

Part 1

Chapter 1

Introductory

SOME DETAILS OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF THAT HIGHLY RESPECTED GENTLEMAN STEFAN TEOFIMOVITCH VERHOVENSKY.

IN UNDERTAKING to describe the recent and strange incidents in our town, till lately wrapped in uneventful obscurity, I find myself forced in absence of literary skill to begin my story rather far back, that is to say, with certain biographical details concerning that talented and highly-esteemed gentleman, Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky. I trust that these details may at least serve as an introduction, while my projected story itself will come later.

I will say at once that Stepan Trofimovitch had always filled a particular role among us, that of the progressive patriot, so to say, and he was passionately fond of playing the part so much so that I really believe he could not have existed without it. Not that I would put him on a level with an actor at a theatre, God forbid, for I really have a respect for him. This may all have been the effect of habit, or rather, more exactly of a generous propensity he had from his earliest years for indulging in an agreeable day-dream in which he figured as a picturesque public character. He fondly loved, for instance, his position as a "persecuted" man and, so to speak, an "exile." There is a sort of traditional glamour about those two little words that fascinated him once for all and, exalting him gradually in his own opinion, raised him in the course of years to a lofty pedestal very gratifying to vanity. In an English satire of the last century, Gulliver, returning from the land of the Lilliputians where the people were only three or four inches high, had grown so accustomed to consider himself a giant among them, that as he walked along the streets of London he could not help crying out to carriages and passers-by to be careful and get out of his way for fear he should crush them, imagining that they were little and he was still a giant. He was laughed at and abused for it, and rough coachmen even lashed at the giant with their

whips. But was that just? What may not be done by habit? Habit had brought Stepan Trofimovitch almost to the same position, but in a more innocent and inoffensive form, if one may use such expressions, for he was a most excellent man.

I am even inclined to suppose that towards the end he had been entirely forgotten everywhere; but still it cannot be said that his name had never been known. It is beyond question that he had at one time belonged to a certain distinguished constellation of celebrated leaders of the last generation, and at one time though only for the briefest moment this name was pronounced by many hasty persons of that day almost as though it were on a level with the names of Tchaadaev, of Byelinsky, of Granovsky, and of Herzen, who had only just begun to write abroad. But Stepan Trofimovitch's activity ceased almost at the moment it began, owing, so to say, to a "vortex of combined circumstances." And would you believe it? It turned out afterwards that there had been no "vortex" and even no "circumstances," at least in that connection. I only learned the other day to my intense amazement, though on the most unimpeachable authority, that Stepan Trofimovitch had lived among us in our province not as an "exile" as we were accustomed to believe, and had never even been under police supervision at all. Such is the force of imagination! All his life he sincerely believed that in certain spheres he was a constant cause of apprehension, that every step he took was watched and noted, and that each one of the three governors who succeeded one another during twenty years in our province came with special and uneasy ideas concerning him, which had, by higher powers, been impressed upon each before everything else, on receiving the appointment. Had anyone assured the honest man on the most irrefutable grounds that he had nothing to be afraid of, he would certainly have been offended. Yet Stepan Trofimovitch was a most intelligent and gifted man, even, so to say, a man of science, though indeed, in science ... well, in fact he had not done such great things in science. I believe indeed he had done nothing at all. But that's very often the case, of course, with men of science among us in Russia.

He came back from abroad and was brilliant in the capacity of lecturer at the university, towards the end of the forties. He only had time to deliver a few lectures, I believe they were about the Arabs; he maintained, too, a brilliant thesis on the political and Hanseatic importance of the German town Hanau, of which there was promise in the epoch between 1413 and 1428, and on the special and obscure reasons why that promise was never fulfilled. This dissertation was a cruel and skilful thrust at the

Slavophiles of the day, and at once made him numerous and irreconcilable enemies among them. Later on after he had lost his post as lecturer, however he published (by way of revenge, so to say, and to show them what a man they had lost) in a progressive monthly review, which translated Dickens and advocated the views of George Sand, the beginning of a very profound investigation into the causes, I believe, of the extraordinary moral nobility of certain knights at a certain epoch or something of that nature.

Some lofty and exceptionally noble idea was maintained in it, anyway. It was said afterwards that the continuation was hurriedly forbidden and even that the progressive review had to suffer for having printed the first part. That may very well have been so, for what was not possible in those days? Though, in this case, it is more likely that there was nothing of the kind, and that the author himself was too lazy to conclude his essay. He cut short his lectures on the Arabs because, somehow and by some one (probably one of his reactionary enemies) a letter had been seized giving an account of certain circumstances, in consequence of which some one had demanded an explanation from him. I don't know whether the story is true, but it was asserted that at the same time there was discovered in Petersburg a vast, unnatural, and illegal conspiracy of thirty people which almost shook society to its foundations. It was said that they were positively on the point of translating Fourier. As though of design a poem of Stepan Trofimovitch's was seized in Moscow at that very time, though it had been written six years before in Berlin in his earliest youth, and manuscript copies had been passed round a circle consisting of two poetical amateurs and one student. This poem is lying now on my table. No longer ago than last year I received a recent copy in his own handwriting from Stepan Trofimovitch himself, signed by him, and bound in a splendid red leather binding. It is not without poetic merit, however, and even a certain talent. It's strange, but in those days (or to be more exact, in the thirties) people were constantly composing in that style. I find it difficult to describe the subject, for I really do not understand it. It is some sort of an allegory in lyrical-dramatic form, recalling the second part of Faust. The scene opens with a chorus of women, followed by a chorus of men, then a chorus of incorporeal powers of some sort, and at the end of all a chorus of spirits not yet living but very eager to come to life. All these choruses sing about something very indefinite, for the most part about somebody's curse, but with a tinge of the higher humour. But the scene is suddenly changed. There begins a sort of "festival of life" at which even insects sing, a tortoise comes on the

scene with certain sacramental Latin words, and even, if I remember aright, a mineral sings about something that is a quite inanimate object. In fact, they all sing continually, or if they converse, it is simply to abuse one another vaguely, but again with a tinge of higher meaning. At last the scene is changed again; a wilderness appears, and among the rocks there wanders a civilized young man who picks and sucks certain herbs. Asked by a fairy why he sucks these herbs, he answers that, conscious of a superfluity of life in himself, he seeks forgetfulness, and finds it in the juice of these herbs, but that his great desire is to lose his reason at once (a desire possibly superfluous). Then a youth of indescribable beauty rides in on a black steed, and an immense multitude of all nations follow him. The youth represents death, for whom all the peoples are yearning. And finally, in the last scene we are suddenly shown the Tower of Babel, and certain athletes at last finish building it with a song of new hope, and when at length they complete the topmost pinnacle, the lord (of Olympia, let us say) takes flight in a comic fashion, and man, grasping the situation and seizing his place, at once begins a new life with new insight into things. Well, this poem was thought at that time to be dangerous. Last year I proposed to Stepan Trofimovitch to publish it, on the ground of its perfect harmlessness nowadays, but he declined the suggestion with evident dissatisfaction. My view of its complete harmlessness evidently displeased him, and I even ascribe to it a certain coldness on his part, which lasted two whole months.

And what do you think? Suddenly, almost at the time I proposed printing it here, our poem was published abroad in a collection of revolutionary verse, without the knowledge of Stepan Trofimovitch. He was at first alarmed, rushed to the governor, and wrote a noble letter in self-defence to Petersburg. He read it to me twice, but did not send it, not knowing to whom to address it. In fact he was in a state of agitation for a whole month, but I am convinced that in the secret recesses of his heart he was enormously flattered. He almost took the copy of the collection to bed with him, and kept it hidden under his mattress in the daytime; he positively would not allow the women to turn his bed, and although he expected every day a telegram, he held his head high. No telegram came. Then he made friends with me again, which is a proof of the extreme kindness of his gentle and unresentful heart.

Of course I don't assert that he had never suffered for his convictions at all, but I am fully convinced that he might have gone on lecturing on his Arabs as long as he liked, if he had only given the necessary

explanations. But he was too lofty, and he proceeded with peculiar haste to assure himself that his career was ruined for ever "by the vortex of circumstance." And if the whole truth is to be told the real cause of the change in his career was the very delicate proposition which had been made before and was then renewed by Varvara Petrovna Stavrogin, a lady of great wealth, the wife of a lieutenant-general, that he should undertake the education and the whole intellectual development of her only son in the capacity of a superior sort of teacher and friend, to say nothing of a magnificent salary. This proposal had been made to him the first time in Berlin, at the moment when he was first left a widower. His first wife was a frivolous girl from our province, whom he married in his early and unthinking youth, and apparently he had had a great deal of trouble with this young person, charming as she was, owing to the lack of means for her support; and also from other, more delicate, reasons. She died in Paris after three years' separation from him, leaving him a son of five years old; "the fruit of our first, joyous, and unclouded love," were the words the sorrowing father once let fall in my presence.

The child had, from the first, been sent back to Russia, where he was brought up in the charge of distant cousins in some remote region. Stepan Trofimovitch had declined Varvara Petrovna's proposal on that occasion and had quickly married again, before the year was over, a taciturn Berlin girl, and, what makes it more strange, there was no particular necessity for him to do so. But apart from his marriage there were, it appears, other reasons for his declining the situation. He was tempted by the resounding fame of a professor, celebrated at that time, and he, in his turn, hastened to the lecturer's chair for which he had been preparing himself, to try his eagle wings in flight. But now with singed wings he naturally remembered the proposition which even then had made him hesitate. The sudden death of his second wife, who did not live a year with him, settled the matter decisively. To put it plainly it was all brought about by the passionate sympathy and priceless, so to speak, classic friendship of Varvara Petrovna, if one may use such an expression of friendship. He flung himself into the arms of this friendship, and his position was settled for more than twenty years. I use the expression "flung himself into the arms of," but God forbid that anyone should fly to idle and superfluous conclusions. These embraces must be understood only in the most loftily moral sense. The most refined and delicate tie united these two beings, both so remarkable, for ever.

The post of tutor was the more readily accepted too, as the property a very small one left to Stepan Trofimovitch by his first wife was close to

Skvoreshniki, the Stavrogins' magnificent estate on the outskirts of our provincial town. Besides, in the stillness of his study, far from the immense burden of university work, it was always possible to devote himself to the service of science, and to enrich the literature of his country with erudite studies. These works did not appear. But on the other hand it did appear possible to spend the rest of his life, more than twenty years, "a reproach incarnate," so to speak, to his native country, in the words of a popular poet:

Reproach incarnate thou didst stand
Erect before thy Fatherland,
O Liberal idealist!

But the person to whom the popular poet referred may perhaps have had the right to adopt that pose for the rest of his life if he had wished to do so, though it must have been tedious. Our Stepan Trofimovitch was, to tell the truth, only an imitator compared with such people; moreover, he had grown weary of standing erect and often lay down for a while. But, to do him justice, the "incarnation of reproach" was preserved even in the recumbent attitude, the more so as that was quite sufficient for the province. You should have seen him at our club when he sat down to cards. His whole figure seemed to exclaim "Cards! Me sit down to whist with you! Is it consistent? Who is responsible for it? Who has shattered my energies and turned them to whist? Ah, perish, Russia!" and he would majestically trump with a heart.

And to tell the truth he dearly loved a game of cards, which led him, especially in later years, into frequent and unpleasant skirmishes with Varvara Petrovna, particularly as he was always losing. But of that later. I will only observe that he was a man of tender conscience (that is, sometimes) and so was often depressed. In the course of his twenty years' friendship with Varvara Petrovna he used regularly, three or four times a year, to sink into a state of "patriotic grief," as it was called among us, or rather really into an attack of spleen, but our estimable Varvara Petrovna preferred the former phrase. Of late years his grief had begun to be not only patriotic, but at times alcoholic too; but Varvara Petrovna's alertness succeeded in keeping him all his life from trivial inclinations. And he needed some one to look after him indeed, for he sometimes behaved very oddly: in the midst of his exalted sorrow he would begin laughing like any simple peasant. There were moments when he began to take a humorous tone even about himself. But there was nothing Varvara Petrovna dreaded so much as a humorous tone. She was a woman of the classic type, a female Maecenas, invariably guided only by the

highest considerations. The influence of this exalted lady over her poor friend for twenty years is a fact of the first importance. I shall need to speak of her more particularly, which I now proceed to do.

There are strange friendships. The two friends are always ready to fly at one another, and go on like that all their lives, and yet they cannot separate. Parting, in fact, is utterly impossible. The one who has begun the quarrel and separated will be the first to fall ill and even die, perhaps, if the separation comes off. I know for a positive fact that several times Stepan Trofimovitch has jumped up from the sofa and beaten the wall with his fists after the most 'intimate and emotional tete-a-tete with Varvara Petrovna.

This proceeding was by no means an empty symbol; indeed, on one occasion, he broke some plaster off the wall. It may be asked how I come to know such delicate details. What if I were myself a witness of it? What if Stepan Trofimovitch himself has, on more than one occasion, sobbed on my shoulder while he described to me in lurid colours all his most secret feelings. (And what was there he did not say at such times!) But what almost always happened after these tearful outbreaks was that next day he was ready to crucify himself for his ingratitude. He would send for me in a hurry or run over to see me simply to assure me that Varvara Petrovna was "an angel of honour and delicacy, while he was very much the opposite." He did not only run to confide in me, but, on more than one occasion, described it all to her in the most eloquent letter, and wrote a full signed confession that no longer ago than the day before he had told an outsider that she kept him out of vanity, that she was envious of his talents and erudition, that she hated him and was only afraid to express her hatred openly, dreading that he would leave her and so damage her literary reputation, that this drove him to self-contempt, and he was resolved to die a violent death, and that he was waiting for the final word from her which would decide everything, and so on and so on in the same style. You can fancy after this what an hysterical pitch the nervous outbreaks of this most innocent of all fifty-year-old infants sometimes reached! I once read one of these letters after some quarrel between them, arising from a trivial matter, but growing venomous as it went on. I was horrified and besought him not to send it.

"I must ... more honourable ... duty ... I shall die if I don't confess everything, everything!" he answered almost in delirium, and he did send the letter.

That was the difference between them, that Varvara Petrovna never would have sent such a letter. It is true that he was passionately fond of writing, he wrote to her though he lived in the same house, and during hysterical interludes he would write two letters a day. I know for a fact that she always read these letters with the greatest attention, even when she received two a day, and after reading them she put them away in a special drawer, sorted and annotated; moreover, she pondered them in her heart. But she kept her friend all day without an answer, met him as though there were nothing the matter, exactly as though nothing special had happened the day before. By degrees she broke him in so completely that at last he did not himself dare to allude to what had happened the day before, and only glanced into her eyes at times. But she never forgot anything, while he sometimes forgot too quickly, and encouraged by her composure he would not infrequently, if friends came in, laugh and make jokes over the champagne the very same day. With what malignancy she must have looked at him at such moments, while he noticed nothing! Perhaps in a week's time, a month's time, or even six months later, chancing to recall some phrase in such a letter, and then the whole letter with all its attendant circumstances, he would suddenly grow hot with shame, and be so upset that he fell ill with one of his attacks of "summer cholera." These attacks of a sort of "summer cholera" were, in some cases, the regular consequence of his nervous agitations and were an interesting peculiarity of his physical constitution.

No doubt Varvara Petrovna did very often hate him. But there was one thing he had not discerned up to the end: that was that he had become for her a son, her creation, even, one may say, her invention; he had become flesh of her flesh, and she kept and supported him not simply from "envy of his talents." And how wounded she must have been by such suppositions! An inexhaustible love for him lay concealed in her heart in the midst of continual hatred, jealousy, and contempt. She would not let a speck of dust fall upon him, coddled him up for twenty-two years, would not have slept for nights together if there were the faintest breath against his reputation as a poet, a learned man, and a public character. She had invented him, and had been the first to believe in her own invention. He was, after a fashion, her day-dream... . But in return she exacted a great deal from him, sometimes even slavishness. It was incredible how long she harboured resentment. I have two anecdotes to tell about that.

On one occasion, just at the time when the first rumours of the emancipation of the serfs were in the air, when all Russia was exulting and making ready for a complete regeneration, Varvara Petrovna was visited by a baron from Petersburg, a man of the highest connections, and very closely associated with the new reform. Varvara Petrovna prized such visits highly, as her connections in higher circles had grown weaker and weaker since the death of her husband, and had at last ceased altogether. The baron spent an hour drinking tea with her. There was no one else present but Stepan Trofimovitch, whom Varvara Petrovna invited and exhibited. The baron had heard something about him before or affected to have done so, but paid little attention to him at tea. Stepan Trofimovitch of course was incapable of making a social blunder, and his manners were most elegant. Though I believe he was by no means of exalted origin, yet it happened that he had from earliest childhood been brought up in a Moscow household of high rank, and consequently was well bred. He spoke French like a Parisian. Thus the baron was to have seen from the first glance the sort of people with whom Varvara Petrovna surrounded herself, even in provincial seclusion. But things did not fall out like this. When the baron positively asserted the absolute truth of the rumours of the great reform, which were then only just beginning to be heard, Stepan Trofimovitch could not contain himself, and suddenly shouted "Hurrah!" and even made some gesticulation indicative of delight. His ejaculation was not over-loud and quite polite, his delight was even perhaps premeditated, and his gesture purposely studied before the looking-glass half an hour before tea. But something must have been amiss with it, for the baron permitted himself a faint smile, though he, at once, with extraordinary courtesy, put in a phrase concerning the universal and befitting emotion of all Russian hearts in view of the great event. Shortly afterwards he took his leave and at parting did not forget to hold out two fingers to Stepan Trofimovitch. On returning to the drawing-room Varvara Petrovna was at first silent for two or three minutes, and seemed to be looking for something on the table. Then she turned to Stepan Trofimovitch, and with pale face and flashing eyes she hissed in a whisper:

"I shall never forgive you for that!"

Next day she met her friend as though nothing had happened, she never referred to the incident, but thirteen years afterwards, at a tragic moment, she recalled it and reproached him with it, and she turned pale, just as she had done thirteen years before. Only twice in the course of her life did she say to him:

"I shall never forgive you for that!"

The incident with the baron was the second time, but the first incident was so characteristic and had so much influence on the fate of Stepan Trofimovitch that I venture to refer to that too.

It was in 1855, in spring-time, in May, just after the news had reached Skvoreshniki of the death of Lieutenant-General Gavrogin, a frivolous old gentleman who died of a stomach ailment on the way to the Crimea, where he was hastening to join the army on active service. Varvara Petrovna was left a widow and put on deep mourning. She could not, it is true, deplore his death very deeply, since, for the last four years, she had been completely separated from him owing to incompatibility of temper, and was giving him an allowance. (The Lieutenant-General himself had nothing but one hundred and fifty serfs and his pay, besides his position and his connections. All the money and Skvoreshniki belonged to Varvara Petrovna, the only daughter of a very rich contractor.) Yet she was shocked by the suddenness of the news, and retired into complete solitude. Stepan Trofimovitch, of course, was always at her side.

May was in its full beauty. The evenings were exquisite. The wild cherry was in flower. The two friends walked every evening in the garden and used to sit till nightfall in the arbour, and pour out their thoughts and feelings to one another. They had poetic moments. Under the influence of the change in her position Varvara Petrovna talked more than usual. She, as it were, clung to the heart of her friend, and this continued for several evenings. A strange idea suddenly came over Stepan Trofimovitch: "Was not the inconsolable widow reckoning upon him, and expecting from him, when her mourning was over, the offer of his hand?" A cynical idea, but the very loftiness of a man's nature sometimes increases a disposition to cynical ideas if only from the many-sidedness of his culture. He began to look more deeply into it, and thought it seemed like it. He pondered: "Her fortune is immense, of course, but ... " Varvara Petrovna certainly could not be called a beauty. She was a tall, yellow, bony woman with an extremely long face, suggestive of a horse. Stepan Trofimovitch hesitated more and more, he was tortured by doubts, he positively shed tears of indecision once or twice (he wept not infrequently). In the evenings, that is to say in the arbour, his countenance involuntarily began to express something capricious and ironical, something coquettish and at the same time condescending. This is apt to happen as it were by accident, and the more gentlemanly the man the more noticeable it is. Goodness only knows what one is to think about it, but it's most likely that nothing had begun working in her heart that

could have fully justified Stepan Trofimovitch's suspicions. Moreover, she would not have changed her name, Stavrogin, for his name, famous as it was. Perhaps there was nothing in it but the play of femininity on her side; the manifestation of an unconscious feminine yearning so natural in some extremely feminine types. However, I won't answer for it; the depths of the female heart have not been explored to this day. But I must continue.

It is to be supposed that she soon inwardly guessed the significance of her friend's strange expression; she was quick and observant, and he was sometimes extremely guileless. But the evenings went on as before, and their conversations were just as poetic and interesting. And behold on one occasion at nightfall, after the most lively and poetical conversation, they parted affectionately, warmly pressing each other's hands at the steps of the lodge where Stepan Trofimovitch slept. Every summer he used to move into this little lodge which stood adjoining the huge seignorial house of Skvoreshniki, almost in the garden. He had only just gone in, and in restless hesitation taken a cigar, and not having yet lighted it, was standing weary and motionless before the open window, gazing at the light feathery white clouds gliding around the bright moon, when suddenly a faint rustle made him start and turn round. Varvara Petrovna, whom he had left only four minutes earlier, was standing before him again. Her yellow face was almost blue. Her lips were pressed tightly together and twitching at the corners. For ten full seconds she looked him in the eyes in silence with a firm relentless gaze, and suddenly whispered rapidly:

"I shall never forgive you for this!"

When, ten years later, Stepan Trofimovitch, after closing the doors, told me this melancholy tale in a whisper, he vowed that he had been so petrified on the spot that he had not seen or heard how Varvara Petrovna had disappeared. As she never once afterwards alluded to the incident and everything went on as though nothing had happened, he was all his life inclined to the idea that it was all an hallucination, a symptom of illness, the more so as he was actually taken ill that very night and was indisposed for a fortnight, which, by the way, cut short the interviews in the arbour.

But in spite of his vague theory of hallucination he seemed every day, all his life, to be expecting the continuation, and, so to say, the denouement of this affair. He could not believe that that was the end of it! And if so he must have looked strangely sometimes at his friend.

She had herself designed the costume for him which he wore for the rest of his life. It was elegant and characteristic; a long black frock-coat, buttoned almost to the top, but stylishly cut; a soft hat (in summer a straw hat) with a wide brim, a white batiste cravat with a full bow and hanging ends, a cane with a silver knob; his hair flowed on to his shoulders. It was dark brown, and only lately had begun to get a little grey. He was clean-shaven. He was said to have been very handsome in his youth. And, to my mind, he was still an exceptionally impressive figure even in old age. Besides, who can talk of old age at fifty-three? From his special pose as a patriot, however, he did not try to appear younger, but seemed rather "to pride himself on the solidity of his age, and, dressed as described, tall and thin with flowing hair, he looked almost like a patriarch, or even more like the portrait of the poet Kukolnik, engraved in the edition of his works published in 1830 or thereabouts. This resemblance was especially striking when he sat in the garden in summertime, on a seat under a bush of flowering lilac, with both hands propped on his cane and an open book beside him, musing poetically over the setting sun. In regard to books I may remark that he came in later years rather to avoid reading. But that was only quite towards the end. The papers and magazines ordered in great profusion by Varvara Petrovna he was continually reading. He never lost interest in the successes of Russian literature either, though he always maintained a dignified attitude with regard to them. He was at one time engrossed in the study of our home and foreign politics, but he soon gave up the undertaking with a gesture of despair. It sometimes happened that he would take De Tocqueville with him into the garden while he had a Paul de Kock in his pocket. But these are trivial matters.

I must observe in parenthesis about the portrait of Kukolnik; the engraving had first come into the hands of Varvara Petrovna when she was a girl in a high-class boarding-school in Moscow. She fell in love with the portrait at once, after the habit of all girls at school who fall in love with anything they come across, as well as with their teachers, especially the drawing and writing masters. What is interesting in this, though, is not the characteristics of girls but the fact that even at fifty Varvara Petrovna kept the engraving among her most intimate and treasured possessions, so that perhaps it was only on this account that she had designed for Stepan Trofimovitch a costume somewhat like the poet's in the engraving. But that, of course, is a trifling matter too.

For the first years or, more accurately, for the first half of the time he spent with Varvara Petrovna, Stepan Trofimovitch was still planning a

book and every day seriously prepared to write it. But during the later period he must have forgotten even what he had done. More and more frequently he used to say to us:

"I seem to be ready for work, my materials are collected, yet the work doesn't get done! Nothing is done!"

And he would bow his head dejectedly. No doubt this was calculated to increase his prestige in our eyes as a martyr to science, but he himself was longing for something else. "They have forgotten me! I'm no use to anyone!" broke from him more than once. This intensified depression took special hold of him towards the end of the fifties. Varvara Petrovna realised at last that it was a serious matter. Besides, she could not endure the idea that her friend was forgotten and useless. To distract him and at the same time to renew his fame she carried him off to Moscow, where she had fashionable acquaintances in the literary and scientific world; but it appeared that Moscow too was unsatisfactory.

It was a peculiar time; something new was beginning, quite unlike the stagnation of the past, something very strange too, though it was felt everywhere, even at Skvoreshniki. Rumours of all sorts reached us. The facts were generally more or less well known, but it was evident that in addition to the facts there were certain ideas accompanying them, and what's more, a great number of them. And this was perplexing. It was impossible to estimate and find out exactly what was the drift of these ideas. Varvara Petrovna was prompted by the feminine composition of her character to a compelling desire to penetrate the secret of them. She took to reading newspapers and magazines, prohibited publications printed abroad and even the revolutionary manifestoes which were just beginning to appear at the time (she was able to procure them all); but this only set her head in a whirl. She fell to writing letters; she got few answers, and they grew more incomprehensible as time went on. Stepan Trofimovitch was solemnly called upon to explain "these ideas" to her once for all, but she remained distinctly dissatisfied with his explanations.

Stepan Trofimovitch's view of the general movement was supercilious in the extreme. In his eyes all it amounted to was that he was forgotten and of no use. At last his name was mentioned, at first in periodicals published abroad as that of an exiled martyr, and immediately afterwards in Petersburg as that of a former star in a celebrated constellation. He was even for some reason compared with Radishtchev. Then some one printed the statement that he was dead and promised an obituary notice of him. Stepan Trofimovitch instantly perked up and assumed an

air of immense dignity. All his disdain for his contemporaries evaporated and he began to cherish the dream of joining the movement and showing his powers. Varvara Petrovna's faith in everything instantly revived and she was thrown into a violent ferment. It was decided to go to Petersburg without a moment's delay, to find out everything on the spot, to go into everything personally, and, if possible, to throw themselves heart and soul into the new movement. Among other things she announced that she was prepared to found a magazine of her own, and henceforward to devote her whole life to it. Seeing what it had come to, Stepan Trofimovitch became more condescending than ever, and on the journey began to behave almost patronisingly to Varvara Petrovna which she at once laid up in her heart against him. She had, however, another very important reason for the trip, which was to renew her connections in higher spheres. It was necessary, as far as she could, to remind the world of her existence, or at any rate to make an attempt to do so. The ostensible object of the journey was to see her only son, who was just finishing his studies at a Petersburg lyceum.

They spent almost the whole winter season in Petersburg. But by Lent everything burst like a rainbow-coloured soap-bubble.

Their dreams were dissipated, and the muddle, far from being cleared up, had become even more revoltingly incomprehensible. To begin with, connections with the higher spheres were not established, or only on a microscopic scale, and by humiliating exertions. In her mortification Varvara Petrovna threw herself heart and soul into the "new ideas," and began giving evening receptions. She invited literary people, and they were brought to her at once in multitudes. Afterwards they came of themselves without invitation, one brought another. Never had she seen such literary men. They were incredibly vain, but quite open in their vanity, as though they were performing a duty by the display of it. Some (but by no means all) of them even turned up intoxicated, seeming, however, to detect in this a peculiar, only recently discovered, merit. They were all strangely proud of something. On every face was written that they had only just discovered some extremely important secret. They abused one another, and took credit to themselves for it. It was rather difficult to find out what they had written exactly, but among them there were critics, novelists, dramatists, satirists, and exposers of abuses. Stepan Trofimovitch penetrated into their very highest circle from which the movement was directed. Incredible heights had to be scaled to reach this group; but they gave him a cordial welcome, though,

of course, no one of them had ever heard of him or knew anything about him except that he "represented an idea." His manoeuvres among them were so successful that he got them twice to Varvara Petrovna's salon in spite of their Olympian grandeur. These people were very serious and very polite; they behaved nicely; the others were evidently afraid of them; but it was obvious that they had no time to spare. Two or three former literary celebrities who happened to be in Petersburg, and with whom Varvara Petrovna had long maintained a most refined correspondence, came also. But to her surprise these genuine and quite indubitable celebrities were stiller than water, humbler than the grass, and some of them simply hung on to this new rabble, and were shamefully cringing before them. At first Stepan Trofimovitch was a success. People caught at him and began to exhibit him at public literary gatherings. The first time he came on to the platform at some public reading in which he was to take part, he was received with enthusiastic clapping which lasted for five minutes. He recalled this with tears nine years afterwards, though rather from his natural artistic sensibility than from gratitude. "I swear, and I'm ready to bet," he declared (but only to me, and in secret), "that not one of that audience knew anything whatever about me." A noteworthy admission. He must have had a keen intelligence since he was capable of grasping his position so clearly even on the platform, even in such a state of exaltation; it also follows that he had not a keen intelligence if, nine years afterwards, he could not recall it without mortification, he was made to sign two or three collective protests (against what he did not know); he signed them. Varvara Petrovna too was made to protest against some "disgraceful action" and she signed too. The majority of these new people, however, though they visited Varvara Petrovna, felt themselves for some reason called upon to regard her with contempt, and with undisguised irony. Stepan Trofimovitch hinted to me at bitter moments afterwards that it was from that time she had been envious of him. She saw, of course, that she could not get on with these people, yet she received them eagerly, with all the hysterical impatience of her sex, and, what is more, she expected something. At her parties she talked little, although she could talk, but she listened the more. They talked of the abolition of the censorship, and of phonetic spelling, of the substitution of the Latin characters for the Russian alphabet, of some one's having been sent into exile the day before, of some scandal, of the advantage of splitting Russia into nationalities united in a free federation, of the abolition of the army and the navy, of the restoration of Poland as far as the Dnieper, of the peasant reforms, and of the

manifestoes, of the abolition of the hereditary principle, of the family, of children, and of priests, of women's rights, of Kraevsky's house, for which no one ever seemed able to forgive Mr. Kraevsky, and so on, and so on. It was evident that in this mob of new people there were many impostors, but undoubtedly there were also many honest and very attractive people, in spite of some surprising characteristics in them. The honest ones were far more difficult to understand than the coarse and dishonest, but it was impossible to tell which was being made a tool of by the other. When Varvara Petrovna announced her idea of founding a magazine, people flocked to her in even larger numbers, but charges of being a capitalist and an exploiter of labour were showered upon her to her face. The rudeness of these accusations was only equalled by their unexpectedness. The aged General Ivan Ivanovitch Drozdov, an old friend and comrade of the late General Stavrogin's, known to us all here as an extremely stubborn and irritable, though very estimable, man (in his own way, of course), who ate a great deal, and was dreadfully afraid of atheism, quarrelled at one of Varvara Petrovna's parties with a distinguished young man. The latter at the first word exclaimed, "You must be a general if you talk like that," meaning that he could find no word of abuse worse than "general."

Ivan Ivanovitch flew into a terrible passion: "Yes, sir, I am a general, and a lieutenant-general, and I have served my Tsar, and you, sir, are a puppy and an infidel!"

An outrageous scene followed. Next day the incident was exposed in print, and they began getting up a collective protest against Varvara Petrovna's disgraceful conduct in not having immediately turned the general out. In an illustrated paper there appeared a malignant caricature in which Varvara Petrovna, Stepan Trofimovitch, and General Drozdov were depicted as three reactionary friends. There were verses attached to this caricature written by a popular poet especially for the occasion. I may observe, for my own part, that many persons of general's rank certainly have an absurd habit of saying, "I have served my Tsar"... just as though they had not the same Tsar as all the rest of us, their simple fellow-subjects, but had a special Tsar of their own.

It was impossible, of course, to remain any longer in Petersburg, all the more so as Stepan Trofimovitch was overtaken by a complete fiasco. He could not resist talking of the claims of art, and they laughed at him more loudly as time went on. At his last lecture he thought to impress them with patriotic eloquence, hoping to touch their hearts, and reckoning on the respect inspired by his "persecution." He did not attempt to

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