

CHAPTER III.

At the time when Maslova, exhausted by the long walk, was approaching with the armed convoy the building in which court was held, the same nephew of the ladies that brought her up, Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch Nekhludoff, who deceived her, lay on his high, soft, spring feather-bed, in spotless Holland linen, smoking a cigarette. He was gazing before him, contemplating the events of the previous day and considering what he had before him for that day. As he thought of the previous evening, spent at the Korchagins, a wealthy and influential family, whose daughter, rumor had it, he was to marry, he sighed, and throwing away the butt of his cigarette, he was on the point of taking another from the silver cigarette holder, but changed his mind. Half rising, he slipped his smooth, white feet into the slippers, threw a silk morning gown over his broad shoulders, and with quick and heavy stride, walked into the adjoining dressing-room, which was permeated with the artificial odors of elixirs, perfumes, cosmetics. There he washed his partly gold-filled teeth with a tooth-powder, rinsed them with a perfumed mouth-wash, then began to sponge himself and dry his body with Turkish towels. After washing his hands with perfumed soap, carefully brushing his trimmed nails and washing his face and stout neck in a marble basin, he walked into a third room, where a shower-bath was ready. Here he received a cold-water douche, and after rubbing his white and muscular body with coarse towels and donning his white linen, he seated himself before the mirror and began to brush

his short, curly beard and the thinning curls of his forehead.

Everything used by him--the linen, clothing, shoes, scarfs, scarf-pins, cuff-buttons, were of the very best quality, simple, tasteful and expensive.

He then picked out the first of a dozen scarfs and pins that came into his hand--it was no more novel and amusing, as it used to be--and he was quite indifferent as to which he put on. He dressed himself in his brushed clothes which lay on the chair and went out, though not quite refreshed, yet clean and fragrant. In the oblong dining-room, the inlaid floor of which had been polished by three of his men the day before, and containing a massive oaken sideboard and a similar extension table, the legs of which were carved in the shape of lion's paws, giving it a pompous appearance, breakfast stood ready for him. A fine, starched cloth with large monograms was spread on the table, on which stood a silver coffee-pot, containing fragrant, steaming coffee, a sugar bowl and cream pitcher to match, fresh rolls and various kinds of biscuits. Beside them lay the last number of the "Revue des deux Mondes," newspapers and his mail. Nekhludoff was about to open the letters, when a middle-aged woman, with a lace head-gear over her unevenly parted hair, glided into the room. This was Agrippina Petrovna, servant of his mother, who died in this very house. She was now stewardess to the son.

Agrippina Petrovna had traveled many years abroad with Nekhludoff's

mother, and had acquired the manners of a lady. She had lived in the house of the Nekhludoffs since childhood, and knew Dmitri Ivanovitch when he was called by the diminutive Mitenka.

"Good-morning, Dmitri Ivanovitch."

"How do you do, Agrippina Petrovna? What's the news?" asked Nekhludoff, jesting.

"A letter from the old Princess, or the young one, perhaps. The maid brought it long ago, and is now waiting in my room," said Agrippina Petrovna, handing him the letter with a significant smile.

"Very well; I will attend to it immediately," said Nekhludoff, taking the letter and then, noticing the smile on Agrippina's face, he frowned.

The smile on Agrippina's face signified that the letter came from Princess Korchagin, whom, according to Agrippina Petrovna, he was to marry. And this supposition, expressed by her smile, displeased Nekhludoff.

"Then I will bid her wait," and Agrippina Petrovna glided out of the dining-room, first replacing the crumb-brush, which lay on the table, in its holder.

Nekhludoff opened the perfumed letter and began to read:

"In fulfillment of the duty I assumed of being your memory," the letter ran, "I call to your mind that you have been summoned to serve as juror to-day, the 28th of April, and that, therefore, you cannot accompany us and Kolossoff to the art exhibition, as you promised yesterday in your customary forgetfulness; à moins que vous ne soyez disposé à payer à la cour d'assises les 300 rubles d'amende que vous vous refusez pour votre cheval, for your failure to appear in time. I remembered it yesterday, when you had left. So keep it in mind.

"PRINCESS M. KORCHAGIN."

On the other side was a postscript:

"Maman vous fait dire que votre couvert vous attendra jusqu'à la nuit. Venez absolument à quelle heure que cela soit. M. K."

Nekhludoff knit his brows. The note was the continuation of a skillful strategem whereby the Princess sought, for the last two months, to fasten him with invisible bonds. But Nekhludoff, besides the usual irresoluteness before marriage of people of his age, and who are not passionately in love, had an important reason for withholding his offer of marriage for the time being. The reason was not that ten

years before he had ruined and abandoned Katiousha, which incident he had entirely forgotten, but that at this very time he was sustaining relations with a married woman, and though he now considered them at an end, they were not so considered by her.

In the presence of women, Nekhludoff was very shy, but it was this very shyness that determined the married woman to conquer him. This woman was the wife of the commander of the district in which Nekhludoff was one of the electors. She led him into relations with her which held him fast, and at the same time grew more and more repulsive to him. At first Nekhludoff could not resist her wiles, then, feeling himself at fault, he could not break off the relations against her will. This was the reason why Nekhludoff considered that he had no right, even if he desired, to ask for the hand of Korchagin. A letter from the husband of that woman happened to lay on the table. Recognizing the handwriting and the stamp, Nekhludoff flushed and immediately felt an influx of that energy which he always experienced in the face of danger. But there was no cause for his agitation; the husband, as commander of the district where Nekhludoff's estates were situated, informed the latter of a special meeting of the local governing body, and asked him to be present without fail, and donner un coup d'épaule in the important measures to be submitted concerning the schools and roads, and that the reactionary party was expected to offer strong opposition.

The commander was a liberal-minded man, entirely absorbed with the

struggles, and knew nothing about his wretched family life.

Nekhludoff recalled all the tortures this man had occasioned him; how on one occasion he thought that the husband had discovered all, and he was preparing to fight a duel with him, intending to use a blank cartridge, and the ensuing scene where she, in despair, ran to the pond, intending to drown herself, while he ran to search for her. "I cannot go now, and can undertake nothing until I have heard from her," thought Nekhludoff. The preceding week he had written to her a decisive letter, acknowledging his guilt, and expressing his readiness to redeem it in any manner she should suggest, but for her own good, considered their relations ended. It is to this letter that he expected a reply. He considered it a favorable sign that no reply came. If she had not consented to a separation, she would have answered long ago, or would have come personally, as she often did before. Nekhludoff had heard that an army officer was courting her, and while he was tormented by jealousy, he was at the same time gladdened by the hope of release from the oppressive lie.

The other letter was from the steward in charge of his estates.

Nekhludoff was requested to return and establish his right to the inheritance and also to decide on the future management of the estates; whether the same system of letting out to the peasants, which prevailed during the lifetime of his mother, was to be continued, or, as the steward had strongly advised the deceased Princess, and now advised the young Prince, to augment the stock and work all the land

himself. The steward wrote that the land could thus best be exploited. He also apologized for his failure to send the three thousand rubles due on the first of the month, which he would send by the next mail, explaining it by the difficulty of collecting the rents from the peasants whose bad faith had reached a point where it became necessary to resort to the courts to collect them. This letter was partly agreeable and partly disagreeable to Nekhludoff. It was agreeable to feel the power of authority over so vast an estate, and it was disagreeable, because in his youth he was an enthusiastic adherent of Herbert Spencer, and being himself a large land owner, was struck by the proposition in *‘Social Statics’* that private ownership of land is contrary to the dictates of justice. With the frankness and boldness of youth, he not only *‘then’* spoke of the injustice of private ownership of land; not only did he compose theses in the university on the subject, but he actually distributed among the peasants the few hundred acres of land left him by his father, not desiring to own land contrary to his convictions. Now that he found himself the owner of vast estates, he was confronted by two alternatives: either to waive his ownership in favor of the peasants, as he did ten years ago with the two hundred acres, or, by tacit acquiescence, confess that all his former ideas were erroneous and false.

He could not carry out the first, because he possessed no resources outside of the land. He did not wish to go into service, and yet he had luxurious habits of life which he thought he could not abandon. Indeed, there was no necessity of abandoning these habits, since he

had lost the strength of conviction as well as the resolution, the vanity and the desire to astonish people that he had possessed in his youth. The other alternative--to reject all the arguments against private ownership of land which he gathered from Spencer's *'Social Statics'*, and of which he found confirmation in the works of Henry George--he could follow even less.

For this reason the steward's letter was disagreeable to him.