



***IVAN SERGEEVICH
TURGENEV***

***A RECKLESS
CHARACTER,
AND OTHER
STORIES***

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A Reckless Character, and Other Stories

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I

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There were eight of us in the room, and we were discussing contemporary matters and persons,

"I do not understand these gentlemen!" remarked A. —"They are fellows of a reckless sort.... Really, desperate.... There has never been anything of the kind before."

"Yes, there has," put in P., a grey-haired old man, who had been born about the twenties of the present century; —"there were reckless men in days gone by also. Some one said of the poet Yázykoff, that he had enthusiasm which was not directed to anything, an objectless enthusiasm; and it was much the same with those people—their recklessness was without an object. But see here, if you will permit me, I will narrate to you the story of my grandnephew, Mísha Pólteff. It may serve as a sample of the recklessness of those days."

He made his appearance in God's daylight in the year 1828, I remember, on his father's ancestral estate, in one of the most remote nooks of a remote government of the steppes. I still preserve a distinct recollection of Mísha's father, Andréi Nikoláevitch Pólteff. He was a genuine, old-fashioned landed proprietor, a pious inhabitant of the steppes, sufficiently well educated,—according to the standards of that epoch,—rather crack-brained, if the truth

must be told, and subject, in addition, to epileptic fits.... That also is an old-fashioned malady.... However, Andréi Nikoláevitch's attacks were quiet, and they generally terminated in a sleep and in a fit of melancholy.—He was kind of heart, courteous in manner, not devoid of some pomposity: I have always pictured to myself the Tzar Mikhaíl Feódorovitch as just that sort of a man.

Andréi Nikoláevitch's whole life flowed past in the punctual discharge of all the rites established since time immemorial, in strict conformity with all the customs of ancient-orthodox, Holy-Russian life. He rose and went to bed, he ate and went to the bath, he waxed merry or wrathful (he did both the one and the other rarely, it is true), he even smoked his pipe, he even played cards (two great innovations!), not as suited his fancy, not after his own fashion, but in accordance with the rule and tradition handed down from his ancestors, in proper and dignified style. He himself was tall of stature, of noble mien and brawny; he had a quiet and rather hoarse voice, as is frequently the case with virtuous Russians; he was neat about his linen and his clothing, wore white neckerchiefs and long-skirted coats of snuff-brown hue, but his noble blood made itself manifest notwithstanding; no one would have taken him for a priest's son or a merchant! Andréi Nikoláevitch always knew, in all possible circumstances and encounters, precisely how he ought to act and exactly what expressions he must employ; he knew when he ought to take medicine, and what medicine to take, which symptoms he should heed and which might be disregarded ... in a word, he knew everything that it was proper to do.... It was

as though he said: "Everything has been foreseen and decreed by the old men—the only thing is not to devise anything of your own.... And the chief thing of all is, don't go even as far as the threshold without God's blessing!"—I am bound to admit that deadly tedium reigned in his house, in those low-ceiled, warm, dark rooms which so often resounded from the chanting of vigils and prayer-services, [2] with an odour of incense and fasting-viands,[3] which almost never left them!

Andréi Nikoláevitch had married, when he was no longer in his first youth, a poor young noblewoman of the neighbourhood, a very nervous and sickly person, who had been reared in one of the government institutes for gentlewomen. She played far from badly on the piano; she spoke French in boarding-school fashion; she was given to enthusiasm, and still more addicted to melancholy, and even to tears.... In a word, she was of an uneasy character. As she considered that her life had been ruined, she could not love her husband, who, "as a matter of course," did not understand her; but she respected, she tolerated him; and as she was a thoroughly honest and perfectly cold being, she never once so much as thought of any other "object." Moreover, she was constantly engrossed by anxieties: in the first place, over her really feeble health; in the second place, over the health of her husband, whose fits always inspired her with something akin to superstitious terror; and, in conclusion, over her only son, Mísha, whom she reared herself with great zeal. Andréi Nikoláevitch did not prevent his wife's busying herself with Mísha—but on one condition: she was never, under any circumstances, to depart from the

limits, which had been defined once for all, wherein everything in his house must revolve! Thus, for example: during the Christmas holidays and Vasíly's evening preceding the New Year, Mísha was not only permitted to dress up in costume along with the other "lads,"—doing so was even imposed upon him as an obligation....[4] On the other hand, God forbid that he should do it at any other time! And so forth, and so forth.



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I remember this Mísha at the age of thirteen. He was a very comely lad with rosy little cheeks and soft little lips (and altogether he was soft and plump), with somewhat prominent, humid eyes; carefully brushed and coifed—a regular little girl!—There was only one thing about him which displeased me: he laughed rarely; but when he did laugh his teeth, which were large, white, and pointed like those of a wild animal, displayed themselves unpleasantly; his very laugh had a sharp and even fierce—almost brutal—ring to it; and evil flashes darted athwart his eyes. His mother always boasted of his being so obedient and polite, and that he was not fond of consorting with naughty boys, but always was more inclined to feminine society.

"He is his mother's son, an effeminate fellow," his father, Andréi Nikoláevitch, was wont to say of him:—"but, on the

other hand, he likes to go to God's church.... And that delights me."

Only one old neighbour, a former commissary of the rural police, once said in my presence concerning Mísha:—"Good gracious! he will turn out a rebel." And I remember that that word greatly surprised me at the time. The former commissary of police, it is true, had a habit of descrying rebels everywhere.

Just this sort of exemplary youth did Mísha remain until the age of eighteen,—until the death of his parents, whom he lost on almost one and the same day. As I resided constantly in Moscow, I heard nothing about my young relative. Some one who came to town from his government did, it is true, inform me that Mísha had sold his ancestral estate for a song; but this bit of news seemed to me altogether too incredible!—And lo! suddenly, one autumn morning, into the courtyard of my house dashes a calash drawn by a pair of splendid trotters, with a monstrous coachman on the box; and in the calash, wrapped in a cloak of military cut with a two-arshín[5] beaver collar, and a fatigue-cap over one ear—*à la diable m'emporte*—sits Mísha!

On catching sight of me (I was standing at the drawing-room window and staring in amazement at the equipage which had dashed in), he burst into his sharp laugh, and jauntily shaking the lapels of his cloak, he sprang out of the calash and ran into the house.

"Mísha! Mikhaíl Andrévitch!" I was beginning ... "is it you?"

"Call me 'thou' and 'Mísha,'" he interrupted me.—"'Tis I ... 'tis I, in person.... I have come to Moscow ... to take a look at people ... and to show myself. So I have dropped in on you.—What do you think of my trotters?... Hey?" Again he laughed loudly.

Although seven years had elapsed since I had seen Mísha for the last time, yet I recognised him on the instant.—His face remained thoroughly youthful and as comely as of yore; his moustache had not even sprouted; but under his eyes on his cheeks a puffiness had made its appearance, and an odour of liquor proceeded from his mouth.

"And hast thou been long in Moscow?" I inquired.—"I supposed that thou wert off there in the country, managing thy estate...."

"Eh! I immediately got rid of the village!—As soon as my parents died,—may the kingdom of heaven be theirs,"—(Mísha crossed himself with sincerity, without the slightest hypocrisy)—"I instantly, without the slightest delay ... *ein, zwei, drei!* Ha-ha! I let it go cheap, the rascally thing! Such a scoundrel turned up.—Well, never mind! At all events, I shall live at my ease—and amuse others.—But why do you stare at me so?—Do you really think that I ought to have spun the affair out indefinitely?... My dear relative, can't I have a drink?"

Mísha talked with frightful rapidity, hurriedly and at the same time as though half asleep.

"Good mercy, Mísha!"—I shouted: "Have the fear of God before thine eyes! How dreadful is thine aspect, in what a condition thou art! And thou wishest another drink! And to sell such a fine estate for a song!..."

"I always fear God and remember him," he caught me up.—"And he 's good—God, I mean.... He'll forgive! And I also am good.... I have never injured any one in my life as yet. And a drink is good also; and as for hurting ... it won't hurt anybody, either. And as for my looks, they are all right.... If thou wishest, uncle, I'll walk a line on the floor. Or shall I dance a bit?"

"Akh, please drop that!—What occasion is there for dancing? Thou hadst better sit down."

"I don't mind sitting down.... But why don't you say something about my greys? Just look at them, they're regular lions! I'm hiring them for the time being, but I shall certainly buy them together with the coachman. It is incomparably cheaper to own one's horses. And I did have the money, but I dropped it last night at faro.—Never mind, I'll retrieve my fortunes to-morrow. Uncle ... how about that drink?"

I still could not collect myself.—"Good gracious! Mísha, how old art thou? Thou shouldst not be occupying thyself with horses, or with gambling ... thou shouldst enter the university or the service."

Mísha first roared with laughter again, then he emitted a prolonged whistle.

"Well, uncle, I see that thou art in a melancholy frame of mind just now. I'll call another time.—But see here: just look in at Sokólniki[6] some evening. I have pitched my tent there. The Gipsies sing.... Well, well! One can hardly restrain himself! And on the tent there is a pennant, and on the pennant is written in bi-i-ig letters: 'The Band of Poltéva[7] Gipsies.' The pennant undulates like a serpent; the letters

are gilded; any one can easily read them. The entertainment is whatever any one likes!... They refuse nothing. It has kicked up a dust all over Moscow ... my respects.... Well? Will you come? I've got a Gipsy there—a regular asp! Black as my boot, fierce as a dog, and eyes ... regular coals of fire! One can't possibly make out whether she is kissing or biting.... Will you come, uncle?... Well, farewell for the present!"

And abruptly embracing me and kissing me with a smack on my shoulder, Mísha darted out into the court to his calash, waving his cap over his head, and uttering a yell; the monstrous coachman[8] bestowed upon him an oblique glance across his beard, the trotters dashed forward, and all disappeared!

On the following day, sinful man that I am, I did go to Sokólniki, and actually did see the tent with the pennant and the inscription. The tent-flaps were raised; an uproar, crashing, squealing, proceeded thence. A crowd of people thronged around it. On the ground, on an outspread rug, sat the Gipsy men and Gipsy women, singing, and thumping tambourines; and in the middle of them, with a guitar in his hands, clad in a red-silk shirt and full trousers of velvet, Mísha was gyrating like a whirligig.—"Gentlemen! Respected sirs! Pray enter! The performance is about to begin! Free!"—he was shouting in a cracked voice.—"Hey there! Champagne! Bang! In the forehead! On the ceiling! Akh, thou rascal, Paul de Kock!"—Luckily, he did not catch sight of me, and I hastily beat a retreat.

I shall not dilate, gentlemen, on my amazement at the sight of such a change. And, as a matter of fact, how could

that peaceable, modest lad suddenly turn into a tipsy good-for-nothing? Was it possible that all this had been concealed within him since his childhood, and had immediately come to the surface as soon as the weight of parental authority had been removed from him?—And that he had kicked up a dust in Moscow, as he had expressed it, there could be no possible doubt, either. I had seen rakes in my day; but here something frantic, some frenzy of self-extermination, some sort of recklessness, had made itself manifest!



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This diversion lasted for two months.... And lo! again I am standing at the window of the drawing-room and looking out into the courtyard.... Suddenly—what is this?... Through the gate with quiet step enters a novice.... His conical cap is pulled down on his brow, his hair is combed smoothly and flows from under it to right and left ... he wears a long cassock and a leather girdle.... Can it be Mísha? It is!

I go out on the steps to meet him.... "What is the meaning of this masquerade?" I ask.

"It is not a masquerade, uncle," Mísha answers me, with a deep sigh;—"but as I have squandered all my property to the last kopék, and as a mighty repentance has seized upon me, I have made up my mind to betake myself to the Tróitzko-Sérgieva Lávra,[9] to pray away my sins. For what

asylum is now left to me?... And so I have come to bid you farewell, uncle, like the Prodigal Son...."

I gazed intently at Mísha. His face was the same as ever, fresh and rosy (by the way, it never changed to the very end), and his eyes were humid and caressing and languishing, and his hands were small and white.... But he reeked of liquor.

"Very well!" I said at last: "It is a good move if there is no other issue. But why dost thou smell of liquor?"

"Old habit," replied Mísha, and suddenly burst out laughing, but immediately caught himself up, and making a straight, low, monastic obeisance, he added:—"Will not you contribute something for the journey? For I am going to the monastery on foot...."

"When?"

"To-day ... at once."

"Why art thou in such a hurry?"

"Uncle! my motto has always been 'Hurry! Hurry!'"

"But what is thy motto now?"

"It is the same now.... Only '*Hurry*—to good!'"

So Mísha went away, leaving me to meditate over the mutability of human destinies.

But he speedily reminded me of his existence. A couple of months after his visit I received a letter from him,—the first of those letters with which he afterward favoured me. And note this peculiarity: I have rarely beheld a neater, more legible handwriting than was possessed by this unmethodical man. The style of his letters also was very regular, and slightly florid. The invariable appeals for assistance alternated with promises of amendment, with

honourable words and with oaths.... All this appeared to be—and perhaps was—sincere. Mísha's signature at the end of his letters was always accompanied by peculiar flourishes, lines and dots, and he used a great many exclamation-points. In that first letter Mísha informed me of a new "turn in his fortune." (Later on he called these turns "dives" ... and he dived frequently.) He had gone off to the Caucasus to serve the Tzar and fatherland "with his breast," in the capacity of a yunker. And although a certain benevolent aunt had commiserated his poverty-stricken condition and had sent him an insignificant sum, nevertheless he asked me to help him to equip himself. I complied with his request, and for a period of two years thereafter I heard nothing about him. I must confess that I entertained strong doubts as to his having gone to the Caucasus. But it turned out that he really had gone thither, had entered the T— regiment as yunker, through influence, and had served in it those two years. Whole legends were fabricated there about him. One of the officers in his regiment communicated them to me.

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I learned a great deal which I had not expected from him. I was not surprised, of course, that he had proved to be a poor, even a downright worthless military man and soldier; but what I had not expected was, that he had displayed no

special bravery; that in battle he wore a dejected and languid aspect, as though he were partly bored, partly daunted. All discipline oppressed him, inspired him with sadness; he was audacious to recklessness when it was a question of himself personally; there was no wager too crazy for him to accept; but do evil to others, kill, fight, he could not, perhaps because he had a good heart,—and perhaps because his "cotton-wool" education (as he expressed it) had enervated him. He was ready to exterminate himself in any sort of way at any time.... But others—no. "The devil only can make him out," his comrades said of him:—"he's puny, a rag—and what a reckless fellow he is—a regular dare-devil!"—I happened afterward to ask Mísha what evil spirit prompted him, made him indulge in drinking-bouts, risk his life, and so forth. He always had one answer: "Spleen."

"But why hast thou spleen?"

"Just because I have, good gracious! One comes to himself, recovers his senses, and begins to meditate about poverty, about injustice, about Russia.... Well, and that settles it! Immediately one feels such spleen that he is ready to send a bullet into his forehead! One goes on a carouse instinctively."

"But why hast thou mixed up Russia with this?"

"What else could I do? Nothing!—That's why I am afraid to think."

"All that—that spleen—comes of thy idleness."

"But I don't know how to do anything, uncle! My dear relative! Here now, if it were a question of taking and staking my life on a card,—losing my all and shooting

myself, bang! in the neck!—I can do that!—Here now, tell me what to do, what to risk my life for.—I'll do it this very minute!..."

"But do thou simply live.... Why risk thy life?"

"I can't!—You will tell me that I behave recklessly. What else can I do?... One begins to think—and, O Lord, what comes into his head! 'T is only the Germans who think!..."

What was the use of arguing with him? He was a reckless man—and that is all there is to say!

I will repeat to you two or three of the Caucasian legends to which I have alluded. One day, in the company of the officers, Mísha began to brag of a Circassian sabre which he had obtained in barter.—"A genuine Persian blade!"—The officers expressed doubt as to whether it were really genuine. Mísha began to dispute.—"See here," he exclaimed at last,—"they say that the finest judge of Circassian sabres is one-eyed Abdulka. I will go to him and ask."—The officers were dumbfounded.

"What Abdulka? The one who lives in the mountains? The one who is not at peace with us? Abdul-Khan?"

"The very man."

"But he will take thee for a scout, he will place thee in the bug-house,—or he will cut off thy head with that same sabre. And how wilt thou make thy way to him? They will seize thee immediately."

"But I will go to him, nevertheless."

"We bet that thou wilt not go!"

"I take your bet!"

And Mísha instantly saddled his horse and rode off to Abdulka. He was gone for three days. All were convinced

that he had come to some dreadful end. And behold! he came back, somewhat tipsy, and with a sabre, only not the one which he had carried away with him, but another. They began to question him.

"It's all right," said he. "Abdulka is a kind man. At first he really did order fetters to be riveted on my legs, and was even preparing to impale me on a stake. But I explained to him why I had come. 'Do not expect any ransom from me,' said I. 'I haven't a farthing to my name—and I have no relatives.'—Abdulka was amazed; he stared at me with his solitary eye.—'Well,' says he, 'thou art the chief of heroes, Russian! Am I to believe thee?'—'Believe me,' said I; 'I never lie' (and Mísha really never did lie).—Abdulka looked at me again.—'And dost thou know how to drink wine?'—'I do,' said I; 'as much as thou wilt give, so much will I drink.'—Again Abdulka was astonished, and mentioned Allah. And then he ordered his daughter, or some pretty maiden, whoever she was,—anyhow, she had the gaze of a jackal,—to fetch a leathern bottle of wine.—And I set to work.—'But thy sabre is spurious,' says he; 'here, take this genuine one. And now thou and I are friends.'—And you have lost your wager, gentlemen, so pay up."

A second legend concerning Mísha runs as follows. He was passionately fond of cards; but as he had no money and did not pay his gambling debts (although he was never a sharper), no one would any longer sit down to play with him. So one day he began to importune a brother officer, and insisted upon the latter's playing with him.

"But thou wilt be sure to lose, and thou wilt not pay."

"I will not pay in money, that's true—but I will shoot a hole through my left hand with this pistol here!"

"But what profit is there for me in that?"

"No profit whatever—but it's a curious thing, nevertheless."

This conversation took place after a carouse, in the presence of witnesses. Whether Mísha's proposal really did strike the officer as curious or not,—at all events, he consented. The cards were brought, the game began. Mísha was lucky; he won one hundred rubles. And thereupon his opponent smote himself on the forehead.

"What a blockhead I am!" he cried.—"On what a bait was I caught! If thou hadst lost, much thou wouldst have shot thyself through the hand!—so it's just an assault on my pocket!"

"That's where thou art mistaken," retorted Mísha:—"I have won—but I'll shoot the hole through my hand."

He seized his pistol, and bang! shot himself through the hand. The bullet went clear through ... and a week later the wound was completely healed!

On another occasion still, Mísha is riding along the road by night with his comrades.... And they see yawning, right by the side of the road, a narrow ravine in the nature of a cleft, dark, very dark, and the bottom of it not visible.

"Here now," says one comrade, "Mísha is reckless enough about some things, but he will not leap into this ravine."

"Yes, I will!"

"No, thou wilt not, because it is, probably, ten fathoms deep, and thou mightest break thy neck."

His friend knew how to attack him—through his vanity.... Mísha had a great deal of it.

"But I will leap, nevertheless! Wilt thou bet on it? Ten rubles."

"All right!"

And before his comrade had managed to finish the last word Mísha flew off his horse into the ravine, and crashed down on the stones. They were all fairly petrified with horror.... A good minute passed, and they heard Mísha's voice proceeding as though from the bowels of the earth, and very dull:

"I'm whole! I landed on sand.... But the descent was long! Ten rubles on you!"

"Climb out!" shouted his comrades.

"Yes, climb out!"—returned Mísha. "Damn it! One can't climb out of here! You will have to ride off now for ropes and lanterns. And in the meanwhile, so that I may not find the waiting tedious, toss me down a flask...."

And so Mísha had to sit for five hours at the bottom of the ravine; and when they dragged him out, it appeared that he had a dislocated shoulder. But this did not daunt him in the least. On the following day a blacksmith bone-setter set his shoulder, and he used it as though nothing were the matter.

Altogether, his health was remarkable, unprecedented. I have already told you that until his death he preserved an almost childish freshness of complexion. He did not know what it was to be ill, in spite of all his excesses; the vigour of his constitution was not affected in a single instance. Where any other man would have fallen dangerously ill, or even

have died, he merely shook himself like a duck in the water, and became more blooming than ever. Once—that also was in the Caucasus.... This legend is improbable, it is true, but from it one can judge what Mísha was regarded as capable of doing.... So then, once, in the Caucasus, when in a state of intoxication, he fell into a small stream that covered the lower part of his body; his head and arms remained exposed on the bank. The affair took place in winter; a rigorous frost set in; and when he was found on the following morning, his legs and body were visible beneath a stout crust of ice which had frozen over in the course of the night—and he never even had a cold in the head in consequence! On another occasion (this happened in Russia, near Orél,[10] and also during a severe frost), he chanced to go to a suburban eating-house in company with seven young theological students. These theological students were celebrating their graduation examination, and had invited Mísha, as a charming fellow, "a man with a sigh," as it was called then. They drank a great deal; and when, at last, the merry crew were preparing to depart, Mísha, dead drunk, was found to be already in a state of unconsciousness. The whole seven theological students had between them only one tróika sledge with a high back;[11]—where were they to put the helpless body? Then one of the young men, inspired by classical reminiscences, suggested that Mísha be tied by the feet to the back of the sledge, as Hector was to the chariot of Achilles! The suggestion was approved ... and bouncing over the hummocks, sliding sideways down the declivities, with his feet strung up in the air, and his head dragging through the snow, our Mísha traversed on his back

the distance of two versts which separated the restaurant from the town, and never even so much as coughed or frowned. With such marvellous health had nature endowed him!

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Leaving the Caucasus, he presented himself once more in Moscow, in a Circassian coat, with cartridge-pouches on the breast, a dagger in his belt, and a tall fur cap on his head. From this costume he did not part until the end, although he was no longer in the military service, from which he had been dismissed for not reporting on time. He called on me, borrowed a little money ... and then began his "divings," his progress through the tribulations,[12] or, as he expressed it, "through the seven Semyóns";[13] then began his sudden absences and returns, the despatching of beautifully-written letters addressed to all possible persons, beginning with the Metropolitan and ending with riding-masters and midwives! Then began the visits to acquaintances and strangers! And here is one point which must be noted: in making his calls he did not cringe and did not importune; but, on the contrary, he behaved himself in decorous fashion, and even wore a cheery and pleasant aspect, although an ingrained odour of liquor accompanied

him everywhere—and his Oriental costume was gradually reduced to rags.

"Give—God will reward you—although I do not deserve it," he was accustomed to say, smiling brightly and blushing openly. "If you do not give, you will be entirely in the right, and I shall not be angry in the least. I shall support myself. God will provide! For there are many, very many people who are poorer and more worthy than I!"

Mísha enjoyed particular success with women; he understood how to arouse their compassion. And do not think that he was or imagined himself to be a Lovelace.... Oh, no! In that respect he was very modest. Whether he had inherited from his parents such cold blood, or whether herein was expressed his disinclination to do evil to any one, —since, according to his ideas, to consort with a woman means inevitably to insult the woman,—I will not take it upon myself to decide; only, in his relations with the fair sex he was extremely delicate. The women felt this, and all the more willingly did they pity and aid him until he, at last, repelled them by his sprees and hard drinking, by the recklessness of which I have already spoken.... I cannot hit upon any other word.

On the other hand, in other respects he had already lost all delicacy and had gradually descended to the extreme depths of degradation. He once went so far that in the Assembly of Nobility of T— he placed on the table a jug with the inscription:

"Any one who finds it agreeable to tweak the nose of hereditary nobleman[14] Pólteff (whose authentic

documents are herewith appended) may satisfy his desire, on condition that he puts a ruble in this jug."

And it is said that there were persons who did care to tweak the nobleman's nose! It is true that he first all but throttled one amateur who, having put but one ruble in the jug, tweaked his nose twice, and then made him sue for pardon; it is true also that he immediately distributed to other tatterdemalions a portion of the money thus secured ... but, nevertheless, what outrageous conduct!

In the course of his wanderings through the seven Semyóns he had also reached his ancestral nest, which he had sold for a song to a speculator and usurer well known at that period. The speculator was at home, and on learning of the arrival of the former owner, who had been transformed into a tramp, he gave orders that he was not to be admitted into the house, and that in case of need he was to be flung out by the scruff of the neck. Mísha declared that he would not enter the house, defiled as it was by the presence of a scoundrel; that he would allow no one to throw him out; but that he was on his way to the churchyard to salute the dust of his ancestors. This he did. At the churchyard he was joined by an old house-serf, who had formerly been his man-nurse. The speculator had deprived the old man of his monthly stipend and expelled him from the home farm; from that time forth the man sought shelter in the kennel of a peasant. Mísha had managed his estate for so short a time that he had not succeeded in leaving behind him a specially good memory of himself; but the old servitor had not been able to resist, nevertheless, and on hearing of his young master's arrival, he had immediately hastened to the

churchyard, had found Mísha seated on the ground among the mortuary stones, had begged leave to kiss his hand in memory of old times, and had even melted into tears as he gazed at the rags wherewith the once petted limbs of his nursling were swathed. Mísha looked long and in silence at the old man.

"Timoféi!" he said at last.

Timoféi gave a start.

"What do you wish?"

"Hast thou a spade?"

"I can get one.... But what do you want with a spade, Mikhaílo Andréitch?"

"I want to dig a grave for myself here, Timoféi; and lie down here forever between my parents. For this is the only spot which is left to me in the world. Fetch the spade!"

"I obey," said Timoféi; and went off and brought it.

And Mísha immediately began to dig up the earth, while Timoféi stood by with his chin propped on his hand, repeating: "That's the only thing left for thee and me, master!"

And Mísha dug and dug, inquiring from time to time: "Life isn't worth living, is it, Timoféi?"

"It is not, dear little father."

The hole had already grown fairly deep. People saw Mísha's work and ran to report about it to the speculator-owner. At first the speculator flew into a rage, and wanted to send for the police. "What hypocrisy!" he said. But afterward, reflecting, probably, that it would be inconvenient to have a row with that lunatic, and that a scandal might be

the result, he betook himself in person to the churchyard, and approaching the toiling Mísha, he made a polite obeisance to him. The latter continued to dig, as though he had not noticed his successor.

"Mikhaíl Andréitch," began the speculator, "permit me to inquire what you are doing there?"

"As you see—I am digging a grave for myself."

"Why are you doing that?"

"Because I do not wish to live any longer."

The speculator fairly flung apart his hands in surprise.—"You do not wish to live?"

Mísha cast a menacing glance at the speculator:—"Does that surprise you? Are not you the cause of it all?... Is it not you?... Is it not thou?...[15] Is it not thou, Judas, who hast robbed me, by taking advantage of my youth? Dost not thou skin the peasants? Is it not thou who hast deprived this decrepit old man of his daily bread? Is it not thou?... O Lord! Everywhere there is injustice, and oppression, and villainy.... So down with everything,—and with me also! I don't wish to live—I don't wish to live any longer in Russia!"—And the spade made swifter progress than ever in Mísha's hands.

"The devil knows the meaning of this!" thought the speculator: "he actually is burying himself."—"Mikhaíl Andréitch,"—he began afresh, "listen; I really am guilty toward you; people did not represent you properly to me."

Mísha went on digging.

"But why this recklessness?"

Mísha went on digging—and flung the dirt on the speculator, as much as to say: "Take that, earth-devourer!"

"Really, you have no cause for this. Will not you come to my house to eat and rest?"

Mísha raised his head a little. "Now you're talking! And will there be anything to drink?"

The speculator was delighted.—"Good gracious!... I should think so!"

"And dost thou invite Timoféi also?"

"But why ... well, I invite him also."

Mísha reflected.—"Only look out ... for thou didst turn me out of doors.... Don't think thou art going to get off with one bottle!"

"Do not worry ... there will be as much as you wish of everything."

Mísha flung aside his spade.... "Well, Timósha," he said, addressing his old man-nurse, "let us honour the host.... Come along!"

"I obey," replied the old man.

And all three wended their way toward the house.

The speculator knew with whom he had to deal. Mísha made him promise as a preliminary, it is true, that he would "allow all privileges" to the peasants;—but an hour later that same Mísha, together with Timoféi, both drunk, danced a gallopade through those rooms where the pious shade of Andréi Nikoláitch seemed still to be hovering; and an hour later still, Mísha, so sound asleep that he could not be waked (liquor was his great weakness), was placed in a peasant-cart, together with his kazák cap and his dagger, and sent off to the town, five-and-twenty versts distant,—and there was found under a fence.... Well, and Timoféi, who still kept his feet and merely hiccoughed, was "pitched out