

**WITH
GURDJIEFF
IN
ST PETERSBURG
AND
PARIS**

ANNA BUTKOVSKY-HEWITT

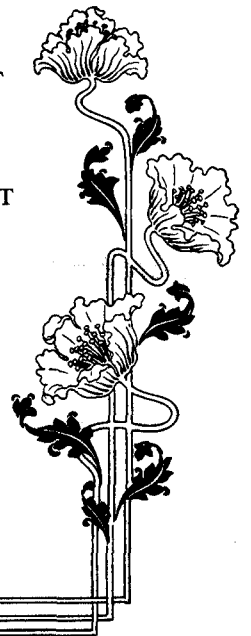
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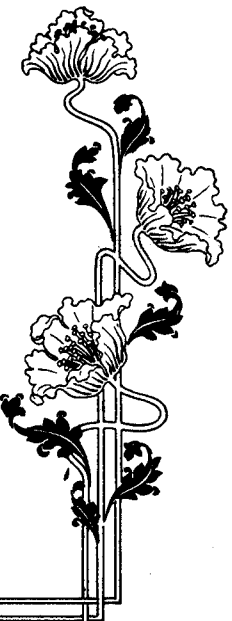
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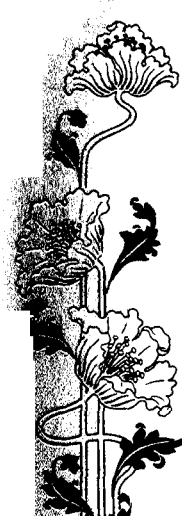




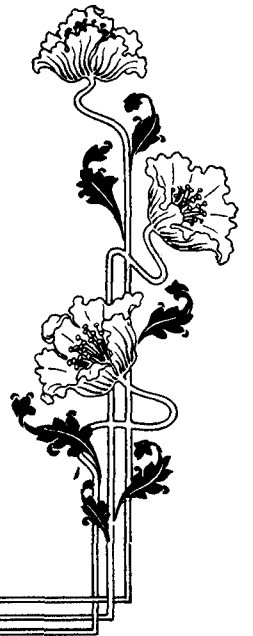
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INTRODUCTION



At the time when many of the events and meetings described in this book took place I was a little over thirty. I was born not far from the capital of Bessarabia, a southern province of Russia noted for its good wine and fruit. My father, Ilya Nikolaevitch Butkovsky, a counsel in the Ministry of Justice, had been sent there from St Petersburg, and it was there that he met and married my mother, whose father was also in the Ministry of Justice.

My paternal grandfather was one of the generals who had fought against Napoleon, and from him my father inherited a large estate in the province of Novgorod, a famous and ancient town not far from St Petersburg. The many serfs on this estate had been freed even before the Act of Liberation issued by the Tsar Alexander II in 1861.

I had one brother, Alexey Ilyitch, who was ten years older than myself, and a sister, Natalie, six and a half years older. Our mother was a highly cultivated woman, who had been educated in Dresden and spoke several languages. She was devoted to the Arts, and when I was

only nine years old she took me and my sister with her to visit the capitals of Europe—Rome, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Prague, and other places—for a whole year. During these travels we visited all the most famous art galleries and museums where my mother by her own informed enthusiasm taught me how to appreciate what I saw. I also studied music from an early age—as I describe in this book—and when I grew up I went to the St Petersburg Conservatoire to study under each of its two best professors in turn. At the same time, I was attending the Faculty of History at the University for Women, under the famous Professor Rostovtsoff—the same who contributed some research to Schliemann's work on Troy.

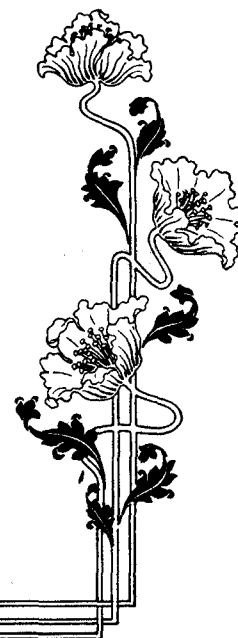
My sister Natalie was later to marry Prince Shervachidze, a scenic designer with the Imperial Opera and Ballet, who was to work abroad with Diaghilev. Through them I met all the leading choreographers and members of the ballet—Fokine, Diaghilev, Pavlova, Karsavina and many others. My sister also published art books and magazines.

In 1908, when I was 23, I married a young Russian naval officer who was also very musical and had quite a good tenor voice. Our marriage did not prove a success and after some time we parted and I returned to live at my parents' house once more. I devoted myself to my studies, especially music, but felt a great lack of meaning to my life and the need to pursue some end more universal and significant than the daily social round.

My story begins in 1916, the time when I first met Ouspensky. Russia had then been at war with Germany for two years, but the rumblings of revolution were still below the surface. Meanwhile, our beautiful capital city was still gay and full of life, café society was as lively as ever, the ballet flourished, and the long nights were filled with social meetings and discussions.



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THE NIGHTS
OF ST PETERSBURG**



attractions was that here, after about eleven o'clock at night when all the theatre performances had finished, people such as these would come; and also honorary balletomanes, Maecenases, critics, contributors to the journals Old Times, The Golden Fleece, Satyricon and the rest. If Sarah Bernhardt were still alive she, too, would surely have come here, with or without her coffin (which she always took about with her when travelling abroad—or so the rumour went!) and perhaps would herself have been tempted to read some fragment from Aiglon, or else seat herself on the divan to listen to some young poet yet unknown, or to the voices of poets already famous: Andrey Bely, Alexander Bloc, Gumilyov, his wife Anna Akhmatova, or any other of the Pleiades. She would have understood what they spoke about, for, thank God, this secret, mystic language is the common tongue of all poets.

Legend had it that somewhere within the walls of the Errant Dog existed an album of the autographs of its most illustrious visitors. What a unique and precious collection that must have been! Very likely in the storm of the Revolution it perished with so many other treasures. What would they not give for it in America today? But even if in times of peace it did exist, all those who wrote their signatures in it vanished in the course of time or were scattered to the four corners of the world.

P. D. Ouspensky, author of books on mysticism and the fourth dimension, whose friend I was, used to enlarge on these and related subjects at the Errant Dog. When he talked, people used to flock around him listening in fascination while the time flew by. Outside, the dawn broke and then, at last, Ouspensky, with Volinsky, a well-known writer, and three or four others including

It was summer and the warm June night, light as day (what we used to call in St Petersburg the 'white nights'—from the title of Dostoevsky's short story), was perfect as we walked along the Neva quay. The clouds, the river, the silhouettes of palaces, bridges, the famous sphinxes—everything in sight was impregnated with an element of unreality, of the fantastic, that we liked. At the granite parapet we stopped to look down at the reflections of the buildings in the water. We had been talking as usual on abstract subjects, or had remained silent, and now it seemed a pity to allow to come to an end that 'crowding of indescribable emotions' so withdrawn from everyday existence, and merely to go home to prosaic sleep.

In such a mood there was only one place one could go, and that was to the Errant Dog.

This was a kind of club for actors, musicians, writers, painters, artists of the ballet and opera—celebrated and less celebrated. It was like a theatre in miniature, or a small concert room, a centre for professional meetings and all kinds of unexpected things. One of its chief

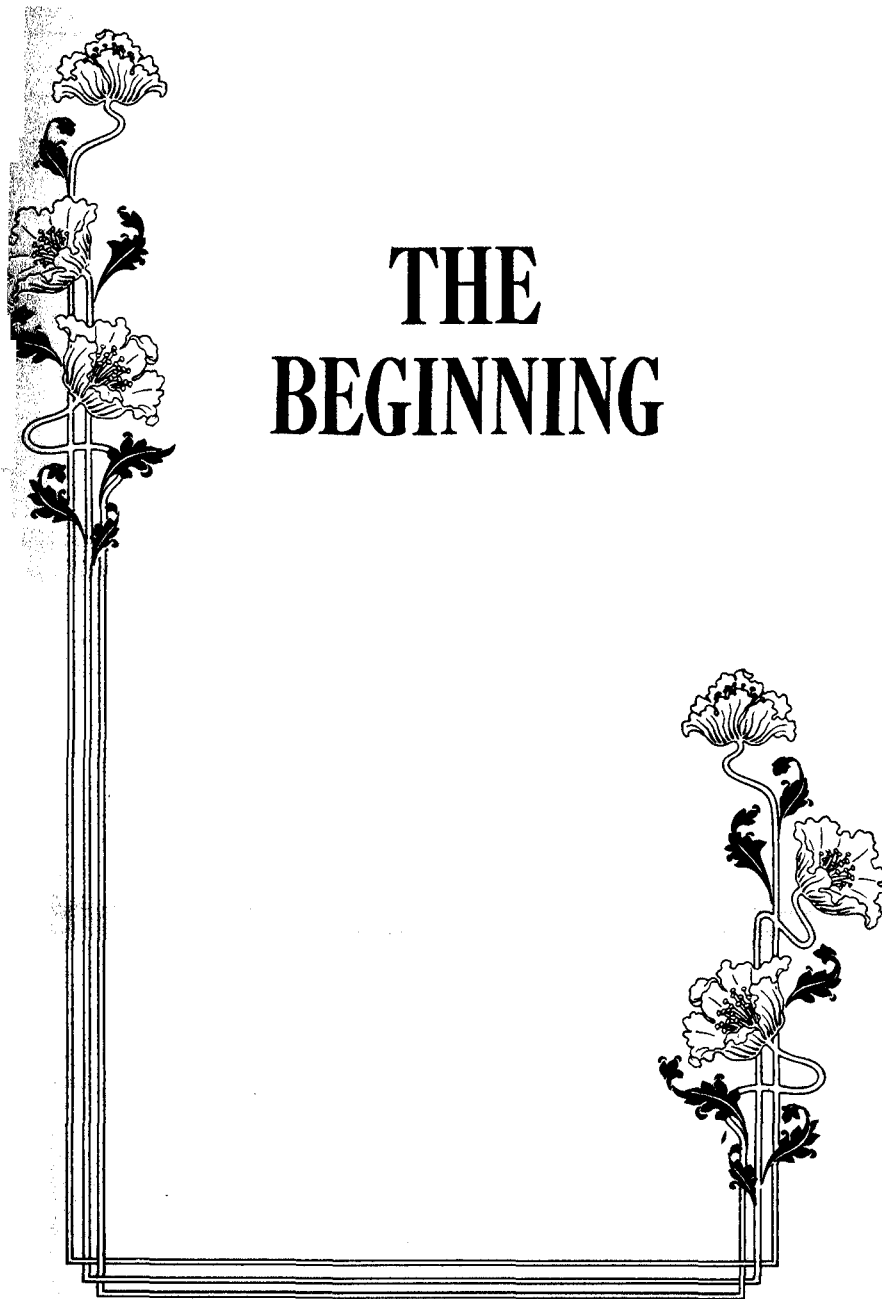
PROLOGUE: THE NIGHTS OF ST PETERSBURG

myself, would go on to the buffet at the Nikolaevski Station to drink an early-morning glass of tea. It would be only after prolonged wanderings of this kind that eventually we all accompanied each other home, while the group gradually shrank in numbers.

Usually the last to go were Ouspensky, who lived at the corner of Nevsky Prospekt—our Piccadilly—and Liteynaia Street, and myself who lived close-by, near the corner of Nevsky and Nikolaevski Street. He would first come to my house and then cross the street to go home, but sometimes would go on to the third corner of Nevsky and Trotsky Street and into the 'Phillipoff', a café well known to everyone.

It was a curious coincidence that the other important character in my story also lived very near there, at the fourth corner, Nevsky and Pushkin Street: Gurdjeff—the man of whom Evreinoff, a celebrity of the Russian theatrical world, spoke of as an 'Event', a word which means, in the Russian language, literally 'unique'.

THE BEGINNING



you realise the helplessness of man, living as he does in a chaos of different events. The multitude of their forms, both known and unknown, contrasts with the simplicity of the Truth.

Truth is of such infinite power and strength that we may think of it as like the apex crowning the pyramid of the world: a point which is already in contact with the non-physical world, and with unknown, unexplored regions of other dimensions. Of these Lobachevsky spoke in discussing neo-Euclidean geometry. If we could imagine that some spiritual Hercules could reverse the pyramid, bringing its base into the air and the apex to the ground, this apex would be able to bear the weight of the whole world.

In the same way the Truth has such strength that it can bear all the untruth, misunderstanding and lack of love between human beings.

Such an apex makes—if one may use the expression—a ‘superman’, like all those who, in different lands, were voices crying aloud in the wilderness. Their voices have been raised almost without interruption since prehistoric times, in many lands, in various forms and different depths, generating also imitators, anti-Christ, pseudo-prophets, ambitious businessmen, all of different calibre and often almost caricatures. Each in his time had followers, most of them temporary.

Among those followers there have existed men, however simple they might be, sincerely hungry for Truth and longing for a miracle; but these ‘poor in spirit’ can almost always separate the sheep from the goats, and distinguish the lie, with all its complications, from the Truth. Their discernment is sure, not from intellectual power but from their hunger and their longing for participation in the Pure. Only one condition is essential:

Whenever I sit down to think of how to write about Gurdjieff and his teaching, and try to picture him in the surroundings in which I knew him, I realise how complicated is the task and how inadequate are my powers to do it justice. And how am I to begin? Although there *is* no beginning in Truth, and no end, even no left or right, top or bottom. Those are all conventions invented by man, just as the watch with its dial does not really represent ‘the Time’ or Numen, nor what we call ‘Time’ or Phenomena.

That is why this subject is so difficult—ill adapted for ordinary writing, and I must beg you to bear with me for beginning my theme so hesitatingly, this theme of mine which has the magic quality of retreating just as one tries to approach it. It is almost as difficult to grasp as the Firebird was to catch, by its glowing tail, in the fairy story.

And here we are confronted with the paradox: as you come nearer to it it slips farther and farther away, for the more you grasp in the darkness at the flickering, formless, sparkling Truth, the more it blinds you, making

that they seek sincerely, and seek the Genuine without compromise, the highest and most pure. These people *will* discern, because their hunger is commensurate with the sacred Truth which they have yet to find.

If they have asked the right question and can receive the right answer, then they are on the path. The answer may not appear in its final form (And what is the final form? There are so many gradations!), but answers will come which are unexpected, impossible to comprehend, direct or obscure, clear or veiled in disguise, seeming to disappear, perhaps temporarily, perhaps for ever. One must, the very instant the answer appears, concentrate one's strength to grasp it. This can be helped by the sublime joy that it engenders, which comes when the whole soul is transfigured by its happiness, in some cases bordering on ecstasy. Of such a state, which our inner self may reach, one might exclaim with Faust, 'Oh Time, stop!'

The path is not an easy one, however, and therefore one must be prepared to encounter all the inevitable difficulties and experiences that will come. To start with, purification is necessary in order to shake off the dust of everything that hinders us from hearing with our full capacity the answer when it does come—or even a part of it. Even if what we gather is infinitesimal, even if it comes in some new, fantastic form, even if the longed-for answer does not come at all—still it is good to be on the move and making progress instead of standing still, or even retreating. And although we may slip and fall we can still recover ourselves and remain on the path.

Maybe someone else will come up to us and ask for our help, and we shall be able to hold out our hand to them and bear them up. Or maybe others seeing our own despair and failing strength will hold out their

hands to us, encouraging and helping us to go forward. The very fact that we are with fellow-travellers is an immense help to us, for then we are together in that spiritual atmosphere that gives unseen nourishment. Just so did the Holy Grail, appearing as a vision floating before the Knights of the Round Table, give its nourishment to their spirits.

And if, for whatever reason, we never attain our goal before our life ends, at least we shall end on the great Path, the Path of the chosen ones.

The Path is open to all. Here is true equality; but whereas in the usual way men only crush and mutilate each other, causing destruction and desolation, here our fellow-travellers help forward their younger brothers on the Path. Even if at first they appear to possess but little spiritual force, their longing to reach the Truth is so great and so active that it will inevitably lead them to it.

On this Path may sometimes be met false shepherds with their flocks, but such is the magic quality of Cosmic truth that by their very nature they will be unable to remain on it; they will end in madness, or dissolve in the dust and ignorance of their moral laziness. They lack that genuine hunger for the Truth by which we can learn to live for the benefit and peace of mankind.

The first time in my own life that I felt this hunger was at the age of nine, when I read a book by Madame Blavatsky, written when she was in India. One episode in this book made a particular impression on me. It described where Madame Blavatsky is in a forest with the Indian Guru Takour. Crouched in their path and blocking their way forward, they see a tiger ready to spring upon them. Takour fixes it with his powerful eye, and solely by the strength of his will he forces the

creature to give way. The tiger recognises his master, and with his tail between his legs, slinks sullenly back into the jungle.

As a child the thought of possessing such power thrilled me and I longed to know the secret. Even before that, however, my imagination had been excited by the fairy tales told me by my old nurse. What appealed to me most was the element of magic, which always worked on the side of justice and was exerted in times of danger or difficulty to help the weak and oppressed.

Mingled with my nurse's tales were Christian and religious stories and pagan tales of rituals and customs. How many of these still existed in the Russia of my time! And indeed I believe they will never be entirely extinguished or die away. These ancient rites were preserved in the form of many interesting superstitions, both mysterious and poetic, and were greatly venerated not only by simple people but among the highly educated as well.

This nurse of mine, whose name was Agraphena Ivanovna, was descended from remarkable stock. From her grandmother, who was everlastingly remembered in our two nearby villages and even farther away, she learned the secret of staunching blood from wounds. On St John's Eve, the 24 June (a day when no one worked), she used to go alone into the forest to gather twelve different herbs both medical and magical. They had to be gathered at the very moment of midnight—the enchanted hour—when the first note struck on the church bell. She had to be well prepared and to know exactly where to find the particular herbs, for great skill was required in finding them and also in picking them—all of which had to be accomplished before the last of the chimes had sounded.

In Madame Blavatsky's book, however, was something which could not be found in the ordinary folklore or fairy tales, and this was that the magic could be practised not solely by magicians but also by men and women like ourselves, that is, those who made the effort to develop the power that lay latent within them.

I read voraciously, and by the age of seventeen I was well acquainted with theosophical literature, which dealt with the hidden world beyond our own; but my studies were without advice or direction of any kind, and so I was only half aware. I was overwhelmed with the desire to approach that world, but how to find it I had no idea.

At this time the Swami Vivekananda's book *Raja-Yoga* came into my hands, and this, too, made the deepest possible impression on me. I longed intensely to find someone who could explain all these things to me in a practical way, and teach me more about them. Facts were described in this book as being not of the character of the episode of Takour and the tiger, but as spiritual achievement that I could not, as yet, understand. There was concrete information here, on how a man might develop his hidden powers in accordance with the Laws of the Universe, how he might get in touch with higher planes and other dimensions, how the Microcosm might truly reflect the Macrocosm.

The book warned that in the first place it was necessary to find a Guru or teacher, and become his faithful Chela, or pupil, in order to awaken one's slumbering powers in the proper manner. Without the guidance of a Guru, the quest was both futile and dangerous.

I was desperately anxious to get to work actively, not just by reading and thinking, as hitherto, about these matters. But I had no idea where to go, or to whom to

apply. So I decided to write to Mrs Annie Besant, who had succeeded on Colonel Olcott's death to the presidency of the Theosophical Society. She was then in Adyar, near Madras, and in my letter I told her that I was ready and indeed anxious to go to India.

Eventually I received a reply from Mrs Besant's secretary, Miss White, but it simply told me that my best course was to join the local branch of the Theosophical Society in St Petersburg. I was warned that it would not be advisable to go to India at the moment, since I might be suspected of being a Russian spy.

This reply astonished me; but it could not put me off. I found it hard to believe that a society dedicated to such high purposes should refuse to accept my offer for what seemed such superficial reasons. Later on, when I was more experienced in these matters, my astonishment even increased.

It is likely that the keenness and impatience my letter displayed alarmed the theosophical areopagites—particularly as I gave my age and personal circumstances, which evidently did not act in my favour. And possibly my very enthusiasm, that fiery urge to leave everything, and my burning will to act and start off at once, was not the right quality for the undertaking.

All the same, in reading the *Bhagavad Gita* I had got the impression that fire and enthusiasm, such as the hero Arjuna possessed, were just the qualities needed: a readiness to proceed without taking into account what was left behind, or the future risks to be encountered—a voluntary sacrifice for the sake of acquiring knowledge.

So there I was, in my hands the letter from Adyar, which denied me my burning action, and feeling both perturbed and unable to find the explanation why they

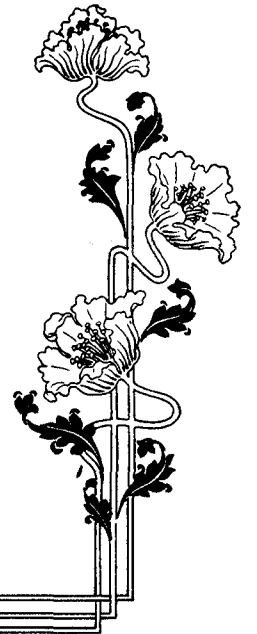
had reacted in this way. I felt rebuffed. A door had slammed in my face.

It was not at all what I wanted: just prosaically to get on a bus and go to a certain street and find a certain house with a certain number. I wanted to rush off to India, flying away on an imaginary magic carpet, and it did not suit my romantic temperament to be offered this discipline instead. Then at once I realised that my zeal to fly off was just like the impulse of a schoolboy, who reads about Red Indians and wants to run away to America, and at the third station from St Petersburg is caught and taken ignominiously home to his parents.

'So all the same,' I said to myself, 'I will do what I'm told.'



OUSPENSKY: I



was to spread until he had followers throughout Europe and the USA.

I was not a member of the Theosophical Society in St Petersburg, and did not know that Ouspensky was a member. However, it was soon after I had read his book that I attended my first meeting of the society, and saw Ouspensky in person, though without realising who he was until Madame Kamensky, an important and active member of the society, asked his opinion on some subject, addressing him by name. The subject in question was the development of the higher faculties in the Eastern and Western schools, which she wanted him to explain to the audience present. But Ouspensky declined to comment, observing that he was in the middle of thinking out his own views and preferred not to commit himself at the moment.

Later, at the close of that evening's meeting, I got into conversation with Ouspensky. He told me that his answer to Madame Kamensky had been only an excuse, and that he was unwilling to enter into any discussion with her since he had already made up his mind to leave the society, in whose effectiveness he had ceased to believe. This decision was in spite of the fact that he had been invited to join the 'inner' circle which, he had been told, was very different from the meeting we had just attended. In the 'inner' circle meetings, it was alleged, one experienced a degree of enlightenment not accessible to ordinary members.

'These ordinary members are just sheep!' he told me scornfully. 'But I feel there are probably even bigger sheep in the "inner" circle.'

'You sound as though you are sorry there are no wolves,' I remarked.

'Exactly! At least wolves display strength. Sheep are

I first came to know Ouspensky through a book that I found in the library.

It was now 1916, during the First World War but before the Revolution, and life in St Petersburg was still normal. Since I was so interested in mysticism I had been continuing my search for an answer to what we used to call 'the cursed questions'—those questions to which there are, seemingly, no answers. 'Where did we come from into this world?' 'Where do we go when we leave it?' The questions are in themselves creative, for even if their final answers will not come, those who are seeking them derive a certain satisfaction from the search itself.

In the course of my browsing at the library, I picked up a volume entitled *Tertium Organum*, and as I turned over its pages and glanced through the long explanatory chapter headings, I found to my great delight that here was a book which seemed to set out to answer the questions I kept asking. Its author was named Ouspensky, who was at that time about forty years old but not yet widely known. In the years to come, of course, his fame

simply sheep, and it is hopeless for them to pretend to aspire to be the image of God, and to develop the hidden, higher faculties.'

As we were leaving the building I asked him if there would be another book to follow *Tertium Organum*. Instead of answering he asked me in which direction I was going and then, after a little discussion, invited me to join him at Phillipoff's Café next morning. I knew the place well; it was close to both our homes.

When I arrived at Phillipoff's next day, Ouspensky was waiting for me at a table, and there were already three empty coffee cups in front of him. (What an enormous quantity of coffee was to be consumed during our conversations, and in our much larger company later on at the same establishment, when Gurdjieff, who eventually became our teacher or 'Guru', presided over the meetings. But all that was in the future: for the moment there were only two of us.) Ouspensky was evidently very well known at Phillipoff's, and without waiting for orders the waiter brought me a glass of very strong coffee 'à la Varsoivienne'. When that was finished he replaced it with another.

Once again I asked Ouspensky the question I had asked the night before: was there going to be another book? This time he gave me an answer. He said that before writing *Tertium Organum* he had started another book but found it would probably have taken him twenty years to complete, and he had abandoned it. The title was to have been *The Wisdom of the Gods*.

'But why did you not write it?' I exclaimed. 'Surely you could finish it in much less than twenty years—but even if it did take so long, why is it not worth writing?'

'Because what I wanted to say in that book was so difficult and elusive that I did not feel equal to it. And I

must always feel equal to anything that I tackle,' added Ouspensky with a rather arrogant smile. 'Although the realisation hurt my pride very deeply I knew I lacked something necessary to do it.' Then, betraying some irritation in his voice, he went on to describe how he had used some of the ideas of this difficult work in another book, which he was hoping to publish soon.

'I will explain it to you in more detail later,' he concluded. 'Meanwhile let's get away from here—will you come with me for a stroll?'

After that morning we used to meet at the café every day at noon, and the subject of our conversation was always the same: how to find somebody who knew more than one could find out from reading books, and who not only talked about such things but could teach one how to do them. Someone who would help us to fulfil the quest for the 'Miracle'—the development of the super-consciousness—and teach us the form of spiritual exercises by which we could, perhaps, at last perceive the fourth dimension.

I was surprised that Ouspensky should want to take me for his companion in this quest, and told him so.

'I haven't indeed known you long,' he admitted, 'but I see clearly that you have in you something that others have not. We are both seeking the same thing, so let us seek it together.'

'But I know so little!' I said. 'What could I possibly bring you?'

'You have a driving force,' he said seriously, 'and a will to seek and find.' Then abruptly, as if closing the subject, he said, 'Now Anna, come on, let's have some more coffee and cakes.'

'Why?' I asked him with a laugh. 'Have you become rich overnight?'

'Yes! I have—indeed I have. Now I am not travelling alone! There are qualities in you which I lack but would like to have. I think that you might even help me to write.'

'Would you like to know what it is, then, that helps me in seeking what you call the "Miracle"?' I asked. 'Did you know I was studying at the Conservatoire? Well, in music I find something that *is* miraculous—an element that guides me, and tells me when there is a false note in everyday life.'

Ouspensky interrupted me excitedly. 'Wait! Wait! Don't explain. I guessed at something of that sort about you, and now you mention music! You play. When can I hear you?' He added, 'As a rule I don't like to hear other people play, but I have a feeling *you* will play in some extraordinary way, perhaps as they might have done if there had been pianos in the school of Pythagoras. . . .'

As he talked on and on about the 'Miracle', and the strength needed to find it, I might well have taken fright at all these words if I, too, had not been an enthusiast, already convinced that there are things which cannot be verified by the intellect alone.

'Sometimes,' he was saying, 'one can put one's foot forward over the edge of a precipice, and propel oneself across to the other side without falling.'

'I think I understand you, Peter Demianovitch,' I replied.

Ouspensky smiled. 'Now you see that I really am rich. Someone here understands and believes the un-understandable!'

'And I, have I become richer too?'

'Yes, you have.'

'You are not being very modest!' I said, smiling in my turn.

'I don't need to be,' he answered. 'I am not a sheep!'

'No, but pity them.'

'Never! . . . Now, have another cup of coffee, and we will talk a little more, and then take a walk in our beautiful St Petersburg.'

In the evenings we used to meet again, in the enchanted light of the northern summer. One day, very soon after our first meeting, Ouspensky suddenly said to me, 'You know, although I am so much older than you, when I am with you I feel about eighteen! We shall find the Miracle, I know it,' he added with a smile. 'I never feel, I *know*.'

This made me laugh. 'I think,' I said, 'that today it's a case of you feeling, not knowing!'

'Perhaps, but I don't think so.' Then, with one of those abrupt changes of subject: 'Now, when are you going to play for me, and where?'

'At my father's house. Come along home with me now, and afterwards I can give you some lunch.'

So we went home, and I played the piano for him as promised. After playing one or two works I continued with improvising, an art in which (as I describe later) I had a certain gift, from a creative feeling I brought to playing that gave the work a new character and made it seem quite 'miraculous' to me. But after a time I became afraid I might be playing too long, and stopped. Ouspensky, however, asked me to go on.

At last he said, when finally I ended, 'This experience has moved me very much. Now I understand more clearly what you told me about the miraculous element in music. It's a *force* itself, not confined to the lines of the music but so expanding to the mind and feelings that it gives one energy and inspiration to hope one may

be able to read the signs in the heavens. Planets are signs, you know—there are signs everywhere, but we cannot read them.’ He gave a sigh. ‘Perhaps we don’t genuinely want to, or don’t want to enough? We’re too anaemic, or too conceited and self-satisfied over our own small personal success.’

No outsider would ever have guessed that Ouspensky was filled with this almost boyish enthusiasm for the Unknown, the Unseen World: the world which was typified, he said as we were walking one day, in our Russian fairy story of the Firebird. ‘Prince Ivan,’ he said, ‘thinks he has captured the elusive flaming bird, but soon learns his mistake. It escapes him, but in escaping drops a feather from its glowing tail—a feather which burns his hand and leaves an indelible mark on its would-be captor. Later, when the world denies that the enchanted bird ever existed, the feather and the marked hand remain as a proof that it was not merely a dream.’

‘In Egyptian mythology the feather was a symbol of truth,’ Ouspensky continued, ‘and so, I think, it is for us, even though like those who followed the Firebird we may be doomed to frustration in our greater quest. But what matters is that, even if you only touch the feather, however lightly, it removes from you all anger and vindictiveness, and in their place leaves peace, yet still with the urge to continue the quest more eagerly than ever.’

I remember that in saying all this Ouspensky spoke very quietly, as if talking to himself, and behind his face I suddenly saw another, more radiant, countenance filled with a youthful happiness which perhaps no one but myself ever witnessed. When, in later years, we were to meet again in Berlin, in Paris and London, he had developed a hard outer shell, and I wondered then why

he had crushed the gentle, poetic radiance of his St Petersburg days. Possibly he thought of this side of himself as a weakness, yet it was in this happy mood that his inspiration and vision were strongest: the intellect had nothing to do with it.

Now he said, ‘I think I’m not talking very logically’ and shook himself as if coming out of a dream. We walked for some time in a thoughtful silence.

During those extraordinary nights of the northern summer, bright as daylight, our conversations covered many subjects, but moved always in the same orbit. For example, one topic which fascinated us both was alchemy. There was something absorbing about the efforts of those mediaeval philosophers to find through the means of their limited scientific knowledge (even more imperfect than our own), answers to some of the same questions that were troubling us now in Petersburg in 1916.

During our walks we also used to talk about the philosophies of the East. We had both read Vivekananda’s *Raja-Yoga*, and discussed the seven states of a neophyte as described in that work, especially the last state or sublime ‘Samadhi’, in which the quest is completed and super-consciousness is attained. But progress through these seven states was not possible by one’s own efforts alone, only through exercises undertaken under the guidance of a Guru, and a Guru was what we had not found at this stage.

Most of all, I think, I loved to talk of the legends of the Holy Grail and the music of Wagner. Edouard Shuré, the French author whom I later visited in Paris, used to say that Wagner was an initiate and that his ancestors were Vikings—Titans in their own land and time. I, too, felt that Wagner had a deep inner knowledge of the

meaning of our quest, which he revealed not only in his music but in his libretti, which of course he wrote himself.

‘. . . All that, we shall see,’ said Ouspensky after only our second meeting, ‘and we shall be there, too, ourselves.’

‘Are you so sure?’

‘I am. . . . You are attracted by the purpose of our quest—by the road that we want to travel. And a little by me, too, perhaps? . . . I don’t think that among your other friends you have anyone as *interesting* as I am.’

I said hesitatingly, ‘Not so long ago I thought I had. But lately. . . .’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well . . . you know that I was married? But I had to leave my husband because of . . . certain discoveries, and now I am living at home again with my father.’

‘You see!’ said Ouspensky triumphantly. ‘It was meant that you should free yourself, so as to be ready for *me*, when I came like a comet across your orbit!’

‘How on earth can you say that?’ I retorted. ‘You hardly know anything of me yet. But it certainly is rather like a comet, arriving so suddenly and unexpectedly.’

‘So, then. What next?’

‘You are pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you? What next?’

‘Ah-h-h!’ Ouspensky paused. ‘I am quite ready to do the conventional thing that is expected of one in these cases, if you like.’

At this point I lost my temper. ‘You are just imagining things! You keep imagining without any foundation.’

‘How do you know what I imagine? . . . But I see it

vexes you.’ He laughed. ‘Anyway, you were certainly ready for me at the right time, and I came at the right time to “collect” you. So, as I said before, all is well. . . . More coffee?’

‘No, *no*, NO!’

‘All right, all right. Waiter! why don’t you *bring* us more coffee? You know, Anna Ilinishna, I have my own system here. Alexei has to bring me coffee without my having to tell him, and when I have had enough I just say “No”. Better to say “No” once, than have to order five or six times, and he isn’t always there when you want him. . . . Now, suppose you tell me of any curious experiences you have had?’

I thought for a moment. ‘Well,’ I said, hesitant again, ‘there is one, but it is not very “delicate”. Still, it amounts to something more than idle chatter. You’ve heard of Evreinoff, no doubt?’

‘The writer and producer? Yes, good-looking: I’ve seen his portrait in the exhibition and in the papers. Romantic face, like a Florentine poet of the sixteenth century.’

‘Well, I will tell you. . . .’

‘. . . And how can you do such things!’ exclaimed Ouspensky when I had finished. ‘But I am glad—it shows you are not “a lady”.’

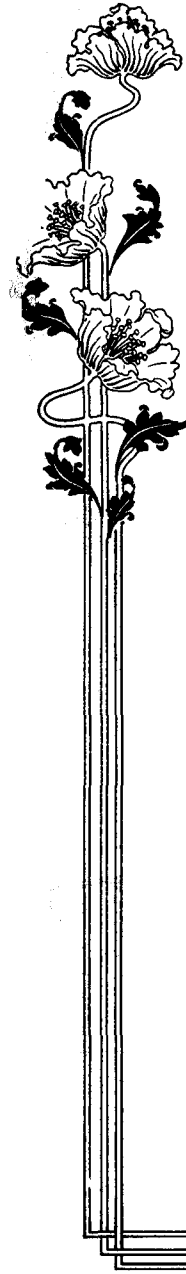
I began to protest indignantly.

‘Oh no,’ he interrupted, ‘I don’t mean in that sense. I’m sorry, I should have put it differently. I mean that you are a human being *before* you are a lady, because you aren’t afraid of things that Society would disapprove of, or of what people may think of you.’

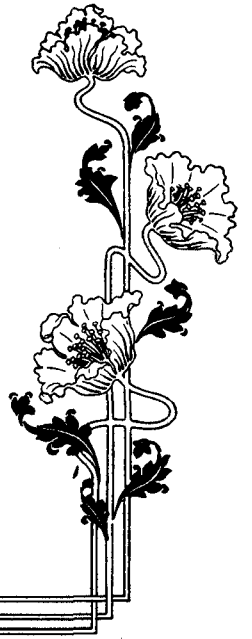
These are just a few recollections of our many meetings and talks over coffee at Phillipoff’s, or walking

OUSPENSKY: I

about all through the night. Sometimes after such hours of walking we would end up at seven in the morning at the Nikolaevski Station, almost tired out, and there we would have more coffee and buns at the bar and then say goodbye and each go to our own homes, to continue till next time the ordinary routine of our daily lives.



OUSPENSKY: II



Swami Vivekananda, the most famous pupil of Rama Krishna Abedananda.

Ouspensky seemed to be living on what he earned as a translator and from his own writings. At this time he was finishing two new books, one of which—I forget its title—had a theme based on the cinema. In it the chief character is examining his past life, recalling his mistakes and the wrong choices he has made, and thinking to himself that if he had the opportunity to start life all over again he would be able to avoid repeating his errors. It happens that his thoughts are overheard by a divine power, and he is actually given the chance to live his life again. A parallel is drawn here with a film projector, which presents the same picture over and over again so many times a day, with the same people, same places and same events each time. In exactly the same way the hero repeats his former life and, whenever he has the opportunity to make a free choice of will, he chooses precisely as he had done the first time.

This book of Ouspensky's was later published in St Petersburg, though then it was unknown elsewhere in Europe. The other book he was writing at about this time was called *The Devil*, but I cannot remember anything about it. Ouspensky thought that certain of Swami Vivekananda's books ought to be translated into Russian, since they were exactly the kind of book that would be eagerly read by many people. The best known of these books was *Raja-Yoga* (the Great Yoga), which I have mentioned already; others included *Abedananda* and *Ananda*.

I therefore decided to get in touch with Nina Souvorina, a friend and former fellow-student of mine at the University of St Petersburg, and to enlist the help of her uncle Alexei. Alexei Souvorin was one of the three sons

One day during our walks together we happened to pass Ouspensky's house. He pointed out the window of his room and asked if I would like to go in for a moment. As I was rather old fashioned in my upbringing, I hesitated, and seeing my uncertainty he said very simply and naturally, 'I thought it might give you pleasure to see some of my books. I went to your house to hear you play, now you should come to mine to look at books!'

I knew that it was not really at all the same thing; but I agreed and we went up.

Although I had been prepared to see a small room, it was much smaller than I had imagined. Its entire furniture consisted of a table, chair and bed, and a packing-case full of books. On the window sill stood a coffee pot and a glass. There were a great many books in French and English, as well as Russian: volumes by Stanislas Guita, Papus, . . . but it would be impossible for me even to try to enumerate them. I took three of them home with me: Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*, *The Fourth Dimension* by Hinton, and one on Yoga by

of the Souvorin who owned the newspaper *Novoe Vremia* (*New Time*), and who was an old man by then, very influential and very rich. Souvorin's other two sons, Michael and Boris, worked with him on the paper, but Alexei, who held very different views, ran the much more liberal paper *Rouss*.

I showed Alexei these books in the English translation, but though he was at once enthusiastic to publish them in Russian, he did not know of a good translator. I, however, found one in another friend, Konstantin Vogak, a very learned young man whom I introduced by appointment to Souvorin. All was arranged and the books were soon published: the *Karma-Yoga*, *Gnana-Yoga*, *Hatha-Yoga* and *Raja-Yoga*. The fifth, *Bhakti-Yoga*, was not (I believe) among the set. How vividly I remember even now those bright purple covers, and the yellow lettering of the titles. All the leading bookshops in St Petersburg and Moscow stocked them, and they sold very well.

About this time Ouspensky told me that, if he wanted, he could quite easily visit Australia, for his best friend had emigrated there and started a sheep farm which had prospered. He was always pressing Ouspensky to go out and join him. But Ouspensky said he could not consider it even for a short visit, for he saw no hope of finding a teacher or 'Guru' there. And it was that, now and always, that really interested him more than anything else.

'But why don't you go to India, then?' I asked. 'And when you come back you can tell me all about what you find there.'

'You really think I should? . . . But what about you? What will you do?'

'Well! I shall go on with my music—you know my final examination is in the spring, and if I spend all my time at Phillipoff's like this, I shall never get on with my work.'

'Oh, so that's it,' said Ouspensky, looking thoughtful. 'I see!'

There was a pause.

'And you're the one,' said I, 'who's always so sure of yourself!'

'I think I still am,' he replied. 'All the same—to India I will go.'

And he went. He visited its great cities, its monasteries and temples, met people who interested him and could give him information about teachers, who in their turn could help him in his quest. At Adyar he met Annie Besant, the President of the Theosophical Society, and they talked (he told me later) sitting on a divan over which was thrown a white llama-skin. Yet the result of his conversation with Annie Besant, and of the many other impressions he gained on his travels about India, was a growing conviction (or as he put it 'a feeling in his bones') that the answer, the *Miracle*, would after all be found here in Europe and perhaps even in St Petersburg itself.

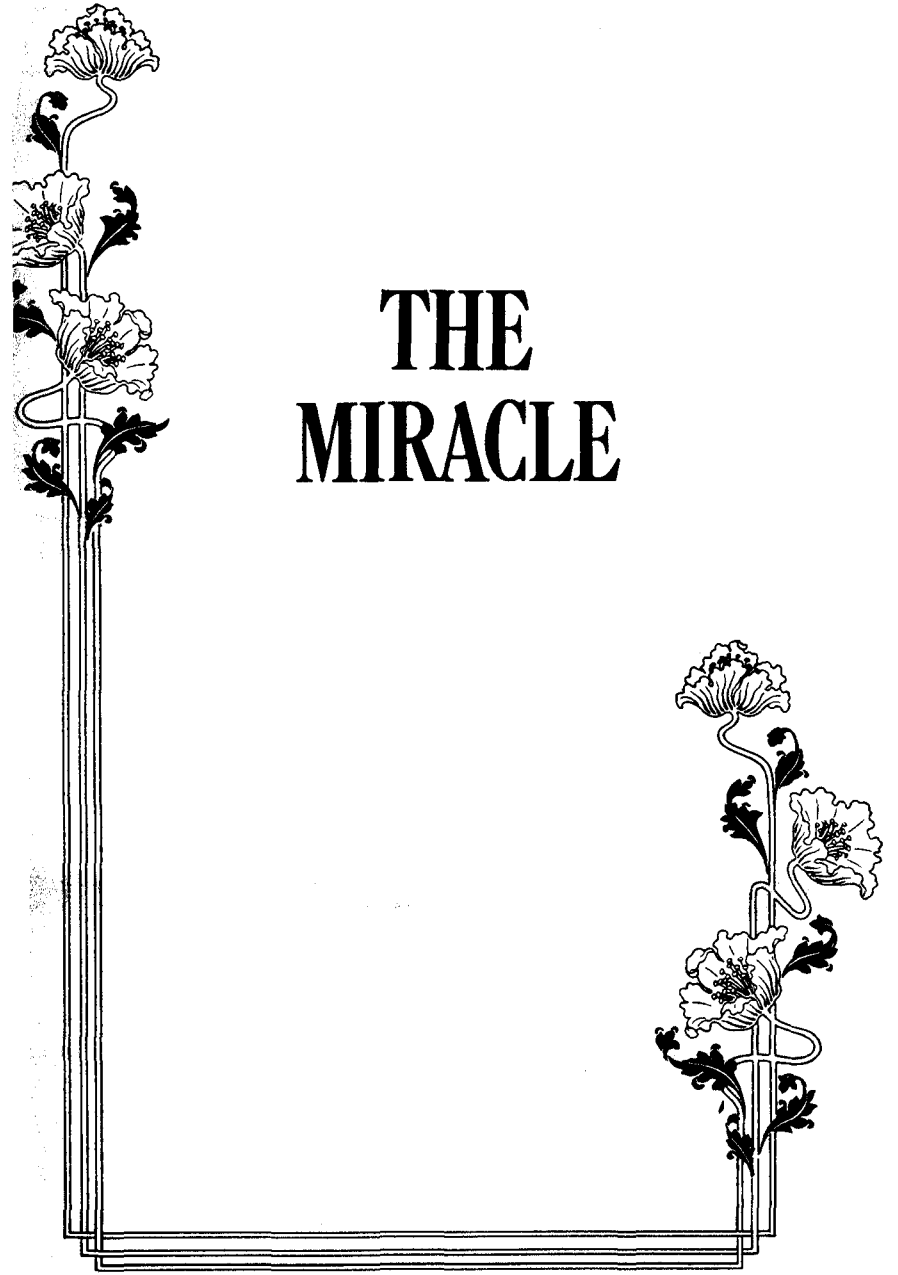
And so he came back to Russia.

'This is not an exotic city,' he told me when we met again on his return, 'but there must be *someone* here of the kind I am seeking. One is all I need. And why not? We must just keep on the lookout for him. . . . Why on earth did I ever go to India? I found nothing there that I have not read before in books, or heard rumoured in some way . . . nothing new, *nothing*. . . .'

He was delighted to be home again. We spent the evening at the famous club the *Errant Dog*, which I have

described earlier, and we celebrated his return among its lively crowd of *habitués*.

THE MIRACLE



Now that Ouspensky was back in St Petersburg we resumed our morning meetings at Phillipoff's and talked more than ever. His visit to India had still further stimulated, if that were possible, his already great knowledge and interest in mysticism, and we talked endlessly of ideas and books on the subject. We still continually searched for other people who might be seeking the same Miracle as ourselves—'our Quest', as we called it. Ever uppermost in our minds was the need to find a teacher, not just a theory: a teacher who could help us in our search and bring us to the threshold of higher planes, prepare our consciousness for that purpose and give us the necessary regimen and schooling for both spirit and body.

So one very beautiful day it came about that I was sitting in the café waiting for Ouspensky, wondering why he had not arrived, for he was a very punctual man and the hour of our usual meeting was already past.

Suddenly he appeared at the table, showing an emotion that was very unusual for him, and without pausing for a formal 'Good morning' or even stopping to sit

down he said, 'I think this time we've really found what we need! I must tell you all about it. I have found the Miracle!

'You remember I told you, that time I went to Moscow, about a painter who everyone thought was eccentric—half mad! And when I was there he took me along to see someone else, with whom I had a couple of interesting conversations. Well, *that* man is here now, in Petersburg. I've just come from him this moment, and that is why I am so late. I knew you would forgive me for it, and understand how important it was!'

'Of course I do,' I replied, 'but tell me—tell me!'

'This man's knowledge goes beyond mere theory,' said Ouspensky, plunging on. 'He really can teach, and give the answers to much of what we and so many others in different lands and times have sought. But he's very sparing—mean, almost—in communication! Still, he has told me two things which I never yet succeeded in learning from any book or from any esoteric society, or from any other person whatever. They are just short phrases, crystallised, condensed, so that I, who as you know am inclined to make long "dissertations" about even quite ordinary subjects—well, I was absolutely amazed to find this means of expression that is so clear and simple.

'Listen, then, and I'll tell you one of the ideas here and now. He says that man, because he is passive, does not actually *do* things personally, but that everything in him is *done*, mechanically. A man will say, "I do such-and-such", but this is not the genuine "I", for he might have twenty-two "I's". . . . What I am trying to say is, there is not one "I" but many. . . .

'But I mustn't try to tell you it all here—you must hear it all from the man himself. He's at the other

Phillipoff's across the road, and he's waiting there for us now!'

When I entered the other Phillipoff's I saw a man sitting at a table in the far corner, wearing an ordinary black coat and the high astrakhan cap that Russian men wear in winter. Signs of Greek ancestry could be discerned in his fine, virile features and in the look that pierced right through you (though not in an unpleasant way). He had an oval-shaped head, black eyes and an olive complexion, and wore a black moustache. His manner was very calm and relaxed, and he spoke without any gesticulation. Even to be sitting with him was very agreeable. Though it was not his native language he could speak Russian fluently, in a manner not quite like ours, more exact and very picturesque. Sometimes he would speak in a 'lazy' voice, and you felt that each phrase was being carefully and specially put together for that particular occasion, not at all like the ready-made phrases which we would normally use in conversation, devoid of creative power or individuality. You quickly grasped that he had the gift of assembling words expressively. And here I sat, and I felt that I was at last in the presence of a Guru.

I said, 'It is you that I have looked forward to meeting with such joy.'

'But you do not know me,' this man replied. 'Perhaps I shall bring some evil on you. What you are saying is mere empty courtesy.' I sensed in his words, as well as some truth, a touch of ephemeral lightness.

'No,' put in Ouspensky, defending me. 'Anna says only what she feels. She is young but she is sincere, and is devoted to seeking the right path.'

'The path to what?' Gurdjieff interrupted. 'And how

can she want what I can give her when she doesn't know me, or my ideas, nor what I say or how I say it?'

I spoke again. 'But to live the way I am living now seems to me very shallow, and I am not satisfied.'

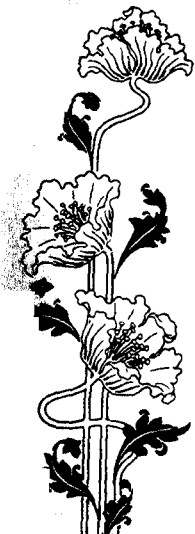
Then he asked, with a note of benevolence in his voice, 'Is it so unbearable?'

'Yes! Perhaps that is the best word to define my state.' I repeated: '*Unbearable!*'

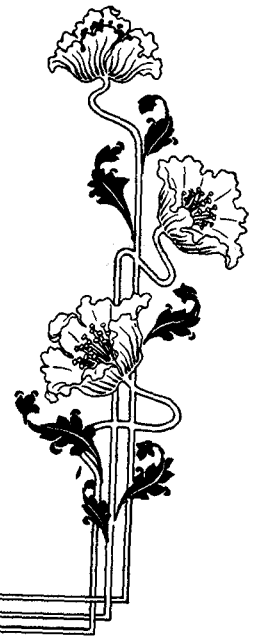
At this Gurdjieff immediately became more interested. He said, 'Then if that is so, it is better than I thought. Come! You will find me here every day from twelve o'clock onwards, at this table.'

'Thank you. I will certainly come.'

And at this café, where from then onwards I went every day, I gradually came to learn Gurdjieff's terminology, as he explained it to Ouspensky and myself. Later, we became a group of six pupils, but already at this stage, with the two of us, he would correct us whenever we used an inexact expression or a phrase inadequate for the ideas we wanted to express.



CHARKOVSKY



still they go on reading and reading. There comes a point where they ought to stop reading and seeking new theories, and instead try to apply them to their own lives, or they will simply end in confusion. The accumulation of too much knowledge is useless unless it is applied. What's the use of reading about someone else's efforts? That won't help them—only their own efforts can do that. But still they go on, buying new books or borrowing them; and some of them are never read, even, they just lie about in the bookcases.

'Yes,' Gurdjieff ended with a little sigh, 'that's all that happens.'

Among Charkovsky's accomplishments was the manipulating of a curious device or aid to philosophical argument invented in the thirteenth century by Raymond Lully, the Catalan mystic and teacher. Lully, a combination of saint and scientist, philosopher and preacher, enjoyed great favour under King John I of Aragon. He dissipated his youth in worldly pleasures until about the age of thirty, when he underwent a dramatic conversion. At that time, though married, he was violently in love with a noted court beauty whom he spent his time pursuing—literally. For one day in Majorca it is said that he followed the lady into church on horseback, where she had gone with her lady-in-waiting to hear mass, without even noticing what he was doing. The lady, who was very virtuous, tried in vain to repulse his persistent attentions. At last, after consulting with her husband, she summoned Lully to her house and revealed to him that she was suffering from cancer of the breast.

Lully, filled with shame by her reproaches and warnings of the consequences of his follies, spent a night of torment and remorse. During these hours he is said to have seen a vision of Christ, who continually exhorted

The bridge engineer Charkovsky, who was very well read, was Ouspensky's rival in the knowledge of mystic literature. It was very interesting to watch and listen to the pair of them discussing the ideas of mystical writers, or the meaning of various Tarot cards. Charkovsky used to talk splendidly on the latter subject—not that he used the cards to tell fortunes—but he would explain their combinations and draw conclusions from them, and could manipulate them with remarkable skill. The subject absorbed and delighted him and Ouspensky alike, and they usually ended up talking both at the same time, even almost 'quarrelling'.

All the time Gurdjieff would be there, listening with a benevolent smile. Good-humouredly he would remark, 'It's interesting—but as a game for the imagination and for trying out fantastic suggestions rather than a serious pursuit. A lot of people have written a vast amount of material on the subject and other people have read it in the hope of finding the answer to "How to live?". Well, judging by the amount they've read they ought to know the answer by now, in some degree at least, yet

him with the words: 'Raymond, from henceforth do thou follow me!' Accordingly Lully renounced the world and became in turn a pilgrim, a hermit, and a teacher and missionary to Islam. He has been credited with the authorship of nearly five hundred works and treatises on philosophy, physics, metaphysics, medicine and above all, theology. He has also (but of this there is considerable doubt) been identified with the Lully who was a renowned alchemist and who, in 1311, was invited by the kings of both England and Scotland to visit their countries, and while lodged in the Tower of London was said actually to have succeeded in transmuting base metals into gold. This story, in spite of the detail with which it is related, is spurious, and in any case there may easily have been more than one man of that name, each of which, in his different way, achieved fame. There could be as many as three Raymond Lully's—otherwise one must believe that the man lived to be more than a hundred!

The device or 'machine' which Charkovsky's Lully had invented was a basis for philosophical thought. The device consisted of three concentric circles (which could be made out of cardboard), the bottom one about five inches in diameter, the middle four, and the top, or smallest, three inches. They were fastened at the centre by a metal pin topped by a little ball. Each circle was divided into thirty-six sections by radii from the centre to the periphery, and each of these sections was inscribed with the name of some quality like 'Wisdom', 'Will-power', 'Ecstasy', and so on. The method was to spin the circles one after another, stopping each one *ad libitum* at some particular quality or character trait, or event, so that different sections appeared in conjunction, and the various combinations that appeared

formed the subject of thought, discussion and conclusion.

For example, starting in the outer circle you could turn up the subject of 'Reason'; by moving the second circle around you would bring next to this section, one marked 'Will-power'. This would be Charkovsky's starting-point for discussion: he would make the suggestion that to have reason alone is useless, since it cannot operate without will-power. Then, as one possible result, the smallest circle could be stopped with the word 'Success' adjoining the other two, to indicate that success was a quality which could only be attained by the combination of the other two.

Charkovsky would first demonstrate a combination of the first two circles, and then go on to discuss the interrelationship of all three qualities, and follow up the philosophical discussion which this induced by drawing his conclusions on the whole.

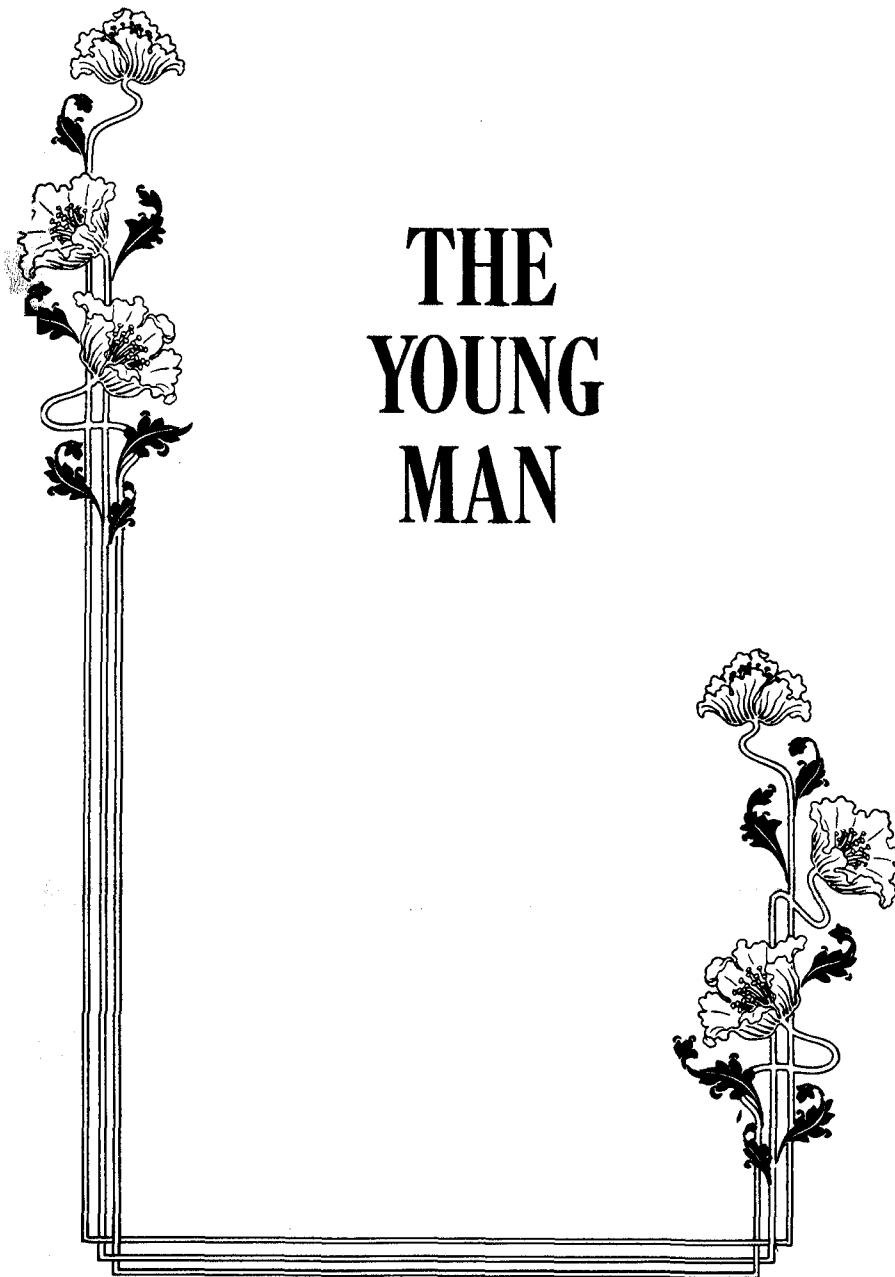
It was I who had discovered this device in an ancient book in the Philosophical Department of the National Library of St Petersburg, a sixteenth-century copy of the original tract written in the thirteenth century. I told Charkovsky about it and he made the cardboard model which we used. To me, it was a very exciting discovery and came about by a lucky chance.

It all happened because the head of the department, a very learned Greek named Papadopoulo Kerameus, had entrusted to me the sorting and cataloguing of their latest acquisitions—for they used to receive a number of very old books and he needed someone for the task who knew several languages. I remember how the rarest books used to be especially brought up from the basement of this vast building by a young attendant named Ivan, who was about sixteen years old and used to wear

a uniform something like a page in a fashionable hotel—and a very cunning fellow he was. He never seemed wholly honest to me, and though I never actually caught him out in any way I always felt suspicious of him. Whenever he saw me apparently particularly fascinated by one of the books he had brought up, he used to come and peep at it over my shoulder. One day I found myself examining a dark, leather-bound volume with copper fastenings, which turned out to be this extraordinary work of Lully's, in quite good condition. Seeing that I could not tear myself away from studying its contents, Ivan came over to have a look at these three concentric circles I had found in it: this puzzling device pinned together at the centre, its short fastening now all rusted. I could scarcely believe my eyes.

At once I went to Pap. Kerameus to tell him I had come across a sixteenth-century work, and because of my suspicions I insisted he did not let Ivan look after it but kept it locked in his cupboard until I came back next day. Pap. Kerameus started to turn over its pages with great excitement—and then the bell for closing time rang and he had to put it away safely under lock and key.

THE YOUNG MAN



In the café where Gurdjieff used to 'hold court' a great many people began to come to him. They used to seat themselves at his table or at one next to it in order to put questions to him or to listen to the questions put by others. Out of the considerable number who came filing in as if through a turnstile, besides Ouspensky and myself four other people settled down to become regulars. This situation lasted for several months, with daily meetings between Gurdjieff and his 'Six'.

One evening we were at Phillipoff's, as usual occupying our customary two tables. We were in the midst of a discussion on how, when you were in conversation with someone, you should strive not to lose your own individuality in listening to the other person—what Gurdjieff called 'drowning' yourself in him—but must keep your critical faculties clear so that you could still judge what the other person was saying.

Suddenly, in the middle of our talk, a young man came into the café in a very boisterous manner. He made straight for our tables where, however, there was

no vacant place. Not knowing who this might be none of us moved up to make room for him, and so after a moment he seated himself at the empty neighbouring table, separated from Gurdjieff's own by the one at which most of us pupils were sitting. Not at all embarrassed by our reception, he now, equally boisterously, broke into our conversation.

'I should like you to give me some exposition of the subject you meet to discuss here, the gist of your theory and practice! Your purpose I already know.'

There was a silence. Gurdjieff did not even look at the young man, seeming as if he had not noticed him; but the slight movement of the corners of his mouth showed us very well what he was thinking of the newcomer, who now repeated his question, though with rather less assurance.

He asked, with a shade of anxiety in his voice, if we could here and now tell him what we had been doing to attain the purpose which 'someone, somewhere, some time' had told him we were after. In fact, could he learn about it now, at once?

Gurdjieff, still not looking at him, said in a lazy kind of voice (I had expected an angry one), 'Young man, although this is a café and open to everyone to enter, these two are our private tables. So all I shall tell you is that all these six people you see here have spent their time with me from noon till midnight or even later, every day for months past. They come here seeking that very thing that "someone, somewhere, some time" told you about. If you think it will be of any use to you, I will just tell you that I know that these six people understand enough for them to know at least that they are on the road they want to take. But to understand that, they must have walked part of the road already. They

know the purpose, they know the way . . . they are satisfied by that and don't ask "When will the end of the road be reached?"—They are satisfied just to *be* on the road and though it brings hardship it also brings experiences that ordinary life cannot give them.

'Am I right?' He turned to us. All six of us like one man, fervently shouted 'Yes! Yes!'

'You see, young man? . . . And these are highly educated people: people of the world. A well-known doctor, a famous writer, two prominent engineers, one member of the Senate and this young lady, a splendid musician preparing for the career of a concert pianist. They are all well-read, are travelled, have studied different schools of esoteric thought, attended universities—in fact, they are extraordinarily gifted people. But in all this time they have never asked me what you asked just now. . . . And here you are, wanting an answer when you have hardly been here ten minutes! Anyway, even if I did open that door for you, and give you a glimpse of a new world behind it, you would not understand a thousandth part of what we discuss here and what we are trying to achieve.

'Well! . . . Ask any of them a few questions and you will get a reply.'

The bright young man had by now lost much of his self-assurance, and there was another silence, not only on our side but also on his.

At last, evidently thinking that I might be the easiest prey, and the most stupid among the six, he addressed me.

'Could you explain to me what is your work?'

'But if you are interested enough to come here,' I replied, full of noble indignation and catching some of Gurdjieff's humour, 'then you must know already!'

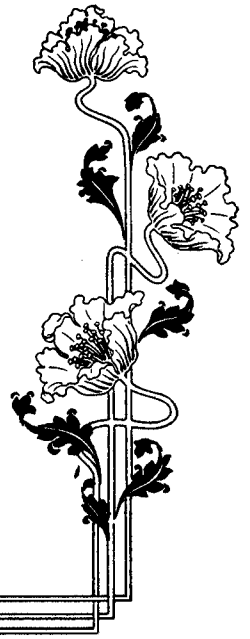
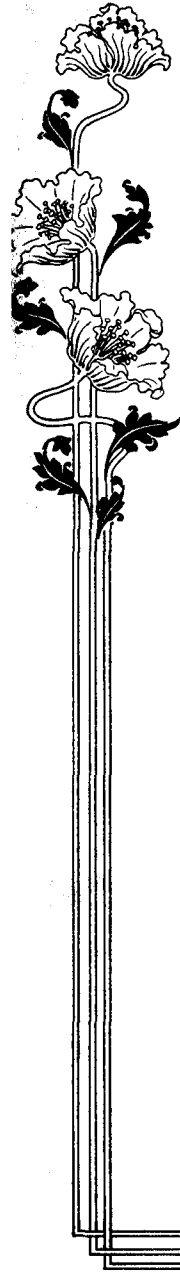
Then I went on to talk to him in technical terms about the way in which theory and knowledge were acquired, drawing parallels from music. The young man sat there looking bewildered and I could tell that he understood nothing.

'You see,' I said, 'what I have just told you is an ordinary way of explaining things—a three-dimensional way. But here we are after the world of the fourth dimension, and *this* would be quite beyond your comprehension, I believe, even in the form of a question.

'We give up much of our time, and make other sacrifices in order to come here and to be on the road, perhaps never to have an answer. We are satisfied just to know that we *are* on the road leading to what we wish to attain. And you just walked in! From the street! From nowhere! . . . Did you think you could get the whole thing served up all ready on a golden tray?'

The young man sat there, still with an expression of total bewilderment. Even then he did not at once move away; it was as if he were petrified.

LAZINESS



for us and hammer it into our heads in order that it should be absorbed and understood. Sometimes it was like splashes of colour in paint, like words of the Impressionists, Gauguin or Van Gogh, representing perhaps through the artist's medium the bursting of a sun. The most difficult subjects, dealt with semi-symbolically in this way, can be understood. Splashes of paint—splashes of words—such were the words uttered by the Pythia in Delphi, or by other ancient oracles, before the tripod, with the fumes working in her and inspiring her. Words seemingly incoherent, nebulous, inarticulate.

There exists a language of symbols or quasi-hieroglyphs which it is possible to decipher, and if we can do so we are enriched by the discovery of unlimited treasures otherwise unknown. Here the future links up with the past, opening to man undreamed-of vistas. The mystics knew that language: poets—real poets—like prophets, could penetrate to cosmic secrets, true ideas, the kind Shuré called 'les idées mères', when God could speak to a man; but that man had to be great himself to be able to hear and understand the spoken word of God.

When Gurdjieff talked he would, sometimes, when the meaning of the phrase was difficult and it was not easy to perceive it at first glance, pause to give us time to absorb and digest it, thus allowing the listener time to hold a kind of silent dialogue with himself, considering all the pros and cons, thus to verify his attitude to the master's words. This helped to make perception of the meaning of what we heard much easier, for the difficulty lay not so much in its lack of clarity as in the fact that it was perfectly possible to interpret it in different ways, and also to approach it in different ways. It was always possible to ask Gurdjieff about the essential

Gurdjieff was sparing with his words; he constructed phrases as if for that time only. Our Russian peasants speak like that, and that is why Tolstoy used to like to talk to them—they thought and felt exactly as they spoke. Sometimes you had to 'fish out' the core of the real meaning in its whole simplicity and strength, and in its natural form (like natural sugar), not subject to literary manipulation and adornment, which only serves to veil the truth. Truth needs no thinning down and dilution: it needs nothing at all except to be left alone. I think of those watery peaches in tins which have gone through the factory and compare them with the real thing, untouched and not 'improved' (some people will try to 'improve' even truth itself). Where has all their juice gone, that blessed health-giving juice? That is how it is with speech: gone is all the vigour, only the suave substitute remains, which is not at all satisfying, or should not be. Unfortunately in many cases it does satisfy.

The beauty of Gurdjieff's talk was that it was condensed and rich in meaning, new; but he had to repeat it

meaning, but it was much better for us to arrive at it (or try to) by our own means and efforts, even if it meant going round and round, hither and thither, before reaching the goal.

For instance, supposing in one particular case there could be three interpretations, which for the sake of argument we may call red, orange and yellow: then the solution must be sought within the limits of these three colours, and the other four colours of the spectrum must be disregarded as irrelevant. It is imperative to bear in mind what we expect will be said today, and what was said on the subject at our last meeting, remembering that everything evolves out of something that went before. And so whatever was relevant to the possible 'colour' of interpretation must be taken into account in our quest. Everything irrelevant would then be discarded and we would be able to dwell only on the essential without wandering in labyrinths and getting lost among the other four colours of the spectrum—which at the beginning of our quest we agreed to discard as inessential to our endeavour to find the right interpretation.

Sometimes, when we asked Gurdjieff which of various possible interpretations was the main, essential one, he answered by putting other questions and the enquirer would often end up amazed. Yet if that enquirer could have spent six—or better twelve—months in Gurdjieff's company, and gained experience in the deep inner significance of these conversations (bearing in mind, too, his own capabilities), he would have soon come to realisation and begun to see daylight, in as much as his own question in itself contained a hidden answer; and so the enquirer would be led by this peculiar method of thinking and by the process of association, and would be able at length to hazard a guess, then succeed in guessing and

finally come closer to the goal of his quest. This was due to the impetus he received in the exchange with Gurdjieff: his thinking apparatus was set working, a clear idea took shape, and he was given the impulse to work in the right direction. Not at once, of course, and not yet with any precision. But everything was being perfected and properly aligned as he continued on his quest, and thus simplified. Still, there were people who could not grasp it for many different reasons, some of which could be dealt with though others were out of their hands.

From time to time it would happen that Gurdjieff would throw out some brief condensed statement in the expectation that we, the listeners, would take it up and enlarge on it. Once, I recall, he did so with a nod in my direction which meant that I had to develop his suggested idea in its different aspects and in all its visible and invisible ramifications. Here is one such example.

Gurdjieff stated: 'Most people are in the clutches of laziness. How can they overcome it?'

I felt very frightened at being singled out to make a discourse in such a gathering, but I plunged in with a firmer voice than I had thought I could muster.

'If a man suffers from this vice,' I started, 'the first thing he has to do is to confess to himself the true state of affairs: that he is lazy. For instance, he feels he cannot—but really he doesn't want to—write some important business letter and he puts it off, every time finding a new excuse for delay. Then suddenly a thought crosses his mind: he remembers that the man he has to write to is very important and powerful and has a lot of influence in the circles where he himself works; that he can be bad-tempered and even vengeful and would never forgive disrespectful behaviour and would make trouble for him. Then on top of that the lazy man becomes aware

of another important fact: that he depends on this man financially, and so . . . he writes the letter without any further delay.

'But then on the other hand, supposing the other man is in *his*, the lazy man's, power: well then he can wait for that letter because he won't dare remind him of his obligations. . . . Not a very noble way of behaving.

'Now, one fine day, under circumstances which for one reason or another are favourable—perhaps due to something quite trivial' (the kind of thing Gurdjieff often liked to cite) 'like some particularly good coffee he has just had, he feels fresh, lucid, his brain is clearer than usual, and suddenly he sees himself as if in a mirror, in a new light. He realises that *he is lazy*. Of course, other people have known this all along (this is always much easier), but now he suddenly becomes aware of all the many things he was supposed to do and do immediately, and how he has failed and left them undone, and how in some cases, perhaps in one especially, some catastrophe has resulted. . . . Why did he never do anything? It seems as if he could have done it. . . . Why, then—we repeat—didn't he? How did this sudden "discovery of America", this great fact that he is lazy, come about?

'Well, this discovery became possible because he came to understand the fact that laziness had become so deeply rooted in him that it was now his *habit*. He never noticed it until now because he ascribed all his failures to other causes. And now, alone and horrified by this new discovery of his, he may say to himself: "I could achieve more if only I ceased being what I am now—almost nobody wants me, I've never achieved anything, and now I am suffering in many different ways."

'So he may try to improve, in this instance losing no

time about it. Time is such a precious thing, and besides (as Seneca says), who knows when the end will come and how much time will be left one? So with what fire and energy he sets to work! But will this fire last or will it vanish just as quickly as it appeared? Or maybe of all those things he has put off doing, he now chooses what seems to him the most important but in reality is just the easiest of all!

'But is it not too late now? What now then? . . . He makes a new "discovery of America": this time he learns that the greater part of his life has gone by already. . . . But how? Where? So little now remains of it—just as when once you break a fifty-rouble note nothing but a trifle remains. Just in the same way he asks himself, "How did I spend it? What did I get in return?" It seems almost nothing at all.

'Now he is afraid to peer deeper into himself, and screwing up his eyes in fear of further discovery, in a panic he makes a desperate effort to start work. . . . But his muscles don't respond, some are stiff, others are atrophied. If only he had in some way exercised his will-power in general things, in daily life, made some small efforts (like gymnastics) in his daily routine, it would have been so much easier now to tackle this larger problem. And now, with his remaining strength and with the time which still remains to him, he must carry on (if just to survive) with the same old task. Time has been lost, strength has been scattered but that present task is there just the same as it was, just as large as ever, and now he must tackle it under the worst possible conditions.

'So he decides he must avoid everybody and everything which might prove an obstacle to him. These obstacles all existed many years ago and he never had the possibility or the will-power to overcome them: he

recognises them as old friends, or rather as old enemies. And those conditions which like a coward he fled in the past are still there. . . . He says to himself, perhaps out loud, "Is the goal worth all this labour?"

'Then he decides to think it over, deliberate, ask the advice of some friend. He comes to the conclusion he is tired. He needs to go out and sit quietly at some outdoor café, and watch the passing crowd. . . .'

Here I paused, hoping (probably) that Gurdjieff might make some remark like 'Good, Anna, you have pursued your line of thinking to a point where one of the others may like to take it up.' But no, he sat there silent and unmoving like Buddha. Gurdjieff never made any unnecessary gestures.

After hesitating a moment, I went on.

'Yet his story may still have a happy ending. He may have the luck to meet some old friend who will listen to his tale of woe, sympathise with him, compel him almost by force to come back to his house and talk. Now he is happy, he blossoms under this friendly compassion, in fact he's rejuvenated. The friend strengthens his resolve and encourages him in his determination to turn over a new leaf. But of course everything depends on whether the regenerated man really has sufficient will-power, for he must not relapse, or turn off, now that he is on the right road.

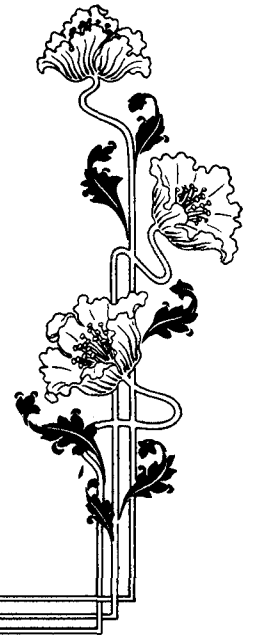
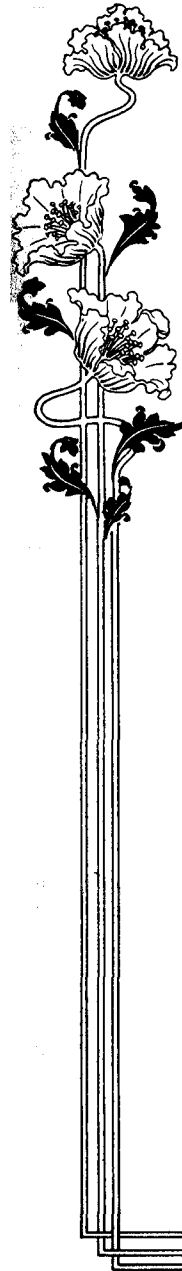
'The happy ending may come about in some other way, however. Once the lazy man has discovered his weakness he may have a strong fit of remorse. This is something most likely to occur in maturity or even at the approach of old age. He then makes a strong effort to obtain the results he desired in the direction and within the limits that are left him and are still within his reach. Long, long ago in his youth he wanted to take

this road—conquer worlds. But however hopefully he set out, somehow he soon forgot his plans and nothing whatever came of those original good intentions. All the same he had made a start then, and the memory of those lost hopes and those lost efforts brings tears . . . tears that at first seem vain, yet falling one by one bring about a miracle.

'Once again he becomes aware of truth and reality. Within his innermost soul one small grain of truth has been preserved alive, like those living seeds of wheat they found in the excavations in Egypt. Those miraculous tears water the dormant grain and bring it to life—just as in our fairy tale Prince Ivan touches the eyes of the sleeping princess with the miraculous water given him by the old white raven, which is called the water of life. The princess comes back to life as if nothing had happened to her: rather shyly she looks about, at things which seem both familiar and strange, for she has slept for two hundred years and a great deal has changed. In the same way our lazy man suffers a sort of shock, awakens, recovers his senses and looks around. Something hidden deep within him stirs into life, and he is saved: within himself he has found a new ego.

'From this point onward his way is clear: he must act. The laziness which up to now has hampered his progress can be conquered. Bad habits *can* be broken, a weak will *can* be made strong. The tears of retribution perform a miracle, transforming the will that was as weak as an unwatered sapling and helping it to grow at last into a mighty tree.'

**JUMPING
OVER YOUR
HEAD**



One day I was sitting alone with Gurdjieff and as we were talking, he began to speak about myself. 'Now,' he said, 'you are feeling ashamed because you are making no progress—and the reason why you feel ashamed is because you've just been drinking coffee, which you love, and that makes you feel ready to embrace the whole world. Well, there's some chance that something good will come out of your being ashamed. . . . But then it's very likely that your feeling of shame will pass very quickly.'

I listened to what he said and ventured to ask in a timid voice, 'But how am I to escape from the problem? You know I've a pretty poor capacity for observing my own faults and shortcomings.'

Gurdjieff replied, 'All the time you keep expecting some miracle to happen! Now,' he went on, 'I'll tell you something. How is it that you know at certain times that you have your hat on crooked? By instinct? That's an empty word. Try to think constructively about what I'm asking you.'

Although I did not feel sure of my words, still I found

myself answering, 'It's a feeling of being uncomfortable—a sensation that something on my head isn't right. Or it's that one feels accustomed to a completely different sensation when it *is* on right!'

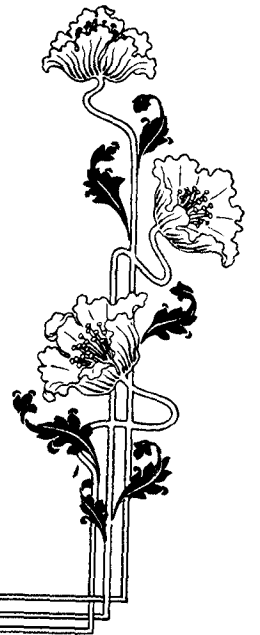
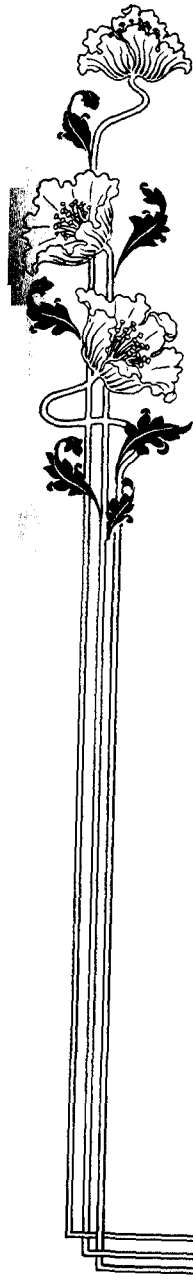
'You must understand the reason,' Gurdjieff said, 'for that feeling of discomfort. You must make tremendous efforts, even that you "jump over your head"—no less,' he added with a sudden smile. 'Jump! Jump! . . . Of course it's true that when *you* jump, your head jumps too, just as much as you do. But still you must jump, higher, higher—till you drop. And it's here that the miracle may happen: because in making all that effort you have accumulated a potential force which serves as a preparation for the miracle to be accomplished. Now, apply my example about the hat to your own character: somehow or other you know that you have to move that hat a little to the right and not to the left. You rectify a situation that was wrong, even if it's only more or less. But already that's something good. Do you understand?'

Humbly, in a low voice, I answered, 'I do . . . perhaps . . . even if not all of it.'

'Very well!' Gurdjieff replied. 'It was good that you added "perhaps"—not being sure of yourself. It's good that you aren't like those people who are dogmatic about everything they say, or are blinded because they are in love—or in situations like playing cards for heavy stakes, or betting at the races, or buying expensive paintings that are far beyond their means. In those situations the emotional temperature is so high that one can't judge clearly, and it can bring one to the edge of catastrophe.'

Gurdjieff's mention of card-playing brought my cousin to my mind, for he had committed suicide when his gambling brought him to the brink of ruin.

THE SIX



that he sometimes used it in the treatment of patients, and he had other connections as well. However, he never told us anything of his personal life or spoke about himself, nor did he ever disclose the reasons which had brought him into Gurdjieff's circle. What was his secret dissatisfaction, his intolerance (that was Gurdjieff's word for it) in life, which caused him to seek help? Or was he merely hoping to learn from Gurdjieff about the scope and practice of hypnotism, so that he could perfect his knowledge and technique in a scientific manner for his patients? More likely, rather, he was driven by some inner anxiety and by questions to which he hoped that here he might find the answers.

Sometimes we used to hold our meetings at the house of one of the doctor's well-to-do patients, a Madame Maximovitch, and occasionally we went over to what was then the province of Finland where she had her country house—it was only about an hour's journey by train from St Petersburg. I remember that on one of those evenings the subject of Christianity came into the conversation. Till then the doctor had been sitting quietly, cool and calm like his usual self. Now, suddenly, he came out with something so utterly unexpected—in fact a bomb-shell—that even Nicholas, who as we shall see had a childish lack of self-control that caused him to blurt out impulsively whatever came into his head, would never have made such a declaration. And here was our well-balanced, level-headed doctor blundering into an extraordinary utterance.

Wearing a trance-like expression and making nervous, excitable gestures as if he were suddenly waking out of a reverie, he burst out in a voice that was hoarse, like subdued thunder, and quite unlike his usual tones: 'Yes! I believe that Georgi Ivanovitch is not less than *Christ himself!*'

I have already said that a group of six of us had gathered together as pupils of Gurdjieff, and I shall now say something about the four who, besides Ouspensky and myself, made up this group.

First was Doctor S—, a man of about fifty-five, who looked exactly as a successful doctor ought to look: big and inclined to stoutness, distinguished in appearance, with a well-kept beard. It was evident that he enjoyed the good things of life. His manner was pleasant and quiet—almost phlegmatic. It was rather astonishing that a man of his age and belonging to such a sceptical profession should so quickly fall under Gurdjieff's spell, and become such a convinced and devoted pupil. The doctor had a wife much younger than himself, whom none of us ever saw. He was a business-like, unemotional man and when he used to speak during our discussions it was the same: he spoke well, but without displaying any excitement, in his level doctor's voice. If he never showed any particular brilliance, what he had to say was always common sense.

The doctor was interested in hypnotism. It was said

What he meant by this I have no idea nor could I even try to see an explanation. Some very strange and violent disturbance must have been taking place in his inmost soul for this utterance to leap out on us without warning.

Gurdjieff himself cut the doctor short, vigorously and at once. There was an embarrassed silence and then conversation and relative normality were restored. But this outburst from the doctor completely changed our view of him, showing him in a new light that was almost impossible to explain. Was it a 'plus' or a 'minus'—who knows? Some softening of his nature which led to an awkward manifestation approaching hysteria? Or the effect of a dry intellectual mind suddenly coming into contact with ideas that could not be dealt with by the intellect alone, as he had always done with former experiences? He was plainly shaken to the core at this moment—but by what? Was it loss of self-control, or a feeling of helplessness in coping with ideas and elements which were new to his soul?

Much later, the suggestion was made to each of the six to relate, in front of all the others, a true account of the very worst action they had ever done in their lives, and I well recall how utterly painful it was to the doctor to make this confession. He was accustomed in his profession to imposing his will on others, and to maintaining the prestige that came from his knowledge that could prevent or lessen human suffering; and here he was being obliged to cast off this crown of convention which he had chosen to wear, and to show himself to his companions, not as he appeared in the eyes of others, on the heights, but in a humiliating light. And when at last, with a forced and pained expression on his face, he embarked on a confession of the worst deed of his lifetime, I felt that he was deliberately shirking the truth.

He described the event in an abstract, impersonal fashion which made it anything but convincing, and one could sense the struggle between his desire to whitewash the action and his knowledge that it was impossible to deceive Gurdjieff; or even to deceive the rest of us, for by this time we had all begun to understand the hidden side of human nature. It was not hypocrisy, but more duality: the duality between the man of everyday and the man who is beginning to discover within himself the things of which he was never before conscious. He is ashamed of his worse actions, but so deeply are they hidden, so blind is his foolish pride, that he does not acknowledge them as his own. Instead of accepting the experience as one that would help him forward along the Path, and instead of bearing his humiliation with stoicism, a man will try to conceal the truth in order to avoid pain and shame, and what he fondly believes will give his colleagues a false view of himself. This was how the doctor reacted in making his confession. Perhaps he was not big enough to make a truly sincere effort to attain the desired purpose—so he tripped over on his first attempt. We could only imagine what he was trying to conceal.

Gurdjieff, listening, said nothing, but fixed him with such a piercing look that it stopped the doctor in the middle of a word.

Then Gurdjieff said, twisting the knife in the wound, 'Another time, doctor, you will be sincere, and recall these matters accurately. . . . Think it over.'

Our second member, Nicholas R—, was a patient of Dr S—, and was his complete antithesis. He was very emotional, more so than most men. At sixty-eight years of age (though he appeared less) he had white hair and a

long beard that were patriarchal, and a pale face with blue-grey eyes. His family name was of German origin; he was a widower and had four grown-up daughters.

Nicholas was never still, but fidgeted perpetually. If he was listening to anything being related he frequently reacted to it with his whole body, and when he spoke it was quickly, excitedly, repeating himself over and over again. To me he used to seem like a bird with ruffled feathers that could never settle down on the same branch for more than a moment, before fluttering off again somewhere else. However, here with Gurdjieff he did 'sit down' firmly for once, and even made some progress in following the principles he taught. Nicholas was a sincere and very likeable person.

For a long time he was interested in questions of life and death, and how to learn to perfect himself. But he was aware of his own weaknesses and he knew he had a great deal that needed to be improved, though his aspirations were very modest. When, therefore, having read a number of books on mysticism, he met Gurdjieff, and found in him a teacher 'in the flesh' with whom he could actually sit at the same table, talk and put questions (and what questions we all put!), his emotional nature so rejoiced in the opportunity that he soon joined the group as one of the six.

Here I should like to relate a little story of an episode during Nicholas's 'apprenticeship' which I think is interesting because it was so characteristic of the man—and which, happily, thanks to his own sincerity and persistence, came to a good ending.

I should explain here that Nicholas was a senior official in a government department, so that not only was he patriarchal in appearance but he had a position of great respectability to keep up. One night, after one of

our meetings that went on late into the magical 'white nights' of our northern St Petersburg, Nicholas offered to escort me home. We walked along together for some time in an unaccustomed silence, and then suddenly, with his face twitching and hands gesturing nervously, he blurted out:

'You know, Anna Ilinishna, I have a terrible problem, and I simply don't know how I'm to solve it. Gurdjieff told me that because I have grown-up daughters and I'm the . . . er . . . age that I am . . . that I ought not to have anything more to do with women. So I have given them up! . . . Except for two.' (Oh, the *naïveté* of this government man!) 'In fact I haven't seen either of them for two weeks now. But—but—you see, I really can't stand it any more, and so—what do you think I should do? Must I confess my weakness to Gurdjieff . . . or do you think I might go to them for a last—a *very last*—time, and say nothing to him about it?'

I had a great longing to laugh, but I answered him very gravely. 'To that, Nicholas, I have several answers. The first one is that, after being with Gurdjieff as long as you have, you yourself must know that when he tells you not to do some particular thing, then you must obey. To me that much is obvious and how can *you* be in any doubt about it? Indeed I believe that you aren't.

'Secondly, supposing you did give way to this weakness without letting him know, you realise that you wouldn't succeed because he would guess at once from your behaviour, or even from your guilty looks—and then you would feel just like a schoolboy caught in class doing something he shouldn't. And that wouldn't really be becoming to your—excuse my saying this—to your white hair and beard. The result would be that Gurdjieff

would expel you from our³ group altogether, and you would never be able to return to it.

'But, Nicholas, the main thing is, whatever is all this undignified comedy about? Nobody is forcing you to follow Gurdjieff's discipline. Why, you are with us of your own free will and for your own good, and you've taken a great deal of trouble and effort to stay in the group. But if you can't make this particular effort to conquer your weakness, would it not be better to quit completely, and not try to deceive yourself about it?

'Then, I suppose you've never given a thought to my learning your secret. You're putting me in a difficult position because I cannot tell anyone about you, naturally, and you are making me feel like an accessory to a crime. Obviously I can't just conveniently "forget" it.

'I think you will have to choose between the spirit and the flesh. Wouldn't it be a pity to lose a teacher like Gurdjieff—and the friends living around him like brothers, so closely knit and so closely interested in the subject of the eternal, which by its very existence helps with the problems of the non-eternal. Wouldn't losing all that be a pity?'

'Yes—yes!' exclaimed Nicholas hastily. 'I see it now—I must not telephone this woman—not today, not tomorrow . . . not ever!'

'Certainly, dear Nicholas! . . . But now that you have made this decision, do be firm about it. Who knows whether in a weak moment you might not change your mind and say, "Well, I'll do it just this once, for the last time . . . just to say goodbye"? I know all about these "last times" only too well!' I added feelingly. 'You would do it and not tell me, just as you believed now you might do it without telling Gurdjieff. Well—you

must do what you think right, but do remember this, it must be one thing or the other. Both you cannot have! And in case you do go back to the women, don't expect to make any progress whatever in your interior life, but be prepared for an *exterior* storm and ostracism! There!'

'No, no, Anna Ilinishna,' said Nicholas, still in that agitated manner. 'I won't do it! All of our group are dearer to me than anything else in life; they are my family—my friends. Gurdjieff's teaching is the main purpose of my existence. . . . You know, I am sixty-eight, and with this long beard of mine I suppose I look to all of you like a hermit—but I know I'm *not*! But I promise you—I promise I will not do it.'

'I don't need your promise,' I said warmly, 'I only want to help you by presenting you with the dry facts. It is you who must weigh them and decide for yourself.'

So much for Nicholas. I need only add, without embroidery, that he remained a member of the group.

Our third member, Anthony Charkovsky, I have already mentioned. He was fifty, an engineer and bridge-builder, very good in his own field. It was always remarkable to me to see how a man of his age could preserve such purity of heart. Everything that Gurdjieff told us we should or should not do he followed religiously. He was kind and good to everyone he met, and all his free time he spent with us. Having a mathematical mind he had great precision of thought; he was one of those who, to a certain level, as I described earlier, could handle the device invented by Lully.

Andrey Z— was the fourth member, a railway engineer of about thirty-seven or thirty-eight. He had one great

impediment which put him at a disadvantage with our group: he was wholly unable to express anything of his inner being, and his efforts whenever he was trying to do so were quite painful to witness as, struggling and speechless, his face reflected his inner torments. Indeed, he seemed at home only with mathematics, for he could not express a single abstract thought. In the early days, then, when Andrey tried to relate his inmost life, he was incoherent, but later on, by making great efforts, he became better able to express himself, and when it came to it, unlike the doctor, he had no reluctance about showing himself at his worst.

Andrey was a good-looking bachelor, very shy, and for a Russian, very 'frozen', silent and reserved. We could sense that he was sincere but we had to judge him from his actions, not his words.

Ouspensky and myself made up the remainder of the six. You may marvel how a group of such seemingly ordinary people came to gather together on such an abstract eternal quest. But for that quest qualities other than accepted 'brilliance' were required. In the course of the search, many individual lines of character became erased because these were only superficial, external. It was, of course, some time before anything else emerged to take their place. There was no room in our meetings for social talk or pretentious display; each of us had to collect himself, to concentrate on something deeper. All of us were united in our determination to penetrate to the inner self, with the object that we would one day perhaps be able to develop the highest faculties possible to man and approach the goal in a sincere way. Gurdjieff always stressed very strongly the importance of sincerity.

On the face of it, the one who was most prominent among the six was Ouspensky. It was he who always kept the conversation going; he who at our meetings talked more than anyone else, asked Gurdjieff the most questions. And complex questions they were, too, for an ordinary person. Gurdjieff sometimes rebuked him for not being brief and keeping to the point. Ouspensky was all outward manifestation. In those early days, before he developed, behind his quasi-scientific phrases there was no real significance or deep meaning. We could see how many facts were stored in his head: he could compare the different esoteric schools, make a historical survey of them, put rhetorical questions and then answer them himself. But in reality he was only posing the same questions in a different form. Names of leaders, countries, philosophers, heroes, mystic books, all poured forth in non-stop speech in a characteristic avalanche. And yet all this knowledge did not serve to bring him even to the path leading to the regions where he so longed to penetrate. When Ouspensky had been going on in this fashion for some time, Gurdjieff used to look at him with a curious enigmatic smile and sometimes would stop him in full flood. In fact I, too, had a very good memory and could rehearse all the names of these Indian books that Ouspensky loved to discuss—the *Vedas*, *Venda Vesta*, *Atavra* and others—but though I always appreciated their value, I knew already that they had not helped me to find what I wanted, which was to attain a vision of another and deeper way to live.

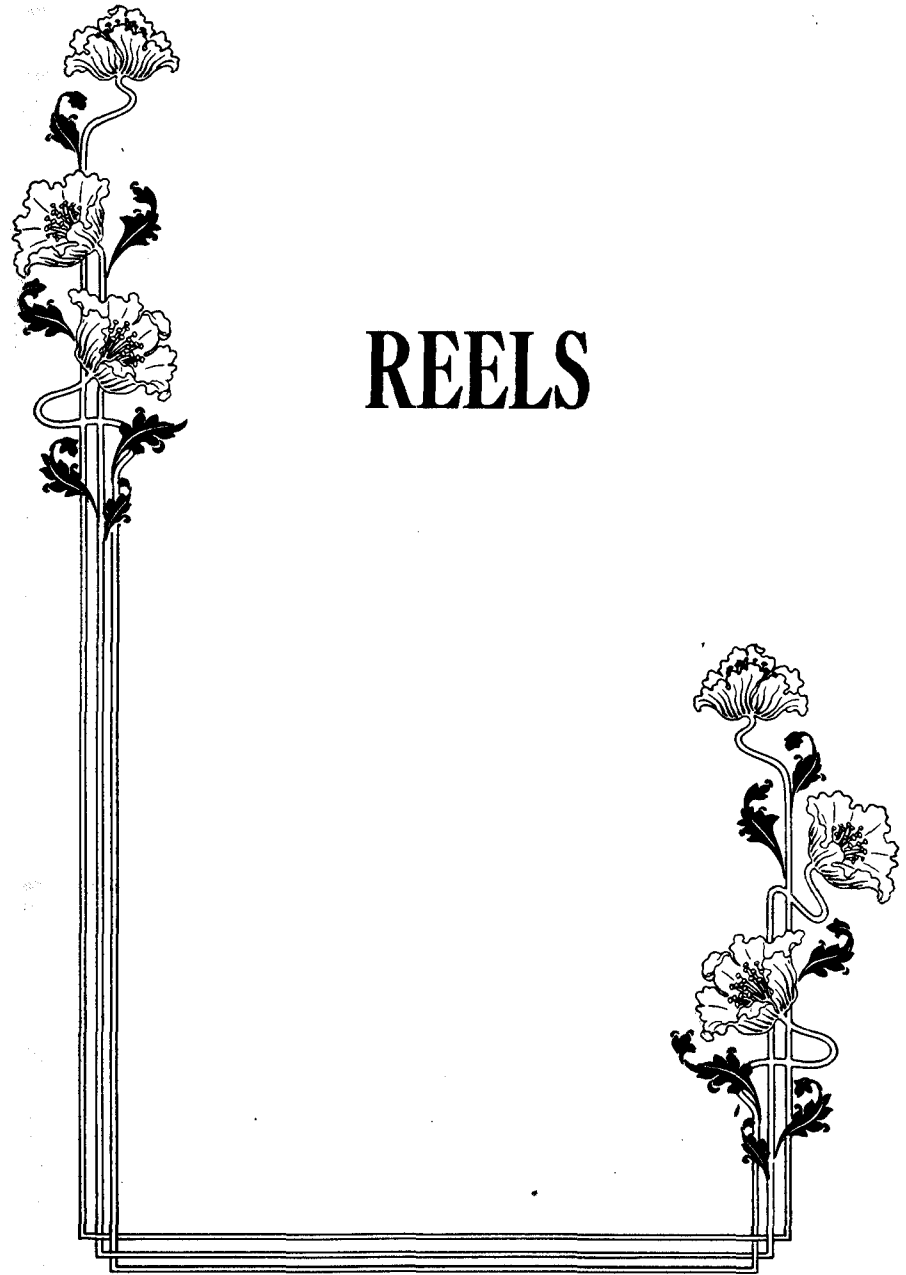
So in spite of all his erudition, Ouspensky, any more than the rest of us, still did not possess the key with which the 'human machine', as Gurdjieff termed the human being, could be wound up to move away from its settled place so that it could begin to use its complicated

inner functions: to bring it out of the three-dimensional world and gradually raise it, if not to the fourth, at least to the threshold.

Where, then, is this threshold between the third- and fourth-dimensional world? How to discover it? How to recognise and be able to cross it? Could man find it by chance? And supposing such 'chance' did exist, then is the 'chance' only *apparent*?

Let us consider a man, between thirty-six and thirty-eight years old, on one particular day at twenty minutes past nine in the morning. He is taking a walk in the fields and suddenly feels himself filled in his innermost soul with light—what, in mystical terms, is called 'illumination'. Then he has a revelation as if a cup were being filled slowly, drop by drop, until at last it becomes so full that each new drop overflows on to the soil around and fertilises it. At that point it seems that one overflowing drop has performed this miracle, but in reality it has been gradually, unknowingly preparing for years past. With the contact of this 'last drop' with the new element or material and the psychic transformation of that particular man, something like an explosion happens which makes him able to understand the 'un-understandable'. Light bursts through the darkness, transforming this same darkness into light itself: a light that will never again be extinguished. And so that man now knows and hears and sees with new organs.

REELS



self-consciously put on an expression like an experienced lecturer, and began:

'Er, er . . . it is difficult . . . well-nigh impossible . . . for civilised humanity with its deeply-rooted ideas, to assimilate new ones . . . er. . . Perhaps we are disciples of Auguste Comte; or we may become attached to the ideas of Thomas à Kempis . . . or possibly we are influenced by reading about the Rosicrucians, or by the doctrines of Theosophy. . . . We are all products of our destructive civilisation.'

Gurdjieff stopped him with an impatient gesture.

'Whatever is this rubbish you're talking?' he shouted. Then he shrugged his shoulders and turned to the rest of us. 'I suppose he wants to show off his knowledge. He's exactly like a cow going round and round a new gate without being able to find the way in. God preserve us from such people! Anna! You try.'

I was taken by surprise because I was not at all accustomed to talking in public, but I answered in a low, although to my astonishment firm, voice.

'I will do my best to repeat what Georgi Ivanovitch was saying to us yesterday. Man absorbs impressions from the outside world on what Gurdjieff calls "reels", receiving and "winding on" impressions from without as if on cotton-reels or spools. Then from these impressions, man gradually develops his habits and inclinations, his tastes, his longings. From earliest childhood their influence affects him. By the same rule the negative qualities are formed—dislikes, idiosyncrasies and so on. A child who has a musical father, for instance, and who constantly hears music played and talked about at home, although by nature he may not be musical, may develop a musical skill because these impressions are "wound" on his "reels". Of course, other impressions

By degrees, the members of our small group became so accustomed to meeting one another every day and living in an atmosphere pervaded by mysticism, that our search for the fourth dimension and our interest in kindred subjects acted like a narcotic. In time it grew to be an absolute necessity to us. If, as happened very rarely, Gurdjieff did not arrange a meeting for the following day, then we would meet without him. In those summer nights, although when we all saw one another home we often walked about till two or three in the morning, still next day we would turn up as usual to meet Gurdjieff at the café at noon.

We did not always satisfy our exacting task-master in our *gropings after the truth—far from it*. I remember one evening when we happened to be gathered together at a friend's house, with Gurdjieff sitting cross-legged on a large settee, that he turned to Ouspensky and said:

'Now, you tell me something about what I was trying to hammer into your heads yesterday, about impressions and "reels". I will smoke and listen.'

Ouspensky cleared his throat, hummed and hawed,

will be there too, but not so strongly. At some period in his life his surroundings or circumstances may change; then, perhaps, there will be wound on his "reels", instead of his father's musical impressions, his mother's complaints about lack of money.

'New conditions will create new impressions, but it may happen that, later in life, some deep, forgotten impression may come through to the surface, and will be a deciding factor in forming the life of the individual. And so it follows that when we speak of "I" doing or thinking something, often it is not the true "I", because all the work is being done by the "reels"—rather like recording for a gramophone. Only through suffering, or rubbing as Georgi Ivanovitch calls it, is the true "I" born. Till that happens we react like parrots, and throw out the impressions we have gathered and stored up, in a distorted form, believing it is a creative process.

'So Gurdjieff calls such a person a "reel" man: he says, "That was spoken by your reels, not by your 'I'. And so we must develop the real 'I'."'

Here Gurdjieff stopped me.

'Enough . . . somewhere near the truth. Nicholas, repeat that!' He turned to the elderly, long-bearded man sitting nearby, who was shading his eyes with his hand. Nicholas started awake, looking rather like a schoolboy caught in the act of doing something he shouldn't. He was embarrassed, tried to collect himself and began, stammering:

'A reel man is someone who . . . is, er, when. . .'

To this day I can recall that perturbed, unhappy face, and the way everyone else looked on, sympathetic but helpless.

'Have you had a nice nap—hm? Then why come to us here? And to think how you begged me to take you on!

. . . What are *you* grinning at?' snapped Gurdjieff, turning to another of the group. 'Now *you* tell us what you heard and understood yesterday.'

But at this unlucky moment our host appeared, inviting us to go into the dining-room to take tea and refreshments. Gurdjieff turned on us with an explosion of wrath.

'Now this beats everything!' he roared. 'Oh, God-seekers indeed! You want a fourth, eighth dimension—three are not enough for you. Mystics indeed! The best thing for you all would be to be put in gaol, and perhaps after a little suffering and discomfort you might understand when to speak and what to say. It seems that taking tea is far more important for you than seeking the truth. Well, drink your healths in it—by yourselves!'

And he swept out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

We all sat there as if paralysed. No one moved. Silently we remembered that often before he had threatened to leave us because of our laziness and lack of will to learn. Below, we heard the hall door bang.

Suddenly Ouspensky, as if shaking himself out of a dream, leapt to his feet and dashed down the stairs after Gurdjieff.

Ouspensky described to me afterwards how, when he caught up with Gurdjieff in the street and tried to reason with him, he had the greatest difficulty in persuading him not to abandon us. He begged him to have mercy on the group, for the sake of one righteous man—'as in Sodom and Gomorrah'. Gurdjieff, in a sceptical voice, asked him, 'But is there really one righteous person among you? Who is it then? . . . Supposing you lumped yourself and Anna together and then added the

other four: maybe out of that there might come—not a whole—but *half* a righteous person . . . maybe! All right, then, and only because all six of you are sincerely “hungry” for knowledge, not for any other reason. Very well, come tomorrow to Phillipoff’s: you and Anna come at noon, and the others come when they can in the evening.’

Next day Ouspensky and I were of course at the café even before noon. We sat, chastened, waiting at our usual table in the corner until Gurdjieff appeared.

‘Good day to you, half-of-a-righteous-one!’ he greeted us gaily, taking his usual place. ‘And what shall we talk about today?’

We remained silent and abashed. For several minutes we all sat drinking our coffee without a word. At last Gurdjieff, with a rather melancholy smile, began to talk.

‘Maybe you, Ouspensky and Anna, are more than half *pravedniki* [righteous], because you can keep still. You are capable of quenching your burning desire to ask unnecessary questions. Statements can wait, you can sit without talking . . . but try to explain *that* to Nicholas Alexandrovitch! *He* always shouts out everything that comes into his head. Explain to *him* about control, about discipline in talking and where to stop, about simplification, abbreviation, throwing out not only superfluous words but also the ideas themselves, which need “dusting out” and tire the thinking apparatus—yours and that of the person you are talking to. One needs to know both *what* and *how* to speak.’

He added to the pair of us, ‘Do you understand what I meant by the reels?’

‘More or less,’ replied Ouspensky.

‘And you, Anna Ilinishna?’

‘I don’t know if I really do.’

‘Very bad! You *must* know. No one can be uncertain whether they want to eat or not—it’s *yes* or *no*. And it’s the same with this: so let’s straighten it out together.’

Then Gurdjieff went on to explain.

‘You presume that you have a genuine “I”? No! You have not, because all your ideas and actions are the results of recordings on your reels. You have thirty-three reels; today you say something is red, tomorrow you say that same thing is green: that is because a different “I” is speaking. One may have seventeen “I’s”, another may have more, and some have only three: for eating, for sleeping and for the sexual urge. To have thirty-three may or may not be an advantage—it depends on whether it is worth “winding” on these reels. Suppose a man wants to become, say, a lecturer: it may be a good thing and lead to success because of many of the qualities of his “reel” impressions. Or through them he may instead turn out just a chatterbox—that’s bad. Look at Nicholas: anything he sees or hears he grabs with both hands—shouts about it. Then he hears something else and forgets the first thing, so nothing in him settles down. He “earns” nothing either for himself or for anyone else. When a man has as many reels as there are subjects to talk about, he can’t see daylight, and no wonder if he is hazy about everything.

‘We must learn to absorb from the outer world and give out again, chiefly *one* impression. One which concerns our chief occupation, and perhaps a few, very few, sidelines. And when we meet people we must refuse to pay too much attention to what they say, but politely, or impolitely, ignore them. As you might put it, let everything go in at one ear and come out at the other.

‘Sometimes there is simply no time to ignore such things politely, for we must run after the object which

is important to us if we are⁹ to catch it. Now it's here at hand, we can seize it. Half a minute later it will be too late, out of reach—and someone else into whose neighbourhood it has shifted may grasp it. Then the first man will stand looking at the second like a *dourak* [imbecile]. He'll watch him, spy on him and at last will see what he has accomplished. On this foundation, which seems "heaven-sent", the second has built his life, while the first man only looks on, licking his lips with envy. One *must* know how to act swiftly, grasp the object and never let go. . . . For will there ever be another opportunity? Probably never! And when it's been lost, a man will try to satisfy himself with some kind of imitation of what he's lost . . . "Paradise lost!" According to his talent and intellect, sometimes it may work, sometimes not. But then he, too, will start trying to "preach" about it to others. From preachers like that, Lord deliver us!

Gurdjieff continued and we listened.

"There is also another way to succeed in our strivings and longings—less dramatic than the first way. That is to have within oneself something like a "savings box" in which one puts observations and facts collected from one's life. One meets people who are interesting or useful to one's particular purpose and accumulates them in one's "savings-box" like coins, one after another. Then, one day, there will be enough collected to sort it all out, make mental notes, and perhaps—here again it all depends on a man's other qualities—one may make use of it as a foundation for life.

'Now you, Anna, are studying music. One cannot be always learning and listening and watching others play: one must play oneself. This you do, and even in public. But even better is your composing—you can extemporise.

That is good: one has to make real efforts, personal efforts, not merely imitate.

'Let's take an instance. Supposing one day while you are improvising at your piano, one of your girl friends arrives in the middle and asks you to go out with her to buy a new hat! And suppose that she, too, has left some job undone at home, something important like working for a final examination on which her whole life depends—perhaps even the lives of all her family as well. All thrown away, after the ninety-ninth effort! All lost because, though she has done so much already, she grew tired as if the hundredth part were not of vital importance—forgetting that only the hundredth part can complete the whole, like closing a circle. So then it remains unfinished, and everything, the other ninety-nine parts as well, is wasted—the purpose, the sacrifices, time, everything.

'I say it again: the efforts to attain this purpose will be lost because that would have become the means of many other things as well, either dreamed of or undreamed of. You, Anna Ilinishna, already would have "wound up", on your own reels, your friend's stupidity about going out to buy the hat—nothing good would have come of it, only more harm and waste of time. Yes—all would sink to hopeless depths.'

He added, as a summing-up, 'One must be loyal to the most important, most cherished, object in one's life, and must never betray it.'

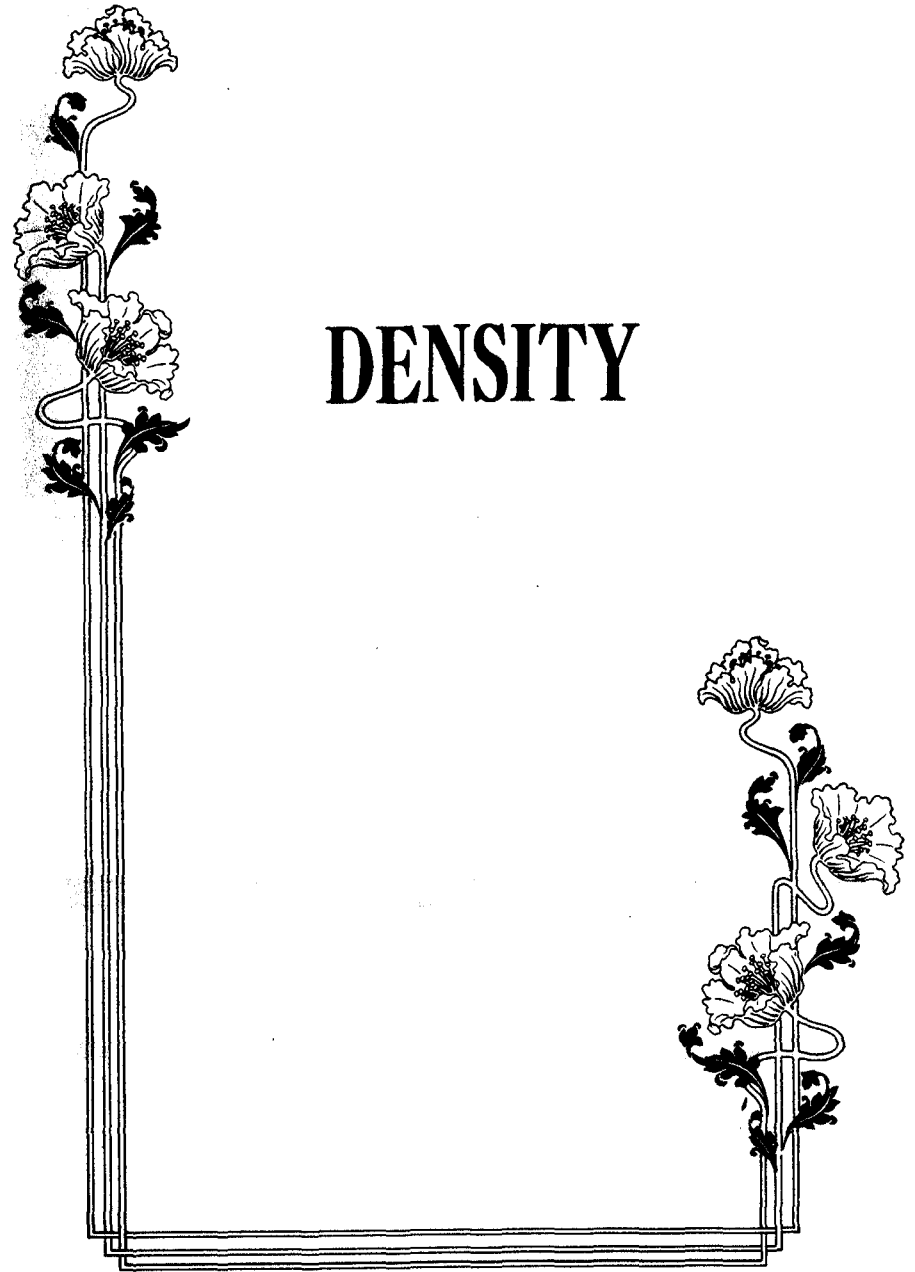
With this Gurdjieff ended and he began to drink a fresh cup of coffee.

All that I have recorded here was spoken with far more picturesque details than I can hope to reproduce. Sometimes he spoke with a glint of humour, sometimes

passionately, with a kind of noble wrath. It was very easy to listen to him . . . but to apply it—that was another thing.

After a moment, Gurdjieff added in a subdued voice, as if talking to himself, 'One must *know*. One has to get off the soft divan and climb that mountain one has seen outside. But not everyone even sees the mountain . . . they are the men who sit there on the divan, trying to teach others without themselves seeing the summit, the sacred heights, and then no one makes any progress. Yes! And how *will* you progress? Only by paying attention in every way to the most important thing, the one thing you have made an idol of. You have chosen it, and it satisfies you . . . whether it is studying the piano, the book you are writing, or love of your wife. To embrace all the subjects that interest you is impossible. All the time other things are pressing in on you from outside, and some of them are like a poison: they eat up your time, your body and soul . . . and at last one day there will be nothing left to eat up, and death is at hand.'

DENSITY



We were aware that Gurdjieff had another group of pupils in Moscow: indeed they were his first and we in St Petersburg formed the second. Gurdjieff had told us the names of his two senior pupils there. Both were Russians—Alexander Nikanorovitch and Alina Fedorovna. Our curiosity and expectations were greatly excited by his promise to bring these two to meet us in Petersburg. Sure enough one day, at his invitation, they arrived in the city, and on the very same evening we all met.

How well I remember the awe I felt on that occasion, and how I wondered—stupidly no doubt—whether there would be anything about their appearance or manner, however slight, to distinguish them from ordinary human beings!

We had no sooner met and been introduced than Alexander went at once to the blackboard, chalk in hand, and began to talk to the rest of us at length about the seven cosmoses, using their Greek names—Macrocosmos, Microcosmos, Tetracosmos, etc. He spoke of their origin, correlativity, and so forth. After that he

embarked on the subject of *Density*, of worlds and of material things. This very important subject of density, of which we then first learned, and which later frequently entered into our conversations, I will now discuss.

Everything that exists has a different density. To take some simple material examples, the two totally different substances wood and jelly: supposing that in a square inch of wood are, say, as many as 1,000 particles, in a square inch of jelly there will be more, for argument's sake 2,000. Then, as everyone knows, a single substance like linen can itself be of different densities—we talk of 'fine linen' and 'coarse linen'. The finer may be of greater density and so, conversely, the coarser of a lesser density. In choosing a piece of linen we hold it up to the light to see how closely its threads are interwoven, and in this way judge its density.

But in Gurdjieff's teaching, 'density' is applied not to material things but to the phenomena of the qualities of human character, their intellectual and emotional elements. Different people in fact have different densities: one individual, A, has one, a second individual, B, another. In each there is a complex of separate densities, of different categories. However deeply these may be hidden, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they can be isolated and analysed as if under a microscope by someone who has the skill to do it, and is experienced in the method of 'condensing' or 'rarefying' them.

It may be that in a person's character some essential trait is missing, or that it functions incorrectly, or is in an abnormal, unhealthy state. Its activity is too great or too little, or lacking in balance instead of being as it ought. The normal trait or function for the particular individual can be established in just the same way as a

man's weight should be normal in relation to his height. Very often the trait that is lacking is will-power: sometimes we meet a man who seems to have every chance of success in some special vocation, or in his marriage, yet all ends in nothing: he ends by being unhappy and so are those around him with whom he is concerned. No one can understand why this should be. Different remedies are sought but his would-be 'helpers', not knowing the reason for his trouble, fail to be of use. He sees a nerve specialist, is recommended to take a cure, or even just a rest, perhaps to leave his family for a while, or else he is prescribed a diet. Still nothing helps. He sees a priest, thinking this may solve his difficulties, but all is in vain.

For a Guru, on the other hand, all appears clear: he will be able to find the cause of this unhappiness, whether moral or physical. He can isolate, treat and frequently, cure it—just so long as the patient has sufficient will-power to co-operate. To achieve this, one has to understand the hidden structure of man. But at what university faculty is one to acquire the skill to become such a 'doctor'? The patient may indeed be talented but if the density of his will-power is not intense enough his power of concentration will not be adequate. One needs to be almost 'possessed' by one's favourite occupation, as if by an *idée fixe*.

Sometimes a man so possessed becomes quite a fanatic. My professor at the St Petersburg Academy of Music, the celebrated pianist Barinova, once told me that when Busoni, who was a friend of hers, was staying in St Petersburg, he made a visit with her and her husband to Peterhof, the Russian Versailles. Even on this party of pleasure to see the tsar's summer palace he still brought his music manuscript with him, and sitting

in the carriage while glancing hurriedly right and left at the splendid fountains and the avenues lined with statues, he was all the time busy with the manuscript, humming to himself and making notes and corrections with his pencil.

Here density was attaining its maximum. So it had probably been from his early youth, even in his childhood. In this case density was, if one may use the expression, 'densified' to such a degree and grown so strong that Busoni had built his whole life on its foundation.

Of course this was a peculiar trait of Busoni's character, but it was a genuine and lively one. Examples of such 'possession' in history are many. There have been great men who, while their whole being was absorbed in their one single occupation, have been unaware of anything else that was going on around them; and to them that single occupation always came first. In some cases it was conscious, in others unconscious—brave deeds of heroes, fearlessness of saints, 'absent-mindedness' of professors.

Lack of will-power to accomplish a purpose, or lack of a longing sufficiently intense to lead to concentration on the goal that one is determined to reach—these provide evidence enough of why a man will end as a failure. But when the longing or concentration is strong, it makes a tremendous driving force, sufficient to make possible the fulfilment of the purpose. It can bring about a state of happiness, ecstasy, creative enchantment, akin to the state of intense love of a man for a woman. He can achieve actions which others, not in that state of noble 'intoxication' and magical excitement, cannot conceive. Later, when his passion has cooled, such achievements seem inexplicable, even to himself.

Cooling off in love is unfortunately a common enough experience, but cooling in vocation is more rare.

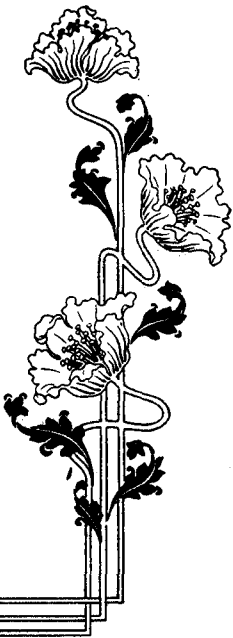
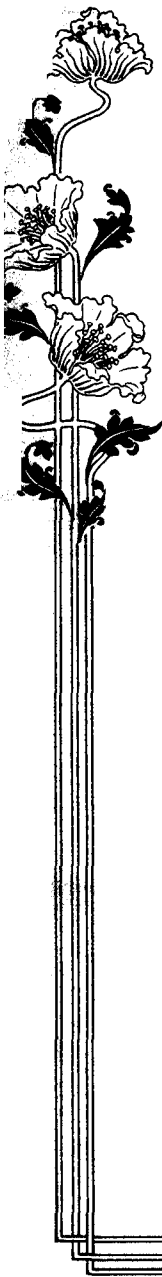
In some cases there may be an *apparent* lack of will-power, but will-power is a quality that must be drawn out and developed. Potentially it is there, and on some particular occasion it may quite suddenly demonstrate itself and achieve the performance of some difficult task. Then everyone will be astonished.

As an example take Mussorgsky, who might seem quite the opposite of Busoni and who could not always bring to a completed form the musical hints of what he had in mind to compose on the piano. Also, unfortunately, he used to drink too much. To bring his ideas to fruition, it needed the help of Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, who sat by him, one on either side, and wrote down bar by bar what he performed on the piano.

Such a man cannot always be helped by a doctor; neither can a doctor always find the cause, nor can he treat more than the symptoms. His diagnosis may not be correct, or he may prescribe the wrong treatment. He may overlook the fact that the medicine he prescribes may produce different effects according to factors and conditions peculiar to the patient and which remain unknown to the doctor. It is like litmus paper which if dipped in one chemical will turn red, whereas in another it turns blue. Nor is the patient always frank: there are certain things he may be ashamed of and he may not be able to overcome his shame sufficiently to speak of them, as Freud revealed. In many cases the man may not even be aware of them. Sometimes a particular influence or element could be eliminated if only it were known, but if it remains unknown, then the patient cannot become better. In the psychological domain, Gurdjieff proved this to the 'Six' by taking our own

selves as examples. Each of us had to make 'confessions', in front of not only him but the other five as well, about the worst thing he had done.

VOICES



Everything that Gurdjieff taught had some meaning for our lives, and a purpose towards aiding understanding between people. Most of his arguments, therefore, had a universal application.

One such theory of his, I remember, concerned what he called 'Voices'. It is an example of Gurdjieff's teaching which has not just individual but even an international application—but the laws of international and individual understanding are the same.

When two people converse (so Gurdjieff taught), in reality it is not a 'duet' but a 'quartet'. Two voices speak aloud which we shall call the 'first' and 'second' persons, but also present in the conversation are two unheard voices, which we shall call the third and fourth persons. Although these may not speak aloud, they most certainly take part in the conversation, often with a greater importance than the first two. Voiceless in a physical sense, they may nevertheless be the root cause of what we actually hear in the normal way.

The third voice inspires the first, and the fourth inspires the second. Sometimes this 'shadow' conversation

between the 'third' and 'fourth' persons can reach such an intensity of probing that the outer person ('first' and 'second') can penetrate into the secret regions of each other's inner person, yet still maintaining an ordinary conversation in an outward sense.

Each of us confronts a hidden conversant—possibly even a hidden enemy. Although this is true about strangers, a friend does not need to hide in this way and put on a mask of disguise. On the contrary, he loses no time in revealing himself and coming straight into the open, provided the situation is not of some special or complicated nature. But often this 'hidden enemy' does not reveal himself at once, if at all, and thus begins a kind of 'shadow play' as tricky sometimes as a complex battle plan, with its diversionary tactics, its simulated attacks, attitudes of indifference, the careful watching of each other and the pretence of taking up arms. The attitudes can range from the refined falsehood or subtle destructiveness of a Cesare Borgia, to the swift, striking forcefulness of an Attila, burning and annihilating all in his way.

Sometimes in such conversations, the participants may even deliberately assume 'character roles' as if out of a play, even to rehearsing the parts and studying them with great care. No doubt in international and diplomatic relationships this is often useful, allowing one a prudent avoidance of the more obvious errors; but again, one of the 'actors' may suddenly over-reach himself—a trifle too much emotion or a lapse of self-control, and then he is completely at his opponent's mercy, to be thrust at, or not, according to the other's whim. In politics, this Machiavellian method is shown to perfection in that famous book *The Prince*.

In ordinary life, too, there are many 'diplomats', who

can easily deceive those who are good and simple, even though not particularly stupid. Many of the latter do not even conceive that people can use such tactics, and so invariably lose their battles. Take the lives of a husband and wife, for example, with all their major and minor love scenes, their quarrels and arguments: often they do not suspect the existence in themselves of the 'third' and 'fourth' persons, or possibly one may and the other not. Thus the weaker one uses only his 'first' voice against the other two, because his own inner voice is often undeveloped and thus not of a harmful nature. This weaker partner may well be on his guard in speaking to a stranger, using his own natural reserve, but in conversation with someone he believes he has no need to fear (often for some very naïve or trivial reason, such as coming from the same town or village!) he will relax. It may well be that he has known this person for a long time, or that it is someone who has been strongly recommended to him, or more rarely it could be the result of some calculated conspiracy between others; but whatever the reason, and whether through his own fault or not, the battle will already be lost.

Occasionally this kind of situation can be prevented in good time, or righted, by the timely help of a more experienced person. Sometimes one's own efforts or experience may be sufficient to put it right, or again, as happens now and then, fate itself unexpectedly intervenes. But generally speaking, how long can one wait to acquire such a sense? A good example of this kind of situation is shown in Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, where the father at last, too late, realises his mistake and the resultant cruelty he has been guilty of towards his own daughter.

It sometimes happens that the 'third' and 'fourth' persons dig more deeply into one another and find, to

their surprise, that they are much closer to friendship than they imagined; their former 'state of war' is concluded in a truce, and peace is declared between them. On the other hand such an assumption made mistakenly will lead to one partner unfolding all his secrets, private thoughts and most cherished plans in vain.

Before the Second World War, Hitler 'rehearsed' with his 'third' person before Chamberlain's arrival in Munich, and the latter when he reached London again after their meeting, said, 'Hitler knows what is in my mind, and I know what is in his.' But did he? We all know now that he did not.

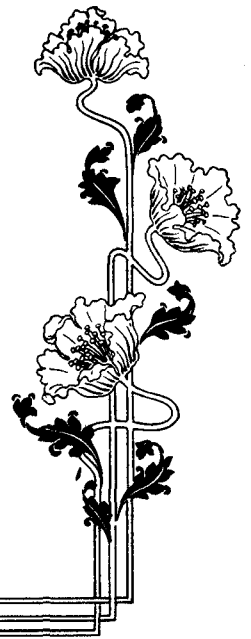
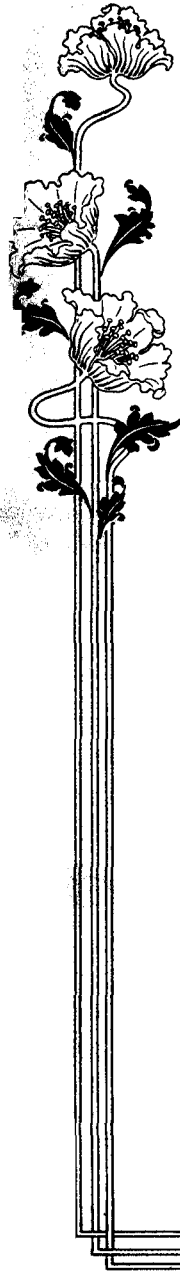
It is always these 'third' and 'fourth' persons who cause the really great events in the world. The 'fourth' or shadow side of Chamberlain was far too noble to suspect the treachery of Hitler's 'third' person, and probably didn't even realise its existence.

Thus, in ordinary everyday life, when peace is concluded between two persons, how long can it last? Much depends on the integrity or weakness of the individuals concerned, and the result is often in doubt.

This whole process of understanding can be analysed, verified, controlled and even taught in such a way as to be handled aright. Many disasters, perhaps even those of national importance, could be prevented if people could be made aware of these hidden voices, thus understanding the adversary in good time.

The lesson to be learned from the meeting of Chamberlain and Hitler in 1938 is that future Chamberlains must learn to listen to the deliberately suppressed third voice. As Gurdjieff said, the man who knows there are four voices has an additional weapon against falsity, for his hidden voice speaks to the other's hidden voice, as his first voice speaks to the other's first voice.

IN THE CAUCASUS



most important factor in our relationship was that we all drank from the source of Gurdjieff's teaching.

It was Gurdjieff who guided us in such a way that we learned from each other in discussions, and this became an important part of his method of teaching in later years, when he had many more followers and could not spend much time with them personally as he did with us.

When Andrey could never find the right words, but laboured to express himself until he was hot and scarlet with the effort, to other people he might have seemed ridiculous; to us he was not ridiculous but merely had great difficulty of self-expression, and we all pitied him (though hoping that he did not realise it). We tried to help him with the words he needed but could not find himself, and those words were sometimes like a beam of bright light transforming his halting explanation, making it shine with meaning and turning the episode into something that to us seemed little short of miraculous. So it was that the interchange between us, whether privately between two or three, or between all six talking together, became more important than a mere exchange of words and developed into an event which affected and even elevated our inner life.

But whatever discoveries we made among ourselves, it was to Gurdjieff that we reported what passed in our unique discussions. He in turn pointed out to each of us the faults in our thinking. It amused him to give us each a nickname, and the nickname itself revealed some quality or failing in us. Poor clumsy, stumbling Andrey, I remember, he called 'Baba', which in Russian means a peasant woman. The doctor was 'Mean', because he would part with nothing that he possessed, whether it was words or money. Ouspensky's was 'Wraps up the

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about Gurdjieff was how he was able to mould a group of very different people into a kind of family. When I consider the group of six—how unlike each other's were our backgrounds, our training, our lives in general—and then think how much we came to love one another, I am amazed. We were not children whose characters and personalities were still being formed; we were adults, each of us already established in a career. Most of us had a profession—Ouspensky writing, Charkovsky the engineer building fine bridges, the doctor a successful man in his own sphere.

I myself had travelled to most of the European capitals, studied for my Doctor of Letters degree at the University, been married, and now, studying music at the Conservatoire, was being encouraged to take up a concert career.

It was not surprising that, when we first met, our personalities often clashed, and we did not always agree in our points of view. I must say that the clashes sometimes brought out interesting aspects of ourselves. But the

Thought'—for the reason I have already explained. My own was 'Wavering', because in thoughts, words and actions I was hesitant and indecisive, wavering in the balance. And Nicholas was known as 'Jubilant Old Man'—a description which fitted his character though it was most unfitting to his venerable appearance.

I felt myself growing in the understanding of abstract subjects, and I noticed that this development also occurred in the other members of the group.

So we worked together, finding that we were making some progress along the road of our quest to find the Miracle. Finally a day came when we were all sitting together, our heads bowed, thinking hard, when something made us turn towards Gurdjieff, and we heard him say, in a voice we had never heard before, both solemn and with an element of love in it—and yet, if I may so put it, quite abstract—'You started the Quest. You are on the road. You must go on.'

It was as if we were being ordained. We all sat still, profoundly moved. Then one of us said, 'I will go on, Georgi Ivanovitch, because you have put us on the right road.'

Gurdjieff said, 'I will try to hammer into your heads as much as I can of that special knowledge you are after, what Ouspensky calls seeking the Miracle. There will be others coming to join our group, and they, too, will gradually progress. The only condition is that they must make the maximum effort to absorb what they hear, either from me or from one of you six.'

We sat, then, and thought about the changes that were coming and how we might transplant our theories, and how, if these newcomers came, we would enlighten them as much as we could so that the group of six would be the foundation of a greater number of followers.

Perhaps in teaching others what we knew we would learn more ourselves. But the main thing was that we had been (as it were) ordained: the Group of Six was now going to be six plus many more. It was going to have a foundation, rules and regulations, even though we always moved along the path of freedom in following the Quest.

Then our time together in St Petersburg came to an end. Early in the Revolution Gurdjieff left the city and we all went to South Russia. Here many people came to us, because they had heard about the teaching of Gurdjieff and wanted to become his pupils. Many were turned away. To each newcomer Gurdjieff would put the question, 'Why do you come to me? Is your life so unbearable?'—just as he had put it to me at our first meeting—and only those who truly felt that they could not endure life without joining us in the search for new knowledge were allowed to stay.

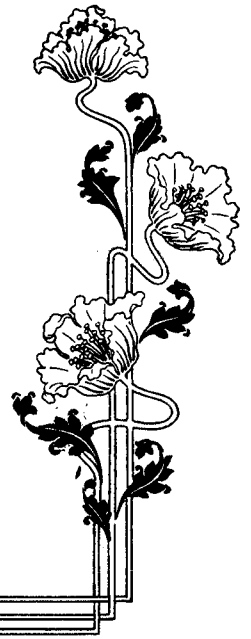
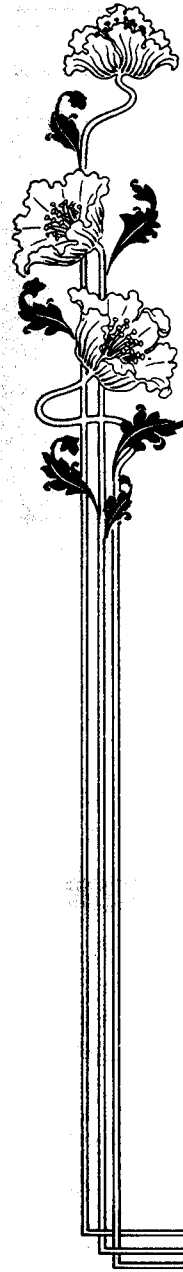
One person who surprised us very much by appearing without warning on our very first day in the Caucasus was my old friend Evreinoff, the well-known theatrical producer and writer. We were all stupefied when we met him in the street, and felt that there must be some special meaning to so extraordinary a meeting. Evreinoff came up to Gurdjieff, inclined his head towards him and said, 'I am a difficult, pretentious man. I am ambitious. But here, Georgi Ivanovitch, I bow to you, and I can only say because I met you here that I don't think our meeting like this is casual. I will stay with you for some time, and you will look at me and I will look at the group.' So Evreinoff stayed for a time.

Gurdjieff bought a house in which we all lived, and others came to join us. In this small community we lived

IN THE CAUCASUS

as we did later on in Paris: everyone had to do some kind of work, cut firewood, prepare food, clean the house (though for some reason Gurdjieff left me free of any tasks). Here, too, we held our discussions and taught the newcomers. Eventually, however, Gurdjieff went back to St Petersburg—or Petrograd as it was now known.

REVOLUTION AND CHANGE



Life in the capital had now become more and more difficult and hunger was becoming worse and worse. In the Caucasus we had actually had white bread to eat, but back at home there was no bread at all, and everyone suffered.

The events of the Revolution are no part of this story, although of course it transformed all our lives as it did those of millions of others. I would like to relate, however, an episode in which I was involved at the time of the Kerensky government.

My sister was at this time one of four directors of a theatre which produced works of the ancient Russian drama dating back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The other directors were Evreinoff, Baron Drizen, and her future husband Prince Chervachidze, who was later to be a scenic designer with the Diaghilev ballet. The Kerensky government, on which many liberal-minded intellectuals and artists pinned their hopes, was in serious financial difficulty. The Prime Minister Kerensky told my sister that he would like her help in raising funds to meet the government pay-roll and with thus

trying to maintain stability during this uncertain time. My sister submitted a scheme which met his approval, and set out on a fund-raising activity which was unique even for those days of extraordinary and unorthodox developments.

What my sister did was mobilise a large number of famous people in all branches of the Arts to appear in a great procession appealing for money to support the government. She invited members of the theatre, opera and ballet, poets, writers, painters, and so on; somehow or other, with Kerensky's help she got together forty-four lorries—no small achievement in itself—and on each lorry was to ride a group representing different arts, actors or ballet dancers or painters.

Meanwhile, through Ivan Nicolayevitch, one of the Progressives, I was introduced to Kerensky as someone who wanted to help in the raising of this Freedom Loan, as it was called. I was given the job of approaching the various Guards regiments, to invite them to provide military bands to head our procession. For my canvassing, Kerensky gave me the use of the ex-tsar's own car, and as my mother was very intrigued by the whole idea she accompanied me. We toured the barracks round Petrograd with a sailor from the Imperial yacht *Standard* acting as chauffeur, and sitting beside him, as our escort, a member of the First Regiment of Guards, the Preobrajensky, which had been founded by Peter the Great.

There were three divisions of Guards in the capital, each containing four regiments, so we had to visit twelve regimental headquarters. At each barracks I addressed the assembled soldiers, and every regiment promised to help except one, the Litovsky, which had by now become very Bolshevik. All the rest at once agreed to my request to lend their bands for our parade.

All came together at the set time and took part in the procession, which went up and down the streets in the centre of the city. It was a splendid sight because most of the people in the lorries were dressed in very picturesque costumes and the lorries themselves were handsomely decorated. My sister and I had our places on the 'drama' lorry along with famous writers, poets and publishers, about fifteen of us in all, among them Evreinoff and Prince Shervachidze. We made a gay and noisy throng, calling to everybody as we drove slowly past along the crowded streets, while spectators showered us with coins and notes from the pavements and from the windows of buildings.

First we gathered all the money and put it into a money-box we had taken with us for the purpose, but that was soon full. Then the people on the lorries literally passed their hats. The event was a remarkable success and it was with great satisfaction that we were able to deliver so much money to the bank, to be deposited for the use of the Kerensky government.

In 1916 I had met an Englishman named Charles Hewitt, who had come to Russia representing a British firm of timber importers, buying timber to be shipped from Russia and Scandinavia to English ports. He needed somewhere to stay in St Petersburg, and a fellow-Englishman named Keeling, working in my sister's publishing office, recommended to him that he come and stay at my parents' house, as he knew my mother had a room available. He stopped with us for several months, and in 1917 he asked me to marry him. We were married by the English Consul, Mr Woodhouse, that December. Charles was forty-eight and I was thirty-two.

Kerensky had a mixed Cabinet representing all the

different parties, though at that time consisting mostly of his own, the Social Revolutionaries. I now had occasion to meet Trotsky, who was in charge of foreign affairs, for my new husband and I had to apply to him for permission to leave Russia and for Charles's repatriation to England. His office was at the Headquarters of the General Staff near the Winter Palace.

We took the lift to his room and after our waiting some time Trotsky came in to us. Trotsky was a very different man from Kerensky in every way. He had a strongly expressive face with a sallow complexion, and rather wild black hair. He had run to fat, especially to a prominent stomach. Incidentally, Trotsky was not his family name, which was Bronstein, for he was Jewish; before the Revolution he had worked in a pharmacy in Kishinev.

I remember saying to him in astonishment, 'You are from Kishinev.' This connection with my own birthplace did not help our application in any way (not surprisingly), and Trotsky was very intransigent over granting exit permits because at the time the British were holding two Bolsheviks prisoner, whom they refused to allow to return to Russia. Trotsky did not see why he should do for us what he regarded as a favour. My husband was angry, and when we left, though Trotsky put out his hand as he said goodbye Charles refused to shake it, quickly putting his own behind his back. This made me rather scared, as I knew Trotsky could be a vindictive man.

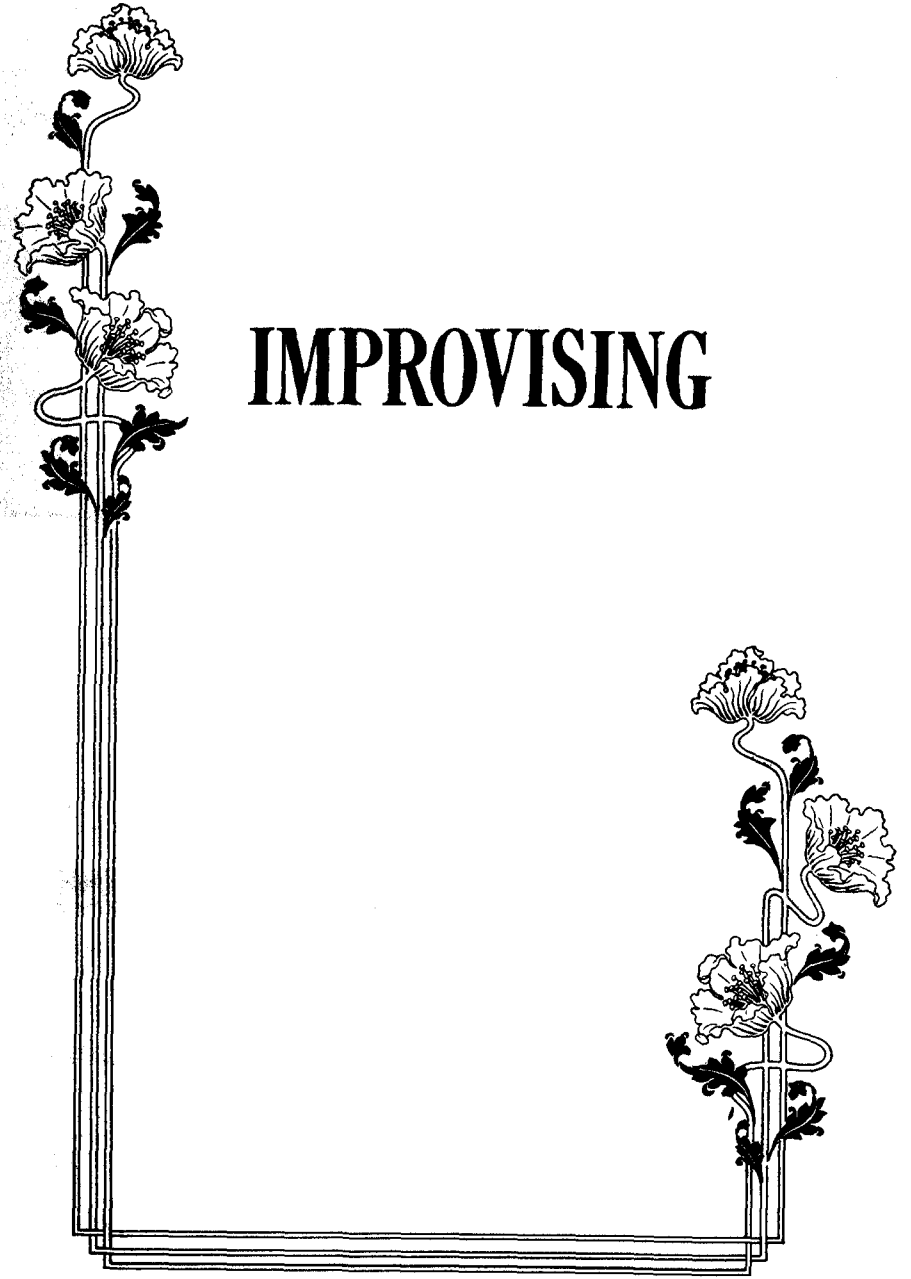
Nevertheless, eventually he yielded to the persuasion of one of our friends, and the two of us were allowed to leave for England along with a large group of other British returning home. This was in January 1918. We travelled by sleigh to one of the Baltic ports and boarded

REVOLUTION AND CHANGE

an English ship which was sailing to Aberdeen via Sweden. One recalls such odd details—I shall never forget my amazement at seeing again white bread, and butter, and my first sight of marmalade, all of which they had on board. We had all been suffering great hunger in these past months in Russia, although my family had been able to benefit to some extent from supplies to Charles from the British Embassy.

When at last we reached London, my husband was unable to return to his timber firm, and he volunteered to join the Royal Navy as a lieutenant. The rest of the war we spent in Chatham, and in Ireland at what was then called Queenstown. All this time I had no work or study to occupy me. How great a change it was from those days in St Petersburg when our group, but especially Ouspensky and I, had passed hours of every day with Gurdjieff listening and discussing, meeting from about noon until five or six in the evening, then parting so that we might dine, and meeting again for discussions until late into the night.

IMPROVISING



Two of us had an extraordinary and indeed almost fantastic experience with Gurdjieff, which was only possible because our gift for improvising on the piano had developed in us a super-sensitivity to the unheard vibrations of music. Gurdjieff said, 'Music has a power besides that of charming the listener—a power which is contained in its hidden vibrations.'

My companion in this was another of Gurdjieff's pupils in Paris, named Hartmann. He had been in the Corps des Pages with my brother and later entered one of the Guards Regiments. His wife Olga was a singer and he himself a composer, who had composed a ballet, *The Scarlet Flower*, for the Marinsky Theatre.

One day at the studio of Jacques Dalcrose, Hartmann and I were seated side by side at the piano à quatre mains, Hartmann on my left while Gurdjieff stood at my right. Gurdjieff said, 'I am going to hum you a melody which is an antidote to fever, for music has this hidden healing power which is generally unknown.'

As he stood beside us and hummed, we listened carefully. Both Hartmann and I, as sensitive musicians, could follow and absorb it at once and were able to transpose what we heard directly to the piano unrehearsed. The melody had a strange Eastern flavour, based on the songs of the dervishes in their temples, which Gurdjieff had known when he was a youth. We could even detect, within the musical vibration, the medical vibration—just as within infra-red rays there is the power to produce heat, which in modern medicine is used for healing purposes. These secondary vibrations within the music combined to create a positive power, which if treated in the right way acted in opposition to the negative elements of the disease it was to counteract. In this remarkable experience perhaps we were actually—who knows?

When I was very young I started to learn the piano from my mother, and had lessons from a teacher from the age of nine until the time when I went to study at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. I acquired the necessary technique to be able to play in concerts, but what was a greater skill was that by degrees I reached the point where I was able to hear a piece of music with my inner ear and then render it on the piano in any of the twelve keys. Nicholas Evreinoff, besides being well known as a playwright and producer, was also a good musician and had in fact been a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, and Evreinoff and I used to improvise together at the piano when I was living at home at my father's.

Although much of what I shall now write of my experiences in improvising on the piano relates to the period when I was in England, I cannot here omit a later episode concerning Gurdjieff when we were in Paris, which illustrates how he made an important contribution to my musical understanding as he did in all other fields.

—almost on the threshold of the Fourth Dimension.

Later, Gurdjieff made similar experiments with Hartmann and myself, making several different combinations of vibration for different illnesses, and always we were able to translate what he hummed to the piano. Without our ability to improvise, it would have been impossible for us to grasp.

The knowledge of this gift had come to me in a very strange way, at home when I was quite young.

One lovely summer day, I was walking in a forest and had sat down to rest, glancing at the trees around me with a still and tranquil mind, void of thoughts or feelings. Suddenly, I heard inside myself a kind of singing—and what singing! It was quite indescribable. I was listening to glorious melodies of a kind I had never heard before—melodies of a style and form peculiar to myself alone, melodies as yet unnamed, and indeed they could have no name, for this was the very moment of their creation. Not one, but many, and they did not move in a logical sequence according to the laws of music, but crowded and overlapped each other, seemingly all trying to be in front, each striving to predominate.

My head was in a whirl of amazement and I heard all this in a state of radiant happiness. I tried hard to calm my overwhelming emotions and made a great effort to pick out one single melody, to which I listened with my 'inner ear'. At length I grasped it, but realised at once that it could never be brought down to a physical plane. Interpreted through my own poor medium, it would lose not only its pristine beauty but also something else which could never be transposed—the magical element of mystery which pervaded it.

And yet . . . what a tremendous alchemistic effect it

was producing: what a transformation was going on within me! I was aware of some new means of creativity being born in me, some new power, a driving force which was able to make itself heard. Suddenly, I understood that if I guarded this new sense carefully and the precious knowledge that had come to me with it—if I could just keep it alive—I would from now on have a new kind of independence and freedom never before experienced. Moreover, these would act as a shield to me against the many dark sides of life. But almost in the same instant I began to fear that this great gift would leave me as unaccountably as it had come, and it took some reflection before I appreciated that if it had come in such a magical way, surely it would grow and develop of its own accord. Meanwhile, I decided to meditate on this new power and study it closely.

Again, the thought struck me that perhaps, after all, I should not be able to do this. I wasn't even sure what part in the whole experience I personally had taken, and even if I had influenced it in any way. It had seemed to appear so involuntarily, without my being aware that anything of an extraordinary nature was taking place at all. What really was the cause of it? Why had it come so suddenly as it did? Even now, more than half a century later, when I look back on this strange event I am thrilled by the memory of this powerful and moving experience.

But at that time my thoughts continued to be in chaos. I was afraid that I would soon lose this new 'inner' power, yet having once experienced it I felt I could never really live again without it. So I concentrated at once on finding a way to preserve my new and wonderful awareness.

But how? That was the question, and at first it seemed

entirely outside my own feeble powers. I took some comfort from the thought that whatever source it had come from had no need of my own help in the matter. I recalled reading in one of Rama Krishna's books that in cases where unexpected and unknown events take place in our inner lives, we should extinguish all thoughts, all feelings and above all, just listen to the inner voice. Therefore, I tried very hard to will myself to stop thinking and feeling, and to listen instead.

Soon after the war came to an end I was living in England and in very reduced circumstances. The Revolution had swept away all the life that I and my family had known and had dispersed us throughout Europe. One of my greatest deprivations, I found, was no longer having my own piano, and I longed above all things to be able to play at times. The longing was acute, almost like that for a living person, and it was made all the more intense because my family were no longer with me and I felt their absence so keenly, even when I was busy occupying myself with other things.

I could still listen to music occasionally, yet this was often more than I could bear, for instead of giving me satisfaction, hearing music only aggravated my poignant desire to play again. The yearning to take a more active part in music, like a continual hammering on the same spot, began to develop in me something approaching a 'new organ' of creativity. I had read somewhere how a student of mysticism was told that a state of great sorrow and confusion had to precede the development of such a new creative organ. Without really knowing what was going on inside me, I had moments—rare though they were—when I felt a hope, a premonition of coming peace, and this comforted me while I waited for I knew not what. My expectations and my faith grew in spite of

the fact that there seemed little or no prospect of any outward change in my life . . . nor even a possibility of obtaining a piano.

It was, then, at this receptive period of my existence that, not long afterwards, I heard the singing melodies again, which one might well call 'The Music of the Spheres'. This time, however, there was only one main melody, which flowed endlessly on like a river into the far distance, and whilst I was actually listening I heard its harmony, as if the left hand had begun to accompany the right. This thought of left and right hands immediately brought on an overwhelming desire to try and play the music I was hearing within.

As it happened, in the neighbourhood where I was then living—just outside London—there was a very beautiful church. I had already met the rector, who shared my interest in beautiful old enamels, and when I had told him how much I missed my piano, he had at once given me permission to play on the church organ whenever I wished. Till then I had not had time to make use of his kind offer, but now I hurried to the church. As if I were dreaming or half-conscious, I sat down at the organ and played chord after chord, all the while listening to the melody within me. I followed it as best as I could for a very long while, then, finally exhausted by my efforts to reproduce this music on the organ, I stopped. Out of the quiet background of the church, I suddenly heard the gentle voice of the rector:

'What were you playing, Madame? I have never heard it, but it was very lovely, and so original.'

From then on I went to the church every day, playing away until I had finally acquired a technique which enabled me to improvise such music for hours at a stretch. Usually I went in the mornings. The rector was

nearly always there at that time, and we became firm friends. He was a man of wide knowledge, well versed in science as well as mysticism, but with a broad, open mind. We used to sit together in one of the pews, with moted shafts of colour streaming down on us from the stained-glass windows, and we would talk of the subjects we both held nearest to our hearts. Occasionally I would go to the rectory for a cup of coffee, which his old housekeeper prepared for us, and afterwards we went into the library to look at his books. He invited me to come along every week and discuss books with him, suggesting that, amongst others, I should read Plato. When I told him of my experience in the forest, he lent me Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*. It was quite a revelation to discover how many other people had had experiences similar to my own—but I was glad that I had not known about it beforehand.

Later on, the rector tried to coax me into playing my improvisations in public, but I felt that this would be much too risky. What would happen if the source of my music dried up?

'It won't,' he assured me. 'It is not you, but a far greater power within you. How can such a power fail?'

'Yes—but, supposing I get frightened, panicky?'

'You will be listening to the music inside you and you will be oblivious to everything else,' he said. 'How can your attention be drawn away when such a magical power attracts it like a magnet? Don't be afraid! We'll have a concert next Sunday afternoon, and you shall play! Come to an early tea at half-past three, and we'll go into church at four-fifteen! I'll introduce you, and say a few words about how you have come to this technique, and you can play for about three-quarters of an hour. There'll be some very distinguished people there,

who will understand and appreciate the music as I do. You're not afraid to play for me, are you?'

And so, the recital was arranged. I felt very strange about the whole affair. At the Conservatoire in St Petersburg, I had often played at our own small concerts, as all pupils did, and even then I had always been rather nervous. But that had been playing something I had studied, something with a definite beginning and end, whereas this was to be completely different: a flowing river of singing melody and a firm belief in its power to enthral an audience.

Fortunately I had great faith in the rector. He arranged for me to use a beautiful Steinway belonging to a friend of his, and I went along every day to this lady's house to practise. These sessions were, for me, a sheer delight.

The day of the recital came all too soon. I tried hard to quell my nervousness. Again and again I said to myself, 'There is my friend, the Steinway.' I had planned a programme to include three different types of improvisation. The first group included a nocturne and an elegy, the second, three pieces in the style of Schumann and Scriabin, and the third, romantic compositions based on Russian themes.

Thank heaven, I was mostly in a dream and did not fully realise where I was or why I was playing, but the recital passed off without mishap. When it was all over, I was asked many questions by the audience on how I had been able to improvise in such a manner, and whether I could teach others how to do the same sort of thing.

'The rector had better answer that question,' I told them. 'He understands it all much better than I do.'

The rector nodded. 'I am quite certain that improvisation can be taught in this way, so long as the pupil has

a certain disposition and certain essential qualities. If anyone wants to try, I am sure Madame Hewitt would be willing to help them.'

'Of course!' I said. 'If I can.'

It was all very friendly and delightful. Four people immediately came forward—all pianists of some proficiency—and we arranged to meet and discuss the subject the following Sunday after evening service. Indeed, it seemed, we were all impatient to start the discussion at once.

'A very good sign,' observed the rector with a laugh. 'Perhaps later on we can arrange improvisations for four pairs of hands!'

'Before you go into that,' commented Lord G—, 'I wish you would arrange a recital for your neighbours. I have a ballroom which will hold five hundred people, and I should willingly place it at your disposal!'

The suggestion delighted everyone and they applauded the speaker. Everyone, that is, apart from myself, for I was still very unsure about the whole matter. But no one waited for my approval—it was settled and only the details needed to be arranged later. Thus began a most interesting and strange experiment, which still seemed to me a complete miracle.

In the meantime, I had to seek out my good angel the rector, who now acted as my impresario, and ask him how on earth I was to set about imparting to others this gift which I had myself received like manna from heaven. My own tuition in it had been of a very strange nature, as if I had had an invisible teacher, but at least I had already obtained a good grounding in music and did not need to be taught how to put chords together; but with this 'new' music my river of flowing melody did it all for me. It sang, and I listened and tried to bring it out

through my fingers. It was true to say that whatever it was inside me had developed and improved with time, not only in principle but also in details of ornamentation and style. I heard the harmony becoming richer and more complicated, and indeed, in my own imagination I could hear several instruments playing at once.

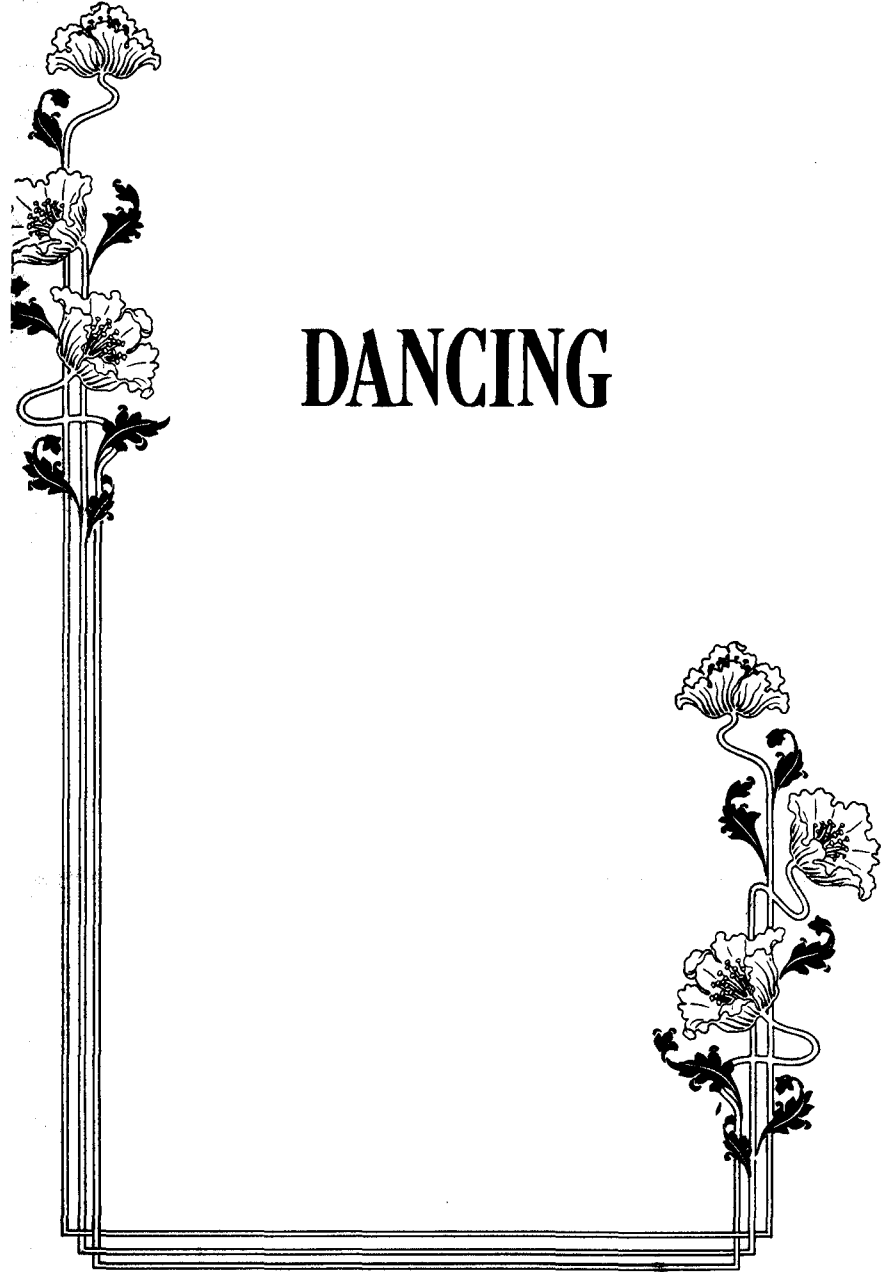
The rector told me that I had, in a way, earned this gift by being loyal to that which I had loved and craved for so long, namely my music. I knew, however, that my ability to improvise had not been earned by the sweat of my brow. It came purely *as* a gift, not as a recompense for my labours. According to the law of inter-relation between the Macrocosm and Microcosm, this was how it should be. Nature, which includes Man, the Microcosm, should reflect the Macrocosm down to the smallest detail. My soul had cried out in its loneliness and the answer had appeared. It seemed, since the effort towards all this had been of noble intent, the reward, equally noble, had also been forthcoming. It had nothing whatsoever to do with me personally: I existed only in the sense of a noble sound—metaphorically speaking, like the ringing of gold, so different from the ringing of tin. Every man, however small his personality, however deeply embedded he may be in this earthly condition, has within him the Divine spark, which cannot but act nobly.

The melody I heard sometimes became weaker, but, like a young plant, began to grow and generally increased in volume. After some time, I learned how to manipulate it, to change its course and mould its expression. Sometimes I spoiled my conception of the music and its beauty through my own inability to adapt my inner ear to this Music of the Spheres, and when this happened the music broke off, and I felt as if a knife had gone

IMPROVISING

through my heart. But as time went on I improved my efforts to listen in the right way, and began to understand the laws which governed the logic, attraction and correlation of sounds, and to distinguish chords. Then, with the same sounds, I was able to draw pictures related to any given theme.

DANCING



Shortly after the war, my husband became assistant to M. Vignon, Secretary of the British Legion in Paris, and thus it came about that we lived in Paris for many years. Charles's job was not well-paid, and so I set up in business myself with a dress salon, which also made accessories such as handbags and scarves. We lived in a beautiful sixteenth-century house on the Rive Gauche by the Pont Neuf, near the Palais de Justice, and I had my dressmakers' workrooms on the top floor (many of my employees were exiled Russians like myself), a tailor's firm occupied the one below, while my salon was on the ground floor. It was beautifully furnished with yellow brocade chairs and sofas, and fine paintings. My career was very successful as 'Madame Anna', and I numbered more than two hundred Americans among my customers.

In 1922 Gurdjieff arrived in Paris with several of his pupils (after spending some time in Constantinople), and as he now re-established his group here I rejoined it and left my fashionable salon.

While I was with this group we used to spend every

morning in the large dance studio where Jacques Dalcrose held his school. We would watch some of these exercises and dances, and I remember one interesting interpretation by his pupils of a Bach fugue in four voices. The first, following the leading voice, would be clad in a flaming-red dress, another voice was in deep green, a third in indigo blue and the fourth in light pink, all dancing to the piano-rendering of the fugue.

Gurdjieff arranged with Dalcrose that his pupils should have the use of the hall from ten till one every morning, including Sundays. We kept our practice clothes in a large room filled with cupboards. They were loose white tunics with thick, red-cord piping and tassels, and very large baggy trousers in the Turkish or Oriental style. When we were ready we entered the hall and formed ourselves into six rows of eight pupils, with about three yards between each of us.

Gurdjieff explained to us about the differences in character between dancers, each of whom as it were 'printed' his individuality on his own movements. The predominant centre (of the three centres), he said, showed itself in the expression of these movements.

One that I particularly recall was a very difficult pose which ended in a reclining position of the body like Canova's statue of Pauline Borghese. The movement was to swing swiftly from a standing position into this reclining one—very hard to achieve. But we were all trying it and repeating it together, and in watching the movements of the others we found we helped ourselves. This gliding, sliding and 'falling' on the floor in a single movement was never successfully achieved by some of the pupils who were always frightened of the risk of falling and hurting themselves, and so could never do it.

Another exercise I remember was to dance like a faun holding grapes in his hands, one hand held higher than the other. One girl, I remember, used to try to make all these movements 'pretty' or 'graceful', but this was not at all what they were meant to attain; it was meant to be achieved by interior control. And I have a vivid picture in my memory of a young man who tried to hop right round the hall on his own, who was brought up short by a loud shout and told to sit and watch how the others were doing it—like a sheep brought to order by a dog and re-established in the flock.

Gurdjieff formulated the dance-patterns or designs and imparted them to Mr Mironoff, whom we knew as our *starosta* or foreman. It was he who, following Gurdjieff's instructions and sometimes his demonstrations, acted as our teacher, having been through them with Gurdjieff beforehand. He helped us back at the house where we were living in Auteuil, and here during the rest of the day we used to practise privately.

Gurdjieff was very anxious to get us on the stage at the Théâtre du Champs-Élysées, but first he insisted on perfection. He himself, he told us one day, had learned the way of the dancing dervishes of the East in one of their monasteries, and some of this went into what he passed on to us. Every movement was a tremendous effort to achieve certain qualities, to surmount the physical obstacles and to develop the will-power. Such a way of dancing was certainly very new.

It used to exhaust us completely, but still we had to go on—to endure and overcome it. And in a way we were living as if in a monastery ourselves. We were given our keep and meals, but had no money of our own. We were each given fifty centimes a day, which was the cost of the tram fare from our house to the Dalcrose Institute

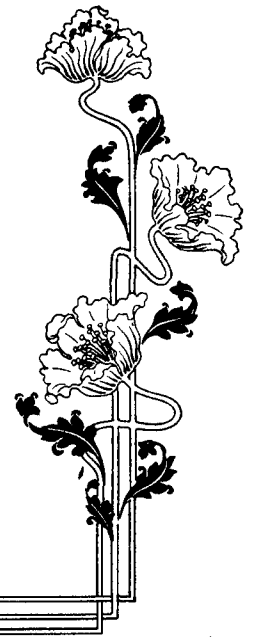
and back. And there were certain duties we all had to perform in the household.

In the evenings we all gathered together for discussions with Gurdjieff. Sometimes he talked to us, sometimes he listened while two of the pupils discussed problems or aspects of the dances. Then afterwards we all joined in and asked questions.

Eventually, after we had been living in this way for quite a long time, some of the best pupils were selected to form a final group, and after further rigorous practice these gave public performances both in Paris and New York.



AUTEUIL



enormous ladle. I put on an apron with a gay design of brightly coloured birds on it, and I remember trying to count the number of birds in each cage while I was stirring the macaroni. I felt rather like a vestal virgin watching the sacred fire and was terribly afraid of making a complete mess of the job. But when it was finally ready, all those kindly indulgent friends, English and Russian alike, said it was 'passable'. I never knew what they really thought about it.

Every morning, after breakfast, we all went by tram to Jacques Dalcrose's studio, which Gurdjieff had rented, to practise our dancing for several hours—first the exercises in rows, rather like a pianist warming up by practising scales, then the movements and 'positions' in sets of six at a time. Our evenings were spent with Gurdjieff, listening either to him or to two of his pupils discussing various problems, followed by general questions in which everyone would join. I mention all this again to give some idea of how we spent our days in Paris, but now I would like to describe one incident that happened at that time.

One morning Gurdjieff sent up his *starosta* or personal supervisor for me. He was a man everyone liked, a senior pupil of about thirty-five who acted as Gurdjieff's secretary and assistant.

'Come down quickly,' he urged. 'Gurdjieff is asking for you.'

'I'm coming,' I told him, wondering what kind of reprimand I was going to get. I wasn't really frightened by the summons, however, for even a reprimand could be quite exciting in that stimulating community. I went down to the ground floor, where Gurdjieff's door was open and he signalled me to come in.

'Sit down, Anna Ilinishna,' he said at once. 'I'm

Gurdjieff had taken a house in Auteuil, one of the loveliest districts in Paris. It was divided into three flats: he lived on the ground floor where he received anyone who wanted to see him; the women lived on the floor above, and above that again there was a flat for the men. I shared a room with another Russian lady, as nearly all the rooms were shared between two or three people. Every morning the person on duty had to tidy the rooms—not in itself a very heavy task—whilst one of the other ladies did the shopping for the whole household. Apart from these obligations we had a great deal of free time and went out very little. The cooking was done by each of the ladies in turn and in most instances it was an entirely new experience for them. Not many of us knew how to cook, having all been used to servants in our pre-Revolution Russian life. I well recall the first time I was given the task of preparing such a meal.

In theory it was very simple: I was given an immense bin, about three feet high and half as wide across, with enough macaroni inside to feed a regiment; and an

entrusting you with a small⁹ commission. Now listen! This afternoon an English lady is arriving from London. She wants to stay with us here for a while and I think you are the best person to look after her. She's quite an important person, who only speaks English and nothing else, so you see why I have chosen you. She's used to being looked after, so don't keep her waiting! Order a taxi in advance and be there on time.' He gave me an ironic smile. 'I don't want to shock her right at the beginning,' he added, 'although it may be necessary later on.'

He paused. 'Remember—keep close to her at first, for everything will seem very strange to her. She won't even know if she's coming to a convent or a gaol. She's probably heard rumours that we give lessons on beds of pointed nails after reading so many books on yoga. . . .' He smiled again. 'The train arrives at six-ten. Here is some money. Put her in the blue room—you know the one I mean.'

At five I set off for the Gare du Nord, found a porter and a taxi and then made my way to the arrival platform. As we didn't know each other it had been arranged that Mrs Page would carry a red and white scarf. Gurdjieff never trusted the traditional red-flower-in-the-buttonhole approach. The train drew in and I soon caught sight of a tall, elegant lady holding the distinguishing scarf, anxiously looking up and down the platform.

'Mrs Page?' I asked, approaching her.

'Yes!' She sounded relieved. 'I am very pleased to see you.'

'I've got a porter here,' I told her, nodding to the man who was already picking up her suitcases. She stopped with a look of astonishment.

'But I have some more luggage. . . .' She produced a receipt and I quickly read the word 'trunks'. Covering my own astonishment—I remembered what Gurdjieff had said about first impressions—I gave the receipt to the porter.

'Very well, he will look after it all. But we must get it cleared through customs.' Fortunately this formality was not too onerous, for all the clothing had been worn, but the quantity took some explaining away to the official concerned. Soon we were installed in the taxi with the three suitcases and two trunks. I kept looking at them out of the corner of my eye, and my new companion, noting my glance, appeared rather apologetic.

'I did my best to bring as little as possible,' she told me. 'But after all, this *is* Paris!' As an afterthought she added, 'I only brought the most necessary things!'

'But Paris has nothing to do with it,' I answered rather hastily. 'You haven't just "come to Paris"—it could just as well be Timbuctoo!'

She looked astounded again.

'You have come to see Gurdjieff,' I explained, 'and that in itself is a very serious matter.' I began to be aware that I sounded cross. 'Look here—you hardly know me—we've never met before. I'm not even sure if what I say has any meaning for you, but do you realise why you are here?'

'Oh yes,' she said eagerly.

'Well, if you're hoping to obtain some knowledge from Gurdjieff—I don't mean ordinary, but really extraordinary, knowledge—don't you think that all these dresses and paraphernalia will be absolutely useless in that context? Many of the ladies here have only the barest necessities. Most of them, particularly the Russians, lost everything in the Revolution. The lady I share

a room with had an enormous wardrobe at home, but now she lives out of two small suitcases. Some of them have only one!’

At that moment we reached the house and I began to feel that my words had been a little strong for her. As I took her up to her room I tried to soften the blow just a little.

‘Well, never mind, don’t be downhearted! Unpack whatever’s necessary—and I do mean “necessary”. There’s a wardrobe there and that chest of drawers—you can use them!’ Mrs Page stood silently and just looked at me. Instinct told me to feel sorry for her, but I couldn’t find very much sympathy.

‘I realise your feelings have been ruffled a little,’ I told her. ‘I can understand what you are thinking and feeling right now, but it just won’t do. You’d better unpack, then we’ll have tea and a good talk like old friends, and you can ask me any questions you want to.’

She started to open the first trunk, while I stood by amazed at the quantity of fine and elegant materials that came out of it: a pink satin housecoat with slippers to match, then a blue velvet day dress and a transparent mauve *négligé*, again both with matching slippers. These were followed by a whole range of evening gowns in gold and silver brocade; then some expensive afternoon frocks, furs, dainty lingerie, shoes, stockings and heaven knows what besides. Everything was taken out and laid carefully on the bed, the chairs and even the window sill. Finally, she sat down on the empty trunk, looking very perturbed. Her eyes met mine for a moment.

‘Don’t be so hard on me,’ she pleaded. ‘I can see the accusation in your eyes.’

‘Good God, no! I’m not blaming you—I just can’t see

why you actually *need* such an enormous amount of clothes.’

I was in the middle of trying to explain how out of keeping her possessions and ideas were with the kind of life we were living in this house when there came a knock at the door. *Starosta* put his head round. ‘Anna Ilinishna, Gurdjieff wants you.’

‘I must go,’ I told Mrs Page, ‘but I’ll be back soon. . . . Meanwhile, perhaps you’d better put all those clothes back into the trunk. I don’t think you’ll be needing them.’ I stopped at the door. ‘And please don’t make a mountain out of what I’m telling you—I’m not trying to teach you, I’m still only a learner myself, but I honestly think it’s the best advice I can give you right now.’

Outside the door I found *starosta*, his face a mingled expression of anxiety, astonishment and laughter. He was trying hard to suppress the last.

‘What on earth’s going on?’ he demanded in a hushed voice. ‘Is she mad? She doesn’t seem to understand the first thing about this place!’ He raised his eyebrows. ‘If Gurdjieff finds out . . . but what am I saying? Of course he’s got to know.’

‘I will tell him,’ I said. ‘I have to give a report.’

‘How is she?’ asked Gurdjieff when I reached his room.

‘Nice—she is quite nice.’ I hesitated. ‘But she has brought along an enormous quantity of expensive gowns. She’s got enough with her to stock a fashionable shop. I’ve told her to pack it all up again except for a couple of dresses.’ Something was urging me on to tell him the exact truth, without reservations. I felt I was doing what had to be done and suddenly I found myself adding the worst condemnation of all: ‘She keeps saying she has

come to Paris—and she's brought an ermine mantle fit for a coronation!

'Paris, eh? Ermine mantle?' murmured Gurdjieff, suddenly looking up. 'I'll tell you what—give her an apron, a broom and a pail of water and tell her to go upstairs to the top floor and clean up all the men's rooms!' He noted the expression on my face. 'What are you staring at me like that for? I know what you're thinking, but believe me, it will do her a power of good!'

'In this case, perhaps I had better go with her?'

'All right, if you must!' he grumbled, a hint of laughter in his voice.

I ran upstairs, thinking of the best way to break the news.

It was to be a day of surprises all round. I now beheld a completely unexpected *tableau*: in the midst of heaps of scattered, multi-coloured garments, luxurious silver brushes, crystal scent bottles, furs and hats, sat Mrs Page weeping bitterly on the empty trunk.

My first instinct was to run to her, but I checked myself. It seemed she did understand something after all. The shock was working. I walked to the window, giving her time to recover, but still the sobs continued. Here I began to feel a little guilty; Gurdjieff would never approve of my being 'tender', but I didn't like it. But still I stayed by the window, and then suddenly I heard a small voice saying, 'I see now how very silly I've been. . . .'

'Not so silly,' I countered off-handedly. After all, those pretty-coloured trifles had been for her a symbol of life, which she now had to cast off. I watched her putting her hair back into place—just another habit? 'Even if you have been silly, at least you can see it now. It's a good thing you had something to see it with! Let's

have a good laugh about your "trip to Paris". . . .' She forced a weak smile.

I went out to fetch the apron, pail and mop which I had left outside. 'Here you are,' I said, pushing the cleaning materials into her hands. 'Make yourself beautiful by putting this apron on, then take the broom, the pail and the mop, and off we go upstairs to the men's quarters. Don't worry,' I added, 'they're all really nice fellows! I don't expect they'll even let you touch the place—they'll offer to do it themselves!'

Suddenly Mrs Page gave a peal of laughter. 'Oh dear, if only my husband Gerald could see me now! He's so pompous at times! Or even my Aunt Veronica, or cousin Adelaide!' Laughing still, she took my hand, and like two schoolgirls we ran up the stairs together. ('Oh dear!' I was thinking. 'You English—how hard you are to understand at times!')

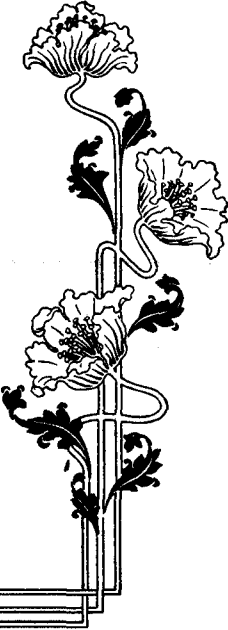
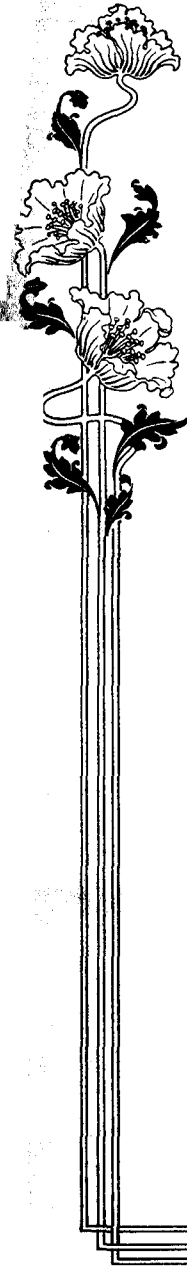
At the top I called out for *starosta*, and quickly explaining to him in an aside, I asked him which room he thought we ought to start on. He reflected for an instant, then smiled.

'But of course, the cleanest one!' adding in a muffled whisper, 'It's just been done!'

Opening one of the doors, he revealed three beds and three chairs with their inhabitants sitting on them. I called to Mrs Page to come along in. As soon as they saw the unknown woman, all three men leapt to their feet, murmuring apologies. They pressed against the wall to allow her plenty of room to work in.

For a first attempt, Mrs Page managed splendidly. Everything went off well and she enjoyed the feeling of having accomplished an heroic deed. When she had finished, she actually asked if there were any more rooms which needed to be done.

CONCLUSION



made us shrink away in startled silence. He was gentle, but when he wished us to learn a lesson that could not be taught by soft and comfortable methods, he was ruthless in his demands and scathing in his condemnation of our failures. He had studied much, and had learned at first hand about such things as the religious basis of the dances of the dervishes.

He was scornful of wordy analysis of philosophical ideas, and his own ideas were always expressed clearly, even crudely, with the earthiness of his peasant stock, and seemed to come out of his personal experience and contemplation. Verbosity he always condemned, and in the early days particularly that of Ouspensky, who was an effortless, brilliant but wordy talker. But then Ouspensky fared no worse than the rest of us. No teacher or Guru was ever more skilful in showing up our weak points: the inability of Andrey Z— to express himself at all, the doctor's pride, my own shyness; and then in leading us almost imperceptibly to help each other to correct these failings. Each of us learned from him as our own characteristics and personalities were affected by his teaching.

In a way it can be said that the group never broke apart; it was the war that divided us. Later, when I saw Gurdjieff and the others in Paris, circumstances were very different for me, though Gurdjieff's mode of life had not changed, and he was still heading the group which was the development of our first six. I stayed with them for a time, but my own life no longer permitted me to follow the Quest for the Miracle. Ouspensky came to Paris, too, though he did not live with the group at Auteuil. We remained in love with one another for many years, and even after I married my English husband and he married another woman, we

This has been the story of how Gurdjieff's first group was founded, the first of many that were to be formed over the next half-century in different parts of the world. From Gurdjieff I learned many important ideas and truths, which I have tried to convey in this book, and which I have never forgotten in the long years that followed.

On looking back at the time I spent with Gurdjieff all those years ago, and particularly at the early period when he first came to St Petersburg, I find that the experience was not only completely different from any other experience of my life—and many strange and interesting things have happened to me—but it was unique in its depth and in the way it influenced me long after I had left him and had, like the other members of our group of six, gone my own way. The secret of that personality that so strongly affected us all is hard to define; words to describe him are too weak, or incomplete or too passive.

He was quiet, but the quiet was a smouldering fire that might suddenly flare up with a scorching flame that

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were loyal to our first purpose, of finding the mystic threshold between the third and fourth dimensions.

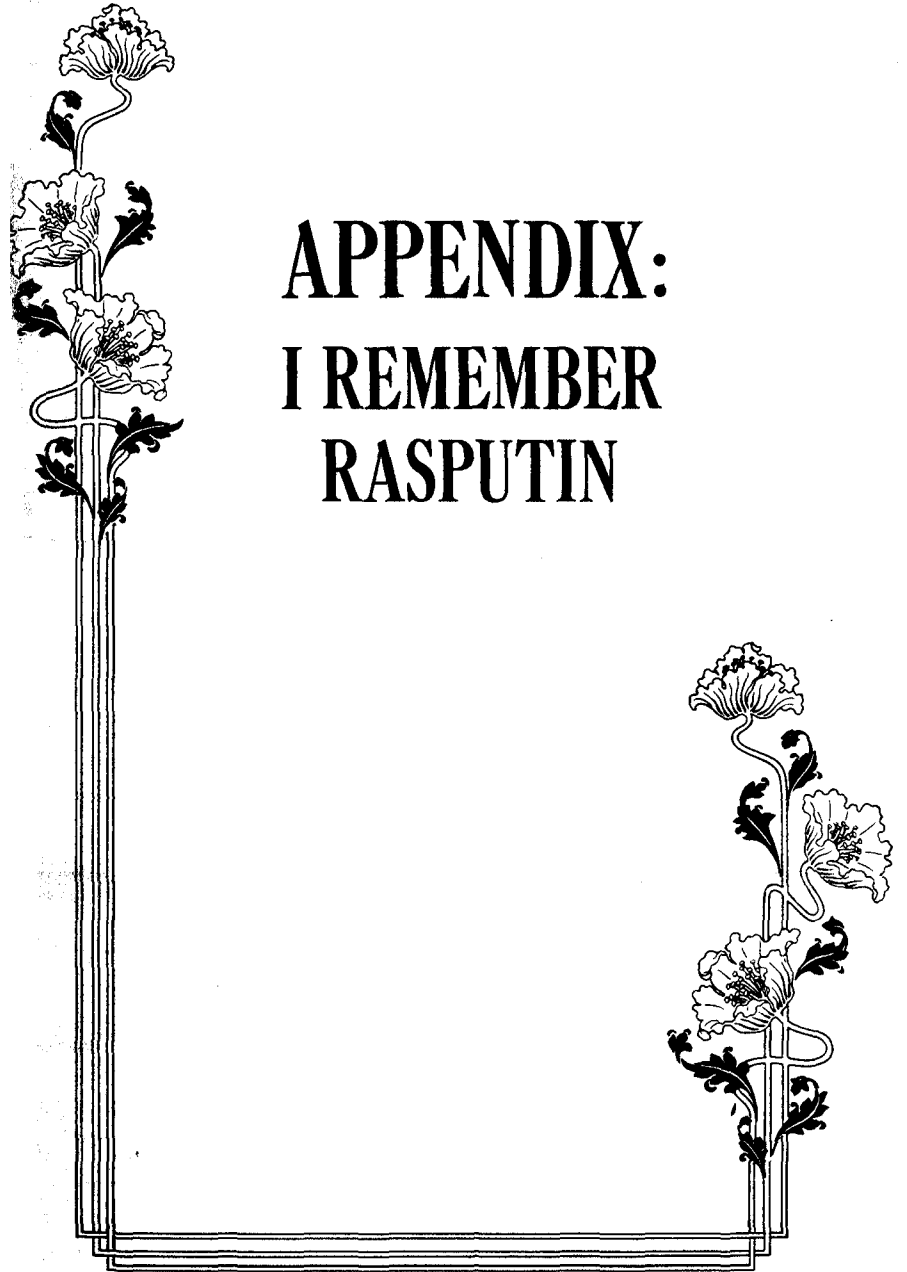
Even though I never reached the Miracle, my life has been better because of the training I had under Gurdjieff's guidance. I have been better able to analyse my thoughts, to separate the subject (the What) from the method (the How), to observe how ideas contradict each other and to look for the right issue. I have remembered, too, how he taught us to handle carefully whatever subject we thought about, so that it would not be distorted as if by one of those distorting mirrors in the old Panoptikon, that make us appear long and thin or squat and fat. Most of all I have remembered Gurdjieff's constant demand for brevity, that our thoughts might not be diluted in a flood of words.

Gurdjieff always said, 'Don't trouble your head over details. Why bother yourself with them before you have worked out the main decision? That comes first.'

And—a serious message for people today—he taught us never to be aggressive. He said, 'Try always to understand the other person. Then you can help, not hinder.' So his thinking was turned unflinchingly to the positive and constructive.

The best of all my memories of those days in St Petersburg is the memory of that unique fellowship that Gurdjieff created, and that special, almost holy, relationship that existed among us members, who were once 'ordained' by him to be the foundation of what was to become, in many parts of Europe and America, a community of followers of Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff.

APPENDIX: I REMEMBER RASPUTIN



When I was a very young woman and married to my first husband, who was an officer in the Russian navy, we, like other officers' families, had a flat in an enormous and very splendid building in St Petersburg. This building, which was Crown property, had been the house of one of the chief ministers of Peter the Great, and among other magnificent rooms it contained a ballroom so large that at the annual naval ball in November 16,000 people danced in it. Our own apartment consisted of four rooms and was very elegantly furnished; in fact the lilac, white and pale green striped silk of the upholstery on the grey maple-wood furniture in the drawing-room was the same as that in the private apartments of the tsarina herself. My young husband was only a sub-lieutenant, so that most of our neighbours were of higher rank.

One day one of my friends who lived in the same building, and whose father was an admiral, said to me, 'Would you like to meet Rasputin?'

'Indeed I would like to,' I said. 'I have heard so much about him.' Who in all Russia had not heard about

Rasputin, that strange character whose name still echoes down the corridors of history? Like everyone else in St Petersburg I knew the extraordinary story of Rasputin's arrival in the city a few years earlier. I knew he came from a village in Siberia called Pokrovskoe. I knew he was a member of a pseudo-religious sect called the Khlysty, who indulged in a form of frenzied dance in which the group danced in a circle ever more wildly until at last the members fell exhausted to the floor. I knew that Rasputin's origins had been very poor; it was rumoured that he had first set out to travel the thousands of miles from Pokrovskoe to St Petersburg on foot, but had been lucky enough to be picked up by a priest travelling there by sleigh. Once arrived in the capital, he was given introduction after introduction—first by the priest to Bishop Feofam; then by the bishop to the Archduchess Anastasia; then by the archduchess to Anna Virubova, the tsarina's favourite, who lived in the Palace. Virubova in her turn introduced him to the tsarina.

'He is extraordinary,' she told the tsarina. 'Everything is revealed to him. He will help Alexei.' The only son and heir of the tsar and tsarina lay seriously ill with haemophilia; he had been losing blood for six days and was now very feeble. All efforts to stop the bleeding had failed and the unhappy tsarina could not easily believe that anyone could help any more.

'But can we have confidence in him?' she asked. Virubova herself has recorded her reply. 'I don't know how I came to say, "He is a prophet inspired by God",' she says. 'He said we are bound by a chain and by the same chain we are bound to Mama.' By 'Mama' Rasputin meant the tsarina herself, and it was through her that he was to gain influence over the tsar. He always called the

tsar and the tsarina Papa and Mama, a familiarity no one else had hitherto dared use in speaking of them; but, after he used it, the dozen or fifteen most intimate members of the Court adopted the usage as well.

So the tsarina said, 'Let him come.' Later, when the boy had been saved, the empress added, 'I had a dream and I know it was Rasputin I saw in that dream.' Whether Rasputin was as clever as people thought or not, one thing seems certain: in a manner of speaking you could say he found the ground soft.

All this was now past history, as was Rasputin's subsequent rise to supreme power and influence in the Court. No wonder I was doubtful about the possibility of meeting him. But my friend brushed aside my doubts.

'Don't worry, I have the entry,' she said. 'The police outside who guard Rasputin all know me.'

So it came about that one day soon afterwards she called on me and together we went to his apartment. The house was in a street called Gorochovaia, near the Kazan Cathedral in the centre of the city. The policemen who stood guard in front let the two of us go into the courtyard, and there another policeman let us pass through another entrance in a sort of porch, and go upstairs to Rasputin's apartment on, if I remember aright, the second floor. Rasputin's sister, Matriona, answered the bell and led us into a large drawing-room with three windows, simply furnished but with a grand piano. My friend, who had come only to introduce me into the house, took her departure, and I was left alone to await Rasputin's arrival.

While I waited, I looked idly at the hundreds of letters strewn about on the piano, letters from people asking for different kinds of help or expressing a desire to meet Rasputin. I remember that one was from a man

who claimed that he had a very good tenor voice and wanted Rasputin to help him get into the Imperial Opera. Another was from a priest who wanted to come to Petersburg to obtain a new post, and gave details of his life and qualifications. A third letter was from someone saying that he had come several times to see Rasputin but the police had not let him in; he wished to express how much he admired Rasputin and to hope that he might one day meet him on secret business.

When at last Rasputin entered the drawing-room, he said 'Good morning' and came straight to me. I was surprised at his appearance: he was very tall and somehow appeared very flat, like a board. He had a long beard, and both hair and beard were parted in the middle. I thought he was about forty-five years old; already his hair showed a little grey. His eyes were remarkable—they were nearly white in colour and they gave me the impression of never being still; they were moving all the time. He was wearing a pale pink kosovorotka, the Russian-style shirt, embroidered, as he said, by the tsarina herself; he had many other such shirts worked by other ladies of the Court. Over the pink shirt he wore a black velvet poddevka, a short sleeveless garment, and he wore his black 'Manchester' cotton velvet trousers tucked into black leather boots.

'What is your name?' he asked as he came up to me. 'Anna.'

'Well, I shall call you Niousha,' he said ('Niousha' is one of the many familiar forms of my name in Russian), 'because I hope you will be coming again. I know from what I have heard of you that you have a good head and I like you for it. Besides, you do not think I am a saint. I have never said this to anyone; nearly all these people come from a class who do nothing with their lives and

have no interests as you do.³ Your friend told me that you play the piano very well and study it seriously. These others just imagine things and come here and talk to other women who are as silly as they are themselves.'

In spite of Rasputin's remarks about his entourage I had heard that he liked young women—there were many among his followers—and I suspected that that story was founded on fact. With me, however, he was correct in his behaviour; I think he knew that I would not have permitted anything else, and he knew, too, that I had a young husband.

Now his two daughters entered the room, with their aunt Matriona. (One of them, though she did not know it, had an extraordinary fate awaiting her, of which I shall speak later.) Matriona opened the door into the dining-room, and Rasputin, saying 'Come, Niousha', led the way. Here a large number of people were awaiting his entrance. A long table was laden with food, a very strange mixture of dishes: the famous strawberry cake from Ivanov, which was really almost a kind of tart, and next to it a dish of home-salted mushrooms. Nearby was a dish of ice-cream and near that again, a bowl of raw cabbage. On the table also stood many bottles of different kinds of vodka and wine, and I noticed that the women who took wine asked Rasputin to touch their glass with his lips before they drank. It was clear that they were members of that cult which flourished around Rasputin. It was also clear from the extraordinary conglomeration of foods on the table that Matriona, who acted as Rasputin's housekeeper, was a simple peasant who did not know how to serve meals properly.

As we approached the table a rather shy young girl sat down among the many ladies who were already there. One of them immediately raised her hands and

clapped them together in horror, exclaiming, 'What have you done?' The girl, frightened and bewildered, asked 'What have I done?' The older woman glared. 'You are sitting in the Holy Father's chair.' The poor girl instantly ran from the room.

He now sat down; I found myself sitting next to one of his daughters. Most of the ladies at the table were young and elegant; some I recognised as ladies-in-waiting to the empress. I also recognised by her crutches Virubova, the empress's favourite. Few of the men found places at the table, most being content to stand around the room. Many were in uniform and some wore the fine epaulettes, a large 'N' surmounted by the crown, which signified that they were personal aides-de-camp to the tsar. Among those in mufti I saw a young man whom I knew very well, Prince A—, who had been with my brother in the famous Corps des Pages. He was known to be devoted to Rasputin. A number of the men were probably ambitious and anxious to be known as somebody of importance.

While we were at table, Rasputin talked about the war—this was in 1915 and until the Revolution life in St Petersburg was still more or less normal. Rasputin said that it was the government ministers, not the tsar, who were to blame for what was taking place. But he did not sit still for long; he was very restless and often left his place to wander about the room talking to people, or to answer the telephone, which rang continually. Sometimes Rasputin merely broke off what he was saying for a moment to give the servant answering the telephone a message; at other times he took care of the matter himself. Some time after this first visit of mine, my friend told me that one of the calls that came through that day had been from a young man who

wanted to marry a young lady who was already married, and who was unable to obtain a divorce because of the disapproval of the Church. The man was desperate as he had to join his regiment in a week's time, and in his desperation he appealed to Rasputin. Rasputin took instant action: he called Prince A—, who in turn called the Minister of Religion, and within an hour everything was arranged. The young man was free to marry within two days, the necessary documents being provided on the morrow. So the apparently insoluble problem was settled by Rasputin in less than an hour.

Later I heard a similar tale about another incident. A baroness tried three times to obtain an audience of the empress, to ask her to intercede with the military authorities because her son was being sent to the Caucasus. Having failed three times she finally approached Rasputin, and through his influence a courier was despatched and actually travelled half the distance to the Caucasus to deliver fresh orders to the young man recalling him to St Petersburg.

Meanwhile, however, my first meeting with Rasputin was interrupted by a servant saying that Prince Y— had sent his kareta (a small carriage) to fetch Rasputin. As I took my leave, he invited me to come again.

'But if I come alone, will they let me in?' I asked.

'They will,' Rasputin assured me. 'I myself will give your name to the police.' I promised to return and I did, several times. Though I was never a member of his 'cult', and I did not even like him, nevertheless I found him interesting and I liked to observe the people who gathered around him. He seemed much less of a peasant than his sister, for since he was highly intelligent he had learned very quickly how to behave in society. Besides, I think that Prince A— had helped

him and sometimes told him what to say and how to say it.

One day Rasputin telephoned me to come over in a taxi and go with him to Peterhof, the tsar's summer residence, as he had to see the tsarina at once on some urgent matter concerning the war.

When I went to his house I found him ready and we went to the Baltiysky Station. I took first-class tickets (there were three classes then) and we entered an empty compartment. Rasputin began to talk about his remarkable career at Court.

'Anna Virubova introduced me first to Mama and Papa, and they at once showed me their sick son, for Anna had told them I could cure him of his illness. I began to treat him and soon he became much better. From that time on I was nearly always at the palace. Then, seeing how intimate I was with Mama and Papa, the ministers began to consult me and to assail me with different problems to be submitted to the tsar. He also started to consult me. So that is how it all happened. But Niousha, tell me what you think about me yourself.'

'I don't know you enough to judge, Gregory Efimovitch.'

'But you are shrewd and truthful. . . .'

Here the conversation ended, for we arrived at the Peterhof Station where we found waiting a footman, who took us to a landau with a coachman in charge of a pair of beautiful horses. I remember their splendid uniforms of crimson and gold and their cocked hats, that of the footman who rode beside the coachman worn with its point forward, and the coachman's with the points sideways. So off we went to the palace.

I waited in the drawing-room while Rasputin was in

the next room with the tsarina. When he came out he presented me with her photograph, which he had asked her to autograph for me.

'You see, Niousha,' he said, 'it's because I like you. You don't want to ask me for something more substantial?'

I hesitated.

'No,' I said, 'not for myself, but my sister's husband did ask me once if I could find out whether his family's lands in the Caucasus, which they have owned since at least the ninth century, could be returned to him. But I don't like to ask you. . . .'

'I will try,' he said. 'And if I succeed you will tell your brother-in-law to give me one hundred thousand roubles for my poor.'

'Of course,' I replied. I knew that Rasputin never kept money but gave it all away.

Whether he ever took any action on this matter I do not know; I was not myself much concerned about it and I think he knew it. Time went on and eventually Rasputin was killed.

But before that I had a number of meetings with him and he said many things that seemed to me to be wise even though I did not really like him, or think he was a good man. Once he said, 'If you do something wrong but you do not know it is a crime or a sin, you must not feel guilty afterwards, but if you know you are doing wrong, then you are guilty.' On another occasion when he asked my opinion of something, I said, 'Why do you ask me? You are clever and you must know the answer yourself.' He replied at once, 'I am not clever. Look at all these people—' (he nodded at the crowd gathered around his big dining-table) 'I am not clever, it is they who are stupid.'

But if Rasputin was not really as clever as people thought (and some of the political advice he gave the tsar was what some would consider to have been very bad indeed), he showed insight in a letter which he wrote to his wife in Pokrovskoe not long before he was assassinated and the Revolution broke out. Some have thought his letter showed the power of prophecy, but I do not think so. It is a difficult letter to translate because it was written in haste, with incomplete sentences and an ungrammatical style, but I have translated it as accurately as I can.

My dear ones,

In that terrible omen great distress will come, our defender will be darkened and the spirit is disturbed in the quiet of the night and there is no consolation. Terrible is the wrath and where to escape? As it is told, watch, for we do not know the day or the hour and there will be such a time for our land. And the blood freezes with terror. So much blood is dark from heavy suffering. I will not see all this but my hour is near. But there is no fear although there is sadness. I will know great suffering and through that will find forgiveness and will inherit the kingdom. It will be a sorrow to you and the little birds in your nest but not long now. Pray on the Cross. You will all be saved. Thinking of you and the sorrow of our dear ones—their sorrowful way is known to God. There will be many for the Faith. Brother will kill brother. Great will be the evil, and the earth will shake and there will be hunger and distress and dire omens will spread over the whole world, but you must pray and through prayer safety and joy will be yours. The Grace of the Saviour will happen and you will be

*under the protecting mantle of the Holy Mother.
Gregory.*

I was busy with my music studies at the time Rasputin was killed but I heard that his wife and daughters Zoria and Mara came from Siberia to attend his funeral, and the tsarina was very kind to them and gave them icons. Later they went far away to some town or village and I do not know what happened to his wife afterwards. It was rumoured that one of the daughters eventually married a foreigner—a diplomat, I think. The other, Mara, had a more curious history. She, too, married, but her husband soon died and she was left in great poverty with two tiny daughters. Monseigneur Chaptal, the French bishop, helped in educating her children but she was still in great need. Finally the proprietor of a famous American circus heard of her and invited her to join his company. She was billed as the daughter of the famous Rasputin, with documents to prove her identity, and appeared wearing a splendid Russian costume of gold brocade with the enormous head-dress, the kokoshnik, sparkling with jewels. At first, Mara's act consisted of driving a troika around the arena, but as time passed it was decided that something new and more sensational was needed, and Rasputin's daughter was asked to enter a cage to act with performing wild bears. The bears really were wild, and one day she was badly mauled and her arms so seriously injured that the act had to be abandoned and the troika ride brought back. Now, however, this act was more successful, as crowds flocked to see the woman who had been savaged by bears and survived. Later, a similar act was performed in Europe.

So ends the story of the Rasputins as I remember

them. History has made its own judgment on the man from Siberia who rose to exercise so much power in the Court of the tsar. For my part I can only record my own impression of that strange figure. He was a complex character, arrogant and diplomatic at once, as one can see from the way in which he once wrote to the tsarina: 'Write to Papa that he must do such and such. He will do what you want, but tell him in such a way that he does not know you are writing at my suggestion.' He was cunning and also daring. For instance, he was daring when he advised the tsar to take over the command of the army from the Grand Duke Nicholas. Anna Virubova writes that he asked her to tell the tsarina to write to the tsar and say that he must come back to Petersburg for three days, to sign papers: that, said Rasputin, would be enough for his ends and he could then finish the job. The tsar, weak though he was, sometimes saw through Rasputin. He once said to the tsarina, 'Sometimes I have the impression that he is not helping me to govern, but he himself governs and I am helping him.' So Rasputin had to be careful. The fact remains that he was a man of unique personality, like no one else. He aimed high—very high indeed—and he was protected by the tsar. One thing is certain: in spite of the common belief based presumably on the stories about his original sect of religious dancers, Rasputin was not mad. Oh no, Rasputin was very sane.