Virgin Soil

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Introduction

TURGENEV was the first writer who was able, having both Slavic and universal imagination enough for it, to interpret modern Russia to the outer world, and Virgin Soil was the last word of his greater testament. It was the book in which many English readers were destined to make his acquaintance about a generation ago, and the effect of it was, like Swinburne's Songs Before Sunrise, Mazzini's Duties of Man, and other congenial documents, to break up the insular confines in which they had been reared and to enlarge their new horizon. Afterwards they went on to read Tolstoi, and Turgenev's powerful and antipathetic fellow-novelist, Dostoievsky, and many other Russian writers: but as he was the greatest artist of them all, his individual revelation of his country's predicament did not lose its effect. Writing in prose he achieved a style of his own which went as near poetry as narrative prose can do. without using the wrong music: while over his realism or his irony he cast a tinge of that mixed modern and oriental fantasy which belonged to his temperament. He suffered in youth, and suffered badly, from the romantic malady of his century, and that other malady of Russia, both expressed in what M. Haumand terms his "Hamletisme." But in Virgin Soil he is easy and almost negligent master of his instrument, and though he is an exile and at times a sharply embittered one, he gathers experience round his theme as only the artist can who has enriched leis art by having outlived his youth without forgetting its pangs, joys, mortifications, and love-songs.

In Nejdanov it is another picture of that youth which we see— youth reduced to ineffectiveness by fatalism and by the egoism of the lyric nature which longs to gain dramatic freedom, but cannot achieve it. It is one of a series of portraits, wonderfully traced psychological studies of the Russian dreamers and incompatibles of last mid-century, of which the most moving figure is the hero of the earlier novel, Dimitri Rudin. If we cared to follow Turgenev strictly in his growth and contemporary relations, we ought to begin with his Sportsman's Note Book. But so far as his novels go, he is the last writer to be taken chronologically. He was old enough in youth to understand old age in the forest, and young enough in age to provide his youth with fresh hues for another incarnation. Another element of his work which is very finely revealed .and brought to a rare point of characterisation in Virgin Soil, is the prophetic intention he had of the woman's part in the new order. For the real hero of the tale, as Mr. Edward Garnett has pointed out in an essay on Turgenev, is not Nejdanov and not Solomin; the part is cast in the woman's figure of Mariana who broke the silence of "anonymous Russia." Ivan Turgenev had the understanding that goes beneath the old

delimitation of the novelist hide-bound by the law—"male and female created he them."

He had the same extreme susceptibility to the moods of nature. He loved her first for herself, and then with a sense of those inherited primitive associations with her scenes and hid influences which still play upon us to-day; and nothing could be surer than the wilder or tamer glimpses which are seen in this book and in its landscape settings of the characters. But Russ as he is, he never lets his scenery hide his people: he only uses it to enhance them. He is too great an artist to lose a human trait, as we see even in a grotesque vignette like that of Fomishka and Fimishka, or a chance picture like that of the Irish girl once seen by Solomin in London.

Turgenev was born at Orel, son of a cavalry colonel, in ISIS. He died in exile, like his early master in romance Heine—that is in Paris-on the 4th of September, 1883. But at his own wish his remains were carried home and buried in the Volkoff Cemetery, St. Petersburg. The grey crow he had once seen in foreign fields and addressed in a fit of homesickness

"Crow, crow, You are grizzled, I know, But from Russia you come; Ah me, there lies home!"

called him back to his mother country, whose true son he remained despite all he suffered at her hands, and all the delicate revenges of the artistic prodigal that he was tempted to take.

E. R.

Chapter 1

1 AT one o'clock in the afternoon of a spring day in the year 1868, a young man of twenty-seven, carelessly and shabbily dressed, was toiling up the back staircase of a five-storied house on Officers Street in St. Petersburg. Noisily shuffling his down-trodden goloshes and slowly swinging his heavy, clumsy figure, the man at last reached the very top flight and stopped before a half-open door hanging off its hinges. He did not ring the bell, but gave a loud sigh and walked straight into a small, dark passage.

"Is Nejdanov at home?" he called out in a deep, loud voice.

"No, he's not. I'm here. Come in," an equally coarse woman's voice responded from the adjoining room.

"Is that Mashurina?" asked the newcomer.

"Yes, it is I. Are you Ostrodumov?

"Pemien Ostrodumov," he replied, carefully removing his goloshes, and hanging his shabby coat on a nail, he went into the room from whence issued the woman's voice.

It was a narrow, untidy room, with dull green coloured walls, badly lighted by two dusty windows. The furnishings consisted of an iron bedstead standing in a corner, a table in the middle, several chairs, and a bookcase piled up with books. At the table sat a woman of about thirty. She was bareheaded, clad in a black stuff dress, and was smoking a cigarette. On catching sight of Ostrodumov she extended her broad, red hand without a word. He shook it, also without saying anything, dropped into a chair and pulled a half-broken cigar out of a side pocket. Mashurina gave him a light, and without exchanging a single word, or so much as looking at one another, they began sending out long, blue puffs into the stuffy room, already filled with smoke.

There was something similar about these two smokers, although their features were not a bit alike. In these two slovenly figures, with their coarse lips, teeth, and noses (Ostrodumov was even pock-marked), there was something honest and firm and persevering.

"Have you seen Nejdanov?" Ostrodumov asked.

"Yes. He will be back directly. He has gone to the library with some books."

Ostrodumov spat to one side.

"Why is he always rushing about nowadays? One can never get hold of him."

Mashurina took out another cigarette.

"He's bored," she remarked, lighting it carefully.

"Bored!" Ostrodumov repeated reproachfully. "What self- indulgence! One would think we had no work to do. Heaven knows how we shall get through with it, and he complains of being bored!"

"Have you heard from Moscow?" Mashurina asked after a pause.

"Yes. A letter came three days ago."

"Have you read it?"

Ostrodumov nodded his head.

"Well? What news?

"Some of us must go there soon."

Mashurina took the cigarette out of her mouth.

"But why?" she asked. "They say everything is going on well there."

"Yes, that is so, but one man has turned out unreliable and must be got rid of. Besides that, there are other things. They want you to come too."

"Do they say so in the letter?"

"Yes."

Mashurina shook back her heavy hair, which was twisted into a small plait at the back, and fell over her eyebrows in front.

"Well," she remarked; "if the thing is settled, then there is nothing more to be said."

"Of course not. Only one can't do anything without money, and where are we to get it from?"

Mashurina became thoughtful.

"Nejdanov must get the money," she said softly, as if to herself.

"That is precisely what I have come about," Ostrodumov observed.

"Have you got the letter?" Mashurina asked suddenly.

"Yes. Would you like to see it?"

"I should rather. But never mind, we can read it together presently."

"You need not doubt what I say. I am speaking the truth," Ostrodumov grumbled.

"I do not doubt it in the least." They both ceased speaking and, as before, clouds of smoke rose silently from their mouths and curled feebly above their shaggy heads.

A sound of goloshes was heard from the passage.

"There he is," Mashurina whispered.

The door opened slightly and a head was thrust in, but it was not the head of Nejdanov.

It was a round head with rough black hair, a broad wrinkled forehead, bright brown eyes under thick eyebrows, a snub nose and a humorously-set mouth. The head looked round, nodded, smiled, showing a set of tiny white teeth, and came into the room with its feeble body, short arms, and bandy legs, which were a little lame. As soon as Mashurina and Ostrodumov caught sight of this head, an expression of contempt mixed with condescension came over their faces, as if each was thinking inwardly, "What a nuisance!" but neither moved nor uttered a single

word. The newly arrived guest was not in the least taken aback by this reception, however; on the contrary it seemed to amuse him.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked in a squeaky voice. "A duet? Why not a trio? And where's the chief tenor?

"Do you mean Nejdanov, Mr. Paklin?" Ostrodumov asked solemnly.

"Yes, Mr. Ostrodumov."

"He will be back directly, Mr. Paklin."

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Ostrodumov."

The little cripple turned to Mashurina. She frowned, and continued leisurely puffing her cigarette.

"How are you, my dear ... my dear ... I am so sorry. I always forget your Christian name and your father's name."

Mashurina shrugged her shoulders.

"There is no need for you to know it. I think you know my surname. What more do you want? And why do you always keep on asking how I am? You see that I am still in the land of the living!"

"Of course!" Paklin exclaimed, his face twitching nervously. "If you had been elsewhere, your humble servant would not have had the pleasure of seeing you here, and of talking to you! My curiosity is due to a bad, old-fashioned habit. But with regard to your name, it is awkward, somehow, simply to say Mashurina. I know that even in letters you only sign yourself Bonaparte! I beg pardon, Mashurina, but in conversation, however—"

"And who asks you to talk to me, pray?"

Paklin gave a nervous, gulpy laugh.

"Well, never mind, my dear. Give me your hand. Don't be cross. I know you mean well, and so do I... Well?

Paklin extended his hand, Mashurina looked at him severely and extended her own.

"If you really want to know my name," she said with the same expression of severity on her face, "I am called Fiekla."

"And I, Pemien," Ostrodumov added in his bass voice.

"How very instructive! Then tell me, 0h Fiekla! and you, Oh Pemien! why you are so unfriendly, so persistently unfriendly to me when I—"

"Mashurina thinks," Ostrodumov interrupted him, "and not only Mashurina, that you are not to be depended upon, because you always laugh at everything."

Paklin turned round on his heels.

"That is the usual mistake people make about me, my dear Pemien! In the first place, I am not always laughing, and even if I were, that is no reason why you should not trust me. In the second, I have been flattered with your confidence on more than one occasion before now, a convincing proof of my trustworthiness. I am an honest man, my dear Pemien."

Ostrodumov muttered something between his teeth, but Paklin continued without the slightest trace of a smile on his face.

"No, I am not always laughing! I am not at all a cheerful person. You have only to look at me!"

Ostrodumov looked at him. And really, when Paklin was not laughing, when he was silent, his face assumed a dejected, almost scared expression; it became funny and rather sarcastic only when he opened his lips. Ostrodumov did not say anything, however, and Paklin turned to Mashurina again.

"Well? And how are your studies getting on? Have you made any progress in your truly philanthropical art? Is it very hard to help an inexperienced citizen on his first appearance in this world?

"It is not at all hard if he happens to be no bigger than you are!" Mashurina retorted with a self-satisfied smile. (She had quite recently passed her examination as a midwife. Coming from a poor aristocratic family, she had left her home in the south of Russia about two years before, and with about twelve shillings in her pocket had arrived in Moscow, where she had entered a lying- in institution and had worked very hard to gain the necessary certificate. She was unmarried and very chaste. "No wonder!" some sceptics may say (bearing in mind the description of her personal appearance; but we will permit ourselves to say that it was wonderful and rare).

Paklin laughed at her retort.

"Well done, my dear! I feel quite crushed! But it serves me right for being such a dwarf! I wonder where our host has got to?"

Paklin purposely changed the subject of conversation, which was rather a sore one to him. He could never resign himself to his small stature, nor indeed to the whole of his unprepossessing figure. He felt it all the more because he was passionately fond of women and would have given anything to be attractive to them. The consciousness of his pitiful appearance was a much sorer point with him than his low origin and unenviable position in society. His father, a member of the lower middle class, had, through all sorts of dishonest means, attained the rank of titular councillor. He had been fairly successful as an intermediary in legal matters, and managed estates and house property. He had made a moderate fortune, but had taken to drink towards the end of his life and had left nothing after his death.

Young Paklin, he was called Sila—Sila Samsonitch, [Meaning strength, son of Samson] and always regarded this name as a joke against himself, was educated in a commercial school, where he had acquired a good knowledge of German. After a great many difficulties he had entered an office, where he received a salary of five hundred roubles a year, out of which he had to keep himself, an invalid aunt, and a humpbacked sister. At the time of our story Paklin was twenty-eight years old. He had a great many acquaintances among students and young people, who liked

him for his cynical wit, his harmless, though biting, self-confident speeches, his one-sided, unpedantic, though genuine, learning, but occasionally they sat on him severely. Once, on arriving late at a political meeting, he hastily began excusing himself. "Paklin was afraid!" some one sang out from a corner of the room, and everyone laughed. Paklin laughed with them, although it was like a stab in his heart. "He is right, the blackguard!" he thought to himself. Nejdanov he had come across in a little Greek restaurant, where he was in the habit of taking his dinner, and where he sat airing his rather free and audacious views. He assured everyone that the main cause of his democratic turn of mind was the bad Greek cooking, which upset his liver.

"I wonder where our host has got to? " he repeated. "He has been out of sorts lately. Heaven forbid that he should be in love!

Mashurina scowled.

"He has gone to the library for books. As for falling in love, he has neither the time nor the opportunity."

"Why not with you?" almost escaped Paklin's lips.

"I should like to see him, because I have an important matter to talk over with him," he said aloud.

"What about?" Ostrodumov asked. "Our affairs?"

"Perhaps yours; that is, our common affairs."

Ostrodumov hummed. He did not believe him. "Who knows? He's such a busy body," he thought.

"There he is at last!" Mashurina exclaimed suddenly, and her small unattractive eyes, fixed on the door, brightened, as if lit up by an inner ray, making them soft and warm and tender.

The door opened, and this time a young man of twenty-three, with a cap on his head and a bundle of books under his arm, entered the room. It was Nejdanov himself.

Chapter 2

2AT the sight of visitors he stopped in the doorway, took them in at a glance, threw off his cap, dropped the books on to the floor, walked over to the bed, and sat down on the very edge. An expression of annoyance and displeasure passed over his pale handsome face, which seemed even paler than it really was, in contrast to his dark-red, wavy hair.

Mashurina turned away and bit her lip; Ostrodumov muttered, "At last!"

Paklin was the first to approach him.

"Why, what is the matter, Alexai Dmitritch, Hamlet of Russia? Has something happened, or are you just simply depressed, without any particular cause?

"Oh, stop! Mephistopheles of Russia!" Nejdanov exclaimed irritably. "I am not in the mood for fencing with blunt witticisms just now."

Paklin laughed.

"That's not quite correct. If it is wit, then it can't be blunt. If blunt, then it can't be wit."

"All right, all right! We know you are clever!

"Your nerves are out of order," Paklin remarked hesitatingly. "Or has something really happened?"

"Oh, nothing in particular, only that it is impossible to show one's nose in this hateful town without knocking against some vulgarity, stupidity, tittle-tattle, or some horrible injustice. One can't live here any longer!"

"Is that why your advertisement in the papers says that you want a place and have no objection to leaving St. Petersburg? " Ostrodumov asked.

"Yes. I would go away from here with the greatest of pleasure, if some fool could be found who would offer me a place!"

"You should first fullfil your duties here," Mashurina remarked significantly, her face still turned away.

"What duties?" Nejdanov asked, turning towards her.

Mashurina bit her lip. "Ask Ostrodumov."

Nejdanov turned to Ostrodumov. The latter hummed and hawed, as if to say, "Wait a minute."

"But seriously," Paklin broke in, "have you heard any unpleasant news?"

Nejdanov bounced up from the bed like an india-rubber ball. "What more do you want?" he shouted out suddenly, in a ringing voice. "Half of Russia is dying of hunger! The Moscow News is triumphant! They want

to introduce classicism, the students' benefit clubs have been closed, spies everywhere, oppression, lies, betrayals, deceit! And it is not enough for him! He wants some new unpleasantness! He thinks that I am joking... . Basanov has been arrested," he added, lowering his voice. "I heard it at the library."

Mashurina and Ostrodumov lifted their heads simultaneously.

"My dear Alexai Dmitritch," Paklin began, "you are upset, and for a very good reason. But have you forgotten in what times and in what country we are living? Amongst us a drowning man must himself create the straw to clutch at. Why be sentimental over it? One must look the devil straight in the face and not get excited like children—"

"Oh, don't, please!" Nejdanov interrupted him desperately, frowning as if in pain. "We know you are energetic and not afraid of anything—"

"I—not afraid of anything?" Paklin began.

"I wonder who could have betrayed Basanov? "Nejdanov continued. "I simply can't understand!"

"A friend no doubt. Friends are great at that. One must look alive! I once had a friend, who seemed a good fellow; he was always concerned about me and my reputation. 'I say, what dreadful stories are being circulated about you!' he would greet me one day. 'They say that you poisoned your uncle and that on one occasion, when you were introduced into a certain house, you sat the whole evening with your back to the hostess and that she was so upset that she cried at the insult! What awful nonsense! What fools could possibly believe such things!' Well, and what do you think? A year after I quarrelled with this same friend, and in his farewell letter to me he wrote, 'You who killed your own uncle! You who were not ashamed to insult an honourable lady by sitting with your back to her,' and so on and so on. Here are friends for you!"

Ostrodumov and Mashurina exchanged glances.

"Alexai Dmitritch!" Ostrodumov exclaimed in his heavy bass voice; he was evidently anxious to avoid a useless discussion. "A letter has come from Moscow, from Vassily Nikolaevitch."

Nejdanov trembled slightly and cast down his eyes.

"What does he say? " he asked at last.

"He wants us to go there with her." Ostrodumov indicated to Mashurina with his eyebrows.

"Do they want her too?'

"Yes."

"Well, what's the difficulty?

"Why, money, of course."

Nejdanov got up from the bed and walked over to the window.

"How much do you want?"

"Not less than fifty roubles."

Nejdanov was silent.

"I have no money just now," he whispered at last, drumming his fingers on the window pane, "but I could get some. Have you got the letter?"

"Yes, it ... that is ... certainly... "

"Why are you always trying to keep things from me?" Paklin exclaimed. "Have I not deserved your confidence? Even if I were not fully in sympathy with what you are undertaking, do you think for a moment that I am in a position to turn around or gossip?"

"Without intending to, perhaps," Ostrodumov remarked.

"Neither with nor without intention! Miss Mashurina is looking at me with a smile ... but I say—"

"I am not smiling!" Mashurina burst out.

"But I say," Paklin went on, "that you have no tact. You are utterly incapable of recognising your real friends. If a man can laugh, then you think that he can't be serious—"

"Is it not so?" Mashurina snapped.

"You are in need of money, for instance," Paklin continued with new force, paying no attention to Mashurina; "Nejdanov hasn't any. I could get it for you."

Nejdanov wheeled round from the window.

"No, no. It is not necessary. I can get the money. I will draw some of my allowance in advance. Now I recollect, they owe me something. Let us look at the letter, Ostrodumov."

Ostrodumov remained motionless for a time, then he looked around, stood up, bent down, turned up one of the legs of his trousers, and carefully pulled a piece of blue paper out of his high boot, blew at it for some reason or another, and handed it to Nejdanov. The latter took the piece of paper, unfolded it, read it carefully, and passed it on to Mashurina. She stood up, also read it, and handed it back to Nejdanov, although Paklin had extended his hand for it. Nejdanov shrugged his shoulders and gave the secret letter to Paklin. The latter scanned the paper in his turn, pressed his lips together significantly, and laid it solemnly on the table. Ostrodumov took it, lit a large match, which exhaled a strong odour of sulphur, lifted the paper high above his head, as if showing it to all present, set fire to it, and, regardless of his fingers, put the ashes into the stove. No one moved or pronounced a word during this proceeding; all had their eyes fixed on the floor. Ostrodumov looked concentrated and business-like, Nejdanov furious, Paklin intense, and Mashurina as if she were present at holy mass.

About two minutes went by in this way, everyone feeling uncomfortable. Paklin was the first to break the silence.

"Well?" he began. "Is my sacrifice to be received on the altar of the fatherland? Am I permitted to bring, if not the whole at any rate, twenty-five or thirty roubles for the common cause?"

Nejdanov flared up. He seemed to be boiling over with annoyance, which was not lessened by the solemn burning of the letter—he was only waiting for an opportunity to burst out.

"I tell you that I don't want it, don't want, don't want it! I'll not allow it and I'll not take it! I can get the money. I can get it at once. I am not in need of anyone's help!

"My dear Alexai," Paklin remarked, "I see that you are not a democrat in spite of your being a revolutionist!"

"Why not say straight out that I'm an aristocrat?"

"So you are up to a certain point."

Nejdanov gave a forced laugh.

"I see you are hinting at the fact of my being illegitimate. You can save yourself the trouble, my dear boy. I am not likely to forget it."

Paklin threw up his arms in despair.

"Aliosha! What is the matter with you? How can you twist my words so? I hardly know you today."

Nejdanov shrugged his shoulders.

"Basanov's arrest has upset you, but he was so careless—"

He did not hide his convictions," Mashurina put in gloomily. "It is not for us to sit in judgment upon him!"

"Quite so; only he might have had a little more consideration for others, who are likely to be compromised through him now."

"What makes you think so?" Ostrodumov bawled out in his turn. "Basanov has plenty of character, he will not betray anyone. Besides, not every one can be cautious you know, Mr. Paklin."

Paklin was offended and was about to say something when Nejdanov interrupted him.

"I vote we leave politics for a time, ladies and gentlemen!" he exclaimed.

A silence ensued.

"I ran across Skoropikin today," Paklin was the first to begin. "Our great national critic, aesthetic, and enthusiast! What an insufferable creature! He is forever boiling and frothing over like a bottle of sour kvas. A waiter runs with it, his finger stuck in the bottle instead of a cork, a fat raisin in the neck, and when it has done frothing and foaming there is nothing left at the bottom but a few drops of some nasty stuff, which far from quenching any one's thirst is enough to make one ill. He's a most dangerous person for young people to come in contact with."

Paklin's true and rather apt comparison raised no smile on his listeners' faces, only Nejdanov remarked that if young people were fools enough to interest themselves in aesthetics, they deserved no pity whatever, even if Skoropikin did lead them astray.

"Of course," Paklin exclaimed with some warmth—the less sympathy he met with, the more heated he became—" I admit that the question is

not a political one, but an important one, nevertheless. According to Skoropikin, every ancient work of art is valueless because it is old. If that were true, then art would be reduced to nothing more or less than mere fashion. A preposterous idea, not worth entertaining. If art has no firmer foundation than that, if it is not eternal, then it is utterly useless. Take science, for instance. In mathematics do you look upon Euler, Laplace, or Gauss as fools? Of course not. You accept their authority. Then why question the authority of Raphael and Mozart? I must admit, however, that the laws of art are far more difficult to define than the laws of nature, but they exist just the same, and he who fails to see them is blind, whether he shuts his eyes to them purposely or not."

Paklin ceased, but no one uttered a word. They all sat with tightly closed mouths as if feeling unutterably sorry for him.

"All the same," Ostrodumov remarked, " I am not in the least sorry for the young people who run after Skoropikin."

"You are hopeless," Paklin thought. "I had better be going."

He went up to Nejdanov, intending to ask his opinion about smuggling in the magazine, the "Polar Star", from abroad (the "Bell" had already ceased to exist), but the conversation took such a turn that it was impossible to raise the question. Paklin had already taken up his hat, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, a wonderfully pleasant, manly baritone was heard from the passage. The very sound of this voice suggested something gentle, fresh, and well-bred.

"Is Mr. Nejdanov at home?"

They all looked at one another in amazement.

"Is Mr. Nejdanov at home?" the baritone repeated.

"Yes, he is," Nejdanov replied at last.

The door opened gently and a man of about forty entered the room and slowly removed his glossy hat from his handsome, closely cropped head. He was tall and well-made, and dressed in a beautiful cloth coat with a gorgeous beaver collar, although it was already the end of April. He impressed Nejdanov and Paklin, and even Mashurina and Ostrodumov, with his elegant, easy carriage and courteous manner. They all rose instinctively on his entrance.

Chapter 3

3 THE elegantly dressed man went up to Nejdanov with an amiable smile and began: "I have already had the pleasure of meeting you and even speaking to you, Mr. Nejdanov, the day before yesterday, if you remember, at the theatre." (The visitor paused, as though waiting for Nejdanov to make some remark, but the latter merely bowed slightly and blushed.) "I have come to see you about your advertisement, which I noticed in the paper. I should like us to have a talk if your visitors would not mind... " (He bowed to Mashurina, and waved a grey-gloved hand in the direction of Paklin and Ostrodumov.)

"Not at all," Nejdanov replied awkwardly. "Won't you sit down?"

The visitor bowed from the waist, drew a chair to himself, but did not sit down, as every oneelse was standing. He merely gazed around the room with his bright though half-closed eyes.

"Goodbye, Alexai Dmitritch," Mashurina exclaimed suddenly. "I will come again presently."

"And I too," Ostrodumov added.

Mashurina did not take the slightest notice of the visitor as she passed him, but went straight up to Nejdanov, gave him a hearty shake of the hand, and left the room without bowing to anyone. Ostrodumov followed her, making an unnecessary noise with his boots, and snorting out once or twice contemptuously, "There's a beaver collar for you!"

The visitor accompanied them with a polite though slightly inquisitive look, and then directed his gaze to Paklin, hoping the latter would follow their example, but Paklin withdrew into a corner and settled down. A peculiarly suppressed smile played on his lips ever since the appearance of the stranger. The visitor and Nejdanov also sat down.

"My name is Sipiagin. You may perhaps have heard of me," the visitor began with modest pride.

We must first relate how Nejdanov had met him at the theatre.

There had been a performance of Ostrovsky's play "Never Sit in Another Man's Sledge", on the occasion of the great actor Sadovsky's coming from Moscow. Rusakov, one of the characters in the play, was known to be one of his favourite parts. Just before dinner on that day, Nejdanov went down to the theatre to book a ticket, but found a large crowd already waiting there. He walked up to the desk with the intention of getting a ticket for the pit, when an officer, who happened to be standing behind him, thrust a three-rouble note over Nejdanov's head and called out to the man inside: "He" (meaning Nejdanov) "will probably want change. I don't. Give me a ticket for the stalls, please. Make haste, I'm in a hurry!"

"Excuse me, sir, I want a ticket for the stalls myself!Nejdanov exclaimed, throwing down a three-rouble note, all the ready money he possessed. He got his ticket, and in the evening appeared in the aristocratic part of the Alexandrinsky Theatre.

He was badly dressed, without gloves and in dirty boots. He was uncomfortable and angry with himself for feeling uncomfortable. A general with numerous orders glittering on his breast sat on his right, and on his left this same elegant Sipiagin, whose appearance two days later at Nejdanov's so astonished Mashurina and Ostrodumov. The general stared at Nejdanov every now and again, as though at something indecent, out of place, and offensive. Sipiagin looked at him sideways, but did not seem unfriendly. All the people surrounding him were evidently personages of some importance, and as they all knew one another, they kept exchanging remarks, exclamations, greetings, occasionally even over Nejdanov's head. He sat there motionless and ill at ease in his spacious armchair, feeling like an outcast. Ostrovsky's play and Sadovsky's acting afforded him but little pleasure, and he felt bitter at heart. When suddenly, Oh wonder! During one of the intervals, his neighbour on the left, not the glittering general, but the other with no marks of distinction on his breast, addressed him politely and kindly, but somewhat timidly. He asked him what he thought of Ostrovsky's play, wanted to know his opinion of it as a representative of the new generation. Nejdanov, overwhelmed and half frightened, his heart beating fast, answered at first curtly, in monosyllables, but soon began to be annoyed with his own excitement. "After all," he thought, " am I not a man like everybody else? "And began expressing his opinions quite freely, without any restraint. He got so carried away by his subject, and spoke so loudly, that he quite alarmed the order-bedecked general. Nejdanov was a strong admirer of Ostrovsky, but could not help feeling, in spite of the author's great genius, his evident desire to throw a slur on modern civilisation in the burlesqued character of Veherov, in "Never Sit in Another Man's Sledge".

His polite neighbour listened to him attentively, evidently interested in what he said. He spoke to him again in the next interval, not about the play this time, but about various matters of everyday life, about science, and even touched upon political questions. He was decidedly interested in his eloquent young companion. Nejdanov did not feel in the least constrained as before, but even began to assume airs, as if saying, "If you really want to know, I can satisfy your curiosity!" The general's annoyance grew to indignation and even suspicion.

After the play Sipiagin took leave of Nejdanov very courteously, but did not ask his name, neither did he tell him his own. While waiting for his carriage, he ran against a friend, a certain Prince G., an aide-de-camp.

"I watched you from my box," the latter remarked, through a perfumed moustache. "Do you know whom you were speaking to?"

"No. Do you? A rather clever chap. Who is he?"

The prince whispered in his ear in French. "He is my brother ... . illegitimate... . His name is Nejdanov. I will tell you all about it someday. My father did not in the least expect that sort of thing, that was why he called him Nejdanov. [The unexpected.] But he looked after him all right. Il lui a fait un sort. We make him an allowance to live on. He is not stupid. Had quite a good education, thanks to my father. But he has gone quite off the track—I think he's a republican. We refuse to have anything to do with him. Il est impossible. Goodbye, I see my carriage is waiting."

The prince separated.

The next day Sipiagin noticed Nejdanov's advertisement in the paper and went to see him.

"My name is Sipiagin," he repeated, as he sat in front of Nejdanov, surveying him with a dignified air. "I see by your advertisement that you are looking for a post, and I should like to know if you would be willing to come to me. I am married and have a boy of eight, a very intelligent child, I may say. We usually spend the summer and autumn in the country, in the province of S., about five miles from the town of that name. I should like you to come to us for the vacation to teach my boy Russian history and grammar. I think those were the subjects you mentioned in your advertisement. I think you will get on with us all right, and I am sure you will like the neighbourhood. We have a large house and garden, the air is excellent, and there is a river close by. Well, would you like to come? We shall only have to come to terms, although I do not think," he added, with a slight grimace, "that there will be any difficulty on that point between us."

Nejdanov watched Sipiagin all the time he was speaking. He gazed at his small head, bent a little to one side, his low, narrow, but intelligent forehead, his fine Roman nose, pleasant eyes, straight lips, out of which his words flowed graciously; he gazed at his drooping whiskers, kept in the English fashion, gazed and wondered. "What does it all mean?" he asked himself. "Why has this man come to seek me out? This aristocrat and I! What have we in common? What does he see in me?"

He was so lost in thought that he did not open his lips when Sipiagin, having finished speaking, evidently awaited an answer. Sipiagin cast a look into the corner where Paklin sat, also watching him. "Perhaps the presence of a third person prevents him from saying what he would like," flashed across Sipiagin's mind. He raised his eyebrows, as if in submission to the strangeness of the surroundings he had come to of his own accord, and repeated his question a second time.

Nejdanov started.

"Of course," he began hurriedly, "I should like to... with pleasure ... . only I must confess ... I am rather surprised ... having no

recommendations ... and the views I expressed at the theatre were more calculated to prejudice you—"

"There you are quite mistaken Alexai—Alexai Dmitritch—have I got the name right?" Sipiagin asked with a smile. "I may venture to say that I am well known for my liberal and progressive opinions. On the contrary, what you said the other evening, with the exception perhaps of any youthful characteristics, which are always rather given to exaggeration, if you will excuse my saying so, I fully agreed with, and was even delighted with your enthusiasm."

Sipiagin spoke without the slightest hesitation, his words flowing from him as a stream.

"My wife shares my way of thinking," he continued. "her views are, if anything, more like yours than mine, which is not surprising, considering that she is younger than I am. When I read your name in the paper the day after our meeting—and by the way, you announced your name and address contrary to the usual custom—I was rather struck by the coincidence, having already heard it at the theatre. It seemed to me like the finger of fate. Excuse my being so superstitious. As for recommendations, I do not think they are necessary in this case. I, like you, am accustomed to trusting my intuition. May I hope that you will come?"

"Yes, I will come," Nejdanov replied, "and will try to be worthy of your confidence. But there is one thing I should like to mention. I could undertake to teach your boy, but am not prepared to look after him. I do not wish to undertake anything that would interfere with my freedom."

Sipiagin gave a slight wave of the hand, as if driving away a fly.

"You may be easy on that point. You are not made that way. I only wanted a tutor, and I have found one. Well, now, how about terms? Financial terms, that is. Base metal!"

Nejdanov did not know what to say.

"I think," Sipiagin went on, bending forward and touching Nejdanov with the tips of his fingers, "that decent people can settle such things in two words. I will give you a hundred roubles a month and all travelling expenses. Will you come?

Nejdanov blushed.

"That is more than I wanted to ask ... because I—"

"Well," Sipiagin interrupted him, "I look upon the matter as settled, and consider you as a member of our household." He rose from his chair, and became quite gay and expansive, as if he had just received a present. A certain amiable familiarity, verging on the playful, began to show itself in all his gestures. " We shall set out in a day or two," he went on, in an easy tone. "There is nothing I love better than meeting spring in the country, although I am a busy, prosaic sort of person, tied to town... I want you to count your first month as beginning from today. My wife and boy have already started, and are probably in Moscow by now. We

shall find them in the lap of nature. We will go alone, like two bachelors, ha, ha!" Sipiagin laughed coquettishly, through his nose. "And now—"

He took a black and silver pocketbook out of his overcoat pocket and pulled out a card.

"This is my address. Come and see me tomorrow at about twelve o'clock. We can talk things over further. I should like to tell you a few of my views on education. We can also decide when to start."

Sipiagin took Nejdanov's hand. "By the way," he said, lowering his voice and bending his head a little to one side, "if you are in need of money, please do not stand on ceremony. I can let you have a month's pay in advance."

Nejdanov was at a loss to know what to say. He gazed, with the same puzzled expression, at the kind, bright face, which was so strange yet so close to him, smiling encouragingly.

"You are not in need of any?" Sipiagin asked in a whisper.

"I will tell you tomorrow, if I may," Nejdanov said at last.

"Well, goodbye, then. Till tomorrow." Sipiagin dropped Nejdanov's hand and turned to go out.

"I should like to know," Nejdanov asked suddenly, "who told you my name? You said you heard it at the theatre."

"Someone who is very well known to you. A relative of yours, I think. Prince G."

"The aide-de-camp?"

"Yes."

Nejdanov flushed even redder than before, but did not say anything. Sipiagin shook his hand again, without a word this time, then bowing first to him and then to Paklin, put on his hat at the door, and went out with a self-satisfied smile on his lips, denoting the deep impression the visit must have produced upon him.

Chapter 4

4SIPIAGIN had barely crossed the threshold when Paklin jumped up, and rushing across to Nejdanov began showering congratulations upon him.

"What a fine catch!" he exclaimed laughing, scarcely able to stand still. "Do you know who he is? He's quite a celebrity, a chamberlain, one of our pillars of society, a future minister!"

"I have never heard of him," Nejdanov remarked dejectedly.

Paklin threw up his arms in despair.

"That's just where we are mistaken, Alexai Dmitritch! We never know anyone. We want to do things, to turn the whole world upside down, and are living outside this very world, amidst two or three friends, jostling each other in our narrow little circle!

"Excuse me," Nejdanov put in. "I don't think that is quite true. We certainly do not go amongst the enemy, but are constantly mixing with our own kind, and with the masses."

"Just a minute! " Paklin interrupted, in his turn. "Talking of enemies reminds me of Goethe's lines—

Wer den Dichter will versteh'n Muss im Dichter's lands geh'n.

and I say—

Wer den Feinde will versteh'n Muss im Feinde's lands geh'n.

To turn one's back on one's enemies, not to try and understand their manner of life, is utterly stupid! Yes, utterly stu-pid! If I want to shoot a wolf in the forest, I must first find out his haunts. You talked of coming in contact with the people just now. My dear boy! In 1862 the Poles formed their revolutionary bands in the forest; we are just about to enter that same forest, I mean the people, where it is no less dark and dense than in the other."

"Then what would you have us do?"

"The Hindus cast themselves under the wheels of the Juggernaut," Paklin continued; "they were mangled to pieces and died in ecstasy. We, also, have our Juggernaut—it crushes and mangles us, but there is no ecstasy in it."

"Then what would you have us do?" Nejdanov almost screamed at him. "Would you have us write preachy novels?

Paklin folded his arms and put his head on one side.

"You, at any rate, could write novels. You have a decidedly literary turn of mind. All right, I won't say anything about it. I know you don't like it being mentioned. I know it is not very exciting to write the sort of stuff wanted, and in the modern style too. "'Oh, I love you," she bounded —'"

"It's all the same to me," he replied, scratching himself.

"That is precisely why I advise you to get to know all sorts and conditions, beginning from the very highest. We must not be entirely dependent on people like Ostrodumov! They are very honest, worthy folk, but so hopelessly stupid! You need only look at our friend. The very soles of his boots are not like those worn by intelligent people. Why did he hurry away just now? Only because he did not want to be in the same room with an aristocrat, to breathe the same air—"

"Please don't talk like that about Ostrodumov before me!" Nejdanov burst out. "He wears thick boots because they are cheaper!"

"I did not mean it in that sense," Paklin began.

"If he did not wish to remain in the same room with an aristocrat," Nejdanov continued, raising his voice, "I think it very praiseworthy on his part, and what is more, he is capable of sacrificing himself, will face death, if necessary, which is more than you or I will ever do!

Paklin made a sad grimace, and pointed to his scraggy, crippled legs.

"Now do I look like a warrior, my dear Alexai Dmitritch? But enough of this. I am delighted that you met this Sipiagin, and can even foresee something useful to our cause as a result of it. You will find yourself in the highest society, will come in contact with those wonderful beauties one hears about, women with velvety bodies on steel springs, as it says in "Letters on Spain". Get to know them, my dear fellow. If you were at all inclined to be an Epicurean, I should really be afraid to let you go. But those are not the objects with which you are going, are they?"

"I am going away," Nejdanov said, "to earn my living. And to get away from you all," he added to himself.

"Of course, of course! That is why I advise you to learn. Fugh! What a smell this gentleman has left behind him!" Paklin sniffed the air. "The very ambrosia that the governor's wife longed for in Gogol's 'Revisor'!"

"He discussed me with Prince G.," Nejdanov remarked dejectedly. "I suppose he knows my whole history now."

"You need not suppose; you may be quite sure of it! But what does it matter? I wouldn't mind betting that that was the very reason for his wanting to engage you. You will be able to hold your own with the best of them. You are an aristocrat yourself by blood, and consequently an equal. However, I have stayed too long. I must go back to the exploiter's, to my office. Goodbye."

Paklin went to the door, but stopped and turned back.

"I say, Aliosha," he began in a persuasive tone of voice, you have only just refused me, and I know you will not be short of money now; but, all the same, do allow me to sacrifice just a little for the cause. I can't do anything else, so let me help with my pocket! I have put ten roubles on the table. Will you take them?"

Nejdanov remained motionless, and did not say anything. "Silence means consent! Thanks!" Paklin exclaimed gaily and vanished.

Nejdanov was left alone. He continued gazing out into the narrow, gloomy court, unpenetrated by the sun even in summer, and he felt sad and gloomy at heart.

We already know that Nejdanov's father was Prince G., a rich adjutant-general. His mother was the daughter of the general's governess, a pretty girl who died on the day of Nejdanov's birth. He received his early education in a boarding school kept by a certain Swiss, a very energetic and severe pedagogue, after which he entered the university. His great ambition was to study law, but his father, who had a violent hatred for nihilists, made him go in for history and philology, or for "aesthetics" as Nejdanov put it with a bitter smile. His father used to see him about four times a year in all, but was, nevertheless, interested in his welfare, and when he died, left him a sum of six thousand roubles "in memory of Nastinka" his mother. Nejdanov received the interest on this money from his brothers the Princes G., which they were pleased to call an allowance.

Paklin had good reason to call him an aristocrat. Everything about him betokened his origin. His tiny ears, hands, feet, his small but fine features, delicate skin, wavy hair; his very voice was pleasant, although it was slightly guttural. He was highly strung, frightfully conceited, very susceptible, and even capricious. The false position he had been placed in from childhood had made him sensitive and irritable, but his natural generosity had kept him from becoming suspicious and mistrustful. This same false position was the cause of an utter inconsistency, which permeated his whole being. He was fastidiously accurate and horribly squeamish, tried to be cynical and coarse in his speech, but was an idealist by nature. He was passionate and pure-minded, bold and timid at the same time, and, like a repentant sinner, ashamed of his sins; he was ashamed alike of his timidity and his purity, and considered it his duty to scoff at all idealism. He had an affectionate heart, but held himself aloof from everybody, was easily exasperated, but never bore ill-will. He was furious with his father for having made him take up "aesthetics," openly interested himself in politics and social questions, professed the most extreme views (which meant more to him than mere words), but secretly took a delight in art, poetry, beauty in all its manifestations, and in his inspired moments wrote verses. It is true that he carefully hid the copy-book in which they were written, and none of his St. Petersburg friends, with the exception of Paklin, and he only by his peculiar intuitiveness, suspected its existence. Nothing hurt or offended Nejdanov more than the smallest allusion to his poetry, which he regarded as an unpardonable weakness in himself. His Swiss schoolmaster had taught him a great many things, and he was not afraid of hard work. He applied himself readily and zealously, but did not work consecutively. All his friends loved him. They were attracted by his natural sense of justice, his kindness, and his pure- mindedness, but