

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"It is shameful and disgusting," Nekhludoff meditated, while returning home on foot along the familiar streets. The oppressive feeling which he had experienced while speaking to Missy clung to him. He understood that nominally, if one may so express himself, he was in the right; he had never said anything to bind himself to her; had made no offer, but in reality he felt that he had bound himself to her, that he had promised to be hers. Yet he felt in all his being that he could not marry her.

"It is shameful and disgusting," he repeated, not only of his relations to Missy, but of everything. "Everything is disgusting and shameful," he repeated to himself, as he ascended the steps of his house.

"I shall take no supper," he said to Kornei, who followed him into the dining-room, where the table was set for his supper. "You may go."

"All right," said Kornei, but did not go, and began to clear the table. Nekhludoff looked at Kornei and an ill feeling sprung up in his heart toward him. He wished to be left in peace, and it seemed as if everybody were spitefully worrying him. When Kornei had left, Nekhludoff went over to the *_samovar_*, intending to make some tea, but, hearing the footsteps of Agrippina Petrovna, he hastily walked

into the drawing-room, closing the door behind him. This was the room in which, three months ago, his mother had died. Now, as he entered this room, lighted by two lamps with reflectors--one near a portrait of his father, the other near a portrait of his mother--he thought of his relations toward his mother, and these relations seemed to him unnatural and repulsive. These, too, were shameful and disgusting. He remembered how, during her last sickness, he wished her to die. He said to himself that he wished it so that she might be spared the suffering, but in reality he wished to spare himself the sight of her suffering.

Desiring to call forth pleasant recollections about her, he looked at her portrait, painted by a famous artist for five thousand rubles. She was represented in a black velvet dress with bared breast. The artist had evidently drawn with particular care the breast and the beautiful shoulders and neck. That was particularly shameful and disgusting. There was something revolting and sacriligious to him in this representation of his mother as a denuded beauty, the more so because three months ago she lay in this very room shrunken like a mummy, and filling the entire house with an oppressive odor. He thought he could smell the odor now. He remembered how, on the day before she died, she took his strong, white hand into her own emaciated, discolored one, and, looking into his eyes, said: "Do not judge me, Mitia, if I have not done as I should," and her faded eyes filled with tears.

"How disgusting!" he again repeated to himself, glancing at the

half-nude woman with splendid marble shoulders and arms and a triumphant smile on her lips. The bared bosom of that portrait reminded him of another young woman whom he had seen dressed in a similar way a few days before. It was Missy, who had invited him to the house under some pretext, in order to display before him her ball-dress. He recalled with disgust her beautiful shoulders and arms; and her coarse, brutal father, with his dark past, his cruelties, and her mother with her doubtful reputation. All this was disgusting and at the same time shameful.

"No, no; I must free myself from all these false relations with the Korchagins, with Maria Vasilievna, with the inheritance and all the rest," he thought. "Yes, to breathe freely; to go abroad--to Rome--and continue to work on my picture." He remembered his doubts about his talent. "Well, it is all the same; I will simply breathe freely.

First, I will go to Constantinople, then to Rome--away from this jury duty. Yes, and to fix matters with the lawyer----"

And suddenly, before his imagination, appeared with uncommon vividness the picture of the prisoner with the black, squinting eyes. And how she wept when the last words of the prisoners were spoken! He hastily crushed the cigarette he was smoking, lit another, and began pacing up and down the room. One after another the scenes he had lived through with her rose up in his mind. He recalled their last meeting, the passion which seized him at the time, and the disappointment that followed. He recalled the white dress with the blue ribbon; he

recalled the morning mass. "Why, I loved her with a pure love that night; I loved her even before, and how I loved her when I first came to my aunts and was writing my composition!" That freshness, youth, fullness of life swept over him and he became painfully sad.

The difference between him as he was then and as he was now was great; it was equally great, if not greater, than the difference between Katiousha in the church and that girl whom they had tried this morning. Then he was a courageous, free man, before whom opened endless possibilities; now he felt himself caught in the tenets of a stupid, idle, aimless, miserable life, from which there was no escape; aye, from which, for the most part, he would not escape. He remembered how he once had prided himself upon his rectitude; how he always made it a rule to tell the truth, and was in reality truthful, and how he was now steeped in falsehood--falsehood which was recognized as truth by all those around him.

And there was no escape from this falsehood; at all events, he did not see any escape. He had sunk in it, became accustomed to it, and indulged himself in it.

The questions that absorbed him now were: How to break loose from Maria Vasilievna and her husband, so that he might be able to look them in the face? How, without falsehood, to disentangle his relations with Missy? How to get out of the inconsistency of considering the private holding of land unjust and keeping his inheritance? How to

blot out his sin against Katiousha? "I cannot abandon the woman whom I have loved and content myself with paying money to the lawyer to save her from penal servitude, which she does not even deserve." To blot out the sin, as he did then, when he thought that he was atoning for his wrong by giving her money! Impossible!

He vividly recalled the moment when he ran after her in the corridor, thrust money in her bosom, and ran away from her. "Oh, that money!" With the same horror and disgust he recalled that moment. "Oh, how disgusting!" he said aloud, as he did then. "Only a scoundrel and rascal could do it! And I am that scoundrel, that rascal!" he said aloud. "It is possible that I--" and he stopped in the middle of the room--"Is it possible that I am really a scoundrel? Who but I?" he answered himself. "And is this the only thing?" he continued, still censuring himself. "Are not my relations toward Maria Vasilievna base and detestable? And my position with regard to property? Under the plea that I inherited it from my mother I am using wealth, the ownership of which I consider unlawful. And the whole of this idle, abominable life? And to crown all, my conduct toward Katiousha? Scoundrel! Villain! Let people judge me as they please--I can deceive them, but I cannot deceive myself."

And he suddenly understood that the disgust which he had lately felt toward everybody, and especially to-day toward the Prince and Maria Vasilievna, and Missy, and Kornei, was disgust with himself. And in this confession of his own baseness there was something painful, and

at the same time joyous and calming.

In the course of his life Nekhludoff often experienced what he called a "cleansing of the soul." This happened when, after a long period of retardation, or, perhaps, entire cessation of his inner life, he suddenly became aware of it, and proceeded to cleanse his soul of all the accumulated filth that caused this standstill.

After such awakenings Nekhludoff always laid down some rules for himself which he intended to follow all the rest of his life; kept a diary and began a new life, which he hoped he should never change again--"turning a new leaf," he used to call it. But the temptations of life entrapped him anew, after every awakening, and, without knowing it, he sank again, often to a lower depth than he was in before.

Thus he cleansed himself and revived several times. His first cleansing happened when he visited his aunts. That was the brightest and most enthusiastic awakening. And it lasted a long time. The next happened when he left the civil service, and, desiring to sacrifice his life, he entered, during the war, the military service. Here he began to sink quickly. The next awakening occurred when he retired from the military service, and, going abroad, gave himself up to painting.

From that day to this there was a long period of uncleanliness, the

longest he had gone through yet, and, therefore, he had never sunk so deep, and never before was there such discord between the demands of his conscience and the life which he was leading. So, when he saw the chasm which separated the two, he was horrified.

The discord was so great, the defilement so thorough, that at first he despaired of the possibility of a complete cleansing. "Why, you have tried to improve before, and failed," the tempter in his soul whispered. "What is the good of trying again? You are not the only one--all are alike. Such is life." But the free, spiritual being which alone is true, alone powerful, alone eternal, was already awake in Nekhludoff. And he could not help believing it. However great the difference between that which he was and that which he wished to be, for the awakened spiritual being everything was possible.

"I shall break this lie that binds me at any cost. I will confess the truth to everybody, and will act the truth," he said aloud, resolutely. "I will tell Missy the truth--that I am a profligate and cannot marry her; that I have trifled with her. I will tell Maria Vasilevna (the wife of the marshal of nobility)--but no, what is the good of telling her? I will tell her husband that I am a scoundrel, that I have deceived him. I will dispose of my inheritance in accordance with the demands of justice. I will tell her, Katiousha, that I am a knave, that I have wronged her, and will do everything in my power to alleviate her condition. Yes, I shall see her, and beg her forgiveness--I will beg like a child."

He stopped.

"I will marry her, if necessary."

He crossed his hands on his breast, as he used to do when a child, raised his eyes and said:

"Lord, help me, teach me; come and enter within me and purify me of all this abomination."

He prayed, asked God to help him and purify him, while that which he was praying for had already happened. Not only did he feel the freedom, vigor and gladness of life, but he also felt the power of good. He felt himself capable of doing the best that man can do.

There were tears in his eyes when he said these things--tears of joy--on the awakening within him of that spiritual being, and tears of emotion over his own virtue.

He felt warm and opened a window which looked into a garden. It was a moonlit, fresh and quiet night. Past the street rattled some vehicle, and then everything was quiet. Directly beneath the window a tall, denuded poplar threw its shadow on the gravel of the landing-place, distinctly showing all the ramifications of its bare branches. To the left the roof of a shed seemed white under the bright light of the

moon; in front were the tangled branches of the trees, through which was seen the dark shadow of the garden inclosure.

Nekhludoff looked at the moonlit garden and roof, the shadows of the poplar, and drank in the fresh, invigorating air.

"How delightful! My God, how delightful!" he said of that which was in his soul.