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I

When the emperor Alexander Pavlovich finished up the Congress of Vienna, he wanted to travel through Europe and have a look at the wonders in the various states. He travelled around all the countries, and everywhere, owing to his amiability, he always had the most internecine conversations with all sorts of people, and they all astonished him with something and wanted to incline him to their side, but with him was the Don Cossack Platov, who did not like such inclinations and, longing for his own backyard, kept luring the sovereign homewards. And the moment Platov noticed that the sovereign was getting very interested in something foreign, while his suite all remained silent, Platov would say at once: 'Well, so, we've got no worse at home,' and would sidetrack him with something.

The Englishmen knew that, and by the sovereign's arrival they thought up various ruses so as to charm him with foreignness and distract him from the Russians, and on many occasions they succeeded, especially at large gatherings, where Platov could not speak fully in French; but that was of little interest to him, because he was a married man and regarded all French talk as trifles that were not worth fancying. But when the Englishmen started inviting

the sovereign to all sorts of warehouses, ammunition and soap-rope factories, so as to show their advantage over us in everything and glory in it, Platov said to himself:

'Well, that'll do now. I've put up with it so far, but no further. Maybe I can speak or maybe I can't, but I won't let our people down.'

And he had only just said these words to himself when the sovereign said to him:

'Well, so, tomorrow you and I will go and have a look at their armoury collection. They have such perfections of nature there,' he says, 'that, once you've seen them, you'll no longer dispute that we Russians, with all our importance, are good for nothing.'

Platov made no reply to the sovereign, but only lowered his hooked nose into his shaggy cape and, coming to his quarters, told his servant to fetch a flask of Caucasian vodka from the cellaret, tossed off a good glassful, said his prayers before the folding travelling icon, covered himself with his cape, and set up such a snoring that no Englishman in the whole house was able to sleep.

He thought: 'Morning's wiser than evening.'

II

The next day the sovereign and Platov went to the collection. The sovereign took no other Russians with him, because the carriage they gave him was a two-sitter.

They pull up to a very big building - an indescribable entry, endless corridors, rooms one after another, and finally, in the main hall, various enormous blustres, and in the middle under a canopy stands the Apollo Belderear.

The sovereign keeps glancing at Platov, to see if he's very surprised and what he's looking at; but the man walks with lowered eyes, as if seeing nothing, and only twists his moustache into rings.

The Englishmen at once start showing them various wonders and explaining what military circumstances they are suited to: sea blowrometers, drench coats for the infantry, and for the cavalry tarred waterprovables. The sovereign is delighted with it all, to him it all seems very good, but Platov holds back his afection, as if it all means nothing to him.

The sovereign says:
'How is it possible — where did you get such insensitivity? Can it be that nothing here surprises you?'

And Platov replies:
'One thing here surprises me, that my fine lads from the Don fought without any of it and drove off two and ten nations.'

The sovereign says:
'That's an imprejudice.'

Platov replies:
'I don't know what you're getting at, but I daren't argue and must hold my peace.'

And the Englishmen, seeing such exchanges with the sovereign, at once bring him straight to Apollo Belderear and take from his one hand a Mortimer musket and from the other a pistolia.

'Here,' they say, 'this is what our productivity is like,' and they hand him the musket.

The sovereign looked calmly at the musket, because he had one like it in Tsarskoe Selo, but then they handed him the pistolia and said:
'This is a pistolia of unknown, inimitable craftsmanship — an admiral of ours pulled it from the belt of a pirate chief in Candelabria.'

The sovereign gazed at the pistol and could not take his eyes from it.

He oh'd and ah'd something awful.

'Ah, oh, ah,' he says, 'how is it . . . how is it even possible to do such fine work!' And he turns to Platov and says in Russian: 'If I had just one such master in Russia, I'd be extremely happy and proud, and I'd make that master a nobleman at once.'

At these words, Platov instantly thrusts his right hand into his wide balloon trousers and pulls out a gunsmith's screwdriver. The Englishmen say, 'It can't be opened,' but, paying no attention, he starts poking at the lock. He turns once, turns twice — and the lock comes out. Platov indicates the trigger to the sovereign, and there, right on the curve, is a Russian inscription: 'Ivan Moskvin, town of Tula.'

The Englishmen were astonished and nudged each other.

'Oh-oh, we've slipped up!'

And the sovereign says woefully to Platov:
'Why did you embarrass them so? Now I feel sorry for them! Let's go.'

They got back into the same two-sitter and drove off, and the sovereign went to a ball that evening, but Platov downed an even bigger glass of vodka and slept a sound Cossack sleep.

He was glad that he had embarrassed the Englishmen and had put the Tula masters in the limelight, but he was also vexed: why did the sovereign feel sorry for the Englishmen in such a case!

'What made the sovereign so upset?' Platov thought. 'I just don't understand it.' And in such thoughts he got up twice, crossed himself, and drank vodka, until he made himself fall into a sound sleep.

But the Englishmen also did not sleep during that time, because they got all wound up as well. While the sovereign was making merry at the ball, they arranged such a new surprise for him that it robbed Platov of all his fantasy.

III

The next day, when Platov appeared before the sovereign with his good mornings, the latter said to him:

'Have the two-sitter hitched up at once, and we'll go to see some new collections.'

Platov even ventured to suggest that they might have had enough of looking at foreign products, and it might be better if they got ready to go back to Russia, but the sovereign said:

'No, I want to see more novelties: they've boasted to me how they make first-rate sugar.'

Off they went.

The Englishmen kept showing the sovereign the various first-rate things they had, but Platov looked and looked and suddenly said:

'Why don't you show us your molvo sugar factories?'

But the Englishmen don't even know what molvo sugar is. They exchange whispers, wink at each other, say 'Molvo, molvo' to each other, but cannot understand that this is a kind of sugar we make, and have to confess that they have all kinds of sugar, but not 'molvo'.

Platov says:

'Well, so there's nothing to boast about. Come and visit us, we'll serve you tea with real molvo sugar from the Bobrinskoj factory.'

But the sovereign pulls him by the sleeve and says softly:

'Please, don't spoil the politics on me.'

Then the Englishmen invited the sovereign to the last collection,
where they have mineral stones and nymphosoria collected from all over the world, starting from the hugest Egyptian overlisk down to the subdermal flea, which cannot be seen with the eye, but causes remorsions between skin and body.

The sovereign went.

They looked at the overlisks and all sorts of stuffed things and were on their way out, and Platov thought to himself:

'There, thank God, everything's all right; the sovereign's not marvelling at anything.'

But they had only just come to the very last room, and there stood the workmen in their jackets and aprons, holding a tray with nothing on it.

The sovereign suddenly got surprised that they were offering him an empty tray.

'What's the meaning of this?' he asks. And the English masters reply:

'This is our humble offering to Your Majesty.'

'What is it?'

'Here,' they say, 'kindly notice this little speck.'

The sovereign looked and saw that there was, in fact, the tiniest little speck lying on the silver tray.

The workmen say:

'Kindly lick your finger and place it on your palm.'

'What do I need this little speck for?'

'It is not a speck,' they reply, 'it is a nymphosoria.'

'Is it alive?'

'By no means alive,' they reply. 'It is the likeness of a flea, fashioned by us of pure English steel, and inside there is a wind-up mechanism and a spring. Kindly turn the little key: it will begin at once to do a danser.'

The sovereign became curious and asked:

'But where is the little key?'

And the Englishmen say:

'The key is here before your eyes.'

'Why, then,' says the sovereign, 'do I not see it?'

'Because,' they reply, 'for that you need a meagroscope.'

They gave him a meagroscope, and the sovereign saw that there was indeed a little key lying on the tray next to the flea.

'Kindly take it on your palm,' they say. 'It has a little winding hole in its belly. Turn the key seven times and it will start to danser . . .'

With difficulty the sovereign got hold of this little key and with difficulty pinched it between his fingers, and with the other hand he pinched the flea, and as soon as he put in the key, he felt the flea move its feelers, then its legs, and then it suddenly hopped and with one leap broke into a danser, with two veritations to one side, then to the other, and thus in three veritations it danced out a whole quadrille.

The sovereign ordered that the Englishmen be given a million at once, in whatever money they liked — silver five-kopeck coins or small banknotes.

The Englishmen asked to be paid in silver, because they had no clue about banknotes; and then at once they produced another of their ruses: they had offered the flea as a gift, but they had not brought its case; and neither the flea nor the key could be kept without the case, lest they get lost and be thrown away with the litter.

And the case for the flea was made of a solid diamond nut and had a little place hollowed out in the middle. They had not brought it, because, they said, the case belonged to the state treasury, and there were strict rules about state property, even for a sovereign — it could not be given away.

Platov was very angry, because, he said:

'What's all this skullduggery! They made a gift and got a million for it, and it's still not enough! A thing,' he said, 'always comes with its case.'

But the sovereign says:

'Leave off, please, it's not your affair — don't spoil the politics on me. They have their ways.' And he asks: 'What's the price of the nut that the flea is kept in?'

The Englishmen asked another five thousand for it.

The sovereign Alexander Pavlovich said, 'Pay it,' lowered the flea into the nut, and the key along with it, and so as not to lose the nut, he put it into his gold snuffbox, and ordered the snuffbox to be placed in his travelling chest, which was all inlaid with mutter-of-pearl and fish bone. As for the English masters, the sovereign dismissed them with honour, saying: 'You are the foremost masters in the whole world, and my people can do nothing up against you.'

They were very pleased with that, and Platov could say nothing against the sovereign's words. He only took the meagroscope, without speaking, and dropped it into his pocket, because 'it comes with it,' he said, 'and you've taken a lot of money from us as it is.'
The sovereign did not know of it until their arrival in Russia, and they left very soon, because military affairs made the sovereign melancholy, and he wanted to have a spiritual confession in Taganrog with the priest Fedot. There was very little pleasant talk between him and Platov on the way, because they were having quite different thoughts: the sovereign considered that the Englishmen had no equals in craftsmanship, while Platov argued that ours could make anything shown to them, only they lacked useful education. And he put it to the sovereign that the English masters had entirely different rules of life, learning and provisioning, and each man of them had all the absolute circumstances before him, and consequently an entirely different understanding.

The sovereign did not want to listen to that for long, and Platov, seeing as much, did not insist. So they drove on in silence, only Platov got out at every posting station and in vexation drank a glass of vodka, ate a salty pretzel, smoked his tree-root pipe, which held a whole pound of Zhukov tobacco at once,* then got back into the carriage and sat silently beside the tsar. The sovereign looked out one side, and Platov stuck his pipe out the other window and smoked into the wind. In this way they reached Petersburg, and the sovereign did not take Platov to the priest Fedot at all.

'You,' he says, 'are intemperate before spiritual conversation and smoke so much that I've got soot in my head because of it.'

Platov was left offended and lay at home on a vexatious couchment, and went on lying like that, smoking Zhukov tobacco without quittance.

IV

The astonishing flea of burnished English steel stayed in Alexander Pavlovich's chest inlaid with fish bone until he died in Taganrog, having given it to the priest Fedot, to be given later to the empress when she calmed down. The empress Elisaveta Alexeevna looked at the flea's veritations and smiled, but did not become interested in it.

The 'priest Fedot' has not blown in on the wind: before his death in Taganrog, the emperor Alexander Pavlovich confessed to the priest Alexei Fedotov-Chchukovsky, who afterwards was referred to as 'His Majesty's Confessor' and liked to remind everyone of this completely accidental circumstance. This Fedotov-Chchukovsky is obviously the legendary 'priest Fedot.' Author.

My business now,' she says, 'is to be a widow, and no amusement holds any seduction for me'—and, on returning to Petersburg, she handed over this wonder, with all the other valuables, to the new sovereign as an heirloom.

The emperor Nikolai Pavlovich also paid no attention to the flea at first, because there were disturbances at his ascension,* but later one day he began to go through the chest left him by his brother and took out the snuffbox, and from the snuffbox the diamond nut, and in it he found the steel flea, which had not been wound up for a long time and therefore did not work, but lay quietly, as if gone stiff.

The sovereign looked and wondered.

'What's this gewgaw, and why did my brother keep it here so carefully?'

The courtiers wanted to throw it out, but the sovereign says:

'No, it means something.'

They invited a chemist from the opposing pharmacy by the Anichkov Bridge, who weighed out poisons in very small scales, and showed it to him, and he took it, put it on his tongue, and said: 'I feel a chill, as from hard metal.' Then he nipped it slightly with his teeth and announced:

'Think what you like, but this is not a real flea, it's a nymphosoria, and it's made of metal, and it's not our Russian workmanship.'

The sovereign gave orders at once to find out where it came from and what it meant,

They rushed and looked at the files and lists, but there was nothing written down in the files. Then they began asking around—nobody knew anything. But, fortunately, the Don Cossack Platov was still alive and was even still lying on his vexatious couchment smoking his pipe. When he heard that there was such a stir in the palace, he got up from his couchment at once, abandoned his pipe and appeared before the sovereign in all his medals. The sovereign says:

'What do you need of me, courageous old fellow?'

And Platov replies:

'Myself, Your Majesty, I need nothing from you, because I eat and drink what I like and am well pleased with it all, but,' he says, 'I've come to report about this nymphosoria that's been found: it happened thus and so, and it took place before my eyes in England—and there's a little key here, and I've got a meagroscope you can see it through, and you can wind up the nymphosoria's belly with the key,
and it will leap through any space you like and do verifications to the
sides.'

They wound it up, and it started leaping, but Platov said:

'This,' he said, 'is indeed a very fine and interesting piece of work,
Your Majesty, only we shouldn't get astonished at it with rapturous
feeling only, but should subject it to Russian inspection in Tula or
Sesterbeck' - Sestoretsk was still called Sesterbeck then - 'to see
whether our masters can surpass it, so that the Englishmen won't go
putting themselves above the Russians.'

The sovereign Nikolai Pavlovich was very confident in his Rus­
sian people and did not like yielding to any foreigners, and so he
answered Platov:

'You've put it well, courageous old fellow, and
I charge you with
seeing to this matter. With my present troubles,
I don't need this
little box anyway, so take it with you,
and don't lie on your vexatious
couchment any more, but go to the quiet Don and start up an inter­
neicene conversation with my Cossacks there concerning their life
and loyalty and likings. And when you pass through Tula, show this
nymposoria to my Tula masters and let them think about it. Tell
them from me that my brother marvelled at this thing and praised
the foreign people who made this nymphosoria more than all, but
that I'm relying on our people, that they're no worse than any others.
They won't let my word drop and will do something.'

Platov took the steel flea and, on his way through Tula to the Don,
showed it to the Tula gunsmiths, passed on the sovereign's word to
them, and then asked:

'What are we to do now, my fellow Orthodox?'

The gunsmiths replied:

'We are sensible of the sovereign's gracious words, good sir, and
can never forget that he relies on his people, but what we are to do
in the present case we cannot say this minute, because the English
nation is also not stupid, but even rather clever, and there is a lot of
sense in their craftsmanship. To vie with them,' they said, 'calls for
reflection and God's blessing. But you, if Your Honour trusts in us
as the sovereign does, go on your way to the quiet Don, and leave us
this flea as it is, in its case and in the tsar's golden snuffbox. Have a
good time on the Don, let the wounds heal that you received for the
fatherland, and on your way back through Tula, stop and send for us:
by that time, God willing, we'll have come up with something.'

Platov was not entirely pleased that the Tula masters were asking
for so much time and yet did not say clearly just what they hoped to
bring off. He questioned them this way and that, and talked in all
the manners of a wily Don Cossack, but the Tula men were no less
wily than he, because they at once hit on such a scheme that there
was even no hope of Platov's believing them, and they wanted to
carry out their bold fancy directly, and then give the flea back.

They said:

'We ourselves don't know yet what we're going to make, we'll
just trust in God, and maybe the tsar's word won't be disgraced
account of us.'

So Platov dodged mentally and the Tula men did likewise:

Platov dodged and dodged, then saw that he could not out-dodge
the Tula men, gave them the snuffbox with the nymphosoria, and
said:

'Well, no help for it, go on,' he said, 'have it your way; I know
how you are; well, anyhow, no help for it - I trust you, only see
that you don't go replacing the diamond, and don't spoil the fine
English workmanship, and don't fuss too long, because I travel fast:
before two weeks are up, I'll be on my way back from the quiet Don
to Petersburg - and then I'll have to have something to show the
sovereign.'

The gunsmiths fully reassured him:

'We will not spoil the fine workmanship,' they said, 'and we will
not replace the diamond, and two weeks are enough for us, and by
the time you go back, you'll have something to present worthy of the
sovereign's magnificence.'

But precisely what, they still did not say.

VI

Platov left Tula, and three of the gunsmiths, the most skilful of them,
one of them cross-eyed, left-handed, with a birthmark on his cheek
and the hair on his temples pulled out during his apprenticeship, bid
farewell to their comrades and families, and, saying nothing to anyone, took their bags, put into them what eatables they needed, and disappeared from town.

The only thing people noticed was that they did not go out by the Moscow Gate, but in the opposite direction, towards Kiev, and it was thought that they were going to Kiev to venerate the saints resting there or to consult some of the living holy men, who are always to be found in Kiev in abundance.

But that was only a near truth, not the truth itself. Neither time nor space would allow the Tula masters to spend three weeks walking to Kiev, and then also manage to do work that would cover the English nation with shame. They might better have gone to pray in Moscow, which was only ‘twice sixty’ miles away, and where there were not a few saints resting as well. While to Orel, in the opposite direction, it was the same ‘twice sixty’, and from Orel to Kiev a good three hundred miles more. Such a journey cannot be made quickly, and once it is made, one is not soon rested – the feet will be swollen and the hands will go on shaking for a long time.

Some even thought that the masters had boasted before Platov, and then, thinking better of it, had turned coward, and had now fled for good, carrying off the tsar’s golden snuffbox, and the diamond, and, in its case, the English steel flea that had caused them so much trouble.

However, this conjecture was also totally unfounded and unworthy of such skilful people, in whom the hope of our nation now rested.

VII

The Tula men, intelligent and experienced in metalwork, are equally well known as foremost connoisseurs in religion. Their native land is filled with their glory in this regard, and it has even reached holy Athos; they are not only masters of singing with flourishes, but they know how to paint out the picture of ‘Evening Bells’, and once one of them devotes himself to greater service and becomes a monk, such a one is reputed to make the best monastery treasurer and most successful collector of money. On holy Athos they know that Tula men are the most profitable people, and if it weren’t for them, the dark corners of Russia would probably never have seen a great many holy relics from the distant East, and Athos would have been deprived of many useful offerings from Russian generosity and piety. Nowadays the ‘Tula-born Athonites’ carry holy relics all over our native land and masterfully collect money even where there’s none to be had. A Tula man is filled with churchly piety and is a great practitioner in these matters, and therefore the three masters who undertook to uphold Platov, and the whole of Russia along with him, made no mistake in heading, not for Moscow, but for the south. They didn’t go to Kiev at all, but to Mtsensk, the district capital of Orel province, where the ancient ‘stone-hewn’ icon of St Nicholas is kept, which came floating there in the most ancient times on a big cross, also of stone, down the river Zusha. The icon has a ‘dread and most fearsome’ look – the bishop of Myra in Lyceia is portrayed ‘full-length’, all dressed in gilded silver vestments; his face is dark, and in one hand he holds a church and in the other a sword – ‘for military conquest’. This ‘conquest’ was the meaning of the whole thing: St Nicholas is generally the patron of mercantile and military affairs, and the ‘Nicholas of Mtsensk’ is particularly so, and it was him that the Tula men went to venerate. They held a prayer service before the icon itself, then before the stone cross, and finally returned home by night and, telling nobody anything, went about their business in terrible secrecy. All three of them came together in Lefty’s house, locked the door, closed the shutters, lit the lamp in front of the icon of St Nicholas and set to work.

One day, two days, three days they sat and went nowhere, tapping away with their little hammers. They were forging something, but of what they were forging – nothing was known.

Everybody was curious, but nobody could learn anything, because the workmen didn’t say anything and never showed themselves outside. Various people went up to the house, knocked at the door under various pretexts, to ask for a light or for salt, but the three artisans did not open to any demand, and nobody even knew what they fed on. People tried to frighten them, saying that the neighbours’ house was on fire, to see if they would get scared and come running out, and whatever they had forged there would be revealed, but nothing worked with these clever masters. Only once Lefty stuck his head out and shouted:

‘Burn yourselves up, we have no time,’ and pulled his plucked head in again, slammed the shutter and they went back to business.
Through small chinks you could only see that lights were shining in the house and you could hear fine little hammers ringing on anvils.

In short, the whole affair was conducted in such terrible secrecy that it was impossible to find anything out, and it went on like that right up to the Cossack Platov’s return from the quiet Don to the sovereign, and in all that time the masters neither saw nor talked to anyone.

VIII

Platov travelled in great haste and with ceremony: himself in the carriage, and on the box two Cossack odorlies with whips sitting on either side of the driver and showering him mercilessly with blows to keep him galloping. And if one of the Cossacks dozed off, Platov poked him with his foot from the carriage, and they would race on even more wickedly. These measures of inducement succeeded so well that the horses could not be reined in at the stations and always overran the stopping place by a hundred lengths. Then the Cossacks would apply the reverse treatment to the driver, and they would come back to the entrance.

And so they came rolling into Tula— at first they also flew past the Moscow Gate by a hundred lengths, then the Cossacks applied their whips to the driver in the reverse sense, and they started racing up new horses by the porch. Platov did not leave the carriage, and only told an odorly to bring him the masters with whom he had left the flea as quickly as possible.

Off ran one odorly, to tell them to come as quickly as possible and bring the work with them that was to shame the English, and that odorly had not yet run very far, when Platov sent more behind him one after the other, to make it as quick as possible.

He sent all the odorlies racing off and had already started sending simple people from the curious public, and was even impatiently sticking his own legs out of the carriage and in his impatience was about to run off himself, and kept gnashing his teeth— so slow it all seemed to him.

Because at that time it was required that everything be done with great punctuality and speed, so that not a minute would be lost for Russian usefulness.

IX

The Tula masters, who were doing their astonishing deed, were just then finishing their work. The odorlies came running to them out of breath, and as for the simple people from the curious public— they did not reach them at all, because, being unaccustomed, their legs gave out on the way and they collapsed, and then, for fear of facing Platov, they hied themselves home and hid wherever they could.

The odorlies came running, called out at once, and, seeing that they did not open, at once unceremoniously tore at the bolts of the shutters, but the bolts were so strong that they did not yield in the least; they pulled at the door, but the door was held shut from inside by an oaken bar. Then the odorlies took a log from the street, placed it fireman-fashion under the eaves of the roof, and ripped off the whole roof of the little house at once. But on taking off the roof, they themselves collapsed at once, because the air in the cramped little chamber where the masters had been working without respite had turned into such a sweaty stuffage that for an unaccustomed man, fresh from outdoors, it was impossible to take a single breath.

The envoys shouted:

'What are you blankety-blank scum doing, hitting us with such stuffage! There's no God in you after that!'

And they replied:

'We're just now hammering in the last little nail and, once we're done, we'll bring our work out to you.'

And the envoys say:

'He'll eat us alive before that and won't leave enough to pray over.'

But the masters reply:

'He won't have time to swallow you, because while you were talking, we hammered that last nail in. Run and tell him we're bringing it.'

The odorlies ran, but not confidently: they thought the masters would trick them, and therefore they ran and ran and then looked back; but the masters came walking behind them, and so hurriedly
that they were not even fully dressed as was proper for appearing before an important person and were fastening the hooks of their kaftans as they went. Two of them had nothing in their hands, and the third, Lefty, was carrying under a green cover the tsar's chest with the English steel flea.

The odorlies came running to Platov and said:

'Here they are!'

Platov says at once to the masters:

'Is it ready?'

'Everything's ready,' they say.

'Give it here.'

They gave it to him.

And the carriage was already hitched up, and the driver and postillion were in place. The Cossacks were right there beside the driver and had their whips raised over him and held them brandished like that.

Platov tore off the cover, opened the chest, unwrapped the cotton wool, took the diamond nut out of the snuffbox and looked: the English flea was lying there as before, and there was nothing else besides.

Platov says:

'What is this? Where is your work, with which you wanted to hearten our sovereign?'

The gunsmiths reply:

'Our work is here, too.'

Platov asks:

'What does it consist in?'

And the gunsmiths reply:

'Why explain? It's all there in front of you — see for yourself.'

Platov heaved his shoulders and shouted:

'Where's the key for the flea?'

'Right there,' they reply. 'Where the flea is, the key is — in the same nut.'

Platov wanted to pick up the key, but his fingers were clubbsy; he tried and tried, but could not get hold either of the flea or of the key to its belly-winding, and suddenly he became angry and began to abuse them Cossack-fashion.

He shouted:

'So, you scoundrels, you did nothing, and you've probably ruined the whole thing besides! Your heads will roll!'

The Tula masters replied:

'You needn't abuse us like that. You being the sovereign's emissary, we must suffer all your offences, but because you have doubted us and thought that we're even likely to let down the sovereign's name, we will not tell you the secret of our work, but kindly take it to the sovereign — he'll see what sort of people he has in us and whether he should be ashamed of us or not.'

But Platov shouted:

'Ah, you're talking through your hats, you scoundrels! I won't part with you just like that. One of you is going to ride with me to Petersburg, and there I'll find out just how clever you are.'

And with that, he seized cross-eyed Lefty by the scruff of the neck with his clubbsy fingers, so hard that all the hooks of his jacket flew off, and threw him into the carriage at his feet.

'Sit there like a pooble-dog all the way to Petersburg,' he says.

'You'll answer for all of them. And you,' he says to the odorlies, 'get a move on! And look sharp. I have to be in Petersburg at the sovereign's the day after tomorrow.'

The masters only ventured to say to him about their comrade,

'How is it you're taking him away without any dokyment? He won't be able to come back!'

Instead of an answer, Platov showed them his fist — terrible, burple, scarred all over and healed any old way — shook it at them, and said: 'Here's your dokyment!' And to the Cossacks, he said:

'Get a move on, boys!'

The Cossacks, the driver and the horses all began working at once, and they carried Lefty off without any dokyment, and in two days, as Platov had ordered, they drove up to the sovereign's palace and, going at a good clip, even rode past the columns.

Platov stood up, pinned on his decorations and went to the sovereign, and told the Cossack odorlies to guard cross-eyed Lefty by the entrance.
XI

Platov was afraid to show his face to the sovereign, because Nikolai Pavlovich was terribly remarkable and memorable - he never forgot anything. Platov knew that he would certainly ask him about the flea. And so he, who had never feared any enemy in the world, now turned coward: he went into the palace with the little chest and quietly put it behind the stove in the reception room. Having hidden the chest, he presented himself before the sovereign in his office and hastily began to report to him what the internecine conversation was among the Cossacks on the quiet Don. He thought like this: that he would occupy the sovereign with that, and then, if the sovereign himself remembered and began to speak of the flea, he would have to give it to him and answer, but if he didn't begin to speak, he would keep silent; he would tell the office valet to hide the chest and put Lefty in a cell in the fortress with no set term and keep him there until he might be needed.

But the sovereign, Nikolai Pavlovich, never forgot anything, and as soon as Platov finished about the internecine conversation, he asked at once:

'And so, how have my Tula masters acquitted themselves against the English nymphosoria?'

Platov replied in keeping with the way the matter seemed to him.

'The nymphosoria, Your Majesty,' he said, 'is still in the same place, and I've brought it back, and the Tula masters were unable to do anything more astonishing.'

The sovereign replied:

'You're a courageous old fellow, but what you report to me cannot be so.'

Platov started assuring him, and told him how the whole thing had gone, and when he reached the point where the Tula masters had asked him to show the flea to the sovereign, Nikolai Pavlovich slapped him on the shoulder and said:

'Bring it here. I know that my own can't let me down. Something supramental has been done here.'

XII

They brought the chest from behind the stove, took off the flannel cover, opened the golden snuffbox and the diamond nut - and in it lies the flea, just as it was and as it lay before.

The sovereign looked and said:

'What the deuce!' But his faith in his Russian masters was undiminished, and he sent for his beloved daughter, Alexandra Nikolaevna, and told her:

'You have slender fingers - take the little key and quickly wind up the mechanism in the nymphosoria's belly.'

The princess started turning the key, and the flea at once moved its feelers, but not its legs. Alexandra Nikolaevna wound it all the way up, but the nymphosoria still did no danse nor any veritations, as it had before.

Platov turned all green and shouted:

'Ah, those doggy rogues! Now I understand why they didn't want to tell me anything there. It's a good thing I took one of those fools along with me.'

With those words, he ran out to the front steps, seized Lefty by the hair, and began yanking him this way and that so hard that whole clumps went flying. But once Platov stopped thrashing him, the man put himself to rights and said:

'I had all my hair torn out as an apprentice. What's the need of performing such a repetition on me?'

'It's this,' said Platov, 'that I trusted you and vouched for you, and you ruined a rare thing.'

Lefty said:

'We're much pleased that you vouched for us, and as for ruining anything, that we haven't done: take and look at it through the most powerful meagroscope.'

Platov ran back to tell about the meagroscope, and only threatened Lefty:

'You so-and-such-and-so,' he said, 'you're still going to get it from me.'

And he told the odorlies to pull Lefty's elbow still tighter behind his back, while he himself went up the steps out of breath and recit-
ing a prayer: ‘Blessed Mother of the blessed King, pure and most pure . . .’ and so on, in good fashion. And the courtiers standing on the steps all turned away from him, thinking: ‘That’s it for Platov, now he’ll be thrown out of the palace’ – because they couldn’t stand him on account of his bravery.

XIII

When Platov brought Lefty’s words to the sovereign, he at once said joyfully:

‘I know my Russian people won’t let me down.’ And he ordered a meagroscope brought on a cushion.

The meagroscope was brought instantly, and the sovereign took the flea and put it under the glass, first back up, then side up, then belly up – in short, they turned it all ways, but there was nothing to be seen. But the sovereign did not lose his faith here either, and only said:

‘Bring the gunsmith who is downstairs here to me at once.’

Platov reported:

‘He ought to be smartened up a bit – he’s wearing what he was taken in, and he looks pretty vile now.’

The sovereign says:

‘Never mind – bring him as he is.’

Platov says:

‘Now come yourself, you such-and-such, and answer before the eyes of the sovereign.’

And Lefty replies:

‘Well, so I’ll go as I am and answer.’

He went wearing what he had on: some sort of boots, one trouser leg tucked in, the other hanging out, and his coat is old, the hooks all gone and the collar torn off, but – never mind – he’s not embarrassed.

‘What of it?’ he thinks. ‘If it pleases the sovereign to see me, I must go; and if I have no dokyment, it’s not my fault, and I’ll tell how it happened.’

When Lefty entered and bowed, the sovereign said to him at once:

“What does it mean, brother, that we’ve looked at it this way and that, and put it under the meagroscope, and haven’t found anything remarkable?’

And Lefty says:

‘Was Your Majesty so good as to look in the right way?’

The courtiers wag their heads at him, as if to say ‘That’s no way to speak!’ but he doesn’t understand how it’s done at court, with flattery and cunning, but speaks simply.

The sovereign says:

‘Don’t complicate things for him – let him answer as he can.’

And he clarified at once:

‘We,’ he says, ‘put it this way: And he put the flea under the meagroscope. Look for yourself,’ he says, ‘there’s nothing to see.’

Lefty replies:

‘That way, Your Majesty, it’s impossible to see anything, because on that scale our work is quite hidden.’

The sovereign asked:

‘How should we look?’

‘Only one leg should be put under the meagroscope,’ he said, ‘and each foot it walks on should be examined separately.’

‘Mercy,’ says the sovereign, ‘that’s mighty small indeed!’

‘No help for it,’ Lefty replies, ‘since that’s the only way our work can be seen: and then the whole astonishment will show itself.’

They put it the way Lefty said, and as soon as the sovereign looked through the upper glass, he beamed all over, took Lefty just as he was – dishevelled, covered with dust, unwashed – embraced and kissed him, then turned to his courtiers and said:

‘You see, I know better than anyone that my Russians won’t let me down. Look, if you please: the rogues have shod the English flea in little horseshoes!’

XIV

They all went up to look: the flea was indeed shod on each foot with real little horseshoes, but Lefty said that that was still not the most astonishing thing.

‘If,’ he said, ‘there was a better meagroscope, one that magnifies five million times, then,’ he said, ‘you’d see that each shoe has a master’s name on it – of which Russian master made that shoe.’

‘And is your name there?’ asked the sovereign.

‘By no means,’ Lefty replied, ‘mine is the only one that’s not.’
'Why so?'
'Because,' he says, 'I worked on something smaller than these shoes: I fashioned the nails that hold the shoes on. No meagroscope can see that.'

The sovereign asked:
'Where did you get a meagroscope with which you could produce this astonishment?'

And Lefty replied:
'We're poor people and from poverty we don't own a meagroscope, but we've got well-aimed eyes.'

Here the other courtiers, seeing that Lefty's case had come off well, began to kiss him, and Platov gave him a hundred roubles and said:
'Forgive me, brother, for yanking your hair.'

Lefty replies:
'God forgives - it's not the first time my head's caught it.'

And he said no more, nor did he have time to talk to anyone, because the sovereign ordered at once that the shod nymphosoria be packed up and sent back to England - as a sort of present, so that they would understand there that for us this was nothing astonishing. And the sovereign ordered that the flea be carried by a special courier, who had learned all the languages, and that Lefty go with him, so that he himself could show the English his work and what good masters we have in Tula.

Platov made the sign of the cross over him.
'May a blessing be upon you,' he said, 'and I'll send you some of my vodka for the road. Don't drink too little, don't drink too much, drink middlingly.'

And so he did - he sent it.

And Count Nestlebroad ordered that Lefty be washed in the Tulyakovsky public baths, have his hair cut at a barber shop, and be put in the dress kaftan of a court choirboy, so that it would look as if he had some sort of rank.

Once he was shaped up in this fashion, they gave him some tea with Platov's vodka, drew in his belt as tightly as possible, so that his innards wouldn't get shaken up, and took him to London. From then on with Lefty it was all foreign sights.

The courier and Lefty drove very fast, and did not stop to rest anywhere between Petersburg and London, but only tightened their belts a notch at each station, so that their lungs would not get tangled with their innards; but since Lefty, after his presentation to the sovereign, on Platov's orders, had received a plentiful supply of drink from the treasury, he did not eat, but got by on that alone, and sang Russian songs all across Europe, only adding the foreign refrain: 'Ai liu-lee, say tray zhulie.'

As soon as he brought him to London, the courier made his appearance to the right people and handed them the chest, and Lefty he installed in a hotel room, but it quickly became boring for him there, and he wanted to eat. He knocked on the door and pointed at his mouth to the attendant, and the attendant led him at once to the food-taking room.

Lefty seated himself at the table and sat there, but how to ask for something in English - that he did not know. But then he figured it out: again he simply tapped the table with his finger and pointed at his mouth - the Englishmen caught on and served him, not always what he wanted, but he did not take what did not suit him. They served him a hot inflamed puddling the way they make it - he said, 'I don't know that such a thing can be eaten,' and refused it; they changed it and set something else before him. He also did not drink their vodka, because it was green, as if mixed with vitriol, but chose what looked most natural, and awaited the courier in the cool over a nice noggin.

But the persons to whom the courier delivered the nymphosoria examined it that same minute under the most powerful of meagrosopes and sent the description at once to the Publice Gazette, so that the very next day a fooliton for general information came out.

'As for that same master,' they said, 'we want to see him at once.'

The courier brought them to the hotel room, and from there to the food-taking room, where our Lefty was already properly flushed, and said: 'Here he is!'

The Englishmen at once gave Lefty a pat-pat on the back and shook hands with him as an equal. 'Cumrade,' they said, 'cumrade -
good master—we'll talk with you in due time, and now we'll drink your health.'

They ordered many drinks, and offered Lefty the first glass, but he politely refused to drink first. He thought, 'Maybe you want to poison me out of envy.'

'No,' he says, 'that's not proper—guest is not above host—have a go yourselves first.'

The Englishmen tried all the drinks before him and then started pouring for him. He stood up, crossed himself with his left hand and drank the health of them all.

They noticed that he had crossed himself with his left hand, and asked the courier:

'What is he—a Lutheranian or a Protestantist?'

The courier replied:

'No, he's no Lutheranian or Protestantist, he's of Russian faith.'

'Why then does he cross himself with his left hand?'

The courier said:

'He's a lefty and does everything with his left hand.'

The Englishmen were still more astonished and began pumping both Lefty and the courier full of drink, and it went on like that for a whole three days, and then they said: 'Enough now.' They drank fuzzy water from a symphon and, quite freshened up, began questioning Lefty: where had he studied and how much arithmetic did he know?

Lefty replied:

'Our science is simple: the Psalter and the Dream Book, and as for arithmetic, we don't know any.'

The Englishmen exchanged glances and said:

'That's astonishing.'

And Lefty replies:

'With us it's that way everywhere.'

'And what,' they ask, 'is this "Dream Book" in Russia?'

'That,' he says, 'is a book which, if you're looking for some fortune-telling in the Psalter and King David doesn't reveal it clearly, then in the Dream Book you get souplemental divinations.'

They say:

'That's a pity. It would be better if you knew at least the four rules of addition in arithmetic—that would be much more useful to you than the whole Dream Book. Then you might have realised that for every mechanism there is a calculation of force, while you, though you have very skilful hands, did not realise that such a small mechanism as this nymphosoria is calculated with the finest precision and cannot carry these horseshoes. That's why it no longer leaps or does a danser.'

Lefty agreed.

'There's no disputing,' he said, 'that we haven't gone far in learning, but, then, we're faithfully devoted to our fatherland.'

And the Englishmen say to him:

'Stay with us, we'll give you a grand education, and you'll come out an astonishing master.'

But Lefty did not agree to that.

'I've got parents at home,' he said.

The Englishmen offered to send money to his parents, but Lefty did not accept.

'I'm attached to my native land,' he says, 'and my father's already an old man, and my mother's an old woman, they're used to going to their parish church, and I'll be very bored here alone, because I'm still of the bachelor's estate.'

'You'll get used to it here,' they say, 'Change your religion, and we'll get you married.'

'That,' said Lefty, 'can never be.'

'Why so?'

'Because,' he says, 'our Russian faith is the most correct one, and as our ancestors believed, so the descendants should believe.'

'You don't know our faith,' say the Englishmen. 'We're of the same Christian religion and adhere to the same Gospel.'

'The Gospel,' says Lefty, 'is indeed the same for all, only our books are thicker next to yours, and our faith has more in it.'

'What makes you think so?'

'About that,' he says, 'we have all the obvious proofs.'

'Such as?'

'Such as,' he says, 'that we have God-working icons and tomb-exuding heads and relics, and you have nothing, and, except for Sunday, you don't even have any extraneous feast days, and for another reason—though we might be married legally, it would be embarrassing for me to live with an Englishwoman.'

'How come?' they ask. 'Don't scorn them: our women also dress neatly and make good housewives.'

And Lefty says:

'I don't know them.'
The Englishmen reply:
'That doesn't matter. You can get to know them: we'll arrange a rendezvous for you.'

Lefty became abashed.
'Why addle girls' heads for nothing?' he says. And he declined. 'A rendezvous is for gentlefolk, it's not fitting for us, and if they find out back home in Tula, they'll make a great laughingstock of me.'

The Englishmen became curious:
'And if it's without a rendezvous,' they said, 'what do you do in such cases, so as to make an agreeable choice?'

Lefty explained our situation to them.
'With us,' he says, 'when a man wants to display thoroughgoing intentions regarding a girl, he sends a talker woman, and once she makes a preposition, they politely go to the house together and look the girl over, not in secret, but with all the familiarity.'

They understood, but replied that with them there were no talker women and no such custom, and Lefty said:
'That's even better, because if you take up such business, it must be with thoroughgoing intentions, and since I feel none at all towards a foreign nation, why addle girls' heads?'

He pleased the Englishmen with these reasonings of his, and they again set about patting him pleasantly on the shoulders and knees, and then asked:
'We'd like to know just one thing out of curiosity: what reproachable qualities have you noticed in our girls and why are you avoiding them?'

Here Lefty replied quite openly:
'I don't reproach them, and the only thing I don't like is that the clothes on them somehow flutter, and you can't figure out what it is they're wearing and out of what necessity; first there's some one thing, then something else pinned on below, and some sort of socks on their arms. Just like a sapajou ape in a velveteen cape.'

The Englishmen laughed and said:
'What obstacle is that to you?'
'Obstacle,' replied Lefty, 'it's not. Only I'm afraid I'd be ashamed to watch and wait for her to get herself out of it all.'

'Can it be,' they said, 'that your fashion is better?'
'Our fashion in Tula,' he replies, 'is simple: each girl wears her own lace, and even grand ladies wear our lace.'

They also showed him to their ladies, and there they served him tea and asked:
'Why do you wince?'

He replied that we are not used to it so sweet.

Then they gave him a lump of sugar to suck Russian-style.

It seemed to them that it would be worse that way, but he said:
'To our taste it's tastier.'

There was nothing the Englishmen could do to throw him off, so as to tempt him by their life, and they only persuaded him to stay for a short time, during which they would take him to various factories and show him all their art.

'And then,' they say, 'we'll put you on our ship and deliver you alive to Petersburg.'

To that he agreed.

XVI

The Englishmen took charge of Lefty and sent the Russian courier back to Russia. Though the courier was a man of rank and knew various languages, they were not interested in him, but in Lefty they were interested - and they started taking him around and showing him everything. He looked at all their industries - metalworking shops and soap-rope factories - and liked all their arrangements very much, especially with regard to the workers' keeping. Each of their workers ate his fill, was dressed not in rags, but in his own good jacket, and was shod in thick boots with iron hobnails, so that his feet would never run up against anything; he worked, not under the lash, but with training and with his own understanding. In plain view before each of them hung the multiplcation table, and under his hand was a rub-out board: whatever a master does, he looks at the multiplication table and checks it with his understanding, and then writes one thing on the board, rubs out another and brings it to precision: whatever's written in the numbers is what turns out in reality. And when a holiday comes, they get together in pairs, take their sticks, and go promenading nobly and decorously, as is proper.

Lefty took a good look at their whole life and all their work, but he paid most attention to something that greatly astonished the
Englishmen. He was interested not so much in how new guns were made as in the way the old ones were kept. He goes around and praises it all, and says:

'We can do that, too.'

But when he comes to an old gun, he puts his finger into the barrel, moves it around inside, and sighs:

'That,' he says, 'is far superior to ours.'

The Englishmen simply couldn't figure out what Lefty had noticed, and then he asks:

'Might I know whether our generals ever looked at that or not?'

They say:

'Those who were here must have looked at it.'

'And how were they,' he asks, 'in gloves or without gloves?'

'Your generals,' they say, 'wear dress uniforms, they always go about in gloves, meaning here as well.'

Lefty said nothing. But he suddenly felt a restless longing. He languished and languished and said to the Englishmen:

'I humbly thank you for all your treats, and I'm very pleased with everything here, and I've already seen everything I had to see, and now I'd like to go home quickly.'

There was no way they could keep him any longer.

It was impossible for him to go by land, because he didn't speak any languages, and to go by sea was not so good, because it was autumn and stormy, but he insisted that they let him go.

'We looked at the blowrometer,' they say. 'A storm's blowing up, you may drown; it's not like your Gulf of Finland, it's the real Firmaterranean Sea.'

'That makes no difference,' he replies. 'Where you die is all the same, it's God's will, and I want to get back to my native land soon, because otherwise I may fetch myself some kind of insanity.'

They didn't force him to stay: they fed him up, rewarded him with money, gave him a gold watch with a rebeater as a souvenir, and for the sea's coolness on his late-autumn journey they gave him a woollen coat with a windbreaking hood. They dressed Lefty very warmly and took him to a ship that was going to Russia. There they accommodated him in the best way, like a real squire, but he didn't like sitting with other gentlemen in a closed space and felt abashed, so he would go up on deck, sit under a tarpoling, and ask: 'Where is our Russia?'

The Englishman whom he asked would point his hand in that direction or nod his head, and Lefty would turn his face and look impatiently towards his native shore.

Once they left harbor for the Firmaterranean Sea, his longing for Russia became so strong that there was no way to calm him. There was a terrible downflood, but Lefty still would not go below to his room - he sits under the tarpoling, his hood pulled over his head, and looks towards his fatherland.

The Englishmen came many times to call him to the warm place below, but he even began to snap at them, so as not to be bothered. 'No,' he replies, 'it's better for me here outside; under the roof I may get seaccups from the fluctuations.'

And so he never went below in all that time until one special occasion, through a certain bos'man who liked him very much and who, to our Lefty's misfortune, could speak Russian. This bos'man could not help admiring that a Russian landlubber could endure such foul weather.

'Fine fellow, Rus!' he says. 'Let's drink!'

Lefty drank.

The bos'man says:

'Another!'

Lefty drank another, and they got drunk.

Then the bos'man asks him:

'What's the secret you're taking from our state to Russia?'

Lefty replies:

'That's my business.'

'In that case,' replied the bos'man, 'let's make an English bet between us.'

Lefty asks:

'What sort?'

'This sort: that we don't drink anything on our lonesome, but everything equally; whatever the one drinks, the other's got to drink, too, and whichever out-drinks the other is the winner.'

Lefty thought: 'The sky's cloudy, my belly's rowdy - the trip's a big bore, it's a long way to shore, and my native land can't be seen beyond the waves - anyhow to make a bet will cheer things up.'

'All right,' he says, 'you're on!'

'Only keep it honest.'

'Don't you worry about that,' he says.

So they agreed and shook hands.
They made the bet while still in the Firmaterranean Sea, and they drank till Dünamünde near Riga, but they kept even and did not yield to each other, and were so perfectly matched that when one looked into the sea and saw a devil emerging from the water, the same thing at once appeared to the other. Only the bos’man saw a red-haired devil, while Lefty said he was dark as a Moor.

Lefty says:
‘Cross yourself and turn away – it’s the devil from the watery deep.’

And the Englishman argues that ‘it’s a deep-sea driver’.
‘Do you want me to toss you into the sea?’ he says. ‘Don’t be afraid – he’ll give you back to me at once.’

And Lefty replies:
‘In that case, toss me in.’

The bos’man took him on his back and carried him to the bulwars. The sailors saw it, stopped them and reported to the captain, and he ordered them both locked up below and given rum and wine and some cold food, so that they could eat and drink and go on with their bet – but they were not to be given hot inflamed pudding, because the alcohol might cause combustion inside them.

And so they were brought to Petersburg locked up, and neither of them won the bet between them; and there they were laid in different carriages, and the Englishman was taken to the embassy on the English Embankment, while Lefty was taken to the police station.

From then on their fates began to differ greatly.

As soon as the Englishman was brought to the embassy, a doctor and an apothecary were called for him. The doctor ordered him put into a warm bath, in his presence, and the apothecary at once rolled a gutta-percha pill and stuck it into his mouth himself, and then they both took him and laid him on a feather bed, covered him with a fur coat and left him there to sweat, and, so that he wouldn’t be disturbed, the order was given to the whole embassy that no one should dare to sneeze. The doctor and the apothecary waited until the bos’man fell asleep, and then prepared another gutta-percha pill for him, put it on his bedside table and left.

But Lefty was dumped on the floor of the police station and asked:
‘Who are you and where from and do you have a passport or any other dokyment?’

But he was so weakened by illness, drinking and the prolonged fluctuations that he didn’t answer a word, but only groaned.

Then he was searched at once, his nice clothes were taken off him, the money and the watch with the rebeater were confiscated, and the police chief ordered him dispatched to the hospital for free in the first cab that came along.

A policeman took Lefty out, intending to put him in a sleigh, because they avoid the police. And all that while Lefty lay on the cold gobbles, and then, when the policeman did catch a cabby, he had no warm fox fur, because on such occasions cabbies hide the warm fox fur under them, so that the policemen will get their feet frozen quickly. They transported Lefty uncovered, and, when changing cabs, they also dropped him each time, and when they picked him up, they pulled his ears so that he would come to his senses. They brought him to one hospital – he could not be admitted without a dokyment; they brought him to another – he was not admitted there either; and the same for the third, and the fourth – they dragged him around the remote by-lanes till morning, and kept changing cabs, so that he got all battered up.

Then one doctor told the policeman to take him to the Obukhovsky Charity Hospital, where people of unknown estate were all brought to die.

There he asked for a receipt, and Lefty was left sitting on the floor in the corridor until things were sorted out.

And meanwhile the English bos’man got up the next day, swallowed the other gutta-percha pill, had a light breakfast of chicken and rice, washed it down with fuzzy water, and said:
‘Where’s my Russian cumrade? I’ll go and look for him.’

He got dressed and ran off.
Astonishingly enough, the bos'man somehow found Lefty very quickly, only he was still not lying in bed, but on the floor of the corridor, and he complained to the Englishman.

'There's a couple of words,' he says, 'that I absolutely must say to the sovereign.'

The Englishman ran to Count Kleinmichel and raised a ruckus.

'This is not possible! It's a sheep's hide,' he says, 'but there's a man's soul inside.'

For such reasoning the Englishman was thrown out at once, so that he wouldn't dare mention man's soul. And then someone said to him, 'You'd better go to the Cossack Platov — he has simple feelings.'

The Englishman got to Platov, who was now lying on his couch again. Platov heard him out and remembered Lefty.

'Why, of course, brother,' he says, 'I'm a close acquaintance of his, even pulled his hair once, only I don't know how to help him in this unfortunate case, because I'm no longer in the service at all and got myself a full aperplexy — there's no respect for me now — but run quickly to Commandant Skobelev, he's in power and also has experience in this line, he'll do something.'

The bos'man went to Skobelev and told him everything: what Lefty's ailment was and how it came about. Skobelev said:

'I understand that ailment, only a German can't treat it, what's needed is a doctor from the clerical estate, who grew up with such examples and knows what to do. I'll send the Russian doctor Martyn-Solsky there at once.'

But by the time Martyn-Solsky arrived, Lefty was already done for, because the back of his head had been bashed against the gobbles, and he could utter only one thing clearly:

'Tell the sovereign that the English don't use bath brick to clean their guns: let us not use it either, otherwise, God forbid there's a war, they'll be no good for shooting.'

And with these loyal words, Lefty crossed himself and died.

Martyn-Solsky went at once and reported it to Count Chernyshev, so that the sovereign could be informed, but Count Chernyshev only said:

'Go to the devil, anima-tube, don't mix in what's not your business, otherwise I'll deny I ever heard it from you — and then you'll really get it.'

Martyn-Solsky thought: 'It's true he'll deny it,' so he kept quiet.

But if they had made Lefty's words known to the sovereign in time, the Crimean War would have turned out quite differently for the enemy.

Now all this is already 'the deeds of bygone days' and 'legends of old', though not very old, but we need not hasten to forget this legend, despite its fabulous make-up and the epic character of its main hero. Lefty's proper name, like the names of many great geniuses, is forever lost to posterity; but, as a myth embodied by popular fantasy, he is interesting, and his adventures may serve as a reminder of that epoch, the general spirit of which has been aptly and rightly grasped.

To be sure, there are no such masters as the fabulous Lefty in Tula nowadays: machines have evened out the inequality of talents and gifts, and genius does not strive against assiduousness and precision. While favouring the increase of earnings, machines do not favour artistic boldness, which sometimes went beyond all measure, inspiring popular fantasy to compose fabulous legends similar to this one.

Workers, of course, know how to value the advantages provided by the practical application of mechanical science, but they remember the old times with pride and love. It is their epos, and, what's more, with 'a man's soul inside'.