CHAPTER XVI.

Nekhludoff's first feeling on rising the following morning was that he had committed something abominable the preceding evening.

He began to recall what had happened. There was nothing abominable; he had done nothing wrong. He had only thought that all his present intentions--that of marrying Katiousha, giving the land to the peasants--artificial, unnatural, and that he must continued to live as he had lived before.

He could recall no wrong act, but he remembered what was worse than a wrong act--there were the bad thoughts in which all bad acts have their origin. Bad acts may not be repeated; one may repent of them, while bad thoughts give birth to bad acts.

A bad act only smooths the way to other bad acts, while bad thoughts irresistibly lead toward them.

Recalling his thoughts of the day before, Nekhludoff wondered how he could have believed them. How so novel and difficult might be that which he intended to do, he knew that it was the only life possible to him now, and that, however easy it might be for him to return to his old mode of life, he knew that that was death, not life. This temptation of the day before was similar to that of a man who, after a

night's sound sleep, feels like taking his ease on the soft mattress for a while, although he knows that it is time to be up and away on an important affair.

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Nekhludoff would have left the same evening but for his promise to Mariette to visit her at the theatre. Though he knew that it was wrong to do it, he went there, contrary to the dictates of his own conscience, considering himself bound to keep his word. Besides his wish to see Mariette again, he also wished, as he thought, to measure himself against that world lately so near, but now so strange to him.

"Could I withstand these temptations?" he thought, but not with entire sincerity. "I will try it for the last time."

Attired in a dress-coat, he arrived in the theatre where the eternal "Dame aux Camelias" was being played. A French actress was showing in a novel way how consumptive women die.

Nekhludoff was shown to the box occupied by Mariette. In the corridor a liveried servant bowed and opened the door for him.

All the spectators in the circle of boxes--sitting and standing, gray-haired, bald and pomaded heads--were intently following the movements of a slim actress making wry faces and in an unnatural voice

reading a monologue. Some one hissed when the door was opened, and two streams of cold and warm air were wafted on Nekhludoff's face.

In the box he found Mariette and a strange lady with a red mantle over her shoulders and high head-dress, and two men--a general, Mariette's husband, a handsome, tall man with a high, artificial, military breast, and a flaxen haired, bald-headed man with shaved chin and solemn side-whiskers. Mariette, graceful, slim, elegant, decolette, with her strong, muscular shoulders sloping down from the neck, at the jointure of which was a darkening little mole, immediately turned around, and, pointing with her fan to a chair behind her, greeted him with a welcome, grateful, and, as it seemed to Nekhludoff, significant smile. Her husband calmly, as was his wont, looked at Nekhludoff and bowed his head. In the glance which he exchanged with his wife, as in everything else, he looked the master, the owner, of a beautiful woman.

There was a thunder of applause when the monologue ended. Mariette rose, and, holding in one hand her rustling silk skirt, walked to the rear of the box and introduced Nekhludoff to her husband. The general incessantly smiled with his eyes, said he was glad, and remained calm and mute.

"I had to leave to-day, but I promised you," said Nekhludoff, turning to Mariette.

"If you don't wish to see me, you will see a remarkable actress," Mariette said, answering the meaning of his words. "Wasn't she great in the last scene?" she turned to her husband.

The general bowed his head.

"That does not affect me," said Nekhludoff. "I have seen so much real misfortune to-day that----"

"Sit down and tell us what you have seen."

The husband listened, and ironically smiled with his eyes.

"I went to see that woman who has been released. She is entirely broken down."

"That is the woman of whom I have spoken to you," Mariette said to her husband.

"Yes; I was very glad that she could be released," he calmly said, nodding his head and smiling ironically, as it seemed to Nekhludoff, under his mustache. "I will go to the smoking-room."

Nekhludoff waited, expecting that Mariette would tell him that something which she said she had to tell him, but instead she only jested and talked of the performance, which, she thought, ought to

affect him particularly.

Nekhludoff understood that the only purpose for which she had brought him to the theatre was to display her evening toilet with her shoulders and mole, and he was both pleased and disgusted. Now he saw what was under the veil of the charm that at first attracted him. Looking on Mariette, he admired her, but he knew that she was a prevaricator who was living with her career-making husband; that what she had said the other day was untrue, and that she only wished--and neither knew why--to make him love her. And, as has been said, he was both pleased and disgusted. Several times he attempted to leave, took his hat but still remained. But finally, when the general, his thick mustache reeking with tobacco, returned to the box and glanced at Nekhludoff patronizingly disdainful, as if he did not recognize him, Nekhludoff walked out before the door closed behind the general, and, finding his overcoat, left the theatre.

On his way home he suddenly noticed before him a tall, well-built, loudly-dressed woman. Every passer-by turned to look at her. Nekhludoff walked quicker than the woman, and also involuntarily looked her in the face. Her face, probably rouged, was pretty; her eyes flashed at him, and she smiled. Nekhludoff involuntarily thought of Mariette, for he experienced the same feeling of attraction and disgust which took hold of him in the theatre. Passing her hastily, Nekhludoff turned the corner of the street, and, to the surprise of the policeman, began to walk up and down the water-front.

"That one in the theatre also smiled that way when I entered," he thought, "and the smile of the former conveyed the same meaning as that of the latter. The only difference between them is that this one speaks openly and plainly, while the other pretends to be exercising higher and refined feelings. But in reality they are alike. This one is at least truthful, while the other is lying." Nekhludoff recalled his relations with the wife of the district commander, and a flood of shameful recollections came upon him. "There is a disgusting bestiality in man," he thought; "but when it is in a primitive state, one looks down upon and despises it, whether he is carried away with or withstands it. But when this same bestiality hides itself under a so-called aesthetic, poetic cover, and demands to be worshiped, then, deifying the beast, one gives himself up to it, without distinguishing between the good and the bad. Then it is horrible."

As there was no soothing, rest-giving darkness that night, but instead there was a hazy, cheerless, unnatural light, so even was there no rest-giving darkness--ignorance--for Nekhludoff's soul. Everything was clear. It was plain that all that is considered important and useful is really insignificant and wicked, and that all that splendor and luxury were hiding old crimes, familiar to every one, and not only stalking unpunished, but triumphing and adorned with all the allurements man is capable of conceiving.

Nekhludoff wished to forget it, not to see it, but he could no longer

help seeing it. Although he did not see the source of the light which revealed these things to him, as he did not see the source of the light which spread over St. Petersburg, and though this light seemed to him hazy, cheerless and unnatural, he could not help seeing that which the light revealed to him, and he felt at the same time both joy and alarm.