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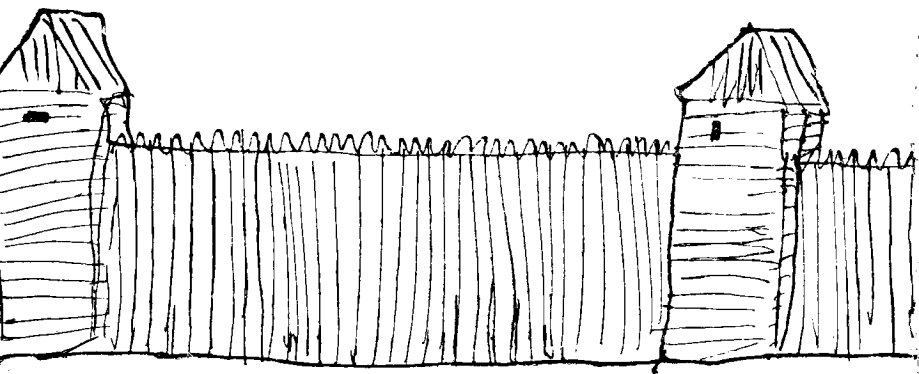
NOTES  
FROM A DEAD  
HOUSE

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

# **CLASSICS OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE**





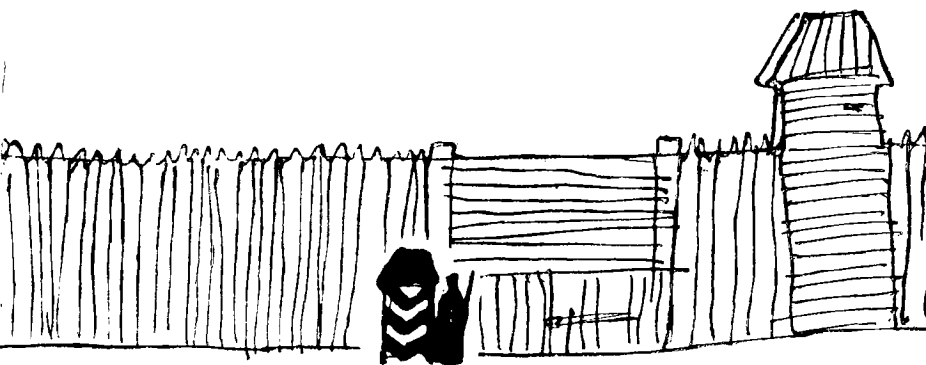
Ф . Д О С Т О Е В С К И Й

ЗАПИСКИ  
ИЗ МЕРТВОГО  
ДОМА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ

Москва





F. D O S T O Y E V S K Y

NOTES  
FROM A DEAD  
HOUSE

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

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# PART ONE

## INTRODUCTION

In the remotest parts of Siberia, amid the steppes, the mountains, and the pathless forests, there are drab lonely little towns, built of wood, each with one or at most two thousand inhabitants and two churches—one in the centre and the other in the graveyard—and all of them more like fair-sized villages in the environs of Moscow rather than real towns. As a rule, they are abundantly furnished with police inspectors, assessors, and other minor officials. Siberia may be cold, but it is a warm and a cosy place for the servants of the government. The populace are simple people untouched by liberal ideas; and the rules and regulations, hallowed by time, stand firm. The officials who justly form the élite of Siberia are either sprung from the local inhabitants or arrived from Russia, chiefly from the capital, enticed by high salaries, double allowances for travelling expenses, and various seductive prospects. Those who know how to work out the riddle of life almost invariably take root in Siberia and gather an abundance of richly flavoured fruit, while others, too light-minded and unable to solve this riddle, are soon bored and regretfully wonder what folly brought them there. No sooner are their three years of statutory service up than they urgently request to be returned, afterwards deprecating and ridiculing Sibe-

ria. They are wrong, for it is a happy land from many other points of view besides that of the government officials. The climate is excellent. The merchants are rich and hospitable and many of the natives live in comfortable circumstances. The girls are like roses and their morals irreproachable. Wild game fly even in the streets, eager to be bagged by the hunters. Champagne is consumed in prodigious quantities and the caviare is astonishing. The crops in places come fifteen-fold. In short, it is a blessed land if one can only turn it to good account, something that they are very good at in Siberia.

It was in one of these gay, smug little towns whose inhabitants I liked so much that I met Alexander Petrovich Goryanchikov, once a nobleman and landlord in Russia, then a convict of the second grade condemned to ten years hard labour for the murder of his wife, and now a peaceful, unobtrusive settler in the little town of K. He had been sent to one of the adjoining districts, but lived in K. where he earned his living as a tutor. There are many like him in Siberian towns and no one is squeamish about them. They are mostly teachers of French, a subject indispensable for worldly success and one of which no one in those remote parts could have known anything but for them.

I first met Alexander Petrovich at the home of Ivan Ivanovich Gvozdikov, a venerable official, hospitable and respected. He had five very promising daughters whom Alexander Petrovich taught French four times a week at the rate of thirty kopeks in silver for each lesson. I was struck by the appearance of the man. He was very pale and thin, about thirty-five years old and rather frail. He was always very correctly dressed in the European fashion. Whenever I spoke to him, he assumed an attentive, thoughtful air, listening to every word with austere politeness as though I were posing a problem or trying to wring some secret from him. He

would answer briefly and clearly, but would weigh each word so carefully that I grew ill at ease and somehow was glad when our conversation was over. I asked Gvozdikov about him and was told that Goryanchikov was a man of irreproachable morals, or would otherwise never have been entrusted with the education of his daughters, but he was a misanthrope and shunned everybody. He was scholarly, well read, but chary of words and not easily drawn into conversation. There were some who even said that he was mad, but added that this was no serious defect, that many respectable people in town showed him every kindness and that he could even be useful: in drawing up petitions for example. It was also believed that he was well connected in Russia, though it was known that he had severed all relations the moment he was exiled, and, in a word, was his own worst enemy. Everyone knew his story: he had killed his wife in their first year of marriage out of jealousy and given himself up to justice (which had made his punishment less severe). Such crimes were always regarded rather like misfortunes deserving pity. And yet the queer fellow kept stubbornly aloof and never put in an appearance anywhere except to give his lessons.

I hardly noticed him at first, but grew gradually interested in him without knowing why. There was something enigmatic about him. It was really impossible to draw him into conversation. He did answer my questions, of course, I should even say he did it with alacrity, but somehow made me feel reluctant to ask any more. Besides, there was such weariness and suffering in his expression.

As we were walking from Gvozdikov's one fine summer evening, it suddenly occurred to me to invite him to my house for a smoke. I can hardly tell how terrified he looked. He grew confused, muttered incoherently,

then glared at me and darted off in another direction, leaving me speechless with surprise. He seemed a little afraid whenever he met me after that. Still, I was not discouraged. He had aroused my curiosity and within a month I found some pretext or other to call on him, though it was a stupid and tactless thing to do.

He was lodging with an old woman at the very edge of the town. She had a consumptive daughter who was the mother of an illegitimate child, a little girl of ten, a gay and pretty thing. When I entered, I found Alexander Petrovich teaching her to read. He was put out, as if I had caught him at some misdemeanour, and sprang up terrified, staring at me. When we sat down, he watched me narrowly, as if my every change of expression had some hidden meaning. He was mistrustful to the point of madness, I could see, and sat looking at me with hatred and all but saying: "Will you never go?"

I spoke of our little town, of the news of the day, but he only smiled wryly and said nothing. I could see that he was absolutely ignorant of all happenings in the town and in no way curious about them. I went on to talk about the country at large and its needs, but he listened without comment, his eyes fixed upon mine so strangely that I finally grew ashamed of having forced myself on him. For a moment, however, he was almost roused when I offered to lend him some books and newspapers fresh from the post. He looked at them hungrily, but instantly changed his mind, explaining that he had no time to read.

I got up to go at last and as I left the house I felt a weight fall from my shoulders. I was sorry to have troubled a man who had made it his chief concern to keep aloof of the world. But what was done was done. I had noticed that he had very few books. It could not be true, then, that he read so much. Yet, on two occasions I saw a light in his window very late at night and won-

dered what had made him sit up so late? Was he writing, and if so, what?

I happened to be away from the town for three months or so. I returned in the winter and learned that Alexander Petrovich was dead. He had died in the autumn, alone and unattended, and had never even sent for a doctor. His lodging was unoccupied and he was already forgotten. In the hope of learning what the man had been doing, had he been writing perhaps, I hastened to make the acquaintance of his landlady. For the gift of twenty kopeks, she brought me a basket filled with the papers of the deceased, confessing that she had already used two pads for household needs. She was a sullen old woman and I could get nothing from her. She could not say anything of interest about her former lodger. He had scarcely ever worked, had not opened a book or touched a pen for months, but kept walking up and down his room all night, thinking and sometimes talking to himself. He had been very fond of her little grandchild and had become especially kind to her when he learned that her name was Catherine. On St. Catherine's day he always had a requiem sung in church for someone's soul. He had detested visitors and never gone out except to give his lessons. He had even eyed his landlady in an unfriendly manner when she came to tidy his room once a week. He had scarcely spoken to her in the three years he had lodged with her.

When I asked the little girl if she remembered him, she looked at me and then turned away weeping. Someone loved him after all!

I took the papers away with me and spent the day examining them. Most of them were unimportant or merely children's exercises, but then I came upon a rather thick notebook filled with minute handwriting, but unfinished and perhaps forgotten by the author himself. It turned out to be a narrative—incoherent and frag-

mentary—of the ten years Alexander Petrovich had spent in hard labour, interrupted here and there by another story or strange, frightening recollections thrown in convulsively as though they had been written under compulsion. Reading some of the fragments again and again, I began to wonder if they had not been set down in moments of madness. Still, the memories of the convict prison—*Notes from a Dead House*, as he called them, seemed not without interest to me. Quite a new world was revealed here and I found the strangeness of his facts, together with his singular remarks on these doomed people, of absorbing interest. But perhaps I am mistaken. I shall publish some of the chapters to allow the public to judge for itself.

## I

### THE DEAD HOUSE

Our prison stood just behind the ramparts of the fortress. Looking through a chink in the stockade in the hope of seeing a bit of God's world, I would see nothing but a strip of sky and a high earthwork overgrown with tall steppe weeds, and the sentries who strode to and fro upon it night and day. And then I would realize that years would pass and I would still be peering through that chink, seeing the same earthwork and sentries and strip of sky, not the sky above the prison, but the other, free sky far, far away. The yard, two hundred feet long by one hundred and fifty wide, an irregular hexagonal, was enclosed by a high stockade. One side had a great, sturdy gate, watched by the sentries day and night, and always shut, except when the convicts were led out to work. Beyond, lay light and liberty, the life of the free people. But to us it seemed like a dream never to come true. We had our own peculiar world,

unlike anything else. Habits, customs, laws and clothes were all different in this house of living death, this world of people set apart whom I shall describe.

On entering the gate, one could see two one-storey wooden structures on each side of the vast yard. These were the barracks where the convicts were kept according to their grades. There was another house farther on, divided into two compartments and serving as a mess room. Behind it there was yet another which served at once as cellar, loft and barn. The middle of the enclosure was a barren stretch where the prisoners were drawn up in rows three times a day. The roll was called morning, noon, and evening, and often several times besides if the soldiers on guard were especially suspicious or not very bright at counting. A broad strip, too, was left between the stockade and buildings on all sides, where prisoners of a sombre turn of mind liked to stroll when not at work, thinking their own thoughts in comparative seclusion.

I liked to watch their grim, branded faces whenever I met them and try to guess what they were thinking of. The favourite occupation of one, in his brief periods of leisure, was to count the stakes in the stockade. There were fifteen hundred or so and he had counted them all and knew each by heart. Every one of them represented a day of confinement. Counting one off every day, he could get a vivid idea of how many days he had yet to serve. He would be genuinely happy when finished with one side of the hexagon; yet many more years were left for him to count. One learns to be patient in prison. I saw a prisoner one day who had served his term and was taking leave of his comrades. He had done twenty years of hard labour. There were convicts there who could remember him when he arrived, young and carefree, troubled neither by his crime nor his punishment. But now he was an old man with grey

hair and a face sad and morose. He walked through our six barracks in silence, prayed before the holy image when he entered each of them, and bowed low before his former comrades, begging them to bear him no ill-will.

I also remember how one of the convicts, formerly a well-to-do Siberian peasant, was called to the gate one evening. Six months before, he had learned that his wife had remarried and he had been brooding on it ever since. And now she had come to the prison and asked for him. She had brought something for him. They talked for a few minutes, wept together and then parted never to meet again. I saw his expression when he came back to the barrack. Yes, one learns to be patient in prison.

When darkness fell, we had to re-enter our barracks to be shut up for the night. I always found it painful to leave the yard for the long, low room dimly lighted by tallow candles and charged with oppressive odours. I can hardly understand how I could have lived there for ten years. My bed was three planks on the bunk shelf; that was all the privacy I had. More than thirty were crowded together on this shelf. We were shut in early in the winter time and there was at least four hours to go before all were asleep. Until then there was a noise, uproar, laughter, oaths, rattling of chains, a poisonous vapour of thick smoke, a confusion of shaven heads, branded foreheads, and ragged clothes, the fallen and the accursed.... Yes, a man is hard to die. He is a being who can get used to anything. And that, probably, is the best definition of him.

There were some two hundred and fifty of us in this prison and the figure hardly ever changed. New men arrived, while others were released having served their terms, or died. There were all sorts of men among them, from all parts of Russia I think. There were all nation-