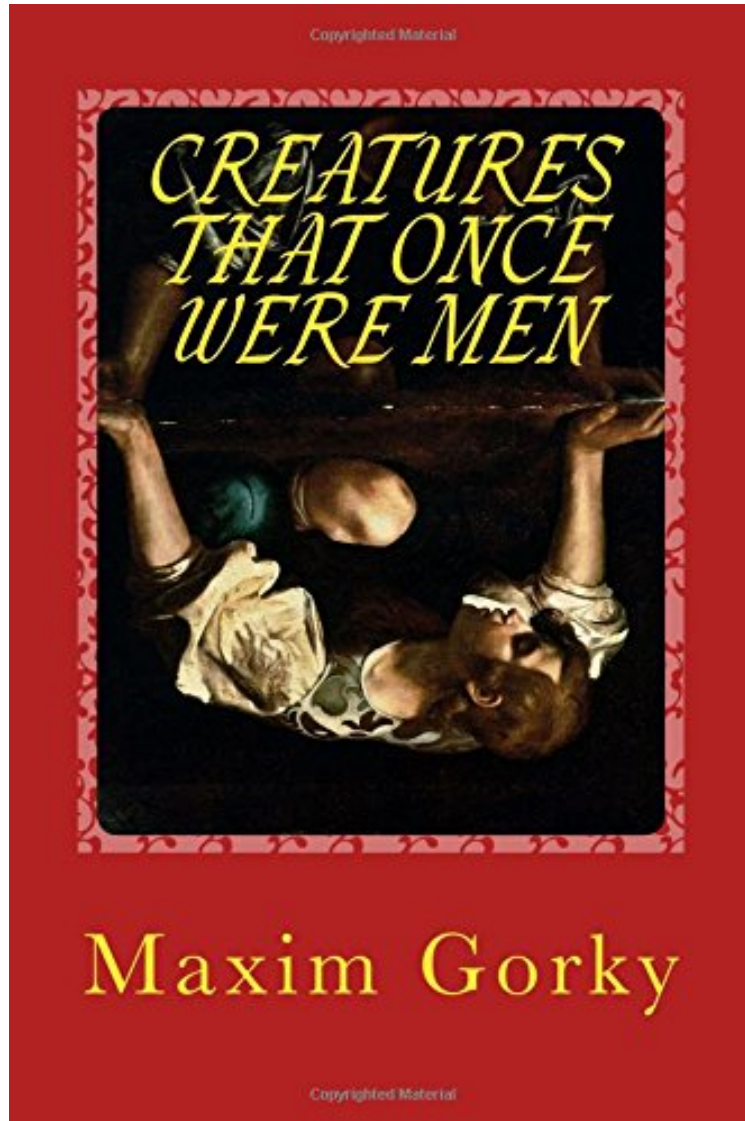


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Maxim Gorky, Maksim Gorky

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If you enjoy Mr Buchan, this is one to read. Not my favorite by any means, but it's part of a solid body of work. I lost interest or focus - not sure which sometimes. Still, glad I got it and read it. This author is amazing.

In front of you is the main street, with two rows of miserable-looking huts with shuttered windows and old walls pressing on each other and leaning forward. The roofs of these time-worn habitations are full of holes, and have been patched here and there with laths; from underneath them project mildewed beams, which are shaded by the dusty-leaved elder-trees and crooked white willow pitiable flora of those suburbs inhabited by the poor. The dull green time-stained panes of the windows look upon each other with the cowardly glances of cheats. Through the street and toward the adjacent mountain runs the sinuous path, winding through the deep ditches filled with rain-water. Here and there are piled heaps of dust and other rubbish either refuse or else put there purposely to keep the rain-water from flooding the houses. On the top of the mountain, among green gardens with dense foliage, beautiful stone houses lie hidden; the belfries of the churches rise proudly toward the sky, and their gilded crosses shine beneath the rays of the sun. During the rainy weather the neighboring town pours its water into this main road, which, at other times, is full of its dust, and all these miserable houses seem, as it were, thrown by some powerful hand into that heap of dust, rubbish, and rainwater. They cling to the ground beneath the high mountain, exposed to the sun, surrounded by decaying refuse, and their sodden appearance impresses one with the same feeling as would the half-rotten trunk of an old tree. At the end of the main street, as if thrown out of the town, stood a two-storied house, which had been rented from Petunikoff, a merchant and resident of the town. It was in comparatively good order, being farther from the mountain, while near it were the open fields, and about half-a-mile away the river ran its winding course. This large old house had the most dismal aspect amid its surroundings. The walls bent outward, and there was hardly a pane of glass in any of the windows, except some of the fragments, which looked like the water of the marshes dull green. The spaces of wall between the windows were covered with spots, as if time were trying to write there in hieroglyphics the history of the old house, and the tottering roof added still more to its pitiable condition. It seemed as if the whole building bent toward the ground, to await the last stroke of that fate which should transform it into a chaos of rotting remains, and finally into dust. The gates were open, one-half of them displaced and lying on the ground at the entrance, while between its bars had grown the grass, which also covered the large and empty court-yard. In the depths of this yard stood a low, iron-roofed, smoke-begrimed building. The house itself was of course unoccupied, but this shed, formerly a blacksmith's forge, was now turned into a "dosshouse," kept by a retired captain named Aristid Fomich Kuvalda. In the interior of the dosshouse was a long, wide and grimy board, measuring some 28 by 70 feet. The room was lighted on one side by four small square windows, and on the other by a wide door. The unpainted brick walls were black with smoke, and the ceiling, which was built of timber, was almost black. In the middle stood a large stove, the furnace of which served as its foundation, and around this stove and along the walls were also long, wide boards, which served as beds for the lodgers. The walls smelt of smoke, the earthen floor of dampness, and the long, wide board of rotting rags. The place of the proprietor was on the top of the stove, while the boards surrounding it were intended for those who were on good terms with the owner, and who were honored by his friendship. During the day the captain passed most of his time sitting on a kind of bench, made by himself by placing bricks against the wall of the court-yard, or else in the eating-house of Egor Yavilovitch, which was opposite the house, where he took all his meals and where he also drank vodka.