

DEAD SOULS

BY

NIKOLAI VASILIEVICH GOGOL

Translated By
D. J. Hogarth

Introduction By
John Cournos

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, born at Sorochintsky, Russia, on 31st March 1809. Obtained government post at St. Petersburg and later an appointment at the university. Lived in Rome from 1836 to 1848. Died on 21st February 1852.

PREPARER'S NOTE

The book this was typed from contains a complete Part I, and a partial Part II, as it seems only part of Part II survived the adventures described in the introduction. Where the text notes that pages are missing from the "original", this refers to the Russian original, not the translation.

All the foreign words were italicised in the original, a style not preserved here. Accents and diphthongs have also been left out.

INTRODUCTION

Dead Souls, first published in 1842, is the great prose classic of Russia. That amazing institution, "the Russian novel," not only began

its career with this unfinished masterpiece by Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol, but practically all the Russian masterpieces that have come since have grown out of it, like the limbs of a single tree. Dostoieffsky goes so far as to bestow this tribute upon an earlier work by the same author, a short story entitled The Cloak; this idea has been wittily expressed by another compatriot, who says: "We have all issued out of Gogol's Cloak."

Dead Souls, which bears the word "Poem" upon the title page of the original, has been generally compared to Don Quixote and to the Pickwick Papers, while E. M. Vogue places its author somewhere between Cervantes and Le Sage. However considerable the influences of Cervantes and Dickens may have been--the first in the matter of structure, the other in background, humour, and detail of characterisation--the predominating and distinguishing quality of the work is undeniably something foreign to both and quite peculiar to itself; something which, for want of a better term, might be called the quality of the Russian soul. The English reader familiar with the works of Dostoieffsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoi, need hardly be told what this implies; it might be defined in the words of the French critic just named as "a tendency to pity." One might indeed go further and say that it implies a certain tolerance of one's characters even though they be, in the conventional sense, knaves, products, as the case might be, of conditions or circumstance, which after all is the thing to be criticised and not the man. But pity and tolerance are rare in satire, even in clash with it, producing in the result a deep sense of tragic humour. It is this that makes of Dead Souls a unique work, peculiarly Gogolian, peculiarly Russian, and distinct from

its
author's Spanish and English masters.

Still more profound are the contradictions to be seen in the author's personal character; and unfortunately they prevented him from completing his work. The trouble is that he made his art out of life, and when in his final years he carried his struggle, as Tolstoi did later, back into life, he repented of all he had written, and in the frenzy of a wakeful night burned all his manuscripts, including the second part of Dead Souls, only fragments of which were saved. There was yet a third part to be written. Indeed, the second part had been written and burned twice. Accounts differ as to why he had burned it finally. Religious remorse, fury at adverse criticism, and despair at not reaching ideal perfection are among the reasons given. Again it is said that he had destroyed the manuscript with the others inadvertently.

The poet Pushkin, who said of Gogol that "behind his laughter you feel the unseen tears," was his chief friend and inspirer. It was he who suggested the plot of Dead Souls as well as the plot of the earlier work The Revisor, which is almost the only comedy in Russian. The importance of both is their introduction of the social element in Russian literature, as Prince Kropotkin points out. Both hold up the mirror to Russian officialdom and the effects it has produced on the national character. The plot of Dead Souls is simple enough, and is said to have been suggested by an actual episode.

It was the day of serfdom in Russia, and a man's standing was often

judged by the numbers of "souls" he possessed. There was a periodical census of serfs, say once every ten or twenty years. This being the case, an owner had to pay a tax on every "soul" registered at the last census, though some of the serfs might have died in the meantime. Nevertheless, the system had its material advantages, inasmuch as an owner might borrow money from a bank on the "dead souls" no less than on the living ones. The plan of Chichikov, Gogol's hero-villain, was therefore to make a journey through Russia and buy up the "dead souls," at reduced rates of course, saving their owners the government tax, and acquiring for himself a list of fictitious serfs, which he meant to mortgage to a bank for a considerable sum. With this money he would buy an estate and some real life serfs, and make the beginning of a fortune.

Obviously, this plot, which is really no plot at all but merely a ruse to enable Chichikov to go across Russia in a troika, with Selifan the coachman as a sort of Russian Sancho Panza, gives Gogol a magnificent opportunity to reveal his genius as a painter of Russian panorama, peopled with characteristic native types commonplace enough but drawn in comic relief. "The comic," explained the author yet at the beginning of his career, "is hidden everywhere, only living in the midst of it we are not conscious of it; but if the artist brings it into his art, on the stage say, we shall roll about with laughter and only wonder we did not notice it before." But the comic in Dead Souls is merely external. Let us see how Pushkin, who loved to laugh, regarded the work. As Gogol read it aloud to him from the manuscript

the poet grew more and more gloomy and at last cried out: "God! What a sad country Russia is!" And later he said of it: "Gogol invents nothing; it is the simple truth, the terrible truth."

The work on one hand was received as nothing less than an exposure of all Russia--what would foreigners think of it? The liberal elements, however, the critical Belinsky among them, welcomed it as a revelation, as an omen of a freer future. Gogol, who had meant to do a service to Russia and not to heap ridicule upon her, took the criticisms of the Slavophiles to heart; and he palliated his critics by promising to bring about in the succeeding parts of his novel the redemption of Chichikov and the other "knaves and blockheads." But the "Westerner" Belinsky and others of the liberal camp were mistrustful. It was about this time (1847) that Gogol published his Correspondence with Friends, and aroused a literary controversy that is alive to this day. Tolstoi is to be found among his apologists.

Opinions as to the actual significance of Gogol's masterpiece differ.

Some consider the author a realist who has drawn with meticulous detail a picture of Russia; others, Merejkovsky among them, see in him

a great symbolist; the very title Dead Souls is taken to describe

the living of Russia as well as its dead. Chichikov himself is now

generally regarded as a universal character. We find an American professor, William Lyon Phelps[1], of Yale, holding the opinion that

"no one can travel far in America without meeting scores of Chichikovs; indeed, he is an accurate portrait of the American promoter, of the successful commercial traveller whose success depends

entirely not on the real value and usefulness of his stock-in-trade,

but on his knowledge of human nature and of the persuasive power of

his tongue." This is also the opinion held by Prince Kropotkin[2], who says: "Chichikov may buy dead souls, or railway shares, or he may collect funds for some charitable institution, or look for a position in a bank, but he is an immortal international type; we meet him everywhere; he is of all lands and of all times; he but takes different forms to suit the requirements of nationality and time."

[1] Essays on Russian Novelists. Macmillan.

[2] Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature. Duckworth and Co.

Again, the work bears an interesting relation to Gogol himself.

A romantic, writing of realities, he was appalled at the commonplaces of life, at finding no outlet for his love of colour derived from his Cossack ancestry. He realised that he had drawn a host of "heroes," "one more commonplace than another, that there was not a single palliating circumstance, that there was not a single place where the reader might find pause to rest and to console himself, and that when he had finished the book it was as though he had walked out of an oppressive cellar into the open air." He felt perhaps inward need to redeem Chichikov; in Merejkovsky's opinion he really wanted to save his own soul, but had succeeded only in losing it. His last years were spent morbidly; he suffered torments and ran from place to place like one hunted; but really always running from himself. Rome was his favourite refuge, and he returned to it again and again. In 1848, he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but he could find no peace for his soul. Something of this mood had reflected itself even much earlier in the Memoirs of a Madman: "Oh, little mother, save your poor son!

Look how they are tormenting him. . . . There's no place for him on earth! He's being driven! . . . Oh, little mother, take pity on thy poor child."

All the contradictions of Gogol's character are not to be disposed of in a brief essay. Such a strange combination of the tragic and the comic was truly seldom seen in one man. He, for one, realised that "it is dangerous to jest with laughter." "Everything that I laughed at became sad." "And terrible," adds Merejkovsky. But earlier his humour was lighter, less tinged with the tragic; in those days Pushkin never failed to be amused by what Gogol had brought to read to him. Even *Revizor* (1835), with its tragic undercurrent, was a trifle compared to *Dead Souls*, so that one is not astonished to hear that not only did the Tsar, Nicholas I, give permission to have it acted, in spite of its being a criticism of official rottenness, but laughed uproariously, and led the applause. Moreover, he gave Gogol a grant of money, and asked that its source should not be revealed to the author lest "he might feel obliged to write from the official point of view."

Gogol was born at Sorotchinetz, Little Russia, in March 1809. He left college at nineteen and went to St. Petersburg, where he secured a position as copying clerk in a government department. He did not keep his position long, yet long enough to store away in his mind a number of bureaucratic types which proved useful later. He quite suddenly started for America with money given to him by his mother for another purpose, but when he got as far as Lubeck he turned back. He

then

wanted to become an actor, but his voice proved not strong enough.

Later he wrote a poem which was unkindly received. As the copies remained unsold, he gathered them all up at the various shops and

burned them in his room.

His next effort, Evenings at the Farm of Dikanka (1831) was more successful. It was a series of gay and colourful pictures of Ukraine,

the land he knew and loved, and if he is occasionally a little over

romantic here and there, he also achieves some beautifully lyrical

passages. Then came another even finer series called Mirgorod, which

won the admiration of Pushkin. Next he planned a "History of Little

Russia" and a "History of the Middle Ages," this last work to be in

eight or nine volumes. The result of all this study was a beautiful

and short Homeric epic in prose, called Taras Bulba. His appointment

to a professorship in history was a ridiculous episode in his life.

After a brilliant first lecture, in which he had evidently said all he

had to say, he settled to a life of boredom for himself and his pupils. When he resigned he said joyously: "I am once more a free

Cossack." Between 1834 and 1835 he produced a new series of stories,

including his famous Cloak, which may be regarded as the legitimate

beginning of the Russian novel.

Gogol knew little about women, who played an equally minor role in his

life and in his books. This may be partly because his personal appearance was not prepossessing. He is described by a contemporary as

"a little man with legs too short for his body. He walked crookedly;

he was clumsy, ill-dressed, and rather ridiculous-looking, with his

long lock of hair flapping on his forehead, and his large prominent nose."

From 1835 Gogol spent almost his entire time abroad; some strange unrest--possibly his Cossack blood--possessed him like a demon, and he never stopped anywhere very long. After his pilgrimage in 1848 to Jerusalem, he returned to Moscow, his entire possessions in a little bag; these consisted of pamphlets, critiques, and newspaper articles mostly inimical to himself. He wandered about with these from house to house. Everything he had of value he gave away to the poor. He ceased work entirely. According to all accounts he spent his last days in praying and fasting. Visions came to him. His death, which came in 1852, was extremely fantastic. His last words, uttered in a loud frenzy, were: "A ladder! Quick, a ladder!" This call for a ladder--"a spiritual ladder," in the words of Merejkovsky--had been made on an earlier occasion by a certain Russian saint, who used almost the same language. "I shall laugh my bitter laugh"[3] was the inscription placed on Gogol's grave.

JOHN

COURNOS

[3] This is generally referred to in the Russian criticisms of Gogol as a quotation from Jeremiah. It appears upon investigation, however, that it actually occurs only in the Slavonic version from the Greek, and not in the Russian translation made direct from the Hebrew.

Evenings on the Farm near the Dikanka, 1829-31; Mirgorod, 1831-33; Taras Bulba, 1834; Arabesques (includes tales, The Portrait and

A

Madman's Diary), 1831-35; The Cloak, 1835; The Revizor (The Inspector-General), 1836; Dead Souls, 1842; Correspondence with Friends, 1847.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS: Cossack Tales (The Night of Christmas Eve, Tarass Boolba), trans. by G. Tolstoy, 1860; St. John's Eve and Other Stories, trans. by Isabel F. Hapgood, New York, Crowell, 1886; Taras Bulba: Also St. John's Eve and Other Stories, London, Vizetelly, 1887; Taras Bulba, trans. by B. C. Baskerville, London, Scott, 1907; The Inspector: a Comedy, Calcutta, 1890; The Inspector-General, trans. by A. A. Sykes, London, Scott, 1892; Revizor, trans. for the Yale Dramatic Association by Max S. Mandell, New Haven, Conn., 1908; Home Life in Russia (adaptation of Dead Souls), London, Hurst, 1854; Tchitchikoff's Journey's; or Dead Souls, trans. by Isabel F. Hapgood, New York, Crowell, 1886; Dead Souls, London, Vizetelly, 1887; Dead Souls, London, Maxwell 1887; Meditations on the Divine Liturgy, trans. by L. Alexeieff, London, A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1913.

LIVES, etc.: (Russian) Kotlyarevsky (N. A.), 1903; Shenrok (V. I.), Materials for a Biography, 1892; (French) Leger (L.), Nicholas Gogol, 1914.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE
TO THE FIRST PORTION OF THIS WORK

Second Edition published in 1846

From the Author to the Reader

Reader, whosoever or wheresoever you be, and whatsoever be your station--whether that of a member of the higher ranks of society or

that of a member of the plainer walks of life--I beg of you, if God shall have given you any skill in letters, and my book shall fall into your hands, to extend to me your assistance.

For in the book which lies before you, and which, probably, you have read in its first edition, there is portrayed a man who is a type taken from our Russian Empire. This man travels about the Russian land and meets with folk of every condition--from the nobly-born to the humble toiler. Him I have taken as a type to show forth the vices and the failings, rather than the merits and the virtues, of the commonplace Russian individual; and the characters which revolve around him have also been selected for the purpose of demonstrating our national weaknesses and shortcomings. As for men and women of the better sort, I propose to portray them in subsequent volumes. Probably much of what I have described is improbable and does not happen as things customarily happen in Russia; and the reason for that is that for me to learn all that I have wished to do has been impossible, in that human life is not sufficiently long to become acquainted with even a hundredth part of what takes place within the borders of the Russian Empire. Also, carelessness, inexperience, and lack of time have led to my perpetrating numerous errors and inaccuracies of detail; with the result that in every line of the book there is something which calls for correction. For these reasons I beg of you, my reader, to act also as my corrector. Do not despise the task, for, however superior be your education, and however lofty your station, and however insignificant, in your eyes, my book, and however trifling the apparent labour of correcting and commenting upon that book,

I

implore you to do as I have said. And you too, O reader of lowly education and simple status, I beseech you not to look upon yourself

as too ignorant to be able in some fashion, however small, to help me.

Every man who has lived in the world and mixed with his fellow men

will have remarked something which has remained hidden from the eyes

of others; and therefore I beg of you not to deprive me of your comments, seeing that it cannot be that, should you read my book with

attention, you will have NOTHING to say at some point therein.

For example, how excellent it would be if some reader who is sufficiently rich in experience and the knowledge of life to be acquainted with the sort of characters which I have described herein

would annotate in detail the book, without missing a single page, and

undertake to read it precisely as though, laying pen and paper before

him, he were first to peruse a few pages of the work, and then to

recall his own life, and the lives of folk with whom he has come in

contact, and everything which he has seen with his own eyes or has

heard of from others, and to proceed to annotate, in so far as may

tally with his own experience or otherwise, what is set forth in the

book, and to jot down the whole exactly as it stands pictured to his

memory, and, lastly, to send me the jottings as they may issue from

his pen, and to continue doing so until he has covered the entire

work! Yes, he would indeed do me a vital service! Of style or beauty

of expression he would need to take no account, for the value of a

book lies in its truth and its actuality rather than in its wording.

Nor would he need to consider my feelings if at any point he should

feel minded to blame or to upbraid me, or to demonstrate the harm rather than the good which has been done through any lack of thought or verisimilitude of which I have been guilty. In short, for anything and for everything in the way of criticism I should be thankful.

Also, it would be an excellent thing if some reader in the higher walks of life, some person who stands remote, both by life and by education, from the circle of folk which I have pictured in my book, but who knows the life of the circle in which he himself revolves, would undertake to read my work in similar fashion, and methodically to recall to his mind any members of superior social classes whom he has met, and carefully to observe whether there exists any resemblance between one such class and another, and whether, at times, there may not be repeated in a higher sphere what is done in a lower, and likewise to note any additional fact in the same connection which may occur to him (that is to say, any fact pertaining to the higher ranks of society which would seem to confirm or to disprove his conclusions), and, lastly, to record that fact as it may have occurred within his own experience, while giving full details of persons (of individual manners, tendencies, and customs) and also of inanimate surroundings (of dress, furniture, fittings of houses, and so forth). For I need knowledge of the classes in question, which are the flower of our people. In fact, this very reason--the reason that I do not yet know Russian life in all its aspects, and in the degree to which it is necessary for me to know it in order to become a successful author--is what has, until now, prevented me from publishing any subsequent

volumes of this story.

Again, it would be an excellent thing if some one who is endowed with the faculty of imagining and vividly picturing to himself the various situations wherein a character may be placed, and of mentally following up a character's career in one field and another--by this I mean some one who possesses the power of entering into and developing the ideas of the author whose work he may be reading--would scan each character herein portrayed, and tell me how each character ought to have acted at a given juncture, and what, to judge from the beginnings of each character, ought to have become of that character later, and what new circumstances might be devised in connection therewith, and what new details might advantageously be added to those already described. Honestly can I say that to consider these points against the time when a new edition of my book may be published in a different and a better form would give me the greatest possible pleasure.

One thing in particular would I ask of any reader who may be willing to give me the benefit of his advice. That is to say, I would beg of him to suppose, while recording his remarks, that it is for the benefit of a man in no way his equal in education, or similar to him in tastes and ideas, or capable of apprehending criticisms without full explanation appended, that he is doing so. Rather would I ask such a reader to suppose that before him there stands a man of incomparably inferior enlightenment and schooling--a rude country bumpkin whose life, throughout, has been passed in retirement--a bumpkin to whom it is necessary to explain each circumstance in detail, while never forgetting to be as simple of speech as though he were a child, and at every step there were a danger of employing

terms

beyond his understanding. Should these precautions be kept constantly in view by any reader undertaking to annotate my book, that reader's remarks will exceed in weight and interest even his own expectations, and will bring me very real advantage.

Thus, provided that my earnest request be heeded by my readers, and that among them there be found a few kind spirits to do as I desire, the following is the manner in which I would request them to transmit their notes for my consideration. Inscribing the package with my name, let them then enclose that package in a second one addressed either to the Rector of the University of St. Petersburg or to Professor Shevirev of the University of Moscow, according as the one or the other of those two cities may be the nearer to the sender.

Lastly, while thanking all journalists and litterateurs for their previously published criticisms of my book--criticisms which, in spite of a spice of that intemperance and prejudice which is common to all humanity, have proved of the greatest use both to my head and to my heart--I beg of such writers again to favour me with their reviews. For in all sincerity I can assure them that whatsoever they may be pleased to say for my improvement and my instruction will be received by me with naught but gratitude.

DEAD SOULS

PART I

CHAPTER I

To the door of an inn in the provincial town of N. there drew up a smart britchka--a light spring-carriage of the sort affected by bachelors, retired lieutenant-colonels, staff-captains, land-owners possessed of about a hundred souls, and, in short, all persons who rank as gentlemen of the intermediate category. In the britchka was seated such a gentleman--a man who, though not handsome, was not ill-favoured, not over-fat, and not over-thin. Also, though not over-elderly, he was not over-young. His arrival produced no stir in the town, and was accompanied by no particular incident, beyond that a couple of peasants who happened to be standing at the door of a dramshop exchanged a few comments with reference to the equipage rather than to the individual who was seated in it. "Look at that carriage," one of them said to the other. "Think you it will be going as far as Moscow?" "I think it will," replied his companion. "But not as far as Kazan, eh?" "No, not as far as Kazan." With that the conversation ended. Presently, as the britchka was approaching the inn, it was met by a young man in a pair of very short, very tight breeches of white dimity, a quasi-fashionable frockcoat, and a dickey fastened with a pistol-shaped bronze tie-pin. The young man turned his head as he passed the britchka and eyed it attentively; after which he clapped his hand to his cap (which was in danger of being removed by the wind) and resumed his way. On the vehicle reaching the inn door, its occupant found standing there to welcome him the polevoi, or

waiter, of the establishment--an individual of such nimble and brisk movement that even to distinguish the character of his face was impossible. Running out with a napkin in one hand and his lanky form clad in a tailcoat, reaching almost to the nape of his neck, he tossed back his locks, and escorted the gentleman upstairs, along a wooden gallery, and so to the bedchamber which God had prepared for the gentleman's reception. The said bedchamber was of quite ordinary appearance, since the inn belonged to the species to be found in all provincial towns--the species wherein, for two roubles a day, travellers may obtain a room swarming with black-beetles, and communicating by a doorway with the apartment adjoining. True, the doorway may be blocked up with a wardrobe; yet behind it, in all probability, there will be standing a silent, motionless neighbour whose ears are burning to learn every possible detail concerning the latest arrival. The inn's exterior corresponded with its interior. Long, and consisting only of two storeys, the building had its lower half destitute of stucco; with the result that the dark-red bricks, originally more or less dingy, had grown yet dingier under the influence of atmospheric changes. As for the upper half of the building, it was, of course, painted the usual tint of unfading yellow. Within, on the ground floor, there stood a number of benches heaped with horse-collars, rope, and sheepskins; while the window-seat accommodated a sbitentshik[1], cheek by jowl with a samovar[2]--the latter so closely resembling the former in appearance that, but for the fact of the samovar possessing a pitch-black lip, the samovar and the sbitentshik might have been two of a pair.

[1] An urn for brewing honey tea.

[2] An urn for brewing ordinary tea.

During the traveller's inspection of his room his luggage was brought into the apartment. First came a portmanteau of white leather whose raggedness indicated that the receptacle had made several previous journeys. The bearers of the same were the gentleman's coachman, Selifan (a little man in a large overcoat), and the gentleman's valet, Petrushka--the latter a fellow of about thirty, clad in a worn, over-ample jacket which formerly had graced his master's shoulders, and possessed of a nose and a pair of lips whose coarseness communicated to his face rather a sullen expression. Behind the portmanteau came a small dispatch-box of redwood, lined with birch bark, a boot-case, and (wrapped in blue paper) a roast fowl; all of which having been deposited, the coachman departed to look after his horses, and the valet to establish himself in the little dark anteroom or kennel where already he had stored a cloak, a bagful of livery, and his own peculiar smell. Pressing the narrow bedstead back against the wall, he covered it with the tiny remnant of mattress--a remnant as thin and flat (perhaps also as greasy) as a pancake--which he had managed to beg of the landlord of the establishment.

While the attendants had been thus setting things straight the gentleman had repaired to the common parlour. The appearance of common parlours of the kind is known to every one who travels. Always they have varnished walls which, grown black in their upper portions with tobacco smoke, are, in their lower, grown shiny with the friction of customers' backs--more especially with that of the backs of such local tradesmen as, on market-days, make it their regular practice to resort to the local hostelry for a glass of tea. Also, parlours of this kind

invariably contain smutty ceilings, an equally smutty chandelier, a number of pendent shades which jump and rattle whenever the waiter scurries across the shabby oilcloth with a trayful of glasses (the glasses looking like a flock of birds roosting by the seashore), and a selection of oil paintings. In short, there are certain objects which one sees in every inn. In the present case the only outstanding feature of the room was the fact that in one of the paintings a nymph was portrayed as possessing breasts of a size such as the reader can never in his life have beheld. A similar caricaturing of nature is to be noted in the historical pictures (of unknown origin, period, and creation) which reach us--sometimes through the instrumentality of Russian magnates who profess to be connoisseurs of art--from Italy; owing to the said magnates having made such purchases solely on the advice of the couriers who have escorted them.

To resume, however--our traveller removed his cap, and divested his neck of a parti-coloured woollen scarf of the kind which a wife makes for her husband with her own hands, while accompanying the gift with interminable injunctions as to how best such a garment ought to be folded. True, bachelors also wear similar gauds, but, in their case, God alone knows who may have manufactured the articles! For my part, I cannot endure them. Having unfolded the scarf, the gentleman ordered dinner, and whilst the various dishes were being got ready--cabbage soup, a pie several weeks old, a dish of marrow and peas, a dish of sausages and cabbage, a roast fowl, some salted cucumber, and the

sweet tart which stands perpetually ready for use in such establishments; whilst, I say, these things were either being warmed up or brought in cold, the gentleman induced the waiter to retail certain fragments of tittle-tattle concerning the late landlord of the hostelry, the amount of income which the hostelry produced, and the character of its present proprietor. To the last-mentioned inquiry the waiter returned the answer invariably given in such cases--namely, "My master is a terribly hard man, sir." Curious that in enlightened Russia so many people cannot even take a meal at an inn without chattering to the attendant and making free with him! Nevertheless not ALL the questions which the gentleman asked were aimless ones, for he inquired who was Governor of the town, who President of the Local Council, and who Public Prosecutor. In short, he omitted no single official of note, while asking also (though with an air of detachment) the most exact particulars concerning the landowners of the neighbourhood. Which of them, he inquired, possessed serfs, and how many of them? How far from the town did those landowners reside? What was the character of each landowner, and was he in the habit of paying frequent visits to the town? The gentleman also made searching inquiries concerning the hygienic condition of the countryside. Was there, he asked, much sickness about--whether sporadic fever, fatal forms of ague, smallpox, or what not? Yet, though his solicitude concerning these matters showed more than ordinary curiosity, his bearing retained its gravity unimpaired, and from time to time he blew his nose with portentous fervour. Indeed, the manner in which he accomplished this latter feat was marvellous in the extreme, for, though that member emitted sounds equal to those of a trumpet in intensity, he could yet, with his accompanying air of guileless

dignity, evoke the waiter's undivided respect--so much so that, whenever the sounds of the nose reached that menial's ears, he would shake back his locks, straighten himself into a posture of marked solicitude, and inquire afresh, with head slightly inclined, whether the gentleman happened to require anything further. After dinner the guest consumed a cup of coffee, and then, seating himself upon the sofa, with, behind him, one of those wool-covered cushions which, in Russian taverns, resemble nothing so much as a cobblestone or a brick, fell to snoring; whereafter, returning with a start to consciousness, he ordered himself to be conducted to his room, flung himself at full length upon the bed, and once more slept soundly for a couple of hours. Aroused, eventually, by the waiter, he, at the latter's request, inscribed a fragment of paper with his name, his surname, and his rank (for communication, in accordance with the law, to the police): and on that paper the waiter, leaning forward from the corridor, read, syllable by syllable: "Paul Ivanovitch Chichikov, Collegiate Councillor--Landowner--Travelling on Private Affairs." The waiter had just time to accomplish this feat before Paul Ivanovitch Chichikov set forth to inspect the town. Apparently the place succeeded in satisfying him, and, to tell the truth, it was at least up to the usual standard of our provincial capitals. Where the staring yellow of stone edifices did not greet his eye he found himself confronted with the more modest grey of wooden ones; which, consisting, for the most part, of one or two storeys (added to the range of attics which provincial architects love so well), looked almost lost amid the expanses of street and intervening medleys of broken or half-finished partition-walls. At other points evidence of more life and movement was to be seen, and here the houses stood

crowded together and displayed dilapidated, rain-blurred signboards whereon boots of cakes or pairs of blue breeches inscribed "Arshavski, Tailor," and so forth, were depicted. Over a shop containing hats and caps was written "Vassili Theodorov, Foreigner"; while, at another spot, a signboard portrayed a billiard table and two players-- the latter clad in frockcoats of the kind usually affected by actors whose part it is to enter the stage during the closing act of a piece, even though, with arms sharply crooked and legs slightly bent, the said billiard players were taking the most careful aim, but succeeding only in making abortive strokes in the air. Each emporium of the sort had written over it: "This is the best establishment of its kind in the town." Also, al fresco in the streets there stood tables heaped with nuts, soap, and gingerbread (the latter but little distinguishable from the soap), and at an eating-house there was displayed the sign of a plump fish transfixed with a gaff. But the sign most frequently to be discerned was the insignia of the State, the double-headed eagle (now replaced, in this connection, with the laconic inscription "Dramshop"). As for the paving of the town, it was uniformly bad.

The gentleman peered also into the municipal gardens, which contained only a few sorry trees that were poorly selected, requiring to be propped with oil-painted, triangular green supports, and able to boast of a height no greater than that of an ordinary walking-stick. Yet recently the local paper had said (apropos of a gala) that, "Thanks to the efforts of our Civil Governor, the town has become enriched

with a
pleasance full of umbrageous, spaciouly-branching trees. Even
on the
most sultry day they afford agreeable shade, and indeed
gratifying was
it to see the hearts of our citizens panting with an impulse of
gratitude as their eyes shed tears in recognition of all that
their
Governor has done for them!"

Next, after inquiring of a gendarme as to the best ways and
means of
finding the local council, the local law-courts, and the local
Governor, should he (Chichikov) have need of them, the gentleman
went
on to inspect the river which ran through the town. En route he
tore
off a notice affixed to a post, in order that he might the more
conveniently read it after his return to the inn. Also, he
bestowed
upon a lady of pleasant exterior who, escorted by a footman
laden with
a bundle, happened to be passing along a wooden sidewalk a
prolonged
stare. Lastly, he threw around him a comprehensive glance (as
though
to fix in his mind the general topography of the place) and
betook
himself home. There, gently aided by the waiter, he ascended the
stairs to his bedroom, drank a glass of tea, and, seating
himself at
the table, called for a candle; which having been brought him,
he
produced from his pocket the notice, held it close to the flame,
and
conned its tenour--slightly contracting his right eye as he did
so.
Yet there was little in the notice to call for remark. All that
it
said was that shortly one of Kotzebue's[3] plays would be given,
and
that one of the parts in the play was to be taken by a certain
Monsieur Poplevin, and another by a certain Mademoiselle
Ziablova,
while the remaining parts were to be filled by a number of less
important personages. Nevertheless the gentleman perused the
notice

with careful attention, and even jotted down the prices to be asked for seats for the performance. Also, he remarked that the bill had been printed in the press of the Provincial Government. Next, he turned over the paper, in order to see if anything further was to be read on the reverse side; but, finding nothing there, he refolded the document, placed it in the box which served him as a receptacle for odds and ends, and brought the day to a close with a portion of cold veal, a bottle of pickles, and a sound sleep.

[3] A German dramatist (1761-1819) who also filled sundry posts in the service of the Russian Government.

The following day he devoted to paying calls upon the various municipal officials--a first, and a very respectful, visit being paid to the Governor. This personage turned out to resemble Chichikov himself in that he was neither fat nor thin. Also, he wore the riband of the order of Saint Anna about his neck, and was reported to have been recommended also for the star. For the rest, he was large and good-natured, and had a habit of amusing himself with occasional spells of knitting. Next, Chichikov repaired to the Vice-Governor's, and thence to the house of the Public Prosecutor, to that of the President of the Local Council, to that of the Chief of Police, to that of the Commissioner of Taxes, and to that of the local Director of State Factories. True, the task of remembering every big-wig in this world of ours is not a very easy one; but at least our visitor displayed the greatest activity in his work of paying calls, seeing that he went so far as to pay his respects also to the Inspector of the Municipal Department of Medicine and to the City Architect. Thereafter he sat thoughtfully in his britchka--plunged in

meditation

on the subject of whom else it might be well to visit. However, not a single magnate had been neglected, and in conversation with his hosts

he had contrived to flatter each separate one. For instance to the

Governor he had hinted that a stranger, on arriving in his, the Governor's province, would conceive that he had reached Paradise, so

velvety were the roads. "Governors who appoint capable subordinates,"

had said Chichikov, "are deserving of the most ample meed of praise."

Again, to the Chief of Police our hero had passed a most gratifying

remark on the subject of the local gendarmery; while in his conversation with the Vice-Governor and the President of the Local

Council (neither of whom had, as yet, risen above the rank of State

Councillor) he had twice been guilty of the gaucherie of addressing

his interlocutors with the title of "Your Excellency"--a blunder which

had not failed to delight them. In the result the Governor had invited

him to a reception the same evening, and certain other officials had

followed suit by inviting him, one of them to dinner, a second to a

tea-party, and so forth, and so forth.

Of himself, however, the traveller had spoken little; or, if he had

spoken at any length, he had done so in a general sort of way and with

marked modesty. Indeed, at moments of the kind his discourse had assumed something of a literary vein, in that invariably he had stated

that, being a worm of no account in the world, he was deserving of no

consideration at the hands of his fellows; that in his time he had

undergone many strange experiences; that subsequently he had suffered

much in the cause of Truth; that he had many enemies seeking his

life;
and that, being desirous of rest, he was now engaged in
searching for
a spot wherein to dwell--wherefore, having stumbled upon the
town in
which he now found himself, he had considered it his bounden
duty to
evince his respect for the chief authorities of the place. This,
and
no more, was all that, for the moment, the town succeeded in
learning
about the new arrival. Naturally he lost no time in presenting
himself
at the Governor's evening party. First, however, his
preparations for
that function occupied a space of over two hours, and
necessitated an
attention to his toilet of a kind not commonly seen. That is to
say,
after a brief post-grandial nap he called for soap and water,
and
spent a considerable period in the task of scrubbing his cheeks
(which, for the purpose, he supported from within with his
tongue) and
then of drying his full, round face, from the ears downwards,
with a
towel which he took from the waiter's shoulder. Twice he snorted
into
the waiter's countenance as he did this, and then he posted
himself in
front of the mirror, donned a false shirt-front, plucked out a
couple
of hairs which were protruding from his nose, and appeared
vested in a
frockcoat of bilberry-coloured check. Thereafter driving through
broad
streets sparsely lighted with lanterns, he arrived at the
Governor's
residence to find it illuminated as for a ball. Barouches with
gleaming lamps, a couple of gendarmes posted before the doors, a
babel
of postillions' cries--nothing of a kind likely to be impressive
was
wanting; and, on reaching the salon, the visitor actually found
himself obliged to close his eyes for a moment, so strong was
the
mingled sheen of lamps, candles, and feminine apparel.

Everything
seemed suffused with light, and everywhere, flitting and
flashing,
were to be seen black coats--even as on a hot summer's day flies
revolve around a sugar loaf while the old housekeeper is cutting
it
into cubes before the open window, and the children of the house
crowd
around her to watch the movements of her rugged hands as those
members
ply the smoking pestle; and airy squadrons of flies, borne on
the
breeze, enter boldly, as though free of the house, and, taking
advantage of the fact that the glare of the sunshine is
troubling the
old lady's sight, disperse themselves over broken and unbroken
fragments alike, even though the lethargy induced by the
opulence of
summer and the rich shower of dainties to be encountered at
every step
has induced them to enter less for the purpose of eating than
for that
of showing themselves in public, of parading up and down the
sugar
loaf, of rubbing both their hindquarters and their fore against
one
another, of cleaning their bodies under the wings, of extending
their
forelegs over their heads and grooming themselves, and of flying
out
of the window again to return with other predatory squadrons.
Indeed,
so dazed was Chichikov that scarcely did he realise that the
Governor
was taking him by the arm and presenting him to his (the
Governor's)
lady. Yet the newly-arrived guest kept his head sufficiently to
contrive to murmur some such compliment as might fittingly come
from a
middle-aged individual of a rank neither excessively high nor
excessively low. Next, when couples had been formed for dancing
and
the remainder of the company found itself pressed back against
the
walls, Chichikov folded his arms, and carefully scrutinised the
dancers. Some of the ladies were dressed well and in the
fashion,

while the remainder were clad in such garments as God usually bestows upon a provincial town. Also here, as elsewhere, the men belonged to two separate and distinct categories; one of which comprised slender individuals who, flitting around the ladies, were scarcely to be distinguished from denizens of the metropolis, so carefully, so artistically, groomed were their whiskers, so presentable their oval, clean-shaven faces, so easy the manner of their dancing attendance upon their womenfolk, so glib their French conversation as they quizzed their female companions. As for the other category, it comprised individuals who, stout, or of the same build as Chichikov (that is to say, neither very portly nor very lean), backed and sidled away from the ladies, and kept peering hither and thither to see whether the Governor's footmen had set out green tables for whist. Their features were full and plump, some of them had beards, and in no case was their hair curled or waved or arranged in what the French call "the devil-may-care" style. On the contrary, their heads were either close-cropped or brushed very smooth, and their faces were round and firm. This category represented the more respectable officials of the town. In passing, I may say that in business matters fat men always prove superior to their leaner brethren; which is probably the reason why the latter are mostly to be found in the Political Police, or acting as mere ciphers whose existence is a purely hopeless, airy, trivial one. Again, stout individuals never take a back seat, but always a front one, and, wheresoever it be, they sit firmly, and with confidence, and decline to budge even though the seat crack and bend with their weight. For comeliness of exterior they care not a rap, and therefore a dress coat sits less easily on their figures than is the case with figures of leaner individuals. Yet invariably fat men amass the greater wealth. In three years'

time a
thin man will not have a single serf whom he has left unpledged;
whereas--well, pray look at a fat man's fortunes, and what will
you
see? First of all a suburban villa, and then a larger suburban
villa,
and then a villa close to a town, and lastly a country estate
which
comprises every amenity! That is to say, having served both God
and
the State, the stout individual has won universal respect, and
will
end by retiring from business, reordering his mode of life, and
becoming a Russian landowner--in other words, a fine gentleman
who
dispenses hospitality, lives in comfort and luxury, and is
destined to
leave his property to heirs who are purposing to squander the
same on
foreign travel.

That the foregoing represents pretty much the gist of
Chichikov's
reflections as he stood watching the company I will not attempt
to
deny. And of those reflections the upshot was that he decided to
join
himself to the stouter section of the guests, among whom he had
already recognised several familiar faces--namely, those of the
Public
Prosecutor (a man with beetling brows over eyes which seemed to
be
saying with a wink, "Come into the next room, my friend, for I
have
something to say to you"--though, in the main, their owner was a
man
of grave and taciturn habit), of the Postmaster (an
insignificant-looking individual, yet a would-be wit and a
philosopher), and of the President of the Local Council (a man
of much
amiability and good sense). These three personages greeted
Chichikov
as an old acquaintance, and to their salutations he responded
with a
sidelong, yet a sufficiently civil, bow. Also, he became
acquainted
with an extremely unctuous and approachable landowner named

Manilov,
and with a landowner of more uncouth exterior named
Sobakevitch--the
latter of whom began the acquaintance by treading heavily upon
Chichikov's toes, and then begging his pardon. Next, Chichikov
received an offer of a "cut in" at whist, and accepted the same
with
his usual courteous inclination of the head. Seating themselves
at a
green table, the party did not rise therefrom till supper time;
and
during that period all conversation between the players became
hushed,
as is the custom when men have given themselves up to a really
serious
pursuit. Even the Postmaster--a talkative man by nature--had no
sooner
taken the cards into his hands than he assumed an expression of
profound thought, pursed his lips, and retained this attitude
unchanged throughout the game. Only when playing a court card
was it
his custom to strike the table with his fist, and to exclaim (if
the
card happened to be a queen), "Now, old popadia[4]!" and (if the
card
happened to be a king), "Now, peasant of Tambov!" To which
ejaculations invariably the President of the Local Council
retorted,
"Ah, I have him by the ears, I have him by the ears!" And from
the
neighbourhood of the table other strong ejaculations relative to
the
play would arise, interposed with one or another of those
nicknames
which participants in a game are apt to apply to members of the
various suits. I need hardly add that, the game over, the
players fell
to quarrelling, and that in the dispute our friend joined,
though so
artfully as to let every one see that, in spite of the fact that
he
was wrangling, he was doing so only in the most amicable fashion
possible. Never did he say outright, "You played the wrong card
at
such and such a point." No, he always employed some such phrase
as,
"You permitted yourself to make a slip, and thus afforded me the

honour of covering your deuce." Indeed, the better to keep in accord with his antagonists, he kept offering them his silver-enamelled snuff-box (at the bottom of which lay a couple of violets, placed there for the sake of their scent). In particular did the newcomer pay attention to landowners Manilov and Sobakevitch; so much so that his haste to arrive on good terms with them led to his leaving the President and the Postmaster rather in the shade. At the same time, certain questions which he put to those two landowners evinced not only curiosity, but also a certain amount of sound intelligence; for he began by asking how many peasant souls each of them possessed, and how their affairs happened at present to be situated, and then proceeded to enlighten himself also as to their standing and their families. Indeed, it was not long before he had succeeded in fairly enchanting his new friends. In particular did Manilov--a man still in his prime, and possessed of a pair of eyes which, sweet as sugar, blinked whenever he laughed--find himself unable to make enough of his enchanter. Claspng Chichikov long and fervently by the hand, he besought him to do him, Manilov, the honour of visiting his country house (which he declared to lie at a distance of not more than fifteen versts from the boundaries of the town); and in return Chichikov averred (with an exceedingly affable bow and a most sincere handshake) that he was prepared not only to fulfil his friend's behest, but also to look upon the fulfilling of it as a sacred duty. In the same way Sobakevitch said to him laconically: "And do you pay ME a visit," and then proceeded to shuffle a pair of boots of such dimensions that to find a pair to correspond with them would have been indeed difficult--more especially at the present day, when the race of epic

heroes is beginning to die out in Russia.

[4] Priest's wife.

Next day Chichikov dined and spent the evening at the house of the Chief of Police--a residence where, three hours after dinner, every one sat down to whist, and remained so seated until two o'clock in the morning. On this occasion Chichikov made the acquaintance of, among others, a landowner named Nozdrev--a dissipated little fellow of thirty who had no sooner exchanged three or four words with his new acquaintance than he began to address him in the second person singular. Yet although he did the same to the Chief of Police and the Public Prosecutor, the company had no sooner seated themselves at the card-table than both the one and the other of these functionaries started to keep a careful eye upon Nozdrev's tricks, and to watch practically every card which he played. The following evening Chichikov spent with the President of the Local Council, who received his guests--even though the latter included two ladies--in a greasy dressing-gown. Upon that followed an evening at the Vice-Governor's, a large dinner party at the house of the Commissioner of Taxes, a smaller dinner-party at the house of the Public Prosecutor (a very wealthy man), and a subsequent reception given by the Mayor. In short, not an hour of the day did Chichikov find himself forced to spend at home, and his return to the inn became necessary only for the purposes of sleeping. Somehow or other he had landed on his feet, and everywhere he figured as an experienced man of the world. No matter what the conversation chanced to be about, he always contrived to maintain his part in the same. Did the discourse turn upon horse-breeding, upon horse-breeding he happened to be peculiarly

well-qualified to speak. Did the company fall to discussing well-bred dogs, at once he had remarks of the most pertinent kind possible to offer. Did the company touch upon a prosecution which had recently been carried out by the Excise Department, instantly he showed that he too was not wholly unacquainted with legal affairs. Did an opinion chance to be expressed concerning billiards, on that subject too he was at least able to avoid committing a blunder. Did a reference occur to virtue, concerning virtue he hastened to deliver himself in a way which brought tears to every eye. Did the subject in hand happen to be the distilling of brandy--well, that was a matter concerning which he had the soundest of knowledge. Did any one happen to mention Customs officials and inspectors, from that moment he expatiated as though he too had been both a minor functionary and a major. Yet a remarkable fact was the circumstance that he always contrived to temper his omniscience with a certain readiness to give way, a certain ability so to keep a rein upon himself that never did his utterances become too loud or too soft, or transcend what was perfectly befitting. In a word, he was always a gentleman of excellent manners, and every official in the place felt pleased when he saw him enter the door. Thus the Governor gave it as his opinion that Chichikov was a man of excellent intentions; the Public Prosecutor, that he was a good man of business; the Chief of Gendarmery, that he was a man of education; the President of the Local Council, that he was a man of breeding and refinement; and the wife of the Chief of Gendarmery, that his politeness of behaviour was equalled only by his affability of bearing. Nay, even Sobakevitch--who as a rule never spoke well

of ANY

ONE--said to his lanky wife when, on returning late from the town, he undressed and betook himself to bed by her side: "My dear, this evening, after dining with the Chief of Police, I went on to the Governor's, and met there, among others, a certain Paul Ivanovitch Chichikov, who is a Collegiate Councillor and a very pleasant fellow." To this his spouse replied "Hm!" and then dealt him a hearty kick in the ribs.

Such were the flattering opinions earned by the newcomer to the town; and these opinions he retained until the time when a certain speciality of his, a certain scheme of his (the reader will learn presently what it was), plunged the majority of the townsfolk into a sea of perplexity.

CHAPTER II

For more than two weeks the visitor lived amid a round of evening parties and dinners; wherefore he spent (as the saying goes) a very pleasant time. Finally he decided to extend his visits beyond the urban boundaries by going and calling upon landowners Manilov and Sobakevitch, seeing that he had promised on his honour to do so. Yet what really incited him to this may have been a more essential cause, a matter of greater gravity, a purpose which stood nearer to his heart, than the motive which I have just given; and of that purpose the reader will learn if only he will have the patience to read this prefatory narrative (which, lengthy though it be, may yet develop and expand in proportion as we approach the denouement with which the present work is destined to be crowned).

One evening, therefore, Selifan the coachman received orders to have the horses harnessed in good time next morning; while Petrushka received orders to remain behind, for the purpose of looking after the portmanteau and the room. In passing, the reader may care to become more fully acquainted with the two serving-men of whom I have spoken. Naturally, they were not persons of much note, but merely what folk call characters of secondary, or even of tertiary, importance. Yet, despite the fact that the springs and the thread of this romance will not DEPEND upon them, but only touch upon them, and occasionally include them, the author has a passion for circumstantiality, and, like the average Russian, such a desire for accuracy as even a German could not rival. To what the reader already knows concerning the personages in hand it is therefore necessary to add that Petrushka usually wore a cast-off brown jacket of a size too large for him, as also that he had (according to the custom of individuals of his calling) a pair of thick lips and a very prominent nose. In temperament he was taciturn rather than loquacious, and he cherished a yearning for self-education. That is to say, he loved to read books, even though their contents came alike to him whether they were books of heroic adventure or mere grammars or liturgical compendia. As I say, he perused every book with an equal amount of attention, and, had he been offered a work on chemistry, would have accepted that also. Not the words which he read, but the mere solace derived from the act of reading, was what especially pleased his mind; even though at any moment there might launch itself from the page some devil-sent word whereof he could make neither head nor tail. For the most part,

his
task of reading was performed in a recumbent position in the
anteroom;
which circumstance ended by causing his mattress to become as
ragged
and as thin as a wafer. In addition to his love of poring over
books,
he could boast of two habits which constituted two other
essential
features of his character--namely, a habit of retiring to rest
in his
clothes (that is to say, in the brown jacket above-mentioned)
and a
habit of everywhere bearing with him his own peculiar
atmosphere, his
own peculiar smell--a smell which filled any lodging with such
subtlety that he needed but to make up his bed anywhere, even in
a
room hitherto untenanted, and to drag thither his greatcoat and
other
impedimenta, for that room at once to assume an air of having
been
lived in during the past ten years. Nevertheless, though a
fastidious,
and even an irritable, man, Chichikov would merely frown when
his nose
caught this smell amid the freshness of the morning, and exclaim
with
a toss of his head: "The devil only knows what is up with you!
Surely
you sweat a good deal, do you not? The best thing you can do is
to go
and take a bath." To this Petrushka would make no reply, but,
approaching, brush in hand, the spot where his master's coat
would be
pendent, or starting to arrange one and another article in
order,
would strive to seem wholly immersed in his work. Yet of what
was he
thinking as he remained thus silent? Perhaps he was saying to
himself:
"My master is a good fellow, but for him to keep on saying the
same
thing forty times over is a little wearisome." Only God knows
and sees
all things; wherefore for a mere human being to know what is in
the

mind of a servant while his master is scolding him is wholly impossible. However, no more need be said about Petrushka. On the other hand, Coachman Selifan--

But here let me remark that I do not like engaging the reader's attention in connection with persons of a lower class than himself; for experience has taught me that we do not willingly familiarise ourselves with the lower orders--that it is the custom of the average Russian to yearn exclusively for information concerning persons on the higher rungs of the social ladder. In fact, even a bowing acquaintance with a prince or a lord counts, in his eyes, for more than do the most intimate of relations with ordinary folk. For the same reason the author feels apprehensive on his hero's account, seeing that he has made that hero a mere Collegiate Councillor--a mere person with whom Aulic Councillors might consort, but upon whom persons of the grade of full General[1] would probably bestow one of those glances proper to a man who is cringing at their august feet. Worse still, such persons of the grade of General are likely to treat Chichikov with studied negligence--and to an author studied negligence spells death.

[1] In this case the term General refers to a civil grade equivalent to the military rank of the same title.

However, in spite of the distressfulness of the foregoing possibilities, it is time that I returned to my hero. After issuing, overnight, the necessary orders, he awoke early, washed himself, rubbed himself from head to foot with a wet sponge (a performance executed only on Sundays--and the day in question happened to be a Sunday), shaved his face with such care that his cheeks issued of

absolutely satin-like smoothness and polish, donned first his bilberry-coloured, spotted frockcoat, and then his bearskin overcoat, descended the staircase (attended, throughout, by the waiter) and entered his britchka. With a loud rattle the vehicle left the inn-yard, and issued into the street. A passing priest doffed his cap, and a few urchins in grimy shirts shouted, "Gentleman, please give a poor orphan a trifle!" Presently the driver noticed that a sturdy young rascal was on the point of climbing onto the splashboard; wherefore he cracked his whip and the britchka leapt forward with increased speed over the cobblestones. At last, with a feeling of relief, the travellers caught sight of macadam ahead, which promised an end both to the cobblestones and to sundry other annoyances. And, sure enough, after his head had been bumped a few more times against the boot of the conveyance, Chichikov found himself bowling over softer ground. On the town receding into the distance, the sides of the road began to be varied with the usual hillocks, fir trees, clumps of young pine, trees with old, scarred trunks, bushes of wild juniper, and so forth, Presently there came into view also strings of country villas which, with their carved supports and grey roofs (the latter looking like pendent, embroidered tablecloths), resembled, rather, bundles of old faggots. Likewise the customary peasants, dressed in sheepskin jackets, could be seen yawning on benches before their huts, while their womenfolk, fat of feature and swathed of bosom, gazed out of upper windows, and the windows below displayed, here a peering calf, and there the unsightly jaws of a pig. In short, the view was one of the familiar type. After passing the fifteenth verst-

stone

Chichikov suddenly recollected that, according to Manilov, fifteen versts was the exact distance between his country house and the town; but the sixteenth verst stone flew by, and the said country house was still nowhere to be seen. In fact, but for the circumstance that the travellers happened to encounter a couple of peasants, they would have come on their errand in vain. To a query as to whether the country house known as Zamanilovka was anywhere in the neighbourhood the peasants replied by doffing their caps; after which one of them who seemed to boast of a little more intelligence than his companion, and who wore a wedge-shaped beard, made answer:

"Perhaps you mean Manilovka--not Zamanilovka?"

"Yes, yes--Manilovka."

"Manilovka, eh? Well, you must continue for another verst, and then you will see it straight before you, on the right."

"On the right?" re-echoed the coachman.

"Yes, on the right," affirmed the peasant. "You are on the proper road for Manilovka, but Zamanilovka--well, there is no such place. The house you mean is called Manilovka because Manilovka is its name; but no house at all is called Zamanilovka. The house you mean stands there, on that hill, and is a stone house in which a gentleman lives, and its name is Manilovka; but Zamanilovka does not stand hereabouts, nor ever has stood."

So the travellers proceeded in search of Manilovka, and, after driving an additional two versts, arrived at a spot whence there branched off a by-road. Yet two, three, or four versts of the by-road had

been

covered before they saw the least sign of a two-storied stone mansion.

Then it was that Chichikov suddenly recollected that, when a friend

has invited one to visit his country house, and has said that the

distance thereto is fifteen versts, the distance is sure to turn out

to be at least thirty.

Not many people would have admired the situation of Manilov's abode,

for it stood on an isolated rise and was open to every wind that blew.

On the slope of the rise lay closely-mown turf, while, disposed here

and there, after the English fashion, were flower-beds containing

clumps of lilac and yellow acacia. Also, there were a few insignificant groups of slender-leaved, pointed-tipped birch trees,

with, under two of the latter, an arbour having a shabby green cupola,

some blue-painted wooden supports, and the inscription "This is the

Temple of Solitary Thought." Lower down the slope lay a green-coated

pond--green-coated ponds constitute a frequent spectacle in the gardens of Russian landowners; and, lastly, from the foot of the declivity there stretched a line of mouldy, log-built huts which, for

some obscure reason or another, our hero set himself to count.

Up to

two hundred or more did he count, but nowhere could he perceive a

single leaf of vegetation or a single stick of timber. The only thing

to greet the eye was the logs of which the huts were constructed.

Nevertheless the scene was to a certain extent enlivened by the spectacle of two peasant women who, with clothes picturesquely tucked

up, were wading knee-deep in the pond and dragging behind them, with

wooden handles, a ragged fishing-net, in the meshes of which two crawfish and a roach with glistening scales were entangled. The

women

appeared to have cause of dispute between themselves--to be rating one another about something. In the background, and to one side of the house, showed a faint, dusky blur of pinewood, and even the weather was in keeping with the surroundings, since the day was neither clear nor dull, but of the grey tint which may be noted in uniforms of garrison soldiers which have seen long service. To complete the picture, a cock, the recognised harbinger of atmospheric mutations, was present; and, in spite of the fact that a certain connection with affairs of gallantry had led to his having had his head pecked bare by other cocks, he flapped a pair of wings--appendages as bare as two pieces of bast--and crowed loudly.

As Chichikov approached the courtyard of the mansion he caught sight of his host (clad in a green frock coat) standing on the verandah and pressing one hand to his eyes to shield them from the sun and so get a better view of the approaching carriage. In proportion as the britchka drew nearer and nearer to the verandah, the host's eyes assumed a more and more delighted expression, and his smile a broader and broader sweep.

"Paul Ivanovitch!" he exclaimed when at length Chichikov leapt from the vehicle. "Never should I have believed that you would have remembered us!"

The two friends exchanged hearty embraces, and Manilov then conducted his guest to the drawing-room. During the brief time that they are traversing the hall, the anteroom, and the dining-room, let me try to say something concerning the master of the house. But such an

undertaking bristles with difficulties--it promises to be a far less easy task than the depicting of some outstanding personality which calls but for a wholesale dashing of colours upon the canvas--the colours of a pair of dark, burning eyes, a pair of dark, beetling brows, a forehead seamed with wrinkles, a black, or a fiery-red, cloak thrown backwards over the shoulder, and so forth, and so forth. Yet, so numerous are Russian serf owners that, though careful scrutiny reveals to one's sight a quantity of outre peculiarities, they are, as a class, exceedingly difficult to portray, and one needs to strain one's faculties to the utmost before it becomes possible to pick out their variously subtle, their almost invisible, features. In short, one needs, before doing this, to carry out a prolonged probing with the aid of an insight sharpened in the acute school of research.

Only God can say what Manilov's real character was. A class of men exists whom the proverb has described as "men unto themselves, neither this nor that--neither Bogdan of the city nor Selifan of the village." And to that class we had better assign also Manilov. Outwardly he was presentable enough, for his features were not wanting in amiability, but that amiability was a quality into which there entered too much of the sugary element, so that his every gesture, his every attitude, seemed to connote an excess of eagerness to curry favour and cultivate a closer acquaintance. On first speaking to the man, his ingratiating smile, his flaxen hair, and his blue eyes would lead one to say, "What a pleasant, good-tempered fellow he seems!" yet during the next

moment
or two one would feel inclined to say nothing at all, and,
during the
third moment, only to say, "The devil alone knows what he is!"
And
should, thereafter, one not hasten to depart, one would
inevitably
become overpowered with the deadly sense of ennui which comes of
the
intuition that nothing in the least interesting is to be looked
for,
but only a series of wearisome utterances of the kind which are
apt to
fall from the lips of a man whose hobby has once been touched
upon.
For every man HAS his hobby. One man's may be sporting dogs;
another
man's may be that of believing himself to be a lover of music,
and
able to sound the art to its inmost depths; another's may be
that of
posing as a connoisseur of recherche cookery; another's may be
that of
aspiring to play roles of a kind higher than nature has assigned
him;
another's (though this is a more limited ambition) may be that
of
getting drunk, and of dreaming that he is edifying both his
friends,
his acquaintances, and people with whom he has no connection at
all by
walking arm-in-arm with an Imperial aide-de-camp; another's may
be
that of possessing a hand able to chip corners off aces and
deuces of
diamonds; another's may be that of yearning to set things
straight--in
other words, to approximate his personality to that of a
stationmaster
or a director of posts. In short, almost every man has his hobby
or
his leaning; yet Manilov had none such, for at home he spoke
little,
and spent the greater part of his time in meditation--though God
only
knows what that meditation comprised! Nor can it be said that he
took

much interest in the management of his estate, for he never rode into the country, and the estate practically managed itself. Whenever the bailiff said to him, "It might be well to have such-and-such a thing done," he would reply, "Yes, that is not a bad idea," and then go on smoking his pipe--a habit which he had acquired during his service in the army, where he had been looked upon as an officer of modesty, delicacy, and refinement. "Yes, it is NOT a bad idea," he would repeat. Again, whenever a peasant approached him and, rubbing the back of his neck, said "Barin, may I have leave to go and work for myself, in order that I may earn my obrok[2]?" he would snap out, with pipe in mouth as usual, "Yes, go!" and never trouble his head as to whether the peasant's real object might not be to go and get drunk. True, at intervals he would say, while gazing from the verandah to the courtyard, and from the courtyard to the pond, that it would be indeed splendid if a carriage drive could suddenly materialise, and the pond as suddenly become spanned with a stone bridge, and little shops as suddenly arise whence pedlars could dispense the petty merchandise of the kind which peasantry most need. And at such moments his eyes would grow winning, and his features assume an expression of intense satisfaction. Yet never did these projects pass beyond the stage of debate. Likewise there lay in his study a book with the fourteenth page permanently turned down. It was a book which he had been reading for the past two years! In general, something seemed to be wanting in the establishment. For instance, although the drawing-room was filled with beautiful furniture, and upholstered in some fine silken material

which clearly had cost no inconsiderable sum, two of the chairs lacked any covering but bast, and for some years past the master had been accustomed to warn his guests with the words, "Do not sit upon these chairs; they are not yet ready for use." Another room contained no furniture at all, although, a few days after the marriage, it had been said: "My dear, to-morrow let us set about procuring at least some TEMPORARY furniture for this room." Also, every evening would see placed upon the drawing-room table a fine bronze candelabrum, a statuette representative of the Three Graces, a tray inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and a rickety, lop-sided copper invalid. Yet of the fact that all four articles were thickly coated with grease neither the master of the house nor the mistress nor the servants seemed to entertain the least suspicion. At the same time, Manilov and his wife were quite satisfied with each other. More than eight years had elapsed since their marriage, yet one of them was for ever offering his or her partner a piece of apple or a bonbon or a nut, while murmuring some tender something which voiced a whole-hearted affection. "Open your mouth, dearest"--thus ran the formula--"and let me pop into it this titbit." You may be sure that on such occasions the "dearest mouth" parted its lips most graciously! For their mutual birthdays the pair always contrived some "surprise present" in the shape of a glass receptacle for tooth-powder, or what not; and as they sat together on the sofa he would suddenly, and for some unknown reason, lay aside his pipe, and she her work (if at the moment she happened to be holding it in her hands) and husband and wife would imprint upon one another's cheeks such a prolonged and languishing kiss that during its continuance you could have smoked a small

cigar.

In short, they were what is known as "a very happy couple." Yet it may be remarked that a household requires other pursuits to be engaged in than lengthy embracings and the preparing of cunning "surprises." Yes, many a function calls for fulfilment. For instance, why should it be thought foolish or low to superintend the kitchen? Why should care not be taken that the storeroom never lacks supplies? Why should a housekeeper be allowed to steal? Why should slovenly and drunken servants exist? Why should a domestic staff be suffered to indulge in bouts of unconscionable debauchery during its leisure time? Yet none of these things were thought worthy of consideration by Manilov's wife, for she had been gently brought up, and gentle nurture, as we all know, is to be acquired only in boarding schools, and boarding schools, as we know, hold the three principal subjects which constitute the basis of human virtue to be the French language (a thing indispensable to the happiness of married life), piano-playing (a thing wherewith to beguile a husband's leisure moments), and that particular department of housewifery which is comprised in the knitting of purses and other "surprises." Nevertheless changes and improvements have begun to take place, since things now are governed more by the personal inclinations and idiosyncracies of the keepers of such establishments. For instance, in some seminaries the regimen places piano-playing first, and the French language second, and then the above department of housewifery; while in other seminaries the knitting of "surprises" heads the list, and then the French language, and then the playing of pianos--so diverse are the systems in

force!

None the less, I may remark that Madame Manilov--

[2] An annual tax upon peasants, payment of which secured to the payer
the right of removal.

But let me confess that I always shrink from saying too much about ladies. Moreover, it is time that we returned to our heroes, who, during the past few minutes, have been standing in front of the drawing-room door, and engaged in urging one another to enter first.

"Pray be so good as not to inconvenience yourself on my account," said Chichikov. "_I_ will follow YOU."

"No, Paul Ivanovitch--no! You are my guest." And Manilov pointed towards the doorway.

"Make no difficulty about it, I pray," urged Chichikov. "I beg of you to make no difficulty about it, but to pass into the room."

"Pardon me, I will not. Never could I allow so distinguished and so welcome a guest as yourself to take second place."

"Why call me 'distinguished,' my dear sir? I beg of you to proceed."

"Nay; be YOU pleased to do so."

"And why?"

"For the reason which I have stated." And Manilov smiled his very pleasantest smile.

Finally the pair entered simultaneously and sideways; with the result that they jostled one another not a little in the process.

"Allow me to present to you my wife," continued Manilov. "My dear--Paul Ivanovitch."

Upon that Chichikov caught sight of a lady whom hitherto he had overlooked, but who, with Manilov, was now bowing to him in the doorway. Not wholly of unpleasing exterior, she was dressed in a well-fitting, high-necked morning dress of pale-coloured silk; and as the visitor entered the room her small white hands threw something upon the table and clutched her embroidered skirt before rising from the sofa where she had been seated. Not without a sense of pleasure did Chichikov take her hand as, lisping a little, she declared that she and her husband were equally gratified by his coming, and that, of late, not a day had passed without her husband recalling him to mind.

"Yes," affirmed Manilov; "and every day SHE has said to ME: 'Why does not your friend put in an appearance?' 'Wait a little dearest,' I have always replied. 'Twill not be long now before he comes.' And you HAVE come, you HAVE honoured us with a visit, you HAVE bestowed upon us a treat--a treat destined to convert this day into a gala day, a true birthday of the heart."

The intimation that matters had reached the point of the occasion being destined to constitute a "true birthday of the heart" caused Chichikov to become a little confused; wherefore he made modest reply that, as a matter of fact, he was neither of distinguished origin nor distinguished rank.

"Ah, you ARE so," interrupted Manilov with his fixed and engaging smile. "You are all that, and more."

"How like you our town?" queried Madame. "Have you spent an agreeable time in it?"

"Very," replied Chichikov. "The town is an exceedingly nice one, and I have greatly enjoyed its hospitable society."

"And what do you think of our Governor?"

"Yes; IS he not a most engaging and dignified personage?" added Manilov.

"He is all that," assented Chichikov. "Indeed, he is a man worthy of the greatest respect. And how thoroughly he performs his duty according to his lights! Would that we had more like him!"

"And the tactfulness with which he greets every one!" added Manilov, smiling, and half-closing his eyes, like a cat which is being tickled behind the ears.

"Quite so," assented Chichikov. "He is a man of the most eminent civility and approachableness. And what an artist! Never should I have thought he could have worked the marvellous household samplers which he has done! Some specimens of his needlework which he showed me could not well have been surpassed by any lady in the land!"

"And the Vice-Governor, too--he is a nice man, is he not?" inquired Manilov with renewed blinkings of the eyes.

"Who? The Vice-Governor? Yes, a most worthy fellow!" replied Chichikov.

"And what of the Chief of Police? Is it not a fact that he too is in the highest degree agreeable?"

"Very agreeable indeed. And what a clever, well-read individual! With him and the Public Prosecutor and the President of the Local Council I played whist until the cocks uttered their last morning crow. He is a most excellent fellow."

"And what of his wife?" queried Madame Manilov. "Is she not a most gracious personality?"

"One of the best among my limited acquaintance," agreed Chichikov.

Nor were the President of the Local Council and the Postmaster overlooked; until the company had run through the whole list of urban officials. And in every case those officials appeared to be persons of the highest possible merit.

"Do you devote your time entirely to your estate?" asked Chichikov, in his turn.

"Well, most of it," replied Manilov; "though also we pay occasional visits to the town, in order that we may mingle with a little well-bred society. One grows a trifle rusty if one lives for ever in retirement."

"Quite so," agreed Chichikov.

"Yes, quite so," capped Manilov. "At the same time, it would be a different matter if the neighbourhood were a GOOD one--if, for example, one had a friend with whom one could discuss manners and polite deportment, or engage in some branch of science, and so stimulate one's wits. For that sort of thing gives one's intellect an airing. It, it--" At a loss for further words, he ended by remarking that his feelings were apt to carry him away; after which he continued with a gesture: "What I mean is that, were that sort of thing possible, I, for one, could find the country and an isolated life possessed of great attractions. But, as matters stand, such a thing is NOT possible. All that I can manage to do is, occasionally, to read

a little of A Son of the Fatherland."

With these sentiments Chichikov expressed entire agreement:
adding
that nothing could be more delightful than to lead a solitary
life in
which there should be comprised only the sweet contemplation of
nature
and the intermittent perusal of a book.

"Nay, but even THAT were worth nothing had not one a friend with
whom to share one's life," remarked Manilov.

"True, true," agreed Chichikov. "Without a friend, what are all
the
treasures in the world? 'Possess not money,' a wise man has
said, 'but
rather good friends to whom to turn in case of need.'"

"Yes, Paul Ivanovitch," said Manilov with a glance not merely
sweet,
but positively luscious--a glance akin to the mixture which even
clever physicians have to render palatable before they can
induce a
hesitant patient to take it. "Consequently you may imagine what
happiness--what PERFECT happiness, so to speak--the present
occasion
has brought me, seeing that I am permitted to converse with you
and to
enjoy your conversation."

"But WHAT of my conversation?" replied Chichikov. "I am an
insignificant individual, and, beyond that, nothing."

"Oh, Paul Ivanovitch!" cried the other. "Permit me to be frank,
and to
say that I would give half my property to possess even a PORTION
of
the talents which you possess."

"On the contrary, I should consider it the highest honour in the
world if--"

The lengths to which this mutual outpouring of soul would have
proceeded had not a servant entered to announce luncheon must
remain a
mystery.

"I humbly invite you to join us at table," said Manilov. "Also, you will pardon us for the fact that we cannot provide a banquet such as is to be obtained in our metropolitan cities? We partake of simple fare, according to Russian custom--we confine ourselves to shtchi[3], but we do so with a single heart. Come, I humbly beg of you."

[3] Cabbage soup.

After another contest for the honour of yielding precedence, Chichikov succeeded in making his way (in zigzag fashion) to the dining-room, where they found awaiting them a couple of youngsters. These were Manilov's sons, and boys of the age which admits of their presence at table, but necessitates the continued use of high chairs. Beside them was their tutor, who bowed politely and smiled; after which the hostess took her seat before her soup plate, and the guest of honour found himself esconsed between her and the master of the house, while the servant tied up the boys' necks in bibs.

"What charming children!" said Chichikov as he gazed at the pair. "And how old are they?"

"The eldest is eight," replied Manilov, "and the younger one attained the age of six yesterday."

"Themistocleus," went on the father, turning to his first-born, who was engaged in striving to free his chin from the bib with which the footman had encircled it. On hearing this distinctly Greek name (to which, for some unknown reason, Manilov always appended the termination "eus"), Chichikov raised his eyebrows a little, but hastened, the next moment, to restore his face to a more

befitting
expression.

"Themistocleus," repeated the father, "tell me which is the finest city in France."

Upon this the tutor concentrated his attention upon Themistocleus, and appeared to be trying hard to catch his eye. Only when Themistocleus had muttered "Paris" did the preceptor grow calmer, and nod his head.

"And which is the finest city in Russia?" continued Manilov.

Again the tutor's attitude became wholly one of concentration.

"St. Petersburg," replied Themistocleus.

"And what other city?"

"Moscow," responded the boy.

"Clever little dear!" burst out Chichikov, turning with an air of surprise to the father. "Indeed, I feel bound to say that the child evinces the greatest possible potentialities."

"You do not know him fully," replied the delighted Manilov. "The amount of sharpness which he possesses is extraordinary. Our younger one, Alkid, is not so quick; whereas his brother--well, no matter what he may happen upon (whether upon a cowbug or upon a water-beetle or upon anything else), his little eyes begin jumping out of his head, and he runs to catch the thing, and to inspect it. For HIM I am reserving a diplomatic post. Themistocleus," added the father, again turning to his son, "do you wish to become an ambassador?"

"Yes, I do," replied Themistocleus, chewing a piece of bread and wagging his head from side to side.

At this moment the lacquey who had been standing behind the future ambassador wiped the latter's nose; and well it was that he did so, since otherwise an inelegant and superfluous drop would have been added to the soup. After that the conversation turned upon the joys of a quiet life--though occasionally it was interrupted by remarks from the hostess on the subject of acting and actors. Meanwhile the tutor kept his eyes fixed upon the speakers' faces; and whenever he noticed that they were on the point of laughing he at once opened his mouth, and laughed with enthusiasm. Probably he was a man of grateful heart who wished to repay his employers for the good treatment which he had received. Once, however, his features assumed a look of grimness as, fixing his eyes upon his vis-a-vis, the boys, he tapped sternly upon the table. This happened at a juncture when Themistocleus had bitten Alkid on the ear, and the said Alkid, with frowning eyes and open mouth, was preparing himself to sob in piteous fashion; until, recognising that for such a proceeding he might possibly be deprived of his plate, he hastened to restore his mouth to its original expression, and fell tearfully to gnawing a mutton bone--the grease from which had soon covered his cheeks.

Every now and again the hostess would turn to Chichikov with the words, "You are eating nothing--you have indeed taken little;" but invariably her guest replied: "Thank you, I have had more than enough. A pleasant conversation is worth all the dishes in the world."

At length the company rose from table. Manilov was in high spirits, and, laying his hand upon his guest's shoulder, was on the point of

conducting him to the drawing-room, when suddenly Chichikov intimated to him, with a meaning look, that he wished to speak to him on a very important matter.

"That being so," said Manilov, "allow me to invite you into my study."

And he led the way to a small room which faced the blue of the forest.

"This is my sanctum," he added.

"What a pleasant apartment!" remarked Chichikov as he eyed it carefully. And, indeed, the room did not lack a certain attractiveness. The walls were painted a sort of blueish-grey colour, and the furniture consisted of four chairs, a settee, and a table--the latter of which bore a few sheets of writing-paper and the book of which I have before had occasion to speak. But the most prominent feature of the room was tobacco, which appeared in many different guises--in packets, in a tobacco jar, and in a loose heap strewn about the table. Likewise, both window sills were studded with little heaps of ash, arranged, not without artifice, in rows of more or less tidiness. Clearly smoking afforded the master of the house a frequent means of passing the time.

"Permit me to offer you a seat on this settee," said Manilov.

"Here you will be quieter than you would be in the drawing-room."

"But I should prefer to sit upon this chair."

"I cannot allow that," objected the smiling Manilov. "The settee is specially reserved for my guests. Whether you choose or no, upon it you MUST sit."

Accordingly Chichikov obeyed.

"And also let me hand you a pipe."

"No, I never smoke," answered Chichikov civilly, and with an assumed air of regret.

"And why?" inquired Manilov--equally civilly, but with a regret that was wholly genuine.

"Because I fear that I have never quite formed the habit, owing to my having heard that a pipe exercises a desiccating effect upon the system."

"Then allow me to tell you that that is mere prejudice. Nay, I would even go so far as to say that to smoke a pipe is a healthier practice than to take snuff. Among its members our regiment numbered a lieutenant--a most excellent, well-educated fellow--who was simply INCAPABLE of removing his pipe from his mouth, whether at table or (pardon me) in other places. He is now forty, yet no man could enjoy better health than he has always done."

Chichikov replied that such cases were common, since nature comprised many things which even the finest intellect could not compass.

"But allow me to put to you a question," he went on in a tone in which there was a strange--or, at all events, RATHER a strange--note. For some unknown reason, also, he glanced over his shoulder. For some equally unknown reason, Manilov glanced over HIS.

"How long is it," inquired the guest, "since you last rendered a census return?"

"Oh, a long, long time. In fact, I cannot remember when it was."

"And since then have many of your serfs died?"

"I do not know. To ascertain that I should need to ask my bailiff.

Footman, go and call the bailiff. I think he will be at home to-day."

Before long the bailiff made his appearance. He was a man of under forty, clean-shaven, clad in a smock, and evidently used to a quiet life, seeing that his face was of that puffy fullness, and the skin encircling his slit-like eyes was of that sallow tint, which shows that the owner of those features is well acquainted with a feather bed. In a trice it could be seen that he had played his part in life as all such bailiffs do--that, originally a young serf of elementary education, he had married some Agashka of a housekeeper or a mistress's favourite, and then himself become housekeeper, and, subsequently, bailiff; after which he had proceeded according to the rules of his tribe--that is to say, he had consorted with and stood in with the more well-to-do serfs on the estate, and added the poorer ones to the list of forced payers of obrok, while himself leaving his bed at nine o'clock in the morning, and, when the samovar had been brought, drinking his tea at leisure.

"Look here, my good man," said Manilov. "How many of our serfs have died since the last census revision?"

"How many of them have died? Why, a great many." The bailiff hiccupped, and slapped his mouth lightly after doing so.

"Yes, I imagined that to be the case," corroborated Manilov. "In fact, a VERY great many serfs have died." He turned to Chichikov and repeated the words.

"How many, for instance?" asked Chichikov.

"Yes; how many?" re-echoed Manilov.

"HOW many?" re-echoed the bailiff. "Well, no one knows the exact number, for no one has kept any account."

"Quite so," remarked Manilov. "I supposed the death-rate to have been high, but was ignorant of its precise extent."

"Then would you be so good as to have it computed for me?" said Chichikov. "And also to have a detailed list of the deaths made out?"

"Yes, I will--a detailed list," agreed Manilov.

"Very well."

The bailiff departed.

"For what purpose do you want it?" inquired Manilov when the bailiff had gone.

The question seemed to embarrass the guest, for in Chichikov's face there dawned a sort of tense expression, and it reddened as though its owner were striving to express something not easy to put into words. True enough, Manilov was now destined to hear such strange and unexpected things as never before had greeted human ears.

"You ask me," said Chichikov, "for what purpose I want the list. Well, my purpose in wanting it is this--that I desire to purchase a few peasants." And he broke off in a gulp.

"But may I ask HOW you desire to purchase those peasants?" asked Manilov. "With land, or merely as souls for transferment--that is to say, by themselves, and without any land?"

"I want the peasants themselves only," replied Chichikov. "And I want dead ones at that."

"What?--Excuse me, but I am a trifle deaf. Really, your words sound most strange!"

"All that I am proposing to do," replied Chichikov, "is to purchase the dead peasants who, at the last census, were returned by you as alive."

Manilov dropped his pipe on the floor, and sat gaping. Yes, the two friends who had just been discussing the joys of camaraderie sat staring at one another like the portraits which, of old, used to hang on opposite sides of a mirror. At length Manilov picked up his pipe, and, while doing so, glanced covertly at Chichikov to see whether there was any trace of a smile to be detected on his lips--whether, in short, he was joking. But nothing of the sort could be discerned. On the contrary, Chichikov's face looked graver than usual. Next, Manilov wondered whether, for some unknown reason, his guest had lost his wits; wherefore he spent some time in gazing at him with anxious intentness. But the guest's eyes seemed clear--they contained no spark of the wild, restless fire which is apt to wander in the eyes of madmen. All was as it should be. Consequently, in spite of Manilov's cogitations, he could think of nothing better to do than to sit letting a stream of tobacco smoke escape from his mouth.

"So," continued Chichikov, "what I desire to know is whether you are willing to hand over to me--to resign--these actually non-living, but legally living, peasants; or whether you have any better proposal to make?"

Manilov felt too confused and confounded to do aught but continue staring at his interlocutor.

"I think that you are disturbing yourself unnecessarily," was Chichikov's next remark.

"I? Oh no! Not at all!" stammered Manilov. "Only--pardon me--I do not quite comprehend you. You see, never has it fallen to my lot to acquire the brilliant polish which is, so to speak, manifest in your every movement. Nor have I ever been able to attain the art of expressing myself well. Consequently, although there is a possibility that in the--er--utterances which have just fallen from your lips there may lie something else concealed, it may equally be that--er--you have been pleased so to express yourself for the sake of the beauty of the terms wherein that expression found shape?"

"Oh, no," asserted Chichikov. "I mean what I say and no more. My reference to such of your pleasant souls as are dead was intended to be taken literally."

Manilov still felt at a loss--though he was conscious that he MUST do something, he MUST propound some question. But what question? The devil alone knew! In the end he merely expelled some more tobacco smoke--this time from his nostrils as well as from his mouth.

"So," went on Chichikov, "if no obstacle stands in the way, we might as well proceed to the completion of the purchase."

"What? Of the purchase of the dead souls?"

"Of the 'dead' souls? Oh dear no! Let us write them down as LIVING ones, seeing that that is how they figure in the census returns. Never do I permit myself to step outside the civil law, great though has been the harm which that rule has wrought me in my career. In my eyes an obligation is a sacred thing. In the presence of the law I am

dumb."

These last words reassured Manilov not a little: yet still the meaning of the affair remained to him a mystery. By way of answer, he fell to sucking at his pipe with such vehemence that at length the pipe began to gurgle like a bassoon. It was as though he had been seeking of it inspiration in the present unheard-of juncture. But the pipe only gurgled, et praeterea nihil.

"Perhaps you feel doubtful about the proposal?" said Chichikov.

"Not at all," replied Manilov. "But you will, I know, excuse me if I say (and I say it out of no spirit of prejudice, nor yet as criticising yourself in any way)--you will, I know, excuse me if I say that possibly this--er--this, er, SCHEME of yours, this--er--TRANSACTION of yours, may fail altogether to accord with the Civil Statutes and Provisions of the Realm?"

And Manilov, with a slight gesture of the head, looked meaningly into Chichikov's face, while displaying in his every feature, including his closely-compressed lips, such an expression of profundity as never before was seen on any human countenance--unless on that of some particularly sapient Minister of State who is debating some particularly abstruse problem.

Nevertheless Chichikov rejoined that the kind of scheme or transaction which he had adumbrated in no way clashed with the Civil Statutes and Provisions of Russia; to which he added that the Treasury would even BENEFIT by the enterprise, seeing it would draw therefrom the usual legal percentage.

"What, then, do you propose?" asked Manilov.

"I propose only what is above-board, and nothing else."

"Then, that being so, it is another matter, and I have nothing to urge against it," said Manilov, apparently reassured to the full.

"Very well," remarked Chichikov. "Then we need only to agree as to the price."

"As to the price?" began Manilov, and then stopped. Presently he went on: "Surely you cannot suppose me capable of taking money for souls which, in one sense at least, have completed their existence? Seeing that this fantastic whim of yours (if I may so call it?) has seized upon you to the extent that it has, I, on my side, shall be ready to surrender to you those souls UNCONDITIONALLY, and to charge myself with the whole expenses of the sale."

I should be greatly to blame if I were to omit that, as soon as Manilov had pronounced these words, the face of his guest became replete with satisfaction. Indeed, grave and prudent a man though Chichikov was, he had much ado to refrain from executing a leap that would have done credit to a goat (an animal which, as we all know, finds itself moved to such exertions only during moments of the most ecstatic joy). Nevertheless the guest did at least execute such a convulsive shuffle that the material with which the cushions of the chair were covered came apart, and Manilov gazed at him with some misgiving. Finally Chichikov's gratitude led him to plunge into a stream of acknowledgement of a vehemence which caused his host to grow confused, to blush, to shake his head in deprecation, and to end by

declaring that the concession was nothing, and that, his one desire being to manifest the dictates of his heart and the psychic magnetism which his friend exercised, he, in short, looked upon the dead souls as so much worthless rubbish.

"Not at all," replied Chichikov, pressing his hand; after which he heaved a profound sigh. Indeed, he seemed in the right mood for outpourings of the heart, for he continued--not without a ring of emotion in his tone: "If you but knew the service which you have rendered to an apparently insignificant individual who is devoid both of family and kindred! For what have I not suffered in my time--I, a drifting barque amid the tempestuous billows of life? What harryings, what persecutions, have I not known? Of what grief have I not tasted? And why? Simply because I have ever kept the truth in view, because ever I have preserved inviolate an unsullied conscience, because I have stretched out a helping hand to the defenceless widow and the hapless orphan!" After which outpouring Chichikov pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped away a brimming tear.

Manilov's heart was moved to the core. Again and again did the two friends press one another's hands in silence as they gazed into one another's tear-filled eyes. Indeed, Manilov COULD not let go our hero's hand, but clasped it with such warmth that the hero in question began to feel himself at a loss how best to wrench it free: until, quietly withdrawing it, he observed that to have the purchase completed as speedily as possible would not be a bad thing; wherefore he himself would at once return to the town to arrange matters. Taking up his hat, therefore, he rose to make his adieus.

"What? Are you departing already?" said Manilov, suddenly recovering himself, and experiencing a sense of misgiving. At that moment his wife sailed into the room.

"Is Paul Ivanovitch leaving us so soon, dearest Lizanka?" she said with an air of regret.

"Yes. Surely it must be that we have wearied him?" her spouse replied.

"By no means," asserted Chichikov, pressing his hand to his heart. "In this breast, madam, will abide for ever the pleasant memory of the time which I have spent with you. Believe me, I could conceive of no greater blessing than to reside, if not under the same roof as yourselves, at all events in your immediate neighbourhood."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Manilov, greatly pleased with the idea. "How splendid it would be if you DID come to reside under our roof, so that we could recline under an elm tree together, and talk philosophy, and delve to the very root of things!"

"Yes, it WOULD be a paradisaical existence!" agreed Chichikov with a sigh. Nevertheless he shook hands with Madame. "Farewell, sudarina," he said. "And farewell to YOU, my esteemed host. Do not forget what I have requested you to do."

"Rest assured that I will not," responded Manilov. "Only for a couple of days will you and I be parted from one another."

With that the party moved into the drawing-room.

"Farewell, dearest children," Chichikov went on as he caught sight of Alkid and Themistocleus, who were playing with a wooden hussar which

lacked both a nose and one arm. "Farewell, dearest pets. Pardon me for having brought you no presents, but, to tell you the truth, I was not, until my visit, aware of your existence. However, now that I shall be coming again, I will not fail to bring you gifts. Themistocleus, to you I will bring a sword. You would like that, would you not?"

"I should," replied Themistocleus.

"And to you, Alkid, I will bring a drum. That would suit you, would it not?" And he bowed in Alkid's direction.

"Zeth--a drum," lisped the boy, hanging his head.

"Good! Then a drum it shall be--SUCH a beautiful drum! What a tur-r-r-ru-ing and a tra-ta-ta-ta-ing you will be able to kick up! Farewell, my darling." And, kissing the boy's head, he turned to Manilov and Madame with the slight smile which one assumes before assuring parents of the guileless merits of their offspring.

"But you had better stay, Paul Ivanovitch," said the father as the trio stepped out on to the verandah. "See how the clouds are gathering!"

"They are only small ones," replied Chichikov.

"And you know your way to Sobakevitch's?"

"No, I do not, and should be glad if you would direct me."

"If you like I will tell your coachman." And in very civil fashion Manilov did so, even going so far as to address the man in the second person plural. On hearing that he was to pass two turnings, and then to take a third, Selifan remarked, "We shall get there all right, sir," and Chichikov departed amid a profound salvo of salutations and

wavings of handkerchiefs on the part of his host and hostess, who raised themselves on tiptoe in their enthusiasm.

For a long while Manilov stood following the departing britchka with his eyes. In fact, he continued to smoke his pipe and gaze after the vehicle even when it had become lost to view. Then he re-entered the drawing-room, seated himself upon a chair, and surrendered his mind to the thought that he had shown his guest most excellent entertainment.

Next, his mind passed imperceptibly to other matters, until at last it lost itself God only knows where. He thought of the amenities of a life, of friendship, and of how nice it would be to live with a comrade on, say, the bank of some river, and to span the river with a bridge of his own, and to build an enormous mansion with a facade lofty enough even to afford a view to Moscow. On that facade he and his wife and friend would drink afternoon tea in the open air, and discuss interesting subjects; after which, in a fine carriage, they would drive to some reunion or other, where with their pleasant manners they would so charm the company that the Imperial Government, on learning of their merits, would raise the pair to the grade of General or God knows what--that is to say, to heights whereof even Manilov himself could form no idea. Then suddenly Chichikov's extraordinary request interrupted the dreamer's reflections, and he found his brain powerless to digest it, seeing that, turn and turn the matter about as he might, he could not properly explain its bearing. Smoking his pipe, he sat where he was until supper time.

CHAPTER III

Meanwhile, Chichikov, seated in his britchka and bowling along the turnpike, was feeling greatly pleased with himself. From the preceding chapter the reader will have gathered the principal subject of his bent and inclinations: wherefore it is no matter for wonder that his body and his soul had ended by becoming wholly immersed therein. To all appearances the thoughts, the calculations, and the projects which were now reflected in his face partook of a pleasant nature, since momentarily they kept leaving behind them a satisfied smile. Indeed, so engrossed was he that he never noticed that his coachman, elated with the hospitality of Manilov's domestics, was making remarks of a didactic nature to the off horse of the troika[1], a skewbald. This skewbald was a knowing animal, and made only a show of pulling; whereas its comrades, the middle horse (a bay, and known as the Assessor, owing to his having been acquired from a gentleman of that rank) and the near horse (a roan), would do their work gallantly, and even evince in their eyes the pleasure which they derived from their exertions.

[1] Three horses harnessed abreast.

"Ah, you rascal, you rascal! I'll get the better of you!" ejaculated Selifan as he sat up and gave the lazy one a cut with his whip. "YOU know your business all right, you German pantaloons! The bay is a good fellow, and does his duty, and I will give him a bit over his feed, for he is a horse to be respected; and the Assessor too is a good horse. But what are YOU shaking your ears for? You are a fool,

so

just mind when you're spoken to. 'Tis good advice I'm giving you, you blockhead. Ah! You CAN travel when you like." And he gave the animal another cut, and then shouted to the trio, "Gee up, my beauties!" and drew his whip gently across the backs of the skewbald's comrades--not as a punishment, but as a sign of his approval. That done, he addressed himself to the skewbald again.

"Do you think," he cried, "that I don't see what you are doing? You can behave quite decently when you like, and make a man respect you."

With that he fell to recalling certain reminiscences.

"They were NICE folk, those folk at the gentleman's yonder," he mused. "I DO love a chat with a man when he is a good sort. With a man of that kind I am always hail-fellow-well-met, and glad to drink a glass of tea with him, or to eat a biscuit. One CAN'T help respecting a decent fellow. For instance, this gentleman of mine--why, every one looks up to him, for he has been in the Government's service, and is a Collegiate Councillor."

Thus soliloquising, he passed to more remote abstractions; until, had Chichikov been listening, he would have learnt a number of interesting details concerning himself. However, his thoughts were wholly occupied with his own subject, so much so that not until a loud clap of thunder awoke him from his reverie did he glance around him. The sky was completely covered with clouds, and the dusty turnpike beginning to be sprinkled with drops of rain. At length a second and a nearer and a louder peal resounded, and the rain descended as from a bucket. Falling slantwise, it beat upon one side of the basketwork of the tilt until the splashings began to spurt into his face, and he found

himself forced to draw the curtains (fitted with circular openings through which to obtain a glimpse of the wayside view), and to shout to Selifan to quicken his pace. Upon that the coachman, interrupted in the middle of his harangue, bethought him that no time was to be lost; wherefore, extracting from under the box-seat a piece of old blanket, he covered over his sleeves, resumed the reins, and cheered on his threefold team (which, it may be said, had so completely succumbed to the influence of the pleasant lassitude induced by Selifan's discourse that it had taken to scarcely placing one leg before the other). Unfortunately, Selifan could not clearly remember whether two turnings had been passed or three. Indeed, on collecting his faculties, and dimly recalling the lie of the road, he became filled with a shrewd suspicion that A VERY LARGE NUMBER of turnings had been passed. But since, at moments which call for a hasty decision, a Russian is quick to discover what may conceivably be the best course to take, our coachman put away from him all ulterior reasoning, and, turning to the right at the next cross-road, shouted, "Hi, my beauties!" and set off at a gallop. Never for a moment did he stop to think whither the road might lead him!

It was long before the clouds had discharged their burden, and, meanwhile, the dust on the road became kneaded into mire, and the horses' task of pulling the britchka heavier and heavier. Also, Chichikov had taken alarm at his continued failure to catch sight of Sobakevitch's country house. According to his calculations, it ought to have been reached long ago. He gazed about him on every side, but the darkness was too dense for the eye to pierce.

"Selifan!" he exclaimed, leaning forward in the britchka.

"What is it, barin?" replied the coachman.

"Can you see the country house anywhere?"

"No, barin." After which, with a flourish of the whip, the man broke into a sort of endless, drawling song. In that song everything had a place. By "everything" I mean both the various encouraging and stimulating cries with which Russian folk urge on their horses, and a random, unpremeditated selection of adjectives.

Meanwhile Chichikov began to notice that the britchka was swaying violently, and dealing him occasional bumps. Consequently he suspected that it had left the road and was being dragged over a ploughed field. Upon Selifan's mind there appeared to have dawned a similar inkling, for he had ceased to hold forth.

"You rascal, what road are you following?" inquired Chichikov.

"I don't know," retorted the coachman. "What can a man do at a time of night when the darkness won't let him even see his whip?" And as Selifan spoke the vehicle tilted to an angle which left Chichikov no choice but to hang on with hands and teeth. At length he realised the fact that Selifan was drunk.

"Stop, stop, or you will upset us!" he shouted to the fellow.

"No, no, barin," replied Selifan. "HOW could I upset you? To upset people is wrong. I know that very well, and should never dream of such conduct."

Here he started to turn the vehicle round a little--and kept on doing

so until the britchka capsized on to its side, and Chichikov landed in the mud on his hands and knees. Fortunately Selifan succeeded in stopping the horses, although they would have stopped of themselves, seeing that they were utterly worn out. This unforeseen catastrophe evidently astonished their driver. Slipping from the box, he stood resting his hands against the side of the britchka, while Chichikov tumbled and floundered about in the mud, in a vain endeavour to wriggle clear of the stuff.

"Ah, you!" said Selifan meditatively to the britchka. "To think of upsetting us like this!"

"You are as drunk as a lord!" exclaimed Chichikov.

"No, no, barin. Drunk, indeed? Why, I know my manners too well. A word or two with a friend--that is all that I have taken. Any one may talk with a decent man when he meets him. There is nothing wrong in that. Also, we had a snack together. There is nothing wrong in a snack--especially a snack with a decent man."

"What did I say to you when last you got drunk?" asked Chichikov.

"Have you forgotten what I said then?"

"No, no, barin. HOW could I forget it? I know what is what, and know that it is not right to get drunk. All that I have been having is a word or two with a decent man, for the reason that--"

"Well, if I lay the whip about you, you'll know then how to talk to a decent fellow, I'll warrant!"

"As you please, barin," replied the complacent Selifan. "Should you whip me, you will whip me, and I shall have nothing to complain of."

Why should you not whip me if I deserve it? 'Tis for you to do as you like. Whippings are necessary sometimes, for a peasant often plays the fool, and discipline ought to be maintained. If I have deserved it, beat me. Why should you not?"

This reasoning seemed, at the moment, irrefutable, and Chichikov said nothing more. Fortunately fate had decided to take pity on the pair, for from afar their ears caught the barking of a dog. Plucking up courage, Chichikov gave orders for the britchka to be righted, and the horses to be urged forward; and since a Russian driver has at least this merit, that, owing to a keen sense of smell being able to take the place of eyesight, he can, if necessary, drive at random and yet reach a destination of some sort, Selifan succeeded, though powerless to discern a single object, in directing his steeds to a country house near by, and that with such a certainty of instinct that it was not until the shafts had collided with a garden wall, and thereby made it clear that to proceed another pace was impossible, that he stopped. All that Chichikov could discern through the thick veil of pouring rain was something which resembled a verandah. So he dispatched Selifan to search for the entrance gates, and that process would have lasted indefinitely had it not been shortened by the circumstance that, in Russia, the place of a Swiss footman is frequently taken by watchdogs; of which animals a number now proclaimed the travellers' presence so loudly that Chichikov found himself forced to stop his ears. Next, a light gleamed in one of the windows, and filtered in a

thin stream to the garden wall--thus revealing the whereabouts of the entrance gates; whereupon Selifan fell to knocking at the gates until the bolts of the house door were withdrawn and there issued therefrom a figure clad in a rough cloak.

"Who is that knocking? What have you come for?" shouted the hoarse voice of an elderly woman.

"We are travellers, good mother," said Chichikov. "Pray allow us to spend the night here."

"Out upon you for a pair of gadabouts!" retorted the old woman. "A fine time of night to be arriving! We don't keep an hotel, mind you. This is a lady's residence."

"But what are we to do, mother? We have lost our way, and cannot spend the night out of doors in such weather."

"No, we cannot. The night is dark and cold," added Selifan.

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" exclaimed Chichikov.

"Who ARE you, then?" inquired the old woman.

"A dvorianin[2], good mother."

[2] A member of the gentry class.

Somehow the word dvorianin seemed to give the old woman food for thought.

"Wait a moment," she said, "and I will tell the mistress."

Two minutes later she returned with a lantern in her hand, the gates were opened, and a light glimmered in a second window. Entering the courtyard, the britchka halted before a moderate-sized mansion. The

darkness did not permit of very accurate observation being made, but, apparently, the windows only of one-half of the building were illuminated, while a quagmire in front of the door reflected the beams from the same. Meanwhile the rain continued to beat sonorously down upon the wooden roof, and could be heard trickling into a water butt; nor for a single moment did the dogs cease to bark with all the strength of their lungs. One of them, throwing up its head, kept venting a howl of such energy and duration that the animal seemed to be howling for a handsome wager; while another, cutting in between the yelpings of the first animal, kept restlessly reiterating, like a postman's bell, the notes of a very young puppy. Finally, an old hound which appeared to be gifted with a peculiarly robust temperament kept supplying the part of contrabasso, so that his growls resembled the rumbling of a bass singer when a chorus is in full cry, and the tenors are rising on tiptoe in their efforts to compass a particularly high note, and the whole body of choristers are wagging their heads before approaching a climax, and this contrabasso alone is tucking his bearded chin into his collar, and sinking almost to a squatting posture on the floor, in order to produce a note which shall cause the windows to shiver and their panes to crack. Naturally, from a canine chorus of such executants it might reasonably be inferred that the establishment was one of the utmost respectability. To that, however, our damp, cold hero gave not a thought, for all his mind was fixed upon bed. Indeed, the britchka had hardly come to a standstill before he leapt out upon the doorstep, missed his footing, and came within an ace of falling. To meet him there issued a female younger than the

first, but very closely resembling her; and on his being conducted to the parlour, a couple of glances showed him that the room was hung with old striped curtains, and ornamented with pictures of birds and small, antique mirrors--the latter set in dark frames which were carved to resemble scrolls of foliage. Behind each mirror was stuck either a letter or an old pack of cards or a stocking, while on the wall hung a clock with a flowered dial. More, however, Chichikov could not discern, for his eyelids were as heavy as though smeared with treacle. Presently the lady of the house herself entered--an elderly woman in a sort of nightcap (hastily put on) and a flannel neck wrap. She belonged to that class of lady landowners who are for ever lamenting failures of the harvest and their losses thereby; to the class who, drooping their heads despondently, are all the while stuffing money into striped purses, which they keep hoarded in the drawers of cupboards. Into one purse they will stuff rouble pieces, into another half roubles, and into a third tchetvertachki[3], although from their mien you would suppose that the cupboard contained only linen and nightshirts and skeins of wool and the piece of shabby material which is destined--should the old gown become scorched during the baking of holiday cakes and other dainties, or should it fall into pieces of itself--to become converted into a new dress. But the gown never does get burnt or wear out, for the reason that the lady is too careful; wherefore the piece of shabby material reposes in its unmade-up condition until the priest advises that it be given to the niece of some widowed sister, together with a quantity of other such rubbish.

[3] Pieces equal in value to twenty-five kopecks (a quarter of a rouble).

Chichikov apologised for having disturbed the household with his unexpected arrival.

"Not at all, not at all," replied the lady. "But in what dreadful weather God has brought you hither! What wind and what rain! You could not help losing your way. Pray excuse us for being unable to make better preparations for you at this time of night."

Suddenly there broke in upon the hostess' words the sound of a strange hissing, a sound so loud that the guest started in alarm, and the more so seeing that it increased until the room seemed filled withadders. On glancing upwards, however, he recovered his composure, for he perceived the sound to be emanating from the clock, which appeared to be in a mind to strike. To the hissing sound there succeeded a wheezing one, until, putting forth its best efforts, the thing struck two with as much clatter as though some one had been hitting an iron pot with a cudgel. That done, the pendulum returned to its right-left, right-left oscillation.

Chichikov thanked his hostess kindly, and said that he needed nothing, and she must not put herself about: only for rest was he longing--though also he should like to know whither he had arrived, and whether the distance to the country house of land-owner Sobakevitch was anything very great. To this the lady replied that she had never so much as heard the name, since no gentleman of the name resided in the locality.

"But at least you are acquainted with landowner Manilov?" continued Chichikov.

"No. Who is he?"

"Another landed proprietor, madam."

"Well, neither have I heard of him. No such landowner lives hereabouts."

"Then who ARE your local landowners?"

"Bobrov, Svinin, Kanapatiev, Khapakin, Trepakin, and Plieshakov."

"Are they rich men?"

"No, none of them. One of them may own twenty souls, and another thirty, but of gentry who own a hundred there are none."

Chichikov reflected that he had indeed fallen into an aristocratic wilderness!

"At all events, is the town far away?" he inquired.

"About sixty versts. How sorry I am that I have nothing for you to eat! Should you care to drink some tea?"

"I thank you, good mother, but I require nothing beyond a bed."

"Well, after such a journey you must indeed be needing rest, so you shall lie upon this sofa. Fetinia, bring a quilt and some pillows and sheets. What weather God has sent us! And what dreadful thunder! Ever since sunset I have had a candle burning before the ikon in my bedroom. My God! Why, your back and sides are as muddy as a boar's! However have you managed to get into such a state?"

"That I am nothing worse than muddy is indeed fortunate, since, but for the Almighty, I should have had my ribs broken."

"Dear, dear! To think of all that you must have been through. Had I

not better wipe your back?"

"I thank you, I thank you, but you need not trouble. Merely be so good as to tell your maid to dry my clothes."

"Do you hear that, Fetinia?" said the hostess, turning to a woman who was engaged in dragging in a feather bed and deluging the room with feathers. "Take this coat and this vest, and, after drying them before the fire--just as we used to do for your late master--give them a good rub, and fold them up neatly."

"Very well, mistress," said Fetinia, spreading some sheets over the bed, and arranging the pillows.

"Now your bed is ready for you," said the hostess to Chichikov. "Good-night, dear sir. I wish you good-night. Is there anything else that you require? Perhaps you would like to have your heels tickled before retiring to rest? Never could my late husband get to sleep without that having been done."

But the guest declined the proffered heel-tickling, and, on his hostess taking her departure, hastened to divest himself of his clothing, both upper and under, and to hand the garments to Fetinia.

She wished him good-night, and removed the wet trappings; after which he found himself alone. Not without satisfaction did he eye his bed, which reached almost to the ceiling. Clearly Fetinia was a past mistress in the art of beating up such a couch, and, as the result, he had no sooner mounted it with the aid of a chair than it sank well-nigh to the floor, and the feathers, squeezed out of their proper confines, flew hither and thither into every corner of the apartment. Nevertheless he extinguished the candle, covered himself over with the

chintz quilt, snuggled down beneath it, and instantly fell asleep.

Next day it was late in the morning before he awoke. Through the window the sun was shining into his eyes, and the flies which, overnight, had been roosting quietly on the walls and ceiling now

turned their attention to the visitor. One settled on his lip, another on his ear, a third hovered as though intending to lodge in his very eye, and a fourth had the temerity to alight just under his nostrils.

In his drowsy condition he inhaled the latter insect, sneezed violently, and so returned to consciousness. He glanced around the

room, and perceived that not all the pictures were representative of birds, since among them hung also a portrait of Kutuzov[4] and an oil

painting of an old man in a uniform with red facings such as were worn

in the days of the Emperor Paul[5]. At this moment the clock uttered

its usual hissing sound, and struck ten, while a woman's face peered

in at the door, but at once withdrew, for the reason that, with the

object of sleeping as well as possible, Chichikov had removed every

stitch of his clothing. Somehow the face seemed to him familiar, and

he set himself to recall whose it could be. At length he recollected

that it was the face of his hostess. His clothes he found lying, clean

and dry, beside him; so he dressed and approached the mirror, meanwhile sneezing again with such vehemence that a cock which happened at the moment to be near the window (which was situated at no

great distance from the ground) chuckled a short, sharp phrase. Probably it meant, in the bird's alien tongue, "Good morning to you!"

Chichikov retorted by calling the bird a fool, and then himself approached the window to look at the view. It appeared to comprise a

poulterer's premises. At all events, the narrow yard in front of the

window was full of poultry and other domestic creatures--of game fowls and barn door fowls, with, among them, a cock which strutted with measured gait, and kept shaking its comb, and tilting its head as though it were trying to listen to something. Also, a sow and her family were helping to grace the scene. First, she rooted among a heap of litter; then, in passing, she ate up a young pullet; lastly, she proceeded carelessly to munch some pieces of melon rind. To this small yard or poultry-run a length of planking served as a fence, while beyond it lay a kitchen garden containing cabbages, onions, potatoes, beetroots, and other household vegetables. Also, the garden contained a few stray fruit trees that were covered with netting to protect them from the magpies and sparrows; flocks of which were even then wheeling and darting from one spot to another. For the same reason a number of scarecrows with outstretched arms stood reared on long poles, with, surmounting one of the figures, a cast-off cap of the hostess's. Beyond the garden again there stood a number of peasants' huts. Though scattered, instead of being arranged in regular rows, these appeared to Chichikov's eye to comprise well-to-do inhabitants, since all rotten planks in their roofing had been replaced with new ones, and none of their doors were askew, and such of their tiltsheds as faced him evinced evidence of a presence of a spare waggon--in some cases almost a new one.

[4] A Russian general who, in 1812, stoutly opposed Napoleon at the battle of Borodino.

[5] The late eighteenth century.

"This lady owns by no means a poor village," said Chichikov to himself; wherefore he decided then and there to have a talk with his hostess, and to cultivate her closer acquaintance. Accordingly he peeped through the chink of the door whence her head had recently protruded, and, on seeing her seated at a tea table, entered and greeted her with a cheerful, kindly smile.

"Good morning, dear sir," she responded as she rose. "How have you slept?" She was dressed in better style than she had been on the previous evening. That is to say, she was now wearing a gown of some dark colour, and lacked her nightcap, and had swathed her neck in something stiff.

"I have slept exceedingly well," replied Chichikov, seating himself upon a chair. "And how are YOU, good madam?"

"But poorly, my dear sir."

"And why so?"

"Because I cannot sleep. A pain has taken me in my middle, and my legs, from the ankles upwards, are aching as though they were broken."

"That will pass, that will pass, good mother. You must pay no attention to it."

"God grant that it MAY pass. However, I have been rubbing myself with lard and turpentine. What sort of tea will you take? In this jar I have some of the scented kind."

"Excellent, good mother! Then I will take that."

Probably the reader will have noticed that, for all his expressions of solicitude, Chichikov's tone towards his hostess partook of a freer, a

more unceremonious, nature than that which he had adopted towards Madam Manilov. And here I should like to assert that, howsoever much, in certain respects, we Russians may be surpassed by foreigners, at least we surpass them in adroitness of manner. In fact the various shades and subtleties of our social intercourse defy enumeration. A Frenchman or a German would be incapable of envisaging and understanding all its peculiarities and differences, for his tone in speaking to a millionaire differs but little from that which he employs towards a small tobacconist--and that in spite of the circumstance that he is accustomed to cringe before the former. With us, however, things are different. In Russian society there exist clever folk who can speak in one manner to a landowner possessed of two hundred peasant souls, and in another to a landowner possessed of three hundred, and in another to a landowner possessed of five hundred. In short, up to the number of a million souls the Russian will have ready for each landowner a suitable mode of address. For example, suppose that somewhere there exists a government office, and that in that office there exists a director. I would beg of you to contemplate him as he sits among his myrmidons. Sheer nervousness will prevent you from uttering a word in his presence, so great are the pride and superiority depicted on his countenance. Also, were you to sketch him, you would be sketching a veritable Prometheus, for his glance is as that of an eagle, and he walks with measured, stately stride. Yet no sooner will the eagle have left the room to seek the study of his superior officer than he will go scurrying along (papers held close to his nose) like any partridge. But in society, and

at the evening party (should the rest of those present be of lesser rank than himself) the Prometheus will once more become Prometheus, and the man who stands a step below him will treat him in a way never dreamt of by Ovid, seeing that each fly is of lesser account than its superior fly, and becomes, in the presence of the latter, even as a grain of sand. "Surely that is not Ivan Petrovitch?" you will say of such and such a man as you regard him. "Ivan Petrovitch is tall, whereas this man is small and spare. Ivan Petrovitch has a loud, deep voice, and never smiles, whereas this man (whoever he may be) is twittering like a sparrow, and smiling all the time." Yet approach and take a good look at the fellow and you will see that is IS Ivan Petrovitch. "Alack, alack!" will be the only remark you can make.

Let us return to our characters in real life. We have seen that, on this occasion, Chichikov decided to dispense with ceremony; wherefore, taking up the teapot, he went on as follows:

"You have a nice little village here, madam. How many souls does it contain?"

"A little less than eighty, dear sir. But the times are hard, and I have lost a great deal through last year's harvest having proved a failure."

"But your peasants look fine, strong fellows. May I enquire your name? Through arriving so late at night I have quite lost my wits."

"Korobotchka, the widow of a Collegiate Secretary."

"I humbly thank you. And your Christian name and patronymic?"

"Nastasia Petrovna."

"Nastasia Petrovna! Those are excellent names. I have a maternal aunt named like yourself."

"And YOUR name?" queried the lady. "May I take it that you are a Government Assessor?"

"No, madam," replied Chichikov with a smile. "I am not an Assessor, but a traveller on private business."

"Then you must be a buyer of produce? How I regret that I have sold my honey so cheaply to other buyers! Otherwise YOU might have bought it, dear sir."

"I never buy honey."

"Then WHAT do you buy, pray? Hemp? I have a little of that by me, but not more than half a pood^[6] or so."

[6] Forty Russian pounds.

"No, madam. It is in other wares that I deal. Tell me, have you, of late years, lost many of your peasants by death?"

"Yes; no fewer than eighteen," responded the old lady with a sigh.

"Such a fine lot, too--all good workers! True, others have since grown up, but of what use are THEY? Mere striplings. When the Assessor last called upon me I could have wept; for, though those workmen of mine are dead, I have to keep on paying for them as though they were still alive! And only last week my blacksmith got burnt to death! Such a clever hand at his trade he was!"

"What? A fire occurred at your place?"

"No, no, God preserve us all! It was not so bad as that. You must understand that the blacksmith SET HIMSELF on fire--he got set on fire in his bowels through overdrinking. Yes, all of a sudden there burst from him a blue flame, and he smouldered and smouldered until he had turned as black as a piece of charcoal! Yet what a clever blacksmith he was! And now I have no horses to drive out with, for there is no one to shoe them."

"In everything the will of God, madam," said Chichikov with a sigh.
"Against the divine wisdom it is not for us to rebel. Pray hand them over to me, Nastasia Petrovna."

"Hand over whom?"

"The dead peasants."

"But how could I do that?"

"Quite simply. Sell them to me, and I will give you some money in exchange."

"But how am I to sell them to you? I scarcely understand what you mean. Am I to dig them up again from the ground?"

Chichikov perceived that the old lady was altogether at sea, and that he must explain the matter; wherefore in a few words he informed her that the transfer or purchase of the souls in question would take place merely on paper--that the said souls would be listed as still alive.

"And what good would they be to you?" asked his hostess, staring at him with her eyes distended.

"That is MY affair."

"But they are DEAD souls."

"Who said they were not? The mere fact of their being dead entails upon you a loss as dead as the souls, for you have to continue paying tax upon them, whereas MY plan is to relieve you both of the tax and of the resultant trouble. NOW do you understand? And I will not only do as I say, but also hand you over fifteen roubles per soul. Is that clear enough?"

"Yes--but I do not know," said his hostess diffidently. "You see, never before have I sold dead souls."

"Quite so. It would be a surprising thing if you had. But surely you do not think that these dead souls are in the least worth keeping?"

"Oh, no, indeed! Why should they be worth keeping? I am sure they are not so. The only thing which troubles me is the fact that they are DEAD."

"She seems a truly obstinate old woman!" was Chichikov's inward comment. "Look here, madam," he added aloud. "You reason well, but you are simply ruining yourself by continuing to pay the tax upon dead souls as though they were still alive."

"Oh, good sir, do not speak of it!" the lady exclaimed. "Three weeks ago I took a hundred and fifty roubles to that Assessor, and buttered him up, and--"

"Then you see how it is, do you not? Remember that, according to my

plan, you will never again have to butter up the Assessor, seeing that it will be I who will be paying for those peasants--_I_, not YOU, for I shall have taken over the dues upon them, and have transferred them to myself as so many bona fide serfs. Do you understand AT LAST?"

However, the old lady still communed with herself. She could see that the transaction would be to her advantage, yet it was one of such a novel and unprecedented nature that she was beginning to fear lest this purchaser of souls intended to cheat her. Certainly he had come from God only knew where, and at the dead of night, too!

"But, sir, I have never in my life sold dead folk--only living ones. Three years ago I transferred two wenches to Protopopov for a hundred roubles apiece, and he thanked me kindly, for they turned out splendid workers--able to make napkins or anything else.

"Yes, but with the living we have nothing to do, damn it! I am asking you only about DEAD folk."

"Yes, yes, of course. But at first sight I felt afraid lest I should be incurring a loss--lest you should be wishing to outwit me, good sir. You see, the dead souls are worth rather more than you have offered for them."

"See here, madam. (What a woman it is!) HOW could they be worth more? Think for yourself. They are so much loss to you--so much loss, do you understand? Take any worthless, rubbishy article you like--a piece of old rag, for example. That rag will yet fetch its price, for it can be bought for paper-making. But these dead souls are good for

NOTHING AT ALL. Can you name anything that they ARE good for?"

"True, true--they ARE good for nothing. But what troubles me is the fact that they are dead."

"What a blockhead of a creature!" said Chichikov to himself, for he was beginning to lose patience. "Bless her heart, I may as well be going. She has thrown me into a perfect sweat, the cursed old shrew!"

He took a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the perspiration from his brow. Yet he need not have flown into such a passion. More than one respected statesman reveals himself, when confronted with a business matter, to be just such another as Madam Korobotchka, in that, once he has got an idea into his head, there is no getting it out of him--you may ply him with daylight-clear arguments, yet they will rebound from his brain as an india-rubber ball rebounds from a flagstone. Nevertheless, wiping away the perspiration, Chichikov resolved to try whether he could not bring her back to the road by another path.

"Madam," he said, "either you are declining to understand what I say or you are talking for the mere sake of talking. If I hand you over some money--fifteen roubles for each soul, do you understand?--it is MONEY, not something which can be picked up haphazard on the street. For instance, tell me how much you sold your honey for?"

"For twelve roubles per pood."

"Ah! Then by those words, madam, you have laid a trifling sin upon your soul; for you did NOT sell the honey for twelve roubles."

"By the Lord God I did!"

"Well, well! Never mind. Honey is only honey. Now, you had collected that stuff, it may be, for a year, and with infinite care and labour. You had fussed after it, you had trotted to and fro, you had duly frozen out the bees, and you had fed them in the cellar throughout the winter. But these dead souls of which I speak are quite another matter, for in this case you have put forth no exertions--it was merely God's will that they should leave the world, and thus decrease the personnel of your establishment. In the former case you received (so you allege) twelve roubles per pood for your labour; but in this case you will receive money for having done nothing at all. Nor will you receive twelve roubles per item, but FIFTEEN--and roubles not in silver, but roubles in good paper currency."

That these powerful inducements would certainly cause the old woman to yield Chichikov had not a doubt.

"True," his hostess replied. "But how strangely business comes to me as a widow! Perhaps I had better wait a little longer, seeing that other buyers might come along, and I might be able to compare prices."

"For shame, madam! For shame! Think what you are saying. Who else, I would ask, would care to buy those souls? What use could they be to any one?"

"If that is so, they might come in useful to ME," mused the old woman aloud; after which she sat staring at Chichikov with her mouth open and a face of nervous expectancy as to his possible rejoinder.

"Dead folk useful in a household!" he exclaimed. "Why, what could you do with them? Set them up on poles to frighten away the sparrows from your garden?"

"The Lord save us, but what things you say!" she ejaculated, crossing herself.

"Well, WHAT could you do with them? By this time they are so much bones and earth. That is all there is left of them. Their transfer to myself would be ON PAPER only. Come, come! At least give me an answer."

Again the old woman communed with herself.

"What are you thinking of, Nastasia Petrovna?" inquired Chichikov.

"I am thinking that I scarcely know what to do. Perhaps I had better sell you some hemp?"

"What do I want with hemp? Pardon me, but just when I have made to you a different proposal altogether you begin fussing about hemp! Hemp is hemp, and though I may want some when I NEXT visit you, I should like to know what you have to say to the suggestion under discussion."

"Well, I think it a very queer bargain. Never have I heard of such a thing."

Upon this Chichikov lost all patience, upset his chair, and bid her go to the devil; of which personage even the mere mention terrified her extremely.

"Do not speak of him, I beg of you!" she cried, turning pale. "May

God, rather, bless him! Last night was the third night that he has appeared to me in a dream. You see, after saying my prayers, I bethought me of telling my fortune by the cards; and God must have sent him as a punishment. He looked so horrible, and had horns longer than a bull's!"

"I wonder you don't see SCORES of devils in your dreams! Merely out of Christian charity he had come to you to say, 'I perceive a poor widow going to rack and ruin, and likely soon to stand in danger of want.' Well, go to rack and ruin--yes, you and all your village together!"

"The insults!" exclaimed the old woman, glancing at her visitor in terror.

"I should think so!" continued Chichikov. "Indeed, I cannot find words to describe you. To say no more about it, you are like a dog in a manger. You don't want to eat the hay yourself, yet you won't let anyone else touch it. All that I am seeking to do is to purchase certain domestic products of yours, for the reason that I have certain Government contracts to fulfil." This last he added in passing, and without any ulterior motive, save that it came to him as a happy thought. Nevertheless the mention of Government contracts exercised a powerful influence upon Nastasia Petrovna, and she hastened to say in a tone that was almost supplicatory:

"Why should you be so angry with me? Had I known that you were going to lose your temper in this way, I should never have discussed the matter."

"No wonder that I lose my temper! An egg too many is no great

matter,
yet it may prove exceedingly annoying."

"Well, well, I will let you have the souls for fifteen roubles each.
Also, with regard to those contracts, do not forget me if at any time
you should find yourself in need of rye-meal or buckwheat or groats or
dead meat."

"No, I shall NEVER forget you, madam!" he said, wiping his forehead,
where three separate streams of perspiration were trickling down his
face. Then he asked her whether in the town she had any acquaintance
or agent whom she could empower to complete the transference of the
serfs, and to carry out whatsoever else might be necessary.

"Certainly," replied Madame Korobotchka. "The son of our archpriest,
Father Cyril, himself is a lawyer."

Upon that Chichikov begged her to accord the gentleman in question a
power of attorney, while, to save extra trouble, he himself would then
and there compose the requisite letter.

"It would be a fine thing if he were to buy up all my meal and stock
for the Government," thought Madame to herself. "I must encourage him
a little. There has been some dough standing ready since last night,
so I will go and tell Fetinia to try a few pancakes. Also, it might be
well to try him with an egg pie. We make them nicely here, and they do
not take long in the making."

So she departed to translate her thoughts into action, as well as to
supplement the pie with other products of the domestic cuisine;
while,

for his part, Chichikov returned to the drawing-room where he had spent the night, in order to procure from his dispatch-box the necessary writing-paper. The room had now been set in order, the sumptuous feather bed removed, and a table set before the sofa. Depositing his dispatch-box upon the table, he heaved a gentle sigh on becoming aware that he was so soaked with perspiration that he might almost have been dipped in a river. Everything, from his shirt to his socks, was dripping. "May she starve to death, the cursed old harridan!" he ejaculated after a moment's rest. Then he opened his dispatch-box. In passing, I may say that I feel certain that at least SOME of my readers will be curious to know the contents and the internal arrangements of that receptacle. Why should I not gratify their curiosity? To begin with, the centre of the box contained a soap-dish, with, disposed around it, six or seven compartments for razors. Next came square partitions for a sand-box[7] and an inkstand, as well as (scooped out in their midst) a hollow of pens, sealing-wax, and anything else that required more room. Lastly there were all sorts of little divisions, both with and without lids, for articles of a smaller nature, such as visiting cards, memorial cards, theatre tickets, and things which Chichikov had laid by as souvenirs. This portion of the box could be taken out, and below it were both a space for manuscripts and a secret money-box--the latter made to draw out from the side of the receptacle.

[7] To serve as blotting-paper.

Chichikov set to work to clean a pen, and then to write. Presently his hostess entered the room.

"What a beautiful box you have got, my dear sir!" she exclaimed

as she
took a seat beside him. "Probably you bought it in Moscow?"

"Yes--in Moscow," replied Chichikov without interrupting his writing.

"I thought so. One CAN get good things there. Three years ago my sister brought me a few pairs of warm shoes for my sons, and they were such excellent articles! To this day my boys wear them. And what nice stamped paper you have!" (she had peered into the dispatch-box, where, sure enough, there lay a further store of the paper in question).

"Would you mind letting me have a sheet of it? I am without any at all, although I shall soon have to be presenting a plea to the land court, and possess not a morsel of paper to write it on."

Upon this Chichikov explained that the paper was not the sort proper for the purpose--that it was meant for serf-indenturing, and not for the framing of pleas. Nevertheless, to quiet her, he gave her a sheet stamped to the value of a rouble. Next, he handed her the letter to sign, and requested, in return, a list of her peasants. Unfortunately, such a list had never been compiled, let alone any copies of it, and the only way in which she knew the peasants' names was by heart. However, he told her to dictate them. Some of the names greatly astonished our hero, so, still more, did the surnames. Indeed, frequently, on hearing the latter, he had to pause before writing them down. Especially did he halt before a certain "Peter Saveliev Neuvazhai Korito." "What a string of titles!" involuntarily he ejaculated. To the Christian name of another serf was appended "Korovi Kirpitch," and to that of a third "Koleso Ivan." However, at length the list was compiled, and he caught a deep breath; which latter proceeding caused him to catch also the attractive odour of something

fried in fat.

"I beseech you to have a morsel," murmured his hostess. Chichikov looked up, and saw that the table was spread with mushrooms, pies, and other viands.

"Try this freshly-made pie and an egg," continued Madame.

Chichikov did so, and having eaten more than half of what she offered him, praised the pie highly. Indeed, it was a toothsome dish, and, after his difficulties and exertions with his hostess, it tasted even better than it might otherwise have done.

"And also a few pancakes?" suggested Madame.

For answer Chichikov folded three together, and, having dipped them in melted butter, consigned the lot to his mouth, and then wiped his mouth with a napkin. Twice more was the process repeated, and then he requested his hostess to order the britchka to be got ready. In dispatching Fetinia with the necessary instructions, she ordered her to return with a second batch of hot pancakes.

"Your pancakes are indeed splendid," said Chichikov, applying himself to the second consignment of fried dainties when they had arrived.

"Yes, we make them well here," replied Madame. "Yet how unfortunate it is that the harvest should have proved so poor as to have prevented me from earning anything on my-- But why should you be in such a hurry to depart, good sir?" She broke off on seeing Chichikov reach for his cap. "The britchka is not yet ready."

"Then it is being got so, madam, it is being got so, and I shall

need
a moment or two to pack my things."

"As you please, dear sir; but do not forget me in connection
with
those Government contracts."

"No, I have said that NEVER shall I forget you," replied
Chichikov
as he hurried into the hall.

"And would you like to buy some lard?" continued his hostess,
pursuing
him.

"Lard? Oh certainly. Why not? Only, only--I will do so ANOTHER
time."

"I shall have some ready at about Christmas."

"Quite so, madam. THEN I will buy anything and everything--the
lard included."

"And perhaps you will be wanting also some feathers? I shall be
having
some for sale about St. Philip's Day."

"Very well, very well, madam."

"There you see!" she remarked as they stepped out on to the
verandah.

"The britchka is NOT yet ready."

"But it soon will be, it soon will be. Only direct me to the
main
road."

"How am I to do that?" said Madame. "'Twould puzzle a wise man
to do
so, for in these parts there are so many turnings. However, I
will
send a girl to guide you. You could find room for her on the
box-seat,
could you not?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then I will send her. She knows the way thoroughly. Only do not carry her off for good. Already some traders have deprived me of one of my girls."

Chichikov reassured his hostess on the point, and Madame plucked up courage enough to scan, first of all, the housekeeper, who happened to be issuing from the storehouse with a bowl of honey, and, next, a young peasant who happened to be standing at the gates; and, while thus engaged, she became wholly absorbed in her domestic pursuits. But why pay her so much attention? The Widow Korobotchka, Madame Manilov, domestic life, non-domestic life--away with them all! How strangely are things compounded! In a trice may joy turn to sorrow, should one halt long enough over it: in a trice only God can say what ideas may strike one. You may fall even to thinking: "After all, did Madame Korobotchka stand so very low in the scale of human perfection? Was there really such a very great gulf between her and Madame Manilov--between her and the Madame Manilov whom we have seen entrenched behind the walls of a genteel mansion in which there were a fine staircase of wrought metal and a number of rich carpets; the Madame Manilov who spent most of her time in yawning behind half-read books, and in hoping for a visit from some socially distinguished person in order that she might display her wit and carefully rehearsed thoughts--thoughts which had been de rigueur in town for a week past, yet which referred, not to what was going on in her household or on her estate--both of which properties were at odds and ends, owing to her ignorance of the art of managing them--but to the coming

political
revolution in France and the direction in which fashionable
Catholicism was supposed to be moving? But away with such
things! Why
need we speak of them? Yet how comes it that suddenly into the
midst
of our careless, frivolous, unthinking moments there may enter
another, and a very different, tendency?--that the smile may not
have
left a human face before its owner will have radically changed
his or
her nature (though not his or her environment) with the result
that
the face will suddenly become lit with a radiance never before
seen
there? . . .

"Here is the britchka, here is the britchka!" exclaimed
Chichikov on
perceiving that vehicle slowly advancing. "Ah, you blockhead!"
he went
on to Selifan. "Why have you been loitering about? I suppose
last
night's fumes have not yet left your brain?"

To this Selifan returned no reply.

"Good-bye, madam," added the speaker. "But where is the girl
whom you
promised me?"

"Here, Pelagea!" called the hostess to a wench of about eleven
who was
dressed in home-dyed garments and could boast of a pair of bare
feet
which, from a distance, might almost have been mistaken for
boots, so
encrusted were they with fresh mire. "Here, Pelagea! Come and
show
this gentleman the way."

Selifan helped the girl to ascend to the box-seat. Placing one
foot
upon the step by which the gentry mounted, she covered the said
step
with mud, and then, ascending higher, attained the desired
position

beside the coachman. Chichikov followed in her wake (causing the britchka to heel over with his weight as he did so), and then settled himself back into his place with an "All right! Good-bye, madam!" as the horses moved away at a trot.

Selifan looked gloomy as he drove, but also very attentive to his business. This was invariably his custom when he had committed the fault of getting drunk. Also, the horses looked unusually well-groomed. In particular, the collar on one of them had been neatly mended, although hitherto its state of dilapidation had been such as perennially to allow the stuffing to protrude through the leather. The silence preserved was well-nigh complete. Merely flourishing his whip, Selifan spoke to the team no word of instruction, although the skewbald was as ready as usual to listen to conversation of a didactic nature, seeing that at such times the reins hung loosely in the hands of the loquacious driver, and the whip wandered merely as a matter of form over the backs of the troika. This time, however, there could be heard issuing from Selifan's sullen lips only the uniformly unpleasant exclamation, "Now then, you brutes! Get on with you, get on with you!" The bay and the Assessor too felt put out at not hearing themselves called "my pets" or "good lads"; while, in addition, the skewbald came in for some nasty cuts across his sleek and ample quarters. "What has put master out like this?" thought the animal as it shook its head. "Heaven knows where he does not keep beating me--across the back, and even where I am tenderer still. Yes, he keeps catching the whip in my ears, and lashing me under the belly."

"To the right, eh?" snapped Selifan to the girl beside him as he pointed to a rain-soaked road which trended away through fresh green fields.

"No, no," she replied. "I will show you the road when the time comes."

"Which way, then?" he asked again when they had proceeded a little further.

"This way." And she pointed to the road just mentioned.

"Get along with you!" retorted the coachman. "That DOES go to the right. You don't know your right hand from your left."

The weather was fine, but the ground so excessively sodden that the wheels of the britchka collected mire until they had become caked as with a layer of felt, a circumstance which greatly increased the weight of the vehicle, and prevented it from clearing the neighbouring parishes before the afternoon was arrived. Also, without the girl's help the finding of the way would have been impossible, since roads wiggled away in every direction, like crabs released from a net, and, but for the assistance mentioned, Selifan would have found himself left to his own devices. Presently she pointed to a building ahead, with the words, "THERE is the main road."

"And what is the building?" asked Selifan.

"A tavern," she said.

"Then we can get along by ourselves," he observed. "Do you get down, and be off home."

With that he stopped, and helped her to alight--muttering as he did so: "Ah, you blackfooted creature!"

Chichikov added a copper groat, and she departed well pleased with her ride in the gentleman's carriage.

CHAPTER IV

On reaching the tavern, Chichikov called a halt. His reasons for this were twofold--namely, that he wanted to rest the horses, and that he himself desired some refreshment. In this connection the author feels bound to confess that the appetite and the capacity of such men are greatly to be envied. Of those well-to-do folk of St. Petersburg and Moscow who spend their time in considering what they shall eat on the morrow, and in composing a dinner for the day following, and who never sit down to a meal without first of all injecting a pill and then swallowing oysters and crabs and a quantity of other monsters, while eternally departing for Karlsbad or the Caucasus, the author has but a small opinion. Yes, THEY are not the persons to inspire envy. Rather, it is the folk of the middle classes--folk who at one posthouse call for bacon, and at another for a sucking pig, and at a third for a steak of sturgeon or a baked pudding with onions, and who can sit down to table at any hour, as though they had never had a meal in their lives, and can devour fish of all sorts, and guzzle and chew it with a view to provoking further appetite--these, I say, are the folk who enjoy heaven's most favoured gift. To attain such a celestial condition the great folk of whom I have spoken would sacrifice half their serfs and half their mortgaged and non-mortgaged property, with

the foreign and domestic improvements thereon, if thereby they could compass such a stomach as is possessed by the folk of the middle class. But, unfortunately, neither money nor real estate, whether improved or non-improved, can purchase such a stomach.

The little wooden tavern, with its narrow, but hospitable, curtain suspended from a pair of rough-hewn doorposts like old church candlesticks, seemed to invite Chichikov to enter. True, the establishment was only a Russian hut of the ordinary type, but it was a hut of larger dimensions than usual, and had around its windows and gables carved and patterned cornices of bright-coloured wood which threw into relief the darker hue of the walls, and consorted well with the flowered pitchers painted on the shutters.

Ascending the narrow wooden staircase to the upper floor, and arriving upon a broad landing, Chichikov found himself confronted with a creaking door and a stout old woman in a striped print gown. "This way, if you please," she said. Within the apartment designated Chichikov encountered the old friends which one invariably finds in such roadside hostelries--to wit, a heavy samovar, four smooth, bescratched walls of white pine, a three-cornered press with cups and teapots, egg-cups of gilded china standing in front of ikons suspended by blue and red ribands, a cat lately delivered of a family, a mirror which gives one four eyes instead of two and a pancake for a face, and, beside the ikons, some bunches of herbs and carnations of such faded dustiness that, should one attempt to smell them, one is bound to burst out sneezing.

"Have you a sucking-pig?" Chichikov inquired of the landlady as she stood expectantly before him.

"Yes."

"And some horse-radish and sour cream?"

"Yes."

"Then serve them."

The landlady departed for the purpose, and returned with a plate, a napkin (the latter starched to the consistency of dried bark), a knife with a bone handle beginning to turn yellow, a two-pronged fork as thin as a wafer, and a salt-cellar incapable of being made to stand upright.

Following the accepted custom, our hero entered into conversation with the woman, and inquired whether she herself or a landlord kept the tavern; how much income the tavern brought in; whether her sons lived with her; whether the oldest was a bachelor or married; whom the eldest had taken to wife; whether the dowry had been large; whether the father-in-law had been satisfied, and whether the said father-in-law had not complained of receiving too small a present at the wedding. In short, Chichikov touched on every conceivable point. Likewise (of course) he displayed some curiosity as to the landowners of the neighbourhood. Their names, he ascertained, were Blochin, Potchitaev, Minoi, Cheprakov, and Sobakevitch.

"Then you are acquainted with Sobakevitch?" he said; whereupon the old woman informed him that she knew not only Sobakevitch, but also Manilov, and that the latter was the more delicate eater of the two, since, whereas Manilov always ordered a roast fowl and some veal and mutton, and then tasted merely a morsel of each, Sobakevitch would

order one dish only, but consume the whole of it, and then demand more at the same price.

Whilst Chichikov was thus conversing and partaking of the sucking pig until only a fragment of it seemed likely to remain, the sound of an approaching vehicle made itself heard. Peering through the window, he saw draw up to the tavern door a light britchka drawn by three fine horses. From it there descended two men--one flaxen-haired and tall, and the other dark-haired and of slighter build. While the flaxen-haired man was clad in a dark-blue coat, the other one was wrapped in a coat of striped pattern. Behind the britchka stood a second, but an empty, turn-out, drawn by four long-coated steeds in ragged collars and rope harnesses. The flaxen-haired man lost no time in ascending the staircase, while his darker friend remained below to fumble at something in the britchka, talking, as he did so, to the driver of the vehicle which stood hitched behind. Somehow, the dark-haired man's voice struck Chichikov as familiar; and as he was taking another look at him the flaxen-haired gentleman entered the room. The newcomer was a man of lofty stature, with a small red moustache and a lean, hard-bitten face whose redness made it evident that its acquaintance, if not with the smoke of gunpowder, at all events with that of tobacco, was intimate and extensive. Nevertheless he greeted Chichikov civilly, and the latter returned his bow. Indeed, the pair would have entered into conversation, and have made one another's acquaintance (since a beginning was made with their simultaneously expressing satisfaction at the circumstance that the previous night's rain had laid the dust on the roads, and thereby

made driving cool and pleasant) when the gentleman's darker-favoured friend also entered the room, and, throwing his cap upon the table, pushed back a mass of dishevelled black locks from his brow. The latest arrival was a man of medium height, but well put together, and possessed of a pair of full red cheeks, a set of teeth as white as snow, and coal-black whiskers. Indeed, so fresh was his complexion that it seemed to have been compounded of blood and milk, while health danced in his every feature.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cried with a gesture of astonishment at the sight of Chichikov. "What chance brings YOU here?"

Upon that Chichikov recognised Nozdrev--the man whom he had met at dinner at the Public Prosecutor's, and who, within a minute or two of the introduction, had become so intimate with his fellow guest as to address him in the second person singular, in spite of the fact that Chichikov had given him no opportunity for doing so.

"Where have you been to-day?" Nozdrev inquired, and, without waiting for an answer, went on: "For myself, I am just from the fair, and completely cleaned out. Actually, I have had to do the journey back with stage horses! Look out of the window, and see them for yourself." And he turned Chichikov's head so sharply in the desired direction that he came very near to bumping it against the window frame. "Did you ever see such a bag of tricks? The cursed things have only just managed to get here. In fact, on the way I had to transfer myself to this fellow's britchka." He indicated his companion with a finger. "By

the way, don't you know one another? He is Mizhuev, my brother-in-law.

He and I were talking of you only this morning. 'Just you see,' said I

to him, 'if we do not fall in with Chichikov before we have done.'

Heavens, how completely cleaned out I am! Not only have I lost four

good horses, but also my watch and chain." Chichikov perceived that in

very truth his interlocutor was minus the articles named, as well as

that one of Nozdrev's whiskers was less bushy in appearance than the

other one. "Had I had another twenty roubles in my pocket," went on

Nozdrev, "I should have won back all that I have lost, as well as have

pouched a further thirty thousand. Yes, I give you my word of honour

on that."

"But you were saying the same thing when last I met you," put in the

flaxen-haired man. "Yet, even though I lent you fifty roubles, you

lost them all."

"But I should not have lost them THIS time. Don't try to make me out

a fool. I should NOT have lost them, I tell you. Had I only played

the right card, I should have broken the bank."

"But you did NOT break the bank," remarked the flaxen-haired man.

"No. That was because I did not play my cards right. But what about

your precious major's play? Is THAT good?"

"Good or not, at least he beat you."

"Splendid of him! Nevertheless I will get my own back. Let him play me

at doubles, and we shall soon see what sort of a player he is! Friend

Chichikov, at first we had a glorious time, for the fair was a tremendous success. Indeed, the tradesmen said that never yet had there been such a gathering. I myself managed to sell everything from my estate at a good price. In fact, we had a magnificent time. I can't help thinking of it, devil take me! But what a pity YOU were not there! Three versts from the town there is quartered a regiment of dragoons, and you would scarcely believe what a lot of officers it has. Forty at least there are, and they do a fine lot of knocking about the town and drinking. In particular, Staff-Captain Potsieluev is a SPLENDID fellow! You should just see his moustache! Why, he calls good claret 'trash'! 'Bring me some of the usual trash,' is his way of ordering it. And Lieutenant Kuvshinnikov, too! He is as delightful as the other man. In fact, I may say that every one of the lot is a rake. I spent my whole time with them, and you can imagine that Ponomarev, the wine merchant, did a fine trade indeed! All the same, he is a rascal, you know, and ought not to be dealt with, for he puts all sorts of rubbish into his liquor--Indian wood and burnt cork and elderberry juice, the villain! Nevertheless, get him to produce a bottle from what he calls his 'special cellar,' and you will fancy yourself in the seventh heaven of delight. And what quantities of champagne we drank! Compared with it, provincial stuff is kvass[1]. Try to imagine not merely Clicquot, but a sort of blend of Clicquot and Matradura--Clicquot of double strength. Also Ponomarev produced a bottle of French stuff which he calls 'Bonbon.' Had it a bouquet, ask you? Why, it had the bouquet of a rose garden, of anything else you like. What times we had, to be sure! Just after we had left

Pnomarev's place, some prince or another arrived in the town, and sent out for some champagne; but not a bottle was there left, for the officers had drunk every one! Why, I myself got through seventeen bottles at a sitting."

[1] A liquor distilled from fermented bread crusts or sour fruit.

"Come, come! You CAN'T have got through seventeen," remarked the flaxen-haired man.

"But I did, I give my word of honour," retorted Nozdrev.

"Imagine what you like, but you didn't drink even TEN bottles at a sitting."

"Will you bet that I did not?"

"No; for what would be the use of betting about it?"

"Then at least wager the gun which you have bought."

"No, I am not going to do anything of the kind."

"Just as an experiment?"

"No."

"It is as well for you that you don't, since, otherwise, you would have found yourself minus both gun and cap. However, friend Chichikov, it is a pity you were not there. Had you been there, I feel sure you would have found yourself unable to part with Lieutenant Kuvshinnikov. You and he would have hit it off splendidly. You know, he is quite a different sort from the Public Prosecutor and our other provincial skinflints--fellows who shiver in their shoes before they will spend a single kopeck. HE will play faro, or anything else, and at any time.

Why did you not come with us, instead of wasting your time on cattle breeding or something of the sort? But never mind. Embrace me. I like you immensely. Mizhuev, see how curiously things have turned out. Chichikov has nothing to do with me, or I with him, yet here is he come from God knows where, and landed in the very spot where I happen to be living! I may tell you that, no matter how many carriages I possessed, I should gamble the lot away. Recently I went in for a turn at billiards, and lost two jars of pomade, a china teapot, and a guitar. Then I staked some more things, and, like a fool, lost them all, and six roubles in addition. What a dog is that Kuvshinnikov! He and I attended nearly every ball in the place. In particular, there was a woman--decolletee, and such a swell! I merely thought to myself, 'The devil take her!' but Kuvshinnikov is such a wag that he sat down beside her, and began paying her strings of compliments in French. However, I did not neglect the damsels altogether--although HE calls that sort of thing 'going in for strawberries.' By the way, I have a splendid piece of fish and some caviare with me. 'Tis all I HAVE brought back! In fact it is a lucky chance that I happened to buy the stuff before my money was gone. Where are you for?"

"I am about to call on a friend."

"On what friend? Let him go to the devil, and come to my place instead."

"I cannot, I cannot. I have business to do."

"Oh, business again! I thought so!"

"But I HAVE business to do--and pressing business at that."

"I wager that you're lying. If not, tell me whom you're going to call upon."

"Upon Sobakevitch."

Instantly Nozdrev burst into a laugh compassable only by a healthy man in whose head every tooth still remains as white as sugar. By this I mean the laugh of quivering cheeks, the laugh which causes a neighbour who is sleeping behind double doors three rooms away to leap from his bed and exclaim with distended eyes, "Hullo! Something HAS upset him!"

"What is there to laugh at?" asked Chichikov, a trifle nettled; but Nozdrev laughed more unrestrainedly than ever, ejaculating: "Oh, spare us all! The thing is so amusing that I shall die of it!"

"I say that there is nothing to laugh at," repeated Chichikov. "It is in fulfilment of a promise that I am on my way to Sobakevitch's."

"Then you will scarcely be glad to be alive when you've got there, for he is the veriest miser in the countryside. Oh, I know you. However, if you think to find there either faro or a bottle of 'Bonbon' you are mistaken. Look here, my good friend. Let Sobakevitch go to the devil, and come to MY place, where at least I shall have a piece of sturgeon to offer you for dinner. Ponomarev said to me on parting: 'This piece is just the thing for you. Even if you were to search the whole market, you would never find a better one.' But of course he is a terrible rogue. I said to him outright: 'You and the Collector of Taxes are the two greatest skinflints in the town.' But he only stroked his beard and smiled. Every day I used to breakfast with Kuvshinnikov in his restaurant. Well, what I was nearly

forgetting is
this: that, though I am aware that you can't forgo your
engagement, I
am not going to give you up--no, not for ten thousand roubles of
money. I tell you that in advance."

Here he broke off to run to the window and shout to his servant
(who
was holding a knife in one hand and a crust of bread and a piece
of
sturgeon in the other--he had contrived to filch the latter
while
fumbling in the britchka for something else):

"Hi, Porphyri! Bring here that puppy, you rascal! What a puppy
it is!
Unfortunately that thief of a landlord has given it nothing to
eat,
even though I have promised him the roan filly which, as you may
remember, I swopped from Khvostirev." As a matter of act,
Chichikov
had never in his life seen either Khvostirev or the roan filly.

"Barin, do you wish for anything to eat?" inquired the landlady
as she
entered.

"No, nothing at all. Ah, friend Chichikov, what times we had!
Yes,
give me a glass of vodka, old woman. What sort to you keep?"

"Aniseed."

"Then bring me a glass of it," repeated Nozdrev.

"And one for me as well," added the flaxen-haired man.

"At the theatre," went on Nozdrev, "there was an actress who
sang like
a canary. Kuvshinnikov, who happened to be sitting with me,
said: 'My
boy, you had better go and gather that strawberry.' As for the
booths
at the fair, they numbered, I should say, fifty." At this point
he
broke off to take the glass of vodka from the landlady, who
bowed low

in acknowledgement of his doing so. At the same moment Porphyri--a fellow dressed like his master (that is to say, in a greasy, wadded overcoat)--entered with the puppy.

"Put the brute down here," commanded Nozdrev, "and then fasten it up."

Porphyri deposited the animal upon the floor; whereupon it proceeded to act after the manner of dogs.

"THERE'S a puppy for you!" cried Nozdrev, catching hold of it by the back, and lifting it up. The puppy uttered a piteous yelp.

"I can see that you haven't done what I told you to do," he continued to Porphyri after an inspection of the animal's belly. "You have quite forgotten to brush him."

"I DID brush him," protested Porphyri.

"Then where did these fleas come from?"

"I cannot think. Perhaps they have leapt into his coat out of the britchka."

"You liar! As a matter of fact, you have forgotten to brush him. Nevertheless, look at these ears, Chichikov. Just feel them."

"Why should I? Without doing that, I can see that he is well-bred."

"Nevertheless, catch hold of his ears and feel them."

To humour the fellow Chichikov did as he had requested, remarking:

"Yes, he seems likely to turn out well."

"And feel the coldness of his nose! Just take it in your hand."

Not wishing to offend his interlocutor, Chichikov felt the puppy's

nose, saying: "Some day he will have an excellent scent."

"Yes, will he not? 'Tis the right sort of muzzle for that. I must say that I have long been wanting such a puppy. Porphyri, take him away again."

Porphyri lifted up the puppy, and bore it downstairs.

"Look here, Chichikov," resumed Nozdrev. "You MUST come to my place. It lies only five versts away, and we can go there like the wind, and you can visit Sobakevitch afterwards."

"Shall I, or shall I not, go to Nozdrev's?" reflected Chichikov. "Is he likely to prove any more useful than the rest? Well, at least he is as promising, even though he has lost so much at play. But he has a head on his shoulders, and therefore I must go carefully if I am to tackle him concerning my scheme."

With that he added aloud: "Very well, I WILL come with you, but do not let us be long, for my time is very precious."

"That's right, that's right!" cried Nozdrev. "Splendid, splendid! Let me embrace you!" And he fell upon Chichikov's neck. "All three of us will go."

"No, no," put in the flaxen-haired man. "You must excuse me, for I must be off home."

"Rubbish, rubbish! I am NOT going to excuse you."

"But my wife will be furious with me. You and Monsieur Chichikov must change into the other britchka."

"Come, come! The thing is not to be thought of."

The flaxen-haired man was one of those people in whose character, at first sight, there seems to lurk a certain grain of stubbornness--so much so that, almost before one has begun to speak, they are ready to dispute one's words, and to disagree with anything that may be opposed to their peculiar form of opinion. For instance, they will decline to have folly called wisdom, or any tune danced to but their own. Always, however, will there become manifest in their character a soft spot, and in the end they will accept what hitherto they have denied, and call what is foolish sensible, and even dance--yes, better than any one else will do--to a tune set by some one else. In short, they generally begin well, but always end badly.

"Rubbish!" said Nozdrev in answer to a further objection on his brother-in-law's part. And, sure enough, no sooner had Nozdrev clapped his cap upon his head than the flaxen-haired man started to follow him and his companion.

"But the gentleman has not paid for the vodka?" put in the old woman.

"All right, all right, good mother. Look here, brother-in-law. Pay her, will you, for I have not a kopeck left."

"How much?" inquired the brother-in-law.

"What, sir? Eighty kopecks, if you please," replied the old woman.

"A lie! Give her half a rouble. That will be quite enough."

"No, it will NOT, barin," protested the old woman. However, she took the money gratefully, and even ran to the door to open it for the

gentlemen. As a matter of fact, she had lost nothing by the transaction, since she had demanded fully a quarter more than the vodka was worth.

The travellers then took their seats, and since Chichikov's britchka kept alongside the britchka wherein Nozdrev and his brother-in-law were seated, it was possible for all three men to converse together as they proceeded. Behind them came Nozdrev's smaller buggy, with its team of lean stage horses and Porphyri and the puppy. But inasmuch as the conversation which the travellers maintained was not of a kind likely to interest the reader, I might do worse than say something concerning Nozdrev himself, seeing that he is destined to play no small role in our story.

Nozdrev's face will be familiar to the reader, seeing that every one must have encountered many such. Fellows of the kind are known as "gay young sparks," and, even in their boyhood and school days, earn a reputation for being bons camarades (though with it all they come in for some hard knocks) for the reason that their faces evince an element of frankness, directness, and enterprise which enables them soon to make friends, and, almost before you have had time to look around, to start addressing you in the second person singular. Yet, while cementing such friendships for all eternity, almost always they begin quarrelling the same evening, since, throughout, they are a loquacious, dissipated, high-spirited, over-showy tribe. Indeed, at thirty-five Nozdrev was just what he had been an eighteen and twenty--he was just such a lover of fast living. Nor had his marriage

in any way changed him, and the less so since his wife had soon departed to another world, and left behind her two children, whom he did not want, and who were therefore placed in the charge of a good-looking nursemaid. Never at any time could he remain at home for more than a single day, for his keen scent could range over scores and scores of versts, and detect any fair which promised balls and crowds. Consequently in a trice he would be there--quarrelling, and creating disturbances over the gaming-table (like all men of his type, he had a perfect passion for cards) yet playing neither a faultless nor an over-clean game, since he was both a blunderer and able to indulge in a large number of illicit cuts and other devices. The result was that the game often ended in another kind of sport altogether. That is to say, either he received a good kicking, or he had his thick and very handsome whiskers pulled; with the result that on certain occasions he returned home with one of those appendages looking decidedly ragged. Yet his plump, healthy-looking cheeks were so robustly constituted, and contained such an abundance of recreative vigour, that a new whisker soon sprouted in place of the old one, and even surpassed its predecessor. Again (and the following is a phenomenon peculiar to Russia) a very short time would have elapsed before once more he would be consorting with the very cronies who had recently cuffed him--and consorting with them as though nothing whatsoever had happened--no reference to the subject being made by him, and they too holding their tongues.

In short, Nozdrev was, as it were, a man of incident. Never was he

present at any gathering without some sort of a fracas occurring thereat. Either he would require to be expelled from the room by gendarmes, or his friends would have to kick him out into the street.

At all events, should neither of those occurrences take place, at

least he did something of a nature which would not otherwise have been

witnessed. That is to say, should he not play the fool in a buffet to

such an extent as to make every one smile, you may be sure that he was

engaged in lying to a degree which at times abashed even himself.

Moreover, the man lied without reason. For instance, he would begin

telling a story to the effect that he possessed a blue-coated or a

red-coated horse; until, in the end, his listeners would be forced to

leave him with the remark, "You are giving us some fine stuff, old

fellow!" Also, men like Nozdrev have a passion for insulting their

neighbours without the least excuse afforded. (For that matter, even a

man of good standing and of respectable exterior--a man with a star on

his breast--may unexpectedly press your hand one day, and begin talking to you on subjects of a nature to give food for serious

thought. Yet just as unexpectedly may that man start abusing you to

your face--and do so in a manner worthy of a collegiate registrar

rather than of a man who wears a star on his breast and aspires to

converse on subjects which merit reflection. All that one can do in

such a case is to stand shrugging one's shoulders in amazement.) Well,

Nozdrev had just such a weakness. The more he became friendly with a

man, the sooner would he insult him, and be ready to spread calumnies

as to his reputation. Yet all the while he would consider himself the

insulted one's friend, and, should he meet him again, would

greet him
in the most amicable style possible, and say, "You rascal, why
have
you given up coming to see me." Thus, taken all round, Nozdrev
was a
person of many aspects and numerous potentialities. In one and
the
same breath would he propose to go with you whithersoever you
might
choose (even to the very ends of the world should you so
require) or
to enter upon any sort of an enterprise with you, or to exchange
any
commodity for any other commodity which you might care to name.
Guns,
horses, dogs, all were subjects for barter--though not for
profit so
far as YOU were concerned. Such traits are mostly the outcome of
a
boisterous temperament, as is additionally exemplified by the
fact
that if at a fair he chanced to fall in with a simpleton and to
fleece
him, he would then proceed to buy a quantity of the very first
articles which came to hand--horse-collars, cigar-lighters,
dresses
for his nursemaid, foals, raisins, silver ewers, lengths of
holland,
wheatmeal, tobacco, revolvers, dried herrings, pictures,
whetstones,
crockery, boots, and so forth, until every atom of his money was
exhausted. Yet seldom were these articles conveyed home, since,
as a
rule, the same day saw them lost to some more skilful gambler,
in
addition to his pipe, his tobacco-pouch, his mouthpiece, his
four-horsed turn-out, and his coachman: with the result that,
stripped
to his very shirt, he would be forced to beg the loan of a
vehicle
from a friend.

Such was Nozdrev. Some may say that characters of his type have
become
extinct, that Nozdrevs no longer exist. Alas! such as say this
will be
wrong; for many a day must pass before the Nozdrevs will have

disappeared from our ken. Everywhere they are to be seen in our midst--the only difference between the new and the old being a difference of garments. Persons of superficial observation are apt to consider that a man clad in a different coat is quite a different person from what he used to be.

To continue. The three vehicles bowled up to the steps of Nozdrev's house, and their occupants alighted. But no preparations whatsoever had been made for the guest's reception, for on some wooden trestles in the centre of the dining-room a couple of peasants were engaged in whitewashing the ceiling and drawling out an endless song as they splashed their stuff about the floor. Hastily bidding peasants and trestles to be gone, Nozdrev departed to another room with further instructions. Indeed, so audible was the sound of his voice as he ordered dinner that Chichikov--who was beginning to feel hungry once more--was enabled to gather that it would be at least five o'clock before a meal of any kind would be available. On his return, Nozdrev invited his companions to inspect his establishment--even though as early as two o'clock he had to announce that nothing more was to be seen.

The tour began with a view of the stables, where the party saw two mares (the one a grey, and the other a roan) and a colt; which latter animal, though far from showy, Nozdrev declared to have cost him ten thousand roubles.

"You NEVER paid ten thousand roubles for the brute!" exclaimed the brother-in-law. "He isn't worth even a thousand."

"By God, I DID pay ten thousand!" asserted Nozdrev.

"You can swear that as much as you like," retorted the other.

"Will you bet that I did not?" asked Nozdrev, but the brother-in-law declined the offer.

Next, Nozdrev showed his guests some empty stalls where a number of equally fine animals (so he alleged) had lately stood. Also there was on view the goat which an old belief still considers to be an indispensable adjunct to such places, even though its apparent use is to pace up and down beneath the noses of the horses as though the place belonged to it. Thereafter the host took his guests to look at a young wolf which he had got tied to a chain. "He is fed on nothing but raw meat," he explained, "for I want him to grow up as fierce as possible." Then the party inspected a pond in which there were "fish of such a size that it would take two men all their time to lift one of them out."

This piece of information was received with renewed incredulity on the part of the brother-in-law.

"Now, Chichikov," went on Nozdrev, "let me show you a truly magnificent brace of dogs. The hardness of their muscles will surprise you, and they have jowls as sharp as needles."

So saying, he led the way to a small, but neatly-built, shed surrounded on every side with a fenced-in run. Entering this run, the visitors beheld a number of dogs of all sorts and sizes and colours. In their midst Nozdrev looked like a father lording it over his family circle. Erecting their tails--their "stems," as dog fanciers call

those members--the animals came bounding to greet the party, and fully a score of them laid their paws upon Chichikov's shoulders. Indeed, one dog was moved with such friendliness that, standing on its hind legs, it licked him on the lips, and so forced him to spit. That done, the visitors duly inspected the couple already mentioned, and expressed astonishment at their muscles. True enough, they were fine animals. Next, the party looked at a Crimean bitch which, though blind and fast nearing her end, had, two years ago, been a truly magnificent dog. At all events, so said Nozdrev. Next came another bitch--also blind; then an inspection of the water-mill, which lacked the spindle-socket wherein the upper stone ought to have been revolving--"fluttering," to use the Russian peasant's quaint expression. "But never mind," said Nozdrev. "Let us proceed to the blacksmith's shop." So to the blacksmith's shop the party proceeded, and when the said shop had been viewed, Nozdrev said as he pointed to a field:

"In this field I have seen such numbers of hares as to render the ground quite invisible. Indeed, on one occasion I, with my own hands, caught a hare by the hind legs."

"You never caught a hare by the hind legs with your hands!" remarked the brother-in-law.

"But I DID" reiterated Nozdrev. "However, let me show you the boundary where my lands come to an end."

So saying, he started to conduct his guests across a field which consisted mostly of moleheaps, and in which the party had to pick their way between strips of ploughed land and of harrowed. Soon Chichikov began to feel weary, for the terrain was so low-lying that

in many spots water could be heard squelching underfoot, and though for a while the visitors watched their feet, and stepped carefully, they soon perceived that such a course availed them nothing, and took to following their noses, without either selecting or avoiding the spots where the mire happened to be deeper or the reverse. At length, when a considerable distance had been covered, they caught sight of a boundary-post and a narrow ditch.

"That is the boundary," said Nozdrev. "Everything that you see on this side of the post is mine, as well as the forest on the other side of it, and what lies beyond the forest."

"WHEN did that forest become yours?" asked the brother-in-law. "It cannot be long since you purchased it, for it never USED to be yours."

"Yes, it isn't long since I purchased it," said Nozdrev.

"How long?"

"How long? Why, I purchased it three days ago, and gave a pretty sum for it, as the devil knows!"

"Indeed? Why, three days ago you were at the fair?"

"Wiseacre! Cannot one be at a fair and buy land at the same time? Yes, I WAS at the fair, and my steward bought the land in my absence."

"Oh, your STEWARD bought it." The brother-in-law seemed doubtful, and shook his head.

The guests returned by the same route as that by which they had come; whereafter, on reaching the house, Nozdrev conducted them to his

study, which contained not a trace of the things usually to be found in such apartments--such things as books and papers. On the contrary, the only articles to be seen were a sword and a brace of guns--the one "of them worth three hundred roubles," and the other "about eight hundred." The brother-in-law inspected the articles in question, and then shook his head as before. Next, the visitors were shown some "real Turkish" daggers, of which one bore the inadvertent inscription, "Saveli Sibiriakov[2], Master Cutler." Then came a barrel-organ, on which Nozdrev started to play some tune or another. For a while the sounds were not wholly unpleasing, but suddenly something seemed to go wrong, for a mazurka started, to be followed by "Marlborough has gone to the war," and to this, again, there succeeded an antiquated waltz. Also, long after Nozdrev had ceased to turn the handle, one particularly shrill-pitched pipe which had, throughout, refused to harmonise with the rest kept up a protracted whistling on its own account. Then followed an exhibition of tobacco pipes--pipes of clay, of wood, of meerschaum, pipes smoked and non-smoked; pipes wrapped in chamois leather and not so wrapped; an amber-mounted hookah (a stake won at cards) and a tobacco pouch (worked, it was alleged, by some countess who had fallen in love with Nozdrev at a posthouse, and whose handiwork Nozdrev averred to constitute the "sublimity of superfluity"--a term which, in the Nozdrevian vocabulary, purported to signify the acme of perfection).

[2] That is to say, a distinctively Russian name.

Finally, after some hors-d'oeuvres of sturgeon's back, they sat

down
to table--the time being then nearly five o'clock. But the meal
did
not constitute by any means the best of which Chichikov had ever
partaken, seeing that some of the dishes were overcooked, and
others
were scarcely cooked at all. Evidently their compounder had
trusted
chiefly to inspiration--she had laid hold of the first thing
which had
happened to come to hand. For instance, had pepper represented
the
nearest article within reach, she had added pepper wholesale.
Had a
cabbage chanced to be so encountered, she had pressed it also
into the
service. And the same with milk, bacon, and peas. In short, her
rule
seemed to have been "Make a hot dish of some sort, and some sort
of
taste will result." For the rest, Nozdrev drew heavily upon the
wine.
Even before the soup had been served, he had poured out for each
guest
a bumper of port and another of "haut" sauterne. (Never in
provincial
towns is ordinary, vulgar sauterne even procurable.) Next, he
called
for a bottle of madeira--"as fine a tippie as ever a field-
marshall
drank"; but the madeira only burnt the mouth, since the dealers,
familiar with the taste of our landed gentry (who love "good"
madeira)
invariably doctor the stuff with copious dashes of rum and
Imperial
vodka, in the hope that Russian stomachs will thus be enabled to
carry
off the lot. After this bottle Nozdrev called for another and "a
very
special" brand--a brand which he declared to consist of a blend
of
burgundy and champagne, and of which he poured generous measures
into
the glasses of Chichikov and the brother-in-law as they sat to
right
and left of him. But since Chichikov noticed that, after doing
so, he

added only a scanty modicum of the mixture to his own tumbler,
our
hero determined to be cautious, and therefore took advantage of
a
moment when Nozdrev had again plunged into conversation and was
yet a
third time engaged in refilling his brother-in-law's glass, to
contrive to upset his (Chichikov's) glass over his plate. In
time
there came also to table a tart of mountain-ashberries--berries
which
the host declared to equal, in taste, ripe plums, but which,
curiously
enough, smacked more of corn brandy. Next, the company consumed
a sort
of pasty of which the precise name has escaped me, but which the
host
rendered differently even on the second occasion of its being
mentioned. The meal over, and the whole tale of wines tried, the
guests still retained their seats--a circumstance which
embarrassed
Chichikov, seeing that he had no mind to propound his pet scheme
in
the presence of Nozdrev's brother-in-law, who was a complete
stranger
to him. No, that subject called for amicable and PRIVATE
conversation.
Nevertheless, the brother-in-law appeared to bode little danger,
seeing that he had taken on board a full cargo, and was now
engaged
in doing nothing of a more menacing nature than picking his
nose.
At length he himself noticed that he was not altogether in a
responsible condition; wherefore he rose and began to make
excuses for
departing homewards, though in a tone so drowsy and lethargic
that, to
quote the Russian proverb, he might almost have been "pulling a
collar
on to a horse by the clasps."

"No, no!" cried Nozdrev. "I am NOT going to let you go."

"But I MUST go," replied the brother-in-law. "Don't dry to
hinder
me. You are annoying me greatly."

"Rubbish! We are going to play a game of banker."

"No, no. You must play it without me, my friend. My wife is expecting me at home, and I must go and tell her all about the fair. Yes, I MUST go if I am to please her. Do not try to detain me."

"Your wife be--! But have you REALLY an important piece of business with her?"

"No, no, my friend. The real reason is that she is a good and trustful woman, and that she does a great deal for me. The tears spring to my eyes as I think of it. Do not detain me. As an honourable man I say that I must go. Of that I do assure you in all sincerity."

"Oh, let him go," put in Chichikov under his breath. "What use will he be here?"

"Very well," said Nozdrev, "though, damn it, I do not like fellows who lose their heads." Then he added to his brother-in-law: "All right, Thetuk[3]. Off you go to your wife and your woman's talk and may the devil go with you!"

[3] A jeering appellation which owes its origin to the fact that certain Russians cherish a prejudice against the initial character of the word--namely, the Greek theta, or TH.

"Do not insult me with the term Thetuk," retorted the brother-in-law.

"To her I owe my life, and she is a dear, good woman, and has shown me much affection. At the very thought of it I could weep. You see, she will be asking me what I have seen at the fair, and tell her about it I must, for she is such a dear, good woman."

"Then off you go to her with your pack of lies. Here is your cap."

"No, good friend, you are not to speak of her like that. By so doing you offend me greatly--I say that she is a dear, good woman."

"Then run along home to her."

"Yes, I am just going. Excuse me for having been unable to stay. Gladly would I have stayed, but really I cannot."

The brother-in-law repeated his excuses again and again without noticing that he had entered the britchka, that it had passed through the gates, and that he was now in the open country. Permissibly we may suppose that his wife succeeded in gleaning from him few details of the fair.

"What a fool!" said Nozdrev as, standing by the window, he watched the departing vehicle. "Yet his off-horse is not such a bad one. For a long time past I have been wanting to get hold of it. A man like that is simply impossible. Yes, he is a Thetuk, a regular Thetuk."

With that they repaired to the parlour, where, on Porphyri bringing candles, Chichikov perceived that his host had produced a pack of cards.

"I tell you what," said Nozdrev, pressing the sides of the pack together, and then slightly bending them, so that the pack cracked and a card flew out. "How would it be if, to pass the time, I were to make a bank of three hundred?"

Chichikov pretended not to have heard him, but remarked with an air of having just recollected a forgotten point:

"By the way, I had omitted to say that I have a request to make

of
you."

"What request?"

"First give me your word that you will grant it."

"What is the request, I say?"

"Then you give me your word, do you?"

"Certainly."

"Your word of honour?"

"My word of honour."

"This, then, is my request. I presume that you have a large
number of
dead serfs whose names have not yet been removed from the
revision
list?"

"I have. But why do you ask?"

"Because I want you to make them over to me."

"Of what use would they be to you?"

"Never mind. I have a purpose in wanting them."

"What purpose?"

"A purpose which is strictly my own affair. In short, I need
them."

"You seem to have hatched a very fine scheme. Out with it, now!
What
is in the wind?"

"How could I have hatched such a scheme as you say? One could
not very
well hatch a scheme out of such a trifle as this."

"Then for what purpose do you want the serfs?"

"Oh, the curiosity of the man! He wants to poke his fingers into

and
smell over every detail!"

"Why do you decline to say what is in your mind? At all events,
until
you DO say I shall not move in the matter."

"But how would it benefit you to know what my plans are? A whim
has
seized me. That is all. Nor are you playing fair. You have given
me
your word of honour, yet now you are trying to back out of it."

"No matter what you desire me to do, I decline to do it until
you have
told me your purpose."

"What am I to say to the fellow?" thought Chichikov. He
reflected for
a moment, and then explained that he wanted the dead souls in
order to
acquire a better standing in society, since at present he
possessed
little landed property, and only a handful of serfs.

"You are lying," said Nozdrev without even letting him finish.
"Yes,
you are lying my good friend."

Chichikov himself perceived that his device had been a clumsy
one, and
his pretext weak. "I must tell him straight out," he said to
himself as
he pulled his wits together.

"Should I tell you the truth," he added aloud, "I must beg of
you not
to repeat it. The truth is that I am thinking of getting
married. But,
unfortunately, my betrothed's father and mother are very
ambitious
people, and do not want me to marry her, since they desire the
bridegroom to own not less than three hundred souls, whereas I
own but
a hundred and fifty, and that number is not sufficient."

"Again you are lying," said Nozdrev.

"Then look here; I have been lying only to this extent." And Chichikov marked off upon his little finger a minute portion.

"Nevertheless I will bet my head that you have been lying throughout."

"Come, come! That is not very civil of you. Why should I have been lying?"

"Because I know you, and know that you are a regular skinflint. I say that in all friendship. If I possessed any power over you I should hang you to the nearest tree."

This remark hurt Chichikov, for at any time he disliked expressions gross or offensive to decency, and never allowed any one--no, not even persons of the highest rank--to behave towards him with an undue measure of familiarity. Consequently his sense of umbrage on the present occasion was unbounded.

"By God, I WOULD hang you!" repeated Nozdrev. "I say this frankly, and not for the purpose of offending you, but simply to communicate to you my friendly opinion."

"To everything there are limits," retorted Chichikov stiffly. "If you want to indulge in speeches of that sort you had better return to the barracks."

However, after a pause he added:

"If you do not care to give me the serfs, why not SELL them?"

"SELL them? I know you, you rascal! You wouldn't give me very much for them, WOULD you?"

"A nice fellow! Look here. What are they to you? So many

diamonds, eh?"

"I thought so! I know you!"

"Pardon me, but I could wish that you were a member of the Jewish persuasion. You would give them to me fast enough then."

"On the contrary, to show you that I am not a usurer, I will decline to ask of you a single kopeck for the serfs. All that you need do is to buy that colt of mine, and then I will throw in the serfs in addition."

"But what should I want with your colt?" said Chichikov, genuinely astonished at the proposal.

"What should YOU want with him? Why, I have bought him for ten thousand roubles, and am ready to let you have him for four."

"I ask you again: of what use could the colt possibly be to me? I am not the keeper of a breeding establishment."

"Ah! I see that you fail to understand me. Let me suggest that you pay down at once three thousand roubles of the purchase money, and leave the other thousand until later."

"But I do not mean to buy the colt, damn him!"

"Then buy the roan mare."

"No, nor the roan mare."

"Then you shall have both the mare and the grey horse which you have seen in my stables for two thousand roubles."

"I require no horses at all."

"But you would be able to sell them again. You would be able to get thrice their purchase price at the very first fair that was

held."

"Then sell them at that fair yourself, seeing that you are so certain of making a triple profit."

"Oh, I should make it fast enough, only I want YOU to benefit by the transaction."

Chichikov duly thanked his interlocutor, but continued to decline either the grey horse or the roan mare.

"Then buy a few dogs," said Nozdrev. "I can sell you a couple of hides a-quiver, ears well pricked, coats like quills, ribs barrel-shaped, and paws so tucked up as scarcely to graze the ground when they run."

"Of what use would those dogs be to me? I am not a sportsman."

"But I WANT you to have the dogs. Listen. If you won't have the dogs, then buy my barrel-organ. 'Tis a splendid instrument. As a man of honour I can tell you that, when new, it cost me fifteen hundred roubles. Well, you shall have it for nine hundred."

"Come, come! What should I want with a barrel-organ? I am not a German, to go hauling it about the roads and begging for coppers."

"But this is quite a different kind of organ from the one which Germans take about with them. You see, it is a REAL organ. Look at it for yourself. It is made of the best wood. I will take you to have another view of it."

And seizing Chichikov by the hand, Nozdrev drew him towards the other room, where, in spite of the fact that Chichikov, with his feet planted firmly on the floor, assured his host, again and again, that he knew exactly what the organ was like, he was forced once more to

hear how Marlborough went to the war.

"Then, since you don't care to give me any money for it," persisted Nozdrev, "listen to the following proposal. I will give you the barrel-organ and all the dead souls which I possess, and in return you shall give me your britchka, and another three hundred roubles into the bargain."

"Listen to the man! In that case, what should I have left to drive in?"

"Oh, I would stand you another britchka. Come to the coach-house, and I will show you the one I mean. It only needs repainting to look a perfectly splendid britchka."

"The ramping, incorrigible devil!" thought Chichikov to himself as at all hazards he resolved to escape from britchkas, organs, and every species of dog, however marvellously barrel-ribbed and tucked up of paw.

"And in exchange, you shall have the britchka, the barrel-organ, and the dead souls," repeated Nozdrev.

"I must decline the offer," said Chichikov.

"And why?"

"Because I don't WANT the things--I am full up already."

"I can see that you don't know how things should be done between good friends and comrades. Plainly you are a man of two faces."

"What do you mean, you fool? Think for yourself. Why should I acquire articles which I don't want?"

"Say no more about it, if you please. I have quite taken your measure.

But see here. Should you care to play a game of banker? I am ready to stake both the dead souls and the barrel-organ at cards."

"No; to leave an issue to cards means to submit oneself to the unknown," said Chichikov, covertly glancing at the pack which Nozdrev had got in his hands. Somehow the way in which his companion had cut that pack seemed to him suspicious.

"Why 'to the unknown'?" asked Nozdrev. "There is no such thing as 'the unknown.' Should luck be on your side, you may win the devil knows what a haul. Oh, luck, luck!" he went on, beginning to deal, in the hope of raising a quarrel. "Here is the cursed nine upon which, the other night, I lost everything. All along I knew that I should lose my money. Said I to myself: 'The devil take you, you false, accursed card!'"

Just as Nozdrev uttered the words Porphyri entered with a fresh bottle of liquor; but Chichikov declined either to play or to drink.

"Why do you refuse to play?" asked Nozdrev.

"Because I feel indisposed to do so. Moreover, I must confess that I am no great hand at cards."

"WHY are you no great hand at them?"

Chichikov shrugged his shoulders. "Because I am not," he replied.

"You are no great hand at ANYTHING, I think."

"What does that matter? God has made me so."

"The truth is that you are a Thetuk, and nothing else. Once upon

a
time I believed you to be a good fellow, but now I see that you
don't
understand civility. One cannot speak to you as one would to an
intimate, for there is no frankness or sincerity about you. You
are a
regular Sobakevitch--just such another as he."

"For what reason are you abusing me? Am I in any way at fault
for
declining to play cards? Sell me those souls if you are the man
to
hesitate over such rubbish."

"The foul fiend take you! I was about to have given them to you
for
nothing, but now you shan't have them at all--not if you offer
me
three kingdoms in exchange. Henceforth I will have nothing to do
with
you, you cobbler, you dirty blacksmith! Porphyri, go and tell
the
ostler to give the gentleman's horses no oats, but only hay."

This development Chichikov had hardly expected.

"And do you," added Nozdrev to his guest, "get out of my sight."

Yet in spite of this, host and guest took supper together--even
though
on this occasion the table was adorned with no wines of
fictitious
nomenclature, but only with a bottle which reared its solitary
head
beside a jug of what is usually known as vin ordinaire. When
supper
was over Nozdrev said to Chichikov as he conducted him to a side
room
where a bed had been made up:

"This is where you are to sleep. I cannot very well wish you
good-night."

Left to himself on Nozdrev's departure, Chichikov felt in a most
unenviable frame of mind. Full of inward vexation, he blamed
himself
bitterly for having come to see this man and so wasted valuable

time;
but even more did he blame himself for having told him of his
scheme--for having acted as carelessly as a child or a madman.
Of a
surety the scheme was not one which ought to have been confided
to a
man like Nozdrev, for he was a worthless fellow who might lie
about
it, and append additions to it, and spread such stories as would
give
rise to God knows what scandals. "This is indeed bad!" Chichikov
said
to himself. "I have been an absolute fool." Consequently he
spent an
uneasy night--this uneasiness being increased by the fact that a
number of small, but vigorous, insects so feasted upon him that
he
could do nothing but scratch the spots and exclaim, "The devil
take
you and Nozdrev alike!" Only when morning was approaching did he
fall
asleep. On rising, he made it his first business (after donning
dressing-gown and slippers) to cross the courtyard to the
stable, for
the purpose of ordering Selifan to harness the britchka. Just as
he
was returning from his errand he encountered Nozdrev, clad in a
dressing-gown, and holding a pipe between his teeth.

Host and guest greeted one another in friendly fashion, and
Nozdrev
inquired how Chichikov had slept.

"Fairly well," replied Chichikov, but with a touch of dryness in
his
tone.

"The same with myself," said Nozdrev. "The truth is that such a
lot of
nasty brutes kept crawling over me that even to speak of it
gives me
the shudders. Likewise, as the effect of last night's doings, a
whole
squadron of soldiers seemed to be camping on my chest, and
giving me a
flogging. Ugh! And whom also do you think I saw in a dream? You
would

never guess. Why, it was Staff-Captain Potsieluev and Lieutenant Kuvshinnikov!"

"Yes," thought Chichikov to himself, "and I wish that they too would give you a public thrashing!"

"I felt so ill!" went on Nozdrev. "And just after I had fallen asleep something DID come and sting me. Probably it was a party of hag fleas. Now, dress yourself, and I will be with you presently. First of all I must give that scoundrel of a bailiff a wiggling."

Chichikov departed to his own room to wash and dress; which process completed, he entered the dining-room to find the table laid with tea-things and a bottle of rum. Clearly no broom had yet touched the place, for there remained traces of the previous night's dinner and supper in the shape of crumbs thrown over the floor and tobacco ash on the tablecloth. The host himself, when he entered, was still clad in a dressing-gown exposing a hairy chest; and as he sat holding his pipe in his hand, and drinking tea from a cup, he would have made a model for the sort of painter who prefers to portray gentlemen of the less curled and scented order.

"What think you?" he asked of Chichikov after a short silence. "Are you willing NOW to play me for those souls?"

"I have told you that I never play cards. If the souls are for sale, I will buy them."

"I decline to sell them. Such would not be the course proper between friends. But a game of banker would be quite another matter. Let us deal the cards."

"I have told you that I decline to play."

"And you will not agree to an exchange?"

"No."

"Then look here. Suppose we play a game of chess. If you win, the souls shall be yours. There are lot which I should like to see crossed off the revision list. Hi, Porphyri! Bring me the chessboard."

"You are wasting your time. I will play neither chess nor cards."

"But chess is different from playing with a bank. In chess there can be neither luck nor cheating, for everything depends upon skill. In fact, I warn you that I cannot possibly play with you unless you allow me a move or two in advance."

"The same with me," thought Chichikov. "Shall I, or shall I not, play this fellow? I used not to be a bad chess-player, and it is a sport in which he would find it more difficult to be up to his tricks."

"Very well," he added aloud. "I WILL play you at chess."

"And stake the souls for a hundred roubles?" asked Nozdrev.

"No. Why for a hundred? Would it not be sufficient to stake them for fifty?"

"No. What would be the use of fifty? Nevertheless, for the hundred roubles I will throw in a moderately old puppy, or else a gold seal and watch-chain."

"Very well," assented Chichikov.

"Then how many moves are you going to allow me?"

"Is THAT to be part of the bargain? Why, none, of course."

"At least allow me two."

"No, none. I myself am only a poor player."

"_I_ know you and your poor play," said Nozdrev, moving a chessman.

"In fact, it is a long time since last I had a chessman in my hand,"
replied Chichikov, also moving a piece.

"Ah! _I_ know you and your poor play," repeated Nozdrev, moving a
second chessman.

"I say again that it is a long time since last I had a chessman in my
hand." And Chichikov, in his turn, moved.

"Ah! _I_ know you and your poor play," repeated Nozdrev, for the third
time as he made a third move. At the same moment the cuff of one of
his sleeves happened to dislodge another chessman from its
position.

"Again, I say," said Chichikov, "that 'tis a long time since
last--But
hi! look here! Put that piece back in its place!"

"What piece?"

"This one." And almost as Chichikov spoke he saw a third
chessman
coming into view between the queens. God only knows whence that
chessman had materialised.

"No, no!" shouted Chichikov as he rose from the table. "It is
impossible to play with a man like you. People don't move three
pieces
at once."

"How 'three pieces'? All that I have done is to make a mistake--
to
move one of my pieces by accident. If you like, I will forfeit

it to
you."

"And whence has the third piece come?"

"What third piece?"

"The one now standing between the queens?"

"'Tis one of your own pieces. Surely you are forgetting?"

"No, no, my friend. I have counted every move, and can remember each
one. That piece has only just become added to the board. Put it
back
in its place, I say."

"Its place? Which IS its place?" But Nozdrev had reddened a good
deal. "I perceive you to be a strategist at the game."

"No, no, good friend. YOU are the strategist--though an
unsuccessful
one, as it happens."

"Then of what are you supposing me capable? Of cheating you?"

"I am not supposing you capable of anything. All that I say is
that I
will not play with you any more."

"But you can't refuse to," said Nozdrev, growing heated. "You
see, the
game has begun."

"Nevertheless, I have a right not to continue it, seeing that
you are
not playing as an honest man should do."

"You are lying--you cannot truthfully say that."

"'Tis you who are lying."

"But I have NOT cheated. Consequently you cannot refuse to play,
but
must continue the game to a finish."

"You cannot force me to play," retorted Chichikov coldly as,

turning
to the chessboard, he swept the pieces into confusion.

Nozdrev approached Chichikov with a manner so threatening that the other fell back a couple of paces.

"I WILL force you to play," said Nozdrev. "It is no use you making a mess of the chessboard, for I can remember every move. We will replace the chessmen exactly as they were."

"No, no, my friend. The game is over, and I play you no more."

"You say that you will not?"

"Yes. Surely you can see for yourself that such a thing is impossible?"

"That cock won't fight. Say at once that you refuse to play with me."

And Nozdrev approached a step nearer.

"Very well; I DO say that," replied Chichikov, and at the same moment raised his hands towards his face, for the dispute was growing heated. Nor was the act of caution altogether unwarranted, for Nozdrev also raised his fist, and it may be that one of her hero's plump, pleasant-looking cheeks would have sustained an indelible insult had not he (Chichikov) parried the blow and, seizing Nozdrev by his whirling arms, held them fast.

"Porphyri! Pavlushka!" shouted Nozdrev as madly he strove to free himself.

On hearing the words, Chichikov, both because he wished to avoid rendering the servants witnesses of the unedifying scene and because he felt that it would be of no avail to hold Nozdrev any longer, let go of the latter's arms; but at the same moment Porphyri and Pavlushka entered the room--a pair of stout rascals with whom it would be

unwise
to meddle.

"Do you, or do you not, intend to finish the game?" said
Nozdrev.
"Give me a direct answer."

"No; it will not be possible to finish the game," replied
Chichikov,
glancing out of the window. He could see his britchka standing
ready
for him, and Selifan evidently awaiting orders to draw up to the
entrance steps. But from the room there was no escape, since in
the
doorway was posted the couple of well-built serving-men.

"Then it is as I say? You refuse to finish the game?" repeated
Nozdrev, his face as red as fire.

"I would have finished it had you played like a man of honour.
But, as
it is, I cannot."

"You cannot, eh, you villain? You find that you cannot as soon
as you
find that you are not winning? Thrash him, you fellows!" And as
he
spoke Nozdrev grasped the cherrywood shank of his pipe.
Chichikov
turned as white as a sheet. He tried to say something, but his
quivering lips emitted no sound. "Thrash him!" again shouted
Nozdrev
as he rushed forward in a state of heat and perspiration more
proper
to a warrior who is attacking an impregnable fortress. "Thrash
him!"
again he shouted in a voice like that of some half-demented
lieutenant
whose desperate bravery has acquired such a reputation that
orders
have had to be issued that his hands shall be held lest he
attempt
deeds of over-presumptuous daring. Seized with the military
spirit,
however, the lieutenant's head begins to whirl, and before his
eye
there flits the image of Suvorov[4]. He advances to the great

encounter, and impulsively cries, "Forward, my sons!"--cries it without reflecting that he may be spoiling the plan of the general attack, that millions of rifles may be protruding their muzzles through the embrasures of the impregnable, towering walls of the fortress, that his own impotent assault may be destined to be dissipated like dust before the wind, and that already there may have been launched on its whistling career the bullet which is to close for ever his vociferous throat. However, if Nozdrev resembled the headstrong, desperate lieutenant whom we have just pictured as advancing upon a fortress, at least the fortress itself in no way resembled the impregnable stronghold which I have described. As a matter of fact, the fortress became seized with a panic which drove its spirit into its boots. First of all, the chair with which Chichikov (the fortress in question) sought to defend himself was wrested from his grasp by the serfs, and then--blinking and neither alive nor dead--he turned to parry the Circassian pipe-stem of his host. In fact, God only knows what would have happened had not the fates been pleased by a miracle to deliver Chichikov's elegant back and shoulders from the onslaught. Suddenly, and as unexpectedly as though the sound had come from the clouds, there made itself heard the tinkling notes of a collar-bell, and then the rumble of wheels approaching the entrance steps, and, lastly, the snorting and hard breathing of a team of horses as a vehicle came to a standstill. Involuntarily all present glanced through the window, and saw a man clad in a semi-military greatcoat leap from a buggy. After making an inquiry or two in the hall, he entered the dining-room just at the juncture when Chichikov, almost swooning with terror, had found himself placed in about as awkward a situation as could well befall a mortal man.

[4] The great Russian general who, after winning fame in the Seven Years' War, met with disaster when attempting to assist the Austrians against the French in 1799.

"Kindly tell me which of you is Monsieur Nozdrev?" said the unknown with a glance of perplexity both at the person named (who was still standing with pipe-shank upraised) and at Chichikov (who was just beginning to recover from his unpleasant predicament).

"Kindly tell ME whom I have the honour of addressing?" retorted Nozdrev as he approached the official.

"I am the Superintendent of Rural Police."

"And what do you want?"

"I have come to fulfil a commission imposed upon me. That is to say, I have come to place you under arrest until your case shall have been decided."

"Rubbish! What case, pray?"

"The case in which you involved yourself when, in a drunken condition, and through the instrumentality of a walking-stick, you offered grave offence to the person of Landowner Maksimov."

"You lie! To your face I tell you that never in my life have I set eyes upon Landowner Maksimov."

"Good sir, allow me to represent to you that I am a Government officer. Speeches like that you may address to your servants, but not to me."

At this point Chichikov, without waiting for Nozdrev's reply, seized his cap, slipped behind the Superintendent's back, rushed out on to

the verandah, sprang into his britchka, and ordered Selifan to drive like the wind.

CHAPTER V

Certainly Chichikov was a thorough coward, for, although the britchka pursued its headlong course until Nozdrev's establishment had disappeared behind hillocks and hedgerows, our hero continued to glance nervously behind him, as though every moment expecting to see a stern chase begin. His breath came with difficulty, and when he tried his heart with his hands he could feel it fluttering like a quail caught in a net.

"What a sweat the fellow has thrown me into!" he thought to himself, while many a dire and forceful aspiration passed through his mind. Indeed, the expressions to which he gave vent were most inelegant in their nature. But what was to be done next? He was a Russian and thoroughly aroused. The affair had been no joke. "But for the Superintendent," he reflected, "I might never again have looked upon God's daylight--I might have vanished like a bubble on a pool, and left neither trace nor posterity nor property nor an honourable name for my future offspring to inherit!" (it seemed that our hero was particularly anxious with regard to his possible issue).

"What a scurvy barin!" mused Selifan as he drove along. "Never have I seen such a barin. I should like to spit in his face. 'Tis better to allow a man nothing to eat than to refuse to feed a horse properly. A horse needs his oats--they are his proper fare. Even if you make a man procure a meal at his own expense, don't deny a horse his oats,

for he
ought always to have them."

An equally poor opinion of Nozdrev seemed to be cherished also
by the
steeds, for not only were the bay and the Assessor clearly out
of
spirits, but even the skewbald was wearing a dejected air. True,
at
home the skewbald got none but the poorer sorts of oats to eat,
and
Selifan never filled his trough without having first called him
a
villain; but at least they WERE oats, and not hay--they were
stuff
which could be chewed with a certain amount of relish. Also,
there was
the fact that at intervals he could intrude his long nose into
his
companions' troughs (especially when Selifan happened to be
absent
from the stable) and ascertain what THEIR provender was like.
But at
Nozdrev's there had been nothing but hay! That was not right.
All
three horses felt greatly discontented.

But presently the malcontents had their reflections cut short in
a
very rude and unexpected manner. That is to say, they were
brought
back to practicalities by coming into violent collision with a
six-horsed vehicle, while upon their heads descended both a
babel of
cries from the ladies inside and a storm of curses and abuse
from the
coachman. "Ah, you damned fool!" he vociferated. "I shouted to
you
loud enough! Draw out, you old raven, and keep to the right! Are
you
drunk?" Selifan himself felt conscious that he had been
careless, but
since a Russian does not care to admit a fault in the presence
of
strangers, he retorted with dignity: "Why have you run into US?
Did
you leave your eyes behind you at the last tavern that you

stopped
at?" With that he started to back the britchka, in the hope that
it
might get clear of the other's harness; but this would not do,
for the
pair were too hopelessly intertwined. Meanwhile the skewbald
snuffed
curiously at his new acquaintances as they stood planted on
either
side of him; while the ladies in the vehicle regarded the scene
with
an expression of terror. One of them was an old woman, and the
other a
damsel of about sixteen. A mass of golden hair fell daintily
from a
small head, and the oval of her comely face was as shapely as an
egg,
and white with the transparent whiteness seen when the hands of
a
housewife hold a new-laid egg to the light to let the sun's rays
filter through its shell. The same tint marked the maiden's ears
where
they glowed in the sunshine, and, in short, what with the tears
in her
wide-open, arresting eyes, she presented so attractive a picture
that
our hero bestowed upon it more than a passing glance before he
turned
his attention to the hubbub which was being raised among the
horses
and the coachmen.

"Back out, you rook of Nizhni Novgorod!" the strangers' coachman
shouted. Selifan tightened his reins, and the other driver did
the
same. The horses stepped back a little, and then came together
again--this time getting a leg or two over the traces. In fact,
so
pleased did the skewbald seem with his new friends that he
refused to
stir from the melee into which an unforeseen chance had plunged
him.
Laying his muzzle lovingly upon the neck of one of his
recently-acquired acquaintances, he seemed to be whispering
something
in that acquaintance's ear--and whispering pretty nonsense, too,
to

judge from the way in which that confidant kept shaking his ears.

At length peasants from a village which happened to be near the scene of the accident tackled the mess; and since a spectacle of that kind is to the Russian muzhik what a newspaper or a club-meeting is to the German, the vehicles soon became the centre of a crowd, and the village denuded even of its old women and children. The traces were disentangled, and a few slaps on the nose forced the skewbald to draw back a little; after which the teams were straightened out and separated. Nevertheless, either sheer obstinacy or vexation at being parted from their new friends caused the strange team absolutely to refuse to move a leg. Their driver laid the whip about them, but still they stood as though rooted to the spot. At length the participatory efforts of the peasants rose to an unprecedented degree of enthusiasm, and they shouted in an intermittent chorus the advice, "Do you, Andrusha, take the head of the trace horse on the right, while Uncle Mitai mounts the shaft horse. Get up, Uncle Mitai." Upon that the lean, long, and red-bearded Uncle Mitai mounted the shaft horse; in which position he looked like a village steeple or the winder which is used to raise water from wells. The coachman whipped up his steeds afresh, but nothing came of it, and Uncle Mitai had proved useless. "Hold on, hold on!" shouted the peasants again. "Do you, Uncle Mitai, mount the trace horse, while Uncle Minai mounts the shaft horse." Whereupon Uncle Minai--a peasant with a pair of broad shoulders, a beard as black as charcoal, and a belly like the huge samovar in which sbiten is brewed for all attending a local market--hastened to

seat
himself upon the shaft horse, which almost sank to the ground
beneath
his weight. "NOW they will go all right!" the muzhiks exclaimed.
"Lay it on hot, lay it on hot! Give that sorrel horse the whip,
and
make him squirm like a koramora[1]." Nevertheless, the affair in
no
way progressed; wherefore, seeing that flogging was of no use,
Uncles
Mitai and Minai BOTH mounted the sorrel, while Andrussha seated
himself upon the trace horse. Then the coachman himself lost
patience,
and sent the two Uncles about their business--and not before it
was
time, seeing that the horses were steaming in a way that made it
clear
that, unless they were first winded, they would never reach the
next
posthouse. So they were given a moment's rest. That done, they
moved
off of their own accord!

[1] A kind of large gnat.

Throughout, Chichikov had been gazing at the young unknown with
great
attention, and had even made one or two attempts to enter into
conversation with her: but without success. Indeed, when the
ladies
departed, it was as in a dream that he saw the girl's comely
presence,
the delicate features of her face, and the slender outline of
her form
vanish from his sight; it was as in a dream that once more he
saw only
the road, the britchka, the three horses, Selifan, and the bare,
empty
fields. Everywhere in life--yes, even in the plainest, the
dingiest
ranks of society, as much as in those which are uniformly bright
and
presentable--a man may happen upon some phenomenon which is so
entirely different from those which have hitherto fallen to his
lot.
Everywhere through the web of sorrow of which our lives are
woven

there may suddenly break a clear, radiant thread of joy; even as suddenly along the street of some poor, poverty-stricken village which, ordinarily, sees nought but a farm waggon there may come bowling a gorgeous coach with plated harness, picturesque horses, and a glitter of glass, so that the peasants stand gaping, and do not resume their caps until long after the strange equipage has become lost to sight. Thus the golden-haired maiden makes a sudden, unexpected appearance in our story, and as suddenly, as unexpectedly, disappears. Indeed, had it not been that the person concerned was Chichikov, and not some youth of twenty summers--a hussar or a student or, in general, a man standing on the threshold of life--what thoughts would not have sprung to birth, and stirred and spoken, within him; for what a length of time would he not have stood entranced as he stared into the distance and forgot alike his journey, the business still to be done, the possibility of incurring loss through lingering--himself, his vocation, the world, and everything else that the world contains!

But in the present case the hero was a man of middle-age, and of cautious and frigid temperament. True, he pondered over the incident, but in more deliberate fashion than a younger man would have done. That is to say, his reflections were not so irresponsible and unsteady. "She was a comely damsel," he said to himself as he opened his snuff-box and took a pinch. "But the important point is: Is she also a NICE DAMSEL? One thing she has in her favour--and that is that she appears only just to have left school, and not to have had time to become womanly in the worser sense. At present, therefore, she is like a child. Everything in her is simple, and she says just what she thinks, and laughs merely when she feels inclined. Such a

damsel
might be made into anything--or she might be turned into
worthless
rubbish. The latter, I surmise, for trudging after her she will
have a
fond mother and a bevy of aunts, and so forth--persons who,
within a
year, will have filled her with womanishness to the point where
her
own father wouldn't know her. And to that there will be added
pride
and affectation, and she will begin to observe established
rules, and
to rack her brains as to how, and how much, she ought to talk,
and to
whom, and where, and so forth. Every moment will see her growing
timorous and confused lest she be saying too much. Finally, she
will
develop into a confirmed prevaricator, and end by marrying the
devil
knows whom!" Chichikov paused awhile. Then he went on: "Yet I
should
like to know who she is, and who her father is, and whether he
is a
rich landowner of good standing, or merely a respectable man who
has
acquired a fortune in the service of the Government. Should he
allow
her, on marriage, a dowry of, say, two hundred thousand roubles,
she
will be a very nice catch indeed. She might even, so to speak,
make a
man of good breeding happy."

Indeed, so attractively did the idea of the two hundred thousand
roubles begin to dance before his imagination that he felt a
twinge of
self-reproach because, during the hubbub, he had not inquired of
the
postillion or the coachman who the travellers might be. But soon
the
sight of Sobakevitch's country house dissipated his thoughts,
and
forced him to return to his stock subject of reflection.

Sobakevitch's country house and estate were of very fair size,
and on

each side of the mansion were expanses of birch and pine forest in two shades of green. The wooden edifice itself had dark-grey walls and a red-gabled roof, for it was a mansion of the kind which Russia builds for her military settlers and for German colonists. A noticeable circumstance was the fact that the taste of the architect had differed from that of the proprietor--the former having manifestly been a pedant and desirous of symmetry, and the latter having wished only for comfort. Consequently he (the proprietor) had dispensed with all windows on one side of the mansion, and had caused to be inserted, in their place, only a small aperture which, doubtless, was intended to light an otherwise dark lumber-room. Likewise, the architect's best efforts had failed to cause the pediment to stand in the centre of the building, since the proprietor had had one of its four original columns removed. Evidently durability had been considered throughout, for the courtyard was enclosed by a strong and very high wooden fence, and both the stables, the coach-house, and the culinary premises were partially constructed of beams warranted to last for centuries. Nay, even the wooden huts of the peasantry were wonderful in the solidity of their construction, and not a clay wall or a carved pattern or other device was to be seen. Everything fitted exactly into its right place, and even the draw-well of the mansion was fashioned of the oakwood usually thought suitable only for mills or ships. In short, wherever Chichikov's eye turned he saw nothing that was not free from shoddy make and well and skilfully arranged. As he approached the entrance steps he caught sight of two faces peering from a window. One of them was that of a woman in a mobcap with features as long

and as
narrow as a cucumber, and the other that of a man with features
as
broad and as short as the Moldavian pumpkins (known as
gorlianki)
whereof balallaiki--the species of light, two-stringed
instrument
which constitutes the pride and the joy of the gay young fellow
of
twenty as he sits winking and smiling at the white-necked,
white-bosomed maidens who have gathered to listen to his low-
pitched
tinkling--are fashioned. This scrutiny made, both faces
withdrew, and
there came out on to the entrance steps a lacquey clad in a grey
jacket and a stiff blue collar. This functionary conducted
Chichikov
into the hall, where he was met by the master of the house
himself,
who requested his guest to enter, and then led him into the
inner part
of the mansion.

A covert glance at Sobakevitch showed our hero that his host
exactly
resembled a moderate-sized bear. To complete the resemblance,
Sobakevitch's long frockcoat and baggy trousers were of the
precise
colour of a bear's hide, while, when shuffling across the floor,
he
made a criss-cross motion of the legs, and had, in addition, a
constant habit of treading upon his companion's toes. As for his
face,
it was of the warm, ardent tint of a piatok[2]. Persons of this
kind--persons to whose designing nature has devoted not much
thought,
and in the fashioning of whose frames she has used no
instruments so
delicate as a file or a gimlet and so forth--are not uncommon.
Such
persons she merely roughhews. One cut with a hatchet, and there
results a nose; another such cut with a hatchet, and there
materialises a pair of lips; two thrusts with a drill, and there
issues a pair of eyes. Lastly, scorning to plane down the
roughness,
she sends out that person into the world, saying: "There is
another

live creature." Sobakevitch was just such a ragged, curiously put together figure--though the above model would seem to have been followed more in his upper portion than in his lower. One result was that he seldom turned his head to look at the person with whom he was speaking, but, rather, directed his eyes towards, say, the stove corner or the doorway. As host and guest crossed the dining-room Chichikov directed a second glance at his companion. "He is a bear, and nothing but a bear," he thought to himself. And, indeed, the strange comparison was inevitable. Incidentally, Sobakevitch's Christian name and patronymic were Michael Semenovitch. Of his habit of treading upon other people's toes Chichikov had become fully aware; wherefore he stepped cautiously, and, throughout, allowed his host to take the lead. As a matter of fact, Sobakevitch himself seemed conscious of his failing, for at intervals he would inquire: "I hope I have not hurt you?" and Chichikov, with a word of thanks, would reply that as yet he had sustained no injury.

[2] A copper coin worth five kopecks.

At length they reached the drawing-room, where Sobakevitch pointed to an armchair, and invited his guest to be seated. Chichikov gazed with interest at the walls and the pictures. In every such picture there were portrayed either young men or Greek generals of the type of Movrogordato (clad in a red uniform and breaches), Kanaris, and others; and all these heroes were depicted with a solidity of thigh and a wealth of moustache which made the beholder simply shudder with awe. Among them there were placed also, according to some unknown system, and for some unknown reason, firstly, Bagration[3]--tall and thin, and with a cluster of small flags and cannon beneath him, and the whole set in the narrowest of frames--and, secondly, the

Greek
heroine, Bobelina, whose legs looked larger than do the whole
bodies
of the drawing-room dandies of the present day. Apparently the
master
of the house was himself a man of health and strength, and
therefore
liked to have his apartments adorned with none but folk of equal
vigour and robustness. Lastly, in the window, and suspected
cheek by
jowl with Bobelina, there hung a cage whence at intervals there
peered
forth a white-spotted blackbird. Like everything else in the
apartment, it bore a strong resemblance to Sobakevitch. When
host and
guest had been conversing for two minutes or so the door opened,
and
there entered the hostess--a tall lady in a cap adorned with
ribands
of domestic colouring and manufacture. She entered deliberately,
and
held her head as erect as a palm.

[3] A Russian general who fought against Napoleon, and was
mortally
wounded at Borodino.

"This is my wife, Theodulia Ivanovna," said Sobakevitch.

Chichikov approached and took her hand. The fact that she raised
it
nearly to the level of his lips apprised him of the circumstance
that
it had just been rinsed in cucumber oil.

"My dear, allow me to introduce Paul Ivanovitch Chichikov,"
added
Sobakevitch. "He has the honour of being acquainted both with
our
Governor and with our Postmaster."

Upon this Theodulia Ivanovna requested her guest to be seated,
and
accompanied the invitation with the kind of bow usually employed
only
by actresses who are playing the role of queens. Next, she took
a seat

upon the sofa, drew around her her merino gown, and sat thereafter without moving an eyelid or an eyebrow. As for Chichikov, he glanced upwards, and once more caught sight of Kanaris with his fat thighs and interminable moustache, and of Bobelina and the blackbird. For fully five minutes all present preserved a complete silence--the only sound audible being that of the blackbird's beak against the wooden floor of the cage as the creature fished for grains of corn. Meanwhile Chichikov again surveyed the room, and saw that everything in it was massive and clumsy in the highest degree; as also that everything was curiously in keeping with the master of the house. For example, in one corner of the apartment there stood a hazelwood bureau with a bulging body on four grotesque legs--the perfect image of a bear. Also, the tables and the chairs were of the same ponderous, unrestful order, and every single article in the room appeared to be saying either, "I, too, am a Sobakevitch," or "I am exactly like Sobakevitch."

"I heard speak of you one day when I was visiting the President of the Council," said Chichikov, on perceiving that no one else had a mind to begin a conversation. "That was on Thursday last. We had a very pleasant evening."

"Yes, on that occasion I was not there," replied Sobakevitch.

"What a nice man he is!"

"Who is?" inquired Sobakevitch, gazing into the corner by the stove.

"The President of the Local Council."

"Did he seem so to you? True, he is a mason, but he is also the greatest fool that the world ever saw."

Chichikov started a little at this mordant criticism, but soon pulled himself together again, and continued:

"Of course, every man has his weakness. Yet the President seems to be an excellent fellow."

"And do you think the same of the Governor?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Because there exists no greater rogue than he."

"What? The Governor a rogue?" ejaculated Chichikov, at a loss to understand how the official in question could come to be numbered with thieves. "Let me say that I should never have guessed it. Permit me also to remark that his conduct would hardly seem to bear out your opinion--he seems so gentle a man." And in proof of this Chichikov cited the purses which the Governor knitted, and also expatiated on the mildness of his features.

"He has the face of a robber," said Sobakevitch. "Were you to give him a knife, and to turn him loose on a turnpike, he would cut your throat for two kopecks. And the same with the Vice-Governor. The pair are just Gog and Magog."

"Evidently he is not on good terms with them," thought Chichikov to himself. "I had better pass to the Chief of Police, which whom he DOES seem to be friendly." Accordingly he added aloud: "For my own part, I should give the preference to the Head of the Gendarmery. What a frank, outspoken nature he has! And what an element of simplicity does his expression contain!"

"He is mean to the core," remarked Sobakevitch coldly. "He will sell you and cheat you, and then dine at your table. Yes, I know them all, and every one of them is a swindler, and the town a nest of rascals engaged in robbing one another. Not a man of the lot is there but would sell Christ. Yet stay: ONE decent fellow there is--the Public Prosecutor; though even HE, if the truth be told, is little better than a pig."

After these eulogia Chichikov saw that it would be useless to continue running through the list of officials--more especially since suddenly he had remembered that Sobakevitch was not at any time given to commending his fellow man.

"Let us go to luncheon, my dear," put in Theodulia Ivanovna to her spouse.

"Yes; pray come to table," said Sobakevitch to his guest; whereupon they consumed the customary glass of vodka (accompanied by sundry snacks of salted cucumber and other dainties) with which Russians, both in town and country, preface a meal. Then they filed into the dining-room in the wake of the hostess, who sailed on ahead like a goose swimming across a pond. The small dining-table was found to be laid for four persons--the fourth place being occupied by a lady or a young girl (it would have been difficult to say which exactly) who might have been either a relative, the housekeeper, or a casual visitor. Certain persons in the world exist, not as personalities in themselves, but as spots or specks on the personalities of others.

Always they are to be seen sitting in the same place, and holding their heads at exactly the same angle, so that one comes within an ace of mistaking them for furniture, and thinks to oneself that never since the day of their birth can they have spoken a single word.

"My dear," said Sobakevitch, "the cabbage soup is excellent." With that he finished his portion, and helped himself to a generous measure of niania[4]--the dish which follows shtchi and consists of a sheep's stomach stuffed with black porridge, brains, and other things. "What niania this is!" he added to Chichikov. "Never would you get such stuff in a town, where one is given the devil knows what."

[4] Literally, "nursemaid."

"Nevertheless the Governor keeps a fair table," said Chichikov.

"Yes, but do you know what all the stuff is MADE OF?" retorted Sobakevitch. "If you DID know you would never touch it."

"Of course I am not in a position to say how it is prepared, but at least the pork cutlets and the boiled fish seemed excellent."

"Ah, it might have been thought so; yet I know the way in which such things are bought in the market-place. They are bought by some rascal of a cook whom a Frenchman has taught how to skin a tomcat and then serve it up as hare."

"Ugh! What horrible things you say!" put in Madame.

"Well, my dear, that is how things are done, and it is no fault of mine that it is so. Moreover, everything that is left over--everything that WE (pardon me for mentioning it) cast into the slop-pail--is

used by such folk for making soup."

"Always at table you begin talking like this!" objected his helpmeet.

"And why not?" said Sobakevitch. "I tell you straight that I would not eat such nastiness, even had I made it myself. Sugar a frog as much as you like, but never shall it pass MY lips. Nor would I swallow an oyster, for I know only too well what an oyster may resemble. But have some mutton, friend Chichikov. It is shoulder of mutton, and very different stuff from the mutton which they cook in noble kitchens--mutton which has been kicking about the market-place four days or more. All that sort of cookery has been invented by French and German doctors, and I should like to hang them for having done so. They go and prescribe diets and a hunger cure as though what suits their flaccid German systems will agree with a Russian stomach! Such devices are no good at all." Sobakevitch shook his head wrathfully. "Fellows like those are for ever talking of civilisation. As if THAT sort of thing was civilisation! Phew!" (Perhaps the speaker's concluding exclamation would have been even stronger had he not been seated at table.) "For myself, I will have none of it. When I eat pork at a meal, give me the WHOLE pig; when mutton, the WHOLE sheep; when goose, the WHOLE of the bird. Two dishes are better than a thousand, provided that one can eat of them as much as one wants."

And he proceeded to put precept into practice by taking half the shoulder of mutton on to his plate, and then devouring it down to the last morsel of gristle and bone.

"My word!" reflected Chichikov. "The fellow has a pretty good holding

capacity!"

"None of it for me," repeated Sobakevitch as he wiped his hands on his napkin. "I don't intend to be like a fellow named Plushkin, who owns eight hundred souls, yet dines worse than does my shepherd."

"Who is Plushkin?" asked Chichikov.

"A miser," replied Sobakevitch. "Such a miser as never you could imagine. Even convicts in prison live better than he does. And he starves his servants as well."

"Really?" ejaculated Chichikov, greatly interested. "Should you, then, say that he has lost many peasants by death?"

"Certainly. They keep dying like flies."

"Then how far from here does he reside?"

"About five versts."

"Only five versts?" exclaimed Chichikov, feeling his heart beating joyously. "Ought one, when leaving your gates, to turn to the right or to the left?"

"I should be sorry to tell you the way to the house of such a cur," said Sobakevitch. "A man had far better go to hell than to Plushkin's."

"Quite so," responded Chichikov. "My only reason for asking you is that it interests me to become acquainted with any and every sort of locality."

To the shoulder of mutton there succeeded, in turn, cutlets (each one larger than a plate), a turkey of about the size of a calf, eggs, rice, pastry, and every conceivable thing which could possibly

be put
into a stomach. There the meal ended. When he rose from table
Chichikov felt as though a pood's weight were inside him. In the
drawing-room the company found dessert awaiting them in the
shape of
pears, plums, and apples; but since neither host nor guest could
tackle these particular dainties the hostess removed them to
another
room. Taking advantage of her absence, Chichikov turned to
Sobakevitch
(who, prone in an armchair, seemed, after his ponderous meal, to
be
capable of doing little beyond belching and grunting--each such
grunt
or belch necessitating a subsequent signing of the cross over
the
mouth), and intimated to him a desire to have a little private
conversation concerning a certain matter. At this moment the
hostess
returned.

"Here is more dessert," she said. "Pray have a few radishes
stewed in
honey."

"Later, later," replied Sobakevitch. "Do you go to your room,
and Paul
Ivanovitch and I will take off our coats and have a nap."

Upon this the good lady expressed her readiness to send for
feather
beds and cushions, but her husband expressed a preference for
slumbering in an armchair, and she therefore departed. When she
had
gone Sobakevitch inclined his head in an attitude of willingness
to
listen to Chichikov's business. Our hero began in a sort of
detached
manner--touching lightly upon the subject of the Russian Empire,
and
expatiating upon the immensity of the same, and saying that even
the
Empire of Ancient Rome had been of considerably smaller
dimensions.
Meanwhile Sobakevitch sat with his head drooping.

From that Chichikov went on to remark that, according to the

statutes
of the said Russian Empire (which yielded to none in glory--so
much so
that foreigners marvelled at it), peasants on the census lists
who had
ended their earthly careers were nevertheless, on the rendering
of new
lists, returned equally with the living, to the end that the
courts
might be relieved of a multitude of trifling, useless
emendations
which might complicate the already sufficiently complex
mechanism of
the State. Nevertheless, said Chichikov, the general equity of
this
measure did not obviate a certain amount of annoyance to
landowners,
since it forced them to pay upon a non-living article the tax
due upon
a living. Hence (our hero concluded) he (Chichikov) was
prepared,
owing to the personal respect which he felt for Sobakevitch, to
relieve him, in part, of the irksome obligation referred to (in
passing, it may be said that Chichikov referred to his principal
point
only guardedly, for he called the souls which he was seeking not
"dead," but "non-existent").

Meanwhile Sobakevitch listened with bent head; though something
like a
trace of expression dawned in his face as he did so. Ordinarily
his
body lacked a soul--or, if he did possess a soul, he seemed to
keep it
elsewhere than where it ought to have been; so that, buried
beneath
mountains (as it were) or enclosed within a massive shell, its
movements produced no sort of agitation on the surface.

"Well?" said Chichikov--though not without a certain tremor of
diffidence as to the possible response.

"You are after dead souls?" were Sobakevitch's perfectly simple
words.

He spoke without the least surprise in his tone, and much as
though
the conversation had been turning on grain.

"Yes," replied Chichikov, and then, as before, softened down the expression "dead souls."

"They are to be found," said Sobakevitch. "Why should they not be?"

"Then of course you will be glad to get rid of any that you may chance to have?"

"Yes, I shall have no objection to SELLING them." At this point the speaker raised his head a little, for it had struck him that surely the would-be buyer must have some advantage in view.

"The devil!" thought Chichikov to himself. "Here is he selling the goods before I have even had time to utter a word!"

"And what about the price?" he added aloud. "Of course, the articles are not of a kind very easy to appraise."

"I should be sorry to ask too much," said Sobakevitch. "How would a hundred roubles per head suit you?"

"What, a hundred roubles per head?" Chichikov stared open-mouthed at his host--doubting whether he had heard aright, or whether his host's slow-moving tongue might not have inadvertently substituted one word for another.

"Yes. Is that too much for you?" said Sobakevitch. Then he added:
"What is your own price?"

"My own price? I think that we cannot properly have understood one another--that you must have forgotten of what the goods consist. With my hand on my heart do I submit that eight grivni per soul would be a

handsome, a VERY handsome, offer."

"What? Eight grivni?"

"In my opinion, a higher offer would be impossible."

"But I am not a seller of boots."

"No; yet you, for your part, will agree that these souls are not live human beings?"

"I suppose you hope to find fools ready to sell you souls on the census list for a couple of groats apiece?"

"Pardon me, but why do you use the term 'on the census list'? The souls themselves have long since passed away, and have left behind them only their names. Not to trouble you with any further discussion of the subject, I can offer you a rouble and a half per head, but no more."

"You should be ashamed even to mention such a sum! Since you deal in articles of this kind, quote me a genuine price."

"I cannot, Michael Semenovitch. Believe me, I cannot. What a man cannot do, that he cannot do." The speaker ended by advancing another half-rouble per head.

"But why hang back with your money?" said Sobakevitch. "Of a truth I am not asking much of you. Any other rascal than myself would have cheated you by selling you old rubbish instead of good, genuine souls, whereas I should be ready to give you of my best, even were you buying only nut-kernels. For instance, look at wheelwright Michiev. Never was there such a one to build spring carts! And his handiwork was not like your Moscow handiwork--good only for an hour. No, he did it all

himself, even down to the varnishing."

Chichikov opened his mouth to remark that, nevertheless, the said Michiev had long since departed this world; but Sobakevitch's eloquence had got too thoroughly into its stride to admit of any interruption.

"And look, too, at Probka Stepan, the carpenter," his host went on. "I will wager my head that nowhere else would you find such a workman. What a strong fellow he was! He had served in the Guards, and the Lord only knows what they had given for him, seeing that he was over three arshins in height."

Again Chichikov tried to remark that Probka was dead, but Sobakevitch's tongue was borne on the torrent of its own verbiage, and the only thing to be done was to listen.

"And Milushkin, the bricklayer! He could build a stove in any house you liked! And Maksim Teliatnikov, the bootmaker! Anything that he drove his awl into became a pair of boots--and boots for which you would be thankful, although he WAS a bit foul of the mouth. And Eremi Sorokoplechin, too! He was the best of the lot, and used to work at his trade in Moscow, where he paid a tax of five hundred roubles. Well, THERE'S an assortment of serfs for you!--a very different assortment from what Plushkin would sell you!"

"But permit me," at length put in Chichikov, astounded at this flood of eloquence to which there appeared to be no end. "Permit me, I say, to inquire why you enumerate the talents of the deceased, seeing that they are all of them dead, and that therefore there can be no sense in doing so. 'A dead body is only good to prop a fence with,' says the

proverb."

"Of course they are dead," replied Sobakevitch, but rather as though the idea had only just occurred to him, and was giving him food for thought. "But tell me, now: what is the use of listing them as still alive? And what is the use of them themselves? They are flies, not human beings."

"Well," said Chichikov, "they exist, though only in idea."

"But no--NOT only in idea. I tell you that nowhere else would you find such a fellow for working heavy tools as was Michiev. He had the strength of a horse in his shoulders." And, with the words, Sobakevitch turned, as though for corroboration, to the portrait of Bagration, as is frequently done by one of the parties in a dispute when he purports to appeal to an extraneous individual who is not only unknown to him, but wholly unconnected with the subject in hand; with the result that the individual is left in doubt whether to make a reply, or whether to betake himself elsewhere.

"Nevertheless, I CANNOT give you more than two roubles per head," said Chichikov.

"Well, as I don't want you to swear that I have asked too much of you and won't meet you halfway, suppose, for friendship's sake, that you pay me seventy-five roubles in assignats?"

"Good heavens!" thought Chichikov to himself. "Does the man take me for a fool?" Then he added aloud: "The situation seems to me a strange one, for it is as though we were performing a stage comedy. No other

explanation would meet the case. Yet you appear to be a man of sense,
and possessed of some education. The matter is a very simple one. The question is: what is a dead soul worth, and is it of any use to any one?"

"It is of use to YOU, or you would not be buying such articles."

Chichikov bit his lip, and stood at a loss for a retort. He tried to saying something about "family and domestic circumstances," but Sobakevitch cut him short with:

"I don't want to know your private affairs, for I never poke my nose into such things. You need the souls, and I am ready to sell them. Should you not buy them, I think you will repent it."

"Two roubles is my price," repeated Chichikov.

"Come, come! As you have named that sum, I can understand your not liking to go back upon it; but quote me a bona fide figure."

"The devil fly away with him!" mused Chichikov. "However, I will add another half-rouble." And he did so.

"Indeed?" said Sobakevitch. "Well, my last word upon it is-- fifty roubles in assignats. That will mean a sheer loss to me, for nowhere else in the world could you buy better souls than mine."

"The old skinflint!" muttered Chichikov. Then he added aloud, with irritation in his tone: "See here. This is a serious matter. Any one but you would be thankful to get rid of the souls. Only a fool would stick to them, and continue to pay the tax."

"Yes, but remember (and I say it wholly in a friendly way) that transactions of this kind are not generally allowed, and that

any one
would say that a man who engages in them must have some rather
doubtful advantage in view."

"Have it your own away," said Chichikov, with assumed
indifference.

"As a matter of fact, I am not purchasing for profit, as you
suppose,
but to humour a certain whim of mine. Two and a half roubles is
the
most that I can offer."

"Bless your heart!" retorted the host. "At least give me thirty
roubles in assignats, and take the lot."

"No, for I see that you are unwilling to sell. I must say good-
day to
you."

"Hold on, hold on!" exclaimed Sobakevitch, retaining his guest's
hand,
and at the same moment treading heavily upon his toes--so
heavily,
indeed, that Chichikov gasped and danced with the pain.

"I BEG your pardon!" said Sobakevitch hastily. "Evidently I have
hurt you. Pray sit down again."

"No," retorted Chichikov. "I am merely wasting my time, and must
be
off."

"Oh, sit down just for a moment. I have something more agreeable
to
say." And, drawing closer to his guest, Sobakevitch whispered in
his
ear, as though communicating to him a secret: "How about twenty-
five
roubles?"

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Chichikov. "I won't give you even a
QUARTER
of that. I won't advance another kopeck."

For a while Sobakevitch remained silent, and Chichikov did the
same.

This lasted for a couple of minutes, and, meanwhile, the

aquiline-nosed Bagration gazed from the wall as though much interested in the bargaining.

"What is your outside price?" at length said Sobakevitch.

"Two and a half roubles."

"Then you seem to rate a human soul at about the same value as a boiled turnip. At least give me THREE roubles."

"No, I cannot."

"Pardon me, but you are an impossible man to deal with. However, even though it will mean a dead loss to me, and you have not shown a very nice spirit about it, I cannot well refuse to please a friend. I suppose a purchase deed had better be made out in order to have everything in order?"

"Of course."

"Then for that purpose let us repair to the town."

The affair ended in their deciding to do this on the morrow, and to arrange for the signing of a deed of purchase. Next, Chichikov requested a list of the peasants; to which Sobakevitch readily agreed. Indeed, he went to his writing-desk then and there, and started to indite a list which gave not only the peasants' names, but also their late qualifications.

Meanwhile Chichikov, having nothing else to do, stood looking at the spacious form of his host; and as he gazed at his back as broad as that of a cart horse, and at the legs as massive as the iron standards which adorn a street, he could not help inwardly ejaculating:

"Truly God has endowed you with much! Though not adjusted with nicety, at least you are strongly built. I wonder whether you were born

a bear
or whether you have come to it through your rustic life, with
its
tilling of crops and its trading with peasants? Yet no; I
believe
that, even if you had received a fashionable education, and had
mixed
with society, and had lived in St. Petersburg, you would still
have
been just the kulak[5] that you are. The only difference is that
circumstances, as they stand, permit of your polishing off a
stuffed
shoulder of mutton at a meal; whereas in St. Petersburg you
would have
been unable to do so. Also, as circumstances stand, you have
under you
a number of peasants, whom you treat well for the reason that
they are
your property; whereas, otherwise, you would have had under you
tchinovniks[6]: whom you would have bullied because they were
NOT
your property. Also, you would have robbed the Treasury, since a
kulak
always remains a money-grubber."

[5] Village factor or usurer.

[6] Subordinate government officials.

"The list is ready," said Sobakevitch, turning round.

"Indeed? Then please let me look at it." Chichikov ran his eye
over
the document, and could not but marvel at its neatness and
accuracy.
Not only were there set forth in it the trade, the age, and the
pedigree of every serf, but on the margin of the sheet were
jotted
remarks concerning each serf's conduct and sobriety. Truly it
was a
pleasure to look at it.

"And do you mind handing me the earnest money?" said
Sobakevitch?

"Yes, I do. Why need that be done? You can receive the money in
a lump

sum as soon as we visit the town."

"But it is always the custom, you know," asserted Sobakevitch.

"Then I cannot follow it, for I have no money with me. However, here are ten roubles."

"Ten roubles, indeed? You might as well hand me fifty while you are about it."

Once more Chichikov started to deny that he had any money upon him, but Sobakevitch insisted so strongly that this was not so that at length the guest pulled out another fifteen roubles, and added them to the ten already produced.

"Kindly give me a receipt for the money," he added.

"A receipt? Why should I give you a receipt?"

"Because it is better to do so, in order to guard against mistakes."

"Very well; but first hand me over the money."

"The money? I have it here. Do you write out the receipt, and then the money shall be yours."

"Pardon me, but how am I to write out the receipt before I have seen the cash?"

Chichikov placed the notes in Sobakevitch's hand; whereupon the host moved nearer to the table, and added to the list of serfs a note that he had received for the peasants, therewith sold, the sum of twenty-five roubles, as earnest money. This done, he counted the notes once more.

"This is a very OLD note," he remarked, holding one up to the

light.

"Also, it is a trifle torn. However, in a friendly transaction one must not be too particular."

"What a kulak!" thought Chichikov to himself. "And what a brute beast!"

"Then you do not want any WOMEN souls?" queried Sobakevitch.

"I thank you, no."

"I could let you have some cheap--say, as between friends, at a rouble a head?"

"No, I should have no use for them."

"Then, that being so, there is no more to be said. There is no accounting for tastes. 'One man loves the priest, and another the priest's wife,' says the proverb."

Chichikov rose to take his leave. "Once more I would request of you," he said, "that the bargain be left as it is."

"Of course, of course. What is done between friends holds good because of their mutual friendship. Good-bye, and thank you for your visit. In advance I would beg that, whenever you should have an hour or two to spare, you will come and lunch with us again. Perhaps we might be able to do one another further service?"

"Not if I know it!" reflected Chichikov as he mounted his britchka.

"Not I, seeing that I have had two and a half roubles per soul squeezed out of me by a brute of a kulak!"

Altogether he felt dissatisfied with Sobakevitch's behaviour. In spite of the man being a friend of the Governor and the Chief of Police, he had acted like an outsider in taking money for what was

worthless
rubbish. As the britchka left the courtyard Chichikov glanced
back and
saw Sobakevitch still standing on the verandah--apparently for
the
purpose of watching to see which way the guest's carriage would
turn.

"The old villain, to be still standing there!" muttered
Chichikov
through his teeth; after which he ordered Selifan to proceed so
that
the vehicle's progress should be invisible from the mansion--the
truth
being that he had a mind next to visit Plushkin (whose serfs, to
quote
Sobakevitch, had a habit of dying like flies), but not to let
his late
host learn of his intention. Accordingly, on reaching the
further end
of the village, he hailed the first peasant whom he saw--a man
who was
in the act of hoisting a ponderous beam on to his shoulder
before
setting off with it, ant-like, to his hut.

"Hi!" shouted Chichikov. "How can I reach landowner Plushkin's
place
without first going past the mansion here?"

The peasant seemed nonplussed by the question.

"Don't you know?" queried Chichikov.

"No, barin," replied the peasant.

"What? You don't know skinflint Plushkin who feeds his people so
badly?"

"Of course I do!" exclaimed the fellow, and added thereto an
uncomplimentary expression of a species not ordinarily employed
in
polite society. We may guess that it was a pretty apt
expression,
since long after the man had become lost to view Chichikov was
still
laughing in his britchka. And, indeed, the language of the

Russian
populace is always forcible in its phraseology.

CHAPTER VI

Chichikov's amusement at the peasant's outburst prevented him from noticing that he had reached the centre of a large and populous village; but, presently, a violent jolt aroused him to the fact that he was driving over wooden pavements of a kind compared with which the cobblestones of the town had been as nothing. Like the keys of a piano, the planks kept rising and falling, and unguarded passage over them entailed either a bump on the back of the neck or a bruise on the forehead or a bite on the tip of one's tongue. At the same time Chichikov noticed a look of decay about the buildings of the village. The beams of the huts had grown dark with age, many of their roofs were riddled with holes, others had but a tile of the roof remaining, and yet others were reduced to the rib-like framework of the same. It would seem as though the inhabitants themselves had removed the laths and traverses, on the very natural plea that the huts were no protection against the rain, and therefore, since the latter entered in bucketfuls, there was no particular object to be gained by sitting in such huts when all the time there was the tavern and the highroad and other places to resort to.

Suddenly a woman appeared from an outbuilding--apparently the housekeeper of the mansion, but so roughly and dirtily dressed as almost to seem indistinguishable from a man. Chichikov inquired for the master of the place.

"He is not at home," she replied, almost before her interlocutor

had

had time to finish. Then she added: "What do you want with him?"

"I have some business to do," said Chichikov.

"Then pray walk into the house," the woman advised. Then she turned

upon him a back that was smeared with flour and had a long slit in the

lower portion of its covering. Entering a large, dark hall which reeked like a tomb, he passed into an equally dark parlour that was

lighted only by such rays as contrived to filter through a crack under

the door. When Chichikov opened the door in question, the spectacle of

the untidiness within struck him almost with amazement. It would seem

that the floor was never washed, and that the room was used as a receptacle for every conceivable kind of furniture. On a table stood a

ragged chair, with, beside it, a clock minus a pendulum and covered

all over with cobwebs. Against a wall leant a cupboard, full of old

silver, glassware, and china. On a writing table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl which, in places, had broken away and left behind it a

number of yellow grooves (stuffed with putty), lay a pile of finely

written manuscript, an overturned marble press (turning green), an

ancient book in a leather cover with red edges, a lemon dried and

shrunk to the dimensions of a hazelnut, the broken arm of a chair, a

tumbler containing the dregs of some liquid and three flies (the whole

covered over with a sheet of notepaper), a pile of rags, two ink-encrusted pens, and a yellow toothpick with which the master of

the house had picked his teeth (apparently) at least before the coming

of the French to Moscow. As for the walls, they were hung with a medley of pictures. Among the latter was a long engraving of a battle

scene, wherein soldiers in three-cornered hats were brandishing

huge
drums and slender lances. It lacked a glass, and was set in a
frame
ornamented with bronze fretwork and bronze corner rings. Beside
it
hung a huge, grimy oil painting representative of some flowers
and
fruit, half a water melon, a boar's head, and the pendent form
of a
dead wild duck. Attached to the ceiling there was a chandelier
in a
holland covering--the covering so dusty as closely to resemble a
huge
cocoon enclosing a caterpillar. Lastly, in one corner of the
room lay
a pile of articles which had evidently been adjudged unworthy of
a
place on the table. Yet what the pile consisted of it would have
been
difficult to say, seeing that the dust on the same was so thick
that
any hand which touched it would have at once resembled a glove.
Prominently protruding from the pile was the shaft of a wooden
spade
and the antiquated sole of a shoe. Never would one have supposed
that
a living creature had tenanted the room, were it not that the
presence
of such a creature was betrayed by the spectacle of an old
nightcap
resting on the table.

Whilst Chichikov was gazing at this extraordinary mess, a side
door
opened and there entered the housekeeper who had met him near
the
outbuildings. But now Chichikov perceived this person to be a
man
rather than a woman, since a female housekeeper would have had
no
beard to shave, whereas the chin of the newcomer, with the lower
portion of his cheeks, strongly resembled the curry-comb which
is used
for grooming horses. Chichikov assumed a questioning air, and
waited
to hear what the housekeeper might have to say. The housekeeper
did

the same. At length, surprised at the misunderstanding, Chichikov decided to ask the first question.

"Is the master at home?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied the person addressed.

"Then where is he?" continued Chichikov.

"Are you blind, my good sir?" retorted the other. "_I_ am the master."

Involuntarily our hero started and stared. During his travels it had befallen him to meet various types of men--some of them, it may be, types which you and I have never encountered; but even to Chichikov this particular species was new. In the old man's face there was nothing very special--it was much like the wizened face of many another dotard, save that the chin was so greatly projected that whenever he spoke he was forced to wipe it with a handkerchief to avoid dribbling, and that his small eyes were not yet grown dull, but twinkled under their overhanging brows like the eyes of mice when, with attentive ears and sensitive whiskers, they snuff the air and peer forth from their holes to see whether a cat or a boy may not be in the vicinity. No, the most noticeable feature about the man was his clothes. In no way could it have been guessed of what his coat was made, for both its sleeves and its skirts were so ragged and filthy as to defy description, while instead of two posterior tails, there dangled four of those appendages, with, projecting from them, a torn newspaper. Also, around his neck there was wrapped something which might have been a stocking, a garter, or a stomacher, but was certainly not a tie. In short, had Chichikov chanced to encounter him at a church door, he would have bestowed upon him a copper or

two

(for, to do our hero justice, he had a sympathetic heart and never refrained from presenting a beggar with alms), but in the present case there was standing before him, not a mendicant, but a landowner--and a landowner possessed of fully a thousand serfs, the superior of all his neighbours in wealth of flour and grain, and the owner of storehouses, and so forth, that were crammed with homespun cloth and linen, tanned and undressed sheepskins, dried fish, and every conceivable species of produce. Nevertheless, such a phenomenon is rare in Russia, where the tendency is rather to prodigality than to parsimony.

For several minutes Plushkin stood mute, while Chichikov remained so dazed with the appearance of the host and everything else in the room, that he too, could not begin a conversation, but stood wondering how best to find words in which to explain the object of his visit. For a while he thought of expressing himself to the effect that, having heard so much of his host's benevolence and other rare qualities of spirit, he had considered it his duty to come and pay a tribute of respect; but presently even HE came to the conclusion that this would be overdoing the thing, and, after another glance round the room, decided that the phrase "benevolence and other rare qualities of spirit" might to advantage give place to "economy and genius for method." Accordingly, the speech mentally composed, he said aloud that, having heard of Plushkin's talents for thrifty and systematic management, he had considered himself bound to make the acquaintance of his host, and to present him with his personal compliments (I need

hardly say that Chichikov could easily have alleged a better reason, had any better one happened, at the moment, to have come into his head).

With toothless gums Plushkin murmured something in reply, but nothing is known as to its precise terms beyond that it included a statement that the devil was at liberty to fly away with Chichikov's sentiments. However, the laws of Russian hospitality do not permit even of a miser infringing their rules; wherefore Plushkin added to the foregoing a more civil invitation to be seated.

"It is long since I last received a visitor," he went on. "Also, I feel bound to say that I can see little good in their coming. Once introduce the abominable custom of folk paying calls, and forthwith there will ensue such ruin to the management of estates that landowners will be forced to feed their horses on hay. Not for a long, long time have I eaten a meal away from home--although my own kitchen is a poor one, and has its chimney in such a state that, were it to become overheated, it would instantly catch fire."

"What a brute!" thought Chichikov. "I am lucky to have got through so much pastry and stuffed shoulder of mutton at Sobakevitch's!"

"Also," went on Plushkin, "I am ashamed to say that hardly a wisp of fodder does the place contain. But how can I get fodder? My lands are small, and the peasantry lazy fellows who hate work and think of nothing but the tavern. In the end, therefore, I shall be forced to go and spend my old age in roaming about the world."

"But I have been told that you possess over a thousand serfs?"

said
Chichikov.

"Who told you that? No matter who it was, you would have been justified in giving him the lie. He must have been a jester who wanted to make a fool of you. A thousand souls, indeed! Why, just reckon the taxes on them, and see what there would be left! For these three years that accursed fever has been killing off my serfs wholesale."

"Wholesale, you say?" echoed Chichikov, greatly interested.

"Yes, wholesale," replied the old man.

"Then might I ask you the exact number?"

"Fully eighty."

"Surely not?"

"But it is so."

"Then might I also ask whether it is from the date of the last census revision that you are reckoning these souls?"

"Yes, damn it! And since that date I have been bled for taxes upon a hundred and twenty souls in all."

"Indeed? Upon a hundred and twenty souls in all!" And Chichikov's surprise and elation were such that, this said, he remained sitting open-mouthed.

"Yes, good sir," replied Plushkin. "I am too old to tell you lies, for I have passed my seventieth year."

Somehow he seemed to have taken offence at Chichikov's almost joyous exclamation; wherefore the guest hastened to heave a profound sigh, and to observe that he sympathised to the full with his host's

misfortunes.

"But sympathy does not put anything into one's pocket," retorted Plushkin. "For instance, I have a kinsman who is constantly plaguing me. He is a captain in the army, damn him, and all day he does nothing but call me 'dear uncle,' and kiss my hand, and express sympathy until I am forced to stop my ears. You see, he has squandered all his money upon his brother-officers, as well as made a fool of himself with an actress; so now he spends his time in telling me that he has a sympathetic heart!"

Chichikov hastened to explain that HIS sympathy had nothing in common with the captain's, since he dealt, not in empty words alone, but in actual deeds; in proof of which he was ready then and there (for the purpose of cutting the matter short, and of dispensing with circumlocution) to transfer to himself the obligation of paying the taxes due upon such serfs as Plushkin's as had, in the unfortunate manner just described, departed this world. The proposal seemed to astonish Plushkin, for he sat staring open-eyed. At length he inquired:

"My dear sir, have you seen military service?"

"No," replied the other warily, "but I have been a member of the CIVIL Service."

"Oh! Of the CIVIL Service?" And Plushkin sat moving his lips as though he were chewing something. "Well, what of your proposal?" he added presently. "Are you prepared to lose by it?"

"Yes, certainly, if thereby I can please you."

"My dear sir! My good benefactor!" In his delight Plushkin lost sight of the fact that his nose was caked with snuff of the

consistency of
thick coffee, and that his coat had parted in front and was
disclosing
some very unseemly underclothing. "What comfort you have brought
to an
old man! Yes, as God is my witness!"

For the moment he could say no more. Yet barely a minute had
elapsed
before this instantaneously aroused emotion had, as
instantaneously,
disappeared from his wooden features. Once more they assumed a
careworn expression, and he even wiped his face with his
handkerchief,
then rolled it into a ball, and rubbed it to and fro against his
upper
lip.

"If it will not annoy you again to state the proposal," he went
on,
"what you undertake to do is to pay the annual tax upon these
souls,
and to remit the money either to me or to the Treasury?"

"Yes, that is how it shall be done. We will draw up a deed of
purchase
as though the souls were still alive and you had sold them to
myself."

"Quite so--a deed of purchase," echoed Plushkin, once more
relapsing
into thought and the chewing motion of the lips. "But a deed of
such a
kind will entail certain expenses, and lawyers are so devoid of
conscience! In fact, so extortionate is their avarice that they
will
charge one half a rouble, and then a sack of flour, and then a
whole
waggon-load of meal. I wonder that no one has yet called
attention to
the system."

Upon that Chichikov intimated that, out of respect for his host,
he
himself would bear the cost of the transfer of souls. This led
Plushkin to conclude that his guest must be the kind of
unconscionable

fool who, while pretending to have been a member of the Civil Service,
has in reality served in the army and run after actresses;
wherefore
the old man no longer disguised his delight, but called down blessings
alike upon Chichikov's head and upon those of his children (he had
never even inquired whether Chichikov possessed a family). Next,
he
shuffled to the window, and, tapping one of its panes, shouted the
name of "Proshka." Immediately some one ran quickly into the hall,
and, after much stamping of feet, burst into the room. This was Proshka--a thirteen-year-old youngster who was shod with boots of such
dimensions as almost to engulf his legs as he walked. The reason why
he had entered thus shod was that Plushkin only kept one pair of boots
for the whole of his domestic staff. This universal pair was stationed
in the hall of the mansion, so that any servant who was summoned to
the house might don the said boots after wading barefooted through the
mud of the courtyard, and enter the parlour dry-shod--
subsequently
leaving the boots where he had found them, and departing in his former
barefooted condition. Indeed, had any one, on a slushy winter's morning, glanced from a window into the said courtyard, he would have
seen Plushkin's servitors performing saltatory feats worthy of the
most vigorous of stage-dancers.

"Look at that boy's face!" said Plushkin to Chichikov as he pointed to
Proshka. "It is stupid enough, yet, lay anything aside, and in a trice
he will have stolen it. Well, my lad, what do you want?"

He paused a moment or two, but Proshka made no reply.

"Come, come!" went on the old man. "Set out the samovar, and

then give
Mavra the key of the store-room--here it is--and tell her to get
out
some loaf sugar for tea. Here! Wait another moment, fool! Is the
devil
in your legs that they itch so to be off? Listen to what more I
have
to tell you. Tell Mavra that the sugar on the outside of the
loaf has
gone bad, so that she must scrape it off with a knife, and NOT
throw
away the scrapings, but give them to the poultry. Also, see that
you
yourself don't go into the storeroom, or I will give you a
birching
that you won't care for. Your appetite is good enough already,
but a
better one won't hurt you. Don't even TRY to go into the
storeroom,
for I shall be watching you from this window."

"You see," the old man added to Chichikov, "one can never trust
these
fellows." Presently, when Proshka and the boots had departed, he
fell
to gazing at his guest with an equally distrustful air, since
certain
features in Chichikov's benevolence now struck him as a little
open to
question, and he had begin to think to himself: "After all, the
devil
only knows who he is--whether a braggart, like most of these
spendthrifts, or a fellow who is lying merely in order to get
some tea
out of me." Finally, his circumspection, combined with a desire
to
test his guest, led him to remark that it might be well to
complete
the transaction IMMEDIATELY, since he had not overmuch
confidence in
humanity, seeing that a man might be alive to-day and dead to-
morrow.

To this Chichikov assented readily enough--merely adding that he
should like first of all to be furnished with a list of the dead
souls. This reassured Plushkin as to his guest's intention of
doing

business, so he got out his keys, approached a cupboard, and, having pulled back the door, rummaged among the cups and glasses with which it was filled. At length he said:

"I cannot find it now, but I used to possess a splendid bottle of liquor. Probably the servants have drunk it all, for they are such thieves. Oh no: perhaps this is it!"

Looking up, Chichikov saw that Plushkin had extracted a decanter coated with dust.

"My late wife made the stuff," went on the old man, "but that rascal of a housekeeper went and threw away a lot of it, and never even replaced the stopper. Consequently bugs and other nasty creatures got into the decanter, but I cleaned it out, and now beg to offer you a glassful."

The idea of a drink from such a receptacle was too much for Chichikov, so he excused himself on the ground that he had just had luncheon.

"You have just had luncheon?" re-echoed Plushkin. "Now, THAT shows how invariably one can tell a man of good society, wheresoever one may be. A man of that kind never eats anything--he always says that he has had enough. Very different that from the ways of a rogue, whom one can never satisfy, however much one may give him. For instance, that captain of mine is constantly begging me to let him have a meal--though he is about as much my nephew as I am his grandfather. As it happens, there is never a bite of anything in the house, so he has to go away empty. But about the list of those good-for-nothing souls--I happen to possess such a list, since I have drawn one up in readiness for the next revision."

With that Plushkin donned his spectacles, and once more started to rummage in the cupboard, and to smother his guest with dust as he untied successive packages of papers--so much so that his victim burst out sneezing. Finally he extracted a much-scribbled document in which the names of the deceased peasants lay as close-packed as a cloud of midges, for there were a hundred and twenty of them in all. Chichikov grinned with joy at the sight of the multitude. Stuffing the list into his pocket, he remarked that, to complete the transaction, it would be necessary to return to the town.

"To the town?" repeated Plushkin. "But why? Moreover, how could I leave the house, seeing that every one of my servants is either a thief or a rogue? Day by day they pilfer things, until soon I shall have not a single coat to hang on my back."

"Then you possess acquaintances in the town?"

"Acquaintances? No. Every acquaintance whom I ever possessed has either left me or is dead. But stop a moment. I DO know the President of the Council. Even in my old age he has once or twice come to visit me, for he and I used to be schoolfellows, and to go climbing walls together. Yes, him I do know. Shall I write him a letter?"

"By all means."

"Yes, him I know well, for we were friends together at school."

Over Plushkin's wooden features there had gleamed a ray of warmth--a ray which expressed, if not feeling, at all events feeling's pale reflection. Just such a phenomenon may be witnessed when, for a brief

moment, a drowning man makes a last re-appearance on the surface of a river, and there rises from the crowd lining the banks a cry of hope that even yet the exhausted hands may clutch the rope which has been thrown him--may clutch it before the surface of the unstable element shall have resumed for ever its calm, dread vacuity. But the hope is short-lived, and the hands disappear. Even so did Plushkin's face, after its momentary manifestation of feeling, become meaner and more insensible than ever.

"There used to be a sheet of clean writing paper lying on the table," he went on. "But where it is now I cannot think. That comes of my servants being such rascals."

Whit that he fell to looking also under the table, as well as to hurrying about with cries of "Mavra, Mavra!" At length the call was answered by a woman with a plateful of the sugar of which mention has been made; whereupon there ensued the following conversation.

"What have you done with my piece of writing paper, you pilferer?"

"I swear that I have seen no paper except the bit with which you covered the glass."

"Your very face tells me that you have made off with it."

"Why should I make off with it? 'Twould be of no use to me, for I can neither read nor write."

"You lie! You have taken it away for the sexton to scribble upon."

"Well, if the sexton wanted paper he could get some for himself. Neither he nor I have set eyes upon your piece."

"Ah! Wait a bit, for on the Judgment Day you will be roasted by devils on iron spits. Just see if you are not!"

"But why should I be roasted when I have never even TOUCHED the paper? You might accuse me of any other fault than theft."

"Nay, devils shall roast you, sure enough. They will say to you, 'Bad woman, we are doing this because you robbed your master,' and then stoke up the fire still hotter."

"Nevertheless I shall continue to say, 'You are roasting me for nothing, for I never stole anything at all.' Why, THERE it is, lying on the table! You have been accusing me for no reason whatever!"

And, sure enough, the sheet of paper was lying before Plushkin's very eyes. For a moment or two he chewed silently. Then he went on:

"Well, and what are you making such a noise about? If one says a single word to you, you answer back with ten. Go and fetch me a candle to seal a letter with. And mind you bring a TALLOW candle, for it will not cost so much as the other sort. And bring me a match too."

Mavra departed, and Plushkin, seating himself, and taking up a pen, sat turning the sheet of paper over and over, as though in doubt whether to tear from it yet another morsel. At length he came to the conclusion that it was impossible to do so, and therefore, dipping the pen into the mixture of mouldy fluid and dead flies which the ink bottle contained, started to indite the letter in characters as bold as the notes of a music score, while momentarily checking the speed of his hand, lest it should meander too much over the paper, and crawling from line to line as though he regretted that there was so

little
vacant space left on the sheet.

"And do you happen to know any one to whom a few runaway serfs would
be of use?" he asked as subsequently he folded the letter.

"What? You have some runaways as well?" exclaimed Chichikov,
again
greatly interested.

"Certainly I have. My son-in-law has laid the necessary
information
against them, but says that their tracks have grown cold.
However, he
is only a military man--that is to say, good at clinking a pair
of
spurs, but of no use for laying a plea before a court."

"And how many runaways have you?"

"About seventy."

"Surely not?"

"Alas, yes. Never does a year pass without a certain number of
them
making off. Yet so gluttonous and idle are my serfs that they
are
simply bursting with food, whereas I scarcely get enough to eat.
I
will take any price for them that you may care to offer. Tell
your
friends about it, and, should they find even a score of the
runaways,
it will repay them handsomely, seeing that a living serf on the
census
list is at present worth five hundred roubles."

"Perhaps so, but I am not going to let any one but myself have a
finger in this," thought Chichikov to himself; after which he
explained to Plushkin that a friend of the kind mentioned would
be
impossible to discover, since the legal expenses of the
enterprise
would lead to the said friend having to cut the very tail from
his

coat before he would get clear of the lawyers.

"Nevertheless," added Chichikov, "seeing that you are so hard pressed for money, and that I am so interested in the matter, I feel moved to advance you--well, to advance you such a trifle as would scarcely be worth mentioning."

"But how much is it?" asked Plushkin eagerly, and with his hands trembling like quicksilver.

"Twenty-five kopecks per soul."

"What? In ready money?"

"Yes--in money down."

"Nevertheless, consider my poverty, dear friend, and make it FORTY kopecks per soul."

"Venerable sir, would that I could pay you not merely forty kopecks, but five hundred roubles. I should be only too delighted if that were possible, since I perceive that you, an aged and respected gentleman, are suffering for your own goodness of heart."

"By God, that is true, that is true." Plushkin hung his head, and wagged it feebly from side to side. "Yes, all that I have done I have done purely out of kindness."

"See how instantaneously I have divined your nature! By now it will have become clear to you why it is impossible for me to pay you five hundred roubles per runaway soul: for by now you will have gathered the fact that I am not sufficiently rich. Nevertheless, I am ready to add another five kopecks, and so to make it that each runaway serf

shall cost me, in all, thirty kopecks."

"As you please, dear sir. Yet stretch another point, and throw in another two kopecks."

"Pardon me, but I cannot. How many runaway serfs did you say that you possess? Seventy?"

"No; seventy-eight."

"Seventy-eight souls at thirty kopecks each will amount to-- to--" only for a moment did our hero halt, since he was strong in his arithmetic, "--will amount to twenty-four roubles, ninety-six kopecks." [1]

[1] Nevertheless Chichikov would appear to have erred, since most

people would make the sum amount to twenty-three roubles, forty kopecks. If so, Chichikov cheated himself of one rouble, fifty-six kopecks.

With that he requested Plushkin to make out the receipt, and then handed him the money. Plushkin took it in both hands, bore it to a bureau with as much caution as though he were carrying a liquid which might at any moment splash him in the face, and, arrived at the bureau, and glancing round once more, carefully packed the cash in one of his money bags, where, doubtless, it was destined to lie buried until, to the intense joy of his daughters and his son-in-law (and, perhaps, of the captain who claimed kinship with him), he should himself receive burial at the hands of Fathers Carp and Polycarp, the two priests attached to his village. Lastly, the money concealed, Plushkin re-seated himself in the armchair, and seemed at a loss for further material for conversation.

"Are you thinking of starting?" at length he inquired, on seeing Chichikov making a trifling movement, though the movement was only to extract from his pocket a handkerchief. Nevertheless the question reminded Chichikov that there was no further excuse for lingering.

"Yes, I must be going," he said as he took his hat.

"Then what about the tea?"

"Thank you, I will have some on my next visit."

"What? Even though I have just ordered the samovar to be got ready? Well, well! I myself do not greatly care for tea, for I think it an expensive beverage. Moreover, the price of sugar has risen terribly."

"Proshka!" he then shouted. "The samovar will not be needed. Return the sugar to Mavra, and tell her to put it back again. But no. Bring the sugar here, and I will put it back."

"Good-bye, dear sir," finally he added to Chichikov. "May the Lord bless you! Hand that letter to the President of the Council, and let him read it. Yes, he is an old friend of mine. We knew one another as schoolfellows."

With that this strange phenomenon, this withered old man, escorted his guest to the gates of the courtyard, and, after the guest had departed, ordered the gates to be closed, made the round of the outbuildings for the purpose of ascertaining whether the numerous watchmen were at their posts, peered into the kitchen (where, under the pretence of seeing whether his servants were being properly fed, he made a light meal of cabbage soup and gruel), rated the said

servants soundly for their thievishness and general bad
behaviour, and
then returned to his room. Meditating in solitude, he fell to
thinking
how best he could contrive to recompense his guest for the
latter's
measureless benevolence. "I will present him," he thought to
himself,
"with a watch. It is a good silver article--not one of those
cheap
metal affairs; and though it has suffered some damage, he can
easily
get that put right. A young man always needs to give a watch to
his
betrothed."

"No," he added after further thought. "I will leave him the
watch in
my will, as a keepsake."

Meanwhile our hero was bowling along in high spirit. Such an
unexpected acquisition both of dead souls and of runaway serfs
had
come as a windfall. Even before reaching Plushkin's village he
had had
a presentiment that he would do successful business there, but
not
business of such pre-eminent profitableness as had actually
resulted.
As he proceeded he whistled, hummed with hand placed trumpetwise
to
his mouth, and ended by bursting into a burst of melody so
striking
that Selifan, after listening for a while, nodded his head and
exclaimed, "My word, but the master CAN sing!"

By the time they reached the town darkness had fallen, and
changed the
character of the scene. The britchka bounded over the
cobblestones,
and at length turned into the hostelry's courtyard, where the
travellers were met by Petrushka. With one hand holding back the
tails
of his coat (which he never liked to see fly apart), the valet
assisted his master to alight. The waiter ran out with candle in
hand
and napkin on shoulder. Whether or not Petrushka was glad to see

the
barin return it is impossible to say, but at all events he
exchanged a
wink with Selifan, and his ordinarily morose exterior seemed
momentarily to brighten.

"Then you have been travelling far, sir?" said the waiter, as he
lit
the way upstarts.

"Yes," said Chichikov. "What has happened here in the
meanwhile?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the waiter, bowing, "except that last
night
there arrived a military lieutenant. He has got room number
sixteen."

"A lieutenant?"

"Yes. He came from Riazan, driving three grey horses."

On entering his room, Chichikov clapped his hand to his nose,
and
asked his valet why he had never had the windows opened.

"But I did have them opened," replied Petrushka. Nevertheless
this was
a lie, as Chichikov well knew, though he was too tired to
contest the
point. After ordering and consuming a light supper of sucking
pig, he
undressed, plunged beneath the bedclothes, and sank into the
profound
slumber which comes only to such fortunate folk as are troubled
neither with mosquitoes nor fleas nor excessive activity of
brain.

CHAPTER VII

When Chichikov awoke he stretched himself and realised that he
had
slept well. For a moment or two he lay on his back, and then
suddenly
clapped his hands at the recollection that he was now owner of

nearly
four hundred souls. At once he leapt out of bed without so much
as
glancing at his face in the mirror, though, as a rule, he had
much
solicitude for his features, and especially for his chin, of
which he
would make the most when in company with friends, and more
particularly should any one happen to enter while he was engaged
in
the process of shaving. "Look how round my chin is!" was his
usual
formula. On the present occasion, however, he looked neither at
chin
nor at any other feature, but at once donned his flower-
embroidered
slippers of morroco leather (the kind of slippers in which,
thanks to
the Russian love for a dressing-gowned existence, the town of
Torzhok
does such a huge trade), and, clad only in a meagre shirt, so
far
forgot his elderliness and dignity as to cut a couple of capers
after
the fashion of a Scottish highlander--alighting neatly, each
time, on
the flat of his heels. Only when he had done that did he proceed
to
business. Planting himself before his dispatch-box, he rubbed
his
hands with a satisfaction worthy of an incorruptible rural
magistrate
when adjourning for luncheon; after which he extracted from the
receptacle a bundle of papers. These he had decided not to
deposit
with a lawyer, for the reason that he would hasten matters, as
well as
save expense, by himself framing and fair-copying the necessary
deeds
of indenture; and since he was thoroughly acquainted with the
necessary terminology, he proceeded to inscribe in large
characters
the date, and then in smaller ones, his name and rank. By two
o'clock
the whole was finished, and as he looked at the sheets of names
representing bygone peasants who had ploughed, worked at
handicrafts,

cheated their masters, fetched, carried, and got drunk (though SOME of them may have behaved well), there came over him a strange, unaccountable sensation. To his eye each list of names seemed to possess a character of its own; and even individual peasants therein seemed to have taken on certain qualities peculiar to themselves. For instance, to the majority of Madame Korobotchka's serfs there were appended nicknames and other additions; Plushkin's list was distinguished by a conciseness of exposition which had led to certain of the items being represented merely by Christian name, patronymic, and a couple of dots; and Sobakevitch's list was remarkable for its amplitude and circumstantiality, in that not a single peasant had such of his peculiar characteristics omitted as that the deceased had been "excellent at joinery," or "sober and ready to pay attention to his work." Also, in Sobakevitch's list there was recorded who had been the father and the mother of each of the deceased, and how those parents had behaved themselves. Only against the name of a certain Thedotov was there inscribed: "Father unknown, Mother the maidservant Kapitolina, Morals and Honesty good." These details communicated to the document a certain air of freshness, they seemed to connote that the peasants in question had lived but yesterday. As Chichikov scanned the list he felt softened in spirit, and said with a sigh:

"My friends, what a concourse of you is here! How did you all pass your lives, my brethren? And how did you all come to depart hence?"

As he spoke his eyes halted at one name in particular--that of the same Peter Saveliev Neuvazhai Korito who had once been the property of

the window Korobotchka. Once more he could not help exclaiming:

"What a series of titles! They occupy a whole line! Peter Saveliev, I wonder whether you were an artisan or a plain muzhik. Also, I wonder how you came to meet your end; whether in a tavern, or whether through going to sleep in the middle of the road and being run over by a train of waggons. Again, I see the name, 'Probka Stepan, carpenter, very sober.' That must be the hero of whom the Guards would have been so glad to get hold. How well I can imagine him tramping the country with an axe in his belt and his boots on his shoulder, and living on a few groats'-worth of bread and dried fish per day, and taking home a couple of half-rouble pieces in his purse, and sewing the notes into his breeches, or stuffing them into his boots! In what manner came you by your end, Probka Stepan? Did you, for good wages, mount a scaffold around the cupola of the village church, and, climbing thence to the cross above, miss your footing on a beam, and fall headlong with none at hand but Uncle Michai--the good uncle who, scratching the back of his neck, and muttering, 'Ah, Vania, for once you have been too clever!' straightway lashed himself to a rope, and took your place? 'Maksim Teliatnikov, shoemaker.' A shoemaker, indeed? 'As drunk as a shoemaker,' says the proverb. I know what you were like, my friend. If you wish, I will tell you your whole history. You were apprenticed to a German, who fed you and your fellows at a common table, thrashed you with a strap, kept you indoors whenever you had made a mistake, and spoke of you in uncomplimentary terms to his wife and friends. At length, when your apprenticeship was over, you said to yourself,

'I am going to set up on my own account, and not just to scrape together a kopeck here and a kopeck there, as the Germans do, but to grow rich quick.' Hence you took a shop at a high rent, bespoke a few orders, and set to work to buy up some rotten leather out of which you could make, on each pair of boots, a double profit. But those boots split within a fortnight, and brought down upon your head dire showers of maledictions; with the result that gradually your shop grew empty of customers, and you fell to roaming the streets and exclaiming, 'The world is a very poor place indeed! A Russian cannot make a living for German competition.' Well, well! 'Elizabeta Vorobei!' But that is a WOMAN'S name! How comes SHE to be on the list? That villain Sobakevitch must have sneaked her in without my knowing it."

"'Grigori Goiezhai-ne-Doiedesh,'" he went on. "What sort of a man were YOU, I wonder? Were you a carrier who, having set up a team of three horses and a tilt waggon, left your home, your native hovel, for ever, and departed to cart merchandise to market? Was it on the highway that you surrendered your soul to God, or did your friends first marry you to some fat, red-faced soldier's daughter; after which your harness and team of rough, but sturdy, horses caught a highwayman's fancy, and you, lying on your pallet, thought things over until, willy-nilly, you felt that you must get up and make for the tavern, thereafter blundering into an icehole? Ah, our peasant of Russia! Never do you welcome death when it comes!"

"And you, my friends?" continued Chichikov, turning to the sheet whereon were inscribed the names of Plushkin's absconded serfs.

"Although you are still alive, what is the good of you? You are practically dead. Whither, I wonder, have your fugitive feet carried

you? Did you fare hardly at Plushkin's, or was it that your natural

inclinations led you to prefer roaming the wilds and plundering travellers? Are you, by this time, in gaol, or have you taken service

with other masters for the tillage of their lands? 'Eremai Kariakin,

Nikita Volokita and Anton Volokita (son of the foregoing).' To judge

from your surnames, you would seem to have been born gadabouts[1].

'Popov, household serf.' Probably you are an educated man, good Popov,

and go in for polite thieving, as distinguished from the more vulgar

cut-throat sort. In my mind's eye I seem to see a Captain of Rural

Police challenging you for being without a passport; whereupon you

stake your all upon a single throw. 'To whom do you belong?' asks the

Captain, probably adding to his question a forcible expletive.

'To

such and such a landowner,' stoutly you reply. 'And what are you doing

here?' continues the Captain. 'I have just received permission to go

and earn my obrok,' is your fluent explanation. 'Then where is your

passport?' 'At Miestchanin[2] Pimenov's.' 'Pimenov's? Then are you

Pimenov himself?' 'Yes, I am Pimenov himself.' 'He has given you his

passport?' 'No, he has not given me his passport.' 'Come, come!' shouts the Captain with another forcible expletive. 'You are lying!'

'No, I am not,' is your dogged reply. 'It is only that last night I

could not return him his passport, because I came home late; so I

handed it to Antip Prochorov, the bell-ringer, for him to take care

of.' 'Bell-ringer, indeed! Then HE gave you a passport?' 'No; I did

not receive a passport from him either.' 'What?'--and here the Captain shouts another expletive--'How dare you keep on lying? Where is YOUR OWN passport?' 'I had one all right,' you reply cunningly, 'but must have dropped it somewhere on the road as I came along.' 'And what about that soldier's coat?' asks the Captain with an impolite addition. 'Whence did you get it? And what of the priest's cashbox and copper money?'' 'About them I know nothing,' you reply doggedly. 'Never at any time have I committed a theft.' 'Then how is it that the coat was found at your place?' 'I do not know. Probably some one else put it there.' 'You rascal, you rascal!' shouts the Captain, shaking his head, and closing in upon you. 'Put the leg-irons upon him, and off with him to prison!' 'With pleasure,' you reply as, taking a snuff-box from your pocket, you offer a pinch to each of the two gendarmes who are manacling you, while also inquiring how long they have been discharged from the army, and in what wars they may have served. And in prison you remain until your case comes on, when the justice orders you to be removed from Tsarev-Kokshaika to such and such another prison, and a second justice orders you to be transferred thence to Vesiegonsk or somewhere else, and you go flitting from gaol to gaol, and saying each time, as you eye your new habitation, 'The last place was a good deal cleaner than this one is, and one could play babki^[3] there, and stretch one's legs, and see a little society.'

[1] The names Kariakin and Volokita might, perhaps, be translated as "Gallant" and "Loafer."

[2] Tradesman or citizen.

[3] The game of knucklebones.

"'Abakum Thirov,'" Chichikov went on after a pause. "What of YOU, brother? Where, and in what capacity, are YOU disporting yourself? Have you gone to the Volga country, and become bitten with the life of freedom, and joined the fishermen of the river?"

Here, breaking off, Chichikov relapsed into silent meditation. Of what was he thinking as he sat there? Was he thinking of the fortunes of Abakum Thirov, or was he meditating as meditates every Russian when his thoughts once turn to the joys of an emancipated existence?

"Ah, well!" he sighed, looking at his watch. "It has now gone twelve o'clock. Why have I so forgotten myself? There is still much to be done, yet I go shutting myself up and letting my thoughts wander! What a fool I am!"

So saying, he exchanged his Scottish costume (of a shirt and nothing else) for attire of a more European nature; after which he pulled tight the waistcoat over his ample stomach, sprinkled himself with eau-de-Cologne, tucked his papers under his arm, took his fur cap, and set out for the municipal offices, for the purpose of completing the transfer of souls. The fact that he hurried along was not due to a fear of being late (seeing that the President of the Local Council was an intimate acquaintance of his, as well as a functionary who could shorten or prolong an interview at will, even as Homer's Zeus was able to shorten or to prolong a night or a day, whenever it became necessary to put an end to the fighting of his favourite heroes, or to

enable them to join battle), but rather to a feeling that he would like to have the affair concluded as quickly as possible, seeing that, throughout, it had been an anxious and difficult business. Also, he could not get rid of the idea that his souls were unsubstantial things, and that therefore, under the circumstances, his shoulders had better be relieved of their load with the least possible delay. Pulling on his cinnamon-coloured, bear-lined overcoat as he went, he had just stepped thoughtfully into the street when he collided with a gentleman dressed in a similar coat and an ear-lapped fur cap. Upon that the gentleman uttered an exclamation. Behold, it was Manilov! At once the friends became folded in a strenuous embrace, and remained so locked for fully five minutes. Indeed, the kisses exchanged were so vigorous that both suffered from toothache for the greater portion of the day. Also, Manilov's delight was such that only his nose and lips remained visible--the eyes completely disappeared. Afterwards he spent about a quarter of an hour in holding Chichikov's hand and chafing it vigorously. Lastly, he, in the most pleasant and exquisite terms possible, intimated to his friend that he had just been on his way to embrace Paul Ivanovitch; and upon this followed a compliment of the kind which would more fittingly have been addressed to a lady who was being asked to accord a partner the favour of a dance. Chichikov had opened his mouth to reply--though even HE felt at a loss how to acknowledge what had just been said--when Manilov cut him short by producing from under his coat a roll of paper tied with red riband.

"What have you there?" asked Chichikov.

"The list of my souls."

"Ah!" And as Chichikov unrolled the document and ran his eye over it he could not but marvel at the elegant neatness with which it had been inscribed.

"It is a beautiful piece of writing," he said. "In fact, there will be no need to make a copy of it. Also, it has a border around its edge! Who worked that exquisite border?"

"Do not ask me," said Manilov.

"Did YOU do it?"

"No; my wife."

"Dear, dear!" Chichikov cried. "To think that I should have put her to so much trouble!"

"NOTHING could be too much trouble where Paul Ivanovitch is concerned.

Chichikov bowed his acknowledgements. Next, on learning that he was on his way to the municipal offices for the purpose of completing the transfer, Manilov expressed his readiness to accompany him; wherefore the pair linked arm in arm and proceeded together. Whenever they encountered a slight rise in the ground--even the smallest unevenness or difference of level--Manilov supported Chichikov with such energy as almost to lift him off his feet, while accompanying the service with a smiling implication that not if HE could help it should Paul Ivanovitch slip or fall. Nevertheless this conduct appeared to embarrass Chichikov, either because he could not find any fitting words of gratitude or because he considered the proceeding tiresome;

and it was with a sense of relief that he debouched upon the square where the municipal offices--a large, three-storied building of a chalky whiteness which probably symbolised the purity of the souls engaged within--were situated. No other building in the square could vie with them in size, seeing that the remaining edifices consisted only of a sentry-box, a shelter for two or three cabmen, and a long hoarding--the latter adorned with the usual bills, posters, and scrawls in chalk and charcoal. At intervals, from the windows of the second and third stories of the municipal offices, the incorruptible heads of certain of the attendant priests of Themis would peer quickly forth, and as quickly disappear again--probably for the reason that a superior official had just entered the room. Meanwhile the two friends ascended the staircase--nay, almost flew up it, since, longing to get rid of Manilov's ever-supporting arm, Chichikov hastened his steps, and Manilov kept darting forward to anticipate any possible failure on the part of his companion's legs. Consequently the pair were breathless when they reached the first corridor. In passing it may be remarked that neither corridors nor rooms evinced any of that cleanliness and purity which marked the exterior of the building, for such attributes were not troubled about within, and anything that was dirty remained so, and donned no meritricious, purely external, disguise. It was as though Themis received her visitors in negligé and a dressing-gown. The author would also give a description of the various offices through which our hero passed, were it not that he (the author) stands in awe of such legal haunts.

Approaching the first desk which he happened to encounter, Chichikov

inquired of the two young officials who were seated at it whether they would kindly tell him where business relating to serf-indenture was transacted.

"Of what nature, precisely, IS your business?" countered one of the youthful officials as he turned himself round.

"I desire to make an application."

"In connection with a purchase?"

"Yes. But, as I say, I should like first to know where I can find the desk devoted to such business. Is it here or elsewhere?"

"You must state what it is you have bought, and for how much. THEN we shall be happy to give you the information."

Chichikov perceived that the officials' motive was merely one of curiosity, as often happens when young tchinovniks desire to cut a more important and imposing figure than is rightfully theirs.

"Look here, young sirs," he said. "I know for a fact that all serf business, no matter to what value, is transacted at one desk alone. Consequently I again request you to direct me to that desk. Of course, if you do not know your business I can easily ask some one else."

To this the tchinovniks made no reply beyond pointing towards a corner of the room where an elderly man appeared to be engaged in sorting some papers. Accordingly Chichikov and Manilov threaded their way in his direction through the desks; whereupon the elderly man became violently busy.

"Would you mind telling me," said Chichikov, bowing, "whether

this is
the desk for serf affairs?"

The elderly man raised his eyes, and said stiffly:

"This is NOT the desk for serf affairs."

"Where is it, then?"

"In the Serf Department."

"And where might the Serf Department be?"

"In charge of Ivan Antonovitch."

"And where is Ivan Antonovitch?"

The elderly man pointed to another corner of the room; whither Chichikov and Manilov next directed their steps. As they advanced, Ivan Antonovitch cast an eye backwards and viewed them askance. Then, with renewed ardour, he resumed his work of writing.

"Would you mind telling me," said Chichikov, bowing, "whether this is the desk for serf affairs?"

It appeared as though Ivan Antonovitch had not heard, so completely did he bury himself in his papers and return no reply. Instantly it became plain that HE at least was of an age of discretion, and not one of your jejune chatterboxes and harum-scarums; for, although his hair was still thick and black, he had long ago passed his fortieth year. His whole face tended towards the nose--it was what, in common parlance, is known as a "pitcher-mug."

"Would you mind telling me," repeated Chichikov, "whether this is the desk for serf affairs?"

"It is that," said Ivan Antonovitch, again lowering his jug-

shaped
jowl, and resuming his writing.

"Then I should like to transact the following business. From various landowners in this canton I have purchased a number of peasants for transfer. Here is the purchase list, and it needs but to be registered."

"Have you also the vendors here?"

"Some of them, and from the rest I have obtained powers of attorney."

"And have you your statement of application?"

"Yes. I desire--indeed, it is necessary for me so to do--to hasten matters a little. Could the affair, therefore, be carried through to-day?"

"To-day? Oh, dear no!" said Ivan Antonovitch. "Before that can be done you must furnish me with further proofs that no impediments exist."

"Then, to expedite matters, let me say that Ivan Grigorievitch, the President of the Council, is a very intimate friend of mine."

"Possibly," said Ivan Antonovitch without enthusiasm. "But Ivan Grigorievitch alone will not do--it is customary to have others as well."

"Yes, but the absence of others will not altogether invalidate the transaction. I too have been in the service, and know how things can be done."

"You had better go and see Ivan Grigorievitch," said Ivan Antonovitch more mildly. "Should he give you an order addressed to whom it may

concern, we shall soon be able to settle the matter."

Upon that Chichikov pulled from his pocket a paper, and laid it before

Ivan Antonovitch. At once the latter covered it with a book.

Chichikov

again attempted to show it to him, but, with a movement of his head,

Ivan Antonovitch signified that that was unnecessary.

"A clerk," he added, "will now conduct you to Ivan

Grigorievitch's

room."

Upon that one of the toilers in the service of Themis--a zealot who

had offered her such heartfelt sacrifice that his coat had burst at

the elbows and lacked a lining--escorted our friends (even as Virgil

had once escorted Dante) to the apartment of the Presence. In this

sanctum were some massive armchairs, a table laden with two or three

fat books, and a large looking-glass. Lastly, in (apparently) sunlike

isolation, there was seated at the table the President. On arriving at

the door of the apartment, our modern Virgil seemed to have become so

overwhelmed with awe that, without daring even to intrude a foot, he

turned back, and, in so doing, once more exhibited a back as shiny as

a mat, and having adhering to it, in one spot, a chicken's feather. As

soon as the two friends had entered the hall of the Presence they

perceived that the President was NOT alone, but, on the contrary,

had seated by his side Sobakevitch, whose form had hitherto been concealed by the intervening mirror. The newcomers' entry evoked sundry exclamations and the pushing back of a pair of Government chairs as the voluminous-sleeved Sobakevitch rose into view from behind the looking-glass. Chichikov the President received with an

embrace, and for a while the hall of the Presence resounded with

osculatory salutations as mutually the pair inquired after one another's health. It seemed that both had lately had a touch of that pain under the waistband which comes of a sedentary life. Also, it seemed that the President had just been conversing with Sobakevitch on the subject of sales of souls, since he now proceeded to congratulate Chichikov on the same--a proceeding which rather embarrassed our hero, seeing that Manilov and Sobakevitch, two of the vendors, and persons with whom he had bargained in the strictest privacy, were now confronting one another direct. However, Chichikov duly thanked the President, and then, turning to Sobakevitch, inquired after HIS health.

"Thank God, I have nothing to complain of," replied Sobakevitch: which was true enough, seeing that a piece of iron would have caught cold and taken to sneezing sooner than would that uncouthly fashioned landowner.

"Ah, yes; you have always had good health, have you not?" put in the President. "Your late father was equally strong."

"Yes, he even went out bear hunting alone," replied Sobakevitch.

"I should think that you too could worst a bear if you were to try a tussle with him," rejoined the President.

"Oh no," said Sobakevitch. "My father was a stronger man than I am."

Then with a sigh the speaker added: "But nowadays there are no such men as he. What is even a life like mine worth?"

"Then you do not have a comfortable time of it?" exclaimed the President.

"No; far from it," rejoined Sobakevitch, shaking his head. "Judge for

yourself, Ivan Grigorievitch. I am fifty years old, yet never in my life had been ill, except for an occasional carbuncle or boil. That is not a good sign. Sooner or later I shall have to pay for it." And he relapsed into melancholy.

"Just listen to the fellow!" was Chichikov's and the President's joint inward comment. "What on earth has HE to complain of?"

"I have a letter for you, Ivan Grigorievitch," went on Chichikov aloud as he produced from his pocket Plushkin's epistle.

"From whom?" inquired the President. Having broken the seal, he exclaimed: "Why, it is from Plushkin! To think that HE is still alive! What a strange world it is! He used to be such a nice fellow, and now--"

"And now he is a cur," concluded Sobakevitch, "as well as a miser who starves his serfs to death."

"Allow me a moment," said the President. Then he read the letter through. When he had finished he added: "Yes, I am quite ready to act as Plushkin's attorney. When do you wish the purchase deeds to be registered, Monsieur Chichikov--now or later?"

"Now, if you please," replied Chichikov. "Indeed, I beg that, if possible, the affair may be concluded to-day, since to-morrow I wish to leave the town. I have brought with me both the forms of indenture and my statement of application."

"Very well. Nevertheless we cannot let you depart so soon. The indentures shall be completed to-day, but you must continue your sojourn in our midst. I will issue the necessary orders at once."

So saying, he opened the door into the general office, where the clerks looked like a swarm of bees around a honeycomb (if I may

liken
affairs of Government to such an article?).

"Is Ivan Antonovitch here?" asked the President.

"Yes," replied a voice from within.

"Then send him here."

Upon that the pitcher-faced Ivan Antonovitch made his appearance
in
the doorway, and bowed.

"Take these indentures, Ivan Antonovitch," said the President,
"and
see that they--"

"But first I would ask you to remember," put in Sobakevitch,
"that
witnesses ought to be in attendance--not less than two on behalf
of
either party. Let us, therefore, send for the Public Prosecutor,
who
has little to do, and has even that little done for him by his
chief
clerk, Zolotucha. The Inspector of the Medical Department is
also a
man of leisure, and likely to be at home--if he has not gone out
to a
card party. Others also there are--all men who cumber the ground
for
nothing."

"Quite so, quite so," agreed the President, and at once
dispatched a
clerk to fetch the persons named.

"Also," requested Chichikov, "I should be glad if you would send
for
the accredited representative of a certain lady landowner with
whom I
have done business. He is the son of a Father Cyril, and a clerk
in
your offices."

"Certainly we shall call him here," replied the President.
"Everything

shall be done to meet your convenience, and I forbid you to present any of our officials with a gratuity. That is a special request on my part. No friend of mine ever pays a copper."

With that he gave Ivan Antonovitch the necessary instructions; and though they scarcely seemed to meet with that functionary's approval, upon the President the purchase deeds had evidently produced an excellent impression, more especially since the moment when he had perceived the sum total to amount to nearly a hundred thousand roubles. For a moment or two he gazed into Chichikov's eyes with an expression of profound satisfaction. Then he said:

"Well done, Paul Ivanovitch! You have indeed made a nice haul!"

"That is so," replied Chichikov.

"Excellent business! Yes, excellent business!"

"I, too, conceive that I could not well have done better. The truth is that never until a man has driven home the piles of his life's structure upon a lasting bottom, instead of upon the wayward chimeras of youth, will his aims in life assume a definite end." And, that said, Chichikov went on to deliver himself of a very telling indictment of Liberalism and our modern young men. Yet in his words there seemed to lurk a certain lack of conviction. Somehow he seemed secretly to be saying to himself, "My good sir, you are talking the most absolute rubbish, and nothing but rubbish." Nor did he even throw a glance at Sobakevitch and Manilov. It was as though he were uncertain what he might not encounter in their expression. Yet he need not have been afraid. Never once did Sobakevitch's face move a muscle, and, as for Manilov, he was too much under the spell of Chichikov's

eloquence to do aught beyond nod his approval at intervals, and
strike
the kind of attitude which is assumed by lovers of music when a
lady
singer has, in rivalry of an accompanying violin, produced a
note
whereof the shrillness would exceed even the capacity of a
bird's
throistle.

"But why not tell Ivan Grigorievitch precisely what you have
bought?"
inquired Sobakevitch of Chichikov. "And why, Ivan Grigorievitch,
do
YOU not ask Monsieur Chichikov precisely what his purchases have
consisted of? What a splendid lot of serfs, to be sure! I myself
have
sold him my wheelwright, Michiev."

"What? You have sold him Michiev?" exclaimed the President. "I
know
the man well. He is a splendid craftsman, and, on one occasion,
made
me a drozhki[4]. Only, only--well, lately didn't you tell me
that he
is dead?"

[4] A sort of low, four-wheeled carriage.

"That Michiev is dead?" re-echoed Sobakevitch, coming perilously
near
to laughing. "Oh dear no! That was his brother. Michiev himself
is
very much alive, and in even better health than he used to be.
Any day
he could knock you up a britchka such as you could not procure
even in
Moscow. However, he is now bound to work for only one master."

"Indeed a splendid craftsman!" repeated the President. "My only
wonder
is that you can have brought yourself to part with him."

"Then think you that Michiev is the ONLY serf with whom I have
parted? Nay, for I have parted also with Probka Stepan, my
carpenter,
with Milushkin, my bricklayer, and with Teliatnikov, my

bootmaker.

Yes, the whole lot I have sold."

And to the President's inquiry why he had so acted, seeing that the

serfs named were all skilled workers and indispensable to a household,

Sobakevitch replied that a mere whim had led him to do so, and thus

the sale had owed its origin to a piece of folly. Then he hung his

head as though already repenting of his rash act, and added:

"Although a man of grey hairs, I have not yet learned wisdom."

"But," inquired the President further, "how comes it about, Paul Ivanovitch, that you have purchased peasants apart from land? Is it

for transferment elsewhere that you need them?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then. That is quite another matter. To what province of

the country?"

"To the province of Kherson."

"Indeed? That region contains some splendid land," said the President;

whereupon he proceeded to expatiate on the fertility of the Kherson

pastures.

"And have you MUCH land there?" he continued.

"Yes; quite sufficient to accommodate the serfs whom I have purchased."

"And is there a river on the estate or a lake?"

"Both."

After this reply Chichikov involuntarily threw a glance at Sobakevitch; and though that landowner's face was as motionless as

every, the other seemed to detect in it: "You liar! Don't tell

ME

that you own both a river and a lake, as well as the land which you say you do."

Whilst the foregoing conversation had been in progress, various witnesses had been arriving on the scene. They consisted of the constantly blinking Public Prosecutor, the Inspector of the Medical Department, and others--all, to quote Sobakevitch, "men who cumbered the ground for nothing." With some of them, however, Chichikov was altogether unacquainted, since certain substitutes and supernumeraries had to be pressed into the service from among the ranks of the subordinate staff. There also arrived, in answer to the summons, not only the son of Father Cyril before mentioned, but also Father Cyril himself. Each such witness appended to his signature a full list of his dignities and qualifications: one man in printed characters, another in a flowing hand, a third in topsy-turvy characters of a kind never before seen in the Russian alphabet, and so forth. Meanwhile our friend Ivan Antonovitch comported himself with not a little address; and after the indentures had been signed, docketed, and registered, Chichikov found himself called upon to pay only the merest trifle in the way of Government percentage and fees for publishing the transaction in the Official Gazette. The reason of this was that the President had given orders that only half the usual charges were to be exacted from the present purchaser--the remaining half being somehow debited to the account of another applicant for serf registration.

"And now," said Ivan Grigorievitch when all was completed, "we need only to wet the bargain."

"For that too I am ready," said Chichikov. "Do you but name the hour.

If, in return for your most agreeable company, I were not to set a few champagne corks flying, I should be indeed in default."

"But we are not going to let you charge yourself with anything whatsoever. WE must provide the champagne, for you are our guest, and it is for us--it is our duty, it is our bounden obligation--to entertain you. Look here, gentlemen. Let us adjourn to the house of the Chief of Police. He is the magician who needs but to wink when passing a fishmonger's or a wine merchant's. Not only shall we fare well at his place, but also we shall get a game of whist."

To this proposal no one had any objection to offer, for the mere mention of the fish shop aroused the witnesses' appetite. Consequently, the ceremony being over, there was a general reaching for hats and caps. As the party were passing through the general office, Ivan Antonovitch whispered in Chichikov's ear, with a courteous inclination of his jug-shaped physiognomy:

"You have given a hundred thousand roubles for the serfs, but have paid ME only a trifle for my trouble."

"Yes," replied Chichikov with a similar whisper, "but what sort of serfs do you suppose them to be? They are a poor, useless lot, and not worth even half the purchase money."

This gave Ivan Antonovitch to understand that the visitor was a man of strong character--a man from whom nothing more was to be expected.

"Why have you gone and purchased souls from Plushkin?" whispered Sobakevitch in Chichikov's other ear.

"Why did YOU go and add the woman Vorobei to your list?" retorted Chichikov.

"Vorobei? Who is Vorobei?"

"The woman 'Elizabet' Vorobei--'Elizabet,' not 'Elizabeta?'"

"I added no such name," replied Sobakevitch, and straightway joined the other guests.

At length the party arrived at the residence of the Chief of Police.

The latter proved indeed a man of spells, for no sooner had he learnt

what was afoot than he summoned a brisk young constable, whispered in

his ear, adding laconically, "You understand, do you not?" and brought

it about that, during the time that the guests were cutting for partners at whist in an adjoining room, the dining-table became laden

with sturgeon, caviare, salmon, herrings, cheese, smoked tongue, fresh

roe, and a potted variety of the same--all procured from the local

fish market, and reinforced with additions from the host's own kitchen. The fact was that the worthy Chief of Police filled the office of a sort of father and general benefactor to the town, and

that he moved among the citizens as though they constituted part and

parcel of his own family, and watched over their shops and markets as

though those establishments were merely his own private larder. Indeed, it would be difficult to say--so thoroughly did he perform his

duties in this respect--whether the post most fitted him, or he the

post. Matters were also so arranged that though his income more than

doubled that of his predecessors, he had never lost the affection of

his fellow townsmen. In particular did the tradesmen love him, since

he was never above standing godfather to their children or dining at

their tables. True, he had differences of opinion with them, and serious differences at that; but always these were skilfully

adjusted
by his slapping the offended ones jovially on the shoulder,
drinking a
glass of tea with them, promising to call at their houses and
play a
game of chess, asking after their belongings, and, should he
learn
that a child of theirs was ill, prescribing the proper medicine.
In
short, he bore the reputation of being a very good fellow.

On perceiving the feast to be ready, the host proposed that his
guests
should finish their whist after luncheon; whereupon all
proceeded to
the room whence for some time past an agreeable odour had been
tickling the nostrils of those present, and towards the door of
which
Sobakevitch in particular had been glancing since the moment
when he
had caught sight of a huge sturgeon reposing on the sideboard.
After a
glassful of warm, olive-coloured vodka apiece--vodka of the tint
to be
seen only in the species of Siberian stone whereof seals are
cut--the
company applied themselves to knife-and-fork work, and, in so
doing,
evinced their several characteristics and tastes. For instance,
Sobakevitch, disdaining lesser trifles, tackled the large
sturgeon,
and, during the time that his fellow guests were eating minor
comestibles, and drinking and talking, contrived to consume more
than
a quarter of the whole fish; so that, on the host remembering
the
creature, and, with fork in hand, leading the way in its
direction and
saying, "What, gentlemen, think you of this striking product of
nature?" there ensued the discovery that of the said product of
nature
there remained little beyond the tail, while Sobakevitch, with
an air
as though at least HE had not eaten it, was engaged in plunging
his
fork into a much more diminutive piece of fish which happened to
be

resting on an adjacent platter. After his divorce from the sturgeon, Sobakevitch ate and drank no more, but sat frowning and blinking in an armchair.

Apparently the host was not a man who believed in sparing the wine, for the toasts drunk were innumerable. The first toast (as the reader may guess) was quaffed to the health of the new landowner of Kherson; the second to the prosperity of his peasants and their safe transferment; and the third to the beauty of his future wife--a compliment which brought to our hero's lips a flickering smile. Lastly, he received from the company a pressing, as well as an unanimous, invitation to extend his stay in town for at least another fortnight, and, in the meanwhile, to allow a wife to be found for him.

"Quite so," agreed the President. "Fight us tooth and nail though you may, we intend to have you married. You have happened upon us by chance, and you shall have no reason to repent of it. We are in earnest on this subject."

"But why should I fight you tooth and nail?" said Chichikov, smiling. "Marriage would not come amiss to me, were I but provided with a betrothed."

"Then a betrothed you shall have. Why not? We will do as you wish."

"Very well," assented Chichikov.

"Bravo, bravo!" the company shouted. "Long live Paul Ivanovitch! Hurrah! Hurrah!" And with that every one approached to clink glasses with him, and he readily accepted the compliment, and accepted it many times in succession. Indeed, as the hours passed on, the hilarity of the company increased yet further, and more than once the President (a man of great urbanity when thoroughly in his cups) embraced the

chief
guest of the day with the heartfelt words, "My dearest fellow!
My own
most precious of friends!" Nay, he even started to crack his
fingers,
to dance around Chichikov's chair, and to sing snatches of a
popular
song. To the champagne succeeded Hungarian wine, which had the
effect
of still further heartening and enlivening the company. By this
time
every one had forgotten about whist, and given himself up to
shouting
and disputing. Every conceivable subject was discussed,
including
politics and military affairs; and in this connection guests
voiced
jejune opinions for the expression of which they would, at any
other
time, have soundly spanked their offspring. Chichikov, like the
rest,
had never before felt so gay, and, imagining himself really and
truly
to be a landowner of Kherson, spoke of various improvements in
agriculture, of the three-field system of tillage[5], and of the
beatific felicity of a union between two kindred souls. Also, he
started to recite poetry to Sobakevitch, who blinked as he
listened,
for he greatly desired to go to sleep. At length the guest of
the
evening realised that matters had gone far enough, so begged to
be
given a lift home, and was accommodated with the Public
Prosecutor's
drozhki. Luckily the driver of the vehicle was a practised man
at his
work, for, while driving with one hand, he succeeded in leaning
backwards and, with the other, holding Chichikov securely in his
place. Arrived at the inn, our hero continued babbling awhile
about a
flaxen-haired damsel with rosy lips and a dimple in her right
cheek,
about villages of his in Kherson, and about the amount of his
capital.
Nay, he even issued seignorial instructions that Selifan should
go and
muster the peasants about to be transferred, and make a complete

and
detailed inventory of them. For a while Selifan listened in
silence;
then he left the room, and instructed Petrushka to help the
barin to
undress. As it happened, Chichikov's boots had no sooner been
removed
than he managed to perform the rest of his toilet without
assistance,
to roll on to the bed (which creaked terribly as he did so), and
to
sink into a sleep in every way worthy of a landowner of Kherson.
Meanwhile Petrushka had taken his master's coat and trousers of
bilberry-coloured check into the corridor; where, spreading them
over
a clothes' horse, he started to flick and to brush them, and to
fill
the whole corridor with dust. Just as he was about to replace
them in
his master's room he happened to glance over the railing of the
gallery, and saw Selifan returning from the stable. Glances were
exchanged, and in an instant the pair had arrived at an
instinctive
understanding--an understanding to the effect that the barin was
sound
asleep, and that therefore one might consider one's own pleasure
a
little. Accordingly Petrushka proceeded to restore the coat and
trousers to their appointed places, and then descended the
stairs;
whereafter he and Selifan left the house together. Not a word
passed
between them as to the object of their expedition. On the
contrary,
they talked solely of extraneous subjects. Yet their walk did
not take
them far; it took them only to the other side of the street, and
thence into an establishment which immediately confronted the
inn.
Entering a mean, dirty courtyard covered with glass, they passed
thence into a cellar where a number of customers were seated
around
small wooden tables. What thereafter was done by Selifan and
Petrushka
God alone knows. At all events, within an hour's time they
issued, arm
in arm, and in profound silence, yet remaining markedly

assiduous to
one another, and ever ready to help one another around an
awkward
corner. Still linked together--never once releasing their mutual
hold--they spent the next quarter of an hour in attempting to
negotiate the stairs of the inn; but at length even that ascent
had
been mastered, and they proceeded further on their way. Halting
before
his mean little pallet, Petrushka stood awhile in thought. His
difficulty was how best to assume a recumbent position.
Eventually he
lay down on his face, with his legs trailing over the floor;
after
which Selifan also stretched himself upon the pallet, with his
head
resting upon Petrushka's stomach, and his mind wholly oblivious
of the
fact that he ought not to have been sleeping there at all, but
in the
servant's quarters, or in the stable beside his horses. Scarcely
a
moment had passed before the pair were plunged in slumber and
emitting
the most raucous snores; to which their master (next door)
responded
with snores of a whistling and nasal order. Indeed, before long
every
one in the inn had followed their soothing example, and the
hostelry
lay plunged in complete restfulness. Only in the window of the
room of
the newly-arrived lieutenant from Riazan did a light remain
burning.
Evidently he was a devotee of boots, for he had purchased four
pairs,
and was now trying on a fifth. Several times he approached the
bed
with a view to taking off the boots and retiring to rest; but
each
time he failed, for the reason that the boots were so alluring
in
their make that he had no choice but to lift up first one foot,
and
then the other, for the purpose of scanning their elegant welts.

[5] The system by which, in annual rotation, two-thirds of a

given

area are cultivated, while the remaining third is left fallow.

CHAPTER VIII

It was not long before Chichikov's purchases had become the talk of the town; and various were the opinions expressed as to whether or not it was expedient to procure peasants for transferment. Indeed such was the interest taken by certain citizens in the matter that they advised the purchaser to provide himself and his convoy with an escort, in order to ensure their safe arrival at the appointed destination; but though Chichikov thanked the donors of this advice for the same, and declared that he should be very glad, in case of need, to avail himself of it, he declared also that there was no real need for an escort, seeing that the peasants whom he had purchased were exceptionally peace-loving folk, and that, being themselves consenting parties to the transferment, they would undoubtedly prove in every way tractable.

One particularly good result of this advertisement of his scheme was that he came to rank as neither more nor less than a millionaire.

Consequently, much as the inhabitants had liked our hero in the first instance (as seen in Chapter I.), they now liked him more than ever.

As a matter of fact, they were citizens of an exceptionally quiet, good-natured, easy-going disposition; and some of them were even well-educated. For instance, the President of the Local Council could recite the whole of Zhukovski's LUDMILLA by heart, and give such an

impressive rendering of the passage "The pine forest was asleep and the valley at rest" (as well as of the exclamation "Phew!") that one felt, as he did so, that the pine forest and the valley really WERE as he described them. The effect was also further heightened by the manner in which, at such moments, he assumed the most portentous frown. For his part, the Postmaster went in more for philosophy, and diligently perused such works as Young's Night Thoughts, and Eckharthausen's A Key to the Mysteries of Nature; of which latter work he would make copious extracts, though no one had the slightest notion what they referred to. For the rest, he was a witty, florid little individual, and much addicted to a practice of what he called "embellishing" whatsoever he had to say--a feat which he performed with the aid of such by-the-way phrases as "my dear sir," "my good So-and-So," "you know," "you understand," "you may imagine," "relatively speaking," "for instance," and "et cetera"; of which phrases he would add sackfuls to his speech. He could also "embellish" his words by the simple expedient of half-closing, half-winking one eye; which trick communicated to some of his satirical utterances quite a mordant effect. Nor were his colleagues a wit inferior to him in enlightenment. For instance, one of them made a regular practice of reading Karamzin, another of conning the Moscow Gazette, and a third of never looking at a book at all. Likewise, although they were the sort of men to whom, in their more intimate movements, their wives would very naturally address such nicknames as "Toby Jug," "Marmot," "Fatty," "Pot Belly," "Smutty," "Kiki," and "Buzz-Buzz," they were men also of good heart, and very ready to extend their hospitality and

their friendship when once a guest had eaten of their bread and salt,
or spent an evening in their company. Particularly, therefore, did
Chichikov earn these good folk's approval with his taking
methods and
qualities--so much so that the expression of that approval bid
fair to
make it difficult for him to quit the town, seeing that,
wherever he
went, the one phrase dinned into his ears was "Stay another week
with
us, Paul Ivanovitch." In short, he ceased to be a free agent.
But
incomparably more striking was the impression (a matter for
unbounded
surprise!) which he produced upon the ladies. Properly to
explain this
phenomenon I should need to say a great deal about the ladies
themselves, and to describe in the most vivid of colours their
social
intercourse and spiritual qualities. Yet this would be a
difficult
thing for me to do, since, on the one hand, I should be hampered
by my
boundless respect for the womenfolk of all Civil Service
officials,
and, on the other hand--well, simply by the innate arduousness
of the
task. The ladies of N. were--But no, I cannot do it; my heart
has
already failed me. Come, come! The ladies of N. were
distinguished
for--But it is of no use; somehow my pen seems to refuse to move
over
the paper--it seems to be weighted as with a plummet of lead.
Very
well. That being so, I will merely say a word or two concerning
the
most prominent tints on the feminine palette of N.--merely a
word or
two concerning the outward appearance of its ladies, and a word
or two
concerning their more superficial characteristics. The ladies of
N.
were pre-eminently what is known as "presentable." Indeed, in
that

respect they might have served as a model to the ladies of many another town. That is to say, in whatever pertained to "tone," etiquette, the intricacies of decorum, and strict observance of the prevailing mode, they surpassed even the ladies of Moscow and St.

Petersburg, seeing that they dressed with taste, drove about in carriages in the latest fashions, and never went out without the escort of a footman in gold-laced livery. Again, they looked upon a visiting card--even upon a make-shift affair consisting of an ace of diamonds or a two of clubs--as a sacred thing; so sacred that on one occasion two closely related ladies who had also been closely attached friends were known to fall out with one another over the mere fact of an omission to return a social call! Yes, in spite of the best efforts of husbands and kinsfolk to reconcile the antagonists, it became clear that, though all else in the world might conceivably be possible, never could the hatchet be buried between ladies who had quarrelled over a neglected visit. Likewise strenuous scenes used to take place over questions of precedence--scenes of a kind which had the effect of inspiring husbands to great and knightly ideas on the subject of protecting the fair. True, never did a duel actually take place, since all the husbands were officials belonging to the Civil Service; but at least a given combatant would strive to heap contumely upon his rival, and, as we all know, that is a resource which may prove even more effectual than a duel. As regards morality, the ladies of N. were nothing if not censorious, and would at once be fired with virtuous indignation when they heard of a case of vice or seduction. Nay, even to mere frailty they would award the lash without mercy. On the other

hand, should any instance of what they called "third personism" occur among THEIR OWN circle, it was always kept dark--not a hint of what was going on being allowed to transpire, and even the wronged husband holding himself ready, should he meet with, or hear of, the "third person," to quote, in a mild and rational manner, the proverb, "Whom concerns it that a friend should consort with friend?" In addition, I may say that, like most of the female world of St. Petersburg, the ladies of N. were pre-eminently careful and refined in their choice of words and phrases. Never did a lady say, "I blew my nose," or "I perspired," or "I spat." No, it had to be, "I relieved my nose through the expedient of wiping it with my handkerchief," and so forth. Again, to say, "This glass, or this plate, smells badly," was forbidden. No, not even a hint to such an effect was to be dropped. Rather, the proper phrase, in such a case, was "This glass, or this plate, is not behaving very well,"--or some such formula.

In fact, to refine the Russian tongue the more thoroughly, something like half the words in it were cut out: which circumstance necessitated very frequent recourse to the tongue of France, since the same words, if spoken in French, were another matter altogether, and one could use even blunter ones than the ones originally objected to.

So much for the ladies of N., provided that one confines one's observations to the surface; yet hardly need it be said that, should one penetrate deeper than that, a great deal more would come to light. At the same time, it is never a very safe proceeding to peer deeply into the hearts of ladies; wherefore, restricting ourselves to the

foregoing superficialities, let us proceed further on our way.

Hitherto the ladies had paid Chichikov no particular attention, though giving him full credit for his gentlemanly and urbane demeanour; but from the moment that there arose rumours of his being a millionaire other qualities of his began to be canvassed. Nevertheless, not ALL the ladies were governed by interested motives, since it is due to the term "millionaire" rather than to the character of the person who bears it, that the mere sound of the word exercises upon rascals, upon decent folk, and upon folk who are neither the one nor the other, an undeniable influence. A millionaire suffers from the disadvantage of everywhere having to behold meanness, including the sort of meanness which, though not actually based upon calculations of self-interest, yet runs after the wealthy man with smiles, and doffs his hat, and begs for invitations to houses where the millionaire is known to be going to dine. That a similar inclination to meanness seized upon the ladies of N. goes without saying; with the result that many a drawing-room heard it whispered that, if Chichikov was not exactly a beauty, at least he was sufficiently good-looking to serve for a husband, though he could have borne to have been a little more rotund and stout. To that there would be added scornful references to lean husbands, and hints that they resembled tooth-brushes rather than men--with many other feminine additions. Also, such crowds of feminine shoppers began to repair to the Bazaar as almost to constitute a crush, and something like a procession of carriages ensued, so long grew the rank of vehicles. For their part, the tradesmen had the joy

of seeing highly priced dress materials which they had brought at fairs, and then been unable to dispose of, now suddenly become tradeable, and go off with a rush. For instance, on one occasion a lady appeared at Mass in a bustle which filled the church to an extent which led the verger on duty to bid the commoner folk withdraw to the porch, lest the lady's toilet should be soiled in the crush. Even Chichikov could not help privately remarking the attention which he aroused. On one occasion, when he returned to the inn, he found on his table a note addressed to himself. Whence it had come, and who had delivered it, he failed to discover, for the waiter declared that the person who had brought it had omitted to leave the name of the writer. Beginning abruptly with the words "I MUST write to you," the letter went on to say that between a certain pair of souls there existed a bond of sympathy; and this verity the epistle further confirmed with rows of full stops to the extent of nearly half a page. Next there followed a few reflections of a correctitude so remarkable that I have no choice but to quote them. "What, I would ask, is this life of ours?" inquired the writer. "'Tis nought but a vale of woe. And what, I would ask, is the world? 'Tis nought but a mob of unthinking humanity." Thereafter, incidentally remarking that she had just dropped a tear to the memory of her dear mother, who had departed this life twenty-five years ago, the (presumably) lady writer invited Chichikov to come forth into the wilds, and to leave for ever the city where, penned in noisome haunts, folk could not even draw their breath. In conclusion, the writer gave way to unconcealed despair, and wound up with the following verses:

"Two turtle doves to thee, one day,

My dust will show, congealed in death;
And, cooing wearily, they'll say:
'In grief and loneliness she drew her closing breath.'

True, the last line did not scan, but that was a trifle, since the quatrain at least conformed to the mode then prevalent. Neither signature nor date were appended to the document, but only a postscript expressing a conjecture that Chichikov's own heart would tell him who the writer was, and stating, in addition, that the said writer would be present at the Governor's ball on the following night.

This greatly interested Chichikov. Indeed, there was so much that was alluring and provocative of curiosity in the anonymous missive that he read it through a second time, and then a third, and finally said to himself: "I SHOULD like to know who sent it!" In short, he took the thing seriously, and spent over an hour in considering the same. At length, muttering a comment upon the epistle's efflorescent style, he refolded the document, and committed it to his dispatch-box in company with a play-bill and an invitation to a wedding--the latter of which had for the last seven years reposed in the self-same receptacle and in the self-same position. Shortly afterwards there arrived a card of invitation to the Governor's ball already referred to. In passing, it may be said that such festivities are not infrequent phenomena in county towns, for the reason that where Governors exist there must take place balls if from the local gentry there is to be evoked that respectful affection which is every Governor's due.

Thenceforth all extraneous thoughts and considerations were laid aside

in favour of preparing for the coming function. Indeed, this conjunction of exciting and provocative motives led to Chichikov devoting to his toilet an amount of time never witnessed since the creation of the world. Merely in the contemplation of his features in the mirror, as he tried to communicate to them a succession of varying expressions, was an hour spent. First of all he strove to make his features assume an air of dignity and importance, and then an air of humble, but faintly satirical, respect, and then an air of respect guiltless of any alloy whatsoever. Next, he practised performing a series of bows to his reflection, accompanied with certain murmurs intended to bear a resemblance to a French phrase (though Chichikov knew not a single word of the Gallic tongue). Lastly came the performing of a series of what I might call "agreeable surprises," in the shape of twitchings of the brow and lips and certain motions of the tongue. In short, he did all that a man is apt to do when he is not only alone, but also certain that he is handsome and that no one is regarding him through a chink. Finally he tapped himself lightly on the chin, and said, "Ah, good old face!" In the same way, when he started to dress himself for the ceremony, the level of his high spirits remained unimpaired throughout the process. That is to say, while adjusting his braces and tying his tie, he shuffled his feet in what was not exactly a dance, but might be called the entr'acte of a dance: which performance had the not very serious result of setting a wardrobe a-rattle, and causing a brush to slide from the table to the floor.

Later, his entry into the ballroom produced an extraordinary

effect.

Every one present came forward to meet him, some with cards in their

hands, and one man even breaking off a conversation at the most interesting point--namely, the point that "the Inferior Land Court

must be made responsible for everything." Yes, in spite of the responsibility of the Inferior Land Court, the speaker cast all thoughts of it to the winds as he hurried to greet our hero.

From

every side resounded acclamations of welcome, and Chichikov felt himself engulfed in a sea of embraces. Thus, scarcely had he extricated himself from the arms of the President of the Local Council

when he found himself just as firmly clasped in the arms of the Chief

of Police, who, in turn, surrendered him to the Inspector of the Medical Department, who, in turn, handed him over to the Commissioner

of Taxes, who, again, committed him to the charge of the Town Architect. Even the Governor, who hitherto had been standing among his

womenfolk with a box of sweets in one hand and a lap-dog in the other,

now threw down both sweets and lap-dog (the lap-dog giving vent to a

yelp as he did so) and added his greeting to those of the rest of the

company. Indeed, not a face was there to be seen on which ecstatic

delight--or, at all events, the reflection of other people's ecstatic

delight--was not painted. The same expression may be discerned on the

faces of subordinate officials when, the newly arrived Director having

made his inspection, the said officials are beginning to get over

their first sense of awe on perceiving that he has found much to commend, and that he can even go so far as to jest and utter a few

words of smiling approval. Thereupon every tchinovnik responds with a

smile of double strength, and those who (it may be) have not heard a

single word of the Director's speech smile out of sympathy with the

rest, and even the gendarme who is posted at the distant door--a man, perhaps, who has never before compassed a smile, but is more accustomed to dealing out blows to the populace--summons up a kind of grin, even though the grin resembles the grimace of a man who is about to sneeze after inadvertently taking an over-large pinch of snuff. To all and sundry Chichikov responded with a bow, and felt extraordinarily at his ease as he did so. To right and left did he incline his head in the sidelong, yet unconstrained, manner that was his wont and never failed to charm the beholder. As for the ladies, they clustered around him in a shining bevy that was redolent of every species of perfume--of roses, of spring violets, and of mignonette; so much so that instinctively Chichikov raised his nose to snuff the air. Likewise the ladies' dresses displayed an endless profusion of taste and variety; and though the majority of their wearers evinced a tendency to embonpoint, those wearers knew how to call upon art for the concealment of the fact. Confronting them, Chichikov thought to himself: "Which of these beauties is the writer of the letter?" Then again he snuffed the air. When the ladies had, to a certain extent, returned to their seats, he resumed his attempts to discern (from glances and expressions) which of them could possibly be the unknown authoress. Yet, though those glances and expressions were too subtle, too insufficiently open, the difficulty in no way diminished his high spirits. Easily and gracefully did he exchange agreeable bandinage with one lady, and then approach another one with the short, mincing steps usually affected by young-old dandies who are fluttering around

the fair. As he turned, not without dexterity, to right and left, he kept one leg slightly dragging behind the other, like a short tail or comma. This trick the ladies particularly admired. In short, they not only discovered in him a host of recommendations and attractions, but also began to see in his face a sort of grand, Mars-like, military expression--a thing which, as we know, never fails to please the feminine eye. Certain of the ladies even took to bickering over him, and, on perceiving that he spent most of his time standing near the door, some of their number hastened to occupy chairs nearer to his post of vantage. In fact, when a certain dame chanced to have the good fortune to anticipate a hated rival in the race there very nearly ensued a most lamentable scene--which, to many of those who had been desirous of doing exactly the same thing, seemed a peculiarly horrible instance of brazen-faced audacity.

So deeply did Chichikov become plunged in conversation with his fair pursuers--or rather, so deeply did those fair pursuers enmesh him in the toils of small talk (which they accomplished through the expedient of asking him endless subtle riddles which brought the sweat to his brow in his attempts to guess them)--that he forgot the claims of courtesy which required him first of all to greet his hostess. In fact, he remembered those claims only on hearing the Governor's wife herself addressing him. She had been standing before him for several minutes, and now greeted him with suave expressement and the words, "So HERE you are, Paul Ivanovitch!" But what she said next I am not

in a position to report, for she spoke in the ultra-refined tone and vein wherein ladies and gentlemen customarily express themselves in high-class novels which have been written by experts more qualified than I am to describe salons, and able to boast of some acquaintance with good society. In effect, what the Governor's wife said was that she hoped--she greatly hoped--that Monsieur Chichikov's heart still contained a corner--even the smallest possible corner--for those whom he had so cruelly forgotten. Upon that Chichikov turned to her, and was on the point of returning a reply at least no worse than that which would have been returned, under similar circumstances, by the hero of a fashionable novelette, when he stopped short, as though thunderstruck.

Before him there was standing not only Madame, but also a young girl whom she was holding by the hand. The golden hair, the fine-drawn, delicate contours, the face with its bewitching oval--a face which might have served as a model for the countenance of the Madonna, since it was of a type rarely to be met with in Russia, where nearly everything, from plains to human feet, is, rather, on the gigantic scale; these features, I say, were those of the identical maiden whom Chichikov had encountered on the road when he had been fleeing from Nozdrev's. His emotion was such that he could not formulate a single intelligible syllable; he could merely murmur the devil only knows what, though certainly nothing of the kind which would have risen to the lips of the hero of a fashionable novel.

"I think that you have not met my daughter before?" said Madame.
"She
is just fresh from school."

He replied that he HAD had the happiness of meeting Mademoiselle before, and under rather unexpected circumstances; but on his trying to say something further his tongue completely failed him. The Governor's wife added a word or two, and then carried off her daughter to speak to some of the other guests.

Chichikov stood rooted to the spot, like a man who, after issuing into the street for a pleasant walk, has suddenly come to a halt on remembering that something has been left behind him. In a moment, as he struggles to recall what that something is, the mien of careless expectancy disappears from his face, and he no longer sees a single person or a single object in his vicinity. In the same way did Chichikov suddenly become oblivious to the scene around him. Yet all the while the melodious tongues of ladies were plying him with multitudinous hints and questions--hints and questions inspired with a desire to captivate. "Might we poor cumberers of the ground make so bold as to ask you what you are thinking of?" "Pray tell us where lie the happy regions in which your thoughts are wandering?" "Might we be informed of the name of her who has plunged you into this sweet abandonment of meditation?"--such were the phrases thrown at him. But to everything he turned a dead ear, and the phrases in question might as well have been stones dropped into a pool. Indeed, his rudeness soon reached the pitch of his walking away altogether, in order that he might go and reconnoitre wither the Governor's wife and daughter had retreated. But the ladies were not going to let him off so easily. Every one of them had made up her mind to use upon him her every

weapon, and to exhibit whatsoever might chance to constitute her best point. Yet the ladies' wiles proved useless, for Chichikov paid not the smallest attention to them, even when the dancing had begun, but kept raising himself on tiptoe to peer over people's heads and ascertain in which direction the bewitching maiden with the golden hair had gone. Also, when seated, he continued to peep between his neighbours' backs and shoulders, until at last he discovered her sitting beside her mother, who was wearing a sort of Oriental turban and feather. Upon that one would have thought that his purpose was to carry the position by storm; for, whether moved by the influence of spring, or whether moved by a push from behind, he pressed forward with such desperate resolution that his elbow caused the Commissioner of Taxes to stagger on his feet, and would have caused him to lose his balance altogether but for the supporting row of guests in the rear. Likewise the Postmaster was made to give ground; whereupon he turned and eyed Chichikov with mingled astonishment and subtle irony. But Chichikov never even noticed him; he saw in the distance only the golden-haired beauty. At that moment she was drawing on a long glove and, doubtless, pining to be flying over the dancing-floor, where, with clicking heels, four couples had now begun to thread the mazes of the mazurka. In particular was a military staff-captain working body and soul and arms and legs to compass such a series of steps as were never before performed, even in a dream. However, Chichikov slipped past the mazurka dancers, and, almost treading on their heels, made his way towards the spot where Madame and her daughter were

seated.

Yet he approached them with great diffidence and none of his late mincing and prancing. Nay, he even faltered as he walked; his every movement had about it an air of awkwardness.

It is difficult to say whether or not the feeling which had awakened in our hero's breast was the feeling of love; for it is problematical whether or not men who are neither stout nor thin are capable of any such sentiment. Nevertheless, something strange, something which he could not altogether explain, had come upon him. It seemed as though the ball, with its talk and its clatter, had suddenly become a thing remote--that the orchestra had withdrawn behind a hill, and the scene grown misty, like the carelessly painted-in background of a picture. And from that misty void there could be seen glimmering only the delicate outlines of the bewitching maiden. Somehow her exquisite shape reminded him of an ivory toy, in such fair, white, transparent relief did it stand out against the dull blur of the surrounding throng.

Herein we see a phenomenon not infrequently observed--the phenomenon of the Chichikovs of this world becoming temporarily poets. At all events, for a moment or two our Chichikov felt that he was a young man again, if not exactly a military officer. On perceiving an empty chair beside the mother and daughter, he hastened to occupy it, and though conversation at first hung fire, things gradually improved, and he acquired more confidence.

At this point I must reluctantly deviate to say that men of weight and

high office are always a trifle ponderous when conversing with ladies.
Young lieutenants--or, at all events, officers not above the rank of captain--are far more successful at the game. How they contrive to be so God only knows. Let them but make the most inane of remarks, and at once the maiden by their side will be rocking with laughter; whereas, should a State Councillor enter into conversation with a damsel, and remark that the Russian Empire is one of vast extent, or utter a compliment which he has elaborated not without a certain measure of intelligence (however strongly the said compliment may smack of a book), of a surety the thing will fall flat. Even a witticism from him will be laughed at far more by him himself than it will by the lady who may happen to be listening to his remarks.

These comments I have interposed for the purpose of explaining to the reader why, as our hero conversed, the maiden began to yawn. Blind to this, however, he continued to relate to her sundry adventures which had befallen him in different parts of the world. Meanwhile (as need hardly be said) the rest of the ladies had taken umbrage at his behaviour. One of them purposely stalked past him to intimate to him the fact, as well as to jostle the Governor's daughter, and let the flying end of a scarf flick her face; while from a lady seated behind the pair came both a whiff of violets and a very venomous and sarcastic remark. Nevertheless, either he did not hear the remark or he PRETENDED not to hear it. This was unwise of him, since it never does to disregard ladies' opinions. Later-but too late--he was destined to learn this to his cost.

In short, dissatisfaction began to display itself on every

feminine
face. No matter how high Chichikov might stand in society, and
no
matter how much he might be a millionaire and include in his
expression of countenance an indefinable element of grandness
and
martial ardour, there are certain things which no lady will
pardon,
whosoever be the person concerned. We know that at Governor's
balls it
is customary for the onlookers to compose verses at the expense
of the
dancers; and in this case the verses were directed to
Chichikov's
address. Briefly, the prevailing dissatisfaction grew until a
tacit
edict of proscription had been issued against both him and the
poor
young maiden.

But an even more unpleasant surprise was in store for our hero;
for
whilst the young lady was still yawning as Chichikov recounted
to her
certain of his past adventures and also touched lightly upon the
subject of Greek philosophy, there appeared from an adjoining
room the
figure of Nozdrev. Whether he had come from the buffet, or
whether he
had issued from a little green retreat where a game more
strenuous
than whist had been in progress, or whether he had left the
latter
resort unaided, or whether he had been expelled therefrom, is
unknown;
but at all events when he entered the ballroom, he was in an
elevated
condition, and leading by the arm the Public Prosecutor, whom he
seemed to have been dragging about for a long while past, seeing
that
the poor man was glancing from side to side as though seeking a
means
of putting an end to this personally conducted tour. Certainly
he must
have found the situation almost unbearable, in view of the fact
that,
after deriving inspiration from two glasses of tea not wholly

undiluted with rum, Nozdrev was engaged in lying unmercifully. On sighting him in the distance, Chichikov at once decided to sacrifice himself. That is to say, he decided to vacate his present enviable position and make off with all possible speed, since he could see that an encounter with the newcomer would do him no good. Unfortunately at that moment the Governor buttonholed him with a request that he would come and act as arbiter between him (the Governor) and two ladies--the subject of dispute being the question as to whether or not woman's love is lasting. Simultaneously Nozdrev descried our hero and bore down upon him.

"Ah, my fine landowner of Kherson!" he cried with a smile which set his fresh, spring-rose-pink cheeks a-quiver. "Have you been doing much trade in departed souls lately?" With that he turned to the Governor.

"I suppose your Excellency knows that this man traffics in dead peasants?" he bawled. "Look here, Chichikov. I tell you in the most friendly way possible that every one here likes you--yes, including even the Governor. Nevertheless, had I my way, I would hang you! Yes, by God I would!"

Chichikov's discomfiture was complete.

"And, would you believe it, your Excellency," went on Nozdrev, "but this fellow actually said to me, 'Sell me your dead souls!' Why, I laughed till I nearly became as dead as the souls. And, behold, no sooner do I arrive here than I am told that he has bought three million roubles' worth of peasants for transferment! For transferment, indeed! And he wanted to bargain with me for my DEAD ones! Look

here, Chichikov. You are a swine! Yes, by God, you are an utter swine!

Is not that so, your Excellency? Is not that so, friend Prokurator[1]?"

[1] Public Prosecutor.

But both his Excellency, the Public Prosecutor, and Chichikov were too taken aback to reply. The half-tipsy Nozdrev, without noticing them, continued his harangue as before.

"Ah, my fine sir!" he cried. "THIS time I don't mean to let you go.

No, not until I have learnt what all this purchasing of dead peasants means. Look here. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Yes, I say

that--I who am one of your best friends." Here he turned to the

Governor again. "Your Excellency," he continued, "you would never

believe what inseperables this man and I have been. Indeed, if you had

stood there and said to me, 'Nozdrev, tell me on your honour which of

the two you love best--your father or Chichikov?' I should have replied, 'Chichikov, by God!'" With that he tackled our hero again,

"Come, come, my friend!" he urged. "Let me imprint upon your cheeks a

baiser or two. You will excuse me if I kiss him, will you not, your

Excellency? No, do not resist me, Chichikov, but allow me to imprint

at least one baiser upon your lily-white cheek." And in his efforts to

force upon Chichikov what he termed his "baisers" he came near to

measuring his length upon the floor.

Every one now edged away, and turned a deaf ear to his further babblings; but his words on the subject of the purchase of dead souls

had none the less been uttered at the top of his voice, and been accompanied with such uproarious laughter that the curiosity

even of those who had happened to be sitting or standing in the remoter corners of the room had been aroused. So strange and novel seemed the idea that the company stood with faces expressive of nothing but a dumb, dull wonder. Only some of the ladies (as Chichikov did not fail to remark) exchanged meaning, ill-natured winks and a series of sarcastic smiles: which circumstance still further increased his confusion. That Nozdrev was a notorious liar every one, of course, knew, and that he should have given vent to an idiotic outburst of this sort had surprised no one; but a dead soul--well, what was one to make of Nozdrev's reference to such a commodity?

Naturally this unseemly contretemps had greatly upset our hero; for, however foolish be a madman's words, they may yet prove sufficient to sow doubt in the minds of saner individuals. He felt much as does a man who, shod with well-polished boots, has just stepped into a dirty, stinking puddle. He tried to put away from him the occurrence, and to expand, and to enjoy himself once more. Nay, he even took a hand at whist. But all was of no avail--matters kept going as awry as a badly-bent hoop. Twice he blundered in his play, and the President of the Council was at a loss to understand how his friend, Paul Ivanovitch, lately so good and so circumspect a player, could perpetrate such a *mauvais pas* as to throw away a particular king of spades which the President has been "trusting" as (to quote his own expression) "he would have trusted God." At supper, too, matters felt uncomfortable, even though the society at Chichikov's table was exceedingly agreeable and Nozdrev had been removed, owing to the fact that the ladies had found his conduct too scandalous to be borne, now that the delinquent had taken to seating himself on the floor

and
plucking at the skirts of passing lady dancers. As I say,
therefore,
Chichikov found the situation not a little awkward, and
eventually put
an end to it by leaving the supper room before the meal was
over, and
long before the hour when usually he returned to the inn.

In his little room, with its door of communication blocked with
a
wardrobe, his frame of mind remained as uncomfortable as the
chair in
which he was seated. His heart ached with a dull, unpleasant
sensation, with a sort of oppressive emptiness.

"The devil take those who first invented balls!" was his
reflection.
"Who derives any real pleasure from them? In this province there
exist
want and scarcity everywhere: yet folk go in for balls! How
absurd,
too, were those overdressed women! One of them must have had a
thousand roubles on her back, and all acquired at the expense of
the
overtaxed peasant, or, worse still, at that of the conscience of
her
neighbour. Yes, we all know why bribes are accepted, and why men
become crooked in soul. It is all done to provide wives--yes,
may the
pit swallow them up!--with fal-lals. And for what purpose? That
some
woman may not have to reproach her husband with the fact that,
say,
the Postmaster's wife is wearing a better dress than she is--a
dress
which has cost a thousand roubles! 'Balls and gaiety, balls and
gaiety' is the constant cry. Yet what folly balls are! They do
not
consort with the Russian spirit and genius, and the devil only
knows
why we have them. A grown, middle-aged man--a man dressed in
black,
and looking as stiff as a poker--suddenly takes the floor and
begins
shuffling his feet about, while another man, even though
conversing

with a companion on important business, will, the while, keep
capering
to right and left like a billy-goat! Mimicry, sheer mimicry! The
fact
that the Frenchman is at forty precisely what he was at fifteen
leads
us to imagine that we too, forsooth, ought to be the same. No; a
ball
leaves one feeling that one has done a wrong thing--so much so
that
one does not care even to think of it. It also leaves one's head
perfectly empty, even as does the exertion of talking to a man
of the
world. A man of that kind chatters away, and touches lightly
upon
every conceivable subject, and talks in smooth, fluent phrases
which
he has culled from books without grazing their substance;
whereas go
and have a chat with a tradesman who knows at least ONE thing
thoroughly, and through the medium of experience, and see
whether his
conversation will not be worth more than the prattle of a
thousand
chatterboxes. For what good does one get out of balls? Suppose
that a
competent writer were to describe such a scene exactly as it
stands?
Why, even in a book it would seem senseless, even as it
certainly is
in life. Are, therefore, such functions right or wrong? One
would
answer that the devil alone knows, and then spit and close the
book."

Such were the unfavourable comments which Chichikov passed upon
balls
in general. With it all, however, there went a second source of
dissatisfaction. That is to say, his principal grudge was not so
much
against balls as against the fact that at this particular one he
had
been exposed, he had been made to disclose the circumstance that
he
had been playing a strange, an ambiguous part. Of course, when
he
reviewed the contretemps in the light of pure reason, he could

not but
see that it mattered nothing, and that a few rude words were of
no
account now that the chief point had been attained; yet man is
an odd
creature, and Chichikov actually felt pained by the could-
shouldering
administered to him by persons for whom he had not an atom of
respect,
and whose vanity and love of display he had only that moment
been
censuring. Still more, on viewing the matter clearly, he felt
vexed to
think that he himself had been so largely the cause of the
catastrophe.

Yet he was not angry with HIMSELF--of that you may be sure,
seeing
that all of us have a slight weakness for sparing our own
faults, and
always do our best to find some fellow-creature upon whom to
vent our
displeasure--whether that fellow-creature be a servant, a
subordinate
official, or a wife. In the same way Chichikov sought a
scapegoat upon
whose shoulders he could lay the blame for all that had annoyed
him.
He found one in Nozdrev, and you may be sure that the scapegoat
in
question received a good drubbing from every side, even as an
experienced captain or chief of police will give a knavish
starosta or
postboy a rating not only in the terms become classical, but
also in
such terms as the said captain or chief of police may invent for
himself. In short, Nozdrev's whole lineage was passed in review;
and
many of its members in the ascending line fared badly in the
process.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the town there was in progress an
event
which was destined to augment still further the unpleasantness
of our
hero's position. That is to say, through the outlying streets
and

alleys of the town there was clattering a vehicle to which it would be difficult precisely to assign a name, seeing that, though it was of a species peculiar to itself, it most nearly resembled a large, rickety water melon on wheels. Eventually this monstrosity drew up at the gates of a house where the archpriest of one of the churches resided, and from its doors there leapt a damsel clad in a jerkin and wearing a scarf over her head. For a while she thumped the gates so vigorously as to set all the dogs barking; then the gates stiffly opened, and admitted this unwieldy phenomenon of the road. Lastly, the barinia herself alighted, and stood revealed as Madame Korobotchka, widow of a Collegiate Secretary! The reason of her sudden arrival was that she had felt so uneasy about the possible outcome of Chichikov's whim, that during the three nights following his departure she had been unable to sleep a wink; whereafter, in spite of the fact that her horses were not shod, she had set off for the town, in order to learn at first hand how the dead souls were faring, and whether (which might God forbend!) she had not sold them at something like a third of their true value. The consequences of her venture the reader will learn from a conversation between two ladies. We will reserve it for the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER IX

Next morning, before the usual hour for paying calls, there tripped from the portals of an orange-coloured wooden house with an

attic
storey and a row of blue pillars a lady in an elegant plaid
cloak.
With her came a footman in a many-caped greatcoat and a polished
top
hat with a gold band. Hastily, but gracefully, the lady ascended
the
steps let down from a koliaska which was standing before the
entrance,
and as soon as she had done so the footman shut her in, put up
the
steps again, and, catching hold of the strap behind the vehicle,
shouted to the coachman, "Right away!" The reason of all this
was that
the lady was the possessor of a piece of intelligence that she
was
burning to communicate to a fellow-creature. Every moment she
kept
looking out of the carriage window, and perceiving, with almost
speechless vexation, that, as yet, she was but half-way on her
journey. The fronts of the houses appeared to her longer than
usual,
and in particular did the front of the white stone hospital,
with its
rows of narrow windows, seem interminable to a degree which at
length
forced her to ejaculate: "Oh, the cursed building! Positively
there is
no end to it!" Also, she twice adjured the coachman with the
words,
"Go quicker, Andrusha! You are a horribly long time over the
journey
this morning." But at length the goal was reached, and the
koliaska
stopped before a one-storied wooden mansion, dark grey in
colour, and
having white carvings over the windows, a tall wooden fence and
narrow
garden in front of the latter, and a few meagre trees looming
white
with an incongruous coating of road dust. In the windows of the
building were also a few flower pots and a parrot that kept
alternately dancing on the floor of its cage and hanging on to
the
ring of the same with its beak. Also, in the sunshine before the
door
two pet dogs were sleeping. Here there lived the lady's bosom

friend.

As soon as the bosom friend in question learnt of the newcomer's arrival, she ran down into the hall, and the two ladies kissed and embraced one another. Then they adjourned to the drawing-room.

"How glad I am to see you!" said the bosom friend. "When I heard some one arriving I wondered who could possibly be calling so early. Parasha declared that it must be the Vice-Governor's wife, so, as I did not want to be bored with her, I gave orders that I was to be reported 'not at home.'"

For her part, the guest would have liked to have proceeded to business by communicating her tidings, but a sudden exclamation from the hostess imparted (temporarily) a new direction to the conversation.

"What a pretty chintz!" she cried, gazing at the other's gown.

"Yes, it IS pretty," agreed the visitor. "On the other hand, Praskovia Theodorovna thinks that--"

In other words, the ladies proceeded to indulge in a conversation on the subject of dress; and only after this had lasted for a considerable while did the visitor let fall a remark which led her entertainer to inquire:

"And how is the universal charmer?"

"My God!" replied the other. "There has been SUCH a business! In fact, do you know why I am here at all?" And the visitor's breathing became more hurried, and further words seemed to be hovering between her lips like hawks preparing to stoop upon their prey. Only a person of the unhumanity of a "true friend" would have had the heart to interrupt her; but the hostess was just such a friend, and at once interposed with:

"I wonder how any one can see anything in the man to praise or to admire. For my own part, I think--and I would say the same thing straight to his face--that he is a perfect rascal."

"Yes, but do listen to what I have got to tell you."

"Oh, I know that some people think him handsome," continued the hostess, unmoved; "but I say that he is nothing of the kind--that, in particular, his nose is perfectly odious."

"Yes, but let me finish what I was saying." The guest's tone was almost piteous in its appeal.

"What is it, then?"

"You cannot imagine my state of mind! You see, this morning I received a visit from Father Cyril's wife--the Archpriest's wife--you know her, don't you? Well, whom do you suppose that fine gentleman visitor of ours has turned out to be?"

"The man who has built the Archpriest a poultry-run?"

"Oh dear no! Had that been all, it would have been nothing. No. Listen to what Father Cyril's wife had to tell me. She said that, last night, a lady landowner named Madame Korobotchka arrived at the Archpriest's house--arrived all pale and trembling--and told her, oh, such things! They sound like a piece out of a book. That is to say, at dead of night, just when every one had retired to rest, there came the most dreadful knocking imaginable, and some one screamed out, 'Open the gates, or we will break them down!' Just think! After this, how any one can say that the man is charming I cannot imagine."

"Well, what of Madame Korobotchka? Is she a young woman or good looking?"

"Oh dear no! Quite an old woman."

"Splendid indeed! So he is actually engaged to a person like that? One may heartily commend the taste of our ladies for having fallen in love with him!"

"Nevertheless, it is not as you suppose. Think, now! Armed with weapons from head to foot, he called upon this old woman, and said:

'Sell me any souls of yours which have lately died.' Of course, Madame

Korobotchka answered, reasonably enough: 'I cannot sell you those

souls, seeing that they have departed this world;' but he replied:

'No, no! They are NOT dead. 'Tis I who tell you that--I who ought to

know the truth of the matter. I swear that they are still alive.' In

short, he made such a scene that the whole village came running to the

house, and children screamed, and men shouted, and no one could tell

what it was all about. The affair seemed to me so horrible, so utterly

horrible, that I trembled beyond belief as I listened to the story.

'My dearest madam,' said my maid, Mashka, 'pray look at yourself in

the mirror, and see how white you are.' 'But I have no time for that,'

I replied, 'as I must be off to tell my friend, Anna Grigorievna, the

news.' Nor did I lose a moment in ordering the koliaska. Yet when my

coachman, Andrusha, asked me for directions I could not get a word

out--I just stood staring at him like a fool, until I thought he must

think me mad. Oh, Anna Grigorievna, if you but knew how upset I am!"

"What a strange affair!" commented the hostess. "What on earth can the

man have meant by 'dead souls'? I confess that the words pass my understanding. Curiously enough, this is the second time I have heard speak of those souls. True, my husband avers that Nozdrev was lying; yet in his lies there seems to have been a grain of truth."

"Well, just think of my state when I heard all this! 'And now,' apparently said Korobotchka to the Archpriest's wife, 'I am altogether at a loss what to do, for, throwing me fifteen roubles, the man forced me to sign a worthless paper--yes, me, an inexperienced, defenceless widow who knows nothing of business.' That such things should happen! TRY and imagine my feelings!"

"In my opinion, there is in this more than the dead souls which meet the eye."

"I think so too," agreed the other. As a matter of fact, her friend's remark had struck her with complete surprise, as well as filled her with curiosity to know what the word "more" might possibly signify. In fact, she felt driven to inquire: "What do YOU suppose to be hidden beneath it all?"

"No; tell me what YOU suppose?"

"What I suppose? I am at a loss to conjecture."

"Yes, but tell me what is in your mind?"

Upon this the visitor had to confess herself nonplussed; for, though capable of growing hysterical, she was incapable of propounding any rational theory. Consequently she felt the more that she needed tender comfort and advice.

"Then THIS is what I think about the dead souls," said the

hostess.

Instantly the guest pricked up her ears (or, rather, they pricked themselves up) and straightened herself and became, somehow, more modish, and, despite her not inconsiderable weight, posed herself to look like a piece of thistledown floating on the breeze.

"The dead souls," began the hostess.

"Are what, are what?" inquired the guest in great excitement.

"Are, are--"

"Tell me, tell me, for heaven's sake!"

"They are an invention to conceal something else. The man's real object is, is--TO ABDUCT THE GOVERNOR'S DAUGHTER."

So startling and unexpected was this conclusion that the guest sat reduced to a state of pale, petrified, genuine amazement.

"My God!" she cried, clapping her hands, "I should NEVER have guessed it!"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I guessed it as soon as ever you opened your mouth."

"So much, then, for educating girls like the Governor's daughter at school! Just see what comes of it!"

"Yes, indeed! And they tell me that she says things which I hesitate even to repeat."

"Truly it wrings one's heart to see to what lengths immorality has come."

"Some of the men have quite lost their heads about her, but for my part I think her not worth noticing."

"Of course. And her manners are unbearable. But what puzzles me

most
is how a travelled man like Chichikov could come to let himself
in for
such an affair. Surely he must have accomplices?"

"Yes; and I should say that one of those accomplices is
Nozdrev."

"Surely not?"

"CERTAINLY I should say so. Why, I have known him even try to
sell
his own father! At all events he staked him at cards."

"Indeed? You interest me. I should never had thought him capable
of
such things."

"I always guessed him to be so."

The two ladies were still discussing the matter with acumen and
success when there walked into the room the Public Prosecutor--
bushy
eyebrows, motionless features, blinking eyes, and all. At once
the
ladies hastened to inform him of the events related, adducing
therewith full details both as to the purchase of dead souls and
as to
the scheme to abduct the Governor's daughter; after which they
departed in different directions, for the purpose of raising the
rest
of the town. For the execution of this undertaking not more than
half
an hour was required. So thoroughly did they succeed in throwing
dust
in the public's eyes that for a while every one--more especially
the
army of public officials--was placed in the position of a
schoolboy
who, while still asleep, has had a bag of pepper thrown in his
face by
a party of more early-rising comrades. The questions now to be
debated
resolved themselves into two--namely, the question of the dead
souls
and the question of the Governor's daughter. To this end two
parties

were formed--the men's party and the feminine section. The men's party--the more absolutely senseless of the two--devoted its attention to the dead souls: the women's party occupied itself exclusively with the alleged abduction of the Governor's daughter. And here it may be said (to the ladies' credit) that the women's party displayed far more method and caution than did its rival faction, probably because the function in life of its members had always been that of managing and administering a household. With the ladies, therefore, matters soon assumed vivid and definite shape; they became clearly and irrefutably materialised; they stood stripped of all doubt and other impedimenta. Said some of the ladies in question, Chichikov had long been in love with the maiden, and the pair had kept tryst by the light of the moon, while the Governor would have given his consent (seeing that Chichikov was as rich as a Jew) but for the obstacle that Chichikov had deserted a wife already (how the worthy dames came to know that he was married remains a mystery), and the said deserted wife, pining with love for her faithless husband, had sent the Governor a letter of the most touching kind, so that Chichikov, on perceiving that the father and mother would never give their consent, had decided to abduct the girl. In other circles the matter was stated in a different way. That is to say, this section averred that Chichikov did NOT possess a wife, but that, as a man of subtlety and experience, he had bethought him of obtaining the daughter's hand through the expedient of first tackling the mother and carrying on with her an ardent liaison, and that, thereafter, he had made an application for the desired hand, but

that
the mother, fearing to commit a sin against religion, and
feeling in
her heart certain gnawings of conscience, had returned a blank
refusal
to Chichikov's request; whereupon Chichikov had decided to carry
out
the abduction alleged. To the foregoing, of course, there became
appended various additional proofs and items of evidence, in
proportion as the sensation spread to more remote corners of the
town.
At length, with these perfectings, the affair reached the ears
of the
Governor's wife herself. Naturally, as the mother of a family,
and as
the first lady in the town, and as a matron who had never before
been
suspected of things of the kind, she was highly offended when
she
heard the stories, and very justly so: with the result that her
poor
young daughter, though innocent, had to endure about as
unpleasant a
tete-a-tete as ever befell a maiden of sixteen, while, for his
part,
the Swiss footman received orders never at any time to admit
Chichikov
to the house.

Having done their business with the Governor's wife, the ladies'
party
descended upon the male section, with a view to influencing it
to
their own side by asserting that the dead souls were an
invention used
solely for the purpose of diverting suspicion and successfully
affecting the abduction. And, indeed, more than one man was
converted,
and joined the feminine camp, in spite of the fact that thereby
such
seceders incurred strong names from their late comrades--names
such as
"old women," "petticoats," and others of a nature peculiarly
offensive
to the male sex.

Also, however much they might arm themselves and take the field,

the
men could not compass such orderliness within their ranks as
could the
women. With the former everything was of the antiquated and
rough-hewn
and ill-fitting and unsuitable and badly-adapted and inferior
kind;
their heads were full of nothing but discord and triviality and
confusion and slovenliness of thought. In brief, they displayed
everywhere the male bent, the rude, ponderous nature which is
incapable either of managing a household or of jumping to a
conclusion, as well as remains always distrustful and lazy and
full of
constant doubt and everlasting timidity. For instance, the men's
party
declared that the whole story was rubbish--that the alleged
abduction
of the Governor's daughter was the work rather of a military
than of a
civilian culprit; that the ladies were lying when they accused
Chichikov of the deed; that a woman was like a money-bag--
whatsoever
you put into her she thenceforth retained; that the subject
which
really demanded attention was the dead souls, of which the devil
only
knew the meaning, but in which there certainly lurked something
that
was contrary to good order and discipline. One reason why the
men's
party was so certain that the dead souls connoted something
contrary
to good order and discipline, was that there had just been
appointed
to the province a new Governor-General--an event which, of
course, had
thrown the whole army of provincial tchinovniks into a state of
great
excitement, seeing that they knew that before long there would
ensue
transferments and sentences of censure, as well as the series of
official dinners with which a Governor-General is accustomed to
entertain his subordinates. "Alas," thought the army of
tchinovniks,
"it is probable that, should he learn of the gross reports at
present
afloat in our town, he will make such a fuss that we shall never

hear

the last of them." In particular did the Director of the Medical Department turn pale at the thought that possibly the new Governor-General would surmise the term "dead folk" to connote patients in the local hospitals who, for want of proper preventative

measures, had died of sporadic fever. Indeed, might it not be that

Chichikov was neither more nor less than an emissary of the said Governor-General, sent to conduct a secret inquiry? Accordingly he

(the Director of the Medical Department) communicated this last supposition to the President of the Council, who, though at first

inclined to ejaculate "Rubbish!" suddenly turned pale on propounding

to himself the theory. "What if the souls purchased by Chichikov should REALLY be dead ones?"--a terrible thought considering that

he, the President, had permitted their transferment to be registered,

and had himself acted as Plushkin's representative! What if these

things should reach the Governor-General's ears? He mentioned the

matter to one friend and another, and they, in their turn, went white

to the lips, for panic spreads faster and is even more destructive,

than the dreaded black death. Also, to add to the tchinovniks' troubles, it so befell that just at this juncture there came into the

local Governor's hands two documents of great importance. The first of

them contained advices that, according to received evidence and reports, there was operating in the province a forger of rouble-notes

who had been passing under various aliases and must therefore be sought for with the utmost diligence; while the second document was a

letter from the Governor of a neighbouring province with regard to a

malefactor who had there evaded apprehension--a letter conveying also

a warning that, if in the province of the town of N. there should

appear any suspicious individual who could produce neither

references

nor passports, he was to be arrested forthwith. These two documents

left every one thunderstruck, for they knocked on the head all previous conceptions and theories. Not for a moment could it be supposed that the former document referred to Chichikov; yet, as each

man pondered the position from his own point of view, he remembered

that no one REALLY knew who Chichikov was; as also that his vague

references to himself had--yes!--included statements that his career

in the service had suffered much to the cause of Truth, and that he

possessed a number of enemies who were seeking his life. This gave the

tchinovniks further food for thought. Perhaps his life really DID

stand in danger? Perhaps he really WAS being sought for by some one?

Perhaps he really HAD done something of the kind above referred to?

As a matter of fact, who was he?--not that it could actually be supposed that he was a forger of notes, still less a brigand, seeing

that his exterior was respectable in the highest degree. Yet who was

he? At length the tchinovniks decided to make enquiries among those of

whom he had purchased souls, in order that at least it might be learnt

what the purchases had consisted of, and what exactly underlay them,

and whether, in passing, he had explained to any one his real intentions, or revealed to any one his identity. In the first instance, therefore, resort was had to