

and a blacksmith. The three lads are brought up in an old tenement house, a human warren inhabited by a number of poor families, shoemakers, raggickers, cabmen, and various beggar women and "unfortunates" who use the eating-house kept by the crafty Petruha the barman. What strikes the English reader is that these characters, one and all, workmen, rogues, and prostitutes alike, are all striving after a deep inner humiliation of spirit, as the ideal for man. Ilia wants "to live decently, in honesty, cleanliness and joy," but some obscure mixture of impulse, moral as well as animal, leads him to place himself in the position of a sinner. He is not in the depths of his heart satisfied with leading an upright prosperous, and happy life, though he has in fact strength of character enough to do so; he is logically bound to give way to his temptations in order to feel the bitter strivings of his soul within him. "Just as a stone is necessary to sharpen the bluntness of a chisel, so is sin necessary to man to quicken his soul and humble it to the dust at our all merciful Lord's feet," is, in fact, the secret belief and fatalistic aspiration of the Russian soul, which, feeling itself surrounded with earthly sin, and beset by inner sin, finds it the easiest way out of accounting for its own weakness, and attaining its spiritual enrichment. Now, if we turn to the other side of the shield we find that the English soul's weakness is just the other way. If we are so spiritually strong and pure, why are we so afraid of coming into contact with sin? why are we so distrustful of knowing our own motives? why are we so hard, so uncharitable, so full of

contempt for the weak and erring? Because our ideal in the power of our will to conquer self means that consciousness of sin really degrades us, while it makes the Russian feel better, worthier, more full of love for his fellow-man. In *Creatures That Once Were Men* Gorky draws a most incisive sketch of the philosophy of life of a band of outcasts, broken men, tramps, drunkards, thieves, and reprobates, who inhabit a doss-house under the presidency of the cynical drunkard Kuvlada an ex-officer. These people commit brutal crimes, live in "wickedness" and in perpetual suffering, which "eats their hearts out," and, unable to rise out of their vicious life, are preoccupied with the great problem of how to get enough drink to deaden their senses. But when all is said and done Gorky brings home to us that these outcast scoundrels are in fact living a deeper spiritual life than are many of the clean, prosperous and successful townsmen on whom these wretched "creatures prey. Remorse and self despair torment them in the interval of their cynical orgies, and in the bitterness of their hearts they know what good is better than most of these complacent, and smug people who "work day and night, and gather money all the time. Mr. Chesterton, who has written a suggestive "Foreword" to the tale sums up its value well when he says: "Here in the very act of describing a fall from humanity Gorky expresses a sense of the strangeness and essential value of the human being, which is far too commonly absent altogether from such complex civilizations as our own."

