

## *Three Novellas*



“If the world could write by itself,  
it would write like Tolstoy.”

*Isaak Babel*

“Tolstoy’s greatness lies in not turning the story into sentimental tragedy... His world is huge and vast, filled with complex family lives and great social events. His characters are well-rounded presences. They have complete passions: a desire for love, but also an inner moral depth.”

*Malcolm Bradbury*

“What an artist and what a psychologist!”

*Gustave Flaubert*

“The pure narrative power of his work is unequalled.”

*Thomas Mann*

“Tolstoy is the greatest Russian writer of prose fiction.”

*Vladimir Nabokov*

“The greatest of all novelists.”

*Virginia Woolf*

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# *Three Novellas*

Leo Tolstoy

Translated by Kyril Zinovieff  
and April FitzLyon



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## *Introduction to the 2009 Edition*

The publication of these three stories in a single volume provides a rare opportunity for those interested in Tolstoy to see how he developed as a writer and, of course, also as a person. The stories in this volume were written over the course of more than half a century, from 1852 until 1909, a year before his death.

In the case of the first two – *A Landowner's Morning* and *The Devil* – we are presented with his attitude to peasants, an attitude which changed fundamentally from the first story, written in 1852 when serfdom still existed, to the end of the century, by which time serfs had been free for several decades. Emancipated in 1861, they were no longer the chattels of their landowners.

In *A Landowner's Morning*, Tolstoy views his peasants as objects dependent on their owner, who, in turn, feels direct responsibility for their welfare. He sets out to improve their lot in every way that he can, but it's as though they were pieces which he can move about on his chessboard, creatures whom he would like to help, but without feelings of their own which must be taken into account. He expects gratitude; they give him suspicion, mistrust. If he's offering it, then for that very reason there must be a catch in it and it will turn out not for their good but for his. So they categorically reject and entirely misunderstand his well-meant offers of improvement. It is interesting that, in his crestfallen despair, the idea of emancipation – of setting them free from him and free to trust him – never seems to enter his head.

In the second story, *The Devil*, written nearly fifty years later and long after the abolition of serfdom, emancipation has brought about a new situation. It is true that it does not result in a happier relationship; it ends in tragedy, whichever of the two endings you choose. But the story is now about two human beings, a man and a woman, emotionally involved. She is tempted by the material advantages and he by the sexual advantages on offer. The attitude of both may be reprehensible. But there is not doubt whatever that they regard each other, emotionally, as equals. He discovers that the relationship isn't purely sexual, as he had

thought, that he isn't just "a stag" but in some sense a husband. He is possessed by her and she possesses him. That, indeed, is why there has to be a tragedy.

So Russia has changed fundamentally. And Tolstoy the person has changed with it. The third story takes us back to the early days of Tolstoy the writer. In *Childhood* (1852) and *The Sebastopol Stories* (1855–56), he was testing himself out as a realistic and objective describer. In *Family Happiness* (1859), we see him for the first time approaching the subject of marriage, which played such an important part in his great novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. He still deploys an almost photographic realism, but applies it now to the intimate, familial relationship of husband and wife, with the added challenge (for a male writer) of viewing it through the eyes of the wife. The novelist has taken an important step towards his great novels.

In this context, *The Devil* at first sight seems regressive – not so much because of its intense sexuality as because it represents what is in effect a retreat by Tolstoy the novelist, and a victory, at the end of his long life, for Tolstoy the didactic moralist. We can see it coming: in *Anna Karenina* (1877) and in *The Confession* (1879). It emerges, full-blown, in *Resurrection* (1899), where the meticulously observed story makes room for the homily. By the time we get to *The Devil*, Tolstoy is still the great observer, but he wants us to be perfectly sure of the moral message to be drawn from what he observes. *Resurrection* remains a novel – a very, very long one – in which the moral message is to some extent diluted. *The Devil* is stripped down, deliberately and brutally, into a short, edifying tale in which the reader has no escape and the author has completed his trajectory.

A Landowner's Morning

*Translated by Kyril Zinovieff*

## *Preface*

This story was written nine years before the abolition of serfdom in Russia, at a time when the existence of serfdom was a subject of constant debate.

By this time, there were two main reasons why it was felt, both by the government and by the people as a whole, that the emancipation of the peasants was essential. One was moral: the sense of shame that a country which considered itself in terms of civilization on a par with Europe should still be practising a form of slavery that was medieval in origin and now indefensible. The second reason was rational and to an extent opportunistic: Russia, it was realized, could only compete with Europe economically if its industry was given the resources to develop along capitalist lines. This meant releasing the necessary labour and entrepreneurial energy locked up by an institution which placed much of the peasant population in thrall to its agricultural owners and landlords.

Even under serfdom, this was partly achieved by allowing peasants to “quit” themselves of their obligations through a system of “quit-rent”; it was possible for a peasant to negotiate an arrangement under which, instead of working on the manorial land, he could choose to work on his own account – in towns and elsewhere – and to pay his owner in money instead of labour. (Tolstoy gives the example of the peasant family which had grown prosperous by becoming carters.) Many of the most enterprising peasants followed this route and the most successful were able to buy their freedom outright (some, indeed, were able to buy up their owners too). But these were the exceptions, and the system of “quit-rent” could not provide enough labour to supply nineteenth-century capitalism. Only emancipation could do that.

Tolstoy did not agree. He believed that on the whole peasants were not helped by education or by being given the freedom to choose; what they needed was material help to go on doing what they did, only better. It followed, though, that landowners for their part had the duty of improving to the best of their ability the standard of living of their peasantry and to help them both financially and materially.

When the story first appeared, in the December 1856 edition of the periodical *Otechestvennyye Zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*), Turgenev (in a letter to A.V. Druzhinin of January 1857) praised it as “masterly” for its “language, story-telling and characterization”. But in the same letter he condemned the implication “running like a trace horse alongside”: that to educate the peasantry as a whole, to improve their conditions of life, was a futile thing. This implication Turgenev found “unpleasant” and in conflict with his own principal concern at the time, which was to shine the most favourable light possible on the potential of the Russian peasant, so as to advance the arguments for emancipation.

The first version of *A Landowner's Morning* was started under a different title in 1852 when Tolstoy was twenty-four, more or less concurrently with *Childhood*. His original intention was to divide the novel into two parts. The first was to deal with peasants, the second with landowners. But the work proceeded slowly in spite of Tolstoy's satisfaction with it, and over four years later even the first part was not as complete as he would have liked. The second consisted merely of a short list of characteristics (mostly disreputable or, at least, unattractive) against some of which he put the names of persons he knew who were presumably to serve as models.

But there were many interruptions and other projects intervened. Tolstoy's original plan now appeared to him too ambitious. So he decided to recast his novel, making a novella or a long short story out of it, by drastically abridging it, retaining no more than the kernel of the idea that first inspired him – the attitude of peasants to landowners – and restricting the time of action to a single morning. As with almost all Tolstoy's writings, the story is based on personal experience and observation. The young landowner, Prince Nekhlyudov, is, of course, himself (he used that name later in other works, when modelling the principal character on his own personality), and the peasants all apparently bear a strong resemblance to those living on Tolstoy's family estate, Yasnaya Polyana. All that remained of the original novel was Nekhlyudov's letter to his aunt, setting out his somewhat vague, but idealistic plan of making his peasants happy, his aunts disillusioning, worldly-wise answer (both now in Russian instead of in French as in the original version) and Nekhlyudov's conversations with the peasants. All unnecessary details were eliminated and all traces of

authorial presence removed. The narrative, thus freed from sententious and didactic expressions of the author's own opinions, was greatly improved.

The work of abridgement and alteration took Tolstoy a mere twelve days to complete, and he then conveyed the novella personally to the editor of the periodical. He himself never again referred to *A Landowner's Morning*. According to Vassily Botkin, a literary-minded tea merchant and friend of many Russian writers, including Turgenev and Belinsky, it "created no impression" on its publication. But several years later, when writing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy incorporated the lesson learnt by Nekhlyudov in his account of Prince Andrew's attempt to educate the peasants on his estate and improve their standard of living at his own expense. This attempt, says Tolstoy, "as has always happened and always will, merely strengthened their distrust of landowners [dislike of their masters]". (Tolstoy's alternative version is in square brackets.) For some reason, however, he excluded this sentence from the next draft of *War and Peace*, and it did not reappear in the final version.

Kyril Zinovieff

# 1

PRINCE NEKHLIUDOV was nineteen years old, and a third-year university student, when he arrived at his estate for the summer vacation to spend the whole summer there by himself. In the autumn he wrote, in his unformed childish writing, the following letter to his aunt, Countess Beloretskaya, who in his estimation was his best friend and the most intelligent woman in the world. The letter was in French and is here given in translation:

*My dear aunt,*

*I have come to a decision which must affect the whole course of my life. I am leaving the university in order to devote myself to life in the country because I feel that I was born for it. For heaven's sake, my dear aunt, don't laugh at me. You will say that I am young; it may be true, perhaps, that I am still a child, but this does not prevent me feeling my vocation, wanting to do good and to love the good.*

*As I wrote to you before, I found my affairs here in very bad shape indeed. Trying to put them right again, I made a close study of them and discovered that the main evil consists in the quite pathetic poverty of the peasants, an evil which can be righted only through work and patience. If you could only see two of my peasants, David and Ivan, and the life they and their families lead, I am sure the mere sight of these two unfortunate people, more than anything I can say, will convince you that I am right in my intention. Is it not my direct and sacred duty to look after the happiness of these seven hundred men for whom I shall have to answer before God? Is it not a sin to abandon them, for the sake of pleasure or ambitious plans, to the whims of callous village elders and farm managers? And why seek in some other sphere opportunities for being useful and doing good, when such a noble and impressive duty lies immediately to hand? I feel it in me to become a good landlord – and in order to be one, as I understand it, there is no need for a university degree or official rank which you so much want me to have. My dear aunt, do not make*

*ambitious plans for me; get used to the idea that I have chosen quite a special path, but one which is good and which will, I feel, lead me to happiness. I have thought a lot about my future duties, have written out rules of conduct for myself and, if only God grants me life and strength, I shall succeed in my enterprise.*

*Do not show this letter to my brother Vasya; I am afraid of his jibes. He is used to dominating me and I am used to obeying him. Vanya may not approve my intention, but he will understand it.*

The Countess sent him the following letter in reply, here also translated from the French:

*So far as I am concerned, my dear Dmitry, your letter proves nothing except that you have a very kind heart, and this I never doubted. But, dear friend, our good qualities do us more harm in life than our bad ones. I shall not tell you that you are doing a silly thing and that your behaviour distresses me, but shall try to convince you by persuasion alone. Let's reason it out, my dear boy. You say that you feel a vocation for life in the country, that you want your peasants to be happy and that you hope to be a good landlord. I must tell you, first, that we feel our vocation only after we have once made a mistake about it; second, that it is easier to achieve one's own happiness than the happiness of others; and third, that to be a good landlord you must be cold and stern, which you are not likely ever to become, though you try to pretend you are.*

*You consider your arguments to be irrefutable, and even take them to constitute rules of conduct, but at my age, my boy, people do not believe in arguments and rules, but only in experience. And experience tells me that your plans are childish. I am getting on for fifty and have known many worthy men, but I have never heard of a young man of good family and abilities burying himself in the country on the plea of doing good. You have always wanted to appear original, but your originality is nothing but excessive self-esteem. And, my friend, you had better choose the well-trodden paths – they lead quicker to success, and success, even if you don't need it as such, is essential to enable you to do the good you aspire to do.*

*The poverty of a few peasants is a necessary evil, or else an evil which can be remedied without forgetting one's duties to society, to*

*one's relations and to oneself. With your intelligence, your kind heart and your love of virtue, there is no career in which you would not succeed, but at least choose one which would be worthy of you and would do you credit.*

*I believe in your sincerity when you say you are not ambitious, but you are deceiving yourself. Ambition is a virtue for someone of your age and your means, but it becomes ridiculous as well as a defect when a man can no longer satisfy this passion. And you will experience this if you do not change your intention. Goodbye, my dear Dmitry. I think I love you all the more for your absurd but noble and magnanimous plan. Do as you wish, but I must confess I cannot agree with you.*

On receiving this letter, the young man considered it for a long time and, having finally decided that even a highly intelligent woman could err in her judgements, applied for a discharge from his university and settled down in the country for ever.

## 2

THE YOUNG LANDOWNER, as he wrote to his aunt, had drawn up a set of rules for his estate management, and his entire life and work had to follow an hourly, daily and monthly timetable. Sundays were fixed for receiving petitioners – domestic servants and peasants – for visiting the households of poor peasants, and for giving them assistance with the agreement of the village commune which met every Sunday evening and had to decide how much assistance should be given and to whom. Over a year had passed in such activities and the young man was no longer quite a novice in either the practice or the theoretical knowledge of farm management.

It was a bright June morning when Nekhlyudov, having finished his coffee and read a chapter of *Maison Rustique*, put a notebook and a wad of banknotes in the pocket of his light raincoat, left the large country house with its colonnades and terraces, where he occupied one small room on the ground floor, and went along the unswept, overgrown paths of the old English-style garden, in the direction of the village which stretched out on either side of the main road.

Nekhlyudov was a tall, well-built young man with a mass of thick, curly brown hair, with bright, sparkling black eyes, a fresh complexion and red lips over which the first down of youth was only just beginning to appear. His gait and all his movements revealed strength, energy and the good-natured arrogance of youth. A motley crowd of peasants was coming back from church. Old men, young girls, children, women with their babies, all dressed in their Sunday best, were dispersing to their homes, bowing low to the squire and stepping out of his way.

Nekhlyudov stopped as soon as he reached the street, took the notebook out of his pocket and, on the last page, filled with his childish writing, he read the names of several peasants with comments. "Ivan Churis – asked for props," he read and went up to the gate of the second house on the right.

Churis's abode consisted of a crumbling log shack, rotting at the corners, sloping to one side and so sunk into the ground that a small window with a broken pane and a shutter torn off one of its hinges and one other window, stopped up with tow, were only just visible above the manure heap. A log-built passageway with a dirty threshold and a low door, another small log shack, even lower and more ancient than the passage, a gate and a wattle shed clustered next to the main building. All this had at one time or other been covered by a single uneven roof; now, however, rotting black thatch hung thickly only on the eaves, while laths and rafters were in places clearly visible. In the front of the yard was a well with ramshackle wooden sides, the remains of a post and pulley, and a dirty puddle which had been trampled by cattle and in which ducks were now splashing about. Two ancient willows, split, half-broken and with some straggly, pale-green branches stood beside the well. Under one of these willows – witnesses to the fact that someone at some time in the past had tried to make the place look a little more attractive – sat a fair-haired eight-year-old girl who was making another two-year-old girl crawl around her. A puppy was playing beside them but, on seeing Nekhlyudov, dashed headlong under the gate and barked furiously from there, a frightened, quivering bark.

"Is Ivan at home?" asked Nekhlyudov.

The elder girl seemed to freeze into immobility at this question and opened her eyes wider and wider without replying. The younger one opened her mouth and prepared to cry. A little old woman, in a tattered check skirt, tied low down with an old reddish belt, looked on

from behind the door, but also said nothing. Nekhlyudov came up and repeated his question.

“He is, master,” uttered the old woman in a quivering voice, bowing low and in a state of frightened agitation.

When Nekhlyudov, after greeting her, went through the passage into the small yard, the old woman rested her chin in her hand, came to the door and slowly shook her head without taking her eyes off the squire.

The yard had a poverty-stricken appearance. Here and there lay old, blackened, uncarted manure. Scattered about on the manure lay a rotting wooden block, a pitchfork and two harrows. A plough and a cart without a wheel and empty, useless beehives, piled on top of each other, were standing and lying in one corner of the sheds surrounding the yard. The roof over the sheds was almost entirely bare of thatch and one side of it had collapsed so that the front beams were no longer resting on the fork-posts but on the manure. Churis, using both the butt and the edge of his axe, was breaking down the wattle fence which had been crushed by the roof. Ivan Churis was a man of about fifty, below average height. The features of his suntanned, oblong-shaped face, framed by a light-brown beard streaked with grey, and thick hair of the same colour, were handsome and expressive. His dark-blue, half-closed eyes shone with intelligence and light-hearted good nature. When he smiled, his small shapely mouth, sharply defined under a scanty fair moustache, expressed a quiet self-confidence and a somewhat mocking indifference to the surrounding world. His rough skin, deep wrinkles, sharply defined veins on his neck, face and hands, unnatural stoop and crooked bandy legs revealed a life spent entirely in heavy work, well beyond his strength. His clothes consisted of white hempen trousers with blue patches on the knees and a dirty shirt of the same material, torn at the back and sleeves, with a tape by way of a belt worn rather low with a small brass key dangling from it.

“Good morning,” said the squire as he entered the yard.

Churis looked round and then resumed his work. With one great effort he freed the wattle fence from under the roof, and only then stuck his axe into the wooden block and came out in the middle of the yard, adjusting his belt.

“A happy Sunday to you, your honour,” he said, bowing low and then shaking back his hair.

“Thank you, my friend. I just came to have a look at your cottage and the way you live,” said Nekhlyudov, shy and friendly as a child, examining the man’s clothes. “Let’s see what you wanted the props for – the ones you asked for at the general meeting of the commune.”

“The props? Well, you know what props are for, your honour, sir. I wanted to prop things up a bit – you can see for yourself. The other day, for example, the corner there collapsed, but thank God the cattle were not in at the time. Everything here is hanging by a thread,” said Churis, looking contemptuously at his thatchless, lopsided, crumbling sheds. “The rafters, now, and the gable-ends and the beams – just touch them, and they’ll all fall apart; there won’t be enough left for a piece of useful timber. And where can a man get wood nowadays? You know yourself.”

“Well then, what do you want five props for, if one shed has collapsed and the others soon will? You don’t want props, you want new rafters, new beams, new posts, that’s what you want,” said the squire, obviously showing off his knowledge.

Churis kept silent.

“In other words you need timber, not props. You should have said so.”

“Of course I need it, but there’s nowhere to get it from. I can’t always go to the squire’s house asking for it. Odd peasants we would be, the likes of us, if we all got into the habit of going to your house begging for all the stuff we need. But if you will be kind enough,” he said, bowing and shuffling from foot to foot, “about those oak tops, I mean, lying about on your threshing floor, not being used for anything... I might change some, cut some up, and fix up something with the old stuff.”

“How do you mean, the old stuff? You’ve just been saying yourself that all you have is old and rotten. There’s one corner there, collapsed already; another may do so tomorrow and then another the next day. So if it’s to be done at all, it must be done all anew; otherwise it’s just wasted labour. Tell me, what do you think: can your place last out this coming winter without collapsing or can’t it?”

“Who knows?”

“Yes, but what do you think – will it collapse or not?”

Churis thought for a minute.

"It should all collapse," he said suddenly.

"Well now, there you are! You should have said at the meeting that you need to have all the buildings rebuilt, and not just have a few props. I'd be glad to help you, you know..."

"I am very grateful to you, sir," replied Churis mistrustfully and without looking at the squire. "If you could only let me have about four beams and a few props I could fix things up myself, perhaps, and any bad timber could be used for struts in the cottage."

"But is your cottage in a bad state too?"

"The wife and I are expecting someone to be crushed any time," said Churis with complete indifference. "In fact, the other day a ceiling beam did crush my old woman."

"How do you mean – crushed her?"

"It just did, your honour. Came down with a whoosh across her back, so she lay as good as dead till night-time."

"Well, and has she recovered?"

"She has in a way, but she is always ailing. But then she's been ailing from birth, really."

"Are you ill?" Nekhlyudov asked the woman who was still standing in the doorway and who had immediately started groaning as soon as her husband mentioned her.

"It never leaves me – just here – it never does," she answered, pointing to her dirty, emaciated chest.

"Again!" said the young squire, shrugging his shoulders in annoyance. "Why then if you are ill didn't you go to the hospital? That's what the hospital was opened for. Haven't you been told of it?"

"We have indeed, sir, but there's just no time. It's work for the manor and work at home, and the children – and I am all alone. There's no one to help us."

### 3

NEKHLYUDOV STEPPED INTO THE COTTAGE. The uneven, sooty walls in one corner of the room were hung with all kinds of rags and garments, while, in the opposite corner, they were literally covered with reddish cockroaches gathered round the icons and the bench. In the middle of this black, foul-smelling, fourteen-foot

shack, there was a large crack in the ceiling which, in spite of struts in two different places, sagged so that it threatened to collapse at any moment.

“Oh, yes, the cottage is very bad,” said the squire, looking closely at Churis, who did not seem eager to start a conversation on this subject.

“It’ll crush us and it’ll crush the children,” began the woman in a tearful voice leaning against the stove under the *polati*.\*

“Don’t you start, now,” said Churis sternly, and his moustache twitched, almost concealing a subtle, scarcely perceptible smile, as he turned to the squire. “I just can’t think what to do with it, your honour, with the cottage, I mean. I put in struts and I put in boards, but there’s just nothing can be done!”

“How can we spend the winter here? O-o-oh,” said the woman.

“Well, of course, if we put up struts and a new beam in the ceiling,” her husband interrupted her with a quiet, businesslike expression, “and changed some of the beams, we could perhaps live through the winter somehow. We could get along, only the struts would block up the cottage inside, that’s the trouble. But if you so much as touch it, there’ll be nothing left of it – not one sound splinter. It only holds together while it stands,” he concluded, obviously very pleased that he had grasped that fact.

Nekhlyudov was both annoyed and pained that Churis should have brought himself to such a pass without applying to him sooner, for ever since his arrival he had never once refused to help the peasants and tried only to induce them to come straight to him with their troubles. He even had a feeling of anger against this man, shrugged his shoulders crossly and frowned. But the sight of the destitution surrounding him and, in the midst of that destitution, Churis’s calm and self-satisfied appearance, turned his annoyance into a feeling of sadness as well as hopelessness.

“Now Ivan, why didn’t you tell me before?” he remarked reproachfully as he sat down on the dirty, crooked bench.

“Haven’t had the courage to, your honour,” replied Churis with the same scarcely perceptible smile, shuffling from one black, bare foot to the other on the uneven earth floor, but he said it so boldly and calmly that it was hard to believe that he had not the courage to apply to the squire.

“We are only peasants, how would we have the courage?” whimpered the woman.

“Oh, stop it,” said Churis, turning to her again.

“You can’t live in this cottage; it’s just nonsense,” said Nekhlyudov after a short silence. “Now, this is what we’ll do, old man...”

“Yes sir,” replied Churis.

“Have you seen those brick cottages that I had built in the new village, the ones with hollow walls?”

“Of course I have,” answered Churis, his smile revealing his teeth, still sound and white. “We even used to wonder a lot at the way they were being built – queer cottages. The kids used to laugh and say they might be storehouses, and the walls would be filled up against the rats. Fine cottages!” he concluded, shaking his head with an expression of scornful perplexity. “Just like prisons.”

“Oh, yes, they are excellent cottages, dry and warm, and fires are not such a risk,” said the squire, with a frown on his young face, evidently annoyed at the peasant’s scorn.

“Can’t say any different, your honour – fine cottages, they are.”

“Well now, one cottage is quite ready. It is twenty-three feet square, with an entrance room and a storeroom, and is quite ready. I might let you have it at cost price; you’ll pay me some day,” said the squire with a self-satisfied smile he could not keep back at the thought that he was doing a good deed. “You will pull down your old one,” he continued, “and use it to build a barn; the buildings in the yard we’ll also move. The water there is excellent; I’ll let you have virgin land for your vegetable plots, and all your land, all three fields of it, I’ll let you have in one plot close by. You’ll be really well off! Well, now, don’t you like it?” asked Nekhlyudov, seeing that as soon as he mentioned resettlement, Churis froze into absolute immobility and no longer smiled as he looked down at his feet.

“It’s as you please, your honour,” he replied without raising his eyes.

The old woman came forwards, as if touched to the quick and was preparing to say something, but her husband forestalled her.

“It’s as you please, your honour,” he repeated firmly and yet resignedly, looking up at the squire and tossing back his hair, “but it’s no life for us in that new village.”

“Why?”

“You see, your honour, if you moved us there – we are bad enough here, but we’ll never be any good. What good will we be there? And anyway a man couldn’t live there, whatever you say.”

“But why not?”

“We’ll lose the little we have, your honour.”

“But why couldn’t a man live there?”

“What sort of a life is it out there? You judge for yourself: no one has ever lived there, untested water, no pasture. Our hemp here has been manured ever since anyone can remember, and there? And anyway what is there there? Nothing, the place is bare! No fences, no kilns, no sheds – nothing. We’ll lose all we have, your honour, if you drive us out there, lose our all! The place is new, unknown...” he repeated thoughtfully, at the same time resolutely shaking his head.

Nekhlyudov tried to argue that resettlement would, on the contrary, be of great advantage to him, that the fences and sheds would be built, that the water out there was good and so on, but Churis’s dull silence embarrassed him, and for some reason he felt that he was not speaking in the way he should. Churis did not argue back, but when the squire stopped, he smiled slightly and remarked that the best thing would be to settle the old house servants and Alyosha the fool in that village, so they could guard the grain.

“Marvellous, that would be,” he remarked and gave a short laugh again. “There’s no sense in it, your honour.”

“What does it matter that the place is uninhabited?” insisted Nekhlyudov patiently. “This, after all, had also been an uninhabited place, but people are living in it now. And it’ll be the same there. If you only went and settled there, you’d give a good example... You really should settle there...”

“Come now, your honour, sir, what comparison can there be?” answered Churis with some heat, as if frightened that the squire might make a final decision. “Here we are in the commune; it’s a cheerful place, we’re used to it; the road’s near by, and the pond – the wife can wash the clothes and water the cattle, and all our peasant possessions are here and have always been: the threshing floor, and the vegetable plot for what it’s worth, and the willows – those there, that my parents planted. My grandfather and father breathed their last here, and all I want is to live my life out in this place; I ask for nothing else. If you were to repair the cottage, sir, you’d make us very happy, but if not, we’d manage somehow in the old one

till our days are over. Let us pray God for you till our dying day," he continued, bowing low, "don't turn us out of our home, sir!"

While Churis was speaking, louder and louder sobs came from under the *polati* where his wife stood, and when the husband said "sir" the wife unexpectedly thrust herself forwards and all in tears went down on her knees in front of the squire.

"Don't ruin us, master!" she wailed. "You are father and mother to us! How could we settle somewhere else? We are old people, and lonely. And have only God to depend on and you..."

Nekhlyudov jumped up from his bench and wanted to raise up the old woman, but she beat her head on the earthen floor in almost voluptuous despair and pushed away the squire's hand.

"What are you doing? Get up, please. If you don't want to go, you needn't. I shan't force you to," he said, waving them away and retreating towards the door.

When Nekhlyudov sat down on the bench again and silence in the cottage was restored, interrupted only by the whimperings of the woman who had once more retired under the *polati* and was wiping her tears with the sleeve of her smock, he understood what the tumble-down little hovel, the broken-down well with the dirty puddle, the rotting sheds and barns and the cracked willows in front of the crooked little window meant to Churis and his wife, and he felt depressed and sad somehow, and ashamed of something.

"Now, Ivan, how is it you didn't tell the commune last Sunday that you needed a cottage? I don't know how to help you now. I told you all at the first meeting that I have settled on the estate and have decided to devote my life to you, that I was ready to deprive myself of everything just to make you contented and happy, and I swear before God that I shall keep my word," said the young landowner, unaware that outpourings of this nature are incapable of earning anyone's trust, least of all that of a Russian who likes deeds, not words, and dislikes the expression of sentiments, however fine.

But the innocent young man was made so happy by the sentiment he was experiencing that he could not help pouring it out.

Churis, with his head to one side, was slowly blinking and was listening to his master with forced attention as we do to a man who must be listened to even though he does say things that are not quite nice and that do not concern us in the slightest.

“But, you know, I can’t give everything to everyone who ever asks me for anything. If I never refused anyone who asks me for timber, I’d soon have nothing left myself, and I should not be able to give any to the man who really needs it. That’s why I set aside some of the woodland for use as building timber to repair the peasants’ buildings, and handed it over completely to the commune. The wood is no longer mine, but yours, it belongs to the peasants and I can no longer dispose of it. The commune can though, and does so as it thinks fit. You come to the meeting tonight; I shall tell the commune about your request, and if it decides to give you a cottage, all well and good, but I have no timber now. From the bottom of my heart I want to help you, but if you don’t want to move, it is no longer my business, but the commune’s. Do you understand me?”

“We are very grateful to you, sir,” replied Churis, looking embarrassed. “If you’ll oblige us with a little timber for the buildings here, we’ll put things right. How can the commune help? Everyone knows...”

“You come, now.”

“Very good. I’ll come. Why shouldn’t I? Only I shan’t ask for anything from the commune.”

## 4

THE YOUNG LANDLORD evidently wanted to put another question to Churis and his wife. He did not stir from the bench and looked in some hesitation now at Churis and now at the empty, cold unheated stove.

“Have you had your dinner?” he asked at last.

A mocking smile became visible under Churis’s moustache, as if he found it funny that the squire should ask such a silly question. He made no answer.

“What dinner, master?” said the woman with a deep sigh. “We’ve had a bit of bread – that’s all the dinner we’ll get. We had no time to go gathering sorrel today, so I had nothing to make soup from, and what kvass there was I gave to the children.”

“It’s the hungry fast these days, your honour,” Churis broke in, in explanation of the woman’s words. “Bread and onions – that’s all the food we peasants get. And yet I must consider myself lucky – my grain

has lasted until now, thanks to you, sir, but most of our peasants here have no grain even. Onions failed everywhere this year. We sent to get some from Michael the gardener the other day, but he takes half a kopeck a bunch, so there's nowhere the likes of us can buy any. We haven't even been to God's holy church since about Easter, can't even afford to buy a candle for St Michael's icon."

Nekhlyudov had long known, not by hearsay and not because he took on trust what others said, but in actual practice, the extreme poverty in which his peasants lived. But this reality was so incompatible with the whole of his upbringing, his type of mind and way of life that unwittingly he kept forgetting it and every time he was, as now, vividly and tangibly reminded of it, he felt unbearably depressed and sad, as if tormented by the memory of an unexpiated crime he had committed.

"Why are you so poor?" he asked, giving expression to his thought in spite of himself.

"But what else could we be, your honour, sir? You know yourself what our land is like: clay and hummocks, and we must have brought God's wrath on ourselves – there's been no crops coming up since about the cholera year. And again, we have fewer meadows now and less arable. Some have been attached to the manor and added to its fields. I am a lonely old man... There are things I'd like to do, but I don't have the strength. The wife is ailing, and every year, almost, she gives birth to a girl; they must all be fed, you know. Here I am, toiling away, all by myself, and there are seven of us at home. It's a sin, I know, but I often think to myself if only God took some of them soon! It would make life easier for me and it would be better for them, too – better than suffering here..."

"O-oh," sighed the woman loudly as if in confirmation of her husband's words.

"Here's all the help I have," continued Churis, pointing to an unkempt flaxen-haired boy of about seven with a huge belly, who had just opened the door with a slight creak and come shyly into the cottage. He was staring at the squire with surprise from under his eyebrows and was holding on to Churis's shirt with both his little hands.

"This is all my help," continued Churis in ringing tones, stroking the child's fair hair with his rough hand. "Years to wait yet for him! But the work is too much for me now. It's not old age so much, it's my rupture is getting me down. When the weather is bad, I could scream with

pain. I should have stopped working on the land long ago – too old for it. Look at Yermilov, Demkin, Zyabrev, all of them younger than me and yet they have stopped working on the land long ago. But I have no one to work for me, that’s my trouble. We have to eat, so I struggle along, your honour.”

“I should like to help you, I should really. But what can I do?” said the young squire, looking at the peasant with sympathy.

“How can you help, indeed? If a man has some land, of course he must work for the manor – we know that all right. I shall manage somehow till this youngster grows up. There is only one thing I would beg of you – let him off school. Only the other day the county council clerk came and said you wanted him to go to school, your honour. Let him off, your honour; there’s no sense in him yet; he’s young, got no understanding.”

“No, old man,” said the squire, “you may say what you like, but your boy has quite enough understanding, it’s time he started school. I am only saying it for your own good. Just think – when he grows up and is head of the house and knows how to read and write and reads in church, things will go better in your home, with God’s help,” said Nekhlyudov, trying to express himself in a way which would make his meaning as clear as possible, but at the same time blushing and stammering for some reason.

“True enough, your honour, you don’t wish us harm, but there’s no one to stay at home when the wife and I are out in the fields working for the manor. He is only a small boy yet, but helps all the same – drives the cattle in, waters the horses. Anyway, small or not, he is a peasant after all.” And Churis took the boy’s nose between his thick fingers and made him blow it.

“All the same, you send him along when you are at home and when he has time – do you hear? Without fail.”

Churis heaved a deep sigh and answered nothing.

## 5

“OH YES, and there is another thing I wanted to say to you,” said Nekhlyudov. “Why hasn’t your manure been carted yet?”

“What manure have I got, your honour, sir? Nothing to cart really. What’s my livestock? A mare and a foal – that’s all the livestock I have.

The heifer I gave to the inn-keeper last autumn when she was only a calf.”

“But why, then, if you have so little livestock, did you sell your heifer as a calf?” asked the squire with surprise.

“But what could I feed her on?”

“Haven’t you got enough straw to feed a cow? The others have enough.”

“The others have well-manured land, but mine is just clay – can’t do anything with it.”

“Well then manure it, so it won’t be all clay, and the land will yield grain and you’ll have enough to feed your livestock on.”

“But I have no livestock, so how can I have manure?”

“This is an odd vicious circle,” thought Nekhlyudov, but was completely at a loss what to advise.

“And then again, your honour, it’s not manure makes grain grow. God does it – just God,” continued Churis. “Now last summer, for instance, we got six ricks off that field of mine that had no manure on it, but we only got a fistful off the one that had. It’s all God,” he added with a sigh. “Besides, our yard does not seem to suit livestock. They all die in it – have been doing so for the past six years. Last summer one heifer died, and I sold another. We had nothing to feed it with. And the year before a fine cow died. There was nothing the matter with her when we brought her in from the pasture. And then she reeled and staggered all of a sudden and there it was – all the steam came out of her. It’s all my bad luck.”

“Well, old man, to stop you saying you have no livestock because you have no fodder and no fodder because you have no livestock, here’s something for you to buy a cow with,” said Nekhlyudov, blushing as he took a wad of banknotes out of his breeches pocket and sorted it out. “Buy yourself a cow and may you have luck. And take the fodder from the threshing ground – I’ll give orders. Mind you have a cow by next Sunday. I’ll look in.”

Churis took so long to stretch his hand out for the money while he smiled and shuffled that Nekhlyudov put it at the end of the table and blushed even deeper.

“We are greatly pleased with your kindness,” said Churis with his usual, somewhat mocking smile.

The woman, standing under the *polati*, sighed deeply several times and seemed to be saying a prayer.

The young squire felt embarrassed; he got up hurriedly from his bench, went out into the passage and called Churis after him. The sight of the man he had done good to was so pleasant that he did not want to part from him too soon.

“I am glad to be helping you,” he said, stopping at the well. “You can be helped because you are never lazy. I know you aren’t. If you work I’ll help you, and, God willing, you’ll get straight.”

“That’s not the worry, sir – getting straight, I mean; all we can hope for is not becoming beggars,” said Churis, his face suddenly assuming a serious, even stern expression as if very displeased that the squire should suppose he could ever get straight. “When my dad was alive my brothers and I lived with him and there was no want. But when he died and we broke up, all went from bad to worse. It’s all from being alone.”

“Why did you break up then?”

“All because of our wives, your honour. Your grandfather was no longer alive then, or we wouldn’t have dared. There was real order then. He looked into everything himself, just like you. We shouldn’t have dared to think of breaking up. Your grandfather would never let peasants get into bad ways, but after his death we had Andrei Ilich to manage us. A drunken man he was, God forgive him, and unreliable. We came to consult him once or twice. “The women make life impossible,” we said. “Give us permission to live apart.” Well, he had us thrashed a few times, but the women had their way in the end all the same, and we went off to live, each on his own with his wife. And you know what it is when a man lives apart from the others. Besides, there was no system in it. Andrei Ilich ruled us as he pleased. “See to it you have all that’s needed,” but where a man was to get it from, he never asked. Then the poll-tax was raised and we had to pay more dues on our produce, but we had less land and the crops failed. And when it came to reallocating the lands and he took our manured land – the old devil – and added it to the landlord’s, he quite did us in. The death of us, he was. Your father, bless him, was a good landlord, but we saw him scarcely ever; he lived in Moscow mostly and of course we had to send produce there rather more often. Sometimes, when the roads disappeared in the spring or autumn and we had no fodder, we were still made to cart the stuff. The master can’t do without, of course. We daren’t resent that; only there was no system in it. Now that you let every peasant see you, your