

CHAPTER XV.

That morning service formed the brightest and most impressive reminiscence of Nekhludoff's after life.

The darkness of the night was only relieved here and there by white patches of snow, and as the stallion, splashing through the mud-pools, and his ears pricked up at the sight of the fire-pots surrounding the church, entered its inclosure, the service had already begun.

The peasants, recognizing Maria Ivanovna's nephew, led his horse to the driest spot, where he dismounted, then they escorted him to the church filled with a holiday crowd.

To the right were the male peasants; old men in homespun coats and bast shoes, and young men in new cloth caftans, bright-colored belts and boots. To the left the women, with red silk 'kerchiefs on their heads, shag caftans with bright red sleeves, and blue, green, red, striped and dotted skirts and iron-heeled shoes. Behind them stood the more modest women in white 'kerchiefs and gray caftans and ancient skirts, in shoes or bast slippers. Among these and the others were dressed-up children with oiled hair. The peasants made the sign of the cross and bowed, disheveling their hair; the women, especially the old women, gazing with their lustreless eyes on one image, before which candles burned, pressed hard with the tips of their fingers on the

'kerchief of the forehead, the shoulders and the abdomen, and, mumbling something, bent forward standing, or fell on their knees. The children, imitating their elders, prayed fervently when they were looked at. The gold iconostasis was aflame with innumerable candles, which surrounded a large one in the centre wound in a narrow strip of gilt paper. The church lustre was dotted with candles, joyful melodies of volunteer singers with roaring bass and piercing contralto mingled with the chant of the choir.

Nekhludoff went forward. In the middle of the church stood the aristocracy; a country squire with his wife and son in a sailor blouse, the commissary of the rural police, a telegraph operator, a merchant in high boots, the local syndic with a medal on his breast, and to the right of the tribune, behind the squire's wife, Matriena Pavlovna, in a lilac-colored chatoyant dress and white shawl with colored border, and beside her was Katiousha in a white dress, gathered in folds at the waist, a blue belt, and a red bow in her black hair.

Everything was solemn, joyous and beautiful; the priest in his bright, silver chasuble, dotted with gilt crosses, the deacon, the chanters in holiday surplice of gold and silver, the spruce volunteer singers with oiled hair, the joyous melodies of holiday songs, the ceaseless blessing of the throng by the priests with flower-bedecked tern candles with the constantly repeated exclamations: "Christ has risen! Christ has risen!" Everything was beautiful, but more beautiful than

all was Katiousha, in her white dress, blue belt and red bow in her hair, and her eyes radiant with delight.

Nekhludoff felt that she saw him without turning round. He saw it while passing near her to the altar. He had nothing to tell her, but tried to think of something, and said, when passing her:

"Auntie said that she would receive the sacrament after mass."

Her young blood, as it always happened when she looked at him, rose to her cheeks, and her black eyes, naively looking up, fixed themselves on Nekhludoff.

"I know it," she said, smiling.

At that moment a chanter with a copper coffee-pot in his hand passed close to Katiousha, and, without looking at her, grazed her with the skirt of the surplice. The chanter, evidently out of respect for Nekhludoff, wished to sweep around him, and thus it happened that he grazed Katiousha.

Nekhludoff, however, was surprised that that chanter did not understand that everything in the church, and in the whole world, for that matter, existed only for Katiousha, and that one might spurn the entire world, but must not slight her, because she was the centre of it. It was for her that the gold iconostasis shone brightly, and these

candles in the church-lustre burned; for her were the joyful chants: "Be happy, man; it is the Lord's Easter." All the good in the world was for her. And it seemed to him that Katiousha understood that all this was for her. It seemed to Nekhludoff, when he looked at her erect figure in the white dress with little folds at the waist, and by the expression of her happy face, that the very thing that filled his soul with song, also filled hers.

In the interval between early and late mass Nekhludoff left the church. The people made way for him and bowed. Some recognized him; others asked: "Who is he?" He stopped at the porch. Beggars surrounded him, and, distributing such change as he had in his pocket, he descended the stairs.

The day began to break, but the sun was yet beyond the horizon. The people seated themselves on the grass around the church-yard, but Katiousha remained in the church, and Nekhludoff waited on the porch for her appearance.

The crowd was still pouring out of the church, their hob-nailed shoes clattering against the stone pavement, and spread about the cemetery.

An old man, confectioner to Maria Ivanovna, stopped Nekhludoff and kissed him, and his wife, an old woman with a wrinkled Adam's apple under a silk 'kerchief, unrolled a yellow saffron egg from her handkerchief and gave it to him. At the same time a young, smiling and

muscular peasant, in a new caftan, approached.

"Christ has risen!" he said, with smiling eyes and, nearing Nekhludoff, spread around him a peculiar, pleasant, peasant odor, and, tickling him with his curly beard, three times kissed him on the lips.

While Nekhludoff was thus exchanging the customary kisses with the peasant and taking from him a dark-brown egg, he noticed the chatoyant dress of Matriena Pavlovna and the lovely head with the red bow.

No sooner did she catch sight of him over the heads of those in front of her, than her face brightened up.

On reaching the porch they also stopped, distributing alms. One of the beggars, with a red, cicatrized slough instead of a nose, approached Katiousha. She produced some coins from her handkerchief, gave them to him, and without the slightest expression of disgust, but, on the contrary, her eyes beaming with delight, kissed him three times. While she was thus kissing with the beggar, her eyes met those of Nekhludoff, and she seemed to ask him: "Is it not right? Is it not proper?"

"Yes, yes, darling; it is right; everything is beautiful. I love you."

As they descended the stairs he came near her. He did not wish to kiss her, but merely wished to be by her side.

"Christ has risen!" said Matriena Pavlovna, leaning her head forward and smiling. By the intonation of her voice she seemed to say, "All are equal to-day," and wiping her mouth with a bandana handkerchief which she kept under her arm-pit, she extended her lips.

"He has risen, indeed," answered Nekhludoff, and they kissed each other.

He turned to look at Katiousha. She flushed and at the same moment approached him.

"Christ has risen, Dmitri Ivanovich."

"He has risen, indeed," he said. They kissed each other twice, and seemed to be reflecting whether or not it was necessary to kiss a third time, and having decided, as it were, that it was necessary, they kissed again.

"Will you go to the priest?" asked Nekhludoff.

"No, we will stay here, Dmitri Ivanovich," answered Katiousha, laboriously, as though after hard, pleasant exertion, breathing with her full breast and looking straight in his eyes, with her submissive, chaste, loving and slightly squinting eyes.

There is a point in the love between man and woman when that love reaches its zenith; when it is free from consciousness, reason and sensuality. Such a moment arrived for Nekhludoff that Easter morn.

Now, whenever he thought of Katiousha, her appearance at that moment obscured every other recollection of her. The dark, smooth, resplendent head; the white dress with folds clinging to her graceful bust and undulating breast; those vermilion cheeks, those brilliant black eyes, and two main traits in all her being: the virgin purity of her love, not only for himself, but for everything and everybody--he knew it--not only the good and beautiful, but even that beggar whom she had kissed.

He knew that she possessed that love, because that night and that morning he felt it within him, and felt that in that love his soul mingled into one with hers.

Ah, if that feeling had continued unchanged! "Yes, that awful affair occurred after that notable commemoration of Christ's resurrection!" he thought now, sitting at the window of the jury-room.