

CHAPTER XIX.

The deportation of the party of convicts to which Maslova belonged was set for the fifth of July, and Nekhludoff was prepared to follow her on that day. The day before his departure his sister, with her husband, arrived in town to see him.

Nekhludoff's sister, Natalie Ivanovna Ragozhinsky, was ten years his senior. He had grown up partly under her influence. She loved him when he was a boy, and before her marriage they treated each other as equals; she was twenty-five and he was fifteen. She had been in love then with his deceased friend, Nikolenka Irtenieff. They both loved Nikolenka, and loved in him and in themselves the good that was in them, and which unifies all people.

Since that time they had both become corrupted--he by the bad life he was leading; she by her marriage to a man whom she loved sensually, but who not only did not love all that which she and Dimitri at one time considered most holy and precious, but did not even understand it, and all those aspirations to moral perfection and to serving others, to which she had once devoted herself, he ascribed to selfishness and a desire to show off before people.

Ragozhinsky was a man without reputation or fortune, but a clever fortune hunter, who, by skillful manoeuvring between liberalism and

conservatism, availing himself of that dominating tendency which promised bitter results in life, but principally by something peculiar which attracted women to him, he succeeded in making a relatively brilliant judicial career. He was already past his youth when he met Nekhludoff abroad, made Natalie, who was also not very young, to fall in love with him, and married her almost against the wish of her mother, who said that it would be a *mésalliance*. Nekhludoff, although he concealed it from himself and struggled against the feeling, hated his brother-in-law. He disliked his vulgar feelings, his self-confident narrowness of mind, but, principally, because of his sister, who should so passionately, egotistically and sensually love such a poor nature, and to please whom she should stifle all her noble sentiments. It was always painful to Nekhludoff to think of Natalie as the wife of that hairy, self-confident man, with shining bald head. He could not even suppress his aversion to his children. And whenever he heard that she was about to become a mother, he experienced a feeling of compassion for her being again infected with something bad by the man who was so unlike all of them.

The Ragozhinskys arrived without their children, and engaged the best suite in the best hotel. Natalie Ivanovna immediately went to the old home of her mother, and learning there that her brother had moved to furnished rooms, she went to his new home. The dirty servant, meeting her in the dark, ill-smelling corridor, which was lit up by a lamp during the day, announced that the Prince was away.

Desiring to leave a note, Natalie Ivanovna was shown into his apartments. She closely examined the two small rooms. She noticed in every corner the familiar cleanliness and order, and she was struck by the modesty of the appointments. On the writing table she saw a familiar paper-press, with the bronze figure of a dog, neatly arranged portfolios, papers, volumes of the Criminal Code and an English book of Henry George, and a French one by Tard, between the leaves of which was an ivory paper knife.

She left a note asking him to call on her the same evening, and, shaking her head in wonder at what she had seen, returned to her hotel.

There were two questions relating to her brother that interested Natalie Ivanovna--his marriage to Katiousha, of which she had heard in her city, where it was a matter of common gossip, and the distribution by him of his land to the peasants, upon which some people looked as something political and dangerous. From one point of view, she rather liked the idea of his marrying Katiousha. She admired his resolution, seeing in it herself and him as they had been before her marriage. At the same time, she was horror-stricken at the thought that her brother was to marry such an awful woman. The latter feeling was the stronger, and she decided to dissuade him from marrying her, although she knew how hard that would be.

The other affair, that of his parting with his land, she did not take

so close to heart, but her husband was indignant at such folly, and demanded that she influence her brother to abandon the attempt. Ignatius Nikiforovitch said that it was the height of inconsistency, foolhardiness and pride; that such an act could only be explained, if at all, by a desire to be odd, to have something to brag about, and to make people talk about one's self.

"What sense is there in giving the land to the peasants and making them pay rent to themselves?" he said. "If his mind was set on doing it, he could sell them the land through the bank. There would be some sense in that. Taking all in all, his act is very eccentric," said Ignatius Nikiforovitch, already considering the necessity of a guardianship, and he demanded that his wife should seriously speak to her brother of this, his strange intention.