



Environment, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky

Environment

I think that all jurors the whole world over, and our jurors in particular, must share a feeling of power (they have other feelings as well, of course); more precisely, they have a feeling of autocratic power. This can be an ugly feeling, at least when it dominates their other feelings. Even though it may not be obvious, even though it may be suppressed by a mass of other, nobler emotions, this sense of autocratic power must be a strong presence in the heart of every juror, even when he is most acutely aware of his civic duty. I suppose that this is somehow a product of the laws of nature themselves.

And so, I recall how terribly curious I was, in one respect at least, when our new (just) courts were instituted. In my flights of fancy I saw trials where almost all the jurors might be peasants who only yesterday were serfs. The prosecutor and the defence lawyers would address them, trying to curry favour and divine their mood, while our good peasants would sit and keep their mouths shut: 'So that's how things are these days. If I feel like lettin' the fella off, I'll do it; and if not, it's Siberia for him.'

And yet the surprising thing now is that they do not convict the accused but acquit them consistently. Of course, this is also an exercise, almost even an abuse of power, but in one direction, toward an extreme, a sentimental one, perhaps – one can't tell. But it is a general, almost preconceived tendency, just as if everyone had conspired. There can be no doubt how widespread this 'tendency' is. And the problem is that the mania for acquittal regardless of the circumstances has developed not only among peasants, yesterday's insulted and humiliated, but has seized all Russian jurors, even those from the uppermost classes such as noblemen and university professors. The universality of this tendency in itself presents a most curious topic for reflection and leads one to diverse and sometimes even strange surmises.

Not long ago one of our most influential newspapers briefly set forth, in a very modest and well-intentioned little article, the following hypothesis: perhaps our jurors, as people who suddenly, without rhyme or reason, sense the magnitude of the power that has been conferred upon them (simply out of the blue, as it were), and who for centuries have been oppressed and downtrodden – perhaps they are inclined to take any opportunity to spite authorities such as the prosecutor, just for the fun of it or, so to say, for the sake of contrast with the past. Not a bad hypothesis and also not without a certain playful spirit of its own; but, of course, it can't explain everything.

'We just feel sorry to wreck the life of another person; after all, he's a human being too. Russians are compassionate people' – such is the conclusion reached by others, as I've sometimes heard it expressed.

However, I have always thought that in England, for instance, the people are also compassionate; and even if they do not have the same softheartedness as we Russians, then at least they have a sense of humanity; they have an awareness and a keen sense of Christian duty to their neighbour, a sense which, perhaps, taken to a high degree, to a firm and independent conviction, may be even stronger than ours, when you take into account the level of education over there and their long tradition of independent thought. Over there, such power didn't just tumble down on them out of the blue, after all. Indeed, they themselves invented the very system of trial by jury; they borrowed it from no one, but affirmed it through centuries; they took it from life and didn't merely receive it as a gift.

Yet over there the juror understands from the very moment he takes his place in the courtroom that he is not only a sensitive individual with a tender heart but is first of all a citizen. He even thinks (correctly or not) that fulfilling his civic duty stands even higher than any private victory of the heart. Not very long ago there was a clamour throughout the kingdom when a jury acquitted one notorious thief. The hubbub all over the country proved that if sentences just like ours are possible over there, then all the same they happen rarely, as exceptions, and they quickly rouse public indignation.

An English juror understands above all that in his hands rests the banner of all England; that he has already ceased to be a private individual and is obliged to represent the opinion of his country. The capacity to be a citizen is just that capacity to elevate oneself to the level of the opinion of the entire country. Oh, yes, there are 'compassionate' verdicts there, and the influence of the 'corrupting environment' (our favourite doctrine now, it seems) is taken into consideration. But this is done only up to a certain limit, as far as is tolerated by the common sense of the country and the level of its informed and Christian morality (and that level, it seems, is quite high).

Nonetheless, very often the English juror grudgingly pronounces the guilty verdict, understanding first of all that his duty consists primarily in using that verdict to bear witness to all his fellow citizens that in old England (for which any one of them is prepared to shed his blood) vice is still called vice and villainy is still called villainy, and that the moral foundations of the country endure – firm, unchanged, standing as they stood before.

'Suppose we do assume,' I hear a voice saying, 'that your firm foundations (Christian ones, that is) endure and that in truth one must be a citizen above all, must hold up the banner, etc., etc., as you said. I won't challenge that for the time being. But where do you think we'll find such a citizen in Russia? Just consider our situation only a few years ago! Civic rights (and what rights!) have tumbled down on our citizen as if from a mountain. They've crushed him, and they're still only a burden to him, a real burden!'

'Of course, there's truth in what you say,' I answer the voice, a bit despondent, 'but still, the Russian People . . .'

'The Russian People? Please!' says another voice. 'We've just heard that the boon of citizenship has tumbled down from the mountain and crushed the People. Perhaps they not only feel that they've received so much power as a gift, but even sense that it was wasted on them because they got it for nothing and aren't yet worthy of it. Please note that this certainly doesn't mean that they really aren't worthy of the

gift, and that it was unnecessary or premature to give it; quite the contrary: the People themselves, in their humble conscience, acknowledge that they are unworthy, and the People's humble, yet lofty, awareness of their own unworthiness is precisely the guarantee that they are worthy. And meanwhile the People, in their humility, are troubled. Who has peered into the innermost secret places of their hearts?

Is there anyone among us who can claim truly to know the Russian People? No, it's not simply a matter here of compassion and soft-heartedness, as you, sir, said so scoffingly. It's that this power itself is frightful! We have been frightened by this dreadful power over human fate, over the fate of our brethren, and until we mature into our citizenship, we will show mercy. We show mercy out of fear. We sit as jurors and think, perhaps: 'Are we any better than the accused? We have money and are free from want, but were we to be in his position we might do even worse than he did – so we show mercy.' So maybe it's a good thing, this heartfelt mercy. Maybe it's a pledge of some sublime form of Christianity of the future which the world has not yet known!

'That's a partly Slavophile voice,' I think to myself. It's truly a comforting thought, but the conjecture about the People's humility before the power they have received gratis and that has been bestowed upon them, still 'unworthy' of it, is, of course, somewhat neater than the suggestion that they want to 'tease the prosecutor a bit,' although even the latter still appeals to me because of its realism (accepting it, of course, more as an individual case, which indeed is what its author intended). But still . . . this is what troubles me most of all: how is it that our People suddenly began to be so afraid of a little suffering? 'It's a painful thing,' they say, 'to convict a man.' And what of it? So take your pain away with you. The truth stands higher than your pain.

In fact, if we consider that we ourselves are sometimes even worse than the criminal, we thereby also acknowledge that we are half to blame for his crime. If he has transgressed the law which the nation

prescribed for him, then we ourselves are to blame that he now stands before us. If we were better, then he, too, would be better and would not now be standing here before us . . .

‘And so now we ought to acquit him?’

No, quite the contrary: now is precisely the time we must tell the truth and call evil evil; in return, we must ourselves take on half the burden of the sentence. We will enter the courtroom with the thought that we, too, are guilty. This pain of the heart, which everyone so fears now and which we will take with us when we leave the court, will be punishment for us. If this pain is genuine and severe, then it will purge us and make us better. And when we have made ourselves better, we will also improve the environment and make it better. And this is the only way it can be made better.

But to flee from our own pity and acquit everyone so as not to suffer ourselves – why, that’s too easy. Doing that, we slowly and surely come to the conclusion that there are no crimes at all, and ‘the environment is to blame’ for everything. We inevitably reach the point where we consider crime even a duty, a noble protest against the environment. ‘Since society is organized in such a vile fashion, one can’t get along in it without protest and without crimes.’ ‘Since society is organized in such a vile fashion, one can only break out of it with a knife in hand.’ So runs the doctrine of the environment, as opposed to Christianity which, fully recognizing the pressure of the environment and having proclaimed mercy for the sinner, still places a moral duty on the individual to struggle with the environment and marks the line where the environment ends and duty begins.

In making the individual responsible, Christianity thereby acknowledges his freedom. In making the individual dependent on every flaw in the social structure, however, the doctrine of the environment reduces him to an absolute nonentity, exempts him totally from every personal moral duty and from all independence, reduces him to the lowest form of slavery imaginable. If that’s so, then if a man wants some tobacco and has no money, he can kill another to get some tobacco. And why not? An educated man, who suffers more keenly than an uneducated

one from unsatisfied needs, requires money to satisfy them. So why shouldn't he kill an uneducated man if he has no other way of getting money? Haven't you listened to the voices of the defence lawyers: 'Of course,' they say, 'the law has been violated; of course he committed a crime in killing this uneducated man. But, gentlemen of the jury, take into consideration that . . .' And so on. Why such views have almost been expressed already, and not only 'almost' . . .

'But you, however,' says someone's sarcastic voice, 'you seem to be charging the People with subscribing to the latest theory of the environment; but how on earth did they get that theory? Sometimes these jurors sitting there are all peasants, and every one of them considers it a mortal sin to eat meat during the fasts. You should have just accused them squarely of harbouring social tendencies.'

'Of course, you're right – what do they care about 'environment,' the peasants as a whole, that is?' I think to myself. 'But still, these ideas float about in the air; there is something pervasive about an idea . . .'

'Listen to that, now!' laughs the sarcastic voice.

'But what if our People are particularly inclined toward this theory of the environment, by their very nature, or by their Slavic inclinations, if you like? What if they are the best raw material in Europe for those who preach such a doctrine?'

The sarcastic voice guffaws even louder, but it's a bit forced.

No, this is still only a trick someone is pulling on the People, not a 'philosophy of the environment.' There's a mistake here, a fraud, and a very seductive fraud.

One can explain this fraud, using an example at least, as follows: Let's grant that the People do call criminals 'unfortunates' and give them pennies and bread. What do they mean by doing that, and what have they meant over the course of perhaps some centuries? Is it Christian truth or the truth of the 'environment?' Here is precisely where we find the stumbling block and the place where the lever is concealed which the propagator of 'the environment' could seize upon to effect.

Some ideas exist that are unexpressed and unconscious but that simply are strongly felt; many such ideas are fused, as it were, with the human heart. They are present in the People generally, and in humanity taken as a whole. Only while these ideas lie unconscious in peasant life and are simply felt strongly and truly can the People live a vigorous 'living life.' The whole energy of the life of the People consists in the striving to bring these hidden ideas to light. The more obstinately the People cling to them, the less capable they are of betraying their instincts, the less inclined they are to yield to diverse and erroneous explanations of these ideas – the stronger, more steadfast, and happier they are. Among such ideas concealed within the Russian People – the ideas of the Russian People – is the notion of calling a crime a misfortune and the criminal an unfortunate.

This notion is purely Russian. It has not been observed among any European people. In the West it's proclaimed only by some philosophers and thinkers. But our People proclaimed it long before their philosophers and thinkers. It does not follow, however, that the People would never be led astray at least temporarily or superficially by some thinker's false interpretation of this idea. The ultimate interpretation and the last word will remain, undoubtedly, always the People's, but in the short term this might not be the case.

To put it briefly, when they use the word 'unfortunate,' the People are saying to the 'unfortunate' more or less as follows:

'You have sinned and are suffering, but we, too, are sinners. Had we been in your place we might have done even worse. Were we better than we are, perhaps you might not be in prison. With the retribution for your crime you have also taken on the burden for all our lawlessness. Pray for us, and we pray for you. But for now, unfortunate ones, accept these alms of ours; we give them that you might know we remember you and have not broken our ties with you as a brother.'

You must agree that there is nothing easier than to apply the doctrine of 'environment' to such a view: 'Society is vile, and therefore we too are vile; but we are rich, we are secure, and it is only by chance that we

escaped encountering the things you did. And had we encountered them, we would have acted as you did. Who is to blame? The environment is to blame. And so there is only a faulty social structure, but there is no crime whatsoever.'

And the trick I spoke of earlier is the sophistry used to draw such conclusions.

No, the People do not deny there is crime, and they know that the criminal is guilty. The People know that they also share the guilt in every crime. But by accusing themselves, they prove that they do not believe in 'environment'; they believe, on the contrary, that the environment depends completely on them, on their unceasing repentance and quest for self-perfection. Energy, work, and struggle – these are the means through which the environment is improved. Only by work and struggle do we attain independence and a sense of our own dignity. 'Let us become better, and the environment will be better.' This is what the Russian People sense so strongly but do not express in their concealed idea of the criminal as an unfortunate. Now imagine if the criminal himself, hearing from the People that he is an 'unfortunate,' should consider himself only an unfortunate and not a criminal. In that case the People will renounce such a false interpretation and call it a betrayal of the People's truth and faith.

I could offer some examples of this, but let us set them aside for the moment and say the following.

The criminal and the person planning to commit a crime are two different people, but they belong to the same category. What if the criminal, consciously preparing to commit a crime, says to himself: 'There is no crime!' Will the People still call him an 'unfortunate'?

Perhaps they would; in fact they certainly would. The People are compassionate, and there is no one more unfortunate than one who has even ceased to consider himself a criminal: he is an animal, a beast. And what of it if he does not even understand that he is an animal and has crippled his own conscience? He is only doubly unfortunate. Doubly unfortunate, but also doubly a criminal. The People will feel compassion for him but will not renounce their own truth. Never have

the People, in calling a criminal an 'unfortunate,' ceased to regard him as a criminal! And there could be no greater misfortune for us than if the People agreed with the criminal and replied to him: 'No, you are not guilty, for there is no "crime"'!

Such is our faith – our common faith, I should like to say; it is the faith of all who have hopes and expectations. I should like to add two more things.

I was in prison and saw criminals, hardened criminals. I repeat: it was a hard school. Not one of them ceased to regard himself as a criminal. In appearance they were a terrible and a cruel lot. Only the stupid ones or newcomers would 'put on a show,' however, and the others made fun of them. For the most part they were a gloomy, pensive lot. No one discussed his own crimes. I never heard a protest of any kind. Even speaking aloud of one's crimes was not done. From time to time we would hear a defiant or bragging voice, and all the prisoners, as one man, would cut the upstart short. Talking about that was simply not acceptable. Yet I believe that perhaps not one of them escaped the long inner suffering that cleansed and strengthened him. I saw them lonely and pensive; I saw them in church praying before confession; I listened to their single, unexpected words and exclamations; I remember their faces. Oh, believe me, in his heart not one of them considered himself justified!

I would not like my words to be taken as harsh. Still, I will risk speaking my mind and say plainly: with strict punishment, prison, and hard labor you would have saved perhaps half of them. You would have eased their burden, not increased it. Purification through suffering is easier – easier, I say, than the lot you assign to many of them by wholesale acquittals in court. You only plant cynicism in their hearts; you leave them with a seductive question and with contempt for you yourselves. You don't believe it? They have contempt for you and your courts and for the justice system of the whole country! Into their hearts you pour disbelief in the People's truth, in God's truth; you leave them confused . . . The criminal walks out of the court thinking: 'So that's how it is now; they've gone soft. They've gotten clever, it seems. Maybe they're

afraid. So I can do the same thing again. It's clear enough: I was in such a hard pinch, I couldn't help stealing.'

And do you really think that when you let them all off as innocent or with a recommendation for mercy you are giving them the chance to reform? He'll reform, all right! Why should he worry? 'It looks like I didn't do anything wrong at all' – this is what he thinks in the final analysis. You yourselves put that notion in his head. The main thing is that faith in the law and in the People's truth is being shaken.

Not long ago I spent several years living abroad. When I left Russia the new courts were only in their infancy. How eagerly I would read in our newspapers there everything concerning the Russian courts. With real sorrow I also observed Russians living abroad and their children, who did not know their native language or who were forgetting it. It was clear to me that half of them, by the very nature of things, would eventually become expatriates. I always found it painful to think about that: so much vitality, so many of the best, perhaps, of our people, while we in Russia are so in need of good people! But sometimes as I left the reading room, by God, gentlemen, I became reconciled to the temporary emigration and emigrés in spite of myself. My heart ached.

I would read in the newspaper of a wife who murdered her husband and who was acquitted. The crime is obvious and proven; she herself confesses. 'Not guilty.' A young man breaks open a strongbox and steals the money. 'I was in love,' he says, 'very much in love, and I needed money to buy things for my mistress.' 'Not guilty.' It would not be so terrible if these cases could be justified by compassion or pity; but truly I could not understand the reasons for the acquittal and I was bewildered.

I came away with a troubled feeling, almost as if I had been personally insulted. In these bitter moments I would sometimes imagine Russia as a kind of quagmire or swamp on which someone had contrived to build a palace. The surface of the soil looks firm and smooth, but in reality it is like the surface of some sort of jellied green-pea aspic, and once you step on it you slip down to the very abyss. I reproached myself for my

faintheartedness; I was encouraged by the thought that, being far away, I might be mistaken and that I myself was the kind of temporary emigré I spoke of; that I could not see things at first hand nor hear clearly . . .

And now I have been home again for a long while.

‘But come now – do they really feel pity?’ That’s the question! Don’t laugh because I put so much stress on it. At least pity provides some sort of explanation; at least it leads you out of the darkness, and without it we comprehend nothing and see only gloomy blackness inhabited by some madman.

A peasant beats his wife, inflicts injuries on her for many years, abuses her worse than his dog. In despair to the point of suicide and scarcely in her right mind, she goes to the village court. They send her away with an indifferent mumble: ‘Learn to live together.’ Can this be pity? These are the dull words of a drunkard who has just come to after a long spree, a man who is scarcely aware that you are standing in front of him, who stupidly and listlessly waves you away so you won’t bother him; a man whose tongue doesn’t work properly, who has nothing in his head but alcohol fumes and folly.

The woman’s story, by the way, is well known and happened only recently. We read about it in all the newspapers and, perhaps, we still remember it. Plainly and simply, the wife who suffered from her husband’s beatings hanged herself; the husband was tried and found deserving of mercy. But for a long time thereafter I fancied I could see all the circumstances of the case; I see them even now.

I kept imagining his figure: he was tall, the reports said, very thickset, powerful, fair-haired. I would add another touch: thinning hair. His body is white and bloated; his movements slow and solemn; his gaze is steady. He speaks little and rarely and drops his words like precious pearls, cherishing them above all else. Witnesses testified that he had a cruel nature: he would catch a chicken and hang it by its feet, head down, just for his own pleasure. This amused him – a most characteristic trait! For a number of years he had beaten his wife with

anything that was at hand – ropes or sticks. He would take up a floorboard, thrust her feet into the gap, press the board down, and beat and beat her.

I think he himself did not know why he was beating her; he just did it, probably from the same motives for which he hung the chicken. He sometimes also starved her, giving her no bread for three days. He would place the bread on a shelf, summon her, and say: 'Don't you care touch that bread. That's my bread.' And that's another remarkably characteristic trait! She and her ten-year-old child would go off begging to the neighbours: if they were given bread they would eat; if not, they went hungry. When he asked her to work she did everything with never a hesitation or a murmur, intimidated, until finally she became a virtual mad woman. I can imagine what she looked like: she must have been a very small woman, thin as a rail. It sometimes happens that very large, heavy-set men with white, bloated bodies marry very small, skinny women (they are even inclined to choose such, I've noticed), and it is so strange to watch them standing or walking together.

It seems to me that if she had become pregnant by him in her final days it would have been an even more characteristic and essential finishing touch; other wise the picture is somehow incomplete. Have you seen how a peasant beats his wife? I have. He begins with a rope or a strap. Peasant life is without aesthetic pleasures such as music, theaters, and magazines; it is natural that this void be filled with something. Once he has bound his wife or thrust her feet into an opening in the floorboards, our peasant would begin, probably methodically, indifferently, even sleepily; his blows are measured; he doesn't listen to her cries and her pleading; or rather, he does listen, and listens with delight – otherwise what satisfaction would there be in beating her?

Do you know, gentlemen, people are born in various circumstances: can you not conceive that this woman, in other circumstances, might have been some Juliet or Beatrice from Shakespeare, or Gretchen from Faust? I'm not saying that she was – it would be absurd to claim that – but yet there could be the embryo of something very noble in her soul, something no worse, perhaps, than what could be found in a woman of

noble birth: a loving, even lofty, heart; a character filled with a most original beauty. The very fact that she hesitated so long in taking her own life shows something so quiet, meek, patient, and affectionate about her.

And so this same Beatrice or Gretchen is beaten and whipped like a dog! The blows rain down faster and faster, harder and harder – countless blows. He begins to grow heated and finds it to his taste. At last he grows wild, and his wildness pleases him. The animal cries of his victim intoxicate him like liquor: ‘I’ll wash your feet and drink the water,’ cries Beatrice in an inhuman voice.

But finally she grows quiet; she stops shrieking and only groans wildly, her breath catching constantly; and now the blows come ever faster and ever more furiously . . . Suddenly he throws down the strap; like a madman he seizes a stick or a branch, anything he can find, and shatters it with three final, terrible blows across her back – enough! He steps away, sits down at the table, heaves a sigh, and sets to drinking his kvass. A small girl, their daughter (and they did have a daughter!) trembles on the stove in the corner, trying to hide: she has heard her mother crying. He walks out of the hut. Toward dawn the mother would revive and get up, groaning and crying with every movement, and set off to milk the cow, fetch water, go to work.

And as he leaves he tells her in his slow, methodical, and serious voice: ‘Don’t you dare eat that bread. That’s my bread.’

Toward the end he also liked hanging her by her feet as well, the same way he had hung the chicken. Probably he would hang her, step aside, and sit down to have his porridge. When he had finished his meal he would suddenly seize the strap again and set to work on the hanging woman. The little girl, all a-tremble and huddled on the stove, would steal a wild glance at her mother hanging by her heels and try to hide again.

The mother hanged herself on a May morning, a bright spring day, probably. She had been seen the night before, beaten and completely

crazed. Before her death she had also made a trip to the village court, and there it was that they mumbled to her, 'Learn to live together.'

When the rope tightened around the mother's neck and she was making her last strangled cries, the little girl called out from the corner: 'Mamma, why are you choking?' Then she cautiously approached her, called out to the hanging woman, gazed wildly at her. In the course of the morning she came out of her corner to look at the mother again, until the father finally returned.

And now we see him before the court – solemn, puffy-faced, closely following the proceedings. He denies everything. 'We never spoke a sharp word to each other,' he says, dropping a few of his words like precious pearls. The jury leaves, and after a 'brief deliberation' they bring in the verdict: 'Guilty, but with recommendation for clemency.'

Note that the girl testified against her father. She told everything and, they say, wrung tears from the spectators. Had it not been for the 'clemency' of the jury he would have been exiled to Siberia. But with 'clemency' he need spend only eight months in prison and then come home and ask that his daughter, who testified against him on behalf of her mother, be returned to him. Once again he will have someone to hang by the heels.

'A recommendation for clemency!' And this verdict was given in full cognizance of the facts. They knew what awaited the child. Clemency to whom, and for what? You feel as if you are in some sort of whirlwind that's caught you up and twists and turns you around.

Wait a moment, I'll tell you one more story.

Once, before the new courts were established (not long before, however), I read of this particular little incident in our newspapers: a mother was holding in her arms her baby of a year or fourteen months. Children of that age are teething; they are ailing and cry and suffer a good deal. It seems the mother lost patience with the baby; perhaps she was very busy, and here she had to carry this child and listen to its heart-rending cries. She got angry.

But can such a small child be beaten for something like this? It's a pity to strike it, and what can it understand anyway? It's so helpless and can't do a thing for itself. And even if you do beat it, it won't stop crying. Its little tears will just keep pouring out and it will put its arms around you; or else it will start to kiss you and just go on crying. So she didn't beat the child. A samovar full of boiling water stood in the room. She put the child's little hand right under the tap and opened it. She held the child's hand under the boiling water for a good ten seconds.

That's a fact; I read it. But now imagine if this happened today and the woman was brought to trial. The jury goes out and, 'after a brief deliberation,' brings in the verdict: 'Recommendation for clemency.'

Well, imagine: I invite mothers, at least, to imagine it. And the defence lawyer, no doubt, would probably start twisting the facts:

'Gentlemen of the jury, this is not what one could call a humane act, but you must consider the case as a whole; you must take into account the circumstances, the environment. This woman is poor; she is the only person working in the household; she puts up with a lot. She had not even the means to hire a nurse for her child. It is only natural that at a moment when, filled with anger caused by the corroding environment, so to say, gentlemen, it is only natural that she should have put the child's hand under the samovar tap . . . , and so . . .'

Oh, of course I fully appreciate the value of the legal profession; it is an elevated calling and a universally respected one. But one cannot help sometimes looking at it from a particular point of view – a frivolous one, I agree – but involuntary nonetheless: what an unbearable job it must be at times, one thinks. The lawyer dodges, twists himself around like a snake, lies against his own conscience, against his own convictions, against all morality, against all humanity! No, truly, he earns his money.

'Come, come!' exclaims suddenly the sarcastic voice we heard before. 'Why this is all nonsense, nothing but a product of your imagination. A

jury never brought in such a verdict. No lawyer ever contorted the facts like that. You made it all up.'

But the wife, hung by her heels like a chicken; the 'This is my bread, don't you dare eat it'; the girl trembling on the stove, listening for half an hour to her mother's cries; and 'Mamma, why are you choking?' – isn't that just the same as the hand under the boiling water? Why it's almost the same!

'Backwardness, ignorance, the environment – have some pity,' the peasant's lawyer insisted. Yet millions of them do exist and not all hang their wives by their heels! There ought to be some limit here On the other hand, take an educated person: suppose he hangs his wife by her heels? Enough contortions, gentlemen of the bar. Enough of your 'environment.'

(1873)

The End