

IX. HOW I PREPARED MYSELF FOR THE EXAMINATIONS

On the Thursday in Easter week Papa, my sister, Katenka, and Mimi went away into the country, and no one remained in my grandmother's great house but Woloda, St. Jerome, and myself. The frame of mind which I had experienced on the day of my confession and during my subsequent expedition to the monastery had now completely passed away, and left behind it only a dim, though pleasing, memory which daily became more and more submerged by the impressions of this emancipated existence.

The folio endorsed "Rules of My Life" lay concealed beneath a pile of school-books. Although the idea of the possibility of framing rules, for every occasion in my life and always letting myself be guided by them still pleased me (since it appeared an idea at once simple and magnificent, and I was determined to make practical application of it), I seemed somehow to have forgotten to put it into practice at once, and kept deferring doing so until such and such a moment. At the same time, I took pleasure in the thought that every idea which now entered my head could be allotted precisely to one or other of my three sections of tasks and duties--those for or to God, those for or to my neighbour, and those for or to myself. "I can always refer everything to them," I said to myself, "as well as the many, many other ideas which occur to me on one subject or another." Yet at this period I often asked myself, "Was I better and more truthful when I only believed in the power of the human intellect, or am I more so now, when I am losing the faculty of developing that power, and am in doubt both as to its potency and as to

its importance?" To this I could return no positive answer.

The sense of freedom, combined with the spring-like feeling of vague expectation to which I have referred already, so unsettled me that I could not keep myself in hand--could make none but the sorriest of preparations for my University ordeal. Thus I was busy in the schoolroom one morning, and fully aware that I must work hard, seeing that to-morrow was the day of my examination in a subject of which I had the two whole questions still to read up; yet no sooner had a breath of spring come wafted through the window than I felt as though there were something quite different that I wished to recall to my memory. My hands laid down my book, my feet began to move of themselves, and to set me walking up and down the room, and my head felt as though some one had suddenly touched in it a little spring and set some machine in motion--so easily and swiftly and naturally did all sorts of pleasing fancies of which I could catch no more than the radiancy begin coursing through it. Thus one hour, two hours, elapsed unperceived. Even if I sat down determinedly to my book, and managed to concentrate my whole attention upon what I was reading, suddenly there would sound in the corridor the footsteps of a woman and the rustle of her dress. Instantly everything would escape my mind, and I would find it impossible to remain still any longer, however much I knew that the woman could only be either Gasha or my grandmother's old sewing-maid moving about in the corridor. "Yet suppose it should be SHE all at once?" I would say to myself. "Suppose IT is beginning now, and I were to lose it?" and, darting out into the corridor, I would find, each time, that it was only

Gasha. Yet for long enough afterwards I could not recall my attention to my studies. A little spring had been touched in my head, and a strange mental ferment started afresh. Again, that evening I was sitting alone beside a tallow candle in my room. Suddenly I looked up for a moment--to snuff the candle, or to straighten myself in my chair--and at once became aware of nothing but the darkness in the corners and the blank of the open doorway. Then, I also became conscious how still the house was, and felt as though I could do nothing else than go on listening to that stillness, and gazing into the black square of that open doorway, and gradually sinking into a brown study as I sat there without moving. At intervals, however, I would get up, and go downstairs, and begin wandering through the empty rooms. Once I sat a long while in the small drawing-room as I listened to Gasha playing "The Nightingale" (with two fingers) on the piano in the large drawing-room, where a solitary candle burned. Later, when the moon was bright, I felt obliged to get out of bed and to lean out of the window, so that I might gaze into the garden, and at the lighted roof of the Shaposnikoff mansion, the straight tower of our parish church, and the dark shadows of the fence and the lilac-bush where they lay black upon the path. So long did I remain there that, when I at length returned to bed, it was ten o'clock in the morning before I could open my eyes again.

In short, had it not been for the tutors who came to give me lessons, as well as for St. Jerome (who at intervals, and very grudgingly, applied a spur to my self-conceit) and, most of all, for the desire to figure as "clever" in the eyes of my friend Nechludoff (who looked upon

distinctions in University examinations as a matter of first-rate importance)--had it not been for all these things, I say, the spring and my new freedom would have combined to make me forget everything I had ever learnt, and so to go through the examinations to no purpose whatsoever.