

CHAPTER VI.

The presiding justice arrived early. He was a tall, stout man, with long, grayish side-whiskers. He was married, but, like his wife, led a very dissolute life. They did not interfere with each other. On the morning in question he received a note from a Swiss governess, who had lived in his house during the summer, and was now passing on her way from the South to St. Petersburg. She wrote that she would be in town between three and six o'clock p.m., and wait for him at the "Hotel Italia." He was, therefore, anxious to end his day's sitting before six o'clock, that he might meet the red-haired Clara Vasilievna.

Entering his private chamber, and locking the door behind him, he produced from the lower shelf of a book-case two dumb-bells, made twenty motions upward, forward, sidewise and downward, and three times lowered himself, holding the bells above his head.

"Nothing so refreshes one as a cold-water bath and exercise," he thought, feeling with his left hand, on the fourth finger of which was a gold ring, the biceps of his right arm. He had to go through two more movements (these exercises he went through every day before court opened), when the door rattled. Some one was attempting to open it. The judge quickly replaced the dumb-bells and opened the door.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

One of the members of the court, wearing gold eye-glasses, of medium height, with high shoulders and frowning countenance, entered.

"Matvei Nikitich is late again," said the newcomer, with an air of displeasure.

"Yes," said the presiding judge, donning his robes. "He is always late."

"It is a shame," said the member, and sat down angrily, then lighted a cigarette.

This member of the court, a very punctilious man, had this morning had an unpleasant encounter with his wife, which was caused by her spending her monthly allowance before the month was up. She asked for a sum of money in advance, and he refused. The result was a quarrel. She said that unless he gave her the money there would be no dinner that night, and that he would have to dine outside. He departed in fear that she would carry out her threat, as anything might be expected from her.

"Is it worth while leading a good, moral life?" he thought, as he looked at the beaming, healthy, joyful and good-natured presiding justice, who, spreading his elbows, stroked his long, gray whiskers; "he is always contented and cheerful, while I am suffering."

The secretary entered and handed the presiding justice a document.

"Thank you," he said, and lighted a cigarette. "Which case shall be taken up first?"

"The poison case, I think," the secretary answered, with feigned indifference.

"Very well; so let it be the poison case," said the justice, considering that that case could be disposed of by four o'clock and make it possible for him to keep the appointment. "Has Matvei Nikitich arrived?"

"Not yet."

"Is Breae here?"

"Yes," answered the secretary.

"Then tell him that we shall try the poisoning case."

Breae was an assistant prosecuting attorney and was assigned to this term of the court.

The secretary met Breae in the corridor. With uplifted shoulders, his

robe unbuttoned, and portfolio under his arm, he almost ran, his heels clattering on the floor, and his disengaged hand outstretched in the direction in which he was going.

"Michael Petrovich desires to know if you are ready," said the secretary.

"Certainly; I am always ready," said the assistant prosecutor; "which is the first case?"

"The poisoning case."

"Very well," said the assistant prosecutor, but he did not consider it well at all--he had not slept all night. A send-off had been given to a departing friend, and he drank and played till two in the morning, so that he was entirely unfamiliar with this case, and now hastened to glance over the indictment. The secretary had purposely suggested the case, knowing that the prosecutor had not read it. The secretary was a man of liberal, even radical, ideas. Breae was conservative, and the secretary disliked him, and envied his position.

"And what about the Skoptzy?"[A]

"I have already said that I cannot prosecute them in the absence of witnesses," said the assistant prosecutor, "and I will so declare to the court."

"But you don't need----"

"I cannot," said the assistant prosecutor, and waving his hand, ran to his office.

He was postponing the case against the Skoptzy, although the absent witness was an entirely unnecessary one. The real reason of the postponement was that the prosecutor feared that their trial before an intelligent jury might end in their acquittal. By an understanding with the presiding justice their case was to be transferred to the session of the District Court, where the preponderance of peasants on the jury would insure their conviction.

The commotion in the corridor increased. The greatest crowd was before the Civil Court, where the case of which the portly gentleman was telling the jurymen was being tried. During a recess the same old lady from whom the ingenious attorney managed to win her property in favor of his shrewd client, came out of the court-room. That he was not entitled to the property was known to the judges as well as to the claimant and his attorney, but the mode of their procedure was such that it was impossible to dismiss their claim. The old lady was stout, in smart attire, and with large flowers on her hat. As she passed into the corridor she stopped, and turning to her lawyer, kept repeating:

"How can it be? Great heavens! I don't understand it!"

The lawyer did not listen to her, but looked at the flowers on her hat, making mental calculations.

Behind the old lady, beaming in his wide-open vest, and with a self-sufficient smile on his face, came that same famous lawyer who so managed the case that the lady with the large flowers lost all her property, while his shrewd client, who paid him ten thousand rubles, received over a hundred thousand. All eyes were directed toward him. He was conscious of it and seemed to say by his demeanor:

"Never mind your expressions of devotion," and brushed past the crowd.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote A: A sect of eunuchs.]