

## CHAPTER IX

Until Prince Andrew settled in Boguchárovo its owners had always been absentees, and its peasants were of quite a different character from those of Bald Hills. They differed from them in speech, dress, and disposition. They were called steppe peasants. The old prince used to approve of them for their endurance at work when they came to Bald Hills to help with the harvest, or to dig ponds and ditches, but he disliked them for their boorishness.

Prince Andrew's last stay at Boguchárovo, when he introduced hospitals and schools and reduced the quitrent the peasants had to pay, had not softened their disposition but had on the contrary strengthened in them the traits of character the old prince called boorishness. Various obscure rumors were always current among them: at one time a rumor that they would all be enrolled as Cossacks; at another of a new religion to which they were all to be converted; then of some proclamation of the Tsar's and of an oath to the Tsar Paul in 1797 (in connection with which it was rumored that freedom had been granted them but the landowners had stopped it), then of Peter Fëdorovich's return to the throne in seven years' time, when everything would be made free and so "simple" that there would be no restrictions. Rumors of the war with Bonaparte and his invasion were connected in their minds with the same sort of vague notions of Antichrist, the end of the world, and "pure freedom."

In the vicinity of Boguchárovo were large villages belonging to the crown or to owners whose serfs paid quitrent and could work where they pleased. There were very few resident landlords in the neighborhood and also very few domestic or literate serfs, and in the lives of the peasantry of those parts the mysterious undercurrents in the life of the Russian people, the causes and meaning of which are so baffling to contemporaries, were more clearly and strongly noticeable than among others. One instance, which had occurred some twenty years before, was a movement among the peasants to emigrate to some unknown "warm rivers." Hundreds of peasants, among them the Boguchárovo folk, suddenly began selling their cattle and moving in whole families toward the southeast. As birds migrate to somewhere beyond the sea, so these men with their wives and children streamed to the southeast, to parts where none of them had ever been. They set off in caravans, bought their freedom one by one or ran away, and drove or walked toward the "warm rivers." Many of them were punished, some sent to Siberia, many died of cold and hunger on the road, many returned of their own accord, and the movement died down of itself just as it had sprung up, without apparent reason. But such undercurrents still existed among the people and gathered new forces ready to manifest themselves just as strangely, unexpectedly, and at the same time simply, naturally, and forcibly. Now in 1812, to anyone living in close touch with these people it was apparent that these undercurrents were acting strongly and nearing an eruption.

Alpátych, who had reached Boguchárovo shortly before the old prince's death, noticed an agitation among the peasants, and that contrary to what was happening in the Bald Hills district, where over a radius of forty miles all the peasants were moving away and leaving their villages

to be devastated by the Cossacks, the peasants in the steppe region round Boguchárovo were, it was rumored, in touch with the French, received leaflets from them that passed from hand to hand, and did not migrate. He learned from domestic serfs loyal to him that the peasant Karp, who possessed great influence in the village commune and had recently been away driving a government transport, had returned with news that the Cossacks were destroying deserted villages, but that the French did not harm them. Alpátych also knew that on the previous day another peasant had even brought from the village of Visloúkhovo, which was occupied by the French, a proclamation by a French general that no harm would be done to the inhabitants, and if they remained they would be paid for anything taken from them. As proof of this the peasant had brought from Visloúkhovo a hundred rubles in notes (he did not know that they were false) paid to him in advance for hay.

More important still, Alpátych learned that on the morning of the very day he gave the village Elder orders to collect carts to move the princess' luggage from Boguchárovo, there had been a village meeting at which it had been decided not to move but to wait. Yet there was no time to waste. On the fifteenth, the day of the old prince's death, the Marshal had insisted on Princess Mary's leaving at once, as it was becoming dangerous. He had told her that after the sixteenth he could not be responsible for what might happen. On the evening of the day the old prince died the Marshal went away, promising to return next day for the funeral. But this he was unable to do, for he received tidings that the French had unexpectedly advanced, and had barely time to remove his own family and valuables from his estate.

For some thirty years Boguchárovo had been managed by the village Elder, Dron, whom the old prince called by the diminutive "Drónushka."

Dron was one of those physically and mentally vigorous peasants who grow big beards as soon as they are of age and go on unchanged till they are sixty or seventy, without a gray hair or the loss of a tooth, as straight and strong at sixty as at thirty.

Soon after the migration to the "warm rivers," in which he had taken part like the rest, Dron was made village Elder and overseer of Boguchárovo, and had since filled that post irreproachably for twenty-three years. The peasants feared him more than they did their master. The masters, both the old prince and the young, and the steward respected him and jestingly called him "the Minister." During the whole time of his service Dron had never been drunk or ill, never after sleepless nights or the hardest tasks had he shown the least fatigue, and though he could not read he had never forgotten a single money account or the number of quarters of flour in any of the endless cartloads he sold for the prince, nor a single shock of the whole corn crop on any single acre of the Boguchárovo fields.

Alpátych, arriving from the devastated Bald Hills estate, sent for his Dron on the day of the prince's funeral and told him to have twelve horses got ready for the princess' carriages and eighteen carts for the things to be removed from Boguchárovo. Though the peasants paid quitrent, Alpátych thought no difficulty would be made about complying

with this order, for there were two hundred and thirty households at work in Boguchárovo and the peasants were well to do. But on hearing the order Dron lowered his eyes and remained silent. Alpátych named certain peasants he knew, from whom he told him to take the carts.

Dron replied that the horses of these peasants were away carting. Alpátych named others, but they too, according to Dron, had no horses available: some horses were carting for the government, others were too weak, and others had died for want of fodder. It seemed that no horses could be had even for the carriages, much less for the carting.

Alpátych looked intently at Dron and frowned. Just as Dron was a model village Elder, so Alpátych had not managed the prince's estates for twenty years in vain. He was a model steward, possessing in the highest degree the faculty of divining the needs and instincts of those he dealt with. Having glanced at Dron he at once understood that his answers did not express his personal views but the general mood of the Boguchárovo commune, by which the Elder had already been carried away. But he also knew that Dron, who had acquired property and was hated by the commune, must be hesitating between the two camps: the masters' and the serfs'. He noticed this hesitation in Dron's look and therefore frowned and moved closer up to him.

"Now just listen, Drónushka," said he. "Don't talk nonsense to me. His excellency Prince Andrew himself gave me orders to move all the people away and not leave them with the enemy, and there is an order from the Tsar about it too. Anyone who stays is a traitor to the Tsar. Do you hear?"

"I hear," Dron answered without lifting his eyes.

Alpátych was not satisfied with this reply.

"Eh, Dron, it will turn out badly!" he said, shaking his head.

"The power is in your hands," Dron rejoined sadly.

"Eh, Dron, drop it!" Alpátych repeated, withdrawing his hand from his bosom and solemnly pointing to the floor at Dron's feet. "I can see through you and three yards into the ground under you," he continued, gazing at the floor in front of Dron.

Dron was disconcerted, glanced furtively at Alpátych and again lowered his eyes.

"You drop this nonsense and tell the people to get ready to leave their homes and go to Moscow and to get carts ready for tomorrow morning for the princess' things. And don't go to any meeting yourself, do you hear?"

Dron suddenly fell on his knees.

"Yákov Alpátych, discharge me! Take the keys from me and discharge me, for Christ's sake!"

“Stop that!” cried Alpátych sternly. “I see through you and three yards under you,” he repeated, knowing that his skill in beekeeping, his knowledge of the right time to sow the oats, and the fact that he had been able to retain the old prince’s favor for twenty years had long since gained him the reputation of being a wizard, and that the power of seeing three yards under a man is considered an attribute of wizards.

Dron got up and was about to say something, but Alpátych interrupted him.

“What is it you have got into your heads, eh?... What are you thinking of, eh?”

“What am I to do with the people?” said Dron. “They’re quite beside themselves; I have already told them...”

“‘Told them,’ I dare say!” said Alpátych. “Are they drinking?” he asked abruptly.

“Quite beside themselves, Yákov Alpátych; they’ve fetched another barrel.”

“Well, then, listen! I’ll go to the police officer, and you tell them so, and that they must stop this and the carts must be got ready.”

“I understand.”

Alpátych did not insist further. He had managed people for a long time and knew that the chief way to make them obey is to show no suspicion that they can possibly disobey. Having wrung a submissive “I understand” from Dron, Alpátych contented himself with that, though he not only doubted but felt almost certain that without the help of troops the carts would not be forthcoming.

And so it was, for when evening came no carts had been provided. In the village, outside the drink shop, another meeting was being held, which decided that the horses should be driven out into the woods and the carts should not be provided. Without saying anything of this to the princess, Alpátych had his own belongings taken out of the carts which had arrived from Bald Hills and had those horses got ready for the princess’ carriages. Meanwhile he went himself to the police authorities.