

CHAPTER VII.

Finally Matvei Nikitich arrived, and the usher, a long-necked and lean man, with a sideling gait and protruding lower lip, entered the jury-room.

The usher was an honest man, with a university education, but he could not hold any employment on account of his tippling habit. A countess, his wife's patroness, had obtained him his present position three months ago; he still retained it, and was exceedingly glad.

"Are you all here, gentlemen?" he asked, putting on his pince-nez and looking through it.

"I think so," said the cheerful merchant.

"Let us see," said the usher, and drawing a sheet of paper from his pocket, began to call the names of the jury, looking at those that responded to their names now through his pince-nez, now over it.

"Counsilor of State E. M. Nikiforoff."

"Here," said the portly gentleman, who was familiar with all the litigations.

"Retired Colonel Ivan Semionovich Ivanoff."

"Present," answered a lank man in the uniform of a retired officer.

"Merchant of the second guild, Peter Baklashoff."

"Here," said the good-natured merchant, smiling from ear to ear. "We are ready."

"Lieutenant of the Guards, Prince Dmitri Nekhludoff."

"Here," answered Nekhludoff.

The usher, looking politely and pleasantly through his pince-nez, bowed, thereby distinguishing him from the rest, as it were.

"Captain Uri Dmitrievich Danchenko; merchant Gregory Ephimovich Kouleshoff," etc., etc., etc.

There were but two missing from the panel.

"You will now, gentlemen, walk into the court," said the usher, pointing to the door with a polite sweep of the hand.

They all rose from their seats, and passing each other through the door, made their way through the corridor to the court-room.

The court was held in a large, oblong room. At one end was a platform, reached by three steps. In the middle of the platform stood a table, covered with green cloth, which was fringed with a dark-green lace. Behind the table stood three arm-chairs with high, carved backs. In an image-case suspended in the right corner was a representation of Christ with a crown of thorns, and beneath it a reading-desk, and on the same side stood the prosecutor's desk. To the left, opposite this desk, was the secretary's table, and dividing these from the seats reserved for spectators was a carved railing, along which stood the prisoners' bench, as yet unoccupied.

On an elevation to the right were two rows of chairs, also with high backs, reserved for the jury; below these were tables for the attorneys. All this was in the front part of the court-room, which was divided in two by a railing. In the rear part of the room benches in lines extended to the wall. In the front row sat four women, either servants or factory employees, and two men, also workmen, who were evidently awed by the grandeur of the ornamentations, and were timidly whispering to each other.

Soon after the jurymen came the usher, who, walking sidewise to the middle of the room, shouted, as if he meant to frighten those present:

"The court is coming!"

Everybody stood up, and the judges ascended the platform. First came the presiding judge with his muscles and beautiful whiskers. Then came the gold-spectacled, gloomy member of the court--now even more gloomy, for before the opening of the session he met his brother-in-law, a candidate for a judicial office, who told him that he had seen his sister, and that she declared that there would be no dinner at home this day.

"So that, it seems, we will have to dine at an inn," said the brother-in-law, laughing.

"What is there droll about it?" said the gloomy member of the court, and sank into a still deeper gloom.

And last of all came the third member of the court, that same Matvei Nikitich, who was always late. He wore a long beard, and had large, kindly eyes, with drooping eyelids. He suffered from catarrh of the stomach, and by the advice of his physician had adopted a new regimen, and this new regimen detained him this morning longer than usual. When he ascended the platform he seemed to be wrapped in thought, but only because he had the habit of making riddles of every question that occurred to him. At this moment he was occupied with the following enigmatical proposition:

If the number of steps in the distance between the cabinet-door and the arm-chair will divide by three without a remainder, then the new

regimen will cure him; but if it does not so divide, then it will not.

There were twenty-six steps, but he made one short step and reached the chair with the twenty-seventh.

As the judges ascended the elevation in their uniforms, with gold-laced collars, they presented an imposing array. They themselves felt it, and all three, as if confused by their own greatness, modestly lowered their eyes, and hastily seated themselves behind the table on which clean paper and freshly-pointed lead pencils of all sizes had been placed. The prosecutor, who entered with the judges, also hastily walked to his place near the window, his portfolio still under his arm, and waving his hand he began to read the papers in the case, utilizing every moment to prepare himself.

This was his fifth case as prosecuting attorney. He was ambitious, and was determined to make his career, and hence he endeavored to obtain a conviction in every case he prosecuted. He knew the main points of the poisoning case, and had already planned his speech; but he needed to know some particulars of which he was now making extracts from the papers.

The secretary sat on the opposite side of the elevation, and, having prepared all the papers that might be necessary to produce on trial, was glancing over a newspaper article, which he had obtained and read the day before. He was anxious to talk to the member of the court with the long beard, who shared his views, and before doing so wished to

better familiarize himself with it.