CHAPTER V.

On the first appointed day, the student enumerators arrived in the morning, and I, the benefactor, joined them at twelve o'clock. I could not go earlier, because I had risen at ten o'clock, then I had drunk my coffee and smoked, while waiting on digestion. At twelve o'clock I reached the gates of the Rzhanoff house. A policeman pointed out to me the tavern with a side entrance on Beregovoy Passage, where the census-takers had ordered every one who asked for them to be directed. I entered the tavern. It was very dark, ill-smelling, and dirty. Directly opposite the entrance was the counter, on the left was a room with tables, covered with soiled cloths, on the right a large apartment with pillars, and the same sort of little tables at the windows and along the walls. Here and there at the tables sat men both ragged and decently clad, like laboring-men or petty tradesmen, and a few women drinking tea. The tavern was very filthy, but it was instantly apparent that it had a good trade.

There was a business-like expression on the face of the clerk behind the counter, and a clever readiness about the waiters. No sooner had I entered, than one waiter prepared to remove my coat and bring me whatever I should order. It was evident that they had been trained to brisk and accurate service. I inquired for the enumerators.

"Vanya!" shouted a small man, dressed in German fashion, who was engaged in placing something in a cupboard behind the counter; this was the landlord of the tavern, a Kaluga peasant, Ivan Fedotitch, who hired one-half of the Zimins' houses and sublet them to lodgers. The waiter, a thin, hooked-nosed young fellow of eighteen, with a yellow complexion, hastened up.

"Conduct this gentleman to the census-takers; they went into the main building over the well." The young fellow threw down his napkin, and donned a coat over his white jacket and white trousers, and a cap with a large visor, and, tripping quickly along with his white feet, he led me through the swinging door in the rear. In the dirty, malodorous kitchen, in the out-building, we encountered an old woman who was carefully carrying some very bad-smelling tripe, wrapped in a rag, off somewhere. From the out-building we descended into a sloping court-yard, all encumbered with small wooden buildings on lower stories of stone. The odor in this whole yard was extremely powerful. The centre of this odor was an out-house, round which people were thronging whenever I passed it. It merely indicated the spot, but was not altogether used itself. It was impossible, when passing through the yard, not to take note of this spot; one always felt oppressed when one entered the penetrating atmosphere which was emitted by this foul smell.

The waiter, carefully guarding his white trousers, led me cautiously past this place of frozen and unfrozen uncleanness to one of the

buildings. The people who were passing through the yard and along the balconies all stopped to stare at me. It was evident that a respectably dressed man was a curiosity in these localities.

The young man asked a woman "whether she had seen the census-takers?" And three men simultaneously answered his question: some said that they were over the well, but others said that they had been there, but had come out and gone to Nikita Ivanovitch. An old man dressed only in his shirt, who was wandering about the centre of the yard, said that they were in No. 30. The young man decided that this was the most probable report, and conducted me to No. 30 through the basement entrance, and darkness and bad smells, different from that which existed outside. We went down-stairs, and proceeded along the earthen floor of a dark corridor. As we were passing along the corridor, a door flew open abruptly, and an old drunken man, in his shirt, probably not of the peasant class, thrust himself out. A washerwoman, wringing her soapy hands, was pursuing and hustling the old man with piercing screams. Vanya, my guide, pushed the old man aside, and reproved him.

"It's not proper to make such a row," said me, "and you an officer, too!" and we went on to the door of No. 30.

Vanya gave it a little pull. The door gave way with a smack, opened, and we smelled soapy steam, and a sharp odor of spoilt food and tobacco, and we entered into total darkness. The windows were on the

opposite side; but the corridors ran to right and left between board partitions, and small doors opened, at various angles, into the rooms made of uneven whitewashed boards. In a dark room, on the left, a woman could be seen washing in a tub. An old woman was peeping from one of these small doors on the right. Through another open door we could see a red-faced, hairy peasant, in bast shoes, sitting on his wooden bunk; his hands rested on his knees, and he was swinging his feet, shod in bast shoes, and gazing gloomily at them.

At the end of the corridor was a little door leading to the apartment where the census-takers were. This was the chamber of the mistress of the whole of No. 30; she rented the entire apartment from Ivan Feodovitch, and let it out again to lodgers and as night-quarters. In her tiny room, under the tinsel images, sat the student census-taker with his charts; and, in his quality of investigator, he had just thoroughly interrogated a peasant wearing a shirt and a vest. This latter was a friend of the landlady, and had been answering questions for her. The landlady herself, an elderly woman, was there also, and two of her curious tenants. When I entered, the room was already packed full. I pushed my way to the table. I exchanged greetings with the student, and he proceeded with his inquiries. And I began to look about me, and to interrogate the inhabitants of these quarters for my own purpose.

It turned out, that in this first set of lodgings, I found not a single person upon whom I could pour out my benevolence. The

landlady, in spite of the fact that the poverty, smallness and dirt of these quarters struck me after the palatial house in which I dwell, lived in comfort, compared with many of the poor inhabitants of the city, and in comparison with the poverty in the country, with which I was thoroughly familiar, she lived luxuriously. She had a feather-bed, a quilted coverlet, a samovar, a fur cloak, and a dresser with crockery. The landlady's friend had the same comfortable appearance. He had a watch and a chain. Her lodgers were not so well off, but there was not one of them who was in need of immediate assistance: the woman who was washing linen in a tub, and who had been abandoned by her husband and had children, an aged widow without any means of livelihood, as she said, and that peasant in bast shoes, who told me that he had nothing to eat that day. But on questioning them, it appeared that none of these people were in special want, and that, in order to help them, it would be necessary to become well acquainted with them.

When I proposed to the woman whose husband had abandoned her, to place her children in an asylum, she became confused, fell into thought, thanked me effusively, but evidently did not wish to do so; she would have preferred pecuniary assistance. The eldest girl helped her in her washing, and the younger took care of the little boy. The old woman begged earnestly to be taken to the hospital, but on examining her nook I found that the old woman was not particularly poor. She had a chest full of effects, a teapot with a tin spout, two cups, and caramel boxes filled with tea and sugar. She knitted

stockings and gloves, and received monthly aid from some benevolent lady. And it was evident that what the peasant needed was not so much food as drink, and that whatever might be given him would find its way to the dram-shop. In these quarters, therefore, there were none of the sort of people whom I could render happy by a present of money. But there were poor people who appeared to me to be of a doubtful character. I noted down the old woman, the woman with the children, and the peasant, and decided that they must be seen to; but later on, as I was occupied with the peculiarly unfortunate whom I expected to find in this house, I made up my mind that there must be some order in the aid which we should bestow; first came the most wretched, and then this kind. But in the next quarters, and in the next after that, it was the same story, all the people had to be narrowly investigated before they could be helped. But unfortunates of the sort whom a gift of money would convert from unfortunate into fortunate people, there were none. Mortifying as it is to me to avow this, I began to get disenchanted, because I did not find among these people any thing of the sort which I had expected. I had expected to find peculiar people here; but, after making the round of all the apartments, I was convinced that the inhabitants of these houses were not peculiar people at all, but precisely such persons as those among whom I lived. As there are among us, just so among them; there were here those who were more or less good, more or less stupid, happy and unhappy. The unhappy were exactly such unhappy beings as exist among us, that is, unhappy people whose unhappiness lies not in their external conditions, but in themselves, a sort of unhappiness which

it is impossible to right by any sort of bank-note whatever.