

ACT II

SCENE 1

In the same country-house, a week later. The scene represents a large dining-hall. The table is laid for tea and coffee, with a samovár. A grand piano and a music-stand are by the wall. Mary Ivánovna, the Princess and Peter Semyónovich are seated at the table.

PETER SEMYÓNOVICH. Ah, Princess, it does not seem so long ago since you were singing Rosina's part, and I ... though nowadays I am not fit even for a Don Basilio.

PRINCESS. Our children might do the singing now, but times have changed.

PETER SEMYÓNOVICH. Yes, these are matter-of-fact times ... But your daughter plays really seriously and well. Where are the young folk? Not asleep still, surely?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Yes, they went out riding by moonlight last night, and returned very late. I was nursing baby and heard them.

PETER SEMYÓNOVICH. And when will my better-half be back? Have you sent the coachman for her?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Yes, they went for her quite early; I expect she will be here soon.

PRINCESS. Did Alexáandra Ivánovna really go on purpose to fetch Father Gerásim?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Yes, the idea occurred to her yesterday, and she was off at once.

PRINCESS. Quelle énergie! Je l'admire.[26]

[26] What energy, I do admire her.

PETER SEMYÓNOVICH. Oh, pour ceci, ce n'est pas ça qui nous manque.[27]

[Takes out a cigar] But I will go and have a smoke and take a stroll through the park with the dogs till the young people are up. [Exit].

[27] Oh, as far as that goes, we are not lacking.

PRINCESS. I don't know, dear Mary Ivánovna, whether I am right, but it seems to me that you take it all too much to heart. I understand him. He is in a very exalted state of mind. Well, even supposing he does give to the poor? Don't we anyway think too much about ourselves?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Yes, if that were all, but you don't know him; nor all he

is after. It is not simply helping the poor, but a complete revolution, the destruction of everything.

PRINCESS. I do not wish to intrude into your family life, but if you will allow me ...

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Not at all--I look upon you as one of the family--especially now.

PRINCESS. I should advise you to put your demands to him openly and frankly, and to come to an agreement as to the limits ...

MARY IVÁNOVNA [excitedly] There are no limits! He wants to give away everything. He wishes me now, at my age, to become a cook and a washerwoman.

PRINCESS. No, is it possible! That is extraordinary.

MARY IVÁNOVNA [takes a letter out of her pocket] We are by ourselves and I am glad to tell you all about it. He wrote me this letter yesterday. I will read it to you.

PRINCESS. What? He lives in the same house with you, and writes you letters? How strange!

MARY IVÁNOVNA. No, I understand him there. He gets so excited when he

speaks. I have for some time past felt anxious about his health.

PRINCESS. What did he write?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. This [reading] "You reproach me for upsetting our former way of life, and for not giving you anything new in exchange, and not saying how I should like to arrange our family affairs. When we begin to discuss it we both get excited, and that's why I am writing to you. I have often told you already why I cannot continue to live as we have been doing; and I cannot, in a letter, show you why that is so, nor why we must live in accord to Christ's teaching. You can do one of two things: either believe in the truth and voluntarily go with me, or believe in me and trusting yourself entirely to me--follow me." [Stops reading] I can do neither the one nor the other. I do not consider it necessary to live as he wishes us to. I have to consider the children, and I cannot rely on him. [Reads] "My plan is this: We shall give our land to the peasants, retaining only 135 acres besides the orchards and kitchen-garden and the meadow by the river. We will try to work ourselves, but will not force one another, nor the children. What we keep should still bring us in about £50 a year."

PRINCESS. Live on £50 a year--with seven children! Is it possible!

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Well, here follows his whole plan: to give up the house and have it turned into a school, and ourselves to live in the gardener's two-roomed cottage.

PRINCESS. Yes, now I begin to see that there is something abnormal about it. What did you answer?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. I told him I couldn't; that were I alone I would follow him anywhere, but I have the children.... Only think! I am still nursing little Nicholas. I tell him we can't break up everything like that. After all, was that what I agreed to when I married? And now I am no longer young or strong. Think what it has meant to bear and nurse nine children.

PRINCESS. I never dreamed that things had gone so far.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. That is how things are and I don't know what will happen. Yesterday he excused the Dmítrovka peasants their rent; and he wants to give the land to them altogether.

PRINCESS. I do not think you should allow it. It is your duty to protect your children. If he cannot deal with the estate, let him hand it over to you.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. But I don't want that.

PRINCESS. You ought to take it for the children's sake. Let him transfer the property to you.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. My sister Alexándra told him so; but he says he has no right to do it; and that the land belongs to those who work it, and that it is his duty to give it to the peasants.

PRINCESS. Yes, now I see that the matter is far more serious than I thought.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. And the Priest! The Priest takes his side, too.

PRINCESS. Yes, I noticed that yesterday.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. That's why my sister has gone to Moscow. She wanted to talk things over with a lawyer, but chiefly she went to fetch Father Gerásim that he may bring his influence to bear.

PRINCESS. Yes, I do not think that Christianity calls upon us to ruin our families.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. But he will not believe even Father Gerásim. He is so firm; and when he talks, you know, I can't answer him. That's what is so terrible, that it seems to me he is right.

PRINCESS. That is because you love him.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. I don't know, but it's terrible, and everything remains unsettled--and that is Christianity!

Enter Nurse.

NURSE. Will you please come. Little Nicholas has woke up and is crying for you.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Directly! When I am excited he gets stomach ache. Coming, coming!

Nicholas Ivánovich enters by another door, with a paper in his hand.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. No, this is impossible!

MARY IVÁNOVNA. What has happened?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Why, Peter is to be imprisoned on account of some wretched pine-trees of ours.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. How's that?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Quite simply! He cut it down, and they informed the Justice of Peace, and he has sentenced him to three months' imprisonment. His wife has come about it.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Well, and can't anything be done?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Not now. The only way is not to possess any forest. And I will not possess any. What is one to do? I shall, however, go and see whether what we have done can be remedied. [Goes out on to the verandah and meets Borís and Lyúba].

LYÚBA. Good morning, papa [kisses him], where are you going?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I have just returned from the village and am going back again. They are just dragging a hungry man to prison because he ...

LYÚBA. I suppose it's Peter?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Yes, Peter. [Exit, followed by Mary Ivánovna].

LYÚBA [sits down in front of samovár] Will you have tea or coffee?

BORÍS. I don't mind.

LYÚBA. It's always the same, and I see no end to it!

BORÍS. I don't understand him. I know the people are poor and ignorant and must be helped, but not by encouraging thieves.

LYÚBA. But how?

BORÍS. By our whole activity. By using all our knowledge in their

service, but not by sacrificing one's own life.

LYÚBA. And papa says, that that is just what is wanted.

BORÍS. I don't understand. One can serve the people without ruining one's own life. That is the way I want to arrange my life. If only you ...

LYÚBA. I want what you want, and am not afraid of anything.

BORÍS. How about those earrings--that dress ...

LYÚBA. The earrings can be sold and the dresses must be different, but one need not make oneself quite a guy.

BORÍS. I should like to have another talk with him. Do you think I should disturb him if I followed him to the village?

LYÚBA. Not at all. I see he has grown fond of you, and he addressed himself chiefly to you last night.

BORÍS [finishes his coffee] Well, I'll go then.

LYÚBA. Yes, do, and I'll go and wake Lisa and Tónya.

Curtain.

SCENE 2

Village street. Iván Zyábrev, covered with a sheepskin coat, is lying near a hut.

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. Maláshka!

A tiny girl comes out of the hut with a baby in her arms. The baby is crying.

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. Get me a drink of water.

Maláshka goes back into the hut, from where the baby can be heard screaming. She brings a bowl of water.

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. Why do you always beat the youngster and make him howl? I'll tell mother.

MALÁSHKA. Tell her then. It's hunger makes him howl!

IVÁN ZYÁBREV [drinks] You should go and ask the Démkins for some milk.

MALÁSHKA. I went, but there wasn't any. And there was no one at home.

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. Oh! if only I could die! Have they rung for dinner?

MALÁSHKA. They have. Here's the master coming.

Enter Nicholas Ivánovich.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Why have you come out here?

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. Too many flies in there, and it's too hot.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Then you're warm now?

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. Yes, now I'm burning all over.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. And where is Peter? Is he at home?

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. At home, at this time? Why, he's gone to the field to cart the corn.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. And I hear that they want to put him in prison.

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. That's so, the Policeman has gone to the field for him.

Enter a pregnant Woman, carrying a sheaf of oats and a rake. She immediately hits Maláshka on the back of the head.

WOMAN. What d'you mean by leaving the baby? Don't you hear him howling! Running about the streets is all you know.

MALÁSHKA [howling] I've only just come out. Daddy wanted a drink.

WOMAN. I'll give it you. [She sees the land-owner, N. I. Sarýntsov]
Good-day, sir. Children are a trouble! I'm quite done up, everything on my shoulders, and now they're taking our only worker to prison, and this lout is sprawling about here.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. What are you saying? He's quite ill!

WOMAN. He's ill, and what about me? Am I not ill? When it's work, he's ill; but to merry-make or pull my hair out, he's not too ill. Let him die like a hound! What do I care?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. How can you say such wicked things?

WOMAN. I know it's a sin; but I can't subdue my heart. I'm expecting another child, and I have to work for two. Other people have their harvest in already, and we have not mowed a quarter of our oats yet. I ought to finish binding the sheaves, but can't. I had to come and see what the children were about.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. The oats shall be cut--I'll hire someone, and to bind the sheaves too.

WOMAN. Oh, binding's nothing. I can do that myself, if it's only mown

down quick. What d'you think, Nicholas Ivánovich, will he die? He is very ill!

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I don't know. But he really is very ill. I think we must send him to the hospital.

WOMAN. Oh God! [Begins to cry] Don't take him away, let him die here.[28] [To her husband, who utters something] What's the matter?

[28] The woman, for all her roughness, is sorry to part from her husband.

IVÁN ZYÁBREV. I want to go to the hospital. Here I'm treated worse than a dog.

WOMAN. Well, I don't know. I've lost my head. Maláshka, get dinner ready.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. What have you for dinner?

WOMAN. What? Why, potatoes and bread, and not enough of that. [Enters hut. A pig squeals, and children are crying inside].

IVÁN ZYÁBREV [groans] Oh Lord, if I could but die!

Enter Borís.

BORÍS. Can I be of any use?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Here no one can be of use to another. The evil is too deeply rooted. Here we can only be of use to ourselves, by seeing on what we build our happiness. Here is a family: five children, the wife pregnant, the husband ill, nothing but potatoes to eat, and at this moment the question is being decided whether they are to have enough to eat next year or not. Help is not possible. How can one help? Suppose I hire a labourer; who will he be? Just such another man: one who has given up his farming, from drink or from want.

BORÍS. Excuse me, but if so, what are you doing here?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I am learning my own position. Finding out who weeds our gardens, builds our houses, makes our garments, and feeds and clothes us. [Peasants with scythes and women with rakes pass by and bow. Nicholas Ivánovich, stopping one of the Peasants] Ermíl, won't you take on the job of carting for these people?

ERMÍL [shakes his head] I would with all my heart, but I can't possibly do it. I haven't carted my own yet. We are off now to do some carting. But is Iván dying?

ANOTHER PEASANT. Here's Sebastian, he may take on the job. I say, Daddy Sebastian! They want a man to get the oats in.

SEBASTIAN. Take the job on yourself. At this time of year one day's work brings a year's food. [The Peasants pass on].

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. They are all half-starved; they have only bread and water, they are ill, and many of them are old. That old man, for instance, is ruptured and is suffering, and yet he works from four in the morning to ten at night, though he is only half alive. And we? Is it possible, realising all this, to live quietly and consider oneself a Christian? Or let alone a Christian--simply not a beast?

BORÍS. But what can one do?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Not take part in this evil. Not own the land, nor devour the fruits of their labour. How this can be arranged, I don't yet know. The fact of the matter is--at any rate it was so with me--I lived and did not realise how I was living. I did not realise that I am a son of God and that we are all sons of God--and all brothers. But as soon as I realised it--realised that we have all an equal right to live--my whole life was turned upside down. But I cannot explain it to you now. I will only tell you this: I was blind, just as my people at home are, but now my eyes are opened and I cannot help seeing; and seeing it all, I can't continue to live in such a way. However, that will keep till later. Now we must see what can be done.

Enter Policeman, Peter, his wife, and boy.

PETER [falls at Nicholas Ivánovich's feet] Forgive me, for the Lord's sake, or I'm ruined. How can the woman get in the harvest? If at least I might be bailed out.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I will go and write a petition for you. [To Policeman] Can't you let him remain here for the present?

POLICEMAN. Our orders are to take him to the police-station now.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH [to Peter] Well then go, and I'll do what I can. This is evidently my doing. How can one go on living like this? [Exit].

Curtain.

SCENE 3

In the same country-house. It is raining outside. A drawing-room with a grand piano. Tónya has just finished playing a sonata of Schumann's and is sitting at the piano. Styópa is standing by the piano. Boris is sitting. Lyúba, Lisa, Mitrofán Ermílych and the young Priest are all stirred by the music.

LYÚBA. That andante! Isn't it lovely!

STYÓPA. No, the scherzo. Though really the whole of it is beautiful.

LISA. Very fine.

STYÓPA. But I had no idea you were such an artist. It is real masterly play. Evidently the difficulties no longer exist for you, and you think only of the feeling, and express it with wonderful delicacy.

LYÚBA. Yes, and with dignity.

TÓNYA. While I felt that it was not at all what I meant it to be. A great deal remained unexpressed.

LISA. What could be better? It was wonderful.

LYÚBA. Schumann is good, but all the same Chopin takes a stronger hold

of one's heart.

STYÓPA. He is more lyrical.

TÓNYA. There is no comparison.

LYÚBA. Do you remember his prelude?

TÓNYA. Oh, the one called the George Sand prelude? [Plays the commencement].

LYÚBA. No, not that one. That is very fine, but so hackneyed. Do play this one. [Tónya plays what she can of it, and then breaks off].

TÓNYA. Oh, that is a lovely thing. There is something elemental about it--older than creation.

STYÓPA [laughs] Yes, yes. Do play it. But no, you are too tired. As it is, we have had a delightful morning, thanks to you.

TÓNYA [rises and looks out of window] There are some more peasants waiting outside.

LYÚBA. That is why music is so precious. I understand Saul. Though I'm not tormented by devils, I still understand him. No other art can make one so forget everything else as music does. [Approaches the window. To

Peasants] Whom do you want?

PEASANTS. We have been sent to speak to Nicholas Ivánovich.

LYÚBA. He is not in. You must wait.

TÓNYA. And yet you are marrying Borís who understands nothing about music.

LYÚBA. Oh, surely not.

BORÍS [absently] Music? Oh no. I like music, or rather I don't dislike it. Only I prefer something simpler--I like songs.

TÓNYA. But is not this sonata lovely?

BORÍS. The chief thing is, that it is not important; and it rather hurts me, when I think of the lives men live, that so much importance is attached to music.

They all eat sweetmeats, which are standing on the table.

LISA. How nice it is to have a fiancé here and sweetmeats provided!

BORÍS. Oh that is not my doing. It's mamma's.

TÓNIA. And quite right too.

LYÚBA. Music is precious because it seizes us, takes possession of us, and carries us away from reality. Everything seemed gloomy till you suddenly began to play, and really it has made everything brighter.

LISA. And Chopin's waltzes. They are hackneyed, but all the same ...

TÓNIA. This ... [plays].

Enter Nicholas Ivánovich. He greets Borís, Tónia, Styópa, Lisa, Mitrofán Ermílych and the Priest.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Where's mamma?

LYÚBA. I think she's in the nursery.

Styópa calls the Man-servant.

LYÚBA. Papa, how wonderfully Tónia plays! And where have you been?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. In the village.

Enter servant, Afanásy.

STYÓPA. Bring another samovár.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH [greeted the Man-servant, and shakes hands with him[29]] Good-day. [Servant becomes confused. Exit Servant. Nicholas Ivánovich also goes off].

[29] People shake hands much more often in Russia than in England, but it is quite unusual to shake hands with a servant, and Nicholas Ivánovich does it in consequence of his belief that all men are brothers.

STYÓPA. Poor Afanásy! He was terribly confused. I can't understand papa. It is as if we were guilty of something.

Enter Nicholas Ivánovich.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I was going back to my room without having told you what I feel. [To Tónya] If what I say should offend you--who are our guest--forgive me, but I cannot help saying it. You, Lisa, say that Tónya plays well. All you here, seven or eight healthy young men and women, have slept till ten o'clock, have eaten and drunk and are still eating; and you play and discuss music: while there, where I have just been, they were all up at three in the morning, and those who pastured the horses at night have not slept at all; and old and young, the sick and the weak, children and nursing-mothers and pregnant women are working to the utmost limits of their strength, so that we here may consume the fruits of their labour. Nor is that all. At this very

moment, one of them, the only breadwinner of a family, is being dragged to prison because he has cut down one of a hundred thousand pine-trees that grow in the forest that is called mine. And we here, washed and clothed, having left the slops in our bedrooms to be cleaned up by slaves, eat and drink and discuss Schumann and Chopin and which of them moves us most or best cures our ennui? That is what I was thinking when I passed you, so I have spoken. Consider, is it possible to go on living in this way? [Stands greatly agitated].

LISA. True, quite true!

LYÚBA. If one lets oneself think about it, one can't live.

STYÓPA. Why? I don't see why the fact that people are poor should prevent one talking about Schumann. The one does not exclude the other. If one ...

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH [angrily] If one has no heart, if one is made of wood ...

STYÓPA. Well, I'll hold my tongue.

TÓNYA. It is a terrible problem; it is the problem of our day; and we should not be afraid of it, but look it straight in the face, in order to solve it.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. We cannot wait for the problem to be solved by public measures. Every one of us must die--if not to-day, then to-morrow. How can I live without suffering from this internal discord?

BORÍS. Of course there is only one way; that is, not to take part in it at all.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Well, forgive me if I have hurt you. I could not help saying what I felt. [Exit].

STYÓPA. Not take part in it? But our whole life is bound up with it.

BORÍS. That is why he says that the first step is to possess no property; to change our whole way of life and live so as not to be served by others but to serve others.

TÓNYA. Well, I see you have quite gone over to Nicholas Ivánovich's side.

BORÍS. Yes, I now understand it for the first time--after what I saw in the village.... You need only take off the spectacles through which we are accustomed to look at the life of the people, to realise at once the connection between their sufferings and our pleasures--that is enough!

MITROFÁN ERMÍLYCH. Yes, but the remedy does not consist in ruining one's own life.

STYÓPA. It is surprising how Mitrofán Ermílych and I, though we usually stand poles asunder, come to the same conclusion: those are my very words, "not ruin one's own life."

BORÍS. Naturally! You both of you wish to lead a pleasant life, and therefore want life arranged so as to ensure that pleasant life for you. [To Styópa] You wish to maintain the present system, while Mitrofán Ermílych wants to establish a new one.

Lyúba and Tónya whisper together. Tónya goes to the piano and plays a nocturne by Chopin. General silence.

STYÓPA. That's splendid; that solves everything.

BORÍS. It obscures and postpones everything!

While Tónya is playing, Mary Ivánovna and the Princess enter quietly and sit down to listen.

Before the end of the nocturne carriage bells are heard outside.

LYÚBA. It is Aunt. [Goes to meet her].

The music continues. Enter Alexándra Ivánovna, Father Gerásim (a priest with a cross round his neck) and a Notary. All rise.

FATHER GERÁSIM. Please go on, it is very pleasant.

The Princess approaches to receive his blessing, and the young Priest does the same.

ALEXÁNDRA IVÁNOVNA. I have done exactly what I said I would do. I found Father Gerásim, and you see I have persuaded him to come--he was on his way to Kursk--so I have done my part; and here is the Notary. He has got the deed ready; it only needs signing.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Won't you have some lunch?

Notary puts down his papers on the table, and exit.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. I am very grateful to Father Gerásim.

FATHER GERÁSIM. What else could I do--though it was out of my way--yet as a Christian I considered it my duty to visit him.

Alexáandra Ivánovna whispers to the young people. They consult together and go out on to the verandah, all except Borís. The young Priest also wants to go.

FATHER GERÁSIM.[30] No. You as a pastor and spiritual father must remain here! You may benefit by it yourself, and may be of use to others. Stay

here, if Mary Ivánovna has no objection.

[30] Father Gerásim is modelled on the lines of the celebrated Father John of Cronstadt.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. No, I am as fond of Father Vasíly as if he were one of the family. I have even consulted him; but being so young he has not much authority.

FATHER GERÁSIM. Naturally, naturally.

ALEXÁNDRA IVÁNOVNA [approaching] Well, you see now, Father Gerásim, that you are the only person who can help and can bring him to reason. He is a clever, well-read man, but learning, you know, can only do harm. He is suffering from some sort of delusion. He maintains that the Christian law forbids a man to own any property; but how is that possible?

FATHER GERÁSIM. Temptation, spiritual pride, self-will! The Fathers of the Church have answered the question satisfactorily. But how did this befall him?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Well, to tell you everything ... when we married he was quite indifferent to religion, and we lived so, and lived happily, during our best years--the first twenty years. Then he began to reflect. Perhaps he was influenced by his sister, or by what he read. Anyhow, he began thinking and reading the Gospels, and then suddenly he grew

extremely religious, began going to church and visiting the monks. Then all at once he gave all this up and changed his way of life completely. He began doing manual labour, would not let the servants wait on him, and above all he is now giving away his property. He yesterday gave away a forest--both the trees and land. It frightens me, for I have seven children. Do talk to him. I'll go and ask him whether he will see you.
[Exit].

FATHER GERÁSIM. Nowadays many are falling away. And is the estate his or his wife's?

PRINCESS. His! That's what is so unfortunate.

FATHER GERÁSIM. And what is his official rank?

PRINCESS. His rank is not high. Only that of a cavalry captain, I believe. He was once in the army.

FATHER GERÁSIM. There are many who turn aside in that way. In Odessa there was a lady who was carried away by Spiritualism and began to do much harm. But all the same, God enabled us to lead her back to the Church.

PRINCESS. The chief thing, please understand, is that my son is about to marry his daughter. I have given my consent, but the girl is used to luxury and should therefore be provided for, and not have to depend

entirely on my son. Though I admit he is a hard-working and an exceptional young man.

Enter Mary Ivánovna and Nicholas Ivánovich.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. How d'you do, Princess? How d'you do? [To Father Gerásim] I beg your pardon. I don't know your name.[31]

[31] He knows that the priest is Father Gerásim, but wishes to address him not as a priest, but by his Christian name and patronymic, as one gentleman would usually address another.

FATHER GERÁSIM. Do you not wish to receive my blessing?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. No, I don't.

FATHER GERÁSIM. My name is Gerásim Sédorovitch. Very pleased to meet you.

Men-servants bring lunch and wine.

FATHER GERÁSIM. Pleasant weather, and good for the harvest.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I suppose you came, at Alexándra Ivánovna's invitation, to divert me from my errors and direct me in the path of truth. If that is so, don't let us beat about the bush, but let us get

to business at once. I do not deny that I disagree with the teaching of the Church. I used to agree with it, and then left off doing so. But with my whole heart I wish to be in the truth and will at once accept it if you show it to me.

FATHER GERÁSIM. How is it you say you don't believe the teaching of the Church? What is there to believe in, if not the Church?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. God and His law, given to us in the Gospels.

FATHER GERÁSIM. The Church teaches that very law.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. If it did so, I should believe in the Church, but unfortunately it teaches the contrary.

FATHER GERÁSIM. The Church cannot teach the contrary, because it was established by the Lord himself. It is written, "I give you power," and, "Upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. That was not said in this connection at all, and proves nothing. But even if we were to admit that Christ established the Church, how do I know that it was your Church?

FATHER GERÁSIM. Because it is said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. That, too, was not said in this connection, and proves nothing.

FATHER GERÁSIM. How can one deny the Church? It alone provides salvation.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I did not deny the Church until I found it supported everything that is contrary to Christianity.

FATHER GERÁSIM. It can make no mistakes, for it alone has the truth. Those who leave it go astray, but the Church is sacred.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I have already told you that I do not accept that. I do not accept it because, as is said in the Gospels, "By their deeds shall ye know them, by their fruit shall ye know them." I have found out that the Church blesses oaths, murders and executions.

FATHER GERÁSIM. The Church acknowledges and sanctifies the Powers ordained by God.

During the conversation, Styópa, Lyúba, Lisa and Tónya at different times enter the room and sit or stand listening.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I know that the Gospels say, not only "Do not kill," but "Do not be angry," yet the Church blesses the army. The Gospel

says, "Swear not at all," yet the Church administers oaths. The Gospel says ...

FATHER GERÁSIM. Excuse me. When Pilate^[32] said, "I adjure thee by the living God," Christ accepted his oath by replying "I am."

[32] Father Gerásim attributes to Pilate what was said by Caiaphas the high priest.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Dear me! What are you saying? That is really absurd.

FATHER GERÁSIM. That is why the Church does not permit everyone to interpret the Gospel, lest he should go astray, but like a mother caring for her child gives him an interpretation suitable to his strength. No, let me finish! The Church does not lay on its children burdens too heavy for them to bear, but demands that they should keep the Commandments: love, do no murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Yes! Do not kill me, do not steal from me my stolen goods. We have all robbed the people, we have stolen their land and have then made a law forbidding them to steal it back; and the Church sanctions all these things.

FATHER GERÁSIM. Heresy and spiritual pride are speaking through you. You ought to conquer your intellectual pride.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. It is not pride. I am only asking you what should I do according to Christ's law, when I have become conscious of the sin of robbing the people and enslaving them by means of the land. How am I to act? Continue to own land and to profit by the labour of starving men: putting them to this kind of work [points to Servant who is bringing in the lunch and some wine], or am I to return the land to those from whom my ancestors stole it?

FATHER GERÁSIM. You must act as behoves a son of the Church. You have a family and children, and you must keep and educate them in a way suitable to their position.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Why?

FATHER GERÁSIM. Because God has placed you in that position. If you wish to be charitable, be charitable by giving away part of your property and by visiting the poor.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. But how is it that the rich young man was told that the rich cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

FATHER GERÁSIM. It is said, "If thou wouldest be perfect."

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. But I do wish to be perfect. The Gospels say, "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven ..."

FATHER GERÁSIM. But we have to understand in what connection a thing is said.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I do try to understand, and all that is said in the Sermon on the Mount is plain and comprehensible.

FATHER GERÁSIM. Spiritual pride.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Where is the pride, since it is said that what is hidden from the wise is revealed to babes?

FATHER GERÁSIM. Revealed to the meek, but not to the proud.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. But who is proud? I, who consider myself a man like the rest of mankind, and one who therefore must live like the rest by his own labour and as poorly as his brother men, or those who consider themselves to be specially selected sacred people, knowing the whole truth and incapable of error; and who interpret Christ's words their own way?

FATHER GERÁSIM [offended] Pardon me, Nicholas Ivánovich, I did not come here to argue which of us is right, nor to receive an admonition, but I called, at Alexáandra Ivánovna's request, to talk things over with you. But since you know everything better than I do, we had better end our conversation. Only, once again, I must entreat you in God's name to come to your senses. You have gone cruelly astray and are ruining yourself.

[Rises].

MARY IVÁNOVNA. Won't you have something to eat?

FATHER GERÁSIM. No, I thank you. [Exit with Alexáandra Ivánovna].

MARY IVÁNOVNA [to young Priest] And what now?

PRIEST. Well, in my opinion, Nicholas Ivánovich spoke the truth, and Father Gerásim produced no argument on his side.

PRINCESS. He was not allowed to speak, and he did not like having a kind of debate with everybody listening. It was his modesty that made him withdraw.

BORÍS. It wasn't modesty at all. All he said was so false. It was evident that he had nothing to say.

PRINCESS. Yes, with your usual instability I see that you are beginning to agree with Nicholas Ivánovich about everything. If you believe such things you ought not to marry.

BORÍS. I only say that truth is truth, and I can't help saying it.

PRINCESS. You of all people should not talk like that.

BORÍS. Why not?

PRINCESS. Because you are poor, and have nothing to give away. However, all this is not our business. [Exit, followed by all except Nicholas Ivánovich and Mary Ivánovna].

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH [sits pondering, then smiles at his own thoughts]
Mary! What is all this for? Why did you invite that wretched, erring man? Why do those noisy women and that priest come into our most intimate life? Can we not settle our own affairs?

MARY IVÁNOVNA. What am I to do, if you want to leave the children penniless? That is what I cannot quietly submit to. You know that I am not grasping, and that I want nothing for myself.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. I know, I know and believe it. But the misfortune is that you do not trust the truth. I know you see it, but you can't make up your mind to rely on it. You rely neither on the truth nor on me. Yet you trust the crowd--the Princess and the rest of them.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. I believe in you, I always did; but when you want to let the children go begging ...

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. That means that you do not rely on me. Do you think I have not struggled and have not feared! But afterwards I became convinced that this course is not only possible but obligatory, and that

it is the one thing necessary and good for the children themselves. You always say that were it not for the children you would follow me, but I say that if we had no children we might live as we are doing; we should then only be injuring ourselves, but now we are injuring them too.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. But what am I to do, if I don't understand?

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. And what am I to do? Don't I know why that wretched man--dressed up in his cassock and wearing that cross--was sent for, and why Alexáandra Ivánovna brought the Notary? You want me to hand the estate over to you, but I can't. You know that I have loved you all the twenty years we have lived together. I love you and wish you well, and therefore cannot sign away the estate to you. If I sign it away at all, it can only be to give it back to those from whom it has been taken--the peasants. And I can't let things remain as they are, but must give it to them. I'm glad the Notary has come; and I will do it.

MARY IVÁNOVNA. No, that is dreadful! Why this cruelty? Though you think it a sin, still give it to me. [Weeps].

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. You don't know what you are saying. If I give it to you, I cannot go on living with you; I shall have to go away. I cannot continue to live under these conditions. I shall not be able to look on while the life-blood is squeezed out of the peasants and they are imprisoned, in your name if not in mine. So choose!

MARY IVÁNOVNA. How cruel you are! Is this Christianity? It is harshness! I cannot, after all, live as you want me to. I cannot rob my own children and give everything away to other people; and that is why you want to desert me. Well--do so! I see you have ceased loving me, and I even know why.

NICHOLAS IVÁNOVICH. Very well then--I will sign; but, Mary, you demand the impossible of me. [Goes to writing-table and signs] You wished it, but I shall not be able to go on living like this.

Curtain.