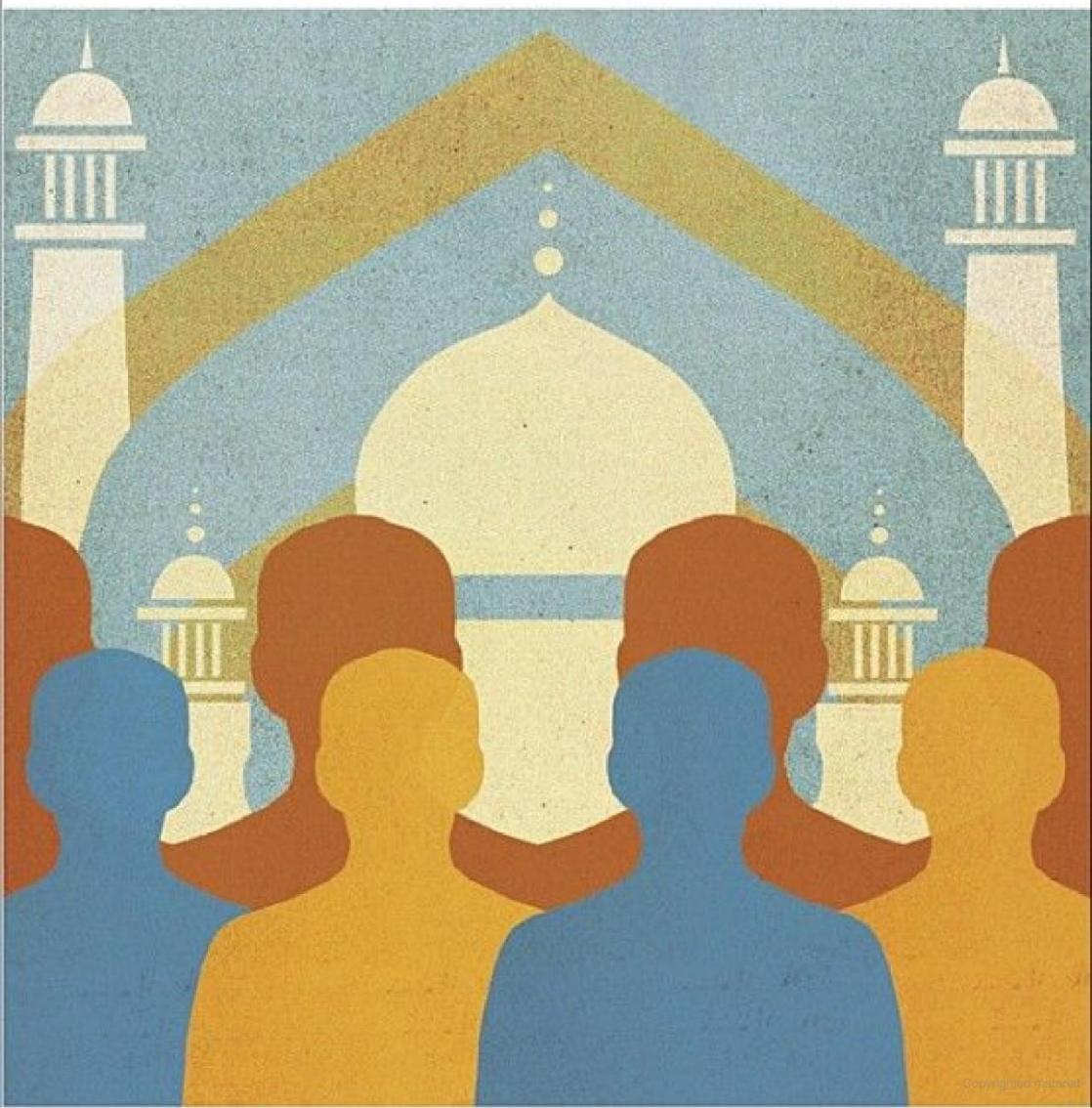
MODERN CLASSICS

G. I. Gurdjieff

Meetings with Remarkable Men



Contents

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS

MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE MEN

George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1877–1949) was born in Alexandropol and trained in Kars as both a priest and physician. Gurdjieff travelled in the remotest regions of Central Asia and the Middle East, before gathering pupils in Moscow before the First World War and continuing his work on the move – first to Essentuki in the Caucasus, and then through Tiflis, Constantinople, Berlin and London to the Château de Prieuré near Paris, where he re-opened his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in 1922 on a larger scale. The story of his unremitting search for a real and universal knowledge, and the exposition of his ideas, are unfolded in his major works: *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* and *Views from the Real World*.

Gary Lachman is the author of several books on consciousness, culture and the western esoteric tradition, including *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality*, *A Secret History of Consciousness*, *The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus*, and *In Search of P. D. Ouspensky: The Genius in the Shadow of Gurdjieff*. He writes for several journals in the UK and US and lectures frequently in the UK, US and Europe. His work has been translated into more than a dozen languages. In a former life he was a founding member of the rock group Blondie and in 2006 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. American by birth he has lived in London since 1996 and can be reached at www.garylachman.co.uk.

WRITTEN IN RUSSIAN, THE MANUSCRIPT OF THIS BOOK WAS BEGUN IN 1927 AND REVISED BY THE AUTHOR OVER A PERIOD OF MANY YEARS. THE FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY A. R. ORAGE HAS BEEN REVISED AND REWORKED FROM THE RUSSIAN FOR THIS PUBLICATION

Translators' Note*

The work of Gurdjieff has many aspects. But through whatever form he expresses himself, his voice is heard as a call.

He calls because he suffers from the inner chaos in which we live.

He calls to us to open our eyes.

He asks us why we are here, what we wish for, what forces we obey. He asks us, above all, if we understand what we are.

He wants us to bring everything back into question.

And because he insists and his insistence compels us to answer, a relationship is created between him and ourselves which is an integral part of his work.

For nearly forty years this call rang with such force that people came to him from all over the world.

But to meet him was always a test. In his presence every attitude seemed artificial. Whether too deferential, or on the contrary pretentious, from the first moment it was shattered; and nothing remained but a human creature stripped of his mask and revealed for an instant as he truly was.

This was a merciless experience – and for some impossible to bear.

These people could not forgive him for having seen through them and as soon as they were out of his sight, went to great lengths to justify themselves. This was the origin of the most fantastic legends.

Gurdjieff himself was amused by these stories. He even went so far as to provoke them, at times, if only to be rid of curiosity-seekers, incapable of understanding the meaning of his search.

As for those who knew how to approach him and for whom this meeting was a turning-point in their lives, any attempt to describe their experience seemed ridiculous. This explains why direct accounts are so rare.

The influence he exerted – and still exerts – cannot, however, be separated from Gurdjieff the man. So it is legitimate to want to know about his life, at least in its main outlines.

For this reason his pupils have felt it right to publish this book, originally intended to be read aloud to a limited circle of pupils and guests. Here Gurdjieff speaks of the least-known period of his life: his childhood, his youth and the first stages of his search.

But if Gurdjieff speaks of himself, he does so to serve his lifelong purpose. It is apparent that this is not an autobiography in the strict sense of the word. For him the past is not worth recounting except in so far as it can serve as an example. In these tales of adventure what he suggests are not models for outward imitation, but a completely new way of facing life, which touches us directly and gives us a foretaste of another order of reality.

For Gurdjieff was not, and could not be, only a writer. His task was a different one.

Gurdjieff was a master.

This idea of master, so familiar in the East, is hardly accepted at all in the West. It calls to mind nothing definite; its content is extremely vague, even suspect.

According to traditional conceptions, the function of a master is not limited to the teaching of doctrines, but implies an actual incarnation of knowledge, thanks to which he can awaken other men, and help them in their search simply by his presence.

He is there to create conditions for an experience through which knowledge can be lived as fully as possible.

This is the real key to the life of Gurdjieff.

From the time of his return to the West, he worked unceasingly to gather round him a group of people ready to share with him a life wholly turned towards the development of consciousness. He unfolded his ideas to them, sustained and gave life to their search, and brought them to the conviction that, to be complete, their experience must include at one and the same time all the aspects of a human being. And this is the very idea of the 'harmonious development of man' on which he based that Institute which for many years he strove to set on its feet.

Working towards this goal, Gurdjieff had to fight a relentless battle through all the difficulties caused not only by war, revolution, and exile, but also by the indifference of some and the hostility of others.

To give the reader some idea of this struggle, and of his tireless ingenuity in carrying it on, there has been added a chapter not originally intended for this book. It is an account he gave one evening in reply to a question – seemingly very indiscreet – about the financial resources of the Institute.

This astonishing narrative, which appears under the title 'The Material Question', may contribute to a better understanding of how a master's life and all his actions are subordinated to the accomplishment of his mission.

Introduction

Meetings with Remarkable Men (1963) is one of the great spiritual adventure stories of the twentieth century. In it the enigmatic Greek-Armenian-Russian esoteric teacher George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1877?–1949) tells of his early years in the ethnic melting-pot of the Caucasus, and his search in Central Asia, Egypt and the holy lands for the 'ancient wisdom' and 'lost knowledge' that he later taught to his students. We should, however, recognize that as strict autobiography *Meetings with Remarkable Men* should be read with caution. Until Gurdjieff 'surfaced' in Moscow in 1915, little of his life can be corroborated, and for the period covered in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* – roughly 1890 to 1910 – we have only his word. As his biographer James Moore remarks, there is 'not one shred of independent evidence to confirm his extraordinary account – nor indeed to invalidate it'.*

In this ambiguity Gurdjieff followed in the footsteps – often literally – of his fellow esoteric teacher and compatriot Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), whose claims to have travelled around the world and, even more extravagantly, to have visited Tibet at a time when Europeans were turned away, remain controversial and unverifiable.† Like Gurdjieff, Blavatsky was in search of ancient wisdom, and, like Gurdjieff, after finding it she returned to the West in order to teach what she had learned; the essence of it can be found in her two compendious volumes *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The*

Secret Doctrine (1888). Again like Gurdjieff, Blavatsky emerged into public life only in her forties, when she co-founded, in New York City in 1875, the Theosophical Society. Before this her life, as the cliché goes, was 'shrouded in mystery', one that, like Gurdjieff, she went out of her way to create. Yet there is enough circumstantial evidence in her accounts of adventures in India, Egypt and the Himalayas to suggest that at least some of her mystical-spiritual journeys did take place, and the same can be said for Gurdjieff.

There seems to be something in the Russian spirit that unites the hunger for spiritual knowledge with a positive need for travel. Grigori Rasputin (1869–1916), the 'Holy Devil', an older contemporary of Gurdjieff, and like him driven by a deep spiritual hunger, once walked from his home in Pokrovskoe, Siberia, to the monastery of Mount Athos in Greece, taking in Jerusalem along the way. There is also the tradition of the Russian *startsy*, elders of the Church and spiritual advisers, who took to the high road and, like journeying Buddhist monks, preached their message throughout the land; readers of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) will recall the figure of Father Zosima. It is no wonder that one of the classics of Russian spirituality is the anonymous *Way of a Pilgrim* (1884), which recounts a pilgrimage across Russia while practising the Jesus Prayer, a kind of Eastern Orthodox mantra. But it is not only in light of the spiritual tradition of Holy Russia that the journeys recounted in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* should be seen. The Western occult and esoteric traditions also inspired prodigious travels. The Swiss alchemist and natural healer Paracelsus (1493–1541) covered most of Europe on foot. In the eighteenth century, the character of the occult 'noble traveller' was exemplified in figures like the Comte de Saint-Germain (1712?–84) and

Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo (1743–95), who crisscrossed the continent incessantly, seeking out initiations and initiating others in turn. Gurdjieff's contemporary, the notorious dark magician Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), spanned the globe and, among other exploits, made two attempts on the Himalayas.

If Gurdjieff's recounting of his adolescence and early manhood in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* requires some pinches of salt, his later career is well documented.* Gurdjieff's life became accessible to independent corroboration in Moscow in the spring of 1915 when the Russian writer and journalist Peter Demianovich Ouspensky (1878–1947) reluctantly agreed to a meeting with a 'certain G., a Caucasian Greek, who led a group engaged in various "occult" investigations and experiments'.† Ouspensky was reluctant to meet this 'certain G.' because he himself had just returned from his own spiritual journey, a 'search for the miraculous' that took him to Egypt, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and India, among other places, and from which he came back empty handed. Ouspensky, like Gurdjieff, called himself a 'seeker of truth', and he had been in search of 'schools' from which he could learn 'an entirely new road, unlike anything hitherto known or used' that could help him to escape from 'the labyrinth of contradictions in which we live'.‡ His search, however, proved disappointing, and Ouspensky wasn't looking for gurus. Ouspensky was a well-known authority on mysticism and 'higher consciousness' – his book *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (1912) had made his reputation – and his accounts of his travels appeared in the popular press. Ouspensky didn't know it, but the students of Gurdjieff who urged him to meet their master had read his articles and books in advance. Gurdjieff knew of Ouspensky and was determined to 'ensnare' him; it was only after the

persistent efforts of Gurdjieff's students that Ouspensky eventually accepted the invitation.

In his account of his years with Gurdjieff, *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949) – still the best introduction to Gurdjieff's ideas – Ouspensky writes of their meeting in a dingy Moscow café, frequented by 'small dealers' and 'commission agents'. 'I saw a man of an oriental type, no longer young, with a black moustache and piercing eyes, who astonished me first of all because he seemed to be disguised and completely out of keeping with the place and its atmosphere. I was still full of impressions of the East. And this man with the face of an Indian rajah or an Arab sheik whom I at once seemed to see in a white burnoose or gilded turban, seated here ... in a black overcoat with a velvet collar and black bowler hat, produced the strange, unexpected and almost alarming impression of a man poorly disguised, the sight of whom embarrasses you because you see he is not what he pretends to be and yet you have to speak and behave as though you did not see it.'* They spoke of India and yoga and Ouspensky quickly understood that Gurdjieff had been to places he had only heard of and very much wanted to visit. After their first meeting came others and for the next few days Ouspensky importuned Gurdjieff with dozens of questions. They spoke of drugs – Ouspensky had already experimented with nitrous oxide and hashish – and the war, and many other things, but what struck Ouspensky most was Gurdjieff's insistence on what at first sight seems an absurd idea: that human beings are 'asleep'. Human beings, Gurdjieff told Ouspensky, are 'machines' and their actions, beliefs and ideals are entirely 'mechanical'. 'All the people you see, all the people you know, all the people *you may get to know*, are machines, actual machines working solely under the power of external

influences.'† This revelation shocked Ouspensky and he could not completely accept it.‡ But with a world erupting into war, Gurdjieff's diagnosis must have seemed acute. Ouspensky was impressed by this 'certain G.', he felt certain that Gurdjieff *knew* what he wanted to know. And when Gurdjieff began to speak of how one can stop being a machine and 'wake up', Ouspensky was hooked. Ironically, the 'school' he had sought in faraway places seemed to be right there, practically on his doorstep.

Ouspensky remained Gurdjieff's student for the next four years. Against the backdrop of the First World War, the Russian Revolution and Civil War – *In Search of the Miraculous* is itself a kind of spiritual adventure story – Ouspensky subjected himself to Gurdjieff's stern command. But by 1921, when he found himself among many other White Russian refugees stranded in Constantinople, he had broken with his teacher and was following his own path. He was in luck. An enthusiastic reader of *Tertium Organum*, Lady Rothermere, wife of the wealthy newspaper baron, was determined to meet him and financed his escape to London. If that wasn't miraculous enough, she also arranged for Ouspensky to lecture on Gurdjieff's philosophy – he had abjured the teacher but not the teaching – to audiences that included T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Algernon Blackwood and A. R. Orage, the flamboyant editor of *The New Age*, the pre-eminent 'journal of ideas' at the time.* In 1922 Gurdjieff opened his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at the Prieuré des Basse Loges in Fontainebleau – at one time the home of Louis XIV's mistress, Madame de Maintenon – a large chateau with immense grounds about forty miles south-east of Paris. Orage gave up his editorship of *The New Age* and went to Fontainebleau to devote himself to what would come to be

known as the 'Work'. Maurice Nicoll, one of C. G. Jung's earliest English followers, gave up his lucrative Harley Street practice, and, with young wife and infant child, did the same. Many others followed – including the writer Katherine Mansfield – and both Orage and Nicoll would become respected exponents of Gurdjieff's ideas. Gurdjieff introduced the sacred 'oriental dances', whose origin, he claimed, came from the mysterious Sarmoung Brotherhood he speaks of in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, and it was as a 'teacher of dances' that in the 1920s Gurdjieff was most known. Soon newspapers spoke about the 'Forest Philosophers' who had taken up residence in the woods of Fontainebleau. Gurdjieff's Institute was prospering and attracting more students, many from the United States, and the future looked good for the Harmonious Development of Man.

Then, in July 1924, something happened. Returning to Fontainebleau from Paris, Gurdjieff's Citroën left the road at high speed and smashed into a tree. Gurdjieff sustained serious injuries. He was found unconscious – he would remain so for five days – lying near the wreck, covered in blood, his head resting on a cushion. How he came to be in this position remains a mystery. Several other mysteries surround the crash, enough to lead some to suggest that Gurdjieff somehow *arranged* the accident.* It was what he called a 'shock', a sudden change, which upset the apple cart and created confusion in those around him. Routine, established patterns, a predictable course of events: these lull us into the 'sleep' it was Gurdjieff's mission to oppose. His Institute was designed to tackle this problem, but it, too, was subject to it. Proceedings there could also become routine. Additionally, Gurdjieff was burdened with onerous financial responsibilities, and was supporting many members of a large

extended family. There are strong reasons to believe that he felt the need for a complete change. In any event, two months after his accident, Gurdjieff announced that he was 'liquidating' the Institute. It was shutting down. He was turning his hand to another tactic. Gurdjieff, the teacher of dances, was becoming a 'professional writer'.

From 1925 to 1935 Gurdjieff laboured at putting his ideas onto paper, writing in cafés, restaurants and other public places, embodying his belief that the 'Work' must be performed in the midst of life. He conceived of three 'series' of writings, each of which had a specific aim and purpose. The First Series encompasses that jaw-breaker of a masterpiece, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (1950). Its aim was to 'destroy mercilessly, without any compromise whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world'.* Readers familiar with *Beelzebub* may accept that it accomplishes its objective. To say it is a difficult book is an understatement. Gurdjieff knots his narrative with endless dependent, subordinate and parenthetical clauses, throws in so many neologisms, and makes so many outrageous claims, that only the most dedicated readers find their way to its pith. In the spaceship Karnak, Beelzebub – one of the names of the devil – and his grandson hurtle through space, and along the way Beelzebub opines on the human condition; that, for some 1,200 pages, is more or less the plot. The result suggests a mash-up between *Tristram Shandy* and *Finnegans Wake*, but somewhat less readable. Some suggest Gurdjieff wrote it in this way purposely, to repel the merely curious; others say it is the work of man not quite sane; while others say he was simply an atrocious writer.

This last opinion seems countered by his Second Series, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, which, if nothing else, shows that, when he wanted to, Gurdjieff could write clearly. *Meetings with Remarkable Men* is more than readable, it is gripping, entertaining, often moving, and fulfils Gurdjieff's aim of 'concealing serious thoughts in an enticing, easily grasped outer form', something that Peter Brook's 1979 solemn film adaptation failed to achieve. It is not surprising that most readers first coming to Gurdjieff disobey his injunction that they begin with *Beelzebub*, and start with this simpler, more congenial work instead. Gurdjieff's Third Series, *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* (1974), was abandoned and remains fragmentary, and one earlier effort, *The Herald of the Coming Good* (1933), was considered a disaster, its bombastic style and incredible claims being so outlandish that soon after publication any unsold copies were rounded up and destroyed. After 1935 Gurdjieff abandoned writing and returned to teaching small groups, for a time in New York, but mostly in Paris, where he died in 1949.

The aim of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, according to Gurdjieff, is to 'acquaint the reader with the material required for new creation and to prove the soundness and good quality of it'.* Following the demolition job of *Beelzebub*, we are ready for a new beginning. But Gurdjieff also tells us that he wrote the book in order to answer all the questions about his life, his beliefs, his travels, that he had been pestered with for years. Gurdjieff solves both problems by introducing the reader to his life and to the many people who have had an instructive influence on him; these are his 'remarkable men', although we should note that we also meet at least one remarkable woman – the unforgettable Vitvitskaïa – as well as a remarkable dog, Philos. As more

than one commentator has suggested, with the exception of his father, there is little evidence for the actual existence of Gurdjieff's remarkable men. Dean Borsh, Bogachevsky, Abram Yelov, Professor Skridlov, and the others may be composites of different people, aspects of Gurdjieff himself, or fictional characters, allegorical figures invented to convey a particular idea or meaning. Or they may, with equal verifiability, have been real people. This uncertainty is only one aspect of a multi-levelled work, which is at once adventure story, parable, memoir and metaphysical marvel tale.

Gurdjieff was born to a Greek father and an Armenian mother, but exactly when remains unclear. The years 1866, 1872, 1874 and 1877 are all possible years of his birth. The year 1877 has a certain prominence because it was the date on Gurdjieff's passport. Yet Gurdjieff destroyed his birth certificate in 1930 on the eve of a trip to America – an example of his deliberate 'mystery mongering' – and all the evidence suggests that he could easily fake a date on a passport, so there is no guarantee it is correct. His birthday is 28 December, but, making allowances for the Old Russian calendar, his followers celebrate it on 13 January. The ambiguity over when Gurdjieff was born also impacts his nationality. He could be Russian or Turkish, depending on the year. If before 1877, he was Turkish; the place of his birth was then under Turkish rule and was called Gümrü. If after 1877, the Russians ruled it, and it was called Alexandropol.

In 1878 his family moved to nearby Kars, which was captured by the Russians in 1877, and it was here that Gurdjieff grew up. It was a turbulent, unsettled and shifting world, and Gurdjieff knew few boundaries and little sense of Western order. As he suggests in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* this uncertainty taught him to be alert and aware of his

surroundings, and to take opportunities that others missed, a lesson he would be at pains to pass on to his students.

The book's first remarkable man, Gurdjieff's own father, was a carpenter. After losing a lucrative business he was driven to become a labourer, but his real love was poetry. He was a bard, and Gurdjieff was impressed when he read about a recent archaeological find, ancient tablets containing fragments of the epic *Gilgamesh*. This was one of the traditional tales his father often recited. He had learned it from another bard who had himself learned it from another, and the recognition of an ancient oral tradition, still alive after centuries, fuelled Gurdjieff's own later search for ancient 'schools'.

It is at this point that Gurdjieff's 'search' began. Early on he had shown a fascination for the occult. As an adolescent he witnessed fortune telling, faith healing, table-rapping – all very popular at the time in Europe and North America – even vampirism, and, as he tells us, the death of his sister provoked questions about the afterlife. His biographer James Webb wonders if Gurdjieff actually witnessed some of these strange occurrences but concludes that, of them all, Gurdjieff's encounter with a Yezidi does ring true. The Yezidis are a religious sect – mistakenly considered devil-worshippers – and are subject to a strange compulsion which makes them unable to step outside of a circle. Gurdjieff recounts coming upon a Yezidi boy trapped within a ring other children had drawn; it wasn't until he rubbed it out that the boy could escape. Gurdjieff asked everyone about this, but received no explanation, and years later he experimented with a Yezidi woman. It took all his and another man's strength to pull her from her circle, and when they did she collapsed.

Gurdjieff encountered other mysterious phenomena. He doggedly investigated each one, but neither priests, nor intellectuals, nor 'men of the world' had a clue about them. He read voraciously in science, religion and philosophy and concluded that human beings are, for the most part, lazy and incurious – a not uncommon realization – and happily accept whatever plausible story they're told as the 'truth'. Gurdjieff would not settle for this, and at an early age determined to uncover the real 'truth', whatever the cost.

Gurdjieff studied for the priesthood but he also studied medicine – an early union of spirituality and scientific method that would later impress Ouspensky, and which exemplifies Gurdjieff's interest in healing both body and soul, the whole 'harmonious man'. He also developed an uncanny facility for mechanical work, learning how to take apart complex things and put them back together, often making improvements in the process. As Ouspensky recounts in *In Search of the Miraculous*, Gurdjieff's later career centred on 'fixing machines' as well. His family was poor, so Gurdjieff earned money as a travelling repairman, and much of *Meetings with Remarkable Men* deals with Gurdjieff's enviable knack and inventiveness at making money; 'The Material Question', added on as an appendix, is a fascinating and instructive account of Gurdjieff's efforts to finance his operations. He had little regard for legalities. Working for the railway and knowing in advance a proposed route between Tiflis and Kars, Gurdjieff approached town elders along the way and told them that, for a price, he could 'arrange' that the train should pass through their town; it would have anyway, but they did not know that, and many were happy to pay. He dyed sparrows different colours, selling them to gullible customers as a rare breed of 'American canary', heading out of town at the first chance of rain. Such roguish

tales lent an *Arabian Nights* flair to Gurdjieff's spiritual travelogue – he also incorporates the *Arabian Nights* strategy of tales within tales – and Gurdjieff later put his entrepreneurial skills to work as, among other things, a carpet seller, restaurateur and practising hypnotist, curing drug addicts and alcoholics. Gurdjieff could have easily become a prosperous businessman – in fact, he often was.

With his friend Sarkis Pogossian, a theology student from whom Gurdjieff learned the virtue of 'work' – Pogossian trains himself to be always active and never waste time – Gurdjieff discussed the fundamental questions of human existence. They visited sacred sites and became convinced that a 'hidden knowledge' existed, a ' "certain something" which people formerly knew', but which was now 'quite forgotten'. Traces of this lost knowledge could be found in the relics of the past – an idea popularized by Madame Blavatsky – and together they purchased a library of ancient Armenian texts and relocated to the ancient city of Ani. There they discovered a monk's cell in an underground passage, filled with old parchments in ancient Armenian. They learned of an ancient secret society, the Sarmoung Brotherhood, which flourished in 2500 BC. Gurdjieff believed remnants of the Brotherhood still existed, and they convinced an Armenian patriotic society to finance an expedition in search of them. Gurdjieff was, at least for a time, involved in some of the political movements of the day and was also most likely employed for a time by the Tsarist secret service. Much of his search was probably undertaken alongside somewhat more political objectives.

At some point Gurdjieff and Pogossian meet an Armenian priest who shows them a strange map of 'pre-sand Egypt'. The idea that Egypt was at some time free of its desert has a long occult pedigree, but more recent writers on ancient

civilizations suggest more solid, if controversial, evidence for this. In 1990 Robert Schoch, a geologist at Boston University, determined that weathering marks on the Sphinx were formed by water erosion, not by wind, and that this argued that the Sphinx was constructed at a time when Egypt was subject to considerable rain.* But *Meetings with Remarkable Men* is a work of 'psychogeography', in which the outer world is a symbol of our inner one. Gurdjieff associated Egypt with Atlantis – as many occultists do – but the ancient lost continent was for him a symbol of our sunken conscience, the awakening of which was one aim of his work. 'Pre-sand Egypt' then is a pointer to our lost 'essence', covered over by the layers of conditioning ('personality') it was Gurdjieff's objective to dismantle.

Gurdjieff surreptitiously copied the map – he later told Ouspensky that a seeker must sometimes 'steal' knowledge – and, while working as a tour guide in Egypt, through it met the most memorable of his remarkable men, the tragic Prince Yuri Lubovedsky. Prince Lubovedsky was also a seeker and he too had encountered the Armenian priest and paid dearly to copy the map – a hint perhaps that Gurdjieff was the more nimble of the two. Seeing it in Gurdjieff's hands, the prince befriended him, and a powerful bond, lasting decades, was forged between them. As leader of a group known as the 'Seekers of Truth', the prince invited Gurdjieff to join them. Who were these Seekers? Were they a real society, dedicated to discover ancient wisdom and lost knowledge? Gurdjieff told Ouspensky that he did not arrive at his knowledge alone, that he had companions, 'specialists'.* In her accounts of her travels, Madame Blavatsky spoke of her 'Masters', Indian sages from whom she learned esoteric secrets in a hidden monastery in Tibet, but she also used the term more loosely to refer to the many men and women she met along the way,

like herself, questers after truth, and from whom she absorbed much knowledge. The man who inspired her on her quest, the Russian Prince Alexander Golitsyn, was a real person, a Freemason who travelled throughout Europe, India and the East, seeking out sacred places and men and women professing esoteric knowledge.† Ouspensky himself spoke of the men and women he met on his own travels, people 'who were interested in the same ideas that interested me, who spoke the same language as I spoke, people between whom and myself there was instantly set up an entirely distinctive understanding', and Ouspensky felt that this was the beginning of a 'secret society, having no name, no form, no conventional laws, but closely connected by community of ideas and language'.‡ Yet Gurdjieff's Seekers were not limited to his own particular companions, or even to the kind of loose community Ouspensky speaks of. They encompass all seekers from all times, everyone with a sincere hunger to grasp the mysteries of existence. In this sense Gurdjieff's Seekers are like the members of Hermann Hesse's 'League' in his allegorical quest novel *The Journey to the East* (1932), who include real contemporary people, ancient figures like Plato and Pythagoras, and fictional characters like Don Quixote.*

The Seekers of Truth embark on a series of expeditions and one of Gurdjieff's aims in relating them is to show us how to overcome difficulties in life, a central objective of the 'Work'. It is here, perhaps, that the allegorical and symbolic aspect of the book is most strong. One challenge they face is how to cross a forbidding patch of the Gobi Desert. To overcome sandstorms, one Seeker suggests using stilts, to rise above the height of the storm. Another Seeker determines that the sand is actually of organic origin and can be used to supplement the food given to the sheep necessary for the journey – the sheep supply the expedition's own food. A third Seeker

realizes that the stilts can be tied across the sheep and used to carry both the Seekers and their equipment; they can travel comfortably, and use the time for study. Suddenly, what seemed like an impossible situation becomes straightforward – at least symbolically – and Gurdjieff concludes that the 'difficulties of crossing the Gobi had been intentionally exaggerated'.

If in this account Gurdjieff is not pulling our leg, which he is often inclined to do, the symbolism becomes clear. The sandstorms are the confusion of 'life' and the stilts the Seekers' ability to rise above it. The sheep are the docile, plodding individuals who, though well-intentioned, lack the more discerning perception of the true Seeker, but who are useful to them nonetheless – Gurdjieff often spoke of his students as 'guinea pigs' for his 'experiments'. The sheep carry the Seekers and provide sustenance for them; this is one reason why Gurdjieff allowed people of all types to join his groups: he would find uses for everyone. On his own expeditions with his students – during a time when, with Ouspensky and a small group, he was trapped in the Caucasus by the civil war – Gurdjieff deliberately increased the difficulties, believing that, by surmounting these, they would not baulk at whatever life threw at them.

Finally Gurdjieff finds his way to the Sarmoung Brotherhood, taken blindfolded to its secret monastery, hidden in the fastness of Turkestan. The parallels with Madame Blavatsky's 'Hidden Masters' in their mysterious monastery in Tibet are clear, but some have suggested that Gurdjieff's Sarmoung Brotherhood actually did exist. J. G. Bennett (1897–1974), a British Intelligence agent who met Gurdjieff in Constantinople and became his student, argued that it is linked to a Sufi brotherhood known as the Naq'shbandis.* Gurdjieff spoke of an 'inner circle of

humanity', who secretly guided mankind in its affairs, and, after breaking with Gurdjieff, Ouspensky tried his best to contact it. But this 'inner circle' may be a metaphor for the individuals who do overcome their 'mechanicalness' and 'wake up'. Such an 'inner circle' indeed has a profound responsibility.

In the monastery Gurdjieff learned much. He learned the 'sacred dances' he later taught, and he also learned about the 'law of seven' and the 'law of three', about vibrations, octaves and other cosmological and psychological 'laws' that he later taught to Ouspensky. Much of this came to him from his observation of a strange apparatus consisting of a column, a tripod and seven arms, each divided into seven segments. The arrangement of the arms and their segments made up a kind of alphabet or hieroglyphics, which, if understood, communicated these cosmic laws. Gurdjieff tells us he saw much else in this mysterious sanctuary, and remarks tantalizingly that he shall perhaps one day speak of it in a 'special book'.

That book, alas, was never written, but the one we have here serves well enough. We may not accept Gurdjieff's teachings unreservedly, and may find his withering indictment of modern Western man too severe; we can do both, I think, and still learn much from him. *Meetings with Remarkable Men* depicts a life lived intensely, with direction and purpose, in a world full of meaning and the promise of that ' "something else" which must be the aim and ideal of every more or less thinking man'. What it also does is introduce us to at least one truly remarkable man.

1

Introduction

Exactly a month has elapsed since I finished the first series of my writings – just that period of the flow of time which I intended to devote exclusively to resting the parts of my common presence subordinate to my pure reason. As I wrote in the last chapter of the first series,* I had given myself my word that during the whole of this time I would do no writing whatsoever, but would only, for the well-being of the most deserving of these subordinate parts, slowly and gently drink down all the bottles of old calvados now at my disposal by the will of fate in the wine-cellar of the Prieuré, and specially provided the century before last by people who understood the true sense of life.

Today I have decided, and now I wish – without forcing myself at all, but on the contrary with great pleasure – to set to work at my writing again, of course with the help of all the corresponding forces and also, this time, with the help of the law-conformable cosmic results flowing in from all sides upon my person from the good wishes of the readers of the first series.

I now propose to give a form understandable for everyone

to everything I have written down for the second series, in the hope that these ideas may serve as preparatory constructive material for setting up in the consciousness of creatures similar to myself a new world – a world in my opinion real, or at least one that can be perceived as real by all degrees of human thinking without the slightest impulse of doubt, instead of the illusory world which contemporary people picture to themselves.

And indeed, the mind of contemporary man, of whatever level of intellectuality, is only able to take cognizance of the world by means of data which, whenever accidentally or intentionally activated, arouse in him all sorts of fantastic impulses. And these impulses, by constantly affecting the tempo of all the associations flowing in him, gradually disharmonize the whole of his functioning, with such sorrowful results that it is impossible for any man, if he is able to isolate himself even a little from the influences of the established abnormal conditions of our ordinary life and is willing to think about it seriously, not to be terrified – as, for example, by the shortening of our life with each decade.

First of all, for the 'swing of thought', that is, for establishing a corresponding rhythm for my thinking and also for yours, I wish to follow somewhat the example of the Great Beelzebub and imitate the form of thinking of one highly respected by him and by me, and perhaps already, brave reader of my writings, by you, if of course you have had the daring to read through to the end all of the first series. That is to say, I wish to introduce at the very beginning of this writing of mine what our dear-to-all Mullah Nassr Eddin* would call a 'subtly philosophical question'.

I wish to do this at the very beginning because I intend to use freely, both here and in my later expositions, the wisdom of this sage, who is now recognized almost everywhere and

upon whom, it is rumoured, the title of 'The One and Only' is soon to be officially conferred by the proper person.

And this subtly philosophical question may already be sensed in that sort of perplexity which is bound to arise in the consciousness of every reader of even the very first paragraph of this chapter, if he compares the many data on which his firm convictions about medical matters are based with the fact that I, the author of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, after the accident which nearly cost me my life, with the functioning of my organism not yet fully re-established owing to the incessant active effort to set down my thoughts for transmission to others as exactly as possible, carried out my rest quite satisfactorily during this time chiefly by the use of immoderate quantities of alcohol, in the form of the above-mentioned old calvados and of its various full-strength virile cousins.

As a matter of fact, to give a completely true and exhaustive reply to this subtly philosophical question thus propounded impromptu, one must first reach a just verdict on my personal guilt in failing to fulfil exactly the obligation I had taken upon myself – to drink down all the remaining bottles of the said old calvados.

The point is that during this time appointed for my rest, despite all my automatic desire, I could not limit myself to the fifteen remaining bottles of old calvados which I mentioned in the last chapter of the first series, but had to combine the sublime contents of these bottles with the contents of two hundred other bottles – enchanting even to look upon – of the no less sublime liquid called old armagnac, so that this totality of cosmic substances might suffice for me personally, as well as for the whole tribe of those who have become in recent years my inevitable assistants, chiefly in these 'sacred ceremonies' of mine.

thoughts usual to contemporary man, it is impossible not to admit with one's mind and agree with one's feelings that anyone calling himself a man must never be lazy, but, constantly devising all sorts of compromises, must struggle with his self-avowed weaknesses in order to attain the aim he has set himself: to preserve intact these two independent animals confided to the care of his reason, and which are, by their very essence, opposite to each other.

Having yesterday finished this, as I called it, 'wiseacring for the swing of thought', this morning I took with me the manuscript of a synopsis I had written in the first two years of my activities as a writer, which I intended to use as material for the beginning of this second series, and went into the park to sit down and work in the shade of the historic avenue of trees. After reading the first two or three pages, forgetting everything around me, I became deeply thoughtful, pondering on how to continue further; and I sat there without writing a single word until very late in the evening.

I was so wrapped up in these reflections that I did not once notice that the youngest of my nieces, the one whose task it is to see that the Arabian coffee which I usually take, particularly when doing any intensely active physical or mental work, does not become quite cold in the cup, changed it, as I afterwards learned, twenty-three times.

In order that you may understand the seriousness of this engrossed thoughtfulness of mine, and picture to yourself, if only approximately, the difficulty of my situation, I must tell you that after I had read these pages and remembered by association the entire contents of the manuscript I had intended to make use of as an introduction, it became quite clear to me that all this over which I had, as is said, 'panted'

during so many sleepless nights, would now, after the changes and additions I had made in the final editing of the first series, be of no use at all.

When I understood this I experienced, for about half an hour, the state which Mullah Nassr Eddin defines by the words 'to feel oneself plunged in galoshes up to the eyebrows'; and I was ready at first to resign myself, and came to the decision to rewrite this entire chapter from beginning to end. But afterwards, continuing to recall automatically all sorts of sentences from my manuscript, I remembered, among other things, the place where, in order to explain why I took an attitude of merciless criticism towards contemporary literature, I had introduced the words of a certain intelligent, elderly Persian which I had heard in my early youth, and which, in my opinion, could not have better described the characteristics of contemporary civilization. I considered it impossible to deprive the reader either of what had been said on this subject or of all the other thoughts, so to say, artfully imbedded in this passage, thoughts which, for anyone able to decipher them, can be exceedingly valuable material for a correct understanding of what I intend to elucidate in the last two series in a form accessible to any man seeking the truth.

And so, these considerations compelled me to think out just how, without the reader being deprived of all this, it could be possible for the form of exposition I had first employed to correspond to the form now required after the great changes made in the first series.

In fact, what I had written during the first two years of this new profession of mine – which I was forced to adopt – could no longer correspond to what was now required, since I had then put down everything as a first version in the form of a synopsis understandable only to myself, intending to develop

all this material in thirty-six books, devoting each book to one special question.

In the third year I had begun to give to this outline a form of exposition which might be understandable to others, at least to those specially trained in, so to say, abstract thinking. But since, little by little, I had become more adroit in the art of concealing serious thoughts in an enticing, easily grasped outer form, and in making all those thoughts which I term 'discernible only with the lapse of time' ensue from others usual to the thinking of most contemporary people, I changed the principle I had been following and, instead of seeking to achieve the aim I had set myself in writing by quantity, I adopted the principle of attaining this by quality alone. And I began to go over from the beginning everything I had written in the synopsis, with the intention now of dividing it into three series and of dividing each of these, in the final version, into several books.

And my becoming so deeply thoughtful today was perhaps also because, just yesterday, there had been freshly revived in my memory the wise ancient saying, 'always to strive that the wolf be full and the sheep intact'.

Finally, when evening drew nigh and, from below, the famous Fontainebleau dampness began to come through my 'English soles' and affect my thinking, while from above various of God's dear little creatures, called little birds, began to evoke more and more frequently a chilly sensation on my completely smooth cranium, there arose in my common presence the bold decision not to have any regard for anyone or anything but simply to insert in this first chapter of the second series, as what present-day professional writers would call a digressive development, certain polished-up fragments of this manuscript, pleasing to me personally, and only

afterwards, in continuing further, to hold myself strictly to the principle I had decided upon for the writing of this series.

And this solution will be all the better both for me and for the reader, since I will thus be spared any extra new exertion of my already over-exhausted brains, and the reader, particularly if he has read through everything I have written before, will be able, owing to this digressive development, to represent to himself what kind of objectively impartial opinion is formed in the psyche of certain people, who have by chance been more or less correctly educated, concerning the results of the manifestations of the people of present-day civilization.

When this introduction was originally planned for the thirtieth book, I entitled it 'Why I Became a Writer', and described in it the impressions accumulated in me in the course of my life which are the basis of my present not very flattering opinion of the representatives of contemporary literature. In this connection, as I have already said, I introduced the speech which I had heard long ago in my youth, when I was in Persia for the first time and happened one day to be in a gathering of Persian intelligentsia where contemporary literature was being discussed.

One of those who spoke a great deal that day was the elderly, intelligent Persian whom I have mentioned – intelligent not in the European sense of the word, but in the sense in which it is understood on the continent of Asia, that is, not only by knowledge but by being.

He was very well educated and was particularly well acquainted with European culture.

He said, among other things:

'It is a great pity that the present period of culture, which we call and which people of subsequent generations will of course also call the "European civilization", is, in the whole

process of the perfecting of humanity, as it were, an empty and abortive interval. And this is because, in respect of the development of the mind, that chief impeller to self-perfection, the people of our civilization cannot transmit by inheritance anything of value to their descendants.

'For example, one of the chief means for developing the mind of man is literature.

'But what has the literature of contemporary civilization to give? Nothing whatever, except the development of, so to say, "word prostitution".

'The fundamental cause of this corruption of present-day literature is, in my opinion, that the whole attention in writing has gradually, of itself, come to be concentrated not on the quality of the thought and the exactitude with which it is transmitted, but only on the striving for exterior polish or, as is otherwise said, beauty of style – thanks to which there has finally resulted what I called word prostitution.

'And in fact you can spend a whole day reading a lengthy book and not know what the writer wished to say, and only when you have nearly finished, after having wasted so much of your time – already insufficient for the fulfilment of the necessary obligations of life – do you discover that all this music was built up on an infinitesimal, almost null idea.

'All contemporary literature falls by content into three categories: the first covers what is called the scientific field, the second consists of narratives, and the third of what are called descriptions.

'The scientific books usually contain collections of all sorts of old hypotheses already obvious to everyone, but combined in different ways and applied to various new subjects.

'In the narratives or, as they are otherwise called, novels – to which bulky volumes are also devoted – for the most part there are descriptions, without sparing any details, of how

native languages, but for outer mutual relations they are compelled to use Russian.

'During my visits there I came in contact with all kinds of people, and, having to speak with them for various personal needs, I decided to learn this language.

'I had had to learn so many languages in my lifetime that the learning of Russian did not present any great difficulty for me. Before very long I was able to speak it quite fluently but of course, like all the local inhabitants, with an accent, and only after a fashion.

'As one who has now become to some degree a "linguist", I consider it necessary to remark here, by the way, that it is never possible to think in a foreign language, even though knowing it to perfection, if one continues to speak one's native language or some other language in which one is accustomed to thinking.

'And therefore when I began to speak Russian, continuing all the while to think in Persian, I was searching mentally for words in the Russian language to correspond to my Persian thoughts.

'And it was then that I became aware of various incongruities – at first quite inexplicable to me – in this contemporary civilized language, on account of which it was sometimes impossible to transmit exactly the simplest and most ordinary expressions of our thoughts.

'Becoming interested in this, and being free of all life obligations, I began to study Russian grammar, and later the grammars of several other modern languages. I then understood that the cause of the incongruities I had noticed lay precisely in these artificially composed grammars of theirs, and there began to be formed in me the firm conviction which I have just expressed to you: that the grammars of the languages in which contemporary literature

is written are invented by people who, in respect of true knowledge, are on a lower level than ordinary simple people.

'As a concrete illustration of what I have just said, I shall point out, among the many incongruities in the Russian language which I noticed at the very beginning, the one that led me to make a detailed study of this question.

'Once, when I was conversing in Russian and, as usual, was translating my thoughts, which formed themselves Persian fashion, I found it necessary to use an expression which we Persians often employ in conversation, *myan-diaram*, which means in French *je dis* and in English "I say". But try as I might, searching my memory for a corresponding word in Russian, I could not find one, in spite of my knowing by this time almost all the words of this language used either in literature or for the ordinary mutual relations of people of all levels of intellectuality.

'Not finding a corresponding word for this simple expression so often used by us, I of course at first decided that I simply did not yet know it, and I began to search in my numerous dictionaries and to inquire of certain people who were considered authorities, for some Russian word which would correspond to this Persian meaning of mine. However, it turned out that in modern Russian there is no such word at all, but instead a word is used, namely, *yah gohvahriou*, which means in Persian *myan-soïl-yaram*, in French *je parle* and in English "I speak".

'Since you Persians have the same sort of thinking faculty as I have for digesting the meaning conveyed by words, I therefore ask you: could I, or any other Persian, on reading in contemporary Russian literature a word corresponding to the meaning of *soïl-yaram*, accept it without instinctive disturbance as having the same meaning as the word *diaram*?

Of course not: *soïl-yaram* and *diaram* – or "speak" and "say" – are two quite different "experienced actions".

'This very minor example is characteristic of thousands of other incongruities to be found in all the languages of the peoples who represent the so-called flower of contemporary civilization. And it is these incongruities which prevent the literature of today from serving as the basic means for developing the minds of those peoples who are considered representatives of this civilization and also of those peoples who at the present time – obviously for reasons already suspected by certain persons with common sense – are somehow deprived of the good fortune of being considered civilized and are therefore, as historical data bear witness, usually called backward.

'Owing to all these incongruities of language existing in contemporary literature, any man – particularly a man from races not included among the representatives of contemporary civilization – who has a more or less normal thinking faculty and is able to give words their real meaning, will of course, on hearing or reading any word used in an incorrect sense, as in the example just given, perceive the general thought of a sentence according to this incorrectly employed word, and as a result will grasp something quite different from what the sentence was intended to express.

'Although the ability to grasp the meaning contained in words differs in different races, the data for sensing the repeated experienced actions which are already well established in the process of the life of people are formed in all of them alike by life itself.

'The very absence, in the present-day Russian language, of a word exactly expressing the meaning of the Persian word *diaram*, which I have taken as an example, can serve to confirm my seemingly unfounded statement that the

illiterate upstarts of our time, who call themselves grammarians, and what is worse, are considered such by those round them, have succeeded in transforming even the language elaborated by life itself into, so to say, German *ersatz*.

'I must tell you here that when I began to study Russian grammar and also the grammars of several other modern languages in order to determine the causes of these numerous incongruities, I decided, being in general attracted to philology, to acquaint myself also with the history of the origins and development of the Russian language.

'And my study of its history proved to me that formerly it had contained exactly corresponding words for all the experienced actions already fixed in the process of the life of people. And it was only when this language, having reached a relatively high degree of development in the course of centuries, became in its turn an object for the "sharpening of the beaks of ravens", that is to say, an object of wiseacring for various illiterate upstarts, that many words were distorted or even entirely ceased to be used, merely because their consonance did not answer to the requirements of civilized grammar. Among these latter was the very word I searched for, which exactly corresponded to our *diaram*, and which was then pronounced *skazivaïou*.

'It is interesting to notice that this word has been preserved even up to the present time, but is used, and in the sense exactly corresponding to its meaning, only by people who, although they belong to the Russian nation, happen to be isolated from the effects of present-day civilization, that is to say, by people of various country districts situated far from any centre of culture.

'This artificially invented grammar of the languages of today, which the younger generation everywhere is now

compelled to learn, is in my opinion one of the fundamental causes of the fact that, among contemporary European people, only one of the three independent data necessary for obtaining a sane human mind has developed – namely, their so-called thought, which tends to predominate in their individuality; whereas without feeling and instinct, as every man with a normal reason must know, the real understanding accessible to man cannot be formed.

'To sum up everything that has been said about the literature of our times, I cannot find better words to describe it than the expression "it has no soul".

'Contemporary civilization has destroyed the soul of literature, as of everything else to which it has turned its gracious attention.

'I have all the more grounds for criticizing so mercilessly this result of modern civilization, since according to the most reliable historical data which have come down to us from remote antiquity we have definite information that the literature of former civilizations had indeed a great deal to assist the development of the mind of man; and the results of this development, transmitted from generation to generation, could still be felt even centuries later.

'In my opinion, the quintessence of an idea can sometimes be very well transmitted to others by means of certain anecdotes and proverbs formed by life.

'So, in the present case, in order to show the difference between the literature of former civilizations and the contemporary, I wish to make use of an anecdote very widely known among us in Persia, entitled "The Conversation of the Two Sparrows".

'In this anecdote it is said that once upon a time on the cornice of a high house sat two sparrows, one old, the other young.

"mathematical informedness" about it, whereas most of the people of Asia grasp the essence of the object observed by them sometimes with their feelings alone and sometimes even solely by instinct.'

At this point in his speech about contemporary literature, this intelligent, elderly Persian, among other things, touched on a question which at the present time is interesting many European, as they are called, 'propagators of culture'.

He then said:

'The people of Asia were at one time greatly interested in European literature but, soon feeling all the emptiness of its content, they gradually lost interest in it, and now it is scarcely read there at all.

'In the weakening of their interest in European literature, the chief part, in my opinion, was played by that branch of modern writing known by the name of novels.

'These famous novels of theirs consist mainly, as I have already said, of long descriptions, in various forms, of the course of a malady which has arisen among contemporary people and which, owing to their weakness and will-lessness, lasts rather a long time.

'The Asiatic people, who are not as yet so far removed from Mother Nature, recognize with their consciousness that this psychic state which arises in both men and women is unworthy of human beings in general, and is particularly degrading for a man – and instinctively, they assume an attitude of contempt toward such people.

'And as regards the other branches of European literature, such as the scientific, the descriptive, and other forms of instructive exposition, the Asiatic, having lost to a lesser degree the ability to feel, that is to say, standing closer to nature, half-consciously feels and instinctively senses the

writer's complete lack of any knowledge of reality and of any genuine understanding of the subject he is writing about.

'And so because of all this the Asiatic people, after first manifesting a great interest in European literature, gradually stopped paying any attention to it, and at the present time disregard it completely; whereas among the European peoples, the shelves of their public and private libraries and bookshops are groaning from the daily increasing number of new books.

'The question must doubtless arise in many of you as to how what I have just said can be reconciled with the fact that an overwhelming majority of the people of Asia are illiterate in the strict sense of the word.

'To this I will answer that nevertheless the real cause of the lack of interest in contemporary literature lies in its own shortcomings. I myself have seen how hundreds of illiterate people will gather round one literate man to hear a reading of the sacred writings or of the tales known as the "Thousand and One Nights". You will of course reply that the events described, particularly in these tales, are taken from their own life, and are therefore understandable and interesting to them. But that is not the point. These texts – and I speak particularly of the "Thousand and One Nights" – are works of literature in the full sense of the word. Anyone reading or hearing this book feels clearly that everything in it is fantasy, but fantasy corresponding to truth, even though composed of episodes which are quite improbable for the ordinary life of people. The interest of the reader or listener is awakened and, enchanted by the author's fine understanding of the psyche of people of all walks of life round him, he follows with curiosity how, little by little, a whole story is formed out of these small incidents of actual life.

'The requirements of contemporary civilization have engendered yet another quite specific form of literature called journalism.

'I cannot pass by in silence this new form of literature, since, aside from the fact that it offers nothing whatsoever for the development of the mind, it has, from my point of view, become the fundamental evil in the life of people today because of the poisonous influence it exerts on their mutual relations.

'This form of literature has become very widespread in recent times because, according to my unshakeable conviction, it answers more completely than anything else to the weaknesses and demands which lead to the ever-increasing will-lessness of man. It thus accelerates in people the atrophy of even their last possibilities for acquiring those data which formerly still gave them a certain relative cognizance of their own individuality, which alone leads to what we call "remembering oneself" – that absolutely necessary factor in the process of self-perfecting.

'Besides, owing to this unprincipled daily literature, the thinking function of people has come to be even further separated from their individuality; and thereby conscience, which was occasionally awakened in them, has now ceased to participate in this thinking of theirs. They are thus deprived of those factors which formerly gave people a more or less tolerable life, if only in respect of their mutual relations.

'To our common misfortune, this journalistic literature, which is becoming more widespread in the life of people year by year, weakens the already weakened mind of man still more by laying it open without resistance to all kinds of deceit and delusion, and leads it astray from relatively well-founded thinking, thus stimulating in people, instead of sane judgement, various unworthy properties, such as incredulity,

indignation, fear, false shame, hypocrisy, pride and so on and so forth.

'In order to portray to you more concretely all the maleficence for people of this new form of literature, I will tell you about several events which took place on account of newspapers, the reality of which was for me beyond all doubt, as by chance I had personally taken part in them.

'In Teheran I had a certain close friend, an Armenian, who some time before his death had made me his executor.

'He had a son, no longer young, who on account of his business lived with his numerous family in a large European city.

'One sad evening after having eaten their supper, he and the members of his family all fell ill, and died before morning. As executor for the family, I was obliged to go to the place where this tragic event had occurred.

'I found out that just before this event the father of this unfortunate family had read long articles for several days in succession, in one of the various newspapers he received, about a butcher shop where, according to these articles, special sausages were made from genuine products in some particular way.

'At the same time he kept coming across large advertisements of this new butcher shop in all the newspapers.

'Finally all this so tempted him that, although neither he nor his family cared for sausages very much, as all of them had been raised in Armenia where sausages are not eaten, he went and bought some. And having had these sausages for supper that same evening, all the family were mortally poisoned.

'My suspicions having been aroused by this extraordinary occurrence, I succeeded a little later, with the co-operation of

an agent of the "private secret police", in bringing to light the following:

'Some large firm had acquired, at a low price from an export concern, an enormous consignment of sausages originally destined for a foreign country, which had been rejected owing to a delay in shipment. To get rid of the entire consignment as quickly as possible, this firm spared no expense on reporters, to whom it entrusted this maleficent campaign in the newspapers.

'Another occurrence:

'During one of my stays in Baku I myself, for several days in succession, read in the local newspapers obtained by my nephew lengthy articles, taking up nearly half the entire paper, which went into ecstasies about the marvels performed by some famous actress.

'So much was written about her and in such a handsome way that even I, an old man, was, as is said, fired by it all, and one evening, putting off everything I had to do and changing my established evening régime, I went to the theatre to see this wonder.

'And what do you think I saw? Something corresponding, even in the slightest, to what had been written about her in these articles which filled up half the paper? ... Nothing of the sort.

'I had seen, in my day, many representatives of this art, both the good and the bad, and without exaggeration I can say that for some time I had been considered a great authority on these matters. But even without taking into consideration my personal views on art in general, and speaking merely from an ordinary standpoint, I must confess that in all my life I had never seen anybody to compare with this celebrity for lack of talent and absence of even the most elementary notions of the principles of playing a role.

husband the possibility of finishing his book, to take employment as a typist in the office of a large publishing house.

'There often came to this office a certain literary critic who met her there, and having, as is said, fallen in love with her, tried, simply for the satisfaction of his lust, to get on intimate terms with her; but she, an honourable wife who knew her duty, would not yield to his advances.

'But while, in this "faithful wife of a European husband", morality continued to triumph, there was nourished in this loathsome contemporary type, in proportion to the non-satisfaction of his lust, the desire for vengeance usual in such people; and by all sorts of intrigues he succeeded in getting her dismissed from her employment for no reason whatsoever. Then, when her husband, my young friend, had finished his book and published it, this specific ulcer of our times, because of his resentment, began to write in the newspaper to which he contributed, and also in other newspapers and periodicals, a whole series of articles containing all sorts of false statements, which discredited the book so completely that it was a total failure – that is to say, no one became interested in it or bought it.

'And so, thanks to one of these unconscionable representatives of this unprincipled literature, things came to such a pass that this honest worker and his beloved wife, having spent their last resources and not having even the wherewithal to buy bread, by mutual pact, hanged themselves.

'From my point of view, these literary critics, owing to the influence of their authority as writers on the general mass of naïve and easily suggestible people, are a thousand times more pernicious than all the slobbering boy-reporters.