CHAPTER XXXIX.

Nekhludoff left the house early. A peasant was driving along a side alley, shouting in a strange voice: "Milk! milk! milk!"

The first warm, spring rain had fallen the evening before. Wherever there was a patch of unpaved ground the green grass burst forth; the lindens were covered with green nap; the fowl-cherry and poplar unfolded their long, fragrant leaves. In the market-place, through which Nekhludoff had to pass, dense crowds in rags swarmed before the tents, some carrying boots under their arms, others smoothly pressed trousers and vests on their shoulders.

The working people were already crowding near the traktirs (tea-houses), the men in clean, long coats gathered in folds in the back of the waist, and in shining boots; the women in bright-colored silk shawls and cloaks with glass-bead trimmings. Policemen, with pistols attached to yellow cords fastened around their waists, stood at their posts. Children and dogs played on the grass-plots, and gay nurses sat chatting on the benches.

On the streets, the left sides of which were yet cool, moist and shady, heavy carts and light cabs rumbled and jostled, the tram-cars rang their bells. The air was agitated by the pealing of the church-bells summoning the people to mass.

The driver stopped at a turn some distance from the prison. A few men and women stood around, most of them with bundles in their hands. To the right stood a few frame houses; to the left a two-story building over which hung a large sign. The large prison itself was directly in front. An armed soldier walked to and fro challenging every one attempting to pass him.

At the gate of the frame buildings sat the warden in uniform, with an entry booklet in his hand. He made entries of visitors and those whom they wished to see. Nekhludoff approached him, gave his name and that of Moslova, and the officer entered them in his book.

"Why don't they open the door?" asked Nekhludoff.

"The morning service is on. As soon as it is over you will be admitted."

Nekhludoff returned among the waiting crowd.

A man in threadbare clothing, rumpled hat and slippers on his bare feet, and his face full of red lines, pushed his way through the crowd and walked toward the prison door.

"Where are you going?" shouted the soldier.

"What are you bawling about?" answered the man, entirely undisturbed by the soldier's challenge. "If I can't go in, I will wait. No use bawling as if you were a general."

The crowd laughed approvingly. Most of the visitors were poorly dressed, even ragged, but, judging by outward appearance, there were also some decent men and women among them. Beside Nekhludoff stood a well-dressed man, clean shaven, stout and with rosy cheeks, who carried a bundle of what looked like linen. Nekhludoff asked him if that was his first visit. The man answered that he came there every Sunday, and they entered into conversation. He was an employee of a bank, whose brother was under indictment for forgery. This kind-hearted man told Nekhludoff all his story, and was about to ask him about his own when their attention was attracted by a rubber-tired carriage drawn by a blooded chestnut horse. The carriage was occupied by a student and a lady whose face was hidden under a veil. The student alighted, holding in his hand a large bundle. He approached Nekhludoff and asked him where and how he should deliver the loaves of bread he had brought for the prisoners. "I brought them at the request of my bride. That is my bride. Her parents advised us to bring some alms for the prisoners."

"I really don't know, for I am here for the first time, but I think that that officer will tell you," said Nekhludoff, pointing to the warden in the crown-laced uniform.

While Nekhludoff was talking to the student the large iron gate of the prison opened and a uniformed officer with another warden came out. The one with the booklet in his hand announced that the prison was open for visitors. The guard stood aside, and all the visitors, as if fearing to be late, with quick step, and some even running, pressed toward the prison gate. One of the wardens stationed himself at the gate, and in a loud voice counted the passing visitors--16, 17, 18, etc. The other warden, within the gate, touching each with his hand, also counted the visitors as they entered another door. This was to make sure that at their departure no visitor remained in prison, and no prisoner made his way out. The tallying officer, without regard to the person of the visitor, slapped Nekhludoff on the back. This at first offended the latter, but he immediately remembered his mission, and he became ashamed that his feelings should be thus wounded.

The second door opened into a large, vaulted room with small iron-grated windows. In this room, which was called the meeting-room, Nekhludoff saw in a niche a large image of the Crucifixion.

Nekhludoff went on slowly, letting the hurrying visitors pass before, and experienced a mingled feeling of horror at the malefactors imprisoned in this jail, compassion for those innocent people who, like the boy and Katiousha, must be here, and timidity and tenderness before the meeting that was before him. When he reached the end of the room the warden said something, but Nekhludoff, who was absorbed in his thoughts, paid no attention to it, and followed in the direction

led by the crowd, that is, to the men's ward instead of the women's.

Letting the hurrying visitors pass, he walked into the next room designated for interviews. On opening the door he was struck by the deafening shouts of a hundred throats turned into a continuous humming noise. Only as he neared the people, who, like flies swarming on sugar pressed their faces against a net which divided the room in two, did Nekhludoff understand the cause of the noise. This room with windows in the rear wall was divided in two not by one, but by two wire nets which stretched from the ceiling to the floor. Two wardens walked between the nets. The prisoners were on the other side of the nets, between which there was a space of about seven feet for visitors, so that not only was it difficult to converse with them but a short-sighted man could not even see the face of the prisoner he was visiting. In order to be heard, it was necessary to shout at the top of one's voice. On both sides, pressing against the nets, were the faces of wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, children, who endeavored to see and speak to each other. But as every one tried to speak so that he could be heard by the person spoken to, and his neighbor did the same, their voices interfered with each other, and each tried to outcry the other. The result was the noise which astonished Nekhludoff when he entered the room. It was absolutely impossible to understand the conversations. Only by the expression of the people's faces could one judge what they were speaking about, and what relation the speakers sustained toward each other. Near Nekhludoff was an old woman with a small 'kerchief on her head, who, with trembling chin, shouted

to a pale young man with head half shaven. The prisoner, knitting his brow, was listening to her with raised eyebrows. Beside the old woman stood a young man in a long coat, who was nodding his head while listening to a prisoner with a weary face and beard turning gray, who greatly resembled him. Further on stood a ragamuffin waving his hand, shouting and laughing. On the floor beside this man sat a woman in a good woolen dress, with a child in her arms. She wept bitterly, evidently seeing for the first time that gray-haired man on the other side of the net, manacled, in a prison jacket, and with head half shaven. Over this woman stood the bank employee shouting at the top of his voice to a bald-headed prisoner with shining eyes.

Nekhludoff remained in this room about five minutes, experiencing a strange feeling of anguish, a consciousness of his impotence at the discord in the world, and he was seized with a sensation like a rocking on board of a ship.

"But I must fulfill my mission," he said to himself, taking heart. "What am I to do?"

As he looked around for some officer, he saw a middle-sized man with mustache, wearing epaulets, who was walking behind the crowd.

"Sir, could you not tell me where the women are kept, and where it is permitted to see them?" he asked, making a particular effort to be polite.

"You wish to go to the women's ward?"

"Yes; I would like to see one of the women prisoners," Nekhludoff said, with the same strained politeness.

"You should have said so in the meeting-room. Whom do you wish to see, then?"

"I wish to see Katherine Maslova."

"Has she been sentenced?"

"Yes, she was sentenced the other day," he said humbly, as if fearing to ruffle the temper of the officer, who seemed to be interested in him.

"Then this way, please," said the inspector, who had evidently decided from Nekhludoff's appearance that he deserved attention. "Sidoroff!" he turned to a warrant-officer wearing a mustache, and medals on his breast. "Show this gentleman to the women's ward."

"All right, sir."

At that moment heart-rending cries came from the direction of the grating.

All this seemed strange to Nekhludoff, and strangest of all was that he was obliged to thank and feel himself under obligation to the inspector and warden.

The warden led Nekhludoff from the men's ward into the corridor, and through the open door opposite admitted him to the women's meeting-room.