

CHAPTER VI.

It was evening when Nekhludoff arrived in the city, and as he drove through the gas-lit streets to his house, it looked to him like a new city. The odor of camphor still hung in the air through all the rooms, and Agrippina, Petrovna and Kornei seemed tired out and dissatisfied, and even quarreled about the packing of the things, the use of which seemed to consist chiefly in being hung out, dried and packed away again. His room was not occupied, but was not arranged for his coming, and the trunks blocked all the passages, so that his coming interfered with those affairs which, by some strange inertia, were taking place in this house. This evident foolishness, to which he had once been a party, seemed so unpleasant to Nekhludoff, after the impressions he had gained of the want in the villages, that he decided to move to a hotel the very next day, leaving the packing to Agrippina until the arrival of his sister.

He left the house in the morning, hired two modest and not over-clean furnished rooms near the prison, and went to his lawyer.

After the storms and rains came those cold, piercing winds that usually occur in the fall. Protected only by a light overcoat, Nekhludoff was chilled to the bone. He walked quickly in order to warm himself.

The village scenes came to his mind--the women, children and old men, whose poverty and exhaustion he had noticed as if for the first time, especially that oldish child which twisted its little calfless legs--and he involuntarily compared them with the city folks. Passing by the butcher, fish and clothing shops, he was struck, as if it was the first time he looked upon them--by the physical evidences of the well-being of such a large number of clean, well-fed shopkeepers which was not to be seen anywhere in the villages. Equally well fed were the drivers in quilted coats and buttons on their backs, porters, servant girls, etc. In all these people he now involuntarily saw those same village folks whom privation had driven to the city. Some of them were able to take advantage of the conditions in the city and became happy proprietors themselves; others were reduced to even greater straits and became even more wretched. Such wretchedness Nekhludoff saw in a number of shoemakers that he saw working near the window of a basement; in the lean, pale, disheveled washerwomen ironing with bare hands before open windows from which soap-laden steam poured out; in two painters, aproned and bare-footed, who were covered with paint from temple to heel. In their sunburnt, sinewy, weak hands, bared above the elbows, they carried a bucket of paint and incessantly cursed each other. Their faces were wearied and angry. The same expression of weariness and anger he saw in the dusty faces of the truck drivers; on the swollen and tattered men, women and children who stood begging on the street corners. Similar faces were seen in the windows of the tea-houses which Nekhludoff passed. Around the dirty tables, loaded with bottles and tea services, perspiring men with red,

stupefied faces sat shouting and singing, and white-aproned servants flitted to and fro.

"Why have they all gathered here?" thought Nekhludoff, involuntarily inhaling, together with the dust, the odor of rancid oil spread by the fresh paint.

On one of the streets he suddenly heard his name called above the rattling of the trucks. It was Shenbok, with curled and stiffened mustache and radiant face. Nekhludoff had lost sight of him long ago, but heard that on leaving his regiment and joining the cavalry, notwithstanding his debts he managed to hold his own in rich society.

"I am glad I met you. There is not a soul in the city. How old you have grown, my boy! I only recognized you by your walk. Well, shall we have dinner together? Where can we get a good meal here?"

"I hardly think I will have the time," answered Nekhludoff, who wished to get rid of his friend without offending him. "What brings you here?" he asked.

"Business, my boy. Guardianship affairs. I am a guardian, you know. I have charge of Samanoff's business--the rich Samanoff, you know. He is a spendthrift, and there are fifty-four thousand acres of land!" he said with particular pride, as if he had himself made all these acres.

"The affairs were fearfully neglected. The land was rented to the

peasants, who did not pay anything and were eighty thousand rubles in arrears. In one year I changed everything, and realized seventy per cent. more for the estate. Eh?" he asked, with pride.

Nekhludoff recalled a rumor that for the very reason that Shenbok squandered his own wealth and was inextricably in debt, he was appointed guardian over a rich old spendthrift, and was now evidently obtaining an income from the guardianship.

Nekhludoff refused to take dinner with Shenbok, or accompany him to the horse races, to which the latter invited him, and after an exchange of commonplaces the two parted.

"Is it possible that I was like him?" thought Nekhludoff. "Not exactly, but I sought to be like him, and thought that I would thus pass my life."

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The lawyer received him immediately on his arrival, although it was not his turn. The lawyer expressed himself strongly on the detention of the Menshofs, declaring that there was not a particle of evidence against them on record.

"If the case is tried here, and not in the district, I will stake anything on their discharge. And the petition in behalf of Theodosia

Brinkova is ready. You had better take it with you to St. Petersburg and present it there. Otherwise there will begin an inquiry which will have no end. Try to reach some people who have influence with the commission on petitions. Well, that's all, isn't it?"

"No. Here they write me----"

"You seem to be the funnel into which all the prison complaints are poured. I fear you will not hold them all."

"But this case is simply shocking," said Nekhludoff, and related the substance of it.

"What is it that surprises you?"

"Everything. I can understand the orderly who acted under orders, but the assistant prosecutor who drew the indictment is an educated man----"

"That is the mistake. We are used to think that the prosecuting officers--the court officers generally--are a kind of new, liberal men. And so they were at one time, but not now. The only thing that concerns these officers is to draw their salaries on the 20th of every month. Their principles begin and end with their desire to get more. They will arrest, try and convict anybody----. I am always telling these court officers that I never look upon them without gratitude," continued the lawyer, "because it is due to their kindness that I, you

and all of us are not in jail. To deprive any one of us of all civil rights and send him to Siberia is the easiest thing imaginable."

"But if everything depends on the pleasure of the prosecutor, who can enforce the law or not, then what is the use of the courts?"

The lawyer laughed merrily.

"That is the question you are raising. Well, my dear sir, that is philosophy. However, we can discuss that. Come to my house next Saturday. You will find there scholars, litterateurs, artists. We will have a talk on social questions," said the lawyer, pronouncing the words "social questions" with ironical pathos. "Are you acquainted with my wife? Call on Saturday."

"I will try," answered Nekhludoff, feeling that he was saying an untruth; that if there was anything he would try hard to do it was not to be present at the lawyer's amid the scholars, litterateurs and artists.

The laughter with which the lawyer met Nekhludoff's remark concerning the uselessness of courts if the prosecutors can do what they please, and the intonation with which he pronounced the words "philosophy" and "social questions," showed how utterly unlike himself were the lawyer and the people of his circle, both in character and in views of life.