

VI. CONFESSION

With these and other disjointed impressions in my mind, I returned to the divannaia. As soon as every one had reassembled, the priest rose and prepared to read the prayer before confession. The instant that the silence was broken by the stern, expressive voice of the monk as he recited the prayer--and more especially when he addressed to us the words: "Reveal thou all thy sins without shame, concealment, or extenuation, and let thy soul be cleansed before God: for if thou concealest aught, then great will be thy sin"--the same sensation of reverent awe came over me as I had felt during the morning. I even took a certain pleasure in recognising this condition of mine, and strove to preserve it, not only by restraining all other thoughts from entering my brain, but also by consciously exerting myself to feel no other sensation than this same one of reverence.

Papa was the first to go to confession. He remained a long, long time in the room which had belonged to our grandmother, and during that time the rest of us kept silence in the divannaia, or only whispered to one another on the subject of who should precede whom. At length, the voice of the priest again reading the prayer sounded from the doorway, and then Papa's footsteps. The door creaked as he came out, coughing and holding one shoulder higher than the other, in his usual way, and for the moment he did not look at any of us.

"YOU go now, Luba," he said presently, as he gave her cheek a

mischievous pinch. "Mind you tell him everything. You are my greatest sinner, you know."

Lubotshka went red and pale by turns, took her memorandum paper out of her apron, replaced it, and finally moved away towards the doorway with her head sunk between her shoulders as though she expected to receive a blow upon it from above. She was not long gone, and when she returned her shoulders were shaking with sobs.

At length--next after the excellent Katenka (who came out of the doorway with a smile on her face)--my turn arrived. I entered the dimly-lighted room with the same vague feeling of awe, the same conscious eagerness to arouse that feeling more and more in my soul, that had possessed me up to the present moment. The priest, standing in front of a reading-desk, slowly turned his face to me.

I was not more than five minutes in the room, but came out from it happy and (so I persuaded myself) entirely cleansed--a new, a morally reborn individual. Despite the fact that the old surroundings of my life now struck me as unfamiliar (even though the rooms, the furniture, and my own figure--would to heavens that I could have changed my outer man for the better in the same way that I believed myself to have changed my inner I--were the same as before), I remained in that comfortable attitude of mine until the very moment of bedtime.

Yet, no sooner had I begun to grow drowsy with the conning over of my

sins than in a flash I recollected a particularly shameful sin which I had suppressed at confession time. Instantly the words of the prayer before confession came back to my memory and began sounding in my ears. My peace was gone for ever. "For if thou concealest aught, then great will be thy sin." Each time that the phrase recurred to me I saw myself a sinner for whom no punishment was adequate. Long did I toss from side to side as I considered my position, while expecting every moment to be visited with the divine wrath--to be struck with sudden death, perhaps!--an insupportable thought! Then suddenly the reassuring thought occurred to me: "Why should I not drive out to the monastery when the morning comes, and see the priest again, and make a second confession?" Thereafter I grew calmer.