

VIII. KARL IVANITCH'S HISTORY

THE evening before the day when Karl was to leave us for ever, he was standing (clad, as usual, in his wadded dressing-gown and red cap) near the bed in his room, and bending down over a trunk as he carefully packed his belongings.

His behaviour towards us had been very cool of late, and he had seemed to shrink from all contact with us. Consequently, when I entered his room on the present occasion, he only glanced at me for a second and then went on with his occupation. Even though I proceeded to jump on to his bed (a thing hitherto always forbidden me to do), he said not a word; and the idea that he would soon be scolding or forgiving us no longer--no longer having anything to do with us--reminded me vividly of the impending separation. I felt grieved to think that he had ceased to love us and wanted to show him my grief.

"Will you let me help you?" I said, approaching him.

He looked at me for a moment and turned away again. Yet the expression of pain in his eyes showed that his coldness was not the result of indifference, but rather of sincere and concentrated sorrow.

"God sees and knows everything," he said at length, raising himself to his full height and drawing a deep sigh. "Yes, Nicolinka," he went on, observing, the expression of sincere pity on my face, "my fate has been

an unhappy one from the cradle, and will continue so to the grave. The good that I have done to people has always been repaid with evil; yet, though I shall receive no reward here, I shall find one THERE" (he pointed upwards). "Ah, if only you knew my whole story, and all that I have endured in this life!--I who have been a bootmaker, a soldier, a deserter, a factory hand, and a teacher! Yet now--now I am nothing, and, like the Son of Man, have nowhere to lay my head." Sitting down upon a chair, he covered his eyes with his hand.

Seeing that he was in the introspective mood in which a man pays no attention to his listener as he cons over his secret thoughts, I remained silent, and, seating myself upon the bed, continued to watch his kind face.

"You are no longer a child. You can understand things now, and I will tell you my whole story and all that I have undergone. Some day, my children, you may remember the old friend who loved you so much--"

He leant his elbow upon the table by his side, took a pinch of snuff, and, in the peculiarly measured, guttural tone in which he used to dictate us our lessons, began the story of his career.

Since he many times in later years repeated the whole to me again--always in the same order, and with the same expressions and the same unvarying intonation--I will try to render it literally, and without omitting the innumerable grammatical errors into which he always

strayed when speaking in Russian. Whether it was really the history of his life, or whether it was the mere product of his imagination--that is to say, some narrative which he had conceived during his lonely residence in our house, and had at last, from endless repetition, come to believe in himself--or whether he was adorning with imaginary facts the true record of his career, I have never quite been able to make out. On the one hand, there was too much depth of feeling and practical consistency in its recital for it to be wholly incredible, while, on the other hand, the abundance of poetical beauty which it contained tended to raise doubts in the mind of the listener.

"Me vere very unhappy from ze time of my birth," he began with a profound sigh. "Ze noble blot of ze Countess of Zomerblat flows in my veins. Me vere born six veek after ze vetting. Ze man of my Mutter (I called him 'Papa') vere farmer to ze Count von Zomerblat. He coult not forget my Mutter's shame, ant loaft me not. I had a youngster broser Johann ant two sister, pot me vere strange petween my own family. Ven Johann mate several silly trick Papa sayt, 'Wit sis chilt Karl I am never to have one moment tranquil!' and zen he scoltet and ponishet me. Ven ze sister quarrellet among zemselves Papa sayt, 'Karl vill never be one opedient poy,' ant still scoltet ant ponishet me. My goot Mamma alone loaft ant tenteret me. Often she sayt to me, 'Karl, come in my room,' ant zere she kisset me secretly. 'Poorly, poorly Karl!' she sayt. 'Nopoty loaf you, pot I will not exchange you for somepoty in ze worlt, One zing your Mutter pegs you, to rememper,' sayt she to me, 'learn vell, ant be efer one honest man; zen Got will not forsake you.' Ant

I triet so to become. Ven my fourteen year hat expiret, ant me coul't partake of ze Holy Sopper, my Mutter sayt to my Vater, 'Karl is one pig poy now, Kustaf. Vat shall we do wis him?' Ant Papa sayt, 'Me ton't know.' Zen Mamma sayt, 'Let us give him to town at Mister Schultzen's, and he may pea Schumacher,' ant my Vater sayt, 'Goot!' Six year ant seven mons livet I in town wis ze Mister Shoemaker, ant he loaft me. He sayt, 'Karl are one goot vorkman, ant shall soon become my Geselle.' Pot-man makes ze proposition, ant Got ze deposition. In ze year 1796 one conscription took place, ant each which vas serviceable, from ze eighteens to ze twenty-first year, hat to go to town.

"My Fater and my broser Johann come to town, ant ve go togezer to throw ze lot for which shoul't pe Soldat. Johann drew ze fatal nomper, and me vas not necessary to pe Soldat. Ant Papa sayt, 'I have only vun son, ant wis him I must now separate!'

"Den I take his hant, ant says, 'Why say you so, Papa? Come wis me, ant I will say you somesing.' Ant Papa come, ant we seat togezer at ze publics-house, ant me sayt, 'Vaiteer, give us one Bierkrug,' ant he gives us one. We trink altogezer, and broser Johann also trink. 'Papa,' sayt me, 'ton't say zat you have only one son, ant wis it you must separate, My heart was breaking ven you say sis. Broser Johann must not serve; ME shall pe Soldat. Karl is for nopoty necessary, and Karl shall pe Soldat.'

"'You is one honest man, Karl,' sayt Papa, ant kiss me. Ant me was

Soldat."