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THE PRINCESS ROUBINE.

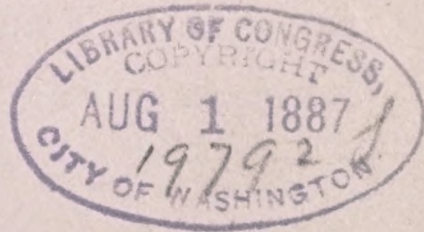
A RUSSIAN STORY.

BY HENRY GRÉVILLE.

AUTHOR OF "DOSIA," "SAVELI'S EXPIATION," "MARRYING OFF A DAUGHTER,"
"ZITKA," "THE PRINCESS OGHROF," "MAM'ZELLE EUGENIE," "MARKOF,"
"SYLVIE'S BETROTHED," "DOURNOF," "GABRIELLE," "BONNE-MARIE,"
"LUCIE RODEY," "XENIE'S INHERITANCE," "TANIA'S PERIL,"
"PRETTY LITTLE COUNTESS ZINA," "SONIA," "A FRIEND,"
"PHILOMENE'S MARRIAGES," "GUY'S MARRIAGE."

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY GEORGE D. COX.

"THE PRINCESS ROUBINE," by Henry Gréville, is one of the most delicious and captivating novels of the day. It breathes an atmosphere of love from beginning to end, and literally teems with interest. A better and purer love story is not to be found in any language. There is no sickly sentimentality about it, even its most impassioned love scenes having a practical element at once unique and refreshing. Nadia, the heroine, is a wealthy Russian princess with amazingly democratic ideas, who registers a solemn vow to marry a poor man. This vow she keeps to the letter, but in a manner that shows consummate ingenuity on the part of the gifted author. Korzof's courtship is a delightful episode that no one can ever forget, and the subsequent career of the married pair, with the unparalleled heroism, sacrifice and love involved, will touch every heart to its inmost recesses. Volodia and Martha are charming characters, fully worthy of the charming novel. The action takes place chiefly in St. Petersburg, though there are fascinating glimpses of the country and the Neva. "THE PRINCESS ROUBINE" is a book that all will read and vastly relish. It is an exact reproduction of the original.



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"LUCIE RODEY," "XENIE'S INHERITANCE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE VOW.

THE Prince Roubine was smoking his after-dinner cigar upon the terrace; stretched out in a rocking-chair of bamboo, he rocked himself carelessly as he gazed at the landscape gilded by the evening rays.

Beneath his eyes spread out the gulf; the right shore was shaded with a light red vapor, in which were barely visible in darker colors the granite masses of the coast of Finland; the blue water swashed gently on the strand at the foot of his garden, the wide avenues of which descended as far as the sea. To the right, the town of

Peterhof lay in the form of an amphitheater, displaying the factitious animation of towns at the waterside, where people hasten to live during the three months of the summer, the steamboats that run to St. Petersburg were smoking and rumbling beside the long landing, depositing numerous passengers come to hear the music in the imperial gardens or to pass the evening with some friend; elegant uniforms of officers of all the arms were visible upon the quay; the light dresses of the women seemed so many flowers on the dark mass of verdure of the park, and all the exuberance of Russian society life appeared to be collected in this corner of the land.

To the left, the villas thinly sown amid the foliage, the sloping strand that seemed to be stealing away from the clasp of the sea, rested the sight and the mind.

The Prince was blasé in regard to the spectacle of the town, perhaps he was still more so in regard to that of the sea and the landscape; but surely he was not blasé in regard to the charm of hot and delicious coffee, of an exquisite cigar, of a comfortable rocking-chair; these were enjoyments, the intensity of which, far from decreasing, seemed to increase with habit; hence he raised himself up in his chair with a little quiver of happiness at the moment when his cup of coffee was placed as if by enchantment within reach of his hand.

"Oh! you bad father, not to say as much as thank you!" cried a joking voice, as a soft, caressing hand was laid on Roubine's shoulder.

"Is it you, Nadia?" said he, turning around.

"Yes, it is I! Would your coffee be good if it were poured out by another hand than mine?"

The Prince took his daughter's hand, examined it attentively, turned the rings upon it, then smilingly looked at the pretty face bent over him and answered:

"No, that's clear! What will they do this evening?"

"They are going to hear the music. The program gives plenty of fine promises; the fountains will play and be illuminated with the electric light. In addition a superb concert——"

"Perfectly splendid! Of course we will go?"

"Certainly! I ordered the calèche and the yellow dun horses to be in readiness at nine o'clock."

"Very well," carelessly said the happy father. "Sit down, Nadia; you prevent me from seeing a vessel that has arrived at Cronstadt."

The young girl turned quickly, put her hand above her eyes, that the sun blinded, and gazed at the large craft that, after several skillfully executed maneuvers, stopped before the granite fortress.

A commotion among the boats around took place immediately. The Prince took up a spy-glass that never quitted the terrace and watched the distant movement.

"I can't make out what the vessel is," said he, after a moment's attentive survey.

"Some German bark," said his daughter, negligently.

They chatted about this and that for an instant, then Roubine again took up his spy-glass.

"Look now, Nadia," said he, "a little steam yacht is coming this way!"

In truth, an elegant pleasure craft was crossing the gulf and coming under a full head of steam toward Peterhof; the flag floated out behind, sometimes dipping in the blue water, and a flame danced at the top of the mast.

"I'll wager it's Korzof!" joyously cried the Prince, "it's Korzof returning from Germany. He has come by vessel to be at Peterhof on his arrival, and has directed his yacht to be in waiting for him. That's just like him! But, Nadia, if it's Korzof, he'll be here before a couple of hours have elapsed!"

"It won't take him as long as that," calmly said the young girl, who had turned her back to the gulf.

"Give him time to arrange his toilet a little," observed her father.

"He can accomplish that operation on board his yacht," answered Nadia, in the same cold tone.

"How indifferent you seem!" exclaimed the Prince, as he put down the spy-glass and looked at his daughter. "I imagined that you had a great deal of friendship for him!"

"I have a great deal of friendship for Dmitri Korzof," replied the young girl; "but my friendship, as you know, father, does not express itself after the fashion of that of dogs that, barking, make a hundred turns around the object of their tenderness."

"Yes, I know; you are for concentrated feelings," said the Prince, with a little irony.

He resumed the spy-glass and watched the progress of the yacht, that was approaching rapidly.

"Wait," said he; "we will soon find out if it is Korzof."

A tap on a bell placed upon the table summoned a servant. Roubine gave him his orders and descended from the terrace into the flower garden situated a few steps below. From there an opening skillfully contrived among the tree tops of the garden gave a view of a portion of the gulf.

After a few instants a gigantic flag, that bore on a red ground the arms of the Roubines, spread out over the roof of the villa and mounted majestically to the top of the flagstaff.

The report of a small piece of artillery replied to this signal; Nadia could see the white smoke fly from the stern of the yacht, and the flame on the mast mounted and descended again rapidly. In its turn, the princely

flag descended and mounted again three times, then sank down, like a bird that folds its wings, and disappeared.

"It is he!" joyously cried the Prince. "He answered at once. I presume that he also had his spy-glass leveled upon the terrace. Eh! Nadia?"

Nadia did not answer. The cannon report had brought a slight blush to her pale cheeks. She turned away and picked two roses from a veritably fabulous rose-bush, a special and priceless product of Roubine's celebrated green-house, transplanted into the flower-garden to charm the sight and the smell for a few days, then to die there and see itself replaced by another.

A calèche drawn by a pair of bay horses, irreproachable in form and bearing, passed rapidly over the highway; the Prince turned in time to catch a glimpse of them, or rather to guess at them, through the grating.

"There goes Korzof's equipage to meet him at the landing-place! It is very amusing! Say, Nadia, the cannon quite likely was not fired for us! It was, perhaps, for his horses!"

"If orders had not been given in advance," answered the young girl in her cold tone, "they would not have had time to harness up so quickly!"

"Ah! quite right!" said the Prince, looking at his daughter out of the corner of his eye.

One of his favorite pastimes consisted in discreetly teasing her, without apparent design, which he did superbly.

"Do you change your toilet to go hear the music?" resumed he, after a short silence, during which Nadia had picked a handful of flowers that she let fall at her feet when she turned to listen to him, keeping in her hand only the two roses.

She glanced at her white batiste dress, covered with lace, and answered with a negative shake of the head.

"I dressed myself before dinner," added she.

"I know, but I thought you had perhaps modified your plans," continued the Prince, in the same tone of light persiflage.

"And why, pray?" asked Nadia, looking him full in the face, with a proud light in her beautiful dark gray eyes.

"I adore you, my dear daughter!" said the happy father, drawing her to him to kiss her. "I am a terrible father; I would like to know everything."

"You do know everything!" responded she, with delightful frankness.

"To guess everything, then!" continued Roubine, placing his daughter's arm in his,— "to guess before you know yourself!"

Nadia lowered her head; the Prince went on:

"I am at once your father and your mother, my dear Nadia; I am afraid of not loving you enough, or of loving you ill, or of loving you too much; if your admirable mother were alive, I should rest easy in regard to your happiness; but since we have lost her, we must love each other more in the first place, and then have more confidence still the one in the other. But I am not calculated to attract your confidence, Nadia——"

"Oh! father!" interrupted the young girl, reproachfully, as she bent down to kiss the hand that retained hers.

"I mean that I am too young a father, a trifle given to teasing; that I am not the absolutely serious and patriarchal man who represents the ideal of a father; I have nothing of the confessor about me, Nadia; I have rather the air of a comrade! What I say is true! In the midst of those young fellows who pay court to you I feel as young as they, and when they pay you a compliment to tell you that you are graceful and witty, I often say to

myself that they do it awkwardly, and that I could do it better, with more grace, and sometimes with more truth. Admit, Nadia, that I am a very singular father!"

"Not at all!" resumed the young girl, raising towards the Prince her pretty eyes full of filial tenderness; "you are an adorable and an adored father."

"And you are the most charming of daughters!" replied Roubine, gazing at her with pride.

In truth, Nadia Roubine was one of the most beautiful young ladies of the court. Tall and slender, with that reed-like flexibility which is such a great charm in the Russian young ladies, she proudly bore the thick and heavy crown of dark golden hair that decked her head; her magnificent eyes had never lied—when politeness obliged her to restrain herself, they protested in spite of her against this violation of the truth. Her mouth, somewhat large, was of a firm and pure design, and her smile discovered large teeth, a trifle wide apart, but perfect in form and color. With this the young Princess Roubine possessed a natural artistic feeling that made her fear the excess of bad taste in her toilet and all that approached it; hence she lacked neither flatterers nor envious friends.

They had paused upon the terrace, and Nadia was looking at the sea, that was changing color in the decreasing light of day, when a carriage stopped in front of the villa, and the horses, suddenly checked, made the metal of their curbs dance.

Almost at the same instant Dmitri Korzof appeared in the embrasure of the glazed door that communicated with the terrace.

"How are you, Prince?" said he. "I saw your signal. I have taken the pleasure of coming to thank you."

He bowed to the young girl, who presented him her hand, and he raised it respectfully to his lips.

“Returning home after an absence of four months,” said he, “you cannot imagine how the sight of your flag made my heart beat.”

“More than that of the national flag?” asked the young girl, slightly frowning.

“It was not at all the same thing,” answered the new arrival, with a luminous smile that well became his brave and intelligent countenance. “The Russian flag represented the country; yours, Princess, represented—represented friendship.”

“He did not dare to say the family!” cried the Prince, laughing, while Korzof blushed and Nadia turned away her head with a disconcerted air. “He did not dare because he has a ferocious sister, who is jealous of all his friends! The Countess is still jealous, eh?”

“Yes, and more than ever,” answered Korzof, also laughing. “But that don’t prevent me, my dear Prince, from loving you like a relative; in reality, my sister is well aware of this, and is enchanted at it. I need not ask if you are in good health. The sea air agrees with you marvelously, Princess.”

“What assurance to call this the sea!” said Roubine; “a small arm of the gulf without tides——”

“But not without tempests,” interrupted the young traveler. “Come, Prince, be indulgent, and let the world make the most of what it has. That’s philosophy, isn’t it, Princess?”

Nadia smiled and did not reply.

“You are going to hear the music after awhile?” demanded Roubine, when Korzof was about to quit them.

“Certainly. Had it not been for that I should not have hurried so. I am going home to take a look around and will rejoin you. You are going to hear the music without doubt?”

Nadia nodded her head affirmatively. The young

man bowed to her, grasped her father's hand, and an instant afterwards the calèche passed before the grating of the garden, the superb horses dashing along at a trot.

Roubine glanced at his daughter out of the corner of his eye; she seemed very calm; a slight color tinted her cheeks, ordinarily of a white tone.

"How do you find him?" asked he, taking Nadia's arm in his.

"About as usual," answered she, tranquilly. "A trifle tanned, but that is natural enough; they say that a sea voyage always produces that effect."

The Prince, disappointed, quitted his daughter's arm, and took two steps toward the salon.

"Will you have a little music, father?" said she, immediately rejoining him.

"The calèche is at the door," said a footman upon the threshold of the salon.

Nadia put on a coquettish straw hat, wrapped herself in a slight gold embroidered bournous and entered an elegant low carriage well-known to all the brilliant youth of Peterhof. Her father seated himself beside her and they rolled toward the park, drawn rapidly by two yellow-dun horses, unique in Russia that year and priceless.

The sun was about setting. In those days, the longest of the year, it did not vanish from the horizon until about half-past nine o'clock in the evening. Its last rays of ruddy gold, coloring the cupolas of the palace, threaded a lofty avenue and illuminated the colossal Samson overthrowing the lion that seemed carved from a massive block of gold, in the midst of a vast sheet of water.

Suddenly a hollow gurgle was heard and an enormous mass of water shot toward the sky in a single bound, leaping from the mouth of the monster, then fell back in the shape of a sheaf into the basin. The noise of running water spread throughout the park,

and the military orchestra placed in front of the château amid the flower beds sent forth its first solemn accord.

It was a fête, the repetition of which had surfeited those who were its almost daily witnesses, but Nadia was not surfeited. While living amid luxury such as very few knew, she had preserved a freshness of impressions rare among the young girls of her age and condition. Seated in a chair amid a group of adorers, she was watching the gigantic column of foam and transparent spray launched forth by the gilded lion stand out against the blue sea, against the already pearl-gray sky. In the caprices of the light and of the wave she found a captivating charm that soothed the melancholy of her secret thoughts.

Around her society life was buzzing; the fair promenaders, amiable and coquettish, had installed themselves to enjoy the freshness of the evening, with the sound of rustling silk which evoked ideas of wealth and comfort; the spurs of the officers of the guard made a sonorous clatter, and the gold-thread tassels resounded against the metal of the scabbards of their swords. The continual roll of carriages, deadened by a thick coat of gravel, seemed like distant thunder; the orchestra continued the overture of "Euryanthe," that speaks so beautifully of forests and solitudes, and, without hearing the idle words exchanged around her, Nadia, her eyes lost in the far-off sky, watched the first star come out in the yet bright azure.

She profoundly enjoyed all these exquisite things, the fruit of brilliant civilization; the contrast of an artificial luxury with the imperishable wealth of nature, the rustling of silken garments beneath the almost imperceptible murmur of the tall lindens, the sparkle of the gilded bronze against the opaline half-tint of the sea that formed the background of this magnificent picture

doubled the power of her sensations. But, while experiencing the delight of this artistic enjoyment, she could not prevent herself from remembering other pictures; her reading and the general tendency of her mind led her to think of those who toiled obscurely to produce the gold that paid for these pleasures and the materials composing them. Deprived too young of her mother, who would have put more moderation in her teachings, Nadia, educated by an English instructress, a strict observer of the laws of duty and morality, had acquired from her a love of the people, a sympathy with their sufferings that, gradually exaggerated by her naturally enthusiastic tendency, had taken the strength and the empire of a fixed idea.

The good she scattered around her did not satisfy her. During the years of her youth her purse, incessantly filled by her father, had been incessantly emptied into hands more greedy than meritorious. Some disillusion in this path inspired her with a desire of attacking the evil at its source, instead of seeking to weaken it in its effects. Nadia then did like the majority of the rich young girls of her epoch. She had in the country her Sunday-school, where the children of the neighboring villages were attracted by the promise of rewards; she was numbered among the founders of a nursery, an orphan asylum, a house of refuge. Her name figured in all the charity lists beside considerable sums. But before reaching her nineteenth year she learned the emptiness of these works, undertaken at great expense by inexperienced women, who expended ten times the sum necessary to do the good desired and only obtained a result sometimes amounting to nothing, always mediocre, from lack of knowing how or wishing to put aside all ruinous and useless ostentation.

"And you, Princess, are you interested in the new orphan asylum?" asked a voice near her.

She was so far from Peterhof and the flower garden that she could not repress a start.

"Pardon," said she, recovering herself. "I was thinking of something else. Of what were you speaking?"

"Of the new orphan asylum founded by the Countess Brazof. She has purchased a house in old St. Petersburg there to receive the orphan daughters of workmen. You are interested in it, without doubt?"

"No," answered Nadia.

"Why? if I may be permitted, Princess, to ask you this question," resumed the young aide-de-camp who had interrogated her.

"Because all such enterprises finish in the same way. Either they have no orphans, I know not why, or they have no employés because they steal or are incapable, or they have no money because the charitable persons get tired of giving it, seeing that the affair makes no progress. I am not for collective charities."

A murmur of approbation arose from the group. If Nadia had said exactly the contrary the approval would have been exactly the same. The group consisted of six young officers of the guard, a Major General of thirty-four and two attachés of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who were absolutely brutalized by the adoration with which the young Princess inspired them.

"You are so good, Princess!" cried the General. "You work more benefits alone by yourself."

"Chut!" interrupted the young girl, raising her fan to her lips, "respect the music!"

Nadia's court immediately fell into profound silence, and everybody endeavored to listen with the most sustained attention to the particular pot-pourri that the military orchestra was executing. Nadia exchanged a jeer-

ing glance with her father, the confidant of all her mischief, and they stealthily smiled at each other, then resumed the appearance of sang froid.

Two or three ladies approached and chatted an instant with Nadia. The Countess Mazourine, her aunt, seated herself beside her, as she usually did. She was a dame of honor of the defunct Empress, a woman with a large heart and a very sensible turn of mind, who replaced as much as possible with her niece the mother who died too soon. The conversation continued by fits, according to the caprices of the young girl, who chatted during the morceaux of music that did not please her and ordained silence for the others. The stars were rapidly invading the yet pale sky, and the evening was advancing; ten o'clock had just struck when Korzof approached the group about the spot where the young Princess was enthroned.

"At last!" said Roubine. "I thought you had given us the slip."

"I have been hunting you for the last half hour. You have changed the place of your sittings, mademoiselle? Formerly—I mean last year—you were to be found much nearer the orchestra."

"One is better here; it is almost a solitude, and the longer I live the more I love solitude," replied Nadia.

"It will never be solitude where you are found!" gallantly said the aide-de-camp.

Nadia smiled with a disdainful air and expressed her thanks by a slight nod. Korzof had seated himself in front of her; by the light of these June evenings he could read the young girl's face as well as in broad day.

"What's the news?" asked he of his nearest neighbor. "I have been four days without communication with the civilized world. These steamship voyages are almost like a sojourn in prison in that respect."

"In prison you can at least sometimes procure a file to cut away your bars, can you not?" said Roubine, who had grown gay since the arrival of the young man in their circle.

"Yes, they say so," resumed Korzof; "and then, moreover, if one is sentenced it is for something, and that occupies one, while on board a ship—"

"You don't know what to think about," said Nadia, raising her head to glance at the young man. "You have nothing in or around you with which to occupy your mind."

"I ask your pardon, mademoiselle; my mind and heart are full of grave things; but as they are neither encouraging nor encouraged," added he in a lower tone, "these thoughts are companions void of gayety. Tell me now what is being done in society; who is dead, born or married?"

"There are but few deaths to note, and those uninteresting ones," rejoined the Prince; "no births that I am aware of, but as many marriages as you may want. Olga Rézine has wedded Bachmakof, Moraline has wedded Mademoiselle Kouref—let me think—Natacha Doubler has wedded old Serguinof."

"A love match?" demanded Korzof, smiling.

Nadia's voice was heard, trembling a trifle with anger or emotion.

"As much on one side as on the other," said she.

The music paused at that moment; they were far removed from the noisy conversation; the only sound that accompanied her voice was that of the leaping waters that fell back in a shower into the basins.

"Natacha has wedded an old husband because he brings her a fortune, and Serguinof has wedded the young girl because she is handsome, well brought up and will make his home agreeable during his declining years.

It was a marriage of interest—the others were the same. They were unions of fortunes, nothing more. Ought not Olga, who has a marriage-portion of a million, to be ashamed of having married Bachmakof, who possesses a million and a half? Are there, then, no longer on the earth young and intelligent men, generous and disinterested girls, that every marriage should be either a trade or a placing of great interests?"

"Permit me, Princess," said the Major General, bridleing up; "is wealth, in your view, a bar to feelings?"

"That is not what I wish to say," said Nadia, with some impatience, "and you well know it! When once such couples love, or imagine they love, let them get married. Mon Dieu! it's very natural, and they will do exceedingly well; besides, they have nothing better to do! But what would you have them become afterwards? What future is reserved for them, for those beings who have nothing to do in life save to amuse themselves wherever people indulge in amusement and grow weary at home, when they are alone? As long as they are young, by dint of dragging themselves reciprocally to the ball, to the theater, to foreign lands, to Karlsbad or to Monaco, they pass the time as well as they can; then, when they are old, they nurse their gout or their liver complaint. Do you imagine they love each other then, when they are tired of and disgusted with each other? Do you imagine they remember their youth, the time when they believed they loved each other?"

She shrugged her shoulders with disgust.

"Nadia," said her aunt, mildly, "all marriages are not like those you depict!"

"You are right, aunt! There are those who separate, because life in common is intolerable to them, or because—But I forget that I am a well-bred damsel and that certain topics of conversation are forbidden to me."

"Nadia!" said her father, with tender reproach.

She was on the point of speaking, when the English horns played a melodious phrase that made her start. She lifted her finger in the air.

"Listen!" said she.

They listened. The phrase unrolled itself with infinite grace and suppleness, running through the orchestra like a ribbon of light that glided across the instrumental woof; then it lost itself, as too often happens, in a noisy and commonplace explosion. Nadia raised her head that she had held lowered in order to hear the better, and her eyes encountered the glance of Korzof.

"Pray, what may be your ideal of marriage, Princess?" asked he, gently, but in a clear voice.

The young girl looked at him with a sort of defiance.

"I would like," said she, with more force than she usually employed in simple society conversations, "I would like every human being to have an aim in life—let it be art, poetry, science, no matter what. I would like a man not to content himself with living happily and spending his money, the money that has come to him through the sweat of his peasants, or the toil of his ancestors, in some way or other, satisfied with giving a portion of it to those who have nothing. I would like him to do something, to be somebody. I would like this to apply to the women as well as the men; the former cannot do it personally, according to the laws of our society! Well, at least let their fortunes be for them the means of doing good. Let each heiress summon to her by marriage a poor and intelligent man. By acting thus she will redeem her original sin—her fortune that puts her in advance in the ranks of the useless!"

A chorus of disapproval arose around Nadia.

"Oh, Princess! You say this, but you would never do it!" cried one of the attachés of the ministry.

Nadia arose and cast a resolute glance at those who surrounded her.

"I? You do not know me! Well, I swear in the presence of you all, who are my witnesses, that, since Heaven has pleased to make me rich and of high birth, I will wed only a man without fortune; but by his merit and his talents he must have made for himself an honorable position. I swear it!"

She stretched out her right hand toward the sky and the sea to call upon them to witness her oath.

"Nadia!" cried her father, stricken to the heart.

"I have sworn it, father!" said the young girl; "but if the object of my choice should displease you, you are well aware that I would not act contrary to your wishes; I would be equal to living and dying beside you without desiring any other happiness."

The music had come to a close, the crowd was dispersing, and the roll of the carriages had recommenced. The waters had ceased to make themselves heard, and silence reigned beneath the tall trees.

"Princess," said Korzof, in a low tone, "I have something to say to you; will you deign to accord me a moment's interview?"

"Whenever you please," said Nadia, her eyes yet filled with a proud flame.

Her circle of adorers escorted her to her carriage, into which she mounted with her aunt, while Roubine seated himself beside Korzof, who had invited him to accompany him. The calèches departed, leaving the adorers a trifle dejected.

"What an extraordinary person!" cried the Major General, when Nadia had vanished.

"Look here, General," said the aide-de-camp, "she dealt in paradoxes to-night. No attention should be paid to them."

CHAPTER II.

FÉODOR STEPLINE.

THE morrow of this memorable day was, as the morrows of fêtes often are, gray and sorrowful; from dawn the drops of rain beat furiously against the window panes; at 11 o'clock it was evident that all hope of fine weather was gone.

At that moment Nadia descended from her chamber, situated on the second floor. She knew that her father liked to rise late, and she did not wish to show herself in the apartment down stairs before him, in order not to have the air of reproaching the paternal laziness by the spectacle of her activity. As she entered the wide dining-room, glazed on three sides like a greenhouse, the first object that attracted her attention was her father's huge Turkish pipe, placed across a little table that bore a perfect wealth of smoker's articles. This pipe had a morose and abandoned air that struck the young girl, and her eyes passed from the table to the Prince himself, who, with his forehead pressed against the window, was gazing at the rain-scarred landscape with extraordinary persistence.

"Father!" said the soft voice of the young girl.

A slight movement of the Prince's shoulders proved to Nadia that he had heard her, but he remained motionless. She approached him and joining her hands together placed them on the shoulder of the taciturn dreamer, leaning her chin upon them. He did not stir. Then she thrust forward her pleasant face until he felt the young girl's downy hair touch the tip of his mustache.

He turned his head a trifle and met Nadia's glance, full of tender mischief and satire that, however, did not shut out respect. He wished to be severe, but that was impossible.

"Are you pouting?" said she, with an inflection of voice so comical that Roubine could not control himself.

"Sorceress!" said he, smiling.

He kissed his daughter and allowed himself to be led to his fauteuil; Nadia delicately took the stem of his pipe, put it in his hand, lighted a roll of paper at the candle that was kept constantly burning on the table awaiting the caprices of the smoker, then she knelt before her father and set fire to the perfumed light-colored oriental tobacco, of which he mechanically drew a few whiffs. When this was done she threw herself lightly backward, half seated, and looked at the Prince with that mixture of tenderness and gentle raillery that rendered her so seductive.

"You are not pouting any longer, are you?" said she, smiling.

"Listen, Nadia," said her father, in a serious tone.

She was instantly upon her feet, and her countenance assumed a grave and dignified expression.

"Listen," continued he, "I pass over all your caprices and many follies; but you must admit that last evening you went beyond the limit of that I can permit."

She threw her head a little back, as if the weight of her braids were too heavy for her, and calmly awaited the continuation.

"When you solemnly call upon the stars, the whole world, the mighty waters, the military staff and the ministries to bear witness to your intention," resumed the Prince, who warmed up to his ill humor, for an instant cooled, as he talked, "I would like, at least, out of proper consideration for yourself, that that intention be

practicable; but in declaring that you will marry a man without fortune, if you show the door to all the men in the habit of using soap and clean linen, you certainly cannot design to inflict upon me in their place the water-carriers of the capital and the country schoolmasters?"

The rain struck against the windows with redoubled violence, and the wind whirled through the air masses of green leaves torn from the trees of the park. Nadia glanced in the direction of the window and, seeing no way of shunning the shock, prepared herself for the battle. The Prince looked at her suddenly, as if to surprise upon her countenance some stubborn expression; but she did not allow herself to be thus entrapped and remained in the same proud and yet respectful attitude.

"Well, Nadia, answer!" cried he, at last, weary at not finding a pretext for another burst of anger.

"Father," said she, in a tender and submissive voice, "I am in despair at having caused you vexation, and you must be vexed to have talked to me as you have just done. But such grave matters are involved that I will permit myself to present to you a few objections."

"Objections!" cried Roubine; "ah, indeed! You yesterday made a declaration of principles equivalent to a declaration of war!"

"Oh, father!"

"Yes, a declaration of war against everything that has the least good sense in it! You should, at least, have spoken to me in advance about it—you should have told me what you wanted! Then we might have talked the matter over, we might perhaps have arrived at some understanding! For, all things said and done, you well know, Nadia, that all I want in this world is your happiness!"

The Prince's voice broke in his throat and he stopped short. The young girl drew nearer to him, knelt at his

feet as she had done an instant before, and placed both her elbows upon her father's knees, clasping her hands with a charming gesture of repentance and prayer.

"My beloved father," said she, "I did very wrong to talk before strangers of matters so private and so deeply affecting our mutual happiness, for our happiness is one and the same thing, is it not? I should have restrained myself last evening, talked with you, explained to you my ideas; but I did not know, I assure you that I did not know myself what I wanted until the moment the conversation brought it to me like a flash of light. On hearing those marriages of which society approves spoken of, I felt such indignation—I would not marry any man at that price, father, and you would not have your child do so either, would you?"

"But, Nadia," said the Prince, with much good sense, "all marriages are not like those! Take my marriage to your mother as an example; I assure you that I wedded her neither from lack of occupation for my idle mind, nor to see my house well-kept, nor to augment my fortune; I wedded her simply because I loved her! Don't you think that sufficient?"

"I have nothing to say about that," replied the young girl, slightly embarrassed. "Don't you think, father, I could reconcile your way of seeing with mine by marrying a man without fortune whom I could love?"

Roubine gave a start. Nadia arose quickly and seated herself in a low chair opposite her father.

"Why don't you say at once that you are smitten with a poor student, and that you wish to marry him to give his genius wings of gold and paper money?"

"No, father, such is not the case," she firmly answered, although she had grown very pale; "but if such were the case, would you see any harm in it?"

"Certainly! Listen attentively, my child: I will put

no obstacle in the way of the marriage of your choice, provided you bring me a well-bred son-in-law, a man of society, a son-in-law worthy of me and worthy of yourself; students may have genius, Nadia, but they have impossible families. Come now, be frank: would you consent to be the daughter-in-law of a village priest, of a small country grocer, or of an employé of the fourteenth class at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, when the Minister himself asked for your hand not three months ago?"

Nadia listened respectfully, without the least appearance of rebellion, but with the same firmness of bearing.

"Father," said she, "the Minister was fifty years old, and for a thousand reasons that it would be superfluous to give you I could not love him; consequently, I could not marry him. You know the respect that I have for myself; why then attribute thoughts to me that I could never entertain? The man who will be my husband, who will be your son-in-law, will be of necessity a man of society, educated and well-bred; otherwise how could I love him?"

"You will then have a great deal of trouble to make your utilitarian theories accord with your personal sympathies," said the Prince, with a sigh.

"In that event, I should prefer never to get married," responded the young girl, with a charming smile.

"What a reassuring prospect to open to me!" cried Roubine; "a philanthropic and humanitarian old maid—a regular scourge! What a future!"

"Don't scold any more, father; I am going to give you a little music."

She bent toward him her pretty face with so much cajoling grace, so much filial abandon, that, despite his ill-humor, he could not resist, and he kissed the fresh cheek offered to him.

"No serious music," answered he, "but if you play me one of Strauss' waltzes that will perhaps change the course of my ideas."

Nadia stifled a sigh and sat down at the piano. The Prince folded his arms, and as long as his daughter played walked back and forth in the vast salon. When she had finished he turned toward her.

"You don't like that kind of music, do you?" said he, looking at her with a sort of uneasy tenderness.

"Not much, my dear father."

"Yes, it's useless music, is it not?" In my time they liked it; we admired the Italians, Bellini, Rossini; Donizetti seemed to us already complicated. You young folks have changed all that. The classics seem to you too simple; you want Schumann. As for me, I don't understand anything about it. Are we growing old, or do you wish to go too quickly?"

The young girl listened with clasped hands and lowered head; she raised her eyes to her father.

"You are a utilitarian, are you not?" resumed the Prince; "another vexation. You want everything to serve some end, do you not? You can't understand having beautiful things simply for the pleasure of having them; you wear marvelous dresses because that gives work to the seamstresses, and you pick roses worth five roubles apiece because that affords the gardeners a living. You have explained all this to me; but, Nadia, as for me, I love your dresses because they make you more beautiful, and I love the roses because they smell good. That, however, is not sufficient for you, is it?"

"You are the best of men and the most adorable of fathers," responded she, smiling upon him; "nothing more is exacted from you. You have filled your task upon the earth in being a brave officer, a good father of a family and one of the most indulgent landed proprietors.

You have the right to love the roses for themselves, my dresses because they are well-suited to me, and the waltzes because they recall to you happy recollections, or because they gently rock your reveries without your having need of fatiguing your brain to comprehend them. Be indulgent for your indocile child, father, for she loves you more than anything in this world!"

Peace was established; the Prince did not feel in condition to struggle any longer that day; nothing was more distasteful to his good nature than a tone of reprimand, and the sense of his paternal duty alone could put him in the humor of scolding. Happy at being able to put aside the disagreeable ideas which had haunted him since the preceding evening, he abandoned himself to the pleasure of listening to his daughter, who for an hour played for him a complete collection of Italian compositions.

The rain was still falling; Nadia, fatigued, had quitted the piano and gone to the window to read the newspaper, when the door opened and a servant, approaching the young girl, spoke a few words to her in a low voice.

"What's the matter?" demanded the Prince, turning around.

"Nothing, father. The superintendent has sent his son with the accounts for the first six months of the year."

"Why didn't he come himself?"

"He is sick, it appears. Will you receive the son, or do you prefer that I should spare you the trouble?"

"Attend to the matter for me," said Roubine, with a faint smile, "since you like to make yourself useful—and since, after all, you are my minister of finance."

Nadia sent him a kiss with the tips of her fingers and left the dining-room. The Prince then took up the abandoned journal and began to read; but his courage

soon quitted him ; he laid down his pipe and fell into a peaceful slumber over the foreign news dispatches.

The superintendent's son was a fine-looking young man of twenty-four, of a somewhat heavy build, that would become still heavier with age ; but for the moment his hair and beard of a dark golden hue and his wide open blue eyes gave to his physiognomy a certain charm that would have hidden from an attentive observer a tricky expression that appeared from time to time in his glance, so frank in appearance. He was standing in the vast apartment that served as an ante-chamber, and bowed respectfully before the young Princess, whose hand he lifted to his lips, according to the Russian custom.

"Well, Féodor," said she, "is everything getting on right in the country?"

"Yes, Princess, with the help of God," responded the young man, smiling in such a way as to exhibit his handsome white teeth.

"Come this way," said Nadia, entering her father's study, a large room already darkened by thick, somber curtains, through which the dull light of the rainy day barely penetrated.

She seated herself before the huge oaken desk and pointed out a seat near her to the young man, who remained standing yet an instant.

"Have you brought your papers?" asked she.

"Yes, Princess."

"Well, sit down then and show them to me."

With a gesture that expressed at once his appreciation of the honor which was done him and a certain familiar ease, Féodor Stepline took the chair designated, and drew from a voluminous napkin a bundle of papers that the Princess examined minutely one by one, the while taking care to enter the figures they represented in a special

note-book. When the bundle was completely scrutinized, Nadia added up the figures she had entered and verified the total several times.

While she was thus engaged the eyes of the young man observed her attentively, with expressions occasionally very diverse. Sometimes they arrested themselves with admiration upon her heavy tresses, upon her white neck bent over the paper, upon her slender fingers loaded with sparkling rings; then they strayed over the sums entered in the note-book, when they shone with a somber and almost wicked luster. When Nadia had finished her calculations, she raised her head and turned her face toward Stepline.

"Total: thirty-seven thousand six hundred roubles," said she.

"Exactly, Princess," answered Féodor, resuming an official air. "Here they are."

He drew from a wallet several packages of bank notes and passed them one by one to the young girl, who verified them carefully, putting them aside in a drawer as she did so. When the last had rejoined the others, she closed the drawer, put the key in her pocket, turned her fauteuil a trifle toward Stepline and said to him with great gentleness:

"Now, tell me a little about our village."

"Everything is getting along there as well as you could wish, Princess," said he. "Your school is full of children. The teacher went away a week ago but the classes continue, nevertheless."

"Went away? Why?"

"He got tired of it, I think," said Féodor, lowering his eyes. "For a long time he neglected his duties."

"Why was I not written to about it?" said Nadia, with animation. "The classes should not have suffered on account of his negligence."

"They did not suffer on account of it," responded the young man, still with the same air of modesty.

"Who, then, supplied the master's place?"

"I. Excuse me, your Highness, if I have run the risk of displeasing you," continued he, with redoubled humility. "But I knew that your heart was firmly set on that school, and I replaced the master every time he failed to appear."

Nadia was on the point of thanking him warmly; she was looking at him and had opened her mouth to speak, when suddenly she checked her enthusiasm, fixed her eyes upon him with a certain persistence and said, in a calm tone:

"I am obliged to you."

Stepline had not noticed this change; he resumed in the same agitated tone:

"Everybody in the country is penetrated by the kindness of our Princess. The effects of a generous initiative are sometimes very diverse and very unexpected. On seeing the pains the Princess takes, more than one who had thought only of living honestly in the fulfilment of his duty has comprehended that that was not sufficient and has applied himself to other studies. The little hospital is too small and my father is no longer equal to the demands of the sick; the trifling knowledge of medicine he possesses, that which our Princess has been kind enough to communicate to him, is no longer up to the needs. We should have a young physician, a health officer at least."

"Who will devote himself sufficiently to the cause of those who suffer to bury himself in a country village without intellectual relations, without amusements?"

"I thought," resumed Stepline in the same restrained and, so to speak, stifled voice, "that if our Princess deigned to encourage me—"

"Well?" said Nadia, somewhat curious.

"I would willingly make the necessary studies. They are not, after all, either very long or very difficult, and then—"

"You would consecrate your life to our little hospital?" demanded the young girl, a trifle troubled by this unexpected proposition.

Stepline looked at her.

"Certainly," said he.

"I believed you ambitious."

A strange gleam shone in the young man's eyes.

"My highest ambition has never ceased to be a simple wish: to render myself worthy of the bounties of our benevolent Princess, to merit a trifle of her esteem—a little of that affection she showers down like rays of sunlight over all who approach her."

Nadia lowered her eyes in her turn and bit her lips.

"It is not, then, solely the ambition to do good that urges you into this path?" said she, without displaying emotion.

Stepline assumed new assurance.

"You have taught and repeated to us, Princess," said he, "and your teachings have not fallen upon sterile ground, that man is the son of his works, and that there is no situation a truly resolute and intelligent man cannot reach. You have cited to us numerous examples from the history of every country, adding that if these things did not take place so frequently in Russia it was because of the inequality of conditions, but that little by little these distances would be effaced. Your father has seen fit to give mine his liberty. I am a free man. Why, then, Princess, can I not aspire to those destinies that you have given me a glimpse of?"

"You speak well," said Nadia. "You have received a good education."

"My father has spared nothing to have me properly instructed," responded Féodor. "He scarcely knows how to read himself, but he caused the priest of our church to teach me all he could. For the rest I spent two years at the University of Moscow."

"And you would resign yourself to consecrate your existence to the poor wretches of the village?" demanded the young girl still incredulous.

"For you what would one not do?" said he, in a low voice.

Nadia arose gently and took the bundles of papers in both her hands.

"I will speak about it to my father," said she. "It is for him to judge of such matters."

"If you would only speak in my favor," insisted the young man.

"It is the Prince's affair," repeated Nadia. "When do you set out on your return?"

"Whenever you so direct," answered Stepline, in a submissive tone.

"At once, then," said the young girl, in a calm voice.

"Without seeing you again?"

She fixed upon him the glance of her beautiful, proud and tranquil eyes.

"We have finished our business," said she; "I have no further time to give you. You will be written to as regards the demand you have just made."

"And when will our Princess deign to visit her lands?"

"In about three weeks; but you will have my father's answer long before that."

Stepline, who had arisen, remained standing in a humiliated attitude.

"You will say to the children of our school that I am pleased with their good conduct. I thank you once

again for having taken care of them. We will send a new schoolmaster in a short time. Meanwhile, I beg you to be kind enough to continue to teach the pupils."

She spoke with perfect urbanity, but without the least abandon. Féodor Stepline felt that he had lost a heavy game, and still he was unconscious of having played unskillfully.

"Au revoir," said Nadia, dismissing him with a movement of her hand.

She left the study and he followed her with a dejected air. She entered the dining-room, the door of which closed upon her, and he immediately quitted the house.

"What has that greenhorn been telling you?" asked the Prince in French, awakening from his refreshing slumber.

"He has been telling me your fortune," said Nadia, smiling. "We are rich, father; the return from our lands on the Volga alone for the past six months amounts to more than thirty-seven thousand roubles."

"Well, so much the better," said Roubine, stifling a yawn. "You can buy yourself another carriage; you wanted a little two-pony panier we saw the other day. Shall I send for it? I will present it to you."

"No, thank you, father," answered the young girl, in a pensive tone. "Perhaps I will ask you for something else."

"Do what you like. Say, Nadia, is it going to rain in this style all day?" continued Roubine, in a tone so piteous that she could not help laughing.

"I fear, my beloved father, that even with thirty-seven thousand roubles in your drawer you will find it impossible to prevent that!"

"Well, at least, send to Korzof's and invite him to dinner. This rain is overwhelming. I don't know what to do with myself!"

Without making any objection, Nadia caused her father's order to be executed. The messenger returned in a short time with the intelligence that Korzof had accepted the invitation and would be present himself at five o'clock, which appeared to satisfy Roubine and restored him his good humor.

"Father," said the young girl, "what sort of a man is Féodor Stepline?"

"An intelligent fellow; his father is an old rascal, but I'd rather keep him as superintendent than take another who would rob me all the same; at least I am accustomed to his manner of stealing; another would have a different plan."

A thousand fugitive impressions passed across Nadia's countenance while her father was speaking; when he had finished she remained silent for an instant.

"But," said she, hesitatingly, "his son knows nothing of this?"

"Féodor? It is he who keeps the accounts! His father is very good at addition, and particularly so at subtraction! His success is convincing proof, since I have never caught him in flagrante delicto; but he is ignorant of the commonest elements of orthography, and it is the younger Stepline who draws up the handsome memoranda such as you brought me; for the sake of perfect regularity, a writing clerk copies them in the account books? You know our beautiful account books? They are well enough kept, I assure you!"

Roubine laughed heartily; the thought that in exchange for the eight or ten thousand roubles that he stole from him annually his superintendent offered for his inspection such beautiful account books seemed to him very comical.

Nadia did not laugh.

"That young man his father's accomplice!" said she

at last. "That passes my comprehension! How can I reconcile——"

"Reconcile what?" demanded the Prince, for he loved to tease her.

In a few words the young girl informed her father of Féodor's ambitions.

"He told you that?" said Roubine, who had grown grave. "In what terms?"

Nadia strove to recall the young man's exact words. Suddenly a glowing blush invaded her countenance and she stopped short.

"No matter," said she; "evidently he is a vulgar aspirant."

Her father looked at her with a certain uneasiness. He lifted a finger in the air.

"Take care, my daughter!" said he. "With your ideas of the leveling of classes, you may cause to be born in disordered brains thoughts that you have never wished to communicate to them. That imbecile was not lacking in respect toward you, I hope, that I see you so discomfited?"

"No, father, not the least in the world," responded the young girl, deeply mortified at the remembrance of Féodor's words, "For you, what would one not do?" "What answer will you send him?"

"Oh! that's very simple: that my sick people have not the time to wait until he shall have finished his studies, and that we are seeking a health officer ready made."

Nadia kissed her father. The door opened and Korzof entered.

"It rained so," said he, excusing himself for coming so early, "and the day appeared so long to me that I have come at the risk of being in the way."

"No! no!" cried Roubine, enchanted. "We will play whist with a dummy while waiting for dinner."

Cards are the best things yet to kill a day that will not die."

The table was soon ready for operations, and the three players gravely seated themselves around it as if it had been an altar prepared for some sacrifice. With the advent of Korzof an influence of joy and comfort seemed to have spread itself throughout the apartment. They played thus until the dinner hour, chatting about a thousand things.

Toward seven o'clock a clear spot was seen in the gray sky, a yellow band showed itself in the occident.

"A miracle—it has stopped raining!" cried Roubine, opening the door of the terrace.

An agreeable odor of damp verdure made its way into the dining-room, and the three friends risked going out into the open air. Vapor ascended from everywhere in a light mist through which the darker points, representing buildings or masses of trees, were dimly visible. A little sunshine appeared, illuminating with a melancholy joy the bushes yet bending beneath the weight of the rain.

"Ah! now I live once more!" cried Roubine, taking the stiffness out of his legs by rapid walking.

Nadia had remained upon the threshold in order not to wet her little shoes. Korzof approached her.

"Should it be clear, mademoiselle," said he, "will you not take a walk to-morrow among the flower-beds?"

She made a sign of approbation.

"Will you permit me to meet you there?"

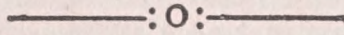
She repeated the same sign.

"I thank you," said Korzof, with much dignity.

She comprehended that he was in every sense a man; he knew the price of what he asked and felt himself worthy of obtaining it. She quitted the door of the terrace and went into the salon, where she seated herself

at the piano. Her fingers strayed carelessly over the keys until the moment the two men rejoined her.

What with music and conversation they passed a delicious evening.



CHAPTER III.

KORZOF'S DECLARATION.

A COOL and joyous breeze made the leaves of the tall lindens quiver and scattered over the avenues a cloud of winged and odorous flowers that flew far away through the parterres. Nadia seated herself on a bench at the extremity of the gardens, at the spot where they rejoined the alleys cut off by the copses, and remained thoughtful for an instant, her hands half-wrapped about her knees.

She was alone; her lady companion had asked her for an hour's leave of absence and the young girl had accorded it, seeing in this freak of chance a providential design. It was, therefore, a veritable tête-à-tête she was about to grant Dmitri Korzof, for the rare passers-by were not witnesses and the society of Peterhof at that scorching hour of the day was reposing beneath the shelter of cotton duck pavilions in the gardens of the villas.

Nadia had scarcely had time to think what she should say, when Korzof made his appearance at the end of the avenue. He was walking rapidly; on perceiving her he slackened his pace and approached with a calm air; but his serious, almost rigid countenance betrayed the effort he was making to preserve his apparent tranquillity.

"I thank you for having come, mademoiselle," said he, after bowing to her. "You have understood that a matter very grave for me was to be considered—in a word, you hold the happiness of my life in your hands."

Nadia nodded her head, without looking at him. While listening to him she had felt in the depths of her soul a strange and solemn emotion, like the grave music of an organ in a lofty cathedral: it was sad, even painful, and yet mingled with a serious, almost holy joy.

"I have loved you for a long time, Princess," continued Korzof, growing paler and paler. "I have striven to conquer the feeling—it seemed to me that you were not disposed to encourage it; thenceforward why expose myself to useless chagrin? I have struggled vainly. I am not the stronger. If you consent to be my wife I shall be happy all my days, and will try to be good; if you decline—"

His voice failed him. He raised his eyes to the young girl, and his glance finished the phrase he had commenced.

In her turn, Nadia looked at him; he saw upon her face something indicative of trembling and indecision, of tenderness and sorrow, that suddenly restored him his courage.

"Do you consent?" asked he, in a low voice, seating himself beside her.

The young girl recovered her self-control.

"Something very strange," said she, "has passed through my mind. While I heard you speaking, it seemed to me that I ought to answer you yes—I had the impression that we would be happy together, and then—"

"Then what?" anxiously demanded Korzof.

"And then I said to myself that our ideas and our ways of looking at life are not the same, and that it is a

perfect communion of views that is the true basis of happiness."

"And love, do you count that as nothing?" said the young man, almost smiling.

Nadia proudly threw back her head, with a movement that was familiar to him.

"Love wears out," said she; "the communion of minds never does."

"But our ideas are the same, dear Princess!" cried Korzof, emboldened. "We both desire the happiness of those who surround us; is not that true? It is only necessary to have an understanding as to the means. That will not be difficult to accomplish. Besides, I want whatever you like."

He spoke with a communicative warmth. Nadia smiled in her turn, then suddenly grew grave again.

"I have made a vow," said she, while her pretty face darkened.

"A rash, impracticable vow! Who has not taken similar oaths?"

"I!" resumed Nadia; "I have never taken an oath that I was not resolved to keep—this as well as the rest!"

But, after having gained so much ground, Korzof was not disposed to lose it. He decided to stoutly defend that which she would take back from him.

"What would you exact of your husband, Princess?" said he, in a pleasant tone. "That he be well-bred in the first place; is not that so?"

Nadia made an affirmative sign.

"Honest?—with a spotless life?—educated? It seems to me that, without too much self-conceit, I can pride myself on combining these advantages. What more is wanted? That he devote himself to some grand idea? Show me the way. I will follow you. In the

path of good as well as elsewhere, you shall be my guiding star."

A new emotion, tenderer and more delicious still, invaded the young girl's heart.

This man was truly the being destined for her by Heaven. Who else would ever have used such language? But the importunate remembrance of the vow troubled her immediately and destroyed all her joy.

"You are rich!" said she, slowly and regretfully.

There was silence between them; the breeze whistled gayly amid the foliage, and they heard at irregular intervals the sound of a drop of water falling into some invisible reservoir.

"But, Princess," said Korzof at last, "it is because I am rich that I am the man you know. It is precisely that fortune that has given me the means of acquiring the instruction and the generous ideas that I am striving to develop in myself. Poor and obliged to struggle, who knows if I would have thought of the lot of my kind?"

"Fortune may be a means, it ought not to be an end," responded Nadia.

"But I do not seek to enrich myself! Quite the contrary! I have spent a great deal of money on things that have procured me only intellectual or moral enjoyments!"

"That is not enough," interrupted the young girl, quickly. "It is simply selfishness. One must work for others."

Korzof did not respond. After an instant he resumed, sadly:

"You think a great deal about others, Princess, and about me not at all. I fear that I have not succeeded in inspiring in you the slightest sympathy."

With a spontaneous movement Nadia offered him her hand.

"Ah! do not believe that," said she.

She blushed instantly and withdrew her hand. Scalding tears arose to her eyes, and for the first time in her life she saw that she might be deceived.

"What do you want of me, then?" said Korzof, greatly affected.

Both of them were overcome as if after some violent physical effort. The difficulty they found in coming to an understanding weighed upon them like a mountain.

"I would like," said Nadia, suddenly, "I would like that you should not be rich. I comprehend that you could not resign yourself to strip yourself of a fortune that serves you only as a means of doing noble actions; and, as for me, I have sworn to wed a man without fortune."

"It was a rash vow," said Korzof, gently.

"That may be," answered she, turning away her face covered with crimson; "but the vow exists; I cannot retract it."

"If I gave my fortune to the poor would you marry me?" cried the young man, taking both her hands.

She was strongly tempted to answer yes, but another thought arrested her.

"What would you do without your fortune?" said she. "How would you employ your leisure as an idle man without any special vocation? You should know that I cannot have the idea of marrying an absolutely poor man! What I should like is that he gain with his own hands his means of existence—in a word, that he should be a toiler. That is what you cannot be!"

"Then," resumed Korzof, in a husky voice, "you will not marry me. You will cast your beauty, your refined tastes, your generous aspirations into the hands of another, who will have for you neither my ardent tenderness, my passionate respect, nor my unshakable resolution to act

always for the best in this world of struggles and difficulties. He will have no more to bring you than myself, he will even be devoid of my long cherished desire to become worthy of you; but, as he had the good luck to be born poor, he will be the chosen one, and I, miserable and sorrowing, will go to the other end of the world to console myself by expending my fortune in useful works for which you will not have the slightest appreciation of me. Come, now, to please you, what must I do? Must I become a mason, a locksmith? No? A professor?"

"No," said Nadia, undecided. "I don't know what I want."

"But you know what you don't want! You don't want me!"

For an instant, wounded by Korzof's bitterness of tone, she was on the point of harshly answering him with a definitive no; but she realized that he was suffering, and restrained that cruel word.

"Reflect," said she, gently; "do me at least the justice to admit that I am acting in good faith, that I took my oath under the impulsion of a loyal and sincere feeling."

"Ah! my dear blind girl," said Korzof, sadly, "those with the greatest souls commit the most fatal errors!"

"In that case they are hurtful only to themselves," returned the young girl, rising.

"You forget that I love you, and that you are causing me a great deal of trouble."

She hesitated an instant, then lifted to the young man a frank and pure look.

"If you were poor," said she, "if you were one of those who toil for the grandeur of the country or of humanity—"

"Do you want me to resume the military service?" asked Korzof, retaining her with a gesture.

"No; Russia does not lack officers."

"Then you refuse?"

"I have sworn," said she, turning away.

He saw that it was with regret.

"Princess," added he, in a low voice.

"What do you wish?"

"Give me your hand, in good friendship, at least."

Without raising her eyes, she presented him her supple and slender hand, which he clasped warmly. She quitted him immediately, without a word, without a look behind.

In the middle of the flower garden Nadia met her lady companion, who was searching for her; together they walked in the direction of the villa, while Korzof, motionless in the same place, followed them with his eyes, deeply meditating.

Two days elapsed. The Prince manifested a little ill humor from time to time. The fine weather continued with an engaging serenity. Hosts of visitors were received daily, either in the grand salon or upon the terrace; at every moment the piano resounded beneath the hand of Nadia or that of some other young girl; but the Princess herself, while fulfilling her duties of hospitality with the serene grace that distinguished her, could not shake off a gravity more pronounced than usual. It was this serious air, accompanied by long periods of silence, that weighed upon Roubine and gave him fits of impatience.

"Invite company, Nadia," said he, one day, in an imperious tone. "We must have some amusement here, we must have dancing to-morrow evening. This house is becoming as gloomy as a night-cap. If you intend to be a nun, that's no reason for me to take the veil. I haven't made any vow!"

He spoke in a jeering tone that he wished to render pleasant, but bitterness pervaded it. His daughter looked at him with eyes full of reproach that he feigned not to see.

"Whom are you going to invite? We must have dancing. I want a little noise and gayety, the deuce take me if I don't!"

Nadia seated herself at her little desk and took from her drawer some vellum cards, upon each of which she wrote a few words. Without saying anything, her father seated himself opposite to her and wrote the addresses. When about twenty cards were ready, Roubine rang and handed them to a footman who appeared.

"Have you invited Korzof?" asked the Prince, turning toward his daughter.

"I forgot," answered she, blushing.

"All right; I am going to his house; I will invite him myself."

He took his hat and went out. Left alone, Nadia leaned her head upon her hand and began to reflect. After an instant, she saw a sparkling drop fall upon the paper before her, put her hand to her eyes and noticed that she was weeping.

What was the good of haughtiness, pride, dignity, the sacredness of oaths, if she could not prevent herself from weeping? It was in vain she strove to stanch with her handkerchief the tears that obstinately arose to her eyes—she wept notwithstanding, as one weeps when one has contained one's self too long. Seeing that she could not stop the strange effusion of an unnamed, almost unknown chagrin, she went up to her chamber and threw herself in her reclining-chair to try to calm herself.

When her father returned he found her paler than usual, but smiling and gentle. Ashamed of the somewhat rude way in which he had spoken to her, he kissed her tenderly and began to give her an account of his peregrinations.

"I was at Lapontine's; excellent cigars; a very wearisome young man, but so good-hearted! In love

with you, Nadia. Would you marry him? No? That's right. Such a son-in-law would make me die of a continuous yawn. Afterwards to Norof's. Too amusing, that fellow; he knows an anecdote about everybody; but, according to him, society is no longer anything but a den of brigands. I found Lesghief there. They all three will come. I went to Korzof's; did not find Korzof. His valet de chambre told me he had been at St. Petersburg the past two days. He will return this evening or to-morrow morning. I have sent him a telegram. He must be on hand; there is no good company without him."

He glanced stealthily at his daughter's face that had suddenly assumed an anxious look.

"Have you received any answers?" resumed he.

"Yes; everybody is coming."

"Splendid! Try to make it nice."

"It shall be nice, father; have no uneasiness about that."

The evening of the next day, at half-past eight o'clock, Nadia came down into the grand salon, all ready to receive her guests. As she had promised, it was "nice," and Roubine, enchanted, immediately expressed his satisfaction to her.

Long garlands hung along the walls, like columns of verdure. At the top of each was a crown of brilliant flowers; in the corners were immense sheaves of plants of a shining and dark green, and everywhere, placed very high, were tall candelabra, loaded with candles that burned like torches in the tranquil air. The terrace, completely shut in by curtains of cotton duck, was decorated in similar style; in an angle a vast buffet, packed with glass and silverware, shone like a relic shrine, and tables covered with refreshments glittered all around.

Nadia stood at the entrance of the salon to receive

her guests, who were already arriving in groups. It is only in these imperial summer resorts of Russia that in forty-eight hours one can gather together sixty or eighty guests chosen from among those society considers the most elegant. She received with a most perfect grace, smiling upon the very young girls with an almost maternal benevolence, showing to the aged mammas a filial deference, finding for each one an amiable word, a service appropriate to him or her who was the object of it.

They were already dancing in the grand salon; on the veranda the mammas and the old generals were playing cards, divided up among the numerous tables, each lighted with two candles, which gave the terrace a strange and amusing aspect. Nadia danced the first waltz with one of her most eager adorers, then urging as a pretext her duties as mistress of the house, she left the other dances to be organized among her guests who were acquainted with each other and returned to the first salon, where, suddenly stricken with a lassitude as yet unknown, she seated herself upon a sofa beside two old ladies who talked but little; after having exchanged two or three words with her neighbors she was at last able to remain silent for a moment.

"Why am I thus sad?" she asked herself. "How is it that life weighs upon me in this manner? It seems to me that I am bearing upon my shoulders the weight of a crime, and yet I have done no evil!"

She was plunged in her meditations, surprised to find herself growing more and more sad and discouraged, when the handsome aide-de-camp bowed before her, causing his spurs to rattle as he made an irreproachable salute.

"This is the quadrille you promised to dance with me, Princess," said he, smiling with the most amiable air.

"Already!" Nadia almost said.

She restrained herself and accepted the arm that was rounded out before her. The contra-dance seemed to her interminable; the verbiage of her cavalier filled her ears with a confused noise; she answered as best she could and, as the handsome officer heard only himself, he was not exacting in regard to the appropriateness of her replies. Everything has a term, however, even the contra-dances that lengthen the cotillon figures; after about half an hour, Nadia, delivered from her companion, heard a clock strike eleven.

"He will not come!" said she to herself, astonished at feeling herself more miserable and more isolated amid this brilliant society than ever she had been before.

She suddenly raised her eyes, and upon the threshold of the door saw Dmitri Korzof, who had just entered.

A puff of fresh air and joy seemed to penetrate to her; to a word that a lady friend cast at her as she passed she replied with a joke that made all who heard it laugh until the tears came; then involuntarily she took a step toward the door. Dmitri Korzof advanced toward her with tranquil countenance, but with a secret joy in his look. He offered her his hand; she rapidly placed her gloved fingers upon it and immediately withdrew them; but in that passing clasp she had felt something expressive of confidence and happiness that did not give the lie to the sound of the young man's voice.

"You are amusing yourselves here," said he.

"Yes, as you see. We missed you."

"I arrived from St. Petersburg but an instant ago."

Roubine passed behind them.

"You were unable to come in time for dinner, eh?" said he, in a pleasantly comical tone.

"Yes, Prince; it was impossible. I regretted it, I assure you."

He had not, however, the air of regretting what had kept him, so Nadia thought, and suddenly a sort of strange and unreasonable jealousy took possession of her.

"He has a very contented air for a man who has been refused my hand," thought she.

An insurmountable desire to weep seized upon her and she wished to flee; but the orchestra played a waltz; Korzof bowed before her, passed an arm around her waist, and they commenced to waltz amid a whirl of floating trains. At the second turn she made a movement indicating that she desired to rest, and he led her to a little sofa, placed between two doors, in a spot comparatively tranquil. She seated herself and he remained standing in front of her.

"I did not lose my time at St. Petersburg," said he, smiling.

"Indeed?" exclaimed she, with an air of doubt.

"I will tell you all about it to-morrow: no, to-morrow you will be too much fatigued to hear me; but the day after shall be the time, if you will."

"So be it!" said she, with a nod of her head.

Though she was not aware of it, the joyous animation of Korzof had begun to be communicated to her and she repented of her ridiculous suspicion of a short time before.

"What do you say to a trip in the yacht to vary your pleasures a little?" continued he, playing with the young girl's fan, that she had allowed him to take.

"Why not? But where shall we go?"

Roubine had stopped before them, and was looking at them with satisfaction.

"Where?" said he. "To our house!—to our country place of Spask. It is just on the edge of the Neva, near Lake Ladoga; to go there from here in a carriage is an almost interminable journey; in a steam yacht it will

be delicious; it is the affair of less than a day. Eh! Nadia?"

"Certainly, father."

"Then it's settled; when shall we start?"

"Day after to-morrow morning at ten o'clock; does that suit you?"

"It's understood; you will be ready, Nadia?"

"Am I not always ready?" demanded she, with her pretty, gay smile, that reappeared upon her face for the first time in several days.

The fête continued, more and more brilliant; Korzof seemed as happy as if nothing had occurred to oppose his projects. Drawn on by that charming gayety, Nadia gave way to a sort of mysterious joy that gently penetrated to her soul.

"What is the good," said she to herself, "of demanding of destiny more than it can give you? To-day has its part, we will see what to-morrow will bring!"

To-morrow brought nothing at all; the day passed, like all the rest, in a multitude of small preparations for the approaching voyage that was to last several days, for Roubine was firmly resolved not to be disturbed for nothing, and to examine his property from bottom to top. Toward evening Korzof sent to ask if the project still held good, and received through his valet de chambre an affirmative response.

At ten o'clock precisely Nadia and her father appeared at the landing where the handsome yacht was moored. Korzof was upon the deck, ready to receive them; they crossed the plank that was immediately withdrawn, and at once the graceful vessel started toward St. Petersburg, leaving behind it the reflection of the marvelous shades of Peterhof to confound itself in the foamy wake.

The day was splendid; an awning of unbleached canvas shaded the stern; the travelers remained upon

the deck to admire at their ease the villas that were unrolled along the river. Behind them, on their left, the heavy granite mass of Cronstadt seemed to plunge itself into the sea like an enormous monitor, surmounted by several turrets; the masts of the vessels sheltered in the harbor rose upwards, slender and elegant. All this was soon lost in the distance, replaced by the verdant isles of the Neva, where the members of the St. Petersburg society, who did not wish to expose themselves to a long and fatiguing journey to reach their lands, during the summer, hired for a season stately country houses. Palaces belonging either to members of the Imperial family or to rich private individuals arose amid the verdure, and the numerous arms of the immense river disappeared and reappeared across the sinuosities like little lakes of silver. The water was blue, sown with brilliant spangles; the sand of the shore was yellow and golden; sometimes they discovered a corner of solitude that seemed unexplored; sometimes a mass of somber fir trees evoked the idea of climates always frozen; but an instant after, the fresh coloring of the lindens and the delicate birch trees came to rest the eyes.

St. Petersburg suddenly disengaged its gilded domes from this ocean of verdure, and appeared fully armed, like Minerva springing from the brain of Jupiter. The enormous dome of the Cathedral of Isaac towered above the varied assemblage of palaces and belfries, while the two rival bonnets of the fortress and the Admiralty loomed up against the sky like a couple of golden needles. The yacht passed amid the gay tumult of the naval dispatch boats and of the agile barks painted light green, with huge eyes, that simulate in front the head of a fish, barks solid in reality, frail in appearance, that replace at St. Petersburg the too rare bridges.

Upon both shores the public buildings succeeded each

other; to the left, after the fortress, the dark mass of the Alexander Park, then the little wooden house that Peter the Great inhabited while the growing city was rising beneath his eyes, then the interminable colonnades of the Academy of Medicine and of the School of Artillery, surmounted in the transparent air by the chimneys of the manufactories that stud this shore. To the right, ascending the course of the river, were the sumptuous palaces that, continuing the line of the Winter Palace and of the Hermitage, make of this quay one of the most curious spectacles in the civilized world. Then more palaces of marble and stone; then the Summer Garden, surrounded by canals; then new palaces and, in the background, above all this, a hundred domes of diverse colors: some gilded like cuirasses, others of pewter as brilliant as silver, others blue or green, sown with stars, all of strange and capricious forms, all peopled with bells, the clanging of which made the ground tremble on the approach of the grand fêtes.

The river had narrowed a little; to the left the houses had grown less frequent, the gardens had come to bathe the trunks of their trees in the water that flowed more noisily and more rapidly; the Convent of Smolna raised to the right of the travelers its lofty-pointed belfry; the enormous and imposing mass of the male convent, placed under the patronage of Saint Alexander Nevsky, appeared in its turn, then lost itself in the perspective, as if it had turned upon itself, and the houses vanished. The manufactories alone continued to draw from the prodigal river the motive power and water they needed. To the left nature had resumed its rights, and the vast plains, the deserted banks, barely sown with a few osiers, seemed to belong to a distant country.

It was at this moment, when the interest of the voyage seemed to be diminishing, that Korzof begged

his guests to descend into the dining cabin, where a sumptuous breakfast awaited them. He was perfect in his rôle of host; nothing in him betrayed preoccupations: nevertheless, his eyes rested upon Nadia with an evident satisfaction that filled the young girl with uneasiness and led her to ask herself a number of times if, by some misunderstanding of which she was ignorant, she had not allowed him to believe that she approved of his pursuit. But no, nothing in him bore witness to the joy of a man who imagines he is about to reach the goal of his wishes; hence the young girl resigned herself to await the solution of this enigma, that could not fail to reveal itself before long.

Finally, a dense grove of lindens appeared at the horizon's verge.

"There's Spask!" cried the Prince, enchanted. "Are not my grandfather's lindens beautiful? Say, Korzof!"

"They are enormous! They tower above the entire landscape. How old are they?"

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of eighty years. My grandfather was young when he planted them. Say, Nadia, it wasn't considered then so stupid to plant lindens! It seems to me that the fashion has its practical utility, not to speak ill of the modern youth, who don't plant trees, and who content themselves with burning those our ancestors took so much trouble to raise."

Nadia smiled and did not reply; Korzof looked at her with a friendly and trustful gentleness that took from her all desire to protest against her father's teasing.

The yacht drew up to an old, wormeaten landing place, the beams of which, turned green by the dampness, blackened by age, were of an admirable color of old bronze. Roubine and his daughter quitted the vessel and went ashore, where a deputation of peasants, commanded by the staroste, or eldest of the party, awaited

them. Korzof followed them, after having given a few orders, and the pretty yacht cast anchor in the tranquil water, to which the fish, frightened for an instant, returned to resume their gambols around the old beams.

"I warn you, Korzof, that you are about to see a singular dwelling," said the Prince. "If you want to be at your ease, you would do well to sleep on board your yacht. The old mansion was built by my grandfather, who did not wish to be far away from the court: it dates from the time of the Empress Catherine, as also do the majority of the country houses in this vicinity."

Korzof shook his head and followed them. They entered an old garden, shut in by palisades, the main alleys of which had in the past been paved with brick to keep the ground sloping at the time of the thaws. Huge clumps of lilacs and syringas lost themselves in the copses, formed by the shoots of old stumps of trees that had been cut down long ago, but the roots of which had remained in the ground. At the extremity of the garden, upon a slight eminence, stood the yet solid old wooden house; the yellow wash with which it had formerly been covered had given place to the rust of time and was barely visible here and there.

"It isn't sumptuous, I tell you, Korzof," said the Prince, "considering that you have a yacht lined with lemon wood—"

"I have renounced luxury," interrupted the young man, looking at Nadia with the mysterious smile that no longer quitted him. "Seriously, Prince, I have made a vow of poverty. May this modest and patriarchal roof hear and be propitious to me and I will bless it."

Nadia lowered her eyes. He followed her, and they all three entered the old mansion, while the peasants, who had escorted them respectfully and at a distance, remained without, with their heads humbly uncovered.

CHAPTER IV.

BETROTHED.

THE following morning Korzof was awakened early; his chamber opened upon an old flower-garden where the ancient alleys, traced out by a *Le Nôtre* of the neighborhood, were yet visible between their borders of centenarian box. He arose, made his toilet leisurely and went down into the garden that attracted him.

Everything there was old and wormeaten; the trunks of the huge lindens, solid as they were, had a damp and fragile air that was due to their mossy bark. It was in vain that the gardener in charge cleaned out the alleys, the grass grew there constantly, despite all his efforts; the place, however, was not sad; the eternally young breath of nature floated above the superannuated mansion, the old flower-garden, the labyrinth in the antique mode; the wild grass and the summer flowers gave each year a new and joyous life to the ancient and almost abandoned domain.

The sun had risen amid mist, and a slight curtain of gray gauze seemed suspended from the lower extremity of the sky; soon the golden rays appeared above that fragile barrier and lighted up the trees. The heat was intense, but so equally distributed in the atmosphere that one bore it almost without thinking of it. Meanwhile the blue water reflected the light through the branches of the trees at the foot of the garden, with spangles of an extraordinary brightness. Korzof mechanically took an alley that led to the brink of the river.

As he placed his hand upon the latch of the barred gate that shut in the garden, he stopped, stupefied. Some one at Spask had arisen sooner than he. Nadia, seated on the wooden bench of the landing-place, was watching the water flow at her feet. A large straw hat, trimmed with black velvet, hid her face; but from the motion of her bent head, Korzof comprehended that she was very grave, perhaps sad. He hesitated to approach, fearing to be indiscreet; but she had heard the sound of the gate turning upon its hinges and was already making him a pretty, friendly gesture. He crossed the trembling bridge and found himself beside the young girl.

"It's nice here, isn't it?" said she, arranging her dress to make room for him at her side. "In an hour it will no longer be tenable, but while the sun is hidden behind the lindens the coolness is delicious."

In truth the place was all that could be desired. The Neva described an elbow at this point, so that it appeared almost like a lake closed in on all sides by verdant banks; the alders and the osiers of the other shore sufficed to give this illusion to the eye. The grand mass of trees in the garden threw over the shore and the river its shadow, pierced here and there by golden rays that, gliding like arrows through the openings of this somber grove, made glitter with sunlight the little, active and hurried wavelets agitated by a light breeze. At the edge the water was calmer; the shallowness of the little cove gave it the repose and transparence of a pond. The old wooden posts, bronzed and turned green by the dampness, mirrored themselves there with the frail construction they supported; even to Nadia's hat, everything was reflected and trembled in the water, darkened by a background of grasses like velvet. A little further away the yacht slumbered at anchor. The crew had gone ashore to breakfast, as was shown by the boat moored by a chain

to a special stake. Nothing troubled the solitude save the cry of the martins that grazed the river in pursuit of winged insects.

"I promised you," said Korzof, "to tell you what I did in St. Petersburg."

The Princess looked at him, then lowered her eyes and appeared to be listening attentively.

"I asked," continued the young man, "concerning the amount of work that represented—"

He paused, with a smile on his lips, awaiting a question. Nadia cast a rapid and furtive glance at him, but continued to preserve silence.

"You are not curious?" asked he, in a tender and moved voice.

She shook her head negatively; but the negative sign clearly said yes.

"I asked," resumed he, "concerning the amount of work represented by a doctor's diploma."

"You?" cried Nadia, looking him full in the face.

"Yes. I learned that, with my anterior studies, for though I am an idle man I am not absolutely an ignorant one, three years, two years and a half, perhaps, would suffice to enable me to pass my examination for a doctor's degree in a fashion, if not brilliant, at least honorable. What do you say about it? Shall I try?"

Nadia had resumed looking at the water, and her hat almost entirely concealed her face. Korzof continued; he was uneasy, though he succeeded in hiding it; his voice betrayed him.

"I know very well that this is not enough; hence I also did something else at St. Petersburg; I informed myself about the cost of constructions, the cost of ground. I made a great many calculations, and this is the conclusion I reached: In the poorest quarter of St. Petersburg, at the Peskis, a quarter devoted at all times

to fatal epidemics, the ground is not dear; one might build an edifice in the modern style, healthful and well ventilated; it would cost a million and a half of roubles. My domain of Korzova is worth that, and even more because of the forest of oaks. One might build a hospital that should bear your name, and where I might be physician under the orders of a chief, until such time as I became sufficiently learned to be director myself."

His voice died away little by little, for Nadia remained motionless, and the generous dream of the young man seemed to be crumbling to pieces before him with the ruins of the imaginary hospital. Silence reigned upon the landing-place; the birds cooed with all their might in the old lindens.

Finally Nadia slowly raised her head and turned toward Korzof her large eyes, from which tears were overflowing.

"My friend," said she, "may we be happy—happy and blest!"

Korzof without approaching took the hand she offered him, and they remained thus, motionless, following in their minds the crowning of the common work. At the expiration of a moment:

"It will be beautiful," said she, in a very low tone, while her free hand sketched in the air the outline of the vast edifice. "It is by such works that one becomes immortal," continued the young girl; "one leaves a name; that is nothing; but one leaves an example; that is what makes one great!"

"You are satisfied?" demanded Korzof, in a tone as calm as his companion's.

It seemed to him at that moment that this had been agreed upon a long while ago, and that they were only continuing a former conversation.

"It is what I wanted!" said she, with a heavenly

smile. "And you found it out all alone. Oh, how nice that was!"

"You will wait three years for me?" said he, with a shade of sadness.

"Three years! What is that compared to life and to eternity?"

They fell back into their happy silence. Never had either of them felt so calm. It seemed to them that this resolution had cast their lives into a mold from which they would come out with a definite, unchangeable form.

"What, in the name of sense, can they be doing there?" cried the Prince on perceiving them. "What can they be doing upon the landing-place? If they are not fishing, really I don't see what!"

The two young people had arisen and had already crossed the little bridge.

Nadia ran to her father, put her forehead to his lips and threw herself in his arms with a cajoling gesture. Korzof approached more gravely and took the young girl's hand. Then, with a simultaneous movement, they knelt before the Prince on the grass of the bank.

"Fiancés!" cried Roubine, overwhelmed, but enchanted.

"Bless us!" said Korzof, without rising.

Very grave, too much affected to speak, the Prince made above them the sign of the cross; then he raised them up with an affectionate clasp and held them in his embrace for an instant.

When he had somewhat recovered:

"What a droll idea," said he, "to choose the water's edge for this ceremony! And at this hour, too! But, Nadia, you never do anything like anybody else!"

She smiled and kissed him. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, then pulled his long mustache, and, steadying his voice:

"It was, as I see," he resumed, "a matter of place. At Peterhof, you wouldn't have Korzof; at Spask, you accepted him. Why didn't you let me know sooner?—then we would have come here long ago!"

Nadia still smiled. They slowly resumed the road to the mansion.

"And that vow," continued the Prince, "what have we done with it? Oh! Nadia! we will write together a chapter of philosophy, entitled 'On the Imprudence of Rash Oaths!' Eh, my daughter?"

Nadia smiled no longer. She pressed her father's arm tightly against hers, and said, in a grave tone:

"You have a strong affection for Dmitri Korzof, have you not, father?"

"Of course I have!" cried the Prince.

"Would you love him as much were he ruined?"

"Ruined?—are you ruined, Korzof?" demanded Roubine, stopping short.

"If he were ruined, father, would you love him as much? Would you be as well disposed to accept him for your son-in-law?"

"Him! God be thanked, I have not a vile enough soul to reject him! You are sufficiently rich for both, Nadia, and an honest man ruined is an honest man all the same!"

He vigorously grasped Korzof's hand, and both of them stood motionless, greatly affected.

"He is ruined, father," resumed Nadia, with an accent of triumph. "I have ruined him and am happy because of it. My soul is full of pride when I think that for me he has sacrificed his fortune and his entire existence!"

Roubine, overwhelmed, let himself fall upon one of the wooden benches that were all along the avenue.

"Explain this to me," said he, "for I don't understand anything about it."

The explanation was not long. When it was finished, he maintained silence.

"It is absurd," said he at length; "in the last degree ridiculous! Think of Korzof as a doctor with a case of instruments! You will bleed, Korzof; you will apply leeches! I must be familiar with you, my son-in-law, I can't help it! You will feel the cataplasms to see if they have the requisite amount of heat; they put them against the cheek, you know, and if they don't burn they can be applied! You will have a little thermometer in your pocket to verify the temperature of your patients. It is in the highest degree comical, but the deuce take me now if I'd have it any way else! It's grand, you know; it's superb; it's— But, mon Dieu! how ridiculous you are both going to make yourselves!"

He burst out laughing, while genuine tears of tenderness rolled down his cheeks. He wiped them away and had another fit of merriment.

"Mon Dieu! how droll it is!" cried he; "it makes me laugh until the tears come!"

Suddenly, he stopped and then continued:

"No, that's not true—my laughter has nothing to do with my tears—I am weeping seriously and I don't know why I should be ashamed of it. May God bless you in your new life, my children! The benediction of a father calls down upon your heads all the grace of Heaven!"

They remained mute, with bowed heads, feeling that something grave was being accomplished in them at that solemn hour. Roubine arose and went toward the house.

"See here, Nadia," said he, looking back, his eyes still wet and his lips agitated by the mad laughter that had again seized upon him, "in ordering your trousseau, don't forget the infirmary aprons! Oh! Nadia, when the Empress hears this, they'll have a jolly time at court!"

"I don't believe it, father," said the young girl, smiling.

"Neither do I! I don't believe a word of it. But I must laugh; if I didn't I'd weep like an imbecile. And the yacht, now that you are penniless, my son-in-law?"

"I will sell it!" joyously answered Korzof.

"Is a thing like that dear?"

"It's worth about a hundred thousand francs."

"All right. I'll buy it of you. Nadia, I make you a present of it. With the money you can found a few more beds in your hospital. Mon Dieu! how droll it is to have a physician for a son-in-law! Will you prevent me from getting the gout, say, my son-in-law!"

"I'll try!" replied the young man, smiling.

The old cook had surpassed himself; but none of them could remember what they ate that morning at breakfast.

They were in no haste to return to Peterhof; they had a thousand plans to arrange, a thousand things to talk over; Roubine was an inexhaustible mine of objections, but he allowed himself to be convinced by sound arguments. The two young people, full of ardor, did not recoil before any difficulty. Korzof had ordered his domain offered for sale; the purchase of the land was already being discussed among the men of business; a few days of rest were absolutely necessary for the happy family before resuming the official and worldly life of Peterhof. The few days insensibly prolonged themselves, so that three weeks had elapsed since their arrival at Spask, and the month of August was well advanced.

"When do we leave?" asked Roubine, whose supply of cigars was becoming exhausted, one evening.

"To-morrow, if you like," replied his daughter. "The yacht is ready, is it not, Dmitri?"

"It will have steam up at five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Five o'clock!" exclaimed the Prince, with a shiver. "Are there people who from taste get up at five o'clock? Let us say eight, will you, Korzof?"

"As you please."

After dinner the young man deemed it advisable to cast a glance of examination at his vessel, and taking advantage of a moment when Nadia and her father seemed absorbed in the tolerably confused explanations of the staroste, he went with a rapid step down to the sloping alley that led to the shore. His inspection was brief, for everything on board was irreproachable; after having given orders for the next day, he was preparing to return when his attention was attracted by a darkness that was slowly descending the course of the river.

It consisted of two enormous boats, solidly fastened one to the other with ropes and loaded with hay to the height of the second story of a house. A roof of planks sloping on either side completed the resemblance to a house. The boatmen, in managing it, made their way around the thick mass by running along the edge, a foot wide: upon this narrow passage they found the means of accomplishing the necessary movements; occasionally an awkward fellow tumbled into the water, but the Russian boatmen swim like fish, and the edge of the craft being nearly on a level with the river's surface, the bather in spite of himself soon scrambled on board again amid the jokes of his comrades.

The coupled boats were advancing, borne by the current that was making them turn insensibly; after the first pair, others had shown themselves at the turn of the Neva, and their somber flotilla, spaced at irregular intervals, had gradually covered the brilliant surface of the water. The sun had set, the night was falling, all

was becoming gray, almost sorrowful; these gigantic masses were filing away slowly, as if under a mysterious impulsion. Korzof paused to look at them. At the same moment he heard the footsteps and the voices of the Prince and his daughter, who soon rejoined him.

“What is that? One might say the river was full of phantoms,” said the Prince, stopping, out of breath, upon the landing-place.

“It’s hay from the meadows of Ladoga, going to supply the St. Petersburg market,” answered Korzof.

“Those boats?—and without lights! Where are their regulation signals?”

“The boats that carry hay have no signal lights, because of the danger of conflagrations. They stop at dark, and, without doubt, these are going to pass the night near the village, a little below Spask.”

The procession continued to file away slowly and noiselessly upon the river, as brilliant as new pewter.

“They have a lugubrious air,” resumed Roubine. “Ho! men!” cried he, at the top of his voice, “sing us something!”

Some one out in the stream answered with a sort of rallying cry, and instantly a fresh and rich tenor voice sent forth a lingering melody in a minor key, with gentle and yielding inflections, interrupted from time to time by a very high note long held. A four-part chorus, short and exceedingly rhythmical, served as a refrain; then the chant was resumed. During this time the boat had floated away and disappeared at the bend of the river; other peasants on other boats that came in their turn took up the melody, varying it according to the caprices of their memories or fancies, and always, at equal intervals, the chorus resumed the refrain, as if to remind the soloist that he was not all alone in this world, lost in the midst of a broad river upon a solitary boat.

Little by little, the floating shadows united in a somber mass amid the denser obscurity along the shore; the chants ceased and no more boats passed. Fires were lighted on the opposite bank.

"Good night," said the Prince. "They are going to sleep in the open air; let us retire to our beds. That's the philosophy of humanity, Korzof! Say, Nadia, do you want us also to sleep in the open air in the spirit of equality?"

"No, father," gently responded she; "I should only like them to have each a bed as good as ours!"

"That's impracticable!" said Roubine, laughing. "But do you know, Nadia, that a bed with coverings would, perhaps, bother those hardy fellows a great deal! They are not used to such things."

"Father, don't tease me!" said she, mildly.

Roubine kissed her tenderly, and they re-entered the dilapidated old mansion, where the luxury of the silver-ware and the lights contrasted so strangely with the moldy hangings and the ancient furniture.

The departure was fixed for eight o'clock, but what good is there in hurrying when one is the master of one's time? Nadia regretted having to quit the old mansion, where she had just passed the sweetest hours of her existence; she strayed into all the corners with a smiling melancholy, as if she desired to leave there the souvenir of her presence. Roubine had a thousand affairs to finish with his staroste and the peasants. Toward ten o'clock he remembered that he had forgotten to give orders for painting the outside of the dwelling, which he wished to have done from bottom to top.

"Bah!" said he, "we will start after breakfast. If we arrive a trifle late it won't be a great misfortune, and, besides, we have the current in our favor."

In short, the departure was so much retarded that it

was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon when the yacht quitted the landing-place. An eddy in the tranquil water, caused by the movement of the screw, and the bank was already distant. Nadia cast a glance of adieu at the beautiful lindens, at the moss-covered beams.

"That's the past," said Korzof, gently, approaching her; "the future is there!"

He pointed toward St. Petersburg, yet invisible in the west. She smiled upon him with that grace that rendered her irresistible.

"The present is here," said she, "and it includes every joy!"

Roubine was smoking beneath the cotton duck awning, with a happy and indolent air.

"Eh! Nadia," cried he, without turning, "what would you do if you were no longer rich? Suppose I also should found a hospital and take advantage of that circumstance to disinherit you?"

"As God wills, father," answered she, with a slight sigh.

The Prince glanced at her sidewise; she was perfectly sincere.

"Well, no!" said he, resuming his long pipe, "I shall not do that sublime act. I shall keep my money and found nothing at all; there will be, perhaps, I may say probably, some day, little personages who will not be sorry to find it at the proper time!"

He resumed his half-somnolent state, and Nadia, chatting in a low tone with her betrothed, soon lost herself in innumerable dreams, all relating to their projected foundation.

The hay boats had disappeared; at that hour they had arrived in the harbor at St. Petersburg.

The day passed quietly; a slight accident that happened to the screw at the moment of departure made

the voyage slower; but, as the Prince had said, they had the current in their favor; however, when they sat down at table for dinner the manufactories in the vicinity of St. Petersburg had barely commenced to show themselves on the left bank of the river.

"The wisest course," said the engineer, confidentially to Korzof, who was uneasy at this slowness, "the wisest course to pursue would be to stop the yacht for a short time. In half an hour I shall have replaced the defective piece, and we can put on an extra head of steam; without that I greatly fear I shall not be able to reach Peterhof until far into the night."

The little vessel was stopped to put into effect this prudent advice. While the friends were dining the damage was repaired, and at eight o'clock in the evening they resumed their trip, this time with all the haste desirable.

It was dark when they were passing St. Petersburg; they had lighted their lanterns and were navigating with prudence to avoid collisions with the dispatch boats, the crews of which are not always sober when evening comes on. Suddenly Nadia, who was looking over the stern, cried out:

"See! What's that?"

An enormous mass of smoke had arisen in the direction of the Convent of Smolna, that they had passed but an instant since, and almost simultaneously the sky was illuminated with an intense light, that fell immediately to reappear more brilliant and more sinister.

"A conflagration! Let's go see it!" exclaimed Roubine.

In all the countries of the world a conflagration excites curiosity, but nowhere, we believe, as much as in Russia, where, though such calamities are not rare, thanks to the abundance of wooden buildings, essentially

inflammable, at the cry: "Parjar (fire)!" each person quits his work or his occupation and runs to the scene of the disaster. The curiosity is the same among the highest classes of society and among the lowest; in the crowd that hurries to the burning edifices will be found as many great lords and even great ladies as peasants. To see a fine fire, people gladly order out their carriages or their sledges.

"All right!—we'll go!" replied Korzof, who ordered the engineer to turn back the yacht.

The light increased every instant, but the travelers could not see the locality of the fire, hidden by a promontory jutting far out into the river, that describes at this spot almost an acute angle. The dispatch boats, the yawls of the watermen, and a government steam tug, always ready in case of accidents, went rapidly toward the conflagration. One could hear upon the quays and in the streets the deafening clatter of fire-engines, drawn over the paving-stones by their incomparable horses, and the constant roll of innumerable vehicles, borne by galloping steeds toward the point as yet unknown. Great sheaves of sparks shot up into the sky like fire-works, indicating that the place was close at hand.

"What could burn like that?" asked Nadia.

"The hay-market, I think," replied Korzof.

"If it be only a financial loss,—" began Roubine.

He paused, mute with surprise; two coupled boats had appeared at the turn of the river, wrapped in flames from hull to top; they advanced majestically, like a gigantic fire-ship, flaming in the tranquil air. After these, two others, then two others again. The fire having consumed their coupling ropes, they were drifting peacefully down the river, illuminating with a splendid and lugubrious glow the houses and the public buildings. It was very calm and it was horrible.

A cry of terror resounded everywhere, upon the river and upon the shore.

“The bridges!”

The first bridge that barred the passage of these fire-ships of a new kind was the great Litéine bridge, since replaced by a stone structure, but which, destined to receive the first shock of the ice coming from Lake Ladoga at the period of the thaws, was then composed only of a large number of pontoon boats, fastened together by a solid wooden flooring. This system admitted of folding the bridge along the banks at the time of the dreaded passage of the ice. Three large bridges of this kind crossed the Neva in its course through the city, and a considerable quantity of others, less important in regard to size, facilitated the passage through the different arms it forms at its mouth, connecting the islands with each other in a space of several kilomètres. If the first bridge took fire from contact with the burning boats, the glowing wrecks descending the river would carry the conflagration to all the shores, where are gathered innumerable vessels of all tonnage; the loss would be incalculable.

The little government tug, directed by a skillful waterman, had already seized the tow chain of the first bridge; the cables of the anchors, cut by boarding axes, had dropped to the bottom and slowly, with extreme precision, as if nothing pressed, the bridge, folding along the shore, left the way open to the first fire-ship that passed tranquilly; one might say that it expected this homage.

“That’s a capital pilot!” cried Roubine, admiring the success of the maneuver. “To the other bridges, men; we have no time to amuse ourselves!”

The yacht steamed at full speed toward the Troïtzky bridge, where zealous men had already cut the cables,

while awaiting a tow boat. Korzof caused the end of a chain to be thrown to him, and the gigantic bridge, a kilomètre in length, was also ranged against the bank. A dispatch boat, requisitioned for the purpose, accomplished the same office for the Palace bridge, and the Neva was free. All the boats, all the vessels not required for the service of the river police had vanished and hidden themselves in the most inaccessible corners.

It was time. The flotilla, all in flames, was descending the noble river with the majesty of a power which knows itself invincible. It was an exceedingly strange sight—the fire raging upon the surface of the water, bearing away worlds of sparks and smoke. In the tranquil air, beneath the blue sky, this spectacle had something fantastic about it. The crowd, grouped on the quays, appeared as if in broad day to the spectators upon the river: the human faces, all wearing the same expression of interest, admiration and horror, were distinguished with astonishing clearness.

Nadia, leaning against the netting of the yacht, could not take her eyes from the scene. Roubine and Korzof incessantly gave directions, in order to keep the vessel in the midst of the current and at the same time steer clear of the fire-ships.

“Use the boat-hook!” cried somebody through a speaking trumpet.

In fact, two of the burning boats were drifting toward the little arm of the Neva, where numerous ships had taken refuge and where it had been impossible to withdraw the bridges. The available steamboats, manned by courageous sailors, advanced to meet the monsters of fire to offer them an obstacle and compel them to return to the main channel, where they would ultimately strand against the Nicholas bridge, built of stone and consequently invulnerable.

It was a lively struggle. The boat-hooks were not long enough; they took the spare masts, that they were compelled to dip in the water every instant to prevent them from taking fire. The men who struggled thus were constantly flooded with water by their comrades; without that they could not have borne for an instant this terrible duel face to face with the fire.

"It is impossible to look on and remain useless," said Korzof to his guests. "Allow me to put you on shore."

Roubine refused to consent to this. Nadia gently placed her hand upon his arm, and he said nothing further. An instant afterwards they were upon the bank near the fortress, and Korzof, after having provided himself with boat-hooks, started off again for the menaced spot.

His yacht, more alert than the dispatch boats, lent itself marvelously to this species of combat. Sometimes by simply quickening its speed, it drew into its wake a fire-ship ready to go astray; sometimes it bravely placed itself sidewise, and putting the power of steam at the service of the boat-hook employed as a spur, it fell upon the wandering mass and drove it back into the channel. Nearly forty boats had thus passed, many had foundered; others had stranded in deserted places, where they could do no further damage; two or three were still floating in the midst of the river, half-submerged. A last one arrived, higher and broader, newly set fire to and hurling forth torrents of sparks like a fireworks sun. It was drifting toward the dangerous point, with the certainty of attack of an intelligent being.

"Attention, men! No false movement!" cried Korzof, who was watching it.

Several sailors held themselves in readiness to act; the engineer made a false maneuver; the attack was

awkwardly made and two boat-hooks fell into the river. A third, imbedded in the burning hay, remained suspended there; but the impulsion had sufficed to force the boat back into the channel.

"To the right!" shouted Korzof.

The dismayed engineer either misunderstood or badly executed this order; he moved a lever and the yacht shot alongside of the fire-ship. A cry of horror arose from the shore.

"A boat-hook!" cried Korzof—"a pole!—no matter what!"

There was nothing upon deck, and, besides, the flames were already leaping among the rigging. Korzof remembered that he had gunpowder on board.

"To the boat!" shouted he.

His men were already in it; he descended the last, cast off the chain, and the light skiff was rowed away. Upon the river, the other boats that had approached to aid him had drawn back, the danger being understood, and held themselves aloof.

At the moment the skiff landed at the feet of Nadia, who, bent forward, sought to recognize her betrothed, the boat and the yacht, still clinging together, passed in company before them. With a sound like the report of a cannon, the stern of the little craft exploded, while the fore plunged gracefully like a diving swan.

"Your pretty vessel!" cried Roubine, full of regret.

Korzof had already passed Nadia's arm beneath his; his visage glowing, his beard and hair reddened, he appeared to his betrothed handsomer than a demi-god.

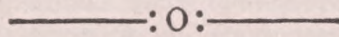
"What would you have?" said he, laughing; happiness must be paid for! Polycrates threw a ring into the sea; we cast our yacht into it and keep our felicity."

The Emperor, who had long known Korzof, caused him to present himself before him the following day.

“What do you want for your yacht?” asked he, after having complimented him.

“A site for my hospital,” answered the young man. “That will enable me to found fifty additional beds!”

A week later the first stone of the hospital was solemnly laid in an immense plot of ground partly planted with trees—the imperial gift; and the Princess Roubine was officially declared betrothed to Dmitri Korzof.



CHAPTER V.

A RUSSIAN WEDDING.

AFTER the first sensation that followed the public betrothal of the young Princess the animation commenced to subside; people had at first cried out about the grandeur of the sacrifice, now they said among themselves that it was absurd. Had not St. Petersburg hospitals enough? Would doctors ever be lacking? One had only to glance at the crowd of students hurrying to the halls of the faculty of medicine to assure one's self that the sick would never die because of a scarcity of physicians. In brief, after having exalted to the clouds the devotion of the betrothed couple people covered them with ridicule, as any wise head would have been able to foresee.

They did not bother themselves in the least about all this clatter, absorbed as they were in the preparations for departure and in the multitudinous preoccupations occasioned by the sale of Korzof's properties. He had reserved for himself only a little estate, of a mediocre

revenue, in order, as he said, not to lose completely the habit of ownership. The funds resulting from this sale were, as fast as they were received, to serve to pay the expenses of the budding hospital, and to be placed so as to furnish an income as advantageous as possible. The imperial munificence had already manifested itself, besides the gift of the site, by the promise of a very considerable sum annually; Nadia had declared that she did not wish to receive other wedding presents than gifts for the new foundation, and everything promised an exceedingly brilliant future for the great work of the young pair.

The sole shadow in this picture was the approaching departure of Korzof for Paris, where he proposed to spend the first year of his medical studies. By dint of talking of the same things, of revolving the same ideas, he had so thoroughly identified himself with Nadia that the thought of a separation was for them a veritable grief. The Prince had even proposed to go pass the winter in Paris, "to gild the pill," as he said; but the young man himself had been sufficiently courageous to refuse.

"I know well enough that I should not toil seriously," said he; "let us not have partial courage merely, let us be really strong!"

Toward the close of October, therefore, he departed, and Nadia, restored to society life, prepared on her side for more serious duties than those she had accomplished up to that period. She was able to divide up her time so as to consecrate every day several hours to her studies, and nevertheless she accomplished all her duties toward society with the most rigorous punctuality. The winter passed more rapidly than she expected, and toward the month of June, at the moment of departing for the country, she went to make a farewell visit to the hospital buildings, already well advanced.

The winter had stopped work on the edifice for several months; but, from the first fine days, they had put on so many workmen that the enormous structure was emerging from the earth literally while one gazed at it. Nadia made the tour of the constructions, advanced across all the planks that served as scaffolding, examined the subcellars and the cellars, scrutinized the arrangements for drainage; having grown very expert in the study of plans, she had a long talk with the architect, and departed at last, her heart swollen with proud joy.

"I don't understand anything about it," said her father, amazed; "she argues matters with the architect, and knows the quality of bricks better than the contractor! Nadia, are you making fun of them or of me?"

She answered merely with a happy smile, and that very evening sent her betrothed a long letter, in which the details of the work finished occupied less space than the joyous outpouring of her soul. She imagined she already saw the completed hospital offer to the eye resting upon it its long rows of clean and well-kept beds.

"No one will die there," said she; "we shall see no tears there; all who enter will leave it cured and triumphant."

A few days later, they departed for their large estate in the government of Smolensk.

The old superintendent received them on their arrival, whimpering and whining, as had been his custom for fifty years. Thanks to this habit of complaining of everything—of the weather, of the crops, of the times and of his health—he had put aside quite a fortune and had cheated in the shrewdest way in the world all those who had done business with him. How could it be, thought simple souls, that this man, constantly within two fingers of death, was capable of voluntarily mystifying his neighbor?

It was thus that he had acquired a competence more than gilded, gleaned from the possessions of his master and augmented by handsome presents, willingly made or extorted; to his mind, the most important thing was that he should get the money in his pocket; once there, it was very certain not to go out again. But although he was rich, although the peasants of the neighborhood could, while chatting frankly among themselves, estimate to within a few roubles the large capital for which they paid him enormous interest, no one ever saw him save in dirty and patched garments. It was only to honor his master that he reluctantly risked taking from his clothes-press a caftan less soiled than usual; as to his fur cap, worn away to the very skin, no one would ever have thought of having him replace it with another. Without his cap, Ivan Stepline would no longer have been himself.

His son Féodor was beside him, as straight as a poplar tree, listening to the old man's complaints with an air at once wearied and suitable. These prolix complaints were no longer the fashion, and he, who prided himself on being up to the times, certainly suffered internally on seeing his father play this rôle that he considered degrading. Hence he accompanied the Prince and his daughter with an uncovered head and without saying a word. When they reached the great hall, he asked them, in a respectful tone, if they had any orders to give him and, receiving a reply in the negative, withdrew; Ivan Stepline was then compelled to follow him.

Very early the next morning, Nadia was already tripping through the gardens and the green-houses of their beautiful domain. She had always loved this spot, where it sometimes seemed to her that she saw float the image of her mother, who had tenderly cherished her. It was here that the Princess was

born, it was here that she had brought into the world her only daughter; it was in the church, looming up opposite the château, that her body had reposed for long years. In her new happiness, in the new pride she felt as a triumphant fiancée, Nadia had need to visit all these spots, full of souvenirs of her childhood; she found them again there, as fresh as in the past; but they seemed to her to have strangely lost much of their importance and interest; all her anterior life was drowned in the splendor of her present joy and of the glorious future that was opening before her.

About eleven o'clock she returned with slow steps toward the mansion, carrying an arm-load of flowers she had gathered in the gardens. Upon the threshold she found her father, ready to go out; they silently took their way to the church, where the priest awaited them, clad in his mourning chasuble. In the center of the choir, upon a small table covered with a fine linen cloth, was placed a plate full of boiled rice amid which was a cross formed of dried grapes. The servants, the footmen, the superintendent with his family and a goodly number of peasants were grouped in the church and respectfully opened a passage for the Prince and his daughter, who took up a position in the place of honor, reserved for the lords of the manor and notable personages, on the left side, within a small grating, open in the center. This place, that was opposite to the group of choristers, was quite near the images of the Saviour and the saints that ornamented the iconostase, a sort of partition separating the tabernacle from the church proper.

The priest saluted the faithful, commencing with the lords, then addressing himself to the choir and afterwards to the crowd massed in the church; he took a smoking censer that was presented to him by the deacon, clad like himself in the symbols of mourning, and offered

the incense to the plate of rice, destined to represent in the funeral ceremonies the body of the deceased person for whom the prayers for the dead were uttered. He afterwards sang the mortuary verses, to which the choir responded in a plaintive fashion.

The ceremony, which was brief, was finished according to the rites, and, when it was over, Roubine went to a slab without inscription, situated at the entrance of the choir. Nadia knelt beside him and scattered her flowers over the stone that covered the vault in which her mother reposed. As far back as she could remember this pious pilgrimage had been the first act of their sojourn in this domain; she had always accomplished it with a pious tenderness; but, this time, as she presented her offering and her prayer to the dear deceased, the young girl said to her, in a very low tone, as if she were able to hear her: "Mother, I am happy; bless me in my new happiness!"

On quitting the church the Prince and his daughter exchanged a few words with such of their peasants as they knew personally, who had approached to kiss their hands. It was in the time of serfdom, but Roubine was beloved by all his serfs. They would have preferred a less rapacious superintendent; for this evil, however, none knew a remedy, all the superintendents, with a few inappreciable differences, being nearly of the same kind; but the rigors of Stepline were greatly softened by the annual presence of the master, who saw with his own eyes the condition of the district, willingly listened to the complaints and never refused to give wood to build a new isba, when the old one had fallen into decay. Nadia inquired concerning her hospital, where everything was going on splendidly, thanks to the new health officer, who had been found to be an active and resolute man; he had formerly been a regimental surgeon, and had

established from the first day a military discipline, always very useful in taking care of the sick, but more useful, perhaps, than elsewhere in Russia, where everybody is, for that matter, but little disposed by temperament to let things get along without interference.

The clock on the manor house struck noon; the Prince took leave of those who surrounded him, requested the priest to come a few hours later to say prayers and bless the mansion, in order to drive from it all misfortune, as all Russians do when they install themselves anywhere; then he entered the dwelling with his daughter. In the afternoon the prayers were said and a collation was offered to the priest and the deacon, after which life resumed its ordinary routine of pleasure and duties.

On the morrow of this well-employed day, when Roubine and Nadia had just passed after breakfast into a cool salon, situated to the north, into which those scourges of Russia in summer, the flies, never ventured, Stepline showed his pimped nose in the embrasure of the door, still standing open.

"Can I enter?" demanded he, with the most obsequious politeness.

An affirmative nod having reassured him, he introduced into the salon the rest of his person, that had always the air of presenting itself sidewise, in order to occupy less space, without doubt.

"What's the matter?" asked Roubine, without raising his eyes from his newspaper.

"This, batiouchka," replied the superintendent, making use of an affectionate term that signifies, literally, my little father, and is employed in speaking as well to superiors as to inferiors with less ceremony than the word *barine* that signifies master or lord." You know, batiouchka, that I have a son, a fine lad; he had the

honor of bringing you your revenues in the month of June."

"I remember," interrupted the Prince, who did not like long speeches. "Well?"

"Well, Prince, the young man is old enough to get married. What do you think about it?"

The penetrating eyes of the old man wandered from Roubine to Nadia, with the regularity of one of those clocks from the Black Forest, in which one sees a lion rolling a look at once ferocious and meek.

"What do you want me to think?" responded Roubine, turning the page of his newspaper, behind which for the moment he wholly disappeared. "It is the young man's own business."

Nadia had blushed, more from anger than shame; she remained motionless and impassible.

"The fact is, batiouchka, that a party has proposed to me a betrothed for my son, a handsome girl, well-bred and rich, but, without your consent, I would not—oh! for nothing in the world, without your consent and that of the Princess—"

His eyes continued to roam from one to the other. Nadia arose and took a book from the table.

"What do you want?" demanded Roubine, at last putting down his newspaper. "My permission for the marriage of your son? Let's see now; who is she, this betrothed of whom you speak?"

"For a demoiselle, she is not a demoiselle—she is simply the daughter of a superintendent, as my Féodor is the son of a superintendent. We peasants cannot pretend to demoiselles—is not that true, Princess? But a superintendent's daughter who has a little money and knows all a housekeeper ought to know, that don't hurt anything, and it's all we need—is not that true, Princess?"

"Evidently," answered Nadia, turning toward him to look him full in the face. "Why do you ask me that question, Stepline? Had you your thoughts turned toward something else?"

She spoke in such a calm and haughty tone that the restless eyes of the old man became motionless beneath his lowered eyelids.

"No, Princess," said he, humbly. "Then this marriage meets your views?"

"My father is master here," said she, haughtily; "address yourself to him."

"Prince, does this marriage meet your views?" repeated Stepline, in a submissive tone.

"I beg to remind you," said Roubine, a trifle irritated by the strange turn, full of hidden meanings, that this interview seemed to be taking; "do you hear me, Stepline? I beg to remind you that this is no affair of mine; I gave you your liberty twenty years ago—you are free, your son is free; he can contract marriage under whatever conditions he may think fit; I have nothing to say."

"But," insisted the old sharper, resuming his customary plaintive tone, "if your Highness should withdraw your good graces from my son after me, and he be not the superintendent of your Highness, what will become of his children, his poor little children, he will have when he is married?"

Roubine burst out laughing.

"Great heavens!" cried he, "one might say that you know how to foresee evils afar off! Well, listen to me: I am aware that you rob me and oppress my peasants; let your son do as you do and I will say nothing; it is the natural order of things. But if he should pass the limit I won't promise anything; I will pitilessly drive him away, even should he have at his heels two dozen of those poor little children you just spoke of!"

"Then you consent? And the Princess also?" said the crafty old man, setting his eyes at liberty.

"Yes, since you are told so."

"In that case will you allow the fiancé to present himself before you with the fiancée?"

"Where are they?" asked Roubine in surprise.

"In the ante-chamber, where they await the good pleasure of your Highness."

Roubine threw himself back in his fauteuil, holding his sides.

"Mon Dieu! Stepline," cried he, between two bursts of laughter, "you are what one might call a man of precautions; you will make me die of joy!"

Nadia did not laugh; she attentively examined the superintendent's countenance that expressed only a sort of good-natured contentment; gently, without speaking, she placed her hand upon the shoulder of the Prince, who instantly resumed his sang-froid.

"Go," said he, "and find them. It is not polite to make them wait."

Stepline went out, after having made three ceremonious bows lower than the belt.

"What do you think of that?" said Roubine, looking at his daughter, divided between a new temptation to laugh and a certain astonishment at all this conversation.

"I think that man is very crafty, and that it would be prudent for you to watch him as well as his son; you are too kind, father; you never think that with so much kindness you may make yourself enemies, and yet Stepline detests us!"

Roubine, petrified with surprise, was still staring at his daughter when the door re-opened and gave passage to the betrothed couple, who entered holding each other by the hand.

The young girl was neither ugly nor pretty; her face,

of a dazzling freshness, like those of almost all the girls of her age and condition, was very ordinary. She was destined, according to all appearances, to be a good house-keeper, a faithful wife, a mother of a family without reproach, and to get fat toward her thirtieth year in a woeful fashion. Nadia looked at her with a certain disdain that Féodor surprised with a rapid glance. He colored to the roots of his hair and advanced with lowered eyes toward the Prince; on arriving in front of him, they moved as if to prostrate themselves. Roubine stopped them with a gesture before they had accomplished the ceremonial.

"My compliments," said he, smiling, with an air half-benevolent, half-joking; "you don't lose any time, you people! Hardly have you shed your milk teeth than you are already thinking of getting married!"

"So much the better, father," said Nadia, in her gentle voice; "they will have time to be happy."

A glance flashed from beneath Féodor's lowered eyelids, and his jaw contracted as if he wanted to bite something, but he said nothing; his countenance resumed its immobility, and no longer expressed anything save the conventional deference of a subordinate in the presence of his superiors.

"Be seated," said the Prince. "We will drink to your health."

Nadia rang, and a waiter immediately appeared, garnished with glasses and carafes containing carefully decanted foreign wines; the butler, who knew the customs, had prepared in advance this inevitable mark of hospitality. The glasses were filled; the Prince raised his, saying: "To your prosperity!" Those present did the same, responding: "Long life to your Highness! We humbly thank you!" They exchanged bows, and the glasses were emptied at a single swallow, as became

true Russians. Then, the betrothed pair and old Stepline arose and withdrew with a final bow.

When the door of the adjoining apartment had closed upon them, Roubine looked at his daughter with a comical air.

"Well, she is not handsome, the future Madame Stepline," said he, in French. "I have the notion that her betrothed did not seem very enthusiastic over her; he does not appear to consider this marriage a promotion, eh, Nadia?"

The young girl remained silent for an instant, then raised to her father a firm look, from which all false shame, all puerile embarrassment had disappeared.

"The old man," said she, "is a tricky fellow, but I don't think him wicked, although he detests us from principle. As to the son, don't deceive yourself, father; beneath his varnish of manners, relatively correct, he is a rude peasant. He hates us."

"He hates us! Mon Dieu! Nadia, what are you stuffing me with? Why should he hate us?"

"Because we are rich and he is less so than we. Further, because his wealth consists only in what he has stolen from us. Because we are civilized and he is just enough so to feel how much we are superior to him. Because he is ambitious and his ambitions are destined to be crossed."

"Nadia! Is it you who are talking—you who lay open every ambition to all classes?"

"Every healthful and loyal ambition—yes, father! But this man does not wish to be either more learned, better or greater; he wishes to rule in order to tyrannize, to be powerful not to create but to destroy, to be rich for the sake of enjoyment, not to heal the wounds of those who suffer. Such ambitions, unfortunately, are the most frequent. This man knows no others!"

“How did you find out all this, my daughter?” asked the Prince, overwhelmed.

“I cannot tell you exactly,” answered she, growing a trifle confused.

Féodor Stepline assuredly inspired her with neither sympathy nor pity, but she feared that her father would become terribly angry if he learned what she had guessed at the time of her interview at Peterhof with the superintendent's son. With that instinctive dread that calm people have of the fury of violent men, she wished to avoid a scandal, and she knew the Prince to be a person of extreme violence.

“You know, father,” resumed she, “that I see a great deal, and often without accounting for it to myself; believe me, I ask you only to be prudent; distrust Féodor Stepline much more than his father!”

“I will do all you tell me, Nadia,” responded the Prince, with truly touching submission; “but may I be hanged if I understand what you mean! However, I will be prudent all the same, but it is simply to obey you.”

Féodor was married a week afterwards. The wedding was sumptuous, at least after the fashion of the weddings of the social class to which he belonged, the luxury of which had nothing either of refinement or elegance about it. The day before the marriage, the fiancée, who had returned to her parents' dwelling, was conducted to the bath-house of her village, reserved for women, with all the prescribed pomp; a swarm of young girls accompanied her, singing as they went, and entered with her into the sweating-room, where she was soaped, rubbed, curried copiously with linden bark in the guise of a sponge, and with birch rods yet garnished with their leaves, to finish the ceremony. After this a collation was served to the young girls, still in the sweating-room,

and there, amid a heat of thirty-five degrees, they sang songs and danced for several hours. When the fiancée left the sweating-room she was as red and shining as a bit of freshly-varnished mahogany.

On his side Féodor had undergone the same treatment at the men's bath-house, where the refreshments had consisted rather of spirits than solids; during this time carts, drawn by the largest number of horses that could be harnessed to them, had deposited in a dwelling long since prepared, but that had never yet been tenanted, the trousseau and furniture of the future bride. The pieces of furniture, more massive than elegant, were ranged in the two rooms of which the dwelling was composed, following an order always the same in every house; a triangular cupboard, called *kiôte*, specially reserved for the holy images, was placed in the consecrated corner, garnished merely with a very small image, destined to sanctify the dwelling while awaiting the others that were to come only with the bride herself. The wooden chests, painted and ornamented with red and yellow flowers, were carried into the back chamber; they contained the linen and garments of the young girl and were to serve as clothes-presses all her life, European furniture not yet having at that epoch any access to the houses of the Russian peasants.

The next day the young men, friends or comrades of the expectant bridegroom, formed a grand cortège, composed of as many *télègues* (carts) as they could get together, and went early in the morning to find the bride in her village. The journey was long; they did not return until afternoon. As soon as the bells of their beribboned *troïkas* were heard in the distance the bells of the church pealed forth, for it was to be a very brilliant wedding, and the bridegroom repaired to the church, there to await the young girl who in a few

instants would be his wife. She entered almost immediately, while the horses, covered with sweat, filed away slowly before the porch, and the choristers, who had greeted the arrival of Féodor with an anthem, sang a chant of welcome. The young girl's father led her to her future husband, in front of a pulpit covered with embroidered cloth, where they both stood, silent and motionless. The priest, escorted by the deacon, then emerged from the tabernacle and the ceremony commenced. The bride and groom each received a lighted wax candle, decked with white roses, orange blossoms and bows of white ribbon, that, after having burned during the ceremony, were to be piously preserved and lighted no more, save on very solemn occasions of the family life, such as births, deaths or grave perils, and the irrevocable yes was exchanged, after which a piece of pink satin was stretched out before the youthful couple; all the young girls present craned their necks to see if the newly-made wife succeeded in first placing her foot upon it, for that would be for her the omen of an uncontested authority in the house of her husband; but Féodor had already crushed with his boot the as yet only partially unfolded corner of the satin. He was resolved to have no other master than himself in his own dwelling. The young wife sadly hung her head, ready to weep; the rings were handed to the wedded pair and passed on their fingers, then exchanged; their candles, that had been taken from their hands to facilitate this operation, were restored to them, and the groomsmen, summoned to lend their aid, received from the priest the two heavy crowns of gilded metal, ornamented with holy images in enameled porcelain, that it was their duty to hold above the heads of the young couple. The latter drank three times, turn by turn, from the same cup the blessed wine that represents life; then the priest, joining their hands

beneath the skirt of his stole, caused them also to pass three times around the pulpit that bore the holy books. During this time, the groomsmen had followed the pair, holding the crowns above their heads, as is done for people favored by fortune, for the poor are sufficiently robust to bear the weight of these heavy ornaments of metal, while the rich would feel themselves incommoded by such uncomfortable burdens.

The ceremony was drawing to its close; the priest addressed a brief exhortation to those who had just sworn to share together the pains and the joys of life' exactly as if they loved each other, and, finally, he directed them to kiss each other that the Church might consecrate that first kiss by her presence. They obeyed, the young wife with passive indifference, Féodor Stepline with a sort of swagger. Nadia and her father had been forced to be present at this ceremony, otherwise the whole district would have believed the superintendent fallen into disgrace. Together they approached the husband and wife, who had just made their devotions to the images placed upon the iconostase, and politely congratulated them; Nadia drew from her finger a ring ornamented with a diamond and presented it to the young wife, who blushed with pleasure; then the crowd opened to make a passage for the bride and groom, who on foot regained their domicile, whither had preceded them a little lad chosen by the family, who carried before them a holy image, destined to recall to them while at prayer the remembrance of this day.

Féodor Stepline had shown himself impassible during the ceremony. He passed before the crowd with uplifted head, leading, as if she were the most beautiful of created beings, his young wife ridiculously bundled in light-hued garments. He maintained the same sang-froid on the porch of the church and in the public

square; but, at that moment, Nadia, who was crossing the cemetery on the arm of the Prince to return to the château by the shortest route, encountered the glance of the newly married man, who followed her with a ferocious expression. Instinctively she clung closer to her father.

"What ails you?" asked the latter. "Are you shivering?"

"Yes, father, but it is nothing."

And she spoke of something else.

After this event, that was for a long while the talk of the village and neighborhood, the most perfect calmness reigned at the château; for two months the letters of Dmitri Korzof arrived regularly twice a week, telling, despite the season, that did not in the least favor serious studies, of work without ceasing and ardent researches. Nadia replied, recounting her life, hoping in the future, speaking of the three years, scarcely begun, that separated them from their reunion, as of a day that would soon be over.

Suddenly, a circumstance without precedent occurred; one morning the post brought no letter from Korzof.

"It's a simple delay," said Roubine; "he missed the mail."

"Doubtless," answered the young girl, without relaxing her painfully contracted features.

She went that day into the gardens as usual, visited the stables, the cattle stalls and the barns, assured herself, alone or accompanied by her father, that the accustomed order reigned everywhere; then she returned to the mansion and sat down at the piano; but in vain the sounds awoke beneath her fingers, the music whirled before her eyes—she played mechanically, without seeing and without hearing. When evening came on, she remained for a long time seated at her closed window,

gazing at the little lake that sparkled at the foot of the flower-garden. The night was cold, for October was approaching, but the stoves, heated during the day, spread an equal and gentle warmth throughout the entire mansion; the moon shone upon the pond with a metallic and almost cruel brightness that made Nadia feel badly. She turned away softly and took up a book. "I will get my letter to-morrow," said she to herself. But if her eyes could be constrained to run over the pages, her mind could not be forced to comprehend them. She retired to bed, hoping that slumber would lead her quietly to the next day; she had great trouble in getting to sleep, and her rest was broken by uneasy dreams.

The next day the post brought a quantity of letters that Nadia scattered with a single movement over the broad table; Korzof's chirography was still absent. She raised her eyes toward her father, and the commonplace consolation that arose to his lips was instantly checked at the sight of the deep care that was already imprinted upon his daughter's features.

"To-morrow," said he.

And he quitted the room, finding nothing to add.

On the morrow it was the same, and on two other days besides; the hope for an instant caressed that a letter might have gone astray was destroyed by the prolongation of this silence; a single letter may be lost—but two! On the evening of the eighth day, when the third letter should have arrived, Nadia, after having poured out a cup of coffee for her father, as was her daily custom, placed her hand upon his arm, with the pretty gesture that was familiar to him, marked this time by mute grief and unspeakable lassitude.

"Father," said she, "Dmitri is ill—perhaps dead! Let us go to him!"

CHAPTER VI.

INAUGURATION OF THE HOSPITAL.

ROUBINE and his daughter reached Paris one sad October evening; the rain beat against the windows of their carriage and the rare passers-by, who were hastening over the sidewalks with umbrellas, along the closed shops, beneath the wavering glimmer of the street-lamps, had the air of fleeing before some unseen enemy.

Since their departure from Russia, the Prince had been unable to obtain any reply either to his letters or his telegrams; hence the anxiety of the travelers, constantly growing, had arrived at fever heat. Roubine had, at least, the resource, all through Germany, of showering his ill-humor upon the employés, upon the restaurants where nothing is eatable, upon the inevitable delays and upon the bad weather; but Nadia, plunged in her corner, silent, her eyes fixed upon some invisible object, always gentle, foreseeing, always ready to smile if her father looked at her, was for him a most painful sight.

"Get into a good fit of anger once!" cried he, between Berlin and Cologne.

"For what would that serve, father?" responded she, smiling sadly.

They arrived at last; a few turns of the wheel alone separated them from the hotel where they would get news of Korzof; the distance was soon traversed. Roubine got out of the carriage first and offered his hand to his daughter.

"M. Korzof?" demanded he of the servant, who was awaiting orders.

"This is the place, monsieur; he is very ill."

"What is the matter with him?"

"A sort of brain fever. We have taken good care of him, monsieur. Has monsieur come to see him?"

"Parbleu!" growled Roubine; "you don't imagine that I spent five days and five nights on a railway train to see you, do you? Announce the Prince Roubine."

"Oh!" said the servant, seized with respect, "there is no need to announce your Highness. M. Korzof understands nothing at all. May it please your Highness to take the trouble to pass this way?"

"Good," said Roubine; "Nadia, go into the salon and wait for me."

"Why, father?" said she, in her tranquil voice. "I will go with you."

Roubine made no answer, but went on before. They entered a spacious chamber, well-lighted by two large windows; a sister of charity standing near the mantelpiece was preparing a potion; at the back of the apartment, in a bed, the curtains of which had been raised as high as possible and fastened with pins, Korzof, his hair and beard shaved close, his eyes glittering and uncertain, was rolling his head back and forth upon the pillow, at the same time speaking low and quickly. The Prince hastened to the bed and took in his hands the burning hand that lay upon the coverlet.

"My poor child," said he, "my dear Dmitri, do you recognize me, say!"

The sick man looked at him without seeing him, then recommenced talking to himself. Roubine drew back a step, frightened. Nadia approached and gently took the hand he dropped. Korzof gave a start and stared at her. He did not see her yet; but behind the veil of con-

fused thoughts that obscured his brain he vaguely perceived the resemblance to his beloved image. The sister of charity approached and spoke to him. He was accustomed to her face and voice, and almost always recognized her.

"Some one has come to see you," said she; "do you know who?"

"No," said Korzof, passing his other hand across his eyes; his fingers firmly held those of Nadia, but he was scarcely conscious of it. "Who has come?"

The sister interrogated the young girl with a look.

"Nadia," said the latter, softly.

"Nadia?" repeated Dmitri, with an anxious expression. "Yes; but, this time, she must not go away again."

The young girl made a movement with her head; a chair was brought to her; she allowed her traveling coat to be removed and remained seated beside the bed, without quitting the sick man's hand. In about a quarter of an hour the latter unclasped his fingers and sank into a deep slumber. The sister noted the temperature of his body that had sensibly diminished.

"It was, without doubt, you upon whom he called," said she, modestly, to Roubine. "He has never ceased to ask for you, but we were unable to procure your address."

She pointed to the little heap formed upon the desk by the letters and telegrams that had been accumulating for two weeks. The Prince shrugged his shoulders and led away his daughter that she might take a little food.

When the physician made his visit, he exhibited satisfaction. Though Korzof's brain was sadly troubled, he was, nevertheless, vaguely conscious of the presence around him of beloved beings. One of the most distressing things for a sick man, in the great convulsions

of human health, is the impression that he is abandoned and that no one thinks of him. The particular circumstances in which the young man found himself inclined him to suffer more than any other from such abandonment. When he comprehended that Nadia bent over him, spoke to him, encouraged him many times during the day, he felt happy and consoled, without seeking to discover by what mysterious means his friends, left in Russia, were now beside him. Little by little his brain cleared, not without sudden and disquieting relapses; but Korzof's strong constitution obtained the mastery, and, one fine morning, sitting up in his bed, amid a whole legion of pillows, he learned the history of the journey, that now appeared something fantastic and improbable to all three of them.

A profound joy filled Dmitri's heart. If, sometimes, on recalling Nadia's refusal, with that need of tormenting himself and of causing himself to suffer that is the rule with men, he had asked himself to what point the young girl had believed herself to be fulfilling a duty in accepting him for her husband, at present he felt reassured; the serious and devoted tenderness of his betrothed was exactly what he had expected of her; it was enough to fill his life with happiness and noble satisfaction; whatever he should wish, whatever he should attempt, they would wish it together and accomplish it of a common accord. In the eyes of Nadia herself Korzof had for the future received the baptism of toil; he was worthy of taking part in the great work of compassion and fraternity.

To complete the cure of the convalescent the south was ordered; they all three departed, as gay as school children on a vacation. Vainly had the young man striven to talk of the time he had lost, of that he was about to lose; Roubine could not be induced to hear

anything on the subject. To tell the truth he had never fully accepted the idea of seeing his son-in-law become a physician. As for the hospital, that was a fancy like many another; but what was the good to cram one's mind with incongruous things when it was so easy to let others learn them, others specially created for the purpose by a Providence that had evidently designed to make savans of them, since it had neglected to give them fortunes that would permit them to live without doing anything!

Nadia had made peace between them by exacting, in accord with the physician, two more months of complete rest before there could be a question of resuming study; these two months were a veritable fête for the three friends. The mildness of the climate, the beauty of the sun, the easy softening of convalescents that gives them so many delicious little emotions, lent an extraordinary charm to their sojourn in this beautiful district.

"It is another summer thrown into the bargain!" said Roubine, delighted at seeing himself out of doors in the month of January without furs and even without a paletot.

But the Prince was a restless being, who tired quickly, at least if his home did not retain him by a thousand close bonds; he had a horror of hotels, a horror of seaside towns and of the society encountered there.

"But, father, you constitute a part of this society! Suppose the people you meet and whom you rail so furiously against said the same things of you, what would you think of that?" laughingly exclaimed Nadia one day.

"I? Parbleu! I would think they were right! One cannot cut a more foolish figure than in wandering thus away from home, like lost cattle that don't know how to find their way back to their pasture-field!"

"Then, you long to return to the sheepfold in dear St. Petersburg, far from which you cannot live?"

"Certainly! In the first place, habits are the half of life; I don't say the best half, but, sure as fate—"

"It is the most inconvenient one!" hazarded Dmitri, who dearly loved to tease his future father-in-law. They all three burst out laughing. "And yet that don't fill you with remorse at leaving me behind you like a poor bundle forgotten in a railway dépôt, eh?"

Nadia cast a glance at her betrothed, still so thin and so pale. She had felt for some time past that her father was weary of this shifting camp life, and yet she could not bear the thought of leaving Dmitri alone, absorbed in his dry tasks, without amusements; for he found, if he amused himself out of doors, that he could no longer bring to study a free enough mind.

"Why the deuce do you want to be a doctor?" cried Roubine. "You are a Count, that's sufficient for me! But it is mademoiselle who is never satisfied!"

He looked at his daughter with an expression half-scolding, half-tender. Nadia thought the moment favorable for entering upon a very delicate chapter that she had not yet dared to begin.

"Father," said she, "I really think that it is urgent for you to return to St. Petersburg!"

"Well, and you?"

"Oh, it isn't so urgent for me to go! The hospital will get on very well without me; besides, you know the works perfectly; you are as thoroughly skilled in them as a contractor!"

"That's not exact," growled the Prince, charmed nevertheless; "but I don't understand."

"You will return to St. Petersburg, where the mansion is ready to receive you; they have put down the carpets, nailed up the hangings, and done everything required;

you will be happy there, like a bird that has recovered its nest, and then the English Club—”

“Nadia, don’t make fun of me; explain yourself immediately.”

She approached her father with a cajoling look, against which he was without resources.

“As for me,” said she, “during that time I will remain in Paris with my husband.”

Dmitri made a bound and seized the young girl’s hand: Roubine, as he fixed his eyes upon his daughter, saw two faces instead of one that implored him in a way to soften stones.

“Well, what an idea!” cried he, “to get married in a foreign land, without a trousseau, without the family—and then that other idea!—to get rid of me, to send me home! I can well believe that you will not be wearied in each other’s society; but, think of me, all alone by myself!”

“Father,” said Nadia, with her pretty, half-bantering smile, “you dine in the city three times a week!”

“Yes,” rejoined Roubine, “but I always breakfast at home. Come, now, Nadia, this is a joke!”

“My dear father, if you order me to follow you I will obey, as you are well aware, but it will give me pain to do so.”

“It won’t give you pain then to let me set out alone?”

The young girl’s eyes filled with tears.

“You well know the contrary, father; but what prevents you from passing the summers with us, in France or in Germany? And, besides, we will come to see you in the country; not at St. Petersburg, eh, Dmitri? We shall not go to St. Petersburg until the hospital is finished.”

At this proposition Roubine broke out, grew furious, declared that this marriage had always been treated in a

ridiculous fashion, that his daughter wished to render it more ridiculous still, and that, since she had lost her wits, he preferred to entirely withdraw the consent he had been weak enough to give. Everybody might go to the deuce, but he did not intend to be made a laughing-stock of.

"Then," said Korzof, who had preserved his sang-froid throughout this storm, "you don't want to be my father-in-law?"

Roubine burst out laughing. Nadia, who was weeping, did the same. They embraced each other. Roubine seated himself again, for he had arisen to gesticulate more at his ease, and they finished where they should have commenced; but if people always commenced at that point it would be too simple! They went into an explanation. The Prince listened to the reasons his daughter gave him, agreed with her that Korzof had committed no crime that deserved an exile of three years, that exile was reduced six months, and the result was an arrangement that the marriage should take place in Paris the day after their return thither, that is to say, at the expiration of two weeks.

It took place accordingly, but not as Roubine and perhaps Nadia herself had dreamed, amid all the splendor of luxury and high position. In the play of her imagination she had pictured to herself this sumptuous marriage in the chapel of their hospital, inaugurated that very day, amid all that the court and the city offered of the greatest brilliancy; she had loved to depict to herself the pomp of such a ceremony, much like a taking of the veil, a definitive adieu to her past life of an idle Princess, a triumphal entry into her modest existence as "the doctor's wife." The realities of life, less poetic, sometimes poignant, had shattered this dream, the wrecks of which Nadia now trampled beneath her feet with joy.

What mattered the renouncing of this somewhat theatrical splendor, if she undertook the task, truly worthy of her and of him, of sustaining her husband in his frequently toilsome studies? It is good for a woman's pride to make a gift of herself the recompense of long efforts! There is in it something well-calculated to flatter a young girl's self-love. But is it not more simple and more touching to share the pains and the fatigues that one imposes, from that time growing up to the rôle of companion and friend, instead of shutting up one's self in the cold dignity of a sovereign who condescends?

These reflections were Nadia's first step in a new path. Until then she had scanned her own personality only with regard to herself; obliged to scan it with regard to others, she perceived that too narrow principles threatened to split, like garments, when they found themselves in disaccord with events. She realized particularly the depth of the feeling with which she had inspired Korzof, and, instead of going to him with a smile of a queen who rewards, she leaned against her husband's heart with the tender confidence of a wife who knows the grandeur of the sacrifice she has prompted.

No toilet splendors, no princely trousseau. The friends the betrothed couple counted in the Russian colony in Paris were present at the ceremony and the lunch that followed; then Roubine departed the same evening for St. Petersburg, and the young married pair remained in a pretty little suite of furnished apartments arranged for them not far from the School of Medicine. Nadia preferred to renounce from time to time a promenade in the Bois de Boulogne to obliging her husband to make a long journey daily to regain a dwelling situated in a brilliant quarter. Roubine on departing had left a carriage and a pair of horses for his daughter, who had never known what it was to go on

foot, except in the country and for pleasure. At the expiration of the first month Nadia dismissed this supplement of embarrassment, as she styled the vehicle and animals, and her greatest delight was to make her journeys in a fiacre. One day she even had the audacity to show herself thus around the Lake at the elegant hour, and the dismayed looks her appearance caused among those who recognized her for a long time furnished matter for her hilarity.

“Just think now, Dmitri,” said she, laughing, “they are asking themselves whether they ought to bow to us or not!”

Their apartments were pleasantly exposed to the sun; Dmitri could not encumber them with books sufficient to prevent his wife in her turn from encumbering them with flowers: the time they spent there was certainly the happiest of their lives.

Roubine could not remain long away from his daughter; at the commencement of spring he returned to Paris, and as soon as the School of Medicine was closed he carried away the young couple, or rather followed them wherever Korzof's studies and preoccupations took them. They traveled thus for two years, now all three together, then separated from the Prince, and, despite their desire to assume a definitive position in life, the time appeared short to them.

Nadia played the mistress of a modest house in a marvelous fashion. Her father laughed until the tears came when he saw her return from market with strawberries in a basket—she who had never drawn money from her purse save to bestow alms. She let him laugh, herself arranged the fruit upon a dish surrounded with grape leaves, and the Prince, enchanted, declared that he had never tasted anything so excellent. The young wife learned in her daily relations with men and things of a

humble cast many precepts unsuitable to the wisdom of society people, and not to be found in books destined for the youthful, although there is their proper place.

The moment finally came for Korzof to pass his graduating examination; he was full of fears, and Nadia trembled as if her husband were beneath the shadow of a death-sentence. The Prince had arrived in order to be present at the triumph of his son-in-law, and he was not slow in cracking jokes in regard to the emotion of his two children.

"Come, Dmitri," said he, "be a man! Haven't you passed examinations before? Remember the book of answers! You found no trouble at that time in tricking your examiners and getting good marks all the same!"

"The cases are not in any way parallel," answered the young man, laughing at this fashion of looking at an examination for a doctor's degree. "If I cheated my examiners, and that seems to me more than doubtful, it is I who would be the most cheated of all."

"No," said Nadia, "the most cheated would be your patients!"

They laughed, but it was to make stout heart against fortune. At last the great day arrived, and Korzof was not only made a physician, but also received unanimous congratulations.

"I feel myself a man!" said he, when he had returned home; "never before did I experience a similar feeling; that is to say, I ask myself how one could live without toiling, without feeling that he will be useful. What a wretched life the idle drag out!"

"That's all very well, son-in-law," said Roubine, "but if you don't want any of it don't disgust others with it; I have always led the wretched life in question, and I don't feel any the worse for it. Come, Nadia, let's all go dine at a restaurant; I invite you; we will wash his

brains with champagne; that, perhaps, will stop him from saying such stupid things!"

Nadia quitted them to put on her hat, but her husband immediately rejoined her.

"It is to you that I owe this happiness, my dear wife," said he, taking her in his arms. "It is you who have made of me an intelligent man, desirous of serving his kind. I thank and bless you!"

"It is I who owe gratitude to you," she answered, in a low tone. "You have made me descend from my chimerical Paradise to teach me the realities of life. Oh! my dear husband, how much good we are going to do! A single terror has haunted me for some time past."

"Name it at once, that I may reassure you," said Dmitri, smiling.

"I have often asked myself if I have not done wrong in thrusting you into a dangerous profession; if some epidemic should break out, Dmitri, if you were attacked, if you were stricken!"

Korzof remained silent for an instant, pressing against his bosom the head of his dear wife whom he loved above everything, and for whom he represented all the joys of life.

"That would be very hard," said he, at length, "but such things happen. Still, whatever may be my fate, to-day, in strength and joy, as, later, in misfortune and tears, if it must come to that, for what you have made of me, Nadia, I repeat that I bless and thank you. And if I should die one day upon the field of honor—well, you will be proud of me!"

He kissed her tenderly, and, when they reappeared before Roubine, the latter could never have suspected the grave question they had just been considering.

Many formalities remained to be seen to; but, whether one be impatient or not, the days have not for that a

half hour less. The young couple were ready to return to Russia; the hospital was not ready to receive them. Roubine set out in advance of them to hasten the dilatory, and, after a long wait that appeared interminable to the young people, for they had holiday and were bored almost to death by their new idleness, he at last telegraphed them that they could start for home.

When the train that bore them slackened its speed to enter the *dépôt* of St. Petersburg, Nadia turned toward her husband, in the reserved compartment they occupied alone.

"We are about to touch our dream with our fingers," said she, "and now I am afraid!"

"Afraid of what, dearest?"

"I don't know—some disillusion, perhaps!"

He took her hand with tenderness.

"There is no disillusion possible," said he, "when one has dreamed of effecting a possible good. Whether the hospital be or be not what we have desired, we will cure suffering creatures there, and that will console us for everything."

The train stopped; Roubine was upon the platform, waiting for them all alone; he embraced them and sprang into his *drochki*, that sped away like the wind; the new arrivals entered their *coupé* and were rapidly borne towards the quarter, formerly shunned, that they would for the future inhabit. They spoke not a word, but held each other's hand with a strong clasp; this moment of their existence seemed to them still more solemn than the hour of their marriage. They were very near now; the *coupé* turned the corner of a street.

"Oh! Dmitri!" said Nadia, almost in a whisper, "there it is!"

The hospital loomed up before them in its architectural splendor, surmounted by a tall gilded cross that indicated

in the center of the building the place of the chapel. The corners and the entablatures were of white stone; the walls were built of brick, and the lofty façade, four stories in height, stood proudly out against the sky. They had studied the plans and knew them by heart; but never had they pictured to themselves this imposing mass that represented a colossal fortune; all the gold of the Korzofs was in it, and never before on earth had it been so nobly employed.

The horses were brought to a stop in front of the steps. Roubine, with uncovered head, was already waiting upon the threshold; the chaplain, clad in sacerdotal vestments and accompanied by the cross, stood on the porch; the young couple silently advanced, a prey to an emotion that almost stopped their respiration; the cross-bearer slowly began his march, entered the broad vestibule, illuminated from above whence the light fell in floods, and commenced to ascend the stairway. The vestibule was full of people; every head bowed as the young couple passed along; they mechanically returned the salutations, but recognized no one. Mysterious voices were somewhere singing a religious hymn, the words of which they could not distinguish. They thus reached the second floor and made their way into the chapel. It was simple and plain; the paintings of the iconostase were its sole adornment; but the holy images of the two united families sparkled with gold and precious stones along the walls, garnished with lamps.

The choristers received them with a triumphal chant, and they still remained mute, still holding each other by the hand, before the doors of the chancel. These opened almost immediately and the priest appeared. The *Te Deum* of actions of grace was chanted. During this time the young couple recovered a trifle from their emotion. When the last stanza had resounded beneath the vaults

and those present had kissed the cross offered to them by the priest, Nadia at length saw around her beloved and well-known faces. The chapel was full of her friends; all those who had not been able to be present at her marriage had come to compliment her. The dignitaries of the State, convoked for the inauguration of the hospital, surrounded her husband; an aide-de-camp brought them the congratulations of the Emperor and Empress; bouquets were presented by little children, though Nadia had not the remotest idea what that ceremony meant, and, finally, she mechanically followed her father and the architect, who delivered to the young couple the keys of the hospital. Leaning upon her husband's arm, altogether bewildered, the youthful wife walked along the waxed corridors that yet retained the odor of new fir wood, approving details about which she did not understand a single thing, and feeling at the bottom of her overflowing heart the strange lack of something, she could not tell what.

Suddenly the physician second in command advanced in his turn and opened a door.

"There they are!" said Nadia, in a whisper.

They were those for whom she had been looking, whom she wanted, the masters of this establishment—the patients! They were there, lying in their white beds, watched over by neat female nurses; snowy linen shone everywhere, and the common faïence sparkled with cleanliness upon the shelves. They were real patients, who would be cured, who would return to their families, blessing the hand that had restored their health! Nadia could not maintain her calmness at the thought, and, leaning her head upon her husband's shoulder, she wept.

The dream was realized; a few millions of roubles were about to restore to hundreds of men and women

their health and happiness; with their wealth they were about to redeem that priceless jewel—human life. Without doubt they would fail occasionally; death would not always allow itself to be cheated; poor coffins would be carried from the rear door, bearing away beings for whom succor had come too late; but life is thus made up of joys and troubles; ought they not to consider themselves sufficiently happy if they could save, at the cost of all their fortune, a father for his children, a wife for her husband?

“It is too beautiful, too good! I cannot bear it!” exclaimed Nadia when, at last restored to herself, she sat down in the fauteuil in the apartment her father had prepared for her with a degree of care she would have found fault with had she dared. “I indeed thought I would be happy on seeing all this, but my joy surpasses my fondest hopes!”

“Remember it, my daughter,” said Roubine, suddenly growing grave. “One has not often in life a chance to make use of such an expression. May this day be for you such a souvenir that it will serve to console you in your hours of trouble.”

Nadia seized the hand he had placed upon her bowed head and raised it to her lips. This father, so frivolous in appearance, was at bottom a big-hearted man.

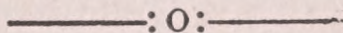
“But,” resumed she, after an instant, when she and her husband had thanked the Prince for having prepared for them so agreeable a surprise, “you must have gone to enormous trouble, my dear father!”

“Enormous!” repeated he, gravely; “I commence to know myself a little, however; but you could never guess what cost me the greatest trouble to find. I could not procure them either for gold or silver.”

His children stared at him with an air of such surprise that he had not the courage to keep them in suspense.

"The patients!" resumed he, losing his seriousness; "yes, you need not look so aghast as that—the patients! I was obliged to go and entice them myself from the other hospitals and to take those who had been refused elsewhere. I did not pick them out; oh, no! You have a very queer collection, I tell you! And, besides, they did not wish to enter. Those who could speak said the place was too clean—that it could not be a hospital. I convinced them by assuring them that it would not long remain so clean, and that they must excuse a new edifice."

The excellent man laughed, but his eyes were full of tears. Nadia dried them with a kiss. The hospital was inaugurated. Korzof and his wife had now only to toil. They fell asleep that night with their souls filled with benedictions.



CHAPTER VII.

THE CHILDREN'S QUARREL.

WHEN an edifice has been erected, when a roof covers it, even when it is inhabited, all is not yet finished, in spite of that. Two whole years elapsed before Korzof and his wife had organized all the interior arrangements and, especially, made a useful and valuable code of laws. This unfortunate code, resembling in this all the codes of the world, for that matter, could not be so framed as to be adapted either to persons or things. No sooner did it operate well in one direction than some enormous, formidable obstacle was discovered in another, and all

was to be begun over again. The fact is that one cannot become an organizer at an instant's notice; the smallest plan of organization, however mediocre it may be, has demanded long meditations, and more than once its author has taken his head in his hands and said: "It will never work!" In fact, generally, it does not!

But Korzof was gifted with a firm will; besides, he had no foolish self-love and freely sought advice; at the same time he possessed sufficient judgment to take only that which was good. Ultimately, by the exercise of inexhaustible patience, he accomplished his ends; the day came when the real code, definitive and unchangeable—until further orders—was enthroned upon all the walls, printed on large sheets of paper and framed in black wood.

The young and brilliant officer of other days had given place to the serious and good man whom people styled Doctor Korzof. Despite the reiterated supplications of a large number of the members of the St. Petersburg aristocracy, who would have been delighted to have had for their physician one of their own class, an amiable society man, he had positively refused to make himself a clientèle outside the hospital. At most, in case of accidents, he consented to bestow the first cares, but only under the express condition that his services should be gratuitous. The patients in the hospital, now nearly three hundred in number, sufficed to occupy his time; besides, he had been compelled to take several assistants and procure the aid of a famous surgeon.

The first time the young physician found himself in the presence of a man who awaited life or death at his hands, a poor, thoughtless being, broken down by suffering, indifferent for the future to everything, save a breath of comfort that would relieve him; the first time that, after having recognized the gravity of the case before

his eyes, he saw himself obliged to draw upon the resources of his memory, of his reason, of his science, and to write a prescription, he felt himself tremble from head to foot. What if he were to make a mistake! What if death came at his order, instead of health! To what point would he be responsible if they bore away on the morrow the corpse of that man, slain by him—or simply allowed to die by the fault of his ignorance or of his error?

The physician second in command, an old practitioner with grayish locks, looked at him in surprise, asking himself why his young chief hesitated in that way. He did not turn the pen so long in his inkstand to write a prescription! Finally, Korzof made his decision and in his beautiful, rapid chirography traced a few lines. As he was about handing the paper to the resident medical student on duty, he addressed the old doctor:

“What would you have prescribed?” asked he.

The physician mentioned a mode of treatment. Korzof, with a partial smile, showed him the prescription.

“It is exactly in accordance with my opinion,” said the aged practitioner; “but I should not have thought of the bath you order; evidently that can only do good.”

“It is the new system,” said Korzof; “they do not employ it here, but they will come to it.”

The treatment succeeded. Five days later the patient, sitting up in his bed, ate a light soup. Korzof sought out his wife and brought her into the presence of the man.

“Look there,” said he; “do you see?—he is alive! Nadia, I have prevented a man from dying!”

They went away softly, without touching each other, without speaking, full of joy too deep to find vent in words.

Every day was not so happy: the first time there was

a death at the hospital Nadia passed an entire day in tears; by a singular immunity, during two months all the attempted cures had succeeded, when an epidemic carried off several patients, one after another. This circumstance in some sort consoled Korzof and his wife by proving to them that the deaths were not due to any error in treatment or any neglect of the sanitary laws, but to an endemic condition against which they were powerless.

Then they grew accustomed to these fluctuations of mortality that had at first made Nadia gloomy. She had imagined that no one would ever die at her establishment; but between the distant possibility of these things and their immediate realization there was a whole world. She became habituated to seeing upon the daily consulted lists the crosses that marked the fatal terminations, and merely felt a tender pity for those whom all the devotedness of her husband united to her own had been unable to save.

A single thing saddened the young wife: it seemed that fate thought her sufficiently occupied with the care of so many human beings and would not grant her children. Four years had passed since her marriage, when she at last had the happiness to see herself the mother of a son. The following year she had a daughter; from that time she considered her good fortune complete. Her children grew beside her, filling with joy and noise the lofty and vast rooms of the suite of apartments until then a trifle sad, and when Korzof, fatigued or saddened by the spectacles of the day, returned in the evening to this retreat—well-separated, well-closed, in order that no danger of contagion might slip in—he found two flaxen heads grouped upon their mother's bosom, waiting to give him simultaneously the kiss of welcome.

Several years passed by in that way, as perfectly

happy as any that can be offered by human life, that is never exempt from cares.

Roubine often came to see them, but never without complaining of the distance, for he had kept his patrimonial mansion, upon the Quay of the Court.

"But, father," observed Nadia, one day, "it was as far in the past, and then you never thought of complaining! When they were building the hospital you came twice daily!"

"It was not so far then, because I was younger!" answered Roubine, philosophically; "my bones are growing old, do you see! I bought a new eight-spring carriage, the other day; well, it don't seem as comfortable as the télègues of my youth! Old age is coming on, Nadia, and one must get used to it! At least, it is a happy old age, and I cannot complain about it."

He kissed his grandchildren, who were leaning upon his knees, one on each side, and sent them off to play; then he confidentially drew his fauteuil nearer to that of his daughter.

"I am going to profit by the absence of your husband to reproach you, Nadia," said he, in a kindly tone. "You know I never scolded you much in the past, and that since your marriage I have not scolded you at all; I, however, have room to blame you, but I will mention it only to you."

"Mon Dieu! what have I done, my dear father?" said Nadia, stupefied, clasping her hands.

"I will tell you. You live perfectly happy here with your husband and your children; you do the most good possible; I even believe, God pardon me! that you grant pensions to your patients when they quit the hospital!"

"Not to all, father!" said the young woman, smiling; "it has happened two or three—"

"Your crime does not lie in that direction," interrupted

Roubine, also smiling, "since I myself have participated in those eccentricities by pensioning one of those who escaped you. But you do not perceive, my dear daughter, concentrated in your happiness and in your family life, that the Countess Korzof no longer goes the least bit into society, and that you are permitting yourself to be forgotten even by those who have been your best friends. Day before yesterday the Princess Adonieff was preparing a list of invitations for her coming ball. Some one mentioned your name. Do you know what she answered? 'Oh! it's not worth while to invite Nadia; she goes nowhere!'"

"That's true, father, but it's because society no longer amuses me. I visit my friends, though I do not attend their fêtes. Isn't that better than to leave my pretty babies alone?"

"You are in the right; only, in twelve or fifteen years from now, when your daughter shall be old enough to be married, to whom will you marry her?"

"Oh, father!" cried Nadia, raising her arms toward heaven; "then you long to be a great-grandpapa!"

"Not the least in the world! But answer my question: to whom will you marry your daughter?"

"To the man of her choice," promptly responded the young woman.

"Well answered. But, tell me, now that you know life a little, now that you have seen creatures who started at the foot arrive at the top round of the social ladder, as you say at present, would you give your pretty child, whom you are about to educate superbly, to one of those men whose intelligence alone is cultivated, but whose customs and habits have remained coarse? I saw one of your resident medical students dine at your table; he has a great deal of talent, according to my son-in-law; I am convinced of it; but he don't clean his

finger nails, that wear perpetual mourning for his good manners! Would you like to have that young man or any other of the same kind for the husband of your delicate Sophie? Would you accept for your daughter-in-law a young girl who had the manners of a servant, whatever might be her moral merit?"

Nadia lowered her head, finding no reply to make.

"You see, my daughter, in the past, when you loudly proclaimed your intention of raising up to you a man sprung from the ranks of the people, I felt an internal rebellion; you thought it was my old patrician blood that spoke. Well, no; it was a feeling of dignity, so complex that I could not formulate it. The years have taught me how to live—yes, my daughter, they have taught me also, despite my locks, that were gray then, that are white to-day. I know now what inspired in me an instinctive repugnance; it was that lack of first education, of the education of infancy, in the course of which a mother brought up in the principles of elegance and—why should I not say it?—of cleanliness, teaches one certain things one does not forget in all time to come, things one does mechanically and by which people instantly recognize, without the possibility of mistake, what is called a well-bred man. Ah! Nadia, in spite of all you can say or do, a man who does not know how to walk, who does not know how to bow, who has not a certain correctness of language and bearing, that man, even be he gifted with genius, does not belong to our sphere, and you cannot give him your daughter!"

Nadia reflected, following in her mind her father's arguments.

"But," said she, gently, "if he has genius, cannot that atone for certain exterior defects?"

"That's what I expected of you, my daughter! Those defects are not purely exterior; if those gentlemen would

take the trouble to observe themselves, to watch over their manners and their language, they would soon obtain an appearance of correctness that would render us indulgent toward the rest; but if they know nothing of what a society man ought to know, if they have the air of plowmen in black coats, it is because they are satisfied to be thus, because their stupid pride makes them claim their bad manners as a proof of their origin and, consequently, of the distance they have been compelled to traverse in order to be able to mingle with our society. I call their pride foolish, because it has neither nobleness nor dignity about it; these two virtues would constrain them, on the contrary, to keep such a rank in society that everybody would be delighted to grasp their hands and would value their conversation; but they persist in posting all over their persons: 'We were nothing, we are somebody; admire the road that we have traveled!' If they dared, they would write it upon a streamer floating from their hats! Now, Nadia, people have long ridiculed, not without some reason, the parvenus of fortune; I don't see why they should not treat in the same way the parvenus of intelligence! And the latter are less excusable than the former, for their very intelligence should forearm them against such foolishness! And mark well that I do not intend here to praise extravagantly the gifts of birth: the Prince Mirof, my cousin on his mother's side, passes his days with his jockeys and his nights with English boxers; one would take him for a horse jockey himself, so well he talks their language. He is a parvenu of nothing at all; he has fallen away from everything! And Prince as he is, I hold him in sorry esteem! But I cannot comprehend those who have been able, by dint of toil, to make themselves familiar with the most difficult sciences and who will not learn puerile and honest civility!"

"Evidently, father," said Nadia, when he paused to take breath, "you are right upon all those points; only, I believe that in time those of whom you speak will recognize the necessity of these exterior forms, more important in fact than they appear at first sight."

The Prince shook his head.

"Don't believe that," said he; "Russia is undergoing at this present moment the reaction of a despotic state of things she has long accepted and against which she is commencing to rebel. You wished to wed a man without birth; never will Korzof suspect what he has spared you! But I would not have consented to it, and we would have passed years in disaccord, while, thanks to him, to his sacrifice, to his grandeur of soul, we have a happy life, with all the guarantees of honor and of the future that could be desired. You had that whim; it did not form itself all alone in your brain; others besides you have had it, but they were not such obstinate demoiselles; they have all wedded officers of the guards or attachés of the ministry of Foreign Affairs. The young people of your age have not escaped these false sentiments of equality that bring one down to the level of the person one should strive to raise to himself. Already the manners are less correct, less severe than formerly."

"But formerly they were pushed to exaggeration!"

"And now people exaggerate in the opposite sense. Know, Nadia, that what already exists in Germany will soon rise up in Russia—a class of people, men and women, very intelligent, savans even, who will try to take by storm our present society, who will cry out against good customs as against good manners, and who, by dint of abolishing superiorities, leveling everything, will abolish even the superiority of intelligence, so that, by a strange logic peculiar to themselves, each one being the equal of everybody, the first idiot who comes along

will be the equal of Plato! And it will be the parvenus of intelligence who will have decreed this! Avoid them if you can!"

"They employ the word equality in two different senses—moral equality and equality before the law."

"Ta, ta, ta, they don't go to that extent! They get so mixed up in their own ideas that they can no longer see clearly, and a hard time he will have who shall extricate them—so persistently do they oppose being extricated. Have you seen pass along the streets demoiselles clad in black, without crinoline, with a band-box or a book under their arms, their flattened hair cut short beneath their toques and falling behind their ears, with blue spectacles that invariably hide their eyes? They are the Nihilist demoiselles; at present their folly is considered inoffensive and only ridiculous; but a day will come, perhaps, when people will be compelled to beware of them. One commences by denying the necessity of good manners, and one finishes by denying the existence of moral sense. Nadia, resume your relations with the world, go into society, and marry your daughter to a well-bred man, even if he have not genius. Let him respect woman, respect his wife; let him neither shock her ears with coarse words, nor her modesty with dram-shop ways; acting in an opposite fashion will not give him genius, for that matter. Try merely to have him possess moral sense, for already we have none of it to spare, and, at the rate we are going, twenty years hence it will be found only in the collections of curiosity hunters!"

Nadia listened pensively, recalling many words that had made no impression on her at the time, and of which her father's discourse seemed the echo.

"You are right," said she, at last; "I will return to society. My indolence must not be prejudicial to my children. They are as yet very young, but—"

“But, since it is your intention to give them a liberal education, and I don't blame you for it, seek a counterpoise in the frequentation of an elegant society. You will thus correct whatever exaggeration each sphere may possess.”

The Prince seemed to have given his daughter in his interview a sort of moral testament; perhaps, in fact, he had talked with so much energy and conviction because he felt within him something abnormal. A few days after this conversation, he took to his bed, and the unflagging care of his son-in-law was unable to save him.

“If it had been possible to cure me, you would have done so, would you not?” said he to Korzof, in one of his last lucid moments. “At least, we have nothing with which to reproach ourselves. Ah! my son, we have been very happy; all is well! Watch over the education of your children; make them honest beings above everything else, for honest beings are daily becoming fewer.”

He died without pain, in a serenity almost gay, such as he had maintained throughout his life. His grandchildren found themselves the possessors of his vast fortune, the revenues of which he had directed should be allowed to accumulate until their majority.

“My daughter having need of nothing,” ran the will, “it is my belief that I am conforming to her wishes in giving my wealth to my grandson Pierre and my granddaughter Sophie, who will thus be enabled to remember their grandfather.”

Roubine was sincerely regretted. He was one of those amiable creatures who conceal noble qualities beneath a somewhat frivolous envelope, from which circumstance the world does not do them much justice until after their death. Nadia and her husband perceived more than once that their father's worldly wisdom was lost to

them now; hence they resolved to obey his last wishes by seeking again the society in which they had moved up to the moment when the preoccupations of their great work had drawn them away from it. Their mourning made it incumbent upon them to preserve their solitude for a time, at least. It was decided that Nadia should depart with her children for the domain of Smolensk, as it must need looking after, and that Dmitri should rejoin them there two months later, at which period he took a holiday every year.

Nadia found great changes. Emancipation had made its way to the estate, giving the peasants other rights and other duties; they had not clearly understood either and had thought themselves almost aggrieved on seeing that they had not been accorded at least half of their master's possessions; but, amid this conflict of interests, they were still tractable enough, thanks to the extreme kindness the Prince had always shown them during his lifetime.

Old Stepline was dead; his son had succeeded him in his functions of superintendent. Since his marriage he had no longer sought to please, and his toilet had gained nothing from that circumstance; his European coats, for he had disdained the castans worn by his father, came from the shop of a cheap German tailor of the nearest large town, and had nothing in common with the English fashions. His wife had grown so fat that she looked like a cask; he had become thin, but his fingers thrust out from the ends of his narrow sleeves gave him an air of greediness for gain that nothing contradicted, for that matter.

The first time he was admitted to Nadia's presence, the very day of her arrival, she again felt the old impression she had in the past so clearly expressed to her father: "That man hates us!" In truth, beneath his

affected ways, beneath the extreme politeness of his language, lurked a sullen anger, a long restrained animosity. This man, having remained an inferior, could not pardon Nadia for being yet rich, yet a great lady, perhaps yet beautiful, when his wife was nothing but a shapeless and ridiculous mass, after having been for ten years a poor fool, without malice and without judgment.

"Madame, will you permit me to present my children to you?" asked he.

While maintaining the show of respectful politeness, he had banished the hyperbolical forms of the old régime and even abstained from giving Nadia the title of Countess that belonged to her.

"Certainly," said Nadia, kindly. She called her son and daughter, who were playing in an adjoining apartment, while Féodor went in search of his offspring. He soon returned, gently pushing before him by the shoulders two boys, the eldest of whom was about nine and the second scarcely four, and two little girls, unkempt, bundled up in their heavy woolen garments, but whose cheeks were fresh and whose eyes were sparkling.

"You are richer than I am," said Nadia, smiling.

She put out her hand to summon the children, but they did not approach to kiss it, as the custom ordained—a custom observed at that period even by the children of the best families when a female relative or friend invited them to come to her. They remained motionless, looking stealthily at the lady's children as if they were rare animals or objects of curiosity.

"Come," said Nadia, somewhat astonished, "and get acquainted. Pierre, Sophie, go and kiss the children of Féodor Ivanitch."

Pierre and Sophie advanced with eagerness; from their earliest infancy their mother had accustomed them to exchange an innocent kiss of peace with the poor

children of their age, even those they met in the street, provided that the latter had an aspect of health. To the mind of Madame Korzof this kiss of her children was the necessary compliment of their charity.

The little strangers received this caress without returning it, and the six children stood motionless and embarrassed beneath the gaze of the parents, who thought a great deal and said nothing. It was in vain Nadia tried, she could not bring herself into the least sympathy with the heirs of Féodor Stepline.

"Go and play in the flower-garden," said Nadia. In what were those innocents responsible for the antipathy with which their father inspired her? "And now, Monsieur Stepline," resumed she, "let us talk over our business, if you please."

Féodor obeyed; drawing up a chair, as in the past at Peterhof, he took from a wallet he had placed upon the table a bundle of papers and bank-notes. Madame Korzof instantly saw again the scene as it had occurred then, and a flood of anger made the blood mount to her face. She saw from the expression of her superintendent's countenance that he also remembered it; with a hasty movement she placed her hand upon the bell, in order to have this insolent fellow thrown out of doors by her servants. She stopped herself. Away in the country, so far from all power and all justice, was she sure even of the devotion of her people, accustomed for so long to obey the superintendent? Save two or three women, all her personnel consisted of the former domestic of her father.

"The revenues have considerably decreased this year," began Féodor, in his business man's drawling voice; "the lack of hands, occasioned by the partial abolition of enforced day labor, has compelled us to leave uncultivated a portion of the wheat fields."

He continued, enumerating the causes that had diminished by nearly one-half the former splendor of the domain. Nadia allowed him to proceed, thinking secretly that many other proprietors had suffered the same inconveniences, and that their income, though lessened, was not half shorn away; she let him speak on, however; besides, this was not the place for discussion. To prove to this man his bad faith was impossible for the moment; all she could do would be to promptly discharge him; but she was unable to determine to do this without having consulted her husband; in these troublous times, one was not sure of one's peasants, and what would she do in a revolt, alone with her two children?

"Then, you approve my accounts?" said Féodor, as he finished his enumeration.

"I *accept* them," answered she, emphasizing the word *accept*.

He glanced at her stealthily and encountered the gaze of her handsome gray eyes, full of calm disdain. He arose and was about to make some supplementary explanation, when the cries of children were heard in the garden. Nadia, recognizing the voice of Pierre, ran to the window; but she could see nothing. At the moment when she was hurrying toward the door, the children came running into the salon, Sophie and Pierre in advance, very red and very indignant. The four little Steplines were behind them; they stopped at the door, near their father, who looked at them without saying a word. Beneath this look, they trembled and grew still.

"What is the matter? Why that noise? Can you not play quietly?" said Nadia, restraining with great trouble the anger that had reawakened within her at the sullen aspect of the superintendent's children.

"Mamma, it was the biggest one!" cried Pierre, point-

ing to the eldest boy; "we were playing horse; he thought I didn't go fast enough and he beat me."

"With the end of the cord?" asked Nadia, pale as death.

"No, mamma, with a stick he had broken from a tree."

He rolled up the sleeve of his little shirt and showed his delicate arm on which was visible the red and swollen mark of the blow from the stick. Nadia pulled down the sleeve and raised her head.

"What! are you not ashamed of yourself?" said she to the culprit; "a child younger than you, and who had done you no harm!"

The delinquent glanced at her with his treacherous and sullen look, then turned away his eyes and said nothing.

"He shall be punished, madame," said Stepline, with his sharp voice; "you can count upon it. You must excuse their manners; they are not the children of a Prince."

Reassembling his flock before him, he went out with a bow, while Nadia clasped her children in her arms. The next day she wrote to her husband to leave his patients and rejoin her at once.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO ORPHANS.

KORZOF arrived in a few days; Nadia's letter, without giving him any definite particulars, had led him to suspect some danger, and he had left everything to hasten to the protection of his family. When he was able to talk with his wife, he immediately saw that if the facts were not grave in themselves, they were the symptom of a rather unsatisfactory state of things.

The question that first presented itself was whether to keep Féodor Stepline and make the best of the situation, or to get rid of him immediately and make a clean sweep. After several conferences, Dmitri and his wife decided to keep Stepline, at least for the present; as it was impossible for them to tell just how far the superintendent had leagued himself with the peasants in robbing the masters, the wisest course was to avoid anything that might bring on a revolt, especially while the family were at the mercy of both parties.

"So," said Nadia, with a sigh, "all the pleasure that I promised myself from my sojourn here is gone now. The best thing we can do is to leave. You must take us away, Dmitri."

"I will take all of you away; that is understood," answered he; "but how is the pleasure spoiled? Is not the mansion still the mansion of your parents? Do you not find here, as in the past, numerous and dear souvenirs? Is it not your patrimony, received as an inheritance and transmitted to our children by the will of your excellent

father?—and are you not happy to be at their house, happier still than at your own?”

“No,” responded Nadia; “I am not happy. I see only that a scoundrel is despoiling our children of what legally belongs to them; I know that he is doing it because he counts upon our indulgence and our weakness, and that makes my dignity as a mother suffer. You think that silence is the wisest course. I think so, too, because I believe all you tell me; but know that I do not submit to the daily presence of that wretch without a secret revolt of my whole internal being, and I ask you as a favor to shorten my sojourn here.”

“Since such is the case,” said Korzof, “you shall leave next week, and as soon as you and the children are in a place of safety, I will turn away the man who fills you with such a violent disgust.”

The young wife thanked her husband with the tenderest transports; she burned to tell him the principal motive of her aversion for Stepline; but in the presence of so many diverse interests, and moved particularly by the fear of occasioning some violent scene the results of which would be incalculable, she resolved yet to maintain silence, cost what it might.

Féodor Stepline showed himself but little, and his children seemed to have sunk into the earth. The principles of equality he had taught them, and that consisted chiefly in as extended as possible an application of the law of the strongest, were carried into effect thenceforward either among themselves—under the pretext that it is wise to wash one’s dirty linen in one’s family—or upon little peasants of no consequence, accustomed to receive blows, and capable at need of returning them, but to whom never could occur the odd idea of complaining to their parents, who were more disposed to augment by several whacks the stock already received

than to make complaints against the children of monsieur the superintendent.

When Korzof met Féodor for some indispensable interview, the latter was as submissive and devoted as possible. The superintendent was one of those men who are insolent only to women or to weak and indulgent creatures, incapable of avenging themselves—either because their silence comes from a feeling of shame or because they say to themselves that the offense will only be increased if made known. People of this kind are not rare; emboldened by impunity, they pursue the course they have adopted until brought to bay by a brave and intelligent man who unmasks and thrashes them.

Fortunately for human nature, that time is sure to come. Stepline had felt that Korzof was not a man to be trifled with; hence, in his presence, he was polite, docile, irreproachable. Nadia would have given a great deal to see him forget himself some day, in order to give occasion for a somewhat rough apostrophe; but this pleasure was not to be granted her: Féodor was too much upon his guard.

The people of the village and neighborhood were greatly astonished to learn that the lord's family were about to quit the district after so brief an apparition; the Prince had accustomed his peasants to much longer sojourns; but no one thought of complaining about it.

The act of emancipation had awakened so many ambitions, raised up so much covetousness, that the former benefits no longer counted in the memory of those who had received them; the women and the old men alone preserved a tender remembrance of the good masters, who during so many years had not refused either the wood required to build a house or the handful of wool of which to make a castan. But the men for the most part would have considered gratitude in the light

of a weakness. This could not be reckoned a crime on their part. In this those ignorant peasants did not show themselves very different from the ordinary members of even the most civilized society.

One thing only spoke in favor of the masters and caused a feeling of sympathy.

This was the kind of hospital established in the past at small cost by Roubine at the request of his daughter. The peasants had quickly recognized the real benefit of this foundation; they had always gone there in crowds, and if the majority had preferred to be cared for at home, at least they had accepted with joy the advice and medicines given gratuitously.

They knew, besides, perfectly how to distinguish between the master, who in their opinion still kept a great deal too much of the land and their wealth, but who spoke with kindness and acted according to law, and the rapacious superintendent, who robbed on all sides and lived not less upon the peasant than the lord.

Fully resolved as was Korzof to submit to a disagreeable state of things rather than assume the responsibility of some conflict, the consequences of which no one could measure, he decided to profit by the ascendancy given him by his title of doctor, added to the good influence of the hospital and the dispensary. For several days he went personally to the consultations and delivered the remedies with his own hand.

While chatting with the patients he obtained many confidential statements that he never could have drawn forth otherwise, and before the week was over he was convinced in every way that the peasants detested Féodor as much as the latter detested them.

As soon as it was known in the villages that the doctor was not the friend of the superintendent, as the latter had constantly boasted, each one hastened to tell his

grievances; but with that spirit of trickery that never abandons the peasant, this was done under the pretext, more or less justified, of asking for a prescription. They complained of their physical ills; then they passed to the troubles of life, harder yet to bear, and Korzof had a new item to add to the record he was composing for Stepline.

"I believe," said he one morning to Nadia, who, all ready for the departure, was waiting only for a definitive resolution on the part of her husband, "I believe we have the rascal in our hands. I hold proofs enough to make him pass the rest of his life in prison if I wished to institute a legal inquiry; but that is unspeakably repugnant to me; not on his account—he deserves heavy punishment, and what I pardon him for the least is having abused the name of your father to oppress the peasants—but he has irresponsible and innocent children."

Nadia was silent. She recalled the scene of the day of her arrival, the livid mark of the stick on her son's arm, and said to herself that if the children were irresponsible for the moment a day would come when the paternal instincts would not be less strong in them; but she uttered not a word.

"I believe, Nadia," persisted Korzof, "that it will be wisest to disembarass ourselves of the scoundrel without giving him up to justice and that this will not be a very difficult thing to do."

"In whatever manner it may be done," said the young wife, casting upon her husband her beautiful, honest glance, "I shall breath more freely the day I know he has quitted this place."

As painful as would be the interview he contemplated, Korzof resolved to enter upon it boldly; now that he knew Féodor had no power to excite the peasants against him, he was in haste to finish the business and

wished to leave nothing undone. He, therefore, summoned the superintendent before him at once and firmly awaited him with all the resignation of a man who has the prospect of a disagreeable task and all the firmness of one who is prepared for the accomplishment of his duty.

Stepline entered with his usual deliberate air. He had renounced the obsequious manners as well as the Russian garments of his ancestors.

"Sit down, please," said Korzof, pointing to a chair.

The superintendent obeyed, without removing his eyes from the doctor's face, upon which he saw an expression that did not much please him.

"Since my arrival here," continued the young doctor, "I have made inquiries about everything, as becomes a proprietor and a father of a family careful of the means of his children, and I have established between you and the peasants on one side, between myself and you on the other, the existence of several misunderstandings."

The word was of an extreme moderation; but, from Korzof's air, the superintendent had understood that he was unmasked.

The blow did not take him unawares. One does not live in the daily practice of fraud without expecting some troublesome event at one time or another. With the extreme mobility that characterized his cunning mind, he caught a glimpse of a way of extricating himself from the situation in an honorable manner, at least so far as appearances were concerned. He would lose his position, but his stealings had been safely stowed away in anticipation of such an event, and, if he could save his honor, he would be doing more than he had dared to hope for. He arose with dignity and stood in front of Korzof.

"I understand," said he, in an agitated voice; "I have

been slandered. I knew that I would be; I have foreseen this day. It is not without deep emotion that I see myself brought to this extremity so long feared; but from the moment that M. the Count can have a doubt as to the efficacy of my services, there is but one thing for me to do: offer him my resignation."

Korzof was stunned by so much audacity; at the same time, the situation had untangled itself in such an easy manner that he with difficulty controlled a strong desire to laugh.

"Just the thing," said he; "I was about to ask you for your resignation, but you have spared me the trouble of taking that step. I thank you for it, Monsieur Stepline."

Féodor turned pale at this sarcasm; he stood with his eyes fixed on the floor, fearing lest his glance should betray all the hate raging in his soul.

"When must I present you my accounts?" asked he, in a choking voice.

"To my knowledge, you have no accounts to present," calmly answered Korzof. "Two weeks since my wife accepted those you presented to her; since then we have ordered no employment of our funds; this is not the season of sales; every kopeck of the working capital should be in your hands; you can turn it over to me when you like—in an hour, for instance, or after breakfast, if you prefer."

Stepline bowed in silence. Korzof had snatched from him his last plank of safety that he had hoped yet to file and pare before reaching the shore. He was walking toward the door, when Korzof recalled him.

"What do you intend doing for the future?" he asked, moved by a feeling of compassion for the man who had suddenly lost a hereditary situation.

"I intend to remain with my family in the house belonging to me until I find a position that suits me,"

replied Stepline, raising his head. "I will engage in trade; I will use for that purpose the small capital my father bequeathed to me."

He glanced at Korzof with a sort of defiance. The doctor arose tranquilly, and their eyes were upon the same level. Stepline lowered his. The glance of this honest man stung him into a species of fury.

"Your father was a prudent individual, Monsieur Stepline; I hope you may make your fortune," said Korzof.

"I thank you," replied Stepline, as he closed the door.

All this had not lasted two minutes. Korzof glanced at the little traveling clock that never quitted his desk, and was astonished at the brief space of time that had sufficed to change a situation from bottom to top. Enchanted and still all amazed, he hastened to announce the great news to Nadia, who could not believe what she heard.

An hour later Féodor brought the working capital and placed it in Korzof's hands. This ceremony was completed without any useless exchange of words. Two hours afterwards Nadia's children ran to the window, attracted by the sound of wheels. Stepline's light drochki, drawn by a pair of excellent horses, was already disappearing in the dust upon the road that led to the neighboring town.

"Was that the superintendent who has just gone away?" asked Nadia of the old butler.

"Yes, madame. His wife and children will join him next week. He has just sold his house to the staroste of the village for half as much again as it cost him, and it is not new, either! That man understands business!" concluded the aged servant, shaking his head.

Left alone, Dmitri and Nadia looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"Well, it has not taken long, at least," said Nadia. "You know how to make a clean sweep, Dmitri. Who is to be superintendent now?"

"Rest easy; a proverb claims that an abbey does not stop work for want of a monk. Something tells me there are in Russia more superintendents than estates to superintend. We will find one, good or bad."

"And should he be bad?"

"We will make a change."

"And meanwhile?"

"We will remain here. And what holidays we are going to have, Nadia! The dear little ones will enjoy a full measure of fresh air and freedom in the sunlight!"

Dmitri's anticipations were realized point by point. He soon had a superintendent, whom, at the expiration of a week, he exchanged for another. The estate was none the worse for this, as, according to the Russian proverb, "A new broom always sweeps well," and Nadia had the inexpressible comfort of thinking that she was at last disembarrassed of the man whose presence had for so long filled her with an insurmountable repugnance.

The two months' holiday passed like a dream. Nadia and her husband, freed from every care, felt several years younger, and thought that, instead of descending, they were ascending the stream of life. Had it not been for the regret the still recent loss of the Prince caused them, the time would have been the happiest they had yet known. But even this regret was tempered by the sweetness of the thought that nothing had ever afflicted the excellent man since the death of his wife, whom he had tenderly loved. It seemed as if Providence had wished to deal him the heaviest blow at an early period in order to allow him to lead the happiest life that could be imagined.

Who can say how much of the sorrow we feel for the

death of those we love is made up of regrets for the unhappy fate that cut them off from the enjoyment of life, how much of regrets for the failure of the unrealized hopes that had been founded upon them?

In this case there was nothing of the kind. Roubine's existence had passed without a cloud; he had died without suffering. Such a fate is better calculated to inspire envy than pity.

So thought his children, and they repressed the exaggeration of their regrets, saying to themselves that the excellent man could not have known a greater grief than to see them so much afflicted by his loss.

But everything has an end, especially holidays! Korzof was compelled to return to St. Petersburg in order to give his assistants their vacation one after another. Nadia accompanied him and installed herself at Spask for the rest of the fine season, so short in that country. There Dmitri could come and go, thanks to the steamboats that furrowed the river, maintaining a regular service between Schlüsselburg and St. Petersburg.

"We ought to have the yacht now!" said Nadia, smiling, as the boat stopped in the middle of the Neva to let the bateau that had put out to meet them come alongside.

"Ah! my dear wife, we are no longer numbered among the rich of this world!" replied her husband, seating himself at the helm. "Not that your father has not left us a vast fortune; but, under the new system, our revenues are reduced one-half, and, in order that our children may be at their ease later on, we must resign ourselves to traveling by steamboat like everybody else. Would you give the hospital for a yacht?"

Nadia answered him with her pretty smile.

The moss-covered little landing place still existed, but was so old and so decrepit that people did not often dare

to disembark there; besides, the draught of the steam-boats did not permit them to approach the shores and they were compelled to make use of lighters. The bateau that bore the entire Korzof family sank gently into the wet sand, and the children walked ashore over a small, narrow plank of the most unassuming description.

"Do you remember, Dmitri?" asked Nadia, putting her hand on his arm and pointing to the frail landing-place that seemed to tremble above the limpid water.

"Do I remember? Dear soul, it was there you gave me life by giving me yourself!"

"Listen, Dmitri," answered the young woman; "it was you who gave me life. I was then so selfish, so vainglorious, so—"

He gently put his hand over her mouth to prevent her from continuing.

"Don't slander yourself before your children," said he, with a laugh. "You mustn't forget that it is for us to inspire them with respect for the family!"

After several delightful weeks, that would have been much gayer if the sun had not set every day a little earlier than the day before—and the day before it was too quick, as the children said—everybody returned to St. Petersburg in order to commence work there in good earnest.

That, at least, was what Dmitri Korzof said to his son Pierre, when he took him for the first time into the study hall, that until then had been unused.

"Do you see," said he to him, "the blackboard, the maps, the globes and all the books in those book-cases? Beginning now, in a few years you must know how to use all these things; you must know everything in those books and an infinitude of other matters still more difficult and taking much longer to learn. Those who are unacquainted with these things are nothing, nobody; if

they have been unable to learn them from lack of means, they are to be greatly pitied; if they have been unwilling to learn them, they are to be greatly blamed; for instruction is as necessary to man as bread: without bread, he does not develop and strengthen; without instruction, he remains stupid or wicked, often both. If you have thoroughly understood me, what are you going to do?'

"I am going to make haste to learn all that's there," answered Pierre, stoutly, "in order that you may soon teach me the rest, the more difficult things."

Korzof placed his hand on his little boy's head and felt that life had, indeed, been merciful to him.

An attempt was made to separate Sophie from her brother during the study hours, for, besides being a year younger than he, she was slender and delicate; but they had to be reunited, so nervous and unhappy were they, the one without the other.

Nadia superintended their lessons and completed them herself with some of those luminous explanations that the professors, even the most intelligent, do not always have at hand, but that mothers often know intuitively.

She had possessed the courage to refuse herself the pleasure of teaching them personally, fearing to lessen, in the little disagreements inseparable from even the most sagely directed education, that great maternal dignity that ought not to be expended in detail on the unimportant occasions of daily life.

Nadia wished to be above the little routine rewards and punishments.

What she lost in trifling joys she found again in the deep tenderness, in the loving veneration of her children, who saw her always like herself, as dignified and serene as the incarnation of Justice upon earth.

Even before her year of mourning had expired Mad-

ame Korzof conformed to the last advice of her father by renewing with society those relations she had allowed to be a little too much broken. Everywhere she was received with joy; the spectacle of her great disinterestedness, the simplicity with which she had in the past detached herself from that which is generally the most desired, had inspired with regard to her a respect that had easily become colder than was necessary. On seeing her more simple than ever, on perceiving that she sought neither to play any rôle nor to place herself upon a pedestal, her friends, who had always been proud of her, drew near again; better known, she inspired more devotion, and, without losing anything in grandeur, she gained a world of sympathy.

The Easter fêtes of the year that followed were very brilliant; they had laid aside court mourning and everybody was in haste to seek amusement; everything was a pretext for a dancing party; they made the children dance in order to be able to dance themselves once more. Nadia's handsome children, whose beauty and grace had passed into a proverb, were present at all the fêtes, and their mother took care not to refuse them this innocent pleasure, as yet unattended with inconvenience because of their age.

At the house of one of her relatives, who had formerly acted as her chaperon and who, being a childless widow, took all her pleasure in giving pleasure to others, Nadia noticed one evening a young girl of about fourteen, whose face, without possessing anything of that which characterizes beauty, was radiant with a singular attractiveness.

The child was very simply clad in a plain white muslin dress; pieces of black velvet bound the braids of her brown hair that fell lower than her belt. She was seated upon one of the benches that garnished the ball-

rooms, near the piano. A little boy about two years younger was sitting beside her; they did not speak to each other or anybody else.

On seeing the mistress of the house, who was crossing the salon to come to her, the young girl arose and very modestly seated herself on the piano stool. Her brother placed himself at her side and stood ready to turn the pages of the music placed upon the rack. Nadia looked at them, but with astonishment. The young girl began to play in good time, with much taste, while the youthful dancers heartily enjoyed themselves.

“Who is that little girl, who plays so well?” asked Madame Korzof of her hostess, interested by these two children, who had not the air of having come to amuse themselves and whose unexceptionable bearing was in every way similar to that of the best bred among the little guests.

“Ah! my dear Nadia,” replied the excellent woman, seating herself beside her niece, “it’s a sad story. Those children come of a noble family: their mother was a Princess Rourief; but you knew her. She had the misfortune to marry a high liver, who spent all she possessed; he took to drinking, and at last died miserably. Then she gave lessons on the piano to bring up the two little ones that you see there. She gave them the best education that can be imagined; the boy entered the gymnasium, where he became a capital scholar; the girl, who is somewhat older than her brother, was already teaching the piano to young beginners, when the mother died of inflammation of the lungs. That was nearly a year ago. From that time the unfortunate children were without either fire or home.”

“Then you brought them here?” said Nadia, smiling.

“No, indeed! I am of the opinion that each individual should be left to take his own initiative. When a

child has been thrown into the water, and he already knows how to swim, well or ill, one cannot render him a worse service than to fish him out and put him dry on a bank where he has nothing to expect from anybody. I found a good woman, who serves as chaperon to the little girl, and who in that manner gets rid of her small income far more agreeably than if she got rid of it all alone; she lives with them. The brother goes to the gymnasium, toils like an enthusiast and aspires to the practice of medicine; he naturally costs somewhat and earns nothing. The sister has kept more than half of her mother's piano pupils. Well, people have taken pity on the youthful music teacher, and, despite her short dresses, her scholars think a great deal of her."

"How happens it that she plays here for the dancers?" asked Nadia, who glanced at the two orphans with increased interest.

"I have done her some services;—at least, I was unable to so conceal myself that she should be ignorant of the circumstance, and she asked as a favor to play the dance music at my house whenever I had company. That is her way of paying the debt of gratitude. Those children have manners and hearts that do honor to their unfortunate mother."

The contra-dance was finished, the dancers scattered. The young girl took her little handkerchief, passed it over her face and returned it to her pocket. Then she smiled upon her brother with an expression of tenderness so extraordinary that Nadia went beside her to talk with her.

"Doesn't it weary you, mademoiselle, to play for the others to dance without dancing yourself?" she asked.

The young girl threw her eyes upon this unknown lady, and, reassured by her smile, answered, with a tranquil pride:

"Oh, no, madame; on the contrary, it gives me pleasure."

"Doesn't it fatigue you?"

"Sometimes, towards the end of the soirée; but not this evening; I did not play on the piano this afternoon, expressly."

Nadia looked at her attentively, then also examined the young lad; they bore this scrutiny without false shame, without embarrassment, like modest and well-bred children, with a shadow of reserve in addition, as is the case with those who find themselves on a footing of inferiority where they know they are the equals of everybody.

"If I were to play for you to dance," said Madame Korzof, suddenly, "would that please you?"

The little boy's eyes sparkled with joy, and he looked at his sister, but said nothing. The young girl expressed her thanks and refused with a very frank smile that lighted up her countenance.

"And your brother, why does he not dance?"

"Because my sister cannot dance."

"Well, try a waltz together," said Nadia, removing her gloves and seating herself at the piano; "that will stretch your limbs. Shall they not dance, aunt?" added she, addressing the Countess, who was approaching.

The latter having approved with a nod, the young couple began amid the applause of the other little dancers; they danced marvelously well, with a juvenile grace that it was a pleasure to see. When Nadia ceased to play, they came back to her; they thanked her with much dignity and a restrained enthusiasm that touched Madame Korzof; she bent toward the young girl to talk to her in a low tone.

"Will you come to see me, mademoiselle? Mademoiselle—"

"Martha Drévine," answered the young girl to the look of interrogation in Nadia's eyes.

"Mademoiselle Martha," resumed the latter, "will you come to see me? I have a little daughter, who wants very much to begin the piano; I am sure she would be delighted to have you for her teacher."

"I thank you infinitely, madame," replied the young girl. "When can I present myself at your residence without disturbing you?"

"To-morrow at noon. Au revoir."

She nodded an affectionate good-bye to the two children and quitted them. An instant afterward Martha ran to her benefactress, who was passing among the groups.

"Madame," said she to her in a low tone, "I have a new pupil at the house of that beautiful and kind lady who played for us to dance! I thank you so much, madame!"

Her eyes expressed still more thankfulness than her lips. The Countess gave her a friendly nod and went on her way.

A week later little Sophie Korzof asked to have a piano lesson every day.

"It is not for the piano," said she; "it is to see Martha Drévine oftener!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE PESTILENCE.

“LOOK out! Attention! Steady there!”

And, raising himself with both hands, Pierre Korzof passed, in the game of leap-frog, over the back of Volodia Drévine; the little boy had barely time to place himself in position, when Volodia passed over his head, three feet from the floor.

“Bravo!” cried Sophie, applauding with enthusiasm. “Oh! how I’d like to be a boy, to be able to jump in that way!”

“Jump the rope!” said Martha.

“Jumping the rope is always the same thing,” replied Sophie, with a little pout. “It’s leap-frog that’s amusing!”

“Because you can’t play it,” said her brother, giving one of the braids of her hair a gentle pull. “If it wasn’t prohibited you wouldn’t think it more amusing than anything else. Come, Volodia, let’s all jump the high rope; young ladies are permitted to do that. Well, Martha, won’t you join us?”

“I’m too old,” answered the latter, laughing; “I’m past sixteen!—and, besides, somebody must hold the rope. We can tie one end to the bar of the trapèze; but, if some one did not hold the other end, all of you would fall and break your noses, and the Lord knows that would be an irreparable loss, for not one of us has a nose sufficiently long now!”

The four children laughed heartily. Korzof, who was

passing the door of the study hall, transformed into a play-room by a rainy November afternoon, stopped to look at and listen to them.

"This is what they wanted," said he to Nadia, who had joined him: "our little ones had need of the gayety and vitality of others. We are too serious for them! Even when we laugh, we laugh like great personages; children want the society of children. I am very glad I had Pierre enter the gymnasium this year."

"So am I," responded his wife; "but without Volodia it would have been very dangerous for him to attend. Pierre is belligerent—that, however, is not a crime; only, when one attacks others, it is necessary to possess the muscular strength requisite to face the difficulties—"

"Of his character!" interrupted Korzof, laughing and resuming his walk in the wide corridor that served as a promenade during the winter days. "Pierre begins the quarrels and Volodia, like a *Deus ex machina*, arrives in time to settle them or take them up! Nothing better could be desired! It clearly proves the intervention of Providence!"

"Don't joke!" exclaimed Nadia: "we have had unusual good fortune in meeting with this fine lad, so kind, so loyal, so intelligent, who seems to have been formed expressly to be the friend of our Pierre. We have had good fortune, Dmitri, it is true—everything we have touched has succeeded! Indeed, things have reached such a pitch that I sometimes ask myself what dreadful misfortune will fall upon us some day and make us pay for our insolent felicity!"

Dmitri pressed closely against him the arm of his stout-hearted companion. During the long while they had been walking the road of life together, more than once he had thought himself too happy, and his heart had been wrung as at the visible approach of a catas-

trophe. Each time, however, the storm had been turned aside, and their existence had resumed its course, with its inevitable cortège of small troubles and trifling vexations, but they had been spared those great thunderbolts that overthrow everything and leave only ruins behind them.

"Everybody is not so cruelly tried, my dear wife," said he; "numbers of men finish their existence without having suffered from great calamities. The death of your excellent father, the diseases that have afflicted our children, the constant diminution of the revenues that give us our reserve funds, are not they sufficient proofs that fate does not favor us beyond measure, and that we need not fear on the part of that blind power the sort of revenge you seem to dread?"

Nadia smiled and sighed simultaneously; in fact, she had no reason to fear the future, but her long felicity had made her timid.

As she saw her children growing up around her, as she thought how kind nature had been toward them in giving them precious faculties, she felt still more powerless to protect herself against these sad presentiments. Nevertheless, as she was strong and brave, she realized how foolish and weak it would be to give way to positively unreasonable impressions; after several efforts, she recovered entire control of herself and recommenced her life of daily toil.

She had undertaken to personally superintend the whole service of the women. Not that she was seen very often in the hospital halls: she rarely appeared there, in order to husband that resource for the cases in which some epidemic should act very powerfully upon the moral force of the patients. When she learned that the women had displayed too much fright in consequence of a succession of too rapid deaths, that the ter-

rible word "contagious," repeated from one bed to another, caused a sound of half-stifled sobs to run along beneath the lofty, well-ventilated ceilings, Nadia made her appearance, one fine morning, in the dress of gray cloth she had imposed upon the nurses as less susceptible of retaining the disease germs than the classic black woolen dress. She went from bed to bed, with kind words of consolation.

"You have been spoken to about contagion," said she; "you can see clearly that the report is untrue because I am among you! Would I have come had there been danger?"

She passed on her way, rousing depressed courage, smiling upon those nearly cured, consoling those who were sickest; like a ray of sunlight, the warmth of which penetrates the damp corners chilled by winter, she brought the benefit of her presence, and left a warm impression of comfort behind her. But, instructed by her husband, she had the courage to abstain from those rash demonstrations so tempting for those who have made in advance the sacrifice of their lives, and whom a mad heroism inspires to such a point that it is meritorious to draw them away. Never, when confronted by the peril of contagion, was she seen to bend over a dying woman, wipe her forehead with her handkerchief, or take in hers the hands frozen by approaching death; that could do no good, and it was a source of danger. Hence the nurses said of Madame Korzof: "She is very kind, but a trifle cold."

It is precisely to those who are the most benevolent that this reproach is generally applied; they lavish so much of their soul's gifts that no more of them are left for puerile outward demonstrations, and the common herd prize only the latter.

Nadia had asked her husband to entrust her with the

general inspection of the service of the nurses, because she believed, not without reason, that she could discover with greater ease than a man the qualities and defects of her personnel. Many little things, in fact, passed beneath her eyes and notified her of the degree of confidence she could accord to each of her employées. The service of the linen-room had also reverted to her by right and she was already exercising in the order and necessary cares her daughter Sophie, who, the older she grew, resembled her more and more, with the exaggeration of the enthusiastic and romantic side calmed down in Nadia by experience and years.

Martha Drévine had also become a valuable assistant to her. This young girl, brought up by an admirable mother and afterward tried by the difficulties of life in such a rough way, had practical sense that exasperated Sophie and charmed Madame Korzof.

The latter had not renounced her old admirations: her desire to confer benefits above everything else and her search for goodness and honesty were expressed in the same terms; she gave to her children the same precepts that had governed her life; the application alone had changed; she certainly would not have done at thirty-five what she had done at twenty; but this was a shade she did not notice.

Her husband, a better judge, had been able to see it; sometimes, indeed, he felt that there was a lack of harmony between the way in which Nadia expressed her ideas, so lofty and so generous, and that in which they both now carried them into execution; but this shade of lack of harmony was so trifling that it was almost impossible to grasp it.

Korzof had from time to time had the impression that there was danger in this for the minds of their children; but how were they to be shielded from it?—how was

Nadia to be warned? She did not suspect that her own way of acting was no longer altogether in accordance with her principles, and whoever should tell her so would cause her genuine sorrow.

Once, however, chance aided the doctor and enabled him to impress a valuable lesson on the minds of his children.

One evening during Lent, the family were assembled as usual in the dining-room, where tea had just been served; they were talking gayly of various things.

The family now also included Martha and Volodia Drévine. After a trial of two years, Korzof and his wife had decided that they could not do better than to make allies in the work of education of those two children, already so sensible, whose friendship would be a most precious resource for Pierre and Sophie. Hence they resided at the hospital.

Volodia toiled with Pierre and aided him to prepare his lessons more effectively than a student of twenty, given up to other preoccupations, would have done; Martha gave instructions in the city, that were now liberally paid for, and hence was enabled to accept from Madame Korzof only food and lodging for herself and her brother in exchange for the lessons and cares she lavished upon Sophie. The latter had professors, but nothing was so dear to her as her kind Martha, whose return was always marked by an explosion of joy that made it the happy event of the day for everybody.

Not that they were constantly in accord, however. Sophie was all imagination and Martha good sense incarnate; there were days when they had their little disputes; but as is the case with well-bred people, be they children or older persons, their differences ever related to general questions and never to personal matters, so that they might wrangle for an hour without their

friendship being the least in the world shaken on that account.

On the evening referred to there was but little to chat about. Lent is not in St. Petersburg a period fertile in social events; concerts were in full blast, but Martha had too much music drummed into her ears during the day to entertain any lively enthusiasm for occupying herself with it when night came. She had a bright idea.

"Madame," said she to Nadia, who was thinking in front of the dying fire, following in her mind some remembrance of her youth, "you have never told me how it happens that you, who are a Countess, cause yourself to be called simply Madame Korzof, and why you constructed this hospital, for it was you who constructed it, was it not? Everybody admires you greatly, but no one has been able to tell me the why and wherefore of this history. It is not a secret, I hope? If it were a secret—"

"A secret in building stones seems to me quite difficult to keep," said Nadia, coloring a trifle. She laughed, nevertheless, and turned toward her husband, who was entering the dining-room. "It is not a secret, but the history of our life. Our children have the right to know it. Shall I tell it to them, Dmitri?"

She glanced interrogatively at Korzof, who answered, gravely:

"Yes; I think the time has come. Children should receive their parents' history from their parents' mouths."

Pierre and Sophie looked alternately at their father and their mother. They had not expected to see them grow so serious; a sort of respectful fear had taken possession of them, and they listened with deference.

"When I was a young girl," began Nadia, "I had a very decided character; I may even say a very obstinate character, eh, Dmitri?"

"No," answered Korzof, gravely shaking his head; "one is not obstinate when one adheres to a course for good reasons; we will say tenacious—that will be nearer the truth."

"Tenacious be it," resumed Nadia, smiling. "I had read a mass of books, and as I was too young to distinguish true theories from absurd theories, I had made for myself an ideal of life, that passed by reality somewhat as railroads pass by towns, that is to say at a distance often quite considerable. I had said to myself, among other things, that it was imperative to call the people to us, the rich and noble, in order to hasten the advent of the reign of equality. Do you understand me, my children?"

"Yes," said Sophie, who was listening with wide open eyes. "You were right, mamma!"

"Evidently, I was right; but the point was to arrive at an understanding in reference to the means. Now, your father and I were the best calculated people in the world to come to an understanding and live happily together—we have proved it since; but when your father asked me to marry him I refused."

"Oh!" exclaimed the four young auditors simultaneously.

"I refused under the pretext that he was too rich, too noble and, above all, too useless to wed a demoiselle equally rich, noble and useless."

"It was then, my children," said Korzof, "that your mother, solicited by me, named as the condition of her consent that I should cease to be rich by devoting my fortune to the construction of this hospital; that my title, which, for that matter, I am far from undervaluing, should be only an adjunct to our moral situation and not a pedestal upon which we should hoist ourselves in default of personal merit; and, finally, that I should

cease to be useless by consecrating my life to medicine. You see that your mother has realized her program; besides, she has made me perfectly happy and is bringing you up marvelously, which proves that she was right."

The young people's eyes shone with repressed emotion, but their respect was so great that they dare not show it at first. After a period of silence, during which Korzof and his wife exchanged a look that was a resumé of their long years of happiness, Pierre arose softly from his place and went to kiss his mother's hands, upon which he pressed his lips for quite a while; then, he rendered his father the same homage. Sophie had hidden her head on Nadia's shoulder and held the doctor's hand in a tight clasp. Martha and her brother remained motionless, filled with a great veneration for these truly superior beings, who spoke so unostentatiously of the grand deeds they had done.

"I was right in what I did," said Nadia, after a moment had elapsed, during which she had reviewed her life; "or rather what I did made me right; but if your father had not been the man he is, I do not know what might have come of it."

"Nothing but good, my beloved mother!" exclaimed Sophie; "you have too great a soul for anything to come from your acts that is not noble and lofty!"

"That is not certain," resumed Madame Korzof. "At all events, I have changed my manner of seeing things; for in the past it would have been impossible for me to comprehend how one could act otherwise than I did; now I would not take the risk of advising any one thus to break with all the social customs, and especially to practice the principles of equality that then constituted my strength."

"Why did you change, mother?" asked Pierre, anxiously.

"Life changed me," replied Madame Korzof; "at twenty we see only one side of things; as we grow old we run the risk of seeing only the other side. What one should endeavor to do is to see both sides with an equal impartiality. But you are yet very young, both of you, for such grave conversations, and we will have plenty of time to talk the matter over again. May the story of our life not be lost upon you, my children, and may it teach you to direct your efforts toward doing good, as your father and I have striven to do."

This scene was the subject of interminable chats among the children. Sophie especially never wearied of admiring her mother, raised suddenly in her eyes to the proportions of the heroines of history. Martha asked nothing better than to admire her benefactress, whom she had long worshipped in her heart; but warned by the restrictions Madame Korzof had mentioned, she also thought that in the application of the principles of equality that in the past had fascinated the noble woman lurked the possibility of certain dangers.

Sophie would hear nothing; intoxicated, at the age at which one most readily shapes out chimeras for one's self, by the atmosphere of abnegation, generosity and universal charity that circulated in the paternal dwelling, she had gradually grown more enthusiastic, more chimerical, than Nadia had ever been.

Often, during their chats, her mother essayed to stop her in this path; but it was exceedingly difficult to drive wisdom into the head of a young girl of fourteen, so largely developed as she was for her age. Dmitri, consulted by his wife on the subject of this overflow of youthful aspirations, thought they should be allowed to exhaust themselves in their own way.

"Are we not here," said he, "to regulate their progress and, at need, to arrest it?"

Things went on in this way at the hospital for a happy year. Pierre's seventeenth birthday was celebrated with great pomp. After having terminated his studies by brilliant examinations, he had just caused himself to be entered as a student at the Academy of Medicine, thinking that no profession could be as honorable for him as that of his father; besides, was it not his duty to work under his direction and to replace him at the hospital when the time for him to rest should come?

Volodia had also become a student of medicine the previous year, dreaming of no other happiness than to be the assistant and friend of his dear Pierre for the remainder of his life.

After the family celebration that had been strictly private, a grand dinner brought together in the evening those who served under Korzof's orders and all who had more or less, even among the most insignificant acquaintances, contributed to the education of him who that day had entered upon his career as a man.

The joy of the guests was sincere; this family, in whom the noblest feelings were concentrated, were the object of universal love and respect; the hope of seeing the tradition of so many virtues perpetuated was well-calculated to inspire satisfaction; that day was a date in the lives of the children that never could be forgotten.

The Monday following Korzof returned to his apartments in a state of anxiety. A considerable number of patients had presented themselves for admission the preceding day, all exhibiting the same strange symptoms of a disease forgotten for long years, and that had just appeared in the distant provinces. Until then nothing had indicated that it was about to reveal itself in St. Petersburg, where it had not yet been studied, save in isolated and unimportant cases.

Questioned by his wife, Dmitri, for the first time in

his life, endeavored to hide the truth from her and pretended that he was suffering from an excess of fatigue caused by the large number of patients he had examined that day.

Nadia was so accustomed to believing her husband that she accepted this explanation, but on the succeeding day, the hospital being full, when she saw the same anxious expression upon his face, she grew troubled; she asked a few questions and discovered an evident intention not to give her satisfactory answers. From that time she feared some calamity; but, as she went out rarely, she had not yet found the means of enlightening herself in the city, when, on the third day, Pierre, on returning from the Academy of Medicine, said suddenly to Korzof:

“Is it true, father, that the pestilence has broken out in St. Petersburg, and that it has already carried off several of our patients?”

Nadia stood as if nailed to the floor. Very pale, she stared at her husband, awaiting his answer with an unspeakable anguish.

“It is true,” replied Korzof. “I had hoped to be able to conceal it from you a little longer. The pestilence is here, and since Sunday we have lost eleven patients by it.”

“Out of how many?” asked Nadia, yet motionless.

“Out of seventeen who entered with the infection; but to-morrow or the day after all the halls will be contaminated. I have given orders to admit no one save those attacked by the pestilence; it is useless to expose people to the danger of dying of a disease worse than that with which they are suffering. A barrack is being constructed in the garden that will be very useful to us; when it is completed we can again receive the general run of patients in our halls, after having disinfected them.”

He spoke thus to quiet himself and to quiet his wife, to prevent her from uttering certain words that he guessed were upon her lips. Pierre bowed his head; he had heard the stories current in the city and knew what frightful danger threatened those he held most dear.

Amid the silence that ensued, they distinctly heard the carpenters hammering away at the boards destined to make a shelter for the unfortunates and, perhaps, with the aid of the pure air they would breathe, to save them. The young man left the room to go and see what progress the barrack was making. Korzof and his wife were alone.

"Dmitri," began Nadia; then she paused.

He looked at her and she read in his eyes what she feared to see there, though she would have blushed had she seen anything else.

"Yes," he replied to her inquiring glances. "But you must go away."

"Never!" exclaimed she, firmly placing her hand upon her husband's arm. "Never, while you remain!"

"Send away the children, then."

"They will not consent to go."

Both were silent. The sound of the hammers grew noisier and noisier. Korzof went to the window and saw his son, who, provided with a mallet, was working like a common laborer.

"Dmitri," resumed Nadia, "it is very hard!"

"It is our duty!" answered he, taking and holding her hand.

"Ah!" sighed she, "if I had only known!"

"You would have done exactly what you did! But should we die from the pestilence what difference would it make?—we must die from that or something else!"

"No; to die from the pestilence is too terrible! With anything else there are chances of escape, while with

this—and then the horrible sufferings, for they are horrible, are they not?”

“People say so,” responded the doctor, turning away his face; “but I repeat what I just said—we must die from that or something else. And, besides, persons have recovered from it. Why should I take it more than the resident medical students, more than any other? Are we not in excellent hygienic conditions?”

“Yes, undoubtedly; but you will see the patients every day!”

“Nadia,” said he, in a low voice, “it is my duty; such was our wish, such is still our wish, such will be our wish until the final day, be that day to-morrow or thirty years hence.”

“You are right,” said she, with a deep sigh. “But I did not know how much I loved you!”

The children were informed that they must go to Spask, but Pierre positively refused to leave his father.

“What a strange physician I would be,” said he, “if I quitted my post at the moment of danger! Volodia would laugh at me!”

Sophie also refused to abandon her parents, and Martha smiled when the proposition to depart was made to her. These brave young creatures had so much strength and life in them that they restored serenity and even gayety to the hearts of Korzof and his wife.

The news had no cheering aspects, however; the mortality increased daily; only downcast countenances were seen, only uneasy people who, at the slightest itching, at the appearance of the smallest pimple, thought themselves infected and made their wills.

The wealthy classes were, as usual, almost spared by the scourge; nevertheless, several fatal cases, absolutely inexplicable, thoroughly frightened the population.

From the first Nadia had given up all personal com-

munication with the outer world, in order not to run the chance of spreading the disease among her friends.

The weeks glided along; Korzof, constantly strong and well, underwent every fatigue, and by his example maintained courage in the ranks of his assistants and nurses. None of them had yet been attacked, a circumstance that spoke loudly in favor of the excellent material and moral condition of this truly unique establishment. By dint of living amid peril the inhabitants of the hospital had at last grown to believe themselves secure from infection, and they even made jokes at the expense of those St. Petersburg people who, though surrounded by every imaginable precaution, had yet managed to take the pestilence and had had the luck not to die of it.

The number of patients was decreasing, and it seemed that the epidemic would soon be over. It was then that the entire Korzof family were seized with great fatigue. They appeared to have exhausted their strength in the resistance they had so stoutly made to the contagion. The doctor himself grew less prudent.

One morning, he awoke late; a leaden sleep had assailed him the night before and thrown him in bed almost without his knowledge. He assumed a sitting posture and stared around him, as if the objects in the apartment, familiar as they were, had suddenly become strange to him. He passed his hand across his forehead, with a singular sensation of torpor and weakness; then, feeling something that disturbed him, he touched his breast near the arm-pit with his finger and sat motionless; his mind would soon plunge into a bottomless gulf, from which no human power could ever withdraw it. With his other hand he touched the bell placed beside his bed. Nadia appeared; the look she cast upon her husband instantly revealed to her the whole fearful truth, and she sprang toward him with open arms.

“Don’t touch me,” said Korzof, putting into his eyes, that an indescribable lassitude was closing, all the tenderness of a last supplication. “Don’t touch me if you love me! Prevent the children from entering and send for the old doctor.”

Without making an objection Nadia returned to the adjoining chamber, gave Martha and Sophie a commission that would keep them away for several hours, notified Pierre that he was dilatory and that it was time for him to go to the Academy of Medicine, replied to their questions that Korzof was well and would soon be up, then sent for the physician whom her husband had demanded and returned to the sick man’s apartment. Though very weak, he had still the strength to smile upon her; then he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

When the old doctor arrived he had no need to verify the existence of the pimple of the pestilence to know that his chief was lost. For six weeks past he had seen too many of those stricken visages to be mistaken for a single instant. The personnel were notified; they sent for all the leading physicians of St. Petersburg, who hastened to the hospital and held a consultation.

“He will not suffer long,” said one of them; “that is all Nature can do for him now.”

The following morning Nadia, who had not quitted him for even a moment, saw her husband’s respiration slacken, then manifest itself at long intervals. Each time she awaited its return with boundless anguish. At last she waited a long while—the respiration did not return.

“It is all over,” said she in a low voice to the old doctor, who was looking at her with his eyes full of tears; “he cannot prevent me now—I can kiss him!”

With eyes too sorrowful to weep, she was already bending over Korzof’s body. The doctor caught her by the arm and held her back.

"Your children!" said he, simply.

"Ah! true; I have my children," said she, in a tone of indifference.

She allowed herself to be led from the chamber without resistance.

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CHAPTER X.

NICHOLAS STEPLINE.

THE news of the death of Doctor Korzof spread through St. Petersburg and caused immense consternation. Forgetting the dread of the contagion that until then had kept them at a distance, the friends of the family hastened to those who remained. One might say that the scourge ought to be disarmed, now that it had chosen its final prey among the noblest and best. In fact, the epidemic rapidly decreased, and soon no trace of the terrible visitation was left save the mourning of those who had loved the victims and the knowledge of their irreparable loss.

Nadia, who had borne the first shock with an inexplicable firmness, was an entire year without succeeding in regaining possession of herself. She performed all her duties with a mechanical regularity; never, even during the days immediately following Korzof's death, did she relax her surveillance or neglect any occupation. They found her always ready to answer a question, to give advice or to repair the forgetfulness of another; but her thoughts were elsewhere: they saw that she lived solely in her past and that the feeling of her responsibility alone sustained her. Even her children, who were so

dear to her, seemed to belong to her rather through the duty she owed them than through the affection she bore them; Nadia's whole soul had followed her husband beyond this life.

A year passed thus; the children suffered more than one could imagine from Nadia's condition, that they comprehended was morbid, but that was none the less full of bitterness and sorrow for them on that account. Pierre, already ripened by work and serious thoughts, become almost a man, pretty thoroughly understood his mother's state of mind; but his sister, whose spontaneous nature, all outbursts and passion, bore reserve and coldness with a bad grace, struggled against the external rigidity, against the apparent indifference of the mother she loved so much, and Sophie grew almost wicked by dint of suffering.

Vainly did Martha strive to console her and to prove to her that Nadia could not always remain as she was; that some day she would recover in her entirety the mother of the past, whom she now wept for as if in her grave. Sophie would hear nothing.

"You do not know what it is to love so dearly some one who does not love you!" cried the latter one day, bursting into tears. "Nor do you, Volodia! It makes one feel so badly that one would be heartily glad to die and be done with it!"

Martha maintained silence, unable to find opposing arguments; Volodia looked gravely at the young girl.

"You talk like an infant, Sophie," said he, in a voice that was almost severe. "We do know what it is to be loved less than we desire to be. It does, indeed, make one feel very badly; but when one's soul is filled with lofty aspirations one does not grieve for that, but bears it patiently; one waits, even when one has lost hope; as for you, however, you have nothing to com-

plain of; you are perfectly aware how much you are beloved; you do not know how to love yourself, if you cannot allow those you cherish to have some trouble that for the moment withdraws them from you. Are you selfish, Sophie?"

The young girl, ready to rebel, cast her eyes upon the friend of her childhood; the words of reproach and anger she was about to utter were checked on her lips, so grave and sorrowful did he appear.

Volodia, like his sister Martha, did not expend his affection in demonstrations; on the contrary he concentrated it in order to show it in its full strength only on occasions of sufficient importance. More than once Sophie had found his advice good; amid the little fits of anger she was subject to at times when reprimanded, he had been a vigorous partisan of duty, and no matter how vexed at being blamed instead of pitied, she had been unable to conceal from herself that the young man was right.

"Selfish?—no!" said she. "My sole desire—and you know it as well as I do, Volodia—is to dedicate my life to the service of others, to make myself useful by some sacrifice—"

He interrupted her with a grave look and took her hand.

"Sacrifices, as you understand them," said he, "are brilliant things, articles of luxury, so to speak; they are ornaments for the life that imposes them upon itself; they draw to you the admiration of others and thus bring you a prompt reward. Sacrifice, as I understand it, is dull and mute; it is not showy and does not court mention. When you have a great desire to disturb a person you love in his work or meditations to make him your confidant, it is this kind of sacrifice that advises you to leave him to his thoughts; it is this kind of

sacrifice that induces you to pardon beloved but heedless or selfish beings for the pain they cause you. Such sacrifices, Sophie, are known to no one but ourselves, and if you were given to them they would command you to respect your mother's grief. You do not know what it is to lose the companion of one's life—nothing is so cruel."

He dropped her hand and turned partially away, adding, in a low voice:

"Nothing is so cruel, save, perhaps, the knowledge that one will never be anything to the person one loves."

Sophie looked at him, undecided what to do. More than once she had thought she had detected in the young man a trusting tenderness, graver and deeper than fraternal friendship. But in that case why did he constantly scold her? Why did he blame her incessantly? When one is in love one does not endeavor to be everywhere and always so disagreeable.

The young girl sighed and left the study hall, the usual scene of their skirmishes.

Martha had said nothing. Patient and serious, she took part in the lives of others with perfect disinterestedness; not that she did not participate in them generously, with all the courage and activity she possessed, but she felt that she was made for subordinate rôles.

"I was born to be an aunt, a sister-in-law, a god-mother or whatever you please," said she at last; "provided I am not asked to launch myself into the midst of the *mêlée* on my own responsibility."

Volodia approached the excellent girl, who was looking at him with a gentle pity.

"I assure you," said she to him, answering her brother's unspoken thoughts, "I assure you she is good at heart; she is full of precious qualities, but at present she is suffering and that renders her unjust."

“Do I not know all about her!” said he, turning away his head.

After a short silence he resumed:

“Martha, I am strongly tempted to go to an academy at Moscow or Kief; I think I would do better there than here.”

His sister uttered not a word, but grew very pale, and fixing her eyes upon him, awaited an explanation.

“I am no longer here what I have been,” he continued. “I know not if it is because I am an insupportable pedant, always ready to administer reprimands, but Sophie is not the only one who holds aloof from me. Pierre also is seeking other friendship than mine. He has lately become very intimate with a certain Nicholas Stepline, of whom I can foresee nothing good.”

“Stepline?” said Martha, searching her memory; “that name is not unknown to me.”

“He is one of those young men of plebeian extraction, who no longer possess the virtues of the people and have not succeeded in acquiring those of the superior classes; he is ill-bred, sullen and coarse at bottom, though he endeavors to appear modest; it is impossible for me to see what can attract Pierre toward him, unless it be the law of contrast, for our Pierre is altogether the opposite of this disagreeable fellow. However, they are always together; the only thing astonishing to me is that he has not yet thought of bringing him here.”

Volodia was lost in thought for an instant; then, placing his hand on his sister's shoulder, he said:

“That is the reason, Martha, I would do well to go away. When friendship is no longer useful, its dignity exacts that it retire.”

“Is it at the moment when Pierre makes bad acquaintances that you find yourself useless?” asked the young girl, who until then had listened in silence.

Volodia, without replying, shrugged his shoulders with an air of vexation.

“What would Doctor Korzof say if he could hear you speak thus?” continued she, with an accent of authority strange in the mouth of such a modest personage, who seemed unwilling to pass judgment on others. “And Nadia, what would she say if she knew what you were thinking of doing? How could you take advantage of the fact that, wrapped up in her grief, she does not heed what is passing around her, to meanly abandon her children? You have not then seen that, since the doctor’s death, his work has fallen on your shoulders and mine, and that we are continuing it?—that his unfortunate wife, buried in her grief, pays but little attention to anything, and that without us the children would lack both supervision and advice? Ah! my dear brother, you did not reflect when you allowed that weak thought to enter your mind.”

The young man lifted his sister’s hand to his lips.

“You are wisdom and devotedness incarnate, Martha,” said he; “but you will remain. The work has grown very painful for me, and since Sophie detests me I have not the strength to continue it.”

With a compassionate glance Martha read even to the depths of Volodia’s soul.

“Yes,” said she, “I know. But where would be the merit, brother, if the sacrifice were easy to make, if the work could be readily performed? How much better than cowards would we be if we recoiled before pain when duty claimed fulfillment? Do you think that I do not suffer at seeing you suffer? But the debt of gratitude we owe the memory of Dmitri Korzof and his wife does not permit us to act in cowardly fashion. We will remain, brother, as long as we are useful, and the day is very far distant when we shall cease to be so.”

The young man took his sister in his arms, and the two orphans clasped each other tightly.

"I am afraid," said Volodia, when he had recovered his calmness, "that Sophie has grown proud and considers me greatly beneath her because of my dependent position."

"Even should such be the case," replied Martha, "we must bear it and pardon her the caprice on account of our love for her dead father and her sorrow-stricken mother."

She looked at her brother and read in his eyes that this caprice would be the death of all that since childhood he had cultivated religiously in his soul.

He had loved Sophie as he had loved Pierre—because she was the child of his benefactors; then this devoted affection had taken another form as years rolled on. He loved her too much now; he would have sacrificed his entire youth to overcome the powerful attraction, the irresistible feeling that gave him wholly to her; but if one can prohibit one's self from loving when one suspects there is danger of it, it is quite another and much more difficult matter to recover one's self when one has let one's soul go out toward another without one's knowledge. He loved Sophie and, good or bad, he would love her always. According as she should be good or bad, she would fill with joy or grief the life of the man who loved her.

"Well," said Volodia, at last, "I will do my duty whatever it may cost me."

The brother and sister grasped each other's hands like soldier comrades about to go under fire together. In all the struggles of life, these two brave beings had clung one to the other and marched side by side. That would be their reward and their consolation forever.

When the family assembled at tea that evening,

Pierre, who for some time past had been pleased to absent himself at that hour, displayed particular amiability toward his mother and sister. When Madame Korzof was preparing to return to her chamber, her son approached her to say good-night and kiss her hand as usual.

"Mother," said he, "I have a request to make of you. Will you allow me to bring here one of my comrades, a medical student like myself?"

"Who is he?" asked Nadia, absently.

"His name is Nicholas Stepline," answered Pierre, coloring slightly.

"Stepline?" repeated Madame Korzof, searching her memory. Her son awaited her response with some uneasiness. "Is he the right kind of a young man? Does Volodia know him?"

"I know him," answered Volodia, laconically.

"Is he a man whom we can receive?"

"If you ask my humble opinion," resumed Volodia, "I think you can admit him to your house with as little inconvenience as another."

Nadia seemed to shake off her habitual indifference.

"What do you mean by that?" she inquired.

"Simply that M. Stepline shares with many other young people the disadvantage of having received but a partial education—in a word, of not being a man of society. He comes from the people, and you know those young folks sprung from the people; morally, they may possess a great deal of merit, but their society is not always of a nature to please more refined beings."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nadia, with a maternal smile, "it is in vain that you strive to be otherwise, Volodia—you will always remain an aristocrat! Well, Pierre, you can bring your friend to us; but be prudent, will you not? You know one must be very careful not to form in one's

youth friendships that one may afterwards drag through-out one's life like a ball and chain!"

The little company separated, each member of it seeking his or her apartment.

Nadia, alone in her chamber, was reading when she heard a knock at the door. Thinking that it was her waiting-maid come to repair some forgetfulness, she gave permission for the applicant to enter. To her great surprise it was Martha who presented herself.

"What do you want, my child?" said Madame Korzof, with her accustomed kindness.

"I have come to ask of you a moment's interview," answered the young girl. "Am I disturbing you?"

"Certainly not, since you have need of me," replied Nadia, a trifle astonished.

Martha seated herself beside her, upon a low stool, and looked at her with that expression of firm confidence that imparted such a charm to her honest countenance.

"Have you a secret to tell me?" demanded Madame Korzof, in order to encourage her.

"No, my benefactress," answered the young girl. "Oh! if you only knew how difficult and painful it is for me to tell you what I have upon my lips! If I fail to make myself understood, you will detest me, drive me from your presence—and yet I affirm to you that it is the purest affection, combined with the most sincere respect, that brings me here!"

"What is it, then?" asked Nadia, frowning slightly.

"Sophie is in trouble," said Martha, bravely, leaping at a bound into the midst of the difficulty. "Sophie thinks that you no longer love her. Her character is changing, and I have not sufficient empire over her to direct her as I would like."

"Sophie?" said Nadia, in amazement. "I thought you wished to speak to me of yourself?"

There was a little haughtiness in her tone, a little disdain in her words; but Martha was firmly resolved to continue to the end and nothing could discourage her.

"It is of Sophie. She thinks that you no longer love her," valiantly repeated the young girl.

"How did she get that idea?" demanded the mother, with evident displeasure.

Here was the difficulty, the almost insurmountable obstacle. Martha took breath before speaking again.

"Because you no longer pay any attention to her," said she, at length, in a single burst.

Nadia gave such a sudden start that her book slipped from her lap, where it had been lying, and fell to the floor. The young girl picked it up and placed it on the table.

"I no longer pay any attention to my daughter?" said Madame Korzof, in a cold tone. "Who says that—she or you?"

"She says it and thinks it; she suffers and weeps on account of it; she has grown bitter and unjust because her mother's heart, absorbed in an irremediable grief, no longer beats save for the lost one. Oh! my benefactress, my own heart bleeds while I talk to you and you look at me with anger in your eyes—yet what I say is true! You live with your beloved dead, you have lost sight of the living!—and if I dare to tell you this, it is because your children are in despair! Who knows how much greater will be their despair, their sufferings in the future, if you allow your maternal solicitude to be turned away from them!"

Nadia was silent; with her lips firmly pressed together, with her eyes cast down, she was fighting a terrible battle with her pride.

"Sophie complains of being neglected by me, eh?" said she, finally, in a milder tone.

"She says that you no longer love her—Oh! do not be too severe with her!—It is the excess of her filial tenderness that has led her astray!"

Martha paused; Madame Korzof's face had assumed a sad and resigned expression that commanded silence.

"It is true," said she, after an instant had passed; "I have lived wrapped up in myself amid my souvenirs; I believed I was doing my duty, but, doubtless, I deceived myself. You have done well, Martha, to show me the right road. And my son, what does he say?"

"He says nothing, madame, but—"

"But what?"

"I have nothing to tell you. You will be a better judge than I of what should be done. Can you pardon my audacity?" added she, humbly.

Nadia drew her to her heart.

"I thank you," said she, tenderly embracing her. "My children will, perhaps, owe you the peace and happiness of their lives!"

On the evening of the next day, just as the family had gathered around the fire in the dining-room, Pierre entered, accompanied by his friend Nicholas Stepline. Madame Korzof took a comprehensive glance at the new arrival and formed this opinion of him: boorish and ambitious.

Sophie formed no judgment. Utterly overwhelmed with joy at having recovered the caresses of her mother, who that morning had awakened her with a kiss, as had been her custom in the past, she was living in a sort of ecstasy, and, for the moment, had lost the feelings of everyday life. Everything seemed to her beautiful, good and lofty; she would have liked to have something very difficult given her to do in order to accomplish it quickly and enthusiastically; her gratitude to Fate for having restored to her arms her adored mother, so long

lost, overflowed upon those who surrounded her, even upon Martha, who smiled silently and kept her secret. Nothing could have mortified the excellent girl more than to see unveiled the mystery by which this mother had been restored to her children.

Certain beings are ashamed of their good actions; this is, doubtless, to balance the glory that others take to themselves for their crimes.

A new life, a sort of resurrection of joy and love, brightened up the hospital again. The remembrance of Doctor Korzof, the martyr to his duty, yet hovered over everybody; but, as he himself would have desired, it was as an aureole and not as a shadow.

Nadia herself once more learned to love life, not for its joys—she could no longer appreciate them—but for its duties. One clings to one's duties infinitely more than to one's pleasures. This mother, feeling that she had something with which to reproach herself, began to observe her children attentively, and obtained proof of the fact that she had, indeed, neglected them for a long time.

Pierre had become very independent, too much so, perhaps, in his relations with people, his habits and his tastes. At the moment when the lost paternal surveillance should have been replaced by that of his mother he had found himself almost master of his own actions; inevitably he had availed himself of his liberty to commit indiscretions.

One of the most important of these had been his close acquaintance with Nicholas Stepline.

The latter was a representative of a group and of an idea, if so be one can call "an idea" that which consists in not having any. Boorish and ambitious, as Madame Korzof had judged him, Stepline was, besides, very crafty. He converted into a tower of strength what another

would have considered a weakness; his lack of advantages and the natural coarseness of his person were for him means of action; he said a disagreeable thing squarely to no matter whom, and immediately passed for a man so frank that he could not conceal his manner of seeing.

This rôle of peasant of the Danube was, it is true, the only one Stepline could enact; but it was something to have assumed it without difficulty, without ever committing an error or a weakness.

How did this boor find favor with Pierre Korzof?

Simply by that threadbare but always successful method that consists in hurling into the faces of people some enormous piece of flattery, seasoned with a bit of rudeness. Can you question the sincerity of a creature who finds in you simultaneously a perfection you are doubtful about possessing and a defect you know you have?

When, after having met at the same course of lectures, a long-sought chance brought Pierre Korzof and Nicholas Stepline face to face, the latter went straight up to the doctor's son.

"I never imagined," said he to him, point-blank, "that a nobleman's son could be good for anything; you have demolished one of my cherished ideas!"

"Which?" said Pierre, somewhat hurt.

"I believed that a choice and corrupt education, like your education as the eldest son of a Count, could produce only withered fruit, and yet I find in you the honor of our school! I had prejudices; it is vexatious to lose them; one clings to his prejudices!"

How are we to escape flattery? The youthful brain of Pierre was altogether intoxicated by this unexpected compliment.

"Do you remember that I beat you once?" continued

Stepline, coolly. "Have you any spite against me for it? If so, speak out! That thrashing cost us dear; my father was ruined by it, for it caused him to lose the position that furnished him with the means of living!"

This was an audacious falsehood, but Stepline was playing all against all. The game was fine enough to be worth this stake.

"What!" cried Pierre, moved by that feeling of juvenile generosity, absolutely unreasonable, ridiculous and stupid, that causes so many foolish deeds, and that, nevertheless, renders youth so sympathetic, "was it you?"

"Yes, it was I. My family paid for my brutality with ten years of poverty. But my father gave me an education notwithstanding, and I doubly thank him for it."

"Ah, how much I regret, how much I regret that I was the cause of your father's trouble!" cried Pierre, grasping Stepline's hand.

From that day they were intimate friends. Young Korzof was anxious to show himself as destitute of aristocratic feelings as his friend; he colored every time the latter alluded to his superior birth, to the luxury of his existence and to the subordinate position formerly held by Féodor on the Prince's estate. These were so many thorns that the malicious Nicholas stuck in his flesh at the tenderest spot; the more Nicholas doubted the democratic tastes of his new friend, the deeper Pierre plunged into the exaggerations of the new doctrine, so it happened that he ultimately showed himself more radical than the radicals themselves.

It was at this moment that Stepline asked to be introduced into the Korzof mansion. He longed to be received as a guest, on a footing of equality, by that family to whom his grandfather had been a servant.

"What do you think of my sister?" asked Pierre of

his friend, when they met on the day after the presentation.

"What do you want me to think of her?" answered the other, in a peevish tone. "She seems intelligent enough, but these demoiselles of high society are all affected!"

"My sister is not affected!" cried Pierre, stung to the quick by this insinuation. "Cannot you believe that a young girl, brought up in the principles my father and mother professed to the extent of despoiling themselves of their fortune as they did, cannot be as intelligent as we and share our ideas?"

"If she shares our ideas it is different," muttered Stepline, hiding his satisfaction; "but that remains to be seen—I cannot take your word for it."

"What is there to prevent you from talking with her? Then you will see that I have not deceived you."

The year of mourning had expired. Yielding to the instigations of his new friend, Pierre asked his mother's permission to have once a week a reunion of several of his chosen comrades at his home.

Madame Korzof put no obstacle in the way of this. At her house, at least, she was certain that her son would not be drawn into any reprehensible error. About ten o'clock in the evening she sent tea to the young men in Pierre's apartments. One night the latter asked permission to bring his friends into the dining-room. From that time every Thursday evening, after the conference that served as a pretext for these reunions, Pierre's three or four friends were admitted into the society of the young girls.

They did not appear to be charmed by this; the majority of them preferred Pierre's study, where they could smoke at their ease; but Stepline had his idea. Insensibly he and Sophie glided into one of those intimacies frequent in Russia between young men and young

girls, in the course of which they chat together as if they were comrades of the same sex, though the conversation never goes beyond the limits of the strictest propriety.

In this instance the proprieties were observed the most rigorously in the world; but Sophie's already excited mind was drawn toward regions inaccessible to the vulgar, that is to say to those with common sense. The ideas of sacrifice and abnegation, that in the past had dominated her mother, had reappeared in her under a more modern and more dangerous form, for she had not the counterbalance that had saved Nadia.

The latter had imparted all her impressions to her father, whose mildly jeering wit had constantly held her back from a dangerous declivity; Sophie did not tell her mother half she thought. During Korzof's lifetime she had not hidden from him one of her reflections; but the long year of reserve that had elapsed since then had habituated her to concentrating her ideas in herself. And, besides, a vague fear warned her that Nadia would not approve of certain things. Sophie was already very far advanced in the path of error.

By means of the same pretense of rough sincerity that had acted so powerfully upon the mind of the brother, Nicholas Stepline took possession of that of the sister. He cunningly took advantage of that enthusiastic child's generous feelings. He pictured a social state in which those possessed of great fortunes would consider it a duty of honor to ally themselves with poor families; he expressed a profound contempt for women of society who live in society: it was only by mingling with the people that they would purify their impure wealth.

Shrewder than one would have supposed him, he took good care not to mention love—he talked only of duty.

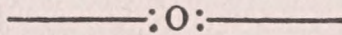
He knew that Sophie could not fall in love with him: he knew that this young girl, brought up amid elegance

and the most refined taste, could not find charms in a peasant but partially shorn of his clownishness; he, therefore, cunningly presented to her the sacrifice of herself as an apostleship.

He found few obstacles in the way of the execution of his project because, not in any manner paying court to the young girl, he could not be considered dangerous either by herself or her mother. He always spoke from a general point of view and made no personal allusions.

Nevertheless, warned by a secret instinct, Volodia looked upon him with distrust that closely approached hate. He strove, sometimes alone, sometimes through Martha, who shared his fears, to keep informed of the change that was being wrought in Sophie's mind. Vain labor; Sophie had become a closed book.

At last she spoke, and that day was a very sad one for the Korzof family.



CHAPTER XI.

TROUBLE UPON TROUBLE.

ON her nineteenth birthday, in the presence of her brother, Martha and Volodia, Sophie said calmly to Nadia:

“Mother, I ask your permission to marry Nicholas Stepline!”

Martha was thunderstruck and Volodia filled with dismay.

Sophie's request was so unforeseen and in every point of view so absurd that Madame Korzof was stunned by

it and thought she had misunderstood her daughter's words.

"I did not understand you," said she to Sophie, who was awaiting her answer with an appearance of calmness.

"I asked, mother, your permission to marry Nicholas Stepline."

"Is it possible that you love him?" cried Nadia, utterly overwhelmed.

Sophie raised her pure and limpid eyes to her mother.

"No," said she. "Why should I love him? The matter at issue is the repairing of an injustice of fate; I will try my best to accomplish it; there is no need of love for that."

"Unhappy child!" said Madame Korzof, going to her and taking her in her arms, "who has put such things into your mind? Has the example of your father and myself ever permitted you to conceive the idea of a marriage without sympathy, without suitableness, without love? That boorish, brutal, ill-bred fellow beside you, my daughter! You have not given the matter an instant's reflection! You have yielded to an interested domination and have allowed yourself to be convinced. It is a passing folly, my child, is it not? We will talk it over calmly and you will understand—"

"Mother," interrupted Sophie, firmly, "I wish to marry Nicholas Stepline. In our day of social inequality it is the duty of every intelligent and well-wishing being to repair as much as possible the injustice of fate. It is for rich women to marry poor and intelligent men, that they may thus serve the cause of civilization and that of the people."

"Oh!" cried Nadia, hiding her face in her hands.

It was the same language she had employed with her father in the past. These were almost her very words. She recollected all this now. From the depths of her

memory rose up the scene in the garden of Peterhof, where she had made her rash vow. She had realized her dream, and her dream had given her happiness; but she had found upon her road a grand and noble being—love without bounds. Her dream had taken body without compelling her to lower herself: on the contrary, she had drawn it up to her. Were the same chimeras, the same utopian ideas now about to destroy her own child?

“My daughter!” said she, “you chastise me cruelly for my imprudence. Either I have not done my whole duty toward you, or I have done it ill. In both cases you are the instrument of my punishment; I did not think I deserved that.”

Sophie threw herself into Nadia’s arms.

“My cherished mother,” said she, “I love and venerate you; but those are the principles you have professed all your life; you cannot condemn them to-day.”

“The principles are not reprehensible, Sophie,” said Volodia, in his grave voice, “but the application you make of them.”

Up to that instant none had spoken save Nadia and her daughter; now everybody except Pierre began to speak simultaneously.

Pierre, embarrassed, remained mute. This scene had about it nothing unexpected for him: for too long he had heard enunciated by his friend the ideas to which Sophie now gave such a sad consecration. Until that instant those ideas had not shocked him. Suddenly, at the thought of seeing his sister united to Stepline, he had recoiled internally and been confounded.

“Brother,” said the young girl, turning toward him, “why do you not come to my assistance?”

Nadia looked at her son with a severe air; it was he who had introduced Stepline into the house; he was in part responsible for what had happened.

“What, Pierre!” continued Sophie, “have you nothing to say? A hundred times you have endorsed those ideas; then, you thought them grand and generous; are you going to abandon me the moment I put them in practice?”

Madame Korzof looked by turns at her two children, with a painful emotion. Alas! Martha had warned her too late! While, all alone, she was living among her widow's souvenirs, she had allowed the hearts of her son and daughter to wander far away from her.

Kind-hearted Martha read her thoughts upon her countenance and approached her very gently. Nadia understood her and pressed her hand, without speaking.

“I see, mother,” resumed Sophie, “that my request has taken you by surprise; therefore, I ask you to make no decision now.”

“Whence does she get this calmness?” cried Madame Korzof, instantly recovering her presence of mind; “she overwhelms us with her mad ideas, and, while we stand dismayed, she reasons tranquilly, like a general of the army arranging his troops. Sophie, have I been deceived in you?—have you no heart?”

A sudden flush, followed by a waxen pallor, spread over Sophie's face; she lowered her eyes and stood motionless.

Of all the painful things in the world her mother had just found that which she could feel the most. Sophie's ardent and spontaneous nature was doing itself an extreme violence to present the appearance of calmness that so shocked those about her, but they could not comprehend it.

“Madame,” said Volodia, in the midst of the general consternation, “will you permit me to have an instant's interview with Sophie?”

Martha glanced at her brother in surprise. What was

he going to say? Was he about to reveal his secret? The moment seemed ill-chosen. Madame Korzof was on the point of replying, but her daughter got the start of her.

"I wish to hear nothing from you, Volodia," said she to the young man in a haughty tone; "we do not share the same ideas, we could not understand each other."

"Very well," said Nadia, ruffled by this attitude; "since you have forgotten all who are near and should be dear to you, go to your chamber, my daughter; later, we will have an interview."

Sophie, with her head held high, passed through the midst of the dismayed family and vanished without turning around.

"Now, Pierre, explain this to me!" cried Nadia, forcing herself to be calm. "Have you also experienced a change of heart? If it be true that I have neglected you both—"

"Oh, mother!" said the young man, in a supplicating voice.

Nadia interrupted him with a gesture.

"If it be true that I have neglected you and your sister, you, Pierre, were rendered only the more responsible thereby. You now have age on your side—you know what social life is, what marriage is. During his lifetime your father talked to you of those matters. He did not neglect his duty," added she, bitterly. "Why did you not watch over your sister?"

Pierre had bowed his head in confusion; he raised it with a movement full of dignity.

"Mother," said he, impressively, "I never for a moment thought that the generous principles in which we all believe could produce such sad results when put in practice. When all of us here said and repeated that the only way to repair the inequalities of fate was to pour wealth into the hands of those who, though active

and intelligent, were condemned to remain in obscurity because destitute of fortune, we believed we were professing a grand and generous doctrine. If Stepline were other than he is, would Sophie be so culpable?"

For a moment Nadia did not reply. A mighty struggle was taking place within her. All her life she had believed herself free from aristocratic prejudices; in the past, she had herself announced her intention to marry a man sprung from the ranks of the people; but she had not met that man. Now that a poor and intelligent man aspired to her daughter's hand all her pride revolted, struggle as she might.

"Mother," resumed Pierre, in the most respectful tone, "is it the person of Stepline or his origin that displeases you?"

Madame Korzof made an effort worthy of herself and replied, firmly:

"It is his person. If it were otherwise, son of a superintendent as he is, if he had the external merits that come from moral qualities, I would accept him as my son-in-law without regret. But I have a natural aversion for this young man. Nothing noble can come from him; he is selfish by nature."

Pierre felt that he was vanquished. More than once during the past six months he had felt the rough sides of his comrade's nature shock him with the sharpness of a discord. He had reproached himself for having been too ready to admit this stranger to his friendship, for having been too ready to introduce him into a household he should have looked upon as sacred. But all this was merely imprudence; and when should one be imprudent if not at twenty years of age?

He endeavored, nevertheless, to defend his friend.

"Selfish, mother, I do not believe him," said he. "Ambitious, well, I have nothing to say on that head.

If he desires to attain a lofty position, is it not his right? Is it not in some measure his duty?"

"It is one's right and duty to seek to create a lofty position for himself," answered Nadia, severely, "but only on condition that he shall owe it to no one save himself. A wife's fortune should not be the stepping-stone of him who seeks her in marriage. He should have some merit in himself; without that he is not ambitious, he is merely selfish."

Pierre bowed silently.

"Listen to the truth," continued Nadia: "it is dangerous to put weapons in the hands of children. You play with sophisms, and at a given moment they rebound against you. While I am striving to make Sophie understand the extent of the folly she wishes to commit, you will say to your friend, my son, that I beg him not to present himself here."

"Do not be afraid, mother, he will not come," said Pierre, considerably hurt. "His dignity—"

"Don't talk to me of the dignity of a man who has exposed to her mother's anger the young girl he claims to love," said Madame Korzof. "If he possessed a single noble feeling, he would have come to me in person instead of making my unhappy child speak for him."

This observation was so palpably true that Pierre was immediately convinced. Truth to tell, he had defended Nicholas from generosity, from a chivalric spirit, but if Madame Korzof had suddenly given her consent he would have been the first to raise objections.

Nadia retired to her apartment and Pierre also quitted the room. Volodia's presence made him feel badly. Though Martha's brother had never exhibited his private feelings, young Korzof felt that his true friend, the companion of his childhood and youth, was wounded to the depths of his soul.

Left alone, Martha and her brother looked at each other sadly.

"I suspected," said the young man, replying to his sister's thoughts as expressed by her countenance, "that she would ultimately commit some terrible folly; and, besides, do you know, Martha, that she does not love us sufficiently?"

"You deceive yourself," said Martha; "she loves us; but for some time past she has feared us more than she has loved us, and that is why she keeps away from us. She is well aware in the depths of her misled, straying mind that she is wrong and that we are right."

After a short silence she resumed:

"You heard what she said, Volodia; she does not love that man! She coldly sacrifices herself to what she considers her duty. Poor, mad enthusiast! We will not abandon her, will we, brother?"

Volodia looked interrogatively at his sister; she continued:

"She is obstinate, and Madame Korzof has a will of iron; their persistent natures will clash in a terrible fashion. If Sophie feels that she is loved by us, if we show her the same affection, the same indulgent kindness as ever, may we not hope that her soul will open itself to our tenderness, that she will at last understand where are her family, duty and love?"

Volodia raised to his lips the hand of his sister, so good and so maternal, but answered not, for his soul was as sad as death.

The door reopened and Sophie appeared upon the threshold.

"You desired to speak with me," said she to the young man; "what did you wish to say?"

Martha discreetly withdrew; during such an interview her presence could only be hurtful.

Volodia advanced two steps, took the young girl's hand and led her to a chair in which she seated herself.

"I wished to tell you," said he, his heart wrung by unspeakable anguish, "that you have not looked within yourself; when you took your resolution—"

"It is not within one's self that one should look when one desires to do good," interrupted Sophie; "those who occupy themselves with themselves are selfish."

"One must look within one's self, nevertheless," insisted Volodia; "no sentient being has the right to willfully neglect a single thing that can weigh in the balance of his or her own resolutions. Will you listen to me, Sophie, without interrupting me? Answer my questions with your usual sincerity, and, when I have finished, you can say to me what you like."

"Very well," said she, with a haughty movement of the head.

He stood before her, casting upon her his clear and honest glance, just as if she had been a stranger and not the being he loved more than his life.

"We have," said he, in his grave voice, "duties toward humanity, toward society, toward the family and toward ourselves; in asking to marry M. Stepline, toward whom do you think you are fulfilling a duty?"

Sophie hesitated an instant, and, suddenly troubled, replied:

"Toward humanity."

"If such be your thought," resumed Volodia, "I can but approve of it. You cannot, however, ignore the fact that at the same time you wound society, your family and yourself!"

"Society and its prejudices matter very little to me," responded the young girl; "my family love me sufficiently, I hope, to allow me to fulfill what I consider a duty. As to myself—" she blushed, but looked

Volodia resolutely in the face. "As to myself, I think I am doing right and that is enough for me."

The young man bowed.

"We will talk of something else, then," said he. "Do you know what marriage is?"

Sophie replied, bravely:

"It is the union of two similar wills that tend toward the same goal."

"Very well. M. Stepline and you have two similar wills that tend toward the same goal; may I ask what that goal is?"

"To ameliorate the lot of the poor classes, to call to the surface those who are in the depths."

"And when you have called them to the surface, what will you do with them?"

Disconcerted for an instant, Sophie replied almost immediately:

"Then we will see what is to be done."

Volodia uttered a sigh.

"That's it," said he; "commence by demolishing, without knowing what you are going to put in the place of the object destroyed! Do you imagine, Sophie, that one can thus abolish the habits, customs and principles of a nation without giving it anything in exchange for them? Do you not see that what you would do in a moment is the work of ages; that the defect of our country, found even in its people of the best intentions, is to act too quickly, and that you wish to act much more quickly than they? But I forget myself; we were talking of marriage just now. Have you attentively scanned that of your parents? No, without doubt. Bred in this family and knowing no other, you have not paid attention to that which surrounded you. But, having come later to your family fireside, I have observed, I have compared this union with others and I have bowed with

re veneration before it, because it realized the ideal of duty and happiness upon the earth.

“Your father loved your mother, Sophie, and if I talk to you of this, I who am only a stranger to you and to them, it is because the sanctity of their tenderness made it an ideal admirable to contemplate. Do you know in what the grandeur of that affection consisted? You mentioned it a little while ago. Two similar wills tending toward the same goal. But those wills were similar, mark that. The same spirit of sacrifice animated those two souls, resigned in advance to the renunciation of all that was not beautiful, good and useful. Those two beings had the same tastes, the same education; they shared the equal sympathy of those who surrounded them. When one saw them, the nobility of their attitude was only the reflection of the nobility of their souls; they had no need to consult in order to understand each other—a glance was sufficient for them; often even that glance was useless; they did the same thing at the same moment, because their minds were so much alike that they thought the same thing at the same time!”

The young man, overcome by emotion, paused. Sophie had listened to him thoughtfully. No; she had never noticed that which he now told her of in that simple and grand fashion; but her remembrances said to Nadia's daughter that what he had seen was true, and that her father and mother had lived together exactly in that way.

“Your father,” resumed he, “was your mother's equal in taste, education and moral status. That was the basis of their deep and lasting affection. Never, either alone or before the world, did they have to blush the one for the other, or to hide from each other a single thought. Your mother had exacted the sacrifice of Doctor Korzof's fortune, but she brought her own patrimony as an offer-

ing, and if you are, in spite of all, rich heirs, it is because your wise and prudent grandfather provided for the future and did not permit the children that might be expected to be despoiled in advance. The most perfect equality was found in your father and mother's union, that met with nothing but approbation. Hence it was always like an aureole that hovered over the wedded pair."

"It would be necessary, then," said Sophie, "that my future husband should be as rich as I am, would it? I would re-establish the equality, I imagine, by making myself as poor as he."

"Fortune is nothing in comparison with tastes and habits," replied Volodia, quickly. "Could you pass your life beside a man who did not keep his finger-nails in proper order?"

Sophie was deeply hurt. Stepline's nails were far from being irreproachable, and she had noticed it; but, with the confidence of her age, she thought that she had only to say a word to him and he would correct that negligence. She cast at Volodia an irritated glance to which he did not see fit to pay attention.

"But there is yet another thing, Sophie," continued he, in a sad and grave tone. "You openly assert that you do not love this man, and still you wish to marry him. You believe yourself far above other young girls, who seek in marriage the sanctification of their love. Take care, Sophie; it is strange language in the mouth of a man as young as I am, but I am old through suffering, if not through years; you cruelly blame the young girls who wed rich men because they are rich; you say that they sell themselves for a fortune and a name; but you, who would marry without love, for the realization of a chimerical fancy, are you not selling yourself for ambition?"

"I!" cried Sophie, rising from her chair in irritation, "when I put myself above all the meannesses of society!"

"Precisely—to be above others," continued Volodia, impressively. "Marriage, as I understand it, Sophie, is not that; it is the ceaseless and sacred joy of living with the being one prefers, without anything having the right to effect a separation; it is the happiness of bringing up children that resemble you to respect and love their parents; it is the perpetual and ever new communion of thoughts and feelings. I shall not marry, Sophie," added he, in a voice suddenly broken, "but I had dreamed for you the happiness that is not destined for me, I should have been happy—yes, happy—to see you the honored wife of a good and honorable man. The future you are preparing for yourself tortures me, and I lack the courage to be a witness of the sacrifice."

"You are thinking of going away?" said Sophie, troubled; "where will you go?"

"I have not yet chosen the city, but I shall leave St. Petersburg with the eternal regret of seeing unhappy the companion of my youth, my friend, almost my sister."

He ceased and Sophie maintained silence. Something that he had not said seemed to vibrate in the young girl's ears. She strove to recover it in her memory, and could seize there only the echo of the words really uttered. She glanced up at him: he was not looking at her. With eyes lost in space, he seemed to be following some floating and far-away image.

"I thank you," said she, striving to steady her trembling voice. "I do justice to the feeling of friendship that inspired your words."

"But you are not convinced?" said he, sadly.

She lowered her head. Convinced, no; shaken, yes.

But her self-love, more powerful even than the voice of reason, prevented her from avowing it.

"Adieu, Sophie," said he, extending his hand.

She gave him hers hesitatingly.

"You are not going away immediately?" said she.

"No; but whether I stay or go, it is a real adieu I say to you here. I have lost a friend, but you still have a brother in me—do not forget it, Sophie."

He quitted the apartment so quickly that she had not the time to say another word to him. She stood motionless for a moment; then she returned to her chamber, where she wept without restraint. Why? She did not know.

An hour afterwards her mother sent for her and had a long interview with her; as Martha had foreseen, Madame Korzof's authority encountered an insurmountable obstacle in the young girl's obstinacy. Volodia's words had moved her: perhaps, with time, under the influence of gentleness and argument, they might have produced some good result; as it was, their effect was destroyed by Nadia's remonstrances.

"I will never give my consent to this marriage," she ended by saying, seeing that her arguments had proved useless.

"As you please, mamma," answered Sophie; "for my part, I will never marry a rich man; but, really, I do not care much about getting married at all."

When these bitter words were spoken, Nadia quitted her daughter; she was grieved to the depths of her soul, and loaded herself with reproaches that in reality she scarcely merited. During the days that followed the subject of the marriage was carefully shunned by the entire family; but they thought of nothing else, if they did not speak about it.

Pierre had seen Stepline and told him what had taken

place, not without heaping reproaches upon him that Nicholas accepted with a sullen air. He did not entrench himself behind the stereotyped excuse of a sudden and violent passion for her whom he wished to wed; such subterfuges were beneath the "ideas" of this new kind of philanthropists. Love, indeed! What idle tales all such grand feelings were! The sole matter at issue was to co-operate in the work of the moral liberation of the people by the people!

Pierre Korzof did not understand life altogether in this way; the example and the principles of his parents had saved him from this glorious contempt for the noblest feelings of human nature. Therefore he experienced a most profound disillusion on hearing the answers his comrade made to the objections with which he overwhelmed him. What! not a spark of feeling—nothing but cold reasoning?

"But, after all," said Pierre to Stepline, suddenly, "you do not understand what vexes me, do you? It is that you have the air of seeking to wed my sister solely for her fortune!"

"Not in the least," coldly replied Nicholas; "she is very intelligent and will be exceedingly useful to us."

Pierre's heart froze. His dear and charming sister wedded with a design of utility! His soul of twenty years could not accept this fashion of looking at life. He mentally cast his eyes around him and saw that Stepline was not the only one who harbored such thoughts.

Deceived by a false self-denial, by a mendacious appearance of grandeur, a whole class of young men thought and acted in the same way in that circle that should have been intelligent but had become almost silly by dint of absurdity. Pierre perceived that what he had taken for inoffensive jests, addressed to his enthusiasm and exuberance, was in reality a sharp criticism. In this

society of formidable stoics, who had raised indifference to the height of a virtue, he found himself mistaken and unhappy. He gradually withdrew from it and sought to become reconciled with Volodia.

The latter gave him a kindly welcome, but he had grown so sad and grave that Pierre thought his bearing a covert reproach. In reality, Volodia had no such thought; but one does not make the sacrifice of the joys of his life without a shadow falling upon him. Thus everybody was unhappy in that mansion, where everything had seemed to offer guarantees of happiness to all.

Stepline, though banished, did not renounce his projects. Sophie, on the contrary, bore the indefinite adjournment of her plans with a resigned patience that did not cause her the slightest suffering. She would even have renounced them without much trouble if she had not deemed that yielding to the maternal law. Too good and too pure to think for an instant of corresponding with the man she was not allowed to marry, her greatest regret was at being unable to serve the "idea" for which she had formerly been inflamed with such ardent zeal.

She continued her daily promenades with Martha, and from time to time met Nicholas Stepline, who on such occasions addressed to her a significant salutation. She answered it with a slight nod of the head, for she felt ill at ease and, to tell the truth, dreaded these meetings, after which she was always dissatisfied with herself.

One day, while she was making purchases with Martha on the Gostinoï Dvor, the latter, having something to attend to in a very much crowded perfumery store, left her in the street and made her way into the midst of the concourse.

It was the last week of Lent: people were thronging to purchase articles for Easter gifts, and both inside and

outside of the stores there was great difficulty in moving about.

The traveling street merchants deafened the buyers with the praise and the prices of their wares; the orange venders displayed their flat baskets packed with golden fruit; the Greeks weighed, with a smile as agreeable as their dainties, the various pastes from Constantinople; cheap toys rolled from the sidewalks into the middle of the thoroughfares; everywhere reigned a joyous clamor, amid which could be distinguished the shouts of the isvochtchiks, quarreling as to which should have the customers.

Pensive, astonished by this tumult that occurs but once a year, at this consecrated epoch that precedes the meditations of the holy week, Sophie was gazing with an inattentive eye at the displays in the windows of the jewelers' stores, when she felt some one touch her on the arm. She raised her eyes; Stepline was before her.

"Well?" said he, roughly.

"What?" responded she, with a sort of revolt against this blunt way of addressing her.

"So they will not permit you? And do you submit?" said Nicholas.

"My mother has refused me her consent," answered she, without emotion.

She looked at him, and suddenly saw that he was ugly, vulgar and mean.

"And you cannot act without it?" said he, in a discontented tone.

"No," replied she. "She is my mother; I love her and do not wish to afflict her."

"Can she disinherit you?" demanded he with a sudden haste and as if frightened. "I thought the Prince, your grandfather, bequeathed his fortune direct to you."

"And so he did," said she, altogether surprised at what she felt within herself.

Stepline uttered a deep sigh of relief.

"Well, then, what are you waiting for?" said he, with a smile that Sophie found disgusting. "I have followed you long enough without finding a favorable occasion to speak to you. Let us go together."

"How?" exclaimed Sophie, drawing back so suddenly that she came in collision with a passer-by.

"Let us go together! We can be married after Easter. We shall never again have such a chance. Come!"

He had laid his thick red hand on the young girl's arm; she trembled with horror.

"Martha!" cried she, instinctively drawing near to the store into which her companion had gone.

"Don't be stupid!" muttered Stepline, without releasing her; "you are attracting attention."

The thought that, in fact, she was protected by the dense crowd surrounding her restored to Sophie the self-possession she had for an instant lost; she turned away without haste and placed her hand that was free upon the knob of the glazed door, that opened softly; with her eyes fixed upon those of Stepline, whom she enveloped with a crushing look, she entered the store, walking backwards, and, overcome by the penetrating odor of the perfumery, vanquished by the emotion she had just experienced, staggered. Martha caught her in her arms.

"What is the matter?" said she, terrified.

"Let us return home, quick! quick!" said Sophie, recovering her senses.

They sent for their carriage, that made its way, not without trouble, in front of the store. Escorted by one of the clerks, they entered it.

In vain did Sophie glance around her—Stepline had vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM SORROW TO BLISS.

ON returning to the hospital Sophie's first act was to hasten to her mother. The latter, a trifle indisposed, had remained in her chamber and was dozing in her reclining-chair when her daughter entered. Sophie approached very softly and stood motionless beside the beloved sleeper.

Nadia's fair features had been gradually transformed in the struggle of years; her smiling countenance had grown serious; a great wrinkle hollowed out by grief now ran from her eyes to her mouth, and down it many tears had flowed; her brown hair, still heavy and magnificent, was almost half-marbled with silver threads. She was no longer Nadia Roubine; she was Madame Korzof, the widow, exhausted by life and, perhaps, also of late by the chagrin of having to suffer through her children.

Sophie, as she gazed at her, felt a thousand emotions pass through her soul. She called to mind her mother in the time of her youth and joy, when, yet a young wife, she played with her son and daughter in the alleys of Spask, when she took them to those children's balls, frequent in Russia, at which the mothers enjoy pleasures so fresh and delicate in seeing develop under their eyes the infantile graces of their dear little ones. Nadia was quite another being in those days.

A more recent souvenir came to her memory: a little while before the fatal epidemic appeared in St. Petersburg Monsieur and Madame Korzof went to a grand reception

at the residence of a high personage; Sophie again saw before her the radiant apparition of her mother, clad in a sumptuous dress of white silk with magnificent folds, decked with all her diamonds, that sparkled on her neck and in her hair, the rich and dark hue of the latter being in nowise impaired at that period.

Scarcely three years had elapsed since then, and yet it was another woman who was sleeping beneath Sophie's eyes. Grief had done its work, and Nadia would bear forever the indelible mark of suffering, more pitiless still than that of a red-hot iron.

The young girl, filled with a profound respect, with an unspeakable regret, sank on her knees beside the reclining-chair, her head between her hands, saying almost in a whisper:

“Oh! my mother!”

Nadia made a slight movement and opened her eyes; her daughter's tearful glance met hers.

“You here!” exclaimed she, raising herself upon her elbow.

“I was watching you sleep. Oh! mamma, I have been foolish and very much to blame. I have given you pain. If you could only look within my heart and see how much I regret it!”

Nadia was alarmed. What could have happened that her daughter was thus tamed and submissive? No misfortune, at least? Sophie replied, not to her words, but to the interrogation contained in her look:

“Nothing has happened, mamma; only on the Gostinoï Dvor, while I was waiting for Martha, who was making a purchase, that—that man approached me.”

Nadia sat erect in the reclining-chair and leaned toward her daughter to get a better view of her.

“He asked me if I was the direct heir of my grandfather; naturally, I answered yes; then—”

“What then?” asked Nadia, breathlessly.

“Then he told me to come with him and placed his hand upon my arm. Oh! mamma!” exclaimed the young girl, with a cry of horror, “I know not what took place within me; I felt such disgust, such humiliation, that I thought I would sink to the pavement; I entered the store where I found Martha.”

“Is that all?” demanded Nadia, who was holding both her daughter’s hands.

“It is all. No, mamma, I could never tell you what I felt—what shame, what a disillusion!—and my aim was so lofty, too! Is it possible that there are men who wish to marry women merely for their wealth? And, besides, to propose to me to come with him! Did he really think I could do it? Are there women who go away like that with men they do not know, who leave their families and their mothers?”

“All that exists, my child,” said Nadia, sadly; “it exists even in the circle of society in which we live; but in that circle a varnish of politeness and decorum covers the vices and the errors. Of course, you think this an evil, but I tell you it is an advantage. A man of our circle, no matter how sordid, would have approached you cautiously; he would have been prudent in his questions, would have seemed delicate in his manner of speaking to you, and never would he have inflicted the insult upon you that you feel so keenly. Society is full of men seeking for marriage-portions, and half the matches are thus made; but when one loves, only a partial evil is done, because one pardons everything in the man one loves. Do you remember that what I blamed you for was wishing to marry this man without loving him in consequence of your false notion of duty?”

Sophie nodded her head affirmatively.

“My daughter,” continued Madame Korzof, “duty is

the most sacred thing in the world; no one has made more sacrifices to it than I."

She paused; gazing straight before her, she, doubtless, saw floating the image of Dmitri, whom she had sacrificed in advance to the great duty toward humanity. She resumed almost immediately:

"I have given all to duty: my position, my fortune, my husband and even my daughter's love; for I assure you, Sophie, that I would never have bent either before your prayers or before your coldness. With torn heart, I would have resisted always."

Sophie piously kissed her mother's hand.

"And now I will tell you my secret thoughts," continued Madame Korzof. "I have not dreamed of an aristocratic marriage for you: that would not harmonize with the principles of my whole life; but I would like to see you happy, loved, appreciated by a man worthy of you. Look around you, my daughter; I will never impose any one upon your preference; but if you look attentively among the intelligent, honest and well-bred people who surround us, you will certainly find the man who is destined for you. I do not desire that he be rich, Sophie; I prefer that he be poor; but I would like him to possess love for work and respect for honor."

She ceased. Sophie expected a name, but she did not speak it. Taking in her arms the beloved daughter who was restored to her, she covered her with caresses that the latter received with a mixture of gratitude, affection and regret.

For some months the feeling of regret for the trouble she had caused her mother had mingled with her existence and clouded her youthful gayety. From that day Sophie was another person. She had received the first great lesson from fate, and that lesson one never forgets.

Martha had asked no questions and Sophie had confided nothing to her; it seemed impossible for her to utter Stepline's name thenceforward. There are things that afflict you, and yet, however painful may be the remembrance of them, you can go back to them in thought; but there are others that humiliate you, and those you cannot think about without keen suffering even worse than grief.

But Madame Korzof had informed her young friend of what had taken place; full of pity for Sophie, almost grateful to Stepline for having shown himself so seasonably in his true light, Martha had again become as joyous as in the past. It was she who enlivened with her quiet mirth the family repasts over which restraint had so long presided, and all the members of the household thought well of her in their hearts for her smiling goodness.

Volodia no longer spoke of going away; had he talked with Martha?—had she revealed to him the secret of the change in Sophie? This was a secret between the brother and sister. But, while showing the greatest prudence in regard to the young girl, whose jealous pride he was afraid of wounding, he had resumed toward her the attitude of affectionate confidence that had for such a length of time constituted the joy of their existence. Nevertheless, he said but little to her and avoided being alone in her company.

The days had perceptibly lengthened; already they had ceased to dine by the light of lamps, and, though April was, as is always the case in Russia, the month of sharp gales and whirlwinds of dust, a certain delight made itself felt in those long days of sunshine and blue sky.

On one occasion, about six o'clock in the evening, Pierre was coming up the Perspective Nevsky; he was returning

to the hospital, after a day of toil at the library, followed by a little loitering in the streets, and was walking with an elastic step, for he felt light-hearted. Suddenly, raising his head, he saw before him, at some distance, the somewhat massive silhouette of Nicholas Stepline. Pierre would have preferred to avoid him; but his comrade was waiting for him in a fashion so evident that to draw back seemed impossible. He, therefore, advanced a few steps. Stepline did not stir. When they were beside each other they bowed without shaking hands. Pierre was embarrassed, while Nicholas was perfectly at ease. But few people were passing at that hour.

"How are you?" said the honest Korzof, not knowing what attitude to assume. In the depths of his soul, he despised his former friend, but his good breeding imposed upon him the duty of concealing his contempt.

"I am very well," answered Nicholas, with an exceedingly calm air. "Really, you aristocrats are people of your word!"

Pierre felt like a willing horse struck by a whip.

"And you plebeians," said he, controlling himself, "have a singular manner of comprehending honor!"

"I have nothing to reproach myself with; your sister promised—"

"I forbid you to utter my sister's name!" cried Pierre, in a terrible fury. "My sister is a good and pure girl; you are a scoundrel with a sordid and vile soul; you have no manly feeling for her—only the thirst for money!"

"False brother," said Stepline between his teeth, "false brother who betrays his beliefs!"

Pierre measured the man before him with a look and suddenly grew calm.

"I betray nothing," said he with disdain. "You wished to initiate me in I know not what principles, that you are not even in a condition to understand. There are men

who believe in them, who risk their lives for them ; false or true, they sacrifice themselves for their ideas; but you are not of that kind. You abused my friendship to gain an introduction to our house, to turn the head—not the heart, God be praised!—of a poor girl, whose generous thoughts made themselves your accomplices. You are a scoundrel! If we had been poor, you would have had no friendship for us. It is you who are a false brother, and I disown you!”

“Very well,” said Stepline, turning on his heel.

Pierre caught him by the sleeve of his paletot and stopped him.

“Keep out of the way,” said he, “and do not present yourself upon our road: I have an old debt to pay you. Many years ago, taking advantage of the fact that I was a courteous, well-bred child, you struck me without provocation for the wicked pleasure of doing evil. I have not returned you that blow. Never cross my path, for I will settle with you at the same time for the old offense and the new!”

Stepline cast at him a look full of hate. If it had been night, in a deserted spot, perhaps Pierre would have paid dear for his imprudent outbreak, but the sun was sending its golden rays over the houses, some carriages were rolling along the street and the stores were open; a few paces away, an agent of police, with his hands behind his back, was watching two dogs playing together.

“Adieu,” said Stepline, turning his back on his former friend.

Pierre was already walking rapidly toward the hospital. On the threshold he met Volodia, who also had returned.

“I have just told Stepline what I think of him,” said young Korzof, his eyes still flashing with his recent anger.

"Ah!" exclaimed Volodia, whose cheeks flushed, "that was right. No quarrel, I hope?"

"No; I simply told him the truth. Ah! my dear friend, I feel better! A weight is removed from my heart that has long been pressing upon it."

Together they quietly passed through the vast gate that received all the sick; they entered the building erected by Nadia and Dmitri amid the generous outbursts of their youthful years, and suddenly Pierre was seized with veneration.

"It was my father who built this," said he to Volodia, speaking in a low voice as if in a church.

"Yes, it was your father, and this is only the visible proof of his work; but his work is otherwise grand and durable. These stones will crumble away some day, my friend, for everything goes to ruin beneath the hand of Time. The imperishable work is the good we do, the suffering people cured, the hearts consoled, the light of duty and of sacrifice profusely spread in souls. That is what outlives our bodies, what survives centuries. Though the name of your parents may have been long forgotten, Pierre, the immortal seed of gratitude and love planted in the minds that felt their influence will, nevertheless, bear glorious fruit forever. I also am the son of their thoughts; I owe them all that is good and lofty in my soul, and the burden of my gratitude is sweet for me to carry."

The light of evening flooded the porch where they stood. Behind them, the vast stairway had a somber look.

"See, Pierre," resumed the young man, as he crossed the threshold; "this picture represents life: on one side everything is dark, if we compare it with the light of happiness that blinds us; when we have dreamed or believed we have attained some joy, when the enthu-

siasm of virtue has illuminated us with its flame and we afterward turn back toward ordinary existence, we feel frozen and gloomy, for life is made up of struggles and cares. But little by little our eyes grow accustomed to the darkness and we perceive that we can see plainly in it; the same light penetrates everywhere; only, instead of entering some places like a ray that illuminates and warms, it penetrates there as if sifted and measured. Alas! we cannot always live in the broad sunlight! Happy the souls contented with that calm light in which one can work and fulfill one's duty! And is not the fulfillment of one's duty the aim and the means of existence?"

They had slowly ascended the stairway and paused in front of a wide glazed partition, situated toward the north, that filled the vast enclosure with an equal and peaceful light. Pierre stretched out to Volodia his arms full of strength and life.

"My brother!" said he, embracing him.

Above them, on the upper landing, appeared the elegant form of Sophie. The low hum of voices had notified her of their presence and, surprised to hear them talk for so long without seeing them, she had come to meet them. Slightly bent forward, she looked at them with a strange emotion.

When Pierre stretched out his arms to his friend, she felt her heart leap in her breast, as if she wished to share that effusion of tenderness. Volodia's words had penetrated to the depths of her soul; yes, this young man had been their brother, their elder brother, he who advises, sustains and sometimes reprimands. How often, while she had rebelled against the blame, though so justly measured, cast upon her by this young censor, had she not felt within herself that he was right and that the most disinterested wisdom alone dictated his words!

"You were listening?" said Pierre, going to his sister.

"Yes," replied she, while her glance rested upon Volodia, who had turned away.

"You heard what he said?"

"Yes."

Pierre looked at Sophie and grasped her hand. His soul still too full of the emotion he had just experienced, he could not express himself in words.

When they entered the dining-room Nadia received them with this mild reproach:

"How late you are, my children!"

"We have not lost our time, mother," answered Pierre, kissing her hand.

A divine and calm joy seemed to float over them; since the death of Doctor Korzof never had all the members of the family felt themselves so closely united. For the first time, Nadia, as she gazed at those four heads grouped beneath her protection, comprehended that, despite her mourning, she could yet be happy.

The days passed calmly and quietly under the salutary influence of this recovered peace. By her affection and her submission Sophie endeavored to prove to her mother how far removed she was from her former errors, and she succeeded without trouble, for Madame Korzof thenceforward read her daughter's soul as if it had been an open book. Volodia had made no further allusions to his departure, and no one had again mentioned it to him. Martha herself feared to broach the subject, although she often saw her brother silent and thoughtful.

Early in the winter, however, he suddenly announced his intention to spend a year abroad. This occurred one evening. Sophie had just quitted the piano that was still vibrating, and Nadia, seated in the shadow in order to spare her eyes that had wept so much, was resting and thinking of the fatigues of the day.

"You wish to depart?" said she, suddenly brought back to reality.

"Yes; I have been too happy here; you have spared me the pains and the struggles of life," responded he, raising to his lips the hand of his benefactress. "I know neither solitude nor that furious battle with toil one is compelled to fight body to body that he may come off victorious. I shall be really a man only when I have partaken of that bread!"

"I cannot blame you," said Nadia, slowly, as she placed her hand upon the yet bowed head of the young man as if she wished to bless him; "you are certainly right; but you will leave a great void among us. I had thought that you would be here always. However, it is a consolation to think that you will return. Never forget, Volodia, that your place is here, beside my son, beside me."

Madame Korzof's glance wandered around the salon. Martha said nothing. Notified by her brother during the day, she had had time to let the first flood of her sorrow overflow. Sophie, who had seated herself, and was reading a book, did not seem to have heard.

"You will return, I hope," repeated Nadia, "never again to leave us."

Pierre began to build castles in the air. He would await his friend's return to introduce a system of aeration invented by him, and superior, he said, to anything of the kind yet seen. The salon was speedily full of intermingled questions and answers.

When they had separated for the night Volodia entered his sister's chamber.

"Madame Korzof has just told me," said Martha, "that you will find a credit in your name at Rothschild's in Paris, London and Frankfort, so that you can complete your studies without the least material care."

"That is exactly like her!" said Volodia, with profound gratitude. "She is always the same; but, Martha, I don't wish to make use of her money. I have saved a little by teaching—"

"So have I," interrupted his kind sister; "wait a moment and I will tell you the exact sum. For five years I have been putting money aside for this day."

She showed him with pride the treasure she had amassed at the cost of hours of lessons, so often tedious and always fatiguing.

"I accept, my beloved sister, my other mother," responded Volodia, his eyes full of tears. "You have made me what I am, by your vigilance first, by your affection afterward."

"It was I, since you will have it so, and then our protectors," said Martha, modestly.

"Ah! certainly," sighed the young man; "but if Madame Korzof had not admired your courage and your patience when you were playing the piano for the youthful dancers, in order to be able to pay my expenses, I do not see clearly what would have become of us. Let me say and think, my dear sister, that I owe to your virtues the career that has opened before me."

Martha was strongly tempted to say something further, but, after mature reflection, she decided not to do so.

Volodia's departure was not long delayed; a few days afterward he quitted the hospital where until that time his life had been concentrated. Sophie said adieu to him like the rest, with the same affectionate solicitude, and he went away with a heavy heart, like a person who leaves behind him all he holds most dear.

The year of absence was prolonged to eighteen months. When he returned, Volodia was no longer the slight young man who had left his friends so sadly; during his absence he had learned the value of life, that of time, and

a thousand other things that one acquires only at his own expense. He brought back with him the materials for a book, in which he hoped to lay the foundation of a new system of experiments. He was a man now, a man capable of filling an important rôle in life.

He found Madame Korzof the same as when he left her; she was continuing a round of duties in which she had at last found joys.

Her beloved husband was never far from her thoughts; at all hours of the day they saw her stop as if she were listening to or gazing at an invisible being whom she alone distinguished.

"Mamma is talking with my father," Sophie was accustomed to say on such occasions in a low tone, as she placed a finger upon her lips. And such was the case. She interrogated in her perplexities the man who had for so long possessed the secret of all her thoughts, and he answered her, for never had they differed in opinion upon questions of duty and right; she had only to seek within herself to find there her husband's reply.

Pierre had become an earnest young man, though he had need in his turn of that discipline indispensable to a retired life; he had not been willing to leave the hospital before Volodia's return, fearing that, in his absence, the young men there employed would take too many liberties.

"It is my turn now!" cried he, joyously, when the first fire of questions and answers had somewhat slackened. "I also am going to take wing, and you will see if I do not bring you back ideas, plenty of ideas!"

"Ah!" said Volodia, "what about your system of aeration?"

"I waited for you a year and a day, my dear friend, as they do for things that are lost, and then I tried it alone."

"And it succeeded?"

"Not the least in the world. It is worth nothing whatever!"

He laughed so heartily that everybody joined in the chorus.

The next day, when Volodia entered the dining-room for the morning tea, he found Sophie alone before the waiter. The previous day they had exchanged only a few affectionate words, and he felt the strange impression that, although he had talked with her, he had not seen her. She greeted him with a smile and he seated himself beside her.

While she was preparing his cup of tea for him he looked at her attentively. She was, perhaps, less pretty than she had been some time before in the flower of her sixteenth year; but how much gentle gravity her countenance had acquired! She also had had her share of trouble and sorrow; she had emerged from the struggle with herself triumphant and calmed, like those who know the price of the joys of duty.

"Well," said she, "so you have come back at last! I hope you will never leave us again!"

She handed him the cup and the silver spoon made a slight clatter. He took the cup and placed it in front of him.

"I have debated that question with myself a great deal," said he, gravely; "during Pierre's absence I cannot, of course, think of abandoning the hospital; but when he returns—"

He came to a sudden stop. Sophie's face was covered with blushes. He looked at her and felt that he had believed himself stronger than he really was. He had been able to live far away from her, with the hope of seeing her again; but if it were necessary to exile himself now, how could he do it! What, therefore, had been the use of his sacrifice? He found himself again at

exactly the same point where he had been eighteen months ago! She spoke, and her unsteady voice had about it something particularly touching.

"Absences have a good effect," said she: "they make us appreciate the absent. Do you not think so?"

Volodia nodded his head affirmatively.

"For instance," continued she, "when you were with us, I saw in you only the severe mentor; when you were gone, I cannot tell you how much I missed the friend."

She paused. He waited for her to continue; after a slight effort she resumed:

"I have treated you very badly for long years; it was during your absence that I made the discovery; I awaited your return with impatience to—"

She paused once again.

"To do what?" said Volodia, with an encouraging smile.

"To ask you to forgive me," said she, holding down her head.

"I never had anything against you," said he, gravely, "and your words of to-day fill me with a profound joy. You are now what you ought to be—a daughter worthy of her parents."

"Oh! no!" said the young girl. "I know how much I differ from my mother. Do you remember when I misunderstood her?"

"Yes, I remember," answered Volodia.

Sophie blushed. She could not think of the error of her life without a feeling of shame, stronger in the presence of this young man than of any other. He noticed this, and, with his usual delicacy, came to her aid.

"You were only a child then," said he; "you had the unreasonable tenacity of childhood. All that is very far off now; the future is full of joys for you."

"The greatest joy," said Sophie, without looking at him, "is the esteem of those one loves."

"You have it," answered Volodia, turning away his eyes.

Sophie bent over the waiter as if she had suddenly grown near-sighted.

At that moment Pierre entered, and the conversation took a different turn.

Two weeks later, just as Nadia's son was in the act of locking his trunk for his departure that had been fixed on for the next day, Volodia, very pale and visibly disturbed, entered his chamber.

"What ails you?" demanded young Korzof, with a calmness that astonished himself.

"I—I had not sufficiently reflected when I promised you to remain here during your absence," said the youthful physician. "I want you to release me from my promise. I do not wish to quit the service of the hospital, as, of course, you understand; I desire merely to reside elsewhere. In your absence, alone beneath this roof with your mother and your sister—"

"Ah!" said Pierre, still exceedingly calm: "you didn't think of that until to-day?"

Volodia grew more and more disturbed.

"I did think of it before," said he, "but I failed to recognize the urgency that—"

"Very well; you take us a little by surprise, but I think I can arrange matters. Lock my trunk while I go and see about it; here is the key."

He quitted the chamber, leaving his friend to struggle as best he might against a refractory lid; in a few instants he returned, as calm as ever.

"Go into the dining-room," said he. "I have told my mother; you will find her there."

It was not Nadia Volodia saw on opening the door; it

was Sophie who was waiting for him, standing at the window. He was about to retire, all in confusion, when the young girl called to him.

“Come here, Volodia,” said she. “You want to leave us?”

He looked at her with eyes full of sadness and reproach, then turned away.

“I cannot do otherwise,” said he.

“Suppose I were to ask you to remain?” said she, timidly.

He gave her a hesitating look and met Sophie’s glance, full of maidenly tenderness.

“I have made you suffer greatly through my defects,” continued she, blushing; “it is only just to offer you a compensation. Remain here, but remain as the master!”

Nadia appeared upon the threshold. She glanced at the young people and her heart felt a deep joy, long desired, long awaited.

“At last!” said she. “Many years ago, Volodia, I chose you as my daughter’s husband!”

Pierre’s departure was delayed, for he wished to be present at his sister’s marriage. At length, one fine winter day, he set out joyously, leaving with his mother the youthful couple wedded the day before. Martha remained with Nadia to draw her attention somewhat from her relative solitude during the honeymoon.

“I was born to be an aunt,” said she. “I have said so all my life. Providence knows it too well not to grant me nieces and nephews.”

The hospital restored to their families that year two hundred cured patients, who bless the name of Korzof.

THE END.

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
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
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
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
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
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