

# THE DEVILS

〈THE POSSESSED〉

FYODOR  
DOSTOYEVSKY

TRANSLATED  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
DAVID MAGARSHACK

PENGUIN BOOKS

MELBOURNE • LONDON • BALTIMORE

## Translator's Introduction

DOSTOYEVSKY began *The Devils*, or *The Possessed*, as the most controversial of his novels is often called in English, towards the end of 1869. He had been living abroad with his second wife Anna, the eighteen-year-old girl he had married at the age of forty-five in February 1867, for about two years, during which time he had written *The Idiot* and *The Eternal Husband*. He had left Russia in a hurry on 14 April 1867, because his creditors had threatened to put him in jail for defaulting on the payments of his debts. He would not have minded going to jail, he wrote to one of his correspondents, as it would have provided him with enough material for another *House of the Dead* and brought him in between 4,000 and 5,000 roubles, but he had a young wife to think of, and he could not expose her to such humiliation and worry. It was more probable that he preferred to try his luck at the roulette tables as an easier way of restoring his fortune. To his great surprise, however, Anna stubbornly refused to pander to his passion for gambling. This he found more than annoying and, besides, so different from his experience with Polina Suslova, the young girl student who had accompanied him to Germany in July 1865. He wrote to Suslova on 23 April, soon after his arrival in Dresden with Anna, addressing her as his 'eternal friend' and discussing his literary plans with her, which he could not very well do with his young and rather simple wife. Indeed, his life with Anna in Dresden soon began to pall on him, and on 4 May he left her there and went off to Homburg, where he spent twelve days at the casino, lost all his money, pawned his watch, and had to get his fares for the return journey from Anna. He returned to Dresden in a state of moral collapse, and on 22 June left with Anna for Baden-Baden, where he began gambling again and had to go through the humiliation of crawling on his knees before his young wife before she would let him have a few gold sovereigns. He lost heavily again, went to see Turgenev, whom he still owed fifty thalers he had borrowed after his losses at the roulette tables in Wiesbaden two years before, quarrelled with the famous novelist, and then went to live in Geneva, where

there was no casino and where he began writing *The Idiot* (in September 1867). There his first child, his daughter Sophia, was born in February 1868, and died three months later. For almost a year – from September 1868 to August 1869 – he lived in Italy, mostly in Florence, and then returned to Dresden, where his second daughter, Lyubov, was born on 14 September.

It was in Florence that he first thought of a great novel in which he would challenge the progressive movements in Russia and proclaim his faith in the regeneration of his native land (and afterwards the whole of the world) through a return to the tenets of Christianity as held by the Greek Orthodox Church. 'I am thinking of writing a huge novel, to be called *The Atheist*,' he wrote from Florence to his friend the poet Maykov on 23 December 1868, 'but before I sit down to write it I shall have to read almost a whole library of atheists, catholics, and Greek Orthodox theologians. ... I have the chief character. A Russian of our set, and middle-aged, not very educated, but not uneducated, either, a man of a quite good social position, who suddenly, at his age, loses faith in God. He has spent all his life in the Civil Service, never leaving the beaten track, and without gaining any distinction, though he was already forty-five years old. ... His loss of faith in God makes a tremendous impression on him. ... He pokes his nose among the younger generation, the atheists, the pan-Slavs, the Russian fanatical sects, hermits, and priests; falls, incidentally, under the influence of a Jesuit propagandist, a Pole, and descends to the very depths by joining the sect of the flagellants – and at last comes to Christ and the Russian soil – the Russian Christ and the Russian God. (For goodness sake, don't breathe a word about it to anyone: I shall write this last novel of mine and I shall say everything to the last word, even if it is the last thing I do.)'

The final sentence about his saying everything to the last word that he thought about the destiny of Russia and the world occurs twice in his letters to Maykov and Strakhov, his journalist friend, in connexion with the first outline of *The Devils*, which, beginning with February 1870, was being serialized in the Moscow conservative monthly *The Russian Messenger*. 'I am working for *The Russian Messenger* now,' he wrote to Maykov from Dresden on 6 April 1870, 'because I owe them money and have put myself in an ambiguous position there. ... What I am writing now is a tendentious thing. I feel like saying everything as passionately as possible. (Let the nihilists and the Westerners scream that I am a reactionary!) To hell with them. I shall say everything to the last word.' And a day earlier he wrote to Strakhov: 'I am relying a great deal on what I am writing for *The Russian*

Messenger now, but from the tendentious rather than the artistic point of view. I am anxious to express certain ideas, even if it ruins my novel as a work of art, for I am entirely carried away by the things that have accumulated in my heart and mind. Let it turn out to be only a pamphlet, but I shall say everything to the last word.'

From the notes Dostoyevsky had jotted down in January 1870, it would appear that his first idea was to incorporate the main theme of his proposed novel, *The Atheist*, in *The Devils*, whose chief character, however, was not to be an ordinary civil servant but a wealthy prince, 'a most dissipated man and a supercilious aristocrat', whose life was 'storm and disorder', but who in the end 'comes to Christ'. He was to be 'a man with an idea', which absorbs him completely, though not so much intellectually as 'by becoming embodied in him and merging with his own nature, always accompanied by suffering and unrest, and having fused with his nature, it demands to be instantly put into action'. The prince is greatly influenced by a well-known Russian religious writer, who greatly influenced Dostoyevsky himself and who was to have figured in the novel. This writer's main idea Dostoyevsky defined as 'humility and self-possession, and that God and the Kingdom of Heaven are in us, and freedom, too'. But two things made Dostoyevsky give up his original idea of Nicholas Stavrogin, the main character of *The Devils*, who in the final draft of the novel no longer appears as a prince, though he is referred to as such in one chapter.

To begin with, his desperate financial position ('I am in a simply frightful position now,' he wrote to Maykov in his letter of 6 April, 'a real Mr Micawber. I haven't got a penny, and yet I must somehow carry on till the autumn') forced him to postpone the writing of his great novel and try to get some money by writing a merely 'tendentious' one. 'What I am writing for *The Russian Messenger* now,' he told Maykov in the same letter, 'I shall finish in about three months, and then, after a month's holiday, I shall sit down to my other novel. It is the same idea I wrote to you about before. It will be my last novel.' And he went on to outline the plot of what was eight years later to become known as *The Brothers Karamazov*.

While engaged in writing *The Devils*, Dostoyevsky returned again and again in his correspondence to the theme of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which at one stage he called *The Life of a Great Sinner*; and he made it quite clear that his great idea was to be left to this last novel. What was this 'great idea'? Roughly, it was the idea of the reconciliation of good and evil according to his own peculiar political and religious recipe of a State based on a docile

peasant population and run by an autocratic Tsar, who was no longer supported by a landed aristocracy (which Dostoyevsky abominated), but who relied entirely on the Greek Orthodox Church. Dostoyevsky, like Gogol before him, found the solution of the problem of the reconciliation of good and evil, based on so fantastically unrealistic an idea, beyond his strength. In *The Devils*, however, he was no longer concerned with so grand a design. All he wanted to do was to settle his own personal accounts with the so-called Westerners, that is, the Russian liberals who dreamt of converting Russia into a constitutional monarchy on the model of a Western European country, and the more revolutionary elements in Russia, who, like himself, refused to have anything to do with the aristocracy or the new class of capitalists, and, unlike himself, with the Tsar or the Church. It was here that quite an unexpected event came to his help. For it was just at this time that, following the murder of a young student in Moscow, a revolutionary conspiracy was discovered, which seemed to fit in with the ideas Dostoyevsky wished to express in *The Devils*. The conspiracy was organized by a certain Sergey Nechayev, who was at the time a disciple of Michael Bakunin, the author of *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* and the founder of the anarchist movement.

Nechayev was a Scripture master in one of the Petersburg elementary schools (a *séminariste*, that is, a divinity student, as the contemporary left-wing propagandists were nicknamed by aristocratic writers like Turgenev, because most of them did not belong to the aristocracy and some of the more eminent of them, like the critic Dobrolyubov, came from the priesthood class). Since the autumn of 1868 he had also been an external student of Petersburg University, and took a leading part in organizing the student disturbances in 1868 and 1869. In March 1869 he went abroad with a false passport to Geneva, where he joined Bakunin and the poet Ogaryov, a close friend of Herzen's, and from there they posted revolutionary leaflets to their friends in Russia. He returned to Russia in August of the same year as the self-styled representative of the World Revolutionary Movement at Geneva and organized a 'Society of National Retribution' in Moscow. Dostoyevsky embodied all the facts relating to the organization of this society (the groups of five, etc.) in his novel. On 21 November Nechayev (who was only twenty-two at the time) and four members of the Moscow 'group of five' murdered the fifth member of the group, a young student of the Moscow Agricultural College called Ivanov, for allegedly refusing to carry out the instructions of the Geneva committee. 'Ivanov,' the official act of indictment of Ivanov's murderers stated,

'was enticed to the grotto in the grounds of the Moscow Agricultural College on the pretext of handing over an illegal printing press. There they at first tried to strangle him, but afterwards Nechayev seized the pistol brought by Nicolayev' (another young accomplice) 'and shot Ivanov in the head, after which Ivanov's body was weighted with stones and thrown into the pond.' Dostoyevsky's description of Shatov's murder follows closely the description of Ivanov's murder. After the murder, Nechayev, like Peter Verkhovensky in the novel, escaped first to Petersburg and then abroad. He went back to Geneva, where he rejoined Bakunin and Ogaryov and assisted them in their abortive attempt to revive Herzen's London journal *The Bell*. His ruthlessness in carrying out Bakunin's own principle that the end justifies the means appalled even Bakunin, who soon broke with him. Nechayev then went to London, where he began publishing his terrorist journal *Village Commune*, which was sharply condemned by Engels, the friend and collaborator of Karl Marx. He later returned to Switzerland, where he was arrested by the Swiss police on an extradition order as a criminal and not a political offender and handed over to the Russian police. On 8 January 1873 he was tried for murder by the Moscow District Court and sentenced to twenty years penal servitude. He was not sent to Siberia, however, but incarcerated in the Peter and Paul fortress in Petersburg, where he died one year and ten months after Dostoyevsky, in November 1882.

While Dostoyevsky was writing *The Devils*, Nechayev was still at large, and Dostoyevsky, who returned to Petersburg in July 1871, no doubt knew all about his revolutionary activities abroad. The sensational trial of the Nechayev followers in Russia (the police had arrested altogether 152 persons, mostly young boys and girls, of whom seventy-nine were put on trial in Petersburg in July 1871, the rest being released for lack of evidence) furnished Dostoyevsky with more material for his novel, such as, for instance, the political leaflet with the drawing of an axe and the poem 'A Noble Character' found among the leaflets confiscated by the police. An interesting fact that has only recently come to light is that Dostoyevsky even found the prototype of Kirilov in a certain Smirnov, one of the accused in the trial of the Nechayev followers. The following statement was taken by the police from Smirnov and subsequently published in the Russian Press (Smirnov had been banished to the town of Vladimir for his part in the student disturbances): 'In Vladimir I began to suffer from fits of depression and to be more and more obsessed with the idea of suicide; even now I doubt whether I shall be able to get rid of it; as I expect to remain in Vladimir till the end of my

term of exile, I decided to kill myself in the Spring. This decision is connected with the kind of death I have chosen.'

The discovery of the Nechayev conspiracy, the murder of Ivanov, and the series of sensational developments which finally led to the trial of Nechayev's alleged followers in Petersburg just when Dostoyevsky himself had returned there, forced Dostoyevsky to introduce a great number of vital changes in his novel, although the first part of it had already been published in *The Russian Messenger*, and he only finished it in November 1871. This slipshod method of writing his 'tendentious' novel has made it into one of the most structurally untidy of Dostoyevsky's great novels. Its two chief characters – Nicholas Stavrogin and Peter Verkhovensky – are only pegs on which Dostoyevsky hung his two most violent dislikes: his dislike of the Russian aristocracy and his dislike of the revolutionaries, whom he lumped together in the person of Verkhovensky-Nechayev. Stavrogin himself remains an obscure and enigmatic figure, the mystery surrounding him being mainly due to Dostoyevsky's decision to leave him hanging in the air, as it were, rather than waste 'the great idea' he had decided to keep for his last novel on him. The fact that the editor of *The Russian Messenger* refused to publish a long chapter dealing with Stavrogin's disreputable past must also to a certain extent be held responsible for the obscurity of Stavrogin's characterization. So far as Peter Verkhovensky is concerned, it is only fair to point out that Dostoyevsky himself went out of his way to emphasize the fact that he was not a Socialist, but just a 'rogue'. The other conspirators in the novel, with the exception of Kirilov – the most metaphysical character Dostoyevsky created – are quite terrifyingly alive as people, but only caricatures as 'revolutionaries'. The fact is that Dostoyevsky had only a vague idea of the revolutionary movements in Europe and was too apt to distort the ideas behind them. Indeed, his own violent political views precluded a fair and thorough appreciation of any progressive movement. To him even a mild liberal like Stepan Verkhovensky was 'a devil' who could just be 'saved' on his death-bed by a none-too-sincere recantation of his former opinions. It was only in people like Shatov – that is to say, people, who, like Dostoyevsky himself, had turned their back on their liberal past and wholeheartedly embraced a philosophy of life based on autocracy and the Church – that he saw the gleam of salvation for a tortured world. And the tragedy of Shatov was also Dostoyevsky's tragedy: both believed in Christ and both were tormented by their disbelief in God. Both were fanatical adherents of their own new creed because both were at heart uncertain whether it was the right way to the mil-

lennium. Shatov toyed with the idea of denouncing his former associates to the police in the same way as Dostoyevsky himself had actually taken steps to denounce Turgenev, the hated aristocrat and atheist, to 'posterity' long before he lampooned him as Karmazinov in *The Devils*.

In his letter to Maykov after his meeting with Turgenev in Baden-Baden on 28 June 1867, Dostoyevsky admitted that he never really liked the great novelist, who, he declared exultantly, had written himself out completely. But when he first met Turgenev in November 1845 he nearly 'fell in love with him', as he wrote to his elder brother Michael. No words were too extravagant to describe his admiration for the twenty-five-year-old 'poet, aristocrat, and wealthy man' who was so extraordinarily intelligent and well educated. Turgenev had just returned from Paris 'and', Dostoyevsky wrote, 'from the first moment he became so greatly attached to me that Belinsky explains it by the fact that Turgenev has fallen in love with me. ... I doubt if there is anything nature has not bestowed on him,' Dostoyevsky went on. 'And, last but not least, his character is so straightforward and has been trained in so admirable a school.' Their friendship, it is true, was not unclouded, for Turgenev liked to pull his friend's leg occasionally, and that Dostoyevsky could not stand. There was, however, no violent quarrel between them, and when, almost twenty years later, Dostoyevsky returned from Siberia and embarked with his elder brother on the publication of the political and literary periodical *Time*, the two resumed their interrupted relationship and seemed to be on the best of terms with one another.

Turgenev had by then become one of the leading novelists in Russia, and it was only natural that Dostoyevsky should be anxious to obtain a story from him for *Time*. They conducted a long correspondence, and Turgenev was very grateful to Dostoyevsky for being one of the very few men of letters who really appreciated his great novel *Fathers and Sons*, which raised a veritable storm of vituperation against its author, particularly among the younger progressive writers, who seemed to see in Bazarov, the hero of the novel, a libel on themselves. Dostoyevsky at last got Turgenev to promise to write a story for his journal. Indeed, Turgenev went further: he promised not to publish anything in any other Russian periodical before his story was published in *Time*, so as to help the circulation of the new journal on which Dostoyevsky's livelihood depended. Meanwhile, however, *Time* was suppressed by the authorities for an article by Strakhov on the Polish rebellion which they quite wrongly considered to be favourable to the Poles. Turgenev did not withdraw his promise, but waited for Dostoyevsky to start

his periodical *Epoch* before contributing to another journal. The promised story was *Phantoms*, one of Turgenev's less successful attempts in the fantastic genre. Turgenev himself was not certain that this story was good enough to be published, but Dostoyevsky made him change his mind by writing a long letter to him in praise of it, though later on he expressed a much less favourable opinion of it in a letter to his brother. Then came Dostoyevsky's journey abroad with Suslova after the death of his brother and the financial failure of *Epoch*. He arrived in Wiesbaden in July 1865, succumbed to the lure of the roulette table, lost all his money, and, in desperation, wrote to Turgenev to ask for a loan of 100 thalers. Turgenev sent him fifty, which he repaid only eleven years later (in March 1876). It is interesting that at the time Dostoyevsky was still on very good terms with Herzen, who was in Switzerland and to whom, indeed, he had turned for help as 'one of his best friends', as he wrote to Suslova after she had left him stranded in the Wiesbaden hotel. But his break with his liberal friends was now imminent. When he left for Germany with his wife two years later, having in the meantime written *Crime and Punishment* and *The Gambler*, he had already become a bitter enemy of every progressive movement in Russia. Turgenev's novel *Smoke*, which had just been published and had roused another storm of abuse against its author, added fuel to the flames of Dostoyevsky's dislike of Turgenev and all he stood for. His dislike turned to hatred when he thought of that 'Baden-Baden bourgeois' (as Turgenev banteringly and rather unwisely described himself in a letter to Dostoyevsky) living a life of ease and comfort, while he was sitting penniless in an hotel with his young wife and had to beg her on his knees for some money to satisfy his passion for gambling. Anna left this account in her diary of the few hectic days in Baden-Baden before the meeting of the two novelists:

'June 25th. On our way home' (from the *Kursaal* where Dostoyevsky lost again) 'Fedya met Goncharov and introduced him to me. Goncharov told me that Turgenev had seen Fedya but had not gone up to him because he knew that players do not like to be disturbed. As Fedya still owes Turgenev fifty thalers, he simply has to pay a call on him, otherwise Turgenev may think that Fedya does not want to visit him because he is afraid that he would ask him for his money. That is why Fedya wants to go and see Turgenev tomorrow.

'June 26th. Fedya took fifteen thalers and went to the gaming-tables. At first he went to see Turgenev, but he was out: he is only at home till twelve o'clock. Fedya lost his fifteen thalers and returned home.

'June 27th. This morning Fedya wanted to go and see Turgenev, but he got up so late that he put off his visit. We again had twelve gold sovereigns. Fedya took five and went to the roulette tables. When he was gone I felt awfully sad because I knew that he would be quite certain to lose again and would be terribly worried. I burst into tears and sobbed bitterly. My fears were justified: Fedya returned home in a state of terrible despair. He said that he had lost everything and began begging me to give him another two gold sovereigns, pleading that he simply had to win some money back as otherwise he could not carry on. He went down on his knees before me and implored me to give him two more gold sovereigns.'

It was in this state of despair and complete nervous exhaustion that Dostoyevsky went to see Turgenev on 28 June with the intention of taking it all out of the man whom he hated as the calumniator of his country (practically all the Russian critics interpreted the strictures upon Russia by Potugin, one of the characters of *Smoke*, as an unpardonable libel on their country). The scene that took place at this meeting of two of the greatest Russian writers is almost unbelievable. According to Dostoyevsky, who described it in a long letter to Maykov from Geneva, he found Turgenev having an early lunch.\* Turgenev, Dostoyevsky declared, told him that he was an atheist and that he was terribly incensed by the hostile reception of his last novel. He then abused Russia and the Russians 'horribly' and said that the Russians 'ought to crawl before the civilized Germans'. Dostoyevsky remarked 'innocently' that Turgenev ought to buy himself a telescope, and in reply to Turgenev's bewildered look, explained that he could then direct it towards Russia and see what was going on there, as otherwise he must really find it very hard to know anything about Russia. This transparent hint at Turgenev's preference for living abroad, with the implied suggestion that his last novel gave a distorted picture of Russia and the Russians, made Turgenev, according to Dostoyevsky, 'terribly angry'. Dostoyevsky then went on to add insult to injury by declaring that all Germans were thieves and scoundrels and that civilization had done nothing for them. Turgenev, who had built himself a beautiful house in Baden-Baden, took this remark as a personal insult and exclaimed that 'he was more a German than a Russian himself'. Dostoyevsky replied that although he had read *Smoke*, he never expected Turgenev to say a thing like that, and that he was therefore sorry that he had insulted

\* It can be assumed that Dostoyevsky's description of Karmazinov in the scene with Peter Verkhovensky in Part II, Chapter VI, is a more or less accurate account of his own meeting with Turgenev, including the cutlet and the red wine and Turgenev's 'aristocratic' habit of running to kiss his visitor, though only offering him his cheek.

him. Still, again according to Dostoyevsky, they parted very courteously. At ten o'clock next morning, when Dostoyevsky was still in bed at his hotel, a maid brought him Turgenev's visiting-card. As Dostoyevsky had told him that he never got up before eleven, he took it to mean that Turgenev did not want to see him again, but merely returned his visit as 'a gentleman'. They did see each other again, on 13 August, at the railway station, when Dostoyevsky was leaving Baden-Baden for Switzerland, but this time they did not even exchange bows.

After giving this version of his meeting with Turgenev to Maykov, Dostoyevsky went on to deliver himself of the following characteristic remarks: 'Perhaps the spitefulness with which I described Turgenev, as well as the way in which we insulted each other, might make an unpleasant impression on you, my dear Apollon Nikolayevich. But, really, I can't help it: he has insulted me too much by his opinions. Personally, I don't care, though he is not very attractive with those aristocratic airs of his, but it is impossible to listen to such abuse of Russia from a Russian traitor.'

Turgenev was a 'traitor' because his opinions of Russia differed from those of Dostoyevsky. The frantic fury with which Dostoyevsky hated his opponents could not be better illustrated. But that was not all. A few months later Dostoyevsky, whose 'spite' was not satisfied, had the part of his letter to Maykov attacking Turgenev and calling him a traitor to his country copied out and sent to P. Bartenev, editor of Russian Archives, with an anonymous letter in which he explained that he would like it to be published in 1890 for 'posterity'. Turgenev was informed of this by a close friend of his and, quite naturally, jumped to the conclusion that Dostoyevsky wanted to get him into trouble with the Russian authorities as a follower of Nechayev. (Turgenev had already been once summoned to Petersburg to account for his association with Herzen to a special committee of the Senate.) He wrote immediately to Bartenev, declaring that Dostoyevsky's account of their meeting was a sheer travesty of the facts, and that it would never have occurred to him to express his private views to a man he considered 'non compos mentis because of his nervous fits and for other reasons. Dostoyevsky', Turgenev went on, 'spent less than an hour at my house and, after relieving his mind by fierce abuse of the Germans, of myself, and of my last book, went away; I scarcely had any time or any wish to argue with him; I repeat, I treated him like a sick man. Very likely he imagined the arguments he claims to have heard me use in his own disordered mind and wrote - his denunciation of me.'

When in 1871 Turgenev learned of Dostoyevsky's satire of him in *The Devils*, he wrote to a correspondent: 'I am told Dostoyevsky has "shown me up" – well, let him have his fun. He came to see me about five years ago in Baden, not to pay me back the money he had borrowed from me, but to abuse me for all I was worth – for *Smoke*, which, according to his ideas, should have been burnt by the public hangman. I listened in silence to his tirade, and what do I find? That I expressed all sorts of subversive opinions to him, which he hastened to retail to Bartenev. That would really have been a libel, if Dostoyevsky had not been a madman – which I do not doubt he is. Perhaps he dreamt it all.'

In *Merci*, Dostoyevsky's skit on Turgenev's writings in *The Devils*, two of Turgenev's less well known works are satirized: *Phantoms*, which, as Turgenev himself pointed out, Dostoyevsky had gone out of his way to praise, and *Enough*, a semi-philosophic essay on the destiny of man of a highly pessimistic character.

Dostoyevsky's spite and hatred not only of his opponents, but also of all imaginary 'enemies' of Russia, was perhaps entirely in harmony with his religious obsessions. In *The Devils* he was not able to overcome them, and this is a serious blot on a novel which, in spite of its structural and artistic blemishes, possesses a tremendous vitality, as well as moments of great tenderness. The novel is best regarded as a political melodrama (the stage at the end of it is literally strewn with corpses). It would be absurd to take Dostoyevsky's political views seriously; but it would be no less absurd to overlook his moments of great inspiration, his amazing insight into the human heart, and his shattering criticism of those aspects of man's character which profoundly affect human thought and behaviour.

D. M.

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# THE DEVILS

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*And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.*

Luke viii. 32-36

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## PART ONE

### 1

*By way of an Introduction:*

*A few details from the biography of the greatly esteemed  
Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky*

### I

BEFORE DESCRIBING THE EXTRAORDINARY EVENTS WHICH took place so recently in our town, hitherto not remarkable for anything in particular, I find it necessary, since I am not a skilled writer, to go back a little and begin with certain biographical details concerning our talented and greatly esteemed Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky. I hope these details will serve as an introduction to the social and political chronicle of our town, while the story I have in mind to relate will come later.

Let me say at once that Mr Verkhovensky had always played a rather special and, as it were, civic role amongst us and that he loved that role passionately – so much so that I cannot help feeling that he would not have been able to exist without it. Not that I have any intention of comparing him to an actor on the stage – God forbid – particularly as I have the utmost respect for him. Perhaps it was all just a matter of habit, or, better still, it may have been the result of a constant and generous desire from his earliest years of indulging in the agreeable fancy of being a famous public figure. For instance, he was very fond of his position as a ‘marked’ man or, as it were, an ‘exile’. There is a sort of classical splendour about those two words that fascinated him and, raising him gradually in his own estimation in the course of years, finally led him to imagine himself as standing on a high pedestal, a position that was very gratifying to his vanity. In an English satirical