CHAPTER V | Alexey Spiridonovich looks for a man

THE DAY AFTER OUR MEETING with Aysha we all went off to spend a few weeks in the Netherlands, where Julio Jurenito had a lot of business to attend to: a meeting of the stockholders of the Island of Java Canal Construction Company, a paper to be read to the Hague Peace Court, the purchase of a large batch of paintings by minor seventeenth-century masters, coffee, and cannibals' knives carved from a charming design by Otto, the German Expressionist. On the way we stopped in Antwerp and in the evening set off to visit the port. A long row of taverns tempted us with their brass bananas, swaying parrots and Negroes with pipes made of pumpkin-rind stuck between their lips. We went into one of these taverns which seemed the quietest (Mr Cool expressed all kinds of fears regarding dollars and the Bible).

On the tables and under them sat people of every conceivable colour: blond Scandinavians, ruddy Flemings, Italians well grilled by the sun, over-grilled Arabs and totally black Somalis. The people under the tables were shouting at the top of their voices, and Mr Cool, clutching his dollars, mentally quoted the Bible, convinced that a fight with knives, and possibly even with Brownings, would begin at any moment. But the Teacher reassured him, explaining that these were Castilians amiably discussing the merits of the tavern-keeper's daughter's legs. A glum Englishman sat alone on top of a cage, spitting out the word 'whisky' every five minutes. Then he brightened up, performed some childish trick for his own benefit involving the mysterious appearance of a coin in a hat and, having demonstrated it, laughed heartily and long. The Frenchmen drank little, made a lot of noise, and boasted continually, one of having knifed twelve bandits within the space of twenty-four hours in Morocco, the other of having afforded the most varied

pleasures to the same number of girls within the space of a single night in his native Nîmes. Whenever the waitress, a very plain woman of about fifty, passed by the sack of pepper near which they were sitting, both of them would grab her by the upper arm shouting 'Ho-ho! My beauty', which apparently formed part of an essential ritual.

Suddenly in a back corner someone began to moan in Russian: 'Friend, brother, tell me, am I a human being or not?' I glanced round and saw a fairly typical Russian intellectual with a little beard so thin that it looked as though it had grown in a bad harvest year, wearing pince-nez with one lens knocked out and a broad-brimmed felt hat, on which various customers of various other taverns had certainly sat and lain many a time.

He was insistently shaking one of the Negroes, who was quite unable to answer so profound a question—all the more as it was put to him in a language he did not know—but, in his excitement and desire to understand, had stuck out the tip of his tongue and was shaking his head in all directions. This spectacle was so picturesque and touching that we all shifted over to the Russian's table. He was overjoyed to see a compatriot and immediately appealed to me to solve the problem left unanswered by the poor Somali. Then he announced with much zest, breaking a jug and four glasses in the process, that 'all this was mere fiction'. This pleased the Teacher, and he performed for the Russian philosopher a few small but curious experiments, or to use more emotional language, 'miracles', confirming the non-existence of real space and time. The Russian was so struck by this that he felt his pockets and the Negro's nose, and then sat for a long time with an expression of profundity on his face and his wrist to his ear, ascertaining that his watch was still ticking. When he had made sure that the Negro had a nose and that his watch was working, but that, nevertheless, neither time nor space existed, and feeling unable to co-ordinate all this, he hiccuped, ordered another litre of vodka, and proudly declared that 'all is fiction, but man exists'.

At the Teacher's affectionate smile he took offence and wanted to leave, but did not do so and considered it necessary to introduce himself as follows: 'A free man, in other words, Alexey Spiridonovich Tishin'. Immediately afterwards he expressed a strong desire to tell Jurenito the story of his life, and asked whether we could not go with him to the station and sit down in an empty railway carriage. Not even I was able to follow the trend of his thought. Then Tishin explained that he was accustomed to telling the story of his life in railway carriages to people he did not know, and as he was now over thirty he found it difficult to change his habits, yet the story of his life must be told or else he would either thrash the Negro, or drown himself, or proceed at once to erect barricades here, on the spot. Neither of these three possibilities appealed to us, but at the same time we did not feel much like crossing the whole town to get to the railway station. With characteristic tact the Teacher convinced Alexey Spiridonovich that a port tavern was the same thing as a railway carriage, so that by telling the story of his life in such a place he would betray neither the great traditions of Russian literature nor his own thirty-year-old habits.

Alexey Spiridonovich was born in the town of Yelets and spent his childhood there. Soon after little Alyosha's birth his mother ran off with a Frenchman called Georges, the hairdresser of the local marshal of the nobility. In Moscow Georges received from her some 'souvenirs without value', to wit, a casket containing the family diamonds and, regarding his mission in the land of savages completed, he returned to his native Toulouse. Alyosha's mother tried to keep going somehow, wrote letters, looked up relations, but after drifting thus for two years she died. The boy lived with his father, a retired general and a great autocrat. He was tended by a series of governesses who succeeded one another fairly rapidly and were in the habit of devoting their leisure hours to the general. After spending a night in the general's bedroom they would beat Alyosha and pinch him hard, jeering: 'I'd like to see you tell your daddy

about this'. When, however, fate forced them to spend long weeks in the nursery, sensing the onset of disfavour, they would treat Alyosha to cream rolls and whisper in his ear: 'You're a dear little boy, go and tell your daddy I love you very much, and him too. Only mind you don't say I sent you'. The general had bouts of frenzied drinking. Sometimes, snatching a whip hanging on the wall above his Turkish divan, he would lash Alyosha's back with it, saying: 'Whore's spawn, here's for you! The devil only knows who's your father! You dirty barber, you! Go and soap your face!' Then at night he would wake the little boy, who would gaze terrified at the old man crawling on all fours by his little drop-side cot howling: 'My angel, my pure one! My little sunshine! I'm not worthy of you, I'm a reptile, a lecher! Stamp on me! Spit, spit on your father!' He would not quieten down until Alyosha had pretended to spit at him. Sometimes after this the general would humbly crawl away, like a dog to his kennel, but at other times he would suddenly leap to his feet, growl: 'What? You dare to spit at your father, filth?', snatch up the whip, and the whole business would start all over again.

Alexey Spiridonovich remembered one night especially. Some time earlier, the general had brought home a young bear-cub, which became Alyosha's bosom friend and shared all his games. The bear-cub was called 'Bumba'; he was clumsy, passionately fond of sweets and very affectionate.

One night the general wakes Alyosha, wraps him carefully in a blanket and carries him down to the garden. There, tied to a summer house, stands Bumba on his rear legs. The general brandishes his revolver and roars with laughter: 'The murder of Saint Sebastian; A picture worthy of the brush of Aivazovsky, ha ha ha! Mishka, run and fetch a bottle of vodka, I'll drink it to the passing of the Lord's servant, Bumba!' The bear-cub, thinking it is all a game, licks his chops and growls. The general fires, but in his drunken state merely puts a bullet through the bear-cub's paw. Bumba squeals desperately, like a puppy when you've trodden on his tail. At last it's over. Alyosha is

carried upstairs, unconscious. A fever, delirium. But he got over it after a while.

Alexey Spiridonovich also told us something about his childish games. The one he liked best of all was catching flies on the window-pane and tearing off their legs and wings. Afterwards he would feel sorry and bored. Then he would make a 'Flies' Hospital', with wingless flies in one matchbox, legless ones in another, and so on. Sometimes he would pray before an ikon of the Virgin to find a place in paradise for himself, Bumba and Mummy (about whom he heard from the old housekeeper), but then, furious because he alone had no Mummy—Petya had one, Vasya had one, only he hadn't—and because Bumba had been shot dead by Daddy, he would take a large pin out of the current governess's hat and start jabbing the Virgin's eyes: 'Here, take that!'

When Alyosha was in the fifth form at school, the general died, repentant and shriven, of an excess of vodka and a cold caught during a pilgrimage to Tihon Zadonsky, on which he had been accompanied by a whore called Lyubka and by Fräulein Charlotte, leaving his son a certain sum of money and a set of not quite honest guardians. Soon after this Alyosha first came to know the temptations of the flesh. Until then, after reading Tolstoy's *Resurrection* secretly in serial form in a magazine, he had merely tried in vain to transform Lena, the maid, into Katyusha, ambushing her in the passage between dining-room and kitchen, furtively fingering her body and causing her to break an inordinate amount of china. After many misgivings, hesitations and fears, Alyosha went off with Puklov, the dunce of the class, who already sported a moustache, to Angelica Karpovna's establishment and there received a certain elementary education from the stout but agile Styosha. When Alyosha came out of Styosha's closet into Angelica Karpovna's drawing-room, Puklov asked with enthusiasm, drinking his muddy beer: 'Well, what did you think of it? A bit of all right, eh? It's my discovery, I'm a kind of Columbus, you know'. But Alyosha covered his face with his hands and whispered: 'What have I done?' And after being called a milksop he ran out into the street. The next day, fully intending to start a new and honourable existence he went to the library, took out a subscription and chose some books by Merezhkovsky and Berdayev.

None of which, of course, stopped him from making another visit soon afterwards, though not to Styosha but to Marunya, a swarthy and sweaty Moldavian who looked like an olive oozing juice. Neither did he stop reading books about sin and the Antichrist. He started keeping a notebook divided into sections such as 'Love', 'God', 'Nature' and so on, and entered the thoughts which particularly struck him under the appropriate headings. Thus in the section called 'Man' he put: 'Man is made for happiness as birds are made for flight' by V. Korolenko; 'Man—how proudly the word rings!' by M. Gorky, and so on.

Then he fell in love with blue-eyed Nyura, the daughter of a post-office clerk, whose distinctive features were four curls in the shape of sausages, a locket with a picture of a kitten, and a passionate love of chocolates with pistachio centres. Having fallen in love he went about sighing and, finally, by dint of speaking at length of his loneliness and edging closer to Nyura on the narrow sofa, he achieved a long and substantial kiss. After this he fell a prey to doubts. Though love might appear lofty and inspiring in the works of all the best authors, though Nyura's plump lips might be sweet, there was much about the situation to make him pause. Nyura was no Styosha and no Marunya; she had a father and all the rest of it, and this meant marriage. But neither was Nyura a Beatrice: she did not thirst for divine and sacred rebellion. And *that* meant a job, nappies and so forth. The worst were the children. How could a man read Nietzsche or Schopenhauer when there was an infant crying next to his desk? Of course, children didn't always come; he had even heard the other chaps mention something. But that 'something' wasn't precisely an engagement ring that you could present to your bride. Besides, what a defilement of an ideal!

He opened his notebook at the heading 'Love' and read: 'Only the morning of love is beautiful', S. Nadson. This provided the final impulse towards a definite decision and he sent Nyura a letter covering sixteen pages, all about the 'great conflict between the mind and the heart' and the 'incalculable ways of Providence'. Six months later he heard that Nyura was engaged to a lawyer's clerk, and exclaimed indignantly: 'There's eternal love for you! The ideal! But I've never been vindictive and I hope she'll be happy'.

At the age of about twenty Alexey Spiridonovich took up politics, i.e. he started taking notes of Bogdanov's textbook of political economy and meditating whether it was or was not a sin to assassinate a provincial governor. One day Puklov, his childhood friend, who had become a member of a mysterious underground organisation, brought a big red-haired fellow in a fancy Russian shirt to see Alexey Spiridonovich and whispered in a deep voice: 'He's being watched; all the usual places have fallen through, you'll have to put him up for the night'. Alexey Spiridonovich consented and spent the entire evening trying to elicit his guest's opinions on revolutions, violence and redemption. The fellow, however, turned out to be of the taciturn kind and reacted favourably only to tongue sandwiches and an album containing views of the Italian Riviera. All during the next days Alexey Spiridonovich was beset by doubts. 'Perhaps he has killed or will kill. I gave him shelter, I saved him. That means I'm an accessory to murder. I'm a murderer. Of course it says "not peace but the sword", but in that case how to interpret "he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword"?' In short, Alexey Spiridonovich was profoundly shaken and weighed down by what had happened. To crown it all, when he went to the library he was followed all the way by some suspicious individual. Clearly he was being watched. His former spiritual torments were replaced by mental ones. He saw himself in prison, his head shaved, in shackles, sometimes even on the way to the scaffold. This improved his moral condition by making him feel a hero, but made it impossible

to live in peace. After a week of agony he decided to escape abroad, but, not knowing how to set about this, he finally applied to the governor of Orel for a passport. For three days he expected to be arrested and was infinitely surprised when a passport for foreign travel was issued to him. 'I've tricked them! I'm too clever for them!' he thought in the sleeping-car to Berlin.

Living abroad this conviction was still further confirmed and Alexey Spiridonovich sincerely regarded himself as a political exile. He ordered fashionable suits from Paris tailors, stopped at first-class hotels, bought hundreds of shop-window objects which caught his fancy—a special set of ointments and brushes for cleaning cigarette-holders, electric moustache-curlers and the like—yet enjoyed parading his veneration for 'homespun Russia' and contrasting her 'humble nakedness' with the well-fed insensibility of Europe. He did nothing at all, and when asked to state his profession on hotel registration forms proudly wrote 'intellectual', to the discomfiture of the hotel porters. Sometimes he would fall into dejection and decide he must work 'for the future of Russia'. On one of these occasions he enrolled in the Versailles school of horticulture, believing that coarse materialism was foreign to the Slav and the motherland must have flowers. But after hearing the first lecture on fertilisers he slipped off to Paris and drank himself into a coma. Another time he felt an urge to join an organisation and hesitated for a long time between the 'Friends of the Socialist Revolutionary Party' and the 'Society for the Improvement of the Russian Church Choir', for in his view the socialisation of the land and the revival of religion were equally important. He would converse with a certain surly Social Revolutionary—whose favourite occupations were playing draughts and rolling cigarettes—on all sorts of abstract subjects, and on leaving him would go to a café with a back-garden—where a pock-marked middle-aged chorister was wont to beat the Frenchmen at bowls—and pester him with the same questions. In the end he joined both organisations and paid his membership fees, but did

not attend a single meeting, for the hot summer weather arrived and he preferred to drape a wet sheet across the window and sit in his pants drinking Vyssotsky's genuine Russian tea.

Europe failed to corrupt Alexey Spiridonovich and he went on being mortally afraid of sin. Meeting a jolly Frenchwoman nicknamed Youyou in a tavern he followed her to her flat and was about to perform all that is customary on such occasions when he noticed that she showed not the least interest in him. He thereupon changed his mind and began putting on his clothes. To her bewildered questions he replied delicately that he was prepared to accept earthly joys without spiritual communion—such things had been known in Hellas—but not without mutual passion; and left, followed by a torrent of invective and some object unsuitable for throwing which happened to be within Youyou's reach.

Meanwhile the years went by, his money dwindled, assisted not a little by past guardians and present lawyers. The remittances from home grew thinner and thinner. Alexey Spiridonovich moved to an attic and instead of the Café de Monico took to visiting various pubs round the markets and stations. Still, as in the past, whenever he had half a bottle of drink inside him he would start smashing glasses, massaging his forehead tragically and hurling bitter truths at anyone who happened to be near, such as 'all is fiction, but Man exists!' 'What is the world? Nothing, but Man is spirit,' etc.

Once, for lack of anything better to do, he decided to tour the old churches of Belgium, and happened to drop in at the tavern in Antwerp where we found him in the state described above; and such, more or less, was his biography, which he related to us—though obviously not for the first time, yet with pathos, tears, and profound emotion. Ending his tale he cried: 'I may be a brute, a slinking reptile, but Man exists'. The Teacher objected mildly: 'My friend, your interesting and instructive story proves more convincingly than ever that what you dream of is just as illusory as everything else in the world'. Tishin was shocked, and as we had already noticed that

all strong emotional experiences were in his case linked with the smashing of tableware, we hurriedly led him out of the tavern.

Alexey Spiridonovich announced that he would sail at once on the steamer *Regina*, just loading in the port, to Rio de Janeiro in order to look for Man. The Teacher said that, if Man existed, his presence must extend over both hemispheres and there was no need to go to Brazil. He, Jurenito, and Mr Cool would be glad to furnish Mr Tishin with the means necessary for his search. They would found a Society for the Search for Man. But if this work led to nothing and Man turned out to be non-existent, Alexey Spiridonovich would have to admit that Jurenito was right and thenceforth follow him.

'I shall be very glad to have a native Russian with me. Whenever I speak to a Slav I enjoy the splendid sensation not of firm land, but of a bog which gives way under your feet. Oh, of course you, too, have your poets, your stock exchange, and—so I believe—even a parliament. But all the things that are so solid and substantial in the West, in Russia need, not a hurricane, but the merest breath, a fortuitous sigh, to vanish without trace. I'm not naïve, I know that you—like women—prefer yielding to taking, I know you're weak, indecisive and inclined towards everything except action, I know it's not for you to destroy these snug cities held together by the blood of many hundreds of generations. But you are vast, and the aged world will not be able to bear so huge a desert. It will turn dizzy and swoon. You will overthrow no one, but you will drag many after you in your fall. For this I love you and I believe that you, Mr Tishin, will be with me.' Alexey Spiridonovich agreed and solemnly shook Jurenito's hand. This took place at dawn in the empty port, among emigrants dozing on their bundles—Jews from Galicia and indeterminate tramps in cloth caps quarrelling among themselves over a large yellow neckerchief. The scene was somewhat operatic and Jurenito, grinning, began to sing 'Daisy, my poppet, where are you?', at which Alexey Spiridonovich for some reason took offence.

I will not describe in detail the activities of the Society for the Search for Man, in view of their excessively complex and varied nature. Besides, the transactions of the academic section of the society have been collected by the Danish psychologist Fals and are shortly to appear in print. As was to be expected, they yielded results that were extremely unfavourable to Alexey Spiridonovich by proving the non-existence of the special systems outlined by him and revealing that the specimens examined coincided entirely with the degenerative species already known to zoo-psychologists. As for the Society's practical activities, i.e. the direct search for Man, according to Alexey Spiridonovich's plan, these yielded nothing but a series of more or less amusing anecdotes. At the start the agents of the Society, attracted by the enormous prizes offered, searched everywhere armed with questionnaires drawn up by Alexey Spiridonovich and consisting of thirty-eight questions, in the hope of finding someone able to satisfy the desiderata. They came back to the Society's headquarters in the Rue de la Boétie with the most unexpected candidates for the title of Man: old ladies from homes for the aged, goitrous idiots from the Alps, doctors of philosophy from Heidelberg and young members of the Jewish *Bund*. But soon, disappointed to find Alexey Spiridonovich so hard to please, they transferred their loyalties to Mr Cool's section and turned to selling his inimitable automatic slot-machines.

In any case the 'search for Man' became fashionable, and some readers of this book may remember a competition announced by the Paris newspaper *Matin* following immediately after a dancing tournament and a contest for the wittiest definition of betrayed love. The newspaper published the photograph of a young woman in rags with a baby in her arms. Caption: 'This woman claims she has had nothing to eat for three days and has nowhere to sleep. What should a real "Man" do if he saw her?' The replies received were very varied and covered a multitude of aspects: 'turn his attention to the moral education of young girls', 'clear our streets of vagrants', 'see she gets a medical certificate', 'establish how much longer she can live

under such conditions', 'overthrow the Cabinet', 'convey her sufferings to the world in verse, or, if unable to do that, in prose'. The prize went to the reply which occurred most frequently (13,426): 'Say to her: you should be ashamed of yourself. You are a young woman and should work'. As a curiosity the newspaper published a suggestion expressed by only one reader: 'Take her to a soup kitchen and give her a good meal at State expense'.

Losing his confidence in the Society's work Tishin tried to conduct the search on his own, but was thrice robbed of his money and clothes, beaten up by some enraged concierge and finally taken to prison, whence the Teacher had to extricate him.

After this Jurenito ventured to ask the obstinate creature whether he admitted defeat. 'No, no!' Alexey Spiridonovich cried. 'Try to understand me!' (Here it should be mentioned that he was very familiar and the very next day after meeting the Teacher insisted on drinking *Brüderschaft* with him and slobbering all over his cheeks, after which Jurenito, wincing, went straight to the wash-basin.) 'Perhaps I haven't found real Man, but he exists! Here's proof: I'm a Man! You don't believe me? Very well, I'm a brute! I'm base, low and filthy! But I love Natasha and I'm a Man, a god! Do you hear me?' Then he told us, eloquently and at length, of his love for Natasha Orlova, a Russian student now in Paris to learn French. In the evenings she would play Tchaikovsky's *Song without Words* to him and Alexey Spiridonovich would feel he was a 'Man'. 'All that's very charming, including Tchaikovsky,' the Teacher remarked, 'but what, precisely, is the difference between your feelings (perfectly legitimate ones, I may add) and certain emotions of my tomcat Joe? The fact, perhaps, that Joe doesn't hire a piano for the occasion but contents himself with his natural musical gifts?' Alexey Spiridonovich fell into a rage, shouting that 'his love was a Man's love', for it 'asked for nothing', and it was 'forever'. 'Very well, we shall see,' said the Teacher, 'let's put off our argument for a few months.'

Jurenito's prediction was soon to be fulfilled, alas, under

rather tragic circumstances. In May, i.e. five weeks after the conversation I have just related, Natasha Orlova died. Faithful to his chaotic and impassioned nature, Alexey Spiridonovich once dared, when in his cups, to accuse the Teacher of the death of his beloved. This was obvious nonsense, for Natasha passed away after an unsuccessful operation for appendicitis performed by one of the best surgeons in France. The Teacher replied with the utmost gentleness that, playing for large stakes, he had no need of winning every trick; indeed, to prove himself right, he would rather have made Mademoiselle Orlova live to be a hundred, since her death could only slow down the inevitable. Certainly Alexey Spiridonovich was inconsolable at first. One rainy night he managed to get past the cemetery gatekeeper and went crawling to Natasha's grave, where he remained lying with his face to the ground until he was noticed and removed. Little by little he began to return to life, continuing to speak incessantly of his beloved, of her love for Parma violets, of her tiny hands (glove size five and a half), and of his love for her. Once he said: 'I think it's best for her that she is dead; she did not know the whole melancholy of life'. The Teacher whispered in my ear: 'That's the beginning: he's trying to find comfort'. Then Alexey Spiridonovich resumed his normal interests and started reading the newspapers and playing chess. Remembering Natasha he would suddenly fall silent and, as it were, withdraw into himself; but this happened more and more rarely. Once, when Aysha brought him a little bunch of violets saying: 'Your lady used to like these', he grew angry, and Jurenito said: 'Stage two: he's trying to forget'. Following this, for a fairly long time, Alexey Spiridonovich did not mention Natasha at all; during this time he was cheerful, calm and even-tempered. After this interlude, when at last he did recall her again in the course of a conversation with me, he spoke about her without any agitation whatever, 'epically' I should say, the way one might speak of childhood memories, one's grandmother or an old clothes cupboard, that is, with sympathy and goodwill. This was in October, and in November he met

Mademoiselle Vile, a French woman painter, who was eccentric and extremely charming. Everything started all over again: sighs, edging closer on a sofa, loneliness, but this time without an inconvenient father or appendicitis. He came to us and said that fate had a higher wisdom of its own. Natasha had been too quiet and pensive, she would not have been happy with him, she was better off now and so was Mademoiselle Vile, and so, in truth, was he. . . . Meeting the Teacher's sarcastic glance he became embarrassed, as though remembering everything all at once, and began shouting that Jurenito was right, that he Alexey Spiridonovich, was 'not a Man but a brute', but that 'life was beautiful for all that'.

A month later Mademoiselle Vile, who had evidently grown tired of Tishin's lyrical sighs and his philosophy of infinity, replaced him by an Argentinian jockey. Then Alexey Spiridonovich came slinking to the Teacher with lamentations about 'life being a fiction', and thereafter followed him everywhere. Being a disorganised and disordered person he never fully grasped Jurenito's aim and often strayed from the path, carried away by various 'fictions', as he called them, but he loved the Teacher as best he could. Such was Jurenito's fourth disciple.

Ivan leads a parade
as does Jurenito

CHAPTER VI | The Teacher's reflections on love

IN THIS CHAPTER I shall reproduce some of the Teacher's reflections on earthly love and describe some incidents which demonstrate his attitude to this question. Evil tongues used to say that Jurenito was a debauchee, that he corrupted young girls and carried with him, in a specially constructed cabin trunk, a monstrous half-woman found by him on a mountain top in the Andes, for the satisfaction of his inhuman lust. All these are vicious lies. I am telling here all there is to tell about the Teacher's life, chapter by chapter, keeping back nothing of the magnificent heritage, out of a genuine desire to help mankind. The Teacher always spoke of carnal love and passion with calm, purity and ease, without embarrassment, giggling, pauses or girlish slobbering. He would look with equal attention at a highschool girl, her breasts just beginning to swell under her uniform dress, who would shyly ask him for his autograph, and at the grandiose spectacle of the mating of mad red-eyed bulls.

Once as he passed by a steer which, in rage and torment, was covering a heifer, the Teacher took off his hat. In reply to Mr Cool's bewildered questioning he said: 'I am merely repeating your boring and conventional gesture. Take off your bowler too, Mr Cool. If we are to bare our heads at all (which is hygienically advisable, apart from anything else), we should not do it before faded beauties with gold crowns on their heads, not before a corpse already beginning to smell, for all that it is heaped high with belated flowers and ribbons; no, it is here that we should do it, before this gesture of the ploughman turning up the hard soil, this seed ejected in torment, out of poverty: before sweat, blood, life'.

Mr Cool certainly regarded the Teacher as a thoroughly immoral and depraved character, which, however, did not prevent Jurenito from being an excellent guide in his opinion. But from time to time the American would fancy himself as a saviour of souls, and begin to weary the Teacher with all kinds of dubious admonitions.

I remember how one morning, meeting our missionary in the garden, Jurenito said to him: 'Mr Cool, last night I found a low and dirty pamphlet on my bedside table. I like to keep my room very clean, I always sleep with my window open because I'm fond of fresh air, and I cannot allow such things to occur. Be so kind as to transfer your activities outside the confines of my bedroom'.

'You're joking! The little book I left for you to glance at, a work of great talent and high moral value, is by our young preacher Mr Hell, called "On married life according to the teachings of St Paul".'

'Yes, that's just the scabrous literature I was speaking about. Once there was the stamen and the pistil, the buck and the roe, the youth and the girl. Then came your apostles and prophets, your Fathers of the Church and castrated monks, declared the great to be shameful and the admirable to be scarcely tolerable, propagated their punishments and their filthy hole-and-corner whispers, their slobbering worship of purity, that is, of anaemic impotence and degenerate perversion. Instead of primeval man who exuberantly tumbles a joyful woman on the grass in spring, they have set up somewhere out of sight—next door to the lavatory—a bed on which man is permitted, out of consideration for his human, i.e. base weakness to sleep with his lawful wife by courtesy of the immaculate church. "Of course it's best if you don't marry," your favourite apostle said. Have you thought about that? It's best if you don't give birth. They've established a cult of the mother, surrounded her breast with angelic light, installed her in the temple, but they've piled the way to that same temple high with filth, stained it with the slimy spittle of squeamish monks. Of course they couldn't castrate the whole of mankind—the ammunition wouldn't go round—and so they decided to be "tolerant". Well, don't be

surprised if, after that, the world has become one enormous *maison de tolérance*. You have said "this is of the flesh, therefore it is evil", and millions have believed you. Some have put on the ascetic's hairshirt and turned to sterile occupations, that is, all they think of day and night is how to keep the stopper in the bottle of fizzy water. But the heated liquid keeps pushing the stopper out of the bottle's neck. Where, in what den of vice, do they think so much of lust as in the ascetic's cell or in the old maid's closet? They think of lust without knowing it, they think with their bodies, their unhealthy sweat, their dreams of the Eternal Virgin or the Heavenly Bridegroom. Others—the majority—decided "well, if we're vile, we may as well go the whole hog". What could have been a temple has become a refuse heap. Instead of the marvellous myth, you have cigarette cases with double lids: on the first a landscape or a bunch of forget-me-nots, but on the second, the secret one, the one that's for the lads, there's something very nasty indeed. This cigarette case—or rather, forgive me, Mr Cool, your spiritual brochure—I was obliged to throw out of my room in the interests of cleanliness and hygiene.'

The Teacher loathed our institution of marriage, placing even contemporary prostitution far above it. On this subject he was destined to clash with the ignorance and hostility of society. For instance, once a Vicomte Lenido—a friend of Jurenito's—came to see us in a state of considerable excitement and swinging his cane. The history of this youthful scion of a noble family was as follows: having lost the last crumbs of his inheritance at the gaming tables of Biarritz, having contracted all conceivable and inconceivable debts, he met a Miss Hopes, an elderly American lady thirsting for love, tender vows and a coat of arms on her visiting card. The rest is obvious; all I need add is that Miss Hopes was quite exceptionally plain—so that her face seemed like something very far from a face, obscenely bared—but also very passionate, shamelessly insisting that her fiancé should keep putting his arm round her waist or touching her breast when on the public beach. Receiving an invitation to the wedding

the Teacher was sorely grieved and worried by the future of the couple. He did not attend the wedding, but sent as a present a large and handsome Mexican scarf and an excerpt from the *Farmers' Calendar* dealing with methods of cross-breeding a stallion with a she-ass. In such cases it is customary first to show a mare to the stallion and then put a tight bandage over its eyes. In enclosing the scarf, Jurenito suggested the use of this method for mutual marital happiness. As I have already said, the vicomte appeared the day after the wedding, swinging his quite unequivocal cane. But the Teacher was the first to admit his error. 'How inexcusable of me! I sent you everything except —the mare. I thought you had such a wide circle of acquaintances. I quite understand your anger, please forgive me. Have you met Mademoiselle Tonette?' The vicomte dropped his cane, burst out laughing and went away with a few addresses in his notebook.

On another occasion, the café where we were sitting was visited by a Monsieur Bock, a hack journalist forever on the hunt for sensational news that would fill twenty lines, and forced to content himself with three-line items about local thefts slipped to him by a clerk at the Préfecture in exchange for the unlimited right to visit Madame Bock. The journalist began to pester Jurenito for some kind of sensation, even a small one: say a revolution in Mexico or a new invention by Mr Cool. At first the Teacher refused, but then, being a man of great kindness, he dictated the following story to Monsieur Bock, a story destined to enjoy unrivalled success: *'Appalling crime.* Last night in a populous part of Paris, in the rue Saint-Honoré, Monsieur Tric, a well known barrister, vice-chairman of the League against Immorality in the Streets, committed an indecent assault on young Lucie Z., aged 16. The worst feature of the crime is that it was committed with the full knowledge of the girl's parents, owners of a large soap factory, who were in the flat at the time'. Monsieur Bock ran off in a state of unbounded enthusiasm. The story was published, and a few days later the journalist came to see Jurenito with his head swathed in bandages.

'You've let me down,' he complained. 'It was all a lie. That scoundrel Tric just married the girl, and they're living with her parents in the rue Saint-Honoré. I've been thrashed three times already and shall be again. I don't go home to sleep and daren't call at the office. To crown it all I've received a summons from the court. You've made me the unhappiest man on earth.'

'My friend, I'm deeply sorry to hear of your troubles, but I haven't sinned against the truth. Lucie, at sixteen, was not in a position to give her consent to what was done to her, for she had had a pure and moral upbringing. She didn't even know why people kiss. She had seen her fiancé precisely twice and was thoroughly frightened of him. Of course her parents knew about the crime. . .'

Bock moaned: 'But can't you understand, they were married!'

'It was only to stop you from getting into still worse trouble that I omitted to mention that representatives of the State, that is, officials of the *mairie* who prepared the wedding contract, were also accessories to the crime.'

These arguments failed to convince poor Bock, and he went away dejected, taking with him the entire contents of Jurenito's purse offered to him in a friendly way. The Teacher was delighted to hear a week later that Monsieur Trac, a rival and sworn enemy of Monsieur Tric, had found the poor journalist and offered him money and compensation for his injuries.

The Teacher used to say: 'When two persons start a business together they are interested in each other's capital and business ability, not love of poetry or skill at football. When a man wants to plant a tree in his garden he does not waste his time wondering whether the soil is a sacred substance or mere dust, does not admire it as a landscape, and does not have it valued by a real estate agent, but finds out whether it is suitable for that particular tree. When it's a matter of buying a shirt collar, no one—however handsome the colour or low the price—will buy one that is too large or too small. But when people are paired in matrimony, everything under the sun is investigated except the thing which, in substance, is the reason why they are

brought together. They find out the size of the bride's dowry and how many silver spoons she's got, the bridegroom's present salary and prospects of a rise, whether or not he likes to play bridge, whether she knows how to make a liver pâté, whether they have kind hearts and good lungs, know foreign languages—and so on. Having ascertained all these things they lead the newly-married couple—not into an office, a philanthropic institution or a school of philology, but towards a broad and comfortable bed, eyes chastely cast down, and then everybody's very much surprised at the statistics of unhappy marriages. O you hypocrites, fathers, husbands, universal marriage-mongers, you who drag earthly joy through the dog-eared files of notaries, you brokers of bonded wares, and you who mumble your fine words while the bargain's clinched, you priests and pastors, parsons and rabbis! What brothel would not blush with shame were you to enter it?'

At Sèvres, the Teacher introduced us to Monsieur and Madame Nolvo. Both were entomologists, which means their favourite occupation was watching caterpillars. Apart from that they were young, not bad-looking, and quite pleasant-natured, lived in a comfortable flat where fine porcelain figures and flower vases stood among the jars of worms; generally speaking they possessed all the features of a happy couple. We were living in the neighbourhood at the time and often met the Nolvos; from the peculiar bitterness of words dropped here and there, from certain almost imperceptible gestures, we gathered that all was not well in that delightful household. And indeed, Monsieur Nolvo soon made an admission to the Teacher. It turned out that the couple were devoted to each other and felt true intimacy and mutual understanding as they sat for days on end over their bisected worms, or, in the evenings, read aloud to each other the moving elegies of the Comtesse de Noäilles. 'Our souls were made for each other,' said Nolvo, 'but—!' And then he made an oblique reference to that which contemporary moralists and hypocrites do not permit to be mentioned except in the psychiatrist's consulting-room or before

a court of law: the fatal disharmony of their bodies. It killed every trace of joy, it transformed passion into ghastly forced labour to which the two victims had been condemned, no one knew why. Having heard these complaints the Teacher introduced the unhappy scientist to Mademoiselle Vile, who by then had completely worn out her Argentinian, and advised us all to see more of Madame Nolvo. The couple's sufferings had evidently been prolonged and excessive, for matters developed at a rapid pace.

A fortnight later, returning from Paris after a rendezvous with Vile, Nolvo could no longer hide a smile of utter contentment. Madame Nolvo, strange to relate, made Aysha her choice and, judging by the reports of our simple-hearted brother, she had no cause to regret it. One might have thought that perfect happiness would follow. But the couple, instead of continuing to study caterpillars and read poetry in the hours unoccupied by Mademoiselle Vile and Aysha, abandoned themselves to reflections on spiritual and non-spiritual love. Then Monsieur Nolvo decided to take along his collection of particularly interesting maggots found in various kinds of cheese, and insisted that Mademoiselle Vile should share all his transports concerning the alimentary tracts of these creatures, whereupon he was banished by his mistress, resolutely and forever. Madame Nolvo, in turn, took to reading to Aysha sonnets about the love of Greek nymphs, and when he, lulled by her voice, fell asleep she began to sob loudly: 'You don't understand the beauty of spiritual love'. All this happened more or less before our eyes, for neither Nolvo nor Aysha was distinguished by his reticence.

'Here's another example of Eros in his death throes,' the Teacher told us. 'Nolvo insists on kisses and spiritual communion and produces the worms from his pocket. He was brought up to look upon his flesh as something inferior, not the drawing-room but, say, the hall. And so he will betray his body, his joy, his love, he will return to Madame Nolvo and will caress her without passion, will or pleasure, only because, after sleeping with her through the night, in the morning he will find spiritual

communion, two microscopes and a slim volume bound in brocade.'

Another time we caused a disturbance of conjugal bliss in Milan, where we often visited a parliamentary deputy called Strecotini. This was a scruffy, puny individual who believed himself to be a mad revolutionary, a misunderstood pioneer and blazer of trails, in short something like a Brand who happened to have become a Marxist. He would pull off his collar, bang his fist on a graceful little Empire table and, sweating so profusely that he hadn't time to mop up the moisture, inveigh against the 'proprietary instincts' and the 'petty prejudices' of the modern bourgeois. His wife, an Italian woman of abundant flesh, listened to these speeches with a barely noticeable smile of sarcasm, as if to say that she could supply an amusing commentary if she wished. As she listened she glanced more and more frequently and tenderly at Alexey Spiridonovich, who was at the time going through one of his disillusioned phases. Comrade Strecotini intercepted an infinitely promising glance. He broke off his harangue against 'accursed property' at the most dramatic moment, sent his wife out on a pretext, and settled down demonstratively to wait for us to go.

In the evening Alexey Spiridonovich received the following letter:

'Citizen Tishin, I considered you an honourable man and a Russian Socialist. I allowed you to enter my home. You have broken all the sacred traditions by molesting my wife. Being an enemy of bourgeois prejudices I will not challenge you to a duel, but you will oblige me by never showing your face in my house again. With Socialist greetings, Strecotini.'

This letter revealed to Alexey Spiridonovich the nature of the lady's feelings, so that when, next morning, he saw an announcement in *Avanti* reading: 'My angel! Ignore the tyrant. I am yours. Come to the gallery at three o'clock', (the speed of publication and economy of wording bore witness to Signora Strecotini's considerable practical experience), he understood who was meant, discarded his pessimism and went off to shave.

The Teacher was much amused by this small incident. 'Alexey Spiridonovich, what have you done? You have forgotten that the enemy of property owns not only a pretty little flat with graceful furniture but also a wife. For a wife or a husband is like an object; yours, mine, somebody else's. An attack on them is theft punishable by law. You take a husband much as you would a good wooden cupboard, one that has been used, but once you've got it no one may go near it again, and you hide the key in your pocket. But a wife's more like a bed; she's got to be new, a first-hand article, and serve only her owner. You've spurned this law, you bandit! You aren't a citizen but a criminal, violator of the sacred traditions of the world's greatest revolutionary.'

One Sunday the Teacher took us into Hyde Park in London. 'Look at those who can but may not.' The grass was dotted with young couples. They were betrothed but obliged to wait many years for the wedding, until the young man could 'stand on his own feet', that is, until he had become more or less old. Indoors, they could meet only in the presence of others; apart from that they met in the park on their days off, where they endeavoured, patently impossible though this was, to assuage their accumulated passion. There were dark rings under their eyes, and the eyes themselves were clouded with desire. Like criminals they writhed on the grass, spending hours of torment in half-embraces, touching each other, burning themselves up with furtive kisses. Five or even ten years would pass; they would be worn out, corrupted by so much frustrated ingenuity, sick with involuntary vices. Then their parents, who themselves had lost their youth and joy on the trampled grass, would graciously announce 'now you may get on with it'.

Jurenito reminded us of those couples on another occasion when we visited a vile establishment in the rue Pigalle in Paris. 'Here you will see those who may but cannot.' The hall was filled with good bourgeois seated in front of their beer-mugs in a peaceful, orderly and somnolent manner. I remember the face of one of them: he had a red ribbon in his lapel. Then

a naked man and woman came out into a space railed off from the main part of the hall and laboriously performed, for a fee of ten francs each, all the things that poor savages used to think sacred in the distant past. Gradually, roused by the titillating spectacle, the good bourgeois livened up; some began to giggle, others dribbled their indignation: 'That man's a bull!' Those who were most impressed tried to break through the barrier wisely provided by the management. Thinking that the time was ripe and that the clients, after such a fillip, were in a fit state to enjoy the basic pleasures of existence, young ladies came running from another room and distributed themselves among the guests. The gentleman with the ribbon in his lapel remained indifferent longer than anyone and finally asked for the girl who had taken part in the performance.

At the beginning of 1914 a book was published in London called the *Encyclopædia of Mechanical Love,* something like a modern Kama-Sutra. Owing to a mistake at the printers, the book somehow got into the book depot of an evangelical society, which, taking advantage of the confusion of the first weeks of the war, destroyed the entire edition. Only six copies survived, one of which, as far as I know, can be found in the *Enfer* of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. This book was written by the eleven oldest prostitutes of Paris. We all know that in Paris the women in this trade have little value in their youth and remain in the cheap cafés of the left bank with the status of apprentices. Only when they reach the age of 35 and have lost their youth and beauty—all their natural gifts—but have acquired the skills of an artist do they become fashionable, high-priced and powerful. The authors of the *Encyclopædia* were women of such experience, and Jurenito willingly agreed to contribute a preface. Here is how it ended: 'You have turned life into an art, a difficult science, a complex machine, a splendid organisation, anything you like except life. Do not be surprised, then, if you meet the same phenomenon in love: naïve simplicity replaced by great art, pitiable homespun kisses by a tremendous range of clockwork caresses. You come to visit your mistress with 17

minutes to spare; you are obliged almost to watch the second-hand if you are to be on time. A car awaits you at your front door. You've just come from the stock exchange, where you have sold shares of cotton plantations in Bukhara to a Melbourne banker by radio; you are on your way to the airport to watch an international aeronautical contest. Do not expect a Shulamite: no, you will find a magnificent machine, the last word in modern technique, which will offer you in the space of seventeen minutes a choice of any of the 13,806 pleasures discovered to date, yielding nothing in perfection to your wireless, your brand-new Ford and your portable electric bath'.

Julio Jurenito told us that he had once organised in Mexico a Circle of Prostitutes in Aid of Society Ladies. The tarts, noticing the jealousy with which 'respectable' women gazed at them in the cafés and wishing to make a worthy return for all the philanthropic enterprises of society ladies, addressed them (with Jurenito's help) in the words of the following manifesto: 'Dear comrades! Our jobs are very similar; they are equally hard and call for solidarity. We suffer from too much variety, you have been sold in perpetuity to husbands who may, in many cases, be repulsive to you. Your work is no less onerous than ours. We have therefore decided to come to your aid. Those of you who enjoy your husbands' caresses should make an appropriate application to our section "For the Protection of Marriage". We shall limit your husbands' right to visit our establishments to once a month and will, moreover, oblige them to undertake, formally and in writing, to spend not less than 36 evenings a year with their wives. But there are others among you who long in vain for the joys of the flesh. We may find one, two, or three among the thousands—a café pianist, a pimp, a chance guest—but you are doomed to the torments of a prison. We shall institute for you special clandestine "Tuesdays", which we undertake to keep secret, and at which you may meet the most gifted of our clients'. Jurenito said that the Circle enjoyed considerable success but was discovered by the Watch Committee after six months and its female chairman was arrested.

Let me quote also the Teacher's speech at the International Congress for Measures Against Prostitution held in Philadelphia in 1911: 'Gentlemen, I know that my words will arouse protests, indignation perhaps, but I feel I must perform my duty as a citizen and speak out resolutely in defence of prostitution. Our society rests on the great principle of free trade and I cannot tolerate any attempt to violate that sacred cornerstone of civilisation. I have, of course, every respect for your anxiety to emphasize the importance of the human body, but no one here present will deny the existence of the mind and the spirit. Why, then, if you ban prostitution, do you hold back from other acts of insanity? Why do you not challenge the journalist's right to sell himself nightly at so much a line? Why do you not set yourselves to defeat the politicians who distribute various earthly goods to their constituents, and the missionaries who regale their neophytes with manna of by no means heavenly origin? The right to own one's body is sacred, and so is the right to sell it for gold or banknotes. The body is a product, but the work of its charming owner is labour. Thus free prostitution combines two rights: that of selling your goods to the consumer and that of selling your labour to the employer. As prostitution is one of the most characteristic expressions of our culture I suggest that, far from fighting it, we should place it under the protection of international law and rank it amongst our most respected institutions, on an equal footing with the Senate, the stock exchange and the Academy of Arts. I call for an immediate vote on my proposal to re-name the congress "International Society for the Propagation of Prostitution".' Julio Jurenito was summarily removed from the hall with the help of the police.

The Teacher often spoke to us about the earthly love of the men of the future. It was as though he slashed through the heavy mists of the ages, and we, astounded, trembled before the indescribable grandeur of thousands upon thousands of human couples joyfully united in their nakedness: not those flabby, shapeless bodies which we are accustomed to see at the

public baths but new, rigorous as steel, yet free. He told us that the way to those ultimate jubilations in the cosmic fields is thorny and harsh. It passes through the denial of love, the insult to the body, through faces covered with veils and copulations measured by callipers. The hour will come when man will forget he has a sex and will offer the woman a chemist's test-tube instead of a kiss. But then he or his grandson (what is time?) will unite his dim, atavistic memories and the thirst for the creation of the best of all possible worlds into a single blissful embrace such as has never been before.

CHAPTER VII | Ercole Bambucci

FROM HOLLAND we went to Italy where, apart from the instructive visits to monasteries and cathedrals which I have already described, we also occupied ourselves with the investigation of various Chiantis, Barberas and Cinzanos in dirty *trattorie*, the collection of donations for a monument to d'Annunzio to be made out of Carrara marble and 56-carat gold (for this purpose Aysha went round the pastrycooks and hatters' with a collecting box, banging a saucepan and crying '*Evviva!*'), and joint public appearances with the Futurists, which, however, were rather monotonous, consisting of a show of passionate admiration for an old broken motor-cycle left to the waiter in a Venice hotel by an American tourist. So the days passed, easy and free from sorrow. The time of departure drew near, for all the churches had already been inspected, all the wines tasted, Aysha's collecting box rattled with four lire eleven soldi and a ring of American gold generously pulled off her finger by a certain Marchesa Nucapruti, and we were finally sick of the Futurists and the motor-cycle.

One hot summer morning we decided to go to Trastevere, our favourite quarter of Rome, for a purpose that was not quite clear—either to see the mosaics of St Parasceva, or drink some innocent Frascati from earthenware jugs, or simply to take leave of the city which had become dear to our hearts. We drove in a carriage and soon, entering the narrow streets of Trastevere, we smelt the marvellous odour of vegetable oil, babies' napkins drying on string stretched across the road, church incense, and houses saturated through and through with sweat and grease—the unforgettable smell of the Eternal City. Soon the cabby stopped the horses and we gazed in bewilderment now at the wheels—all of which seemed to be in their places—now at the end of the little street, from which one of the usual church processions might have been advancing, but from which no one

seemed to be coming at all. The cabby was exchanging fervent and eloquent invective with a man who lay across the road, obviously reluctant to clear the way. The cabby produced arguments: his fares were foreigners, there was no other road to St Parasceva, the road wasn't meant for lying on but for driving along; the man retorted that it was a hot day, he had had to get up twice already, and getting up for a third time was much harder for him than it would be for the cabby to take another street. This argument went on for a long time; it lost its original practical meaning and became a duel of eloquence worthy of the ancient Senate. We got out of the carriage and began to chip in, timidly it is true, as befitted mere amateurs. Mr Cool tried to tempt the lazy fellow with a lira, but the Italian, nimbly picking up the coin with his foot, did not budge. Then the cabby, reaching the ultimate stage of rhetoric, brought out the heavy guns: he threatened the tramp with St Parasceva, the road to whom he was blocking and who would punish him with ulcers, diarrhoea and mosquitoes; the *carabinieri* who would beat him up artistically with knotted wet towels and then put him in jail; Mr Cool's cane, his own whip, and the hoofs of his horses. As all this was no longer on the plane of abstract discussion, the Italian saw no possibility of reply, but only stretched voluptuously, yawned, scratched his behind and then spat high in the air in the direction of the nearest house, hitting the signboard of a midwife over the second floor. This gesture finally captured the Teacher, who had been showing symptoms of *attendrissement* all along. He went up to the Italian, jabbed him amiably in the stomach with his foot and said: 'Would you like to come in the carriage with me? Would you like to live with me for good?' The Italian reflected for a while, but then, evidently growing tired of thinking, spat once more at the same unfortunate signboard, got up, went towards the carriage without saying a word, and settled in the most comfortable seat, which happened to be Mr Cool's. Then he said graciously to the Teacher: 'I'm very hot, but I like you all the same, come and sit next to me', and thus—without thinking it, and generally,

on account of the high temperature and his noble indolence, without thinking anything at all—became Jurenito's fifth disciple.

As we continued on our way the Teacher noticed that his latest fledgling was dressed in a highly original manner, or, rather, wound round with coloured rags which, depending on their position on his body, were described grandly as shirt or trousers. Jurenito offered to take him to a shop where he might choose new clothes to suit his taste. The Italian turned out to be extremely modest in his requirements, for he resolutely turned down a suit and only chose a very tall polished opera-hat, a chauffeur's winter jacket with goatskin on the outside (despite the heat) and, finally, a pair of 'Zephyr' pants, salmon-coloured with an emerald stripe, with which he promptly replaced the rags that had till now fulfilled the function of trousers. Dressed in this unusual garb he began to feel doubly drawn towards the Teacher and even showed signs of some pangs of conscience, for he exclaimed: 'Signor, I am your guide!' At the next corner, as we were passing a three-storeyed house recently gutted by a fire, he caught Jurenito by the sleeve —'look, ruins of ancient Rome!'—after which he fell back exhausted and asked for a lira to buy a jug of wine.

At the Stella d'Italia hotel the courteous porter, restraining his amazement at the sight of the picturesquely dressed tourist, came running towards us with a form which had to be filled in. But the strange guest informed him contemptuously that, 'thanks be to the Madonna, he could not write and would not learn so boring a job even for a second pair of such splendid trousers'. Name? Ercole Bambucci. Where from? He always spent the day lying on the via Pascudini and the night under the railway bridge near San Francisco's church. Occupation? He lost his composure for a moment, looked down at his feet, glanced round as though he had lost something, but in the end cried proudly 'None!'

Mr Cool, Alexey Spiridonovich and even Aysha were greatly intrigued by the Teacher's choice and began putting all kinds

of questions to Ercole, who lay down comfortably on a sofa in the hotel smoking-room. Mr Cool was particularly interested to know Bambucci's views on the Bible and the dollar. But the Italian manifested a profound indifference to both. True, on being told that dollars were something of the same kind as lire and even better, he declared that he wouldn't turn them down, adding, however, that it wasn't for Bambucci to go after lire but more or less the other way round. He had often thought that some 'English ass' would find him in the via Pascudini and give him a thousand lire. What for? For being a real Roman, for being Ercole, and anyway—those asses (a gesture in Jurenito's direction) had no Rome of their own, but a lot of money instead. He had other plans, too; for instance, he might marry a rich American woman. 'You're an American? Really? Perhaps you've got a daughter who'd like to marry a handsome and noble Roman, Ercole Bambucci himself? No? What a pity! By the way, your people aren't from Cavi di Lavagna, by any chance? You see, a lot of our fellows have gone from there to America, and that's not a bad way of finding an American uncle. No? Well, never mind, things are very nice as they are. Give me ten soldi. For two soldi you can get a plateful of spaghetti at the counter, for two more a portion of cuttlefish, for four a litre of wine, and for the rest a piece of Toscana, that's a good cigar, as fat as a dog's tail. Or you might spend six soldi on wine and pick up a dozen or so excellent fag-ends near the Colosseum, for all those asses always throw away their half-smoked cigarettes. Then off I go under the bridge, and, believe me, life's a wonderful thing and your dollars are a lot of nonsense.' After this harangue Ercole turned to his favourite occupation; that is, he began spitting in an intricate pattern all round Mr Cool's shoes. The American, feeling extremely uncomfortable, wanted to go away, but Ercole stopped him. 'Don't be afraid! My name isn't Ercole Bambucci if I as much as wet the tip of your shoe.'

However, Ercole was prevented from devoting himself completely to this peaceful pursuit by Alexey Spiridonovich, who began to question him in a voice hushed with emotion. 'Tell

me, do you ever suffer torments, are you rent asunder?'

'Oh yes, especially in the autumn when the figs and melons are ripe, the colic sometimes won't let me get to sleep.'

'No, I mean spiritual torment. How should I explain? Do you ever feel an urge to destroy everything, burn all the old rubbish, be re-born?'

'Of course! I adore holidays when they bring all the old rubbish out of the houses into the streets, old mattresses filled with straw, one-legged tables, drawers with their bottoms knocked out. They pile everything up in a heap and then set fire to it. The firecrackers go bang-bang! It's all in honour of the Holy Virgin.'

'You say "holy"? Does that mean you believe there's a higher being? A Providence?'

'Of course I do! What about the "banco-lotto"? No one—no one, do you realise, not even the king—knows what numbers will come up!'

Ercole himself was very fond of trying his luck in the banco-lotto, and once he had joined a pool and had actually won four lire. As for the reason why the world was arranged as it was—yesterday you won some money, today you meet a rich ass, tomorrow you may be dead—that wasn't worth thinking about, for thinking was very difficult and boring at the best of times and particularly in such hot weather. It would be better if Alexey Spiridonovich were to fetch two Toscanas for the pair of them and then lie down beside Ercole, after which they could smoke and spit round the second shoe of that uncouth American who hadn't got a daughter and wasn't an uncle, but only an indeterminate sort of thing with dollars.

Aysha said: 'You don't know why Master took him, but I do. I expect he makes gods, like me. I say, Ercole, do you know how to make a god?'

The Italian waxed indignant. 'Nonsense, whoever makes gods these days? They've made so many of them here that there's more gods than people, and no mistake! Two gods, three saints and a virgin martyr for each Roman. Don't think I don't believe

in God'—(Ercole even crossed himself)—'but the fact is I don't want to do anything at all, least of all a boring thing like making gods. If ever I did decide to make anything, it would be braces. They're marvellous things'—(Ercole became animated)—'I've never worn them myself, but I've seen them on Giuseppe Crapapucci and I actually tried to pull them off him at night but he woke up. When I'm forced to get up I can never talk, because if I talk I have to wave my arms, and if I start waving my arms my trousers will fall to the ground. When I'm not lying down I have to hold them up, and that's very tiring. Sometimes I let them go, on trust so to speak, but they've no honour or conscience and they keep slipping down. No, there's definitely nothing better than braces. Listen, if you aren't feeling too hot and you really want to do something, why don't you leave off making your gods and start making braces? Only they've got to be sky-blue or puce.'

Conversations in the course of the next few days revealed to me several pages of Ercole's life history. It appeared that three events had shaken him most deeply: the time he had pinched one of Santa Placida's bones, the time the *carabinieri* had beaten him on account of the woman painter, and the time he made a revolution. The bone was quite small, smaller than your little finger; he said a prayer before he pinched it, and then he gave it to fat Rosalia, who was 'very, very religious indeed, like Santa Placida herself'. Rosalia had wrapped the bone in a silk handkerchief and put it next to a palm branch which had been blessed by the Pope, and she'd given Ercole a piece of roast pork with stuffing and a *fiasca* of wine. The business with the woman painter was not so good. She took it into her head to paint Ercole—'an Englishwoman of some kind, a she-ass'—and the picture she painted was boring, boring, everything just as it really was, even the midwife's shield. Ercole had insisted, first of all, that she should paint him in a top-hat —he'd long wanted one—secondly, that she should put in a palm tree and a bird next to the house and, thirdly, that she should replace the babies' napkins on the line with beautiful

flags. The Englishwoman had refused and had offered Ercole a lira; Ercole had taken the lira, but then he'd gone up to the picture, pushed the woman politely out of the way and got down to the job himself. The Englishwoman had begun to scream as if she were being strangled, and he hadn't even had time to cover the dirty old grey house with beautiful sky-blue paint when two *carabinieri* had appeared and had started beating him, which hurt very much indeed. As for the revolution, that hadn't hurt at all and had been great fun. Somebody in some foreign country—maybe it was Spain—had shot somebody else whom he shouldn't have shot, and so they had made a revolution. To do this they had overturned all the street benches, buses, lamp-posts, and then they'd sung and shouted and fired off guns, right up until it had got dark. That was even better than a holiday; a pity it happened so rarely and was over so soon.

Once we were out riding in Rome, the three of us, the Teacher, Ercole and I. Ercole asked the cabby to drive to Trastevere. In the via Pascudini he got out, took off his goat-skin jacket and his top hat, gave them to me to keep, while he —in his striped pants—lay down in his old place and turned his attention to his favourite signboard, asking us to leave him alone just for an hour.

'They can't understand,' the Teacher said to me, 'why I take this tramp about with me. But what should I love if not dynamite? Ercole isn't Aysha, he has seen everything and has done everything that could conceivably be done. These hands have held all the world's accessories: the sceptre and the cross, the lyre and the chisel, the code of laws and the palette. He has built palaces and arches, temples with the full-bosomed goddesses of Hellas, the emaciated Gothic Christs, the fluttering Baroque saints. Look at him: the Munich prima donna will copy his gestures, St Petersburg's best lawyer will envy his eloquence. He knows everything and can do everything from childhood, but it so happens that he prefers to spit because he has a strong and passionate loathing of all sense and all organisa-

tion. He does everything the wrong way round. Clowning, you say? Perhaps, but isn't the clown haloed with the dying gleams of freedom? He gets his top hat, but he politely hands it to you to keep. This gesture holds within it the coming renascence of the world. At the great top-hat factory—remember my words! —Ercole will be with us, like the chaotic love of freedom, like the jar of dynamite packed in the suitcase next to the bottle of brilliantine and the Coty perfume!'

As he lay on the ground, half asleep, Ercole listened to our conversation with one ear. Winking slyly, he said: 'I know, you want to make a revolution, like that other one, over the Spaniard. Well, I don't mind a bit, it's good fun. But don't forget I'm your guide, signor! Ten soldi for cigarettes!'

CHAPTER VIII

Some of the Teacher's reflections on the arts

THE TEACHER did not like talking at length about the arts. Though he approved of conversations on their practical aspects —for example, the quality of paints, the roots of words, and various building materials—he could not bear exalted chatter about art in the metaphysical plane, and asserted that such talk befitted only land surveyors, building contractors and art critics. But since he well understood the organising and destructive forces of art, he was obliged, under various circumstances, to explain his attitude towards it; all the more so as the twenty-three trades mastered by Jurenito during his lifetime included poetry and architecture. I am trying to trace, through some friends living in Mexico, the manuscript of his poem entitled *Trepfert 1717*, written in the days of his youth, after the Teacher had tried converting Indians to Catholicism and before he turned to the annihilation of Mexican generals. From the fragments the Teacher used to recite to me from memory I can judge the merits of this, the only epic poem of modern times devoted to the cult of stocks and shares, advertising publicity for 'North' lorries and the grandiose struggle of races and classes. If—as I should like to hope—the manuscript is not lost, I shall publish it as soon as it comes into my hands, both in the original (it was written in Spanish) and in translations into other languages. In the sphere of architecture I have seen two plans of constructions drawn up by the Teacher. The first represented huge rotating weight-lifting machines, made of steel and equipped with glass baskets, for transporting thousands of people through the air from one end of New York to another. The other plan showed various revolutionary systems of underground *pissoirs* designed for thousands of users. Alas! the file with the projects vanished on the day of the Teacher's tragic death.

I have mentioned Jurenito's works so that it should be clear to all that in him we are not dealing with an amateur, an outsider, but with a man of knowledge and experience. Most of the Teacher's judgments have, in recent years, become the common property of society. All kinds of 'innovators' struggling helplessly in the grip of the obsolete used to follow close on the Teacher's heels, picking up his most casual remarks; and—such was the stupidity of their natures—after clipping the wings of Jurenito's thought they would pass it off as their own. For instance, the editor of a 'terribly progressive' Paris review who claims to be a poet, but in fact plays the fiddle shamefacedly in his back-kitchen and shamelessly writes articles on painting in public, used to make a living solely by waylaying the Teacher with a notebook at the entrance to private views and not leaving his side thereafter. Jurenito, who did not know the meaning of vainglory and was interested only in the dissemination of his ideas, did nothing to counter such phenomena and even charged me never to accuse anyone of plagiarism and never to write *démentis* to the newspapers. Accordingly, I shall not reproduce here those of Jurenito's sayings about art which are known, if in distorted form, but will mention only some practical steps taken by him in this sphere.

In order that these actions should be understood it is necessary to recall the Teacher's great contempt for the role of art in modern society. Dining with Mr Cool, who under the influence of a vintage Pouilly became sentimental and assured Jurenito that he loved beauty more than anything in the world, even dollars, the Teacher candidly confessed: 'As for me, I prefer these pork chops with green peas'. The Teacher used to say that the meaning of art was that, like other levers of culture, it assisted the organisation of men. It had been so in all the epochs of the history of mankind. Art had welded separate individuals into close-knit national, religious and social units for common love or hatred, work or struggle, in a word, for life. Not only the pyramids and the Gothic cathedrals, but also the melancholy folk-song, the smiling Virgin by an unknown

painter of the Trecento, all this was merely the cement of a grandiose construction, merely the fuel needed to maintain existence.

'What a witless joke, what a pathetic hara-kiri is, then, the arrogant break of art with life! Art solemnly amends its purpose: one of the horses unharnesses itself from the chariot and attempts to slow down its inevitable course by senseless rearing and bucking. Art no longer wants to organise life: on the contrary, its aim is, as it were, to lead man away from life. But since no one, genius though he may be, can jump higher than himself, all these frenzied leaps and bounds remain within the limits of life itself; they can only lead to the greatest possible disorganisation of life. So the struggle between art and life began, so it goes on. Life has found hundreds of other means of organisation; it can get on all right without art, merely becoming harder and more austere than before. And art? Art is transformed into baubles, into a sport practised by a handful of initiates, into different phases of mental illness, into an after-dinner whim of Mr Cool's, less essential than his glass of Cordial-Médoc or his soft pillow. Art is dying, thrice despised, though, thanks to professional training, it can masquerade as the conqueror of life in its last years; it is dying with a romantic dagger in its hand, dying in this private room where the restaurant-keeper, as an afterthought, has hung Matisse's dancers on the wall for the benefit of better-educated Mr Cools, and has invited actors to sob out the dreamy verses of Duhamel and musicians to play the music of Stravinsky. But I, since I believe in the ancient truth that "a live dog is better than a dead lion", refuse to shed any tears over it, and speak out candidly in praise of pork chops with green peas, or even without them.'

In 1913 the *Mercure de France* organised a large-scale literary inquiry into the achievements and possibilities of modern poetry. On receiving the questionnaire Julio Jurenito immediately sent off an answer, which, for some reason, was never published. A copy has been preserved, and I reproduce it here as follows: 'Your questions put me in a very difficult position

because I do not know what is meant by the word "poetry" in the present age. I have, it is true, encountered among the articles in the journals, and sometimes even in the form of separate books, printed in special typography, some disquisitions on politics, love, the holiness of the Trinity or about a coffee-set, with or without rhymed endings. If these curious offerings are what you call poetry, I am unable to answer your questions. Neither do I have any opinion concerning many other senseless occupations, such as playing patience or scratching one's back with the help of a Chinese contrivance. I am perfectly willing to admit, however, that such pastimes may appeal to individuals, and I see nothing wrong with that. I believe that in such cases it is necessary to be completely tolerant, guided by the saying carved on the collar of Diogenes' dog in the dogs' paradise: "Here, everyone amuses himself as best he can". In other epochs the word "poetry" referred to occupations quite unlike the foregoing, but, on the contrary, both useful and full of meaning. The word itself was an action, and poetry, as a skilful combination of words, assisted this or that act of life. I know the lofty poetry of the primitive witch-doctor who, by a combination of words, used to be able to persuade a stubborn cow to let herself be milked in a state of conscious calm. But how can I apply the same great word to the riddles of Mallarmé, the meaning of which thirty-three loafers have been trying to guess for thirty-three years? Once upon a time the word could kill or cure, it could make a man love or hate. That is why spells and conjurations were poetry. The poets were merely craftsmen, working just like other men. The blacksmith forged the armour, the poet composed the heroic songs which led to victory. The carpenter made the cradle or the coffin, the poet made the lullaby and the dirge. The women spun and sang at their spinning, and the song made their hands quick and confident, their labour light. I have had occasion to read the verses you publish in your esteemed journal, and I have wondered: how can they awaken anyone, call anyone out to fight, whose work can they help forward?

Their sole practical purpose—not, however, arising from the artists' intentions—is to lull a man to sleep, provided the ground has already been prepared by the preceding article on the number of vowels and consonants in the tragedies of Racine. Remembering the splendid craft of the past and comparing it with a pursuit which is incomprehensible to me, I was, I repeat, at a loss to answer your apparently simple question. But my young friend E., a Russian to whom I confided these thoughts, told me a fact of exceptional interest, which to some extent removes my doubts.

'It appears that in Russia there lives a poet (I regret I cannot recollect the name) who once wrote a poem full of mystical passion and exclamation marks. E. assures me that when, in the town of Tsaritsyn, a certain military scribe declaimed this quatrain to a chambermaid who had, until then, been quite unprepared for a romance with him, the poem's effect was so decisive that the chambermaid began to unfasten her dress hurriedly of her own accord. This important information convinces me that certain paths are open to poetry in our day, and I am able therefore to reply to you not only with sighs and lamentations, but also with words of hope.'

At a banquet in honour of the latest 'prince of poets' held in Paris in January 1914, Julio Jurenito made the following speech:

'I raise my glass to one of the martyrs of contemporary civilisation. The position of the poet in our society reminds me of that absurd dog, an honest mongrel, who has been put in the zoo with an inscription reading, not *Rover,* not *Fido,* but *Canis vulgaris*. The visitors, prepared for the spectacle of a savage denizen of tropical lands after seeing the lion and the hyena, go up to the dog's cage, read the incomprehensible Latin, and instead of patting the dog amiably on the muzzle like any other *Canis vulgaris* which simply roams the streets, they open their mouths wide, prod it cautiously with the tips of their umbrellas, and mistake its cheerful bark for a terrible roar and its piteous yelping for the battle-cry of a beast of prey. Then they go away.

'Poor dog! Poor poet! You could be doing an honest job of work, peacefully writing your verses! But they expect anything from you except work. First of all you're a "prophet", secondly a "madman", thirdly a "misunderstood leader". *Canis vulgaris!* The surgeon slitting open a belly, the tailor cutting out a waistcoat, the mathematician studying the laws of time, all these are working. But you, when you sweat over a sheet of paper, when you cross out a word for the hundredth time, when you hammer out a good line—that isn't called work, but "creation". And the imbeciles round the cage stare at your bowels: is that where the angel put the "flaming coal"? They wonder: did the muse sleep with you last night? And has "inspiration" descended upon you as a result? The only thing left for you to do is to take the game seriously, open wide your jaw and imitate the lion as best you can. "Fall down before the prophet! I am inspired! Hush, hush!" And the poor, sad, ill-treated dog, working hard to pass for a tiger, makes a lunge through the railings at the nose of some particularly goggle-eyed barber. Well done! Your health, Bengal tiger!'

To Mr Cool's horror, the Teacher was fond of spending many of his evenings in the company of poets, painters and actors. He used to say that a man as devoted to the future as he could afford the weakness of loving some old bric-à-brac, including that merry tribe of gipsies turbulently ending their days in the city squares. 'I love them for their aimlessness, their doom, I don't myself know what for. Each of them taken by himself is young, bold and alive, but together they're older than the mediaeval cathedrals. They have a passionate love of the present, and that is the condemned man's ecstasy before the scaffold. These poor artisans are madly in love with the machine, they strive to convey its forms in sculpture, its clanging and rumble in poetry, refusing to realize that they are doomed to perish under those very wheels. For the machine does not require portrait painters or courtier-poets, it demands the transformation of living flesh into wheels, nuts, screws. Freedom and individuality, the face and the image, must die

in the name of the total mechanisation of life. Rejoice, Mr Cool! These great down-and-outs will die together with love, rebellion and much else. Though, as you know from your favourite book (no, not the blue one, the one in the morocco leather binding), that which dies shall rise again. But never again will these gipsies exist as a picturesque sect, a small, rebellious caste: they are destined to dissolve and be born again in the distant days of purposeless, liberated humanity.'

Once at an exhibition of the work of Italian Futurists the Teacher said to me: 'Here the dead-end reached by modern art is particularly in evidence. Having forgotten how to make useful objects, having lost the sense of the necessity of his work, the painter has begun to compete for the conjuror's bread. What can be more precise, more strict, than the dividing line between the arts of time and space? Yet look at the naïve cunning of this painter who tries to make his motionless canvas tell of man's ability to run. He does not want to know that painting, sculpture, architecture are static not through the accident of their subject but by their very nature, that a perfect painting kills the sense of time itself, stopping all the clocks on the church towers and all the watches in the waistcoat pockets. Then there's the poet who describes in detail a green field, a blue river across the field, a white house by the river, a pink Mimi inside the house and a red rose on Mimi's breast. Never mind that what you get is a colour-merchant's catalogue, never mind that between the field and the rose lie twenty lines, which is hundreds, thousands of years. Never mind: he's performed a trick, too, a trick of the fence-climbing type. Need I speak of the full variety and range of this new trade—of musical painting, relief painting, painted sculpture, onomatopœic verse and all the rest? The bakers have begun to worry about the permanence of bread, the masons are building houses consisting of one wall. At least, after the abolition of art, we shall still have the adventures of Baron Munchausen!'

Shortly after this exhibition Jurenito addressed the following letter to the Italian Minister of Education and Fine Arts:

'Sir, a few days ago I visited a poor and touching exhibition of the work of my friends, the Futurists. I have also acquainted myself with contemporary poetry and drama. The young Italian painters' adulation for broken American motor-cycles, bad German toothpaste and last year's Paris fashions evokes my profound pity. Though hygiene lies outside the functions of your office, let me remind you, sir, of the need to wean the infant from the breast at a certain age, in the interests not only of the mother, but also of the babe. Isolated cases observed of breast-fed children of three and even five years old have resulted, to the best of my belief, in mental deficiency. I personally was convinced of this by the example of my kitten, which continued to suck its mother though it was twice her size, so that, when the cat finally shook it off, the kitten proved unable to feed itself in any other way, grew thin, and presently died. I believe that the impotence and anaemia of modern art are the fault of those who failed to wean it in time from the mother's breast but, on the contrary, encouraged and still continue to encourage the miserable nuzzling at the last drops of a milk which, by now, has become noxious. In consequence we have the large and apparently well-fed flocks of impotents copying the Renaissance painters or Dante's tercets for the thousandth time, and side by side with them a few thin, mangy "innovators", of whom I have already spoken. I am a foreigner, but I sincerely love your country. I venture therefore, Sir, to outline the measures which, in my view, are necessary to save the future generations from perdition. The children must be resolutely weaned from the teat, and with this in mind attention should be paid to those dangerous centres of the sucking epidemic, namely the old cities, the museums and the editions of so-called classics. Though the method of artificially keeping these alive which you apply is highly unhygienic, since no preserving balm can prevent decomposition and therefore infection; though your town councils are tending more and more to replace the corruptible cemetery by the practical crematorium, I hesitate to advise you to choose the radical

method of burning all the images of a dead art, taking into account particularly the attachment felt by many to objects known from childhood, and being guided also by budgetary considerations. But I should like, Sir, to draw your attention to a series of perfectly practicable measures, which, though mere palliatives, would nevertheless prove effective.

1. A general announcement to the effect that Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian (you may add Guido Reni if you think fit), Dante, Torquato Tasso, Leopardi, Milan Cathedral and St Peter's (and so forth, at your discretion) exist. This gives full satisfaction to legitimate feelings of love of the past and national pride.

2. Entry to museums and old churches and the reading of so-called classics to be permitted only to persons in no way associated with art, either as producers or as consumers; to wit, cattle-breeders, art historians and tourists of Anglo-Saxon race.

3. All those actively engaged in art to be resettled at government expense from towns having an artistic past to the industrial centres of Lombardy and Piedmont. Painters attempting to walk through the Roman Campagna and poets going about Venice in gondolas will be proceeded against with particular severity. I am sure, Sir, that these rational measures will result in a true flowering of Italian art. Yours, etc.'

Having dispatched the letter, the Teacher awaited an invitation from the Minister for the purpose of explaining various details of the plan, but no such invitation came. Later the Teacher mentioned to me that he was afraid the letter might have been lost, though he had sent it by registered post in view of the devotion of the Italian post-office to hallowed traditions.

Such were some of the Teacher's opinions on art. Later on I shall describe how he attempted to put a few of them into practice during the years of the Russian revolution.

CHAPTER IX

Monsieur Delet, or the reincarnation of Buddha

ON OUR RETURN TO PARIS we experienced some financial difficulty due to the Teacher's complicated experiments, Mr Cool's departure for Chicago on business and the reckless extravagance of Alexey Spiridonovich, who was just then going through a particularly pessimistic phase. Wishing to emerge with dignity from this awkward situation the Teacher went straight to an agency which specialised in raising investment capital, and returned, fully satisfied, with the address of a certain *rentier*, a Monsieur Gaston Delet, resident at Massy-Verrières near Paris, who wanted to invest 40,000 francs in a sound business. 'I'll advise him to start a fashionable night-club or a maternity home,' said Julio Jurenito as he went off to see Monsieur Delet.

The next evening, at the Café de la Bourse, the Teacher introduced me to a short, plump gentleman. He had a sparse, carefully curled moustache on a pink tidy face, and the inevitable (in the circumstances) ribbon in his lapel. First we decided to have an aperitif, and M. Delet, slapping his thigh, called '*Garçon, un picon-citron*!' and explained to us that 'it was wonderful for the digestion'. Then he remained silent, while the Teacher spoke. Jurenito's words startled me a little, for he said nothing about a night-club or a maternity home, but instead, with pencil in hand, described in detail the unheard-of profits of a limited company called 'Universal Necropolis'. M. Delet's heart, it seemed, warmed to the Teacher's arguments, but the long series of noughts after the figures worried him a little. 'Why such round figures? Why 300,000 francs? Surely it could be more than that, or less?' Jurenito explained: 'You're right, there's 300,114 francs clear profit'.

Knowing nothing about business I was very bored; my patience, however, was rewarded not only by a splendid dinner, but also by M. Delet's perfectly amazing conversation during it. He announced suddenly that, since both of us were now his partners in an important enterprise, he must acquaint us with his character and his views, for 'this wasn't a love affair, and all cards must be laid on the table'.

It was an extraordinary autobiography, punctuated by pauses to praise the meal and choose the wines. I shall try to reproduce it here, though my memory, alas, is weakened and my pen blunted by the passage of years.

'*Garçon*, you may serve us.

'My dear friend, may I recommend the tunny-fish? A most tender fish and, what's more, so easily digestible. You are surprised by my gaiety? Yes, I am always gay, resourceful and witty. How can I help it? The Gallic wit! You, as foreigners, must be very happy to be in such a country. The home of reason and liberty! Personally, I'd never go abroad—what would be the point? If I want to be by the sea, there's Brittany. The mountains? Savoy! The sun? Nice! Forests? Fontainebleau! Pleasures—hee! hee! Paris! For you, of course, it's different, your country . . . but don't let's talk about depressing things.

'It often makes me sad to think how much gloom still exists in the world. You're a Russian, aren't you? Your country's so cold! But it's very large and, besides, you're our allies. And then you've got that writer . . . oh, how difficult they are, those Slav names! I've got it—Tolstoy! Something like our Dumas. What an excellent salad! Tell me, my friend, wouldn't it be more profitable to buy a Russian *rente* rather than these shares? Are you sure? One feels safer, somehow, with a *rente*. Click, snap, and there it is. I wouldn't advise you to have roast beef—who wants to tax the stomach like that, at night? You Russians are mystics. And you are a Mexican? That's in America, isn't it? Yes, Yes! Uncle Sam! Well, my heart's at rest, you're all wonderful businessmen. Now about myself. I was a genius

even as a child. My late father, the founder of our undertakers' business, used to say to everybody: "Look at Gaston, he'll be a deputy one day!" But I don't care for politics. It interferes with one's enjoyment of life.

'*Garçon,* a bottle of Nuits, but mind you take the chill off!

'I was telling you that I was a genius. At school I cared only for arithmetic. I can't bear a lot of fancy chatter. Give me clarity, logic! At five I already knew that it was quite all right to thrash Paul, the washerwoman's son, but not Victor, the mayor's son. Hee! hee! the science of life. And I already knew how to hit without leaving any bruises. Surely you know? *Passage au tabac.* But let us continue. When I reached the age of sixteen, my father gave me a louis and said "Gaston, be moderate in all things". Great words! My poor father! How well they prepare asparagus tips here. Alas, I was young! Hee! hee! I forgot my father's words. I lost my sense of moderation. Oh, you cannot know what it is, a sense of moderation! It's rational politics, it's beauty, it's a well-filled purse, an easy stomach, a pleasant tremor at the sight of a pretty woman! It's everything! My friend'—this to the Teacher—'you're still young, I like you—let me go further than that—you are like a Frenchman, you almost *are* a Frenchman—remember: Moderation! Moderation! I was cruelly punished. I contracted a catarrh. Since then I have to be careful, very careful, and take Pink pills—a splendid preparation! I repeat, I was young, fire in the blood, you know! Saint Anthony! Hee! hee! And—so, by the time I was twenty-five I had already lost much of my strength. I'd be walking along the boulevard, a warm sun, so many pretty little chickens, and yet—not a quiver! I have to diet. I used to have a charming mistress, Minette, I'm sure you never had one like that. The things she knew! Hee! hee! She used to say to me "My poor Gaston, remember what Danton said: "*De l'audace, de l'audace et encore de l'audace!*" (that's on the monument by the Odeon station). I bought a painting for sixty francs at an exhibition—a man out shooting rescues a girl from drowning in a brook. I hung it up in

Minette's bedroom. For some reason it encouraged me. What? Elan, my friend! Hee! hee!

'*Garçon,* what's the camembert like? Is it runny?

'But don't think this is going to be all about love. I occupied myself with business. I took over the undertakers', I improved it, I expanded it, I turned it into the best business in the whole Montrouge district. What's death, after all? The end! No kisses, no wine, nothing! A hole! Do smell the camembert—what an aroma! I don't hold with all that claptrap. I'm a free man without prejudices. I was even mentioned in the Chamber of Deputies, well, not exactly personally, but never mind, I was there. You see, I went to stay with my uncle at Perpignan. The mayor there is a broadminded man, a philosopher, a positive Voltaire. He ordered the stones commemorating all those bishops and saints—you know, clerical stuff—to be removed from the church, and had the public lavatory lined with them. Yes, I was personally present at the solemn opening. They've duped us long enough! Then Barrès, the clericalist, asked a question in the Chamber. I was ready to suffer for an idea, but nothing happened. The times of the Inquisition are past. As I was saying, death is the end, and nothing more. Nothing to wait for! But a funeral's got to be decent, like the whole of life. And so I introduced a profound philosophy into my funeral business. Until I came there were fifteen categories. I created two more—one 'luxury class', yes, yes, for idiots who throw their money out of the window. It would be a sin for simple people like us not to pick it up. But it's a glorious funeral! Every lady mourner gets a scented handkerchief. And then, for the poor, a 16th class. I'm a good-hearted man and I love justice. Everyone should have a right to be buried. Why arouse the anger of the poor? That can only benefit criminals and socialists. But, of course, they've got to know their place—all very fair and simple. For three years. You keep your place for three years, and then time's up—give someone else a chance. Starting with the 6th category, a monument in perpetuity. Those are people of substance, they've earned their rest. My

friends, here's an entire system, a world ladder! What depth! I myself should like to have a third or fourth class funeral. That's nice, that's proper. I don't shout: "My name is so-and-so, I must have the luxury class!" No, I say politely: "I am Delet, I've led an honest life, earned my living honestly, now I'm dead, and here's peace, rest, sleep!" Isn't that right? Well, that's enough about death. At forty-one I married. The girl I chose was young and fresh, a Mademoiselle Boé, perhaps you've heard the name? The daughter of a maker of sanitary installations. Another 20,000. Hee! hee! I'll say no more. Work it out for yourself! I was happy: my coffee in the morning, my paper in the evening, and Marie waiting at my side. Alas! Fate decreed otherwise. An unlucky confinement. The boy lives, Marie is dead. Poor Marie!

'*Garçon*, coffee and calvados. What about you? A nectar of the gods! *Garçon*, three calvados!

'My son. Here's a photograph. A splendid boy! A genius! Only four, but how he can count! I've left him with my sister. Now I am alone. I live quietly. After all I'd been through I sold the business. But I buried Marie myself first. I have worked enough. I've bought a charming villa; now I plant beans and sweet peas in my own garden. Ah, the beauty of nature! I've a little housekeeper. Hee! hee! Zizi. A rosebud! But'—to the Teacher—'you've seen her for yourself! What? Wouldn't you like to? I'm still fresh and strong, I keep going. Now I've decided to place my capital. I wanted a Russian *rente*, but he's convinced me to stick to my own line. "Necropolis": very well, what's wrong with funerals? I've had a good rest the last three years. I'm ready for more work . . . The main thing is to reckon everything up exactly in advance. If there are profits, there'll be calvados, and Zizi, and sweet peas. But moderation, moderation, and life will be beautiful!'

Suddenly M. Delet became visibly tired. Before swallowing his calvados he rinsed his mouth with it, then lay back in his chair, unfastened the lowest button of his waistcoat and became completely immobile.

Then the Teacher said: 'Monsieur Delet shall be my sixth disciple.' For a moment M. Delet seemed to wake up and mumbled: 'A disciple? No! we two shall be equal partners . . . our "Universal Necropolis" will be a great success'. But immediately afterwards he sank back again into total indifference.

'He's ready, he's ripe, he's running, like his own splendid camembert! My child, should doubt ever creep into your soul, take a look at M. Delet and you will understand that the end is nigh. Perhaps there isn't a man in the whole world who has gone so far along the road to the future as he, for out of the deepest night comes the dawn.' Then the Teacher stood up and commanded me to rise too: 'Look again! look at him!'

M. Delet sat staring in front of him with unblinking eyes that were perfect in their vacuity, a dead cigarette stub clinging to his lower lip, one hand crushing a bunch of violets lying on the table, the other lightly toying with trinkets representing Faith, Hope and Charity on the watch-chain which dangled across his stomach.

'Look, this isn't just Monsieur Delet, it is Buddha, the bringer of final peace. There are two ways to Nirvana: through complete refusal, final negation, the way of the ascetic and the rebel; and through the sweetness of being, through ultimate pleasure. Look, Monsieur Delet is no longer on the road to the end: he *is* the end—the ultimate—nothingness!' And, as he said this, the Teacher—and I after him—bowed down reverently before Monsieur Delet. Scarcely turning his eyes in our direction, Monsieur Delet murmured languidly: 'Yes, yes, I know! Your country has some barbaric customs! But now you're in France, you're free men. Better pour me a glass of water, I must take a pill. Otherwise—my stomach, my stomach, my poor stomach!'

CHAPTER X

Germany: a six mark fine, and Schmidt's organising ability

AT THE BEGINNING of 1914 a marked change occurred in the Teacher's disposition and way of life. Nothing—not the successes of Mr Cool, who, on his return from America, converted to the path of righteousness one genuine Rothschild, two Radical journalists suffering from gout, and more than twenty Papuans brought to Paris for an international stock-breeding exhibition; not the dramatic exploits of Alexey Spiridonovich, who, in view of the non-existence of God and the frivolous behaviour of his latest fiancée, took it into his head to commit suicide, to which end he daily dosed himself before the eyes of this (by no means timorous) lady with fruit salts, alleging that they were potassium cyanide and exacting vows of fidelity; not Flic-Flic, Aysha's new god made in the likeness of the traffic policeman opposite our house, who had particularly impressed my black brother, being cruel and proud and directing the destinies of worlds with his mighty wand—nothing entertained the Teacher any longer. He became serious, almost melancholy; often he would leave us and I would come across him in the company of all kinds of people, e.g. Serbian students, German commercial travellers (the latter suspicious to a degree) and French financiers. Once I even found him with a Russian monk, the favourite of aristocratic ladies, who was shouting at Jurenito: 'I spit at your snout, you toad! Scatter like swinish pearls, Antichrist!', adding immediately afterwards in a whisper: 'throw in another hundred Katenkas*, sir, and I'll take you just where you want to go'. The Teacher did not explain to us why he sought these people out. Night after night he would pore over tedious studies of such matters as German and British

* A Katenka is a 100-rouble note.

export statistics, production figures of various coalfields, etc. Maps of African colonies and complicated diagrams now hid the paintings of Picasso and Léger on the walls of his room.

In March the Teacher announced that he had to go to Germany for a few weeks and suggested that we should all accompany him, for the trip would be a highly instructive one. Monsieur Delet at first dug in his heels, saying that he hated the idea of going abroad anyway, and particularly to the Prussians. But the Teacher persuaded him with ease and speed to change his mind.

I was always impressed by Jurenito's resourcefulness and the extraordinary variety of his methods for taming widely differing specimens of humanity. How had he managed to compel the close and calculating *rentier* that was Monsieur Delet to hand over all the money he had made out of burying the dead? How had he persuaded that pudgy Frenchman, who had spent all the forty-five years of his life sitting in his office or in the café at the corner of his street, to abandon his Zizi and his sweet peas in order to follow a shady adventurer to the ends of the earth? Naturally the Teacher did not appeal to Monsieur Delet in the name of the future of humanity; no, he convinced the Frenchman with irreproachable logic that his way was the only one that led to wealth, happiness and the sweetness of life. Events appeared to refute these arguments, for the forty thousand vanished and still there were no profits in view; yet the perfection of Jurenito's calculations remained, and when Monsieur Delet lost heart the Teacher turned up, pencil in hand, to laugh all minor difficulties out of court and point to the heavenly pastures ahead. The Teacher proved to Monsieur Delet that the Germans were bound to be more interested in the 'Universal Necropolis' than any other nation, and that it would be they who, scorning all prejudice, would finally make a going concern of it. 'Nothing for it, business is business,' said Monsieur Delet as he got into the railway carriage, giving Mademoiselle Zizi his final instructions on how to water his favourite carrot-bed.

And so we came to Germany. I must confess we did not feel any too well there. Ercole suffered more than the rest of us, and his sufferings became the weak point in our budget. Not through ill intent but wholly by virtue of his childlike spontaneity he did everything wrong and we were obliged to pay fines on his behalf as often as five times a day. He would light his beloved 'dog's tail' cigar in non-smokers, throw banana peel under the very feet of the *Schutzmann,* walk in those parts of public gardens where walking was forbidden, sit down to rest on the backs of recumbent marble women who, as if to spite us, turned out to be allegorical figures surrounding Bismarck's memorial, and commit many other misdeeds of the same kind. His innocent passion for spitting cost us particularly dear; arrested by a policeman in Frankfort and taken to the station for questioning, he spat—only once and very neatly, as he said—over the top of the cardboard files between the police clerk's head and a bust of the Kaiser into a spittoon in the corner, and was promptly put in jail, whence Jurenito extricated him by paying a substantial sum and producing a medical certificate to the effect that Ercole was suffering from a nervous disease.

Monsieur Delet was very depressed. He lost his cheerfulness and *élan* and said that if all women had such fat calves and all restaurants in the world served boiled potatoes, life would obviously not be worth living. 'Of course the Germans are interested in the "Necropolis". What can anyone in this country do but die?'

Alexey Spiridonovich, also in very low spirits, at last found a master of philosophy from Halle and decided to open his heart to him, expressing all his doubts concerning the existence of logic and illustrating this theme at many points by incidents from his life story. The philosopher, however, remained strangely indifferent. At the start of the conversation he furnished Alexey Spiridonovich with a detailed bibliography on the subject which interested him, but later he politely took back the list of books and instead offered Alexey Spiridonovich the address of a hydro with up-to-date shower baths. Alexey

Spiridonovich comforted himself by relating the same story of his life that very night to Klärchen the waitress, a plump blonde, who shed a heartfelt tear, offered her services 'as a loving sister' at once, and charged only ten marks for everything, for she was trying to save enough to be able to marry Herr Otto, an assistant in a cigar shop.

Aysha suffered simply and quietly from the cold and wrapped himself in the Teacher's tartan travelling rug.

I missed the Paris cafés, and tried in vain to replace the Rotonde by cakeshops with checked tablecloths and waitresses in starched caps.

Only Mr Cool showed no signs of dissatisfaction; he liked travel and regarded Jurenito as a capable guide. In every town we visited he would immediately inquire into the current rate of the dollar, the number of churches and schools and whether there were many establishments where he could install his automatic slot-machines.

In the mornings the Teacher would go off to attend important business meetings; in the afternoons he would go with us to view the towns where we were staying. Everything excited his interest and everything evidently put him in a happy mood. He liked in particular to show us the universities, the barracks and the beer halls; these, in his words, were the 'larvae of a new society'. Slashed about in the course of their periodic duels until they resembled meat cutlets, the *Burschen* sat like obedient children, their fingertips on the lids of their desks, attentively taking in the magnificent construction of the universe as conceived in the pathos of Kant or the sharp-edged intelligence of Hegel, preparing for an honest career as trainers of peasant children or officials in the Excise Department. Watching military exercises, the Teacher admired the uniformly out-thrust chests and pulled-in stomachs, the faces which had lost the last trace of individuality, and that 'right-left' which instantaneously shifted the splendid toy. When the sergeant boxed some undisciplined Fritz or other on the ears for holding his head slightly to one side, everyone, including Fritz, showed

complete satisfaction, for the point at issue was not Fritz's knocked-out tooth but the perfection of the marvellous mechanism. Then we would visit one of the five-storey beer-drinking establishments, where two thousand customers regularly flushed their stomachs with ten to fifteen thousand litres of beer. Everyone sat at identical tables: men, women and children. Waitresses ran up to taps fitted in the walls and in the twinkling of an eye filled dozens of monumental pottery mugs. Then a batch of customers would rise and pass into a large adjoining room to relieve themselves, so that they might be able to continue the interrupted work. This, incidentally, was described as entertainment; an orchestra played military marches, some of the fathers read humorous magazines and laughed resoundingly, while others stared dully at the walls hung with various proverbs and wise sayings such as: 'Drink without worry, God is watching over this house', and the like.

'Look,' the Teacher would say after such an excursion, 'everywhere else people live simply for the sake of a peaceful existence, for their innocent pleasures; they live, they say they love, they fall ill and suffer, then they die. But here, with clenched teeth, from morning till night, people possessed by a single will—in the schools as on the parade-grounds and in these beer-halls—are forging great chains for others—for others and for themselves—or else, perhaps, the finest steel swaddling-clothes for their dearly loved children.'

Once, on a walk through Stuttgart, as we passed the magnificent flowerbeds of the public gardens, something happened which was exceptional for Germany and which put Ercole into a state of ecstasy. Walking towards us along a deserted path came a poor woman with a baby in her arms and a young student in an oilcloth cap, meek and dreamy in appearance. The student addressed the woman politely and, after speaking to her for a couple of minutes, went and stood aside in deep thought. So far everything had been quite normal, but what happened next was unimaginable. The student calmly stepped over the railing surrounding a flowerbed and started assiduously

trampling the first March hyacinths. 'There, there's a gesture for you!' cried Ercole, transported. 'Now they'll nab him, like they did me, remember?' But there was no one about. After waiting a little the student went to the gate and, finding a policeman, addressed him. This was irresistibly curious and we came close to listen. Here is what the student reported to the *Schutzmann*:

'My name is Karl Schmidt. I'm a student at the Technical College. I have just trampled a flowerbed in the park in protest against the bad organisation of the State.' The policeman heard him unmoved and took out his receipt book.

'You'll have to pay a fine of six marks.'

'I've only got two marks eighteen pfennigs.'

'Then kindly follow me.'

We went along too and entered the police station, leaving only Aysha and Ercole outside to avoid putting temptation in their way or in that of the police.

'Explain your action,' the officer on duty said to Schmidt.

'I was protesting against the absurd system of social economy. In the park I met Frau Müller, a widow of a stonemason's labourer. Last year she used to do my washing at a cheap rate. She asked me whether I knew of any work for her as she had been having a very hard time since her husband's death. Frau Müller has a child at the breast, and she cannot find a job. She told me that she had been obliged to pawn her blanket and that she was losing her milk as a result of insufficient nourishment. Then I looked at the flowerbeds in the public park. Large sums are spent on maintaining them, yet Frau Müller's son, a member of society, a future elector to the Reichstag, may die for lack of milk. I am not in the least sorry for Frau Müller, though she is a perfectly decent woman. I am prepared to condone the annihilation of a thousand babies for the good of society, but I cannot bear such senselessness. I trampled on the flowers—which anyway I detest as patently useless objects—to draw the attention of society, the press and the Government to these shameful contradictions.'

The policeman took down the statement without saying a word. Then he asked about the six marks. 'You may serve a prison sentence in lieu of the fine.' At that point the Teacher intervened. He offered Schmidt the missing 3 marks 82 pfennigs as a friend, saying that a man of such intelligence must not waste his time in a place of detention.

Then all of us, including Aysha and Ercole, went off to Schmidt's room. He lived in an attic, so small that we were obliged to stand motionless all the time—as on a tramway platform—but scrupulously tidy. The walls were covered with portraits of various persons, to wit, Kaiser Wilhelm, Karl Marx, the philosopher Kant, Herr Aschinger, the owner of 270 restaurants in Berlin whose organising talent Schmidt greatly admired, and a large ruled timetable entitled 'System of distribution of week-days and holidays of Karl Schmidt, student of the Stuttgart Technical College'. All Schmidt's time, from 7 in the morning when he woke until 11 at night when (except on Saturdays) he went to sleep, was strictly divided between various occupations. Thus from 10 to 11 p.m. on Saturdays Schmidt devoted himself to love. He explained to us that love did not interest him much and that he had even intended to remain a virgin, but this would have required time and an effort of will which he needed for more serious purposes. He had therefore taken the advice of a medical student he knew, and had decided to sacrifice an hour a week, to which end he had selected a modest but hygenic establishment kept by a Frau Hase.

As soon as he came home, Schmidt for reasons of economy (he lived on only 60 marks a month) took off his suit, which had already served him for four years, and put it away carefully in a trunk—for there was no other furniture in the room—remaining thereafter in his underwear. From our talks with him we learned many picturesque details which bore witness to his passion for order and method. It appeared that, apart from the timetable, he had another chart, devoted to the sixty marks and covering all his expenses, from laundering his socks to Frau Hase's Saturdays. Five months previously

Schmidt had received a supplementary three marks from his mother 'for a little pleasure'. He had pondered for a long time on how he might spend the money wisely without disobeying his mother's injunction. He wanted to buy a new set of drawing instruments, but this cost four marks. Then he thought of celebrating his Aunt Bertha's birthday by going to the Metropole café and having a cup of coffee and a slice of cherry cake with whipped cream, but this would have cost only 60 pfennigs and the remaining sum would have been even more difficult to spend. The three marks continued to lie in his trunk, and Schmidt explained that he could not, on account of the respect he bore his mother, give them to Jurenito. Talking of pastries, Schmidt expressed his indignation at the fact that in the cake-shops they often went bad, for the fools could not calculate how many they would sell in a given day. He was equally shocked by his landlady who peeled her potatoes raw, so that at least 30% of the total was lost.

The conversation then turned to serious matters. Schmidt was greatly interested in all of us. Aysha's presence disconcerted him, and he confessed that he could not bear the thought of the vast territories of Africa remaining in a state of primitive chaos. He was, however, an optimist and believed in a better future. The most important thing was to organise the whole world as he had organised his life, for he was convinced that he lived better and more wisely in his attic on 60 marks a month than any multi-millionaire. He was able to be a nationalist, a follower of the Kaiser and a socialist all at the same time. In substance they were identical. Both Wilhelm and any socialist realised that the world was not organised, and must be organised by means of force. 'Our enemy is anarchism, regardless of whether it is represented by Herr Bambucci, a revolutionary with a bomb, or by Herr Delet, who may become a Minister tomorrow, but will always remain a *rentier* who recognises only the pleasures of life.' (Acting as interpreter, I translated this sentence to Monsieur Delet, who was deeply offended by it, particularly at being lumped together with

Ercole, whose mere presence was an embarrassment to him). He, Schmidt, was doing a great deal of work in many fields of mechanics, chemistry and political economy. He had worked out a large number of plans, though unfortunately it would be difficult to put these into effect in the prevailing disorder. Take, for example, the final dissociation of complicated sexual problems from the fundamental question of population increase. He insisted that artificial insemination was a practicable possibility. Unfortunately he was unable to carry out the necessary tests. He was certain of success. And, for that eventuality, he had worked out a law on compulsory childbearing. Further, a no less important question: the replacement of basic nourishment by chemicals; elimination of hunger and poverty, a gain of billions of working hours. But when, when would he be able to turn at last to practical work? Here was Wilhelm playing with pacifism and the socialists becoming tamer and tamer every year. Where was salvation to come from?

All these remarks, which I translated, provoked an outburst of indignation. Monsieur Delet tried hard to be calm and even, remembering where he was, logical.

'Very well! Let's suppose that all this nonsense can be put into effect. Then what? Instead of an *escalope à la jardinière*—a pill (as if I didn't have enough with my Pinks), instead of Zizi . . . What horror! Neither nature nor beauty, neither love nor appetite! Only a timetable! But ask him, ask him—what would be the point of living?'

Ercole declared simply that if we were not in this accursed Germany where they fined you for everything—but absolutely everything—and at home in Italy, he would immediately stick a knife into that scoundrel. What a louse! And he had thought, earlier in the park, that here was an honest fellow!

Alexey Spiridonovich was unable to utter. Squeezed against the door by Mr Cool he suddenly burst into floods of tears and babbled 'Save us, save us! Lord, Lord, Lord, have mercy!' As for me, the feeling Schmidt produced in me was one of confusion and even fear, as in a factory when faced with an

incomprehensible machine in motion, capable of cutting off a workman's head if he doesn't look out.

Despite all our protests and tears, the Teacher pushed his way through to Schmidt and said: 'I knew you at once for what you are. You shall be my seventh and last disciple. Your hopes are destined to come true sooner than you think; believe me, I shall assist you in this. You others, look: here is one of those destined, now and for a long time to come, to stand at the helm of humanity'.

Schmidt stood there, smiling good-naturedly, Schmidt with his curly head, large glasses and patched shirt. He heard the Teacher to the end, and briefly answered: 'Very good, Herr Jurenito!'