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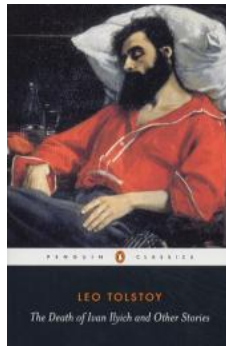
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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Foreordained Final Farewell and Depression of Ivan Ilyich

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Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich

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It is evident and apparent that even the worlds richest or the poorest individual can't conjure death to have a different pattern, different from the regular occurrence. When one lies in his death bed everything turns out to be different. Every patient in his/her death bed fears the demise and thinks about a pain-free journey to eternity and some may wish to loiter around spirituality. The life of Ivan Ilyich is an ordinary one and, therefore, becomes a terrible one. "Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible." (DOII 10)

Liked by All

Ivan Ilyich died at the age of forty five, which is rather known as 'the middle age of a man' where man's mind is mainly occupied with his memories of youth as well as the anxiety of aging and death. Ivan Ilyich had an older and a younger brother. He was not so formal and cold like his elder brother or a mere failure like his younger brother, but was a happy mean between them. He was so much liked by everyone and in turn he also became so acquainted with everyone. "Neither as a boy nor as a man was he a toady, but from early youth was by nature attracted to people of high station as a fly is drawn to the light, assimilating their ways and views of life and establishing friendly relations with them." (DOII 11)

Marriage with Praskovya

Next comes the vital part of life, love and marriage. Praskovya Fedorovna Mikhel is a charming and a pretty woman he has ever seen and he initially becomes attracted to her. He attends balls and dances with Praskovya. It is these dances which make Praskovya fall in love with him. At first he does not have any intention of getting married, but after Praskovya has

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fallen for him, he questions himself about getting married. “She fell in love with him. Ivan Ilych had at first no definite intention of marrying, but when the girl fell in love with him he said to himself: “Really, why shouldn’t I marry?” (DOII 14) So Ivan gets married. At the initial stages of married life everything seems to be pleasant, but things take a turn when Praskovya gets pregnant. From the first month of his wife’s pregnancy, something new, unpleasant, depressing, and unseemly, from which there is no way of escape, unexpectedly shows itself.

Irritating Marriage Brings Changes

As his wife grows more and more irritable towards Ivan, Ivan turns his entire concentration and interest on his work. He turns out to be a workaholic and ambitious. According to him the conveniences like home, wife, bed and dinner at table seem to have meaning in marriage, rather than the intricate relationship of husband and wife.

Preoccupation with Job

For seventeen years Ivan remains married and experiences this existential living. Though he earns 3500 roubles per month it is still insufficient to run the family. In order to save money, he avails of leave of absence and leaves for his wife’s brother’s country with his wife. After going there he couldn’t spend the time ideally and a sense of ennui surrounds him, for he really wishes to go to his home and look after his valuable job. This preoccupation of the job is so rooted in his mind, when he experiences marriage becoming meaningless. He did not have this kind of feeling when he was younger. So the things were all fine and everyone seemed to be in the pink of health, except Ivan.

Onset and Progress of Disease

Ivan experiences some strange taste in his mouth and he has some discomfort in his left side. This discomfort does not vanish but grows stronger in course of time. This doesn't leave Ivan in a comfy sofa in a cozy house; rather it makes him irritable and ill humored. The rift between husband and wife becomes constant.

“But this discomfort increased and, though not exactly painful, grew into a sense of pressure in his side accompanied by ill humour. Quarrels between husband and wife became more and more frequent, and soon the ease and amenity disappeared and even the decorum was barely maintained.” (DOI 23).

Confusion Sets In

Ivan Ilyich is not sure what is happening to him and complains about it to his wife. The wife in turn tells him to visit a celebrated doctor as all the world would say. Everything seems dismal to Ivan, all the waiting for the doctor and the air of importance the doctor has. He somehow manages to visit the doctor. Many biological tests are performed on him. The doctor is all Latin to him for Ivan does not understand even a word uttered by the doctor. All his concern is whether this illness is something serious or not for which the doctor could not answer, because he suspects something more to be going on with Ivan than usual sickness. To his distress Ivan cannot make up his mind even for a minute to find the real answer, as to whether the illness is serious or not. He returns home to find his wife and starts to narrate his session with the doctor. But the wife does not wish to hear her husband, rather wants to go out with her daughter.

“He reached home and began to tell his wife about it. She listened, but in the middle of

his account his daughter came in with her hat on, ready to go out with her mother. She sat

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down reluctantly to listen to this tedious story, but could not stand it long, and her mother too did not hear him to the end.” (DOII 25).

Pain Grows Stronger – Sense of Isolation Sets In

Right after the visit of the doctor, Ivan’s duty is to follow the instructions and medications prescribed by the doctor. He is so conscious about his illness that he consumes the proper medications out of fear of more pain. Though the pain grows stronger and the disease starts growing, he does not stop visiting the doctors regularly. He has this sense of hope that someday by way of medicating, his pain would vanish, but it does not. He observes some idiosyncratic changes in his wife and daughter. They no longer listen to him as they have concluded that Ivan has become depressive and gloomy. “He saw that his household, especially his wife and daughter who were in a perfect whirl of visiting, did not understand anything of it and were annoyed that he was so depressed and so exacting, as if he were to blame for it.” (DOII 27) He expects someone in his family to understand his pain, but in vain, since no one seemed to care. This sense of isolation lands Ivan in a very distressful state of anxiety, pain and depression.

Solace through Death?

Ivan is so worried and has such anguish that he questions himself often about death and answers himself, not with a proper answer, but with the solace that eventually everyone is going to die sooner or later.

“What’s the use? It makes no difference,” he said to himself, staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness. “Death. Yes, death. And none of them knows or wishes to know it, and they have no pity for me. Now they are playing.” (He heard through the door the distant

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sound of a song and its accompaniment.) “It’s all the same to them, but they will die too! Fools! I first, and they later, but it will be the same for them. And now they are merry...the beasts!” (DOII 34)

Gerasim the Peasant

The only individual who wanted to stay by Ivan during his episode of pain was Gerasim. He was a peasant and duly understood about the pain and was all ears to listen to Ivan. He wept on giving an account of his helplessness, his terrible loneliness, the cruelty of man, the cruelty of God, and the absence of God. The main problem of man seems to be that he realizes that God is absent when he is lonely, helpless and in terrible pain. Man expects some sort of escape from the pain he has, both mental and physical, but it never lets him leave or escape his mysterious destiny which no one can understand. Ivan starts weeping like a child and often questions God about his bizarre pain, “Why hast Thou done all this? Why hast Thou brought me here? Why, why dost Thou torment me so terribly?” (DOII 45)

Ivan’s Death

Even for a moment, Ivan cannot not feel better because the pain does not stop in one spot, but radiates throughout the body. At the final stage of the pain he does what everyone tends to do. He shouts and screams for three consecutive days with various intonations. His acrimony was from the fact that all he experiences is the pain, but death never seems to free him. He is in a dilemma whether to die or not, but what he really wishes is an escape from this annoying pain permanently. Finally, Ivan breathes his last breath and dies: ““Death is finished,” he said to

himself. “It is no more!” He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died.”

Why is there a concern over Ivan Ilych's death? He was an ordinary man who aspired for material comforts that most people seek while leading their ordinary life. He had an ordinary death. Nearly all of us face this quotidian pattern especially in death. While Tolstoy's story is deep and multilayered, we can observe the physical and spiritual suffering of a man. Ivan married because it was the correct societal thing to do; whether he loved his wife or not was almost immaterial to him. His children were a necessary addition to his life. Though his denial of illness, suffering, depression and pain are so pitiful and pathetic, his self-realization of what he could have done better in life and with relationships, acceptance of his fate, and the ultimate peace he found at the end of life is remarkable and noteworthy.

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