Youth

I said that my friendship with Dmitry opened up to me a new view of life, its purpose and relationships. The essence of this view consisted in the conviction that man's purpose is the striving toward moral perfection, and that this perfection is easy, possible, and eternal. But until now I had enjoyed only the discovery of new thoughts flowing from this conviction and the drawing up of brilliant plans for a moral, active future; yet my life went on in the same petty, tangled, and idle way.

Those virtuous thoughts which we went over in our conversations with my adored friend Dmitry, the wonderful Mitya, as I sometimes whispered to myself called him, still pleased only my mind and not my heart. But the time came when these thoughts came into my head with such fresh force of moral revelation that I was frightened, thinking how much time I had wasted in vain, and at once, in that very second, I wanted to apply these thoughts to life, with the firm intention never again to turn away from them.

And from that time I count the beginning of my youth.

I was at that time in my sixteenth year. Tutors continued to come to me. St.-Jérôme looked after my studies, and I prepared for the university unwillingly and against my will. Outside my studies my occupations consisted of solitary, incoherent daydreams and reflections, of doing gymnastics in order to become the strongest man in the world, of wandering without any definite aim or thought through all the rooms and especially the girls' corridor, and of gazing at myself in the mirror, from which, however, I always walked away with a heavy feeling of dejection and even disgust. My appearance, I became convinced, was not only unattractive, but I could not even console myself with the usual consolations in such cases. I could not say that I had an expressive, intelligent, or noble face. There was nothing expressive — the most ordinary, coarse, and bad features; my eyes were small and gray, especially at the time when I looked at myself in the mirror, and seemed stupid rather than intelligent. There was even less of the masculine; although I was not short and was very strong for my years, all the features of my face were soft, flabby, and indefinite. There was nothing noble either; on the contrary, my face was like that of a simple peasant, and my legs and hands were just as big; and this seemed very shameful to me at that time.