

II. SPRINGTIME

Easter of the year when I entered the University fell late in April, so that the examinations were fixed for St. Thomas's Week, [Easter week.] and I had to spend Good Friday in fasting and finally getting myself ready for the ordeal.

Following upon wet snow (the kind of stuff which Karl Ivanitch used to describe as "a child following, its father"), the weather had for three days been bright and mild and still. Not a clot of snow was now to be seen in the streets, and the dirty slush had given place to wet, shining pavements and coursing rivulets. The last icicles on the roofs were fast melting in the sunshine, buds were swelling on the trees in the little garden, the path leading across the courtyard to the stables was soft instead of being a frozen ridge of mud, and mossy grass was showing green between the stones around the entrance-steps. It was just that particular time in spring when the season exercises the strongest influence upon the human soul--when clear sunlight illuminates everything, yet sheds no warmth, when rivulets run trickling under one's feet, when the air is charged with an odorous freshness, and when the bright blue sky is streaked with long, transparent clouds.

For some reason or another the influence of this early stage in the birth of spring always seems to me more perceptible and more impressive in a great town than in the country. One sees less, but one feels more. I was standing near the window--through the double frames of which the

morning sun was throwing its mote-flecked beams upon the floor of what seemed to me my intolerably wearisome schoolroom--and working out a long algebraical equation on the blackboard. In one hand I was holding a ragged, long-suffering "Algebra" and in the other a small piece of chalk which had already besmeared my hands, my face, and the elbows of my jacket. Nicola, clad in an apron, and with his sleeves rolled up, was picking out the putty from the window-frames with a pair of nippers, and unfastening the screws. The window looked out upon the little garden. At length his occupation and the noise which he was making over it arrested my attention. At the moment I was in a very cross, dissatisfied frame of mind, for nothing seemed to be going right with me. I had made a mistake at the very beginning of my algebra, and so should have to work it out again; twice I had let the chalk drop. I was conscious that my hands and face were whitened all over; the sponge had rolled away into a corner; and the noise of Nicola's operations was fast getting on my nerves. I had a feeling as though I wanted to fly into a temper and grumble at some one, so I threw down chalk and "Algebra" alike, and began to pace the room. Then suddenly I remembered that to-day we were to go to confession, and that therefore I must refrain from doing anything wrong. Next, with equal suddenness I relapsed into an extraordinarily goodhumoured frame of mind, and walked across to Nicola.

"Let me help you, Nicola," I said, trying to speak as pleasantly as I possibly could. The idea that I was performing a meritorious action in thus suppressing my ill-temper and offering to help him increased my good-humour all the more.

By this time the putty had been chipped out, and the screws removed, yet, though Nicola pulled with might and main at the cross-piece, the window-frame refused to budge.

"If it comes out as soon as he and I begin to pull at it together," I thought, "it will be rather a shame, as then I shall have nothing more of the kind to do to-day."

Suddenly the frame yielded a little at one side, and came out.

"Where shall I put it?" I said.

"Let ME see to it, if you please," replied Nicola, evidently surprised as well as, seemingly, not over-pleased at my zeal. "We must not leave it here, but carry it away to the lumber-room, where I keep all the frames stored and numbered."

"Oh, but I can manage it," I said as I lifted it up. I verily believe that if the lumber-room had been a couple of versts away, and the frame twice as heavy as it was, I should have been the more pleased. I felt as though I wanted to tire myself out in performing this service for Nicola. When I returned to the room the bricks and screws had been replaced on the windowsill, and Nicola was sweeping the debris, as well as a few torpid flies, out of the open window. The fresh, fragrant air was rushing into and filling all the room, while with it came also the

dull murmur of the city and the twittering of sparrows in the garden. Everything was in brilliant light, the room looked cheerful, and a gentle spring breeze was stirring Nicola's hair and the leaves of my "Algebra." Approaching the window, I sat down upon the sill, turned my eyes downwards towards the garden, and fell into a brown study.

Something new to me, something extraordinarily potent and unfamiliar, had suddenly invaded my soul. The wet ground on which, here and there, a few yellowish stalks and blades of bright-green grass were to be seen; the little rivulets glittering in the sunshine, and sweeping clods of earth and tiny chips of wood along with them; the reddish twigs of the lilac, with their swelling buds, which nodded just beneath the window; the fussy twitterings of birds as they fluttered in the bush below; the blackened fence shining wet from the snow which had lately melted off it; and, most of all, the raw, odorous air and radiant sunlight--all spoke to me, clearly and unmistakably, of something new and beautiful, of something which, though I cannot repeat it here as it was then expressed to me, I will try to reproduce so far as I understood it. Everything spoke to me of beauty, happiness, and virtue--as three things which were both easy and possible for me--and said that no one of them could exist without the other two, since beauty, happiness, and virtue were one. "How did I never come to understand that before?" I cried to myself. "How did I ever manage to be so wicked? Oh, but how good, how happy, I could be--nay, I WILL be--in the future! At once, at once--yes, this very minute--I will become another being, and begin to live differently!" For all that, I continued sitting on the window-sill,

continued merely dreaming, and doing nothing. Have you ever, on a summer's day, gone to bed in dull, rainy weather, and, waking just at sunset, opened your eyes and seen through the square space of the window--the space where the linen blind is blowing up and down, and beating its rod upon the window-sill--the rain-soaked, shadowy, purple vista of an avenue of lime-trees, with a damp garden path lit up by the clear, slanting beams of the sun, and then suddenly heard the joyous sounds of bird life in the garden, and seen insects flying to and fro at the open window, and glittering in the sunlight, and smelt the fragrance of the rain-washed air, and thought to yourself, "Am I not ashamed to be lying in bed on such an evening as this?" and, leaping joyously to your feet, gone out into the garden and revelled in all that welter of life? If you have, then you can imagine for yourself the overpowering sensation which was then possessing me.