

## CHAPTER IX.

Passing through the hall and the ill-smelling corridors, the superintendent passed into the first building of the prison in which those condemned to hard labor were confined. Entering the first room in that building they found the prisoners stretched on their berths, which occupied the middle of the room. Hearing the visitors enter they all jumped down, and, clinking their chains, placed themselves beside their berths, while their half-shaven heads were distinctly set off against the gloom of the prison. Only two of the prisoners remained at their places. One of them was a young man whose face was evidently heated with fever; the other was an old man, who never left off groaning.

The Englishman asked whether the young man had been sick for a long time. The superintendent replied that he had been taken sick that very same morning, that the old man had had convulsions for a long time, and that they kept him in prison because there was no place for him in the hospital.

The Englishman shook his head discontentedly, said that he would like to say a few words to the prisoners, and asked Nekhludoff to translate his remarks. It turned out that, besides the aim of his journey, which was the description of the exile system--he had another one--the preaching of the gospel, of salvation through faith.

"Tell them that Christ pitied and loved them," he said to Nekhludoff, "and that He died for them. He who will believe in Him will be saved."

While he was saying this, all the prisoners were standing erect with their hands by their sides.

"Tell them," continued the Englishman, "that all I said will be found in this book. Are there any among them who can read?" It turned out that there were more than twenty who could.

The Englishman took out a few leather-bound Bibles from his traveling bag, and soon a number of muscular hands, terminating in long black nails, were stretched out toward him, pushing each other aside in order to reach the Testaments. He left two Testaments in this room, and went to the next one.

There the same thing occurred. There prevailed the same dampness and ill-smells. But in this room, between the windows, an image of the Virgin, before which a small lamp burned dimly, was hung up. To the left side of the door stood the large vat. Here the prisoners were stretched out on their berths, and in the same way they rose and placed themselves in a row. Three of them remained in their places. Two of these three lifted themselves and sat up, but the third one remained stretched out, and did not even look at the visitors. These latter ones were sick. The Englishman addressed them in the same

manner, and left two Testaments.

From the cells in which those condemned to hard labor were imprisoned, they passed over to the cells of the exiles, and finally those in which the relatives who escorted the prisoners to Siberia were awaiting the day appointed to start hence.

Everywhere the same cold, hungry, idling, sickly, degraded, brutalized human beings could be seen.

The Englishman distributed his Bibles, and, being tired out, he walked through the rooms saying "All right" to whatever the superintendent told him concerning the prisons.

They went out into the corridor.

The Englishman, pointing to an open door, asked what that room was for.

"This is the prison morgue."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Englishman, and he expressed a desire to enter. This room was an ordinary room. A small lamp, fastened to the wall, lit up the four bodies which were stretched on berths, with their heads toward the wall and the feet protruding toward the door. The first body, in a plain shirt, was that of a tall young man, with a

small, pointed beard and half-shaven head. The corpse was already chilled, and its blue hands were folded over the breast. Beside him, in a white dress and jacket, lay a bare-footed old woman, with thin hair and wrinkled, yellowish face. Beside this old woman lay a corpse, attired in blue.

This color recalled something in Nekhludoff's memory.

"And who is this third one?" he asked, mistrusting his own eyesight.

"This one is a gentleman who was sent hither from the hospital," replied the superintendent.

Nekhludoff walked up to the body and touched the icy cold feet of Kryltzoff.