

XXX. HOW I EMPLOYED MY TIME

Nevertheless, the fact that that summer I developed a passion for music caused me to become better friends with the ladies of our household than I had been for years. In the spring, a young fellow came to see us, armed with a letter of introduction, who, as soon as ever he entered the drawing-room, fixed his eyes upon the piano, and kept gradually edging his chair closer to it as he talked to Mimi and Katenka. After discoursing awhile of the weather and the amenities of country life, he skilfully directed the conversation to piano-tuners, music, and pianos generally, and ended by saying that he himself played--and in truth he did sit down and perform three waltzes, with Mimi, Lubotshka, and Katenka grouped about the instrument, and watching him as he did so. He never came to see us again, but his playing, and his attitude when at the piano, and the way in which he kept shaking his long hair, and, most of all, the manner in which he was able to execute octaves with his left hand as he first of all played them rapidly with his thumb and little finger, and then slowly closed those members, and then played the octaves afresh, made a great impression upon me. This graceful gesture of his, together with his easy pose and his shaking of hair and successful winning of the ladies' applause by his talent, ended by firing me to take up the piano. Convinced that I possessed both talent and a passion for music, I set myself to learn, and, in doing so, acted just as millions of the male--still more, of the female--sex have done who try to teach themselves without a skilled instructor, without any real turn for the art, or without the smallest understanding either of

what the art can give or of what ought to be done to obtain that gift. For me music (or rather, piano-playing) was simply a means of winning the ladies' good graces through their sensibility. With the help of Katenka I first learnt the notes (incidentally breaking several of them with my clumsy fingers), and then--that is to say, after two months of hard work, supplemented by ceaseless twiddling of my rebellious fingers on my knees after luncheon, and on the pillow when in bed--went on to "pieces," which I played (so Katenka assured me) with "soul" ("avec ame"), but altogether regardless of time.

My range of pieces was the usual one--waltzes, galops, "romances," "arrangements," etcetera; all of them of the class of delightful compositions of which any one with a little healthy taste could point out a selection among the better class works contained in any volume of music and say, "These are what you ought NOT to play, seeing that anything worse, less tasteful, and more silly has never yet been included in any collection of music,"--but which (probably for that very reason) are to be found on the piano of every Russian lady. True, we also possessed an unfortunate volume which contained Beethoven's "Sonate Pathetique" and the C minor Sonata (a volume lamed for life by the ladies--more especially by Lubotshka, who used to discourse music from it in memory of Mamma), as well as certain other good pieces which her teacher in Moscow had given her; but among that collection there were likewise compositions of the teacher's own, in the shape of clumsy marches and galops--and these too Lubotshka used to play! Katenka and I cared nothing for serious works, but preferred, above all things, "Le

Fou" and "The Nightingale"--the latter of which Katenka would play until her fingers almost became invisible, and which I too was beginning to execute with much vigour and some continuity. I had adopted the gestures of the young man of whom I have spoken, and frequently regretted that there were no strangers present to see me play. Soon, however, I began to realise that Liszt and Kalkbrenner were beyond me, and that I should never overtake Katenka. Accordingly, imagining that classical music was easier (as well as, partly, for the sake of originality), I suddenly came to the conclusion that I loved abstruse German music. I began to go into raptures whenever Lubotshka played the "Sonate Pathetique," and although (if the truth be told) that work had for years driven me to the verge of distraction, I set myself to play Beethoven, and to talk of him as "Beethoven." Yet through all this chopping and changing and pretence (as I now conceive) there may have run in me a certain vein of talent, since music sometimes affected me even to tears, and things which particularly pleased me I could strum on the piano afterwards (in a certain fashion) without the score; so that, had any one taught me at that period to look upon music as an end, a grace, in itself, and not merely as a means for pleasing womenfolk with the velocity and pseudo-sentiment of one's playing, I might possibly have become a passable musician.

The reading of French novels (of which Woloda had brought a large store with him from Moscow) was another of my amusements that summer. At that period Monte Cristo and Taine's works had just appeared, while I also revelled in stories by Sue, Dumas, and Paul de Kock. Even their most

unnatural personages and events were for me as real as actuality, and not only was I incapable of suspecting an author of lying, but, in my eyes, there existed no author at all. That is to say, the various personages and events of a book paraded themselves before me on the printed page as personages and events that were alive and real; and although I had never in my life met such characters as I there read about, I never for a second doubted that I should one day do so. I discovered in myself all the passions described in every novel, as well as a likeness to all the characters--heroes and villains impartially--who figured therein, just as a suspicious man finds in himself the signs of every possible disease when reading a book on medicine. I took pleasure both in the cunning designs, the glowing sentiments, the tumultuous events, and the character-drawing of these works. A good man was of the goodness, a bad man of the badness, possible only to the imagination of early youth. Likewise I found great pleasure in the fact that it was all written in French, and that I could lay to heart the fine words which the fine heroes spoke, and recall them for use some day when engaged in some noble deed. What quantities of French phrases I culled from those books for Kolpikoff's benefit if I should ever meet him again, as well as for HERS, when at length I should find her and reveal to her my love! For them both I prepared speeches which should overcome them as soon as spoken! Upon novels, too, I founded new ideals of the moral qualities which I wished to attain. First of all, I wished to be NOBLE in all my deeds and conduct (I use the French word noble instead of the Russian word blagorodni for the reason that the former has a different meaning to the latter--as

the Germans well understood when they adopted noble as nobel and differentiated it from ehrlich); next, to be strenuous; and lastly, to be what I was already inclined to be, namely, *comme il faut*. I even tried to approximate my appearance and bearing to that of the heroes who possessed these qualities. In particular I remember how in one of the hundred or so novels which I read that summer there was a very strenuous hero with heavy eyebrows, and that I so greatly wished to resemble him (I felt that I did so already from a moral point of view) that one day, when looking at my eyebrows in the glass, I conceived the idea of clipping them, in order to make them grow bushier. Unfortunately, after I had started to do so, I happened to clip one spot rather shorter than the rest, and so had to level down the rest to it-with the result that, to my horror, I beheld myself eyebrow-less, and anything but presentable. However, I comforted myself with the reflection that my eyebrows would soon sprout again as bushy as my hero's, and was only perplexed to think how I could explain the circumstance to the household when they next perceived my eyebrow-less condition. Accordingly I borrowed some gunpowder from Woloda, rubbed it on my temples, and set it alight. The powder did not fire properly, but I succeeded in singeing myself sufficiently to avert all suspicion of my pranks. And, indeed, afterwards, when I had forgotten all about my hero, my eyebrows grew again, and much thicker than they had been before.

XXXI. "COMME IL FAUT"