

CHAPTER VI.

The inhabitants of these houses constitute the lower class of the city, which numbers in Moscow, probably, one hundred thousand. There, in that house, are representatives of every description of this class. There are petty employers, and master-artisans, bootmakers, brush-makers, cabinet-makers, turners, shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths; there are cab-drivers, young women living alone, and female pedlers, laundresses, old-clothes dealers, money-lenders, day-laborers, and people without any definite employment; and also beggars and dissolute women.

Here were many of the very people whom I had seen at the entrance to the Lyapinsky house; but here these people were scattered about among the working-people. And moreover, I had seen these people at their most unfortunate time, when they had eaten and drunk up every thing, and when, cold, hungry, and driven forth from the taverns, they were awaiting admission into the free night lodging-house, and thence into the promised prison for despatch to their places of residence, like heavenly manna; but here I beheld them and a majority of workers, and at a time, when by one means or another, they had procured three or five kopeks for a lodging for the night, and sometimes a ruble for food and drink.

And strange as the statement may seem, I here experienced nothing resembling that sensation which I had felt in the Lyapinsky house; but, on the contrary, during the first round, both I and the students

experienced an almost agreeable feeling,--yes, but why do I say "almost agreeable"? This is not true; the feeling called forth by intercourse with these people, strange as it may sound, was a distinctly agreeable one.

Our first impression was, that the greater part of the dwellers here were working people and very good people at that.

We found more than half the inhabitants at work: laundresses bending over their tubs, cabinet-makers at their lathes, cobblers on their benches. The narrow rooms were full of people, and cheerful and energetic labor was in progress. There was an odor of toilsome sweat and leather at the cobbler's, of shavings at the cabinet-maker's; songs were often to be heard, and glimpses could be had of brawny arms with sleeves roiled high, quickly and skilfully making their accustomed movements. Everywhere we were received cheerfully and politely: hardly anywhere did our intrusion into the every-day life of these people call forth that ambition, and desire to exhibit their importance and to put us down, which the appearance of the enumerators in the quarters of well-to-do people evoked. It not only did not arouse this, but, on the contrary, they answered all other questions properly, and without attributing any special significance to them. Our questions merely served them as a subject of mirth and jesting as to how such and such a one was to be set down in the list, when he was to be reckoned as two, and when two were to be reckoned as one, and so forth.

We found many of them at dinner, or tea; and on every occasion to our greeting: "bread and salt," or "tea and sugar," they replied: "we beg that you will partake," and even stepped aside to make room for us. Instead of the den with a constantly changing population, which we had expected to find here, it turned out, that there were a great many apartments in the house where people had been living for a long time. One cabinet-maker with his men, and a boot-maker with his journeymen, had lived there for ten years. The boot-maker's quarters were very dirty and confined, but all the people at work were very cheerful. I tried to enter into conversation with one of the workmen, being desirous of inquiring into the wretchedness of his situation and his debt to his master, but the man did not understand me and spoke of his master and his life from the best point of view.

In one apartment lived an old man and his old woman. They peddled apples. Their little chamber was warm, clean, and full of goods. On the floor were spread straw mats: they had got them at the apple-warehouse. They had chests, a cupboard, a samovar, and crockery. In the corner there were numerous images, and two lamps were burning before them; on the wall hung fur coats covered with sheets. The old woman, who had star-shaped wrinkles, and who was polite and talkative, evidently delighted in her quiet, comfortable, existence.

Ivan Fedotitch, the landlord of the tavern and of these quarters, left his establishment and came with us. He jested in a friendly manner with many of the landlords of apartments, addressing them all by their

Christian names and patronymics, and he gave us brief sketches of them. All were ordinary people, like everybody else,--Martin Semyonovitches, Piotr Piotrovitches, Marya Ivanovnas,--people who did not consider themselves unhappy, but who regarded themselves, and who actually were, just like the rest of mankind.

We had been prepared to witness nothing except what was terrible. And, all of a sudden, there was presented to us, not only nothing that was terrible, but what was good,--things which involuntarily compelled our respect. And there were so many of these good people, that the tattered, corrupt, idle people whom we came across now and then among them, did not destroy the principal impression.

This was not so much of a surprise to the students as to me. They simply went to fulfil a useful task, as they thought, in the interests of science, and, at the same time, they made their own chance observations; but I was a benefactor, I went for the purpose of aiding the unfortunate, the corrupt, vicious people, whom I supposed that I should meet with in this house. And, behold, instead of unfortunate, corrupt, and vicious people, I saw that the majority were laborious, industrious, peaceable, satisfied, contented, cheerful, polite, and very good folk indeed.

I felt particularly conscious of this when, in these quarters, I encountered that same crying want which I had undertaken to alleviate.

When I encountered this want, I always found that it had already been

relieved, that the assistance which I had intended to render had already been given. This assistance had been rendered before my advent, and rendered by whom? By the very unfortunate, depraved creatures whom I had undertaken to reclaim, and rendered in such a manner as I could not compass.

In one basement lay a solitary old man, ill with the typhus fever. There was no one with the old man. A widow and her little daughter, strangers to him, but his neighbors round the corner, looked after him, gave him tea and purchased medicine for him out of their own means. In another lodging lay a woman in puerperal fever. A woman who lived by vice was rocking the baby, and giving her her bottle; and for two days, she had been unremitting in her attention. The baby girl, on being left an orphan, was adopted into the family of a tailor, who had three children of his own. So there remained those unfortunate idle people, officials, clerks, lackeys out of place, beggars, drunkards, dissolute women, and children, who cannot be helped on the spot with money, but whom it is necessary to know thoroughly, to be planned and arranged for. I had simply sought unfortunate people, the unfortunates of poverty, those who could be helped by sharing with them our superfluity, and, as it seemed to me, through some signal ill-luck, none such were to be found; but I hit upon unfortunates to whom I should be obliged to devote my time and care.