НИКОЛАЙ ГОГОЛЬ

THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL

Николай Васильевич Гоголь
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Содержание

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Translated by Thomas Seltzer from the Russian

INTRODUCTION

The Inspector-General is a national institution. To place a purely literary valuation upon it and call it the greatest of Russian comedies would not convey the significance of its position either in Russian literature or in Russian life itself. There is no other single work in the modern literature of any language that carries with it the wealth of associations which the Inspector-General does to the educated Russian. The Germans have their Faust; but Faust is a tragedy with a cosmic philosophic theme. In England it takes nearly all that is implied in the comprehensive name of Shakespeare to give the same sense of bigness that a Russian gets from the mention of the Revizor.

That is not to say that the Russian is so defective in the critical faculty as to balance the combined creative output of the greatest English dramatist against Gogol's one comedy, or even to attribute to it the literary value of any of Shakespeare's better plays. What the Russian's appreciation indicates is the pregnant role that literature plays in the life of intellectual Russia. Here literature is not a luxury, not a diversion. It is bone of the bone, flesh of the flesh, not only of the intelligentsia, but also of a growing number of the common people, intimately woven into their everyday existence, part and parcel of their thoughts, their aspirations, their social, political and economic life. It expresses their collective wrongs and sorrows, their collective

hopes and strivings. Not only does it serve to lead the movements of the masses, but it is an integral component element of those movements. In a word, Russian literature is completely bound up with the life of Russian society, and its vitality is but the measure of the spiritual vitality of that society.

This unique character of Russian literature may be said to have had its beginning with the Inspector-General. Before Gogol most Russian writers, with few exceptions, were but weak imitators of foreign models. The drama fashioned itself chiefly upon French patterns. The Inspector-General and later Gogol's novel, Dead Souls, established that tradition in Russian letters which was followed by all the great writers from Dostoyevsky down to Gorky.

As with one blow, Gogol shattered the notions of the theatre-going public of his day of what a comedy should be. The ordinary idea of a play at that time in Russia seems to have been a little like our own tired business man's. And the shock the Revizor gave those early nineteenth-century Russian audiences is not unlike the shocks we ourselves get when once in a while a theatrical manager is courageous enough to produce a bold modern European play. Only the intensity of the shock was much greater. For Gogol dared not only bid defiance to the accepted method; he dared to introduce a subject-matter that under the guise of humor audaciously attacked the very foundation of the state, namely, the officialdom of the Russian bureaucracy. That is why the Revizor marks such a revolution in the world of Russian

letters. In form it was realistic, in substance it was vital. It showed up the rottenness and corruption of the instruments through which the Russian government functioned. It held up to ridicule, directly, all the officials of a typical Russian municipality, and, indirectly, pointed to the same system of graft and corruption among the very highest servants of the crown.

What wonder that the Inspector-General became a sort of comedy-epic in the land of the Czars, the land where each petty town-governor is almost an absolute despot, regulating his persecutions and extortions according to the sage saying of the town-governor in the play, "That's the way God made the world, and the Voltairean free-thinkers can talk against it all they like, it won't do any good." Every subordinate in the town administration, all the way down the line to the policemen, follow—not always so scrupulously—the law laid down by the same authority, "Graft no higher than your rank." As in city and town, so in village and hamlet. It is the tragedy of Russian life, which has its roots in that more comprehensive tragedy, Russian despotism, the despotism that gives the sharp edge to official corruption. For there is no possible redress from it except in violent revolutions.

That is the prime reason why the Inspector-General, a mere comedy, has such a hold on the Russian people and occupies so important a place in Russian literature. And that is why a Russian critic says, "Russia possesses only one comedy, the Inspector-General."

The second reason is the brilliancy and originality with which this national theme was executed. Gogol was above all else the artist. He was not a radical, nor even a liberal. He was strictly conservative. While hating the bureaucracy, yet he never found fault with the system itself or with the autocracy. Like most born artists, he was strongly individualistic in temperament, and his satire and ridicule were aimed not at causes, but at effects. Let but the individuals act morally, and the system, which Gogol never questioned, would work beautifully. This conception caused Gogol to concentrate his best efforts upon delineation of character. It was the characters that were to be revealed, their actions to be held up to scorn and ridicule, not the conditions which created the characters and made them act as they did. If any lesson at all was to be drawn from the play it was not a sociological lesson, but a moral one. The individual who sees himself mirrored in it may be moved to self-purgation; society has nothing to learn from it.

Yet the play lives because of the social message it carries. The creation proved greater than the creator. The author of the Revizor was a poor critic of his own work. The Russian people rejected his estimate and put their own upon it. They knew their officials and they entertained no illusions concerning their regeneration so long as the system that bred them continued to live. Nevertheless, as a keen satire and a striking exposition of the workings of the hated system itself, they hailed the Revizor with delight. And as such it has remained graven in Russia's

conscience to this day.

It must be said that "Gogol himself grew with the writing of the Revizor." Always a careful craftsman, scarcely ever satisfied with the first version of a story or a play, continually changing and rewriting, he seems to have bestowed special attention on perfecting this comedy. The subject, like that of Dead Souls, was suggested to him by the poet Pushkin, and was based on a true incident. Pushkin at once recognized Gogol's genius and looked upon the young author as the rising star of Russian literature. Their acquaintance soon ripened into intimate friendship, and Pushkin missed no opportunity to encourage and stimulate him in his writings and help him with all the power of his great influence. Gogol began to work on the play at the close of 1834, when he was twenty-five years old. It was first produced in St. Petersburg, in 1836. Despite the many elaborations it had undergone before Gogol permitted it to be put on the stage, he still did not feel satisfied, and he began to work on it again in 1838. It was not brought down to its present final form until 1842.

Thus the Revizor occupied the mind of the author over a period of eight years, and resulted in a product which from the point of view of characterization and dramatic technique is almost flawless. Yet far more important is the fact that the play marked an epoch in Gogol's own literary development. When he began on it, his ambitions did not rise above making it a comedy of pure fun, but, gradually, in the course of his working on it, the

possibilities of the subject unfolded themselves and influenced his entire subsequent career. His art broadened and deepened and grew more serious. If Pushkin's remark, that "behind his laughter you feel the sad tears," is true of some of Gogol's former productions, it is still truer of the Revizor and his later works.

A new life had begun for him, he tells us himself, when he was no longer "moved by childish notions, but by lofty ideas full of truth." "It was Pushkin," he writes, "who made me look at the thing seriously. I saw that in my writings I laughed vainly, for nothing, myself not knowing why. If I was to laugh, then I had better laugh over things that are really to be laughed at. In the Inspector-General I resolved to gather together all the bad in Russia I then knew into one heap, all the injustice that was practised in those places and in those human relations in which more than in anything justice is demanded of men, and to have one big laugh over it all. But that, as is well known, produced an outburst of excitement. Through my laughter, which never before came to me with such force, the reader sensed profound sorrow. I myself felt that my laughter was no longer the same as it had been, that in my writings I could no longer be the same as in the past, and that the need to divert myself with innocent, careless scenes had ended along with my young years."

With the strict censorship that existed in the reign of Czar Nicholas I, it required powerful influence to obtain permission for the production of the comedy. This Gogol received through the instrumentality of his friend, Zhukovsky, who succeeded in

gaining the Czar's personal intercession. Nicholas himself was present at the first production in April, 1836, and laughed and applauded, and is said to have remarked, "Everybody gets it, and I most of all."

Naturally official Russia did not relish this innovation in dramatic art, and indignation ran high among them and their supporters. Bulgarin led the attack. Everything that is usually said against a new departure in literature or art was said against the Revizor. It was not original. It was improbable, impossible, coarse, vulgar; lacked plot. It turned on a stale anecdote that everybody knew. It was a rank farce. The characters were mere caricatures. "What sort of a town was it that did not hold a single honest soul?"

Gogol's sensitive nature shrank before the tempest that burst upon him, and he fled from his enemies all the way out of Russia. "Do what you please about presenting the play in Moscow," he writes to Shchepkin four days after its first production in St. Petersburg. "I am not going to bother about it. I am sick of the play and all the fussing over it. It produced a great noisy effect. All are against me… they abuse me and go to see it. No tickets can be obtained for the fourth performance."

But the best literary talent of Russia, with Pushkin and Bielinsky, the greatest critic Russia has produced, at the head, ranged itself on his side.

Nicolay Vasilyevich Gogol was born in Sorochintzy, government of Poltava, in 1809. His father was a Little Russian,

or Ukrainian, landowner, who exhibited considerable talent as a playwright and actor. Gogol was educated at home until the age of ten, then went to Niezhin, where he entered the gymnasium in 1821. Here he edited a students' manuscript magazine called the Star, and later founded a students' theatre, for which he was both manager and actor. It achieved such success that it was patronized by the general public.

In 1829 Gogol went to St. Petersburg, where he thought of becoming an actor, but he finally gave up the idea and took a position as a subordinate government clerk. His real literary career began in 1830 with the publication of a series of stories of Little Russian country life called Nights on a Farm near Dikanka. In 1831 he became acquainted with Pushkin and Zhukovsky, who introduced the "shy Khokhol" (nickname for "Little Russian"), as he was called, to the house of Madame O. A. Smirnov, the centre of "an intimate circle of literary men and the flower of intellectual society." The same year he obtained a position as instructor of history at the Patriotic Institute, and in 1834 was made professor of history at the University of St. Petersburg. Though his lectures were marked by originality and vivid presentation, he seems on the whole not to have been successful as a professor, and he resigned in 1835.

During this period he kept up his literary activity uninterruptedly, and in 1835 published his collection of stories, Mirgorod, containing How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich, Taras Bulba, and others. This collection firmly

established his position as a leading author. At the same time he was at work on several plays. The Vladimir Cross, which was to deal with the higher St. Petersburg functionaries in the same way as the Revizor with the lesser town officials, was never concluded, as Gogol realized the impossibility of placing them on the Russian stage. A few strong scenes were published. The comedy Marriage, finished in 1835, still finds a place in the Russian theatrical repertoire. The Gamblers, his only other complete comedy, belongs to a later period.

After a stay abroad, chiefly in Italy, lasting with some interruptions for seven years (1836-1841), he returned to his native country, bringing with him the first part of his greatest work, Dead Souls. The novel, published the following year, produced a profound impression and made Gogol's literary reputation supreme. Pushkin, who did not live to see its publication, on hearing the first chapters read, exclaimed, "God, how sad our Russia is!" And Alexander Hertzen characterized it as "a wonderful book, a bitter, but not hopeless rebuke of contemporary Russia." Aksakov went so far as to call it the Russian national epic, and Gogol the Russian Homer.

Unfortunately the novel remained incomplete. Gogol began to suffer from a nervous illness which induced extreme hypochondria. He became excessively religious, fell under the influence of pietists and a fanatical priest, sank more and more into mysticism, and went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship at the Holy Sepulchre. In this state of mind he came to consider

all literature, including his own, as pernicious and sinful.

After burning the manuscript of the second part of Dead Souls, he began to rewrite it, had it completed and ready for the press by 1851, but kept the copy and burned it again a few days before his death (1852), so that it is extant only in parts.

THOMAS SELTZER.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

ANTON ANTONOVICH SKVOZNIK-DMUKHANOVSKY, the Governor.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA, his wife.

MARYA ANTONOVNA, his daughter.

LUKA LUKICH KHLOPOV, the Inspector of Schools.

His Wife.

AMMOS FIODOROVICH LIAPKIN-TIAPKIN, the Judge.

ARTEMY FILIPPOVICH ZEMLIANIKA, the Superintendent of Charities.

IVAN KUZMICH SHPEKIN, the Postmaster.

PIOTR IVANOVICH DOBCHINSKY. }

PIOTR IVANOVICH BOBCHINSKY. } Country Squires.

IVAN ALEKSANDROVICH KHLESTAKOV, an official from St. Petersburg.

OSIP, his servant.

CHRISTIAN IVANOVICH HÜBNER, the district Doctor.

FIODR ANDREYEVICH LULIUKOV. } ex-officials, esteemed

IVAN LAZAREVICH RASTAKOVSKY. }personages

STEPAN IVANOVICH KOROBKIN. }of the town.

STEPAN ILYICH UKHOVERTOV, the Police Captain.

SVISTUNOV. }

PUGOVITZYN. }Police Sergeants.

DERZHIMORDA. }

ABDULIN, a Merchant.

FEVRONYA PETROVA POSHLIOPKINA, the Locksmith's wife.

The Widow of a non-commissioned Officer.

MISHKA, the Governor's Servant.

Servant at the Inn.

Guests, Merchants, Citizens, and Petitioners.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES
DIRECTIONS FOR ACTORS

THE GOVERNOR.—A man grown old in the service, by no means a fool in his own way. Though he takes bribes, he carries himself with dignity. He is of a rather serious turn and even given somewhat to ratiocination. He speaks in a voice neither too loud nor too low and says neither too much nor too little. Every word of his counts. He has the typical hard stern features of the official who has worked his way up from the lowest rank in the arduous government service. Coarse in his inclinations, he passes rapidly from fear to joy, from servility to arrogance. He is dressed in uniform with frogs and wears Hessian boots with spurs. His hair with a sprinkling of gray is close-cropped.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA.—A provincial coquette, still this side of middle age, educated on novels and albums and on fussing with household affairs and servants. She is highly inquisitive and has streaks of vanity. Sometimes she gets the upper hand over her husband, and he gives in simply because at the moment he cannot find the right thing to say. Her ascendency, however, is confined to mere trifles and takes the form of lecturing and twitting. She changes her dress four times in the course of the play.

KHLESTAKOV.—A skinny young man of about twenty-three, rather stupid, being, as they say, "without a czar in his

head," one of those persons called an "empty vessel" in the government offices. He speaks and acts without stopping to think and utterly lacks the power of concentration. The words burst from his mouth unexpectedly. The more naiveté and ingenousness the actor puts into the character the better will he sustain the role. Khlestakov is dressed in the latest fashion.

OSIP.—A typical middle-aged servant, grave in his address, with eyes always a bit lowered. He is argumentative and loves to read sermons directed at his master. His voice is usually monotonous. To his master his tone is blunt and sharp, with even a touch of rudeness. He is the cleverer of the two and grasps a situation more quickly. But he does not like to talk. He is a silent, uncommunicative rascal. He wears a shabby gray or blue coat.

BOBCHINSKY AND DOBCHINSKY.—Short little fellows, strikingly like each other. Both have small paunches, and talk rapidly, with emphatic gestures of their hands, features and bodies. Dobchinsky is slightly the taller and more subdued in manner. Bobchinsky is freer, easier and livelier. They are both exceedingly inquisitive.

LIAPKIN-TIAPKIN.—He has read four or five books and so is a bit of a freethinker. He is always seeing a hidden meaning in things and therefore puts weight into every word he utters. The actor should preserve an expression of importance throughout. He speaks in a bass voice, with a prolonged rattle and wheeze in his throat, like an old-fashioned clock, which buzzes before it strikes.

ZEMLIANIKA.—Very fat, slow and awkward; but for all that a sly, cunning scoundrel. He is very obliging and officious.

SHPEKIN.—Guileless to the point of simplemindedness. The other characters require no special explanation, as their originals can be met almost anywhere.

The actors should pay especial attention to the last scene. The last word uttered must strike all at once, suddenly, like an electric shock. The whole group should change its position at the same instant. The ladies must all burst into a simultaneous cry of astonishment, as if with one throat. The neglect of these directions may ruin the whole effect.

THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL

ACT I

A Room in the Governor's House.

SCENE I

Anton Antonovich, the Governor, Artemy Filippovich, the Superintendent of Charities, Luka Lukich, the Inspector of Schools, Ammos Fiodorovich, the Judge, Stepan Ilyich, Christian Ivanovich, the Doctor, and two Police Sergeants.

GOVERNOR. I have called you together, gentlemen, to tell you an unpleasant piece of news. An Inspector-General is coming.

AMMOS FIOD. What, an Inspector-General?

ARTEMY FIL. What, an Inspector-General?

GOVERNOR. Yes, an Inspector from St. Petersburg, incognito. And with secret instructions, too.

AMMOS. A pretty how-do-you-do!

ARTEMY. As if we hadn't enough trouble without an Inspector!

LUKA LUKICH. Good Lord! With secret instructions!

GOVERNOR. I had a sort of presentiment of it. Last night I kept dreaming of two rats—regular monsters! Upon my word, I never saw the likes of them—black and supernaturally big. They came in, sniffed, and then went away.—Here's a letter I'll read to you—from Andrey Ivanovich. You know him, Artemy Filippovich. Listen to what he writes: "My dear friend, godfather and benefactor—[He mumbles, glancing rapidly down the page.] —and to let you know"—Ah, that's it—"I hasten to let you know, among other things, that an official has arrived here with instructions to inspect the whole government, and your district especially. [Raises his finger significantly.] I have learned of his being here from highly trustworthy sources, though he pretends to be a private person. So, as you have your little peccadilloes, you know, like everybody else—you are a sensible man, and you don't let the good things that come your way slip by—" [Stopping] H'm, that's his junk—"I advise you to take precautions, as he may arrive any hour, if he hasn't already, and is not staying somewhere incognito.—Yesterday—" The rest are family matters. "Sister Anna Krillovna is here visiting us with her husband. Ivan Krillovich has grown very fat and is always playing the fiddle"—et cetera, et cetera. So there you have the situation we are confronted with, gentlemen.

AMMOS. An extraordinary situation, most extraordinary! Something behind it, I am sure.

LUKA. But why, Anton Antonovich? What for? Why should we have an Inspector?

GOVERNOR. It's fate, I suppose. [Sighs.] Till now, thank goodness, they have been nosing about in other towns. Now our turn has come.

AMMOS. My opinion is, Anton Antonovich, that the cause is a deep one and rather political in character. It means this, that Russia—yes—that Russia intends to go to war, and the Government has secretly commissioned an official to find out if there is any treasonable activity anywhere.

GOVERNOR. The wise man has hit on the very thing. Treason in this little country town! As if it were on the frontier! Why, you might gallop three years away from here and reach nowhere.

AMMOS. No, you don't catch on—you don't—The Government is shrewd. It makes no difference that our town is so remote. The Government is on the look-out all the same—

GOVERNOR [cutting him short]. On the look-out, or not on the look-out, anyhow, gentlemen, I have given you warning. I have made some arrangements for myself, and I advise you to do the same. You especially, Artemy Filippovich. This official, no doubt, will want first of all to inspect your department. So you had better see to it that everything is in order, that the night-caps are clean, and the patients don't go about as they usually do, looking as grimy as blacksmiths.

ARTEMY. Oh, that's a small matter. We can get night-caps easily enough.

GOVERNOR. And over each bed you might hang up a

placard stating in Latin or some other language—that's your end of it, Christian Ivanovich—the name of the disease, when the patient fell ill, the day of the week and the month. And I don't like your invalids to be smoking such strong tobacco. It makes you sneeze when you come in. It would be better, too, if there weren't so many of them. If there are a large number, it will instantly be ascribed to bad supervision or incompetent medical treatment.

ARTEMY. Oh, as to treatment, Christian Ivanovich and I have worked out our own system. Our rule is: the nearer to nature the better. We use no expensive medicines. A man is a simple affair. If he dies, he'd die anyway. If he gets well, he'd get well anyway. Besides, the doctor would have a hard time making the patients understand him. He doesn't know a word of Russian.

The Doctor gives forth a sound intermediate between M and A.

GOVERNOR. And you, Ammos Fiodorovich, had better look to the courthouse. The attendants have turned the entrance hall where the petitioners usually wait into a poultry yard, and the geese and goslings go poking their beaks between people's legs. Of course, setting up housekeeping is commendable, and there is no reason why a porter shouldn't do it. Only, you see, the courthouse is not exactly the place for it. I had meant to tell you so before, but somehow it escaped my memory.

AMMOS. Well, I'll have them all taken into the kitchen to-day. Will you come and dine with me?

GOVERNOR. Then, too, it isn't right to have the courtroom

littered up with all sorts of rubbish—to have a hunting-crop lying right among the papers on your desk. You're fond of sport, I know, still it's better to have the crop removed for the present. When the Inspector is gone, you may put it back again. As for your assessor, he's an educated man, to be sure, but he reeks of spirits, as if he had just emerged from a distillery. That's not right either. I had meant to tell you so long ago, but something or other drove the thing out of my mind. If his odor is really a congenital defect, as he says, then there are ways of remedying it. You might advise him to eat onion or garlic, or something of the sort. Christian Ivanovich can help him out with some of his nostrums.

The Doctor makes the same sound as before.

AMMOS. No, there's no cure for it. He says his nurse struck him when he was a child, and ever since he has smelt of vodka.

GOVERNOR. Well, I just wanted to call your attention to it. As regards the internal administration and what Andrey Ivanovich in his letter calls "little peccadilloes," I have nothing to say. Why, of course, there isn't a man living who hasn't some sins to answer for. That's the way God made the world, and the Voltairean freethinkers can talk against it all they like, it won't do any good.

AMMOS. What do you mean by sins? Anton Antonovich? There are sins and sins. I tell everyone plainly that I take bribes. I make no bones about it. But what kind of bribes? White greyhound puppies. That's quite a different matter.

GOVERNOR. H'm. Bribes are bribes, whether puppies or anything else.

AMMOS. Oh, no, Anton Antonovich. But if one has a fur overcoat worth five hundred rubles, and one's wife a shawl—

GOVERNOR. [testily]. And supposing greyhound puppies are the only bribes you take? You're an atheist, you never go to church, while I at least am a firm believer and go to church every Sunday. You—oh, I know you. When you begin to talk about the Creation it makes my flesh creep.

AMMOS. Well, it's a conclusion I've reasoned out with my own brain.

GOVERNOR. Too much brain is sometimes worse than none at all.—However, I merely mentioned the courthouse. I dare say nobody will ever look at it. It's an enviable place. God Almighty Himself seems to watch over it. But you, Luka Lukich, as inspector of schools, ought to have an eye on the teachers. They are very learned gentlemen, no doubt, with a college education, but they have funny habits—inseparable from the profession, I know. One of them, for instance, the man with the fat face—I forget his name—is sure, the moment he takes his chair, to screw up his face like this. [Imitates him.] And then he has a trick of sticking his hand under his necktie and smoothing down his beard. It doesn't matter, of course, if he makes a face at the pupils; perhaps it's even necessary. I'm no judge of that. But you yourself will admit that if he does it to a visitor, it may turn out very badly. The Inspector, or anyone else, might take it as meant

for himself, and then the deuce knows what might come of it.

LUKA. But what can I do? I have told him about it time and again. Only the other day when the marshal of the nobility came into the class-room, he made such a face at him as I had never in my life seen before. I dare say it was with the best intentions; But I get reprimanded for permitting radical ideas to be instilled in the minds of the young.

GOVERNOR. And then I must call your attention to the history teacher. He has a lot of learning in his head and a store of facts. That's evident. But he lectures with such ardor that he quite forgets himself. Once I listened to him. As long as he was talking about the Assyrians and Babylonians, it was not so bad. But when he reached Alexander of Macedon, I can't describe what came over him. Upon my word, I thought a fire had broken out. He jumped down from the platform, picked up a chair and dashed it to the floor. Alexander of Macedon was a hero, it is true. But that's no reason for breaking chairs. The state must bear the cost.

LUKA. Yes, he is a hot one. I have spoken to him about it several times. He only says: "As you please, but in the cause of learning I will even sacrifice my life."

GOVERNOR. Yes, it's a mysterious law of fate. Your clever man is either a drunkard, or he makes such grimaces that you feel like running away.

LUKA. Ah, Heaven save us from being in the educational department! One's afraid of everything. Everybody meddles and wants to show that he is as clever as you.

GOVERNOR. Oh, that's nothing. But this cursed incognito! All of a sudden he'll look in: "Ah, so you're here, my dear fellows! And who's the judge here?" says he. "Liapkin-Tiapkin." "Bring Liapkin-Tiapkin here.—And who is the Superintendent of Charities?" "Zemlianika."—"Bring Zemlianika here!"—That's what's bad.

SCENE II

Enter Ivan Kuzmich, the Postmaster.

POSTMASTER. Tell me, gentlemen, who's coming? What chinovnik?

GOVERNOR. What, haven't you heard?

POSTMASTER. Bobchinsky told me. He was at the postoffice just now.

GOVERNOR. Well, what do you think of it?

POSTMASTER. What do I think of it? Why, there'll be a war with the Turks.

AMMOS. Exactly. Just what I thought.

GOVERNOR [sarcastically]. Yes, you've both hit in the air precisely.

POSTMASTER. It's war with the Turks for sure, all fomented by the French.

GOVERNOR. Nonsense! War with the Turks indeed. It's we who are going to get it, not the Turks. You may count on that. Here's a letter to prove it.

POSTMASTER. In that case, then, we won't go to war with the Turks.

GOVERNOR. Well, how do you feel about it, Ivan Kuzmich?

POSTMASTER. How do I feel? How do YOU feel about it, Anton Antonovich?

GOVERNOR. I? Well, I'm not afraid, but I just feel a little—you know—The merchants and townspeople bother me. I seem to be unpopular with them. But the Lord knows if I've taken from some I've done it without a trace of ill-feeling. I even suspect—[Takes him by the arm and walks aside with him.]—I even suspect that I may have been denounced. Or why would they send an Inspector to us? Look here, Ivan Kuzmich, don't you think you could—ahem!—just open a little every letter that passes through your office and read it—for the common benefit of us all, you know—to see if it contains any kind of information against me, or is only ordinary correspondence. If it is all right, you can seal it up again, or simply deliver the letter opened.

POSTMASTER. Oh, I know. You needn't teach me that. I do it not so much as a precaution as out of curiosity. I just itch to know what's doing in the world. And it's very interesting reading, I tell you. Some letters are fascinating—parts of them written grand—more edifying than the Moscow Gazette.

GOVERNOR. Tell me, then, have you read anything about any official from St. Petersburg?

POSTMASTER. No, nothing about a St. Petersburg official, but plenty about Kostroma and Saratov ones. A pity you don't

read the letters. There are some very fine passages in them. For instance, not long ago a lieutenant writes to a friend describing a ball very wittily.—Splendid! "Dear friend," he says, "I live in the regions of the Empyrean, lots of girls, bands playing, flags flying." He's put a lot of feeling into his description, a whole lot. I've kept the letter on purpose. Would you like to read it?

GOVERNOR. No, this is no time for such things. But please, Ivan Kuzmich, do me the favor, if ever you chance upon a complaint or denunciation, don't hesitate a moment, hold it back.

POSTMASTER. I will, with the greatest pleasure.

AMMOS. You had better be careful. You may get yourself into trouble.

POSTMASTER. Goodness me!

GOVERNOR. Never mind, never mind. Of course, it would be different if you published it broadcast. But it's a private affair, just between us.

AMMOS. Yes, it's a bad business—I really came here to make you a present of a puppy, sister to the dog you know about. I suppose you have heard that Cheptovich and Varkhovinsky have started a suit. So now I live in clover. I hunt hares first on the one's estate, then on the other's.

GOVERNOR. I don't care about your hares now, my good friend. That cursed incognito is on my brain. Any moment the door may open and in walk—

SCENE III

Enter Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, out of breath.

BOBCHINSKY. What an extraordinary occurrence!

DOBCHINSKY. An unexpected piece of news!

ALL. What is it? What is it?

DOBCHINSKY. Something quite unforeseen. We were about to enter the inn—

BOBCHINSKY [interrupting]. Yes, Piotr Ivanovich and I were entering the inn—

DOBCHINSKY [interrupting]. Please, Piotr Ivanovich, let me tell.

BOBCHINSKY. No, please, let me—let me. You can't. You haven't got the style for it.

DOBCHINSKY. Oh, but you'll get mixed up and won't remember everything.

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, I will, upon my word, I will. PLEASE don't interrupt! Do let me tell the news—don't interrupt! Pray, oblige me, gentlemen, and tell Dobchinsky not to interrupt.

GOVERNOR. Speak, for Heaven's sake! What is it? My heart is in my mouth! Sit down, gentlemen, take seats. Piotr Ivanovich, here's a chair for you. [All seat themselves around Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky.] Well, now, what is it? What is it?

BOBCHINSKY. Permit me, permit me. I'll tell it all just as it happened. As soon as I had the pleasure of taking leave of

you after you were good enough to be bothered with the letter which you had received, sir, I ran out—now, please don't keep interrupting, Dobchinsky. I know all about it, all, I tell you.—So I ran out to see Korobkin. But not finding Korobkin at home, I went off to Rastakovsky, and not seeing him, I went to Ivan Kuzmich to tell him of the news you'd got. Going on from there I met Dobchinsky—

DOBCHINSKY [interjecting]. At the stall where they sell pies —

BOBCHINSKY. At the stall where they sell pies. Well, I met Dobchinsky and I said to him: "Have you heard the news that came to Anton Antonovich in a letter which is absolutely reliable?" But Piotr Ivanovich had already heard of it from your housekeeper, Avdotya, who, I don't know why, had been sent to Filipp Antonovich Pachechuyev—

DOBCHINSKY [interrupting]. To get a little keg for French brandy.

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, to get a little keg for French brandy. So then I went with Dobchinsky to Pachechuyev's.—Will you stop, Piotr Ivanovich? Please don't interrupt.—So off we went to Pachechuyev's, and on the way Dobchinsky said: "Let's go to the inn," he said. "I haven't eaten a thing since morning. My stomach is growling." Yes, sir, his stomach was growling. "They've just got in a supply of fresh salmon at the inn," he said. "Let's take a bite." We had hardly entered the inn when we saw a young man —

DOBCHINSKY [Interrupting]. Of rather good appearance and dressed in ordinary citizen's clothes.

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, of rather good appearance and dressed in citizen's clothes—walking up and down the room. There was something out of the usual about his face, you know, something deep—and a manner about him—and here [raises his hand to his forehead and turns it around several times] full, full of everything. I had a sort of feeling, and I said to Dobchinsky, "Something's up. This is no ordinary matter." Yes, and Dobchinsky beckoned to the landlord, Vlas, the innkeeper, you know,—three weeks ago his wife presented him with a baby —a bouncer—he'll grow up just like his father and keep a tavern. —Well, we beckoned to Vlas, and Dobchinsky asked him on the quiet, "Who," he asked, "is that young man?" "That young man," Vlas replied, "that young man"—Oh, don't interrupt, Piotr Ivanovich, please don't interrupt. You can't tell the story. Upon my word, you can't. You lisp and one tooth in your mouth makes you whistle. I know what I'm saying. "That young man," he said, "is an official."—Yes, sir.—"On his way from St. Petersburg. And his name," he said, "is Ivan Aleksandrovich Khlestakov, and he's going," he said "to the government of Saratov," he said. "And he acts so queerly. It's the second week he's been here and he's never left the house; and he won't pay a penny, takes everything on account." When Vlas told me that, a light dawned on me from above, and I said to Piotr Ivanovich, "Hey!"—

DOBCHINSKY. No, Piotr Ivanovich, I said "HEY!"

BOBCHINSKY. Well first YOU said it, then I did. "Hey!" said both of us, "And why does he stick here if he's going to Saratov?"—Yes, sir, that's he, the official.

GOVERNOR. Who? What official?

BOBCHINSKY. Why, the official who you were notified was coming, the Inspector.

GOVERNOR [terrified]. Great God! What's that you're saying. It can't be he.

DOBCHINSKY. It is, though. Why, he doesn't pay his bills and he doesn't leave. Who else can it be? And his postchaise is ordered for Saratov.

BOBCHINSKY. It's he, it's he, it's he—why, he's so alert, he scrutinized everything. He saw that Dobchinsky and I were eating salmon—chiefly on account of Dobchinsky's stomach—and he looked at our plates so hard that I was frightened to death.

GOVERNOR. The Lord have mercy on us sinners! In what room is he staying?

DOBCHINSKY. Room number 5 near the stairway.

BOBCHINSKY. In the same room that the officers quarreled in when they passed through here last year.

GOVERNOR. How long has he been here?

DOBCHINSKY. Two weeks. He came on St. Vasili's day.

GOVERNOR. Two weeks! [Aside.] Holy Fathers and saints preserve me! In those two weeks I have flogged the wife of a non-commissioned officer, the prisoners were not given their rations, the streets are dirty as a pothouse—a scandal, a disgrace!

[Clutches his head with both hands.]

ARTEMY. What do you think, Anton Antonovich, hadn't we better go in state to the inn?

AMMOS. No, no. First send the chief magistrate, then the clergy, then the merchants. That's what it says in the book. The Acts of John the Freemason.

GOVERNOR. No, no, leave it to me. I have been in difficult situations before now. They have passed off all right, and I was even rewarded with thanks. Maybe the Lord will help us out this time, too. [Turns to Bobchinsky.] You say he's a young man?

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, about twenty-three or four at the most.

GOVERNOR. So much the better. It's easier to pump things out of a young man. It's tough if you've got a hardened old devil to deal with. But a young man is all on the surface. You, gentlemen, had better see to your end of things while I go unofficially, by myself, or with Dobchinsky here, as though for a walk, to see that the visitors that come to town are properly accommodated. Here, Svistunov. [To one of the Sergeants.]

SVISTUNOV. Sir.

GOVERNOR. Go instantly to the Police Captain—or, no, I'll want you. Tell somebody to send him here as quickly as possibly and then come back.

Svistunov hurries off.

ARTEMY. Let's go, let's go, Ammos Fiodorovich. We may really get into trouble.

AMMOS. What have you got to be afraid of? Put clean

nightcaps on the patients and the thing's done.

ARTEMY. Nightcaps! Nonsense! The patients were ordered to have oatmeal soup. Instead of that there's such a smell of cabbage in all the corridors that you've got to hold your nose.

AMMOS. Well, my mind's at ease. Who's going to visit the court? Supposing he does look at the papers, he'll wish he had left them alone. I have been on the bench fifteen years, and when I take a look into a report, I despair. King Solomon in all his wisdom could not tell what is true and what is not true in it.

The Judge, the Superintendent of Charities, the School Inspector, and Postmaster go out and bump up against the Sergeant in the doorway as the latter returns.

SCENE IV

The Governor, Bobchinsky, Dobchinsky, and Sergeant Svistunov.

GOVERNOR. Well, is the cab ready?

SVISTUNOV. Yes, sir.

GOVERNOR. Go out on the street—or, no, stop—go and bring—why, where are the others? Why are you alone? Didn't I give orders for Prokhorov to be here? Where is Prokhorov?

SVISTUNOV. Prokhorov is in somebody's house and can't go on duty just now.

GOVERNOR. Why so?

SVISTUNOV. Well, they brought him back this morning

dead drunk. They poured two buckets of water over him, but he hasn't sobered up yet.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.