

## XVIII -- PRINCE IVAN IVANOVITCH

When the Princess had heard my verses and overwhelmed the writer of them with praise, Grandmamma softened to her a little. She began to address her in French and to cease calling her "my dear." Likewise she invited her to return that evening with her children. This invitation having been accepted, the Princess took her leave. After that, so many other callers came to congratulate Grandmamma that the courtyard was crowded all day long with carriages.

"Good morning, my dear cousin," was the greeting of one guest in particular as he entered the room and kissed Grandmamma's hand, He was a man of seventy, with a stately figure clad in a military uniform and adorned with large epaulettes, an embroidered collar, and a white cross round the neck. His face, with its quiet and open expression, as well as the simplicity and ease of his manners, greatly pleased me, for, in spite of the thin half-circle of hair which was all that was now left to him, and the want of teeth disclosed by the set of his upper lip, his face was a remarkably handsome one.

Thanks to his fine character, handsome exterior, remarkable valour, influential relatives, and, above all, good fortune, Prince, Ivan Ivanovitch had early made himself a career. As that career progressed, his ambition had met with a success which left nothing more to be sought for in that direction. From his earliest youth upward he had prepared himself to fill the exalted station in the world to which fate actually

called him later; wherefore, although in his prosperous life (as in the lives of all) there had been failures, misfortunes, and cares, he had never lost his quietness of character, his elevated tone of thought, or his peculiarly moral, religious bent of mind. Consequently, though he had won the universal esteem of his fellows, he had done so less through his important position than through his perseverance and integrity. While not of specially distinguished intellect, the eminence of his station (whence he could afford to look down upon all petty questions) had caused him to adopt high points of view. Though in reality he was kind and sympathetic, in manner he appeared cold and haughty--probably for the reason that he had forever to be on his guard against the endless claims and petitions of people who wished to profit through his influence. Yet even then his coldness was mitigated by the polite condescension of a man well accustomed to move in the highest circles of society. Well-educated, his culture was that of a youth of the end of the last century. He had read everything, whether philosophy or belles lettres, which that age had produced in France, and loved to quote from Racine, Corneille, Boileau, Moliere, Montaigne, and Fenelon. Likewise he had gleaned much history from Segur, and much of the old classics from French translations of them; but for mathematics, natural philosophy, or contemporary literature he cared nothing whatever. However, he knew how to be silent in conversation, as well as when to make general remarks on authors whom he had never read--such as Goethe, Schiller, and Byron. Moreover, despite his exclusively French education, he was simple in speech and hated originality (which he called the mark of an untutored nature). Wherever he lived, society was a necessity to him, and, both in

Moscow and the country he had his reception days, on which practically "all the town" called upon him. An introduction from him was a passport to every drawing-room; few young and pretty ladies in society objected to offering him their rosy cheeks for a paternal salute; and people even in the highest positions felt flattered by invitations to his parties.

The Prince had few friends left now like Grandmamma--that is to say, few friends who were of the same standing as himself, who had had the same sort of education, and who saw things from the same point of view: wherefore he greatly valued his intimate, long-standing friendship with her, and always showed her the highest respect.

I hardly dared to look at the Prince, since the honour paid him on all sides, the huge epaulettes, the peculiar pleasure with which Grandmamma received him, and the fact that he alone, seemed in no way afraid of her, but addressed her with perfect freedom (even being so daring as to call her "cousin"), awakened in me a feeling of reverence for his person almost equal to that which I felt for Grandmamma herself.

On being shown my verses, he called me to his side, and said:

"Who knows, my cousin, but that he may prove to be a second Derzhavin?" Nevertheless he pinched my cheek so hard that I was only prevented from crying by the thought that it must be meant for a caress.

Gradually the other guests dispersed, and with them Papa and Woloda.

Thus only Grandmamma, the Prince, and myself were left in the drawing-room.

"Why has our dear Natalia Nicolaevna not come to-day" asked the Prince after a silence.

"Ah, my friend," replied Grandmamma, lowering her voice and laying a hand upon the sleeve of his uniform, "she would certainly have come if she had been at liberty to do what she likes. She wrote to me that Peter had proposed bringing her with him to town, but that she had refused, since their income had not been good this year, and she could see no real reason why the whole family need come to Moscow, seeing that Lubotshka was as yet very young and that the boys were living with me--a fact, she said, which made her feel as safe about them as though she had been living with them herself."

"True, it is good for the boys to be here," went on Grandmamma, yet in a tone which showed clearly that she did not think it was so very good, "since it was more than time that they should be sent to Moscow to study, as well as to learn how to comport themselves in society. What sort of an education could they have got in the country? The eldest boy will soon be thirteen, and the second one eleven. As yet, my cousin, they are quite untaught, and do not know even how to enter a room."

"Nevertheless" said the Prince, "I cannot understand these complaints of ruined fortunes. He has a very handsome income, and Natalia has

Chabarovska, where we used to act plays, and which I know as well as I do my own hand. It is a splendid property, and ought to bring in an excellent return."

"Well," said Grandmamma with a sad expression on her face, "I do not mind telling you, as my most intimate friend, that all this seems to me a mere pretext on his part for living alone, for strolling about from club to club, for attending dinner-parties, and for resorting to--well, who knows what? She suspects nothing; you know her angelic sweetness and her implicit trust of him in everything. He had only to tell her that the children must go to Moscow and that she must be left behind in the country with a stupid governess for company, for her to believe him! I almost think that if he were to say that the children must be whipped just as the Princess Barbara whips hers, she would believe even that!" and Grandmamma leant back in her arm-chair with an expression of contempt. Then, after a moment of silence, during which she took her handkerchief out of her pocket to wipe away a few tears which had stolen down her cheeks, she went, on:

"Yes, my friend, I often think that he cannot value and understand her properly, and that, for all her goodness and love of him and her endeavours to conceal her grief (which, however as I know only too well, exists). She cannot really be happy with him. Mark my words if he does not--" Here Grandmamma buried her face in the handkerchief.

"Ah, my dear old friend," said the Prince reproachfully. "I think you

are unreasonable. Why grieve and weep over imagined evils? That is not right. I have known him a long time, and feel sure that he is an attentive, kind, and excellent husband, as well as (which is the chief thing of all) a perfectly honourable man."

At this point, having been an involuntary auditor of a conversation not meant for my ears, I stole on tiptoe out of the room, in a state of great distress.