

young, and the burden of the coils of memory hangs heavier and heavier on the race. Always the individual spirit increases, according to its knowledge, its dreadful consciousness of solitude. Language has done this; but language, which was born in order to permit social relationships between men, is striving still towards that end and con-

solation. As it grows subtler and subtler, burying in its vaults more and more associations, more and more mind, it becomes to those same spirits a more and more perfect medium of companionship.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

## THE QUIET LIGHT

BY P. YARTSEV

From *Russkaia Mysl, May*

(RUSSIAN LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL AND LITERARY MONTHLY)

THE essence of the French school of dramatic art consists in the actor's creating the part previous to his appearance on the stage, and then showing this creation to the public on the night of the performance. This creative process requires all the emotion, insight, fancy, and reasoning power of which the actor is capable. As soon as he appears upon the stage with his creation, he must be entirely self-possessed, attentive, and cold. He has already gone through all the feelings that the part implies; now he must show them to the public. The French school achieved a high degree of perfection in this art of exhibition. A gesture which instinctively came to him when he studied the part, together with a certain intonation, would be repeated on the stage whether or not the same intonation is found again, because the actor expressly remembered the gesture, as he did every other gesture, as he did every other detail of his creation. When he was working over his part, his eyes expressed what he felt

even in a scene where it would be impossible for the audience to see his eyes. Now, during the performance, he is able to reproduce exactly the posture he worked out for that scene without reproducing the feelings; but his eyes, if the audience does not see them, express nothing. The actor of the French school does not love, or suffer, or rejoice, on the stage; he *shows* to the public how a man can love, or suffer, or rejoice. That is why Sarah Bernhardt, in *La Dame aux Camélias*, looks with infinite tenderness not at Armand, but at the audience.

An audience watching a good actor of this school receives an impression that he plays with great ease and in a perfectly natural way, but this ease is the ease of the rope-walker or of the juggler who is throwing and catching daggers in the air. The actor who seems to play with such great ease experiences an overwhelming physical fatigue after his performance. This fatigue is not caused by experiencing genuine feelings on the stage, as the

French technique strictly excludes genuine feeling during the performance; it is, on the contrary, the result of an enormous effort to check all feeling, never to allow himself to be carried away for a moment and lose sight of a previously studied detail.

Accordingly, if an actor allows his inspiration to get the best of him and make him forget about his technique, his performance is poor. The emotion which such an 'inspired' actor experiences on the stage is not a creative impulse; he does not 'live on the stage,' as the critics are sometimes fond of expressing it. He may be so carried away that he will wound his rival with the wooden dagger or dislocate the arm of his unfaithful sweetheart while throwing her on her knees; but, as is not the case in real life, he will be unable later to tell the color of her hair, he will never have noticed the expression of her eyes or the way she was dressed.

Sometimes such playing makes the audience wild with enthusiasm — but the people may burst out laughing just as easily when they are supposed to shudder with the tragedy of the action. The 'inspired' actor may very easily make some little, involuntary, and highly comical movement, because all his inspired performance is entirely involuntary.

Both the highly technical and the 'inspired' actors do not feel the people, the accessories, and the setting upon the stage; they are solely conscious of the audience that is watching them. The technical actor has had his creative moments — before the public performance — when he elaborated his part; the 'inspired' one never had any, as he thinks he is merely going to 'live upon the stage.'

The first vestiges of the new technique, the technique of creating life itself upon the stage, slowly began to appear

on the Russian stage about the time of the great actor Shchepkin, who acted in the 40's and 50's. He taught that we must exhibit upon the stage true human feelings — 'Take your samples from nature,' he would say. But true feelings cannot be 'performed,' no matter how high a technique the actor possesses. Shchepkin worked hard; but he could only point the way, being as yet unable to find it for himself. His teachings were misunderstood, and for a time created the so-called school of 'simple playing,' where the actors, trying to be natural, used to walk upon the stage, hands in pockets, muttering their parts in such 'natural' low voices that the public could not hear what they were saying.

Constantin Sergeievich Alexeiev of the Moscow Art Theatre — better known under his stage name, Stanislavskii — discovered the true principles of creating characters on the stage. He was born in Moscow, in an old merchant family of good standing. As an actor, Stanislavskii has made a long journey. At first he followed the French school, the technique of which he had mastered to excellence; later he tried to escape the discipline of this school and fell into the rut of 'inspired' playing; and he also tried to be an opera singer.

From his earliest childhood he lived in a theatrical atmosphere. The Alexeiev family had large, well equipped stages in both their winter and summer houses. It was a very large family, living in a truly Russian fashion, with a multitude of nurses, governesses and servants; and in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. The young people were always performing something on the stage, and young Constantin gradually became manager of these performances. After a while, he hit upon the original idea of preparing his part by continually trying to act like the man he was going to impersonate on the stage —

even while living his every-day life, among his family and friends. Later on, after many years of work, the master Stanislavskii introduced 'improvisations' in his school, training his pupils to create improvised scenes in any place, at any time — in the street, upon the tramcar, in the room, making other persons take part in them without letting them suspect it. The object of these improvisations was to let his pupils feel the boundary line between the stage and the real life; to realize the difference between real feeling and feeling as it is shown upon the stage; to make them study fear from a person really afraid, and not from a first class actor who knew how to pretend fear — or anger, or joy.

Blind imitation of nature, however, is not art. Nature in art must be beautiful nature. Accordingly, to the principle 'Take your samples from nature' was added: 'but for your art, select the beautiful only.' Stanislavskii never lost sight of the value of the French school, even after he repudiated it as a whole. The 'ready-made' rules for acting the various human emotions he called 'stamps.' He knew to perfection how to use these 'stamps,' and whenever his pupils failed, in a rehearsal, to produce the effect he desired, he would quickly get up on the stage and perform the part himself, using the French 'stamps' with so much precision and freedom, that the pupils usually understood the lesson at once. He would show them clearly how *not* to act, and after that it was easier to find a way of acting according to the new principle. Nevertheless, Stanislavskii always taught his actors to use the French technique whenever they happened to lose their way in creating real feeling upon the stage; to fill the interval with 'stamps' until they found the true tone again.

Stanislavskii considered the following

saying of Fedotova, a remarkable Russian actress, one of the fundamental principles of acting: 'When you act a villain — look for his good points; when you act a good man — look for whatever evil he has in his character.'

Stanislavskii related the following incident to his friends. One time he called upon Madame Fedotova. Her chambermaid was absent. The cook opened the door and went back to the kitchen, leaving the caller to find the lady of the house himself. Stanislavskii stepped into one of the rooms and suddenly saw Fedotova standing before a large mirror, only partly dressed; her posture indicated embarrassment, and she rubbed her stomach with awkward movements. She was herself — and not herself at the same time. In another moment Stanislavskii saw that she was simply rehearsing the part of a peasant woman at a medical examination. Her acting was extraordinarily natural, yet there was nothing vulgar in it, nothing that would offend the eye. On the contrary, every detail was an æsthetic delight. This was not a French 'stamp'; it was live nature, selected for purposes of art. French technique could only assist the actress in fixing the part and transplanting it upon the stage.

Stanislavskii turned to nature. He felt that it was futile to fight the French 'stamps' as he had been doing — merely by substituting his own 'stamps' for the ones he disliked. It was imperative that genuine, lifelike pictures should be created upon the stage from natural sources.

He began to transport to the stage as much of the 'live nature' as he could; to build upon it rooms with real doors and windows, door knobs, and latches; to substitute the traditional forest scenery by a multitude of sounds, beams, reflections, noises that help to create an impression of moving and breathing forest-life. He required the

actors first of all to get hold of the subtle, outward details characteristic of their part: a professor was required to walk as professors frequently do; another part was going to produce a truer impression if the actor stammered just a trifle, and another again required a little nervous shrugging of shoulders. All dress and other accessories used on the stage would be real ones, such as the character acted would undoubtedly wear in real life. Stanislavskii transplanted nature upon the stage in heaps, like some gold-bearing soil, in the hope that the pure gold of art will gradually sift out. And the gold began to sift out — very slowly, at first almost imperceptibly.

The actors, supported by the multitude of living details set down by the régisseur, began to find fresh and unexpected expressions for representing experiences of human life. The performances of the Dramatic Circle of the Artistic and Literary Society of Moscow, where Stanislavskii launched his new art, began to attract wide attention. It was a new theatre, altogether unlike anything previously seen upon the stage — that much was everywhere unhesitatingly admitted.

'Just as in life!' — was what delighted the audience in Stanislavskii's performances. But 'just as in life' is not yet art. Art begins where the hidden essence of the live things becomes visible — something that was invisible before. This real gold did not begin to appear until almost twenty years after the beginning of Stanislavskii's creative work, in 1903 and 1904. Then it was discovered that the thing to do was to create every time on the very stage, and not to *act* something previously created.

Stanislavskii was far from desiring to 'discover' something new in dramatic art, or from an attempt to produce something that was never seen before.

He simply went groping ahead, driven by an impulse he could not suppress, advancing along the slow and tortuous way of guesswork and sudden flashes of inspiration. The new technique of the Moscow Art Theatre was created gradually, spontaneously, from the various remarks that Stanislavskii made while training his pupils in school and those that his assistants repeated during rehearsals. The master would drop those remarks — sometimes of very striking form and depth of observation — and immediately forget them. But the pupils would write them down and later, when they were collected, they formed a complete and exact foundation for a new school of dramatic art.

'Do not worry about remembering the right pose; be sure to remember *the feeling* you had when you first found this pose,' he would say.

'A person never knows exactly what he is going to say. It is only actors who know!'

'Empty eyes! An actor with empty eyes — how horrible!'

'A person always *walks into the room*. It is only actors who *appear upon the stage*.'

'Your part requires that you sweep the room. But you are thinking what you are to say next, all the while you are sweeping! Don't think about that! Sweep carefully, attentively. Look out for that little crack in the floor, clean up that little corner! . . .'

'Sit down quietly. Relax. Don't you see this little table next to your chair? Feel it with your hand, feel its smooth and cool surface. Find out the color of its finish — and by and by you will find yourself. Otherwise, you see, your every muscle is contracted, as if you were of steel. No feeling can ever penetrate such an armor. I remember myself acting in this way, in the old days; after such performances I used to find

that little veins in my feet had burst — from sheer strain.'

'Introduce yourself into the circle of feelings of the people around you — on the stage. Your world is here. There — in the audience — is no one to interest you.'

'Why is it that no actress can step out on the stage without holding on to the curtains?'

'Women like to appear upon the stage as they are not in reality. A lively one wants to pretend quietness. A gay one wants to appear melancholy. But upon the stage you must be what you are! And that is the hardest part of it.'

'You wear a bracelet on your ankle — you do not have to learn acting. You already know how to act' — this he said to a 'modernized' young woman who came to his school for a trial.

'Do not laugh if you feel sad. The tone of your voice does not call for laughter — and you are pulling it up by the hair.'

'Never try to speak upon the stage with another voice than your own.

You play the part of an old man — and your voice sounds young. What shall you do? Breathe slowly — and you will have to speak slowly, and there will be an old man.'

Even these few remarks practically include the foundations of the 'technique of living upon the stage.' The actor is supposed to cut himself off entirely from the audience and shut himself into the circle of the people, the feelings and the things of the play. He thus frees himself from the constant muscular tension which keeps the actor of the old school riveted to the audience; and his genuine creative ability is not hindered any longer and is constantly stimulated by looking into the *live* eyes of those who are with him upon the stage. He has not memorized his gestures previously; but he has memorized — and he calls back every time he plays upon the stage — the feeling that inevitably produces this or that gesture. The tone of his voice compels him to make certain movements; the expression of his eyes produces his mimicry.

# VESPER ADEST

BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN

[*Outlook*]

Down weighs Day his gold in the west,  
Heavily, heavily. Then without rest  
Comes Love the implacable. Vesper adest:  
    Consurgite, juvenes!  
        Vesper adest.

Earth is old; but nature is vernal.  
Dark is the husk; but sweet the kernel.  
Here, for lovers, the message eternal:  
    Vesper adest: consurgite, juvenes!  
        Vesper adest.

Evening comes to the trysting-place;  
Hesperus shines, and lovers embrace.  
The winds are still, and the waves lie hushed;  
And here with a will young things have rushed,  
And together come leaping. Vesper adest:  
    Consurgite, juvenes!  
        Vesper adest.

Day lies dead; but rosy the dusk.  
Youth is the kernel, and Age the husk.  
Leave them together: with Love be the rest!  
Life has united them. Vesper adest:  
    Consurgite, juvenes!  
        Vesper adest.

Men gave Love so evil a name:  
Smote him with rods, and condemned to flame,  
Striped, and scourged, and put him to shame . . .  
    Vain are their bleatings, cacophonies, euphonies!  
    Nature will out: and the Deuce take the rest!  
    Vesper adest: consurgite, juvenes!  
        Vesper adest.