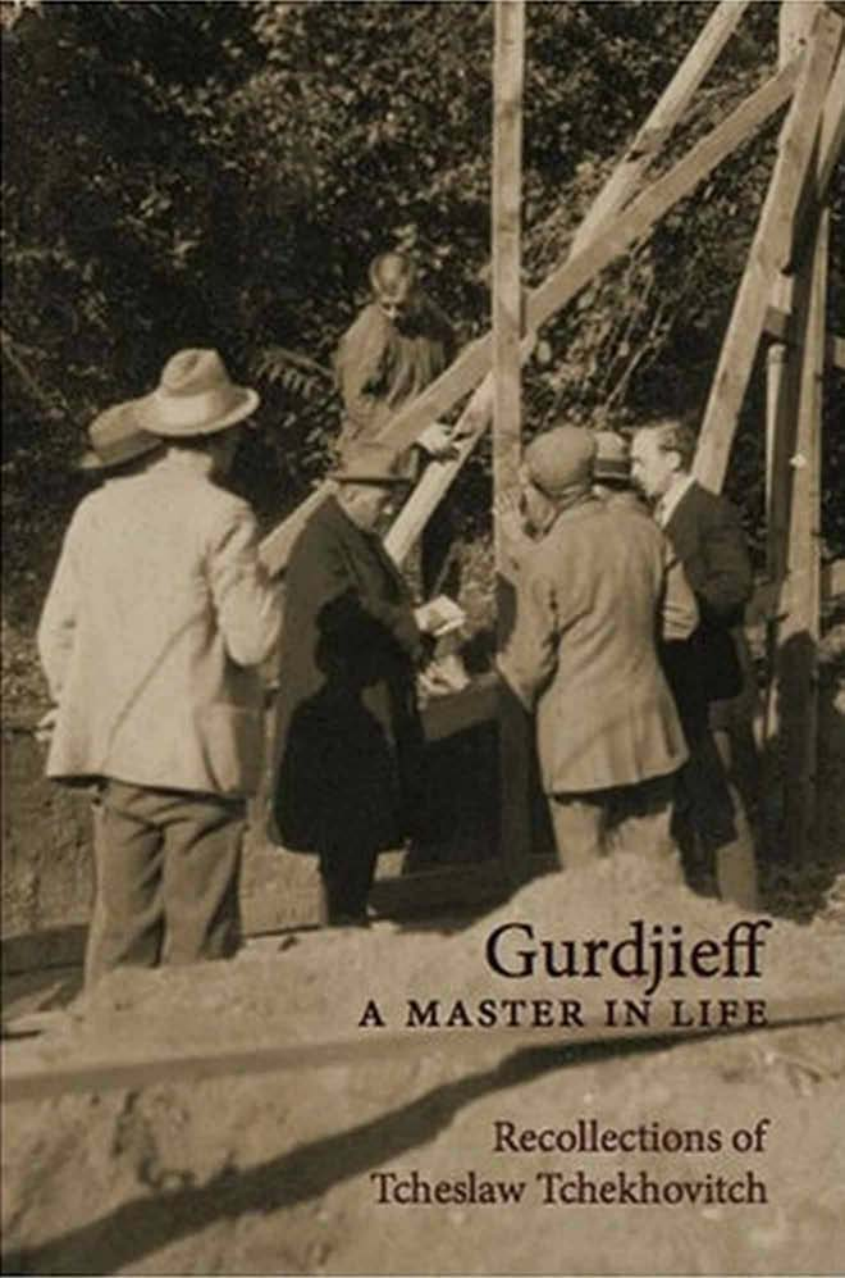
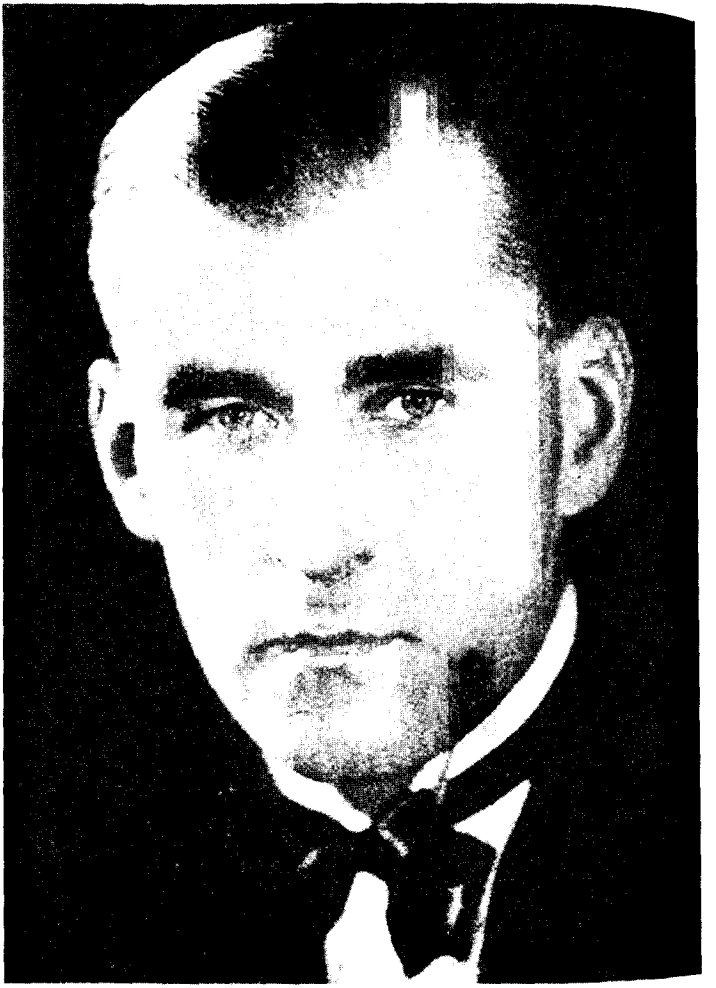


Gurdjieff

A MASTER IN LIFE

Recollections of
Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch



Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch

Gurdjieff

A MASTER IN LIFE

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Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch

DOLMEN MEADOW EDITIONS

Toronto

CONTENTS

PART II: Memories of the Prieuré (1922–1930)

PREFACE

AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR, the Bolshevik Revolution, and a great many circuitous adventures, Gyorgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff found himself in Constantinople with several students from his Russian groups. It was there, in the early 1920s, that Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch, fresh from being a promising officer in the army of the Tsar, had the good fortune to come into contact with Gurdjieff in the course of a series of lectures given by P.D. Ouspensky.

A few years before his death in 1958, Tchekhovitch realized the importance of his numerous personal recollections and first-hand accounts of his life at Gurdjieff's side, and he felt a pressing need to record this unique experience so that it should not be lost. With groups of students interested in Gurdjieff's teaching gathered around him in Paris, Lille, and elsewhere, Tchekhovitch began to dictate from scattered notes written in very rough French. These bits and pieces did not constitute a continuous text and clearly called for shaping, restructuring, and complete rewriting to make them presentable.

Michel de Salzmann decided to compile these fragments

into a genuine narrative. He wanted to include me because he was anxious to have the collaboration of a pupil of Tchekhovitch in carrying out this work so that, as well as being literary, it would respect the memory of the man who had initially drafted it. Let us hope that the reader will find in these accounts both Gurdjieff as he was and Tchekhovitch as he became with the benefit of Gurdjieff's teaching.

It is my wish that the reader may discover, through the pages that follow, Gurdjieff as the 'master in life' that he was and as Michel de Salzmann has characterized him. This expression reflects Gurdjieff's true stature – a stature even greater than the 'master of thought' that he also indubitably was.

Serge Gautier d'Orier

FOREWORD

AS THE RECOLLECTIONS gathered together in this book were written down after Gyorgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff's death, it was naturally impossible for me to show them to him, which I certainly would have done had he been alive. These accounts have been recorded with sincerity and with all possible faithfulness to the events. At the same time, they are necessarily subjective, for which I take full responsibility.

Why do I feel so strongly the need to relate these experiences? I spent twenty-eight years in contact with Gyorgi Ivanovitch under many different circumstances, and I now recognize that my life began to have meaning only through this man and his teaching. Moreover, Gurdjieff's ideas and work have aroused a growing interest throughout the world. Being one of the increasingly rare survivors of that heroic period, I have felt the obligation to record, for those who didn't know him, the indelible impressions left on me from being in the presence of this extraordinary man.

When I was speaking about 'work on oneself', as taught by Gurdjieff, people would often ask me what he was like in daily life. My first recollections were simple and brief. But

as more and more of them came back to me – rich in detail and substance – they became evocative of the essence of the man. At my students' urging, I then elaborated the notes they had already taken and developed them into what eventually became these recollections.

This is no doubt a different approach to Gurdjieff. In view of the many, often baseless, speculations about the man, it seemed to me essential not to forget Gyorgi Ivanovitch as a human being, in his relationship with others, with life itself, and with his teaching.

Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch

PART I

Memories of Constantinople 1920–1922

FIRST MEETING

In January 1920, I was in the Polish contingent of the Tsar's army, which was retreating toward the south. When we reached the Black Sea, we hastily boarded ship. Our vessel made a short stopover in Bulgaria and then proceeded to Constantinople, which was to become my home for a year and a half.

I was greatly relieved to find myself far from the atrocities of the civil war. To tell the truth, I had become involved in it against my will, for it was impossible to remain neutral amidst the turmoil. Of course, I had every intention of saving my skin, and our landing in Constantinople seemed to offer us an unexpected opportunity to escape this inhuman conflict without dishonour.

In Constantinople, the war seemed very far away. Even so, I could not erase from my mind what I had just lived through. Nightmarish images of the barbarity and violence obsessed me. I could not find any reason for the war and its atrocities. Yet, in the very midst of the hostilities, during brief moments of sleep or while dozing from extreme fatigue, a strange intuition arose in me that there exists another life,

a life full of meaning. In my youth, similar impressions had already given rise to many questions, and it was undoubtedly these experiences that had prepared me for what was to follow.

I regularly went to the Russian community centre, Russki Mayak. There, one day, I saw a poster announcing a series of lectures by a certain P.D. Ouspensky. Their theme was rather mysterious: "The ancient wisdom of the East revealed through a new current in Western thought." This attracted me and I immediately decided to go.†

I couldn't say now what the first lecture was about, but one fact does remain in my memory. Mr. Ouspensky gave us practical instructions so that we could verify for ourselves through direct experience whether or not his assertions were correct. Surprised by this approach in the first lecture, I promised myself that I would return for the others.

As time passed, more and more people came to these talks. I was struck by the fact that the ideas, which were becoming clearer for me and seemed to shine with truth, often seemed to provoke resistance in those who had recently joined us. They often interrupted Mr. Ouspensky and prevented him from fully presenting his ideas - which made us 'old timers' furious! Fortunately, he arranged to meet us after the lectures, and sometimes we spent the entire night in cafés of the old quarter. In such picturesque places, rounds of *duziko* accompanied by oriental delicacies agreeably enriched our endless philosophical discussions.

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† These lectures were subsequently presented in greater detail in Ouspensky's book, *In Search of the Miraculous.*

The more I went to these talks, the more my interest grew. The meetings became so fascinating that I resolved not to be distracted by anything that would keep me from them. A new world had really opened up, a world that drew me to it. I felt a need to become more balanced – to put my house in order, so to speak – in order to be capable of listening sincerely to this inner call that was beginning to make itself heard within me.

My family and friends did not understand what was happening to me. For them, I had simply fallen under the influence of a guru or a charlatan, and they considered me beyond hope. I felt quite the opposite, for I was becoming more and more aware of my own shortcomings and particularly of my lack of knowledge. I knew that 'Time has no pity', and that I should not put off completing my studies, which had been brutally interrupted by the war. Although I had been made an officer when the war broke out, the only diploma I had was the Polish equivalent of the French *baccalauréat.*

The Russian *émigrés* in Constantinople were very worried about the future of the younger generation. Many ingenious solutions were proposed by well-known people and various organizations to allow young people to continue their studies and obtain degrees. Czechoslovakia opened its universities to Russian students, even granting them scholarships, in part to affirm its Slavic identity. The United States also offered them certain advantages. Obviously, Constantinople would be only a temporary stopover.

The most clear-headed among the Russian *émigrés* knew that they would never see their homeland again. Others

remained hopeful that one day they would return to their old way of life. While waiting, they all lived as best they could, the wealthier selling off their goods, including their jewellery. As for the young people, most of them eagerly accepted the scholarships offered.

Everyone had the same burning questions. What to do? How to organize one's life? What direction to take? I myself was deeply uncertain. We often raised these questions in our conversations with Ouspensky. He told us we were living in 'biblical' times, when prophecies seemed to be coming to pass. And he added, "What is needed today is the emergence of a new kind of man, one who is capable of understanding the meaning of human life."

He assured us that he knew someone who could open the way for us. This person was soon to arrive in Constantinople, and the aim of these preliminary lectures was to prepare people like us to understand his language and practical teaching, which offered keys to man's possible evolution. I still didn't understand very well what Ouspensky was alluding to, as I was not particularly attracted to mysticism, philosophy, or psychology. Even so, these lectures left me with a taste of something universal that I had never experienced before.

Almost a year had gone by without my missing a single meeting. One day, I arrived a bit late with someone I had invited to attend. I noticed right away that Ouspensky, instead of being seated in the centre as usual, was sitting to one side. Another man was in his place. This man had a dark complexion and a large black moustache, and his head was completely shaven. He had a particularly penetrating look,

and his Russian had a strong Caucasian accent. I didn't pay much attention to what he was saying. Actually, I was quite annoyed, for I had often spoken about Ouspensky to the person I had brought, and here was this intruder upsetting my plans.

At the time, I was incapable of understanding what this man was talking about. Each sentence seemed to contain a paradoxical meaning bordering on the absurd. It was so preposterous that I couldn't help laughing throughout the entire meeting. When it was over, I felt irritated and would have liked to tell Ouspensky how much I felt that the evening had been wasted. However, the person I had brought with me was in a hurry to get home, so I had to leave without introducing him.

At the next meeting, I arrived a little early and waited for Ouspensky with a few other regulars in the gardens of the Russki Mayak. As soon as he appeared, I went up to him.

"Piotr Demianovitch," I said, "What happened? Why did you let that man talk all evening? Usually, the meetings are so interesting! At the last one, I heard only trivialities. This man gave such an incomprehensible talk that I couldn't stop laughing from start to finish."

"My dear Tchekho, this only shows to what extent you are not yet ready. The man who made you laugh so much is none other than Gyorgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, the man I told you about. What he says is very profound, very coherent, but you have to know how to listen and you're not yet capable of that."

Ouspensky's words hit me like a slap in the face. How could I put the situation right? Above all, how could I explain

my uncontrollable laughter? This last question stayed with me for several days. It suddenly became clear that only Mr. Gurdjieff could tell me the cause of my laughter, and I had no choice but to go to him for an explanation. Various scenarios crossed my mind. The more I thought about the answer he would give, the more I imagined him telling me I had behaved like a fool. However, on second thought, if Mr. Gurdjieff were truly an exceptional man, he would take the time to explain the reason for my laughter. Whatever the outcome, whether he gave me an answer or not, I would at least have the means to measure the man's worth.

A few days later, firmly resolved, I went courageously to his house. I can still see myself in front of his door, my finger at the doorbell, frozen in mid-air. A stream of thoughts had interrupted my movement: 'Aren't you making a big mistake? Isn't it stupid to ring his bell like this?' I stood in front of his door, paralysed by indecision. It occurred to me to go and see Piotr Demianovitch instead. I took a few steps down the street, but my legs drew me irresistibly back to the door. The same scene was repeated two or three times. Finally, exasperated and disgusted by my lack of resolve, I decided to throw myself into the lion's den, and I rang the bell.

It was Mr. Gurdjieff himself who opened the door. In a calm, welcoming voice he greeted me. "Well, my boy, you've come to pay me a visit?"

"Yes, Gyorgi Ivanovitch," I answered, surprised. "I need to talk to you."

The door closed behind us and, rather than being in a lion's den, I very soon found myself in the warm atmosphere of a large family. From the entrance hall, we went into

a room where there were already several people. Apparently, Mr. Gurdjieff was having tea with some of his students.

"A glass of tea?" he asked me.

I accepted with a nod, relieved to be able to make myself very small while drinking my tea. Mr. Gurdjieff noticed, no doubt, that I was beginning to relax. He gave me time to finish my tea, then got up.

"You're tall and that's going to be useful," he said calmly. "Could you help me take down these paintings? I would like to hang them somewhere else."

"Of course," I replied. I got up and followed him. He led me to the other end of the room where several paintings were hanging. He had me switch two of them and straighten some others. No doubt this was a pretext for having a *tête-à-tête.* He sighed and sat down on a bench, inviting me with a gesture of his hand to do the same.

"Is this simply a visit, or do you have something to tell me?"

"Well, I do have something to ask, but I don't quite know how to put my question."

"It doesn't matter. Put it as it comes."

"All right, then. When I was listening to you the other evening, I started laughing and couldn't stop. I don't really understand why. Can you explain this to me?"

I suppose I had spoken these words while looking down at my feet, for I don't remember at all the expression on his face. What I do remember is my surprise at not seeing him react in the way I had expected. Instead of replying right away, Mr. Gurdjieff remained silent for a long time. He seemed to be recalling the evening. Then, in a soothing

voice, he said, "Ah, yes, I remember that you laughed several times, and now you would like to know why. No doubt it's because what I was saying seemed absurd to you. Let's see if it's really that."

He uttered some unrelated words, and then asked what each of them meant to me. I managed to respond but not without difficulty. Then he composed a sentence out loud using these same words, and remarked, "What happened was that this sentence, asserted by me as truth, seemed an absurdity to you."

He demonstrated that these particular words, taken together, produced in me such a contradictory impression that it made me laugh. Then he explained the real meaning that was contained in these words, which revealed a completely different perspective from the one I had given them. The meaning of the sentence then became very clear. He repeated the same demonstration three or four times, asking me each time to tell him the meaning that certain words had for me. Again, he constructed a sentence from these words, a sentence that at first seemed absurd, given my own interpretation of the words. He repeated the sentence, explaining the real, deeper significance of each word and finished by showing me the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

His explanations left me both flabbergasted and, at the same time, enlightened beyond anything I could have hoped for. And to think I had been worried he would treat me like a fool! On the contrary, he made me feel that I was capable of understanding him. I was astonished, confused, and filled with wonder, all at once, because I was ashamed not to have

grasped this earlier. One thing had become certain – I was ready to follow him anywhere. All my prejudices had been swept away. Faced with such intelligence, there was no need to ask myself if my new attitude was reasonable, or whether he deserved my confidence. It was simply self-evident.

With him right there in front of me, I couldn't help asking another question that had been tormenting me for a long time. It concerned the mystery of my dreams of premonition. I told him how they had always guided me in the midst of danger. He then asked me, "How long have you been participating in the preparatory group?"

"About a year."

"You're not planning on leaving?"

"Oh, no! At least, I don't think so."

"Then, with time, the answer you're looking for could be the fruit of your efforts, of your search. One day you will understand on your own that what you want someone else to give you now, all at once, would be of no use. Only what you understand through your own efforts can become part of you."

I was delighted, and his words gave me hope concerning the question of my dreams. I felt that it would be taking advantage of his hospitality to stay any longer. I thanked him and asked if I could come back. He told me he was staying there for a few more months and that I could see him again if I wished. And then I took my leave.

On returning home, I was filled with a desire to participate in the work of this man. I felt that I had to commit myself. It was necessary to make the kind of decision from which there is no turning back – a decision not dictated by

calculation, choice, or any petty interest. It would be a decision that would determine my life, just as the life of an animal is determined by its habitat: the worm by the earth, the bird of prey by the air, the trout by the stream.

I felt that the relationship being established between Mr. Gurdjieff and those around him was very special. For me too, I felt so much in my element that it seemed completely natural to want to be there. It was in this state of mind that I returned home. It seemed that now I knew another dwelling place, the one everyone dreams about – the 'house of the father'.†

† John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (King James Version of the Bible).

DVADTSATNIKI

In Constantinople, I very soon found myself living at Mr. Gurdjieff's house and having my meals there. This gave me a wonderful opportunity to observe at close quarters the many Russian refugees who came to enjoy his abundant meals. His wife, Julia Osipovna, was in charge of the cooking with the help of several of his pupils, and as more and more people came to eat there, we had to find larger and larger pots to prepare the meals.

The Russian refugees were desperately poor. Most of them were former government officials, now completely destitute. They all crowded into Mr. Gurdjieff's home. Some came with soldiers' mess tins; others were served using the crockery of the house; and they sat wherever there was room, on benches or the stairs.

Mr. Gurdjieff often brought all these refugees together, remonstrating with them about how they must adapt quickly to their new conditions of life. Most of them, however, were convinced that good times would return, and that they would soon be able to go back to Russia. No one seemed to take Mr. Gurdjieff's exhortations seriously.

Mr. Gurdjieff was a kind and attentive host, receiving everyone with generosity. When he spoke to the refugees about their situation, it was always after the meal, when hungry bellies had been satisfied. After a week or two of such genuine friendliness, Mr. Gurdjieff began to speak insistently of the need for each of us to make his own contribution.

"The cost of these meals cannot always be left to the same people," he said. "Everyone must help. All of you can earn some money, but first of all you must wish to do so."

Several days later, Mr. Gurdjieff seemed a bit irritated. Without showing any anger, he forcefully asked us not to leave after lunch, because he wanted to speak to us about helping him with his activities. He added that he would specify what help was expected from each person, according to his abilities. When the time came, instead of speaking to each of us in turn, as was his custom, he paced up and down as we watched him expectantly. His face was sombre and thoughtful.

"You seem concerned, Gyorgi Ivanovitch," someone ventured.

This was the one spark that Mr. Gurdjieff needed to set him off, as though he had been waiting to begin, and he immediately turned on the unfortunate speaker.

"How can one not be concerned? So much misery everywhere, so much poverty among our fellow *émigrés*, so many obligations weighing on us all. I cannot and do not want to shirk my responsibilities."

He observed our tense faces for a moment, then continued. "I have spent nearly all my money. Tomorrow's meal is far from certain! I've had to borrow right and left to keep

things going up to now. Some of you say you want to help me, but you do nothing."

We bowed our heads in shame. Each of us felt his hard reproach.

"I'm not saying that you don't want to help me, but a vague intention is not enough! Like all members of Russia's ruling class, you have been nothing but parasites all your lives. You only wait for one thing: the day on which your salary drops from the sky. You are all *dvadtsatniki*,† incapable of the least initiative, of earning a living on your own. It's as if you prefer poverty to making an effort. Not one of you has paid any attention to my suggestions or warnings. Think about it! If I don't get the necessary money today, tomorrow I'll have to abandon you. I'll be unable to offer you anything at all. One might almost say that this prospect pleases you more than making an effort to help me. What sort of respect can I have for people incapable of being independent? You are all under the sway of this parasitic climate, which is everywhere now. You are slaves, subject to whatever happens. If you really had no possibility of earning money, no one could blame you. But if you haven't even tried, you are less than nothing."

No one dared raise his eyes. My guilt weighed heavily on me, and I too felt like an unmasked parasite.

Several people started to speak, timidly stating that they were ready to make the necessary efforts. Mr. Gurdjieff swept

† The Russian word *dvadtsat* means twenty, and it was on the twentieth day of the month that civil servants were paid. The term *dvadtsatniki*, meaning "the faithful of the twentieth day", is somewhat pejorative.

it all aside with a gesture. "All this is just words. What is needed is action. Those of you who are ready to do something, go to the back of the room."

Almost everyone did so.

Mr. Gurdjieff disappeared, taking some of his closest followers with him. When he returned, his arms were laden with carpets and various objects. Quickly forming us into groups of twos and threes, he distributed the articles to be sold, indicating the minimum price we had to get for them.

"Go to the bazaar in Constantinople," he said. "There you will find a select clientele, especially among foreigners and Turkish collectors, who greatly appreciate Russian antiques."

He then sat down on a bench and casually lit a cigarette. Gradually, the groups set out. On parting, each of them ceremoniously said good-bye to him. Mr. Gurdjieff replied with a smile, and our faces relaxed.

When Mr. Gurdjieff was alone, I approached him with the noble intention of offering him some Turkish pounds, earned in a restaurant where I was in charge of the cloakroom. I sat down next to him and said, "Gyorgi Ivanovitch, since you are short of money, may I offer you some Turkish pounds?"

He turned toward me as if nothing were wrong and asked, "Do you know the current price of diamonds?"

Put ill at ease by this riddle, I stammered, "Why? Does someone want to buy some?"

I was acutely aware that this was a silly question. Mr. Gurdjieff seemed to ignore it, and went on. "I have a real

problem," he said. He took a large red handkerchief from his pocket and opened it carefully. I was astonished to discover that it contained a heap of diamonds of various sizes.

"Ever since the Russians have been selling their jewels for almost nothing, no one wants to buy these at a decent price."

"But Gyorgi Ivanovitch, with all these diamonds, you're very rich! You just said you haven't a penny. And I offered you some miserable Turkish pounds!"

"Tchekhovitch, you are naive. If I don't push them to the limit, they'll never get down to earning money."

Of course, Gyorgi Ivanovitch turned down my offer.

Only a few hours had gone by when the first small group of would-be merchants reappeared. Very excited, they recounted how they had succeeded in selling their two carpets at a good price, even higher than what they had been told to get.

"We didn't do badly! Especially since these carpets weren't worth much, according to the buyers."

For a moment, they already had the detached air of true professional merchants.

As for the other groups, they returned with long faces. They had sold nothing, claiming that the asking price was too high.

"None of you understand anything," said Mr. Gurdjieff. "You believe the first person who comes by. Besides, you gave up far too soon. What price did I tell you to ask?"

"Twenty Turkish pounds."

"Twenty Turkish pounds? Impossible! I couldn't have told you such nonsense. These are the carpets that the Shah

of Persia offered to the Grand Duke Alexander on the occasion of a state visit to Russia, when the Shah was invited by the Grand Duke to a hunting party on his estate. These carpets have historical value."

With these words, he set a price twice as high as the previous one.

That same evening, a second group succeeded in selling these 'historic' carpets to some foreigners eager to possess such collectors' items, and at prices even higher than those fixed by Mr. Gurdjieff.

Each group in its turn tasted the exhilaration of success. Gyorgi Ivanovitch enjoyed himself immensely, inventing new and irresistible sales pitches for them. After several days, he said, "Now you've got it! You know the secret of success in the marketplace! So from now on, it's up to you!"

These experiences gave birth to careers in business that were as rapid as they were spectacular. Some immediately opened their own shops; others became excellent dealers. Their contact with Mr. Gurdjieff gradually became less frequent as they became more and more absorbed in their affairs; but I am sure that in their hearts they always felt a deep gratitude toward him.

After these events, I had an increasing desire to understand Mr. Gurdjieff's apparently enigmatic behaviour.

THE CASE OF YOUNG ALEXIS

How could a teaching as valuable as that brought by Mr. Gurdjieff be transmitted? He had always wished to establish his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, which had only an ephemeral life in Russia because of the political situation. In 1921, under even more precarious conditions, he reopened its doors in Constantinople, where I was accepted as a pupil. As my financial situation was tenuous, Mr. Gurdjieff allowed me to live in his house.

A newcomer also came to live with Gyorgi Ivanovitch, who gave him a small attic room. We soon became friends and he told me his story. Alexis Combe was a young man of about twenty whose pale face was covered with pimples. His father was a wealthy shipping magnate. I learned that Alexis suffered from a life-threatening nutritional disorder and that Mr. Gurdjieff had agreed to treat him. This is his story.

Alexis used to begin his day with a breakfast of three or four large cups of coffee, twenty fried eggs or an enormous

omelette, and bread and butter in corresponding quantit... For lunch, this young Pantagruel† devoured several bowls of soup, a number of steaks, a variety of vegetables, and an almost endless supply of desserts. His millionaire father hoped to make an athlete of him, and believed that such a diet could only lead to perfect health.

I don't know how long this went on, but one day those around him recognized with astonishment that, instead of filling out, gaining weight, and becoming athletic, Alexis was getting thinner and thinner.

When the father saw his son's cheeks becoming hollow and his entire face erupting in pimples, he was seriously worried. He consulted a doctor, who prescribed some medicine. The treatment was followed for some time, but when the father realized that this doctor was not helping his son, he consulted an even more renowned one, who of course asked for higher fees. A new treatment program was worked out, which resulted in Alexis' cheeks becoming even more hollow. His father then decided to take him to a specialist, who declared that the young man simply lacked appetite, prescribed drops to stimulate it, and put him on an even richer diet. Alexis conscientiously swallowed his drops and his appetite increased so much that two dozen eggs were barely enough for his breakfast. In spite of all that, the pimples continued to blossom on his face, and he became weaker still.

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† Pantagruel is a larger-than-life character in a series of books by the French author François Rabelais (1495-1553) entitled *La Vie de Gargantua et Pantagruel.*

The situation seemed hopeless until Mr. Combe met a psychiatrist, Dr. de Stjernvall, to whom he related the dramatic story of his son's illness. Dr. de Stjernvall suggested that the case be referred to Mr. Gurdjieff, who examined Alexis and immediately ordered blood tests. These showed the young man's blood to be so depleted that he was threatened with a slow death, as if, paradoxically, from lack of nourishment. The father begged Mr. Gurdjieff to take Alexis under his care.

When the time came to set the fee, Mr. Gurdjieff asked how long, exactly, Alexis had been eating in such an absurd way. Next, he calculated the cost of all the food consumed as well as its preparation, and added the price of the medicine taken and the combined fees of the doctors already consulted. He then announced to the father that the treatment would cost precisely this amount. Furthermore, Mr. Gurdjieff stipulated certain conditions that must be met before he would agree to look after the young patient: Alexis would have to live in Mr. Gurdjieff's house and no one would have the right to interfere in any way with the treatment he would impose. The father accepted without hesitation.

I will never forget Alexis' first morning. He was accustomed to having his breakfast of two dozen eggs brought to him in bed at ten o'clock in the morning; instead, he was awakened at seven o'clock by an imperious voice.

"Come down, Alexis, come quickly. Gyorgi Ivanovitch is waiting for you!"

As soon as Alexis appeared, Mr. Gurdjieff put him to work. He asked him to straighten things up, move some

benches, wash the floor, cut the wood, get the bread. All this had to be done very quickly, and without a moment's rest. After this, he had to clean the stairs. When this was done, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, pretending to be clumsy, spilled a bucket of garbage so expertly that the stairs were dirty again from top to bottom.

"Alexis, Alexis, look what happened. Would you be so kind as to clean up this mess?" implored Mr. Gurdjieff.

Alexis had barely finished cleaning the stairs again when Mr. Gurdjieff asked him to rearrange the pictures on the walls and then to help move the stage we used for practising the Movements. By nine o'clock, Alexis, sweaty and covered with dust, was already exhausted. Gyorgi Ivanovitch then declared that, after a final sweeping, we could have breakfast. At this prospect, Alexis seemed to recover his strength.

When the work was finished, breakfast was finally announced. But before coming to the table, we had to wash and change, making one more small effort. Before Alexis went up to change his clothes, Mr. Gurdjieff asked him in a friendly voice, "Alexis, I believe that you like fried eggs?"

"Oh, yes!"

Mr. Gurdjieff turned to his wife and said, "Julia Osipovna, make some eggs for Alexis, and bring us some coffee."

You can imagine how Alexis felt when he was ceremoniously served just one fried egg, a small cup of coffee, and a single croissant.

I was uneasy. I watched as indignation flooded his face. Who knows what black thoughts or unpredictable reactions might have taken hold of him if Mr. Gurdjieff had not said

in a reassuring tone, "We're not eating much now, but we'll have much more at lunch."

Poor Alexis – he had spent twenty minutes making himself presentable, only to find the meal practically finished before it had begun. He obviously did not understand, and looked incredulously at Mr. Gurdjieff. Seeming to ignore him, Gyorgi Ivanovitch added, "He who eats quickly can also work quickly and well. All those who have finished, hurry up and put on your work clothes. We have a lot to do. In less than an hour people will be coming to practise the Movements."

We had to move the furniture, roll back the carpets, and move the stage again. Then we had to change our clothes once more and join those arriving for the Movements class. At noon, numb with fatigue, Alexis was served a small bowl of soup, a piece of bread, some salad, and a piece of fruit. After that, Gyorgi Ivanovitch allowed him a brief rest, but barely half an hour later he called him and it started all over again.

This went on for two weeks. It was a tremendous ordeal for Alexis, but his horrible pimples were beginning to dry up. During these weeks and those that followed, Alexis more than once cast deadly looks at Mr. Gurdjieff. But Gyorgi Ivanovitch, with great fondness, always managed to calm him. After six weeks, some colour appeared on Alexis' face, his hunger was less painful, he began to smile, and his cheeks filled out. I noticed that he had even become aware of the presence of women. The intense physical work, the special gymnastics, and the warm atmosphere of the community, restored his energy and *joie de vivre*.

When Alexis' father came, at Gyorgi Ivanovitch's invitation, to visit his son, he could not hold back his tears. Of course, he wanted to take Alexis home right away, but Gyorgi Ivanovitch interceded. "If you want him to get even better and his condition to stabilize, then he must stay for at least two more weeks."

As for Alexis, he no longer had any desire to leave Mr. Gurdjieff. Moreover, he wanted very much to continue to take part in the Movements and dances that we were practising regularly in preparation for a public demonstration.

At the end of Alexis' stay at the Institute, Mr. Gurdjieff explained to us what had really been going on with this poor young man as a result of his excessive eating.

"In man," he told us, "certain glands produce a definite quantity of substances for the digestion of food. Suppose, for example, that the organism produces 50 grams of gastric juices, and with these 50 grams it can transform 500 grams of various foods into elements that can be assimilated by the blood. If the organism takes in 1000 grams of food instead of 500, the proportion of gastric juice will no longer be 1 to 10, but 1 to 20. So, heavy food, which is digested slowly, cannot be broken down into elements that can be absorbed by the blood. Only lighter food, which can be transformed by gastric juices diluted to a proportion of 1 to 20, will be digested.

"You understand that I am not giving you exact numbers or precise data about digestion, but with these examples

you can grasp what was happening to Alexis. In fact he ate much more than a kilogram of food and put so much into his stomach that his gastric juices – as well as other digestive juices I haven't mentioned – were diluted to the point of not being able to break down even the lightest foods into elements that could be assimilated. Therefore, almost everything he ate simply passed through his organism without nourishing him at all.

"If he didn't die in spite of all this, it's because somehow or other his body adapted and managed to use some of the first mouthfuls that were eaten. On the other hand, since his stomach expanded more and more, he had to eat more at each meal to feel satisfied."

Turning to Alexis, Mr. Gurdjieff said, "Now your stomach is almost normal. If you wish to stay in good health, do not eat more than you've been given here during these last few weeks. For a certain time, you must accept that you will finish your meals with a sensation of hunger. Now, this sensation of hunger leaves you half an hour after the meal, which is great progress, but soon it will disappear the moment you leave the table."

Following the two additional weeks demanded by Mr. Gurdjieff, Alexis left us to go back to his studies. I never saw him again.

THE FIRST COLD SHOWER

As far back as I can remember, I always dreamt of developing my physical capacities to the full: my dexterity, suppleness, and especially my strength. I even managed to convince my parents to buy me a complete set of body-building equipment, and I applied myself to working out with an obsessive dedication.

Results were soon evident. I quickly surpassed all my classmates and even my elder brother. When I became the school champion, sure of being admired and envied by all, I began to be consumed by a feeling of superiority, which I tried to hide beneath an appearance of adolescent timidity. As for the girls who turned my head, I hoped to charm them by flaunting my strength.

During the war, my overdeveloped and bulging muscles were of no advantage, as they made me an easy target for bullets and shrapnel. But as soon as I arrived in Turkey, I managed to get hired as a circus wrestler in the capital, and the glorification of my body soon returned. I quickly became a star in wrestling tournaments and, if not the champion, at least a favourite with the girls. So, full of pride, nose in the

air, and hands in my pockets, I sauntered through the old town, pompously observing the petty occupations of my fellow creatures.

At that time I became a member of Ouspensky's group. In this milieu, which favoured intellectual pursuits, I was almost ashamed of my exaggerated muscles. All the same, I gradually let it be known to Ouspensky, and later to Mr. Gurdjieff, that I had unsuspected possibilities, and I took advantage of every occasion to show off my physical prowess.

From time to time Gyorgi Ivanovitch would say, "Bravo Tchekhovitch!" and I was overjoyed to have again aroused the admiration I felt I deserved.

One day, in front of the others, Gyorgi Ivanovitch declared with great fanfare, "Look everyone! Tchekhovitch has so much strength he doesn't know what to do with it all."

I realized it was now or never: this was the moment to show them they hadn't seen anything yet! Lowering my eyes, and with an expression of extreme humility, I said, "You know, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, I can do even better! During the war I couldn't work out, but now I'm planning to take it up again very seriously, and, what's more, on a scientific basis."

Gyorgi Ivanovitch looked at me calmly, nodding his head. "Very good, Tcheslaw. That's very good."

An egotistical exhilaration began to take hold of me.

"Go ahead," Mr. Gurdjieff continued. "Train. Become stronger and stronger. But you know, whatever you do, you'll never become stronger than a donkey!"

I saw stars. Feeling dizzy, my face crimson, legs like lead, I looked around, desperate for some way to regain my composure.

That first cold shower was all it took. I never again boasted about, nor even took any interest in, my physical strength.

AN ENTERTAINING MEMORY

Sleight of hand and the skill of jugglers had always fascinated me. At twelve years old, I wouldn't miss, for anything in the world, even one of the evening shows given by jugglers in our town. One day, I plucked up enough courage to introduce myself to one of the performers, whose feats were loudly proclaimed on the posters. At first, I sensed that he wanted to put me off; then, touched by my look of disappointment, he invited me to dinner. He must have seen qualities in me that could be useful to him, because he soon made me his assistant.

As a result, I nearly ended up as a professional conjuror, a job that all but destroyed my romantic illusions about this kind of entertainment. However, I never quite lost my conviction that truly miraculous powers do exist. In fact, my interest became even stronger when I saw certain feats being performed: for instance, the ability of some people to demonstrate an extraordinary memory. No tricks are possible there, I told myself. This gift seemed like a miracle, and I was determined that one day I would possess a memory like that myself.

Events came and went: war, revolution, and finally my meeting with Mr. Gurdjieff in Constantinople. Encouraged by his interest in my work at the Institute, I confided in him my fascination with the psychic faculties of man, mostly still unexplored. He asked me which one I would particularly like to develop.

"Memory," I replied.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch smiled and calmly lit a cigarette. Then he explained that there were many kinds of memory, but that at my particular stage of development I could only manage one – 'entertainment' memory. He added that he would teach me how to develop this type of memory, on condition that I would apply myself and take advantage of any opportunity that arose.

For some time I thought he'd forgotten his promise, and I was afraid to remind him. However, one day when we were alone together, he gave me an exercise. While he did so, I was struck by his detached and relaxed manner, which I would become more familiar with later. He told me to let him know when I succeeded. Two days later, I managed it, and was ready to be tested. He then gave me another exercise.

This is not the place to elaborate on these exercises. It is enough to say that Gyorgi Ivanovitch explained the laws of mnemonics to me in detail. After several months' practice, I could perform several tricks. For instance, I invited members of my audience to suggest words in different languages and assign a number to each word. When I had a list of a hundred or so, I'd have someone read the list just once, but not in numerical order. For example, the reader might say "67 electricity, 18 miracle, 42 thank you, 33 *zdravstvuite*",

and so on. Then someone would ask me which word corresponded to which number, or vice versa. I'd give the right answer every time. People were amazed at my ability to repeat a long series of words corresponding to numbers in ascending or descending order.

Later I improved my act. By now I was able to memorize the faces of the people giving me the different words with their corresponding numbers, and soon learned to put scrambled sequences of words back in their correct order.

With mastery of the principles given me by Gyorgi Ivanovitch, and thanks to an additional exercise, I was able to perform the following:

On a blackboard, someone from the audience would write eight numbers, each with eight digits. Each number was written one above the other, making a square. This was then hidden from me. Someone else would then indicate a row or column, and I would recite the whole sequence it contained. Also, given any coordinate in the square – for example, "third column, fourth row" – I could identify the corresponding number, and state how often it appeared. Finally, without a moment's thought, I could say how often any number recurred. The audience was even more thrilled when I managed these feats while engaged in an activity requiring manual dexterity, or even while dancing. Clearly no trickery was involved, and I could equally well give the correct answer anywhere, any time.

This was nothing more than a cabaret act, but people naively credited me with supernatural powers. I insisted, however, that it was merely an exercise in mnemonics – taken to the limit, certainly, but still based on simple logic.

FROM DREAM TO REALITY

It was 1921. I had been in Constantinople for about a year, and I was certain that Russia was living through a bad dream that could not last. If not tomorrow, it would perhaps end in a month, two months, a year, but eventually everything would have to return to normal. Calm would prevail. We could return to our homes and take up our lives again – not quite as they had been, of course, but perhaps we could find a new way of living, based on principles of real justice and mutual understanding among the different classes of society. I don't remember having discussed this with Ouspensky, but the hope of soon returning to Russia was alive and deeply rooted in each of us.

At that time, I believe, the last pocket of White Russian resistance in the Crimea had not yet been eliminated, and Tsarist money was still being traded on the market. The Russian *émigrés* followed these events day by day, and everyone was consumed by the fever that dominated the Constantinople Stock Exchange. Some got rid of their roubles, even while complaining about the foreign businessmen who, they felt, were exploiting their misfortune by

buying at a very low price. Others, who had already earned a little Turkish money, were happy to buy large quantities of Tsarist bills, with the idea of acquiring property on their return to Russia.

I too began to make money and, one day, as I was passing a foreign exchange office, I was astonished to see a pile of Tsarist bank notes, in large denominations, offered at the ridiculously low price of a few Turkish pounds. 'What idiots,' I thought, 'It's a fortune. In Russia, I'll be rich! But it's too easy! Perhaps I shouldn't ... and yet .... To think that my parents dreamt of selling their bonds and making a 200,000-rouble profit. Now their dream will come true; I'll have the 200,000 roubles!' With this thought, I entered the exchange office and snatched up my small fortune.

When I arrived at Mr. Gurdjieff's house at 35 Yemenidji Street, I was so overjoyed that he asked me, with his usual composure, "What are you so happy about, Tchekhovitch?"

"I met these idiots, Gyorgi Ivanovitch."

"And so?"

"For a mere three Turkish pounds I acquired more than 200,000 roubles. Do you realize, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, what a fortune this will be when we return to Russia!"

I see now how naive I must have appeared, and I understand why Mr. Gurdjieff didn't dare shatter all my insane hopes at once. He was very kind all through lunch, and several times he even called me 'Moneybags'.

At first, I took him seriously and, inflated with my own importance, I felt truly rich. But each time he called me Moneybags I sensed the irony, and became more and more uncertain. Still, it was difficult for me to jump from blind

confidence to abject doubt. However, doubt won out, and I finally took the risk of asking, "Gyorgi Ivanovitch, from what you seem to be saying, perhaps I've made a mistake. Could all these bank notes really be worthless?"

"They do have value, but not what you think."

"But you, wouldn't you have bought them?"

"Yes, in fact I am looking for some to buy, and I would be happy to buy yours too, but only when they cost half the price of wallpaper. I would like to paper the walls with them."

I knew that even when he was joking, there was an element of truth in what he said. Trying hard to contain my emotions, I replied, "Russia can't disappear! Money can't become worthless! Why do you say that? Where is my mistake?"

"Your reasoning, Tcheslaw, is sound. There is only one thing that you are not taking into account: the Russia that you knew no longer exists, and will not exist for a long time to come."

"So, what's to be done?"

"Prepare to live abroad for a very long time."

His response, like a shock, produced in me an awareness of reality. I have often relived this abrupt moment of awakening. I still wonder how Mr. Gurdjieff could have had, yet again, such a clear vision of how events would unfold.

A NEW WAY OF THINKING

When Ouspensky was in Constantinople, he stayed on Prinkipo, an island in the Bosphorus. His pupils met there regularly and Mr. Gurdjieff often attended these meetings. He would enter discreetly, then quietly follow the conversation, listening attentively while observing us closely. When he intervened, it was always unexpected.

One day, after a long silence, he shook his head and, making a gesture with his hand, said, "All that, it's just philosophy!"

"Isn't philosophy useful?" someone asked.

"Yes, philosophy can be very useful, but only up to a point. And then, only if it's actually philosophy in the proper sense of the word. Unfortunately, what you are doing is just pouring from the empty into the void."

"But Gyorgi Ivanovitch, what should we do?"

"Do? It has already been said that man in his ordinary state can do nothing. However, he can try to observe and notice what is actually happening in him. Only such observations can lead to real understanding, and understanding is the threshold of real doing."

He then asked us to tell him of our discoveries, our 'little Americas', as he called them. Our observations were showing us the force of mechanicalness in all our manifestations, even the smallest. At the same time, we were led to see what he called the wrong functioning of the 'centres' of the human machine. Our illusions about ourselves collapsed one after another, but, at the same time, we had glimpses of a new level of consciousness, different from what we had previously known.

Mr. Gurdjieff began to join in our conversations more often. He showed us, in subtle ways, either the authenticity or the abnormality of various aspects of human behaviour. The following recollections are from this period.

A Discussion about Food

One day, Mr. Gurdjieff arrived in the midst of a lively debate in which the vegetarians in our group were fiercely defending their cause. Among them was Mme N., the wife of a banker. Actually, this lady was not a vegetarian; she could not stop talking and involved herself in everything in order to be noticed. She never missed an opportunity to show off her eccentric opinions, or defend ideas that she thought were highly original.

"Gyorgi Ivanovitch," she said, "it really isn't necessary to kill animals to feed ourselves, is it? Can't we live perfectly well on grains, milk, fruit, and vegetables?"

"Yes," Mr. Gurdjieff replied, "it is quite possible, because everything required for the physical and spiritual life of

man can be found in the vegetable kingdom."

Mme N. was radiant. "You see," she said to the others, "I was right!"

"Yes," Mr. Gurdjieff added. "You would be right if our human existence was limited only to the spiritual, but it isn't. Meat is necessary when there is hard physical work to be done, or in a very cold climate, or when edible plants cannot be found. Besides, our canine teeth as well as other biological characteristics show that our digestive system has been adapted by nature to assimilate meat. Animal flesh provides all the substances we need, both for the intensive working of our organism and for maintaining a normal temperature in cold climates. So, you are right, and at the same time, you are not right."

I particularly liked such moments when, with an objectivity infused with tolerance, Mr. Gurdjieff widened the perspective of our exchanges.

Hypnotism and Hypnosis

In my youth, I was passionately interested in hypnotism. I tried to practise it, but with uncertain results. I did succeed in hypnotizing people, but not always in correctly bringing my 'experimental subjects' back. The power of hypnosis intrigued me, and I really thought I could help people by using it.

Boasting a little, I told Mr. Gurdjieff about some of these experiments. In reply, he spoke at length about the danger I had been to those who took part in my experiments. This

led me suddenly to have serious doubts about what I had done.

He explained to me that another even more dangerous kind of hypnosis exists, under which all men live in their ordinary state. He made me understand that it was under this very hypnotic influence that I myself had behaved so irresponsibly.

"It is because men do not wish to liberate themselves from this hypnotic state of sleep in which they live, that they can so easily be hypnotized," he said. "That is why their psyche is subject to that terrible disease called 'suggestibility'. De-hypnotize yourself, Tchekhovitch. Only then will you be able to help others."

The Demands of the Way

Another time we were speaking about 'schools' in the traditional sense – that is, about the different 'ways' Ouspensky would later describe in his book, *In Search of the Miraculous.*

"What should the attitude of a pupil be in such a school?" one of us asked.

"The attitude of a pupil is judged according to each individual, and is not necessarily always the same," replied Mr. Gurdjieff. "To say that something is objectively good or bad, right or wrong, can only be true in relation to a particular case. What is most important is that the pupil develops those qualities that make it possible for him to maintain the necessary attitude. An allegory can perhaps help you grasp

the qualities that are really required and the subtle principles on which the work of a school is based. Only those who understand, who can accept and undergo the conditions I am going to describe, will be able to go further.

"Imagine you are in a vast, virgin forest. In a clearing, there is an isolated house, far from anywhere. You are given the opportunity to live there in complete freedom. There is just one condition: you are asked to maintain a certain substance at the boiling point in a cauldron, which is firmly set over a fire. You don't know anything about this substance. One of your duties is to get wood from the forest to feed the fire. The boiling must not stop at any price. No one is checking on you. You don't even know whether someone will come to relieve you. Nothing is certain. However, you have to hold out. The result you obtain will depend on your perseverance, on your rigour, on the honesty with which you undertake this task, which no one verifies except yourself. Besides, no one has the least interest in either encouraging or discouraging you.

Well, would you be able to accomplish such a task for an indefinite time? And without trying to find out what is boiling in the cauldron, however intrigued you might be by that question? What is more, the lid of the cauldron, even though it is easily lifted, must not be moved."

Naturally, many of us thought it did not make sense to undertake this blindly, to waste one's time, go to all that trouble, without knowing in advance what all that might produce.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch listened patiently to our objections and perplexities. "I have no doubt that you are sincere," he

said, "but you need to understand that to be able to bear the difficulties of a situation so foreign to our reason, you must have already been prepared by life itself."

None of us dared ask questions about this preparation acquired in the course of life, which could allow one to surmount so many temptations, including laziness, curiosity, doubt, and the whole gamut of uncontrollable reactions.

Much later I began to suspect what this mysterious alchemical substance might be, and why it requires such sacrifice to obtain the gift it bestows.

The Inner Prison

When Mr. Gurdjieff arrived at our meetings he was usually smiling, but we knew beforehand that, after hearing our observations, he would surely show his displeasure. One day, however, it was just the opposite. He had entered with a sombre air, but when one of us began to speak of the state he had experienced at the moment he seriously undertook the exercise suggested for the day, Mr. Gurdjieff began to look at him attentively, and his face brightened into a smile.

"From that moment on," our companion continued, "a strange state took hold of me, a state in which I felt I could no longer perceive what I was doing, in which I felt ashamed that I couldn't really do what I had decided, in which I realized that I had given myself a number of good reasons for not really living something which nevertheless I had felt to be...." He stopped, then continued, "To be an experience...."

No, it is not an experience."

Someone suggested: "More like a task?"

"No," he replied, "from that moment on – that's it – it no longer was a task for me. All I could recall was that I was supposed to be doing a task. However, when I had first tried it, when I had felt the need to live the experience, it really was a task. But when later I tried to do it, my decision seemed to have no weight, no importance; the meaning of the task was gone. My ordinary state had gotten the better of me."

There followed an animated conversation during which someone said that the moment when one clearly sees one's state is similar to what a prisoner must feel. Listening to us as he smoked, Mr. Gurdjieff smiled with satisfaction. I do not remember exactly when he joined our conversation, but I remember well that he spoke humorously about how prisoners might react to their situation. "Sometimes a prisoner, crushed by his situation, becomes embittered, withdraws into himself and, full of resentment, spends all his time pitying himself and dreaming of his lost youth. Another looks out for the least hope, the smallest ray of light, and ceaselessly prays in order to recover his freedom. A third lives in the hope that his sentence will be reduced; and to be well liked by his jailers, he becomes obsequious, and even an informer.

"I knew some sorry prisoners," Mr. Gurdjieff continued, "who brought up three generations of spiders, which they succeeded in taming and even in teaching tricks. Another became friends with mice and rats, and still another shared his bread with sparrows. Each of these prisoners looked for

a way of adapting to his condition and of finding a means to escape, not from the prison, but from himself. But only the one who sees that he is imprisoned in himself has a chance of freedom; that is, if he really desires it and is intelligently prepared. One needs to think very carefully and see *who* is in prison and what the prison consists of."

During the following weeks, Mr. Gurdjieff spoke to us about what he called 'the inner prison' and about the long process of liberation or awakening to oneself.

Religion

Another day, when Mr. Gurdjieff arrived, we were speaking of all the various religions. This time he joined in our conversation almost at once, saying, "There are not three, not twenty, not even two, religions. There is simply Religion. As for the rest, you can call them what you like: the study of Holy Scriptures, the teaching of theological principles, ritual practices, the Church or the community of believers – but don't call any of that religion. True religion is always and everywhere the same – it is one and unique."

A long silence greeted this strong statement, until one of us ventured to disagree. "I cannot consider religions such as Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, or Protestantism as being one and the same religion, because they have always been constantly in conflict with each other."

"This is true," replied Mr. Gurdjieff. "I cannot accept, or even imagine, that at the heart of religion there is any division or conflict whatsoever. The name of religion is given

today to a sect that yesterday was regarded as heretical."

This reply perplexed us, and no one said a word. The silence was finally broken by one of the most astute among us. "I understand the sense of your reply, Gyorgi Ivanovitch," he began, "and I see that you are right. But we are talking of different religions – for example, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity – they are different in their rites, their forms, and also in their essential nature."

"Yes, there are big differences," Mr. Gurdjieff agreed.

"Exactly," was the reply. "So in that case, shouldn't we speak not of Religion, but of religions?"

"Tell me," asked Mr. Gurdjieff, "in your opinion, what is the most important thing about a religion, whichever it may be? Is it the rite, the form, or its essential nature?"

I do not remember his reply, but I do remember that Mr. Gurdjieff then spoke to us about the nature of religion.

"The essence of all the religions you've mentioned is the same," affirmed Mr. Gurdjieff. "Fundamentally, they are all concerned with only one thing – evolution. The teaching of each great master enables his pupils to follow a certain evolutionary path, and to arrive at a level where contact with the highest cosmic force becomes possible. At their root, all the teachings are one and the same, each having as its purpose to help us attain this possibility."

"Well then, why do they seem to be so different?" someone else asked.

"It's true, they do appear to be different, but their fundamental nature is not. If you want to understand why their appearance is different, the following metaphor may help.

"Imagine that a rabbit is shown to several people, and

each is asked to write a description so that there could be no doubt as to which animal it is, the only rule being never to use the word 'rabbit'. People begin to write, but instead of giving them three hours – let's say this is the time necessary to complete their descriptions – the papers are collected after only twenty minutes. If all these descriptions are read in front of an audience who knows nothing about how they came to be written, they will find it difficult to understand that they are hearing descriptions of one and the same animal. It is almost certain that no two listeners will have formed an image of the same thing - a rabbit. One might see a kangaroo; another, a rat; the third, a hare; a fourth might see a mule or an ass, or even a dog – all that will depend on how each description begins. One writer might begin by saying that it is a vertebrate, and so all the vertebrates in the world will appear to the listeners as a possible choice. Another starts by saying it is a rodent, and all rodents appear as possibilities. A third will begin by describing the colour of the animal, or by giving its measurements. Another will say it is warm-blooded, or will speak of its food, while another will evoke its cry, its paws, the way it runs, its look, or even its relation with human beings. In short, each will begin his description with the aspect that is easiest for him to write about, and so the listener will see a different animal in each description.

"An uninformed man faces exactly the same situation with the teachings transmitted by the founders of what you call different 'religions'. You are all speaking now as if you've only heard the beginning of the descriptions, where they seem most different. But beyond a certain point, all these

religions converge and constitute one sole Religion."

One of us then said, "I believe I understand you, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, when you speak of sects and when you give us the metaphor of the rabbit, but the great religions, which our friend mentioned, exist as a whole. They are not beginnings of a description. Each is presented as a unity, although they appear to be quite different."

"The difference is only apparent," replied Mr. Gurdjieff, "and this contradiction arises from several factors. People who judge a religion in this way have not penetrated the essence of the teaching, and their judgments are bound to be superficial. Religions are actually like mathematics: it is the elementary part, the most exoteric, that is offered to the masses, and this elementary part differs according to the religion. It is because a Messiah or Messenger from Above appears among people who differ in language, philosophical outlook, character, fundamental mentality, and many other temporal aspects, that he has to adapt to the times and choose an appropriate way to accomplish his task.

"You have already understood, haven't you, one important thing: man is not one. He is a multitude of numerous impulses and motivations that continually manifest in him."

We nodded our heads, acknowledging this truth that most of us had grasped by now.

"Well," Mr. Gurdjieff continued, "if the messenger chooses mastery of the body as his starting-point, his emphasis will be placed on what we will call 'the way of the fakir'. If the Messiah considers that his task will be fulfilled through feeling, we will see the development of 'the way of the monk'. To use Christian language, if the master relies on the divine

impulse of love or of charity, the way will consist of a specific work whose perfected and highest form will be the unique teaching of Christ. If, on the other hand, because of the culture of the time, he trusts that it will be through reason – the intellectual function – that he will be able to bring true ideas to life, it will lead to what we call 'the way of the yogi'.

"There also exists a 'fourth way', based on the sacred impulse emanating from Conscience, of which a germ is deposited in each human being. This way leads to another specific form of teaching, a new approach to Religion.

"You have agreed," he continued, "that in the description of the rabbit, a reading limited to the beginning would inevitably produce confusion. Even as a rabbit has many aspects from which one could begin its description, so Religion presents an infinite range of starting-points. Think especially of the real difficulty of escaping from the simplistic reductionism of ordinary so-called rational thought. Anyone would have to admit that almost no one knows the true essence of his own religion, yet everyone believes he can judge all the others."

He then finished the meeting with the following words: "Only he who has succeeded by persistent and conscious efforts in freeing himself from the chaos resulting from his own lack of consciousness can be aware of what Religion really means."

Such intense moments spent with Mr. Gurdjieff opened us to a deeper questioning about religion, and led us to approach traditional teachings with a new sensitivity.

THE AWAKENED MAN IN THE FACE OF WAR

Like everyone, it was in my adolescence that a definite image of myself was formed. I became completely convinced that all my opinions, reactions, and aims were absolutely justified and worthy of respect. I did not imagine that other values as true and valid as my own could exist. There were certain ideas – such as patriotism, duty, and friendship – that I held sacred and which had an absolute and unalterable meaning for me. It was a real shock to discover that others had motives and points of view quite different from my own that were just as valid and perhaps even more correct. One day, shortly after my arrival in Constantinople, a confrontation with Gyorgi Ivanovitch literally turned my inner world upside down and forced me to question the basis of all my beliefs.

We were drinking tea in the shade of the trees by the Russki Mayak, the Russian pavilion. Our conversation turned to memories of the war, still very much alive in our minds. It was a hot day and Mr. Gurdjieff, passing nearby, stopped to take some refreshment. We stood up to offer him a seat. He sat down and asked us to continue our conversation as if he

weren't there, and so we returned to our talk of the war.

Mr. Gurdjieff's relaxed attitude encouraged us to recount the many events we had all lived through. As we went from one heroic episode to another, we naturally fell to condemning the cowardice of the deserters. One of us began to accuse the Jews of not being patriotic and loyal to Russia and its allies. He described how, on different occasions, they had refused to fight. We all joined in to condemn these deserters and cowards.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch said nothing, but something in his attitude made us feel uneasy, and we wanted to know his opinion on such a burning subject. There was a moment of silence. We no longer saw on his face the look of approval that had been there before. He sighed deeply, and this sigh deflated our righteous indignation.

As the conversation bogged down, Mr. Gurdjieff intervened. "You say the Jews are unpatriotic, and accuse them, among other things, of being cowards unworthy to be Russian subjects. You also spoke of the great number of deserters at the end of the war. Can you tell me the difference between a deserter at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the war?"

This question astonished me. I had never put it to myself before. I suddenly understood that the only difference among these 'deserters' was the moment when they had opened their eyes to the reality of the war.

"He who realizes what war really is," continued Gyorgi Ivanovitch, "cannot but wish to desert. If Jews refused to participate in the killing and massacres, it was because, not being blinded by patriotism, they were more aware, less enslaved by

the general blindness, and so more free to act consciously."

These words of Mr. Gurdjieff made a powerful impression on me, as if he had asked me to set out leeks with their roots in the air. I knew nonetheless that his philosophy of the relativity of things often led him to be provocative, in order to bring out the absurdity of extreme positions. Seeing that his intervention had produced its effect, and that no one tried to contradict him, he got up and went into the pavilion. When he returned, he looked at his watch, saying that he had an appointment and had to leave.

After his departure the reactions set in. Just at the moment when the opposition to this offence against patriotism had reached its height, the waiter brought each of us a glass of tea and some little cakes. Seeing our surprise, he said that this kindness came from Mr. Gurdjieff. In response to this gesture, our indignation began to subside. The unease we had experienced before made its presence felt again, and our revolt against Mr. Gurdjieff's words gradually waned in intensity.

I quickly examined my conscience. I compared, for the first time, the committed attitude I had held in 1916 with the one I had in 1919, when, sickened by all the killing, I too became a potential deserter. In accepting the final retreat, I was agreeing, with deep relief, to abandon the struggle.

Several years later, I was all the more struck by the painful truth of one of Mr. Gurdjieff's terse aphorisms: "A conscious man refuses war. Mutual destruction is a manifestation of men who are asleep."

THE ORDERS OF LAWS

If Mr. Gurdjieff sometimes frankly expressed his dissatisfaction with our work, he also strove in subtle ways to help us see clearly what we had failed to understand. One day we spoke of how man is dependent on the laws that rule his existence. He listened with interest to the examples we gave, but when one of us incorrectly used the expression 'order of laws', he interrupted and asked what meaning we were giving to the word 'order'. Each gave his own interpretation. Someone said that it meant the quantitative or numerical order of laws in different worlds. Another saw in it the relativity of deterministic laws, each law depending on its distance from the primary source.

Having listened to us for a while, he said that if we are subject to a law, the importance is not just in the law itself, but in the possibility of becoming free from it, whether mechanically or by the evolution of consciousness. He reminded us that there are laws governing and maintaining cosmic worlds, laws to which planets are subject, laws governing organic life on earth, laws of a psychological order, laws governing the world of atoms, and so on. All these

worlds, from the largest to the smallest, are nestled within each other like a set of Russian dolls, each corresponding to a certain order of laws. Mr. Gurdjieff must have seen perplexity written all over our faces, for he often returned to this essential idea of his teaching. He tried very hard to help us by using images and metaphors that even a child could grasp.

"So now you see," he said to us one day, "a human being lives under different orders of laws. This comes from the simultaneous action of different orders of laws belonging to higher worlds on the ladder of the Ray of Creation,† the earth being contained in larger and larger worlds."

To help us understand these ideas, which were so new to us, Gyorgi Ivanovitch began by bringing them down to our level. He amazed me and my young friends, most of whom had just been demobilized, with the ingenuity of his explanations.

"Imagine," he said, "a boy born in 1920. In 1940 he will be conscripted with others of his age. So, from his birth onwards he is unknowingly subject to an order of military laws, which he will have to face only when he is called up. Military laws depend on the country, the division, the regiment, the platoon, etc., each level having its own laws.

"For example, when this young soldier is on call, he will be under certain laws. When he is on active duty, he will be under other laws. When he joins his platoon, for example, he will be free from the laws that weighed on him when he was

† This terminology refers to a cosmology found in P.D. Ouspensky's, *In Search of the Miraculous*.

on call, but now he will be subject to the laws of the platoon, regiment, division, and country. When he completes his military service, he will be provisionally freed from the orders of definite laws. So you see, the order of military life contains many laws a man is not aware of."

These simple and concrete images gradually opened us up to the ideas of scale and relativity that characterize his teaching.

RATIONAL GLIMPSES OF IMMORTALITY

I will end this account of our meetings with Mr. Gurdjieff in Constantinople by recalling an answer he gave to a question about immortality. It was in Prinkipo, shortly before our departure. A dear friend of a member of our group had just died, and we were speaking of this when Mr. Gurdjieff joined us. There was an embarrassed silence at being caught in idle chatter about the details of the deceased person's death. We felt ashamed that we had not been speaking about our work and observations.

After a while one of us began to fidget and cough, his nervousness showing the difficulty he had in formulating his thoughts. "I don't really see," he finally said, "how work of a spiritual nature leads to immortality. This question has always tormented me, and I find the explanation you gave about the possible survival of subtle bodies very obscure."

Mr. Gurdjieff looked hard at all of us, and then, with his habitual calm and a softness in his voice, he said, "Yes, it's true. It is very difficult to imagine how such a thing could be possible. We need knowledge of the different functions of the human body, and of physical bodies in general, to

conceive of such a possibility. In the laboratory of the human body, three kinds of nourishment – physical food, air, and impressions – are transformed, not only into the substances necessary for the life of the organism, but also into subtle substances and energies with higher frequencies of vibration.

"You know that in the gall-bladder, for example, stones form as a result of crystallization from a saturated liquid. Psychic substances obey the same law and, having reached saturation, they crystallize, as salt does when the concentration is above a certain level.

"In order to understand how immortality can be acquired, one must know that in certain definite conditions, man has the possibility of transforming coarse energies into very fine ones. By means of a work that accumulates these energies, they can reach saturation and eventually crystallization. As every student of physical chemistry knows, crystals have properties that have many advantages over those that exist in a saturated liquid.

"Let's take an example. If one empties a bucket of salt water into a river, one will be able to detect the presence of salt at a particular moment fifteen metres downstream. The water there will be less salty than the water in the bucket, but the salt will still be detectable. On the other hand, a kilometre farther down, the salt will be so diluted that it cannot be detected by taste or analysis.

"If we take the river as representing life, and salt as the immortal substance, then salt, once crystallized, will survive longer than salt water. Do you understand what I have just said?"

Seeing our expressions of agreement, Mr. Gurdjieff continued. "If it were possible to take away the salt crystal from the river's current and put it somewhere where water could not dissolve it, theoretically it would be immortal. In the case of man, the current of life unceasingly carries away all the energies formed in him, as we can easily discover for ourselves. If a man were able to withdraw himself from the devouring influences of life, the substance he consciously forms by his work could crystallize more quickly and remain on a higher level that is distinct from the one on which he lives his ordinary life. In such a case, this freed material substance, that of consciousness, would have unique properties in its own world. It would be an independent entity and would no longer be dissolved through the ordinary functioning of a living being."

I do not know how long this explanation took, but I do remember that Mr. Gurdjieff then spoke about the law of three forces, or the law of trinity. Using the metaphor of making bread as another example, he wanted to help us understand how a new independent entity could be formed.

"In making bread, water represents the active force, flour the passive force, and fire the neutralizing force. Bread is the independent result, the fourth element arising from the action of these three forces.

"Each of the three forces is necessary for the bread to be made; if one of them is missing, there will not be bread. From dough treated in a certain way, you could again get flour; but bread, though reduced to powder, could never again become flour. Once made, bread has a fate of its own.

"What is difficult to understand is the nature of the river

we spoke of earlier and the possibility of leaving it so that crystallization can take place. As you are now, you cannot do it; nor do you see the unfortunate consequences of not understanding this idea. It was precisely this lack of understanding that caused an asceticism to arise in many monasteries, where the monks too often exhausted themselves instead of developing. Perhaps you will understand later, but now, let's resume our work."

That evening, Gyorgi Ivanovitch took us to the Turkish part of the city where people were celebrating the feast of *Bairam*. He talked to us there for a long time about the rites and customs of the East.

The next morning, all our attention was taken by the careful preparations for our forthcoming departure.

LEAVING CONSTANTINOPLE AND REMARKS ON ART

Mr. Gurdjieff had called us all together at Ouspensky's house in Prinkipo. This meeting has stayed vividly in my memory, for I experienced there a rare feeling of happiness. Toward evening, after a long exchange, he spoke to each of us about arrangements for our departure. "Nina, Adèle, Leonid," and he mentioned several other names, "get ready to leave Turkey in a week."

Most of these people were the sons and daughters of families who were following Mr. Gurdjieff's teaching and had asked him to look after their children through those dramatic times.

"Olga Ivanovna, you and your husband" – and he added other names – "all of you, if you wish, can join those of us who will soon be leaving for Germany."

Mr. Gurdjieff's gaze stopped at me and then at Alexis M. "Tcheslaw, Alexis," he murmured, "and you, Ivanov, and you, Starosta, and you, Pan," he continued. "If you want, you can join us in Berlin, but you will have to find your own means of travel. The organizations giving aid to *émigrés* will certainly help. Once you're in Berlin, I'll do what's necessary."

In view of all the obvious risks involved, Mr. Gurdjieff strongly advised those of us who were leaving independently to choose a companion for the journey. Then he continued: "Alexander and Jeanna," he said, referring to the de Salzmanns, "Thomas and Olga," meaning the de Hartmanns, "I think we can leave at the beginning of next week."

This unexpected proposition, and the possibilities that it opened for us, made me suddenly very happy during those last days in Turkey. Several days later, accompanied by those closest to him, Mr. Gurdjieff left Constantinople.

Those of us who remained were very impatient, gathering together in groups like migratory birds on the eve of their departure. Starosta and Ivanov left together and quickly reached Germany. Pan, who was to join us after a visit to his parents in Poland, found us again only much later at the Prieuré. I made the journey with Alexis M. Because of the crazy adventures we had to go through, a trip that would normally have taken three days actually took us five months.

This is the story of how, together with seventeen other *émigrés*, we were kidnapped by Ukrainian agents to be shipped back to Soviet Russia, and through what strange circumstances we were able to escape from that terrible fate and rejoin Mr. Gurdjieff, the one man able to free our lives from chaos. Despite the risk of losing the reader through long digressions, I would like to recount the events that we lived through with such intensity during this period.

After Mr. Gurdjieff and his party had left, Constantinople seemed dead to us. Therefore, being anxious to speed up my departure with Alexis at any cost, I immediately set out to get the necessary papers. I found out that it was possible to obtain passports and visas for Germany, but it would take a long time. Then I learned at the Russian embassy that the German consulate did not welcome Poles very kindly, and that it would be easier to get into Germany via Hungary. Moreover, the Russian representative in Budapest was a Mr. Malama, a high-ranking nobleman whose children were old friends. My idea was that through him I could obtain whatever was necessary to get into Germany, in particular a Russian passport. Since Alexis already had the necessary papers for Hungary, I decided that the quickest solution for me was to get a permit for Poland, but with the intention of stopping in Budapest.

Our journey passed without incident as far as Budapest, where I quickly got my papers for Germany. However, Mr. Malama was unable to secure a visa for Alexis. As we did not want to separate, we had to look for another solution. Meanwhile, we were able to get word to Mr. Gurdjieff that we had arrived in Hungary. He replied, asking us to be patient as he would soon be in a position to help, but he advised us not to be passive and to look for a solution on our own. Hungary at that time welcomed Russian *émigrés*, and we were given temporary lodgings in the Budapest military barracks. We got to know many *émigrés* who, like us, were looking for a way to the West via Czechoslovakia or Germany.

A rumour spread in the barracks that the Ukrainian consul, who was more influential than the former Tsarist

representative, could help Ukrainians reach other countries free of charge. We heard that this man, formerly a colonel in the Imperial Army, was very kind to all *émigrés* who considered themselves to be subjects of Tsarist Russia. In any case, we all went to meet with him. He welcomed us warmly, and said in a friendly way that he knew very well we were not Ukrainians, but as we had shown trust in him, he would help us. He asked us to wait a few days for further news.

At our second visit, after taking down the necessary details, he told us to be ready to leave on short notice. In fact, on the morning of the third day, we were told to be under the clock in the railway station at six in the evening. We were all there at half-past-five, and waited for some time. Finally, a member of the consular staff, reproaching us for not being in the right place, asked us to follow him at once. He led us to the train and we climbed cheerfully into a carriage. He insisted that we should behave correctly during the whole voyage so as not to cause any trouble for the consul. We had been told that the consul had done everything regarding our papers, and so we had no undue worries. Fortunately, just before our departure, the man from the consulate suddenly remembered to give us our documents.

Pleased to be leaving, we began to sing. A full two hours passed in this carefree mood, and soon the Czech frontier was announced. The ticket inspector told us that we would not have to change trains because, after crossing the frontier, our carriage would be joined to another train for the rest of the journey. This good news boosted our spirits even more. At the frontier, the Hungarian agent passed our

papers to his Czech colleague. Then, during a short stop in the no man's land between the borders, some military police clambered onto the steps of our carriage. As soon as the train reached Czechoslovakia, they entered our carriage and asked us to get out. We told them that the carriage was going to be joined directly to another train, and that we had been assured that we would not have to leave it. To our astonishment, they forced us out of the carriage with their bayonets. On the platform, other military police were waiting for us and, jostling us roughly, took us to a waiting-room. Soon an officer appeared and ordered us to strip. Our adventure was taking a nasty turn. In reply to our indignant questions, we received only scornful sneers.

What was happening? We desperately needed to know! I asked the officer for permission to go to the toilet. He agreed, and I was escorted by two soldiers. They gladly accepted the money I discreetly offered them, and were astonished that we did not know what was going on. They told me that many groups of Communist agents like ourselves were being sent to Soviet Russia in exchange for Hungarian officers. I smelled trouble. There was no doubt. We had been kidnapped, and this whole thing, having been arranged by the Ukrainian consul, was nothing but a vile deception.

When I returned to the waiting room, the officer had our dossier in his hands.

"Is it true," I asked him, "that you consider us to be Communist agents?"

"We hold you to be exactly what you believe yourselves to be," he replied, "and from the moment that you declared yourselves to be Communists wanting to return to Soviet

Russia, the Czechoslovakian state has tried by every means to help you achieve your wish." From then on, we knew where we stood.

Among the seventeen people in our group were Prince Gedroitz and Colonel Udovikov, both heroes of the First World War who had received all possible honours and decorations. Since they had not heard what the Czech officer had said, it took me a long time to get them to see the reality of our situation. I was convinced that we had to act here and now in Czechoslovakia – afterwards, it would be too late! The colonel finally grasped what I was desperately trying to make him understand. While the military police were taking us back toward the train, they told us that before reaching Germany we would have to change once more, in Stettin,† north of the Czech border near the Baltic Sea, where we would be taken on board a Soviet ship. They assured us that many groups had already been transported in this way. Colonel Udovikov realized the gravity of our plight and we feverishly made a plan of action.

At Podmokly-Podmonetzka,‡ the last station in Czechoslovakia, we were forced to get out and were shoved like animals into a room. At our request, the military commander came in person. Having heard our explanations, he promised to send us to Prague if we could pay the fares. We col-

† At the time, Stettin was in Prussia. It is now called Szczecin, and is in present-day Poland.

‡ Podmokly-Podmonetzka seems to refer to the twin cities of Podmokly (Bodenbach, in German), situated on the left bank of the Elbe, and Tetschen (now called Děčín, in the Czech Republic), situated on the right bank of the Elbe. The two are connected by railway bridges.

lected the money needed, those better off paying for those who had no funds. While waiting for our departure, we asked the passers-by, through the windows of the room, on which side the train would be leaving for Prague, and on which side for Stettin. Four people gave us the same reply, so we knew that if the engine was on the left, it was going to Stettin. But what could we do? We decided that, if we were to be taken to Stettin, then one of us would give the command and we would all lie down on the platform and wait to see what would happen.

Time passed; trains came and went. Then soldiers appeared and shoved us roughly through the crowded platform toward a train.

"The engine is on the left. Lie down!"

We threw ourselves to the ground. The Czech soldiers then beat us with their rifle butts, and we all cried out, even those who were not being hit. The windows of the Constantinople-Stettin express opened, and we were quickly surrounded by journalists and all sorts of people who loudly expressed their indignation at the way defenceless people were being treated. We fiercely proclaimed that we were officers of the Imperial Army, kidnapped by Soviet agents.

When the local military commander then reappeared, Colonel Udovikov stood up, opened his cape, and proudly showed a chest covered with decorations. He turned to the commander and said, "I am a colonel of the Russian Imperial Army. I say this on my word of honour as a Russian officer. I ask you to reply, on your word of honour as a Czech officer. Where are you sending us?"

The commander was disconcerted, but even before he

had time to answer, the crowd shouted that the train was going to Germany, via Stettin. As Colonel Udovikov sat down, we cried out with one voice, "You can kill us, but we will not go to Soviet Russia!"

The journalists surrounding us promised to send an urgent message to representatives of Russian *émigrés* in Germany, and to place this message in German and Czech newspapers. The military commander, embarrassed by all this and by the delay to the train, sent it on its way and then asked us what we wanted.

"We want to see a genuine representative of the Russian *émigrés*!" someone shouted. A few minutes later there appeared a Herr Weber, a former teacher of German in Russia. He told us that he would alert the German authorities and the Czech government, as well as the representatives of the Russian *émigrés* in both these countries. Fortunately for us, both Herr Weber and the journalists kept their word. The commander then ordered some soldiers to take us to a military barracks.

The next morning the commander's wife appeared, looking tired. She brought us a large basket of pastries that she and her husband had prepared during the night, and begged us to forgive the terrible misunderstanding that had taken place. Her husband hadn't known the true situation, and was only doing his duty. From now on, he would take special care of us. A feeling of confidence and friendship was established between the commander and our group, and this time we were treated with the greatest respect.

Three weeks of feverish waiting went by. The shopkeepers and other people living in Podmokly-Podmonetzka were

very sympathetic to our plight and did not allow us to pay for anything. At the end of these three weeks we were taken back to Budapest, where we arrived in the evening. As soon as we had left our carriage, we were surrounded by police in civilian clothes. They directed us to a side courtyard where cars were waiting to take us discreetly to the local prison.

'Another ordeal!' we thought.

The following morning we were summoned one by one to an office where, in broken Russian, we were strongly 'advised' to say nothing to anyone about our unfortunate adventure. We were forbidden to go near the Ukrainian embassy, for if as a group we had escaped by the skin of our teeth, as individuals we would be liquidated immediately. By then, of course, we were hardly tempted to embark on another adventure. Thank heavens, Gyorgi Ivanovitch somehow managed to send visas to Alexis and me. The German consul then at once gave us all the necessary travel documents for the rest of our journey.

We were warmly welcomed in Berlin, and Mr. Gurdjieff listened to the story of our tribulations with an expression of amusement and compassion. At the end of our account he said, "For your suffering, at least two of your sins will be forgiven."

We thought with gratitude of the practical advice Mr. Gurdjieff had given us before we left Constantinople. What would we have done if we had been separated? Could he actually have foreseen what was going to happen to us?

During the five months of our journey from Constant ople to Berlin, in our forced stops in various central Europ cities, there were occasions when, in spite of everythi Alexis and I had some very pleasant moments. In mos the places we passed through, the military authorities up Russian *émigrés*, and we were very grateful for their h pitality. We all lived together in whatever places they pu our disposal, but in the evenings, Alexis and I would go on our own and try to understand our situation in light Gyorgi Ivanovitch's teaching. Sometimes the organizatio supplied our board and lodging, and so we had plenty free time. We set out to profit from this, like sociologis by studying the life of the inhabitants, their level of cultur their habits, interests, and how they expressed their aspira tions. We were particularly drawn to museums, monu ments, religious buildings, and art exhibitions, as we wer keen to understand the meaning and value of art in huma society. Our judgments were certainly rather naive.

But we became tired of these systematic excursions int the domain of art. More and more, I understood the truth o the saying, "The more you grasp, the less you hold." Alexi opinion was that the value of a work of art depended on th impression it produced. He was above all a painter, but h had also worked as a restorer and had even learned to pain icons. He used to look at a painting with the help of an ey piece that he had improvised with a rolled-up newspape by isolating and magnifying certain parts of a painting, is possible to see a composition more clearly. I found th interesting when we looked at landscapes, but in other cas the paintings seemed to lose their true meaning. Howeve

my own questions about art remained unanswered.

Several days after giving the account of our travels to Mr. Gurdjieff in Berlin, we shared our impressions and investigations in the field of art with him. I waited for the right moment to go more deeply into the subject, and one day, finding him alone, I asked, "Gyorgi Ivanovitch, we have visited many museums in the course of our travels; we have seen many paintings, many works of art. Tell me, what really is the value of a work of art?"

"The value of a work of art," he replied, "lies in its content."

This statement left me perplexed. When I look at a work of art, I can see what it is. But its content? What could that be? I remained pensive. He seemed to read my thoughts and said, "You can see what the content of a book is, can't you?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And you understand that there are different kinds of books?"

I agreed.

"You see that books have a different value according to their content. A work of art is like a book – a scholar can transmit knowledge, fragments of understanding, or even a discourse on human evolution. A real work of art is as precise as a treatise on mathematics."

I didn't understand anything he was saying. Seeing me open-mouthed, he added, "You don't understand what I'm saying because you understand nothing about art. What you have seen is not really art but, in a way, just decorative objects that for me have no real value."

"But Mr. Gurdjieff! They are shown in museums – the

temples of art – and many of them are worth enormous amounts!"

"Think, Tchekhovitch! You are speaking of something quite different."

"Something quite different? Everybody calls that art, and aren't they the works of great artists?"

"Poor Tchekhovitch," he said, sighing. "Your eyes are still covered by a veil of illusion. What you are talking about is just their commercial value."

"Commercial, yes," I exclaimed, "but it is great works of art that people pay for."

Smiling, Mr. Gurdjieff continued, "The heels of Marie-Antoinette's slippers were recently sold for one hundred thousand French francs. That's a lot, and yet, objectively, those heels are worth less than a leg of that stool you're sitting on."

I could not understand this. The objective value is nothing ... ; the monetary value is enormous .... Mr. Gurdjieff did not leave me long in the thick fog of my perplexity, and took the trouble to continue. "The value that a painting has for a collector is subjective, but its value from the point of view of real art is objective. These two values very rarely coincide, and it is unusual to see an instance when they correspond. In most cases the valuation of a work of art is purely subjective."

Until then, I had not given any attention to the meaning of the words 'subjective' and 'objective'.

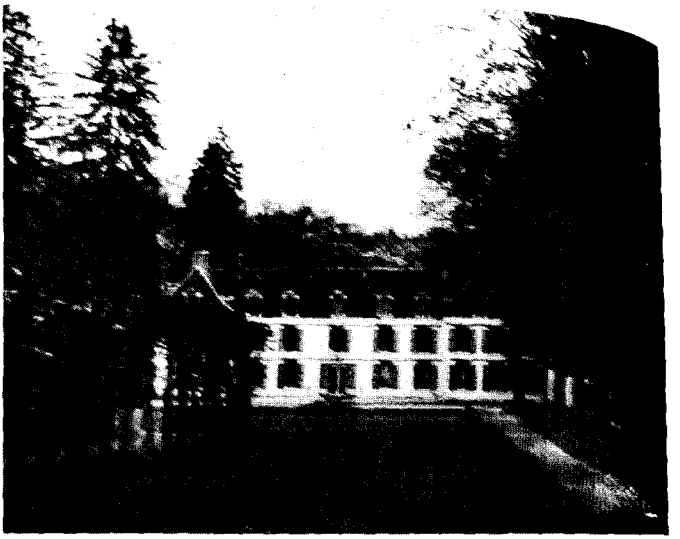
"You have to understand, Tchekhovitch, that this noble activity called 'art' practically doesn't exist anymore, and it is useless to look for it, especially in the modern world of

Europe and America. The historians of art in our time are only concerned with the products of their own 'glorious' artists. This activity has nothing in common with the artistic world of ancient traditions, but it bears the same name. Historians writing on this subjective activity only record the zigzags that pseudo-artists cause them to write about about. These zigzags correspond to successive tendencies in the branches of art, and these different movements come from currents that these ignoramuses, who usurp the name of 'artist', pretend to discover, invent, or create. The futurists who are famous today describe a zag in the history of art, while yesterday, the cubists made a zig – such is the history of art. So, to what degree of degeneration is this leading?

"As for the collectors, those who 'love art' – the patrons of contemporary art – they just want to be in fashion. They want to be able to boast of owning, not only one painting of a school from this or that fashionable zig or zag, but even the entire work of the artist who initiated such a zig or zag in the history of their art. They compete with each other to possess more and more of their valued 'masters', and since there are more collectors than there are such works of art, their commercial value is bound to go up. If one painting pleases you more than another, it is more valuable for you. This is its subjective worth."

"And the objective worth?" I asked.

"The time has not yet come to really speak of that. First we have to study many other things. But now, dear Tcheslaw, we must first decide where we are going to live."



Prieuré d'Avon, Fontainebleau

PART II

Memories of the Prieuré
1922–1930

TOO MANY COOKS

The Prieuré d'Avon was an old historic French château where aristocrats and monks had left traces of their fantasies, eccentricities, and sometimes wise ways of living.† In addition to the château with its outbuildings and several small houses, there were arbours and greenhouses, tool sheds and fountains, foot-bridges, summer houses, and a small romantic lake with an island. Some of the structures were still in good condition, others were on the verge of collapse, and still others nothing but rubble.

New arrivals at the Prieuré liked to visit and study these places. Occasionally, whole groups would gather and, with an expert air, hold forth on the style, period, and function of the buildings. During one such visit, a small group of these 'enlightened amateurs' discovered that a main beam in one of the old barns was about to come out of its supports, threat-

† Mr. Gurdjieff had moved into the Prieuré d'Avon around August 1922 with a group of his students. His ideas had already aroused a great deal of interest in English and American avant-garde literary circles, and this resulted in a large influx of visitors to the Prieuré in the following months.

ening to bring down the whole roof. Wanting to be useful, they immediately went to work with the best of intentions. Two of them busied themselves with the beam, four others held the supporting posts in place, some pulled, others pushed, and the most enterprising among them directed the whole operation. At a given moment, everyone made a concerted effort. The result was not long in coming - the beam was dislodged and the roof sagged dangerously.

I'm only sorry that no one filmed the scene. It was enough to make one laugh and cry at the same time. Once the emotions caused by this calamity had died down and reason began to prevail, they decided to ask the residents of the Prieuré for advice on how to correct their disastrous mistake. I was consulted, as well as others who had a certain expertise.

Some said, "Better take the tiles off first. If they fall while we're working, someone could get hurt." Others replied, "Forget the tiles. It's more important to find new beams before we start."

"Not at all," others argued. "The beams are fine. First, we have to cover the grain in case it starts raining."

"I'd rebuild the whole roof," someone else said.

"What? A new roof on this old shack?"

As Mr. Gurdjieff was not at the Prieuré at the time, advice, opinions, and counter-opinions filled the air for two whole days.

On his return, seeing everyone so preoccupied, Gyorgi Ivanovitch demanded, "What's going on here?" Once on the scene, he looked around and calmly assessed the work to be done. Then he ordered: "Axe! Hammer! Spikes! Bricks!

Mortar!" He assigned everyone a job and made sure that everything was perfectly understood. Then he directed the work, orders following each other in rapid succession: "One ... two ... a little bit more, three ... hold on, now wedge it in." And the roof, as if obeying a magic wand, shifted, began to rise, rose even higher, and finally settled back into place. Once fixed to its supports, it continued to serve its purpose until Mr. Gurdjieff sold the Prieuré.

While everyone else was casting about, Mr. Gurdjieff had already found a solution using the materials at hand. It struck me that, in situations like this, he always used whatever was available in order to get things done. One day, for example, some men were unable to drive in a nail for lack of a hammer. I saw Mr. Gurdjieff ask one of them to take off his work-boot, and, without another word, he used the heel to pound in the nail himself.

Another time, we were on a station platform when a member of our group accidentally dropped his ticket on the tracks below. One man went to get his son to climb down and retrieve it. Another suggested leaving without the ticket, saying he would straighten things out with the stationmaster later. Endless advice and opinions flew back and forth. While this was going on, Mr. Gurdjieff took his cane, borrowed another from a fellow traveller and, holding the two together like pincers, retrieved the ticket and returned it to its owner.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

By the autumn of 1922, the Prieuré had become too small to house the growing number of residents and foreign visitors. New faces appeared every day. Among the people I came across was a distinguished-looking man who turned out to be a high-ranking ambassador, using his vacation to experience the life and methods of the Institute. Another gentleman, with whom I was pruning trees, was rich enough not to quibble about a mistake of £20,000 on an estimate for a villa he was building on the Riviera. By contrast, yet another was a penniless Russian refugee whom Gyorgi Ivanovitch had found wandering the streets of Paris and had immediately taken in at the Prieuré. In the past their families had known each other well, and the man really adored Gyorgi Ivanovitch.

Each individual I met there could have inspired a good-sized novel, but none of that was important to us. Once past the gates of the Prieuré, everything to do with one's private life and social position no longer mattered. At the Institute a man was simply a man, or rather, a seeker. We were careful not to make subjective distinctions between people, or

to concern ourselves with any social considerations at all. This attitude was dictated by a common interest in Gyorgi Ivanovitch's ideas and the respect we all felt for him. Everyone, rich or poor, had the same questions, and the finest dress for everyone was our simple work clothes.

While people came and went, the big projects, such as building the Study House and the Turkish Baths, the restoration of various pools in the gardens, and important maintenance jobs, were competently carried out by well-established groups of workers. Newcomers, once integrated into these teams, adapted quickly.

Some visitors came simply to meet Mr. Gurdjieff. These people stayed only a few days, but they often came to watch us work. They would spend hours observing us, knowing that our physical work was accompanied by difficult inner exercises. The main aim of these exercises was to reach a more sensitive state of awareness, revealing a new attention free of all attachment and, what is most important, an attention liberated from automatic, unconscious responses that we called 'identification'.

We naturally tried not to be distracted by these strangers watching us. So, one day in October, we did not really notice the appearance of a certain frail-looking woman. Yet, strangely enough, not long after she moved away we found ourselves talking about her during a break. We had all sensed a special quality emanating from this sylph-like creature. Far from distracting us, she filled the air with her subtle and sympathetic presence.

"Who is she?" I asked. No one knew her.

She came back the next day, this time greeting us with a

brief wave. She kept her distance, contemplating us with a radiant expression. Again, we were enchanted by her presence.

Fragile health was written all over her thin, waif-like body. Though it was not cold, she wore a blanket around her shoulders. It seemed far too heavy for her, so heavy that I could not help but offer her an old crate to sit on. Her attitude showed that she did not want to bother us, but she thanked me with such grace that I suddenly felt awkward offering this crude seat to a person of such refinement. She sat down, making sure that she would not be a nuisance and that we would not put ourselves out any more on her account. We went back to work. Timidly, she looked for a way to be useful, and her pure, benevolent gaze never left us for a single moment.

At the first opportunity, I brought a *chaise-longue* from the château, and placed it near her. At first she did not realize that it was meant for her, and when I suggested that it might be more comfortable, she suddenly blushed, once again embarrassed that someone had felt the need to look after her. Finally, she sat down on the chair, tightly pressing her legs together as if as if in despair of ever finding a way of getting warm again. My jacket was lying nearby on the grass, and I put it over her knees. When I happened to look at her a little later, I saw that all this had helped her to relax. A look of peace illuminated her face. We had a wonderful impression of her calm, serene presence.

She stayed with us for more than two hours; then she rose and held out my jacket. I went up to her, urging her not to be shy about joining us the next day.

"Really?" she asked. "Are you sure I won't disturb you?"

"We're delighted to have you with us," I replied.

"Thank you! I'm so pleased! You can't know how happy I am. I'll certainly be back."

During the following days, she went from one group to another, apparently fascinated by our activities. Everywhere, her graciousness elicited the same welcoming response. She was often to be found in the kitchen when it was at its busiest, in the cowshed when the cows were being milked, and each morning in the barnyard scattering the grain with a delicate hand.

We bent over backwards to please her and make her life easier. Often it was my job to carry wood up to her room, where we kept a fire burning day and night. Not to make her feel a burden, we were careful to bring the wood when she was not there. Her room was on the second floor, next to Mr. Gurdjieff's. An especially peaceful atmosphere suffused this beautiful room, with its large window looking out over the gardens.

As she became a familiar figure at our work-site, we took to putting the *chaise-longue* and blanket out beforehand, so that she would always feel welcome.

"What shall I call you," I asked her one day, "Miss or Mrs.?"

"My name is Katherine. Why not call me by my name?"

"Katherine! In Russian, that's Katya.... The name brings back memories," I said.

She responded with that shy smile I already recognized as so much a part of her.

"All right! Katherine it'll be! That will make another Katya

among us, but an especially charming one!"

We had accepted her into our family, but we had no idea that this young woman was Katherine Mansfield, the already well-known author later to become world famous. For us, she was simply a remarkable young woman blessed with exceptional sensitivity.

One day, after Mr. Gurdjieff had just left for Paris, as he did regularly, I noticed that Katherine's demeanour had changed: she looked overwhelmed, as if everything in her had slowed down.

"Bonjour, Katya. How are you?"

"Bonjour, Tchekhovitch."

Her voice was subdued; its tone had changed. She took her usual place and watched us working with a far-away look in her eyes. Suddenly, she put her head in her hands and began to weep. I went over to her and put my hand on her shoulder.

"What's wrong, Katya?"

"It's nothing." Then she added, "I'm very unhappy."

I insisted on knowing what was tormenting her.

"Well," she said sorrowfully, "Gyorgi Ivanovitch doesn't want me to stay here any longer. He's asked me to leave."

"And what about you? What do you want?"

"I want to stay here. I'm so happy among all of you."

"Then why is Gyorgi Ivanovitch asking you to leave?"

"He wants me to go to a sanatorium. I'm quite ill, you see. I have tuberculosis and I don't have much longer to live. I want so much to stay here until the end. Here, I've found what I've been seeking for a long time. I don't want to be anywhere else, with people I don't know. I want to stay here

with all of you. But I think that he doesn't want me to die here."

I was so taken aback by this unexpected confession that, at first, I could not think of anything to say to her. But I could not keep silent. A strange determination came over me on her behalf: not to give up, not to lose hope. I could not believe Gyorgi Ivanovitch would refuse to let her stay at the Prieuré if she expressed her wish sincerely, from the depths of her being.

Gently, I spoke my mind. "You know as well as I that Gyorgi Ivanovitch is a good man. He won't refuse, if you speak to him frankly."

Then, wanting to provide her with a request he could not turn down, I added, "Don't just ask to stay. Tell him it's the only way for you to find true happiness."

In my wish to persuade her, I did not really weigh the import of my words, or their possible consequences. In fact, I was not really aware of the seriousness of the situation, and in my eagerness I went on. "Speak to him exactly as you have spoken to me, without hiding anything."

"Really?" she asked. "Do you think so? Will he allow me to stay? Are you sure?"

"I'm certain of it, if you speak to him in the way I suggest."

"Oh! I'll be so happy if he accepts."

When she came back the next day, she told me what she had prepared to say to Mr. Gurdjieff, as if trying to reassure herself that her words would be sufficiently convincing.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch returned that evening. The following morning Katherine did not pay us her customary visit. She

made a brief appearance in the afternoon, however, and this time she seemed very excited; her eyes were shining.

"Bonjour, Tchekhovitch. I'm so happy! Gyorgi Ivanovitch is truly a good man. He has agreed. I can stay!"

And with these words, she went off airily.

I learned later that Katherine Mansfield's request had put Mr. Gurdjieff in a very difficult position. At first he had been reluctant. "If she dies here, just imagine what malicious gossip will ensue – another pretext for slander. They are bound to say that we were the cause of her premature death."

This was the essence of Mr. Gurdjieff's realistic and somewhat bitter remarks when Mme de Salzmann, Mrs. Frank Lloyd Wright, and Mme Chaverdian had begged him to agree to Katherine's request. These women were not easily put off.

"Gyorgi Ivanovitch, people have already said plenty of scandalous things about you, so one more isn't going to make much difference! We'll share that burden with you."

"All right, then," he said, looking at them intently. "So be it. We'll all bear it together!"

I was suddenly gripped by the terrible fear that I might be responsible for all the trouble that would plague Gyorgi Ivanovitch as the result of this generous act. When I next spoke to Katherine, I begged her, cowardly as it may seem, not to reveal my part in this episode or my over-enthusiastic advice. At first she seemed bewildered, not at all understanding my request. Then her face lit up and she gave me a knowing look. "Of course, Tchekhovitch. Don't worry. You can count on me. I won't say a thing!"

She never betrayed our secret.

Katherine's visits among us stopped two days before her death. She died on January 9, 1923, and was buried in the cemetery at Avon, near the Prieuré. Her absence left a great emptiness, which was felt by us all.

For a long time I was haunted by the image of her face, especially her radiant expression as she sat, in perfect stillness, watching us practise the sacred dances. What was it in this young woman that was so unusual and so touching? Later on, reading her work and letters, I found the answer to my question.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

At breakfast on Christmas Eve, 1922, Mr. Gurdjieff gave me the task of putting a Christmas tree up in the living-room, one that he had already pointed out to me in the forest. He assigned four people to help me, and we left immediately.

My helpers were English and American, all newcomers. When we reached the tree, whose trunk was almost a foot in diameter, I placed my team around it, telling each to take firm hold of a strong branch within easy reach. I told them that if we all rocked the tree back and forth rhythmically, we could uproot it without having to cut it down.

Our efforts led to nothing. What's more, the very idea that we could pull up such a big tree while standing on its roots seemed to them absurd, if not completely mad. From then on, all four refused to follow instructions that seemed totally ridiculous to them.

As Mr. Gurdjieff was passing by with several people, I explained the situation to him. He immediately sent the four rebels off to the château but, curious to see what might happen, they stopped to observe from a distance. Gyorgy

Ivanovitch immediately had water brought in buckets and he poured it slowly over the base of the tree while we rocked it from side to side. Then, each taking hold of a large branch, we all pulled upwards together, and the tree began to rise.

The four sceptics, who had never stopped watching, returned, amazed. One more pull and the tree came out of the ground. It was not an illusion. All four of them were left dumbfounded. The apparent miracle, however, lasted only a moment: the trunk, without a single root and sharpened to a point, seemed to be mocking the four speechless and somewhat crestfallen men. It was, in fact, the superb top of a tall tree felled on the site where the Study House was to be built.

One thing did seem miraculous, however. How could a tree that was cut down several months earlier still be green at the end of December?

A NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN LESSON

The year is 1923. The Prieuré is humming with activity. Mr. Gurdjieff is everywhere at once, constantly speeding up the construction work at the Institute, as there are still many new projects he wants to get started. Each week he divides his time between Paris and the Prieuré, according to what is needed.

We never saw him go to bed before us, nor rise after us. It was as if there were several motors inside him working in relay, day and night. Even when he was obviously drawing on his last drop of energy, his face never showed the least sign of fatigue, and the intensity of his presence never varied.

He was away from the Prieuré the day that the basic structures of the Turkish Baths and the adjoining rooms were to be finished. I was in charge of constructing the drainage gutters and of moulding the rounded plinths with cement. I really liked this work, and smoothed the cement with loving care.

By five o'clock in the afternoon, the job was practically done. There were still two full hours left until dinner, and I

spent the whole time on the final touches. When I was finished, I experienced a great feeling of happiness. I imagined how pleased Mr. Gurdjieff would be when he saw how carefully I had completed my task.

I went back to the château, walking with a spring in my step. I wanted to change my clothes before dinner. On the way, I saw Mr. Gurdjieff seated on a bench beside one of the paths, talking to a woman who had recently arrived. Having just returned, he was still wearing his hat and coat.

I was eager to let him know everything I had accomplished while he was away and, hoping he would ask me about it, I walked down the path. Arriving at his bench, I gave a sign of greeting. With his typical calm, he asked me the question I was waiting for.

"Why so happy, Tchekhovitch?"

"I've just finished the gutters and the plinths, Gyorgi Ivanovitch."

"Yes, and so?"

"They turned out well, and I am rather pleased."

"By what values? How do you measure that? I'd like to see this work that you're so happy about."

Asking the woman to wait for him a few moments, Mr. Gurdjieff got up.

"Let's see," he said in a tone of voice that immediately cast a shadow of anxiety over my happiness.

We entered the baths, and Gyorgi Ivanovitch asked me to show him exactly what I had done.

"And you dare to call this well done? If I had known you were going to ruin my project this way, I would never have entrusted it to you."

He took a trowel and began to scrape away everything I had just done with such care. "Quick!" he said. "Get another trowel. We've got to get all this cement off before it sets."

Sick at heart, I did what I was told.

Mr. Gurdjieff was visibly displeased with me, and as he left, his words cut deep. "Someone else will finish this work. As for you, get over to the stable and clean out the manure."

I went to the stable, and was surprised to find it all in order; the manure had already been taken out.

The next day, as I was passing the baths, I went in and saw that everything had been redone. The plinths and gutter had been moulded and smoothed just as I had done them the day before.

Who had spent the whole night re-doing all that? I didn't have to look far to know. On the floor, some familiar cigarette butts gave me the answer.

To tell the truth, the quality of the work seemed no better than mine. I began to reflect. Why? Why, with all the pressure on him, with all the countless responsibilities, and in spite of the importance he gave to finishing everything as quickly as possible – why had Mr. Gurdjieff destroyed a perfectly good job only to work throughout the night, putting it back exactly as it was? Why, despite all the fatigue he must have felt, did he take on this extra effort to give a lesson to just one man?

I did not understand, and could not understand.

It was only a long time afterwards that I understood. No doubt I had by then acquired a new set of values.

THE MASTER AND THE MOUSE

In the year 1923, rats and mice had the run of the Prieuré. Even in broad daylight they paraded around like kings, and as twilight approached, our cat would no longer dare venture into the courtyard. These rodents had ravaged our food reserves, even those earmarked for the livestock and the hen-house, so we mounted a merciless war against them.

We had just finished the construction of the Turkish Baths, and we were still clearing away the building materials strewn around the work-site. Mr. Gurdjieff was with us, directing the operations. As we were getting rid of a pile of old planks that lay on a pathway and on the ivy bordering it, one of us suddenly yelled, "Mice!"

Everyone rushed over, and the hunt was on. We removed the each board, one by one, until only the last one remained. Armed with shovels and sticks, we surrounded it. Two of us lifted it up abruptly. There were the mice, huddled in the ivy. Terrified, they tried to escape down the path. We raised our shovels and sticks, ready to strike.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Gurdjieff.

Our arms froze, and we remained immobile as statues. A

mouse hesitantly emerged from the ivy, dragging her babies clinging to her sides.

"Impossible," said Mr. Gurdjieff smiling. With a solemn movement, he added, "Motherhood!"

The mouse calmly crossed the path and disappeared into the bushes, bearing her precious burden.

Once again we had found ourselves touched by a simple human act – such was the magic of the Prieuré. And I can still see us taking up our work again with an extraordinary feeling – the feeling that creates a true opening to life.

INTELLIGENTSIA – REAL OR APPARENT

Those who cannot recognize Mr. Gurdjieff's exceptional qualities as a man and a spiritual master, either from his own writings or from those of his most prominent pupils, will certainly not be any more enlightened by my own accounts. The extraordinary will not be found by searching for it romantically. In reality, it is in the simple experience of everyday life that the nature of a true man, "a man not in quotation marks", as Mr. Gurdjieff used to say, is revealed. In my view, the following account is a good example of what I mean.

One night after dinner, several of us were gathered around Mr. Gurdjieff. The atmosphere was relaxed. The conversation had turned to the subject of social classes, particularly the role of the intellectual and the thorny question of the 'élite'. Together we were trying to understand what 'intelligentsia' really meant, and who has the right to claim that he belongs to the 'upper' or most 'intelligent' layer of society.

Those who had started the discussion belonged precisely to what is commonly known as the 'ruling class' – those who, without a shadow of a doubt, believe themselves to be the

'élite'. Various shades of opinion arose out of our discussion: the Russians went on about their heavy responsibilities; the French insisted on the duty that fell to them; and the English especially stressed their concern for the welfare of the masses. Each strove to use high-sounding words, to give the impression that the élite was a crown in which they themselves shone like brilliant jewels.

Mr. Gurdjieff said nothing, and just smiled. Calmly, with a look both ironic and compassionate, he observed the way in which each vied with the other to appear more intelligent.

Although each of these proposed definitions did appear coherent in itself, put side by side they cancelled each other out. In fact, they were so contradictory that each invariably lost its coherence and ended up dissolving into thin air. A vision of the whole was lacking.

Gradually, it was becoming clear that we were unable to understand what was meant by the words 'intelligentsia' and 'élite'. After an hour, it was evident that we would not reach agreement about these terms, so familiar to all of us. All eyes turned toward Mr. Gurdjieff to settle the debate.

"Everyone," he said, "knows something. Each of us has learned to do something *mechanically*." He insisted on this word. "Two people have the same worth when each stays within his own speciality. However, if one can also do what the other does, then he is superior. He who aspires to be one of the 'élite' must be capable not only of doing what he does

habitually, but also of doing anything that those he regards as inferior can do, even if not with the competence of a professional."

I remember how struck I was at the time by this simple and penetrating way of seeing things. Of course, I tried to extrapolate this thought and apply it to historical events. I was thinking in particular of men who, after serving as political or military leaders, return to the village of their birth to work the land. And then, when called upon again, they return to handle matters of state, with as much competence as they did their plough.

I had already witnessed Mr. Gurdjieff's talents as a sculptor, painter, master of music, philosopher, veterinarian, and cook. I had seen him excel in many other fields, but none of this seemed extraordinary to me. There was so little ostentation in what he did that it seemed completely natural. There was none of that deliberate showing off, which was the only thing that would have impressed me at the time, ashamed as I am to say it.

Nevertheless, when I think about it today, there was no dearth of spectacular situations. I remember one particular event that is worth relating. Even though it happened around thirty years ago, I can still see it in all its detail.

The setting is the Prieuré during the summer of 1923, when the Turkish Baths were under construction. They were being built at the edge of the forest, using an old storeroom that had been hollowed out of the rock. The space was being

enlarged and two new rooms were to be added. This meant that we had to cut back even deeper into the rock. One day we were stopped by a huge boulder about a cubic metre in size.

Mr. Gurdjieff was not at the Prieuré at this particular time, and I can now confess that we took advantage of his absence to make our work into a sort of joyful amusement. We were faced with the necessity of removing the entire boulder, and that meant taking out the rocks surrounding it. As we were doing this, we amused ourselves by finding little tricks that could make our task easier. For two whole days these smaller stones were the source of nearly unending conversation.

We worked with enthusiasm, and there was great joy at the end of a long day when the boulder was finally extracted. We proudly set it right in the middle of a pathway, thirty metres from the baths, for all the world to see. The prospect of then breaking it up only added to our pleasure.

The next morning, Alexis M. and I, each armed with a blacksmith's sledgehammer, took turns attacking the rock. I should add that Alexis had apprenticed himself to a blacksmith a few years before, and he seemed to be a bona fide rock-smasher. As for me, I had no shortage of credentials regarding my physical strength: I was high-school wrestling champion and the winner of several rowing races. Later, when I became a wrestler in a circus in Constantinople, the posters falsely made me out to be the university wrestling champion of Poland. In short, we thought ourselves to be unbeatable at rock-breaking.

It is eleven o'clock, and the noise of our sledgehammers

has already been heard for three hours, when certain signs indicate the imminent arrival of Mr. Gurdjieff. We pound even harder!

Several minutes later we see the familiar silhouette of Gyorgi Ivanovitch approaching from the château. He is coming toward us down the path, where we are fiercely struggling with our invincible enemy.

He comes up to us, responds to our greetings, and says calmly, "Why are you beating so hard on this poor rock?"

"It's impossible to break it, Gyorgi Ivanovitch. It has totally resisted our blows for three hours."

"Impossible? Let's see who is the weaker – the rock or the men."

He goes up to the boulder and examines it. "Turn it," he says.

"Which side, Gyorgi Ivanovitch?"

"It doesn't matter, just turn it."

He looks at it closely. "Turn it again."

He looks at it a third time. "Again, to this side."

After examining all its sides, he makes us turn it one last time, so that a precise point he has marked is on the top. Then he says, "Now, wedge it."

With a movement of his shoulder, Gyorgi Ivanovitch lets his jacket slide to the grass. Then he comes back toward us, takes a sledgehammer, and searches for the right position.

Alexis and I look at each other knowingly. Each of us reads an expression of ineffable joy on the other's face, as if to say, "Let him try. He'll see."

Mr. Gurdjieff makes several movements, to be sure of the best grip. Then ... a flash in the air, followed by a dry

sound – crack!

Now there are two rocks in front of us.

"Turn this one a little more .... Stop .... Wedge it.

Crack! Three rocks.

"Turn the other one."

Crack! Four rocks.

He hands the sledgehammer back to us. "Keep g
When force isn't enough, you must find the artist's tou

With these words, Gyorgi Ivanovitch puts on his coa
walks away. We look at him for a long moment, torn bet
bewilderment and admiration.

There's no denying it – our vanity had once again re
ed a serious blow.

THE SECRET OF THE TURKISH BATH

As I have said elsewhere, we had built the thermal baths at the Prieuré out of an old cellar dug into the rock. This was a project that Mr. Gurdjieff closely directed, and he had taken part in the actual work himself.

An entrance to the baths served both as a dressing-room and as a place to rest, while in the adjoining space were showers with benches and massage tables, and the steam-room itself. From the outside, the access to the baths, which was covered with earth and moss, was like the mouth of a cave, and tucked away nearby was a small bathing pool. A plunge in its icy cold water before the period of rest was the final step in the ceremony of the bath.

At the far end of the dressing-room, there was a kind of large oven filled with stones from which pipes led into the steam-room. One only had to open the oven door and empty a bucket of water onto the exceedingly hot rocks to produce a blast of steam. In fact, two large buckets of water, thrown in five minutes apart, were all that was needed to heat the room and fill it with steam dense enough to conceal anyone seated more than a metre away. In the steam-room,

as in many Turkish baths, there was a succession of tiers each was about 50 centimetres high and just wide enough for lying back comfortably and turning over with ease. But on the highest tier the heat was almost unbearable.

This system produced steam that was very hot and humid but it still didn't satisfy Gyorgi Ivanovitch. He wanted not one, but several adjoining rooms, like the oriental *hammams* he had known, in which, as the temperature rose, the air became progressively drier. He was already talking of making new excavations in the rock. However, it was nearly winter, and as there was no question of beginning this work in the wrong season, it was up to our little team to find a temporary solution.

"You must absolutely find a way," he told us, "of producing – simultaneously and in the same room – very hot dry air next to the air saturated with water that we have now." It was like squaring the circle. The challenge seemed as ludicrous as it was impossible. Nevertheless, we went to work and in less than two weeks we had accomplished the desired miracle.

The first sessions were unforgettable. All the regulars of the Turkish baths took their places on the tiers and someone, following Mr. Gurdjieff's instructions, threw two or three buckets of water onto the stones. A powerful burst of steam invaded the room, but mysteriously it never rose above the second level. Instead, it curled back on itself, forming a dense bank of clouds. In this way, those who were on the upper tiers could stay in hot dry air while still being able to expose themselves to the cloud of steam that rose before them.

The Turkish Bath

This phenomenon was very disconcerting for our elders. We delighted in their astonishment, while Mr. Gurdjieff just smiled and said nothing. Several of the engineers and scientists who happened to be at the Prieuré discreetly asked me to reveal our secret. Of course, I feigned ignorance.

In fact, it was once again Mr. Gurdjieff who had achieved this 'miraculous' result. I must first make it clear that the tiers were constructed so that only the highest bench touched the wall. The lower tiers were placed progressively away from it, leaving a large empty space below. Here, Mr. Gurdjieff had arranged for us to install a very powerful stove that provided a controlled distribution of heat through its vertical vents. When we were all in the dressing-room, Mr. Gurdjieff would give me a discreet signal to enter the steam-room through a concealed opening and slip under the tiers in order

to start a fire in the stove. The intense heat passing betwee
the planks of the second tier would rise and create a so
of thermal screen, so that those who were on the top tier
could lie back in comfort in the dry air.

Surprise was guaranteed. For us younger ones, it was pur
jubilation. We were more than happy to torment the mind
of these intellectuals, who were so proud of their knowledge
and to remind them that the simplest things are often the
most difficult to understand.

THE MASTER BUILDER

The construction of the Study House had just been completed and the work on the baths was coming to an end. I remember one day when Mr. Gurdjieff, having quickly eaten his lunch, went from one room to another assigning each of us work for the afternoon. We had scarcely finished eating when, in his characteristic way, he sent us off to work, saying, "The sooner we finish, the sooner we can rest."

Having heard most of Mr. Gurdjieff's instructions, I knew more or less what each person had to do. The children were to carry as many rocks as they could from the baths to an area near the Study House. Some of us were to bring clay; others, to gather up anything that could be used to mix it in: buckets, basins, tubs, and so on; still others were sent to get spades, pickaxes, string, and various other tools.

I was to start by digging, and then, equipped with a mason's hammer, stay close to Mr. Gurdjieff. I went to get a spade, and on my return to the Study House, I was transfixed by this ant-hill of intense activity. In a steady procession, an unbroken line of women and children were busy carrying rocks and piling them along the length of the Study

House. Others were pushing wheelbarrows filled with cla
or bringing jugs of water.

A string about 30 metres long was stretched next to th
pathway, not far from the front of the Study House. Gyorg
Ivanovitch was there, giving instructions. The grassy are
between the Study House and the path was sloped and uneve
First, we had to cut the turf there into squares roughly
centimetres thick and place them temporarily on the othe
side of the pathway. Next, along the string, we levelled
strip of earth wide enough to build a retaining wall, usin
the excess earth to give the slope an even surface. I had th
task of edging, for 8 to 10 metres, the area we had levelled
then others would take over. We wanted to prevent the slop
from collapsing onto the pathway by building a low retainin
wall. The wall was to be about 30 metres long and 60 to
centimetres high. After every 10 metres had been levelled
Mr. Gurdjieff asked us to dig a wide drainage ditch so tha
the wall would not become undermined.

Going from one group to another of those mixing th
clay and water, Gyorgi Ivanovitch checked its consistenc
and, having made sure that the work in the other group
was going well, he shouted, "Bring the clay! Bring the stone
Pour the water!"

With these directions, the work of the 'ant-hill' bega
to take on a more definite form. Even an outside observe
would now be able to see the aim of all this activity. A fe
men were cutting large stones to shape. These were the
brought to Mr. Gurdjieff, who immediately began to buil
the wall. An incredible rhythm began to appear.

"Clay! Stones! Clay! Stones! More clay!"

No sooner did Mr. Gurdjieff have a stone in his hand than it was already laid in place. It was like something out of a myth: more than ten people working as hard as they could were scarcely able to supply enough stones for the work of only one man.

To my surprise, Mr. Gurdjieff did not leave for Paris that day as usual. Most of the time he would leave after organizing the work and showing each of us how to work in a rhythm that supported a truly active effort. That day he stayed with us.

Shouting orders, and swearing in colourful language I could not understand, he goaded us repeatedly to become active, especially those preparing the stones, since the chain was sometimes held up because of us. The wall seemed to rise as if in an accelerated film and soon began to get longer. Now it was those struggling to level the ground ahead of us who were afraid of slowing things down.

Gradually, beneath our astonished gaze, the wall seemed to grow out of the grass, for the squares of turf that had been cut out in advance were immediately put back and the whole stretch of newly landscaped terrain formed a magnificent carpet of green. Those who had no more stones to carry now brought water from a nearby pool, soaked the turf, and tamped down the squares with their bare feet to make the space between them less apparent. Still others, armed with brushes and tubs, were cleaning the excess clay from the wall that was already completed.

It took less than five hours to finish a wall 30 metres long. Not a trace of the work done could be seen, and not one of us had laid a single stone. We really had the impres-

sion that this wall had always been there. Now that the task was finished, Mr. Gurdjieff gave us half an hour's rest before dinner. His face wore its usual expression, as if nothing had taken place. All of us clearly understood that in any activity, only an all-encompassing vision could allow one, as Mr. Gurdjieff said, "to work like a man".

We were given another illustration of this in the salon that very evening. Mr. Gurdjieff, with the help of Thomas de Hartmann,† was composing music as a support for the work of the Movements. Mr. Gurdjieff would give a certain rhythm, which Thomas de Hartmann played on the piano. Gyorgi Ivanovitch listened attentively, then indicated the accents by tapping his fingers on the piano. Next, the tonality was modified until a definite inner state was evoked. Only at this point did he begin to hum a melody of an oriental character, which Thomas de Hartmann reproduced while trying out different harmonies one after another. In the silence that followed each attempt, he would turn to Mr. Gurdjieff as if to measure his reaction. It was fascinating to see how the collaboration of these two gifted men could in a few moments give birth to an original work fulfilling precise demands and conditions.

To return to the work completed that afternoon, I assumed that a wall built as this one had been would not resist the ravages of time, but a subsequent visit allowed me to

† Thomas de Hartmann was a gifted composer who, while still young, had already been recognized in Russia. In Constantinople, I had witnessed the astonishing collaboration between Mr. Gurdjieff and Mr. de Hartmann, which had already begun in their native country.

see for myself. Thirty years after the construction of the wall, I returned to Fontainebleau on Tuesday, May 6, 1952. According to the Orthodox calendar it was St. George's Day, which Mr. Gurdjieff never failed to celebrate. Several of his students and I visited his grave in the cemetery at Avon, where we silently paid our respects. We then went on to the Prieuré. Part of our work had been demolished by the new owners, but what remained of the wall held fast, and will hold fast, I am certain, for a long time to come.

A LESSON IN ACROBATICS

Seeing Mr. Gurdjieff always thoughtful, serious, and contained, I could not imagine him capable of acrobatic feats. Indeed, he never ceased to astonish me and give me food for thought.

One day he shared a joyful moment of comradeship with us young men. The Study House was almost finished. We were in the process of laying the carpets and sewing them together, which most of the time forced us either to squat or kneel. The work was going well, and the relaxed presence of Mr. Gurdjieff created a very pleasant atmosphere. The softness of the carpets made us feel like rolling on the ground and, as Mr. Gurdjieff often encouraged us to relax, we had great fun doing acrobatics. Each of us took advantage of the occasion to display his skill. Mr. Gurdjieff followed our antics, encouraging those who were not doing so well; but if someone wanted to show off, he was at once given an exercise he could not do, which quickly put him in his place.

For example, seeing someone walking on his hands with his legs in the air, Mr. Gurdjieff would say, "Going forward is easy. Try staying still."

When someone managed to do this, he would immediately throw out a new challenge: "Anyone can do this on two hands! But one cannot claim to be a real champion unless he can support himself on only one!"

If someone succeeded at this, he would then say that to be the very best, one must be able to support oneself equally on either hand. In short, he always found a difficulty that would teach a pretentious person a lesson or make him feel out of his depth.

Something very difficult for us amateur acrobats was to extend one leg parallel to the ground and to slowly bend the other until sitting on one's heel; then, after a moment in this squatting position, to come up again slowly, still keeping the extended leg parallel to the ground. Even if one of us succeeded in doing this on one leg, he couldn't do it on the other.

Watching us, Mr. Gurdjieff laughed kind-heartedly and said that one part of our bodies was made of wood and another filled with lead. When we were exhausted by our fruitless efforts, he interjected: "What! You can't even do a childish exercise like that! When I was a child, we also played such games; but it would take too long to explain them. I will simply show you something we did as children."

Turning to one of us, he asked, "Which leg is more difficult to hold in the air?"

"The left."

Mr. Gurdjieff extended his left leg parallel to the ground and lowered himself in stages. Once seated on his right heel, he slowly brought the sole of his left foot to his right knee, then held this position. Clearing his throat, he took a packet

of cigarettes from his pocket, lit one and began to smoke. This was done so naturally and with such ease that none of us took the demonstration to be at all serious or difficult.

In the same position, still smoking his cigarette, he continued the conversation. When he had finished the cigarette, his body gave a jolt upwards and became immobilized, another jolt and again it stopped. It was as if electrical discharges shook an inert body, raising it by degrees until it was completely upright, the left leg always resting on the right knee. Then, with the look of someone who had just remembered something, he bent forward and simply let his left foot fall to the ground as he began to walk away.

"Try to sew the rest of the carpets together for tonight," he said to us as he left.

We had not found this demonstration by Mr. Gurdjieff at all astonishing as there was no apparent effort, either in this posture, in his movements, or on his face.

Naturally, we were determined to repeat the exercise and after he left, we tried to copy the movements he had made. It was only then that we were forced to accept the real difficulty of what he had shown us. A long time afterwards I understood that this exercise, though not at all spectacular, in fact belonged to a higher level of balance and acrobatics.

We told some older people what we had seen. After having tried this exercise several times without success, they asked Mr. Gurdjieff how to practise it. He did not immediately understand what they were referring to, but once he grasped the meaning he declared innocently, "To tell the truth, I no longer remember what I did as a child."

PAINTERS PUT TO THE TEST
In Memory of Alexandre de Salzmann

The interior decoration of the Study House was progressing rapidly. A large, slightly raised platform for practising the Movements had been built at the back of the Study House. Here, as in all other tasks, the rule was *haida yoga* or 'maximum intensity'. This specific aspect of the teaching has the virtue of mobilizing the entire being, and brings an immediacy to the study and knowledge of the self. It was on this stage that we later presented demonstrations of the Movements to specially invited audiences.

The stage was covered with a thick linoleum. Our job there was to decorate the ceiling. Mr. Gurdjieff wanted it to be draped with material so as to make an oriental-style canopy. Following his instructions, we began by attaching an immense cloth along the edge of the ceiling, letting the centre fall freely. Then we pushed the middle of the cloth up with a pole while one of us, up on a beam, grabbed the material from above and placed it at different levels, letting those below judge the effect. Mr. Gurdjieff watched our efforts attentively and indicated the best height.

Once the cloth was attached, it only remained for us

to decorate it. Early the next day, the qualified 'specialists' were summoned. Gyorgi Ivanovitch indicated what he expected. We knew that, as he was planning to go to Paris, we were unlikely to see him again for the rest of the day.

A group of five of us had been chosen to decorate the cloth. Alexandre de Salzmann, of course, was to direct the operation. At his side was Mme Adèle Kafian, his faithful painting student, who was highly qualified in her own right. Both had followed Mr. Gurdjieff from the time we had left Tiflis. Alexis M., the stone carver,† was also there, as well as L.I., who was close to Ouspensky. I was put on the team as apprentice and general handyman.

Our task was to decorate the cloth with different symbols, one being the enormous tongue of what seemed to me to be a holy martyr of the East. The task was quite difficult not only because of the large surface area, but also because of the folds in the material. To produce a balanced effect, moreover, the proportions of the drawings had to be gradually enlarged as we moved farther from the centre.

The morning was spent measuring, tracing the symbols and filling in the empty spaces so as to create a harmonious composition. Around noon we went to lunch, satisfied with our work. At the end of the meal, Mr. Gurdjieff arrived unexpectedly.

"Well, Salzmann! Have you made good progress?"

"Yes, Gyorgi Ivanovitch. We've finished the drawings."

"What drawings? I'm asking how far you've gone with the painting."

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† See the chapter "Intelligentsia – Real or Apparent".

Stained-glass panels hung in the Study House at the Prieuré

"We haven't started painting yet, but we have made the necessary preparations."

"Preparations?" As he left the room, Mr. Gurdjieff added ironically, "That's what they do in school."

The joyful mood of our little group quickly evaporated. Hastily finishing our lunch, we returned to the task. Even before we could begin, Mr. Gurdjieff reappeared. Seeing that nothing had been painted, his voice rose and an avalanche of abuse fell upon us. The force of Mr. Gurdjieff's verbal storms could cause such turmoil that, when exposed to them, some even fainted on the spot. But everything quickly returned to normal. Without letting us recover, he

immediately swept us into action.

"Bring the step-ladder," he said. "Put it here. Quick, pass me the cans of paint – yellow, blue, brown! And the brushes, put them there!"

He was about to climb the ladder without even taking off his coat and hat. We almost had to tear them off to make him put on a smock and something to protect his head. With a bound he was at the top of the ladder signalling for two of us to climb up and form a chain behind him.

"Pass the paint!" he shouted.

Hooking the cans to the rungs of the ladder, then checking that everything necessary was within reach, he began to paint. As he progressed, he told us what to prepare, and we passed him the brushes saturated with the colours he needed. At first he seemed to create random chaotic shapes, but as soon as the different colours were joined together, the image came alive.

All this took place without any hesitation, without a moment being lost. He would paint for a few minutes, come down the ladder, have us move it, and then immediately start again a little farther on. It was incredible! All by himself, he took only fifteen minutes to cover more than a quarter of the cloth!

One after another, we pleaded with him, "Gyorgi Ivanovitch, don't get any more paint on you! Come down! We understand now. We can continue on our own!"

Finally, at our insistence, he stopped.

"You understand," he said, coming down, "that because of the folds, if you paint the lines evenly there seems to be no perspective, but uneven lines trick the viewer's eye and

produce the impression of depth. We could even increase this effect by adding some sequins."

Mr. Gurdjieff took off his smock and, after we removed some paint from his suit, he left for Paris. When he returned three days later, the painting of the cloth was finished. He must have been satisfied, for we never heard of those famous sequins again.

On the subject of decoration and painting, I would like to say something more about Alexandre de Salzmann, a really exceptional figure among those close to Mr. Gurdjieff. He had numerous talents, not the least of which was humour. Yet what fascinated us most was his ability to use these talents in the service of his art.

Mr. Gurdjieff obviously enjoyed his company, for I often found them together, immersed in endless conversations. Of course, when they were not speaking Russian I could not understand them, but I still remember some of what was said, such as this reflection of Mr. Gurdjieff's.

"Design .... You know better than anyone, Salzmann, that design is done in the head. It is entirely prepared in the head. The hand follows thought; it does not design by itself. This is why, as long as thought is active, the hand can move almost as quickly as thought."

The marvellous stained-glass panels of the Study House represented, without any doubt, the finest work of decoration at the Prieuré. They gave us the opportunity to see, in fact, how much Alexandre de Salzmann understood from

experience what Mr. Gurdjieff said about design. It was de Salzmann who had the idea of producing a subtle and diffuse lighting by placing a row of windows high up around the walls of the Study House. The windowpanes, measuring one by five metres, were mounted in old frames we had discovered half-buried on the grounds. We re-cut and restored them and then applied a special paint that allowed coloured light to come through. Alexandre de Salzmann knew how to do this perfectly.

One day Gyorgi Ivanovitch showed us a phonetic alphabet whose letters were inspired by Persian writing. These letters had been conceived and drawn by Alexandre de Salzmann, and could be used equally well in any language. Using this alphabet, de Salzmann wrote in calligraphy on the walls of the Study House the aphorisms formulated by Mr. Gurdjieff. We spent a lot of time deciphering these inscriptions and pondering how they could illuminate our daily life and our mutual relationships.

On another occasion, when many of us were gathered together to admire de Salzmann's work and the magical speed of his hand, I remember how, with his agreement, we amused ourselves by timing how long it would take him to decorate one of the windows to the right of the main door. The design was to include five large bouquets arranged on a green background sprinkled with wildflowers.

The scene is still with me. Alexandre de Salzmann, having arranged his paints and brushes on a shelf below the window, indicated he was ready. One person, holding a stopwatch, gave him the signal, and he began to paint. When he had finished, he turned toward us with one of his

inimitable looks that always made us collapse with laughter. The stopwatch indicated twelve minutes and forty-two seconds.

Mr. Gurdjieff used to say of him, "Salzmann is truly unique. No other painter can do what he does."

Alexandre de Salzmann later became a legendary figure in the Parisian art scene, as much for his vast knowledge as for his talent and unique brand of humour.

JOURNALISTS AT THE PRIEURÉ: THE DEMONSTRATIONS

As soon as the Study House was completed in 1923, Gyorgi Ivanovitch devoted himself to intensifying the work on the Movements and varying the inner exercises. On Saturday evenings, he even opened demonstrations of the Movements and some of the sacred dances to the public. At first, the growing number of visitors left their cars in the courtyard, but as their numbers increased, it became necessary for them to park in the street. The local authorities went so far as to improve the street lighting and place a traffic officer at the entrance to the château.

The curiosity aroused by our activities grew day by day. Articles on the Prieuré appeared in the press both in France and abroad, and unleashed a veritable invasion of journalists. Gyorgi Ivanovitch received them warmly and tried to explain the meaning of our search to them. I recall that one day he said to a group of journalists, "I am going to show you some Movements whose purpose is to awaken man's latent inner possibilities, allowing him to open to a new perception of himself and of reality. If you don't distort the meaning of my words, I will gladly give you any clarification you wish."

After dinner, we put on traditional costumes and demonstrated a series of specific postures for prayers and sacred dances from various oriental countries. The journalists photographed everything.

This invasion of the Prieuré by the press lasted several weeks. A host of articles was published both in France and abroad, but none faithfully passed on the explanations given by Gyorgi Ivanovitch. They preferred instead to give free rein to the most fantastic interpretations of the meaning of our work. It was so many pearls offered to those who refused to admit their lack of understanding.

This chorus of slander made Mr. Gurdjieff's work seem like a great hoax and its creator, a charlatan – a twentieth-century Cagliostro.† We were dumbfounded by the way the journalists, convinced that they had a real scoop for the gutter press, exploited the public's credulity and trust. They managed to distort a work directed toward consciousness until it was completely unrecognizable, either by making it totally absurd or by deliberately turning it into something evil.

One day, Mr. Gurdjieff discovered a particularly shocking article accompanied by photographs that gave the impression that the sacred dances were somehow suspect and even immoral. From that day on, he never allowed reporters to set foot in the Prieuré again.

† Cagliostro (1743-1795), a renowned figure of the occult, is generally considered to be a charlatan.

TO WORK AS A GENUINE CHRISTIAN

No matter what kind of work Gyorgi Ivanovitch gave us to do, he followed the fluctuations of our inner state closely, and his behaviour toward each of us could vary accordingly from one moment to the next.

In the morning, after breakfast, we would head off to the work we had been assigned. Every day we were given an inner exercise whose aim was to help us reach a higher level of consciousness. These exercises called for a more balanced relationship among the three principal functions: physical, emotional, and intellectual. The exercises were constantly changed, coming from a seemingly infinite repertoire, and they could be very complex.

One time we were asked to carry out arithmetical operations while using, in the place of numbers, sixteen feminine names. Instead of saying that 16 minus 12 equals 4, for example, we had to say Nina minus Adèle gives Marie, or that Marie multiplied by Nina gives Lily-Marie, meaning 64. When we were together at our tasks, one of us had to propose an arithmetical operation in time with a certain rhythm. On the following measure, the others were to

:spond according to the proposed rule. Then it was the :ext person's turn, and so on. It is not hard to imagine the :fficulty of such exercises, particularly when a physical :sk had to be done at the same time. The feminine names :uld just as well be replaced by colours, opera titles, vari- :s objects, gestures, or whatever. It was interesting to see that time could seem very long when our effort remained mechanical or very short when our attention and presence became free.

Generally speaking, we were severely put to the test, but the reward was worth the effort. All these mental gymnastics, created out of a fiendish ingenuity, fostered a high level of concentration, the end result being the liberation of an independent attention no longer subject to what Mr. Gurdjieff called 'associative mechanisms'.

We had the impression that after lunch we would not be able to do anything at all, yet in the afternoon, when Mr. Gurdjieff was at the Prieuré, we managed to work even more intensely than before. If a new community project was undertaken, he first made sure that each of us fully understood what he had to do. Then he could become even more demanding. He found ingenious ways to challenge our self-esteem by confronting us with our lack of sustained attention and the inadequacy of our presence in the face of reality.

"Doctor, where are you going?" he asked Dr. Kissilov.

"I'm going to the Orangery to ... "

Mr. Gurdjieff did not let him finish his sentence. "You can see that your friends are carrying planks in that direction, so why go empty-handed? Pick one up! They're working

for you, so you must work for them."

You can imagine the two-fold discomfort of Kissilov: o the one hand, his frustration at not being able to have a qui smoke along the way and, on the other, having his self-ce tred attitude painfully exposed.

The demands and provocations redoubled: "You se everyone passes by here and no one picks up this piece paper! ... And you! Look! Why come back with an emp pail? Think about watering the tomatoes on the way bac Why do you work like a day-labourer? Try to be conscio of the needs and possibilities of the moment. We all depe on each other's work and intelligence."

It was hard to accept that we were passive, insensitive - a word, asleep – that we always gravitated toward the path least resistance. Every one of us felt confused and dissatisfie by not having taken the right initiative at the right momen Yet it was not guilt that Mr. Gurdjieff sought to arouse in us on the contrary, he was constantly making clear that gui was often pathological. His aim was to awaken our lucidit and conscience.

"Only conscious work is worthy of a genuine Christian he said. "It is the constant effort to be at the level of one highest understanding."

When our minds were clear and alert, and we had becom sensitive to every need, Mr. Gurdjieff said nothing mor His presence appeared lighter, more congenial, brotherly. A warm smile would appear on his face, mood became that of something subtly shared. In was by his very attitude that he awoke in us an awarene our state.

Mr. Gurdjieff's words were simple, but they had incredible weight. For example, he once said, "Every living being must work in order to eat. It is a great law of nature. But the man who works only to feed himself is nothing but an animal. To work as a Christian requires a super-effort in order to consciously approach an aim that is beyond one's reach."

So, in the evening when, Mr. Gurdjieff asked for volunteers after a session of Movements, many of us wanted to stay close to him and work late into the night. We were getting a taste for the search toward a super-effort, and I still have unforgettable impressions of these moments.

I must admit, however, that more than once my incorrigible bravado caused difficulty and worry for Mr. Gurdjieff. One evening when we were installing the electrical system in the Study House, I tried to appear very active so that my extreme fatigue would not be noticed. Mr. Gurdjieff twice insisted that I go to bed, but I could not bring myself to leave as long as he was there.

When he asked someone to hang the electric wires on the crossbeam, I quickly clambered up to justify my still being there. Once I was on the beam, the ladder was moved away. After that I don't remember a thing. While waiting for someone to pass me the wires, it seems I instinctively wrapped my arms around the beam and fell into a deep sleep.

I found out later that they had yelled to me several times in order to throw me the wires. Hearing these repeated calls,

Mr. Gurdjieff had rushed over and immediately placed people under the beam to break a possible fall. Next, with a finger to his lips, he called for silence, had a ladder brought, and climbed up like a cat. Speaking very softly, he put his arms around me to keep me firmly on the beam. I was awakened by his soft and affectionate voice. It took me a while to realize the strangeness of the situation that made me worthy of such brotherly love. Assured that I had come to, he released his hold and immediately ordered me down. Once my feet hit the ground, his tenderness disappeared and he berated me so severely that I slunk away to my bed and took refuge under the covers. It only dawned on me little by little that my stupidity could have had dire consequences.

The following day, when I wanted once again to stay late, I presumptuously said to Mr. Gurdjieff, "I want to work like a Christian!"

His lightning response, inspired by popular wisdom, deflated all my pretensions. "Don't ask an idiot to prostrate himself on a tiled floor – his skull would shatter to bits."

LET NATURE TAKE CARE OF HERSELF

As soon as we arrived at the Prieuré, Gyorgi Ivanovitch began to set up a farm on the property. Dr. de Stjernvall was put in charge of buying the cows, and his wife with stocking the hen-house. Alexandre de Salzmann painted some pictures in the pigsty for the sow we were expecting, showing her surrounded by her piglets. A mule was bought to cart the hay and, as if by magic, the farm became a reality.

Although the people who tended the animals had the best of intentions, they really didn't know what they were doing. Some used to have vast estates in Russia. Having had an aristocratic upbringing and being accustomed to having numerous servants, they were unprepared for practical life. For example, the rabbits caused considerable anxiety to the 'high society' ladies who took care of them. Thinking it was the right thing to do, they constantly gave water to the 'poor little creatures'. But it was precisely all this water that killed them, plunging the ladies into depths of despair.

Furthermore – we never knew why – one day the sow smothered one of the piglets, and then devoured it. Only a few remains were ever found. Another dramatic incident

took place in the stable. Our favourite cow fell seriously ill after giving birth to a calf. But misfortune loves company. Another little calf died in its turn, a victim of the avant-garde theories of a young agricultural engineer who was trying to help us improve our methods.

We often asked Mr. Gurdjieff for his advice. He very much insisted that one must: "Love animals", "Take care of them with love", "Intentionally show this love." He also told us, of course, to ask the advice of neighbouring farmers in order to get as much information as possible about what was practised in the region.

After this succession of bitter disappointments, our methods gradually improved, and the farm ended up becoming worthy of the name. The cows provided plenty of milk, and our sow, Moumounia, generously delivered a new litter of piglets.

With this in mind, I must mention how we enjoyed another example of Alexandre de Salzmann's priceless humour. Accustomed to raising pigs, he used all his wits to train them, and from time to time we had the chance to witness hilarious demonstrations of his comic skills. One day, like a genuine tamer of wild beasts, he solemnly entered the sty and forced the pigs to line up as if on parade. Then food was poured in their trough. The pigs didn't dare move. De Salzmann then began to tour the ranks. The pigs never took their eyes off him. He insulted them in an extremely vulgar manner, ordering them to eat. The pigs still would not budge. He repeated the invitation in various outrageous ways, but to no avail.

We all assumed that the pigs' stubborn indifference to

the appetizing food we had prepared was due to his intimidating presence. Turning to us and acting the clown, he declared the pigs were too distinguished to heed an invitation that lacked the appropriate etiquette. So, changing his tone, he complimented them profusely, using polite phrases in different languages in a manner worthy of a seventeenth-century salon. This seemed to fascinate the pigs, for they now leaned toward him with pricked-up ears. Then, with studied reverence and a sweeping gesture inviting them to the trough, he finally got the pigs to move toward their 'daily feast'. It goes without saying that Mr. Gurdjieff enjoyed this as much as we did.

But soon, a new misfortune fell upon the farmyard. The ducklings and chicks were being decimated, and each morning we found some of them newly massacred. It was verging on catastrophe. For some time, the ducks, the geese, the guinea fowl, and all the breeds of hens had been living happily with the peacocks. How was it that this idyllic farmyard life was being plunged into gloom by daily massacres?

Mme de Stjernvall, who was in charge, seemed to have taken all the necessary precautions. At dusk, she rounded up all the fowl into their cages, making sure the doors were locked, and later, on returning from the Study House, she checked that everything was in order. Dr. de Stjernvall also kept a close watch on the farmyard, and even though traps were set all around, each morning new victims lay dead on the ground. What could this formidable predator be? Was it a marten, or maybe rats? Even though the bait was changed, the traps turned out to be useless. The uncertainty lasted a long time.

Returning to the Study House late one evening, we heard piercing cries coming from the farmyard. Lanterns in hand, we went directly to the spot. All the birds seemed paralysed with fear. A hen lay slaughtered on the ground.

"This will be the last one," said Mr. Gurdjieff.

From that day on, he asked that the birds no longer be caged in the evening and that all the doors be left wide open. To Mme de Stjernvall's great surprise, the next morning she found all the birds unharmed. We were amazed but could not stop worrying. We feared the worst.

The next day, Dr. de Stjernvall rose at dawn to observe the result of this new stratagem ordered by Mr. Gurdjieff. On the third morning, he did not need to enter the farmyard; all the birds were assembled on the lawn, forming a veritable procession flanked by two peacocks seemingly maintaining order. The hens and guinea fowl fluttered excitedly in the middle, loudly squawking and snapping their beaks at an enormous weasel that was crawling forward in a pitiful state. The ducks also pecked relentlessly at the gashed coat of the wounded animal.

As Dr. de Stjernvall approached, he realized that it was already half dead, its eyes having been pecked out. Encouraged by our presence, the birds' rage redoubled. Dr. de Stjernvall followed the procession until the vengeance was complete. Then he took the weasel by the tail and went into the farmyard. The birds followed him, waddling with legitimate pride. That day they received double rations.

The news of this surprising event spread by word of mouth throughout the neighbourhood. Some days later, the gardener from the neighbouring property came and asked

to see the person in charge of the hen-house. Received by Dr. de Stjernvall, he said that his fowl were also victims of this carnivore. He thought that there must be others, and wanted permission to search the property. Later, a second weasel was located in a lair covered with straw.

Armed with sticks, all the children surrounded the spot. Two people probed the straw with pitchforks for a long time, until a boy suddenly saw the straw shifting and cried out, "There it is!" He struck hard at the spot, seriously wounding the beast, which scurried off to hide in the herb garden. We unsuccessfully explored every nook and cranny, and while we made sure it did not escape again, the gardener ran to find his dog. He soon returned, and the dog came very quickly to a dead stop in front of one of us. The weasel, in fact, was holed up right behind him.

The gardener killed it with one blow of his stick. This weasel had no doubt participated in the previous night's skirmish, as its right eye was almost torn out. Its still-warm body was carried into the farmyard, as if to reassure the birds about their future.

As an epilogue, Mr. Gurdjieff offered Mme de Stjernvall the two weasels' superb pelts, and to comfort her, he said, "When human reason realizes its limits, it recognizes the laws of nature."

IN BETWEEN IS SUFFERING

In 1924, Mr. Gurdjieff left the Prieuré to visit a number of cities in the United States to give lectures and to present the special work of the Movements and certain sacred dances. I was one of the troupe, along with many other pupils. In each city, after performing the Movements, we would present demonstrations of 'parapsychology' and 'magic'. Then we would invite the audience to distinguish between the real phenomena and what were only tricks.

After a few demonstrations of this kind, Mr. Gurdjieff would give a talk. One evening remains deeply engraved in my memory. The theatre was packed and everyone was expecting something sensational. The excitement grew in anticipation of a great theatrical event. When the curtain rose, the audience saw a man simply standing motionless on the stage surrounded by thirty of us who were sitting cross-legged without moving. The audience apparently took this to be the preliminary setting for an experiment in magic.

When Mr. Gurdjieff began to expound on the three brains of man, on the chaotic state created in the inner life of the individual by the disharmony and lack of balance of

his centres, and on the necessity, according to the alchemical formula of 'submitting the coarse to the fine', some in the audience began to show their displeasure. A few got up and left without any consideration for the rest of the audience.

Unconcerned, Mr. Gurdjieff continued to speak. Those who wanted to follow the talk could no longer hear a word, for other people also began to leave. In the midst of all this commotion, Mr. Gurdjieff remained unmoved. He continued speaking and punctuated his talk with very studied gestures, as if everyone were drinking in his words. It was obvious, however, that the lecture was turning into a disaster, and it was becoming more and more unbearable for us to sit there helplessly. It looked as if Mr. Gurdjieff would soon find himself facing an empty auditorium, but still he kept on speaking, modulating his intonations like an actor, and turning to us from time to time for an English word that escaped him.

And then he stopped, coughed, scratched his chin and, in a voice that suddenly carried very far, confronted the audience. "So, when someone speaks of serious things, what do you do? You show how frivolous and incredibly superficial you are. Just as the wind scatters the leaves, so the seriousness of the subject drives you away. Very well, if there are still people who would like to leave, go ahead, but leave now, immediately, because we are going to lock the auditorium."

He asked some of us to be ready to close the doors. A number of those still remaining got up and left. While he waited, Mr. Gurdjieff sat down, lit a cigarette, and smoked it calmly. As soon as there was silence, he stood up and said, "No one else wants to leave? ... You are all staying?"

There was no reply. Then Mr. Gurdjieff's attitude completely changed. In a warm, pleasant voice, he invited everyone to sit in the orchestra seats, nearer to him. Those who were in the galleries and at the back of the hall came and sat together in the front rows. To this 'selected' audience, Mr. Gurdjieff solemnly explained that what he wanted to speak about was in fact not meant for everybody. "Now that the parasites have left, we can speak seriously and go to the heart of the matter," he added.

The audience had now become very attentive and began to follow Gyorgi Ivanovitch with great interest. People no longer noticed his accent, and were deeply touched by the meaning of his words. He spoke for a long while, and then a discussion began. Some people asked questions, others raised objections.

I especially remember one of his answers, to a man who had already been to several Movements demonstrations and to the lectures of Alfred Orage.† In light of his efforts toward greater consciousness, this man felt that his entire inner world, in which until then he had had an unshakeable faith, was about to disintegrate. In a voice that betrayed his emotion, he expressed his fear.

Mr. Gurdjieff kindly invited him to stand. Still trembling, the man continued, "Sir, you have shaken my inner world. My opinions, my points of view, are crumbling. Soon there will be nothing left of my long-standing convictions.

† Alfred Orage was a well-known English writer and founder of the avant-garde literary review, *The New Age*. He had taken on the task of making Mr. Gurdjieff's ideas known to the American public.

and I am afraid – afraid of finding myself in front of a great void. I am afraid of not finding the elements that would enable me to rebuild my world on a new basis. I feel lost, and dread the prospect of the unhappiness and suffering that await me. Is the ground that I once felt so solid under my feet going to give way completely? Why," he added almost accusingly, "do you deprive me and the others of our moral and psychic equilibrium?"

Everyone had become more and more attentive. The intense silence demanded a response from Mr. Gurdjieff. He seemed to have expected just such a reaction, and one could even detect a hint of satisfaction on his face.

"Your fear and anxiety are not without reason," he replied. "This means that these new ideas have penetrated into your subconscious more rapidly than the intellectual knowledge needed for understanding man's situation in the world. No one can live without believing in something; therefore, each of us believes in the solidity of the ground beneath his feet. Some believe in it only up to a certain age, but most believe in it until they die.

"You must understand that there is no balance in you, that you lack moral and psychic stability, and that this is due to a misunderstanding of the spiritual world. Only he who is convinced that he is heading directly over a precipice toward annihilation understands the vital necessity of following a path that leads somewhere. I know this path. It is very difficult but it can prevent 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

"Of course, what we are speaking about can at first provoke fear, but while it is true that this fear can be very strong, it is not a fear that comes from our essential being.

This fear comes from everything that must be abandoned, everything that wants to cling to automatic habits. It is these false 'I's living in us that feel threatened when we awaken to reality; and the fear that takes hold of these 'I's evokes the impulse to flee anything that could draw this reality nearer.

"You say that you anticipate unhappiness and suffering. Nothing could be closer to the truth. Happy is he who knows nothing of his situation. Equally happy is he who is on the path of his spiritual evolution. But unhappy is he who has recognized only a few fundamental truths, that is, he who has only a germ of consciousness. For this man, consciousness is the cause of remorse; it does not yet prevent suffering. It is comfortable to sit on a stool or a bench, but it is still more comfortable to sit in an armchair. But woe to him who, having got up from his bench, hasn't yet reached the armchair. Countless torments await him.

"To be a raven is fine, but of course the peacock is more admired and much better treated. But sad is the lot of the raven whose plumage has been adorned with one or two peacock feathers. The other ravens reject him because he makes them uneasy. The peacocks also do not accept him, for he is only the beginnings of a peacock, and they treat him with unrestrained cruelty. What's worse, he takes everything that comes from the peacocks as a reproach, and feels compelled to flee their company. It's possible that millions of men may be in this unhappy situation, but that must not stop us. Even if there are millions of incomplete half-men – thanks, objectively, to their own fault – with all the suffering this implies, this number can be more readily accepted if even one man escapes the sad fate that awaits all who do

not fulfill their duty to nature."

There were immediate protests: "By what right do you assert such things? For what purpose?"

Mr. Gurdjieff smiled compassionately, and said gravely, "You know, one who has been freed can save ten others; these ten can then save a hundred; these hundred, thousands; these thousands, millions. So, millions of suffering and unhappy human beings can cause millions of joyful human beings to appear. Such could be the blessing brought by the emergence of these 'new men'. As for my right to say this, it arises from my duty to serve objective knowledge.

"The joys and well-being of those who do not know that they are on the way to annihilation are ephemeral and illusory. The suffering and pain of those who know they are on the way to annihilation comes from the remorse and the reproaches they inevitably heap on themselves. From an objective point of view, there is no difference between them. A good gardener willingly sacrifices some seedlings in order to create space and conditions for others to flourish. What causes real suffering is when fertile conditions are created in this way and nothing grows."

These last words were accompanied by a long silence in the audience. We had lost all sense of time.

"Tomorrow is another day," Mr. Gurdjieff concluded. "Everything begins again. Now we need to rest a little."

Some of the people, visibly touched by the evening's events, expressed a desire to continue these meetings and go more deeply into the questions that had been raised.

And so the first Work group inspired by the teaching of Mr. Gurdjieff was born in the city of Chicago.

THE POWER TO HELP

During our stay in Germany, a certain Mme R. appeared among the people around Mr. Gurdjieff. She seemed to have known him for a long time, and it turned out that she and her husband had met him in Russia. Mr. R. was rather cool to the ideas of the teaching, and his wife, although not without leanings toward it, was not really committed like the rest of us. But this slight difference in interest was not the cause of the lack of harmony between them. The problem, as is often the case, was a matter of the heart. He loved his wife, but she was in love with another man. They had a charming little boy named Alexander, and it was only because of the child that Mme R. stayed with her husband.

The other man, whose name was Nicolas, suffered from tuberculosis. He was strongly attracted to the ideas of the teaching, but Mme R. did her utmost to take him away from Gyorgi Ivanovitch because she felt his influence was bad for Nicolas. Much later, however, when she had rejoined us at the Prieuré, her attitude had changed. This is what she confided to me. "Something is really troubling me," she said. "When we were still in Russia, and Nicolas was seeing

Mr. Gurdjieff, he always felt well. But as soon as I managed to get him away, he became ill. Each time, I had to give in to his wish to be near Mr. Gurdjieff, because then his health would quickly improve. When I tried to get my way and asked Nicolas to break with Gyorgi Ivanovitch for good, his state immediately deteriorated and he fell ill. This happened over and over again.

"When we had to leave Russia," she continued, "Mr. Gurdjieff advised us not to come with him but to travel to central Europe. He urged Nicolas to follow the advice of his doctors, who had recommended a cure in the mountains of the Tyrol."

Nicolas obediently left for Austria, while Mr. R. found work in Berlin. His wife divided her time between the Tyrol and her family in Germany. Mr. and Mrs. R. finally divorced, but continued to live under the same roof.

On his way to Germany, Mr. Gurdjieff passed through the Tyrol to see Nicolas, whose illness had become much worse after he left Russia and Mr. Gurdjieff. He would soon die. The last weeks of his life were spent with Mme R. at his side. She was greatly moved by the transformation in him, illuminated as he was by the spirit during his last days. Before he died, he persuaded her to follow Gyorgi Ivanovitch, adding that if Alexander fell ill, she must entrust the child to his care without fail.

During this final period with Nicolas, Mme R. realized that there were two opposing forces in her: one, a possessive woman's jealousy and selfishness; the other, the wish to devote herself to the welfare of her lover. Whenever Nicolas' health seemed to be improving, the 'possessive female', as

she put it, regained the upper hand, using all possible means to achieve her ends. But now this had all ended, as Nicolas was no longer alive.

She resumed living with her former husband. But before long, to compound her unhappiness, the child, who had been well until then, began sweating at night. A medical examination confirmed that he had the same illness as the one that killed Nicolas. Mme R. immediately went to Mr. Gurdjieff to ask for his help, but he replied that he had to leave Germany. In despair, Mme R. told him of the promise she had made to Nicolas and implored him to take care of the child. Mr. Gurdjieff then suggested that she come to Paris once he was settled. And so she came to France with her family.

"In Paris," she went on, "I repeatedly asked Mr. Gurdjieff to tell me which medicines to buy, but he always replied that he was looking after Alexander and that the boy was not in any danger. I could not bear the uncertainty and had X-rays taken. These showed two spots on the lungs; the illness was getting worse. Without divulging this to Mr. Gurdjieff, I pressed him to tell me what I should do, because my son was getting weaker by the day. But Mr. Gurdjieff could be harsh at times, and one day he even threatened: 'I won't take care of Alexander any more if you continue to badger me like this. I have enough problems without you adding to them.'

"Soon, the Prieuré was purchased, and Gyorgi Ivanovitch told me that I should live there. 'You will be in charge of the laundry,' he said. When I learned that the Prieuré was situated down the hill from Avon in the middle of a damp and

foggy forest, only a few hundred metres from the Seine, I was very frightened. No doctor would ever advise someone with tuberculosis to stay in such a place. I felt as if I were throwing myself over a precipice and taking my child with me. Torn by these contradictory feelings, I took the train to Fontainebleau.

"At first, I did not dare ask Mr. Gurdjieff what his treatment was going to be. I constantly felt pulled between fear, my responsibility as a mother, the promise I had made to my former companion, and the recollection of my last exchange with Mr. Gurdjieff. These feelings of anxiety alternated with the calm and confidence that the memory of Nicolas revived in me. Now and then I reproached myself for all the time lost when I had not been taking proper care of my son.

"After a month and a half, I took advantage of a moment when Mr. Gurdjieff was alone to confide my inner conflict to him. He responded by saying, 'Look at him. He's running around with the other children, full of life and joy. What more do you want?' And he pointed to them as at that moment they were chasing a pig that was dashing across the lawn, trying to avoid being put back in its pen. 'Yes, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, of course, he's only a child. He plays, but he's not aware of his condition, and without proper care, he will certainly not get better.' 'All right,' said Mr. Gurdjieff, 'as soon as I am a bit freer of my other concerns, I will give more time to his care.'

"Several months passed. One day I timidly approached Gyorgi Ivanovitch and asked him if it would not be wise to have X-rays taken. I was sure they would be positive and

that Mr. Gurdjieff would then be forced to act. 'Of course, that must be done, but not today,' he replied without interrupting his stride. 'This damp weather isn't suitable for such an outing.' In despair once again, I returned to my work.

"In this way the winter passed, and I grew more and more anxious. Whenever I looked at my son, I thought, 'He's still full of energy, but for how long?' Mr. Gurdjieff seemed to me to be indifferent, and I was full of resentment. I kept turning round and round in my head all the things I would tell him when my son died."

As I had seen Mme R. speaking to her husband about the health of their son during his recent visit to the Prieuré, I interrupted her account and asked, "And what about your husband? Did he pressure Mr. Gurdjieff to treat your son?"

"Whether he was more confident, or perhaps more patient, I can't say," she replied. "He told me that something must certainly be done, but that, on the other hand, Alexander's condition was stable, and that's already a lot. I stopped talking to him about it.

"One day," she continued, "while I was working in the laundry, my son came running in to tell me that Mr. Gurdjieff was going to take him to Paris, and there was room for me in his car if I wanted to go. If so, I should be at the garage in an hour. Panic-stricken, I ran to Mr. Gurdjieff to ask him what this was all about, but I had no time to open my mouth. 'Hurry up, get yourself dressed for Paris. We're leaving immediately.' He added, 'You will be able to bring him back home this evening.'

"When we arrived in Paris, we went straight to the hospital to have X-rays taken. Gyorgi Ivanovitch left immediately

afterwards, leaving me to deal with the formalities. When we returned to the Prieuré nothing was said about any of this, and on the date set to pick up the X-rays, I went by myself. Before giving them to me, the radiologist looked at them for a long time, and then said, 'The lungs are clear, your son is in good health.' 'That's not possible,' I replied. 'Several months ago there were two large spots.' 'Perhaps, but there is no trace of them now.'

"I realized that it was useless to insist, so I left. On the train, I was again seized with doubt. Although the X-rays showed no sign of illness, I thought there must be some mistake. After arriving at the Prieuré, I took the old X-rays and immediately returned to Paris with my son. 'These X-rays don't belong to the same person,' declared the doctor. This only reinforced my fears, and despite the assurance of the doctor, who insisted that the numbers on the films corresponded exactly to the numbers on the receipts, I had more X-rays taken by another specialist. The new ones, taken in my presence, confirmed the absence of any lesions.

"Beside myself with joy, I rushed to Gyorgi Ivanovitch to tell him the news and to thank him. But did I have to thank him? And yet without him Alexander would not have been cured. Listening to me, Mr. Gurdjieff gave the appearance of being astonished, not because of the boy's state of health, but because I was telling him this as if it were something extraordinary. Continuing on his way, he said nonchalantly, 'So, your mind's at rest now?' When I tried to thank him again, he replied, 'For what? You know very well that I did nothing.' And with these simple words, he dismissed me.

"I know it was he who cured my son," she went on. "But

what did he do? How and when did he do it? I have no idea. But Alexander is cured. Nicolas was right."

This story of Alexander showed me again how much, and with what discretion, Mr. Gurdjieff cared for others.

THE ACCIDENT

We are at the Prieuré d'Avon in the middle of summer of 1924. It is a stiflingly hot afternoon. Everybody is intent on completing his task while trying to do the exercises given during the week. Once again, Mr. Gurdjieff has gone to Paris, and we are waiting for him to return.

The team I happen to be on is working in the garden. Suddenly, the news spreads like wildfire: Mr. Gurdjieff has been in a car accident while driving. The gendarme who found him has come to tell us that he has been taken to the hospital in Fontainebleau.

We are stunned, literally paralysed, the garden tools poised motionless in our hands. We stare at one another dumbfounded, powerless to speak. How did the tools get back in their places? How did we exchange our work-clothes for our everyday attire? Impossible to remember.

All I can see before me is that long chain of men moving along the road from Avon to Fontainebleau, each reacting in his own way – some dragging their feet, others almost running. No one thinks of waiting for the tram. That would have seemed a waste of precious time.

Individually or in small groups we soon arrive at the hospital. Impressed by the gathering, the doctor on duty comes over and with great sensitivity tells us that Mr. Gurdjieff is in a coma. He is not yet able to make a diagnosis, nor therefore a prognosis. After several meetings and at the request of Dr. de Stjernvall, a psychiatrist and long-time friend of Mr. Gurdjieff, the doctor on duty authorizes us to take Gyorgi Ivanovitch to the Prieuré. But this cannot be done until the diagnosis has been made and the local physician's official statement recorded.

Several hours later, the formalities are over and the ambulance takes us to the Prieuré. We carry Mr. Gurdjieff up to his room on a stretcher. He is still unconscious and wearing the same clothes as when he had the accident.

There are four of us to take care of him: Dr. de Stjernvall, Alexandre de Salzmann, Thomas de Hartmann, and myself. Mr. Gurdjieff's wife, Julia Osipovna, is also there.

Wishing not to cause further suffering to his critically injured body, we remove his clothes and put pyjamas on him with the greatest of care. We are amazed that in spite of his deep coma, Mr. Gurdjieff's body readily accepts every move we make. Yet his head is inert, and his body seems totally devoid of energy.

On the wall of his room, two large paintings stand out: one of Christ, the other of Buddha. Everything combines to make us feel the gravity of the situation. Speaking softly, we say only what is needed to coordinate our actions. When everything is prepared, Alexandre de Salzmann, with his natural authority, asks us to lay Mr. Gurdjieff on the bed. Jeanne de Salzmann, Olga Ivanovna, and Olga de Hartmann.

ving just come in, witness the scene, ready to help. Just as e start, I feel a resistance as though he wants to free his ght arm, which I have firmly in my grasp. In spite of this tempted movement, I don't let go, fearing he will fall. But w I clearly sense he's trying to get free, and I let go of his m while continuing to support him. Nothing happens for moment, but his body seems to be reanimated, then it comes quite still while a barely audible murmur reaches s, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, men." After that, his body offers no more resistance, and e put him to bed.

We stay there a long time, unable to utter a single word, but the spiritual quality of Mr. Gurdjieff is clear to all. Later, we often discussed this moment. We could not understand how it could have happened.

Long after the accident, I told Mr. Gurdjieff what had aken place that day, and asked him whether he had any nemory of it. "No," he replied, "I don't remember." I asked im how this event could have occurred, how he could have cted like that, being comatose. He answered very simply hat while his body had been completely powerless, his spirit vas still present. "It was the spirit that manifested," he said.

During the following days, Mr. Gurdjieff remains in a coma, his condition not improving. On the contrary, cer- ain bodily functions are deteriorating, and so, among other reatments, we decide to proceed with an enema. Alexandre le Salzmann and I take on this responsibility. Encouraged by the result, we discuss repeating the procedure in a few days. This conversation takes place around Mr. Gurdjieff's bed. To our astonishment, his body, which until now has

been inert, begins to move. His lips part, and we can barely distinguish his injunction, "No more enemas." As always, I think, he's the one in control.

The days pass; there seems no end to it. Mr. Gurdjieff is still in the same state. After several weeks, our anxiety is nearly more than we can bear, for now we fear not only for his life, but also for his mental faculties. Although we desperately want him to open his eyes, the truth is we are also afraid his eyes may not recognize us.

More than two months go by in the same way. Although he is still in a coma, his physical condition has improved. The superficial wounds have healed. His face is relaxed and has regained its colour. But the shock to his head? What will the consequences be? Will Gyorgi Ivanovitch be normal, really normal, if he survives? What to do if his behaviour is odd? If he asks what has happened to him, what are we going to say? We are seized by a multitude of questions, and are full of uncertainties. Nevertheless, deep within ourselves, we are convinced that Mr. Gurdjieff is still Mr. Gurdjieff. Neither ordinary rules, nor ordinary standards, can be applied to him.

At last, it happens: he coughs, and his cough has the old familiar sound. He moves his arms, and it is clear that thought is directing his movements. As he is now, eyes closed, he simply looks like someone peacefully awakening from a short sleep. We are all watching expectantly. The crucial moment is coming. Full of anxiety, we await the slightest gesture. It appears. He slowly pulls his body up so as to raise his head higher on the pillow. Finally, his eyes open.

We try to assume a detached air, as if nothing has hap-

pened. He looks in our direction; his eyes fix on me. Then he begins opening and closing two fingers of his right hand. 'He doesn't really know what he's doing,' I say to myself. I am absolutely done in, incapable of responding. Fortunately, his wife understands the meaning of his gesture. It is a movement like scissors, which she rushes to get and hands to him.

Mr. Gurdjieff takes the scissors and, holding them, reaches out with the other hand. He looks around. It is obvious he wants to cut something. We hand him a piece of paper. He cuts it in two and begins to cut a shape from one of the pieces. When he has finished, he shows it to us.

"It's a cow," we all say in the same breath.

Then he cuts a shape from the other piece and shows it to us.

"It's a horse."

He puts the scissors on the table. This time he makes the gesture of writing. I get a pencil from my pocket and hand it to him. He takes it. I quickly get a piece of paper. He puts it on his bed and someone slides a book under it as a support. He begins writing. After a time he hands the paper back to me. I see long columns of numbers he has added. I check the sums and say, "The results are correct, Gyorgi Ivanovitch."

He takes back the pencil and paper and at once begins lining up two large numbers; then, he hands it to me again. This time it's a multiplication. I again verify the calculation. There are no errors. "It's completely right, Gyorgi Ivanovitch," I say to him.

I'm overwhelmed. It's really him, with his own particular way of being. He has answered in advance all our doubts

and uncertainties and, as always, started off by demonstrating facts, transforming them into proof. Here, before our very eyes, he has illustrated one of the fundamental principles of his teaching: *not to believe anything without verifying it for oneself.* He places the pencil and paper back on the bed, contemplates each of us in turn, then says in his normal voice, "So you see, I am not mad."

This day remains engraved in my memory. Never had we shared such joy together, nor had such a marvellous celebration. A few days later, Mr. Gurdjieff was back on his feet.

THE FORCE OF IDENTIFICATION

An old oriental saying states that every family has its monster, and within a spiritual community – to which the members of a group commit themselves – everyone may come to see himself as such, at one time or another. Pascal rightly said, "The self is hateful."† From the point of view of the evolution of consciousness, this painful recognition is a natural stage; but I am not speaking of the egotistical self. The monster in the saying can almost always be found in any human community, and this was certainly the case more than once among Mr. Gurdjieff's followers. In fact, a man appeared at the Prieuré who seemed to have only one purpose in life: to enrage his companions for no apparent reason. Or if he did have a reason, it was known only to himself.

The man was divorced, and his ex-wife, also one of Mr. Gurdjieff's students, suited him about as well as 'a racing saddle on a milk cow'.‡ She was young, beautiful, and entic-

† Blaise Pascal, *Les Pensées*.

‡ This is a Russian proverb.

ing, while he, on the contrary, was dull, aging, and no longer vigorous. Above all, this man was jealous of everything and everybody, particularly of those who were the least bit friendly with his ex-wife.

One day, the 'monster' declared to me, "Understand this, Tchekhovitch, if all of you stopped being so nice to my wife, she would naturally come back to me. But you refuse to understand this; everyone acts against my interests. That's why I must defend myself as best I can."

Since his interests were anything but noble, he could not defend them with dignity. Furthermore, believing that the end justifies the means and being without scruples, he would resort to anything to get his way: mockery, slander, and even the most treacherous insinuations. I realized this, however, only much later, which is why I didn't immediately understand why I too became the victim of his attacks. Since he is still alive, I will not give his real name, but simply call him Richard.

Richard was always butting into conversations that didn't concern him, incessantly giving uncalled for and hurtful opinions of others. This, of course, infuriated everyone. As I was naturally cordial to the young lady, I became the target of his attacks as well. I did not realize at first that these were premeditated, and I bravely endured them, while naively trying to show good will. The more I tried to be conciliatory, the more aggressive he became, until I came close to threatening him physically to get him to show me some respect. That's what the 'monster' wanted: to make me lose my temper, so that he could ridicule me the way he did the others.

One day I was again on the verge of losing all control. However, instead of giving in to violence, I decided to find Mr. Gurdjieff to let him know that my patience was exhausted. The longer I took finding him, the more exasperated I became, especially as Richard was following right on my heels. At last, there was Mr. Gurdjieff! I ran up to him to explain the situation, but I must have been in such a state that he had to calm me down first. He listened to me with such compassion that I was soon soothed, relieved at being finally understood.

"It's true," he said. "This madman needs to be taught a good lesson, but with your strength you might kill him. Find him immediately – I just saw him head behind the house - and ask him if he hasn't gone completely mad."

As I ran off after Richard, I heard Mr. Gurdjieff shout, "Be sure to tell me what happens!"

I yelled at the top of my voice, "Richard! Richard!"

Richard stopped and turned around. The closer I got to him, the more uneasy I became. Once we were face to face, I was speechless.

"So, what is it?" asked Richard, taking out a cigarette.

I didn't know what was wrong, but I couldn't say a word. "Nothing, everything's fine," I finally answered, coming back to myself.

I felt so sheepish for having been carried away, so stupid for having talked to Mr. Gurdjieff in such an uncontrolled way, and truly idiotic for having given in to this monster's provocation. I was really face to face with myself and my own stupidity. I then understood that not only had Mr. Gurdjieff calmed me, but what is more important, he had succeeded

in thwarting my rage by putting me in front of myself. (... the force of identification can cause a man to become attached to a situation that he becomes both its slave a... its victim.† I had truly experienced this organically. No one could have demonstrated this better than Mr. Gurdjieff, nor made one feel at the same time both identification and its terrible consequences. So, of course, there was no longer any point in my trying to find out if Richard had 'gone completely mad'.

For several days I continued to have a bad conscience, a taste of remorse. Richard continued his attacks on everyone, but from that day on they no longer had any effect on me. The gratitude I experienced toward Mr. Gurdjieff for revealing to me the force of identification was only felt later. How slow indeed is the road to understanding.

† The concept of identification in Gurdjieff's teaching is viewed differently from that in psychoanalysis.

THE JUSTICE OF THE MASTER: PUNISHMENT

Few of us understood French when we arrived in France at the beginning of 1922, and Mr. Gurdjieff himself knew only a few words. While we all found lodging in Paris, we felt the need for a place where we could comfortably carry on our activities, especially the Movements.

This situation was not new. Ever since we left Russia, Gyorgi Ivanovitch had tried, in several places, to establish his Institute on a property large enough for us to live intensely the many aspects of work on ourselves. He gave those of us who spoke French and had contacts in Paris the task of finding such a property. In addition to creating the conditions necessary for our inner work each day, Mr. Gurdjieff also had to devote a lot of time to our financial problems. Since business was no longer based on honour, that is, on the simple respect for a man's word, he needed a qualified professional familiar with the laws and customs of the country. Miraculously, an experienced businessman appeared on the scene. He was young, active, very helpful and, although a foreigner, marvellously adept at navigating the maze of French law. Furthermore, he clearly showed a

great devotion to Mr. Gurdjieff.

He began visiting Gyorgi Ivanovitch regularly and was entrusted with a number of tasks. Since he carried them out quite conscientiously, Mr. Gurdjieff soon began to trust and even to like him. So it was through him that the purchase of the Prieuré d'Avon was negotiated. In gratitude, Gyorgi Ivanovitch invited him and his family to spend their vacation at the Prieuré, an invitation he gladly accepted.

During this period, Mr. Gurdjieff's ideas and teaching were making a great stir. As more people came to the Prieuré and the range of the Institute's activities grew, the more this man was seen at Mr. Gurdjieff's table. It was clear that he was giving scrupulous attention to the financial interests of his host. When some of us left with Mr. Gurdjieff for America, he entrusted many of his business affairs to this man, who, as expected, carried them out to perfection.

After our return, a drama was about to unfold. In 1924, Mr. Gurdjieff's car accident left him suspended between life and death for several weeks. Among many other worries, the question of money became paramount. The pupils tried as well as they could to give financial support, but their contributions were nothing compared to the amount Mr. Gurdjieff himself provided to keep the Institute alive.

For a long time after the accident, Gyorgi Ivanovitch was confined to his bed, making it impossible for him to take care of his personal affairs or those of the Institute, and the income continued to diminish. In the midst of these difficulties, our businessman struggled valiantly, 'doing his best', as he put it. But the situation got worse from day to day. When Mr. Gurdjieff was well enough to get up, he was still quite

weak, and he preoccupied himself primarily with his health. He left his material affairs in the hands of this 'sympathetic and devoted' businessman, trusting him completely, even to the extent of revealing all his financial problems.

Nevertheless, the difficulties continued year after year, and Mr. Gurdjieff was forced to mortgage the property. It was then that our businessman showed his true colours. With the benefit of all the confidential information that had been entrusted to him, this 'sympathetic and devoted' businessman prepared to deliver the final blow. He approached Mr. Gurdjieff's creditor to offer his services. Without the least scruple, he painted an enticing picture of the unexpected advantages to be gained from his inside knowledge of the situation.

For lack of resources – the mortgage money having evaporated – Mr. Gurdjieff found himself forced to sell. This was how such a large property as the Prieuré passed into a creditor's hands for a pitiful sum. Once his strength returned, Gyorgi Ivanovitch was soon back on his feet. He resumed his work and again became the centre of a beehive of activity.

Some time later, Mr. Gurdjieff heard that this 'sympathetic and devoted' businessman was rubbing his hands in glee while telling stories about his brilliant financial triumph, and that his wife was boasting in public about her husband's shrewdness.

A few years passed. Mr. Gurdjieff was now living on the Rue des Colonels Renard near Place des Ternes. As in times past, his door was wide open and his table overflowing.

Always on the look-out for a good deal and detecting

renewed signs of prosperity, our businessman began prowling around the cafés where Gyorgi Ivanovitch did his writing and conducted his business affairs. One day Mr. Gurdjieff spotted him and, being a master at playing a role, smiled and welcomed him warmly. The businessman took the bait.

"I thought you were dead!" Mr. Gurdjieff said. "Have a seat! Why haven't we seen you for so long? How is your wife? And your daughter? I'm sure you haven't seen my new apartment." With these words, Mr. Gurdjieff gave his new address, and ceremoniously invited him to come to dinner that very evening with his wife and daughter.

What an unforgettable dinner! There were already many guests when our distinguished businessman and his lovely, perfumed wife arrived with their daughter, wearing beautiful ribbons in her hair. Mr. Gurdjieff was particularly friendly and attentive and had them sit in the place of honour.

After offering an abundance of sumptuous hors d'oeuvres – caviar, smoked salmon, *bastourma* of bear, camel meat, and all sorts of exotic *zakuski* – Mr. Gurdjieff declared, "Today we will do even greater honour to this feast than would pigs, because pigs eat their fill and stop. Man not only has the possibility of satisfying his hunger like the pig, but he also has the great privilege of being able to eat more than his fill simply for the pleasure of eating. Therein lies the great difference between man and pig. Today we are going to take advantage of this privilege and give ourselves over entirely to this pleasure."

After the hors d'oeuvres, there followed in order, accompanied by a profusion of comments, a Caucasian soup, meats

prepared in the oriental fashion, and fowl embellished with special sauces such as mushroom, curry, and juniper. It is not possible to list here the variety of all these exquisite dishes, each one more astonishing than the last, or all the drinks that went with them.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch was obviously going to great lengths to stuff his guests like geese, and he succeeded marvellously. When it was impossible for them to eat any more, Mr. Gurdjieff invited them to "loosen their belts" so they could do honour to what was to come. Then from the ice-boxes came oriental sweets and multi-coloured desserts worthy of the finest gourmet, including a very special pepper ice-cream.

When it became obvious from their scarlet complexions that the honoured guests, the stars of the evening, were completely stuffed, Gyorgi Ivanovitch turned to them and said, "Well then! We have truly proven that man is not just a pig, but that he surpasses the pig by far. So that you may recall pleasant memories of this evening, I insist on giving you something."

He got up and left the table. When he returned, his arms were laden with boxes of delicacies and sweets. "Have some of these every day and enjoy the memory of this agreeable evening."

The guests of honour could not contain their delight. Mr. Gurdjieff then asked if they would allow him to entrust their daughter with an errand. They eagerly agreed. Then, turning toward the young girl, Gyorgi Ivanovitch solemnly said to her, "After leaving here, *Mademoiselle*, when you see a pharmacy that's open, go in and buy a litre of castor oil."

Taking from his wallet a bank note that was much larger than necessary, he repeated, "A litre of castor oil, *oleum ricinum*. It is especially for your parents."

Then, addressing both the 'sympathetic and devoted' businessman and his resplendent wife, he said, "Since you outdo the pig in stuffing your face, you undoubtedly have plenty to expel! So, *Monsieur*, you should take a healthy dose of what your daughter is going to buy for you and then wait patiently. When the time comes, assume the appropriate posture and carefully shit into the soul of your wife. And you, *Madame*, take your dose a little later, and when the time comes, take the same posture and apply yourself to shitting into the beautiful soul of your husband, so clever in business."

It was like a terrible thunderbolt breaking into the relaxed atmosphere of the evening! For a moment they sat, petrified. Indeed we all were. Then Gyorgi Ivanovitch calmly added, "Now, get out. You've shit enough in my house. There is no more reason for you to be here."

Our guests of honour, devastated, dignity gone, faces pale, rose and headed for the door.

"Aim well, into the very depths of the soul!"

As the businessman and his wife were leaving, Mr. Gurdjieff murmured softly, "Scum!"

Then, turning to us, he said soberly, "For them it is no doubt too late, but it might save their daughter!"

THE JUSTICE OF THE MASTER: FORGIVENESS

In contrast to the previous story, I am reminded of another episode that took place in the twenties. One day a man of about forty turned up at the Prieuré. He had just finished his military career in the service of a major power and had been a high-ranking liaison officer in Russia, where he became fluent in the language. He gave the impression of having found real happiness at the Prieuré, and of having discovered the path he was searching for in Gyorgi Ivanovitch's teaching. He soon brought his wife and son to join him, which showed the trust he put in the Institute and its ideas.

During this period, the Institute attracted many people, and every day new faces appeared. Since Mr. Gurdjieff was not always there, he soon found it necessary to find a practical person with the ability to organize things. He needed someone to direct all the external activities and to oversee the tasks assigned to the permanent residents. The former high-ranking officer seemed ideal for this responsibility. Indeed, he seemed to be perfectly qualified. Liked and respected by most of us, he was even-tempered and

could maintain a just discipline. Not only was he attracted by the ideas that inspired our search, but he spoke Gyorgi Ivanovitch's language and several others as well. So it was hardly surprising when he was chosen to take on this task.

At the beginning of 1924, when Mr. Gurdjieff took a group of us to the United States to demonstrate the Movements and sacred dances in various cities, the Prieuré remained in the good hands and under the vigilant administration of this former officer. But on our return from America, he was no longer at his post. It seemed that our imminent arrival had caused him to flee with his family. The mystery of his departure soon became clear.

During our absence he must have become delirious, or rather, temporarily insane, because he apparently had come to believe that the whole enterprise of the Prieuré was nothing but a fraud – a front for illicit activities – and he had felt obliged to expose Mr. Gurdjieff. But for this, he needed proof. Since he held all the keys to the property, it was easy for him to go rummaging around everywhere, driven as he was by the certainty of soon finding incriminating evidence. Yet the more he searched, the less he found; the less he found, the stronger his conviction and the more he was persuaded of the Machiavellianism of Gyorgi Ivanovitch, certain that he was cunning enough to erase any evidence that could compromise him.

This *idée fixe* had driven him to scrutinize over and over again all the documents that he had already examined. The ensuing disarray grew to such a point that he could no longer put them back in order. And he had found nothing! All his prying had yielded no results, and the sudden horror

he had felt in the face of his own betrayal, he who had been so trusted, forced him to flee.

'Here is somebody,' I thought, 'who deserves the strictest punishment.' But he was out of reach; he had already left France.

Years passed, and Mr. Gurdjieff had moved to Paris. One evening, I arrived at his apartment at dinnertime. Everyone was already seated. Imagine my surprise at seeing this man among the guests in friendly conversation with Mr. Gurdjieff. Noticing me, he stood up, and smiled broadly in my direction. He was so overflowing with happiness that the only reason he didn't embrace me, it seemed, was because he was Mr. Gurdjieff's guest.

I had by then already witnessed so many unusual things at Gyorgi Ivanovitch's that the reappearance of this man did not really astonish me. During the course of the dinner, he frequently turned toward me with a joyful expression. From time to time he made a discreet gesture in the direction of Mr. Gurdjieff as if he wished to say to me, 'What a good man he is!'

With that special look of his, Gyorgi Ivanovitch showed friendliness and courtesy toward him, expressing interest in his life and family. He invited them all to visit him during their next stay in France. When dinner was over, I spoke with Gyorgi Ivanovitch about the reason for my visit; then, being in a hurry, I prepared to leave. However, the man insisted on speaking to me right away, so I waited while Mr. Gurdjieff loaded him up with an enormous package of sweets for his family. We then said goodbye to Mr. Gurdjieff and left in high spirits.

The man invited me to a café, where we sat down at a secluded table.

"Tchekhovitch," he said to me, "you remember, don't you, how we were good friends. And I know the poor opinion you must have had of me after I ran away. I really deserved it. I acted in a vile manner, not only in relation to Gyorgi Ivanovitch, but toward all of you. I defiled the entire group. That is why I need to ask your forgiveness as well."

"From the moment Gyorgi Ivanovitch forgave you," I said, "you again became my friend."

"Yes," he replied, "but I need to tell you something. I wrote to Gyorgi Ivanovitch asking to see him. He agreed, and when I arrived three hours ago wanting to confess what I had done, he wouldn't let me open my mouth. As I insisted, still wishing to explain myself, he gave me such a profound and disapproving look that I had to remain silent. When he saw by my serious attitude that I had given up any attempt to speak, he put his arm around my shoulder, took me into his room, and talked to me like an old friend.

"Tcheslaw," he continued, "I have never been so happy in my life. It's only now that I understand who Gyorgi Ivanovitch really is. I need to confide in someone, to tell my story that I have kept only to myself, and it's with you that I would like to do this."

I listened to his lengthy confession and realized how deeply he had suffered, how painful his remorse of conscience had been.

Mr. Gurdjieff had no need to hear the story. This man's sincere desire to meet with him, the vision of what he had

become, was sufficient for Mr. Gurdjieff to understand his suffering and to pardon him.

In this case, the man who had behaved badly was not treated harshly, and even received the blessing of justice from the master.

A JUST MAN AND HIS NEIGHBOUR

As soon as Mr. Gurdjieff was up and about after the accident, his business affairs seemed to pick up again. This probably would have continued if the 'sympathetic and devoted' businessman had not appeared on the scene once more. Convinced that Mr. Gurdjieff's state of health prevented him from managing the Prieuré's financial affairs, he proposed a seemingly very advantageous investment. However, this turned out to be a total disaster that eventually resulted in the Prieuré having to be mortgaged.

It is from this period that another episode took place which once again shows the incurable weakness of human nature. When he was better, Mr. Gurdjieff made it his business to find out who had saved him and taken him to the hospital after his accident. It turned out to be a gendarme whose duty it was to patrol the local roads. Mr. Gurdjieff inquired as to where he lived and found out information about his family, the number and ages of his children, and which was his day off. Then, making sure that he would find the gendarme at home, he set off to visit him in a car loaded with presents for the whole family. Knowing Mr. Gurdjieff's

generosity, I can easily imagine the surprise and delight this brought to them all.

Our hero was at first hesitant to accept all these gifts for fear that such generosity would have a price. He pleaded that he was paid for what he did and that, being on patrol, he had only done his duty and could not accept to be rewarded in this way. Mr. Gurdjieff insisted, saying that it was only a natural expression of gratitude to someone who had certainly saved his life. He opened the presents himself, which he had carefully chosen for each member of the family, and stayed with them for a good part of the afternoon. He made his 'saviour' promise to turn to him if ever in need and suggested that he come with all his family to visit the Prieuré as honoured guests. Then, having thanked him once more, he took his leave from this conscientious officer.

When this good man repaid Mr. Gurdjieff's visit by going to the Prieuré, Gyorgi Ivanovitch received him in his customary way: without hypocritical friendliness, affected mannerisms, or any form of condescension – in other words, as a true man receives his neighbour. He had the wonderful ability to give everyone his rightful place, a place to be simply human. Whether bricklayer, banker, minister, or lord, everyone felt free to be himself and obviously appreciated being in the atmosphere that surrounded Mr. Gurdjieff.

As there were many children at the Prieuré, the gendarme gradually became bold enough to bring his entire family. He often came on Saturdays, the day solemnly devoted to the ritual of the Turkish baths, in which Mr. Gurdjieff himself never failed to participate. This usually ended with a sumptuous feast that often went on late into the night. Each time,

Mr. Gurdjieff would offer to put him up for the night so he would not have a late journey home.

While this man dutifully patrolled the roads bringing help to traffic victims, his family would often stay at the Prieuré. He became an *habitué* of the château, ate his meals there, and even had an apartment put at his disposal. He liked to jest that Mr. Gurdjieff's hospitality presented a serious danger to society because, in his words, "if my colleagues learned of the benefits I've received, every gendarme in the division would no doubt be tempted to cause such accidents." Mr. Gurdjieff obviously appreciated the directness and good sense of this man and seemed pleased to keep him in his entourage. This state of affairs continued for several years.

One day, wanting to know the circumstances of the accident, I asked this good man to tell me exactly what had happened. He did so in a lively manner, and even went so far as to imitate the posture of Mr. Gurdjieff lying unconscious in the car. He showed me how he had moved him, and even insisted on taking me to the site of the accident in order to reconstruct the event. It turned out that Mr. Gurdjieff had crashed into a tree trying to avoid running over a dog that had jumped out of an open car coming in the opposite direction.†

Some time later, when I no longer lived there, I visited the Prieuré and found this man slumped in a garden chair

† I am sure that this is the true explanation, which should put to rest the many fanciful hypotheses that some people have invented about the cause of the accident.

on a path in the park, seemingly quite bored. He was pleased to see me, and at once said that he had forgotten to tell me a certain detail about the accident. Then, to my astonishment, he started to tell me the whole thing all over again. It was a warm day, I had plenty of time, and was happy to compare his account, point by point, with what he had told me before.

His telling of the story both satisfied and troubled me. I was satisfied because of the accuracy of my memory, since I could recall the smallest details of his original account. At the same time, however, I was dismayed to see in front of me, no longer a human being but a kind of automaton, mechanically reproducing the same phrases, the same intonations and, what fascinated me most of all, the same gestures as before. He scrutinized my face to see if his account was producing the desired effect. He must have told the same story hundreds of times to whoever was willing to listen.

Years later, because of his age and long service, he retired from his job. He tried gardening, then raising animals, but finally implored Mr. Gurdjieff to give him a job. Until then there had been no such thing as an employee at the Prieuré. All the work, all the jobs, had always been done by the people who lived there. Mr. Gurdjieff was very embarrassed by this request, but as 'Gratitude overcomes all obstacles,' and quoting the adage that 'Every rule has its exceptions,' he finally gave the man the four-roomed house of the gate-keeper with food for his entire family. With his material needs thus assured, there was nothing more for this man to do but to enjoy these benefits while fulfilling his duty.

Once, when Mr. Gurdjieff was absent, there again appeared at the Prieuré, as if by chance, that 'sympathetic and devoted' businessman. He explained to the retired gendarme the critical situation in which the master of the house now found himself, and mentioned the impending sale of the Prieuré. He painted in glowing terms all the possible advantages for the gendarme's future if, from then on, he were exclusively to serve the interests of the buyer. At once, our man changed his allegiance, without even seeing his own treachery.

At the time, Mr. Gurdjieff was the sole occupant of the château, although some members of his family lived in Le Paradou, a lodge also situated on the property. So it was that one evening when Mr. Gurdjieff returned to the château, which legally was still his, this disciplined man, in spite of the respect he had for Mr. Gurdjieff, felt obliged to refuse him entry. Mr. Gurdjieff could have shattered him with his force or softened him with his kindness. But the poor devil had simply forgotten how much he had been given. Mr. Gurdjieff looked at him for a long time and then, with an understanding smile, left to stay the night with his family at Le Paradou.

For me, this is a touching testimony of the all-embracing acceptance that Mr. Gurdjieff had for his neighbour. Once again, I realized that Mr. Gurdjieff saved his rigour and severity for the times when his strictest demands could serve the inner needs of his pupils on their long pilgrimage toward the hidden source.

IN PRAISE OF REST AND CELEBRATION

I cannot finish these recollections of the Prieuré without emphasizing what great importance Gyorgi Ivanovitch gave to a well-deserved rest and, in a similar vein, what a keen sense he had of traditional celebrations. I want to describe these things so that this almost ritualistic aspect of our life together at the Institute will not be forgotten. At the same time, I realize how difficult it is to express the essential quality that infused these moments of relaxation. It was Mr. Gurdjieff's presence, after all, that created this light-heartedness and genuine letting go of ourselves. He was always encouraging us to acknowledge the laws of nature and reminding us that, like breathing, the whole of life is the result of two opposite but complementary movements: going and coming, expansion and contraction, involution and evolution. In fact, we valued these moments of rest all the more since the days before these celebrations were always filled with intensive work and extraordinary demands.

In addition to the traditional religious holidays such as Easter, Christmas, and St. George's day, as well as the

Orthodox New Year,† there were often festivities to mark the completion of major projects – such as the construction of the Study House and the Turkish baths – and also the end of certain periods of fasting. There were also the elaborate dinners on Saturday night after the baths, as well as special evenings in the main salon of the château or in the spacious atmosphere of the Study House. On these occasions music held the place of honour. From time to time, in addition to the special evenings intended solely for pupils, magnificent dinners for chosen guests took place in the Study House. With their oriental pomp, these events reminded us of tales of lavish celebrations held in the courts of Indian maharajas or the Shah of Persia.

There were also surprise picnics that unfailingly delighted all the guests. Alexandre de Salzmann, the 'connoisseur', would always go to a nearby farm to buy three or four lambs as the main dish for these special picnics. After gutting the lambs, the women would stuff and prepare them in a special way under the watchful eye of Mr. Gurdjieff. Sometimes this process would include putting whole stuffed chickens or ducks inside the succulent lambs.

Mr. Gurdjieff would make sure that all the preparations were properly handled. For those in the know, the huge quantity of wood cut in the preceding days was a sign that a picnic was imminent. Very early in the morning, a large fire was started in a pit left by an uprooted tree. The fire was tended so that by nine o'clock the pit would become a verit-

† January 1st in the Julian calendar is January 13th in our current (Gregorian) calendar, and is celebrated as Mr. Gurdjieff's birthday.

ble furnace. Any remaining logs were removed, leaving only he burning coals, which were then covered with a layer of dry, sifted sand. The sewn-up lamb, wrapped in linen, was hen placed on the fire-bed. This was then entirely covered vith more sand, on which another fire was kindled.

The picnic was, of course, a big surprise for the guests nd even for most of the residents. When they arrived in he forest, they discovered a huge campfire surrounded by ree trunks and other places to sit. As soon as everyone had at down, an enormous cart drawn by six men appeared efore the astonished eyes of the guests. The young girls of he Prieuré then gracefully brought out platters containing a rich assortment of hors d'oeuvres that were immediately taken to the guests by the children. Everyone then chose some kind of alcoholic drink to participate in the sacred ritual of toasting the different types of 'idiots'.

The 'Director of Toasts' interrupted the chorus of voices echoing through the forest each time he solemnly pronounced the prescribed phrases of the ceremony. From the very first toast, dedicated "to the health of all ordinary idiots," we found ourselves again confronted with that enigmatic science of 'idiots' and its mysterious typology. After enjoying the hors d'oeuvres, Gyorgi Ivanovitch signalled to have the burning coals removed from the pit. Thinking the feast was over, some of the guests complained while others expressed sorrow. To their great surprise, however, a large object wrapped in charred linen was pulled from the sand, and many of the guests stood up to get a better view. The cloth was then unrolled on a large board revealing superb roasted lamb, which was greeted loudly with cheers. The

exquisitely prepared meat was so tasty that many regretted having previously eaten too many hors d'oeuvres.

I recall how at one such feast Mr. Gurdjieff described the shepherds' festivals he had participated in during his travels in Central Asia. He told us that in addition to religious celebrations, the shepherds also observed two great annual festivals: one in the spring when they left for the mountains with their flocks, the other in the fall when they returned to the valley. He said that during these festivals several clans would get together and build an enormous fire in the rock, and when the stone was red hot they would put in an animal, often an entire stuffed calf, which would take several days to eat.

As for the celebrations at the Prieuré, it is true they always took us by surprise; nevertheless, I wonder why none of us ever thought of bringing a camera to immortalize these extraordinary events.

The Christmas celebrations were equally unforgettable. For example, even though Christmas trees are usually placed right side up, Mr. Gurdjieff sometimes had them hung upside down, their roots symbolically turned toward heaven. Most years, however, the enormous pine tree in the salon was set up in the usual way and covered with gifts and delicacies. The Christmas dinner was held in the large dining-room next to the salon. It held not only the main table reserved for the adults, but also one for the adolescents and a lower one for the children.

I remember a particularly amusing Christmas Eve when

Mr. Gurdjieff's generosity and devilish provocations were skilfully combined. On certain evenings, important visitors from Fontainebleau and elsewhere were invited to the Prieuré and seated in the places of honour on either side of Mr. Gurdjieff.

On this occasion, however, it was a different story, but I must first explain that an old stonemason from nearby was helping us at the time with certain building projects in the park. When we were busy elsewhere, the old man continued to work by himself, and would even work for several days at a time without supervision. Mr. Gurdjieff very much valued the professional integrity of this good man who, despite his old age, managed to do even more than Gyorgi Ivanovitch expected of him.

Mr. Gurdjieff quickly took to this old mason. He was invited to join us when we went to the baths, and as the man was very attached to his grandchildren, he was allowed to bring them to play with the children of the Prieuré. Because of their sweet nature and good upbringing, the mason's grandchildren quickly earned the affection of everyone.

On this particular Christmas Eve, the mason had been invited with his entire family. As we were sitting down to dinner, Gyorgi Ivanovitch placed the Mayor of Fontainebleau and a visiting English lord on his left, and, on his right, the mason, the curator of the Château de Fontainebleau, and other notables. Right from the beginning of the meal, I felt quite embarrassed for the old mason, given the seating arrangement. In this dignified company, the mason seemed very ill at ease, and I did as well. Now, as often happens before a general conversation gets under way, every-

one was chatting with his neighbour, talking of one thing or another. Then little by little a general conversation started up on some current topics in the news, and the mayor and the other notables displayed their authority, knowledge, and expertise with a great deal of panache.

It was strange to observe Mr. Gurdjieff taking part in this worldly discourse, and it amazed me to see how adroit he was in entering the conversation. Suddenly, turning the discussion to a subject of his choice, he asked the old mason for his opinion. As soon as the mason began to speak, Mr. Gurdjieff nodded his head in approval and, because of this consideration, the mason became more and more relaxed, seeming to forget where he was. The other guests gradually became aware of his common sense and simple faith, so that the sincerity of his words not only caught the attention, but also gained the respect, of this august assembly. Feeling then at ease, the mason naturally joined the conversation, all the while observing the rules of etiquette and asking permission of Gyorgi Ivanovitch each time he spoke. Mr. Gurdjieff continued to be attentive at every moment to what the mason was saying.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch always maintained a marvellous simplicity even when frequenting the court of the Tsar, and it was this that went straight to my heart that Christmas Eve. An especially pleasant atmosphere pervaded the entire evening.

As for the children, they became even noisier than usual as they crowded around the Christmas tree. At a word from Gyorgi Ivanovitch, they quietly returned to their table, but their eyes remained fixed on the presents. The conversation

at the main table was continually being interrupted by their disputes over the gifts, each wanting what another had decided was his.

The parents looked on all this agitation with a mixture of tenderness and alarm. As if wanting to increase the tension even more, Mr. Gurdjieff began talking with the children. "So, Kolka, what do you want? What would you like to have?"

"A bicycle."

"And you, Mishka?"

"I want the bicycle!"

"No, me. I want the bicycle," shouted both Bousska and Lida.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch and the parents burst out laughing.

"Look," said Mr. Gurdjieff, "there are lots of toys, but there is only one bicycle. Find a fair way to divide the toys."

Left to themselves, the children began to bicker even more. There seemed no way out, so Mr. Gurdjieff said, "The one who wants the bicycle most will get it, but he must show how strong his desire is. So, the one who can hold his arms straight out to the side for fifteen minutes can have the bicycle."

The children lined up in a row and raised their arms. The physical challenge intrigued them, but very quickly their faces began to reveal an inner struggle. One looked to see how the others were doing; another wondered if the effort was worth it; a third was prey to feelings he could scarcely admit to himself. This 'psychodrama' had the effect of easing the general tension while keeping everyone in high spirits.

ısing, jokes, and laughter erupted from all quarters. The

youngest among them were at a disadvantage and were the first to give up. One by one the older ones did the same, freed from desire and miraculously calm.

In the end, the toys found their rightful owners. There were certainly disappointments, but the following day all was forgotten because an exceedingly generous 'Father Christmas' returned to give each of the children his own bicycle.

Our favourite moments of relaxation were the pleasures of the Turkish baths, a ritual carried out with great ceremony.

Once the women had returned to the château from the baths, which were situated some distance away, the men headed for them in their turn. As soon as we entered the bathhouse, Mr. Gurdjieff checked the temperature in the different rooms. A large vestibule served as a place to undress. We began our sweat by sitting in a room that was moderately hot. Some then began to wash, while others went directly to the steam-room. This we had built ourselves, and we could choose either dry, hot sauna-like air, or steam at a lower temperature. After the sweat, we took a cold shower or jumped into the icy water of the outdoor pool. Finally, there came the revered period of rest.

Mr. Gurdjieff sat in a kind of alcove facing Dr. de Stjernvall, the composer Thomas de Hartmann, and the quite irreplaceable Alexandre de Salzmann. De Salzmann's presence, in fact, was so indispensable to the delights of the final moments of the bath that one day Mr. Gurdjieff, having

entrusted him with an urgent mission in Paris, had him called back just when he was about to leave. "Salzmann, be a good fellow. Don't go today. This job can wait until the beginning of next week."

"That wouldn't do," de Salzmann answered. "All the supplies need to arrive by then."

"Perhaps we can do without them for a few days. Tomorrow we go to the baths, and without you it would be impossible." After a moment's reflection, he added, "You know, I have another idea. You can leave today and be back tomorrow in time for the baths, then leave again the next morning."

Alexandre de Salzmann really wanted to protest, but Mr. Gurdjieff's pleading tone was irresistible. So the next day he came back faithfully to join us in the baths. His presence was indeed indispensable to create the proper atmosphere for the rest period. Once we were comfortably seated in our bathrobes, Mr. Gurdjieff looked at the newcomers and asked if they had enjoyed the baths. Then he mischievously asked for payment.

"How can we pay you?" they asked.

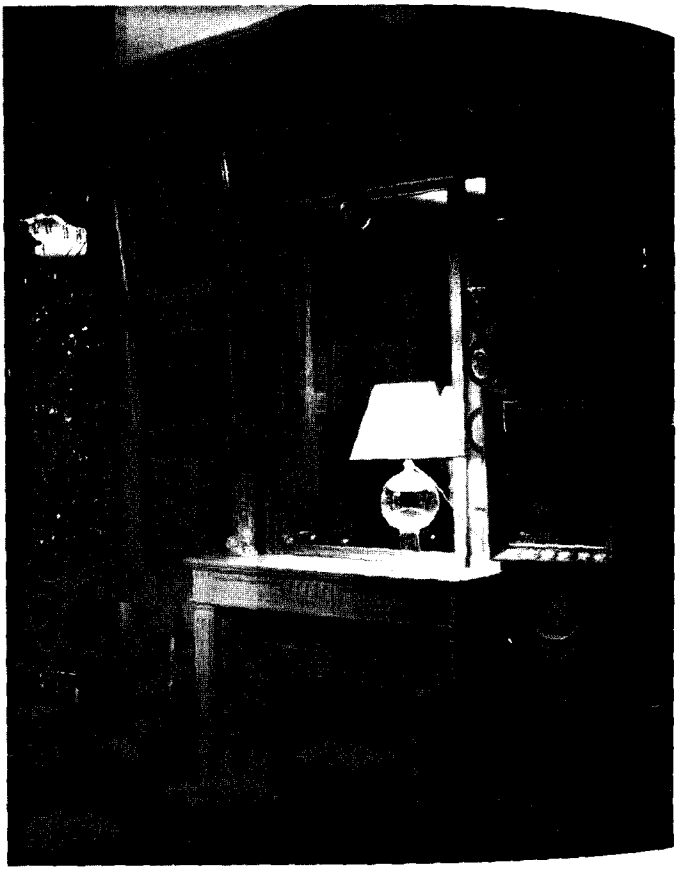
"By telling us stories we haven't heard before," Mr. Gurdjieff answered.

Initially embarrassed, the guests would then willingly comply. If we had already heard the story, Mr. Gurdjieff would pretend to stroke an imaginary beard. If the story was really well known, the gesture lengthened right down to his knees, while the audience kept a stony silence. In response to the storyteller's perplexity, Mr. Gurdjieff said that the story needed to be told in a different way.

"Come on, Salzmann," he would say, "tell it again as it *should be*."

De Salzmann would then launch into his routine. His imitations and accents were irresistible. The clumsy storyteller would become completely disarmed by uncontrollable laughter and get caught up in the general hilarity. Mr. Gurdjieff took a special delight in hearing de Salzmann tell stories. He laughed so hard that he finally had to say, "Salzmann, stop, stop! You're killing us!"

One day, a rather proper guest was shocked at seeing Mr. Gurdjieff laugh in this way. Smiling, Mr. Gurdjieff responded by saying that these two hours at the baths were the only rest he allowed himself each week, conforming to law. No doubt those unacquainted with inner combat - the 'Holy War' that one must wage day in and day out with oneself – have not experienced these moments of grace and letting go, and so they keep a rigid, idealized, and false representation of self-mastery.



Gurdjieff's apartment on Rue des Colonels Renard

PART III

Rue des Colonels Renard

1936 – 1949

CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED

Mr. Gurdjieff clearly required vast sums of money to carry out all his projects. Yet I was amazed to see how easily, it seemed, he found all the money he needed. As everyone knows, it is hard for an honest man, clever though he may be, to manage in a foreign country, especially without knowing the language. Only exceptional beings, I thought, know how to surmount natural difficulties with such tranquil ease.

When he left Turkey, Mr. Gurdjieff brought scores of people with him, most of whom were, like me, completely impoverished. In his travels through Europe, which finally brought him to the Prieuré, he had to house, clothe, and feed all of them by himself, and provide for unforeseen expenses and pocket money. Was it justified to rely on him like this? This situation made me face an eternal question of principle: does the end always justify the means? Even some of the best of us were tempted to think this way – that it was justified in the name of our work and its aim. Sometimes, Mr. Gurdjieff would intentionally confuse the situation and encourage this point of view, thus exposing the hypocrisy and questionable motives of those who lived off his generos-

ity. In the beginning, I too was taken in by his constantly changing behaviour.

The force that emanated from this man in the great variety of things he undertook was extraordinary. Those of us who followed him over the years would often talk about how we experienced this force. Even his enemies, the ones he had mercilessly unmasked, were obliged to recognize the reality of this power. But his real aim was far from being understood by everyone.

I would like to describe several incidents that helped me to understand this aim, and how in hidden but always carefully considered ways he was able to act for the good of others.

In the winter of 1921-1922 we divided our time between Berlin and Dresden. There were often people who wished to speak to Mr. Gurdjieff. In Berlin, these conversations took place in a quiet well-known café called Le Cristal.

One day a lady came to consult him, accompanied by a man who spoke both Russian and German. With his help, she told Mr. Gurdjieff that her fourteen-year-old son was mentally retarded, and that, having heard of his 'powers', she hoped that he could help her. Before deciding, Mr. Gurdjieff asked to see the boy, who had been placed in an institution outside Berlin. A meeting was arranged for several days later. Mr. Gurdjieff saw the boy and decided he could help.

At a second meeting at the café, he inquired about the state of the lady's finances and fixed a price for the boy's

care. I think the sum agreed was about ten thousand marks. The woman, lamenting her pitiful situation, declared that she could not take advantage of his help because such a sum greatly exceeded her means. It was finally agreed that she would pay only half of what Mr. Gurdjieff had originally asked.

After the woman left, the owner of the café, keen to show off his intimate knowledge of his customers' private lives, approached Mr. Gurdjieff's table and proceeded to tell him everything he knew about her. It turned out that she was the widow of a well-known industrialist who had owned many factories in Germany and Austria. She had started out as the secretary to this aging man, become his mistress, and finally convinced him that the child she was carrying was his own. The industrialist, himself a regular customer of this café, eventually married her. Not many years later he died, leaving his wife an immense fortune that guaranteed her a princely income. The café owner added that he had been very surprised to see her so modestly dressed.

"She spends her time," he said, "amusing herself in Europe's most prestigious hotels, fancying to dazzle the world in a wardrobe designed exclusively for her by great French *couturiers*."

Mr. Gurdjieff listened attentively to everything the café owner told him, and asked how this lady felt about her son. With a knowing look, he answered that the child was more a burden for her than a treasure.

Mr. Gurdjieff simply nodded his head. He had understood.

I was sitting at a nearby table when the woman, again

very modestly dressed, came back to see Mr. Gurdjieff at the same café. The man who had come with her twice before was not there. This time Alexandre de Salzmann, who spoke perfect German and Russian, was the interpreter. Mr. Gurdjieff had her sit opposite him, and de Salzmann began to translate very attentively.

"You are responsible for this poor child, and I had set my price believing you to be a suffering mother with limited means."

The woman humbly lowered her head in acknowledgment. However, her demeanour revealed a growing discomfort. And as Mr. Gurdjieff grilled her with a series of questions, she became totally confused and was forced to admit the truth. Then, turning to Alexandre de Salzmann, Mr. Gurdjieff said very sternly, "Now translate word for word what I am about to say without softening a thing."

Translating, Alexandre de Salzmann then hammered out every word. "There is one type of mother who is venerated throughout the world. She is the 'devoted mother' who can spend whole nights mending or knitting at her child's bedside. You came to me pretending to be that kind of mother, and on that basis I set my conditions. But there is another type of mother called the 'whore mother', and it is to this category that you belong. If you want me to take care of your child you will have to give me not ten thousand but one hundred thousand marks."

It was obvious that the mother was shocked, more by the sum that was demanded than by being unmasked. She began to snivel and whine, gesturing pitifully, and claiming that a hundred thousand marks was way beyond her means.

However, with great difficulty she might be able to raise fifty thousand.

Mr. Gurdjieff gave her a severe look and said, "Neither you nor your money nor your problems interest me. You are nothing but a whore. Go and sell yourself somewhere else."

And she found herself dismissed then and there.

It is evident that for Mr. Gurdjieff her money had a bad smell, because even at a time of great need he refused to deal with this unworthy woman. She did not satisfy the conditions required for Mr. Gurdjieff's help. Clearly, she did not deserve it.

Helping does not mean taking over someone else's responsibility. Only when people suffer because of their own inability to help others do they themselves deserve help.

By contrast, this first story reminds me of another one that Sophia, Mr. Gurdjieff's sister, told me one day. "Gyorgi Ivanovitch," she began, "had a deep affection and respect for our father. In his youth he returned home to Alexandropol as often as he could to take care of the family. It was during this period that we began to experience hard times. The years of prosperity had passed and a series of misfortunes were about to overtake us. Once, after a long absence, he found our parents in a desperate financial situation. He soon managed to open a cinema in the town, and before long its substantial income relieved our family's predicament.

"One day our father said to him, 'Once we have paid off our debts, I am going to give the next money we get to our

neighbours, who have so often helped us.'

"Gyorgi Ivanovitch listened attentively, and then asked several questions about these neighbours. They had always shown great respect for our parents and had helped them so much in difficult times that our parents were very grateful to them. In their turn, this family was now stricken with misfortune," Sophia went on. "The son, abandoned by a woman he adored, fell into despair, drowning his grief in alcohol. He dishonoured his worthy family to such an extent that the mere mention of his name caused them great suffering.

"When our father finished telling us this story, there was a heavy silence. We felt helpless in the face of this painful situation. Gyorgi Ivanovitch had listened without saying a word. The next morning he was gone for a long time, and over the next few days his absences continued. He went out regularly either in the afternoon or in the evening and would return very late at night. He explained his absences by saying he was out on business.

"One day, the father of this unfortunate drunkard came to visit us and said, 'Do you know our sons are very fond of each other; they are getting along very well. They seem to enjoy each other's company and go out a lot. Gyorgi Ivanovitch has even suggested that they set up a business together.'

"Now our father knew very well," Sophia continued, "that his son would never let himself fall under the influence of a drunkard. In any case, owing to the apparently unforeseen departure of Gyorgi Ivanovitch, the business didn't in fact get off the ground.

"Several weeks later, the pretext for this famous business venture became clear. The neighbours' son had stopped drinking and was very upset that he and his 'best friend' had failed to get their enterprise going. Because of this, shortly after Gyorgi had left, this young man was moved to set up a business of his own. Turning his mechanical skills to profit, he opened a repair shop, which was soon a great success. A year later he married and had his first child. He gradually won back his parents' complete confidence and even began to manage their affairs."

I understood that, in this case, the distressed neighbours had fulfilled the necessary conditions and therefore deserved Mr. Gurdjieff's help.

Another episode showed this principle even more clearly. It was in Constantinople, when I had been with Mr. Gurdjieff only a short time. Pan Philipovitch, the engineer, told me an incredible story that haunted me for several days.

In Tiflis, he said, he had strongly advised two young men to attend a lecture by Mr. Gurdjieff. During this lecture they spent the whole time sniggering disrespectfully, obviously understanding nothing. As they were leaving, they came upon Mr. Gurdjieff and, walking a little behind him, continued to mock and make fun of the lecture. Mr. Gurdjieff was impassive. Suddenly, in an almost deserted street, he saw a wallet lying on the ground and stopped. He spent a long time looking at it, gently poking it with the end of his cane.

The two young men approached, obviously interested.

"What should we do?" asked Mr. Gurdjieff.

"What should we do? Take it and share it!" answered one of them.

"But someone lost it and will be very upset. It should be returned," said Mr. Gurdjieff.

"Return it to whom? It's nobody's. Let's divide it."

"No," answered Gyorgi Ivanovitch without raising his head. "He will soon return and ask if we have found it. In the meantime, let's have a cigarette, talk a bit, and wait and see what happens."

Putting the wallet in his pocket, Mr. Gurdjieff offered them cigarettes. The conversation had barely started when a man, visibly upset, headed toward them and asked if by any chance they had found a wallet. Gyorgi Ivanovitch took his own wallet out of his pocket and opened it to reveal a large wad of bills and said, "Here is what I found."

But the man refused to take it. "No, no," he said humbly. "That isn't mine. I don't have that much money."

Mr. Gurdjieff then took out the wallet that he had found.

"That's it, that's mine!" the man cried out without hesitation.

"Make sure your money is all there," said Mr. Gurdjieff, handing him the wallet.

Then he continued, "Your wife is sick, isn't she, my friend?"

"How do you know that? Who are you, sir?"

Mr. Gurdjieff handed him a large bank note. "Your medical expenses are considerable, are they not? This will help you out a little."

The young men were completely stunned. Mr. Gurdjieff

turned to them and said simply, "For someone to show you the special powers that you have been mocking, you must be honest. But since you are not honest, I will not reveal them to you."

Mr. Gurdjieff went on his way, followed by the man with the wallet.

I saw that the main characters in these three stories each had a different attitude and so deserved to be treated differently by Mr. Gurdjieff.

All these stories led me to serious self-examination. Looking back at my past, I saw that in each stage of my life - secondary school, military college, business school – my manner inspired a certain trust, and people felt they could rely on me. But deep down I felt I was an impostor because, for me, studying was only a way of getting a diploma. In fact, no university study or career had any real attraction for me. I was simply carried along unconsciously in a certain direction. I could not abandon my studies, nor could I give up that indefinable quest within me.

When I began meeting with Gyorgi Ivanovitch, my inner discomfort was still there. I felt strongly that this man cared for me, but it was hard to bear because I had the sense that I was living a lie. What could he possibly like in me? I was just a good-for-nothing. It seemed impossible to reveal myself to him. I was condemned to live as an impostor, like a thief afraid to be exposed. As for my faults, better not to mention them because I felt that was all there was. I realize today

how much they cling to me, and will no doubt continue to plague me right up to the end.

I came to see that I was much more demanding of others than Gyorgi Ivanovitch ever was with me. Demanding, he certainly was, but toward himself. By his example, I was brought back to myself; but as someone left free to choose. This did not reduce my unease. Deep down, I felt insignificant, but I couldn't tell him that, because I felt there was no real reason for him to be interested in me. Because of this deadly 'inner considering', I did not always tell him, for example, when and why I left him from time to time.

After he had suggested a task or exercise, he seemed no longer interested. I did them, but was unable to tell him the results. I didn't see that the process of inner evolution made it impossible to move toward awakening while still holding on to the 'old man', our habitual self. I no doubt felt intuitively that my motivation was sincere, but I didn't understand what this evolution and possible transformation were really about.

When I left the Prieuré, I settled in Paris, married, and became the father of a little girl. At that time my wife became gravely ill. Mr. Gurdjieff was the only one I could confide in, and several times I asked him for help. He came to our place on the Rue de Tennis in Paris, and examined my wife. The very next day one of his pupils took her to the Prieuré. She was so well cared for that at the end of three weeks she had completely recovered. After one more week, and having fully regained her weight, she returned home.

When I went back to see him and asked, "How much do I owe you, Gyorgi Ivanovitch?" he told me to sit down across

from him. Calmly drinking his coffee, he stated with a smile that if I sold my business, my wife, my child, myself, and threw in my Sunday trousers, it would not have the slightest effect on the health of his finances.

Years passed, during which we met only infrequently. Then I learned that Gyorgi Ivanovitch was once more receiving pupils in Paris. Again I went regularly to his house, and again he treated me with both ends of the stick: one bringing real happiness, the other digging into the most tender spots of what we call the personality.

This new period of work helped me get out of the rut of associative thinking and automatic behaviour. Once again my question appeared: what conditions have I fulfilled for him to bother with me? The certainty of my unworthiness penetrated me even more deeply at that time. I saw that, far from being able to help others, I could sometimes even be harmful to them.

However hard I tried, I could never find anything with which to reproach him. He guided each of us toward the same impartial goal: to see oneself, really see oneself, see oneself as one is. Everything else was just the means to attain this aim. Why did I deserve this gift? Had I really fulfilled all the conditions? I still don't know. In any case, all this has given birth in me to a sense of indebtedness; but I can never fully repay him.

WAR AND THE HONOURABLE MAN

The story I am going to relate shows two characteristic qualities that we often witnessed in Mr. Gurdjieff: his extraordinary memory and his sense of appropriateness. The first scene took place in Constantinople in 1921. I was holding forth in front of a group of Mr. Gurdjieff's pupils when he suddenly appeared and asked me, "What are you talking about to all these people, Tchekhovitch?"

"Well, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, I'm telling them how it was during the war. I..."

Mr. Gurdjieff did not let me continue. "You are doing very well, but by carrying on like this in your youth, you will probably finish up like one of those old generals who stroll down the street searching for victims, sneak up and grab them by their shirt-tails, and tell them stories about how this or that decisive battle was won, thanks to their own cool-headedness. This, you see, is how you become gaga."

"But Gyorgi Ivanovitch, I just wanted to tell them...."

"Could you say, simply, how an honourable man behaves in war?"

The question did not frighten me because I was sure I

knew the right answer.

"The honourable man," I said with assurance, "distinguishes himself from others in that he does not deliberately kill his own kind, even if they are his enemies." Actually, I was just repeating what my mother had often said. Once, during the Russo-Japanese War, a friend of the family, Colonel Netchaieff, had come to say his farewells, and she'd said to him, "I hope that even during the war you won't kill anyone."

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Because that is how an honourable man distinguishes himself from others."

This statement of hers, short as it was, struck me as being right on the mark. It also seemed to please Mr. Gurdjieff.

The second scene took place twenty years later in Paris during the Second World War. I was seated at Mr. Gurdjieff's table in his apartment, on Rue des Colonels Renard. Among the guests was a former Russian officer who couldn't stop telling us in detail about the breathtaking episodes of his unfailing heroism.

Mr. Gurdjieff listened without saying a word, calmly continuing to eat. The hero was beginning to tire, his words falling into the void. Seeing everyone's unease, Mr. Gurdjieff tossed him a lifeline. "You truly are what one calls a patriot!"

"Yes," the officer nodded.

"So, please tell us how an honourable man behaves in war?"

"An honourable man? You mean to say ... as a patriot?"

"An honourable man, as a man," Gyorgi Ivanovitch insisted.

"A man as an honourable patriot...."

"No, no, a man as a man. There are no more patriots. Your patriots lost Russia. I mean simply as a man."

"As a man? As an honourable man? How he acts in war?"

The general stopped for an instant to reflect, and then he declared, "You know, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, I am a confirmed patriot."

"Of course you are, but of a Russia that no longer exists," retorted Mr. Gurdjieff.

A general burst of laughter eased the tension in the air. Although a little confused, our patriot did not surrender. "So then, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, what is the difference between the behaviour of a patriot and that of an honourable man? This interests all of us."

"No, this does not interest us at all any more," Mr. Gurdjieff replied dryly.

"And why is that?"

"Because we've already known it for a long time. But if you really want to know," he said, pointing to me, "ask this man. Maybe he will explain it to you."

Then, changing his tone, he went on. "And now, are there any more questions?"

The confirmed patriot remained stunned. The qualities of an 'honourable man' did not seem to be of great concern to him, for he did not ask me anything. I myself was disconcerted by the wink that Mr. Gurdjieff gave me, as I recalled my proud response in Constantinople twenty years earlier.

A MASTERLY PRESCRIPTION

One day I arrived at Mr. Gurdjieff's for lunch, but told him I would not be able to eat the meal. To his questioning look, I replied that I had a kind of dysentery that made me get off the bus twice and stop two other times in cafés, all in less than an hour.

"Dysentery ... a very well-known thing. Now you must help me!" said Mr. Gurdjieff, and without losing a moment, he tossed four large Spanish onions into my hands. They were quickly chopped up, then, under Gyorgi Ivanovitch's direction, seasoned with salt, pepper, oil, and vinegar. A large bowl of it was put in my place, and as soon as we were seated, he suggested I eat the contents.

Taken aback and rather apprehensive at having to consume such a large portion of this honourable bulb, I was confronted with a real dilemma. But since I would have to suffer whether I ate it or not, I preferred to suffer obediently all the more as it would have quite pleased me to prove Gurdjieff wrong. Whatever might happen, it was all the same to me. I downed it all, and on top of that I did honour the main meal like everyone else.

I expected the worst, awaiting the moment when the dreaded colic would strike; but to my great astonishment, the pressing urges disappeared as if by magic.

Whether it pleases the medical experts or not, I freely give this recipe to all those intemperate at the stool. But take note, if you are hypochondriacs or hypersensitive – this is not for you!

IMPERSONAL KINDNESS

Mr. Gurdjieff would not allow anyone to say that he acted from kindness, yet it seemed obvious to us that he did. I frequently asked myself what the motives were behind his often unexpected actions. Did they originate from kindness, sympathy, or was there some other inner imperative?

Certainly, his motive was not kindness in the usual sentimental sense of the word. This was especially true in relation to his pupils. No, if it was kindness, it was a real kindness that originated elsewhere. The source of his actions, words, and outlook on everything could only be described as something called love. It was not a personal feeling for another, but rather one that came from somewhere else. And this included his relations with his pupils. In other words, it was an opening to a sense of the sacred that he shared with others. This was quite distinct from his legendary generosity, his kindness in the ordinary sense of the term, of which we caught comical and unforgettable glimpses nearly every day.

Since I was often with him at different times of the day, I saw in an intimate way aspects of his life that most of his

pupils, who only attended the evening groups, never knew about. I have often spoken of his kindness toward me, but now I want to recall some events that I chanced to witness.

Mr. Gurdjieff often did his own shopping when he took his morning stroll. As soon as he returned, he started working in the kitchen. During this time, he would not receive any of his pupils, and the door opening onto the main staircase remained closed.

It was quite another story, however, at the back staircase. One had to see it to believe it: from the bottom of the stairs to the top, there was a long procession of beggars, parasites, and the like. One had his bowl, another his tin plate, still another an old pot, all coming solemnly to receive a full ration of soup accompanied by some kind words. Mr. Gurdjieff himself served from enormous cooking pots while asking after the health of everyone, not forgetting those who could not come because of illness. When he found out that someone was sick, he would say, "Well, now let's give him something special!" and, according to the latest information he received about him, he would fill the container with some dish or other that he had prepared.

Here was an old woman who came for herself and also for her husband, who could no longer walk; there, an undernourished and sick man who said he was unable to work; then children from a large poverty-stricken family; and the concierge from a neighbouring building, who had looked after a bedridden tenant on the seventh floor for a long time.

Now, an old, aristocratic Russian lady appears. She respectfully greets Mr. Gurdjieff. He takes her bowl while

asking for details of her husband's health. Instead of answering directly, she starts to put on airs, to grovel, and to flatter Mr. Gurdjieff, who still does not know what food would be appropriate. He interrupts her and asks the same question again, this time more dryly. The lady finally answers, but while Mr. Gurdjieff serves her, she repeats her mundane compliments. I am embarrassed for her and make a move in her direction, wishing to make her understand that she is on dangerous ground. But, carried away by her grovelling, she is totally unaware and goes on to compare the kindness of Mr. Gurdjieff with that supreme .... I do not learn which paragon of virtue she meant because he interrupts her in mid-sentence: "You, your husband, and all your kind have made your path in life by playing the role of ass-lickers, and in spite of so many years in exile, you are still not free from that repugnant trait. It is truly sad!"

The woman begins to justify and excuse herself. Mr. Gurdjieff says to her, "Good, good, I know, it's not your fault. Now be off with you; we still have much to do."

The woman, offended, goes toward the door, but Mr. Gurdjieff reassures her in a warm voice, simply saying, "Till tomorrow."

This scene was repeated every morning, the procession usually ending about one o'clock, sometimes only to start again in the evening. Mr. Gurdjieff also prepared enormous quantities of food to share with his pupils and others who regularly frequented his apartment. His table was a veritable cornucopia, for no day passed without parcels of food arriving from all over the world: the south of France, Spain, Turkey, Australia, the Americas, and even Africa. Yet, if

there was no one to eat with, he would often choose not to eat at all.

As for the children, Mr. Gurdjieff never left home without filling his pockets with a good supply of bonbons and various sweets. When he came across a mother with her child, he always offered a bonbon to the little one. If the child offered it to his mother, he gave him two more. But if the child did not offer anything, that was all he received. If the mother hid the sweet to give to the child later, she was offered more too. In the district where he took his regular walk, he was well known to all the children and those who accompanied them. He was a kind of Father Christmas, and was called 'Monsieur Bonbon'.

The reader may be irritated by what appears to be a blind attachment and unreserved partiality on my part. If so, please excuse a devotion that may seem excessive. One has to imagine how living near him shattered all habitual forms; one found oneself literally entering into the world of myth. We all experienced this same feeling.

After Mr. Gurdjieff's death, I witnessed many touching scenes. For example, an old woman came to the apartment about three weeks later. Overcome by the news that he was no longer there, she could only say, "And now, how shall I pay my rent?" Someone else came and said, "I would so much liked to have thanked him. He paid for my daughter's treatment, and she has just come out of the sanatorium cured." After hearing of Mr. Gurdjieff's death, one man collapsed into an armchair, remained silent for ten minutes, and then murmured, "To come from South Africa and learn this. How sad." And he left.

And I thought to myself, 'Yes, how sad, how sad not to have known him; but more, how sad to have known him and not to have understood him. And above all, how sad to have understood him and not to have served his work.'

SACRIFICE IS WHAT OPENS TO THE HIGHER

I have always tried to be impartial in writing these recollections, but I have realized how difficult this is. It is clear that throughout all these stories, the word 'sacrifice' best describes the essential quality of the man whom I venerate as my master. But will the reader receive the same impression? I feel that this question will stay with me until I complete the book.

I would now like to recall an event that deeply unsettled me, especially because of the state of Mr. Gurdjieff's health. It happened in his apartment on Rue des Colonels Renard in 1948, about a year before his death.

Although aged and weakened by the inexorable progression of his illness, Gyorgi Ivanovitch nevertheless had an ever-growing circle of pupils around him, who quite naturally offered to be of service in various situations. Feeling that perhaps his end was near, many faithful came from America, England, and elsewhere to live in his *darshan*, as they say in India. As was his custom, Mr. Gurdjieff received everyone generously, and made sure that each found a place at his table. It was rare that fewer than fifty or sixty people

were gathered in his little dining-room for meals.

One can imagine the number of dishes that had to be washed: three or four plates per person, spoons – one for the salad, one for the soup, one for dessert – and of course forks, knives, bowls, glasses, cups, and all the platters, pans, and pots. All this meant an endless washing of dishes every day. When the dirty dishes were brought to the kitchen, a designated team – which often included myself – washed them and immediately put them away in the dining-room. Without meaning to boast, this worked very well when I was put in charge.

Yet one day Gyorgi Ivanovitch expressly forbade me ever to wash the dishes again. Nevertheless, when I noticed that an inexperienced team was late in putting the dishes away before the dirty ones arrived from the next course, I would discreetly come to help them so that there would always be dishes available until the end of the meal. When the system was running late because a team had been put together at the last minute, delay was inevitable, and Mr. Gurdjieff kept a watchful eye on me. One day I was washing the dishes and was caught in the act. I received such a reprimand that I decided not to disobey him again. For two days I managed to restrain myself from entering the kitchen, but on the third day I anxiously counted sixty-eight people for dinner, a good number of them overflowing into the hall.

Late in the evening, when the last guests had left, I cast a furtive glance into the kitchen, and saw three of my companions slaving away in front of a mountain of plates, silverware, and dirty pots and pans. Unable to restrain myself, I went to help them. Suddenly, Mr. Gurdjieff burst

into the kitchen and demanded that we all leave the apartment immediately. In an almost pleading tone, I asked him if I could stay just a little longer to put things in order. He gave me a severe look and dismissed me in a voice that permitted no reply. I could not stop thinking that more than sixty people were expected for lunch the next day. It was already a quarter past one in the morning, and I knew that by nine o'clock the kitchen would again be in full swing. Worried about the situation, I asked him insistently if I could return early in the morning to finish the dishes. He did not reply, and showed me the door. I finally left, firmly stating that I would return early the next morning.

Still concerned, I arrive at half past six, and fearing to wake him, I first listen at the door, not sure how to proceed. Hardly a minute has passed when I hear his familiar step in the hall. I knock, and he comes to the door.

"Who is it?" he asks.

He opens the door, and with an innocent expression asks me the reason for my visit at such an early hour.

"But, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, you know why. The kitchen is in a real mess, and I promised I would come and put it in order."

"Very good," he says and goes off toward his room.

I dash to the kitchen, then stand there stunned. Everything is in order, immaculately arranged! Then I hear a call. "Tcheslaw, come and have a cup of coffee!"

He does not let me ask who has done the dishes, but I know full well it was he (and this is later confirmed).

Later that morning, I anxiously confided to Mme de Salzmann everything that had happened, and my unease

increased as I saw her beautiful face darken. Once more, I thought, his night and rest had been sacrificed. For whom? Perhaps for me? How many nights had he sacrificed for others? How many nights did he still have before him? No doubt, he knew.

Is there a limit to the capacity to serve, to serve a task taken upon oneself? To follow one's *dharma*?

It was beyond my understanding. Only silence seemed able to provide the answer.

PAN PHILIPOVITCH
OR THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION

Stanislas Adrian Philipovitch was a charming civil engineer, known by Mr. Gurdjieff as 'Pan', Polish for 'Mister'. I am moved to tell the the story of the strange circumstances that led to their meeting.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch and his followers were in the south of Russia when the spreading chaos of the Revolution caught up with them.† Since it was becoming clear that they would have to leave Russia, Mr. Gurdjieff arranged a 'scientific expedition' for archaeological and ethnographic studies in Transcaucasia in order to bring the whole group safely to the shores of the Black Sea.

The country was then divided between the White Russians, led by General Denikin, and the Bolsheviks, under Trotsky and Lenin. From the White Russians, Mr. Gurdjieff cleverly obtained all the official papers required for the expedition. Then, once across the front line, he also pro-

† Ouspensky, in his book, *In Search of the Miraculous*, and Thomas and Olga de Hartmann in *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*, have written about their extraordinary adventures at that time.

cured from the Bolsheviks all the authorizations necessary for the protection of this 'important expedition'.

From time to time Gyorgi Ivanovitch would tell us about some of the comic episodes of this incredible adventure. Once he showed us, with a wry smile, the official permit of the White Russians allowing him to bear arms, which had, on the other side, the stamp of the revolutionary party giving "Comrade Gyorgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff the authority to carry a revolver for self-defence".

Now I must recount in some detail a few of the dramatic moments that this group had to face, and how Gyorgi Ivanovitch always succeeded in finding a way out of tough situations. One day, deep in a Caucasian forest, their expedition was suddenly surprised by a group of armed men. After the initial shock, Mr. Gurdjieff immediately took the initiative. He brought the horses to a stop, got down from the wagon, and shook hands with them in a friendly way. Overhearing a few words of their dialect, he immediately realized he was dealing with bandits.

He began talking to them in their own language, while his companions, confronted by these highway robbers armed to the teeth, trembled in fear. In a country without laws, and swarming with bandits, you had to be prepared for such things.

Negotiations took a long time. As the leader wasn't present, Gyorgi Ivanovitch used the friendliness of the leader's lieutenant to have the expedition escorted by one of the bandits to their hideout. Gyorgi Ivanovitch joked to his companions that, once there, he hoped to spend a rare night without problems.

And that's exactly what happened. They had spit-roasted lamb and drank quantities of Caucasian wine. The raucous evening went on and on, with music and popular songs echoing through the forest, uniting all present in the same spirit of friendship.

After a good night's rest, and thanks to the leader's hospitality, the expedition was escorted by two of the bandits to a road many miles farther on that no doubt defined the end of their territory. There they were handed over to another group of bandits. They stopped briefly to have a snack with them, washed down with rough wine. For lack of time, the burgeoning spirit of friendship could only be expressed by firm handshakes.

Relaxed and at ease, the expedition set off again. After several uneventful stages of their journey, they began to follow a railway line under construction. In the afternoon, they came upon a house, the first sign of habitation for several weeks. It had a courtyard surrounded by outbuildings. Hoping to find a place to rest that was somewhat better than what they had recently experienced, Mr. Gurdjieff knocked on the door to ask for hospitality. It was immediately opened by a young-looking man, who welcomed the new arrivals.

Pan, for it was he, gave instructions to his servants to stable and feed the horses, then warmly invited the whole group to make themselves comfortable inside his house. Preparation for a feast in honour of the guests was immediately put into motion.

Much later, in Constantinople, Pan told me his first impressions of the group. "I didn't really understand," he said. "These people seemed a bit odd to me – at the same

time both serious and cheerful, and greatly respectful of one particular man, who didn't seem to be very important in the usual sense. He wasn't one of those puffed-up bureaucrats or haughty military types that we were so used to. I couldn't quite put my finger on what was so special about him."

That evening they were able to wash at their leisure, joyfully sloshing buckets of water over themselves. The next morning they groomed their horses and mended their equipment. Pan left early on business, but toward noon he was brought back on a stretcher. Dr. de Stjernvall, who was there, watched as Pan was placed in the shade and covered with a woollen blanket. He examined him, and found that he was plunged in a deep sleep.

They were told that, recently, he had often fallen into this state. "He loses consciousness," said one of his workers. "This generally happens when he is at a construction site and looks at mountain peaks or a distant horizon. At first we were worried about him and sent for a doctor, who would always arrive after Mr. Philipóvitch had regained consciousness. Although he's been to town many times to consult doctors, and has taken a number of different medicines, he still drops off just as before. Now we simply lay him in the shade and leave him in peace. Then, after a good rest, he comes around."

The group had lunch without their host. Mr. Gurdjieff seemed interested in the case, but did not intervene. From time to time he would lift up the blanket and contemplate the sleeping man's face. A little later, Pan awoke and stood up as if nothing had happened.

"Except for the comments of those around me and the

evidence of my watch," Pan told me in Constantinople, "I would never have believed anything out of the ordinary had happened to me. When I woke up that day, this strange man was in the process of shaving and cutting the hair of his travelling companions. A lady in the expedition came up to me and kindly asked what the matter was. I replied that never before, either in Poland or in Russia, had anything like this happened to me. It was here, I told her, when I came to manage the construction of the railway, that I developed this illness.

"'This happened to me for the first time several months ago,' I explained to her. 'I was out hunting, and I remember admiring the landscape. The next thing I knew was the surprise of waking up to find it was almost dark. It was perhaps the cold of the evening that awakened me. With difficulty, I managed to reorient myself and find my way home. The thought that I awoke only by chance, and that I could have been devoured by wolves frightened me so much that, from then on, I didn't go far from my home alone. Since then, as this has happened more and more often, it has become an accepted part of life for me and those around me.'

"This lady, I learned later, was Olga Arkadievna, wife of the composer Thomas de Hartmann. She suggested that I ask for help and advice from the man who was busy cutting his companions' hair.

"'How could a simple barber cure me,' I replied, 'when even the specialists don't know what's wrong? The doctors in Tiflis have described my case to specialists in Moscow and St. Petersburg, which has led to a lot of scientific prattle, but very little result.'

"I later learned that Mr. Gurdjieff wasn't at all pleased to have been suggested as someone who could be helpful in my case. 'Whether or not I help,' he declared, 'does not depend on his asking or even begging me. If he deserves help, he'll get it; otherwise don't interfere.'

"The expedition stayed in my house for three days. On the third evening, the same lady came to ask how much they owed me. But I was so happy to have put up these people who were so friendly, considerate, and interesting, that I refused to accept any payment for their food or the keep of their horses.

"'There are plenty of chickens in my yard,' I told them, 'and the mutton you've eaten cost almost nothing. You asked me for hospitality, not a hotel,' I added smiling. 'On the contrary, if anything displeased you, please tell me in all sincerity.'

"At dinner on the last night, I found myself again seated, a little nervously, across from the man whom everybody called Gyorgi Ivanovitch. At the end of the meal he asked if he could speak to me when I was in bed. He asked in such a way that I couldn't refuse to see him, even though I thought he was coming to insist on paying me.

"As soon as he came in, he sat down next to me on the bed and thanked me for the hospitality that he and his companions had received. He asked who I was and where I came from. Then, after several questions about my illness, he asked if he might take my pulse and examine me. He took my hand. And that's all I remember.

"In the morning, they were up before me, and I was surprised to find them ready to leave so early. We had break-

fast together, then they set off for Tiflis. I accompanied them as far as the road, as I would have done for my own close friends. My servants told me later that they had been given very generous tips.

"The house seemed empty without them, but life resumed its normal course, and the days passed by. One evening, while serving me dinner, my old cook said, 'It's a week now, sir, since that thing last happened to you.'

"'What thing?' I asked, turning toward her.

"'That's right,' she recalled to herself. 'The last time was when they were all in the courtyard, and you were asleep outside.' Then she added in a meaningful tone of voice, "'It's exactly a week since that strange man came out of your room.'

"I jumped at the idea that there could be some connection between the absence of my fainting spells and the visit of those people. Immediately I started to think: 'They've left for Tiflis. They would have arrived there two days later. Will they stay there? Will they leave right away?' I was afraid I might never see that strange man again, that amazing barber, and all his friends. After this miracle, how could I possibly stay here, stuck miles away from anywhere!

"I didn't hesitate even a moment. That very evening I sent off my resignation, and the next day I was already on the road to Tiflis, without the slightest idea of who these people were or how to find them. In Tiflis, I quickly settled my business affairs, drew my salary, and got a long sick-leave from the doctors. This took two days; and then I started searching the streets of the city, hoping to find the travellers I had come looking for. I went methodically through all the

hotels and visited all the cafés. On the evening of the fourth day, I finally saw Mr. Gurdjieff. He was sitting at a table surrounded by a cheerful crowd. Not standing on ceremony, Mr. Gurdjieff simply said, 'Sit down Philipovitch. Have you come to Tiflis on business?'

"'I've come to join you, Gyorgi Ivanovitch,' I replied. 'I'm not ill any more.'

"'How's that? Join us? You mean for a cup of coffee?'

"'No! No, to follow you, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, along with the others.'

"After a long silence, Mr. Gurdjieff just said, 'Well, my friends, we have one more companion.'

"And that is how I eventually ended up in Constantinople," concluded Philipovitch.

A long time afterwards, Mr. Gurdjieff spoke to us about Pan. During that night, sitting at his bedside, Gyorgi Ivanovitch had learned that when he was twelve years old, Pan had been hypnotized by some friends of his older brother. They had all gathered at his parents' house and used him as a guinea pig.

"You see," Mr. Gurdjieff explained, "Pan's illness was the result of a barbaric game. Playing with a person's psychic faculties without understanding them, these children succeeded in putting him to sleep and doing various experiments. But, not having sufficient knowledge, they didn't know how to wake him completely, or, what is even more important, to clear his brain of all the conditioning they had produced. As a result, some of his cerebral functions stayed linked to the hypnotic sleep during which he had been made to admire distant landscapes. He had never been entirely released

from that sleep, and so whenever he saw certain landscapes again, he lost consciousness."

Pan had a mellow, bass voice, and Mr. Gurdjieff often asked him, in Constantinople as well as during his stay at the Prieuré, to accompany the Movements by singing sustained notes. His singing sustained the chords of the piano like a cello.

When we were already living at the Prieuré, Pan announced the imminent arrival of a certain Adamovitch, another 'Pan', also Polish. The fact that he had brought someone else to the teaching made him important in my eyes, and I felt he had a promising future in the service of our search.

But it was not to be. A year later, Pan received bad news about his father's health. He left the Prieuré for Poland, saying he hoped to return to us soon. But his father's illness continued and he had to take a job as an engineer again in order to meet the needs of the family. When his father died, he had to look after the inheritance; then he fell in love, and ended up getting married.

When he came back several years later, the Prieuré had been sold. He traced me through an advertisement, and stayed for several weeks at my place. I learned that his wife was a dentist and earned a lot of money. She probably earned more than he did and, feeling independent, acted in a way that was somewhat too free in regard to her wifely obligations.

He became jealous and started drinking. Afraid of losing all control, he again sought out Mr. Gurdjieff. But the Institute had ceased to exist, and Mr. Gurdjieff could only

see him very rarely. After giving up drinking for about a month, he regained his self-confidence and decided to rely only on himself in following his path.

It was in this state of mind that he returned to Poland. The first letters that we received from him spoke of the 'triumph of effort' and sang the praises of will. But the following letters were less cheerful. Pan rejoined his wife, and his conjugal martyrdom started again. Soon afterwards, in 1939, the Germans invaded Poland, and since then I have had no news of him at all.

A MYSTERIOUS CURE IN MOSCOW

In Paris, near the stock exchange, there was a shop that specialized in selling and repairing typewriters, as well as printing circulars, manuscripts, and other documents. I had written a text on mysticism, and I went there one day to get it typed.

Monsieur P., the shopkeeper, loved to chat. We skipped from one subject to another, from mysticism to spirituality, which led us to current ideas and finally, for no particular reason, to discussing Mr. Gurdjieff. When he learned that I was one of his pupils, he could not stop talking about him.

The next time I returned to his shop, he told me that his wife, hearing I was one of Gyorgi Ivanovitch's pupils, wanted to meet me. I willingly agreed, and we went up to their apartment. Mme P. talked to me for a long time about Mr. Gurdjieff and his former life in Moscow. It seemed that some of her Russian *émigré* friends knew of him, and some had even known him in Russia.

While she was talking, it struck me that many people who had been acquainted with him in Moscow were not aware then of his true stature, of his spiritual dimension.

Mme P. considered him a strange, elusive man, who furthermore had the power to hypnotize and control people "even at a distance".

"Everybody," she said, "knows that the man has certain powers, and it is common knowledge that he teaches all sorts of things." But neither Mme P. nor her circle really knew what his teaching was about.

"I'm surprised," I said. "You say that this man seems to have special powers and extraordinary knowledge, and yet none of you is interested, and no one tries to find out about his teaching!"

"If *you* could tell me, I'd really be interested," she replied, "but to go to a man with such power over others.... Imagine what he could do to you! Perhaps he'd submit us to his will and we'd be like most of his followers, under his control, unable to act freely. No thank you! I'll leave that funny stuff to others."

"But think about it! In choosing to follow him, people have shown their freedom. Have you considered that?"

"No, no," she replied, without listening. "Let me tell you about something that happened in Moscow. A member of Mr. Gurdjieff's group had fallen ill and gone home, about fifty miles from Moscow. Mr. Gurdjieff was told of his state, but did not intervene. Soon the illness got worse, and the doctors said it was fatal. Although the patient had wanted to consult Mr. Gurdjieff, his relatives had always refused. But the situation became desperate, and, fearing his death would be on their conscience, they finally begged Mr. Gurdjieff to help.

"Mr. Gurdjieff agreed and told them to come and get

some medicine later that day. This done, two bottles were immediately taken to the patient. He took the prescribed dose and, to everyone's astonishment, he got up that very evening. What remained in the bottles was submitted for analysis. What do you think they found? Nothing but distilled water with a bit of sodium chloride.

"You see, even at a distance he managed to exert his power of suggestion! That's why, if you went to him and he offered you food, he might cast a spell on it or maybe even put a curse on you," she added to justify her position.

Several days later at Mr. Gurdjieff's, I told him about this conversation. He began to laugh and told me that many people in Moscow, and also in St. Petersburg, had asked for his help and medical assistance. When I mentioned the salty distilled water in the bottles, he replied, "The ability of laboratories to identify substances dissolved in water is limited to finding gases, and then only if they look for particular ones. But when it comes to detecting special energy – which can be transferred to water and preserved – chemists are at a loss."

After a moment's silence, he added, "You know, it's sad that these people have no interest in things that are really important and that their attention is so easily taken by things that have no importance at all. Doesn't this upside-down view show how childish man is?"

PART IV

Four Women

SOPHIA, THE YOUNGEST SISTER

Sophia Ivanovna was the fifth and last child of the family, and from a very early age she felt a special affection for her eldest brother, Gyorgi Ivanovitch, whom she also greatly admired. He constantly astonished her, for example, with his mastery in crafts and other manual work. Observing experts in these fields, and putting into practice what he had learned, he eventually surpassed them all in skill and dexterity. Because he was helpful and attentive and would generously lend a hand to anyone, he was well liked by craftsmen, who gladly shared the knowledge and secrets of their crafts with him. As Gyorgi Ivanovitch was interested in all aspects of human life, he learned almost every trade in this way. While still young, he already knew how to knit, embroider, and make fireworks, Chinese toys, rifles, and artificial flowers – in short, everything the Russians called 'fancy goods', not to mention other objects sold in the bazaar. Everything about him fascinated Sophia, and she told me that she used to follow him around like a shadow.

As a child, she had been nicknamed 'Black Thread' by her father because of her slender figure and dark complex-

ion. As carefree and sprightly as a baby goat, she was often the one to be sent on errands. She later told me, with much tenderness, of many unforgettable moments shared in childhood with her elder brother.

One day their parents went away for some time, taking the other three children with them. Sophia stayed behind with Gyorgi Ivanovitch, who spent his time fixing things or doing odd jobs, as was usual during his youth. Their uncle's family, who lived nearby, had been asked to keep an eye on them and to prepare their meals. Gyorgi Ivanovitch always waited until the last minute to send his sister to get their dinner. Ever willing, Black Thread would dash right off.

However, the road was filled with many things that might distract a little girl. Afraid that she wouldn't carry out her errand, Gyorgi Ivanovitch invented various tricks so she would avoid these temptations. For example he would tell her, "Take these plates, but you have to run. I am going to spit on this stone. If it dries before you return, I might die."

Afraid of the stone drying, Sophia ran until she was out of breath. When she got back, her heart beating wildly, her first look was at the stone. Was it wet? As always, it was! This trick was so effective that Gyorgi Ivanovitch used it often. Of course, he went back and spat on the stone from time to time when his sister was out of sight – until the day she caught him at it! Long afterwards, the memory of this event often made them laugh, and this made her grow even fonder of her older brother.

Sophia Ivanovna

❖

On another occasion, Gyorgi Ivanovitch fell ill and wanted some ice to put on his stomach. It was Black Thread, as usual, who went to get it, from a café some distance away. The owner was grateful to Gyorgi Ivanovitch for having repaired some machines of his, and generously gave her all the

ice she wanted. Sophia insisted that he load as much as possible on her back, winning the café owner's admiration with her courage and energy. While running back home, half the ice melted in the sun, and she arrived completely soaked. But when Gyorgi Ivanovitch said how much the ice comforted him, it was Sophia's turn to melt!

Another story demonstrated the harmony and solidarity that reigned in this family. It took place when their father had practically been ruined by an epidemic that had ravaged his herds, and he was offered money one day to cut some logs. While the offer was an unexpected boon, he deeply regretted that he could not accept it, because two were needed to do the work. But Sophia, little Black Thread, hardly nine years old, saved the situation by showing that she was quite capable of doing the sawing with her father; and she begged him to accept the job. For several weeks she was able to overcome her fatigue, and between them the work was successfully accomplished.

Since Gyorgi Ivanovitch was the eldest son, he was exempt from military service. When he reached the age of twenty, he decided to take advantage of this situation by helping his father solve the family's financial problems. As he couldn't make enough money working for someone else, he realized that the best solution would be to open a shop. But

how to find enough money to begin? After much thought, he decided to make the merchandise himself, young as he was, and he soon began to display his wares in a well-placed stall. There, one could find everything to satisfy the bourgeois clientele of the surrounding area: artificial flowers, multi-coloured lamp-shades, fans of all sorts, piggy-banks, and decorative plaster objects that he moulded and painted himself. Only one person was there to help him in this venture, and that was Sophia. Her brother's efforts to help the family made him more dear to her every day, especially as their work had brought a smile back to their mother's face.

Before long the business was thriving, but such rapid success could only arouse jealousy among the neighbouring merchants. They constantly jeered at him in front of his always-crowded stall; but Gyorgi Ivanovitch knew how to respond when they said things like, "Hey there, you half-black Greek! What are you trafficking in to lure all those customers?"

And Gyorgi Ivanovitch would respond, "It's much too precious for your kind. You could never understand! Go back to your shack!"

"Oh, is that so?" they would throw back. "That junk of yours is only good for duping half-wits!"

Black Thread was delighted to see the others so full of admiration and envy for her brother. When the family was back on its feet, Gyorgi Ivanovitch closed his stall to devote himself entirely to his search, but he still continued, from time to time, to help his parents in various ways. Because of these strong ties woven from childhood between the eldest brother and the younger sister, it was natural that

Black Thread supported her brother with care and affection all her life. After the death of Julia Osipovna, Mr. Gurdjieff's wife, Sophia, never stopped showing proof of her devotion to him, first at the Prieuré and then in Paris, where she remained close to him until the end.

That Gyorgi Ivanovitch was able to give himself entirely to his work in his last years was partly the result of his being able to rely on his sister to take care of his everyday needs. As are so many others, I am full of gratitude when I think of Sophia Ivanovna, for, in sparing Gyorgi Ivanovitch from having to do so many things, she freed him for the well-being of us all and for the good of his work.

JULIA OSIPOVNA

Mr. Gurdjieff's wife could not be distinguished from his other pupils, either by his behaviour toward her or by her attitude toward him. As the rest of us did, she called him Gyorgi Ivanovitch, as was the custom in Russia. New residents at the Prieuré were quite surprised to discover during their stay that this lady, so full of grace and kindness, was Mr. Gurdjieff's wife.

It might seem surprising that this member of the Polish high aristocracy, who associated with those close to the Tsar, became the wife of a man so remote from the manners of the court. Mr. Gurdjieff had won the heart of this young woman, though she little suspected what she was to find out about him later. One day she confided to us, with a certain smile, how moved she was to discover her husband's true nature, and to realize that he was totally devoted to work of a spiritual order and dedicated to the good of his fellow man. In his quiet strength she had until then appreciated him above all as an affectionate companion, a benevolent protector, and the hoped-for father of their children. This had seemed enough to make her happy. She saw him

in a new light when she realized that her husband was revered by those around him as an exceptional teacher and as an authentic master of wisdom, with the power to help his pupils discover their true spiritual potential. She then took a discreet place beside him, careful not to hinder in any way the work he had to accomplish.

When describing someone, it is natural to emphasize their characteristic qualities, originality, and special traits – in a word, all that distinguishes them from others. But with Julia Osipovna, this would seem inappropriate and even offensive to her memory, since the aim of all her efforts was to remain unnoticed and to submit herself to the service of a work that was greater than her. She behaved as both a mother and a friend to us, always ready to help, to advise, even to care for those in need, as once was the case with me.

Although conflicts are inevitable in all communities and people hurt each other unnecessarily, Julia Osipovna never had the smallest dispute with anyone. She was always ready to listen, and to understand the justifications of those who persisted in their stubbornness, and she did this without harbouring any grudge or showing the slightest criticism. Her impartial goodwill created an atmosphere of peace among us all.

When this slender woman performed the Movements, my attention was held by her noble beauty. I was particularly struck when she opened her arms. This movement made me think of an eagle opening its wings before taking flight. She became so light that it seemed a simple gesture would be enough for her to leave the earth. If I had to define what

Julia Osipovna

characterized her, I would say that she was the embodiment of delicacy and tact, as was shown by an apparently commonplace event, which I cannot forget.

It was at the Prieuré. A newcomer with diplomas and special qualifications from abroad had been put in charge

of the cows. One day he insolently replied to something Julia Osipovna had said about looking after these animals. I approached quietly, thinking that the presence of another might soften his arrogance. But instead of making him calmer, an audience only incited him to show off his knowledge further, and he held forth pompously on the superiority of modern scientific techniques over traditional methods which, according to him, were based on an outmoded elementary empiricism.

This difference of opinion was about how to feed a young calf that had just made its appearance in the world. Our young expert, following the latest methodology, was busy milking the poor mother when Julia Osipovna interrupted him to ask why he was doing that. He replied that it was important to discard the first milk, saying that it was fundamentally harmful to the young calf. He was not the first among those responsible for the cows to employ this modern method in order to correct the 'imperfection' of Mother Nature. The last such attempt had actually resulted in the death of a young calf. To prevent any further untimely interventions in the workings of nature, Mr. Gurdjieff had entrusted Julia Osipovna with the task of overseeing the newborn calves.

Unaware of the misadventures of his predecessor, and indignant at having his expertise put in doubt, this new person in charge showed little respect toward Julia Osipovna. Nevertheless, after she had explained the methods that had already been tried, and their results, she calmly told him that he was no doubt right, but that on this occasion Gyorgi Ivanovitch wanted to respect the processes of nature, and would be annoyed to learn that the new director of the

cowshed had not been informed about his instructions, as the results of all these experiments greatly interested him. These words had the effect of putting an immediate end to this modern procedure. In spite of the young scientist's reluctance, the newborn was returned to its mother and did not suffer the sad fate of the previous calf.

After this, I told Julia Osipovna how indignant I was at this young man's rudeness, and suggested that Mr. Gurdjieff should be informed. She replied gently, "Gyorgi Ivanovitch already has many burdens and worries. Why add to them? Besides, the young man's behaviour does not come from bad intentions, but from lack of experience."

After a short silence, she added, "He is sincere, but his head is stuffed with bookish knowledge, and practical applications escape him. He tries his best, and this is honourable. When he is in a good mood, I'll try to speak with him."

Being always gentle and considerate, she quickly won this man's respect and friendship, and this incident eventually brought her a new admirer. For my part, in front of her magnanimity, I was ashamed to have let myself be carried away by my narrow sense of justice, which would only have corrected and punished a fault without actually addressing the cause.

Seeing her always so radiant, we were all convinced she was in excellent health, but it turned out that she had been ravaged by cancer for a long time. The doctors had been wrong in their diagnosis, and she had therefore been treated for all kinds of other illnesses, while the real evil continued its destructive course.

When Mr. Gurdjieff, still very weak himself from his

accident, ordered tests for his wife, the results showed that the disease was already incurable. Julia Osipovna was growing thinner by the day, and her appearances among us became more and more rare. Nevertheless, she remained truly herself in spite of all her suffering, and when she passed away, she left behind a subtle fragrance of purity and nobility.

We all followed the coffin to the cemetery at Avon, where Mr. Gurdjieff had obtained a plot for the members of his family.

BABUSHKA

By all accounts, Gyorgi Ivanovitch seems to have passed his childhood in the heart of a patriarchal family – or 'matriarchal' as we shall soon see – reminiscent of biblical times. In *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, he even devotes a very moving chapter to the memory of his father.

Since for some time I had the privilege of living close to Mr. Gurdjieff's mother, I am sure the reader will understand why I would wish to devote to this woman some recollections that illustrate her exceptional character. After a long series of adventures, sufferings, and privations, this courageous lady managed to reach the Prieuré with other members of her family. They had succeeded in escaping the Turkish invasion, though Gyorgi Ivanovitch's father and several relatives, not wanting to leave their homeland, were inevitably to become victims of the genocide perpetrated by the invader. Travelling through Soviet Russia and remote regions of Transcaucasia with neither money nor shelter, the refugees lived through an extraordinary ordeal. Mr. Gurdjieff's mother was accompanied by his youngest sister, Sophia, and her husband. Mr. Gurdjieff's brother, Dmitri, with his wife

and four children, were also among these refugees. When Gyorgi Ivanovitch learned where they had taken refuge, he immediately sent help, but long months were to pass before they finally arrived at the Prieuré in the winter of 1923, amid feelings of joy tinged with sadness.

From the first day, we all called her 'Babushka', grandmother, just as her grandchildren did. She was of medium height, and always wrapped herself in a black shawl. For me she was the image of the eternal woman – ageless, a sort of archetype.

Here I must return to the past. When Gyorgi Ivanovitch's father and mother were married, they wanted to have a child right away. Twice, the young woman conceived and gave birth, but each time the newborn survived only a few weeks. Feeling desperate at first, and later becoming really depressed, she came to see her fate as a just punishment, proof of her unworthiness to be a mother. She withdrew little by little from all the convivial, social events that traditionally marked the life of her family. She no longer took care of her youthful appearance, chose the simplest clothing, and the most basic food, and adopted a self-effacing, modest manner. Although far from being a fanatic, she gave herself up to continual prayer, imploring heaven to bless her with a child.

One of the religious practices still widely honoured in that region was to dedicate oneself to begging, and to offer what one received to charity. Generally, it was women of

Babushka

the poorer social classes, who, unable to pay for a doctor, resorted to this ritual to obtain divine favour. But this young woman was quite well off. She and her husband lived with

her mother, a celebrated midwife who was well known for hundreds of miles around.

To merit divine pardon and rid herself of all traces of pride and possessiveness, she made a humble vow that if she were granted this blessing, she would offer to the church the weight of the child in wax. With this wax she would make candles and give them to the poor and to all those lacking the means to ritually honour their favourite saints by lighting candles during religious ceremonies. That in itself was not a very great sacrifice, for although wax was expensive, what really mattered was that the money came from alms acquired by begging. It was this act of mortification that constituted the real sacrifice. If a child were to be born, then, as soon as her health permitted, the young woman would go begging in great privation, barefoot, without either shawl or headdress, her hair hanging loose.

It came to pass that divine grace soon favoured her. Once she had conceived, she guarded herself against any impious act or thought. All the time fearing she would lose her child, she prayed continually. Once the child had made its appearance in the world, she faithfully honoured her vow, and even continued with it in the following years. This conduct seemed to assure her the favours of heaven, because after Gyorgi Ivanovitch, she had four more children – a son, Dmitri, and three daughters, Maria, Loukeria, and Sophia – all of whom survived their mother.

The family home was in Alexandropol, an important economic and administrative centre of the region. Our Babushka lived with her parents until the death of her mother, who left a very deep impression on her.

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In order to understand the roots and influences that determined Gyorgi Ivanovitch's destiny, we must devote some words to his grandmother. Her renown, both as a midwife and as a woman of remarkable qualities, was so great that, not only pregnant women, but people with all kinds of illnesses came even from the most remote parts of Transcaucasia for her advice. At that time, as people travelled by horse-drawn vehicles, it became necessary for her to buy the large field in front of the house to accommodate all those who came.

Mr. Gurdjieff remembered this very well. In the field there was always an enormous encampment filled with entire families of various cultural origins, waiting their turn to see 'Sophia Padji' ('Sister Sophia' in Turkish), which was how she was known to everyone. She had earned this title of 'Padji' by virtue of her devotion to others, and her never refusing the least service to anyone. Though famous, she even took on a particular obligation to devote the greatest part of her time to the poor, sick, and suffering. She never put off a visit till another time, but each day fulfilled what fate had decided was her duty.

From the rich, she asked; to the poor, she gave. Such was her view of justice. It was the poor who had baptized her 'Padji', sister of kindness and charity. The more fortunate willingly brought her their old clothing and what they no longer had any use for, which she redistributed to those in need. This further increased her popularity and authority.

Gyorgi Ivanovitch's sister told me, "All we had to say was

that we were the grandchildren of Sophia Padji for people to give us their seats in public places, in the *hammam*, or even in theatres. Everywhere Sophia Padji was revered."

Despite there being many qualified and respected doctors in Alexandropol, Sophia Padji's prestige was unequalled. Many stories, such as the following one, contributed to her renown.

One night, the wife of a high official began feeling contractions, and the doctor was urgently summoned. Around noon, the delivery of the child was imminent, but the labour was difficult, and various interventions were of no avail. The exhausted wife could not continue her efforts, and the baby, as if disappointed, withdrew. In the evening, as the situation became critical, the servants and neighbours demanded the intervention of Sophia Padji, but the family would not lower themselves to ask for her assistance. As for the doctor, he was categorically opposed to this suggestion. However, when the doctor finally admitted that he was powerless, they did decide to call Sophia Padji, who came immediately. The doctor, wrapped in his dignity, retired to a corner, not admitting that one should have recourse to an 'illiterate' woman. Addressing the husband with a disdainful reproach, he said, "Look! Your wife is in agony. She is already quite ashen, and you're going to let that sorceress make her suffer more."

Sophia Padji did not lose a moment, and did what had to be done. To the astonishment of everyone, she quickly brought the baby into the world, provided the necessary care, and put the child in the cradle. Then, approaching the mother's bed, she picked up the placenta and flung it at the

feet of the doctor with these scathing words: "Here, eat this! And go on with your deadly ministrations!"

The new mother recovered her colour and, as soon as she was out of danger, Sophia Padji left. According to witnesses, the doctor emerged with genuine dignity. Confronted by Sophia Padji's evident knowledge, he recognized her true value, and in spite of her offensive gesture, asked her not to be angry, assuring her of his sincere admiration. "Well done, Sophia Padji. Well done!" he repeated.

This professional exploit further increased her renown, as from then on her abilities were recognized by the medical authorities. She gave the considerable sum she had received to the poor, stating that she exercised this profession only to help others, not to earn a living.

Such were the strong roots of our Babushka. When she felt her end approaching due to cancer of the liver, she devoted herself entirely to prayer, wishing to remain conscious and lucid in the face of death. After several days, sensing that her final hour was imminent, she prepared her body for death, dressed herself in a gown that would serve as her shroud, and quietly lay down to await the end. Even as her body was getting cold, she chanted the words of her favourite prayer, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name ...," sometimes looking at those present as if to assure herself that she was still here on earth, sometimes singing more loudly, "Thy Kingdom come ...," as if to let the mystery resound more deeply in herself.

Her last words, spoken in Armenian, had the character of a Japanese poem:

The bird is silent.
It has flown away
To the other land.
The flower has faded.
It has left this life,
But the wind will scatter its seeds.

And looking at those around her, she added, "And you! Laugh or cry. Do as you wish. It's all the same to me. I am already elsewhere."

After uttering these words, she closed her eyes, never to open them again.

From these women, whose characters were forged in steel, the young Gyorgi Ivanovitch would certainly have received unforgettable impressions and an exceptional preparation for life.

JEANNE DE SALZMANN: A LAWFUL TRANSMISSION

In 1921 we had to return to Constantinople, and Mr. Gurdjieff had recently invited me to stay in his house. After about a week, I had come to know most of the older pupils, those who had been with him since his stay in Russia. One day, I answered the door. A young woman stood there accompanied by a man carrying a child in his arms.

"What can I do for you, Madame?"

Without waiting for a reply, she strode across the threshold and, in a Russian tinged with French, asked, "Is Gyorgi Ivanovitch here?"

As I hesitated, she entered the meeting room and was joyfully greeted.

"Jeanna Julievna has arrived!"

Mr. Gurdjieff then appeared and warmly welcomed Mme de Salzmann, her husband, Alexander, and their daughter, Bousska.†

† Bousska, which means 'Little Pearl', was the nickname she had from birth. Her Christian name is Nathalie. I still remember her as a child, making faces which delighted us all. But time has passed and Bousska

Soon after arriving, Mme de Salzmann and her husband entered into all the activities, in particular the Movements. Even then, Mme de Salzmann stood out among Gyorgi Ivanovitch's pupils by the quality of her presence; the women and girls all felt a special respect for her. She was always calm and even-tempered in her relationships with others, and she also quickly gained the respect and affection of Ouspensky's group in Constantinople.

It was Jeanna Julievna to whom everyone turned for help in understanding the special experience of the Movements. An excellent pianist and former pupil of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze,† she had founded a successful school of rhythmic dance in Tiflis. However, after meeting Gyorgi Ivanovitch, she submitted without hesitation to the demands of his teaching. Having an innate sense of choreography, she understood how the Movements should be practised. Trying always to decipher their meaning, and stressing the need for precision in the sequence and rhythm, she helped everyone feel their scope and significance. Mr. Gurdjieff quickly entrusted her with the responsibility of overseeing this work. I can still see her working intensely with Lili Galoumian and Olga Ivanovna, who later became the wife of the visionary American architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

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has grown up. Today she has many grandchildren and guides the work of the numerous groups that she started in South America.

† Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) was a Swiss innovator in rhythm, dance, and musical improvisation who became famous far beyond his native land. He was the originator of the system of musical and rhythmical education known as eurhythmics, which greatly influenced twentieth-century dance.

Jeanne de Salzmann

They practised for hours with other experienced pupils.

This unremitting work was punctuated by repeated requests such as, "Jeanna, look, is this correct?" ... "Jeanna, would you please check the position of my arms."

During this work, I never noticed any reluctance on her

part, nor did I ever see an expression of weariness appear on her majestic countenance. Beautiful and gracious, and amazingly open toward others, resistance melted magically before her. She was like this in Constantinople, as she was to be later at the Prieuré. I remember being opposite her during a dance, that was said to come from Khorovod. Buoyed by her complete, yet natural participation in the dance, I felt myself being lifted beyond what I believed to be my limits.

One evening in the Study House, when Mr. Gurdjieff had to leave after the day's work, the older pupils asked Thomas de Hartmann if he would improvise some music on the piano. Mme de Salzmann and about ten other women began to dance. Some distance from the stage there were comfortable benches covered with rich furs. Alexandre de Salzmann, myself, and, a few other pupils discreetly took our places there to watch the improvisation. I had never seen anything so enchanting and so conducive to the awakening of man to the unknown. I began to understand that communication through dance was something beyond compare, and that it could become an almost perfect language. All that these women felt, even all that they thought – in short, everything they expressed in the dance – was transmitted to us by the essential quality of their movements. Mme de Salzmann was in the centre, and seemed to bestow unity and harmony on this feminine choreography. We watched the scene, not daring to move for fear of disrupting it. I do not know if the dancers still remember that evening, but for me it remains one of the purest moments in the magical setting of the Study House.

We often sought out Jeanna Julievna to speak to her

about our personal inner search. She gave unstintingly of her time and knew how to guide us toward what was essential. I remember one day she told me, "We have to suffer from our unconscious instability, and all the time seek to return to what we feel to be the right attitude. Inwardly we are not able to keep this attitude. In fact, without our being aware of it, our state changes all the time."

What poor Jeanna Julievna had to deal with; at that time I was still very naive. Now and then, another inner state did appear in me of its own accord, and I imagined that I could maintain it. I still did not understand the hard truth expressed by the teaching: that in man's ordinary state 'everything just happens', and that in this state he does not have the capacity to act consciously.

Mme de Salzmann, like Ouspensky, often took notes – it was forbidden to do so during the activities, although it was permitted afterwards. She especially noted down everything to do with the Movements and the music that accompanied them. Later, in Paris, I also tried to write down different Movements and exercises. I quickly realized how difficult it was to find a satisfactory notation that showed how all the different movements, rhythms, and sequences were combined into a whole. I then understood why Mme de Salzmann noted separately the movements of the limbs, head, and trunk, each with its own rhythm, and later reassembled them with the music.

One day, much later, after the death of Mr. Gurdjieff, Mme de Salzmann visited me to ask if I had kept notes on certain exercises. I thought I would be able to help, but in fact neither my memory nor my notes – most of which I

had lost – were of any help. This made me more aware of the essential role she played in transmitting the teaching, and how she constantly and tirelessly served it. Each day Mr. Gurdjieff threw us some pearls of living fragments of knowledge from his treasure-trove, as one throws crumbs to birds, not being sure they would be received, pondered, preserved, and transmitted. Most of us were not able to recognize the true value of what Mr. Gurdjieff was offering us.

Mme de Salzmann had an inner strength that enabled her to solve the most difficult problems. Years later, when I saw her regularly and worked under her guidance, I noticed that, apart from her own creativity and contributions, she had preserved all the exercises and practical knowledge that Gyorgi Ivanovitch had brought.

In the first few years, I was not really aware of Mme de Salzmann's role, however, toward the end of Mr. Gurdjieff's life, it became clear to me how important she was for him. He solemnly stated more than once, "Whoever seeks a relationship with me must come through Jeanna. I have entrusted the continuation of my work to her, and she has my complete confidence. She has never let me down."

Today I shudder at the thought that Mme de Salzmann might not have been at Gyorgi Ivanovitch's side. It is thanks to her, and to those around her, that I have been able to appreciate the profundity of the oral teaching he left. It is also thanks to her that the teaching has remained alive and has spread gradually throughout the world.

The pantry at Rue des Colonels-Renard

PART V

The Last Days

AUTUMN 1949

It was the end of summer, 1949. Mr. Gurdjieff seldom went out. As I learned later from his doctors, he had known for a long time that his days were numbered, but he allowed none of this to show.

For most of those around him, nothing in his routine had apparently changed, except perhaps a particular concern for putting his affairs in order. In other respects, and on quite another level, he made very special demands on his closest French pupils, as if he wished to call them to an ever-greater responsibility in leading the work of the groups. At that time, many English and Americans had joined us, and Mr. Gurdjieff clearly wished them to take part in more intensive work.

His strength declined from day to day, and he only stayed at meals for a short while. We then knew that his condition was very serious. Apart from that, his appearance was deceptive because, in spite of everything, the various activities continued under his direction as if nothing were wrong - but at what cost!

I can still see him leaving his room, walking painfully

down the corridor until he reached the dining-room. There he would straighten himself up, smooth his moustache, and only then enter, completely transformed – he was again the master, the superb old lion. A good-natured smile would light up his face, this familiar smile that always had the effect of reassuring us and reviving our hope once again.

So it was until his last days.

He seemed to time the moment of his arrival at our meals carefully, in order to tire himself as little as possible and to fulfil his role most effectively. Thanks to the set progression of the 'Toasts to the Idiots', he could follow it even from his bed. I noticed that he always appeared when the toast was given for "all hopeless idiots". The ritual recitation of this toast went as follows, "To the health of all hopeless idiots, objectively and subjectively – that is, to the health of all those who are candidates to die like a dog, and to the health of all those who are candidates to die honourably."

During those last days,† Mr. Gurdjieff himself would then solemnly add, "He who works on himself also prepares for an honourable death."

When it was time for the next toast, he would leave the table with a firm, determined step, which allowed no one to suspect his fatigue. "Continue, continue," he would say without looking back. Our eyes would follow his imposing silhouette disappearing down the corridor. Time stopped. The atmosphere remained charged with his presence. His words, which filled the silence, called us back to the essential.

† Mr. Gurdjieff was hospitalized at the American Hospital in Neuilly, where he died on October 29th.