

CHAPTER II.

When I mentioned this poverty of the town to inhabitants of the town, they always said to me: "Oh, all that you have seen is nothing. You ought to see the Khitroff market-place, and the lodging-houses for the night there. There you would see a regular 'golden company.'"

{1} One jester told me that this was no longer a company, but a GOLDEN REGIMENT: so greatly had their numbers increased. The jester was right, but he would have been still more accurate if he had said that these people now form in Moscow neither a company nor a regiment, but an entire army, almost fifty thousand in number, I think. [The old inhabitants, when they spoke to me about the poverty in town, always referred to it with a certain satisfaction, as though pluming themselves over me, because they knew it. I remember that when I was in London, the old inhabitants there also rather boasted when they spoke of the poverty of London. The case is the same with us.] {2}

And I wanted to have a sight of this poverty of which I had been told. Several times I set out in the direction of the Khitroff market-place, but on every occasion I began to feel uncomfortable and ashamed. "Why am I going to gaze on the sufferings of people whom I cannot help?" said one voice. "No, if you live here, and see all the charms of city life, go and view this also," said another voice. In

December three years ago, therefore, on a cold and windy day, I betook myself to that centre of poverty, the Khitroff market-place. This was at four o'clock in the afternoon of a week-day. As I passed through the Solyanka, I already began to see more and more people in old garments which had not originally belonged to them, and in still stranger foot-gear, people with a peculiar, unhealthy hue of countenance, and especially with a singular indifference to every thing around them, which was peculiar to them all. A man in the strangest of all possible attire, which was utterly unlike any thing else, walked along with perfect unconcern, evidently without a thought of the appearance which he must present to the eyes of others. All these people were making their way towards a single point. Without inquiring the way, with which I was not acquainted, I followed them, and came out on the Khitroff market-place. On the market-place, women both old and young, of the same description, in tattered cloaks and jackets of various shapes, in ragged shoes and overshoes, and equally unconcerned, notwithstanding the hideousness of their attire, sat, bargained for something, strolled about, and scolded. There were not many people in the market itself. Evidently market-hours were over, and the majority of the people were ascending the rise beyond the market and through the place, all still proceeding in one direction. I followed them. The farther I advanced, the greater in numbers were the people of this sort who flowed together on one road. Passing through the market-place and proceeding along the street, I overtook two women; one was old, the other young. Both wore something ragged and gray. As they walked

they were discussing some matter. After every necessary word, they uttered one or two unnecessary ones, of the most improper character. They were not intoxicated, but merely troubled about something; and neither the men who met them, nor those who walked in front of them and behind them, paid any attention to the language which was so strange to me. In these quarters, evidently, people always talked so. Ascending the rise, we reached a large house on a corner. The greater part of the people who were walking along with me halted at this house. They stood all over the sidewalk of this house, and sat on the curbstone, and even the snow in the street was thronged with the same kind of people. On the right side of the entrance door were the women, on the left the men. I walked past the women, past the men (there were several hundred of them in all) and halted where the line came to an end. The house before which these people were waiting was the Lyapinsky free lodging-house for the night. The throng of people consisted of night lodgers, who were waiting to be let in. At five o'clock in the afternoon, the house is opened, and the people permitted to enter. Hither had come nearly all the people whom I had passed on my way.

I halted where the line of men ended. Those nearest me began to stare at me, and attracted my attention to them by their glances. The fragments of garments which covered these bodies were of the most varied sorts. But the expression of all the glances directed towards me by these people was identical. In all eyes the question was expressed: "Why have you, a man from another world, halted here

beside us? Who are you? Are you a self-satisfied rich man who wants to enjoy our wretchedness, to get rid of his tedium, and to torment us still more? or are you that thing which does not and can not exist,--a man who pities us?" This query was on every face. You glance about, encounter some one's eye, and turn away. I wished to talk with some one of them, but for a long time I could not make up my mind to it. But our glances had drawn us together already while our tongues remained silent. Greatly as our lives had separated us, after the interchange of two or three glances we felt that we were both men, and we ceased to fear each other. The nearest of all to me was a peasant with a swollen face and a red beard, in a tattered caftan, and patched overshoes on his bare feet. And the weather was eight degrees below zero. {3} For the third or fourth time I encountered his eyes, and I felt so near to him that I was no longer ashamed to accost him, but ashamed not to say something to him. I inquired where he came from? he answered readily, and we began to talk; others approached. He was from Smolensk, and had come to seek employment that he might earn his bread and taxes. "There is no work," said he: "the soldiers have taken it all away. So now I am loafing about; as true as I believe in God, I have had nothing to eat for two days." He spoke modestly, with an effort at a smile. A sbiten{4}-seller, an old soldier, stood near by. I called him up. He poured out his sbiten. The peasant took a boiling-hot glassful in his hands, and as he tried before drinking not to let any of the heat escape in vain, and warmed his hands over it, he related his adventures to me. These adventures, or the histories of them, are

almost always identical: the man has been a laborer, then he has changed his residence, then his purse containing his money and ticket has been stolen from him in the night lodging-house; now it is impossible to get away from Moscow. He told me that he kept himself warm by day in the dram-shops; that he nourished himself on the bits of bread in these drinking places, when they were given to him; and when he was driven out of them, he came hither to the Lyapinsky house for a free lodging. He was only waiting for the police to make their rounds, when, as he had no passport, he would be taken to jail, and then despatched by stages to his place of settlement. "They say that the inspection will be made on Friday," said he, "then they will arrest me. If I can only get along until Friday." (The jail, and the journey by stages, represent the Promised Land to him.)

As he told his story, three men from among the throng corroborated his statements, and said that they were in the same predicament. A gaunt, pale, long-nosed youth, with merely a shirt on the upper portion of his body, and that torn on the shoulders, and a cap without a visor, forced his way sidelong through the crowd. He shivered violently and incessantly, but tried to smile disdainfully at the peasants' remarks, thinking by this means to adopt the proper tone with me, and he stared at me. I offered him some sbiten; he also, on taking the glass, warmed his hands over it; but no sooner had he begun to speak, than he was thrust aside by a big, black, hook-nosed individual, in a chintz shirt and waistcoat, without a hat. The hook-nosed man asked for some sbiten also. Then came a

tall old man, with a mass of beard, clad in a great-coat girded with a rope, and in bast shoes, who was drunk. Then a small man with a swollen face and tearful eyes, in a brown nankeen round-jacket, with his bare knees protruding from the holes in his summer trousers, and knocking together with cold. He shivered so that he could not hold his glass, and spilled it over himself. The men began to reproach him. He only smiled in a woe-begone way, and went on shivering. Then came a crooked monster in rags, with pattens on his bare feet; then some sort of an officer; then something in the ecclesiastical line; then something strange and nose-less,--all hungry and cold, beseeching and submissive, thronged round me, and pressed close to the sbiten. They drank up all the sbiten. One asked for money, and I gave it. Then another asked, then a third, and the whole crowd besieged me. Confusion and a press resulted. The porter of the adjoining house shouted to the crowd to clear the sidewalk in front of his house, and the crowd submissively obeyed his orders. Some managers stepped out of the throng, and took me under their protection, and wanted to lead me forth out of the press; but the crowd, which had at first been scattered over the sidewalk, now became disorderly, and hustled me. All stared at me and begged; and each face was more pitiful and suffering and humble than the last. I distributed all that I had with me. I had not much money, something like twenty rubles; and in company with the crowd, I entered the Lyapinsky lodging-house. This house is huge. It consists of four sections. In the upper stories are the men's quarters; in the lower, the women's. I first entered the women's place; a vast room all

occupied with bunks, resembling the third-class bunks on the railway. These bunks were arranged in two rows, one above the other. The women, strange, tattered creatures, both old and young, wearing nothing over their dresses, entered and took their places, some below and some above. Some of the old ones crossed themselves, and uttered a petition for the founder of this refuge; some laughed and scolded. I went up-stairs. There the men had installed themselves; among them I espied one of those to whom I had given money. [On catching sight of him, I all at once felt terribly abashed, and I made haste to leave the room. And it was with a sense of absolute crime that I quitted that house and returned home. At home I entered over the carpeted stairs into the ante-room, whose floor was covered with cloth; and having removed my fur coat, I sat down to a dinner of five courses, waited on by two lackeys in dress-coats, white neckties, and white gloves.

Thirty years ago I witnessed in Paris a man's head cut off by the guillotine in the presence of thousands of spectators. I knew that the man was a horrible criminal. I was acquainted with all the arguments which people have been devising for so many centuries, in order to justify this sort of deed. I knew that they had done this expressly, deliberately. But at the moment when head and body were severed, and fell into the trough, I groaned, and apprehended, not with my mind, but with my heart and my whole being, that all the arguments which I had heard anent the death-penalty were arrant nonsense; that, no matter how many people might assemble in order to

perpetrate a murder, no matter what they might call themselves, murder is murder, the vilest sin in the world, and that that crime had been committed before my very eyes. By my presence and non-interference, I had lent my approval to that crime, and had taken part in it. So now, at the sight of this hunger, cold, and degradation of thousands of persons, I understood not with my mind, but with my heart and my whole being, that the existence of tens of thousands of such people in Moscow, while I and other thousands dined on fillets and sturgeon, and covered my horses and my floors with cloth and rugs,--no matter what the wise ones of this world might say to me about its being a necessity,--was a crime, not perpetrated a single time, but one which was incessantly being perpetrated over and over again, and that I, in my luxury, was not only an accessory, but a direct accomplice in the matter. The difference for me between these two impressions was this, that I might have shouted to the assassins who stood around the guillotine, and perpetrated the murder, that they were committing a crime, and have tried with all my might to prevent the murder. But while so doing I should have known that my action would not prevent the murder. But here I might not only have given sbiten and the money which I had with me, but the coat from my back, and every thing that was in my house. But this I had not done; and therefore I felt, I feel, and shall never cease to feel, myself an accomplice in this constantly repeated crime, so long as I have superfluous food and any one else has none at all, so long as I have two garments while any one else has not even one.] {5}