

Strike me dead, the track has vanished, Well, what now? Weve lost the way, Demons have bewitched our horses, Led us in the wilds astray. What a number! Whither drift they? Whats the mournful dirge they sing? Do they hail a witchs marriage Or a goblins burying? Pushkin. And there was one herd of many swine feeding on this mountain; and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Luke, ch. viii. 32-37. IN UNDERTAKING to describe the recent and strange incidents in our town, till lately wrapped in uneventful obscurity, I find myself forced in absence of literary skill to begin my story rather far back, that is to say, with certain biographical details concerning that talented and highly-esteemed gentleman, Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky. I trust that these details may at least serve as an introduction, while my projected story itself will come later. I will say at once that Stepan Trofimovitch had always filled a particular role among us, that of the progressive patriot, so to say, and he was passionately fond of playing the part—so much so that I really believe he could not have existed without it. Not that I would put him on a level with an actor at a theatre, God forbid, for I really have a respect for him. This may all have been the effect of habit, or rather, more exactly of a generous propensity he had from his earliest years for indulging in an agreeable day-dream in which he figured as a picturesque public character. He fondly loved, for instance, his position as a persecuted man and, so to speak, an exile. There is a sort of traditional glamour about those two little words that fascinated him once for all and, exalting him gradually in his own opinion, raised him in the course of years to a lofty pedestal very gratifying to vanity. In an English satire of the last century, Gulliver, returning from the land of the Lilliputians where the people were only three or four inches high, had grown so accustomed to consider himself a giant among them, that as he walked along the streets of London he could not help crying out to carriages and passers-by to be careful and get out of his way for fear he should crush them, imagining that they were little and he was still a giant. He was laughed at and abused for it, and rough coachmen even lashed at the giant with their whips. But was that just? What may not be done by habit? Habit had brought Stepan Trofimovitch almost to the same position, but in a more innocent and inoffensive form, if one may use such expressions, for he was a most excellent man.

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