

DOSIA'S DAUGHTER

HENRY GREVILLE





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DOSIA'S DAUGHTER

BY

HENRY GRÉVILLE

TRANSLATED BY

CLARA ERSKINE CLEMENT

Durand
"



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1886

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PRESS OF
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TO

My American Friends,

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK,

WRITTEN FOR THEM,

WITH MY HEARTY THANKS

FOR

THEIR KIND WELCOME.

HENRY GRÉVILLE.

BOSTON, Nov. 24, 1885.



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DOSIA'S DAUGHTER



DOSIA'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

TWENTY YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE.

“YOUR health, my dear friends, and may you see many happy returns of the day!” said Pierre Mourief, raising his glass, filled to the brim with champagne, to the level of his eyes.

The hosts rose and replied to Mourief's toast with their usual good grace; the children came and kissed their parents; all left their places; kisses and handshakings without number were exchanged, and finally every one returned to his seat. A short silence followed, while all the company looked at each other with smiles

of content. The servants took the opportunity to remove the knives and forks, and replace the chafing-dishes by a well-ordered dessert.

It was a handsome table, superbly arranged; everything on it gave proof of a tasteful and long-established luxury; there were no fragile, fanciful things, but massive silverware and thick Bohemian glass, though from the ceiling was suspended a wreath of globes from which hung bunches of leaves and flowers, that swayed to and fro above the table; the traditional lamp was replaced by a chandelier full of candles, and it all had a peculiarly aerial air, quite individual, and of a character not to be found elsewhere.

“You are looking at our ceiling,” said Platon Sourof to his brother-in-law Pierre. “It is an idea of Dosia’s.”

“A good idea; but one must be in one’s own house in order to execute it. My landlord at Petersburg would make a great to-do if I pleased myself by making a dozen holes like

that in his stucco ceiling! But it is very pretty."

"Dosia has only good ideas," added Madame Mourief, smiling at her sister-in-law.

"You did not say the same of me when I was a young girl!" exclaimed Madame Sourof, laughing. "I don't believe there ever was a girl on earth more scolded than I!"

"Oh, yes!" said a sulky voice at the other extremity of the table; "I am!"

A general laugh resounded so gayly that the ivy wreaths began to dance above the guests, and the complainer could not help laughing too.

"You, Ania?" said Uncle Pierre, putting his eye-glass to his eye, in order to look at his niece, who lowered her eyes with a vexed air, in spite of an involuntary movement which still raised the corner of her mouth. "Why, you! You were born to be scolded!"

"I perceive it," replied Agnes.

She was crimson, and ready to get angry;

but, raising her eyes, she met her Aunt Sophie Mourief's glance, and her ill-humor vanished at once. Aunt Sophie had a way of smiling at you so sweetly that it went to your heart, whatever might be the matter with you. Agnes held out against her mother sometimes, but never against her Aunt Sophie.

"She is a second Dositia," said General Baranine, laughing.

"General!" exclaimed Madame Sourof. "I think you are wanting in respect towards me."

Laughter ran again around the table.

"It is not my fault," continued the old friend of the family, "if your originalities have illustrated the name; you bear, my dear, the burden of glory."

"Oh!" sighed Dositia, "it is so long since I was young."

Here the shouts of laughter were so loud that, for some time, no one could hear anything else. Agnes alone did not laugh.

"I do not understand," thought she, "why

they find so droll in mamma the same things which they blame in me!"

But she remained silent.

Dosia's face, indeed, contradicted her words in a most striking manner. It was easy to see that twenty years ago she had been extremely pretty. The passing years had somewhat altered her former childlike charms, but she was beautiful now; her complexion had retained the pearl-like freshness of youth, and her eyes shone as brightly as ever.

"Dosia," said Pierre Mourief, "it is twenty years ago to-day since you married my good friend Platon; do you remember the year before?"

"I should think so," answered Madame Sourof, blushing slightly.

"Do you know that it was exactly a year before the same date that we ran away together?"

"Carrying with you, for all your luggage, two oranges and a jar of sweetmeats, tied up

in a handkerchief," added Platon, with a satisfied air.

"A year? day for day? No, I did not know it. I didn't make a note of it," replied Dosia, with a disdainful manner.

"That, Pierre, is for you," said the good Sophie, complacently.

"Yes, my dear wife, that is a hard blow to my vanity. But tell me, Dosia, if I had not brought you back that day, what would have happened?"

Madame Sourof's eyes sparkled so that it seemed to her friends that they saw her again just as she was twenty years before.

"What would have happened, my dear brother?" she replied with vivacity; "ask your right cheek, for I think the slap you received that day was on your left one."

At this her guests burst out laughing together, including Agnes. She was not sorry to know that her Uncle Pierre, who was always teasing her, had received a slap on the face one

fine morning from her mamma, who was always scolding.

“A slap, Uncle Pierre?” said she, when calm was restored.

“Yes, my niece.”

“Pierre!” murmured Dosia; “before the children, I think that” . . .

Madame Mourief glanced at her sister-in-law with her tranquil look.

“I think,” she said, “it is far better that children should not have any cause to suspect mysteries in the lives of their parents.”

Dosia acquiesced with a sign of her head, as did also her husband.

Pierre, who had followed this conversation without seeming to take notice of it, turned towards his young niece, ready to receive her attacks.

“Tell me, uncle, did the slap hurt you?”

“My niece, look at your mother’s pretty little hands, and answer the question yourself.”

Agnes looked at her own hands and shook

her head. She knew by experience that a slap from those slim fingers had more than once drawn a groan from her big brother, a few years before.

“And, uncle, will you have the kindness to tell me what effect it had upon you?” she replied.

“Ania!” said her brother, in a low tone of reproach.

She shrugged her shoulders, which was her usual way of replying to observations.

“The effect?” said Pierre; “well, it was rather curious, and very pleasant. The result was this: I married your Aunt Sophie, and your mother married my friend Platon.”

Ania looked at her parents in turn with a perplexed and somewhat incredulous air.

“I will tell you about it,” said Sophie Mourief to her niece. “Nothing is so simple, you will see.”

“What your aunt could not tell you, my dear,” added Dosia, “is of the extraordinary

kindness she has shown to me, and the deep affection which her brother, your father, my child, deserved and has won. . . . There is no one in the world better than your father, except it may be his sister."

Tears, which she discreetly held back, gave to Dosithea's eyes all their juvenile brilliancy, while she rose from the table, giving the signal to disperse. Platon joined his wife and kissed her hand fervently. He had loved her deeply, with her faults, as a girl; and now, when she had become a wife and mother, full of estimable qualities, he loved her still better, and more and more every day. Their love, like every deep and sincere affection, was destined to grow till the end of their lives.

Aunt Sophie laid her hand on Agnes's shoulder and led her gently towards a corner of the drawing-room, which was shut off from intruders by a sort of carved wooden screen, ornamented with trailing plants. They both sat down on a small sofa, while the other guests

grouped themselves in the large, brilliantly lighted room.

"Do you remember your grandmother?" asked Sophie.

"Mamma's mother? Yes, I remember her. She was always out of spirits."

"She is dead," said Madame Mourief, gently. "Well, her character did not at all enable her to understand your mother's" —

"I should think so! mamma so gay, and brilliant, and funny — and grandmother so tiresome!"

"Let us not speak of her, since she no longer lives," insisted Sophie. "But you can understand, can you not? Your mother could not be very happy with her."

A very significant nod of the head showed that Agnes understood perfectly.

"Well, one day more unlucky than others, your mother was so vexed that she could not bear it."

“What had she done?” asked Agnes, curiously.

An impulse to laugh showed itself in Sophie's face, but she restrained herself and remained serious.

“There was a story about a dog, if I remember well, but that has no importance” —

“O aunt! pray tell me about it!”

“I don't remember it very distinctly. However, it seems to me that Dosia had installed in her bed an enormous dog, with a morning-jacket and a night-cap on.”

“Oh! I know. Sultan!”

“Exactly. One of your aunts was sleeping in the same room. She took fright and screamed” —

“My horrid aunts! I am delighted. I would like to know which of them it was. But I hate them all, one as much as the other,” said the young girl, laughing till she rolled on the sofa.

"Dosia was scolded, and the dog was beaten" —

"Poor, dear thing!"

"My husband, who was then only your mother's cousin, happened to be there. Dosia wanted to leave her mother's house, and did, in fact, leave with him; but she had not gone a *verst* before she realized how foolish she had been. Pierre was not pleased. He received the memorable slap of which they were talking just now, and he took your mother back to her home."

"And, of course, she was scolded still more than before?"

"You must confess that she deserved it."

"That depends," replied Agnes, with a knowing air. "And then?"

"Then, a little while after, my brother met Dosia; he had heard Pierre speak of her. They were friends; we all made each other's acquaintance, and it ended by our two marriages."

Agnes remained in deep meditation.

“Of what are you thinking?” asked her aunt.

“I am thinking that, if I had left the house like that, I would not have gone back to it in a quarter of an hour.”

“You would have done wrong,” replied Sophie, in her kind, commanding way. “But your mother, capricious as she was at that time, was really unhappy on account of her sisters. You are the very happiest of young girls; there is, therefore, no analogy whatever between the two situations.”

“You are an excellent, dear aunt,” replied Agnes, kissing Madame Mourief.

A few moments after, she joined her brother, who had sought refuge in a corner, with two or three young people, his youngest sister and his friend Ermile Drakof. They were very merry in the little group, where they made a place for Agnes.

Ermile was a tall fellow, somewhat heavy, and with broad shoulders, which had already

caught a slight bend from a habit of leaning over his books, although he was scarcely twenty-five years old. One could see from his appearance that he was simple-hearted, of an upright character, and an enemy to all deceit. His clothes, which were very neat, bore that individual stamp peculiar to men who care for their toilet as a duty only, and not as a pleasure. There was nothing striking about him, and one could have met him frequently without remarking him; but once having noticed him one could not fail to be attracted, and, having once conversed with him for an hour, to be desirous of becoming his friend.

“Are you not going to give us a little music, Miss Agnes?” said he.

Agnes at first looked a refusal, and then relented; for, in truth, she was very fond of playing.

“I am willing,” she replied, “only you must play with me.”

“I shall be only too happy,” murmured Ermile, and he hurried to open the piano.

They both played very well: Agnes with more caprice and *brio*; he with faultless surety and excellent taste. Separately they would certainly not have obtained such satisfactory results as when playing together, for they corrected each other's faults, and their good qualities appeared to better advantage from contrast.

The company listened but inattentively, and the general conversation followed its course; it mattered little to them, however, for they loved music enough for itself to find pleasure in playing without preoccupying themselves about applause.

“How well they play together,” said Pierre Mourief. Platon looked at his charming daughter with a paternal pride that was very justifiable.

“She is a good musician,” said he; “she can do whatever she wishes to do. What a pity that she is so hard to manage!”

“She belongs to the family,” said Pierre.

He loved his sister-in-law very sincerely; but from their perpetual quarrels and makings-up, in the days of their childhood and youth, they had retained an inveterate habit of teasing each other.

“Yes,” replied Dosia; “but I was not so rough” —

“Oh!” said Pierre, touching his cheek in so droll a way that they all three smiled.

“I mean,” continued Madame Sourof, “that I did not have that somewhat rude firmness which I regret to see in my daughter.”

“That,” interrupted Pierre, “is one of her father’s virtues, which has been slightly modified by transmission.”

“You can laugh at me,” said Platon; “you know it will not make me angry; but it is nevertheless true that at times Agnes evinces something ascetic, so to speak, which makes me anxious for her future.”

“Wait a bit, till she wants to marry, and then you will see!”

“Precisely. I see her just as severe to herself as she is to others, and I don’t know what will come of it. Kola was made in another mould.”

“Oh! Kola, he is perfection,” said Dosia, throwing complacently a mother’s glance upon her son, who was occupied at the time in explaining to the children the complicated mechanism of a toy. “He is good, he is patient, he is well-behaved. He is the picture of his father!”

“A hit!” said Platon, laughing. “Well, Agnes is not the picture of her mother, and it is really a pity.”

“I used to be very terrible, though,” replied Dosia; “I even think, were it necessary, I could be so again. The old Adam is not yet dead in me!”

“Mamma, aunt, will you let us dance?” cried the children and young people, all in one

breath, running towards the mistress of the house.

“As much as you please,” replied Dosia. Ermile and Agnes had just struck the final chord. The young girl left the piano with a sulky air. She did not like dancing. The young man, seeing what they all desired, turned round on the piano-stool, which he had not left, and began one of Strauss's most brilliant waltzes. Immediately all the company, with the exception of some venerable personages seated round the whist-tables, commenced dancing in the lofty, cool drawing-room, where the breeze of a soft summer night came through the open windows.

Mademoiselle Titof, who had educated the girls, came and sat by Agnes, who was not dancing. “Wouldn't you like to dance?” said she. “See how gay they all are! Your mother does not look twenty years old to-night.”

“And I feel as if I were sixty,” replied

Agnes, in a curt tone. "It disgusts me to see people act so youthful when they have not a hair on their heads! I don't say that for mamma, nor for my father, or Aunt and Uncle Mourief." She hastened to add: "They are good-natured and jolly, and I am glad of everything that gives them pleasure."

"You don't look so!" said her brother as he passed her, waltzing with Ermile's sister.

Agnes did not deign to reply.

"What disgusts me is to see grave people, like General Baranine, who ought to know better — Well, it seems the world is happy so."

"Miss Agnes, will you give me a turn?" asked Ermile, bowing before her. An old lady had taken his place at the piano.

She looked at him with a displeased air, but his face was so kind, and he seemed so disposed not to dance again that evening if she exacted it, that she rose slowly and let herself be carried off in the whirl. They had not gone

half-way round the room when she perceived a little boy and girl, about twelve years old, who were obstinately turning round in a corner, with a helpless air, being unable to get outside a rampart some chairs made about them.

She at once left her partner, seized the small boy, and threw the little girl into Ermile's arms, saying to him: —

“Let us make two people happy!”

In less than a second after she was whirling madly at the other end of the drawing-room. A French window, opening on the balcony that went round the house, being close at hand, Agnes cried out: —

“Let us go outside; let us go out in the moonlight!”

Her voice, as clear as the sound of a bell, rang to the very end of the room; all the dancers ran down the five or six steps that led to the gravelled garden, and without losing time began to waltz in good order.

“A polonaise!” cried Pierre Mourief, in a loud voice, “and let us lead the dance gayly!”

Mademoiselle Titof heard him. The old lady gave up her place to her, and a brilliant polonaise, played so as to make the very trees dance, resounded in the large, empty, and splendidly illuminated drawing-room. The imperturbable whist-players did not even perceive the change. Pierre had taken his sister-in-law's hand, and led her with a solemn air to the head of the column of dancers. Couple after couple ranged themselves in line, and, marking the time, they made the round of the house. The flower-beds, lit up by the first rays of the full moon, embalmed the air.

They had begun by laughing, and then a certain gravity spread over the merry company. The penetrating odors of heliotrope and mignonette, the calm beauty of the landscape bathed in a soft, transparent mist, which the moon penetrated with a milky light, and a certain indescribable melancholy inspired by

the night, awoke some poetic feeling in the most prosaic minds.

“What a night, Dosia!” said Pierre, as he led the column. “What a pity we are no longer young!”

“We live our own youth again in our children,” replied his sister-in-law, with a touch of sadness.

“Yes, but it is not ourselves! Do they even know how to be young? We were really so. Bah! we are so still,” continued he. “Fie upon sadness! Change ladies!” cried he, in a strong voice, and clapped his hands together.

An indescribable confusion followed amid shouts of laughter, except from the first two or three ladies in the column, who were obliged to recede, while Pierre ran and took Agnes from the end of the line. Every one found a partner at last, but Mademoiselle Titof had unfortunately changed the tune and had begun to play a galop. The time

was soon seized by the dancers, and all the company reëntered the drawing-room, rushing wildly.

Pierre threw himself on a sofa and gave vent to a loud "Phew!"

The piano stopped, and the room was suddenly filled with noise and laughter.

"Well, Ania, are you enjoying yourself?" said Platon, seizing his daughter by one of the braids of her hair.

The face which was turned towards him was certainly not that of one who felt bored.

"Be happy, my darling," said the father, kissing his daughter's brow. "May this day be without a cloud for you, my children, as it is for us!"

Agnes returned his caress, ran away and sat down at the piano; for the young people clamored for more dancing.

Ermile Drakof had withdrawn into a comparatively obscure corner, whence he looked at Agnes without being seen. The thought

that she could not distinguish the expression of his face gave him confidence, and he no longer constrained himself to appear conventionally friendly.

If she had known all the tenderness that this young and upright heart contained for her! If she could have discerned how much resolution, courage, and dauntless stoicism was hidden behind the smiling, almost silly air of the tall and rather heavy young man! But he would have been ashamed to have shown himself to her as he really was. She had told him so many times that one should know how to command one's feelings, and that one was only a man when self-possessed; and he feared so to displease her.

Agnes was just eighteen. Ermile had known her from her childhood. The six years of difference between Nicolas Sourof's age and his own had not interfered with their friendship; but would he have been as fond of a boy who was only a child, while he was finishing his

studies at the university, if Kola had not been brother to the disdainful Agnes?

He loved this house where the Sourofs lived six months of the year. He also loved their house at Petersburg; but the real nest, the refuge, the home, was the country-seat of Sourova, where a thousand memories of childhood united his life with those of his kind neighbors. Ermile's father was a quiet old man, who went out very little, and went to sleep regularly after dinner in an arm-chair in the smoking-room. Married late in life, and a widower after a few years, he passionately loved his daughter Marie and his son Ermile. Marie, the elder, was an excellent girl, twenty-eight years old. Plain, and a good house-keeper, expert and active, she had long since given up all thought of marriage, and lived very happy without it. "No one can ever know," she was wont to say, "how easy it makes life!"

While Ermile was gazing at Agnes, whose

lovely face had become rosy from the movement of her agile hands, Marie came near and leaned her chin on the shoulder of her brother, whom she adored. She had been almost a mother to him from the time he was left an orphan in his cradle; and, in spite of the years passed since then, she could not help always treating him somewhat like a baby.

“Why don't you dance?” she asked him.

“I am resting,” replied he, hastening to fix his eyes on another object.

What he most dreaded of all things was to have Marie guess his secret.

“Look at Agnes! Is she not pretty when rosy like that? One can find no fault with her except that she is ordinarily a little too pale; to-night she is adorable.”

“She is tiring herself, I am going to take her away,” said Ermile, hastening towards the piano.

Marie saw him lean over Agnes to speak to her, but without daring to look at her. She

made a sign, and rose, still playing. The young man took her seat and continued the dance she had begun. He kept the measure so well that no one noticed the substitution.

“How we understand each other!” said Agnes, smiling.

“Like a pair of thieves,” replied Ermile, whose heart beat with joy at that friendly “*we.*”

He was indefatigable that evening; waltz following polka, quadrille after quadrille. He sat at the piano without growing tired. The children had gone to bed, their eyes full of sleep and regret at not being able to keep open any longer; their parents talked, seated in happy groups. Not one of the fifty guests who had dined that day with Dositia felt within the sting of discontent. This happy house was one of sunshine, where reigned the sweetness of a constant and luminous peace.

When the burnt-out candles made their glass supporters crack, the players of whist or of

preference at last rose. To them, too, the evening had been a pleasant and happy one. They were good people who had known each other for many years, and liked to play together. More than one of them would have found life joyless if the same round of visits had not allowed him to meet every day of the week the same friends whom he had been accustomed to see for forty years. From time to time death gathered a member from the circle, but kind Providence aged together those who, young at first, had gradually given up dancing, and acquired a taste for cards, so that the card-tables were still well crowded.

Dosia's house contained a large number of guest chambers, and they were all occupied that night. They had made beds for the young men even in the out-houses, in rooms where provisions were ordinarily kept, and which retained a pleasant smell of fruit or grain.

Other guests, who were nearer neighbors, had come with their equipages, and their

departure presented an interesting sight. A dozen four-horse carriages, for the most part open, came in turn to the front door, ready for the travellers; they left one by one, and the noise of the bells on the harnesses gradually grew less. When the last one had quitted the court the servants extinguished the torches that had lighted the departure; all sought their beds, and the moon shed floods of serene light over the silent house, over the perfumed garden, and over the fertile country of Sourova.

CHAPTER II.

CONFESSIONS.

IT is said that fête-days make sad to-morrows. This is true sometimes; above all, when in the gayeties of the evening there has been something of license. But rejoicings like those which marked the twentieth anniversary of the marriage of Monsieur and Madame Sourof leave behind them no regrets.

One rises late, however. The children may chatter at dawn with the birds in the garden and park, but those who have danced until two o'clock in the morning have no wish to see the sun rise. They enter, one after the other, the great dining-room, where the crystal bowls, full of foaming milk, the old utensils of silver *repoussé*, and the little rolls, smoking and golden, make for them the most cheering sight.

Ermile and his sister arose first. Marie was seated at the table, where for two hours already she had poured tea and coffee, and served each new-comer with inexhaustible complacency. She had not her equal for remaining half a day before a *samovar*, refilled from time to time by the attentive servants, and giving a kindly word with each cup. No wonder that Madame Sourof scarcely knew how to do without her when she entertained her guests.

Agnes entered, a quiet expression on her face, her eyes beaming. She inherited from her mother a wonderful vitality; but, instead of showing it on the surface, and spending it in those fancies which made Dosia, when young, the heroine of many a tale, she carefully reserved it in concealment, like a smothered fire. Throwing back the braids of blonde hair, which fell on her breast at every motion, she seated herself comfortably near Marie, and, pouring out a cup of milk, she rested her

arms on the table and her chin upon her arms, looking about her.

“Are your breakfasts like this?” asked Marie, taking from her pocket a ball of white wool and an ivory crochet-needle. She was always making afghans, and her father declared that she had already finished three dozen.

Agnes regarded her cup of milk with indifference. “I have seen my bears just now; they eat with such appetites that it has satiated me.”

“Your bears! Have you bears now?”

“Yes, I have two. They are very pretty. I will show them to you. They are not in the house.”

“I fancy they are not in the sheepfold, either!”

“No. They are near the greenhouse; they were given to me last spring, when they were very small. Just imagine, when mamma and I came here last April, at a post-station, while we were changing horses, a peasant came up

carrying something in his cloak. 'Are they dogs?' said mamma. You know she cannot see a dog without a palpitation of the heart.

" 'No,' replied the peasant; 'they are little bears.'

" 'So little! Show them to us,' said mamma, and the man placed them on the ground.

" O Marie, you cannot imagine what dears they were! They were three weeks old, and as large as a Newfoundland dog of three months; and they had such pretty little ways! I sat down on the ground to play with them; they laid down on the train of my dress, and when I got up I drew them along on it. They did not wish to leave me. Their mother had been killed the day before. We gave them some milk, and they drank it like kittens, putting their lovely little noses and their paws into the bowl naturally, and when they had finished it they sat down to lick their paws. Then they ran after me about the room. And so mamma bought them and gave me one; the other

belongs to Vera, but she does not care for it."

"But what are you going to do with them?" asked Marie. "You can't undertake to break them to harness."

"We will eat them," said Kola, who entered at that moment.

"Oh!" cried Agnes,—"eat my bears?"

"That's all a bear is good for, unless you teach him to dance."

Agnes maintained a dignified silence, and Kola asked the obliging Marie for a cup of coffee. At this moment Ermile made his appearance, and received only a cool "good-morning" from his idol. Without appearing to notice it he sat down and began to talk with his friend.

"Did you see Mademoiselle Borikof yesterday?" said Marie, in a low tone.

"Yes, I saw her, as she was there," replied Agnes, coldly; "what is there remarkable about her?"

“Why, her lover is so long in declaring himself that she is likely to become ill.”

“That’s making a great fuss for a man with yellow hair,” said Agnes, pouting.

“Yellow or not, if she loves him ! ”

“If she loves him it is a proof that her mind is inferior; and another proof of it is that she wears green ribbons, which are horribly unbecoming to her.”

“The poor girl! I heard him say that he admired green ribbons. They make him think of the green leaves, and thus recall summer to him.”

“Then she ought only to wear them in winter,” said Agnes.

“O my child,” sighed Marie, “you do not know to what extremes the desire to please may lead one. I understand it.”

Nicolas burst out laughing. The idea that this good, simple Marie should have personal knowledge of the desire to please seemed to him absolutely comical.

"It is true," she affirmed, "I have wished to please; it wasn't a success, but then it only happened once."

"O Marie, tell me about it," said Agnes, her eyes sparkling with malicious fun.

"Yes, my children, I will tell you, so that it may be a lesson to you. Come here, Vera," added she, as the child passed; "and you, too, my little friends, and you, Mademoiselle Titof; all you young ladies, listen to what may happen when one wishes to charm a young man by outward attractions."

The little company listened, open-mouthed. Marie looked about her with an air of satisfaction. "I was fifteen years old," said she. "Ermile, you must remember it."

He nodded his head affirmatively, and the thought of her adventure brought a passing smile to his face.

"I was fifteen," repeated Marie, "and I was still more ugly than I am now" —

"O Marie!" exclaimed Vera, who adored

her, and thought her more beautiful than a Madonna by Raphael.

“Yes, my child, it is as I tell you. I had an uncle who was interested in agriculture. He is dead, the poor, dear man! God keep his soul! He ruined himself buying those English ploughs, that never would plough Russian soil. He came to our house, I don't know why. Perhaps he came to persuade my father to buy those English ploughs also, and he happened to bring with him his engineer. I had never seen an engineer, but it sounded well, and I said to myself, ‘This engineer must have the impression that I am a charming person.’ So the next day — it was in summer — I put on a lovely white dress.”

“Well, that was natural enough,” said Vera, looking at her dress, which was white.

“Just wait, my foolish little girl! After tea in the morning, we went out. My father, who did not like to walk, bade me take my uncle and the engineer to the tool-house, which

was at some distance from the house. As we walked along I explained this, and showed that, and made many foolish remarks. I don't remember what they were, but they were foolish, and there were a great many of them, I am sure of that. At length we crossed a stream,—broad enough, but not deep, with a slight current,—a kind of pond; the bridge was narrow, made of one or two planks.

“‘Oh, what a lovely color!’ said the engineer, looking at the stagnant water. Really it had a wonderful green. As he was about to pass over he drew back to let me go first.

“‘Now is the time,’ said I to myself, ‘to display all my perfections. He must think to himself she has a beautiful figure, and the elegance of one of the Graces.’ In fact, I carried myself well, skipping with an aristocratic air. But I stepped outside of the plank, and fell into that water which had such a beautiful green.”

“O Marie!” exclaimed Vera, with an air of consternation.

“Exactly so. I told you that I wore a white dress, so when my uncle and the engineer pulled me out of the water my dress was green, but only to the knees, as the pond was not deep. We had a half *verst* back to the house. I walked, my friends. I do not know whether the engineer remembered me, but I did not forget him, I warrant you. Since then I have given up trying to please. Now go and play, my children, and remember that modesty is the sweetest ornament of beauty.”

Marie ridiculed herself with such grace that the least one could do was to join in her fun. But Vera, who was very sensitive, kissed her affectionately, as if to console her for her misadventure. As the child went away Marie said reflectively, “You might have had such an experience; but Agnes, never.”

“Oh, no,” said Agnes, throwing her blonde

hair over her shoulder. "The opinion of others — I don't care much for it."

"That's plain enough," said Kola, with an innocent air.

"Come now, Kola, don't tease her," said Marie, who had carried Nicolas in her arms when he was a baby, and from time to time corrected him, as she did her own brother. "You have all breakfasted; no one is hungry? Well, I am not sorry."

She rang the bell, and, leaving the room to the care of the servants, she seated herself on the veranda with the everlasting ball of white wool. The others went into the garden, each one taking his own way. Agnes took the path bordered by lindens. The summer's heat had already tinged the leaves with pale gold. It was her favorite walk, and she carried there each day her good or bad humor, in order to think over its causes and results.

She found Mademoiselle Titof there, who, without precisely waiting for her pupil, ex-

pected to meet her. At sight of her Agnes frowned.

“I wish to speak to you, my dear,” said the governess.

“To scold me, you mean to say,” replied Agnes.

“No, only to talk with you.”

With a sigh of resignation Agnes walked beside Mademoiselle Titof in the shade of the lindens, which the sun flecked with bits of gold.

The governess was of about the same height as her pupil, and resembled her a little; she had not the same features, but the same form of face and the same color of hair; only that Agnes was like a fresh flower, while the other, wearied by her life, was already faded. There was but six years of difference between their ages, but the twenty-four of Mademoiselle Titof's life had already brought many troubles, while the eighteen of Agnes might be counted as so many holidays if she had wished.

“ I desire to speak to you, my dear,” said the governess, “ because all sorts of ideas came into my head last night. I don't know why; perhaps on account of the gayety which reigned in the house yesterday, in which you alone did not share.”

“ I was amused at the end,” said Agnes, as if in explanation.

“ Yes, when you were at the piano, and had made the others dance.”

Agnes nodded her head gravely. “ That alone pleased me,” said she; “ to be occupied with one's self is to wrong others.”

“ Exactly! But you occupy yourself with others only when they are *en masse*; you do not care enough for individuals. Do you know that your mother was much vexed on your account, yesterday?”

Agnes shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She adored her mother, and could not bear the idea of grieving her, but she felt unable to correct her faults for the

sake of pleasing her. How many are like this!

“She suffers from your disposition, Agnes, notwithstanding that you know what a mother, what an excellent wife, she is. This has decided me to talk seriously with you. You know, my dear, that you have confidence in me. We have known each other, and I have loved you, for five years. Speak to me frankly. You are not satisfied with your fate. What do you desire? If it is possible to gratify you I think I can promise that it shall be done.”

Agnes walked on slowly, her eyes fixed on the spots of light which the sun cast through the shade of the path.

“I wish,” said she, in a low tone, but with great decision, “to lead a useful life,—not to waste my youth and my powers in a fruitless existence. I have had a fine education, and I have profited by it,—I may say that without vanity,—and here I am, at eighteen, good for

nothing except to parade in a drawing-room. You are astonished that I prefer to make others dance before dancing myself. Useless as this may be, it counts for something."

She ended with a sort of bitterness, but her usual pride gave way to a genuine sadness.

"You are impatient, my child," said Mademoiselle Titof. "If you knew how necessary it is to wait in this life, and to make attempts again and again which come to nothing. Your education has fitted you to hold your place in society."

"I do not like society."

"Then it has fitted you to be a learned person, so that you may taste all the pleasures of intellect and of art. When you are married"—

Agnes repressed a sign of impatience. Mademoiselle Titof put her white, thin hand on the girl's arm. "Do not say, 'I do not wish to marry.' The part of a woman in this life is to be a wife and a mother."

“A wife,” cried Agnes, — “such a wife as belongs to our world: to meet her husband at the table! A mother, to see her children twice a day, at morning and evening, and to scold them when their masters complain of them. If that is to be my future, I should prefer anything, — even the cloister. One may work there.”

“Do you find such examples in your family?” demanded Mademoiselle Titof.

“My family? One cannot find twice in a century such a man as my father — such a woman as my Aunt Sophie. Do you think that, without her my Uncle Pierre would be the man that he is?”

Mademoiselle Titof was confounded by this sagacity. It was perfectly true that Pierre Mourief had been moulded and formed by the hands of his wife, and, in spite of Agnes’s silence regarding her mother, it was not less certain that, under a different influence from that of Platon Sourof, Dosia would have been

another person ; full of generous instincts, but incapable of regulating her life wisely.

“Truly, few men are like your father,” replied Mademoiselle Titof; “but humanity is not so poor in men of merit as you think. Around us there are some who have great qualities, and, indeed, one day or another, you may meet one who will please you. We are not exacting towards those whom we love.”

She ended with a sigh. Perhaps she knew by some sad experience how indulgent we can be to the faults of a loved one.

“Tell me,” said Agnes, suddenly, “how came you to be a governess?”

Mademoiselle Titof blushed, and for a moment her blush restored to her the charm of her vanished youth.

“I had taken my diploma from the Institute for noble young ladies in Kazan,” said she, “and had won some brilliant honors. I was about to marry when my father died, leaving his affairs very much embarrassed. We were

not rich before, and after this we were in misery. I was the only support of my mother, and my future husband proposed that I should place her in an asylum for the aged. An asylum for my dear mamma! Since she was a widow she needed more than ever my care and tenderness. I refused; the marriage was broken off, and I took a situation. I see my mother in the winter only, but she has two pretty rooms, and your mother's generosity enables me to give her every desirable comfort."

Agnes fell on the neck of her governess with such ardor that she was in danger of being overthrown; they were laughing and weeping at the same time; she held her in this embrace one moment, and then resumed their promenade, giving Mademoiselle Titof her arm. "And you say," cried Agnes, "that there are men of heart!"

"Precisely; because I came near marrying one who had but a very ordinary soul I have

my eyes open to the merits of others. I am too much afraid of becoming a misanthrope."

"You had enough to make you one," murmured Agnes. "But tell me how one becomes a governess, my friend."

"One receives a passport and seeks a place," replied Mademoiselle Titof, smiling.

"Ah! is a passport necessary?"

"Always, with us."

"And what do you do now with your passport?"

"I keep it. When I travel I state at the police office that I am going away, and when I arrive elsewhere I inscribe my name as a new-comer, that is all. So when I go to Moscow next month, to visit my uncle, I shall comply with the regulations as to my passport before I go away."

"What a nuisance!" exclaimed Agnes.

"All restraint is disagreeable, in fact; but this is a little thing, a mere formality."

Agnes listened no longer. Her vivid imagi-

nation was entirely absorbed by thoughts of the sufferings of Mademoiselle Titof.

“And I have never had the least idea of that,” cried she. “You are so quiet; you never speak of yourself.”

The governess smiled sweetly. “You will love me better now,” said she.

“Ah! I believe it. I shall adore you. When I think how often I have been naughty to you — If I had known!”

“It would be better always to act as if one knew,” said Mademoiselle Titof, with extreme delicacy. “But I do not wish to preach you a sermon, and it is time for Vera’s music-lesson.” She moved towards the house, but Agnes detained her.

“I beg your pardon,” said she, with beating heart,—“your humble pardon for my past impertinences, and I assure you that I shall atone for them.”

“My dear child!” exclaimed Mademoiselle Titoff, kissing her. They pressed each other’s

hands, and the governess returned to the house.

While fragments of the scales played on the distant piano fell upon her inattentive ears Agnes seated herself upon a bench and was lost in thought. There are, then, some lives without brightness, without joys, uniquely consecrated to others? Agnes knew this, but she had always thought that some characteristic sign distinguished these choice beings; some particular appearance; an unusual exterior; in short, a sort of aureole, visible, at least, to the initiated. And now, behold, her governess, she who for four years had taught her everything, was a soldier of duty! Who could have imagined it?

Agnes's heart was stirred to its depths with interest in unknown martyrs. It was one of her hobbies, and she had passed many hours in reflection upon these vague beings; but this time her dream had form. While she allowed her fancy to execute some new vari-

ations on this well-known theme an intruder entered the linden path, and approached her without being seen. When he was near her she started suddenly and looked up.

“Ermile!” said she; “you almost frightened me!”

“That was not what I wished,” he answered, smiling. “I thought I should find you here, and have come at the risk of being indiscreet. If you command it I will go away.”

“Why should you?” answered she, with a shade of haughtiness. “We can talk as well here as while dancing a german in a drawing-room.” She rose from her seat, saying, “We can talk better while walking.”

Ermile silently took his place at her side, and they paced half the length of the alley without exchanging a word. At length Agnes broke the silence.

“Have you settled your plans?” asked she, without looking at him.

He bowed his head before replying; then said, in a serious voice, "I believe so."

"What have you decided?"

"I wish to live in the country, and employ my talents to civilize the people."

"That is well," said Agnes, with a movement of the head full of proud satisfaction.

"My Uncle Varlamof has willed me his property. Did you not know it?"

"No; and then?"

"It makes me rich, that is all; and I can now do what I could not do for a year past."

He ceased speaking, and as she said no more he did not feel encouraged. After a silence he went on: "You have advised me to do it."

"I should think so! Are there not men enough who spend their money at Petersburg or Moscow? Do good to the peasants; improve the land. Spend your fortune to educate the former and to cultivate the latter. You will be recompensed."

"By whom?"

“By those whom you have benefited. And then, is not the approval of your own conscience sufficient for you?”

Ermile looked much discomfited. Certainly at this moment the approbation of his own conscience did not suffice for him.

“My conscience — oh, yes,” said he, hesitating; “but I am twenty-five years old, my studies are finished, and I believe that I shall make a tolerable agriculturist. So much the more that I have not too many false theories in my head,—at least I hope that those which have charmed me are not false,—and then, theories are well enough; I do not doubt that, but it is necessary to prove them.”

Agnes nodded her assent. He made a great effort, and went on, in a trembling voice:—

“Finally, Agnes, have you not seen that which I have forced myself to conceal so carefully?”

She had seen it certainly, but she could not have been made to confess it for all the world.

“It is a long time now since I have said to myself that I must speak to you, from fear” —

His voice was lost in his throat. Agnes remained impassive. The unhappy young man made a new effort, and continued: —

“From fear that another might speak to you before me, and obtain that which I should value as the greatest joy of which it is possible to dream.”

She turned towards him, her beautiful gray eyes full of fire.

“I have understood it, Ermile,” said she. “Another young girl in my place would give herself the pleasure of making you explain yourself more fully, but these coquetries are beneath me. You love me?”

He bowed his head, unable to speak.

“It is — pardon me the words that I shall say; I cannot find others, though I might wish it — it is unhappy for you and for me.”

“Unhappy!” exclaimed he, turning pale.

“Yes, I do not love you.”

“ You will learn to love me ! ”

“ I shall not love you ! ”

She spoke with the unconscious and fierce cruelty of those whose hearts have not been touched by love. She did not know the depth of the wound which she made. How could she understand it? Only those who have suffered such pains know what they cost.

“ Oh ! ” continued Ermile ; “ if you but knew how much I love you ! ”

“ I am sorry for you,” said she, calmly. However, a secret joy filled Agnes’s soul, beneath her apparent coldness. The magic word revealed to her some springs of emotion, hitherto concealed ; she entered into a new life through the triumphal gate of a love inspired, if not felt. A little proud satisfaction, like that of a queen who receives homage, entered this young mind like a breath of madness. Ermile continued to walk, looking straight before him.

“ I cannot love you,” said Agnes. “ I do

not know if it is because I have always known you; but you can only be a brother to me."

"And I — I love you madly," cried the unhappy man.

Agnes frowned. It was all very well to be loved, and it was flattering enough to her; but if the discarded lover took it upon himself to complain it would be very tiresome. Did he not know how to accept his refusal with dignity, as it had been pronounced?

"If it is thus," said she, "I see but one course for me, — to see you no more."

"That! Impossible!" said Ermile, in a decisive tone. "Think of it! You love me only as a brother, but I love you as the friend of all my youth — and more, as the woman with whom I wish to live and die."

"Then it is better never to speak to me of it, nor to allow me to see it."

He was silent.

"Come, Ermile," said Agnes, in her most

persuasive voice, "be reasonable. I can do nothing for you, and you can make my existence most painful by keeping at my side like a ghost of remorse. It is not my fault if I do not love you."

Ermile did not feel sure of that, but he did not reply.

"Moreover," continued Agnes, "if my father and mother knew what you have said to me, they would certainly beg of you, for your own sake, to cease your visits to us, for a time at least."

This was true, and Ermile felt himself vanquished.

"It is necessary, then, for you to make a resolution," continued the young stoic, "either to see me no more, or else to promise me now that you will never speak to me of this matter again; and that no action of yours shall ever recall to me this conversation."

"I shall not be able to do that," said Ermile, with a half-sad smile.

“I am speaking seriously,” said Agnes, severely, “and so I shall pray you not to see me again until you have put this madness out of your head.”

She was really angry. Did he, then, dream of resisting her? And in a matter of which she was the mistress to give or to retain that which he demanded?

Ermile stood there, confounded; he knew that she was passionate, and liable to do some rash thing which she would afterwards regret with all her heart. He knew, too, that a word from her would bring down upon him the affectionate condolences of Agnes's relatives, with the charitable advice to go away, to travel in foreign lands; in short, to forget, or feign to forget, this unwelcome love.

“Agnes,” said he, humbly, “do not deny me your presence.”

“Let it be so,” said she, with dignity. “Then you must give me your word of honor that you will never speak one word, or do one

act, which can remind me that you love me. Do you swear it?"

"I swear it," said Ermile.

"And if you should break your oath?"

"I should punish myself for it. You will not need to reproach me."

"Very well," said she, "let us be friends." And by the most natural of inconsequences she offered him her hand. He took it, pressed it as a friend might do, and released it with a deep sigh.

The breakfast-bell, which rang at one o'clock, recalled them to the house. They walked on together, he silent and constrained; she merry, and almost joyful. She felt as if she had wings; in fact, had she not conquered? Did she not hold in her cruelly inexperienced hands the most precious of toys,— the rarest of jewels, — the heart of a man which she could henceforth torment and dissect, not for the sake of wounding it, but merely to find out how it is made?

He felt like a bird when seized by the hands of a child, soft and rough at the same time. He felt his heart beat in these untrained hands, and asked himself if they would stifle it altogether, or if he should ever succeed in flying away. As for his oath—an oath more dangerous and more difficult to keep than he could yet believe—he did not regret that for one moment. If he should be punished some day for breaking it, he would at least enjoy the time which would precede the fatal moment. And then, if he could be near her, perhaps he could win her love. Could it be possible that she would not be moved by a tenderness so true, so discreet, and so unselfish?

The guests of the house came from all directions to the veranda, while awaiting the sound of the second bell. Dosia watched her daughter and her young friend.

“She has scolded him,” said she, laughingly, to her husband. “See how dispirited he is; but she seems to be enchanted.”

Platon looked at the young man attentively, but said nothing. He knew the expression which the great struggles of life bring to the face. As Ermile came near him the father took him affectionately by the arm, and led him to the dining-room, talking to him all the while.

CHAPTER III.

THE FOREST BURNS.

“GENERAL,” said Agnes, quietly, “your woods are burning.”

General Baranine took his pipe from his mouth, looked at the sky above him, tossed his head with a knowing look, and replied, “Not mine, my neighbor’s.”

Agnes looked at the general, and then at the sky, from the rocking-chair where he was see-sawing comfortably, and said nothing. She bent over the number of an illustrated paper in which she was examining the prints, shook it a little, blew away some white specks which had fallen upon it, and seemed to be interested in the pictures.

This year, a drought, longer than any other within the memory of the living, had dried up the forests. During the past week

fire had been raging in a great wood about twenty *versts* distant from the home of the general. In order to reach his house, the Sourof family, who had been invited to spend the day with him, were obliged to pass through a suffocating cloud of smoke, which the wind had borne for some distance, and which hung over the forest like a cloak of fog. In the grounds of the general the smoke was less dense, but was still enough so to resemble a thick and yellowish mist.

The visitors talked of one thing and another, the gentlemen smoked, the ladies talked of the children who were playing in the garden. Agnes waited a few moments and then repeated, in a clear voice, "General, your woods are burning;" and she shook over the general's hand the bits of cinders which were scattered over her newspaper.

"I know what that is," said Baranine, without looking disturbed. "For the last week, at five o'clock in the evening, when the wind

changes to the west, we have a rain of cinders."

"Yes, general, but it is two o'clock, and the wind is in the east. After all, it is not my forest, and I speak only on your account."

Platon rose. "We ought to see to it all the same," said he.

Baranine was stubborn. He made a reassuring gesture. "Let it alone! I am accustomed to this since the fires broke out."

But, in spite of all, Monsieur Sourof was not satisfied. He continued to scan the sky and in a moment he started suddenly. "There," said he, "behind you, general, the forest is really burning. See that column of smoke!"

A gust of wind threw on the paper a handful of gray cinders and black charcoal, still hot.

"It is, indeed, true that it burns," exclaimed Baranine, pulling his cap down over his polished head. "I am a stubborn old brute, and Agnes is right."

He ran towards the servants' quarters and rang the kitchen bell; in a moment he was surrounded by all those who had been in the garden and near at hand.

There was no need of many words. He extended his arms towards the column of smoke which ascended against the background of yellow mist, and each one took in the whole truth. The men ran to the sheds for tools and then rushed to the fire.

Monsieur and Madame Sourof walked rapidly by the side of their friend, without showing too much anxiety, which would not be proper for people of their class. Baranine had taken a gait of which one would not have believed him capable, seeing his bulk. Vera, Marie Drakof, and the young people had run ahead. Agnes was dying to follow them, but the external propriety which she maintained on all occasions prevented her from doing as she wished.

The smoke became dense and choking; some burning coals fell into the path, and

Platon, while still running, had all he could do to extinguish those which were within his reach. The general snuffed the air loudly.

“It is the birches,” said he; “what a perfume!”

In spite of the gravity of the situation both he and his friends burst out laughing. Agnes could restrain herself no longer, and ran to join the advance-guard, who were horrified.

A vast clearing which had been made the preceding year, and in which a few scattered trees had been left for shade, was burning like a brazier. Some small pines, and some clusters of birches, scarcely three feet high, gave excellent food to the flames; the furze which carpeted the ground spread the fire, even by its roots, and it all flamed up with a strange noise and a ferocious activity.

“We must lose a good deal of it,” said the general, pointing out with his hand a considerable circuit. The forest itself was very near,

separated from this brazier by a path only seven or eight yards wide. Fortunately the wind did not blow to that side, but a whirl of the wind might bend the tops of the lofty burning birches towards the great trees already scorched, and the fire would then take on the proportions of a disaster, the extent of which could not be foreseen.

“How beautiful!” said Agnes, in a low voice.

“Is it not?” responded Ermile, who found himself near her, no one knows how. “What a misfortune that it should be so horrible! Look at that birch,—it seems as if it were really alive: it writhes; its branches crack; one would say it is begging for mercy.”

The other spectators looked on in silent consternation. A crowd of women and children who seemed to have sprung out of the ground contemplated the spectacle with a good degree of philosophy. The forest which was burning belonged to the general; if it had been the

common property they would have been more anxious.

A squadron of peasants appeared, under the direction of an old man, with picks and spades on their shoulders.

“Bravo! my children; you are prompt,” cried the general. “Begin your work there,” pointing to the part nearest the forest; “you know what is to be done, don't you? And you others, clear away this underbrush quickly. The clearing is burning; let it burn, but do not let the fire spread.”

The men set to work with wonderful rapidity. The Russian peasants are slow in their movements, and display violent activity only before a fire in the forest; but there they are unequalled in energy and promptitude.

“And you women, go to work!” shouted the general. “What is the matter that you stand there open-mouthed, and chatter like magpies? Get your brooms and forks and throw back into the fire all that falls upon the road. Quick!”

The village was not more than three hundred yards away. In a few minutes the implements were brought, and the women, ranged in rows, as when they turn the hay, began to sweep the ground.

The heat was intense, and the spectators were careful to keep to the windward of the fire. Dusia watched to see that Vera kept near Mademoiselle Titof. Platon, Ermile, and Kolã worked with the men to make the ditch around the fire so that it should not be fed by the roots and spread still further.

Agnes, near her mother, watched the exciting scene, and asked herself why it was that it inspired her with interest rather than with regret.

The general approached Madame Sourof. "Do you see," said he, pointing to the east, "the river is there, thirty yards away? It flows down the slope, so there is not much to fear if the fire spreads on that side; but if it goes to the right, we are, that is to say, I am,

burned out. The wood extends to the garden fence and adjoins the barns. In one hour I may be all ruined, or in part. But sit down, ladies, you will be tired."

With his chivalric politeness, meritorious at such a time and under such circumstances, he showed the ladies to the trunk of a fallen tree lying on the side of the road, where Vera was already sitting with her governess.

"Ah! if I had water enough," continued he, "it would be easy. I know some brave fellows who would cut down the dangerous trees; but it would be necessary to make a path through the furnace in order not to be roasted alive there."

"Why," said Agnes, "the river is so near?"

"So near, but it is so low down, at least fifteen yards. If we should bring it in buckets the water would all be spilled before it was half-way to the fire."

Agnes looked at Baranine with a strange expression of perplexity. Suddenly she made

a motion with her hand, as if she were answering some welcome thought, and ran towards the house.

“What is the matter with her?” asked the general, in surprise.

“She has a new idea,” answered Dosia, smiling. “That is the way in which she usually manifests them. She has thought of something of which you will probably know soon.”

Baranine went to encourage his men, who were black with cinders and smoke. Platon, his son, and Ermile worked like simple workmen, and the blows of their picks were not the least energetic.

“It wearies me to do nothing,” suddenly exclaimed Marie, who had more than once searched mechanically in her pocket for her ball of wool. “Look here, child! you are too young. It is absurd! Give me your brush-broom, already half worn out.”

The little peasant thus apostrophized allowed her broom to be taken from her, and

Marie bravely took her place among the women at work, but not without having first pinned up her skirt with two pins.

“Agnes does not return,” said Vera, anxiously. “Suppose I go for her?”

“No, no,” replied her mother. “If you went after her, in a moment Mademoiselle Titof would go after you, and, neither of you coming back, I should start off to find you all. Meantime each one would return by a different way, and would then go back in search of the others. I know all about that.”

However, Dosia was not at ease, and the time seemed long to her. She was wondering whether she ought not to go to the house, when the sound of the bells drew her attention to the road.

“A traveller!” said Baranine, who had come up. “Well, he will have a nice time passing here! The road has caved in, and if he has more than three horses he will be overturned in the new ditch.”

But the bells did not sound like those of a team on the trot; they approached slowly.

“What the devil is it?” said the puzzled general.

Just then there appeared on the road a truly extraordinary equipage, — an old white horse, drawing an enormous hogshead, mounted on four wheels, which was provided with a spout, and a pail with a handle to draw up the water. On the horse, seated comfortably enough, with her feet on the shaft, Agnes held the reins.

“Agnes! And there is water!” cried Baranine. “Hurrah!”

The astonished workmen stopped a moment.

“Hurrah!” repeated the general. “Hurrah for the young lady! Now the forest is as good as saved.”

Every voice repeated the hurrah.

With the modesty of true merit Agnes continued to advance. Then she jumped down from the horse and gave the pail with the long

handle to her father, who had come to meet her.

“This was an idea,” said Platon, “and a good one. How did you manage it?”

A half-dozen men with their axes were already cutting a path through the underbrush, which was about to take fire. Others, at the same time, were pouring water to prevent the fire from surrounding the pioneers.

“I thought of the hogshhead all of a sudden,” replied Agnes to her father, “and remembered that I had seen the old Whitey draw it many a time. I knew he was gentle as a lamb, and I took him from the stable. I had some trouble in harnessing him because I did not know how to do it. There was not a soul in the house, naturally. At last I made it out. I went to the banks of the stream, and there—oh, it was such fun!—I found a strange gentleman who was about to ford the river in his carriage. When I tried to draw up the water to put it in the hogshhead I spilled

much more over myself than I put in the cask."

"That was not strange," said Platon, laughing.

"Then the gentleman took the reins and ordered his coachman to fill the hogshead. You cannot imagine how comical it was, — this coachman, with his long cloth coat and Muscovite cap, drawing up the water with the gravest manner, while the other held the horses with an equally serious air. I was dying to laugh, but I did not."

"You are wet?" said Platon, passing his hands over his daughter's shoulders.

"I was, but one dries quickly in this heat. I do not know how you can endure it. Just see Vera and Mademoiselle Titof, sitting over there for pleasure. It is cool in the woods. On the bank of the stream it is shady; it is delicious. The cask is empty. I will go and fetch some more water."

With a quick, light movement she jumped

on the back of the horse, arranged her dress about her feet as if it had been a riding-habit, shook the reins on the back of the gentle beast, and made it trot, although for ten years it had given up the habit of doing so. With the decreasing sound of the bells Agnes disappeared under the thick birches which made an arch above her head.

Baranine had watched her going off with a mingling of gratitude and admiration, while he also felt like laughing. The picture was, at the same time, both graceful and comical. He immediately turned towards the women, and shouted in a thundering voice:—

“Fools that you are, there is not one of you who would have had the idea of this young lady. You have water-casks in the village; go and fetch them quickly!”

All the women scattered at first, then three or four ran on, while the others returned to their work. A quarter of an hour later the woods were filled with the sound of the bells,

and Agnes, as she returned, found herself obliged to give up Whitey's reins to coarser hands than her own.

"It is too bad!" said she, sighing. "I have not had such fun for a long time."

The day was passing. The sun was disappearing behind the forest, and the flames seemed redder. Every one was weary, and yet the danger was not overcome. They were sure that the fire would not be spread further by the roots, because the ditches dug so hastily, now constantly filled with water, formed an impassable barrier around the great extent of the clearing which had been sacrificed. But the trees whose branches were already nearly consumed began to burn at the trunks. If their fall should precipitate them beyond the trench there would be much to fear. The forest, already singed by the intensity of the blaze, had more than once taken fire, in some bushes upon its borders, from the rain of burning cinders. A path was finally opened

through the blazing underbrush, and the thing now to be done was to cut down two birches which were especially dangerous by their nearness to the road. The lavish use of the water permitted the wood-cutters to begin their work, but no one seemed anxious to put the axe to a tree which was dropping burning coals instead of fruit.

“Forward, children!” exclaimed Baranine. “If I were young I should be the first.”

A very excusable hesitation was still to be seen among the group of men. Suddenly a jet sprang forth spontaneously from a tree, near the ditch, which had been spared until now. The fire curled up the leaves with an almost joyous crackling; the branches snapped and threw their flaming fragments into the air like a show of fireworks.

Ermile hastily seized one of the wet linen sacks with which the men covered their heads and shoulders, and with an axe in his hand he

rushed forward under the rain of fire. The sound of the first blow of his axe was heard in the profound silence which had before been interrupted only by the hissing of the flames. Kola followed him immediately, and Baranine's cook, a tall, sturdy, fine-looking fellow, rushed after him. All the peasants would have followed if the general had not called them to order.

The flame and smoke sprang in fantastic jets, from time to time, and revealed the workmen to those who remained on the road. Agnes took a little turn on the road. She wished to see what would happen, and she went near the tree where Ermile was at work. She could not see the pioneers, but she heard their voices, though they scarcely spoke in the smoke which blinded them and stung their throats. A group of children had followed her and remained near, watching the oscillations of the tree which was attacked. At each blow of an axe it shook down a shower of sparks. Two

other trees trembled also, and seemed ready to fall. A cracking was heard and the trunk of Ermile's tree bent towards the road. The children ran away, except one, younger or less intelligent than the others, who was looking up open-mouthed.

Agnes began to retreat, measuring, with her eye, the probable extent of the danger, receding but an inch at a time, for the sake of caution. The pleasure of danger was a new and delicious sensation to her, and she wished to enjoy it to the full.

"Agnes!" cried out some voice in alarm.

"Here I am," replied she, mechanically.

She heard steps behind her, and, thinking she would be scolded for exposing herself thus, she cast one look of regret at the tree, now leaning over so much that its fall was imminent, and at the same instant she saw, opposite to her, the child, petrified in unconscious admiration.

"Agnes!" cried her father, with an imper-

ative tone; he was a few yards behind her. The tree cracked, staggered, throwing out a torrent of sparks.

Agnes rushed forward, with an impulsive, irresistible movement, and snatched the child up in her arms. At the same instant the tree fell across the road, exactly in the place where the little peasant had stood, and they were both surrounded with a whirlwind of flame and smoke.

Agnes leaped rapidly over the largest pieces of burning wood, walked over the rest without thinking, and reappeared in the road. She was not injured, but her dress was burned in five or six places, and her shoes were beginning to smoke.

She put the child down, safe and sound, and looked about her, smiling vaguely in the loved faces which surrounded her; then, raising her hand to her half-burned hair, she fainted and fell into her father's arms.

A little fresh water on her temples soon

restored her. When she opened her eyes Ermile was watching her with a face full of anxiety, and she could not resist smiling, to reassure him.

“ Agnes ! ” said her mother's trembling voice, “ I ought to be very angry with you ” —

“ O mamma ! do not say that ; you would have done the same. Where is the child ? ”

It was near by, in the arms of its mother, who was weeping violently.

“ Everything is all right,” said Agnes, rising, “ except that I have burned my dress. It does not look very well.”

Nothing further was said : all hearts were too full for words. Meantime the two other birches had fallen in the burnt clearing. Water was thrown all about them, and the danger seemed to be over.

At this moment Kola and the cook came up, as black and smutty as Ermile himself.

“ You are a brave fellow,” said Baranine to

his cook, who was running rapidly towards the house. "Where are you running so fast?"

"Ah, Your Excellency," replied the worthy fellow, turning around, "it is six o'clock, and I have not yet begun to prepare your dinner!" He went on without waiting for a reply.

"Why, how you look, all of you!" said the general. "I am ashamed to be clean, upon my word!"

"The fact is," said Ermile, looking at his hands, "I must be hideous." He cast an anxious look towards Agnes, who was always so exacting as to appearances. She looked him straight in the face.

"It is the first time in my life that I have thought you handsome," said she, heartily.

The others laughed. Ermile did not feel like laughing. He felt an earnestness in her voice which precluded all thought of pleasantry.

"It is the same with her," thought he; "with her scorched hair and her tattered dress

she seems to me a hundred times more beautiful than in an exquisite toilet."

Some watchmen were left to look out for the burned precinct, and the others slowly took their way to the house. Each one felt himself exhausted and in need of rest. The young people were hungry as well, and Vera dared to say so.

"I don't know what you will have for dinner," said the general, "and I am miserable."

As they approached the kitchen the cook came out to meet them. He had washed his face and hands and put on a fresh pink shirt.

"Excuse me, Your Excellency," said he to the general, in a confused manner.

"Can you give us nothing to eat?" asked Baranine, in a vexed tone.

"Pardon, Excellency! There is a cold roast, an *aspic* of game, a cold fish in jelly, and *bouillon* for soup."

“ Ah, you stupid boy! — what else do we need?” said Baranine, gayly.

“ You ordered some ices, and it takes time to make them.”

A suppressed laugh ran through the company.

“ We shall not have ices!” cried Dosia, with the merriment of her best days. “ Just think, my children, you will have no ices! They are all melted!”

Her gesture of dismay was so droll that the cook tried to hide his shamefaced smile, and, not succeeding, he returned to his kitchen.

“ Look here, Nikita!” called out the general.

The cook’s head appeared at the window.

“ How soon can we have dinner?”

“ You must give me half an hour at least, Your Excellency, for the fire is out; it is a pity.”

At this unexpected remark they all laughed again. “ There is no more fire! — that is really

sad," said Baranine, laughing louder than the rest. "Ah, well, we will wait!"

It required more than an hour for our friends to remove the stains of their labor. They came to the dining-room, at last, in the drollest costumes. Dosia, her husband, and the governess were able to wear their own clothes, after brushing them. Vera also wore her dress, although it was badly enough soiled by the cinders; but the young men were obliged to borrow from the wardrobe of the general, which, in spite of the willingness of his *valet de chambre*, could furnish nothing that was not three or four times too large for them.

Since there was no mistress of the house to whom Agnes and Marie could apply, they had been obliged to have recourse to the chambermaid. They came in dressed as peasants, each one with her hair in a single braid down her back. They were greeted with shouts and laughter.

They took their places at the table, and the repast was served in an original and irregular manner, which the general, even, had not the heart to censure, and due allowance was made for the circumstances. The dinner went on slowly, the dishes were brought in at long intervals, and it seemed that the servants wished to gain time. At length the vegetable had followed the roast, and, having been eaten, the general leaned towards Dosia to ask her to give the signal for rising. At this moment, and without exactly observing the proper form, the waiter placed on the table porcelain plates, upon which were the knives and forks for the dessert.

“But there is no dessert,” grumbled the general. “Nikita said that he could not make the ices, and I don’t wonder, poor fellow!”

“Your Excellency, there is a dessert,” politely murmured the servant.

“Oh, there is a dessert! It is for that you have gained — or lost as much time as possible. Let us see Nikita’s surprise.”

The steward entered, triumphantly bearing a pyramid. All the servants, with an air of pleasure, seemed to give it their best wishes as it passed in.

“What have you there?” asked the puzzled Baranine.

“Raspberry ice-cream!” cried Vera, clapping her hands.

It was true. In the shadow of the pantry the silhouette of the cook might be seen, who wanted to witness the effect of his surprise.

“Nikita, come here,” commanded the general, coughing, to clear his voice, which was husky with emotion.

“Here I am, Your Excellency,” said the good fellow, appearing at the door-way.

“No one could have done what you have done to-day, Nikita,” said his master, seriously. “It is not on account of the tree you cut down that I say this, although the tree in itself, and in that furnace,—in short, others did as much

as that. But it is for your service as cook. I am satisfied with you, Nikita."

"I thank Your Excellency. God give you long life," said the young man, smiling with content, as he retired, quietly.

"The Russians are like that," said Baranine, in French, to his guests. "We are a curious nation. We are not yet entirely spoiled. Come, my friends, let us eat the ice; that will please him."

In spite of the persuasions of the general Monsieur and Madame Sourof wished to return home that evening. It seemed to them that since morning a century had passed.

"You will carry to Sourova an odor of fire which will last at least a fortnight," said the excellent man; "it will prevent your forgetting me, and I shall not forget you; I have good reason for that."

He pinched Agnes's ear lightly, while she blushed and smiled at the same time.

"What a curious thing!" continued he, —

“one invites his friends to pass the day with him, and amuses them with a fire. He makes them work like firemen, and everybody is satisfied. What do you want? You seem to be meditating a question.”

“I want to know something of that little boy; who is he?”

“The one you saved? He is the son of the second coachman. His mother is as stupid as a goose; his father is often drunk. He will be a fool, like his father and mother. Meantime, he owes his life to you.”

“Oh, dear!” said Agnes, sadly. “In novels those who are saved are always extraordinary beings, full of merit and virtue; and in real life it is a simpleton, and the son of a simpleton, who will never see further than the end of his nose.”

“Do you wish to have him carried back?” asked the general, laughing. “There is still fire enough to burn up the little brute.”

“Thank you,” replied Agnes, in the same

tone. "Since he has escaped, it was his destiny. You know one does not hang twice by the same rope; but you must grant it is less agreeable for me than if he had been a prince in a fairy tale."

"A matter of self-conceit!" said Ermile, near her, so low that she alone heard it. She turned suddenly.

"Pardon me, if I wound you," said he, very low and with much kindness. "But a good action should not be measured by its object; it is simply a matter of humanity. See the physicians in time of an epidemic. Do they trouble themselves to value intellectually or morally those for whom they endanger their lives?"

She turned away thoughtfully, but her face expressed no anger. A moment later they entered the carriages. The two young men rode with Monsieur and Madame Sourof. The four young girls followed in the second carriage, and Agnes said no more to Ermile that evening.

As usual he shared the chamber of Kola, but his sleep was troubled; more than a dozen times he awoke with a start, at the moment when, in his dream, Agnes was surrounded with flames, bearing a child in her arms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEARS.

TEN days had passed, and the Sourof family were beginning to recover from their alarm, when one day, about two o'clock, as they were all sitting in the drawing-room, to avoid the heat outside, a sound of bells was heard coming along by the garden hedge. It ceased in the court, and the servant appeared, with a card on a salver.

“Constantine Semenof,” read Platon. “I do not know him. Who is he?”

“He is a nobleman, monsieur,” which means, in the language of servants, that a man is a gentleman.

“What does he wish?”

“He desires to see Monsieur and Madame Sourof, in order to pay his respects to them as a neighbor.”

"It must be the new proprietor at Kouzlo," said Dosia.

"Show him in," said Platon.

The visitor presented himself in the most approved manner, wearing a diagonal cloth of the English fashion of that year. He had, however, entirely the bearing of a Russian of good breeding.

"Oh!" said Agnes, in a low tone.

Mademoiselle looked at her, surprised at her rudeness.

"It is the gentleman of the river bank," said Agnes, in a whisper, by way of explanation.

The new-comer did not appear to notice Agnes more than the others. He advanced towards Platon, mentioned his name, and requested the pleasure of being presented to Madame Sourof. All this was irreproachable. Dosia invited her guest to be seated; he complied with grace, and a conversation began.

He was, in fact, the new proprietor of a very considerable estate, situated some *versts* distant,

on the other side of the stream which watered the general's forest, but nearer to Sourova. He was making the necessary round of ceremonious visits among his neighbors, and was full of praise of the surroundings and of the country.

Semenof had tact, and proved this by speaking of himself in such a way as to make himself known without wearying his hearers with his personality. He showed no curiosity regarding those whom he visited.

When inviting him to sit down, Dosia had simply said, "My daughters," with a gesture which designated Agnes and Vera. His silent inclination, with a perfect elegance of manner, had provoked a courtesy from Vera and a slight bow from Agnes.

The proprieties being ended, the visitor addressed himself to Platon.

"Has your friend, General Baranine, put out his fire?" asked he, with a slight smile.

"The same day, after a few hours," was the response. "Did you know of it?"

Agnes, who was annoyed, said calmly, "This is the gentleman who made his coachman fill the cask."

"It was you?" said Dosia, laughing. "You should have said so at once; you would have been treated as a benefactor."

"I should prefer to be received on my own account," replied Semenof, with great courtesy.

There was more cordiality in the conversation of the next few minutes. Semenof, with an admirable reserve, avoided speaking of Agnes, or addressing himself directly to her, and, moreover, when he was gone no one could even say that he had looked at her.

"That was a visit to you, Agnes," said Dosia, in a light tone. "You have fished up an adorer on the bank of the river, with your handled pail."

"Mamma, you know very well that I detest such jokes," replied the young girl, in an angry voice, and she shut herself up until evening in the silence of her worst days.

After a proper time had elapsed Monsieur Constantine Semenof, who had meantime received a visit from Platon, presented himself a second time at Sourova. The head of the family had made inquiries concerning his visitor, and all that he could learn being very favorable, the new-comer was invited to dinner the following week. Such is Russian hospitality, always generous. He came, and was extremely correct, as usual, but he showed a shade more of marked attention to Agnes.

She feigned not to see it; but Vera, who was not content with being a good little girl, round and plump as a quail, was, into the bargain a cunning gypsy. This malicious Vera said that evening, as she was going to bed: —

“Ania, is it for the pleasure of papa’s conversation that Monsieur Semenof comes here?”

“I believe not,” replied Agnes, without suspicion, “for he talks to papa of the least interesting things, and the first one who happens to come along will do as well for him.”

“Ania,” again said the sly little one, “is it for the sake of mamma’s beautiful eyes that Monsieur Semenoff comes?”

“Vera!” cried Mademoiselle Titof, who was scandalized. But Vera was not to be abashed, and continued: —

“Ania, it must be, then, for your beautiful eyes, for if you had been a Charlotte-russe you would have melted under the fire of his looks.”

“Vera, will you hold your tongue?” said Mademoiselle Titof, quite upset at hearing such reflections from the mouth of her innocent pupil.

The little innocent leaped on her bed, seated herself, and arranged her small feet under her night-dress. Then she took her knees in her arms, and, resting her little chin on them, she looked at her sister with the most audacious knowingness, then, half turning her face, flushed with pleasure, towards her governess: —

“You don’t understand me,” said she. “No

one knows what I can do. But nothing can prevent my being mamma's daughter, and mamma said many worse things at my age without minding what she did" —

"Vera! Vera!" cried Mademoiselle Titof, amazed at this new language.

"Kola is papa's son — pure cream — and Agnes, nobody knows — there is some cream, and some whey — very sour."

"Is that all, little fool?" said the elder sister, in her most scornful tone.

Vera shook her head, and continued, quite undisturbed: —

"I am a little jumping-Jack out of its box! No one knew what was inside; it is a surprise. But I shall not show all my merits until my sister Agnes is married and gone; when that great, clumsy Ermile, or, better, this new wooden gentleman who dined here to-day; or, better yet, another still more new, shall have led away my dear sister. You know that he is made of wood, — your

lover. His head can be separated from his neck. At night he takes it off and puts it on the table so as not to hurt it."

"Vera! Vera! you are crazy!" said Mademoiselle Titof, falling into a chair.

"Oh, no!" said the child, with extreme candor. "But you do not appreciate my kindness. If I had shown all my qualities while Agnes is still in the house, between us two you would have lost your head, dear mademoiselle; but with one at a time you may manage it. There! I have finished. I will say no more until the day of your wedding, Agnes. Good-night."

She dove down quickly under the bedclothes, and said no more. A minute later her regular breathing announced that she was asleep. Mademoiselle Titof and Agnes went into the next room.

"Well, this is something new!" said the dismayed governess. "Who could have thought it?"

“I have suspected it more than once,” replied Agnes; “but it is a surprise all the same. It will annoy mamma.”

“Happily Vera is not a dozen years old; she may be corrected.”

Agnes smiled involuntarily. She knew by experience that one does not correct her disposition unless she wishes to do so herself; but her smile was mingled with bitterness, because she was not inclined to take things in good part.

“It is true that he is wooden, this Semenof,” thought she before she went to sleep. “He is also as proper as a well-clothed marionette. Happily we shall not see him often, I hope.”

In this Agnes was deceived. Semenof did come often, — twice a week, at least, — in immaculate dress, as usual; and in the interval he sent, on the ground of being a near neighbor, superb fruit and flowers to Madame Sourof.

“This gentleman is very polite,” said Dosia,

one day, as she received a basket of hot-house grapes; "but he annoys me a little, because I do not know how to acknowledge his politeness, not wishing it" —

"We shall go back to Petersburg in two months," said Platon, in a consoling tone.

"Two months is a long time in such a case. I do not know why he annoys me so, this Monsieur Semenov."

"He has a gift for it!" said Vera, from her corner.

Fortunately her mother did not hear her.

A servant entered bringing a very large package. "The furrier sent it," said he, putting it on the floor.

"It is the mother of my bears," said Agnes; "let us see it, mamma."

The strings were cut, and the monstrous head of a bear of the largest size appeared, then the paws, and at last the whole skin.

"What a superb carpet for your father's work-room!" said Dosia, admiring the thick,

dark fur. "But it smells so strong of the animal that it is unendurable; it must be hung out for several days, and some one must be careful to bring it into the drying-room at night."

The skin was quickly spread out on the lawn, under the beautiful September sun, which still gave out a very perceptible heat.

"Let us go to see my bears," said Agnes; "it is a long time since I have paid any attention to them."

"Our bears," corrected Vera.

Agnes looked at her crossly, but then reflecting that Vera, having begun to play tricks upon her elders, was able now to claim the ownership of her bear, she said nothing.

Dosia followed her daughters slowly, looking pleasantly around. She had preserved her wonderful facility for interesting herself in everything, and her life was full of unforeseen enchantments and pleasant discoveries.

“How they have grown!” said Agnes. “It is at least a fortnight since I have brought them anything. Michka, Michka, come here!”

But the summoned Michka, who was sitting up, regarded her with a sullen air.

She had rested her hands against the bars of the grating in order to see them better. Suddenly the other bear, growling, extended his paw and muzzle at the same moment towards the delicate white hand, which appeared to him like a dainty morsel.

Without screaming Agnes drew back hastily, but her pallor showed how terrified she was. Dosia ran to her daughter, and, with her handkerchief wet in the fountain, immediately bathed the deep scratches.

“It is nothing, mamma,” said the young girl; “thank you.”

However, the blood was flowing, and they returned to the house in great confusion. Platon came out to meet them, and, when he

heard of the accident, declared that the two bears should be killed the next day.

“It was wrong to keep them so long,” said he. “Such beasts are only fit for bear shows, and I condemn those from the standpoint of humanity. It is cruelty and madness to keep them in confinement, as this event has proved.”

“Papa,” said Agnes, “I beg you not to kill my bear; it was his brother that clawed at me.”

“And to-morrow yours will bite some one else. No, my daughter, what I have said I shall do. They shall not be made to suffer. A ball in the head, and they will no longer be dangerous.”

Agnes was very much displeased. Since her experience in the forest she had become enamored of danger, and the scratch of the bear's claw had given her less physical suffering than justifiable pride on account of the courage with which she had borne it. She

considered her father's decision as a personal affront, and fell into her most unsocial humor.

Towards evening Vera, wishing to console her, came to her secretly.

"Agnes," asked she, "is your hand very bad?"

"Very bad? No, but bad enough."

"Can you move it?"

"Yes; but not much."

"It is the left hand, luckily, for I want your help."

"Why?"

"Ermile and Kola are coming back from their visit to the old Drakof this evening. I want to play a trick on them; but first promise me that you will not tell any one."

"If it is dangerous I shall tell it immediately."

"It is not dangerous; will you promise me?"

"Say what it is, and if it is dangerous you will not do it."

“All right. I have faith in you. They do not know that the bear-skin has come home, and they have forgotten about it. I want to frighten them.”

“How?” asked Agnes, pleased with this prospect.

“We must put the bear-skin in their bedroom during supper-time, and when they go to bed they will make a fine racket. Probably they will fire a pistol at it; that would be delicious.”

Agnes reflected.. She had all her mother's irrepressible fondness for fun, though she very rarely indulged herself in it; this time the occasion was too tempting. She wished to do it all the more because her father had passed sentence on the bears, and her mother had not opposed him.

“That can be done,” said she; “but if we are caught we shall be scolded.”

“That is nothing,” replied Vera, lifting her brows disdainfully. “You ought to have been

accustomed to that long ago, and I must get used to it. It will happen to me often enough."

Agnes nodded affirmatively. Once more or less was not of importance, and then, in reality, she was not sorry to brave the paternal authority.

"Very well," said she, with her usual dignity, "at eight o'clock we will go."

"Your wooden lover dines here; perhaps that will prevent us."

"Oh, no; since they will not find the bear until they go to bed."

"All right, we will do it."

The delighted Vera leaped on her sister's neck and stifled her with kisses. She then went away, but after a few steps returned.

"Say, Agnes, what if, instead of frightening these great boobies, we should put the bear in Mademoiselle Titof's dressing-room? Perhaps that would be still more fun."

"I will not have Mademoiselle Titof teased," said Agnes, gravely. "It is another thing with

the young men. Kola has teased us enough ; it would only be paying him off."

The wooden gentleman arrived about five o'clock, and at the first glance Agnes saw that he was prepared for something extraordinary. Not that his dress or his personal appearance were different from that of other days, but his language and manners betrayed something important and premeditated.

"Look out! it's coming to-day, Agnes," said Vera, softly, as she passed near her.

Fortunately General Baranine came almost immediately, drawn by four piebald horses, on which he plumed himself so much the more because their color was not the fashion. He had bought them at a bargain, for almost nothing. They all went out to see his turnout, and he received many compliments on it. Semenov, alone, approved it faintly.

"They are very fine," said he, "and well matched; but, general, that will always be an eccentric turnout for you; they are not classic."

Kola came up at this moment with Ermile, just in time to catch this sentence, and, in order not to laugh, he was forced to make so droll a grimace that Agnes's ill-humor could not hold out against it. Vera, in mocking gayety, pinched her arm enough to bring the tears. She took to flight, and went to stifle her laughter in her pillow.

"It is classic enough for him," said Vera, who had followed and thrown herself on the floor, the better to give way to her fun. "Kola's Greeks and Romans were simple vagrants to him! Henceforth he shall be called '*Monsieur Classique*,' with a capital C."

The dinner-bell sounded. "We shall be scolded," said Vera, rising quickly. "I am not sorry for that; it makes me believe myself to be a grown-up woman, like my sister Agnes."

The company came from all directions to the dining-room, so large, and so bright. Dosia looked at her daughters severely; but it was

lost on them, for they lowered their eyes with the most effective modesty. Agnes was placed beside Semenof, who had not appeared to notice her flight before dinner. He was extremely amiable and she extremely polite. Unfortunately during the whole dinner she could not help hearing Vera's voice, who, while talking unaffectedly, now to Ermile, and again to Mademoiselle Titof, managed to use the word "classic" at least twice every five minutes. This upset Agnes's politeness a little, as she feared that she should burst into a shout of laughter.

At length the dinner was over, and they went into the drawing-room for the coffee. Baranine announced his intention of leaving almost immediately, as he did not wish to be late with his turnout of four horses, which his coachman was driving for the first time. Moreover, the night was very dark in spite of the rising of the full moon, and everything gave signs of heavy rain.

The two sisters exchanged a knowing look and slipped away very quietly.

The bear-skin was in the drying-room, and, taking a little lamp, they succeeded in carrying it off, one holding it by the head, and the other by the hind paws. They carried it to Kola's chamber, on the upper floor. The hour was eminently favorable, as the domestics were eating their dinner in the kitchen, situated in an isolated building, as is the fashion in the country.

A candle was lighted, and the young girls arranged the fur in several ways before they found that which was most effective. At length, after many unsuccessful trials, they thought of placing it on two chairs, so that the head would be at about the height of a person's eyes, and the rest of the skin well supported. In the shadow of the curtains the monstrous beast was truly frightful. Then they put out the light, closed the door, and descended noiselessly to the parlor.

The gentlemen had disappeared, and the noise of the balls indicated that they were in the billiard-room. General Baranine was standing to take leave of his hosts.

Vera ran to tell her father, who appeared with Ermile, their billiard queues in their hands; with them they made a military salute, and the excellent man departed at the fastest speed of his piebald horses.

"Can I speak with you a few moments?" said Monsieur Semenof, in his most amiable tone.

"Certainly," replied Platon.

"My children," said Dosia, "go and play us a duet."

"The Wedding March of the Midsummer Night's Dream," said Vera, with such an air of innocence that her mother did not notice it, and replied, with an absent air, "Yes, that, or anything you like."

Vera, full of fun, drew her sister to the piano, and made such a noise with the bass

octaves, that if Monsieur Semenof succeeded in making himself heard he must have had a loud voice.

After the march a *scherzo*, after the *scherzo* a *nocturne*. The last was played very softly, and Semenof, not foreseeing it, this phrase, which he pronounced without precaution, was distinctly heard: —

“The advantages of fortune are not to be despised. I can also boast, myself, on account of my family; my grandfather” —

Vera, without reason, struck at that moment a tremendously loud chord on the piano.

“You will never know who his grandfather was,” said she to her sister; “so much the better” —

Semenof had lowered his tone, perceiving that the music had ceased to exact so much effort on his part. The *nocturne* was dying away in an ethereal softness, when the door opposite the piano was violently thrown open, then closed again, and the favorite cham-

bermaid precipitated herself into the room, screaming like a wild-cat.

“Miss Agnes! Miss Agnes! the bear!”

She rushed under the piano, and literally hugged Agnes's knees, in which she buried her clutching fingers. The sober people, at the other end of the vast room, rose suddenly.

“Now we have it,” said Vera, quickly.

The head of the bear appeared at the door, which was half opened cautiously. A growling was heard; one paw was shaken, then a second, and the entire beast entered on the head of Kola, who growled with a certain talent, though feebly, in comparison to the size of the animal. Ermile followed him with a disturbed air. There was smothered laughter in the corridor, where the presence of all the servants could be guessed.

Kola advanced to the piano, swinging himself along, and threw the fur down at his sisters' feet. The chambermaid gave a final

scream; on her hands and knees she crawled in against the wall, and sat there, with dishevelled hair, and eyes starting out of her head.

"This is the greatest impropriety," said Dosia, angrily. "Such jokes as these cannot be tolerated. Go out, Nicolas!"

"Mamma, I am to blame," said Agnes, bravely. "I carried the skin to my brother's room."

"Mamma, it was I who thought of it," interrupted Vera. "Agnes has only helped me; and, with her hand all bruised, she couldn't do much."

"The fault is all mine," said her brother. "If I had left the skin in my own room no one would have known it."

Platon and Dosia were much embarrassed between their three children, so much the more since Semenof was present; without losing his urbanity for a moment. He had barely smiled when Agnes accused herself.

“That is enough; we will talk it over later,” said Platon, and, turning to Semenof, “Will you pardon the interruption, sir?”

“Which has not changed my feeling,” replied Semenof, bowing. “I hold to my request; and if I dared I should say that I am more anxious for it than ever. I adore wit and humor, and all that sort of thing,” added he, turning himself with a grave bow towards Agnes, who was choking with laughter.

“You are very fortunate, monsieur,” replied she. “I enjoy it too; that is why I cannot endure stiffness and compliments and all that sort of thing.”

Semenof did not answer, but he turned pale. “What sparkling wit!” said he, with a pleasant smile, addressing Dosia. “I shall have the honor to return, on any day you may name, to resume this conversation.”

“I will write to you,” said Platon, heartily wishing him to the devil.

“I shall be much obliged. I am your

servant, ladies. My dear sir, do not take the trouble" —

Escorted by Platon he took his leave very properly; mounted his calash, and left Sourova.

Kola had disappeared, obeying the command of his mother, but he remained near, so as to answer if he should be called. Ermile had rejoined him.

"It was kind of you, Ermile," said the unhappy boy to him, "not to have told me that you had warned me two or three times."

"That would have done no good," said the reasonable Ermile.

"I have no chance," exclaimed Kola. "Another day mamma would have laughed. If it had not been for that conceited fellow who was there, with his offer of marriage."

"Of marriage?" repeated Ermile, troubled.

"Yes; Vera saw it, and she was right. You understand that bringing in a bear, in the midst of an offer of marriage, was a

grave affair. Vera will be punished for a week, at least."

While he was tormenting himself the two culprits left in the parlor — to which Platon had returned — explained all to their mother. The chambermaid was sent away, after having been duly "scolded all over," as she said later, for her cowardice. Vera went to confide her misfortunes to Mademoiselle Titof, whom a headache had confined to her room all day.

Agnes was thus left alone with her parents, and the spirit of revolt began to rise in her with a violence that she had not yet known. Her mother said "*vous*" to her, and this little thing troubled her more than all the rest.

"Your bad disposition shows itself even to strangers. This man came here to offer you his hand, and you act like a school-girl on her vacation."

"The joke was innocent," replied Agnes.

"It was that gentleman's offer which spoiled it; but that was not my fault."

There was much truth in this remark, but Dosia was angry, and it only irritated her all the more.

"He speaks to you with regard and deference, and you reply like a badly behaved child."

"I cannot bear stiffness, and foolish compliments, and all that sort of thing," replied Agnes, defiantly.

"My daughter!" said Dosia, indignantly. Platon thought best to interfere.

"Go to your room, Agnes," said he. "Think over your conduct during the night, and to-morrow morning we will talk of it."

As she approached her parents for her good-night kiss Dosia turned away. Platon placed his hand on his daughter's head with a gentle sadness, and merely said, "Good night."

This gesture, which was a caress, moved

the young girl deeply. Her eyes were full of tears, and if her mother had only looked at her she would have fallen at her knees and asked her pardon. But Dosia, much displeased, would not turn her head, and Agnes went out, feeling herself treated with great injustice.

In her chamber she found Vera, who had wept like a river, and had dried her eyes by means of four pocket-handkerchiefs, which were soaking wet. Seeing her sister, the child precipitated herself into her arms with effusion.

“It is all my fault, my dear sister, my good Ania.”

Agnes was hardened only in appearance. She received Vera's caresses with a tenderness that was delicious to the young culprit, because it was entirely new, — a tenderness she had never known. After putting her sister to bed, and kissing her many times, Agnes went to Mademoiselle Titof's chamber, which adjoined that of Vera.

A night-lamp was burning. The poor governess, after a day of cruel headache, had suffered a rude shock in seeing her pupil come to her in tears.

"Well," said she to Agnes, raising herself on her elbow with difficulty, "how has it gone with you?"

"Very badly; I am in the most complete disgrace."

"Bless me! How is that?"

"Because that fool Semenof has got into his head to offer his precious self to me, and I have sent him flying."

"You have done that!"

"Exactly! I should like to know if I am obliged to marry against my will."

"But, my dear, no one asks you to do that."

Agnes took up a paper which was lying under her hand, and began to twist it nervously between her fingers. "I don't know what is wanted of me, but I know I have been treated

as if I had committed some crime, and I have not deserved it."

The paper crunched in her fingers as if it had been Semenof's joints.

"Please drop that paper, Agnes darling," said Mademoiselle Titof, quietly; "it is my passport which has just been brought, ready for my journey to Moscow. I ought to go next week, but if you are so unhappy it would be better for me to defer my journey. I could not enjoy any pleasure while you are in disgrace."

Agnes had replaced the paper on the table. "Well," said she, throwing back her head, "it shall be as my mother wishes. But I have not done wrong. If my parents do not think that I consider the offer of that ridiculous creature, Semenof, as an insult, they do not know me."

"But, my child," said Mademoiselle Titof, "they never had the thought of accepting him, I am sure."

“Well, then!”

“But it is no reason for being disagreeable to him. A little diplomacy should be used.”

“Oh, well, I am not a diplomat!” said Agnes, with a haughty air. “Good-night, my dear friend. I ask your pardon for making your headache worse.”

She went away without being softened, and all through the night she repeated to herself, “But I have done no wrong; no, I have done no wrong.”

CHAPTER V.

SORROWS.

THE next morning all faces were full of care, and all hearts were heavy. Agnes's attitude was not such as to disarm her mother's resentment, for she had never been more haughty. The day itself seemed made to depress one's spirits. A curtain of whitish rain separated the house from the rest of the world. On the hill, opposite the veranda, only a confused mass of forest could be seen, and there the outlook ended.

In such circumstances people are either very happy to be together and morally close to each other, or else this forced nearness becomes intolerable; and here the latter was the case.

Mademoiselle Titof, while feeling much better, was not yet able to take part in the life about her. Vera, seated at the study table, worked

hard at some lessons in which she was behind-hand. She bent so low over her copy-book that her braids fell on it from time to time, and made there some transparent clouds in fresh ink, to the great detriment of the text.

Ermile and Nicolas worked in their room with that industry which follows disagreeable experiences, when one feels that he has before him the task of bringing himself to pardon his own fault.

The whole day passed thus, broken only by the gloomy meals, when no one spoke except for the sake of form. Dosia felt that she had been somewhat hard the evening before, but she could not take back what she had said. Platon waited, with sad heart, for the change in his daughter's feeling which would allow him to speak to her the firm and affectionate words which he could always command under troublesome circumstances. But he understood Agnes, and he knew that, at present, any attempt of his to make her see her faults would be

useless, and perhaps perilous to his paternal authority.

Twilight fell, — a rainy autumn twilight, which seemed to pour down upon the earth all the sadness which had been hoarded up during the radiant summer days. Agnes went into a long glazed gallery, the place least frequented in all the house, which made a passage to some rooms usually uninhabited. The feeble, gray light from without was penetrating it as much as possible, giving a confused appearance to the few objects it contained, — extra chairs and tables for the garden, pots of unthrifty plants, and out-of-door games, placed there on account of the rain.

It was always a bare and desolate place, but more desolate than ever in the dull, faint light which filled the gallery itself with the sensation of the rain without. Sad as it was, Agnes found it in perfect harmony with her state of mind. Following a custom, very general in Russia, she began to walk up and down the gal-

lery, from one end to the other, shaking up her ideas and her blood, for she felt herself benumbed by the inactivity of this long, tiresome day.

Little by little a tenderness came into her thoughts; her cold and haughty anger gave way to a sudden compassion for herself.

"I am most unhappy," said she, while her eyes, that were fixed upon the fog without, filled with hot tears. "Everything that I do goes wrong! I cannot think or act like other people. It looks as if some evil fate pursued me and inspired disapprobation of me in all those whom I love. O mother! if you but knew how much I love you! If you would only know and understand me!"

The tears rolled down her burning cheeks, and she did not think to wipe them away; she found a deep comfort in feeling herself unhappy, and in piercing her own heart with the sting of this pain.

"Is it necessary to be run in the common-

place mould for being loved?" thought she. "Will nothing that is above vulgarity find favor with good, and even intelligent people? They punish me for refusing the addresses of a fool, and this fool succeeds in making his presence and his conversation agreeable to my father and mother, who are so much above the ordinary. Must one be like him in order to succeed? O mother! you have found my father to love and lead you; but I, shall I not find a guide and friend who will bring joy to my heart?"

An intruding shadow appeared at the end of the gallery; the darkness came on so rapidly that it could scarcely be seen. The figure remained immovable until Agnes came near enough to recognize it.

"Ermile!" said she, in a sweet, tearful voice. In her mental distress the help of a truly compassionate soul was welcome.

He came quickly to her. "I trouble you," said he, timidly.

"No, you may stay," replied Agnes.

He walked silently beside her. She had relaxed the rapidity of her gait and her step was now uncertain and weary.

"You suffer," began he, in a low tone, "and I do not know what I would not have given to prevent this deplorable joke."

"It was I who caused it," answered she; "besides that, what does it matter now?"

"If you knew," continued he, "how I have suffered all day! I felt that you were so sad."

"Ah, you do not know how they talked to me! I am not sure that my mother loves me, even!" A stifled sob made the young girl tremble.

"Your mother! O dear Agnes, you know not with what a deep love! But she looks at things with a different eye from yours. At her age this is natural."

"And at mine it is also very natural to think otherwise," responded Agnes, with returning pride.

“Certainly,” replied the good Ermile; “but why question this now? What we should do is to mend things.”

“An idle fancy,” said she, bitterly. “The trouble is old, Ermile; it is a mistake older than myself. I have reflected much upon this for several days, and I have learned the meaning of some things which seemed incomprehensible to me. You see, my mother, who was what is called an *enfant terrible*, fears nothing so much as seeing us like herself. She wished her children to be like my father; that is why she loves Nicolas much more than us. She does not know that she is partial to him; but it is easy to see it. She is almost afraid of me, Ermile, because I am hard to manage.”

She took some steps in silence.

“Oh, yes, I am difficult to manage!” continued she, with repressed violence. “I avow it to you without shame; but I also know how much good there is in me, all stifled in my soul. You

think me bound by customs, by exterior things. I look pedantic. You,—have you never understood that I impose this restraint upon myself in order that there may be a restraint? That I create fictitious barriers for myself because I am afraid that I should overstep the true barriers if I allowed myself from the first to act upon my own ideas and impulses?”

“Yes; I have thought that more than once,” replied he; “otherwise you would not be consistent with yourself.”

“Do you think that a young girl, rich, brought up in the paternal home, has had no merit in distrusting herself? Is it not something to have struggled, even with an imaginary evil? To have willingly imposed laws upon herself, if they be only those of the exterior? Does it not show a power which should sometimes be acknowledged?”

“That is it, dear Agnes. You wish to be looked at as being some one; and parents, in

general, will not do that with their children. You are independent only of your years and your discretion, but not by marriage"—

“Marriage is merely changing masters.”

“Not always,” replied the young man, in a singularly grave tone. “Some are reasonable enough to treat their wives as friends, as peers, when they are worthy of it.”

Agnes made a disdainful gesture with her hand.

“I wish to employ my best powers, while I have them, to do something,—some work, in short, for others,—not for myself.”

“Work is not wanting in Russia. There is everything to do. I know a young man with small fortune, who was about to begin the practice of law, and had the prospect of a brilliant career in his native town, when he heard that a teacher could not be found for a village, situated far away in the marshes—Can you understand that primary teachers might be needed?”

“Ah, well!” exclaimed Agnes, impatiently, “your friend?”

“He left his clients and went to the marsh. He teaches reading and writing to peasant children,—at least if he has not died of fever.”

Agnes clasped her hands tightly together. “How beautiful that is!” said she. “That is the kind of people to be loved! But I, useless as I am! Not even able to earn my own bread”—

“You don't know,” said Ermile, smiling; “I think you might make a very good teacher.”

She smiled faintly.

“And you,” said she, turning suddenly to her friend,—“what do you wish to do?”

“I will teach our peasants not to lose their labor and their harvests through ignorance, or negligence, or stupidity; that is all that I can do. I am not a hero,” added he, humbly. “I do not feel equal to heroic deeds. I should know how to die for my duty, but I cannot invent fictitious ones.”

“Fictitious! Are there then fictitious duties?”

“I think so,” replied he, with humble gentleness.

“To keep your word,—is that a fictitious duty?”

“Certainly not; but to swear to one’s self to do impossible things is, perhaps, a fictitious duty. I do not know. I am an honest man, Agnes, but I am not a knight.”

“I saw you at the fire.”

“Oh, that!—that was natural enough. What I mean to say is, that I am wanting in poetry, in imagination; perhaps—I am simple, too simple.”

It seemed as if he begged pardon for his simplicity. She looked at him a moment, a little puzzled, disposed to take what he said as a reality, feeling at the same time, confusedly, that this extreme modesty was in itself an indication of uncommon merit.

“When one has given his word he must keep

it," said she, with that slightly haughty decision which was natural to her. "I do not know whether it is a fictitious or a real duty, but it is the duty of an honest man. I won't yield that point."

He bowed his head, submissive, but not convinced. Something within him protested, and he would have liked to explain, to justify himself, perhaps; but after Agnes's formal declaration he did not know how.

"But, after all," said she, sighing, "these are theories; the thing is to overcome practical difficulties."

He longed to tell her that her theories made a large part of the practical difficulties of which she complained; but he could not, he dared not, so much did he fear to displease her. She suffered, but he suffered a hundred times more than she, not being able to offer her the only true remedy for all mental grief,—a complete tenderness, an entire abandonment of himself—forgetfulness, abnegation, in a word.

And she imprudently had robbed herself of the consolation of hearing, even as she denied him the joy of speaking it.

“Ermile,” said she, suddenly, “this house depresses me. I have offended everybody, and I do not feel myself among friends.”

Ungrateful child! Ungrateful friend! But could he tell her so?

“I suffer cruelly here. I wish to go very far away,—so far, that nothing of the past would return to my memory.”

“Nothing? Ever?” demanded Ermile, in a broken voice.

“Ever? Oh, I don’t know! Perhaps by and by. Now, everything wounds and saddens me.”

She clasped her hands with a sorrowful gesture.

“I am eighteen years old, in the spring of my life, and I am absolutely miserable. There, Ermile, leave me; I had better be alone.”

He came nearer to her instead of obeying.

“You are unhappy; yes, dear Agnes, very unhappy, but, if you pleased, you could be otherwise.”

“I know — act like others, and be like every one else,” said she, with an expression of bitter sarcasm.

“Yes,” said he, courageously. “You can never bring yourself down to a common level, but you ought to accept general laws and common duties.”

“And clip my wings?”

“Yes; since your wings make you fly cross-wise!”

Amazed at his audacity, she stopped and looked at him with as much curiosity as anger.

“Listen to me, Agnes. I love you more than it is possible to express. I would give my life to dry your tears, but I see you wilfully blinding yourself, and it is my duty to tell you so. Your father and mother adore you, and wish only for your happiness; you voluntarily misjudge them. At the bottom

of your heart you feel the truth of my words, and your pride keeps you from acknowledging it. You enjoy acting the part of an unappreciated person, because if you should give it up you would be obliged to be submissive to the laws, which at present you only denounce. I offend you, Agnes; I know it, and yet I never loved you better. Perhaps you will never forgive me, and I stake my happiness in order to give you this supreme warning. It is time for you to renounce your fancies: be simple and good, as you know how to be, as you were that day at the fire in the forest, when you saved that little child."

She said nothing; he went on vehemently, but in smothered accents: —

"Agnes, my well-beloved! if this house oppresses you, mine awaits you. We have the same ardent desires to serve our time and our country. Your firmness will compensate for my indecision, and we could lead a life suited to Paradise. And then, I love you,

Agnes — I love you, and see only you in the whole universe. Let us go to your parents, tell them that you consent to marry me, and all this sadness will turn into joy."

He had taken both her hands and regarded her with a deep expression of devotion.

She almost said yes. She knew that he was so good, so noble, so true, and within herself she felt the growth of a delicious emotion. She knew that, sustained by those strong hands, she could pass through life above dangers and petty cares; her soul was melting for tears and tenderness; she already was bending towards him, ready to rest her head on this generous bosom. Suddenly her terrible pride asserted itself; she snatched her trembling hands away from those of Ermile and drew herself back.

"You had sworn not to speak to me of these things," said she, angrily; "you have broken your oath."

He started back. In this moment he had

forgotten the oath extorted from his weakness.

“I forbid you to see me again,—do you hear?” said Agnes, who struggled not only with her pride, but also with the new sentiment which had seized her.

He looked straight in her face. “You are doing wrong, Agnes,” said he, pale with emotion.

“I deny your right to judge me,” replied she.

“You cannot take that right away.”

“I can ignore it in banishing you from my presence. I do not wish to see you again; I repeat it; and if you do not find a pretext for leaving this house I will go away myself.”

He bowed low to her.

“I can only obey,” said he. “Yours is a cruel act, wicked, dangerous; you will repent it.”

“What! — threats?”

“No, grief. Adieu, Agnes!”

“Adieu!”

He left the gallery. It was now really dark, and nothing could be seen without, except the thick fog, which seemed to stick to the window like a sheet of tissue-paper. Agnes ran to her room and threw herself on her bed.

“I do not want, I do not want to love him!” repeated she to herself with an inexpressible anger. “Love this man who ridicules me — blames me! Foolish and cowardly heart, I shall know how to bring you to reason. It would be a fine thing if I could not prevent myself from loving him when I will it. Where there is a will there is a way.”

In spite of this bold statement of principles the unhappy girl wept bitterly far into the night. A real grief had added itself to her fancied sorrows. She loved Ermile, and she had sent him away forever.

She was not one of those coquettes who refuse in order to attract. It was entirely in good faith that she had banished the young

man. She thought she had done an heroic act. Curtius had leaped into the gulf. Scœvola had put his hand into the fire. Why should not Agnes Sourof tear her heart out by the roots?

CHAPTER VI.

ALONE.

THE next day was fine, and Platon announced that all the family would dine with General Baranine, as he had promised the other evening. The foliage of the trees, still wet from the rain of the day before, had grown yellow very rapidly, giving to the landscape a rich, yet melancholy color. However, a bright sunshine soon lighted the park and the woods and made them merry, at least for the young, who think not of to-morrows nor yesterdays. Platon knew life better than that; after taking his cup of tea he went out on the terrace. "Autumn already," said he; "winter soon, and another year will have fallen into the abyss."

The flowers of the garden were shining with an incomparable brightness. There is a mo-

ment in the year when summer mingles itself with autumn; when the colors and perfumes of those mute friends seem to try to give us all possible joy before their approaching death: the grass is greener than ever; the reds, the purples, and the intense yellows glitter in the gardens like little fireworks, almost hurting the eyes by their intensity. A frost comes, and all this gaudy pomp falls, mowed down upon the turf and suddenly faded.

“Agnes,” said Platon, seeing his daughter crossing the garden at a little distance off.

She approached him silently.

“Listen to me, my child,” said he to her. “Your mother is in her room; go to her and tell her in a few words that you regret your conduct, and we shall be quiet hereafter.”

Agnes looked at her father again and again. She wanted to tell him something, but she did not dare.

“What do you wish?” said he, kindly.

"I want to tell you, my father, that if it were you I should be sure of finding the words which would touch your heart; with my mother I fear that I shall not succeed."

Platon sighed. "But you ought to express your regret."

Agnes remained silent. "Come now," said Platon, in a slightly irritated tone, "you do feel regret, I think?"

She raised her eyes to her father's and replied, "I am in despair at having given you pain, my father."

"Oh, well, go and say the same thing to your mother, my child! she asks no more than that."

Agnes hesitated a moment, and then decided to go on. "It is not the same thing, my father; my mother has treated me differently from you. I do not mean that I am not sorry," began she quickly, seeing her father's face grow sad; "but it would be impossible for me to express to her, without falsehood, the senti-

ments which I have declared to you,— to you — my dearly loved father,” added she, in a low tone.

Platon looked very anxious. Evidently Dosia had deeply wounded the self-love of her daughter, and the wound was not one which would heal readily.

“Will you not do it for my sake?” asked he, hoping to touch the heart of the child whom he loved so tenderly.

“O my father! there is nothing I would not do for you,” murmured Agnes, raising his hand to her lips.

She was vanquished; the tears which fell from her eyes, heavy and fast, like the rain of a tempest, proved that her proud coldness had come to an end.

Platon kissed the pure brow which was offered for his caress.

“Go at once,” said he to his daughter; “your mother has waited only too long.”

Passing his arm about Agnes’s elegant waist

he led her towards the chamber where Dositia was completing her toilet before going away.

"Dositia," said he, "here is our daughter, who comes to speak with you."

He discreetly closed the door, and returned to the veranda, where he remained in deep thought, his eyes fixed on the golden tops of the woods, which awoke so vividly in him the thought of the decline of life.

The best strategist may make a mistake, and this Platon did when he left his daughter alone with her mother without being sure of the sentiments of the latter. It happened that Dositia, after having reflected upon her anger of the other evening, said to herself that her forbearance had lasted long enough, and that henceforth she ought to employ all her severity to lead back to her duty the child who had appeared to forget it.

The old demon was not entirely dead in Dositia's heart, — that old demon which had formerly led her into so many follies. Age had

not entirely corrected her undisciplined character, and, at times, she felt herself still capable of a struggle with human nature in order to establish her own will. In such a state of mind the conduct of Agnes could not bring the change for which Platon hoped. The young girl understood this from the sound of her mother's voice, and all her pride rose up again, — so much the more that her effort to conquer it had been most difficult.

“Well?” said Dosia.

She was standing before her long mirror, putting on her gloves, ready to go out.

The tone was not very encouraging; however, Agnes thought that, after the way in which her father had spoken to her, she ought to conquer herself once more, and give her mother the tribute of submission which was demanded. But Agnes was sincerity itself, and she could scarcely speak words which were not in full accord with the state of her mind.

“Mamma,” said she, hesitatingly, “I fear I

have displeased you, and I wish that you would not be angry with me."

Dosia's whole nature revolted against this act of imperfect submission.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" said she, haughtily.

"Yes, mamma," said Agnes, looking at her fearlessly.

"Then you can go away. You will make proper excuses to me for your impertinence, or you will never appear before me."

Madame Sourof certainly went beyond her intention in passing this sentence of banishment, but she did not easily master herself, and her autocratic ways were now so much more pronounced that in her youth she had wilfully escaped from all control. A French proverb illustrates this curious fact by an eloquent, though vulgar, figure, "When the devil is old he becomes a saint."

"Then, mamma," said Agnes, "shall I not go with you to General Baranine's?"

“It will be much better for you to remain here. You can better reflect upon your faults; and perhaps your reason will return to you.”

Agnes bowed to her mother, and went towards the door; at the moment she turned the handle Dosia was tempted to recall her. A gesture, ever so formal and wanting in kindness, would have sufficed to throw the undisciplined child into her mother's arms; but the two were equally proud, and the gesture was withheld. The young girl returned to her father, who looked at her in amazement, seeing her so pale.

“Mamma has commanded me to remain here,” said she, in a low voice. “You will go to the general's without me.”

“You have then offended her again,” said Platon, sadly.

“I have not intended it, I assure you, papa,” replied Agnes; “but I believe that my mother is too angry with me to be satisfied with what I said.”

They heard the horses stamp and shake their harnesses. Platon rose and placed his hand on Agnes's head with his affectionate and familiar gesture. "My child," said he, "this is life; one must learn to submit—even when the punishment seems to us disproportionate to the fault."

"The carriages are here," said the servant.

"Stay, my daughter," continued Platon. "Solitude is sometimes a good counsellor. Be not sad, but think about it. On coming back your mother will certainly be in another disposition."

Vera ran out ready to go. "Well, you are not dressed. Are you not going?" said she to her sister.

Agnes bent towards her and kissed her with more effusion than usual. The child was more dear to her since she knew her to be the original and the involuntary cause of her disgrace.

"No," said she; "I remain here."

Ermile and Nicolas also appeared, followed by Mademoiselle Titof. The same exclamations from them irritated the wounded self-love of Agnes.

“No,” replied she to their questions; “I am not going. I am in disgrace, if you wish to know.”

This declaration was received with incredulous laughter; but the appearance of Madame Sourof, silently though visibly moved, made them understand that something serious was going on. They all went to the carriages while Agnes remained on the terrace.

Suddenly Ermile came running back, as if he had forgotten something.

“I beg you, Agnes,” said he, hastily, “give me your commands; what can I do for you? You are so evidently unhappy!”

“I demand no favor of you,” replied the young girl, haughtily. “I have forbidden you to appear before me. Do not you see, that between my mother’s hardness and your

tenderness, which I discard, this house is becoming intolerable to me?"

He went away without adding another word. She heard for some time the waning sound of the bells on the carriages, which went away, following the ravine; and then their light tinkling was lost in the distance, and the deep silence of the woods surrounded the deserted house. Agnes remained a long time in the same place. Her hands joined listlessly before her she looked at the hill without seeing it. The whole world of childish memories, of little, forgotten bitternesses, of stifled rancors, of unreasonable angers,—all the fire that slumbers within us rose slowly to the surface, following the current of her thought.

In this twilight hour, in her happy home, no images arose in her mind which could soften or cheer her. Naturally sensitive and melancholy, in spite of her flashes of youthful gayety, she found a bitter joy in calling up

the sorrows of a stormy childhood. She had always been misunderstood. Her father alone had known her, and Agnes was too clever not to see how wise he was not to take her part when her mother reprimanded her. The young girl had a high conception of duty. She knew that if her mother blamed her, her father could not but disapprove of his child. How cruel of fate it was that her mother, so charming, and so tenderly loved, could not endure in her daughter that which had formerly been so natural to herself! Tears fell slowly and sorrowfully from Agnes's eyes, while she thus revived the days of her childhood.

"I have always been unhappy," said she to herself; "and yet it seems to me that I ought to have been happy."

The day faded; a light, transparent mist ascended from the valley, enveloping the alders like a bridal veil. So a deep melancholy was rising up in the heart of the afflicted girl, while

at the same time an emotion of sweet sadness crept over her soul—less hardened than she believed it to be.

“Perhaps it is my fault,” thought Agnes, in profound discouragement. “Others would be happy in my place. I have a contrary disposition. My father loves my mother so much! How could he love her thus if she were not good and noble? It is I who do not know how to appreciate her. And I am condemned to pass here my days, months, and years, without knowing the hearts of those whom I love, or making myself known by them. My life will flow on, useless and frivolous, while I ought to employ it to do some good.”

A chill came over her and she entered the house. Soon after the maid came to say that her dinner was served. She went into the dining-room and ate scarcely anything; she swallowed down a glass of cold water, and said she would have her cup of tea in her own room.

When the young servant who had brought the tray had gone away, Agnes took a lamp and went into Mademoiselle Titof's little library to look for an interesting book. She felt more and more, in the depths of her soul, a deep sorrow, as if it were torn by some ferocious claws, and she wished to escape from her own thoughts. As she turned over the books that she already knew, despairing of finding one that would amuse her enough to drive away her sorrow, her elbow knocked down a folded paper, which opened as it fell. She picked it up and abstractedly looked at it. Mademoiselle Titof's passport, *visé*, in preparation for her journey, had been left upon the bureau by mistake. Agnes read attentively the half-written, half-printed page. We cannot say why it is always interesting to read the passport of an acquaintance. She looked at it carefully from the top, where the Russian coat-of-arms was engraved, to the illegible signature of the last clerk through whose hands it had passed.

“One would say that it was made out for me,” thought the young girl, reading the description of the features of her governess. “It is strange that we resemble each other so little, and yet answer to the same description! Except the age, for I am seven years younger, this would serve me as well, and then I look older than I am” —

She examined her fine face, changed by the sadness which made it suddenly grow pale in the mirror before her. “And to fancy that a miserable sheet of paper like that makes Mademoiselle Titof free to exercise her profession, to do good, to be independent — How much in so little!” thought Agnes.

She stood looking at the passport with such concentration that she seemed to ask of it the secret of her destiny. A little farther away, on the bureau, was the time-table of the Volga boats, intended, also, to be used in the journey of the governess. Agnes drew it towards her and consulted it. Which boat would Madem-

oiselle Titof take? Probably that of the following Saturday, for the next one left this same evening, at nine o'clock. Agnes looked at her watch; it was half-past six.

Something was growing in her mind. She could not, or dared not, yet explain too fully to herself a project which appeared so vague, and yet which was already decided in her own mind, for everything converged towards the same end.

She rang the bell and her maid came in. "Where is Mademoiselle Titof's trunk? I do not see it in its usual place."

"Her trunk has been at the station for three days, miss," replied the young servant. "Mademoiselle Titof would have gone to-day if she had not been so ill since the beginning of the week."

"Very well," said Agnes; and she was once more alone with the passport and the fascinating time-table. Suddenly, with a quick action, she folded the two and put them into her

pocket. She then went to her own room and opened her wardrobe. A row of garments hung there, displaying a whole gamut of colors. She chose a large, dark cloak, which would entirely conceal the simple gray woollen gown she had worn that day. A cap with feathers, round which a veil was twisted, was in her bandbox, near by; she put it on, and then, opening her writing-desk, took out her purse and a small portfolio. Many dear and familiar objects were near at hand. She scattered them about with a sort of anger. Why should they be there, before her, to speak of what she most wished to forget? Her jewel-case caught her eye. She pushed it away and closed the drawer. A little valise, which was ordinarily used for the small objects necessary when they passed a few hours in the woods, happened to be within reach. She thrust in some linen and indispensable toilet articles, and then, hiding the valise beneath her cloak, she left the room furtively, as if she left some remorse

there. She entered her father's dressing-room. A sheet of white paper on the bureau attracted her. She took a pen and wrote:—

DEAR PARENTS:—I go away. Have no trouble for me. I wish to try to earn an honorable living by my own labor. Do not be angry with me, for I love you.

AGNES.

The house was still and deserted. The servants were dining in the farther part of their quarters. Agnes passed through the vast drawing-room, usually lighted up, but dark this evening, filled as ever with the perfume of the hot-house flowers which adorned it. She opened the door leading to the veranda and looked into the garden. The mist rose slowly from the den. A kind of soft white down seemed to surround the clusters of trees scattered on the hillside, and moved slowly in circles, changing in thickness and transparency so gradually that the motion was imperceptible. The round white moon rose in an opal

sky which daylight had scarcely left. Its rays pierced the mist without taking away its mystery. The silence was so deep that a dry leaf dropping from a tree upon the grass might be heard. Only the brook in the depths of the vale sang softly its little, monotonous ditty. The dahlias and china-asters were as visible in the moonlight as at noontime. Their rich hues, though softened, were still to be seen on the grayish background of verdure in the flower-garden.

“How beautiful all this is!” thought Agnes. Her soul seemed closed to every impression except that of the beauty of the landscape. A strange moral indifference had seized her. She ran down a path which led to an outlet of the park, and was closed by a wooden gate with a simple latch. Her gloved hand raised without hesitation the little iron bar, and the gate closed behind her.

The road wound round a little hill. The diaphanous shadows of the trees, already half

stripped of leaves, formed a delicate net-work shaded by the flying mist. The dampness was scarcely perceptible. The ground was almost dry under her feet, and Agnes walked quickly, with a firm step. She did not consider the consequences of the action which she carried out so naturally; she did not even think of them. She was not acting from reason, but from instinct, and instinct almost savage, which made her fly from a house where, for two days, every thing had wounded her.

The steamer stopped at a little town four or five kilometers from the Sourof mansion. It was a short walk, and Agnes had taken it many times; this evening the way seemed long to her. Occasionally there were very dark places extending back under the trees on the roadside, and the young girl peered into them questioningly,—not that she was afraid; but she had that insurmountable feeling of pain at the heart which accompanies extraordinary deeds. Suddenly she heard, at a little distance,

in a thicket, the strong strokes of an axe upon a tree. "Some one robbing my father's timber," thought she. Moved by her old habit of order she was ready to turn back to give warning, when she stopped herself. "To what good now, and what matters one pine more or less?" The essential point was that she should profit by her newly-acquired freedom, the novel sensations of which strongly agitated her.

A long winding in the forest still separated her from the Volga. She heard the sound of wheels near her and was frozen by sudden fright. Had not some one discovered her flight? What would happen if she should be taken back and be made a prisoner? Would not the humiliation of such an adventure make existence awful to her?

Ready to throw herself into the thicket if she were pursued, and assured that she should not be found should she pass the night there, she listened attentively.

The wheels sounded as if they were before and not behind her. Another feeling of horror seized her. Might it not be the carriages of her parents, returned too soon from the general's house? Sometimes they took this road, which was less abrupt, although longer.

The wheels approached nearer and nearer. She wished to hide in the wood, but the roots of the trees were rough, and her shoes would scarcely protect her against the brambles. A clear spot opened into the forest at her left; entering it, and, hiding behind a pine, she listened.

It was a simple *telegue*, drawn by one horse and driven by a peasant. Whether the solitude weighed on him, or whether he was in a poetic humor, he commenced, in a half-voice, a popular song of a slow and sad rhythm. The stillness of the air allowed sounds to be carried a long distance, for the strokes of the axe were heard distinctly, although the wood-cutter was already far away.

“I am an orphan,” said the song; “my mother is dead, and no one pities my misery.”

The horse went slowly, as if lulled by the sad melody.

A vivid impression crossed Agnes's mind. Was she not an orphan, although her mother still lived? More quickly and farther, until she could not be retaken. She went from her hiding-place as soon as the peasant had passed, and began to run. The sound of a distant whistle made her tremble in every limb. It was the steamer! What should she do if she were too late? Happily she remembered that the boat always whistled a warning before rounding a little cliff the other side of the town. She had still a half-hour before her. It was not too much, for the place of embarkation was on the other side of the river, and she must take a ferry-boat, which made the passage for a few kopecks. Agnes trembled once more at the thought that she might miss the boat.

At length she reached the bend of the Volga. The ferry-boat was at its slip, ready to leave, loaded with horses, carts, peasants, and sheep.

“Wait!” Agnes cried, several times. She screamed, and it seemed to her that her voice had no power. She ran, and her feet appeared not to move, as one feels in dreams.

However, she had been heard, for the peasants, who had seized the poles to push the boat, stopped. She cleared the plank of embarkation at a bound, and found herself in the midst of a group of a dozen or fifteen persons, gathered at the stern, while the animals were at the other end.

“Sit down, my daughter,” said to her, pleasantly, an old peasant, wrapped to her eyes in a great woollen shawl. “You ought to be tired after running like that. Bless me! What a blessing to be young!”

The good woman moved to make a place for Agnes on the bench. The fugitive, with

a word of thanks, sat down. Aristocratic pride had never shown itself in the manner of this undisciplined girl. Far from believing herself to be of a race superior to that of the peasants who lived, morally, so far beneath her, she leaned rather — and that instinctively, for she was not acquainted with the modern doctrines — towards the belief which looks for the principle of all the virtues in these simple souls. The odor of the sheep-skin *touloupes* offended her somewhat, but she silenced her disgust in the name of Christian law, and was thus able to conquer it, but not without the help of some stoicism.

The ferry-boat moved slowly, struggling against a very strong current. It was not a ferry-boat in the true sense of the word, for it was not held by ropes; it was a great flat pontoon, calculated to receive a cumbersome rather than a heavy load, such as wagons and herds. The passengers seemed to be more or less sleepy, with the exception of two peasants,

very much engaged in the discussion of the price of cattle.

Agnes looked around her. The steamer which she was to take was seen at the bend of the river, but it was still so far away, that the noise of its paddles was scarcely that of an indistinct echo, and its headlights shone confusedly through the thin veil of fog floating over the stream.

It was an exquisite spectacle, so much so, that in spite of the contradictory emotions which agitated her, Agnes could not refrain from remarking its marvellous beauty. The fog above the river was so transparent that the moon was reflected in the still waters; only their surface was a little dim, like a mirror clouded by a breath. The banks disappeared in a floating mist, now more and now less dense; the steeples of a village, situated on a little cliff, emerged, sketching their fine silhouettes on the silvery sky like so many minarets.

An imperceptible breeze carried the vapor

along with the current of the river in such a way that everything had a dreamy look, even life itself.

“It is like my destiny,” thought Agnes. “Do I know where I am going?”

The ferry-boat neared the wharf of the steamer, which arrived at the same moment. There was some shipping of freight, which gave the young girl time to find Mademoiselle Titof's trunk and take it with her. Five minutes later the paddle-wheels awakened the echoes of the sleeping forest, and Agnes, transformed into Mademoiselle Titof, went towards Nijni Novgorod, from which she could easily reach Moscow.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

AFTER a troubled sleep on the narrow cushion of the ladies' room, Mademoiselle Sourof awoke the next morning with the first light of dawn.

It was a strange awakening, confused, and almost happy at first. Twice a year Agnes had made this voyage, back and forth between Petersburg and Sourova, and at the first moment it seemed as if she was making it now, with her mother; raised on her elbow, she looked about her and saw only strangers.

It was as if a thunderbolt had burst above her head; alone, so far from her friends, and in spite of them. She realized for the first time, since the evening before, the pain which they must have felt, and suddenly the

irrepressible, burning tears gushed forth from her sorrowful heart.

What had they thought on their coming back? What a return! What fears! what tears! Above all, the thought of her father rent Agnes's soul. Perhaps he cursed her at this morning hour, when the sun, entering his room, was accustomed to bring to him — the father of a family, happy in his children — the joy of a new day.

“Oh! I did not think enough of them!” said Agnes to herself. “I thought only of myself. I am a selfish girl.”

An overpowering desire to turn on her steps and immediately return home again seized upon her. It was too cruel to pain those whom she loved; better to suffer herself. Quickly arranging her disordered toilet, she ascended to the deck. Her voice was cheerful, and her eyes filled with tears which were not those of sorrow. Seeing the captain, she asked him if, before reaching

Nijni Novgorod, there was a chance of meeting, at some stopping-place, a boat going down the Volga.

“No, miss,” said he, smiling, “we shall not meet a single one before arriving. Do you want to go home again?”

Offended at this familiarity, although it was quite paternal,—for the captain was a stout man, with gray hair, not very gallant by nature,—Agnes replied by a very sharp “No,” and regained the ladies’ room, where she felt herself safe. Two or three hours later Nijni Novgorod was outlined on the blue sky, with its belt of old strong walls and churches. The waters of the Oka, mingled with those of the Volga, enlarged the river almost to the proportions of a lake.

Agnes thought that the die was cast. Since morning she had turned it all over, and she had concluded that to go back would be to disown the firmness and stoicism which she had taken as the basis of her life. And then a

little taste for adventure; the secret satisfaction of having made this expedition so far so well; an unavowed desire to know about the life of the young girls whose fathers were not rich landed proprietors,—in short, the worst sentiments of Agnes's mind, disguised, even to herself, under a very presentable exterior, inspired her with the resolution to proceed on her journey.

The reflection that most influenced her, but which she would not admit even to herself, was that she dreaded horribly the reproaches which would await her at home, and she felt very strongly that were she obliged to make amends for her fault she should only resist the more.

“What is the use of beginning over again?” said she to herself. “It would always be the same thing. I will write to them. That will be better.”

The steamer stopped. Mademoiselle Titof's little trunk was given over to Agnes, who, at first, did not know what to do with it. Since

her earliest childhood she had been accustomed to consider a private carriage as a necessary appendage to a station or a wharf. Now this was not the case.

Then, very bravely, she did as she had seen others do in like circumstances. She called a *drojky*, ordered the driver to put her trunk on his box, and directed him to go to the station of the railway for Moscow.

It was a very new sensation to Agnes to find herself in a vehicle so unsteady that it threatened, at each moment to throw her upon the rough and uneven pavement. Above all, the coachman, perched in an indescribable fashion upon his narrow seat, with his feet resting on Mademoiselle Titof's little trunk in a grotesque manner, was an object of fear to her. It looked impossible that this strange equipage could arrive safely at the top of the hill, up which they were so painfully toiling.

Some open shops, remnants of the great

annual fair, still gave to the place such an air of animation as astonished the young girl. It was quite a long time since she had been in this city, as some years since a new railroad had been constructed, which ran nearer to the town in the neighborhood of Sourova. But Agnes was not inclined to examine the picturesque side of things. The hot sun gave her a violent headache, her empty stomach disturbed her cruelly, and, together with the jolting of the road, she felt very much like being sea-sick.

She was at length landed, safe and sound, contrary to her expectations, before the little temporary wooden building which then served as a station to the railway for Moscow.

The train left soon. She had just time to register her baggage and take a cup of very black and bitter tea, mingled with a whitish, muddy mixture, which pretended to take the place of cream.

When leaving the ticket-office Agnes counted

her money. She had about a hundred roubles, for her father and her Aunt Sophie never allowed her to want money.

A hundred roubles! It was an enormous sum for a young girl who bought only the superfluities of life. At least it represented a good many pairs of gloves. Thus she took a good seat in a first-class carriage, in order the more easily to endure the eight-hours' journey which separated her from Moscow, with a feeling of being well-to-do.

Her sorrow was entirely past; at least, she thought so. The feeling of her own responsibility, and the plan which she had conceived vaguely at first, now more clearly, since her awakening on the boat, gave her a certain consideration for her own decision and energy.

This plan was quite simple. Mademoiselle Titof's passport gave her all the advantages of a very honorable position as governess, since it testified to the sojourn of the said governess in the house of Monsieur and Mad-

ame Sourof, landholders in the province of Nijni Novgorod. What more natural, then, than to pass herself off as Mademoiselle Titof, and seek a position in harmony with Agnes's taste?

The plan was very well conceived; but how does one find these situations as a governess?

Agnes was not troubled about this. She read, every day, in the advertisements of the newspapers, such immediate and numerous demands that she would surely be embarrassed in making her choice. She would take a befitting situation in a distinguished family, and this would be the most noble revenge for her upon those who had misunderstood her. When she had proved that she was able to support herself honorably they would be forced to cease treating her as a disobedient child.

These thoughts, and some others, made the time pass very quickly, if not very pleasantly, until the moment of the arrival of the train at Moscow, in the poorly-lighted station; for

it was, as at Nijni, a building of a temporary sort.

As she had done in the morning, Agnes took a carriage, and confided herself to the care of a very eager driver, whose zeal appeared to her to be a good augury. The equipage was deep and large enough to allow her to take the trunk beside her.

Fortunately she had found in her memory the name of a hotel situated opposite the post-office, where she had formerly passed the night with her family. She gave the order to be driven there; but before a hundred yards had been passed she perceived that the amiability of the coachman arose from his preliminary libations. The worthy fellow had no malice in him, and the discourse which he addressed to his horse was of the most affectionate character; but he had a way of driving at a gallop, and going crosswise through the street, which constantly made Agnes fear that they should break into one of the little gardens which

fronted the buildings in that part of the city.

It was already late; the lighting by petroleum lamps left much to be desired, and the little houses, of poor and ancient aspect, spread themselves out, one so much like another, that at more than one turning Agnes believed she was repassing the same street through an error of the driver.

"Please," said she to him, touching his shoulder lightly, "drive your horse a little straighter, and not so fast, or we shall certainly be upset."

"You are perfectly right, my dove," replied the man, regarding her in a most friendly way. "We shall certainly be upset; what a head you have to think of that!"

He soon brought his horse to a walk. The poor beast, overdriven since morning, wished for nothing better than to go as slowly as possible; and, to the inexpressible despair of Agnes, the driver began to tell his tale to her.

“You come from the province, my little sister,” said he to her, turning round on his narrow seat, in such a way that the young girl feared each moment that he would fall over on her in the jolts which the slow pace of the horse seemed only to make deeper, without lessening their violence. “You come to take a situation,—one can see that soon enough. You are well dressed, in very good style. You want to be a chambermaid, eh? Say, do you want to be a chambermaid?”

“We shall never get there at this rate,” replied Agnes, impatiently, but without anger. Accustomed to being familiarly addressed by the peasants, she did not feel hurt at being treated in the same way by the driver of a public carriage, though seeing him intoxicated was slightly aggravating.

“Be easy, it is safer; as you said yourself, just now. We will go fast when the road gets better.”

Agnes gazed despairingly into the darkness

of the long street, scarcely lightened, here and there, by a smoking street lamp.

“You want to be a chambermaid,” repeated the driver, returning to his fixed idea. “It is not a bad trade—but that of a cook! Ah, my dear! I have in my time eaten good cooking. No, the masters, you understand, will never eat as good! They have a hundred little dishes as stupid as can be, and then the mistress comes to the kitchen and says, ‘Glaphyra, you will do this; you will do that.’ You well know that they always say ‘Yes.’ You must not contend with masters; they are like horses; they become vicious when you oppose them. You answer Yes; but you do as you please. My first wife did her own way, and the mistress never discovered it. And the more she changed houses, the more she found it the same thing. Masters, you see, are all alike; they don’t understand anything.”

“You will fall!” said Agnes to him, more

occupied with the balance of that slanderer of masters than with his words.

“Have no fear, — I am so used to it.”

In spite of this consoling reply the man placed himself somewhat straighter on his seat, and lifted his reins, in which it was a wonder that the horse had not entangled himself, for they were dragging on the ground.

“Yes, you see,” continued he, “my first wife was a cook, because that is a good trade; but she was not neat, — no, she was slovenly, to do her justice, — God keep her soul! So as a second wife I took a laundress, and now I am clean as a new penny. Wouldn't you like to be a laundress? It is a good trade.”

“I should like very much to reach the hotel,” answered Agnes. “I am cold and tired. Be good enough to drive a little faster.”

“O my little angel!” cried the drunkard; “you ought to have said so. Just wait; we shall be there in the twinkling of an eye.”

A lash of the whip reached both the horse and Agnes's head, which was fortunately protected by her veil, and the whole equipage made a prodigious bound, as though it were going to fly towards the stars. They soon struck the ground again, and with great force, as Agnes realized; but the driver was imperturbable, and the oscillations which he described about his centre of gravity in no wise disturbed his good-humor.

"Old boy!" cried he to his horse, making the lash curl round the poor beast's ears, "you must show that you have got legs! We are carrying one of our own set. Come on, boy! Better than you do for aristocrats!"

"Boy" seemed to comprehend principally that the whistling of a whip-lash in his ears was very stimulating. He ran for half a minute so swiftly, that, owing to the jolts, Agnes saw the street filled with a myriad of lamps by no means there. Then suddenly, without apparent cause, except, perhaps, that he had run enough,

he stopped, planted himself on his four feet, and refused to go on.

“Eh! go on, dog!” cried the driver.

“Boy” disdained an answer to this address.

“Well, go on!” repeated the drunkard, giving him a hard blow with his whip.

“Boy” flung up all four feet with such unanimity that shafts and harness all flew into the air.

“Ah! the cursed beast! he has broken the shaft! Wait, my little dove! This don't amount to anything. I am used to it. I have some string in my pocket, and we will soon fix it!”

Agnes now came near crying with rage. Was her expedition to close with this ridiculous *dénouement*? Passing the night in a deserted street in Moscow, beside a vicious horse and a tipsy driver, in order to guard a trunk which did not belong to her!

Had the trunk been her own, instead of having been purloined from her governess,

the young girl would have readily abandoned it at the risk of never seeing it again. But perhaps it contained family souvenirs, objects of value to the poor girl, disinherited by fate, and this thought was enough to inspire Agnes with an unalterable resolution not to let this encumbrance out of her sight.

Since leaving the station they had not met a vehicle, so deserted was the part of the city through which they drove, and she had no hope of seeing help arrive in the shape of an empty carriage. If only she could carry her baggage herself!

"I wish I were at home!" thought she, suddenly; but, reproaching herself at once for this lack of courage, she made a firm resolution to overcome all possible weaknesses.

"Well," said she to the driver, "is it mended?"

He was very busy with the broken shaft, which he had somehow repaired with a piece of wood and some string. A little sobered

by the accident he was not so talkative, and appeared to be less satisfied with himself.

“See how I have made it strong!” said he. “Let us go, miss; have no fear. We shall arrive in good shape, all the same, only it will take longer. With a broken shaft we cannot go very fast” —

“But your horse, — will he go?” demanded Agnes.

“He’s as quiet as a lamb. When he has done with his little antics a child could lead him with a thread.”

“Boy” was, in fact, very steady — so steady that he could not be made to trot. Agnes crossed Moscow at a walking pace, so her expedition took some time.

When they arrived in a more central quarter a new trouble arose. At each moment, other coachmen, who were in haste, were railing at the unfortunate driver of “Boy,” showering on him both oaths and pleasantries. Agnes began to find the common people less agree-

able than she had imagined them, and now only desired to get away from them.

At length, after driving through unknown streets and squares, Agnes was set down before the hotel she had named. There were only servants about at this untimely hour, and Agnes had some difficulty in making them understand that she wanted a quiet room for the night.

A waiter, less stupid or less sleepy than the others, took a candle from a table, made a sign to a porter in a pink shirt and bright yellow pantaloons, who shouldered Mademoiselle Titof's trunk, and the three began to ascend the stairs.

Passing floor after floor the little procession finally reached the top story; their shadows made grotesque outlines on the ceilings, but Agnes was no longer disposed to look for the ridiculous. A door was opened before her, her trunk placed on the floor, and the two men were about to go away.

"I want to have some tea," said Agnes to the man who seemed the most intelligent.

"Tea at this hour!"

"Yes; some tea at this hour. In the first place it is not midnight, and then in hotels I suppose one can have what one wants by paying for it."

"Not midnight!" repeated the bewildered waiter. "Indeed! then I will have some tea brought you."

"Make haste!"

"All right."

He disappeared in the interminable passage, where his heavy steps resounded for a long time.

Agnes remained alone with her candle, which ran down in a lamentable manner; seated on a chair, she waited.

In a few minutes, weary of her inaction, she got up and inspected the little bed. It was a mattress, placed on four boards in a little iron bedstead, as plain as possible. It was not its

simplicity which made her anxious; but under the only covering there was nothing, — neither sheets, nor a pillow-case to cover the pillow, which was of extremely doubtful color.

“It is not their custom to keep the beds ready for travellers,” thought Agnes. “Presently, when the tea is brought, they will bring sheets.”

The whole house seemed as if plunged in a deep slumber; not a sound betrayed any occupant whatever. After waiting some time Agnes opened the door of her room, took her candle in her hand, and ventured out into the passage. Here and there, before a door, was seen a pair of boots, denoting that the chamber was occupied. Agnes went on to the staircase; it was totally dark; this great empty cage seemed as if made for giants. Taken aback, she sought for a bell-rope. A whole battery of electric bells was spread out within her reach. She pressed one button; no response followed. One after the other she tried

them all without hearing a tinkle, even in the farthest space. She raised her candle and looked on the ceiling for the wires which ought to correspond to the buttons; there was no vestige of them: the buttons were there merely for the sake of good looks.

Agnes had never been extremely patient, but she now felt herself extremely angry. Returning to her chamber she discovered a bell-rope and hung on it with wrath; the result of her efforts was the same as before. The tranquillity of the house did not appear to be disturbed in the least. For a moment Agnes thought she would go down and make a racket in the vestibule, sure of getting some response to this energetic proceeding; but she reflected that it might end disastrously for her, so she proceeded to arrange herself to pass a bad night as well as possible. She spread her cloak over the pillow and laid down on the bed, which was as hard as an ironing-board covered with dimity. See-

ing that she had no matches she decided to keep her light burning, which could not be any great help, as the candle was scarcely more than a puddle of tallow, in the midst of which burned a smoky, dried mushroom, which answered for a wick. Turning her back to this mock-light Agnes tried to sleep.

She had scarcely closed her eyes when she felt something run rapidly over her hand; sitting up suddenly she instinctively brushed this strange object with her other hand, then looked around her to see what it could be.

An inexpressible horror and disgust seized her when she saw the floor, the furniture, and even the bed, covered with beetles, large, slow, and black, and cockroaches of a golden-brown, running with mad activity. They moved about by hundreds, running to and fro, as if the aim of their life was to run, no matter where. Agnes's clothes were covered with them; the bed-covering, white before, seemed

now to be ornamented with moving designs formed by these nimble things.

Agnes knew that such insects existed, having occasionally seen one run in the kitchen or the pantry, which was immediately chased out, in spite of the popular tradition which attributed to them the power of bringing good luck to a house.

But such a flood of insects had never entered her imagination, even in dreams. She stood up in the middle of her room, terrified, not knowing what to do, shaking her dress mechanically, to throw off the unwelcome creatures. The candle threatened to go out; Agnes thought that, with the return of the darkness, these myriads of bugs would fasten on her, and a chill seized her.

“Ah, no!” said she to herself; “I prefer the street.”

She looked at her watch, and found it was half-past three in the morning. In half an hour the bells would ring for matins, and she would

have a refuge. Her resolution was quickly made. She descended the stairs, taking care to set her candle on the top in order to light up her way as much as possible. She had hardly reached the second floor when the wick went out with a little crackling, which resounded in the deep silence. She continued to descend, her heavy heart full of bitterness and disgust for men and things. A badly-smelling night-lamp feebly lighted the vestibule. Two waiters were asleep, stretched out on a bench. Agnes thought she would wake them to tell them the facts; but she reflected that they were not responsible for the care of the house, and that it would be better to address herself to the proprietor when day should come. A new fear now came over her: what if the door should be locked, what should she do?

An iron bar fastened the door, but it was not very heavy, and Agnes moved it without much trouble. The open door permitted the fresh, damp air to come in, and this was like a resur-

rection to the young girl. Her courage and strength returned to her instantly. Shaking her clothing for the last time on the threshold of this inhospitable house, she softly closed the door, and found herself alone in the street, lighted by the dim gas of some street lamps.

Where should she find a church? It was not difficult, for churches are everywhere in Moscow; one could not go two hundred yards, no matter in what direction, without seeing, near at hand, the strange form of a dome or a steeple. A breeze made the flame of the street lamps tremble; the pavement was damp; a few drops of rain falling from the roofs struck on Agnes's face as she tried to find her bearings.

"I have no umbrella," thought she; "I must buy one."

A new gulf opened before her eyes; what an enormous quantity of things she must buy! But at that hour this question was an idle one; those who sold umbrellas slept as

well as others, and if it rained she must be wet.

Even this consideration did not lead her to reënter the house she had just left. She went indifferently to the left or right, taking care only to look about her in such a way as to be able to return when day broke and take Mademoiselle Titof's trunk, which was now to her a conscientious duty, and for the time an extremely annoying one.

Agnes had been walking scarcely five minutes, when she heard the first stroke of the matin-bells sound very near to her,—that boom of the largest bell which always produces such a deep and mysterious impression.

She trembled, with the soil itself, so powerful was the concussion of the mass of bronze; it seemed to her as though her soul was suddenly awakened with the resonance of the air.

The bells were sounding one after another, and all the churches of Moscow answered

to this call. Agnes felt the disgusts and terrors of that night flying up to the sky with that strange harmony, brought only by chance, and which at times gave her exquisite musical sensations. Guided by those sounds she found herself before a church. Two or three women, with black shawls on their heads, passed her in the door-way; they belonged to the people: small shopkeepers, or servants, who came to bless their day-work with a prayer.

Agnes followed them; that kind of people were the very ones whom she loved.

The church was very dark except where the chandeliers burning before the holy images spread a little luminous halo three feet wide. The faces and hands of saints, darkened by age, emerged from their long robes, made of gold or silver. Evangelists, one finger pointing to heaven, with a book in their left hand; virgins presenting the divine child; archangels trampling the evil

spirit, — saints of every kind, preaching or teaching, like Olez or Alexander Nevski, crowded on the walls of the little church, which smelt strongly of incense and wax.

From time to time a human figure, still half-shrouded in darkness, came near a chandelier, with a little wax-taper; the taper was lighted and took its place among others, whilst the half-veiled figure knelt, kissed the image, and went back to darkness. The impression was, on the whole, very mysterious, but also very sweet and comforting. The sacrifice which took place there was an innocent one, a mystery of peace and love.

The deacon appeared before the closed door of the chancel, and his deep voice began the morning prayers. The choir singers responded to the verses; the service was conducted with simplicity and touching good feeling. Little by little the church was half filled: peasants going to their work; merchants ready to open their shops; workmen and work-

women, who, moved by the religious sentiment which is so strong in Russia, took from their sleep the half-hour for morning worship.

Agnes had never attended matins ; often in winter the loud bells had disturbed her sleep ; she had turned her pretty head upon her pillow, thinking " It is four o'clock," and had slept again her happy sleep. Never had she dreamed of the meaning of these early bells during the dark hours of the winter, when the north wind blew, and the snow was piled up at the house doors.

It was a very strange thing for her to go into a church at four o'clock in the morning ; such experience she could have only by leaving her father's house and travelling a long way ; but for those whom she saw there it was very simple ; they rose every morning at the peal of the bell, and God knows what labor filled their time until the sun went down.

There were in the church some babies still

asleep, wrapped in shawls, brought by their mothers, and put down on the pavement, there to finish out their interrupted night's rest; there were other children, a little older, who stood up, quite awake, examining the saints, and listening to the music, filling their eyes and their ears with something rich and warm, sumptuous and welcoming, which to them was religion itself.

The service ended; the sextons came to collect the tapers, which they blew out, leaving the lamps still burning; the church was soon empty. Agnes went out, almost the last one; nothing hurried her, not even hunger. She had forgotten all her troubles in a sort of mystical dream, full of sweetness, in which her prayer had gradually blended, and life now appeared to her much less difficult, and, above all, far more simple, than she had found it for a long time.

The day dawned, still pale and grey; but the sky, covered with light clouds, promised

pleasant weather. The young girl took her way to the hotel, which she found without difficulty.

The waiters in red shirts were now up, the door was open, and two women, in rags, with petticoats tucked up in their belts, were washing the pavements with showers of water, while displaying their stout calves, which were very dirty.

In the midst of this flood Agnes passed through the entrance and found in the hall a sort of clerk, clothed properly enough, who descended the stairs, rubbing his eyes with a circular movement of his fists. At the sight of the young girl he stood still, his hands fallen at his sides.

“What do you wish, miss?” said he, with a sort of bow.

“I want to have my trunk brought down, sir,” replied she.

“Your trunk! But you do not live here?”

“ I beg your pardon ! I arrived last evening, and my trunk is upstairs.”

One of the waiters in a red shirt came up just then, and said, roughly, “ It was you, then, who went out this morning so early, and left the door open ? Say, you mustn't leave the house doors open ” —

Agnes looked at him from top to toe. “ It was you, then, who promised to bring me some tea last night, and went to bed instead of doing it ? It was you who took me to a disgusting room, full of nasty beetles and a bed with no sheets ? It was you who slept so well here that one could unbar the door and go out without being noticed ? ”

The man was about to reply coarsely, but the clerk prevented him. Accustomed to judge people by their looks, he felt that Agnes was neither an adventuress nor a vulgar person.

“ If all that has happened, miss,” said he, “ we owe you apologies. Be kind enough

to say what you* desire, and you will be obeyed immediately."

"I desire," replied Agnes, with her haughtiest manner, "to have my trunk brought down at once and put upon a *drojky*, and to know how much I owe, that I may pay you."

Her manner showed so much decision that the clerk dared not oppose her. Her trunk was brought down and put upon a *drojky*, and a sheet of paper, ornamented with a magnificent engraved heading, was given to Agnes, showing her that the price of her room was a rouble and a half.

"It is expensive here," said she, drawing from her purse the sum demanded; "but one would not know how to pay for such good service."

The cold irony of her words so stupefied the servants that they forgot to ask for *pour boire*,—a thing which certainly had never happened to them before.

"Where are you going?" demanded the driver.

That was precisely what Agnes did not know; suddenly a practical idea burst on her mind. "To the station for Petersburg," said she.

The driver was young and skilful, the horse strong and steady; in twenty minutes Agnes was at the station, a fine building, and suited to its use. The trunk was taken to the baggage-room, and Agnes, freed from a great weight, went to the restaurant for breakfast, where she could make herself comfortable at her leisure.

It is something to get out of trouble so quickly, and all alone, and the young girl was disposed to feel very proud of herself.

"It is not difficult, after all," said she to herself, tasting her nice coffee and that delicious Moscow bread, called "Kalatch." She had a good appetite, and life appeared to be quite acceptable, after all, in spite of the last night's experience, which now seemed very comical to her. But if the present was supportable the

future was entirely problematical. It would be necessary to find a place for the coming night, and Agnes began to distrust hotels.

One could certainly remain one night in the station, where the ladies' room is always open, like the rest; but this was not a very cheering prospect, in spite of the nearness of the dressing-room, which would allow the young girl to make her toilet.

To make her toilet was, by the way, that which she most desired at this moment. Her appetite satisfied, she indulged in the luxury of ablutions, and went out from the ladies' waiting-room entirely reassured for the present, and even disposed to see the future through an agreeable coloring.

How, then, to find a situation as a governess? By reading the newspapers. Agnes knew this; but this method would demand time, and more or less correspondence. However, it would be better to lose a little time than to find nothing. Agnes bought some daily

papers, and seated herself in the waiting-room to read carefully the fourth page.

Naturally she had gone into the room of the first and second class, having no idea that she could go elsewhere, and without thinking that she might be recognized by some one of her acquaintance. While she read the "Wanted" attentively, making a list with a pencil in her note-book of those that she thought might suit her, an old lady came and put down her bag and shawl-strap on a table near Agnes. After giving a bit of money to a servant who had brought her valise, she turned to look about her.

"Ania!" said she, with astonishment.

Agnes heard this exclamation, but pretended that she had not. Besides, not exactly recognizing the voice which had made it, she could easily excuse herself from turning a deaf ear.

"Ania, Agnes, Agnes Sourof! I am not mistaken: it is you, my dear child! How

glad I am to see you! Your father is here? No? Your mother then? And your little sister, and Mademoiselle Titof? Are they all well? You are looking finely. So much color for you, who are usually so pale. Do you go to Petersburg? We shall go together. Has your mamma taken a compartment?"

"No, madame," said Agnes. She had not hastened to reply, for the questions were embarrassing, and had she wished to speak she could not, on account of the marvellous loquacity of the old lady.

"No compartment! All the more reason why we should go together. Where are your things? Put them with mine; or perhaps they are already in the car?"

"No, madame," said Agnes.

"Is that so? Where is your mother? Oh, in the dressing-room, without doubt. After a night in the train one has need of fresh water. I don't understand about the management of railroads; could they not manage to

have a little less smoke? You are going to town early this year. I am obliged to go to Petersburg on business; but I return in a week; so I shall not find you then. I shall miss you."

The good lady talked so fast that it was not possible to put in a word; the danger of being obliged to speak existed only when she stopped for breath, as then she looked up, waiting for a reply.

"That is very kind of you," said Agnes, who then recognized her as one of her country neighbors.

"You came by the boat to Nijni? I came by the train; it is tiresome, and so dirty. Do you think I shall have time to go and wash my hands?"

"I think so," said Agnes, who knew absolutely nothing about it.

"And then I should have the pleasure of seeing your mamma sooner. I will go, and you will look out for my bag."

The good lady rushed out of the room, and Agnes ran after her with the bag and the shawl.

“Take these, madame,” said she; “I cannot undertake to watch them; it is too much responsibility.”

She thought of Mademoiselle Titof's trunk, which had already caused her so much care. Before the good lady had recovered from her surprise Agnes had disappeared, and when the traveller returned to the waiting-room she was no longer there.

During the journey this talkative neighbor searched the compartments and the waiting-rooms; but no member of the Sourof family was visible.

Disturbed, as well as puzzled, for she was kind-hearted, the very day after her arrival Madame Savine went to the city house of Madame Sourof, and there learned that no member of the family was in town; neither had they announced their coming.

“It’s very strange!” thought she. “Then it was not Agnes. But I could not have been so mistaken! Why did she speak — the foolish creature! — if it were not she?”

And her inquisitive mind sought the solution of this problem a long time without finding it.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEEKING A SITUATION.

AGNES had left the station as quickly as possible, and hurried down the first side-street, without looking behind her, fearing pursuit. After what she had endured within the last twenty-four hours the thought of returning home was more unacceptable than ever to her, for to the sense of her guilt was added that of being ridiculous, and she dreaded ridicule above all things. Agnes leaving the house on account of her mother's severity towards her, — that was one side of the question. Agnes as the victim of padlocks and bell-ropes, of a restive horse and a drunken driver, — there was material to delight for ten years all who were inclined to make fun of her: it was that which she could not endure.

After having gone some hundred yards in

the unknown street which she had entered the fugitive was about to turn towards the centre of the town, when she saw a sign, placed on a balcony, which read, "HOME FOR GOVERNESSES." On the door of the house a bright copper plate bore the same inscription. Agnes hesitated an instant, looked back towards the station, then before her in the direction of the town, and finally entered the door-way. On the second story the word "Home" again appeared. . . . She rang boldly. An old servant-woman, very neat, came to admit her.

"The Home for Governesses?" asked Agnes, in a less assured voice than she would have wished.

"Is here, miss," replied the servant.

"I would like" —

Agnes's voice failed her completely, and for the first time she had a feeling akin to humiliation. She was about to ask for something, and should they refuse what she asked!

Her pride would be hardly able to bear that! The servant had understood.

“For a place,” she said. “This way.”

Agnes was ushered into a sort of office, furnished with an oak-table and two or three chairs. A little lady, still young, seated at the table, was consulting alternately two registers opened before her. On seeing the young girl she rose and motioned her to a chair; then she reseated herself, all in a mechanical fashion, as if her principal care was to practise economy in time and in movements.

“You desire a situation, miss?” said the little lady, looking at her visitor.

“Yes, madame, a situation as governess.”

Agnes had never imagined that this sentence could be so difficult to pronounce.

“Have you references, a diploma, recommendations?”

“Just now I have only my passport, madame,” replied the young girl, producing that document. “It will inform you that I am”—

Agnes had such a noble air, offering the paper with her delicate, well-gloved hand, that the lady was inspired with respect. She glanced over the passport with an experienced eye.

“How long were you in the same house?”

“I have been in no other.”

The matron mentally compared the age on the passport with that at which a girl would usually seek a situation, and the calculation seemed to satisfy her.

“And what was the cause of your leaving?”

“On account of family reasons,” replied Agnes, in a somewhat aggressive tone. This examination irritated her exceedingly; although her good sense showed her how necessary it was, she could not submit to it calmly. The matron of the Home must have divined something of her feeling, for she did not insist on further questions on this point.

“What kind of a situation do you wish?” asked she.

“I should like to teach a little girl, — not too little, however,” Agnes added hastily; “ten or twelve years old.”

“What are you competent to teach?”

“Everything!” answered Agnes. Her confidence was so naïve that the matron smiled good-naturedly. “I mean to say,” continued the young girl, “everything that is usually taught: the sciences, languages” —

“Including German?”

“French, English, and German.”

“And music?”

“Music — and painting in water-colors” —

The matron felt much surprise that so capable a person had no recommendations; but Agnes’s beauty and air of distinction made her suspect some little romance, very proper, no doubt. Therefore she did not attempt to know more.”

“And what salary?”

Agnes was puzzled. She was absolutely ignorant as to how much learning like hers

could command, and of what she ought to ask.

Besides, the question of salary seemed to her a secondary one, and almost degrading.

“I care less about that,” said she, “than about the respectability of the house I may enter.”

The matron was entirely satisfied. She examined her register with a busy countenance.

“Here,” said she,—“a little girl of eleven years, a slight invalid; she must be read to; you could not go out at all,—five hundred roubles a year.”

“No, madame,” replied Agnes, deliberately, “I need air and exercise; and, besides, I hate to read aloud.”

The woman turned to another leaf.

“In the provinces,—does that make any difference to you? Besides, it is not far from here; only an hour or two from the monastery of St. Serge”—

Agnes nodded approvingly.

“A little girl, twelve years old; sciences, French, German, and music; the whole year in the country; four hundred roubles,—does that suit you?”

It suited Agnes perfectly.

“But it is immediately. You would have to arrange to start this very day.”

“So much the better,” answered the girl, reflecting that she would not pass the night on the bench in the waiting-room at the station.

“Then you may go to this address; you will return and let me know whether you are engaged. Where are you staying?”

“I have just arrived from the province, as you see by the passport; my trunk is at the railway station”—

“Oh! well! if not engaged, you might return here; you may have a bed and board for sixty kopecks a day.”

This was consoling and almost hospitable; but Agnes had too strong a desire to enter

upon her duties not to accept, no matter what situation, rather than remain inactive. She felt, also, both for the sake of her relatives and herself, that it would be more honorable not to take advantage of the low rates of an institution, established in part, at least, for the sake of charity. The matron rose at the same time with Agnes; a sort of misgiving seemed to come to her.

“I regret that you cannot furnish recommendations,” said she; “you appear so young, and, in spite of what you tell me, so inexperienced, that I should have wished to send you to a better place; but without references it is so difficult— Could not one write to these people with whom you were,—to the Sourofs?”

“Oh, no!” cried Agnes; “not that.”

“Why? Did you leave them on bad terms?”

“Very bad,” replied the young girl, turning away, her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"I am sorry. . . . You see the address which I have given you is that of a very respectable lady. . . . Oh! there is nothing to be said as to that, but of a rather difficult temper — the child, especially."

Agnes raised her head like a spirited war-horse.

"That does not frighten me," said she. "I have had experience with difficult tempers."

"Then I wish you good success, miss."

"Thank you, madame; do I not owe you something?"

"No," said the matron; "not you. Madame Markof will give me a little money for the Home, if she cares to do so, although she is not obliged to. This is a benevolent institution."

With a rapid movement Agnes opened her purse and took out five roubles, which she slipped into the box placed on the desk.

"That is for those who are poorer than I," said she, with a timid, yet proud, smile.

Her eyes met those of the matron, who placed her hands on the young girl's shoulder.

"If this place should not suit you, my child, come back and see me," said she; "we will find you something else. Take our address," — she handed her a printed card, — "and accept my thanks for your less fortunate sisters."

Agnes bowed, thanked her, went out, and found herself in the street, greatly astonished at what she had just done.

A *drojky* was passing; she hailed the driver, and was again jolted along over the phenomenally ill-paved streets of the good old city of Moscow. The *drojky* stopped before a hotel in all respects like that which had sheltered the fugitive during a few hours of the preceding night. The magnificent facade presented numerous rows of windows;

there were, indeed, so many that the smallest room must have had at least two, so that one could not stretch his arms without touching the window panes. The broad, high staircase had the same smell of fish-days' cooking and of an old fur which one has slept in; but Agnes was not allowed to continue her comparison in the upper stories, for on the second floor she was introduced into a very shabby drawing-room, where a lady of about forty-five was taking tea, seated on an extremely hard sofa.

Seeing Agnes, she arose, but when the card from the matron of the "Home" was presented to her she reseated herself, not inviting the young girl to do the same.

"Is it you who wish to enter my service?" asked she.

"Yes, madame."

"Sit down," then said Madame Markof, and she immediately began a formal examination into Agnes's acquirements. She evi-

dently wished to find in her some fault; but this was not easy, thanks to Agnes's pedantry, which had led her to go to the bottom of things. The famous passport was also produced, and no recommendations were demanded. If Agnes had known the world better, this indulgence would have caused her some disquiet, but she only congratulated herself upon it.

"You please me," said Madame Markof, at last. "You understand the terms: four hundred roubles a year; payable quarterly, and no vacations."

"I understand it, madame," replied Agnes.

"Then we will start this evening by the five-o'clock train. Till then, if you have anything to do, you are free."

"I will take advantage of it, madame," said Agnes, rising. "I can say at the 'Home' that you have engaged me?"

"Yes; besides, I shall call there myself, later."

“Good-by, madame,” said the newly-made governess.

“Good-by,” answered Madame Markof, without stirring.

“You are ill-bred,” thought Agnes; “but I will teach you manners; you shall see!”

“She is very pretty, but has an innocent look,” said the other to herself; “I shall get the best of her without much trouble. If only Mittia does not conceive the idea of falling desperately in love with her — Well! I would send her away! She would not be the first.”

In the afternoon Madame Markof paid a visit to the “Home,” and tendered with a satisfied air her modest contribution.

When she had gone the matron remained perplexed. “It is curious,” she said to herself. “The governess has given to our poor girls five times as much as the lady who engaged her. Poor thing! she will have a hard time of it!”

CHAPTER IX.

AT SERVICE.

THE train bearing Madame Markof and the young governess reached St. Serge at that delightful hour when, although it is growing dark, prominent objects are reflected in strong outlines against the still, clear sky. Nothing could be finer than the silhouettes of the steeples and the different buildings of the noble old monastery against the greenish-blue of the firmament, dotted with stars at the zenith.

A pleasant smell pervaded the ravine; a perfidious, but exquisite freshness rose from the woods, wet by the autumn rains. Agnes leaned out of the car-window to inhale the perfume of the dead leaves.

“You will take cold,” cried Madame

Markof. "Close the window, miss. I have a horror of draughts."

"As for me I adore them!" Agnes was about to reply; but she suddenly remembered her dependent position and raised the glass without a word.

The train stopped. Loaded with a quantity of small parcels which Madame Markof had unceremoniously placed in her hands, Agnes descended, and found herself in the arms, so to speak, of a tall young man, with red whiskers, who bent forward a very small head at the end of a very long neck.

"Wait, take this, and this, and this, and the basket. Oh! hold on, there are still the rugs, — have you got them? That's all!"

Madame Markof advanced, empty-handed, towards a heavy calash which awaited her in a corner of the yard. She took her place and arranged her innumerable packages in good order. After which, "Well, come, get

in!" said she to Agnes, who was wondering where she could place herself without sitting on something.

"Where?" asked the young girl, very sedately. Madame Markof looked at her in astonishment; then perceived that it was indeed impossible for her to find room upon the cushions. Then there began a general upsetting; all the parcels were shifted about without improving the situation.

At last, by dint of jamming the soft objects and piling up the hard ones, a space about three inches square was triumphantly pointed out to Agnes. Fortunately she was slender, and managed to install herself by secretly pushing back some of the harder packages which were sticking into her sides.

"I wonder what she is carrying that has so many sharp corners," thought Agnes, when the tall young man said, piteously:—

"Well, mamma, and I?"

"You? Why, beside the driver."

“There is a trunk,” groaned the little head at the end of the long neck.

“A trunk,—what trunk? I didn’t bring any trunk.”

“It is mine,” said Agnes, truly ashamed at having such an inconvenient trunk.

“Ah! yes. Well, Mittia, can’t you put it under your feet?”

“Very willingly—if I can,” added Mittia, prudently.

He made the attempt with very good grace, and was soon perched, with his chin on his knees, in a position as impossible to describe as to preserve.

“All right! go on,” said Madame Markof to the driver, who had not stirred, and whose calm was something surprising in the midst of all this bustle.

He was quiet because he was very deaf, as Agnes soon perceived, for he remained as indifferent to his mistress’s order as to the fore-going clatter; but Mittia touched him, he shook

the reins, and the vehicle moved off. Then Madame Markof perceived that she had omitted a formality, and, pointing at Mittia, perched on the trunk : —

“ He is my son,” cried she, in Agnes's ear, for the rattling of the calash necessitated an unusual diapason.

Agnes nodded and remained silent; it was the best she could do. After two hours and a half over a passable road the calash stopped before a low house. A dirty little servant, wearing a sort of jacket of a remarkably light brown, — even by candle-light, — came to open the carriage door and let down the step. They had some trouble in releasing Mittia, who was almost ankylosed upon Mademoiselle Titof's trunk, and the packages were then handed, one by one, to two maids, who disposed of them with incredible celerity. Meanwhile Agnes waited until they should attend to her. At last Madame Markof, having made certain, by two investigations, that nothing remained in

the calash, alighted, and requested the young girl to follow her.

They entered a room, quite large, but very low-studded, where an old gentleman, seated at a table, was reading an old Russian review, and a young girl, tall, dark, and bony, was preparing tea.

“What do you think I have brought you?” asked Madame Markof, in a bewitching tone, as if about to announce a pleasant surprise.

“Some little cakes?” asked old Markof.

“No! a new governess!” and, standing aside, she revealed Agnes.

“Oh!” said Miss Seraphine, disdainfully; “only that!”

Agnes felt a blush rise to her cheeks, and, stepping forward, replied:—

“I hope, mademoiselle, that before long you will take me for something.”

Seraphine, who was by no means an angel, looked askance upon her, and betook herself again to her teapot.

“Welcome, miss,” said the kindly old man. “You must be weary. Sit down; lay aside your cloak, and take a cup of tea.”

Agnes, touched by this gentleness, obeyed in silence, and sat down, near the old gentleman, in the place he had indicated to her.

“Bless me! how pretty she is!” said Mittia, who had just entered the room, half out loud.

His mother made a warning sign to him, and his sister stuck her tongue out at him, after which they all began drinking tea.

While Agnes was thoughtfully going through with this operation, she recalled the exact words of the telegram which she had sent to her parents before starting:—

Dear Parents, found good situation in respectable house. Do not be anxious; I shall be happy.

CHAPTER X.

AT SOUROVA.

WHEN the carriages stopped before the porch, on the return from the dinner at General Baranine's, Dosia alighted with some haste. Without appearing to do so she had reflected a great deal since morning, and had regretted her imprudent manner towards Agnes; she now realized how her severity must have chilled the young heart whose effort at submission merited a better reception.

Full of tenderness and forgiveness she sought her daughter's room; the lamp was burning on the table where Agnes had left it; there were no signs of disorder or precipitation, and yet something chilled Dosia's heart as she entered.

"Where is Miss Agnes?" asked she of the maid who appeared.

"I don't know, madame," replied the girl; "we have not seen her since dinner."

Agnes was in the habit of taking long walks alone, and they were never disturbed at her absence; but, at this hour — almost ten o'clock in the evening — it was strange that she should not be in-doors.

"You had better call from the terrace," said Madame Sourof, with a shade of anxiety.

The maid left the room hastily, and there soon sounded without, the blast of a shepherd's horn, that they called the horn of Uri, brought back sometime from a tour in Switzerland, and which was used when they wished to collect the family, scattered in the forest. The hoarse, deep sound died away in the light, transparent mist, awaking distant echoes. Dosia, still wearing her carriage cloak, went out to the veranda, her ears

intent to catch the cry, the customary response to this summons; in the deep calm of this still night the least sound must reach very far from the terrace, situated high above the circling woods.

The brook warbled in the glen over the pebbles which checked its way; but no other sound could be heard. The horn of Uri sounded a second time, so loudly that Dosia quivered. The prolonged call went beyond the hills, even to the depths of the great forest; echoes answered from all directions, some feeble and quite near, others distant and very powerful; the air seemed to quiver for some time after the sounds had died away. All the family had silently gathered around Dosia, except the father, who had, on arriving, gone directly to his study. They said nothing; all listened. The whiteness of the valley seemed sinister; Ermile felt suddenly as though this mist was a shroud. The horn gave yet another blast,

so loud that Nicolas thought involuntarily of the horn of Roland, broken with his last call.

“My daughter!” murmured Dosia, pressing a nervous hand to her heart.

Platon appeared on the threshold of the drawing-room, with a paper in his hand.

“Don't wait,” said he; “she is gone! I hope she is well and safe somewhere.”

Without speaking a word they went into the house and remained standing around the father, whose face expressed grief and sternness.

“She tells me of her departure,” said he, gravely; “she means well, I am sure; her intentions are honorable, but—but she did not think enough of the grief she was causing us”—

His voice was broken, as he pronounced these last words. Dosia threw herself sobbing on her husband's breast.

“It is my fault,” murmured she, in a low voice. Platon pressed his wife firmly against

his heart. Vera and Nicolas burst into tears. Ermile, very pale, looked fixedly before him without seeing anything. He would willingly have thrown himself at the feet of her parents, and said also, "It is my fault!"

After the first troubled moments they sat down to take counsel.

Mademoiselle Titof, who had been to examine the fugitive's room, to make sure that she had left no trace, returned in confusion.

"I cannot find my passport," said she.

"Then I understand," said Platon. "Her plan is well conceived, and proves that she was complete mistress of herself. But the precaution that she has taken to insure herself a means of honorable existence is exactly what will enable us to find her. God be praised, my dear wife! Our daughter certainly causes us great grief, but she gives us no cause to blush for her."

"She must be sought for and found at

once," cried Nicolas. "With her passport that cannot be difficult!"

"She must be found, certainly," said the father; "but I don't think it advisable to make her come back against her will. Let her learn a little of life; it will be an excellent lesson to her; for, observe it well, my children," continued he, turning towards his son and daughter, "we are now more disposed to pity than to blame her, but she is very guilty and ought to suffer. I hope that fate will teach her, and that she will return to us more submissive."

They dispersed very sadly, and Dosia passed the night in bitter tears. What her husband said to console her, or to take upon himself a just share of the responsibility, has remained a secret between them; but she certainly received an important lesson in life, for in the following days she appeared more indulgent and more tender. Vera was much surprised at it; but, as she was a good and intelligent

child, she gave her heart to her mother more completely than she had ever done before. This mother, with tear-stained eyes, who scarcely ever spoke of her absent daughter, but evidently thought much of that rebellious child, became very dear to her, and the little girl felt that the only way to soothe this terrible wound, always bleeding, was to assure Madame Sourof an absolute tranquillity as to the future of her other daughter.

Ermile had left the house the morning following the fatal day. He was not willing that Agnes should find him there in open disobedience to her command, should some unforeseen circumstance bring her back to the fold. His sister Marie, seeing him so gloomy and troubled, perceived that he reproached himself with something. With a little strategy and much kindness she soon gained his confidence, and learned with surprise the decree passed against him, and the submission with which he had accepted it.

“You consented not to see her again!” said she. “Ah, brother! you were very wrong. You should have replied: ‘Turn your back upon me when I enter, if you wish to; but I will not renounce my dear friends simply to please you, capricious little creature!’”

“Marie, perhaps she is suffering” —

“So much the better! It will teach her not to cause others to suffer!” replied the good girl, with her customary sense. “You will see what good it will bring her!”

“What do you advise me to do?” asked Ermile, a little confused.

“To keep quiet.”

“No! I can't do that.”

Marie looked full into her brother's eyes; then placing her hands on his shoulders, “You want to go and look for her,” said she, with an indulgent smile; “well, go! Search, ransack, turn heaven and earth, find her, — and when you have found her she will again send you about your business, unless” —

“Unless what?”

“Unless she falls upon your neck, for she has the best heart in the world!” concluded Marie. “Come, make haste, brother; for you see I have more confidence in the scent of a lover than in all the police in the world, and I long to know that she is back at Sourova, until she will come here, where I will receive her as a beloved sister.”

“Ah!” sighed Ermile, “we have not come to that yet! When I think of all that might happen to her” —

“To her! You don’t know her! Unless a chimney falls upon her some windy day I assure you that no harm will be able to reach her. She is a young person who knows what she is about, although she does not always know what she wishes. When I think of her stealing worthy Mademoiselle Titof’s passport — and perhaps her trunk! — I would undergo a good deal to see her in Mademoiselle Titof’s dresses, teaching the

history of Russia to a little brat, — it would be such fun!”

Marie burst out laughing, wiping her eyes, and Ermile went to prepare for his departure.

Platon had gone to Moscow the very next day, and there had set in motion everything necessary to discover the fugitive; but the peculiar circumstances which prevented the name of Agnes's passport from appearing on the hotel register paralyzed all search. It would have been otherwise had she not left Moscow; as things actually were, search was almost impossible.

Agnes's telegram was received with great joy by all the family. It was then true? She wished to become familiar with a life of labor? Her love for her parents had not been lessened by the test?

“O God!” thought Dosia, wiping away tears less bitter than any she had shed since her daughter's departure, “if she would but

return! I should know how to teach the dear child her duty without wounding her sensitive heart. It will be a hard lesson for her, but certainly more so for me!"

The customary routine of life at Sourova had been resumed. Mademoiselle Titof had abandoned the thought of her journey to Moscow until the passport should be returned to her. When she went to find her trunk, still at the station, as she supposed, she learned that it had taken the road to Nijni Novgorod with its pseudo-proprietor.

"How well managed!" cried that excellent person. "What a pity that I had not placed in it my best clothes!" and she again betook herself to initiating Vera into the mysteries of orthography.

CHAPTER XI.

TEACHING OF EVERY KIND.

AGNES had not paused a moment to consider the unpleasant side of her undertaking; she had, as they say, taken the bull by the horns. The day after her arrival at the Markofs she made a thorough examination of Seraphine, who, in spite of her evident disinclination, was obliged to answer the questions, and thus showed that she knew almost nothing.

“There is no merit,” Agnes told herself, “in educating an amiable and intelligent girl; with this pupil I shall be able to show that I have the patience as well as the faculties necessary to a pedagogue.”

A Russian proverb says that “a new broom always sweeps best.” This irreverent comparison is as apt for the scholars as for teachers. Seraphine’s broom was not especially supple;

however, it swept her young brain quite well during five or six days; and the new governess was able to use her own little brush in carefully dusting the newly-sharpened facets of her knowledge, so that they glistened like diamonds.

The lessons were held in a school-room, as scantily furnished as a room used only for study could be. It was cold and damp. Agnes felt her aristocratic feet, accustomed to rest on carpets, — or at least mattings, — grow cold at the contact with a rough wooden floor, carelessly washed by the servants, and left to itself to dry, which it, by no means, succeeded in doing.

The food especially caused the young girl unspeakable surprise. The day after her arrival being Sunday, she attributed the scanty lunch to an estimable piety, which did not compel the servants to work during the hours for services. The dinner consisted of a soup, mainly hot water and half-melted fat; then a

prodigious roast of beef, so large that Agnes could not repress an exclamation.

“Ah! you didn't have any like that with the Sourofs?” said Madame Markof, triumphantly.

Agnes frowned; but, soon recollecting that she was not now the daughter of Colonel Platon, she replied, with a more engaging air, “I confess it. The meat was very good; but the roasts were not as large.”

Madame Markof buried a great knife in the mountain of bleeding meat with the gesture of a sacrificing priest. The juice ran into the platter, and the victim was deprived of several slices too enormous to be appetizing. However, the meat was good, and Agnes reconciled herself to the roast beef, especially on seeing some fine, savory potatoes brought in, still clothed with floury coats, which attested their excellent quality.

“We live in the English style here,” said Madame Markof, “and it suits us very well.”

A pretentious and not very good dessert

terminated the feast, with which Agnes found herself tolerably well satisfied. It was not the delicate fare of her home, but it was something to live upon; and the young girl accepted all the accidents of the existence which she had voluntarily chosen.

The next day, at lunch, she saw upon the table the roast of the night before, which the breach made by the dinner did not appear to have perceptibly diminished. The same knife was plunged into the same meat, equally large slices were distributed, the potatoes again appeared, and all was ended,—without dessert this time.

Agnes did not dislike cold meat; she also approved of this system of domestic economy, especially as, after two successive appearances, the roast must probably pass on to the kitchen, to the great joy of the servants. But at dinner-time the roast beef was again upon the table, where it would seem it had chosen to reside; only the platter was smaller.

The next day at lunch, and at dinner, it still remained, although very much attenuated; the next morning, which was Wednesday, there remained only a very small, dry piece; and, as they did not receive it very cordially, the little piece reappeared almost intact at dinner. That day Agnes ate only potatoes, for the greasy, tasteless soup made her sick at her stomach.

The following morning there was nothing on the table at the hour for lunch. Madame Markof entered in morning wrapper and slippers. "The meat has not arrived," said she; "we shall have to lunch upon the oatmeal, but it doesn't matter for once only."

A great dish of oatmeal was brought, together with a bowl of milk. Agnes did not care much for oatmeal, except that it was better than cold roast for four entire days.

"At any rate," sighed she, "we shall have something new this evening!" She was not an epicure, and at home was the very last to

trouble herself as to what constituted the fare ; but the uniform diet which had existed since her entrance into this house inspired her with some curiosity as to the probable bill of fare for this day.

After the soup had been removed the servant entered, bending beneath the weight of an enormous dish, which Agnes at once recognized ; he approached, staggering, and deposited upon the table a magnificent roast of beef, so entirely resembling its predecessor that Agnes had to call on her memory in order to be sure that she was not dreaming, and that the day was really Thursday, not Sunday.

The potatoes entered, large and smoking, in a deep dish, and her three table companions expressed an unequivocal delight at the sight of this substantial repast.

When one has eaten cold roast for three days, hot roast has certainly some chance of success on the fourth. But, on leaving the table, Agnes felt a desire to improve her knowl-

edge. She was a person of very orderly mind, and loved to lay foundations for the future.

“Do you often eat roast beef?” she asked her young pupil.

Seraphine looked at her in astonishment.

“What! what did you ask me?” replied she, as though she had not understood.

“I asked if you often eat roast beef.”

“Why — always,” was the answer, with an amazed air.

“Always? The whole year?” exclaimed Agnes, no less astonished.

“Why, certainly.”

“Warm twice a week, and cold the rest of the time?”

“Naturally! What did you eat, then, where you used to be?”

“A great many good things, of which you will never have an idea,” replied Agnes, composedly. Seraphine looked askance at her, then turned away. Up to that time they had been upon a footing of armed neutrality; from

that day it was open war; the second roast beef of the week had been the signal for hostilities.

The next day Seraphine did not know her lessons, which was not extraordinary; but she gave evidences of an ill-humor which Agnes had not seen before. The little girl's state of mind showed itself in a cross indifference to everything which did not contribute to her immediate pleasure.

"You must learn your lesson in play-hours," said the young governess.

"I? — that has never happened! Find some other way, miss," answered the rebellious pupil. Agnes was about to reply sharply, when her malicious memory caused her to blush. Had she not formerly made an exactly similar response to the governess who preceded Mademoiselle Titof in their house, — a poor girl, who, tired out, had given it up, not feeling strong enough to cope with so formidable an antagonist?

"I have well deserved it," thought Agnes.

However, as power must remain with authority, Agnes went to ask Madame Markof what she should do when Seraphine did not know her lessons.

“But, miss, that is your affair! It is precisely to relieve myself of that trouble that I employ you.”

“But, madame, Seraphine will not admit that she is to learn during play-hours the lessons which she has not prepared in the school-time.”

“Well, the child is right! She must have her recreation!”

Agnes returned to her room to try and fathom the situation, which seemed deep indeed. Her apartment was as cold and damp as the school-room; she left it and went to the drawing-room, which was quite well heated, and sat down close to a window, taking up a book as a pretext.

In a few minutes her attention was attracted by a sort of sigh or moan. Thinking that a

dog had found its way into the house, and foreseeing trouble for the poor thing when discovered by Madame Markof, Agnes bent down and looked under the lounge, the chairs, and the table, as its short cloth left its legs visible; but no quadruped was to be seen.

Thinking she had been mistaken, she returned again to her book, or rather to her meditations; but a second piteously modulated sigh caused her a second time to raise her head.

She then saw, opposite her, stretched in an arm-chair, the ill-shaped figure of Mittia, whose protruding eyes contemplated her with a gaze of ecstasy. Agnes turned away her face impatiently. She had previously noticed the young man's marked attention, and was not pleased by it, but she trusted that he would be polite enough not to become troublesome. The two sighs which she had just heard deprived her of this hope. Despairing of finding in the drawing-room the peace

which she sought, Agnes rose to return to her own room.

“O miss, don't run away from me!” murmured young Mittia's mournful voice.

Agnes turned around suddenly, thoroughly angry. “Run away from you, sir?” said she. “In order to do that I should first be obliged to notice that you were present!”

“Oh-o-oh!” drawled the unhappy young man; “you are as cruel as you are beautiful.”

Agnes shrugged her shoulders and advanced towards the door. All at once Mittia leaped from his chair with a rapidity which one would not have anticipated from his languid voice.

“Miss,” said he, extending his arms so as to bar her way, “you must listen to me.”

His prominent eyes, his little mouth, and thin, red whiskers gave him a puppet-like appearance, rendered all the more absurd by his ridiculous gestures. Agnes would have laughed had she not been very angry.

“You are unhappy here, miss,” continued Mittia, rolling up his eyeballs despairingly; “you don’t eat; you don’t like cold roast beef, — oh! I have seen it. I observe everything you do. My sister is a dunce, and my mother has just treated you unkindly.”

“Sir!” interrupted Agnes, provoked.

“Don’t get angry,” replied he, with an entreating gesture, and an infinite gentleness in his voice. “You will find out many other things. It always commences well enough here, but it always ends badly.”

“Badly? What do you mean?” asked Agnes, somewhat frightened, in spite of her courage.

“They go away,” sighed the unfortunate youth. “They all go away, and abandon me to my bitter and desolate solitude.”

“He must have something the matter with his brain,” thought Agnes, with a strong inclination to laugh.

Madame Markof's morning-dress appeared in the corridor, but hid itself behind a wardrobe.

"The truth is, that the house is not cheerful," continued Mittia, in a less poetic tone. "But, if you wished, one could manage not to have it too tedious. A walk in the moonlight, — do you like moonlight walks?"

"I should not like them in your company," said Agnes, disdainfully.

"Oh! I? Never! It gives me the toothache to walk out at night, except in summer when it is very warm, and the season is gone by for this year. But there are a thousand ways of meeting — Miss, I love you!" —

"And I don't love you," replied Agnes. "Will you allow me to pass, if you please?"

"You must pay toll!" said Mittia, opening his arms wider and extending his cheek, probably with the intention of receiving a kiss.

"What strange governesses they must have

had here!" thought the young girl. But she had no desire to quarrel with this half-witted creature, whose brain must have been subjected to some serious shock. Instead of parleying she stooped quickly, passed under his outstretched arms, and found herself outside the door.

"Oh! how clever you are!" cried Mittia, delighted. "It is a pleasure to deal with one so spirited! But I will catch you!"

Madame Markof's morning-dress made a retreat, and Agnes was certain that the worthy mother had seen all.

"What a mother!" thought she, with an invincible disgust. "The son is only a simpleton; but the woman who allows such things in her house"—

A strong desire to leave this house had suddenly taken possession of her; if she had followed her inclination she would have at once demanded her passport, which Madame Markof had taken from her, and horses with

which to reach St. Serge. But a little reflection showed her that this summary proceeding after only eight days would make it difficult for her to get a new situation, should inquiries be made. Besides, was it not necessary to learn life? These people were ridiculous and despicable, but they did not seem wicked. In case of need she would address herself to the father, always absent watching his crops, who only returned in time for meals; he at least was gentle and good, and would, if necessary, protect her.

In the school-room Agnes again found Seraphine, who did not seem to have nursed any animosity on account of the scene in the morning. The young governess knew that it was good policy not to revive dangerous remembrances, and assumed a quiet face.

"We will have a good exercise in dictation, Seraphine," she said to her. The little girl shook her head with an important air, balancing herself on the hind legs of her chair,

in a way to cause anxiety for her equilibrium.

“I don't do any work to-day,” she said. “Mamma has given me a holiday!”

“A holiday! In honor of what saint?” asked Agnes, somewhat surprised.

“There is no saint in the matter. I have a holiday because I asked for it.”

“That cannot be!”

“Ask mamma, then!” replied Seraphine, balancing herself so as to make Agnes dizzy. It was, indeed, necessary to do so. The young girl went to Madame Markof, who confirmed what her child said.

“It is exactly so, mademoiselle. I granted it because she asked it. But that displeases me greatly, and I beg you henceforth to manage so that it may not occur again.”

“Pardon, madame,” said Agnes; “I hardly understand you. What do you wish me to do?”

“I wish you to prevent my daughter from

asking me for holidays. It interferes with her studies, and does her no good."

"In that case, madame, if you would consent to refuse her request."

"Not at all, miss. Every time she asks me I shall grant it her. There is nothing in the world worse than to hear a child tease you for hours; and Seraphine is very persistent. When once she has taken a thing into her head one can't turn her from it. Therefore, I find it much better to yield at once, you know."

"I realize that it annoys you, madame," answered Agnes, making an effort to keep her countenance in the face of this odd reasoning. "But I don't see exactly what you want me to do."

"Why! you don't understand? I thought you were clever; you look it! I wish you to prevent my daughter from asking me"—

"What she is sure of obtaining when she asks?"

Madame Markof remained a moment confused. "In short," replied she, impatiently, "manage to do what I tell you. I have entrusted you with authority; it is for you to show yourself worthy of it!"

Upon that she left the room with the air of an empress.

Agnes returned to the school-room in a very troubled state of mind. Her reason refused to admit the absurdity of Madame Markof's proposition. She preferred to believe in a lack of attention on her own part rather than in such utter nonsense.

"She did not explain herself clearly," thought the girl. "We shall understand each other better by and by."

Seraphine grew weary of being idle; the rain beat against the windows, forbidding all thoughts of a walk. Agnes thought it a favorable opportunity to try an attractive system of instruction which she had been meditating; and, thanks to the child's want of something

to do, she succeeded in occupying her for a couple of hours, winning her point while seeming to play with her. Seraphine, who was not a fool, understood all the advantage to be gained from so entertaining an instructress, and, at the close of the day, peace and harmony again reigned in the school-room.

“Were it not for that imbecile Mittia,” thought Agnes, “I am sure one could make an interesting experiment here. Bah! perhaps even he can at last be muzzled!”

Happy privilege of youth! A ray of sun is seen, and the storm is forgotten. Agnes went to sleep that evening in an excellent frame of mind, although the cold roast beef had again appeared at dinner.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW EXPERIMENT.

DOGS are muzzled, also bears; but how muzzle a calf's-head, boneless, and cooked to a turn? Mittia's character, as well as his person, was so mucilaginous that one could give it no form nor impose upon it any restraint. His sighs, less harmonious but as confused as the sounds of an æolian harp, pursued Agnes in all parts of the house.

It was in vain that she attached no importance to it; this plaint, like the whinings of a puppy, wearied Agnes exceedingly. The young man's glances amused her no more; she had tried in vain to laugh at the matter; her realization of the baseness of Madame Markof, who allowed it, because it was a pastime for her son, took away all her amusement at this ridiculous incident.

Fine weather had returned out of doors, with warm, clear days; but within the Markof mansion the barometer seemed to indicate a storm. Agnes had sought in vain for a little moral support from the elder Markof; she soon perceived that the worthy man had long since abdicated, "for the sake of peace." Madame Markof had replied to a slight allusion from Agnes, that it was of the first importance to a young girl not to be prudish. Besides, from her point of view, the most desirable trait in a person was always that for which they had need at the moment.

Seraphine had enjoyed the attractive work for several days, but became tired of it, as of all else; for she hated every exertion, even were it to procure herself a pleasure. The fifth roast of beef had appeared on the family table. Agnes reckoned the time by roasts of beef, which made it now fifteen whole days that she had spent in this original household. Either owing to the influence of cold meat, or

to that of the sirocco, Agnes was nervous that day, and Seraphine not less so.

“Miss, I love you!” Mittia had murmured, in the morning, while taking his coffee. “I love you more than ever! If you will consent, we will fly together! You have a family? Let us go to them! We will marry, and shall be far better off than here.”

Oh! yes, it was far better at Sourova! That was certain! Agnes thought, with unspeakable regret, of the autumn-tinted forest; of the rippling brook, of the fragrant terrace, which the early frosts respected, so warm and sheltered was the situation. She thought of the grand piano, formerly touched by her agile fingers; of Vera, who must find it dull; of Mademoiselle Titof, who had not been able to visit her uncle for want of a passport; of her mother, —

Her mother! She dared not think of her! She recoiled before the dear remembrance, which was now a remorse. She felt con-

fusedly that her father, however afflicted he might be, would be better able to sustain the blow than her mother.

She had hardened herself since her departure, to avoid thinking of this dear, blessed home where dwelt happiness and duty, inseparable from one another. She had in vain created for herself false duties, false responsibilities, artificial conventionalities, an ideal vocation; she had only succeeded in accumulating upon her shoulders burden after burden, without finding again any of the joys which had formerly rendered her duties so light.

“Fool that I was!” said Agnes to herself, looking over the barren, monotonous landscape, crossed by the highway. “I thought myself the centre of the world, and I am not even a useful wheel in this social machinery where I cannot find a place. I am good for nothing! I know nothing, although I have learned so many things, and I shall know nothing until I have learned to bend myself to discipline.”

It was a great point to have acknowledged the truth; but Agnes was hardly able to feel it. Her tears fell, and she did not know that she was weeping; the old leaven of pride was melting away in a deep emotion of repentance. How gladly she would now have fallen at the feet of those whom she formerly considered unjust, — if she had thought she could obtain forgiveness!

Mittia's plaintive voice sounded somewhere in the house. Agnes repressed a movement of impatience.

This was what she had gained by banishing Ermile, the noble and courageous Ermile, who loved her in spite of her faults, and knew how to tell her of it! She had bartered the friend of her youth, worthy to be that of her whole life, for a plaintive, ridiculous lover, whose sighs would have been offensive but that they were beneath all notice.

“O mother!” thought Agnes, while tears fell upon her hands like beads from a chaplet;

“my good mother, my noble father, my dear Ermile,—how I love you all! Yes, I love and bless you in the midst of trouble which I have brought upon myself. And how eagerly would I go to you if I thought you would welcome me!”

It was not the dread of reproaches which now held Agnes back: it was the fear lest they should not be willing to receive her at the hearth which she had deserted.

“Aunt Sophie!” thought the young girl all at once. “Wisdom and goodness personified! She is the one who will give me assistance; it is through her that I will implore forgiveness from those whom I have so cruelly offended!”

She hastened to the school-room, to write the letter which should prepare her aunt for her arrival. While she was searching in her portfolio for a sheet of paper the voice of Madame Markof sounded on the threshold:—

“How is this, miss,—did I not forbid

you to allow Seraphine to ask me for a holiday?"

"Yes, madame," replied Agnes, raising her head.

"Well, and what has she just done?"

"I do not know, madame. She said that she was going to say good-morning to you."

"Exactly! While saying good-morning to me she asked me for a holiday, and I granted it to her! You knew, however, that it was not to happen again!"

"Yes, madame, you told me so," answered Agnes, firmly. "But, in order that I may be able to obey you, you will have to authorize me not to send Seraphine to you to say good-morning."

"But I am very particular that she shall bid me good-morning! Deprive myself of the caresses of my child! That is, indeed, a strange idea!"

"In that case," said Agnes, who could hardly restrain herself, "I am powerless to

prevent her from asking you whatever she wishes to!"

"It is because you don't know your business! I wish,—understand,—I wish to have Seraphine see me whenever she desires to do so, and I forbid you that she shall ask for holidays!"

"Your expression is not correct, madame," said Agnes.

"How?"

"No, it is not correct, either from a grammatical or common-sense point of view."

"Impertinent!" cried Madame Markof.

"Your ill-opinion cannot injure me, madame," replied Agnes, suddenly feeling herself again the daughter of Platon Sourof. "I will leave your house. Will you be kind enough to provide a carriage to take me to St. Serge?"

"You? By no means! I am satisfied with your services, though you don't know how to command obedience, and I shall keep you."

“Against my will?”

“Certainly! I shall not give you back your passport. What can you do without a passport?”

At this Agnes burst into a hearty laugh. For the first time since her departure the famous passport was of no consequence to her. She thought of the trunk, Mademoiselle Titof's precious trunk, from which she had taken only a little linen, having opened it with a key found by chance. She was then rid of the trunk and the passport at the same time! What a figure these good people would present when summoned to give up these two articles, unduly retained!

Madame Markof could not suspect the thoughts of fun which were dancing through the head of her governess. Seeing her breathless with laughter, she thought her in hysterics, and hastened to bring her a glass of water.

She had no sooner left the school-room

than Mittia glided in. Agnes, sitting down, continued to laugh, in spite of her efforts to stop. Her handkerchief at her mouth, she now and then calmed herself, then burst out more violently, as a new comic phase of the difficulty presented itself to her. The sight of Mittia was not fitted to diminish her hilarity, and, as he regarded her tenderly, she could not restrain herself. Burying her face in her handkerchief she laughed till she cried. It was too good an opportunity; Mittia could not resist. With all the grace he could command he bent towards the young girl, and advanced his lips to kiss her.

But Agnes had felt his red whiskers tickle her ear; her movement was quicker than his thought; and, just as Madame Markof entered with a glass of water, the fingers of her governess gave her son's cheek a resounding slap.

“Oh!” cried Mittia, dumfounded, raising his hand to his cheek.

“Miss Agnes! It is unheard of! To strike my son!” exclaimed Madame Markof, spilling the water upon her dress, in her indignation.

“It would be better to kiss him, I suppose?” replied Agnes. “Come, madame, will you let me have a carriage?”

“No! no! no!” shrieked Madame Markof, wiping away with her handkerchief, meanwhile, the water which ran down her dress.

“It is all one to me then. I will go away on foot.”

“On foot! — and your trunk?”

Agnes began to laugh again, while gathering up some few articles which belonged to her.

“My trunk,” said she, “will be sent for. Good-by, madame! good-by, Mittia!”

She disappeared, leaving Madame Markof and her son regarding each other in astonishment. Soon after she ran across the garden, clothed in the same gray dress, the same

cloak, and the same bonnet, covered with the veil, which she had worn when leaving Sourova. The same little bag hung from her hand; only she had, besides, an umbrella, bought at Moscow, which was the only material vestige of her fanciful expedition.

CHAPTER XIII.

WALKING.

IT was a beautiful day, and Agnes's heart leaped in her breast with joy, when she reached the road leading to St. Serge. The sun shone so brightly, and there was so much freedom in store for the young fugitive! She felt as though she were issuing from a prison where, for an endless time, she had enjoyed neither light nor society.

"However, they are not monkeys," thought she, laughing; "but perhaps monkeys would have been better."

"Oh-o-oh! Mittia!" sighed Agnes, aloud, and then she burst out laughing.

When one is young and joyous, when the sky is clear and the air fresh, one always commences by walking too fast. At the

end of a quarter of an hour the traveller's legs were already tired. She had set off at such a quick pace that she thought to reach St. Serge in two hours at the most; but she was soon obliged to stop, seat herself on the wayside on a soft pile of stones which offered her a rest, and consider that even at the rate of five *versts* an hour, which was certainly the maximum of her speed, it would take her four or five full hours.

This was not very encouraging, although liberty could be bought at this price. Rising, a little stiff, she took a less rapid pace, and her thoughts underwent the same modification.

It was an excellent thing to have escaped from slavery; but the days of deliverance have their to-morrows, for individuals as well as for nations, and no one knows how to take advantage of these days if they have not foreseen the consequences.

For Agnes the consequence was a journey to the house of her Aunt Mourief, who must still be occupying her residence at Tsarskoé-Sélo. In that case she must go to Petersburg — pass a night in a hotel!

“Never!” cried Agnes, out loud. “There are too many beetles!”

In vain her reason tried to persuade her that there would probably be fewer in other hotels; her mind refused to listen.

“I had rather take the train and pass the night in a railway carriage!”

All at once she realized that, unfortunately, her liberty had so far brought her uncomfortable nights; and naturally her thoughts flew towards home, where all was so pleasant and comforting to the heart.

“O mamma! my sister! Kola!” thought she; “I shall see you again, at last! My dear ones, it is indeed true that one’s joy must be lost in order to realize its value!”

While walking she considered that this

truth had been repeated to her a thousand times in conversation and in books, and that she had disregarded it with a sort of disdain, like so many others. Youth does not love established truths, acquired experiences. It admits at first only that which it has itself verified.

“If it is thus with everything,” she said to herself, “I know nothing of life; I have it all to learn, and it will take a long time! How foolish and self-conceited I have been!”

As these reflections passed, and Agnes walked on, the sun also traversed the sky, the mile-posts succeeded one another, and—must we confess it?—the young girl became very hungry. The emotions of her breast could not impose silence on the demands of her appetite.

The road so far had been absolutely bare and deserted. On each side were noble, silent forests, where the bright green moss in the openings indicated an extreme dampness,

excellent for vegetation, but precluding all idea of finding wild fruits—especially rare at this season.

“It is rather hard,” thought Agnes; “one can, it seems, be hungry and unable to procure food, even with money in one’s pocket! I am wrecked on the shores of civilization.”

After a long, tedious walk, the sun indicating almost half-past three, Agnes came at last to a small village. With a confidence inspired by her annual sojourn among the peasants of her father’s land—whom she loved and who loved her—the young girl entered the first house, and asked for bread and milk, offering payment.

The peasant woman was old and cross.

“We are not shop-keepers,” said she, in a rude tone; “we don’t sell our milk.”

“Then give it to me,” replied the girl, good-naturedly. “I will pray to God for you.”

How different she was from the vain Agnes of former times! Even so few days had already taught her that one gains nothing by being haughty, and that a little good-humor serves one better than the grandest airs.

“You are going to St. Serge?” asked the woman, pacified.

“Yes, on foot; and I am very hungry.”

“You should have said so. Sit down there, my child; you shall have something to eat and to drink.”

A fresh honeycomb and a bowl of milk were immediately placed before her, with a large piece of black bread, and her youthful appetite did them the greatest honor. The old woman watched her eat with a satisfied air; evidently she had felt great hunger more than once herself; and she knew what pleasure, not only material, but moral, accompanies the partaking of hospitality generously offered and gracefully received.

When Agnes had finished her meal the old woman asked, "Will you have some more? Don't hesitate! Although far from rich, we are not poor, and can offer a crust of bread to passing pilgrims. They pray to God for us, and we are better for it."

"Thanks, mother," replied the young girl. "I am satisfied. I shall never forget your hospitality. What can I do for you?"

"If you wish you can offer a very small candle to the miraculous Virgin at the monastery. But a very small one, you understand! A candle worth three kopecks. That which I have given you is not worth so much; but I have been wanting for a long time to offer a candle there, and for ten years have not been able to get as far as St. Serge."

"I will do it," said Agnes. "Why can you not go as far as that, — it is so near?"

"Ah, my child, we have no leisure in our family! We work; some are born,

others die. I have three daughters and two sons, all married; they have a throng of children; and, besides, it is now five years since I have had my husband there on the stove."

Agnes looked surprised, and in the darker part of the room she perceived an old man, with a white beard, lying on the stove, wrapped in blankets.

"Excuse me, father, I had not seen you," said she, going towards him. "Do you suffer?"

"I do not suffer, my little beauty," replied the old man, looking at her kindly; "only my legs refuse to support me, and I remain thus. In summer they carry me out of doors, and I see the good God's bright sun; but after it begins to be rather cold I do not go out. Thanks to the Lord, I have a kind wife and good children, who let me want for nothing, and I am content."

"You are content?" cried Agnes, with a kind of religious awe.

“Why, yes! Why should I not be? They take good care of me. I have good eyes and good ears; and from time to time a bounty comes to me.”

“A bounty?”

“Certainly; a pedler passes with his boxes, or even some pilgrims, who sing hymns or tell stories. To-day it is you, my little beauty. I take pleasure in looking at you, and I shall laugh to-morrow in remembering with what good appetite you ate your bread just now.”

The young girl became thoughtful. She placed her hand upon that of the old man, who smiled as he looked at her.

“Father,” said she, “I thank you for your hospitality; it has done me more good than you think for. I will pray that your life may be always full of things which you love. And you, mother, I will gladly fulfil your desire. I will offer a candle to the Virgin of the monastery.”

“A little one, for three kopecks.”

“Yes, a little one; for the recovery of your husband.”

“Oh! — his recovery! — that isn't to be thought of! But only that he may not grow any worse.”

She bade them farewell; the good woman accompanied her, and on the threshold she paused.

“I am glad that I entered here, mother; you have given me bread for my body, and your husband that for my soul. May God's blessing rest upon your house!”

“May his protection accompany you!” answered the old woman fervently. “But listen to a word of advice, my child: don't mention money when you enter people's houses; that makes them angry, you see! One is willing to give, but not for money; that would spoil all!”

“You are indeed right, mother. I will not forget it. Good-by.”

She departed with a light step, refreshed and comforted. A mysterious and solemn impression remained upon her, as if she were walking in a church. The resignation of the peasant and the simplicity of the old woman had penetrated her soul with a strange sweetness; the bread of charity, simply accepted, appeared to her a veritable communion with these humble people.

“To know how to content one’s self with a little! — with so little! O my brothers, before God, I love you!” murmured Agnes, her eyes brimming with happy tears.

The sun declined, and she kept on walking. Soon it hid itself behind a grove of birches which covered a hill on the right; through the thin branches, already bereft of their leaves, she saw the sky grow red like a flame, and then the brightness decrease. The steeples of St. Serge at last appeared before her eyes, which began to grow weary, and which the chill of the evening filled with mist.

She was tired out; often, fearing to drop, she paused an instant to take breath. Must the night come on before she reached the town? At home, in her father's woods, she would not have been afraid; but here, on this unknown ground, she knew not what she might meet.

She walked on and on, thinking that everything was difficult; that the way to liberty was full of unexpected obstacles, and that to be willing was not sufficient. In spite of the firmest determination, how many hindrances, how many snares,—and her ever strong will could not assuage the pain of her burning feet, wearied by a long journey.

The sky had turned from red to yellow, from yellow to green. The shadows of the forests were now black masses, where one could distinguish neither leaves nor branches—and Agnes still walked on. The bells of St. Serge pealed out in the calm air. "Come," said they; "we are the refuge, the end of the pilgrimage;

we call the tired traveller to the place of rest and prayer. When you have reached the foot of the tower whence we resound you may retire and sleep" —

The sound of the bells died away in the clear air, and Agnes felt no longer alone.

For an instant she thought of seating herself by the wayside and remaining there. She had less fear of the open air than of hotels, which, moreover, appeared to her to be inaccessible. She recalled songs where the heroes laughingly spoke of sleeping at the inn of "The Fair Star."

But it was growing cold, and Agnes was so orderly, such a careful observer of propriety, that this seeming vagabondage was exceedingly distasteful to her. A church might answer, — but the roadside —

And, besides, what encounters she might have! She resumed her walk with dragging feet, very tired, sad, and overcome. Finally the houses of the town appeared; the young

girl straightened up so as to present a good front, like troops on the march; with calm face and confident tread, she walked to the square before the monastery. There were few people about; the train from Moscow had just arrived, and all had hastened to their homes or their business. Agnes thought that she would take a carriage to the railway station, for she was unable to walk more.

She went to the carriage stand in the centre of the square, and was about to call a cabman, when she saw a tall man, with shoulders slightly bent, who seemed to be making a bargain for a cab.

A voice, grave and rather sad, struck her ear. There was everything in that well-known voice,—home, happiness, even love.

“Ermile!” cried the young girl, stretching out her arms.

The bag and umbrella fell to the ground, and Agnes threw herself, weeping, on the breast of her banished lover.

“I was just going to seek you,” said the young man, simply, gathering up the fallen objects, after the first moment of surprise.

“Which do you prefer, — to pass the night here, or to start immediately for Moscow?”

“Let us start! let us start!” murmured Agnes, clinging tightly to his arm.

“There is a train in an hour; let us go to the station.”

“No, wait!” said the young girl. “I have a duty to fulfil.”

Followed by her friend, she entered the great church, where vespers were being sung; near the door she bought a candle for three kopecks, and placed it herself before the miraculous image, after which she went out. But Ermile had not understood the meaning of her act.

“Superstitious rites! — you, Agnes?” said he.

“No; a promise. I will tell you about it.”

The train was soon carrying them away to

Moscow. Sitting silently, opposite each other, they looked at one another and smiled; they were not inclined to speech; they had too much to say, and, besides, they had plenty of time.

An hour later they crossed Moscow. At ten o'clock they were in the night train, which bore them towards the Volga.

When they found themselves alone, in the warm and well-lighted compartment, Agnes stretched out so as to rest her swollen feet. Ermile said to her, smiling sadly, "How thin you have grown!"

"It's because I have eaten too much cold roast," replied she, in a tired voice.

She was truly exhausted.

Without dwelling on the originality of this reply Ermile answered: —

"I have disobeyed you again, but reassure yourself; as soon as we have returned I shall be wise enough to go to my father's, and not trouble you further by my presence" —

“Ermile, will you never pardon me?” cried Agnes, stretching towards him her thin hand, now a little feverish.

“I pardon you? O my darling!” —

And, at the risk of appearing ridiculous, he fell upon his knees in the carriage, showering tender kisses on her burning hand.

The next day, before the sun had disappeared behind the forests, Agnes reëntered the home of her parents. Warned by a despatch from Ermile, they awaited her with hearts full of anxiety. Despatches say either too little or too much to satisfy the eagerness of anxious people, and Dosia feared to see her child return embittered by suffering.

At last the carriage sent to meet the travellers rolled up the drive. Dosia wished to run out on the porch, but her husband restrained her.

“It is the prodigal child, wife,” said he; “but do not forget that, like him, she has

sinned against heaven and against us. The happiness of her life may depend upon the first word she shall say on entering the house" —

The door opened; Agnes entered; without speaking, her father and mother awaited her, standing. She did not even look in their faces, but ran towards them, and fell on her knees before her mother. Dosia received her in her arms, and felt that paradise is sometimes found upon earth.

"Well, my daughter," said Platon, with a slight smile, "have you tasted the fruits of the tree of knowledge?"

"They are bitter, papa," replied the guilty girl; "but their bitterness has at least taught me that my wisdom was only folly,"

After Vera and Kola had eagerly embraced their sister, and Mademoiselle Titof had cut short Agnes's excuses by a most affectionate reception, Platon turned to Ermile.

"How were you able to find her?" said he.

“It is very simple,” replied the worthy young man, with his accustomed modesty. “I was anxious on your account, — you understand that, do you not?”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” said Platon, with a convinced air, while Dosia repressed a smile.

“Then I said to myself that Miss Agnes must have had recourse to some bureau of employment. They are not very numerous in Moscow, and I soon made the round of them. A wrong direction, in consequence of a resemblance of names, cost me several days; but finally I was fortunate enough to get upon the right track, and from that moment was entirely successful.”

“You met, then, on the street?”

“On the square, just as Agnes — Miss Agnes was about to take one carriage for the station, and I another to go to the place where she lived.”

“Where were you going then?” asked Vera, — “not coming here, surely?”

Agnes blushed.

"No, not here. I knew that I did not deserve to be received here. I was going to Aunt Mourief's."

"That's all right!" cried Kola; "they will be here to-morrow evening!"

"Come," said Platon, "all is for the best. Now, my children, let us go to dinner."

The next day Pierre and his wife did, indeed, arrive. Aunt Sophie had to receive many confidences from Agnes, who told her all which she did not yet dare express to her mother, although they understood each other's hearts from the first. Good Sophie knew how to place them at once in enjoyment of their reciprocal feelings, so that no cloud, no doubt, could henceforth rise between them.

"Well, niece," said Pierre, seeing the young girl evince at table the best of appetites; "have you eaten of the *vache enragée*?"

"Pardon me, uncle, it was of beef," replied

she. And everybody was delighted with the joke, for at that moment they were easily satisfied.

Marie had come to Sourova to celebrate the finding of the lost sheep. After some preliminaries she said to her:—

“You know that Ermile deserves credit for going to seek you. You had not given him any encouragement!”

“I know it,” answered Agnes. “Do not overwhelm me! Marie, it seems to me that, from the time of my birth until the moment he rescued me, I have made nothing but blunders.”

“Oh! then all is well!” said Marie.

A few days after, Ermile made his marriage offer to Agnes’s parents. He knew now, beyond doubt, that the heart, so long coveted, was irrevocably his.

“We have only just recovered her; you are not going to take her from us at once!” was Dosia’s response.

“Next summer,” said Platon. “And you had better come and pass the winter at Petersburg. You and she can only gain by seeing each other often in the same society. You will thus both become better acquainted with it and with yourselves.”

Christmas eve, all the family, including Ermile, dined at Aunt Sophie's, with a great abundance of good-humor and choice dishes.

“Come, Agnes,” said Uncle Pierre, who could not refrain from the pleasure of teasing, “you have never confided to us what occurred there at the house of the ogress, in the vicinity of St. Serge.”

“I have told my parents about it, dear uncle!”

“You could not more delicately inform me that I am indiscreetly curious. But an uncle is almost a father! Confess, now! You devoured the ogress, and it is to escape justice that you have sought refuge in the bosom of your family?”

Agnes smiled good-naturedly. She could take a joke now, and knew how to reply to it.

“I ate no one, uncle; and. I sometimes regret it, for it would have varied the bill of fare.”

Pierre made a gesture of approval.

“Well answered. And tell me, was the family numerous?”

“A father, mother, son, and daughter.”

“A grown-up son?” said Pierre, winking.

“Yes, uncle.”

“In love with you?”

“Yes, uncle.”

Agnes burst out laughing at the remembrance of Mittia.

“Did you make a martyr of him?”

“O uncle, it was he made a martyr of me. I did not look at him, I assure you!”

“Well, did he court you?”

“Yes, uncle.”

"How?"

Agnes imitated one of the tenderly modulated sighs of the unfortunate Mittia. Everybody laughed.

"And that was all?"

"Oh, no!"

"What happened finally?"

Agnes assumed a very serious air and looked at Ermile, who was laughing.

"Don't laugh, sir," said she. "It is a serious matter, as you will see."

"You did not stab him?" asked Vera, whom all the ladies regarded reproachfully.

"No, but he came near" —

"To kiss you?" interrupted Pierre Mourief, with a droll expression about his mouth.

"Yes, and then" —

"Go on, Dositia's daughter, go on" —

"I gave him a slap," said Agnes, modestly.

"It runs in the family!" cried Pierre, shaking with delight.

All the guests shared his gayety, even Platon. Dosia alone did not laugh altogether heartily. It was very painful to her to think that her daughter, her cherished Agnes, had been exposed to such dangers. Agnes understood it, and threw her a look full of tenderness, which contained a world of regrets and promises.

After a delightful winter, when the spring brought every one back to the country, there came a festival season for the happy family. The time of Agnes's marriage drew near; but she would really be very little separated from her parents, whom she had now learned to love as they deserved. However, Dosia seemed to treasure the last days that her daughter was to be with her; for now she and Agnes never left each other.

The day came, however, when the young bride left her loved home to join at church the husband whom she now loved with all her soul. Just as she was crossing the threshold

a little package was handed her, which had arrived by post. Since the previous day there had been a constant shower of presents. The package was opened, for Agnes wished to see who had thought of her. It was a little image carved out of cypress wood, very simple and even rude, representing St. Serge.

“From whom can that come?” asked Vera, always inquisitive.

“I do not know!” said Agnes, searching her memory. “Oh, yes! it is my wayside peasant, she who gave me food the day I found — no, that Ermile found me! We wrote them of our marriage. Such kind people!”

The ceremony took place very quietly, as was fitting in a country church; but everybody was happy, and the church as full of flowers as at Whitsuntide.

When, in the evening, Ermile had led away his young wife, who secretly shed tears of real repentance at the memory of her errors,

Platon sat in the large drawing-room, with all the family.

“She will be happy,” said he; “there is not the least doubt of that; but how we shall miss her!”

“I do not know,” replied Dosia, “how I can manage to live without her. I shall miss her follies even, and there will be a great vacancy in my life.”

“Happily I am here!” said Vera, with a suggestive air, which said much.

Dosia stroked her hair affectionately, and turned towards her sister-in-law. But Vera had her idea, and it was to Mademoiselle Titof that she confided it.

“If they find it dull,” said she, “it will not be my fault! Now that Agnes is gone they shall learn what I am capable of. So far I have been misunderstood.”

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