

**THE FLIGHT
FROM THE CROSS**

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The flight from the cross by Ossip Duimow & G. M. Foakes

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THE FLIGHT FROM THE CROSS

BY

OSIP DUIMOV

TRANSLATED BY

G. M. FOAKES



LONDON

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Osip Duimov

Born 1878. Gave up a post in the "Imperial Institute of Foresters" in order to devote himself to literature. In addition to *The Flight from the Cross* he has written several novels, one of which, entitled *Vlass*, is a very interesting study of child life; the story is supposed to be told by the child Vlass himself. Duimov has also written some good plays, of which *Niyu* is the most popular. Duimov's pen-pictures of nature are much admired.

FOREWORD

THE mind of the Master, Yarmuishevski, is representative of a certain type of mentality which is as the proverbial sign-post—always pointing the right direction to the inquirer, but quite unable to follow it. The high and noble thoughts that the Master expresses are fraught with wonderful, philosophic truths; but when it comes to a question of practical effort, both he and his disciples miserably fail to grasp the one underlying truth of all their grandiose ideas—namely, that one should always practise what one preaches. The title chosen—*The Flight from the Cross*—shows that all the characters in the story knew what they should do, but could not bring themselves to do it, and then turned their backs upon their grand ideals. This story is very indicative of modern life in England, with its varied cults and hypocrisies, its pretence to “Higher Thought” alongside of the most sordid details of human existence.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

KYRIL YARMUISHEVSKI, the Master

JULIA VESKLOVSKI, his Mistress

ELENA KOLUIMOV

NEIL SOUBBOTINE

SERGEI SOUBBOTINE

} Students at the University

JENIA SIZOV, in love with Neil

ALEKSANDR SHICHETININE, an Officer in the Guards

NADEJDA SEMIRYECHENSKI, a celebrated Actress

PROFESSOR SLYAZKIN, of the University

*The scene of the story is laid in a University town of
Russia.*

THE FLIGHT FROM THE CROSS

I

THE evening had been a great success. The Master was in good form, and before midnight had delivered himself of three brilliant aphorisms, one on the temperature and two on militarism.

On Thursdays the Master received his friends and others who were of the same way of thinking as himself. What subjects these were on which they thought alike it would be difficult to define. However, they were expecting the Master to write a book which would explain all this clearly and precisely. In fact, it was rumoured that the book had actually been written—a book reconciling the teaching of the Church with modern culture. When he happened to be in good form, which was when he found himself in the company of young and thoughtful girls, his friends foresaw passages of the coming book in his brilliant improvisations; usually reserved, with coldly gleaming, keen, greenish eyes, at such moments he was transfigured; passionate, inspired words flew from his mouth like impetuous birds, which words formed the subject of conversation in his set for a long time, and were sometimes even reported in a newspaper. But whether they were really passages from the coming book about Christ, no one knew for certain.

The Master lived a solitary and poverty-stricken life; at times, doubtless, he was in great difficulties, but he never complained. In his workroom there hung over the writing-table a large crucifix of cypress wood—the gift of a monk of Athens, before the war. All the rooms, and even the hall, were crammed with books, as high as the ceiling. Sometimes it happened that their owner, in search of some ancient Gallic

folio, would unexpectedly find between the yellow leaves a flattened cigarette end, placed there secretly by one of his Thursday visitors. The Master would then set himself to answer the question—who was that smoker? In the majority of cases he never found out, and one of his old friends, an artist, or a priest maybe, would experience his silently raging, cold hatred, which could only be diverted if the person in question rendered the Master some service, or if the suspected smoker were overtaken by a great misfortune.

The Master did not seek earthly happiness; money had no significance at all in his eyes; he was hardly conscious of its existence. Of his health also he took small account, being able to do with three hours' sleep out of the twenty-four; and he was always attired in the same grey pea-jacket, in which he appears in so many photographs. But in one of the drawers of his writing-table there lies an enormous yellow envelope, in which are hidden away all the newspaper notices, even the most insignificant, in which his name is mentioned. Once one of his disciples, a young poet-philosopher, who ended his career by going out of his mind, accidentally discovered the carefully hidden envelope. In the course of a week the Master had parted from him on some trifling pretext. Unable to forgive him for what he had done, he mercilessly reviled him to his friends, and when he died, at the end of three years, he refused to attend his funeral.

Almost all the guests were assembled when, at about twelve o'clock, an attendant from the hospital appeared, to inform Doctor Verstov, who was amongst the visitors, that a patient had been brought in who had been run over by a tram. The Doctor rose lazily from the couch, went lazily out of the room, and said to the messenger:

"I'll come in a minute. Sit down."

Verstov was a young and very capable surgeon, who had become fashionable, and made thousands of roubles while treating the whole affair as a joke. He had not the slightest idea of what he did for his patients, and therefore he was successful. In spite of his youth—he was somewhat under thirty—he had attained a great reputation in the world of medicine, especially amongst specialists, but of this he had no idea. The Doctor referred to himself, with unconcealed irony, as to a being immeasurably lower than his position. In spite