### A. PUSHKIN

The Tales Ivan Belkin

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

MOSCOW

1954

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## Translated from the Russian by IVY and TATIANA LITVINOV

Illustrated by

D. A. SHMARINOV,

Stalin Prize winner

Designed by
S. M. POZHARSKY

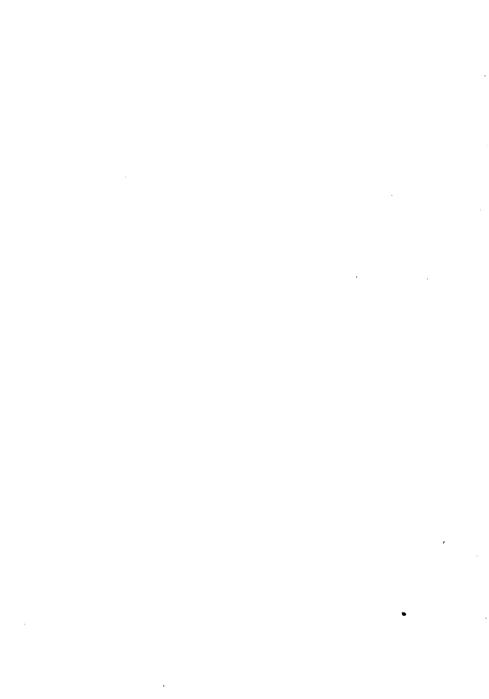
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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ МОСКВА

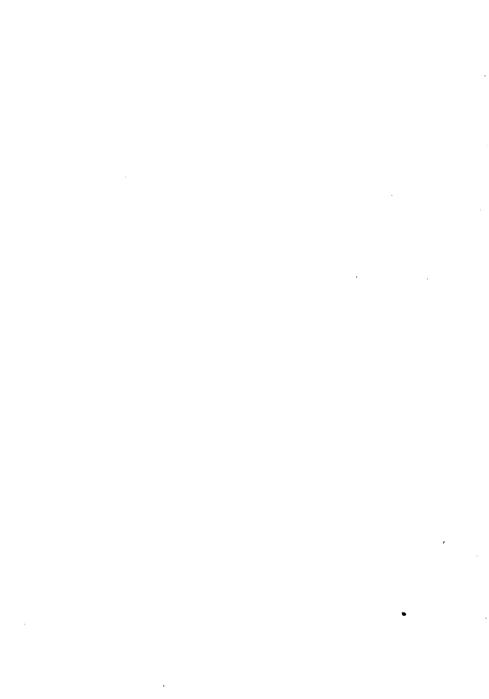
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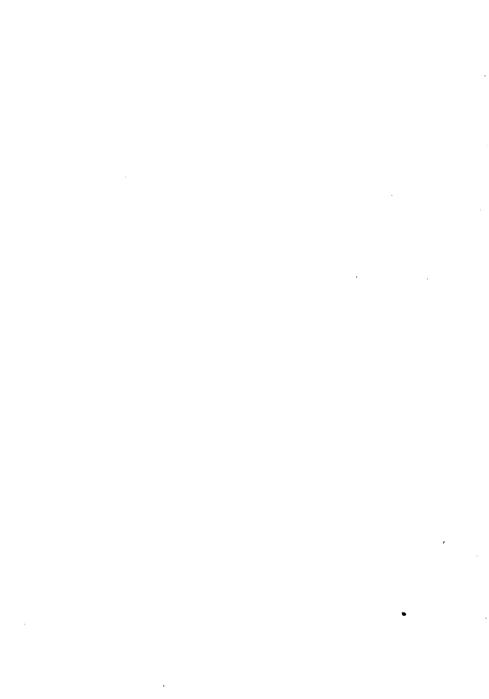


The Tales
of the Late
Ivan Petrovich
Belkin
edited
by A.P.



# From the Editor

Original title
of first edition (1831)
of "The Tales of Ivan Belkin"



Mistress Prostakova

Aye, Sir, he was fond of listening to tales from a child.

Skotinin Mitrofan takes after me.

THE DUNCE1

now presented to the reader, we should like to preface them with a brief account of the life of the deceased author, thereby satisfying in part the legitimate curiosity of lovers of our native literature. For this purpose we appealed to Marya Alexeyevna Trafilina, the next of kin and the heiress of Ivan Petrovich Belkin. Unfortunately, however, she was unable to furnish us with any information about him, never having had the slightest acquaintance with the deceased. She advised us to apply on this subject to a certain worthy gentleman, who was a friend of Ivan Petrovich. We followed her advice, and our letter received the satisfactory reply given below. We print it without any alterations whatever, as a precious monument to a refined understanding and a touching friendship, and at the same time a perfectly adequate biographical statement:

#### Respected Sir,

I had the honour to receive your kind letter of the 15th of this month on the 23rd day of the same, in which you made known to me your desire to receive detailed information concerning the birth and death, the service, the home life, occupations and character of the late Ivan Petrovich Belkin, my erstwhile sincere friend and neighbour in the country. I undertake the fulfilment of your desire with the utmost satisfaction to myself, and am sending you, my dear Sir, all that I can remember of his conversation and also some observations of my own.

Ivan Petrovich Belkin was born of honourable gentlefolk in the year 1798, in the village of Goryukhino. His late father, Second-Major Pyotr Ivanovich Belkin, married the spinster Pelageya Gavrilovna, of the Trafilin family. He was not wealthy, but thrifty, and thoroughly capable of managing his practical affairs. His son received his early education from the parish clerk. To this worthy man he seems to have owed his love of reading and his taste for writing in his native tongue. In 1815 he joined a Jager infantry regiment (I cannot recall its number), in which he remained right up to 1823. His parents dying within a short time of one another, he was compelled to send in his papers and go to live in his native village of Goryukhino, on his hereditary estate.

Entering upon the management of his estate, Ivan Petrovich, owing to his inexperience and soft-heartedness, very soon let his property fall into neglect and relaxed the strict discipline maintained by his late parent. Discharging the conscientious and efficient village-elder with whom the peasants (as is their wont) were dissatisfied, he left the management of the village to his former housekeeper, who had earned his confidence by her skill in telling stories. This gullible old woman had never been able to distinguish a twenty-five-ruble note from a fifty-ruble note; the peasants, to many of whose children she was godmother, stood in no fear of her. The peasants chose a new elder, who indulged them inordinately, con-

niving with them to cheat their master, so that Ivan Petrovich was obliged to give up the system of corvée, substituting for it extremely low quit-rents; even so his peasants, taking advantage of their master's weakness, wheedled out of him certain quite superfluous favours in respect to the first year, and in the next year paid over two-thirds of their rents in nuts, bilberries and the like; and even here there were arrears.

As a friend of Ivan Petrovich's late father, I considered it my duty to offer my advice to the son also, and volunteered several times to restore the former order, which he had been unable to maintain by himself. For this purpose I went to visit him one day, demanded the account-books, summoned the rascal of an elder, and began looking through them in the presence of Ivan Petrovich. The youthful proprietor at first followed my investigations with the utmost attention and diligence, but when the accounts showed that during the past two years the number of peasants had increased, while that of the poultry and cattle had noticeably decreased, Ivan Petrovich was content with these preliminary calculations, and would listen to no more, and at the very moment when I had reduced the rascally elder, by my investigations and stern questions, to extreme confusion, and silenced him completely, what was my vexation to hear Ivan Petrovich snoring loudly in his chair! From that moment I ceased to interfere in the arrangements of his estate, leaving his affairs (as he did himself) to the will of the Almighty.

The friendliness of our relations was by no means affected by all this, for, while deploring his weakness and the disastrous slackness common to our young gentlefolk, I was sincerely attached to Ivan Petrovich. It would indeed have been impossible not to love so kindly and honourable a youth. And Ivan Petrovich, for his part, paid me the respect due

to my years, and was very fond of me. We met almost daily, up to the very end, for he valued my simple conversation, though, as regards habits, manner of thinking, and dispositions, we had very little in common.

Ivan Petrovich was extremely moderate in his tastes, avoiding all forms of indulgence; I never saw him the worse for drink (a perfect miracle this, in our parts); he had a great weakness for the female sex, but was himself as bashful as a maid.\*

In addition to the tales to which you refer in your letter, Ivan Petrovich left behind a number of manuscripts, some of which are in my possession, and some of which have been used by the housekeeper for various domestic purposes. Thus, last winter, all the windows in her wing of the house were pasted up with the first part of a novel which he never finished. If I am not mistaken the above-mentioned tales were his first literary attempts. Most of them, according to Ivan Petrovich, are true, and were related to him by various persons.\*\* Almost all the names are, however, fictitious, while the hamlets and villages are taken from our parts, my own village being referred to among others. This was not owing to

- \* Here follows an anecdote which we omit as superfluous. At the same time we can assure the reader it contained nothing injurious to the memory of Ivan Petrovich.
- \*\* As a matter of fact, every tale in the manuscript of I. P. Belkin bears the inscription, in the author's hand: "Told me by So-and-so (rank or title, and initials). We may cite the following for the curious: "The Postmaster" was related to him by Titular Counsellor A.G.N., "The Shot" by Colonel I.L.P., "The Undertaker" by B.V., a shop-assistant, "Blizzard" and "Lady Into Lassie" by a young lady K.I.T.