III. A NEW POINT OF VIEW

Katenka was with me in the britchka; her lovely head inclined as she gazed pensively at the roadway. I looked at her in silence and wondered what had brought the unchildlike expression of sadness to her face which I now observed for the first time there.

"We shall soon be in Moscow," I said at last. "How large do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know," she replied.

"Well, but how large do you IMAGINE? As large as Serpukhov?"

"What do you say?"

"Nothing."

Yet the instinctive feeling which enables one person to guess the thoughts of another and serves as a guiding thread in conversation soon made Katenka feel that her indifference was disagreeable to me; wherefore she raised her head presently, and, turning round, said:

"Did your Papa tell you that we girls too were going to live at your Grandmamma's?"

"Yes, he said that we should ALL live there."

"ALL live there?"

"Yes, of course. We shall have one half of the upper floor, and you the other half, and Papa the wing; but we shall all of us dine together with Grandmamma downstairs."

"But Mamma says that your Grandmamma is so very grave and so easily made angry?"

"No, she only SEEMS like that at first. She is grave, but not bad-tempered. On the contrary, she is both kind and cheerful. If you could only have seen the ball at her house!"

"All the same, I am afraid of her. Besides, who knows whether we--"

Katenka stopped short, and once again became thoughtful.

"What?" I asked with some anxiety.

"Nothing, I only said that--"

"No. You said, 'Who knows whether we--'"

"And YOU said, didn't you, that once there was ever such a ball at

Grandmamma's?"

"Yes. It is a pity you were not there. There were heaps of guests--about a thousand people, and all of them princes or generals, and there was music, and I danced--But, Katenka" I broke off, "you are not listening to me?"

"Oh yes, I am listening. You said that you danced--?"

"Why are you so serious?"

"Well, one cannot ALWAYS be gay."

"But you have changed tremendously since Woloda and I first went to Moscow. Tell me the truth, now: why are you so odd?" My tone was resolute.

"AM I so odd?" said Katenka with an animation which showed me that my question had interested her. "I don't see that I am so at all."

"Well, you are not the same as you were before," I continued. "Once upon a time any one could see that you were our equal in everything, and that you loved us like relations, just as we did you; but now you are always serious, and keep yourself apart from us."

"Oh, not at all."

"But let me finish, please," I interrupted, already conscious of a slight tickling in my nose--the precursor of the tears which usually came to my eyes whenever I had to vent any long pent-up feeling. "You avoid us, and talk to no one but Mimi, as though you had no wish for our further acquaintance."

"But one cannot always remain the same--one must change a little sometimes," replied Katenka, who had an inveterate habit of pleading some such fatalistic necessity whenever she did not know what else to say.

I recollect that once, when having a quarrel with Lubotshka, who had called her "a stupid girl," she (Katenka) retorted that EVERYBODY could not be wise, seeing that a certain number of stupid people was a necessity in the world. However, on the present occasion, I was not satisfied that any such inevitable necessity for "changing sometimes" existed, and asked further:

"WHY is it necessary?"

"Well, you see, we MAY not always go on living together as we are doing now," said Katenka, colouring slightly, and regarding Philip's back with a grave expression on her face. "My Mamma was able to live with your mother because she was her friend; but will a similar arrangement always suit the Countess, who, they say, is so easily offended? Besides, in

any case, we shall have to separate SOME day. You are rich--you have Petrovskoe, while we are poor--Mamma has nothing."

"You are rich," "we are poor"--both the words and the ideas which they connoted seemed to me extremely strange. Hitherto, I had conceived that only beggars and peasants were poor and could not reconcile in my mind the idea of poverty and the graceful, charming Katenka. I felt that Mimi and her daughter ought to live with us ALWAYS and to share everything that we possessed. Things ought never to be otherwise. Yet, at this moment, a thousand new thoughts with regard to their lonely position came crowding into my head, and I felt so remorseful at the notion that we were rich and they poor, that I coloured up and could not look Katenka in the face.

"Yet what does it matter," I thought, "that we are well off and they are not? Why should that necessitate a separation? Why should we not share in common what we possess?" Yet, I had a feeling that I could not talk to Katenka on the subject, since a certain practical instinct, opposed to all logical reasoning, warned me that, right though she possibly was, I should do wrong to tell her so.

"It is impossible that you should leave us. How could we ever live apart?"

"Yet what else is there to be done? Certainly I do not WANT to do it; yet, if it HAS to be done, I know what my plan in life will be."

"Yes, to become an actress! How absurd!" I exclaimed (for I knew that to enter that profession had always been her favourite dream).

"Oh no. I only used to say that when I was a little girl."

"Well, then? What?"

"To go into a convent and live there. Then I could walk out in a black dress and velvet cap!" cried Katenka.

Has it ever befallen you, my readers, to become suddenly aware that your conception of things has altered--as though every object in life had unexpectedly turned a side towards you of which you had hitherto remained unaware? Such a species of moral change occurred, as regards myself, during this journey, and therefore from it I date the beginning of my boyhood. For the first time in my life, I then envisaged the idea that we--i.e. our family--were not the only persons in the world; that not every conceivable interest was centred in ourselves; and that there existed numbers of people who had nothing in common with us, cared nothing for us, and even knew nothing of our existence. No doubt I had known all this before--only I had not known it then as I knew it now; I had never properly felt or understood it.

Thought merges into conviction through paths of its own, as well as, sometimes, with great suddenness and by methods wholly different from

those which have brought other intellects to the same conclusion. For me the conversation with Katenka--striking deeply as it did, and forcing me to reflect on her future position--constituted such a path. As I gazed at the towns and villages through which we passed, and in each house of which lived at least one family like our own, as well as at the women and children who stared with curiosity at our carriages and then became lost to sight for ever, and the peasants and workmen who did not even look at us, much less make us any obeisance, the question arose for the first time in my thoughts, "Whom else do they care for if not for us?" And this question was followed by others, such as, "To what end do they live?" "How do they educate their children?" "Do they teach their children and let them play? What are their names?" and so forth.