



Previously in the Dostoevsky for Parents and Children series:

[Varenka's Memoirs](#) (from the novel Poor Folk, 1846 [1883, 1887, 1897, DPC I])

[An Honest Thief](#) (from Stories of a Man of Experience, 1848 [suggested by the Introduction to the 1897 anthology, DPC V])

[Nellie's Story](#) (from The Insulted and Injured, 1861 [1883, 1887, DPC VI])

[Marie's Story](#) (from The Idiot, 1868 [suggested by Anna Dostoevskaya in correspondence pertaining to the 1897 anthology, DPC X])

[At The Select Boarding School](#) (from the novel The Adolescent, 1875 [1883, 1897, DPC II])

[The Merchant's Story](#) (from the novel The Adolescent, 1875 [1897, DPC IV])

[A Little Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree](#) (from The Diary Of A Writer, January 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC VII])

[The Peasant Marey](#) (from The Diary Of A Writer, February 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC III])

[A Centenarian](#) (from The Diary Of A Writer, March 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC VIII])

[Foma Danilov](#) - The Russian Hero Tortured to Death (from The Diary Of A Writer, 1877 [1883, 1897, DPC IX])

{In square brackets we indicate the original Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaya anthologies in which each story appeared, followed by its order of posting in the present Dostoevsky for Parents and Children (DPC) collection. Thus [1883, 1897, DPC II] means the story appeared in the first (1883) and third (1897), but not in the second (1887) Anna Dostoevskaya anthology, and as the second in this series of postings. Please find [here](#) our brief introduction to the original Dostoevsky for Children anthologies, and to this English online version. Accompanying photo: Vladimir Gotovtsev in the role of Alyosha, 1910}

--/--

"Let every abbot become and remain always in his relation to those subject to him as a wise mother."

(St. Seraphim of Sarov, Fr. Seraphim Rose transl.)

In his monumental biography of Dostoevsky, Joseph Frank inspiringly compares *The Brothers Karamazov* to the best works of Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and Goethe. At one point, even to Beethoven's 9th! Dostoevsky's final novel is, indeed, in many ways, his grandest tour de force: majestic and deep, complex and spellbinding. And each facet of it illuminates every other...

Obviously, no introduction or anthology can do justice to such a work! Even so, we hope that what follows can be of some use.

Here are some of the main themes and questions posed with existential intensity in the book:

The Mystery of Filial Piety - natural and spiritual - and the implications of its denial. The Mystery of Eldership, or the Golden Chain of mentoring in the ways of Holy Tradition. The Mystery of co-suffering love, including how to feel, think, pray, and act according to the insight that "all are guilty for all". The impact of doing or not doing so, on man, family and community, especially on the "smallest ones" (children, mudjiks, "the people"...) The ways and implications of putting one's faith in the [Economy of Salvation](#) (reflecting the author's growing interest in the Scriptures, the Lives of the Saints, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, the nowadays seemingly neglected [Tales of the Wanderings of the Athonite Monk Parfeny](#), the Optina elders, and St. Isaac the Syrian, among others). Or, in something else. Active faith versus mere speculative faith. And the haunting question of Utopia: can the rare and painstakingly won inner and communal harmony of the virtuous souls be extended beyond the confines of an almost ideal Russian monastery? To a small, Jane Austen-like community, around the monastery? To the Great Modern Society at large? All this, and more, closely weaved in a literary masterpiece.

For our part, we would also compare the novel to Confucius, the father of classical Chinese thought and civilization, who essentially taught that [filial piety moves Heaven and Earth](#), while the lack of it antagonizes both - which is the exact teaching verified by Dostoevsky, with a spiritual dimension added, in his central character, Alyosha Karamazov, and all around him.

And, among the philosophies of our times, to those which (like that of A. MacIntyre) essentially point out that there is no rationality outside of tradition. I.e., no practical rationality, and indeed no justice, in the ancient sense, of giving to each his due, starting from each of the powers of one's own soul.

Indeed, Dostoevsky is pointing to the transmissible ways of Eldership, of mentorship according to Holy Tradition, as the great unifier that calls everything good to fruition, harmony and balance. Starting with the root virtue of Filial Piety. In doing so, our author makes Alyosha his civilizing hero.

A hero capable to inspire the real-life path of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky: the path from The Brothers Karamazov (the core of all the Metropolitan's practical-oriented Dostoevskian interpretations), to the Metropolitan's blessed pastoral efforts, crowned by the mentoring of many Confessors and Saints, such as Vladika John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Thus, the Brothers Karamazov points towards a path of redeeming practical wisdom and rationality as no other work of fiction we are aware of. Including enough practical tips for those seriously interested, to find the next steps themselves. It is the case of Metropolitan Anthony, but also of Prof. Ivan Andreyev, of [Fr. Gheorghe Calciu](#), and others. Including, it seems, more than one actor, from more than one country, who played the role of Alyosha Karamazov in some screen or theatrical adaptation, and then went on to become an actual monk...

To repeat and emphasize: in Alyosha Karamazov, whose story we begin to read today, we see Dostoevsky's foremost civilizing hero. In the West, his saga may evoke Beethoven's greatest symphony. To the [Chinese mind](#) he would probably evoke [Shun, first among the archetypes of heroic Filial Piety](#) brought to completion with the blessing of Heaven, and therefore the ideal Man and Emperor. Still, only a

mythical Emperor. However, to the heart of Met. Anthony Khrapovitsky and other Eastern Orthodox, Alyosha has inspired the path to real-life Sainthood, via Christ-like pastorship and Christ-filled love, according to the tested ways of Holy Tradition.

Our diligent homeschooling readers will, perhaps, also wish to compare Alyosha to other key Dostoevsky characters. Compared to Prince Myshkin (the "Idiot"), for instance, he seems to us what the Apostle is to a holy fool for Christ. Also rare and exceptional, but invaluable in a very special way: because he is the evocation of a link in the "Golden Chain" of Holy Tradition - in the unbroken spiritual chain of those capable to receive and hand down the ways of holiness. Something "repeatable" and refinable by the ones inspired, each according to their calling and circumstances, as suggested above.

Let us also emphasize that the relevant comparison between Myshkin and Alyosha, it seems to us, is not so much a matter of greater worldly achievement by either of them, as has sometimes been suggested. Indeed, the mature Dostoevsky's practical test and concern seems to us the impact of worldviews on children and youth (something adumbrated at least since [The Idiot](#), if not since

[The Insulted and Injured](#)

, though something perhaps too easily overlooked by those readers who, not unlike some of our author's heroes, tend to see only Scholastic disputations, where basic practical discernment is clearly the issue). "By their fruit you shall know them..."

Yet, in terms of impact on children, Prince Myshkin's experience is quite as uplifting as, and commensurable with, that of Alyosha Karamazov. Except that Myshkin's redeeming impact on the "smallest ones", and on their small community, comes at the beginning of *The Idiot* (in [the story of Marie](#)), freeing the Quichotesque Prince to take on the Great Russian Society, next - something

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (Xla) Alyosha Karamazov

Scris de Dostoievski et al.
Joi, 25 August 2022 18:30

Alyosha was supposed to do only in a sequel novel, left unwritten due to Dostoevsky's repose.

In short, by Dostoevsky's "final" criterion and concern, as we understand it, *The Brothers Karamazov* ends where *The Idiot* begins: with the spiritual redemption of a group of children and their close ones. Indeed, *The Idiot* could almost be read as *The Brothers Karamazov*'s sequel. A poetic, and some would say less didactic, even less "didacticist" (Leatherbarrow) sequel.

Yet, as we have said, Dostoevsky manages to weave everything in a spellbinding masterpiece, and Alyosha touches on the mystery of practical mentorship, of practical wisdom and rationality, as no other Dostoevsky character does, unless we count his mentor, Elder Zosima, and, in the end, Alyosha's own "novices", especially the children, as we shall soon see.

What about the unforgettable and in a sense forever irreplaceable [Marmeladov](#) , his daughter Sonia, or even the

[Honest Thief](#)

? Compared to them, Alyosha is of course still like an Apostle is to the Good Thief, or to the humble Publican (who are, in turn, perhaps closer to the holy fool "type", than to the civilizing hero).

Finally, it seems to us that it was Dostoevsky's final stroke of genius to emphasize (as much as he could, but enough to immortalize this important insight) that besides the mudjik

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (Xla) Alyosha Karamazov

Scris de Dostoievski et al.
Joi, 25 August 2022 18:30

Christ-bearers of a fragile ancestral world, like Makar and [Sophia Dolgoruky](#) , or [Peasant Marey](#) , there is an essentially monastic, long tested chain of hesychast bearers and bestowers of Holy Tradition, at the core of the Church that the gates of hell shall not conquer. And they are essentially always there, or within living memory, for anyone seriously interested.

Over and over again, their "golden chain" can properly strengthen or adjust, unify, refine and harmonize everything good in those like Alyosha, like his mentor Zosima, and like all those similarly "called". And, to a remarkable extent, in those around them.[1] "Acquire the Peace of God, and thousands around you will be saved!" (St. Seraphim of Sarov.)

Met. Anthony beautifully emphasizes how this applies to Alyosha, and the hesychast undertone of it all:

"Such is the almost involuntary spiritual imprint that Dostoevsky's favourite hero, Alyosha Karamazov, leaves on everybody, not only and not so much by means of relaying some ideas of facts, but rather by his very presence in the vicinity of the morally diseased, like both his brothers, partly his father, the high school boys and the three women. They all sense his compassionate love, they all know what he would like to tell them, what to caution against and what to call to: it is as if some life-giving water would moisten their hearts in his presence; the repenting ones have in him a moral support, while the obstinate and wavering ones like the boy Kolia, his old father and his brother Ivan, dash about but tremble beneath the rays of his love, like the possessed seeing the Saviour." (Pastoral Study of People and Life from the Works of F.M. Dostoevsky, 1893, translated by Ludmila Koehler)

Thus, Filial Piety, spiritual and natural, and their every fruit, or the lack of them and their contraries, is what is tested, under both mild weather and burning fire, in Dostoevsky's last novel. Positively, in the meek but great-souled Alyosha - and negatively, in his swept by the Modern winds brothers, and community.

Nevertheless, it has been noted that the Karamazov brothers are all one, and we should think of the possibility of seeing them all reunited, like a person made whole. Thus read, the novel is also a parable. The parable of a distorted-by-abstraction mind (Ivan Karamazov), of an untended Romantic soul (Dimitry Karamazov), and of a repressed but true to God conscience or spirit (Alyosha). And, perhaps, even of an ailing body (Smerdyakov). So we are left with the question: what will make them all one again, and reconciled to their conscience? What would heal the broken Karamazovian person, and make it whole?

Dostoevsky's general answer would be Christ, of course. Synergy in Christ, as the learned would say. But what is the common solution, the common denominator, so to speak, of all four Karamazovian "equations"? Without going into details, here, we propose it is the "nostalgia for the desert". The almost perfectly hidden, but always present, even in the first family reunion, even in the criminal, nostalgia for the desert. Not for the civilizing hero, not even for the fool for Christ, but for the desert, and the saintly desert dweller.

Let us imagine, for a moment, that Dostoevsky would receive a divine commission to write the sequel to the Brothers Karamazov, from beyond the grave, after all. Who, among the Karamazovs, is the potential hermit? Where is this nostalgia for the desert Saint most burning?

Not so much in the civilizing hero, we would suggest. Not even in his mentor Zosima. But in he who is like burning fire, waiting only to be reoriented. In the sequel volume he could perhaps be a second Arseny the Great, if not a second Isaac the Syrian. We speak of Ivan Karamazov, of course. Whose eschatological imagery seems, at times, already more inspired by St. Isaac and otherworldly than even Zosima's (Met. Anthony notes it, but perhaps too hastily assigns it to some supposedly Origenist influence, although the novelist hints only at St. Isaac the Syrian.)

Thus, when the existing novel mentions copies of St. Isaac's Ascetic Homilies in unexpected places (one at the good simple peasant-servant Grigory and another at the otherwise deeply troubled Smerdyakov!), we can only see the written symbol of a common Karamazovian longing, for the desert hermit. It is the one hopeful thing they all secretly share in the household.

For, Isaac was not at all meant for, or popular among, the very simple, as far as we are aware. Back then, it was a rare book, and almost reserved to elite spiritual strugglers. But then, they all share the faith in the desert hermit (or only a longing, in the case of Ivan). Therefore, Dostoevsky makes even the simple ones own and display their mysterious copies of the foremost practical guide for experienced desert dwellers.

In brief, in *The Brothers Karamazov* the Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian simply symbolize the mantle of the truest desert ascetic. And everyone's tacit longing, perhaps even the author's, for the day and hour when Ivan will finally bring them all under its protection. Even his alter ego ('the devil') hints at such a course...

Thus, what begins with Filial Piety, tested or lost, continues with Filial Piety (almost) regained, by the repenting Dimitry and Ivan, in the last pages of the existing volumes, under the prayerful influence of the "Golden Chain". But in some sense it could only end (we suggest, in the author's perhaps not even fully acknowledged hopes) under the mantle of St. Isaac the Syrian.[2]

Finally, we now turn back to the first steps of Alyosha. As we begin the story, please also note his special relationship with his natural Mother, beautifully counted by Met. Anthony among Dostoevsky's quasi-hesyachast women:

"A loving and simultaneously a humble woman is a formidable force. Love deprived of humility causes domestic discord and grief, hence the stronger this love is, and not only for a husband, but also for the children, the more harm it causes if it lacks humility. Proud love is the cause of adultery and hard drinking of husbands, the suicide of bridegrooms and the sufferings of children: the love of Katerina Ivanovna - the [would-be] bride (The Brothers Karamazov), and of Katerina Ivanovna - the mother and wife (Crime and Punishment), the love of Lisa - daughter and [would-be] bride, the love of Grushenka (The Brothers Karamazov), of The Meek One [!] and of Nelly (The Insulted and The Injured) of Katia (Netochka Nezvanova), the wife of Shatov (The Possessed) and of all the proud characters in general is the source of evil and unnecessary sufferings. The love of the humble and self-abashing ones, on the contrary, is the source of peace and repentance. Such are the mother of Raskolnikov and Sonia (Crime and Punishment) who was worshipped even by the convicts who had divined her humble and contrite heart, such is Natasha's mother (The Insulted and The Injured) and the mother of the "Adolescent," the paralyzed sister of Iliusha (The Brothers Karamazov), Netochka Nezvanova, Aliosha Karamazov's mother, and many others. They do not insist on having it their own way at all costs, but they are able to achieve, in almost all cases, by means of love, tears, forgiveness and prayerful repentance and the conversion of their beloved husbands, parents or children. While taking the difficult step of renouncing their former life, their beloved ones find inspiration in this constant example of self-denial, they absorb, as it were, the power of self-denial, while the love of a humble being turns the very feat of a formerly proud man into a sweet task." (Met. Anthony Khrapovitsky, Pastoral Study..., Ludmila Koehler transl.)

This is also one of the most carefully drawn lists of proud v. genuinely meek and humble Dostoevskian loves. To understand its point is, perhaps, to understand the heart of Motherhood and the Golden Chain, all at once (cf. also the motto, above). The heart of the Civilizing Hero, the Holy Fool, and the Hermit. The heart of Dostoevsky.

Notes:

[1] Our abstract-inclined readers will notice, here: this means even the overstretched "Euclidean" side of Ivan Karamazov, the story's rebellious "rationalist" ferment, must have been redeemable. It only needed adjustment to a larger context. As exemplified in A. Khomiakov, the famous mathematician, scientist and Church philosopher, and a major influence on Dostoevsky's generation. In other words, the issue wasn't so much "Reason vs. Faith", as it was "Euclidean" reductionism, versus a more comprehensive and practical kind of rationality and wisdom.

[2] The proper context of The Brothers Karamazov, then, until its sequel reaches this side of Eternity, might be Confucius, The Optina Series, and St. Isaac. We would suggest the Slingerland, Platina, and Boston editions, respectively. With due attention to the practical side that such works seem to have in view (cf. also this [bookreview by Dana R. Miller](#) , translator of St. Isaac.)

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (Xla) Alyosha Karamazov

Scris de Dostoievski et al.
Joi, 25 August 2022 18:30

F.M. Dostoevsky

ALYOSHA KARAMAZOV

(from The Brothers Karamazov, 1880, book I, part I, chap. IV. Translation by Constance Garnett. Russian original [here](#) .)

He was only twenty, his brother Ivan was in his twenty-fourth year at the time, while their elder brother Dmitri was twenty-seven. First of all, I must explain that this young man, Alyosha, was not a fanatic, and, in my opinion at least, was not even a mystic. I may as well give my full opinion from the beginning. He was simply an early lover of humanity, and that he adopted the monastic life was simply because at that time it struck him, so to say, as the ideal escape for his soul struggling from the darkness of worldly wickedness to the light of love. And the reason this life struck him in this way was that he found in it at that time, as he thought, an extraordinary being, our celebrated elder, Zossima, to whom he became attached with all the warm first love of his ardent heart. But I do not dispute that he was very strange even at that time, and had been so indeed from his cradle. I have mentioned already, by the way, that though he lost his mother in his fourth year he remembered her all his life—her face, her caresses, “as though she stood living before me.” Such memories may persist, as every one knows, from an even earlier age, even from two years old, but scarcely standing out through a whole lifetime like spots of light out of darkness, like a corner torn out of a huge picture, which has all faded and disappeared except that fragment. That is how it was with him. He remembered one still summer evening, an open window, the slanting rays of the setting sun (that he recalled most vividly of all); in a corner of the room the holy image, before it a lighted lamp, and on her knees before the image his mother, sobbing hysterically with cries and moans, snatching him up in both arms, squeezing him close till it hurt, and praying for him to the Mother of God, holding him out in both arms to the image as though to put him under the Mother’s protection ... and suddenly a nurse runs in and snatches him from her in terror. That was the picture! And Alyosha remembered his mother’s face at that minute. He used to say that it was frenzied but beautiful as he remembered. But he rarely cared to speak of this memory to any one. In his childhood and youth he was by no means expansive, and talked little indeed, but not from shyness or a sullen unsociability; quite the contrary, from something different, from a sort of inner preoccupation entirely personal and unconcerned with other people, but so important to him that he seemed, as it were, to forget others on account of it. But he was fond of people: he seemed throughout his life to put implicit trust in people: yet no one ever looked on him as a simpleton or naïve person. There was something about him which made one feel at once (and it was so all his life afterwards) that he did not care to be a judge of others—that he would never take it upon himself to criticize and would never condemn any one for anything. He seemed, indeed, to accept everything without the least condemnation though often grieving bitterly: and this was so much so that no one could surprise or frighten him even in his earliest youth. Coming at twenty to his father’s house, which was a very sink of filthy debauchery, he, chaste and pure as he was, simply withdrew in silence when to look on was unbearable, but without the slightest sign of contempt or condemnation. His father, who had once been in a dependent position, and so was sensitive and ready to take offense, met him at first with distrust and sullenness. “He does not say much,” he used to say, “and thinks the more.” But soon, within a fortnight indeed, he took to embracing him and kissing him terribly often, with drunken tears, with sottish sentimentality, yet he evidently felt a real and deep affection for him, such as he had never been capable of feeling for any one before.

Every one, indeed, loved this young man wherever he went, and it was so from his earliest childhood. When he entered the household of his patron and benefactor, Yefim Petrovitch

Polenov, he gained the hearts of all the family, so that they looked on him quite as their own child. Yet he entered the house at such a tender age that he could not have acted from design nor artfulness in winning affection. So that the gift of making himself loved directly and unconsciously was inherent in him, in his very nature, so to speak. It was the same at school, though he seemed to be just one of those children who are distrusted, sometimes ridiculed, and even disliked by their schoolfellows. He was dreamy, for instance, and rather solitary. From his earliest childhood he was fond of creeping into a corner to read, and yet he was a general favorite all the while he was at school. He was rarely playful or merry, but any one could see at the first glance that this was not from any sullenness. On the contrary he was bright and good-tempered. He never tried to show off among his schoolfellows. Perhaps because of this, he was never afraid of any one, yet the boys immediately understood that he was not proud of his fearlessness and seemed to be unaware that he was bold and courageous. He never resented an insult. It would happen that an hour after the offense he would address the offender or answer some question with as trustful and candid an expression as though nothing had happened between them. And it was not that he seemed to have forgotten or intentionally forgiven the affront, but simply that he did not regard it as an affront, and this completely conquered and captivated the boys. He had one characteristic which made all his schoolfellows from the bottom class to the top want to mock at him, not from malice but because it amused them. This characteristic was a wild fanatical modesty and chastity. He could not bear to hear certain words and certain conversations about women. There are "certain" words and conversations unhappily impossible to eradicate in schools. Boys pure in mind and heart, almost children, are fond of talking in school among themselves, and even aloud, of things, pictures, and images of which even soldiers would sometimes hesitate to speak. More than that, much that soldiers have no knowledge or conception of is familiar to quite young children of our intellectual and higher classes. There is no moral depravity, no real corrupt inner cynicism in it, but there is the appearance of it, and it is often looked upon among them as something refined, subtle, daring, and worthy of imitation. Seeing that Alyosha Karamazov put his fingers in his ears when they talked of "that," they used sometimes to crowd round him, pull his hands away, and shout nastiness into both ears, while he struggled, slipped to the floor, tried to hide himself without uttering one word of abuse, enduring their insults in silence. But at last they left him alone and gave up taunting him with being a "regular girl," and what's more they looked upon it with compassion as a weakness. He was always one of the best in the class but was never first.

At the time of Yefim Petrovitch's death Alyosha had two more years to complete at the provincial gymnasium. The inconsolable widow went almost immediately after his death for a long visit to Italy with her whole family, which consisted only of women and girls. Alyosha went to live in the house of two distant relations of Yefim Petrovitch, ladies whom he had never seen before. On what terms he lived with them he did not know himself. It was very characteristic of him, indeed, that he never cared at whose expense he was living. In that respect he was a striking contrast to his elder brother Ivan, who struggled with poverty for his first two years in the university, maintained himself by his own efforts, and had from childhood been bitterly conscious of living at the expense of his benefactor. But this strange trait in Alyosha's character must not, I think, be criticized too severely, for at the slightest acquaintance with him any one would have perceived that Alyosha was one of those youths, almost of the type of religious

enthusiast, who, if they were suddenly to come into possession of a large fortune, would not hesitate to give it away for the asking, either for good works or perhaps to a clever rogue. In general he seemed scarcely to know the value of money, not, of course, in a literal sense. When he was given pocket-money, which he never asked for, he was either terribly careless of it so that it was gone in a moment, or he kept it for weeks together, not knowing what to do with it.

In later years Pyotr Alexandrovitch Miüsov, a man very sensitive on the score of money and bourgeois honesty, pronounced the following judgment, after getting to know Alyosha:

“Here is perhaps the one man in the world whom you might leave alone without a penny, in the center of an unknown town of a million inhabitants, and he would not come to harm, he would not die of cold and hunger, for he would be fed and sheltered at once; and if he were not, he would find a shelter for himself, and it would cost him no effort or humiliation. And to shelter him would be no burden, but, on the contrary, would probably be looked on as a pleasure.”

He did not finish his studies at the gymnasium. A year before the end of the course he suddenly announced to the ladies that he was going to see his father about a plan which had occurred to him. They were sorry and unwilling to let him go. The journey was not an expensive one, and the ladies would not let him pawn his watch, a parting present from his benefactor's family. They provided him liberally with money and even fitted him out with new clothes and linen. But he returned half the money they gave him, saying that he intended to go third class. On his arrival in the town he made no answer to his father's first inquiry why he had come before completing his studies, and seemed, so they say, unusually thoughtful. It soon became apparent that he was looking for his mother's tomb. He practically acknowledged at the time that that was the only object of his visit. But it can hardly have been the whole reason of it. It is more probable that he himself did not understand and could not explain what had suddenly arisen in his soul, and drawn him irresistibly into a new, unknown, but inevitable path. Fyodor Pavlovitch could not show him where his second wife was buried, for he had never visited her grave since he had thrown earth upon her coffin, and in the course of years had entirely forgotten where she was buried.

Fyodor Pavlovitch, by the way, had for some time previously not been living in our town. Three or four years after his wife's death he had gone to the south of Russia and finally turned up in Odessa, where he spent several years. He made the acquaintance at first, in his own words, “of a lot of low Jews, Jewesses, and Jewkins,” and ended by being received by “Jews high and low alike.” It may be presumed that at this period he developed a peculiar faculty for making and hoarding money. He finally returned to our town only three years before Alyosha's arrival. His

former acquaintances found him looking terribly aged, although he was by no means an old man. He behaved not exactly with more dignity but with more effrontery. The former buffoon showed an insolent propensity for making buffoons of others. His depravity with women was not simply what it used to be, but even more revolting. In a short time he opened a great number of new taverns in the district. It was evident that he had perhaps a hundred thousand roubles or not much less. Many of the inhabitants of the town and district were soon in his debt, and, of course, had given good security. Of late, too, he looked somehow bloated and seemed more irresponsible, more uneven, had sunk into a sort of incoherence, used to begin one thing and go on with another, as though he were letting himself go altogether. He was more and more frequently drunk. And, if it had not been for the same servant Grigory, who by that time had aged considerably too, and used to look after him sometimes almost like a tutor, Fyodor Pavlovitch might have got into terrible scrapes. Alyosha's arrival seemed to affect even his moral side, as though something had awakened in this prematurely old man which had long been dead in his soul.

"Do you know," he used often to say, looking at Alyosha, "that you are like her, 'the crazy woman' "—that was what he used to call his dead wife, Alyosha's mother. Grigory it was who pointed out the "crazy woman's" grave to Alyosha. He took him to our town cemetery and showed him in a remote corner a cast-iron tombstone, cheap but decently kept, on which were inscribed the name and age of the deceased and the date of her death, and below a four-lined verse, such as are commonly used on old-fashioned middle-class tombs. To Alyosha's amazement this tomb turned out to be Grigory's doing. He had put it up on the poor "crazy woman's" grave at his own expense, after Fyodor Pavlovitch, whom he had often pestered about the grave, had gone to Odessa, abandoning the grave and all his memories. Alyosha showed no particular emotion at the sight of his mother's grave. He only listened to Grigory's minute and solemn account of the erection of the tomb; he stood with bowed head and walked away without uttering a word. It was perhaps a year before he visited the cemetery again. But this little episode was not without an influence upon Fyodor Pavlovitch—and a very original one. He suddenly took a thousand roubles to our monastery to pay for requiems for the soul of his wife; but not for the second, Alyosha's mother, the "crazy woman," but for the first, Adelaïda Ivanovna, who used to thrash him. In the evening of the same day he got drunk and abused the monks to Alyosha. He himself was far from being religious; he had probably never put a penny candle before the image of a saint. Strange impulses of sudden feeling and sudden thought are common in such types.

I have mentioned already that he looked bloated. His countenance at this time bore traces of something that testified unmistakably to the life he had led. Besides the long fleshy bags under his little, always insolent, suspicious, and ironical eyes; besides the multitude of deep wrinkles in his little fat face, the Adam's apple hung below his sharp chin like a great, fleshy goiter, which gave him a peculiar, repulsive, sensual appearance; add to that a long rapacious mouth with full lips, between which could be seen little stumps of black decayed teeth. He slobbered every time he began to speak. He was fond indeed of making fun of his own face, though, I believe, he was

well satisfied with it. He used particularly to point to his nose, which was not very large, but very delicate and conspicuously aquiline. "A regular Roman nose," he used to say, "with my goiter I've quite the countenance of an ancient Roman patrician of the decadent period." He seemed proud of it.

Not long after visiting his mother's grave Alyosha suddenly announced that he wanted to enter the monastery, and that the monks were willing to receive him as a novice. He explained that this was his strong desire, and that he was solemnly asking his consent as his father. The old man knew that the elder Zossima, who was living in the monastery hermitage, had made a special impression upon his "gentle boy."

"That is the most honest monk among them, of course," he observed, after listening in thoughtful silence to Alyosha, and seeming scarcely surprised at his request. "H'm!... So that's where you want to be, my gentle boy?"

He was half drunk, and suddenly he grinned his slow half-drunken grin, which was not without a certain cunning and tipsy slyness. "H'm!... I had a presentiment that you would end in something like this. Would you believe it? You were making straight for it. Well, to be sure you have your own two thousand. That's a dowry for you. And I'll never desert you, my angel. And I'll pay what's wanted for you there, if they ask for it. But, of course, if they don't ask, why should we worry them? What do you say? You know, you spend money like a canary, two grains a week. H'm!... Do you know that near one monastery there's a place outside the town where every baby knows there are none but 'the monks' wives' living, as they are called. Thirty women, I believe. I have been there myself. You know, it's interesting in its own way, of course, as a variety. The worst of it is it's awfully Russian. There are no French women there. Of course they could get them fast enough, they have plenty of money. If they get to hear of it they'll come along. Well, there's nothing of that sort here, no 'monks' wives,' and two hundred monks. They're honest. They keep the fasts. I admit it.... H'm.... So you want to be a monk? And do you know I'm sorry to lose you, Alyosha; would you believe it, I've really grown fond of you? Well, it's a good opportunity. You'll pray for us sinners; we have sinned too much here. I've always been thinking who would pray for me, and whether there's any one in the world to do it. My dear boy, I'm awfully stupid about that. You wouldn't believe it. Awfully. You see, however stupid I am about it, I keep thinking, I keep thinking—from time to time, of course, not all the while. It's impossible, I think, for the devils to forget to drag me down to hell with their hooks when I die. Then I wonder—hooks? Where would they get them? What of? Iron hooks? Where do they forge them? Have they a foundry there of some sort? The monks in the monastery probably believe that there's a ceiling in hell, for instance. Now I'm ready to believe in hell, but without a ceiling. It makes it more refined, more enlightened, more Lutheran that is. And, after all, what does it matter whether it has a ceiling or hasn't? But, do you know, there's a damnable question involved in it? If there's no ceiling there can be no hooks, and if there are no hooks it all breaks

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (Xla) Alyosha Karamazov

Scris de Dostoievski et al.
Joi, 25 August 2022 18:30

down, which is unlikely again, for then there would be none to drag me down to hell, and if they don't drag me down what justice is there in the world? Il faudrait les inventer, those hooks, on purpose for me alone, for, if you only knew, Alyosha, what a blackguard I am."

"But there are no hooks there," said Alyosha, looking gently and seriously at his father.

"Yes, yes, only the shadows of hooks, I know, I know. That's how a Frenchman described hell: 'J'ai vu l'ombre d'un cocher qui avec l'ombre d'une brosse frottait l'ombre d'une carrosse.' How do you know there are no hooks, darling? When you've lived with the monks you'll sing a different tune. But go and get at the truth there, and then come and tell me. Anyway it's easier going to the other world if one knows what there is there. Besides, it will be more seemly for you with the monks than here with me, with a drunken old man and young harlots ... though you're like an angel, nothing touches you. And I dare say nothing will touch you there. That's why I let you go, because I hope for that. You've got all your wits about you. You will burn and you will burn out; you will be healed and come back again. And I will wait for you. I feel that you're the only creature in the world who has not condemned me. My dear boy, I feel it, you know. I can't help feeling it."

And he even began blubbering. He was sentimental. He was wicked and sentimental.

(To be continued.)