

Unbelievable for Many, but a True Occurrence

Reproduced below is an individual's description of his having been restored to life after dying, which was published by Mr. K. Uekskuell in the "Moscow Journal" towards the end of the last century. In 1916, Archbishop Nikon, a member of the Holy Synod, reprinted the article in his publication "Trinity Pages" with the following comments: "in regard to this narrative, in due time, we had correspondence with its author, who, after ascertaining its validity, testified that his subject, after relating his experience, entered into a monastery. In view of the fact that nothing in his narrative is in contradiction to the stand of the Church on the mystery of death and the life beyond death, we feel it beneficial to reprint this article as a separate publication."

Taken from *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (July-August, 1976), pp. 1-36.

I shall not here devote myself to a general description of my personality, since it has no bearing on the matter to be presented, but try to describe myself to the reader only in terms of my relation to religion.

Having grown up in an Orthodox Christian and rather devout family, and thereafter having studied in a type of institution where faithlessness was not respected as a sign of student's genius, I did not turn out to be a vehement, arrant disbeliever, which the majority of the young people were in my time. In essence I turned out to be something very indefinite: I was not an atheist, and in no way could I regard myself as having been to any degree a religious man, and since both these mental states were not the result of my convictions, but came about, as it were, through being passively superimposed upon me by definite environmental forces, I shall ask the reader to find himself an appropriate classification for my personality with respect to this situation.

Officially I bore the name of a Christian, but undoubtedly never thought of whether I really had the right to such a name. I never even had the slightest inclination to check what the calling of a Christian demands from me and whether I satisfy these demands. I always said I believed in God; but if I were asked how I believe — how the Orthodox Church to which I belonged teaches to believe, without doubt I would have found myself in a rut. If I were further asked in greater detail, whether I believe, for example, in our salvation through the Incarnation and suffering of the Son of God, in His Second Coming

as a Judge, what my relation to the Church is, whether I believe in the necessity of Her founding, in Her holiness and salvation for us through Her sacraments and so forth, I only can imagine what absurdities I would have given for answers. Here is an example:

Once my grandmother, who always strictly observed fasts, reprimanded me for my not observing fasts.

"You are still strong and healthy, you have a good appetite, it follows that you are able very well to get along with lenten food. How is it that one does not observe those Church laws which are not even difficult for us?"

"But grandmother, this is an entirely unreasonable law," I objected. "For you eat, as it were, mechanically, by habit, and no body with intelligence is going to subject oneself to such a custom."

"Why unreasonable?"

"Well, does it make any difference to God what I eat: ham or smoked fish?"

(Is it not true of this case — what an example we have here in profundity of understanding of the essence of fasting by an educated man!).

"How is it that you speak in such a manner?" grandmother continued. "Can one say: an unreasonable law, when the Lord Himself fasted?"

I was struck by such a reply, and only with the help of my grandmother was I able to remember the evangelical narration of this condition. But the fact that I completely forgot it, as you see, in no way hindered me from flinging myself into opposition, which took on a rather haughty character.

And do not think, reader, that I was more foolish or fickle-minded than the other young people of my circle.

Here is another example.

One of my colleagues who was considered to be well read and serious, was asked: did he believe in Christ as a God-Man? He answered affirmatively, but immediately thereafter further conversation revealed that he denied the Resurrection of Christ.

"Allow me, why you are saying something very strange," objected one old lady. "According to your belief, what further followed for Christ? If you believe in Him as in God, how is it you simultaneously allow that He died completely, that is to say, completely ended His being?"

We await some kind of slippery answer from our intelligent one, some kind of subtleties in the conception of death or a new explanation of the question under discussion. Not in the least he answered simply.

"Oh! I did not realize this. I said as I felt."

II

An exactly identical state of incompatibility of ideas with respect to one another settled upon me, and, due to heedlessness on my part, wove itself a secure, nest in my mind.

I seemed to believe in God as one should, that is, I understood Him as a Being personal, all-powerful, eternal; I recognized man to be His creation, but I did not believe in the life hereafter.

A good illustration of the fickle-mindedness of our relations to both religion and to our own spiritual state is seen in the following, that I did not know of this serious lack of faith in myself until, similar to my above mentioned colleague, a certain circumstance brought it to light.

Fate brought me together in friendship with a serious and very well educated man; together with this he was extremely sympathetic and lonely, and I liked to visit him from time to time once, having paid him a visit, I found him reading catechism.

"What is this, Prochor Alexandrovich" — that was what my friend was called — "are you preparing yourself to become a pedagogue?" I asked, astonishedly, pointing to the book.

"My dear fellow, what do you mean pedagogue! It would be fine if I could become a passable student. It is far removed from me to teach others. I have to prepare myself for the examination. Why, look at the graying of my hair, see, it increases with every day; and before you know it you are called out to account for it all, he said with his usual good-hearted smile."

I did not take his words literally, thinking that since he was a man who always read much, he simply found a need for some kind of correction in catechesis. He, evidently desiring to explain the reading that was strange to me, said:

One reads a lot of all kinds of contemporary trash, well, here I am checking myself so that I do not go off on a wrong track. For, you know, the examination that is awaiting us is a severe one, it is severe even in this, that no reexamination will be given.

"But do you really believe this?"

"Really, how can one not believe in it? What will become of me, let us find out? Do you really think one two three and I turn into dust. And if I do not turn to dust, then there can

be no doubt that I will be called to answer. I am not foam, I have a will and a mind, I lived consciously and . . . sinned . . ."

"I do not know, Prochor Alexandrovich, how and from what our belief in the life hereafter could have arisen. It is natural to think that a man dies — and, well, it all ends here. You see him still and not breathing, all this decays, what ideas of some kind of life can there be here in this state?" I said, also expressing exactly that which I felt, in the order that these ideas must have previously arisen and formed my understanding.

"Allow me, and what do you think I should do with Lazarus of Bethany. Why, you know this is actually a fact, and he was also a man, molded from the same clay as I."

I looked at my interlocutor with frank surprise. Is it possible that this educated man believes such incredible things?

And Prochor Alexandrovich in turn looked fixedly at me for about a minute and thereafter, having lowered his voice, said:

"Or, are you an unbeliever?"

"No, why do you say so? I believe in God, I answered."

"And in divinely-revealed teaching you do not believe? But then, nowadays God is understood in different ways, and practically each individual begins to remake divinely-revealed teaching to meet one's personal needs, one finds classifications being set up here; in this, then, you must believe, but in this you may or may not believe, and in that you do not have to believe at all! As if there are several truths, and not just one. And they do not understand that in doing so they already believe in the products of their own mind and imagination, and if this is so, then, of course, there is no place here for belief in God."

"But one can not believe everything. Sometimes one meets up with such very strange things."

"That is to say, not properly understood? Make yourself understand. If you do not succeed, then you must admit to yourself that the fault lies here in yourself, and you must yield on this point. Begin reasoning like an ordinary uneducated man concerning the quadrature of a circle, or about some other wisdom of higher mathematics, and you will see that he also understands nothing of this, but from this it does not follow that one has to deny the study of mathematics itself. Of course it is easier to renounce, but this is not always ... fitting.

"Think carefully about what you have said, in essence, an absurdity: you say that you believe in God, but that there is no life after death. But God is not a God of the dead but of the living. Otherwise what kind of a God is this? Christ Himself spoke of life after death: do you really think He spoke untruths? Why even His bitterest enemies were not

able to prove this. And why then did He come and suffer, if our whole future amounts only to being resolved into dust?

"No, that is not right. You must, by all means, by all means" — he suddenly spoke with intensity — "correct it. You must understand how important this is. Such a faith should cast an entirely new light into your life, give it a different purpose, give an entirely new direction to all your work. This will be a complete moral revolution for you. In this faith we take on a burden, but at the same time we have a source of consolation and support for struggle with the misfortunes of life that are inseparable for everybody."

III

I understood the whole logic in Prochor Alexandrovich's words, but, of course, a few minutes conversation could not implant in me a belief in that, which I was accustomed not to believe, and my conversation with him essentially only served to manifest my view on a certain important question — a view, which until then I myself did not know well because I had no occasion to express it, and even less occasion to think it through.

My unbelief evidently seriously worried Prochor Alexandrovich: several times in the course of the evening he returned to this theme, and when I was preparing to leave, he quickly picked out several books from his large library and, giving them to me, said:

"Read them, without fail read them, because one can not leave this the way it is in its present state. I am, certain that you will soon rationally understand and become convinced in the complete lack of foundation for your unbelief, but it is necessary to convey this conviction from the mind to the heart, it is necessary that the heart understand, otherwise in an hour or a day it will evaporate and be forgotten — because the mind is a sieve through which different thoughts only pass, and the storehouse for them is not there."

I read the books. I do not remember now if I read all of them, but it turned out that habit was stronger than reason. I recognized that everything written in these books was very convincing, however due to the scantiness of my understanding in religious matters, I was unable to raise the slightest of serious objections to the arguments that they contained — but faith, nevertheless, did not appear in me. I acknowledged that this was not logical, I believed that everything written in the books was truth, but there was no feeling of faith in me and death so continued in my understanding as the absolute final of human existence, after which only decomposition followed.

Unfortunately, it happened that soon after the above mentioned conversation with Prochor Alexandrovich, I had to leave the city in which he lived, and we did not see one another again. I do not know, perhaps as an intelligent man and possessing the charm of an intensely convinced man, he would have succeeded at least to a certain extent of deepening my views and my relations to life and things in general, and through this also to introduce certain changes into my understanding of death, — but left to myself and by nature not being a particularly serious-minded young man, I in no way was interested in

such diverting questions, and due to my thoughtlessness, soon thereafter did not even give a grain of thought to Prochor Alexandrovich's words, which dealt with the seriousness of the insufficiency in my faith and the necessity of ridding myself of it.

And following this, changes of abode, meetings with new people not only faded this question out of my memory, but the conversation with Prochor Alexandrovich also, and even his mental image and my brief acquaintance with him.

IV

Many years passed. To my chagrin, I have to admit that morally I changed very slightly in the course of these years. Although I already was a man at the half-way mark of my life, that is to say I was a man of middle age, neither in my relation to life itself nor to myself was there a gain of seriousness. I did not understand the meaning of life, a kind of amazing knowledge of myself remained for me the same "chimerical" invention, as the reasoning of a metaphysician* in a well known fable of the same name, and I lived, being led by the same crude-like, empty interests, by that very same false and mean conception of the purpose of life by which the majority of secular people of my class and education lived.

My relation to religion also had remained unchanged, that is, to say, as previously I was neither an atheist, nor to any degree a consciously understanding religious man. As previously, by habit I now and then went to Church, went to confession by habit once a year, crossed myself by habit, when it was proper to do so — and this was everything in religion for me. I was not interested in any questions dealing with religion and did not even understand that there was something of interest there, besides, of course, the most elementary conceptions. I did not know anything here, and it seemed to me that I knew and understood everything, and that everything was so simple and "lacking any guile," that here an "educated" man had nothing to burden his mind with. A naiveté that reaches laughable proportions, but, unfortunately, very characteristic of "educated" people of our times.

It is quite obvious, that with the manifestation of these facts, there cannot be any possibility either of any progress in my religious feeling, or of a broadening of the scope of my conceptions in this realm.

V

It happened at this period of my life that my work carried me to K., and I became seriously ill there.

Since I had neither relatives nor even a servant in K., I had to go to a hospital. The doctors found it to be pneumonia.

At first I felt so well that not once I thought it was not necessary to lie in a hospital on account of such a trifle; but as the sickness developed and the temperature began to rise

rapidly, I understood that with such a "trifle" it would not at all be wise to lie in bed alone in a room of some hotel.

The long winter nights in a hospital were especially annoying to me; the fever did not allow me to sleep at all, sometimes it was even impossible to lie, and sitting in bed was both uncomfortable and tiring: I did not feel like or was not able to get up and walk through the ward; and so one kept on tossing in bed, lay down, sat up, let my legs down and again lifted them up into bed, and all the while I continued to listen carefully: when will the clock begin to strike! I waited, waited and it seemed on purpose to ring only two or three times, — that meant a whole eternity to wait before daybreak. And how depressing on a sick man is the effect of this common slumber of many people, together with the quietness of the night. One literally feels oneself to be in a graveyard in company with dead men.

The degree to which my sickness approached a crisis, to that same degree I became increasingly worse and felt worse. At times I had such seizures that the ordinary unpleasant conditions became unnoticeable, and I did not notice the wearying effect of the endless nights. But I do not really know what to ascribe this to: is it because I always was and regarded myself to be very strong and a healthy man, or was it because up until that time I was never once seriously ill, and those sad thoughts which are sometimes called forth by serious sicknesses were alien to my mind — however, no matter how badly I felt at times, no matter how abruptly the seizures of my illness came on, not once did the idea of death enter my mind.

I awaited with confidence that today or tomorrow a change for the better was to take place, and impatiently asked each time the thermometer was removed from beneath my arm what my temperature was. But having reached a certain level, it literally froze at that point, and to my questions I constantly heard the reply: "40 and nine tenths," "forty-one," "forty and eight tenths."

"Ah me, what a drawn out process this is!" I would say with disappointment, and thereafter would ask the doctor if my recovery was expected to continue at the same turtle's pace.

Seeing my impatience, the doctor calmed me and said, that in my years and with my health there was nothing to fear, that recovery would not be drawn out, that under such favorable circumstances after each sickness one can recuperate in a matter of almost a few days.

I believed this whole-heartedly and strengthened my patience with the thought, that there remains only somehow to await the crisis, and then everything will immediately become completely normal.

One night I felt especially badly; I tossed about from fever and breathing was extremely difficult for me, but towards morning it suddenly became so much easier for me, that I was even able to fall asleep. Having awakened, my first thought during the recollection of the night suffering was: "Well this must have been it, the crisis is past. And finally now there will be an end to this gasping and this unbearable fever."

And having seen a very young doctor's assistant entering a neighboring ward, I called him over and asked to have my temperature taken.

"Well, my lord, now things have taken a turn for the better," he said joyfully, removing the thermometer at the appointed time. "Your temperature is normal."

"Really?" I asked joyfully.

"Take a look for yourself: thirty seven and one tenth. And it seems your cough did not bother you as much."

I only realized here that since midnight I actually had not coughed until morning and that although I tossed about and drank a few gulps of hot tea, I also did not cough as a result of this.

At nine o'clock the doctor came. I told him that I felt badly at night and made the assumption that evidently this must have been the crisis, and that now I did not feel badly and before morning even was able to sleep for a few hours.

"Well that certainly is fine," he said, and walked up to the table and perused some sort of tables or notes that were lying there.

"Do you want to take his temperature?" the doctor's assistant asked him. "His temperature is normal."

"What do you mean by normal?" he asked him, quickly raising his head from the table and looking at the assistant with perplexity.

"That is exactly what I said, I just took it."

The doctor again had the temperature taken and this time even looked himself to see if the temperature was properly taken. But this time the temperature did not even reach thirty-seven: it turned out to be two tenths below thirty seven.

The doctor took his own thermometer out of the side pocket of his jacket, shook it, checked it, and evidently certain of its correctness again took my temperature.

The second showed the same as the first.

To my surprise, the doctor did not evince any sign of happiness with respect to my condition, not making, well, out of politeness sake, even the slightest expression of satisfaction on his mien, and, having turned around somewhat in a fidgety manner, he left the ward, — following a minute or so I heard a telephone begin ringing in the room.

VII

Soon the head physician appeared; they both listened to me and examined me — and had practically my whole back covered with leeches; following this, having prescribed a medicine, they did not give my prescription with the others, but sent an assistant separately to have it filled before the others.

"Listen here, what have you thought up for me now that I feel not at all bad, to burn me with leeches?" I asked the head doctor.

To me it seemed that my question confused or discouraged the doctor, and he answered impatiently:

"Oh, my God! Why you cannot be abandoned like this to the free course of the sickness because you feel somewhat better. We have to draw out of you all that mess that has accumulated in you during this time."

Three hours later the younger doctor again came to see me; he examined to see how the leeches were placed on me, asked how many spoonfuls of medicine I had taken. I said, "Three."

"Did you cough?"

"No, I answered."

"Not once?"

"Not once."

"Please tell me," I turned to the assistant doctor who was continually present in my ward, "what kind of loathsome stuff is mixed in this medicine. It makes me throw up."

"There are various expectorants here, also a little ippekaque," he explained.

In the given case I acted exactly as contemporary negators of religion often act, that is, understanding exactly nothing of what was taking place, I mentally judged and upbraided the doctor's procedure in my lack of understanding: they give me expectorants when I have nothing to expectorate.

VIII

In the meantime, an hour and a half or two after the latter visit by the doctors, all three of them again appeared in my ward: two of ours and a third, bearing an air of importance and imposing, not belonging to our ward.

They percussed and listened to me for a long time; a tank with oxygen appeared. The latter somewhat astounded me.

"Now what is this for?" I asked.

"Why we have to filter through your lungs a little. Why they almost have been backed in you," said the third doctor, who was not from our ward.

"But tell me, doctor what is it about my back that has fascinated you, that you are so concerned about it. It is now the third time this morning that you have percussed and covered it all over with leeches."

I felt myself so much better compared to those previous days, and therefore in my thoughts I was so far from anything pessimistic in nature, so that evidently no medical accessories were capable of bringing me to surmise my true condition; even the appearance of an important, strange looking doctor I explained away to myself as a change in the staff or something of a similar nature, in no way suspecting that he was specially called for me, because my case demanded a consilium. The last question I made with such an unconstrained and happy tone, that evidently neither of my physicians had the heart at least to hint at the oncoming catastrophe. And, in truth, how can one tell a man, full of the happiest hopes, that he perhaps has only a few hours more to live!

"It is namely now that we must percuss about you," the doctor answered me in an undetermined manner.

But this answer I also had understood in a manner desired by myself, and namely, that now, when the climax was past, when the strength of the infirmity was weakening, evidently it was necessary and more convenient to apply all possible means to chase out the remaining sickness and help restore all that which had been affected by the malady.

IX

I remember at about four o'clock I felt a kind of mild chill, and desiring to become warm, I covered myself snugly with the blanket and lay in bed, but suddenly I felt very dizzy.

I called the assistant doctor; he came over, lifted me from the pillow and raised the bag of oxygen. Somewhere I heard the ringing of a bell, and in a few minutes the head physician hurriedly walked into my ward, and shortly thereafter, one following the other, both of our physicians.

At another time such an unusual mass assemblage of the medical staff and the rapidity with which it was gathering undoubtedly would have astonished and confused me, but now I felt entirely indifferent to it, as if it had no relation to me.

A strange change suddenly took place in my mood! A minute before, full of optimism, now although I saw and understood fully well all that was taking place about me, there suddenly arose a kind of an incomprehensible indifference, such a remoteness, which, as it now seems, is completely alien to the living.

All my attention was concentrated on myself, but here there also was an astonishing, peculiar quality, a certain state of division within me: I felt and was conscious of myself with complete clarity and certainty, and at the same time I had a feeling of such indifference to myself, that it seemed as if I even had lost the capacity for perceiving physical sensations.

For example, I saw how the doctor extended his hand and felt my pulse — I saw and understood what he was doing, but did not feel his contact with my body. I saw and understood that the doctors, having raised me, continued to do something and were making a fuss over my back, where evidently the edema had begun, but what they were doing — I felt nothing and this not because I actually lost the capacity to perceive these sensations, but because this did not in the least draw my attention to itself, because having withdrawn somewhere deep within myself, I did not listen to or observe what they were doing to me.

It seemed as if suddenly two beings or essences were manifested in me: one — concealed somewhere deep within and this was the main part of me; the other — external and evidently, less significant; and now it seemed as if that which had bound these two either burned itself out or melted, and these two essences separated, the stronger of these being felt more vividly and with greater certainty, and the weaker becoming a matter of indifference. This weaker part or being was my body.

I can imagine how, perhaps even only a few days ago, I would have been struck by the manifestation in myself of this hitherto unknown to me internal being and the realization of its superiority over that other part of me, which according to my previous beliefs made up the whole being of Pan, but which I now did not even notice.

This state was most astounding: to live, see, hear, and understand all, and at the same time seemingly not to see or understand anything, to feel such alienation with regard to everything.

X

Thus, for example, the doctor asks me a question; I hear and understand that which he asks, but I do not reply, I do not give an answer, because I feel there is no reason for me to speak to him. And yet he fusses and worries over me, but he is concerned with that half

of *me*, which now has lost all meaning for myself, and with which I feel I have nothing to do.

But suddenly the other half asserted itself, and in so striking and unusual a manner!

I suddenly felt myself drawn somewhere downward with irresistible force. During the first minutes this sensation was similar to having heavy, massive weights tied to all the members of my body; but shortly following this such a comparison could not justly describe my state of feeling. This representation of such an attraction now seemed comparatively insignificant.

No, here some kind of law of gravitational attraction of most tremendous power was acting.

It seemed to me that no not only I as a whole, but every member, every hair, the thinnest tendon, each cell of my body was separately being drawn somewhere with such irresistibility, as a strong magnet attracts pieces of metal to itself.

And yet, no matter how strong this sensation might have been, it did not hinder me from thinking and being conscious of everything; I was also conscious of the strangeness of this phenomenon. I remembered and was conscious of reality, that is to say, that I lay in bed, that my ward was on the second floor, [and] that below me there was an identical room; but at the same time, according to the strength of the sensation, I was certain that if below me there were not one, but ten rooms piled on top of one another, that this would suddenly give way before me in order to let me pass . . . where?

Somewhere further, deeper into the earth.

Yes, namely into the earth, and I wanted to lay on the floor; I exerted myself and began tossing about.

XI

"Agony," I heard this word pronounced over me by the doctor.

Since I did not speak, being completely concentrated within myself, and my glance expressed a complete absence of affect in relation to the surrounding world, the doctors evidently decided that I was in an unconscious state and spoke about me audibly without restraint. But meanwhile, I not only excellently understood all, but it was impossible for me not to think and observe to a certain degree.

"Agony, death!" I thought, having heard the words of the doctor. "Am I really dying?" Turning to myself, I spoke out loud; but how? Why? I cannot explain this.

I suddenly remembered a learned discourse dealing with the question of whether or not death is painful, which I once read long ago, and, having closed my eyes, I examined myself with regard to what was taking place in me at the time.

No, I felt no physical pain whatsoever, but undoubtedly I was suffering. I felt heavy within and weary. What was this from? I knew of what sickness I was dying; what was the case here, was the edema choking me, or was it depressing the activity of the heart and this was making me weary? I do not know. Perhaps such was the explanation of my oncoming death according to the ideas of those people, of the world, which now was so alien and remote from me. I, however, only felt an insurmountable striving towards somewhere, an attraction towards something concerning which I already have spoken.

And I felt that this attraction increased with each moment, that I already had just, just about come very close, almost in contact with that magnet which was attracting me, which if I should touch, would cause me with my whole body to become fused with it, to grow into one with it in such a manner that no force would then be capable of separating me from it, and the more strongly I felt the proximity of this moment, the more fearful and depressed I became, and this was so because I simultaneously felt a resistance to this with increasing clarity, I felt more clearly that I as a whole could not unite, that something had to separate within me, and that this something was striving away from the unknown object of attraction with the same intensity that the something else in me was striving towards it. It was this struggle that caused me weariness, suffering.

XII

The meaning of the word "agony," which I heard, was entirely understood by me, but now everything in me somehow turned away from my relationships, feelings and extended to my conceptions inclusively.

Without doubt, if I had heard this word even at the time when the three doctors were examining me, I would have been frightened to an alarming degree. Likewise, if such a strange turn had not taken place in my sickness, if I remained in the ordinary state of a sick man, even at the present moment, knowing that death is approaching, I would have understood and explained all that had taken place with me differently; but in the present state the words of the doctor only surprised me, not having aroused that feeling of fear which is characteristic of people who are thinking about death, and I gave an entirely unexpected, in comparison with my previous conceptions, interpretation to that state which I was experiencing

"Well now, so that's what it is! It is the earth that is drawing me so," suddenly it dawned on me. "That is to say, not me, but that which belongs to her, that which she let me have for a period of time. And is the earth drawing it, or is matter itself trying to return to her?"

And that which previously seemed so natural and true, and namely, that after death I should turn completely to dust, now appeared unnatural and impossible.

"No, I as a whole shall not disappear, I cannot," I almost screamed out loud, and made an attempt to free myself, to tear myself from that force which was attracting me, and suddenly I felt a calm within myself.

I opened my eyes, and everything that I saw in the course of that minute, down to the slightest details, registered in my memory with complete clarity.

I saw that I was standing alone within a room; to the right of me, standing about something in a semi-circle, the whole medical staff was crowded together: having put his hands behind himself and gazing intently at something which I was unable to see due to their figures, stood the head physician; behind him, slightly bent forward — the younger physician; the old assistant doctor, holding a bag of oxygen in his hands, with indecision shifted from one leg to the other, evidently not knowing what to do with his apparatus, either to bear it away, or not to do so, since it could still be of use; and the young doctor, having bent down, was supporting something, but due to his shoulder, only the pillows were able to be seen by me.

This group struck me with surprise: at the place where they were standing there was a bed. What was it that drew the attention of these people, what were they looking at, when I already was not there, when I was standing in the midst of the room?

I moved forward and looked where they all were looking:

There on the bed I was lying.

XIII

I do not have any recollection of experiencing anything like fear when seeing my double; I only was perplexed: how can this be? I feel myself here, and at the same time I am there also.

I looked at myself standing in the midst of the room. Why this without doubt was me, exactly the same as I always knew myself to be.

I wanted to touch myself, to take the left hand by the right: my hand went right through; I tried to grasp myself at the waist — my hand again went through my body as through empty space.

Struck by such a strange phenomenon, I wanted that some one nearby should help me understand what I at was happening and, having made several steps, I extended my hand, desiring to touch the shoulder of the doctor; but I felt that I was walking strangely, not feeling contact with the floor; and my hand, no matter how I tried, could not reach the figure of the doctor. Only perhaps a few inches of space remained, but I was not able to touch him.

I made an effort to stand firmly on the floor, but, although my body obeyed my attempts and lowered itself, yet it could not reach the floor just as the figure of the doctor was not able to be reached before. Here also an insignificant amount of space remained, but I could in no way overcome it.

And I vividly remembered how several days ago the nurse of our ward, desiring to guard my medicine from becoming spoiled, lowered a vial containing it into a pitcher of cold water. However, there was much water in the jug and immediately the light vial was buoyed up; but the old nurse, not understanding what had taken place, persistently tried one, two, and three times to lower it down to the bottom of the pitcher and even held it down with her finger in the hope that it eventually would remain there. But hardly had she removed her finger, than it again would be carried upwards to the surface.

Evidently in a similar manner, the surrounding air must have become too dense for me, for present me.

XIV

What happened to me?

I called the doctor, but the atmosphere in which I was found turned out to be entirely unfit for me; it did not receive and transmit the sounds of my voice, and I understood myself to be in a state of utter dissociation from all that was about me. I understood my strange state of solitude, and a feeling of panic came over me. There really was something inexpressibly horrible in this extraordinary solitude. If a person becomes lost in a forest, is drowning in the depths of the sea, caught in a fire, sitting in solitary confinement — he never loses hope that he will be heard. He knows that he will be understood if his call for help is carried to somebody's hearing; he understands that another living being sees him, that the guard will walk into his casemate, and he will be able to start speaking with him, express what he desires and the other will understand him.

But to see people about oneself, to hear and understand their conversation, and at the same time know that no matter what happens to you, you have no opportunity whatsoever of informing them of your presence and of expecting help if in need — from such a state of solitude my hairs stood on end, the mind became torpid. It was worse than being on an uninhabited island, because there at least nature would have manifested positive signs of receptivity of one's individuality; but here, in this one deprivation of the capacity to associate with the surrounding world, as an unnatural experience for a human being, in it there was so much deathly fear, such a horrible acknowledgment of helplessness, which one is neither able to experience in any other situation nor convey in words.

I, of course, did not give in at once; I attempted in all possible ways and tried to make my presence known, but these attempts only brought me complete despair. Is it really possible that they don't see me? — I thought with despair and repeatedly approached the group of people standing over my bed, but none of them turned around or paid attention

to me, and now I looked at myself with perplexity, not understanding how it was possible for them not to see me, when I was the same as I had always been. I made an attempt to touch myself, and my hand again only passed through air.

"But I am not a ghost. I feel and am conscious of myself, and my body is a real body, and not some kind of delusive 'mirage,'" I thought, and again looked at myself intently and became convinced that my body really was a body, because I could observe it and see its minutest details, even a dot, with complete clarity. Its external appearance remained the same as it had been previously, but evidently its qualities changed. It became inaccessible to touch, and the surrounding air became too dense for it so that complete contact with objects was not possible.

"An astral body. It seems that is what it is called?" the thought flashed through my mind. "But why, what has happened to me?" I asked myself, trying to remember if I ever had heard descriptions of such states, of strange transfigurations in sickness.

XV

"No, you cannot do anything here! Everything is finished," the young doctor said, waving his hand in a hopeless manner, and went away from the bed on which was lying the other me.

I felt inexpressibly vexed, that they continue to reason and fuss over that me which I completely did not feel, which did not exist for me, and were leaving without attention the other *real* me, which is conscious of everything and being tormented by the fear of obscurity, seeks, demands their help.

"Is it possible that they will not find out. Is it possible that they do not understand that I am not there?" With disappointment I thought and, walking up to the bed, I looked at that me, which at the expense of my real me, attracted the attention of the people in the ward.

I glanced, and here only for the first time the thought emerged: is it possible that that which has happened to me, in our language, in the language of living people, is defined by the word "death"?

This occurred to me because the body lying on the bed had all the appearances of a corpse: without any movement, not breathing, the face covered with a kind of pallor, with firmly compressed, slightly cyanotic lips, it vividly reminded me of all the deceased that I had ever seen. It may seem strange at first, that only in seeing my lifeless body I comprehended what really had happened to me, but if one carefully considers and thoroughly perceives that which I felt and experienced, such a strange, on first sight, perplexity on my part becomes understandable. With our understanding of the word "death" there is inextricably bound the idea of some kind of destruction, a cessation of life, how could I think that I died when I did not lose self-consciousness for one moment, when I felt myself just as alive, hearing all, seeing all, conscious of all, capable of movement, thought, speech? Of what deterioration could there be any consideration here,

when I splendidly saw myself, and at the same time even acknowledged the strangeness of my state? Even the words of the doctor, that "all is over" did not draw my attention and did not call forth a guess concerning that which had taken place — to such a great extent did that which took place with me differ from our conceptions of death!

The dissociation from everything about me, the split in my personality more than anything could have made me understand that which had taken place, if I should have believed in the existence of a soul, if I were religious; but this was not the case and I was guided solely by that which I felt, and the sensation of life was so clear, that I only was perplexed with the strange phenomenon, being completely unable to link my feelings with the traditional conception of death, that is to say, while sensing and being conscious of myself, to think that I do not exist.

Subsequently I often had the opportunity of hearing from religious people, that is to say, those not negating the existence a soul and after-life, the following opinion or supposition: that as soon as the soul of man has shuffled off its corruptible flesh, it immediately becomes a kind of an all-knowing essence, that for it there is nothing unknown, and it is astonishing how in the new realm of reality, in the new form of existence, that it not only immediately enters into the field of new laws which are revealed to it by the new world and its own changed state of being, but that all this is so akin to it, that this transition is like a return to a real homeland, a return to its natural state. Such a supposition is founded mainly on the idea that the soul is a spirit, and those limitations do not present themselves for the spirit that exist for the physical part of man.

XVI

Such a hypothesis, of course, is entirely untrue.

From what has been described above, the reader sees that I arrived in this new world essentially the same as I had left it, that is to say, with practically the very same capacities, conceptions and knowledge which I had while living on earth.

For example, when I wanted somehow to make my presence known, I had recourse to those means which are commonly used in these cases by all live people; that is to say, I called, approached, tried to touch or push someone; having noticed a new quality of my body I felt it to be strange: consequently, my previous conceptions remained in me; otherwise it would not have seemed strange to me, — and desiring to become convinced in the existence of my body, I again had recourse to the usual method that I had been accustomed to in these cases as an earthly human.

Even after having understood that I had died, I did not grasp by means of some kind of new means the change which had taken place within me, and, being perplexed, I either called my body "astral," or before my attention there emerged the following idea, was not the first man ever to be created given such a body. And later, with the fall of his leathern sacerdotal vestment, which is mentioned in the Bible, is this not that corruptible body, which is now lying in bed and would in a short time change to dust? In short, desiring to

understand what had taken place with me, I proposed such explanations which were known and accessible to me according to my mundane conceptions.

And this was to be expected. The soul of course is spirit, but spirit is created for life with the body; therefore in what way can the body be anything like a prison for it, some kind of bonds that chain it to some supposedly unrelated form of existence?

No, the body is a lawful dwelling place that has been, as it were, placed at the disposal of the spirit, and therefore it will appear in the other world at that level of its development and perfection, which it had attained during its joint existence with the body, in the lawfully established form of its existence. Of course, if during life a person was spiritually developed, spiritually disposed, then his soul will feel more related and things will therefore appear more understandable in this new world than that of the soul of the person who lived never thinking of the other world, and while the first will be in a position, so to say, of reading these, even though not rapidly and not without mistakes, the second, similar to my case, has to begin from the rudiments. Time is needed in order to understand both that fact which it never had thought about, and that actual realm in which it now finds itself and where it never drifted mentally during earthly existence.

Afterwards in recalling and thinking over my state of being at the time, I noticed only that my mental capacities functioned with such striking energy and swiftness, that it seemed not the slightest trace of time remained after I had made the exertion to comprehend, compare or remember something. Hardly had something appeared before me when my memory, immediately penetrating into the past, would dig up all the slightest bits of knowledge concerning a given subject which were carelessly lying about and forgotten; and that which at another time would doubtlessly have aroused a feeling of perplexity, now appeared as if it were quite apparent. At times, by virtue of some infusion of power, I even guessed beforehand that which was unknown to me; but this nevertheless not before it actually appeared before my eyes. And it was only this latter condition that turned out to be the outstanding quality of my capacities, besides those other, as it were, expected changes which resulted from my altered state of being.

XVII

I am now proceeding with the narration of the further circumstances in my unbelievable occurrence.

Unbelievable! But if up until now it has seemed unbelievable, then these further circumstances will appear as such "naive" stories before the eyes of my learned readers, that it would not be worth relating them; but perhaps for those who should want to view my narration differently, the *naïveté* itself and scantiness of the material presented will serve as proof of its veracity; because if I were making up this narration — imagining it — then such a wide field opens up for one's fantasia here that, of course, I could have thought up something more subtle and effective.

Now then, what further took place with me? The doctors, walked out of the ward, both assistant doctors were standing about and trying to explain the stages of my illness and death, and the old nurse turned to the ikon, crossed herself and audibly expressed the accepted wish in such cases:

"May he inherit the kingdom of heaven, eternal peace to him."

And hardly had she uttered these words, than two Angels appeared at my side; for some reason in one of them I recognized my Guardian Angel, but the other was unknown to me.**

Having taken me by the arms, the Angels carried me right through the wall of the ward into the street.

XVIII

It already had grown dark. Snow was silently falling in large flakes. I saw this, but the cold and in general the difference in temperature between the room and outside I did not feel. Evidently these like phenomena lost their significance for my changed body. We began to quickly ascend. And the degree to which we had ascended, the increasingly greater became the expanse of space that was revealed before our eyes. And finally it took on such terrifyingly vast proportions that I was seized with a fear from the realization of my insignificance in comparison to this desert of infinity. Here also certain peculiarities of my vision became apparent to me. Firstly, it was dark and I saw everything clearly in the dark; consequently my vision received the capacity of seeing in the dark; secondly, I was able to include in the field of my vision such a vast expanse of space, which undoubtedly I would not have been able to do with my ordinary vision. And at the time I was not conscious of these peculiarities, but, that I did not see everything, that no matter how broad the field of my vision was. Nevertheless a limit existed for it. This I understood very clearly and was terrified by it. Yes, to what a great extent is it characteristic for man to give a permanent kind of value to his individuality: I recognized myself to be so very unimportant, a meaningless atom, the appearance and disappearance of which would of course remain unnoticed in this limitless space, but instead of finding some kind of consolation in this, a kind of security became frightened ... that I could get lost, that this unbounded vastness would swallow me up like a sorry particle of dust. A most wonderful rebuttal by an insignificant particle of the common (as some think) law of destruction, and an outstanding manifestation of man's acknowledgment of his immortality, of the eternal state of being of his individuality!

XIX

The conception of time was absent in my mental state at this time, and I do not know how long we were moving upwards, when suddenly there was heard at first an indistinct noise. And following this, having emerged from somewhere, with shrieks and rowdy laughter, a throng of some hideous beings began rapidly to approach us.

"Evil Spirits!" — I suddenly comprehended and appraised with unusual rapidity that resulted from the horror I experienced at that time, a horror of a special kind and until then never before experienced by me. Evil spirits! O, how much irony, how much of the most sincere kind of laughter this would have aroused in me but a few days ago. Even a few hours ago somebody's report, not only that he saw evil spirits with his own eyes, but only that he believed in their existence as in something fundamentally real, would have aroused a similar reaction! As was proper for an "educated" man at the close of the nineteenth century, I understood this to mean foolish inclinations, passions in a human being and that is why the very word itself had for me not the significance of a name, but a term which defined a certain abstracted conception. And suddenly this "certain abstracted conception" appeared before me as a living personification. Even up to the present time I am not able to say how and why at that time, without the slightest trace of doubt, I recognized evil spirits to be present in that ugly sight. Undoubtedly only because such a designation of it was completely outside of the normal order of things and logic, for if a similar hideous sight appeared before me at another time, undoubtedly I would have said that it was some kind of fiction personified, an abnormal caprice of one's imagination. In short, everything else but in no way, of course, would I have called it a name by which I would have meant something which cannot be seen. But at the time, this designation of its nature took place with such rapidity, that seemingly there was no need to think about it, as if I had seen that which already was well known to me long ago; and since, as I already have explained, at that time my mental capacities functioned with such incomprehensible intensity, I therefore comprehended just as rapidly that the ugly outward appearance of these beings was not their real exterior; that this was some kind of an abominable show which was probably conceived with the purpose of frightening me to a greater degree; and for a moment something similar to pride stirred within me. I then felt ashamed of myself, for man in general, because in order to arouse fear in man, a being who thinks so much of himself, other forms of being have recourse to such methods which we ourselves use with respect to small children.

Having surrounded us on all sides, with shrieks and rowdy sounds the evil spirits demanded that I be given over to them, they tried somehow to seize and tear me away from the Angels, but evidently did not dare to do this. In the midst of their rowdy howling, unimaginable and just as repugnant to one's hearing as their sight was for my eyes, I sometimes caught up words and whole phrases.

"He is ours: he has renounced God," they suddenly cried out almost in unison. And here they lunged at us with such boldness that for a moment fear froze the flow of all thought in my mind.

"That is a lie! That is untrue!" Coming to myself I wanted to shout, but an obliging memory bound my tongue. In some way unknown to me, I suddenly recalled such a slight, insignificant occurrence, which in addition was related to so remote a period of my youth that, it seems, I in no way could have been able to recall it to mind.

I recalled how during my years of study, once having gathered at my friend's, after having spoken about school studies, we passed over to discussing various abstract and elevated topics — conversations which often were carried on by us.

"Generally speaking, I don't like abstractions," says one of my comrades, "but here you already have absolute impossibility. I am able to believe in some kind of power of nature which, let us say, has not been investigated. That is to say, I can allow for its existence, even when not seeing its clear cut, definite manifestations, because it may be very insignificant or combined in its effects with other powers, and for this reason difficult to grasp; but to believe in God, as a Being, individual and omnipotent, to believe — when I do not anywhere see clear manifestations of this Individuality — this already becomes absurd. I am told: believe. But why must I believe, when I am equally able to believe that there is no God. Why, is it not true? Is it also not possible that He does not exist?" Now my comrade turned to me for support.

"Maybe not," I let escape from my lips.

This phrase was in the full sense of the word an "idle statement": the unreasonable talk of my friend could not have aroused within me a doubt in the existence of God. I did not particularly listen to his talking; and now it turned out that this idle statement of mine did not disappear without leaving a trace in the air, I had to justify myself, to defend myself from the accusation that was directed against me, and in such a manner the New Testament statement was verified in practice: We really shall have to give an account for all our idle words, if not by the Will of God, Who sees the secrets of man's heart, then by the anger of the enemy of salvation.

This accusation evidently was the strongest argument that the evil spirits had for my perdition. They seemed to derive new strength in this for the daring of their attacks on me, and now with furious bellowing they spun about us, preventing us from going any further.

I recalled a prayer and began praying, appealing for help to those Holy Ones whose names I knew and whose names came to mind. But this did not frighten my enemies. A sad ignorant Christian only in name, I now, it seems, almost for the first time in my life remembered Her, Who is called the Intercessor for Christians.

And evidently my appeal to Her was intense. Evidently my soul was filled with terror, that hardly had I remembered and pronounced Her name, when about us there suddenly appeared a kind of white mist which soon began to enfold within itself the ugly throng of evil spirits. It concealed them from my eyes before they could withdraw from us. Their bellowing and cackling was still heard for a long while, but according to how it gradually weakened in intensity and became more dull, I was able to judge that the terrible pursuit was gradually being left behind.

The feeling of fear that I experienced took hold of me so completely that I was not even conscious of whether we had been continuing our flight during this terrible meeting or whether it stopped us for awhile. I realized that we were moving, that we were continuing to move upward only when the infinite expanse of space again spread itself before me.

Having passed through some of its distance, I saw a bright light above me, it resembled, as it seemed to me, our sunlight, but was much more intense. There, evidently, is some kind of kingdom of light.

"Yes, namely a kingdom, full of the power of light," guessing by means of a special kind of feeling yet not understood by me, I thought. Because there was no shade with this light. "But how can there be light without shade?" Immediately my perplexed conceptions made their appearance.

And suddenly we were quickly carried into the field of this light, and it literally blinded me. I shut my eyes, brought the hands up to my face, but this did not help since my hands did not give shade. And what did the like protection mean here anyway?

"My God, what is this, what kind of light is this? Why for me it is like regular darkness! I cannot look, and as in darkness, can see nothing," I implored, comparing my earthly vision to that of my present state, and forgetting, or perhaps even not realizing that now such a comparison was of no use here, that now I could see even in the dark.

This incapacity to see, to look, increased in me the fear before the unknown, natural in this state of being found in a world unknown to me, and with alarm I thought: "What will come next? Shall we soon pass this sphere of light, and is there a limit to it, an end?"

But some thing different happened. Majestically, without wrath, but authoritatively and firmly, the words resounded from above: "Not ready!"

And after that thereafter an immediate stop came to our rapid flight upward — we quickly began to descend.

But before we left this realm, I was endowed with the capacity to learn of one most wonderful phenomenon.

Hardly had the said words resounded from above when everything in that world it seems, each particle of dust, each slightest atom, responded to these words with their accord, as though a multimillion echo repeated them in a tongue unable to be perceived by hearing, but perceived and understood by the heart and mind, expressing its unison with the decision so decreed. And in this unity of will there was such wonderful harmony, and in this harmony so much inexpressible, exalted happiness, before which all our earthly charms and raptures appeared like a gloomy day without sunlight. This multimillion echo resounded in the form of an inimitable musical chord, and one's whole soul extended out towards it, wholly responding to it in a state devoid, of any cares and in an ardent transport of zeal to be at one with this omnipresent, most wonderful harmony.

XXII

I did not understand the real sense of the words that were directed to me, that is to say, I did not understand that I had to return to earth and again live just as previously. I thought that I was being carried to some other different parts, and a feeling of timid protest stirred within when before me. At first as hazily as in a morning mist, the outlines of a city were denoted before me, and following this, streets well known to me also became clearly visible.

Here I saw the building of the hospital which was known to me. Exactly in the same manner as before, through the walls of the building and closed doors, I was carried into a room completely unknown to me. In this room there stood a row of tables which were coated with dark paint; and on one of them, covered over with something white, I saw myself lying, or more correctly, my dead, stiff body.

Not far from my table some gray haired small old man in a brown jacket, moving a bent wax candle along the lines of large type, read the Psalter, and on the other side, on a black bench that stood against the wall, sat my sister who evidently had been notified of my death and already had arrived, and beside her, bent over and quietly saying something — her husband.

"Have you heard the decision of God?" leading me up to table, my Guardian Angel, who hitherto had not spoken, addressed me. And after that pointing with his hand to my dead body, said: "Enter and prepare yourself."

And following this, both Angels became invisible.

XXIII

I recall with complete clarity how and what happened to me after these words.

At first I felt as though something pressed close about me; after this followed the sensation of unpleasant cold, and the return of this capacity (which was absent in me just before this) of feeling such things, vividly brought back to life the conception of my previous life. A feeling of deep mourning came over me, as though I had lost something (I shall further note here, that this feeling has always remained with me after the above described occurrence).

The desire to return to my previous form of life, although up until now there was nothing especially sorrowful in it, did not once stir in me; in no way was I drawn to it, nothing in it attracted me.

Reader, have you ever had the occasion to see a photograph that had been lying for a considerable amount of time in a damp place? The image on it was preserved but faded from dampness, moldy, and in place of a definite beautiful image, one has a kind of continuous light gray murkiness. In like manner life here has become faded for me,

appears like a kind of monotonous and watery picture, and appears so to my eyes even up to the present time.

How and why I suddenly felt this I do not know; but one thing is certain: it in no way had any attraction for me. The horror that I experienced earlier concerning my separation from the surrounding world, now, due to some reason, lost its strange significance for me. For example, I saw my sister and understood that I could not associate with her, but this in no way disturbed me. I was content with seeing her and knowing all about her. Unlike previously, I even did not have the desire to somehow announce my presence.

And besides, this was not my main concern. The feeling of being compressed from all sides caused me ever-increasing suffering. It seemed to me that I was being squeezed between pliers, and this sensation increased with time. On my part, I did not remain passive. Whether I did something, whether I struggled trying to free myself of it, or whether I made no exertion to free myself, to cope with and overcome it — I am not able to ascertain. I only remember that I felt a sensation of ever-increasing tightness about me, and, finally, I lost consciousness.

XXIV

When I recovered consciousness, I already found myself lying on a bed in a hospital ward.

Opening my eyes, I saw myself surrounded by almost a whole crowd of inquisitive people, or otherwise speaking: faces that were observing me with strained attention.

At my bedside the head physician sat on a tabouret which had been moved over towards my bed, trying to preserve his usual air of grandeur. His posture and manner seemed to say that all this was only a common occurrence, and that there was nothing astonishing about it; but at the same time, tense attention and confusion could be seen in his eyes which were fixed upon me.

The younger doctor — he, of course, without any reserve whatsoever literally fastened himself on to me with his eyes, as though trying to penetrate right through me.

At the foot of my bed, dressed in mourning habit and with a pale, excited countenance, stood my sister, and next to her, my brother-in-law; from behind my sister the comparatively calmer face of the hospital sick-nurse; and still further behind her, the completely frightened physiognomy of our young assistant surgeon was visible.

Recovering myself completely I first of all greeted my sister. She quickly came over, embraced me and started to cry.

"Well, dear fellow, you certainly gave us a scare!" the younger doctor spoke with that impatience to share as soon as possible the extraordinary impressions and observations which is characteristic of youthfulness. "If you only knew what took place with you!"

"Why, I recall all that took place with me," I said.

"How is that? Is it possible that you did not lose consciousness?"

"Apparently not!"

"This is very, even extremely strange," he said, glancing at the head physician. "It is strange because you were lying like a real lifeless stalk, without the slightest signs of life, nowhere even a slight hint of life, not the slightest hint of it. How is it possible to preserve consciousness in such a state?"

"Evidently though, it is possible, since I both saw and was conscious of everything."

"As far as seeing is concerned, you could see nothing, but to hear and feel. And did you really hear and understand everything? You heard how they washed and dressed you . . . ?"

"No, I did not feel anything like that. In general, I was, completely insensitive to my body."

"How can this be? You say you remember everything that took place with respect to yourself, but that you did not feel anything?"

"I say, that I did not feel only that which was done with my body, being under the strong influence of that which was being experienced at the time," I said, thinking that such a kind of explanation was entirely sufficient for understanding that which was said by me.

"Well?" ... said the doctor, seeing that I stopped here.

Here I faltered for a moment, not knowing what else was required of me. It seemed that everything was so clear, and I again only repeated:

"I told you that I only did not feel my body, and therefore everything in relation to it. Now then, my body — it is not my whole self, is it? Why it was not my whole self that was lying there like a stalk. The rest of me lived and continued to function within me," I said further. I thought that that division or, more truly, divisibility in my individuality which now was more apparent to me than a day of God, was just as apparent to those people to whom I addressed my words.

Evidently I still had not entirely returned to my former life, did not carry myself over to their point of view, and in speaking of that which I now knew and felt, I did not understand that my words would almost seem like a delirium of an insane man to those who themselves had not experienced the like and who discarded it as being untrue.

The younger doctor still wanted to reply or ask me something, but the head physician made a sign for or him to leave me alone. I do not really know why, whether this quietude was actually necessary for me, or because from my words he concluded that my mind was still not in order, and therefore there was no purpose to reason with me.

Having become convinced that the organic mechanism of my body had come into more or less proper condition, they listened to me through the stethoscope. There was no edema in the lungs. After this, having given me, as I recall, a cup of bouillon to drink, everybody withdrew from the ward except for my sister, who was allowed to remain with me for still a longer period of time.

Apparently they thought that my being reminded of that which had taken place could only have arouse anxiety in me, causing all kinds of terrible conjectures and possibilities to arise in my mind, such as being buried alive and the like. All those who were about me avoided talking with me about this. Only the young doctor was an exception and did not conduct himself with this reserve.

Evidently he was extremely interested in that which had taken place with me; and several times in the course of the day he would run up to me, either simply to glance at me and see how things were, or to pose some question that would come to his mind. At times he would come alone, and sometimes he would even bring some friend, in most cases a student, in order to look at a man who had been in the morgue.

On the third or fourth day, apparently finding me sufficiently strong, or, perhaps, simply having simply lost patience to wait longer, he came into my ward in the evening and let himself into a more a prolonged conversation with me.

Having felt my pulse for a while, he said:

"Amazing. All these days your pulse has been completely even, without any irregularities or deviations, but if you only knew what took place with you! A miracle, that is only what it could have been!"

At this time I already had become accustomed to myself as an earthly being, entered the frame of my previous life, and came to understand the whole extraordinariness of that which had taken place with me. I also understood that only I knew about it, and that those miracles which the doctor spoke of were in their conception only a type of external manifestation of that which had actually taken place with me, from the medical standpoint some type of hitherto not understood pathological rarity, and I asked:

"When did these miracles take place with me? Before my coming back to life?"

"Yes, before you recovered. I do not speak only for myself. I have only little experience, and up until now have never even seen a case of lethargy; but no matter to which of the old physicians I tell this, all become astounded, and imagine, to that extent, that they refuse to believe my words.

"I think you know, and besides, it is not necessary to know. It is self-evident: that when a person goes through even a simple fainting spell, all organs at first function very weakly. It is hardly possible to perceive a pulse, breathing is completely imperceptible, one does not hear the heart beat. But with you something unimaginable took place: the lungs suddenly began puffing, like gigantic bellows, the heart began knocking like a hammer against an anvil. No, one just can not put this into words. One should have seen it. You see, there was in you a type of state resembling a volcano before its eruption. One feels chills pass over one's back, and it became frightening to those standing by. It seemed yet one more moment and there would not even be pieces of you left, because no organism can withstand such intense activity.

"Hmm . . . it is no wonder then that I lost consciousness before recovering consciousness" — I thought.

And likewise, before the doctor's report, I continued to be in a state of perplexity and did not know how to explain that strange — as it then seemed to me — condition, that when I was dying, that is to say, when all was gradually leaving me, I did not for a moment lose consciousness, but when I had come back to life, I went into a fainting spell. Now this became clear to me: when dying, although I also had the sensation of being pressed in from all sides, at the moment of extreme agony, it resolved itself through my having cast away from myself that which was causing this; but apparently the soul alone is incapable of fainting. However, when it was necessary for me to again return to this life, I, on the contrary, had to take upon myself that which was subject to all physical suffering, including fainting.

XXVI

In the meantime, the doctor continued:

"And do not forget, this is not after some kind of fainting spell, but after a thirty-six hour lethargy! You can judge concerning the power of this process by the fact that at the time you were like a frozen stalk, and following 15-20 minutes your members already took on flexibility, and in an hour even your extremities were warm. Why, this is unbelievable, like out of a make-believe story. And, so when I relate it, they refuse to believe me."

"And do you know, doctor, why this happened so extraordinarily?" I said.

"Why?"

"Do you, according to your medical concepts, under the classification of lethargy, understand to mean something similar to a fainting fit?"

"Yes, but only to the most extreme degree . . ."

"Well, then it follows, that I was not in lethargy."

"What then?"

"It follows from this, that I actually died and returned back, to life. If here there was only a weakening of life function in the organism, then, of course, it would have been restored without the "upheaval" that took place; but since it was necessary for my body to prepare in an extraordinary manner to receive my soul, then all the members also had to work extraordinarily.

The doctor listened to me attentively at each second, but following this his face took on an expression of indifference.

"Why, you are joking; but for us medics, this is an extremely interesting case."

"Let me assure you, I have no intention of joking. I myself firmly believe that which I am saying, and I even would want that you too would believe it . . . well, at least for the purpose of seriously investigating such an exceptional phenomenon. You say that I was not able to see anything, but would you want me to describe to you the whole setting of the morgue, where I had never been in as a live person? Do you want me to tell you who of you were standing about and what you were doing at the moment of death and following this?"

The doctor became interested in what I had said, and when related and recalled to him all that had taken place, he, appearing like a man who had been thrown into unbalance, out of his usual state of equanimity into confusion, stammered:

"N..n . . , well, y..y yes, strange; some kind of clairvoyance"

"Well, doctor, there is something wrong in your thinking: a state of being similar to a frozen stalk — and clairvoyance!"

But my narration of that state in which I was found immediately after the separation of my soul and body called forth extreme surprise: how I saw everything, saw that they were stirring about my body, which, due to its insensibility, had for me the significance of discarded clothing; how I wanted to touch or push somebody in order to draw attention to myself; and how the air, which had at that time become too dense for me, did not allow me to come into contact with the objects about me.

All this he listened to with almost a gaping mouth and wide open eyes; and hardly had I finished than he hurried to bid me farewell and left, apparently hurrying to share with the others this extremely interesting narration of mine.

XXVII

Apparently he reported this to the head physician, because during visitation hours on the following day, the latter, after having examined me, lingered at my bedside and said:

"It seems you had hallucinations during lethargy. So take care and try to free yourself of this, otherwise ..."

"I can become insane?" I prompted.

"No, that is going too far, but it can pass over into a mania."

"Can there really be hallucinations during lethargy?"

"Why ask? You now know this better than I."

"A single case, even though concerning me, is not proof enough for me. I should like to know the general observations concerning this condition."

"And what are we to do with your case? Why it is a very fact?"

"Yes, but if all cases are brought under one heading, will not then the door be closed to investigation of diverse phenomena, diverse symptoms of sicknesses, and through similar attitudes an undesirable prejudice will take root in medical diagnoses?"

"Why here nothing of the sort is possible. That you were in lethargy — this is beyond all doubt. Consequently then, we must accept that which took place with you as possible in this state."

"And tell me doctor, is there any cause for the appearance of lethargy in such a sickness as pneumonia?"

"Medicine cannot indicate namely what basis is needed for it, because it occurs in all sicknesses; and there even were cases when a person lapsed into a lethargic sleep without the precurrence of any kind of sickness, being apparently completely healthy."

"And can an edema of the lungs pass by itself during lethargy, that is to say, at the time when the heart is inactive and, consequently, a progressive increase of edema does not meet any hindrance?"

"Since it happened with you, it follows that it is possible, although, believe me, your edema passed when you came to your senses."

"In the course of several minutes?"

"Well, then in several minutes . . . and even if it came to that. Such functioning of the heart and lungs which took place at the time of your waking could, it seems, even break the ice on the Volga, and not only to disperse any type of edema in a short period of time."

"And could compressed, edemic lungs function in such a manner as in my I case?"

"It follows that they could have."

"Therefore, there is nothing surprising or striking about that which took place with me?"

"No, why so? This, in any case, is a phenomenon that is rarely observed."

"Rarely, or under such conditions, under such circumstances — never?"

"Hmm. How never, when it occurred in your case?"

"Consequently an edema may pass by itself, even when all the organs in one are inactive; and a heart compressed with edema, and edemic lungs, may, if it occurs to them, function for the sake of glory. It would seem there is no reason to die from edemic lungs. But tell me, doctor, can one recover from a lethargy which came on during an edema of the lungs, that is to say, can he at one time slip out of two such unfavorable conditions?"

An ironical smile appeared on the face of the doctor.

"Now, you see: I warned you not in vain with regard to the appearance of a mania," he retorted. "You are continually trying to place that which occurred with you into another category, but not under lethargy, and you are posing questions with the purpose . . ."

"For the purpose of becoming convinced," I thought, "who of us is a maniac: I who desire through conclusions of science to test the basis of the classification which you have made with respect to my state, or you, who, contrary to all possibility, place everything under the one classification which you have in your science."

But I spoke out the following:

"I give questions with the purpose of showing you that not every man who sees snow flying about is able, contrary to all indications in the calendar and the blooming trees, to affirm in all cases that it is winter. For I myself recall how once snow fell when the calendar showed it to be the twelfth of May, and the trees in my father's orchard were in flower.

This answer of mine apparently convinced the doctor that he was late with his warning, that I already had fallen into a mania, and he did not oppose this with anything; and I ceased asking him further questions. . . .

* *The Metaphysician*, Hemnitzer. A fable which relates how a man leaves his Homeland and goes abroad to study. Here his mind is filled with misguiding material, "and upon returning to his Homeland he falls, into a hole in the ground out of which he himself, cannot emerge. His countrymen throw him a rope, but instead of taking it and climbing out of the hole, he goes off in thought tangents on the nature, usefulness etc. of the rope and other related subjects. His countrymen become weary of tibia, and leave him sitting in the hole.

** Such does he remain for me up to this day, although later I asked many spiritual people about this, if there were in the teachings of our Church or in the works of the Holy Fathers any kind of indication of his appearance at the death side of a human being. But up until the present I heard very little only from one

simple wanderer that one should pray to the "meeting angel," and to, my question, what a 'meeting angel' is, he only said briefly: "Why it is that one who meets your soul there," and I did not learn anything more about this.

http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/unbelievable_but_true.htm