

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"

SEVERAL times in the course of this narrative I have hinted at an idea corresponding to the above French heading, and now feel it incumbent upon me to devote a whole chapter to that idea, which was one of the most ruinous, lying notions which ever became engrafted upon my life by my upbringing and social milieu.

The human race may be divided into several categories--rich and poor, good and bad, military and civilian, clever and stupid, and so forth, and so forth. Yet each man has his own favourite, fundamental system of division which he unconsciously uses to class each new person with whom he meets. At the time of which I am speaking, my own favourite, fundamental system of division in this respect was into people "comme il faut" and people "comme il ne faut pas"--the latter subdivided, again, into people merely not "comme il faut" and the lower orders. People "comme il faut" I respected, and looked upon as worthy to consort with me as my equals; the second of the above categories I pretended merely to despise, but in reality hated, and nourished towards them a kind of feeling of offended personality; while the third category had no existence at all, so far as I was concerned, since my contempt for them was too complete. This "comme il faut"-ness of mine lay, first and foremost, in proficiency in French, especially conversational French. A person who spoke that language badly at once aroused in me a feeling of dislike. "Why do you try to talk as we do when you haven't a notion how to do it?" I would seem to ask him with my most venomous and quizzing smile. The second condition of "comme il faut"-ness was long nails

that were well kept and clean; the third, ability to bow, dance, and converse; the fourth--and a very important one--indifference to everything, and a constant air of refined, supercilious ennui. Moreover, there were certain general signs which, I considered, enabled me to tell, without actually speaking to a man, the class to which he belonged. Chief among these signs (the others being the fittings of his rooms, his gloves, his handwriting, his turn-out, and so forth) were his feet. The relation of boots to trousers was sufficient to determine, in my eyes, the social status of a man. Heelless boots with angular toes, wedged to narrow, unstrapped trouser-ends--these denoted the vulgarian. Boots with narrow, round toes and heels, accompanied either by tight trousers strapped under the instep and fitting close to the leg or by wide trousers similarly strapped, but projecting in a peak over the toe--these meant the man of mauvais genre; and so on, and so on.

It was a curious thing that I who lacked all ability to become "comme il faut," should have assimilated the idea so completely as I did. Possibly it was the fact that it had cost me such enormous labour to acquire that brought about its strenuous development in my mind. I hardly like to think how much of the best and most valuable time of my first sixteen years of existence I wasted upon its acquisition. Yet every one whom I imitated--Woloda, Dubkoff, and the majority of my acquaintances--seemed to acquire it easily. I watched them with envy, and silently toiled to become proficient in French, to bow gracefully and without looking at the person whom I was saluting, to gain dexterity in small-talk and dancing, to cultivate indifference and ennui, and to keep my fingernails

well trimmed (though I frequently cut my finger-ends with the scissors in so doing). And all the time I felt that so much remained to be done if I was ever to attain my end! A room, a writing-table, an equipage I still found it impossible to arrange "comme il faut," however much I fought down my aversion to practical matters in my desire to become proficient. Yet everything seemed to arrange itself properly with other people, just as though things could never have been otherwise! Once I remember asking Dubkoff, after much zealous and careful labouring at my finger-nails (his own were extraordinarily good), whether his nails had always been as now, or whether he had done anything to make them so: to which he replied that never within his recollection had he done anything to them, and that he could not imagine a gentleman's nails possibly being different. This answer incensed me greatly, for I had not yet learnt that one of the chief conditions of "comme il faut"-ness was to hold one's tongue about the labour by which it had been acquired. "Comme il faut"-ness I looked upon as not only a great merit, a splendid accomplishment, an embodiment of all the perfection which must strive to attain, but as the one indispensable condition without which there could never be happiness, nor glory, nor any good whatsoever in this world. Even the greatest artist or savant or benefactor of the human race would at that time have won from me no respect if he had not also been "comme il faut." A man possessed of "comme il faut"-ness stood higher than, and beyond all possible equality with, such people, and might well leave it to them to paint pictures, to compose music, to write books, or to do good. Possibly he might commend them for so doing (since why should not merit be commended where-ever it be found?), but he could never stand

ON A LEVEL with them, seeing that he was "comme il faut" and they were not--a quite final and sufficient reason. In fact, I actually believe that, had we possessed a brother or a father or a mother who had not been "comme il faut," I should have declared it to be a great misfortune for us, and announced that between myself and them there could never be anything in common. Yet neither waste of the golden hours which I consumed in constantly endeavouring to observe the many arduous, unattainable conditions of "comme il faut"-ness (to the exclusion of any more serious pursuit), nor dislike of and contempt for nine-tenths of the human race, nor disregard of all the beauty that lay outside the narrow circle of "comme il faut"-ness comprised the whole of the evil which the idea wrought in me. The chief evil of all lay in the notion acquired that a man need not strive to become a tchinovnik, [Official.] a coachbuilder, a soldier, a savant, or anything useful, so long only as he was "comme il faut"--that by attaining the latter quality he had done all that was demanded of him, and was even superior to most people.

Usually, at a given period in youth, and after many errors and excesses, every man recognises the necessity of his taking an active part in social life, and chooses some branch of labour to which to devote himself. Only with the "comme il faut" man does this rarely happen. I have known, and know, very, very many people--old, proud, self-satisfied, and opinionated--who to the question (if it should ever present itself to them in their world) "Who have you been, and what have you ever done?" would be unable to reply otherwise than by saying,

"Je fus un homme tres comme il faut,"

Such a fate was awaiting myself.