

CHAPTER IV.

Having breakfasted, Nekhludoff went to the cabinet to see for what hour he was summoned to appear at court, and to answer the Princess' note. In the work-room stood an easel with a half-finished painting turned face downward, and on the wall hung studies in drawing. On seeing that painting, on which he had worked two years, and those drawings, he called to mind the feeling of impotence, which he experienced of late with greatest force, to make further advance in the art. He explained this feeling by the development of a fine aesthetic taste, and yet this consciousness caused him unpleasant sensations.

Seven years before he had retired from active service he decided that his true vocation in life was painting, and from the height of his artistic activity he looked down upon all other occupations. And now it appeared that he had no right to do so, and every recollection of it was disagreeable to him. He looked on all the luxurious appointments of the work-room with heavy heart, and walked into the cabinet in ill humor. The cabinet was a high room, profusely ornamented, and containing every imaginable device of comfort and necessity.

He produced from one of the drawers of a large table the summons, and, ascertaining that he must appear at eleven o'clock, he sat down and

wrote to the Princess, thanking her for the invitation, and saying that he should try to call for dinner. The tone of the note seemed to him too intimate, and he tore it up; he wrote another, but that was too formal, almost offensive. Again he tore it up, and touched a button on the wall. A servant, morose, with flowing side-whiskers and in a gray apron, entered.

"Please send for a carriage."

"Yes, sir."

"And tell the Korchagins' maid that I thank them; I will try to call."

"Yes, sir."

"It is impolite, but I cannot write. But I will see her to-day," thought Nekhludoff, and started to dress himself.

When he emerged from the house a carriage with rubber tires awaited him.

"You had scarcely left Prince Korchagin's house yesterday when I called for you," said the driver, half-turning his stout, sun-burned neck in the white collar of his shirt, "and the footman said that you had just gone."

"Even the drivers know of my relations to the Korchagins," thought Nekhludoff, and the unsolved question which continually occupied his mind of late--whether or not he ought to marry Princess Korchagin--again occurred to him, and, like most questions that he was called upon to decide at that time, it remained unsolved.

He had many reasons for, and as many against, marriage. There was the pleasure of domestic life, which made it possible to lead a moral life, as he called married life; then, and principally, the family and children would infuse his present aimless life with a purpose. This was for marriage generally. On the other hand there was, first, the loss of freedom which all elderly bachelors fear so much; and, second, an unconscious awe of that mysterious creature, woman.

However, in favor of marrying Missy in particular (Korchagin's name was Maria, but, as usual in families of the higher classes, she received a nickname) there was, first, the fact that she came of good stock, and was in everything, from her dress to her manner of speaking, walking and laughing, distinguished not by any exceptional qualities, but by "good breeding"--he knew no other expression for the quality which he prized very highly. Second, she valued him above all other men, hence, he thought she understood him. And this appreciation of him, that is, acknowledging his high qualities, was proof to Nekhludoff of her intelligence and correct judgment. Finally, against marrying Missy in particular, was, first, the extreme probability of his finding a girl of much better qualities than Missy, and,

consequently, more worthy of him; and, second, Missy was twenty-seven years old and had probably loved other men before him. This thought tormented him. His pride could not reconcile itself to the thought that she could love some one else, even in the past. Of course, she could not be expected to know that she would meet him, but the very thought that she could have loved some one else before offended him.

So that there were as many reasons for as there were against marriage in general and marrying Missy in particular. At all events the arguments were equally strong on both sides, and Nekhludoff laughed as he compared himself to the ass in the fable who, while deciding which of the two bales of hay before him he should have his meal from, starved himself.

"However, until I have heard from Maria Vasilieona, the wife of the commander, and have done with her for good, I can do nothing," he said to himself.

And the consciousness that he could and must defer his decision pleased him.

"Ah, but I will consider it all later," he said to himself, as his cabriolet silently approached the asphalt pavement of the court-house.

"And now I must do my duty to the community conscientiously, as I always do, and think it one's duty to do. Besides, it is often

interesting," he said, and went past the door-keeper into the vestibule of the court.