

CHAPTER XVI.

It was hard for me to come to this confession, but when I had come to it I was shocked at the error in which I had been living. I stood up to my ears in the mud, and yet I wanted to drag others out of this mud.

What is it that I wish in reality? I wish to do good to others. I wish to do it so that other people may not be cold and hungry, so that others may live as it is natural for people to live.

[I wish this, and I see that in consequence of the violence, extortions, and various tricks in which I take part, people who toil are deprived of necessaries, and people who do not toil, in whose ranks I also belong, enjoy in superabundance the toil of other people.

I see that this enjoyment of the labors of others is so arranged, that the more rascally and complicated the trickery which is employed by the man himself, or which has been employed by the person from whom he obtained his inheritance, the more does he enjoy of the labors of others, and the less does he contribute of his own labor.

First come the Shtiglitzzy, Dervizy, Morozovy, the Demidoffs, the

Yusapoffs; then great bankers, merchants, officials, landed proprietors, among whom I also belong; then the poor--very small traders, dramshop-keepers, usurers, district judges, overseers, teachers, sacristans, clerks; then house-porters, lackeys, coachmen, watch-carriers, cab-drivers, peddlers; and last of all, the laboring classes--factory-hands and peasants, whose numbers bear the relation to the first named of ten to one. I see that the life of nine-tenths of the working classes demands, by reason of its nature, application and toil, as does every natural life; but that, in consequence of the sharp practices which take from these people what is indispensable, and place them in such oppressive conditions, this life becomes more difficult every year, and more filled with deprivations; but our life, the life of the non-laboring classes, thanks to the co-operation of the arts and sciences which are directed to this object, becomes more filled with superfluities, more attractive and careful, with every year. I see, that, in our day, the life of the working-man, and, in particular, the life of old men, of women, and of children of the working population, is perishing directly from their food, which is utterly inadequate to their fatiguing labor; and that this life of theirs is not free from care as to its very first requirements; and that, alongside of this, the life of the non-laboring classes, to which I belong, is filled more and more, every year, with superfluities and luxury, and becomes more and more free from anxiety, and has finally reached such a point of freedom from care, in the case of its fortunate members, of whom I am one, as was only dreamed of in olden times in fairy-tales,--the state of the

owner of the purse with the inexhaustible ruble, that is, a condition in which a man is not only utterly released from the law of labor, but in which he possesses the possibility of enjoying, without toil, all the blessings of life, and of transferring to his children, or to any one whom he may see fit, this purse with the inexhaustible ruble.

I see that the products of the people's toil are more and more transformed from the mass of the working classes to those who do not work; that the pyramid of the social edifice seems to be reconstructed in such fashion that the foundation stones are carried to the apex, and the swiftness of this transfer is increasing in a sort of geometrical ratio. I see that the result of this is something like that which would take place in an ant-heap if the community of ants were to lose their sense of the common law, if some ants were to begin to draw the products of labor from the bottom to the top of the heap, and should constantly contract the foundations and broaden the apex, and should thereby also force the remaining ants to betake themselves from the bottom to the summit.

I see that the ideal of the Fortunatus' purse has made its way among the people, in the place of the ideal of a toilsome life. Rich people, myself among the number, get possession of the inexhaustible ruble by various devices, and for the purpose of enjoying it we go to the city, to the place where nothing is produced and where every thing is swallowed up.

The industrious poor man, who is robbed in order that the rich may possess this inexhaustible ruble, yearns for the city in his train; and there he also takes to sharp practices, and either acquires for himself a position in which he can work little and receive much, thereby rendering still more oppressive the situation of the laboring classes, or, not having attained to such a position, he goes to ruin, and falls into the ranks of those cold and hungry inhabitants of the night-lodging houses, which are being swelled with such remarkable rapidity.

I belong to the class of those people, who, by divers tricks, take from the toiling masses the necessaries of life, and who have acquired for themselves these inexhaustible rubles, and who lead these unfortunates astray. I desire to aid people, and therefore it is clear that, first of all, I must cease to rob them as I am doing. But I, by the most complicated, and cunning, and evil practices, which have been heaped up for centuries, have acquired for myself the position of an owner of the inexhaustible ruble, that is to say, one in which, never working myself, I can make hundreds and thousands of people toil for me--which also I do; and I imagine that I pity people, and I wish to assist them. I sit on a man's neck, I weigh him down, and I demand that he shall carry me; and without descending from his shoulders I assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him, and that I desire to ameliorate his condition by all possible means, only not by getting off of him.

Surely this is simple enough. If I want to help the poor, that is, to make the poor no longer poor, I must not produce poor people. And I give, at my own selection, to poor men who have gone astray from the path of life, a ruble, or ten rubles, or a hundred; and I grasp hundreds from people who have not yet left the path, and thereby I render them poor also, and demoralize them to boot.

This is very simple; but it was horribly hard for me to understand this fully without compromises and reservations, which might serve to justify my position; but it sufficed for me to confess my guilt, and every thing which had before seemed to me strange and complicated, and lacking in cleanness, became perfectly comprehensible and simple. But the chief point was, that my way of life, arising from this interpretation, became simple, clear and pleasant, instead of perplexed, inexplicable and full of torture as before.] {18}

Who am I, that I should desire to help others? I desire to help people; and I, rising at twelve o'clock after a game of vint {19} with four candles, weak, exhausted, demanding the aid of hundreds of people,--I go to the aid of whom? Of people who rise at five o'clock, who sleep on planks, who nourish themselves on bread and cabbage, who know how to plough, to reap, to wield the axe, to chop, to harness, to sew,--of people who in strength and endurance, and skill and abstemiousness, are a hundred times superior to me,--and I go to their succor! What except shame could I feel, when I entered into communion with these people? The very weakest of them, a

drunkard, an inhabitant of the Rzhanoff house, the one whom they call "the idler," is a hundred-fold more industrious than I; [his balance, so to speak, that is to say, the relation of what he takes from people and that which they give him, stands on a thousand times better footing than my balance, if I take into consideration what I take from people and what I give to them.] {18}

And these are the people to whose assistance I go. I go to help the poor. But who is the poor man? There is no one poorer than myself. I am a thoroughly enervated, good-for-nothing parasite, who can only exist under the most special conditions, who can only exist when thousands of people toil at the preservation of this life which is utterly useless to every one. And I, that plant-louse, which devours the foliage of trees, wish to help the tree in its growth and health, and I wish to heal it.

I have passed my whole life in this manner: I eat, I talk and I listen; I eat, I write or read, that is to say, I talk and listen again; I eat, I play, I eat, again I talk and listen, I eat, and again I go to bed; and so each day I can do nothing else, and I understand how to do nothing else. And in order that I may be able to do this, it is necessary that the porter, the peasant, the cook, male or female, the footman, the coachman, and the laundress, should toil from morning till night; I will not refer to the labors of the people which are necessary in order that coachman, cooks, male and female, footman, and the rest should have those implements and

articles with which, and over which, they toil for my sake; axes, tubs, brushes, household utensils, furniture, wax, blacking, kerosene, hay, wood, and beef. And all these people work hard all day long and every day, so that I may be able to talk and eat and sleep. And I, this cripple of a man, have imagined that I could help others, and those the very people who support me!

It is not remarkable that I could not help any one, and that I felt ashamed; but the remarkable point is that such an absurd idea could have occurred to me. The woman who served the sick old man, helped him; the mistress of the house, who cut a slice from the bread which she had won from the soil, helped the beggar; Semyon, who gave three kopeks which he had earned, helped the beggar, because those three kopeks actually represented his labor: but I served no one, I toiled for no one, and I was well aware that my money did not represent my labor.