



Grand Prince Vladimir Monomakh's Instruction to His Children ^[1]

Being ill and about to seat myself in the sleigh,[2] I have considered in my soul and have praised God for having preserved me, sinful man, to this day. Do not make light of this instruction, my children, or anyone else who may hear it, but if it please any of you children, take it to heart, and give up indolence, and begin to work.

Above all, for the sake of the Lord and your own souls, have the fear of the Lord in your hearts by doing unstinted charity, for that is the beginning of all good. If this instruction should not please any of you, be not angry but say thus: "Starting out on a distant journey and about to seat himself in the sleigh, he spoke this insipidity."

My brothers' messengers met me on the Volga and said: "Hasten to us that we may drive out the sons of Rostislav,[3] and take away their patrimony, and if you go not with us, we shall stand alone, and you will be alone." And I said: "Even though you may be angry, I cannot go with you and transgress the cross." And having sent them away, I picked up a Psalter in my sorrow, opened it, and these words were before me: "Why are you sad, my soul? Why are you grieved?" and so forth. And then I picked out words here and there, and put them in order, and I wrote: "If the latter things do not please you, accept the former. . . ."

Forsooth, my children, consider how kind and overkind God, the lover of men, is. We men, who are sinful and mortal, wish to avenge ourselves and immediately to spill the blood of him who has done us any wrong; but our Lord, who rules over life and death, suffers our transgressions above our heads, nay to the very end of our lives, like a father, now loving, now chastising his child, and again fondling it. Our Lord has likewise shown us how to be victorious over our foe, how to assuage and conquer him with three good acts: with repentance, tears and charity. It is not hard, my children, to keep this command of the Lord, and you can rid yourselves of your sins by those three acts, and you will not forfeit the kingdom of heaven. And, I beg you, be not slack in the performance of the Lord's commands, and do not forget those three acts, for neither solitude, nor monkhood, nor hunger, such as many good people suffer, is hard to bear, but with a small act you may gain the favour of the Lord. What is man that Thou shouldst remember him?

Thou art great, O Lord, and Thy works are wonderful, and human understanding cannot grasp all Thy miracles! And again we say: Thou art great, O Lord, and Thy works are wonderful, and Thy name be blessed and praised for ever and through all the earth! For who would not praise and glorify Thy power and Thy great miracles and goodness that are evident in this world: how by Thy wisdom the heaven is built, how the sun, the moon, the stars, darkness and light, and the earth is placed on the waters, O Lord! How the various animals, birds and fishes are adorned by Thy foresight, O Lord! And we also wonder at the miracle, how that He has created man from the dust, how different the forms of human faces are, how if you look at the whole world, you will not find all made in one image, but the face of each according to God's wisdom. And we wonder also how the birds of the sky come from the south, and do not remain in one country, but both the weak and the strong fly to all lands, by the will of God, in order to fill the woods and fields.

All these God has given for the use of man, for food and enjoyment.

Listen to me, and if you will not accept all, heed at least half. If God should mollify your hearts, shed tears over your sins and say: "As Thou hast shown mercy to the harlot, the murderer and the publican, even thus show mercy to us sinners. " Do this in church and when you lie down to sleep. Fail not to do so a single night. If you can, make your obeisance to the ground; if your strength gives out, do it thrice; in any case, be not slack in it, for with this nightly obeisance and singing man conquers the devil and frees himself from the sins he has committed during the day.

When you are riding and have no engagement with anyone, and you know no other prayer, keep on repeating secretly: " Lord, have mercy upon me! " for it is better to say this prayer than to think idle things. Above all, forget not the destitute, but feed them according to your means, and give to the orphan, and protect the widow, and allow not the strong to oppress the people. Slay neither the righteous, nor the wrongdoer, nor order him to be slain who is guilty of death, and do not ruin a Christian soul.

Whenever you speak, whether it be a bad or a good word, swear not by the Lord, nor make the sign of the cross, for there is no need. If you have occasion to kiss the cross with your brothers or with anyone else, first inquire your heart whether you will keep the promise, then kiss it; and having kissed it, see to it that you do not transgress, and your soul perish. As for the bishops, priests and abbots, receive their benediction in love, and do not keep away from them, but love them with all your might, and provide for them, that you may receive their prayers to God. Above all, have no pride in your hearts and minds, but say: " We are mortal, alive to-day, and tomorrow in the grave. All that Thou hast given us, is not ours, but Thine, and Thou hast entrusted it to us for but a few days." Put away no treasure in the earth, for that is a great sin.

Honour the elders as your father, and the younger ones as your brothers. Be not slack in your houses, but watch everything: Do not rely upon yourthane, nor your servant

lest those who come to see you should make light of your house and of your dinner. If you start out to a war, be not slack, depend not upon your generals, nor abandon yourselves to drinking and eating and sleeping. Put out the guards yourselves, and lie down to sleep only after you have placed the guards all around the army, and rise early. Do not take off your armour in haste, without examination, for man perishes suddenly through his negligence. Avoid lying and drunkenness and debauchery, for body and soul perish from them.

Whenever you travel over your lands, permit not the servants, neither your own, nor a stranger's, to do any damage in the villages, or in the fields, that they may not curse you. Wheresoever you go, and wherever you stay, give the destitute to eat and to drink. Above all honour the stranger, whencesoever he may come, whether he be a commoner, a nobleman or an ambassador; if you are not able to honour him with gifts, give him food and drink, for these travellers will proclaim a man to all the lands, whether he be good or bad. Call on the sick, go to funerals, for we are all mortal, and pass not by a man without greeting him with kind words. Love your wives, but let them not rule you.

But the main thing is that you should keep the fear of the Lord higher than anything else. If you should forget this, read this often; then shall I have no shame, and all will be well with you. Whatever good you know, do not forget it, and what you do not know, learn it; just as my father had learned, staying at home, five languages,[4] for this makes one honoured in other lands. Indolence is the mother of all vices: what one knows, one forgets, and what one does not know, one does not learn. While doing good, be not negligent in any good act, first of all in regard to the Church. abet not the sun find you in bed. Thus my father of blessed memory did, and thus do all good, perfect men. Having prayed to God at daybreak, he, noticing the rising sun, praised God in joy and said: " Thou hast made me see, Christ, O Lord, and Thou hast given me this beautiful light! " and again: " Lord, add years to my years that I may repent my sins and, improving my life, may praise God." And thus he did when he seated himself to take counsel with the družina, or to judge people, or when he went on the chase, or out riding, or laid himself down to sleep: but sleep has been intended by the fjord for the afternoon, when both beasts and birds and men rest themselves.

And now I shall tell you, my children, of my labours which I have performed either in my expeditions or on the chase these thirteen years. First I went to Rostov[5] through the country of the Vyatches[6], whither my father sent me when he himself went to Kursk; next I went to Smolensk [follows an account of his expeditions]. . . . Altogether I have made eighty-three long journeys and I cannot recall how many shorter ones. I have made peace with the Polovtses[7] twenty

times lacking one, both with my father and without him, giving away much of my cattle and garments. I have liberated from their shackles royal princes of the Polovtses as follows. . . .

I have undergone many hardships in the chase. Near Chernigov I have with my own hand caught ten or twenty wild horses in the forests, and I have besides caught elsewhere many wild horses with my hands, as I used to travel through Russia. Two aurochs threw me and my horse with their horns: a stag butted me with his horns; an elk trampled me under his feet, and another butted me with his horns. A boar took away the sword at my side; a bear bit me into my knee covering; a grim animal [wolf] leaped at my loins and threw me with my horse: and yet God has preserved me. I have often fallen from my horse, I twice injured my head and frequently hurt my hands and feet in my youth, being reckless of my life and not sparing my head. Whatever there was to be done by my servants, I did myself, in war and in the chase, in daytime and at night, in the summer heat and in winter, without taking any rest. I depended neither on the *posadniks*[8] nor the heralds, but did all myself, and looked after my house. In the chase I looked myself after the hunting outfit, the horses, the falcons and the sparrow-hawks. Also have I not permitted the mighty to offend the poor peasants and the destitute widows, and I have myself looked after the church property and the divine service.

Think not ill of me, my children, nor anyone else who may read this, for I do not boast of my daring, but praise God and proclaim His goodness for having preserved me, sinful and miserable man, for so many years from the hour of death, for having made me, miserable one, active in the performance of all humane acts. Having read this instruction, may you hasten to do all good acts and praise the Lord with His saints. Fear neither death, my children, nor war, nor beast, but do what behooves men to do, whatever God may send you. Just as I have come out hale from war, from encounters with animals, from the water, and from my falls, even so none of you can be injured or killed, if it be not so ordained by God. And if death come from the Lord, neither father, nor mother, nor brothers can save you. Though it is good to take care of oneself, yet God's protection is better than man's.