

4 June 1963

READING 4

MONDAY MEETING, COLET HOUSE, 20TH MAY (continued)

Dr. Roles. Now I would like you to hear an attempt we have made because people have been very interested in the idea of 'Recurrence' with a new understanding of Mr. Ouspensky's *Kinemadrama*; and I put into the 'New Life' that there were just *two* points in Osokin's life where 'if he could remember the Magician and do just what he says everything important in his life will be different.' We have described the first one, which was the pillow in the dormitory; and the second one (to my thinking) was in Paris, and this is I'm afraid a very poor recording of that scene which we did in rather a hurry as a try-out, but have not been able to repeat:

(Dr. R. suggested that Mr. and Mrs. Robin Carnegie and Mr. J. Carnegie might try and record this scene.)

THE NEW LIFE OF IVAN OSOKIN (continued)

(Recording, with Dr. Roles again as Osokin)

A Cross-road in Paris, Ch. 22

Four years later. Osokin is a student in Paris. Just as he was finishing his military service his aunt died, leaving him a small legacy which enabled him to go abroad. At first he moved from place to place, went to Switzerland, stayed for a year in England, then came to Paris, and for the last two years he has been living there. He is attending lectures by various professors, but still cannot make a choice of any particular faculty.

Beautiful pale sunny autumn day with a slight mist over the river.

Osokin and an English girl-student, Valerie Dale, are walking along the Seine embankment by the book-stalls. She is a tall blonde girl with hair the colour of autumn leaves, a fine profile and pensive dark grey eyes. She belongs to a rich English family and dresses beautifully, so that even in Paris people always turn and look at her.

'But really she is an awfully clever girl,' says Osokin to himself. 'She is the best pupil of old Sorel. She studies mediaeval history and art and has written a very interesting monograph – *Builders of Cathedrals*.

'Where does she get these ideas?' thinks Osokin. 'Sorel never had any like that. And how extraordinary that she knows Russian and Russian literature and history.'

One day they had a long talk about Pushkin and about Russian masons. She told him then that she had begun with Russian and intended to go to Russia, but later became quite absorbed by Gothic art and its period.

Osokin looks at Valerie. She is wearing what is evidently a very expensive coat with fine sables, and a wide-brimmed hat with an ostrich feather. Osokin always admires her feet in trim Paris shoes with high heels.

They continue a conversation which started when they were in the Louvre.

'I believe in destiny,' says Osokin. 'I know that our future is written down somewhere and that we merely read it page by page. Besides that, I had strange fantasies as a boy. It seemed to me that I had lived before; for instance, I knew Paris – though of course I had never been here. Even now there are times when I feel that I have lived in Paris before.'

When I met with Nietzsche's ideas on eternal recurrence, I recalled all these fantasies. And now I am sure that everything really does repeat itself.'

'Do you know Stevenson's – Robert Louis Stevenson's – *Song of the Morrow*?' asks his companion.

Osokin starts, and looks at her.

'Why, what's the matter?' she asks,

'How astonishing! How could I have forgotten it? Of course I know it. How does it begin?'

'The King of Duntrine had a daughter when he was old,' begins the girl slowly, 'and she was the fairest King's daughter between two seas...'

Osokin listens to these words like one bewitched. Scenes in which he can scarcely believe pass in succession through his mind: the morning at school when he repeated the beginning of this tale to himself in order to prove that he had lived before; all the elusive thoughts and incomprehensible sensations connected with the Magician, and with what – to him, at school – appeared to be the past, and which now – here in Paris – appears to be the fantastic and impossible future. What does it all mean? And once more this tale... It seems to Osokin that if only he could stop his thoughts for a moment he would understand everything – but his thoughts rush past so quickly that he can catch nothing. All that remains with him is the general impression that everything is turning upside down: the past becoming the future and the future the past. For a moment he feels that if only he were able, or if only he dared, to think of the future as of something that had been before, he would see it as clearly as he can see yesterday.

At the same time there comes over him the old familiar sensation – which used to come so often but now comes more and more rarely – that everything around him has been before. In the same way the river flowed by, the same mist hung over the water; the same greenish Paris sky smiled faintly from above and the last leaves flew from the trees. In the same way the girl's golden curls escaped from her black hat, and in the same way her voice sounded...

'Do you remember the end, the very end?' asks Osokin.

'Yes, I remember,' and slowly she recited the end of the tale:

'And the King's daughter of Duntrine got her to that part of the beach where strange things had been done in the ancient ages; and there she sat her down. The sea foam ran to her feet, and the dead leaves swarmed about her back, and the veil blew about her face in the blowing of the wind. And when she lifted up her eyes, there was the daughter of a King come walking on the beach. Her hair was like the spun gold, and her eyes like pools in a river, and she had no thought for the morrow and no power upon the hour, after the manner of simple men.'

'It's amazing,' says Osokin to himself. 'Why do these words arouse so many memories in me? I feel that the memories come directly from the words, apart from their meaning, as if I know something connected with them but every year forget it more and more.'

'It is remarkable, that tale,' he says aloud. 'How do you understand "the man in the hood"? Who is he or what is he?'

'I don't know,' the girl answers slowly, 'and I feel that it's not necessary even to try to understand; such things must simply be felt. I feel it as I do music, and interpretations of music have always seemed ridiculous to me.'

They reach the Place St. Michel and she takes a fiacre. Osokin says goodbye to her.

'Will you be at my brother's this evening?' she asks.

‘Probably, but I don’t know yet.’

‘Tell him that I’m expecting him to-morrow.’

Osokin walks across the bridge towards the Cité.

‘Shall I go there or not?’ he asks, when he is alone. ‘Seriously speaking, I should not go. Bob himself and his friends are too absurdly rich. Valerie and he are quite easy-going and mix with all sorts of people here, but they belong to a rather important family in England. Valerie is an interesting girl, it’s true, and however it may be, in view of our different positions in life, I know that if I let things develop they may bring us to quite unexpected results. Even now I feel that there is something unusual in our friendship as though very brilliant and fiery sparks fly between us from time to time.

‘And yet I know that we should never get on well together. First there are those millions, and then I think that Valerie is too virtuous for me. She will always be even-tempered, charming and reasonable. I am sure I should soon run away from a woman like that, and then she would suffer. She is the type of one of Turgeneff’s heroines. She is decidedly too good for me. But if Loulou finds out about her she will scratch my eyes out.’

(Then suddenly he comes to himself):

‘Where *are* my thoughts taking me? Is Valerie merely a girl for me to play around with? Haven’t I been telling myself that she is not my sort? But just because the Dales are rich and influential, couldn’t they be useful to the Magician’s work? They know many people. The family is important in England. And hasn’t Valerie an inkling of the ‘Great Secret’? After all it was *she* who reminded *me* of the ‘Song of the Morrow’ which I’ve unaccountably forgotten! Moreover, although she’s so clever and intellectual, she refused to analyse it – just ‘felt it like music’. Decidedly I must meet her again and try to bring her to the Magician.

But in order to meet her, do I *have* to go to Brother Bob’s roulette party this evening? Surely not? It is evident that Valerie does not mean to go there and Bob and I couldn’t possibly talk in all that noise. Also it wouldn’t be a good way of beginning a new relationship, for I’d be in a completely false position among those millionaires. They won’t miss me, that’s certain. I’ll go to the Bois instead, and think over what to say to Valerie...’

6 o’clock, the Bois de Boulogne

Though it is Autumn the sun is still up. Osokin is sitting with his back against a tree in his favourite secluded spot looking out across a lake. He has been silent and undisturbed for half-an-hour. As the sun goes down behind the trees and the taller houses in the distance, he feels sleepy and dozes off.

How long he has been asleep he doesn’t know, but he wakes in the dark with that terrible feeling of disaster, when a weak man asks himself: ‘But perhaps it’s not true, perhaps it never happened?’ ...

But what *is* it? What has happened in his dream? ‘It begins to come back to me, as always from the end. I am walking down the stairs and out into the street with the feeling that my whole life has been changed at one stroke. Then the roulette table with my gaze glued to the wheel. The ball stops rolling. ‘Who staked on 26?’ calls the Banker, and my stake is on 25! I’ve lost everything. And there I am writing out a cheque for the last 300 francs of the thirty thousand I got from my aunt’s legacy. Now I’m feeling dizzy with the champagne, the whisky and the smoke

of cigars. I want to get out into the fresh air. It's all so vivid and real. I actually *am there* in Bob Dale's flat!

A gust of wind shakes the tree and some leaves fall on him. He shivers and comes to himself, still with that sick and sinking feeling in the stomach.

'But I'm here,' he says out loud. 'I can feel the tree at my back...' He looks at his watch: So the party must be going on *now*, I can't have gone there this time. The Magician... *It's all different!* He pulls out his cheque-book. All those cheques he wrote in his dream – they are blank. He still has most of his legacy; he's a free man again. A wild elation seizes him. He moves off, and in spite of the darkness feels the ground firmly under his feet. 'I'll call on Valerie to-morrow.'

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Dr. R. That is one way it could happen; for then, you see, he can stay on longer in Paris, but later he will have the urge to get back to Moscow where he will meet Zinaida – he will be quite eligible this time!

There are two things I would like you to think about there (a recording is just a preliminary for trying to act it): One is (do you remember?) that 'It seems to Osokin that if only he could stop his thoughts for a moment he would understand everything, but his thoughts rush past so quickly that he can catch nothing.' This, I feel you will realise, is the key-point in many of the scenes in Osokin. And then one turns to oneself, and one realises that if one's thoughts did not rush past all the time (particularly at important moments) one would not step over the opportunity that lies in front of one! Suppose that on this occasion Osokin *did* stop in time, how different his future would be! So that it is in the *recurrence of one's own thoughts*, the *recurrence of one's own mechanicalness* – not in life after life, but *now* that we *can stop the repetition of things!* I feel that story of Mr. Ouspensky's brings out this very well.

The other interesting thing – you know the point, that when you recall your dreams, you recall them from *the end*. This is based on a very definite law of the human nervous system; it *has* to be like that. Recall of memory is from recent events, and when you are going under an anaesthetic it is the recent events which disappear first. We will have occasion to speak about this later, which is very interesting and not taken into account in the ordinary way; but perhaps it applies also to memory of the repetition of lives.

When you are born, as you know, the clock of your Personality is put back. Suppose you were born in 1900 and lived till 1970: in 1970 the clock is put back – Personality dies, the body dies, and these two have to begin again. But the *Essence* goes on. It is the Essence that remembers, and when a baby is born maybe it is remembering not 1900 but 1970 – a completely different scene. That might be why a baby for sometime before the new gramophone record is formed in its brain, is so bewildered. He expects a certain scene at the termination of his life; instead of that he finds this extraordinary scene... – everything quite different and totally different surroundings! That idea needs verification; it may be true only for *some* people.

Mr. Hersey. What was it that really changed in Osokin?

Dr. R. Well, he stopped thinking of his personal attraction to Valerie and began to think of the Magician; he began to *remember* the Magician.

Mrs. Hersey. What change enabled him to do that?

Dr. R. I am supposing that he continued to do his half-hours, or at any rate he did some work that he had learned in the life before.

Mrs. Henry. What do you think that Zinaida stands for in the story?

Dr. R. We have not got to there yet.

Mrs. Henry. Zinaida is met there.

Dr. R. You must write the sequel to this! In the next chapter when Osokin returns to Moscow he meets Zinaida's brother, and what will happen then? Try to write the end of the story!

Surely one of the differences in 'Osokin's New Life' – one of the things that happens to him – is that what have been *thoughts* before – thoughts and ideas, strange and interesting experiences – become *personally vital to him* the second time. In the first story he remembers, and it is an interesting idea, that perhaps he lived before; the second time it takes on an *immediate vital importance*, not just an interesting idea at all!

One gets the feeling that he was taking everything theoretically, just as ideas and thought processes before. But the second time, when he begins to talk to Valerie, even while his personality speaks about Nietzsche, etc., in his *inner Essence* he is *remembering* that this was a *practical idea* and not just theory, and *there is something he has to do when he remembers*.

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Finally, there are these questions from your meetings following the reading about Osokin:

Mrs. Garten's meeting (which 'really came to life when they got on to Ivan Osokin')

Mr. Heal. Why all this talk about changing the past, why not change the future?

Dr. R. Well, try it!

Mrs. Melville. Can work done now, even if not entirely successful, be of value when the same point recurs next time?

Dr. R. One essential is that such work penetrates into the Essence; but I am sure you will agree with what the Shankaracharya has been saying – that *learning to Do* is also very necessary. You might *remember* but not be able to *Do* anything!

Mrs. Melville. Why is there less time for us?

Dr. R. Well it is, as Mr. Ouspensky said, just like an ordinary school. One is allowed to stay in the same form for a certain length of time, but no master is going to continue to teach one a fourth term! One has got to move on. It is a question of somebody's precious time; a Conscious man – how much time will he give?

Mrs. Rush. Do some people have a better chance because of the people (family, etc.) surrounding them?

Dr. R. Yes, that is so, but I don't believe anybody really has *no* chance, because it depends on the strength of what is *in* them. It is the individual Essence that can be stronger than adverse circumstances.

Richmond Group

Mr. Fleming. What are cross-roads for us?

Mrs. Dennison-Ross. Aren't they continually recurring in ordinary life in a small way?

Mrs. L. Jennens. Would one recognise these cross-roads?

Mrs. Gould. They aren't the things that happen every day?

Dr. R. A practical way of looking at these questions in this: Whenever you find your thoughts repeating, the first time, 'Yes'; the second time, 'Yes'; the third time you say, 'What is the good of that?' So you take your attention away from the repetition of thoughts. For it shows that they are mechanical and no good. So if you want to think of the repetition of lives, you think of the repetition of thoughts and the repetition of ordinary actions – *involuntary actions* – how one always waves one's hand about when one is speaking, again and again and again! Escape from *these things* is the way to escape from the Law of Repetition of everything in this life *now, here*, and it does not matter if we live again and again or if life ends this time. *We still have to do the same thing NOW!*

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