

X -- THE SORT OF MAN MY FATHER WAS

Papa was a gentleman of the last century, with all the chivalrous character, self-reliance, and gallantry of the youth of that time. Upon the men of the present day he looked with a contempt arising partly from inborn pride and partly from a secret feeling of vexation that, in this age of ours, he could no longer enjoy the influence and success which had been his in his youth. His two principal failings were gambling and gallantry, and he had won or lost, in the course of his career, several millions of roubles.

Tall and of imposing figure, he walked with a curiously quick, mincing gait, as well as had a habit of hitching one of his shoulders. His eyes were small and perpetually twinkling, his nose large and aquiline, his lips irregular and rather oddly (though pleasantly) compressed, his articulation slightly defective and lispng, and his head quite bald.

Such was my father's exterior from the days of my earliest recollection. It was an exterior which not only brought him success and made him a man a bonnes fortunes but one which pleased people of all ranks and stations. Especially did it please those whom he desired to please.

At all junctures he knew how to take the lead, for, though not deriving from the highest circles of society, he had always mixed with them, and knew how to win their respect. He possessed in the highest degree that measure of pride and self-confidence which, without giving offence, maintains a man in the opinion of the world. He had much originality,

as well as the ability to use it in such a way that it benefited him as much as actual worldly position or fortune could have done. Nothing in the universe could surprise him, and though not of eminent attainments in life, he seemed born to have acquired them. He understood so perfectly how to make both himself and others forget and keep at a distance the seamy side of life, with all its petty troubles and vicissitudes, that it was impossible not to envy him. He was a connoisseur in everything which could give ease and pleasure, as well as knew how to make use of such knowledge. Likewise he prided himself on the brilliant connections which he had formed through my mother's family or through friends of his youth, and was secretly jealous of any one of a higher rank than himself--any one, that is to say, of a rank higher than a retired lieutenant of the Guards. Moreover, like all ex-officers, he refused to dress himself in the prevailing fashion, though he attired himself both originally and artistically--his invariable wear being light, loose-fitting suits, very fine shirts, and large collars and cuffs. Everything seemed to suit his upright figure and quiet, assured air. He was sensitive to the pitch of sentimentality, and, when reading a pathetic passage, his voice would begin to tremble and the tears to come into his eyes, until he had to lay the book aside. Likewise he was fond of music, and could accompany himself on the piano as he sang the love songs of his friend A-- or gipsy songs or themes from operas; but he had no love for serious music, and would frankly flout received opinion by declaring that, whereas Beethoven's sonatas wearied him and sent him to sleep, his ideal of beauty was "Do not wake me, youth" as Semenoff sang it, or "Not one" as the gipsy Taninsha rendered that

ditty. His nature was essentially one of those which follow public opinion concerning what is good, and consider only that good which the public declares to be so. [It may be noted that the author has said earlier in the chapter that his father possessed "much originality."] God only knows whether he had any moral convictions. His life was so full of amusement that probably he never had time to form any, and was too successful ever to feel the lack of them.

As he grew to old age he looked at things always from a fixed point of view, and cultivated fixed rules--but only so long as that point or those rules coincided with expediency, The mode of life which offered some passing degree of interest--that, in his opinion, was the right one and the only one that men ought to affect. He had great fluency of argument; and this, I think, increased the adaptability of his morals and enabled him to speak of one and the same act, now as good, and now, with abuse, as abominable.