

CHAPTER XXV.

The heat in the large car of the third class, due to its exposure to the scorching sun rays and the large crowd within, was so suffocating that Nekhludoff remained on the platform. But there was no relief even there, and he drew in long breaths when the train rolled out beyond the houses and the movement of the train created a draught. "Yes, killed," he repeated to himself. And to his imagination appeared with unusual vividness the beautiful face of the second dead convict, with a smile on his lips, the forbidding expression of his forehead, and the small, strong ear under the shaved, bluish scalp. "And the worst part of it is that he was killed, and no one knows who killed him. Yet he was killed. He was forwarded, like the others, at the order of Maslenikoff. Maslenikoff probably signed the usual order with his foolish flourish, on a printed letter-head, and, of course, does not consider himself guilty. The prison physician, who inspected the convicts, has still less reason for considering himself guilty. He carefully fulfilled his duties, separated the weak ones, and could not possibly foresee either the terrible heat, or that they would be taken away so late and in such a crowd. The inspector? But the inspector only carried out the order that on such a day so many men and women prisoners should be sent away. No more guilty was the officer of the convoy, whose duty consisted in receiving so many people at such a place and delivering them at another place. He led the party in the usual way, according to instructions, and could not possibly foresee

that such strong men, like the two whom Nekhludoff had seen, would succumb and die. No one was guilty, and yet the men were killed by these very people who were innocent of their death.

"All this happened," thought Nekhludoff, "because all those people--the governor, inspector and the other officers--saw before them, not human beings and their duties toward them, but the service and its requirements. Therein lies the difficulty."

In his meditation Nekhludoff did not notice how the weather had changed. The sun had hidden behind a low strip of cloud, and from the southern sky a light-gray mass, from which a slanting rain was already pouring in the distance over the fields and forests, was coming on. Now and then a flash of lightning rent the clouds, and the rattle of the train mingled with the rattle of thunder. The clouds came nearer and nearer, the slanting drops of rain, driven by the wind, pattered on the platform of the car and stained Nekhludoff's overcoat. He moved to the other side, and drawing in the fresh, humid air and the odor of the wheat coming from the parched ground, he looked on the passing gardens, forests; the rye fields just turning yellow, the emerald streaks of oats, and the furrows of the dark-green, flowering potato. Everything looked as if covered with varnish: the green and yellow colors became brighter; the black became blacker.

"More, more," said Nekhludoff, rejoicing at the reviving fields and gardens under the abundant rain.

The heavy rain did not last long. The clouds partly dissipated, and the last fine shower fell straight on the wet ground. The sun came forth again, the earth brightened, and a low but brilliant violet tinged rainbow, broken at one end, appeared in the eastern horizon.

"What was I thinking of?" Nekhludoff asked himself, when all these changes of nature came to an end and the train descended into a vale. "Yes, I was thinking that all those people--the inspector, the guard and all those servants, for the most part gentle, kind people--have become wicked."

He recalled the indifference of Maslenikoff when he told the latter of what was going on in the prison, of the severity of the inspector, the cruelty of the sergeant who refused the use of the wagons to the weak convicts and paid no attention to the suffering of the woman in child-birth. All those people were evidently proof against the feeling of sympathy, "as is this paved ground against rain," he thought, looking at the incline paved with multi-colored stone, from which the water streamed off. "May be it is necessary to lay the stones on the incline, but it is sad to see the soil deprived of vegetation when it could be made to grow grain, grass, shrubs and trees like those seen on those heights. It is the same with people," thought Nekhludoff. "The whole trouble lies in that people think that there are conditions excluding the necessity of love in their intercourse with man, but such conditions do not exist. Things may be treated without love; one

may chop wood, make bricks, forge iron without love, but one can no more deal with people without love than one can handle bees without care. The nature of bees is such that if you handle them carelessly you will harm them as well as yourself. It is the same with people. And it cannot be different, because mutual love is the basic law of human life. True, man cannot compel himself to love, as he can compel himself to work, but it does not follow from this that in his dealings with men he can leave love out of consideration, especially if he wants something from them. If you feel no love for people, then keep away from them," Nekhludoff said to himself. "Occupy yourself with things, yourself--anything; only keep away from people. As it is harmful to eat except when one is hungry, so is it harmful to have intercourse with people when one does not love them. If one permits himself to deal with people without having any love for them, as I did yesterday with my brother-in-law, there is no limit to the cruelty and brutality one is liable to display toward others, as I have seen to-day, and there is no limit to one's own suffering, as I have learned from all the experiences of my own life. Yes, yes, that is so," thought Nekhludoff, experiencing the double pleasure of a cool breeze after the intolerable heat, and the consciousness of having reached the highest degree of lucidity in the question which had so long occupied him.