

CHAPTER XII.

Maslova's case was to be heard the following day, and Nekhludoff went to the Senate. He met Fanirin at the entrance to the magnificent Senate building, where several carriages were already waiting. Walking up the grand, solemn staircase to the second floor, the lawyer, who was familiar with all the passages, turned into a room to the left, on the door of which was carved the year of the institution of the Code. The lawyer removed his overcoat, remaining in his dress-coat and black tie on a white bosom, and with cheerful self-confidence walked into the next room. There were about fifteen spectators present, among whom were a young woman in a pince-nez, and a gray-haired lady. A gray-haired old man of patriarchal mien, wearing a box-coat and gray trousers, and attended by two men, attracted particular attention. He crossed the room and entered a wardrobe.

An usher, a handsome man with red cheeks and in a pompous uniform, approached Fanirin with a piece of paper in his hand and asked him in what case he appeared. Being told that in Maslova's case, the usher made a note of something and went away. At that time the door of the wardrobe opened and the patriarchal looking old man came forth, no longer in the coat, but in a brilliant uniform which made him resemble a bird. His uniform evidently embarrassed the old man, and he walked into the room opposite the entrance with quicker than his ordinary step.

Fanirin pointed him out to Nekhludoff as Bé, "a most honorable gentleman." The spectators, including Fanirin, went into the next room and seated themselves behind the grating on benches reserved for spectators. Only the St. Petersburg lawyer took a seat behind a desk on the other side of the grating.

The session room of the Senate was smaller than the room of the Circuit Court, was furnished in simpler style, only the table behind which the Senators sat was of crimson plush instead of green cloth, bordered with gold lace.

There were four Senators. The President, Nikitin, with a closely shaved, narrow face and steel-gray eyes; Wolf, with thin lips and small white hands, with which he was turning over the papers before him; then Skovorodnikoff, stout, massive and pock-marked, and a very learned jurist, and finally, Bé, the same patriarchal old man, who was the last to arrive. Immediately behind the Senators came the Chief Secretary and Associate Attorney General. He was a young man of medium height, shaved, lean, with a very dark face and black, sad eyes.

Nekhludoff recognized him, notwithstanding his strange uniform and the fact that he had not seen him for about six years, as one of his best friends during his student life.

"Is the associate's name Selenin?" he asked the lawyer.

"Yes, why?"

"I know him very well; he is an excellent man----"

"And a good associate of the Attorney General--very sensible. It would have been well to see him," said Fanirin.

"At all events, he will follow the dictates of his conscience," said Nekhludoff, remembering his close relations with and friendship for Selenin, and the latter's charming qualities of purity, honesty and good breeding, in the best sense of the word.

The first case before the Senate was an appeal from the decision of the Circuit Court of Appeals affirming a judgment in favor of the publisher of a newspaper in a libel suit brought against him.

Nekhludoff listened and tried to understand the arguments in the case, but as in the Circuit Court, the chief difficulty in understanding what was going on was found in the fact that the discussion centered not on what appeared naturally to be the main point, but on side issues.

The libel consisted in an article accusing the president of a stock company of swindling. It seemed, then, that the main point to consider was, whether or not the president was guilty of swindling the stockholders, and what was to be done to stop his swindling. But this

was never mentioned. The questions discussed were: Had the publisher the legal right to print the article of its reporter? What crime has he committed by printing it--defamation or libel? And does defamation include libel, or libel defamation? And a number of other things unintelligible to ordinary people, including various laws and decisions of some "General Department."

The only thing Nekhludoff did understand was that, though Wolf had sternly suggested but yesterday that the Senate could not consider the substance of a case, in the case at bar he argued with evident partiality in favor of reversing the judgment, and that Selenin, in spite of his characteristic reserve, argued in favor of affirming the judgment with unexpected fervor. The cause of Selenin's ardor lay in the fact that he knew the president of the stock company to be dishonest in money affairs, while he accidentally learned that Wolf, almost on the eve of the hearing of the case, had attended a sumptuous dinner at the president's house. And now, when Wolf, though with great caution, showed undoubted partiality, Selenin became excited and expressed his opinion with more nervousness than an ordinary case would justify. Wolf was evidently offended by the speech; he twitched nervously, changed color, made silent gestures of wonder, and with an haughty air of being offended he departed with the other Senators into the deliberation-room.

"What case are you interested in?" the usher again asked Fanirin, as soon as the Senators had left the room.

"I have already told you that I am here in behalf of Maslova."

"That is so. The case will be heard to-day. But----"

"What is that?" asked the lawyer.

"You see, the case was to be argued without counsel, so that the Senators would hardly consider it in open session. But--I will announce----" and he made a note on the piece of paper.

The Senators really intended, after announcing their decision in the libel case, to consider the other cases, including Maslova's, while drinking their tea and smoking cigarettes in the consultation-room.