

CHAPTER IX.

Still more remarkable were my relations to the children. In my role of benefactor, I turned my attention to the children also, being desirous to save these innocent beings from perishing in that lair of vice, and noting them down in order to attend to them AFTERWARDS.

Among the children, I was especially struck with a twelve-year-old lad named Serozha. I was heartily sorry for this bold, intelligent lad, who had lived with a cobbler, and who had been left without a shelter because his master had been put in jail, and I wanted to do good to him.

I will here relate the upshot of my benevolence in his case, because my experience with this child is best adapted to show my false position in the role of benefactor. I took the boy home with me and put him in the kitchen. It was impossible, was it not, to take a child who had lived in a den of iniquity in among my own children? And I considered myself very kind and good, because he was a care, not to me, but to the servants in the kitchen, and because not I but the cook fed him, and because I gave him some cast-off clothing to wear. The boy staid a week. During that week I said a few words to him as I passed on two occasions and in the course of my strolls, I went to a shoemaker of my acquaintance, and proposed that he should

take the lad as an apprentice. A peasant who was visiting me, invited him to go to the country, into his family, as a laborer; the boy refused, and at the end of the week he disappeared. I went to the Rzhanoff house to inquire after him. He had returned there, but was not at home when I went thither. For two days already, he had been going to the Pryesnensky ponds, where he had hired himself out at thirty kopeks a day in some procession of savages in costume, who led about elephants. Something was being presented to the public there. I went a second time, but he was so ungrateful that he evidently avoided me. Had I then reflected on the life of that boy and on my own, I should have understood that this boy was spoiled because he had discovered the possibility of a merry life without labor, and that he had grown unused to work. And I, with the object of benefiting and reclaiming him, had taken him to my house, where he saw--what? My children,--both older and younger than himself, and of the same age,--who not only never did any work for themselves, but who made work for others by every means in their power, who soiled and spoiled every thing about them, who ate rich, dainty, and sweet viands, broke china, and flung to the dogs food which would have been a tidbit to this lad. If I had rescued him from the abyss, and had taken him to that nice place, then he must acquire those views which prevailed in the life of that nice place; but by these views, he understood that in that fine place he must so live that he should not toil, but eat and drink luxuriously, and lead a joyous life. It is true that he did not know that my children bore heavy burdens in the acquisition of the declensions of Latin and Greek grammar, and that

he could not have understood the object of these labors. But it is impossible not to see that if he had understood this, the influence of my children's example on him would have been even stronger. He would then have comprehended that my children were being educated in this manner, so that, while doing no work now, they might be in a position hereafter, also profiting by their diplomas, to work as little as possible, and to enjoy the pleasures of life to as great an extent as possible. He did understand this, and he would not go with the peasant to tend cattle, and to eat potatoes and kvas with him, but he went to the zoological garden in the costume of a savage, to lead the elephant at thirty kopeks a day.

I might have understood how clumsy I was, when I was rearing my children in the most utter idleness and luxury, to reform other people and their children, who were perishing from idleness in what I called the den of the Rzhanoff house, where, nevertheless, three-fourths of the people toil for themselves and for others. But I understood nothing of this.

There were a great many children in the Rzhanoff house, who were in the same pitiable plight; there were the children of dissolute women, there were orphans, there were children who had been picked up in the streets by beggars. They were all very wretched. But my experience with Serozha showed me that I, living the life I did, was not in a position to help them.

While Serozha was living with us, I noticed in myself an effort to hide our life from him, in particular the life of our children. I felt that all my efforts to direct him towards a good, industrious life, were counteracted by the examples of our lives and by that of our children. It is very easy to take a child away from a disreputable woman, or from a beggar. It is very easy, when one has the money, to wash, clean and dress him in neat clothing, to support him, and even to teach him various sciences; but it is not only difficult for us, who do not earn our own bread, but quite the reverse, to teach him to work for his bread, but it is impossible, because we, by our example, and even by those material and valueless improvements of his life, inculcate the contrary. A puppy can be taken, tended, fed, and taught to fetch and carry, and one may take pleasure in him: but it is not enough to tend a man, to feed and teach him Greek; we must teach the man how to live,--that is, to take as little as possible from others, and to give as much as possible; and we cannot help teaching him to do the contrary, if we take him into our houses, or into an institution founded for this purpose.