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CHAPTER XII. THE PERFORMANCE.

On the evening of the third day of the holidays took place our first theatrical performance. There had been much trouble about organising it. But those who were to act had taken everything upon themselves, and the other convicts knew nothing about the representation except that it was to take place. We did not even know what was to be played. The actors, while they were at work, were always thinking how they could get together the greatest number of costumes. Whenever I met Baklouchin he snapped his fingers with satisfaction, but told me nothing. I think the Major was in a good humour; but we did not know for certain whether he knew what was going on or not, whether he had authorised it, or whether he had determined to shut his eyes and be silent, after assuring himself that everything would take place quietly. He had heard, I fancy, of the meditated representation, and said nothing about it, lest he should spoil everything. The soldiers would be disorderly, or would get drunk, unless they had something to divert them. Thus I think the Major must have reasoned, for it will be only natural to do so. I may add that if the convicts had not got up a performance during the[Pg 172] holidays, or done something of the kind, the administration would have been obliged to organise some sort of amusement; but as our Major was distinguished by ideas directly opposed to those of other people, I take a great responsibility on myself in saying that he knew of our project and authorised it. A man like him must always be crushing and stifling some one, taking something away, depriving some one of a right—in a word, for establishing order of this character he was known throughout the town.

It mattered nothing to him that his exactions made the men rebellious. For such offences there were suitable punishments (there are some people who reason in this way), and with these rascals of convicts there was nothing to do but to treat them very severely, deal with them strictly according to law. These incapable executants of the law did not in the least understand that to apply the law without understanding its spirit is to provoke resistance. They are quite astonished that, in addition to the execution of the law, good sense and a sound head should be expected from them. The last condition would appear to them quite superfluous; to require such a thing is vexatious, intolerant.

However this may be, the Sergeant-Major made no objection to the performance, and that was all the convicts wanted. I may say in all truth that if throughout the holidays there were no disorders in the convict prison, no sanguinary quarrels, no robberies, that must be attributed to the convicts being permitted to organise their performance.

I saw with my own eyes how they got out of the way of those of their companions who had drunk too much, and how they prevented quarrels on the ground that the representation would be forbidden. The non-commissioned officer made the prisoners give their word of honour that they would behave well, and that all would go off quietly. They gave it with pleasure, and kept their promise religiously. They were much flattered at finding their word of honour accepted. Let me add that the representation cost nothing, absolutely nothing, to the[Pg 173] authorities, who were not called upon to spend a farthing. The theatre could be put up and taken down within a quarter of an hour; and, in case an order stopping the performance suddenly arrived, the scenery could have been put away in a second. The costumes were concealed in the convicts' boxes; but first of all let me say how our theatre was constructed, what were the costumes, and what the bill, that is to say, the pieces that were to be played. To tell the truth, there was no written playbill, not, at least, for the first representation. It was ready only for the second and third. Baklouchin composed it for the officers and other distinguished visitors who might deign to honour the performance with their presence, including the officer of the guard, the officer of the watch, and an Engineer officer. It was in honour of these that the playbill was written out.

It was supposed that the reputation of our theatre would extend to the fortress, and even to the town, especially as there was no theatre at N——: a few amateur performances, but nothing more. The convicts delighted in the smallest success, and boasted of it like children.

"Who knows?" they said to one another; "when our chiefs hear of it they will perhaps come and see. Then they will know what convicts are worth, for this is not a performance given by soldiers, but a genuine piece played by genuine actors; nothing like it could be seen anywhere in the town. General Abrosimoff had a representation at his house, and it is said he will have another. Well, they may beat us in the matter of costumes, but as for the dialogue that is a very different thing. The Governor himself will perhaps hear of it, and—who knows?—he may come himself."

They had no theatre in the town. In a word, the imagination of the convicts, above all after their first success, went so far as to make them think that rewards would be distributed to them, and that their period of hard labour would be shortened. A moment afterwards they were the first to laugh at this fancy. In a word,[Pg 174] they were children, true children, when they were forty years of age. I knew in a general way the subjects of the pieces that were to be represented, although there was no bill. The title of the first was *Philatka and Miroshka Rivals*. Baklouchin boasted to me, at least a week before the performance, that the part of Philatka, which he had assigned to

himself, would be played in such a manner that nothing like it had ever been seen, even on the St. Petersburg stage. He walked about in the barracks puffed up with boundless importance. If now and then he declaimed a speech from his part in the theatrical style, every one burst out laughing, whether the speech was amusing or not; they laughed because he had forgotten himself. It must be admitted that the convicts, as a body, were self-contained and full of dignity; the only ones who got enthusiastic at Baklouchin's tirades were the young ones, who had no false shame, or those who were much looked up to, and whose authority was so firmly established that they were not afraid to commit themselves. The others listened silently, without blaming or contradicting, but they did their best to show that the performance left them indifferent.

It was not until the very last moment, the very day of the representation, that every one manifested genuine interest in what our companions had undertaken. "What," was the general question, "would the Major say? Would the performance succeed as well as the one given two years before?" etc., etc. Baklouchin assured me that all the actors would be quite at home on the stage, and that there would even be a curtain. Sirotkin was to play a woman's part. "You will see how well I look in women's clothes," he said. The Lady Bountiful was to have a dress with skirts and trimmings, besides a parasol; while her husband, the Lord of the Manor, was to wear an officer's uniform, with epaulettes, and a cane in his hand.

The second piece that was to be played was entitled, *Kedril, the Glutton*. The title puzzled me much, but[Pg 175] it was useless to ask any questions about it. I could only learn that the piece was not printed; it was a manuscript copy obtained from a retired non-commissioned officer in the town, who had doubtless formerly participated in its representation on some military stage. We have, indeed, in the distant towns and governments, a number of pieces of this kind, which, I believe, are perfectly unknown and have never been printed, but which appear to have grown up of themselves, in connection with the popular theatre, in certain zones of Russia. I have spoken of the popular theatre. It would be a good thing if our investigators of popular literature would take the trouble to make careful researches as to this popular theatre which exists, and which, perhaps, is not so insignificant as may be thought.

I cannot think that everything I saw on the stage of our convict prison was the work of our convicts. It must have sprung from old traditions handed down from generation to generation, and preserved among the soldiers, the workmen in industrial towns, and even the shopkeepers in some poor, out-of-the-way places. These traditions have been preserved in some villages and some Government towns by the servants of the

large landed proprietors. I even believe that copies of many old pieces have been multiplied by these servants of the nobility.

The old Muscovite proprietors and nobles had their own theatres, in which their servants used to play. Thence comes our popular theatre, the originals of which are beyond discussion. As for *Kedril, the Glutton*, in spite of my lively curiosity, I could learn nothing about it, except that demons appeared on the stage and carried Kedril away to hell. What did the name of Kedril signify? Why was he called Kedril and not Cyril? Was the name Russian or foreign? I could not resolve this question.

It was announced that the representation would terminate with a musical pantomime. All this promised[Pg 176] to be very curious. The actors were fifteen in number, all vivacious men. They were very energetic, got up a number of rehearsals which sometimes took place behind the barracks, kept away from the others, and gave themselves mysterious airs. They evidently wished to surprise us with something extraordinary and unexpected.

On work days the barracks were shut very early as night approached, but an exception was made during the Christmas holidays, when the padlocks were not put to the gates until the evening retreat—nine o'clock. This favour had been granted specially in view of the play. During the whole duration of the holidays a deputation was sent every evening to the officer of the guard very humbly "to permit the representation and not to shut at the usual hour." It was added that there had been previous representations, and that nothing disorderly had occurred at any of them.

The officer of the guard must have reasoned as follows: There was no disorder, no infraction of discipline at the previous performance, and the moment they give their word that to-night's performance shall take place in the same manner, they mean to be their own police—the most rigorous police of all. Moreover, he knew well that if he took it upon himself to forbid the representation, these fellows (who knows, and with convicts?) would have committed some offence which would have placed the officer of the guard in a very difficult position. One final reason insured his consent: To mount guard is horribly tiresome, and if he authorised the performance he would see the play acted, not by soldiers, but by convicts, a curious set of people. It would certainly be interesting, and he had a right to be present at it.

In case the superior officer arrived and asked for the officer of the guard, he would be told that the latter had gone to count the convicts and close the barracks; an answer which could easily be made, and which could not be disproved. That is why our superintendents authorised[Pg 177] the performance; and throughout the holidays the barracks were kept open each evening until the retreat. The convicts had known

beforehand that they would meet with no opposition from the officer of the guard. They were quite quiet about him.

Towards six o'clock Petroff came to look for me, and we went together to the theatre. Nearly all the prisoners of our barracks were there, with the exception of the "old believer" from Tchernigoff, and the Poles. The latter did not decide to be present until the last day of the representation, the 4th of January, after they had been assured that everything would be managed in a becoming manner. The haughtiness of the Poles irritated our convicts. Accordingly they were received on the 4th of January with formal politeness, and conducted to the best places. As for the Circassians and Isaiah Fomitch, the play was for them a genuine delight. Isaiah Fomitch gave three kopecks each time, except the last, when he placed ten kopecks on the plate; and how happy he looked!

The actors had decided that each spectator should give what he thought fit. The receipts were to cover the expenses, and anything beyond was to go to the actors. Petroff assured me that I should be allowed to have one of the best places, however full the theatre might be; first, because being richer than the others, there was a probability of my giving more; and, secondly, because I knew more about acting than any one else. What he had foreseen took place. But let me first describe the theatre.

The barrack of the military section, which had been turned into the theatre, was fifteen feet long. From the court-yard one entered, first an ante-chamber, and afterwards the barrack itself. The building was arranged, as I have already mentioned, in a particular manner, the beds being placed against the wall, so as to leave an open space in the middle. One half of the barrack was reserved for the spectators, while the other, which communicated with the second building, formed the[Pg 178] stage. What astonished me directly I entered, was the curtain, which was about ten feet long, and divided the barrack into two. It was indeed a marvel, for it was painted in oil, and represented trees, tunnels, ponds, and stars.

It was made of pieces of linen, old and new, given by the convicts; shirts, the bandages which our peasants wrap round their feet in lieu of socks, all sewn together well or ill, and forming together an immense sheet. Where there was not enough linen, it had been replaced by writing paper, taken sheet by sheet from the various office bureaus. Our painters (among whom we had our Bruloff) had painted it all over, and the effect was very remarkable.

This luxurious curtain delighted the convicts, even the most sombre and most morose. These, however, like the others, as soon as the play began, showed themselves mere children. They were all pleased and satisfied with a certain

satisfaction of vanity. The theatre was lighted with candle ends. Two benches, which had been brought from the kitchen, were placed before the curtain, together with three or four large chairs, borrowed from the non-commissioned officers' room. These chairs were for the officers, should they think fit to honour the performance. As for the benches, they were for the non-commissioned officers, engineers, clerks, directors of the works, and all the immediate superiors of the convicts who had not officer's rank, and who had come perhaps to take a look at the representation. In fact, there was no lack of visitors. According to the days, they came in greater or smaller numbers, while for the last representation there was not a single place unoccupied on the benches.

At the back the convicts stood crowded together; standing up out of respect to the visitors, and dressed in their vests, or in their short pelisses, in spite of the suffocating heat. As might have been expected, the place was too small; so all the prisoners stood up, heaped together—above all in the last rows. The [Pg 179]camp-bedsteads were all occupied; and there were some amateurs who disputed constantly behind the stage in the other barrack, and who viewed the performance from the back. I was asked to go forward, and Petroff with me, close to the benches, whence a good view could be obtained. They looked upon me as a good judge, a connoisseur, who had seen many other theatres. The convicts remarked that Baklouchin had often consulted me, and that he had shown deference to my advice. Consequently they thought that I ought to be treated with honour, and to have one of the best places. These men are vain and frivolous, but only on the surface. They laughed at me when I was at work, because I was a poor workman. Almazoff had a right to despise us gentlemen, and to boast of his superior skill in pounding the alabaster. His laughter and raillery were directed against our origin, for we belonged by birth to the caste of his former masters, of whom he could not preserve a good recollection; but here at the theatre these same men made way for me; for they knew that about this matter I knew more than they did. Those, even, who were not at all well disposed towards me, were glad to hear me praise the performance, and gave way to me without the least servility. I judged now by my impressions of that time. I understood that in this new view of theirs there was no lowering of themselves; rather a sentiment of their own dignity.

The most striking characteristic of our people is its conscientiousness, and its love of justice; no false vanity, no sly ambition to reach the first rank without being entitled to do so; such faults are foreign to our people. Take it from its rough shell, and you will perceive, if you study it without prejudice, attentively, and close at hand, qualities which you would never have suspected. Our sages have very little to teach our people. I will even say more; they might take lessons from it.

Petroff had told me innocently, on taking me into the theatre, that they would pass me to the front, because they expected more money from me. There were no[Pg 180] fixed prices for the places. Each one gave what he liked, and what he could. Nearly every one placed a piece of money in the plate when it was handed round. Even if they had passed me forward in the hope that I should give more than others, was there not in that a certain feeling of personal dignity?

“You are richer than I am. Go to the first row. We are all equal here, it is true; but you pay more, and the actors prefer a spectator like you. Occupy the first place then, for we are not here with money, and must arrange ourselves anyhow.”

What noble pride in this mode of action! In final analysis not love of money, but self-respect. There was little esteem for money among us. I do not remember that one of us ever lowered himself to obtain money. Some men used to make up to me, but from love of cunning and of fun rather than in the hope of obtaining any benefit. I do not know whether I explain myself clearly. I am, in any case, forgetting the performance. Let me return to it.

Before the rise of the curtain, the room presented a strange and animated look. In the first place, the crowd pressed, crushed, jammed together on all sides, but impatient, full of expectation, every face glowing with delight. In the last ranks was the grovelling, confused mass of convicts. Many of them had brought with them logs of wood, which they placed against the wall, on which they climbed up. In this fatiguing position they paused to rest themselves by placing both hands on the shoulders of their companions, who seemed quite at ease. Others stood on their toes, with their heels against the stove, and thus remained throughout the representation, supported by those around them. Massed against the camp-bedsteads was another compact crowd; for here were some of the best places of all. Five convicts had hoisted themselves up to the top of the stove, whence they had a commanding view. These fortunate ones were extremely happy. Elsewhere swarmed the late arrivals, unable to find good places.

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Every one conducted himself in a becoming manner, without making any noise. Each one wished to show advantageously before the distinguished persons who were visiting us. Simple and natural was the expression of these red faces, damp with perspiration, as the rise of the curtain was eagerly expected. What a strange look of infinite delight, of unmixed pleasure, was painted on these scarred faces, these branded foreheads, so dark and menacing at ordinary times! They were all without

their caps, and as I looked back at them from my place, it seemed to me that their heads were entirely shaved.

Suddenly the signal is given, and the orchestra begins to play. This orchestra deserves a special mention. It consisted of eight musicians: two violins, one of which was the property of a convict, while the other had been borrowed from outside; three balalaiki, made by the convicts themselves; two guitars, and a tambourine. The violins sighed and shrieked, and the guitars were worthless, but the balalaiki were remarkably good; and the agile fingering of the artists would have done honour to the cleverest executant.

They played scarcely anything but dance tunes. At the most exciting passages they struck with their fingers on the body of their instruments. The tone, the execution of the motive, were always original and distinctive. One of the guitarists knew his instrument thoroughly. It was the gentleman who had killed his father. As for the tambourinist, he really did wonders. Now he whirled round the disk, balanced on one of his fingers; now he rubbed the parchment with his thumb, and brought from it a countless multitude of notes, now dull, now brilliant.

At last two harmonigers join the orchestra. I had no idea until then of all that could be done with these popular and vulgar instruments. I was astonished. The harmony, but, above all, the expression, the very conception of the motive, were admirably rendered. I then understood perfectly, and for the first time, the [Pg 182]remarkable boldness, the striking abandonment, which are expressed in our popular dance tunes, and our village songs.

At last the curtain rose. Every one made a movement. Those who were at the back raised themselves upon the point of their feet; some one fell down from his log. At once there were looks that enjoined silence. The performance now began.

I was seated not far from Ali, who was in the midst of the group formed by his brothers and the other Circassians. They had a passionate love of the theatre, and did not miss one of our evenings. I have remarked that all the Mohammedans, Circassians, and so on, are fond of all kinds of representations. Near them was Isaiah Fomitch, quite in a state of ecstasy. As soon as the curtain rose he was all ears and eyes; his countenance expressed an expectation of something marvellous. I should have been grieved had he been disappointed. The charming face of Ali shone with a childish joy, so pure that I was quite happy to behold it. Involuntarily, whenever a general laugh echoed an amusing remark, I turned towards him to see his countenance. He did not notice it, he had something else to do.

Near him, placed on the left, was a convict, already old, sombre, discontented, and always grumbling. He also had noticed Ali, and I saw him cast furtive glances more than once towards him, so charming was the young Circassian. The prisoners always called him Ali Simeonitch, without my knowing why.

In the first piece, *Philatka and Miroshka*, Baklouchin, in the part of Philatka, was really marvellous. He played his rôle to perfection. It could be seen that he had weighed each speech, each movement. He managed to give to each word, each gesture, a meaning which responded perfectly to the character of the personage. Apart from the conscientious study he had made of the character, he was gay, simple, natural, irresistible. If you had seen Baklouchin you would certainly have said that he was a genuine actor, an actor[Pg 183] by vocation, and of great talent. I have seen Philatka several times at the St. Petersburg and Moscow theatres, and I declare that none of our celebrated actors was equal to Baklouchin in this part. They were peasants, from no matter what country, and not true Russian moujiks. Moreover, their desire to be peasant-like was too apparent. Baklouchin was animated by emulation; for it was known that the convict Potsiakin was to play the part of Kedril in the second piece, and it was assumed—I do not know why—that the latter would show more talent than Baklouchin. The latter was as vexed by this preference as a child. How many times did he not come to me during the last days to tell me all he felt! Two hours before the representation he was attacked by fever. When the audience burst out laughing, and called out "Bravo, Baklouchin! what a fellow you are!" his figure shone with joy, and true inspiration could be read in his eyes. The scene of the kisses between Kiroshka and Philatka, in which the latter calls out to the daughter, "Wife, your mouth," and then wipes his own, was wonderfully comic. Every one burst out laughing.

What interested me was the spectators. They were all at their ease, and gave themselves up frankly to their mirth. Cries of approbation became more and more numerous. A convict nudged his companion with his elbow, and hastily communicated his impressions, without even troubling himself to know who was by his side. When a comic song began, one man might be seen agitating his arms violently, as if to engage his companions to laugh; after which he turned suddenly towards the stage. A third smacked his tongue against his palate, and could not keep quiet a moment; but as there was not room for him to change his position, he hopped first on one leg, then on the other; towards the end of the piece the general gaiety attained its climax. I exaggerate nothing. Imagine the convict prison, chains, captivity, long years of confinement, of task-work, of monotonous life, falling away drop by drop[Pg 184] like rain on an autumn day; imagine all this despair in presence of permission given to the convicts to amuse themselves, to breathe freely for an hour, to

forget their nightmare, and to organise a play—and what a play! one that excited the envy and admiration of our town.

“Fancy those convicts!” people said: everything interested them, take the costumes for instance. It seemed very strange, but then to see, Nietsvitaeff, or Baklouchin, in a different costume from the one they had worn for so many years.

He is a convict, a genuine convict, whose chains ring when he walks; and there he is, out on the stage with a frock-coat, and a round hat, and a cloak, like any ordinary civilian. He has put on hair, moustaches. He takes a red handkerchief from his pocket and shakes it, like a real nobleman. What enthusiasm is created! The “good landlord” arrives in an aide-de-camp uniform, a very old one, it is true, but with epaulettes, and a cocked hat. The effect produced was indescribable. There had been two candidates for this costume, and—will it be believed?—they had quarrelled like two little schoolboys as to which of them should play the part. Both wanted to appear in military uniform with epaulettes. The other actors separated them, and, by a majority of voices, the part was entrusted to Nietsvitaeff; not because he was more suited to it than the other, and that he bore a greater resemblance to a nobleman, but only because he had assured them all that he would have a cane, and that he would twirl it and rap it out grand, like a true nobleman—a dandy of the latest fashion—which was more than Vanka and Ospiety could do, seeing they have never known any noblemen. In fact, when Nietsvitaeff went to the stage with his wife, he did nothing but draw circles on the floor with his light bamboo cane, evidently thinking that this was the sign of the best breeding, of supreme elegance. Probably in his childhood, when he was still a barefooted child, he had been attracted by the skill of some proprietor in twirling his cane, and this[Pg 185] impression had remained in his memory, although thirty years afterwards.

Nietsvitaeff was so occupied with his process that he saw no one, he gave the replies in his dialogue without even raising his eyes. The most important thing for him was the end of his cane, and the circles he drew with it. The Lady Bountiful was also very remarkable; she came on in an old worn-out muslin dress, which looked like a rag. Her arms and neck were bare. She had a little calico cap on her head, with strings under her chin, an umbrella in one hand, and in the other a fan of coloured paper, with which she constantly fanned herself. This great lady was welcomed with a wild laugh; she herself, too, was unable to restrain herself, and burst out more than once. The part was filled by the convict Ivanoff. As for Sirotkin, in his girl’s dress, he looked exceedingly well. The couplets were all well sung. In a word, the piece was played to the satisfaction of every one; not the least hostile criticism was passed—who, indeed,

was there to criticise? The air, “Sieni moi Sieni,” was played again by way of overture, and the curtain again went up.

Kedril, the Glutton, was now to be played. Kedril is a sort of Don Juan. This comparison may justly be made, for the master and the servant are both carried away by devils at the end of the piece; and the piece, as the convicts had it, was played quite correctly; but the beginning and the end must have been lost, for it had neither head nor tail. The scene is laid in an inn somewhere in Russia. The innkeeper introduces into a room a nobleman wearing a cloak and a battered round hat; the valet, Kedril, follows his master; he carries a valise, and a fowl rolled up in blue paper; he wears a short pelisse and a footman’s cap. It is this fellow who is the glutton. The convict Potsiakin, the rival of Baklouchin, played this part, while the part of the nobleman was filled by Ivanoff, the same who played the great lady in the first piece. The innkeeper (Nietsvitaeff) warns the nobleman that the room is haunted by demons,[Pg 186] and goes away; the nobleman is interested and preoccupied; he murmurs aloud that he has known that for a long time, and orders Kedril to unpack his things and to get supper ready.

Kedril is a glutton and a coward. When he hears of devils he turns pale and trembles like a leaf; he would like to run away, but is afraid of his master; besides, he is hungry, he is voluptuous, he is sensual, stupid, though cunning in his way, and, as before said, a poltroon; he cheats his master every moment, though he fears him like fire. This type of servant is a remarkable one in which may be recognised the principal features of the character of Leporello, but indistinct and confused. The part was played in really superior style by Potsiakin, whose talent was beyond discussion, surpassing as it did in my opinion that of Baklouchin himself. But when the next day I spoke to Baklouchin I concealed my impression from him, knowing that it would give him bitter pain.

As for the convict who played the part of the nobleman, it was not bad. Everything he said was without meaning, incomparable to anything I had ever heard before; but his enunciation was pure and his gestures becoming. While Kedril occupies himself with the valise, his master walks up and down, and announces that from that day forth he means to lead a quiet life. Kedril listens, makes grimaces, and amuses the spectators by his reflections “aside.” He has no pity for his master, but he has heard of devils, would like to know what they are like, and thereupon questions him. The nobleman replies that some time ago, being in danger of death, he asked succour from hell. Then the devils aided and delivered him, but the term of his liberty has expired; and if the devils come that evening, it will be to exact his soul, as has been agreed in their compact. Kedril begins to tremble in earnest, but his master does not lose courage, and orders him to prepare the supper. Hearing of victuals, Kedril revives. Taking out a bottle of wine, he taps it on his own account. The audience[Pg 187] expands with

laughter; but the door grates on its hinges, the winds shakes the shutters, Kedril trembles, and hastily, almost without knowing what he is doing, puts into his mouth an enormous piece of fowl, which he is unable to swallow. There is another gust of wind.

“Is it ready?” cries the master, still walking backwards and forwards in his room.

“Directly, sir. I am preparing it,” says Kedril, who sits down, and, taking care that his master does not see him, begins to eat the supper himself. The audience is evidently charmed with the cunning of the servant, who so cleverly makes game of the nobleman; and it must be admitted that Poseikin, the representative of the part, deserved high praise. He pronounced admirably the words: “Directly, sir. I—am—preparing—it.”

Kedril eats gradually, and at each mouthful trembles lest his master shall see him. Every time that the nobleman turns round Kedril hides under the table, holding the fowl in his hand. When he has appeased his hunger, he begins to think of his master.

“Kedril, will it soon be ready?” cries the nobleman.

“It is ready now,” replies Kedril boldly, when all at once he perceives that there is scarcely anything left. Nothing remains but one leg. The master, still sombre and pre-occupied, notices nothing, and takes his seat, while Kedril places himself behind him with a napkin on his arm. Every word, every gesture, every grimace from the servant, as he turns towards the audience to laugh at his master’s expense, excites the greatest mirth among the convicts. Just at the moment when the young nobleman begins to eat, the devils arrive. They resemble nothing human or terrestrial. The side-door opens, and the phantom appears dressed entirely in white, with a lighted lantern in lieu of a head, and with a scythe in its hand. Why the white dress, scythe, and lantern? No one could tell me, and the matter did not trouble the convicts. They were sure that this was the way it ought[Pg 188] to be done. The master comes forward courageously to meet the apparitions, and calls out to them that he is ready, and that they can take him. But Kedril, as timid as a hare, hides under the table, not forgetting, in spite of his fright, to take a bottle with him. The devils disappear, Kedril comes out of his hiding-place, and the master begins to eat his fowl. Three devils enter the room, and seize him to take him to hell.

“Save me, Kedril,” he cries. But Kedril has something else to think of. He has now with him in his hiding-place not only the bottle, but also the plate of fowl and the bread. He is now alone. The demons are far away, and his master also. Kedril gets from under the table, looks all round, and suddenly his face beams with joy. He winks, like the rogue

he is, sits down in his master's place, and whispers to the audience: "I have now no master but myself."

Every one laughs at seeing him masterless; and he says, always in an under-tone and with a confidential air: "The devils have carried him off!"

The enthusiasm of the spectators is now without limits. The last phrase was uttered with such roguery, with such a triumphant grimace, that it was impossible not to applaud. But Kedril's happiness does not last long. Hardly has he taken up the bottle of wine, and poured himself out a large glass, which he carries to his lips, than the devils return, slip behind, and seize him. Kedril howls like one possessed, but he dare not turn round. He wishes to defend himself, but cannot, for in his hands he holds the bottle and the glass, from which he will not separate. His eyes starting from his head, his mouth gaping with horror, he remains for a moment looking at the audience with a comic expression of cowardice that might have been painted. At last he is dragged, carried away. His arms and legs are agitated in every direction, but he still sticks to his bottle. He also shrieks, and his cries are still heard when he has been carried from the stage.

The curtain falls amid general laughter, and every[Pg 189] one is delighted. The orchestra now attacks the famous dance tune Kamarinskaia. First it is played softly, pianissimo; but little by little, the motive is developed and played more lightly. The time is quickened, and the wood, as well as the strings of the balalaiki, is made to sound. The musicians enter thoroughly into the spirit of the dance. Glinka [who has arranged the Kamarinskaia in the most ingenious manner, and with harmonies of his own devising, for full orchestra] should have heard it as it was executed in our Convict Prison.

The pantomimic musical accompaniment is begun; and throughout the Kamarinskaia is played. The stage represents the interior of a hut. A miller and his wife are sitting down, one mending clothes, the other spinning flax. Sirotkin plays the part of the wife, and Nietsvitaeff that of the husband. Our scenery was very poor. In this piece, as in the preceding ones, imagination had to supply what was wanting in reality. Instead of a wall at the back of the stage, there was a carpet or a blanket; on the right, shabby screens; while on the left, where the stage was not closed, the camp-bedsteads could be seen; but the spectators were not exacting, and were willing to imagine all that was wanting. It was an easy task for them; all convicts are great dreamers. Directly they are told "this is a garden," it is for them a garden. Informed that "this is a hut," they accept the definition without difficulty. To them it is a hut. Sirotkin was charming in a woman's dress. The miller finishes his work, takes his cap and his whip, goes up to his

wife, and gives her to understand by signs, that if during his absence she makes the mistake of receiving any one, she will have to deal with him—and he shows her his whip. The wife listens, and nods affirmatively her head. The whip is evidently known to her; the hussey has often deserved it. The husband goes out. Hardly has he turned upon his heel, than his wife shakes her fist at him. There is a knock; the door opens, and in comes a neighbour, miller also by trade. He wears a beard, is in a kuftan, and he brings as a present a red handkerchief. The woman[Pg 190] smiles. Another knock is heard at the door. Where shall she hide him? She conceals him under the table, and takes up her distaff again. Another admirer now presents himself—a farrier in the uniform of a non-commissioned officer.

Until now the pantomime had gone on capitally; the gestures of the actors being irreproachable. It was astounding to see these improvised players going through their parts in so correct a manner; and involuntarily one said to oneself:

“What a deal of talent is lost in our Russia, left without use in our prisons and places of exile!”

The convict who played the part of the farrier had, doubtless, taken part in a performance at some provincial theatre, or had played with amateurs. It seemed to me, in any case, that our actors knew nothing of acting as an art, and bore themselves in the meanest manner. When it was his turn to appear, he came on like one of the classical heroes of the old repertory—taking a long stride with one foot before he raised the other from the ground, throwing back his head on the upper part of his body and casting proud looks around him. If such a gait was ridiculous on the part of classical heroes, still more so was it when the actor was representing a comic character. But the audience thought it quite natural, and accepted the actor’s triumphant walk as a necessary fact, without criticising it.

A moment after the entry of the second admirer there is another knock at the door. The wife loses her head. Where is the farrier to be concealed? In her big box. It fortunately is open. The farrier disappears within it and the lid falls upon him.

The new arrival is a Brahmin, in full costume. His entry is hailed by the spectators with a formidable laugh. This Brahmin is represented by the convict Cutchin, who plays the part perfectly, thanks, in a great measure, to a suitable physiognomy. He explains in the pantomime his love of the miller’s[Pg 191] wife, raises his hands to heaven, and then clasps them on his breast.

There is now another knock at the door—a vigorous one this time. There could be no mistake about it. It is the master of the house. The miller’s wife loses her head; the

Brahmin runs wildly on all sides, begging to be concealed. She helps him to slip behind the cupboard, and begins to spin, and goes on spinning without thinking of opening the door. In her fright she gets the thread twisted, drops the spindle, and, in her agitation, makes the gesture of turning it when it is lying on the ground. Sirotkin represented perfectly this state of alarm.

Then the miller kicks open the door and approaches his wife, whip in hand. He has seen everything, for he was spying outside; and he indicates by signs to his wife that she has three lovers concealed in the house. Then he searches them out.

First, he finds the neighbour, whom he drives out with his fist. The frightened farrier tries to escape. He raises, with his head, the cover of the chest, and is at once seen. The miller thrashes him with his whip, and for once this gallant does not march in the classical style.

The only one now remaining is the Brahmin, whom the husband seeks for some time without finding him. At last he discovers him in his corner behind the cupboard, bows to him politely, and then draws him by his beard into the middle of the stage. The Brahmin tries to defend himself, and cries out, “Accursed, accursed!”—the only words pronounced throughout the pantomime. But the husband will not listen to him, and, after settling accounts with him, turns to his wife. Seeing that her turn has come, she throws away both wheel and spindle, and runs out, causing an earthen pot to fall as she shakes the room in her fright. The convicts burst into a laugh, and Ali, without looking at me, takes my hand, and calls out, “See, see the Brahmin!” He cannot hold himself upright, so overpowering is his laugh. The curtain falls, and another song begins.

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There were two or three more, all broadly humorous and very droll. The convicts had not composed them themselves, but they had contributed something to them. Every actor improvised to such purpose that the part was a different one each evening. The pantomime ended with a ballet, in which there was a burial. The Brahmin went through various incantations over the corpse, and with effect. The dead man returns to life, and, in their joy, all present begin to dance. The Brahmin dances in Brahminical style with the dead man. This was the final scene. The convicts now separated, happy, delighted, and full of praise for the actors and gratitude towards the non-commissioned officers. There was not the least quarrel, and they all went to bed with peaceful hearts, to sleep with a sleep by no means familiar to them.

This is no fantasy of my imagination, but the truth, the very truth. These unhappy men had been permitted to live for some moments in their own way, to amuse themselves in a human manner, to escape for a brief hour from their sad position as convicts; and a moral change was effected, at least for a time.

The night is already quite dark. Something makes me shudder, and I awake. The “old believer” is still on the top of the high porcelain stove praying, and he will continue to pray until dawn. Ali is sleeping peacefully by my side. I remember that when he went to bed he was still laughing and talking about the theatre with his brothers. Little by little I began to remember everything; the preceding day, the Christmas holidays, and the whole month. I raised my head in fright and looked at my companions, who were sleeping by the trembling light of the candle provided by the authorities. I look at their unhappy countenances, their miserable beds; I view this nakedness, the wretchedness, and then convince myself that it is not a frightful night there, but a simple reality. Yes, it is a reality. I hear a groan. Some one has moved his arm and made his chains rattle. Another one is agitated in his dreams and speaks aloud, while the old grandfather is praying for the “Orthodox Christians.”[Pg 193] I listened to his prayer, uttered with regularity, in soft, rather drawling tones: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon us.”

“Well, I am not here for ever, but only for a few years,” I said to myself, and I again laid my head down on my pillow.

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Part II.

CHAPTER I. THE HOSPITAL

Shortly after the Christmas holidays I felt ill, and had to go to our military hospital, which stood apart at about half a verst (one-third of a mile) from the fortress. It was a one-storey building, very long, and painted yellow. Every summer a great quantity of ochre was expended in brightening it up. In the immense court-yard stood buildings, including those where the chief physicians lived, while the principal building contained only wards intended for the patients. There were a good many of them, but as only two were reserved for the convicts, these latter were nearly always full, above all in summer, so that it was often necessary to bring the beds closer together. These wards were occupied by “unfortunates” of all kinds: first by our own, then by military

prisoners, previously incarcerated in the guard-houses. There were others, again, who had not yet been tried, or who were passing through. In this hospital, too, were invalids from the Disciplinary Company, a melancholy institution for bringing together soldiers of bad conduct, with a view to their correction. At the end of a year or two, they come back the most thorough-going rascals that the earth can endure.

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When a convict felt that he was ill, he told the non-commissioned officer, who wrote the man's name down on a card, which he then gave to him and sent him to the hospital under the escort of a soldier. On his arrival he was examined by a doctor, who authorised the convict to remain at the hospital if he was really ill. My name was duly written down, and towards one o'clock, when all my companions had started for their afternoon work, I went to the hospital. Every prisoner took with him such money and bread as he could (for food was not to be expected the first day), a little pipe, and pouch containing tobacco, with flint, steel, and match-paper. The convicts concealed these objects in their boots. On entering the hospital I experienced a feeling of curiosity, for a new aspect of life was now presented.

The day was hot, cloudy, sad—one of those days when places like a hospital assume a particularly disagreeable and repulsive look. Myself and the soldier escorting me went into the entrance room, where there were two copper baths. There were two convicts waiting there with their warders. An assistant surgeon came in, looked at us with a careless and patronising air, and went away still more carelessly to announce our arrival to the physician on duty. Soon the physician arrived. He examined me, treating me in a very affable manner, and gave me a paper on which my name was inscribed. The ordinary physician of the wards reserved for the convicts was to make the diagnosis of my illness, to prescribe the fitting remedies, together with the necessary diet. I had already heard the convicts say that their doctors could not be too much praised. "They are fathers to us," they would say.

I took my clothes off to put on another costume. Our clothes and linen were taken away, and we were given hospital linen instead, to which were added long stockings, slippers, cotton nightcaps, and a dressing-gown of a very thick brown cloth, which was lined, not with linen, but with filth. The dressing-gown was indeed very filthy, but I soon understood its utility. We were afterwards taken to the convict wards, which were at the head of a[Pg 196] long corridor, very high, and very clean. The external cleanliness was quite satisfactory. Everything that could be seen shone; so, at least, it seemed to me, after the dirtiness of the convict prison.

The two prisoners, whom I had found in the entrance hall, went to the left of the corridor, while I entered a room. Before the padlocked door walked a sentinel, musket on shoulder; and not far off was the soldier who was to replace him. The sergeant of the hospital guard ordered him to let me pass, and suddenly I found myself in the middle of a long narrow room, with beds to the number of twenty-two arranged against the walls. Three or four of them were still unoccupied. These wooden beds were painted green, and, as is notoriously the case with all hospital beds in Russia, were doubtless inhabited by bugs. I went into a corner by the side of the windows. There were very few prisoners dangerously ill and confined to their beds.

The inmates of the hospital were, for the most part, convalescents, or men who were slightly indisposed. My new companions were stretched out on their couches, or walking about up and down between the rows of beds. There was just space enough for them to come and go. The atmosphere of the ward was stifling with the odour peculiar to hospitals. It was composed of various emanations, each more disagreeable than the other, and of the smell of drugs; though the stove was kept well heated all day long, my bed was covered with a counterpane, which I took off. The bed itself consisted of a cloth blanket lined with linen, and coarse sheets of more than doubtful cleanliness. By the side of the bed was a little table with a pitcher and a pewter mug, together with a diminutive napkin, which had been given to me. The table could, moreover, hold a tea-urn for those patients who were rich enough to drink tea. These men of means, however, were not very numerous. The pipes and the tobacco pouches—for all the patients smoked, even the consumptive ones—could be concealed beneath the mattress. The doctors and the other officials scarcely ever made searches, and when they surprised a patient[Pg 197] with a pipe in his mouth, they pretended not to see. The patients, however, were very prudent, and smoked always at the back of the stove. They never smoked in their beds except at night, when no rounds were made by the officers commanding the hospital.

Until then I had not been in any hospital in the character of patient, so that everything was quite new to me. I noticed that my entry had mystified some of the prisoners. They had heard of me, and all the inmates now looked upon me with that slight shade of superiority which recognised members of no matter what society show to one newly admitted among them. On my right was lying down a man committed for trial—an ex-secretary and the illegitimate son of a retired captain—accused of having made false money. He had been in the hospital nearly a year. He was not in the least ill, but he assured the doctors that he had an aneurism, and he so thoroughly convinced them that he escaped both the hard labour and the corporal punishment to which he had been sentenced. He was sent a year later to T——k, where he was attached to an

asylum. He was a vigorous young fellow of eight-and-twenty, cunning, a self-confessed rogue, and something of a lawyer. He was intelligent, had easy manners, but was very presumptuous, and suffered from morbid self-esteem. Convinced that there was no one in the world a bit more honest or more just than himself, he did not consider himself at all guilty, and never kept this assurance to himself.

This personage was the first to address me, and he questioned me with much curiosity. He initiated me into the ways of the hospital; and, of course, began by telling me that he was the son of a captain. He was very anxious that I should take him for a noble, or at least, for some one connected with the nobility.

Soon afterwards an invalid from the Disciplinary Company came and told me that he knew a great many nobles who had been exiled; and, to convince me, he repeated to me their christian names and their patronymics. It was only necessary to see the face of this soldier to[Pg 198] understand that he was lying abominably. He was named Tchekounoff, and came to pay court to me, because he suspected me of having money. When he saw a packet of tea and sugar, he at once offered me his services to make the water boil and to get me a tea-urn. M. D. S. K—— had promised to send me my own by one of the prisoners who worked in the hospital, but Tchekounoff arranged to get me one forthwith. He got me a tin vessel, in which he made the water boil; and, in a word, he showed such extraordinary zeal, that it drew down upon him bitter laughter from one of the patients, a consumptive man, whose bed was just opposite mine, Usteantseff by name. This was the soldier condemned to the rods, who, from fear, had swallowed a bottle of vodka, in which he had infused tobacco, this bringing on lung disease.

I have spoken of him above. He had remained silent until now, stretched out on his bed, and breathing with difficulty. He looked at me all the time with a very serious air. He did not take his eyes from Tchekounoff, whose civility irritated him. His extraordinary gravity rendered his indignation comic. At last he could stand it no longer.

“Look at this fellow! He has found his master,” he said, stammering out the words with a voice strangled by weakness, for he had now not long to live.

Tchekounoff, much annoyed, turned round.

“Who is the fellow?” he asked, looking at Usteantseff, with contempt.

“Why, you are a flunkey,” replied Usteantseff, as confidently as if he had possessed the right of calling Tchekounoff to order.

“I a fellow?”

“Yes, you are a flunkey; a true flunkey. Listen, my good friends. He won’t believe me. He is quite astonished, the brave fellow.”

“What can that matter to you? You see when they don’t know how to make use of their hands that they are not accustomed to be without servants. Why should I not serve him, buffoon with a hairy snout?”

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“Who has a hairy snout?”

“You!”

“I have a hairy snout?”

“Yes; certainly you have.”

“You are a nice fellow, you are. If I have a hairy snout, you have a face like a crow’s egg.”

“Hairy snout! The merciful Lord has settled your account. You would do much better to keep quiet and die.”

“Why? I would rather prostrate myself before a boot than before a slipper. My father never prostrated himself, and never made me do so.”

He would have continued, but an attack of coughing convulsed him for some minutes. He spat blood, and a cold sweat broke out on his low forehead. If his cough had not prevented him from speaking, he would have continued to declaim. One could see that from his look; but in his powerlessness he could only move his hand, the result of which was that Tchekounoff spoke no more about the matter.

I quite understood that the consumptive patient hated me much more than Tchekounoff. No one would have thought of being angry with him or of looking down upon him by reason of the services he was rendering me, and the few kopecks that he tried to get from me. Every one understood that he did it all in order to get himself a little money.

The Russian people are not at all susceptible on such points, and know perfectly well how to take them.

I had displeased Usteantseff, as my tea had also displeased him. What irritated him was that, in spite of all, I was a gentleman, even with my chains; that I could not do

without a servant, though I neither asked for nor desired one. In reality I tried to do everything for myself, in order not to appear a white-handed, effeminate person, and not to play the part which excited so much envy.

I even felt a little pride on this point; but, in spite of every thing—I do not know why—I was always surrounded by officious, complaisant people, who attached[Pg 200] themselves to me of their own free will, and who ended by governing me. It was I rather who was their servant; so that, whether I liked it or not, I was made to appear to every one a noble, who could not do without the services of others, and who gave himself airs. This exasperated me.

Usteantseff was consumptive, and, therefore, irascible. The other patients only showed me indifference, tinged with a shade of contempt. They were occupied with a circumstance which now presents itself to my memory.

I learned, as I listened to their conversation, that there was to be brought into the hospital that evening a convict who, at that moment, was receiving the rods. The prisoners were looking forward to this new arrival with some curiosity. They said, however, that his punishment was but slight—only five hundred strokes.

I looked round. The greater number of genuine patients were, as far as I could observe, affected by scurvy and diseases of the eyes—both peculiar to this country. The others suffered from fever, lung disease, and other illnesses. The different illnesses were not separated; all the patients were together in the same room.

I have spoken of genuine patients, for certain convicts had come in merely to get a little rest. The doctors admitted them from pure compassion, above all, if there were any vacant beds. Life in the guard-house and in the prison was so hard compared with that of the hospital, that many persons preferred to remain lying down in spite of the stifling atmosphere and the rules against leaving the room.

There were even men who took pleasure in this kind of life. They belonged nearly all to the Disciplinary Company. I examined my new companions with curiosity. One of them puzzled me very much. He was consumptive, and was dying. His bed was a little further on than that of Usteantseff, and was nearly beside mine. He was named Mikhailoff. I had seen him in the Convict Prison two weeks before, when he was already seriously ill. He ought to have been under treatment long before,[Pg 201] but he bore up against his malady with surprising courage. He did not go to the hospital until about the Christmas holidays, to die three weeks afterwards of galloping consumption. He seemed to have burned out like a candle. What astonished me most was the terrible change in his countenance. I had noticed him the very first day of my

imprisonment. By his side was lying a soldier of the Disciplinary Company—an old man with a bad expression on his face, whose general appearance was disgusting.

But I am not going to enumerate all the patients. I just remember this old man simply because he made an impression on me, and initiated me at once into certain peculiarities of the ward. He had a severe cold in the head, which made him sneeze at every moment, even during his sleep, as if firing salutes, five or six times running, while each time he called out, “My God, what torture!”

Seated on his bed he stuffed his nose eagerly with snuff, which he took from a paper bag, in order to sneeze more strongly, and with greater regularity. He sneezed into a checked cotton pocket-handkerchief which belonged to him, and which had lost its colour through perpetual washing. His little nose then became wrinkled in a most peculiar manner with a multitude of wrinkles, and his open mouth exhibited broken teeth, decayed and black, and red gums moist with saliva. When he sneezed into his handkerchief he unfolded it and wiped it on the lining of his dressing-gown. His proceedings disgusted me so much that involuntarily I examined the dressing-gown I had just put on myself. It exhaled a most offensive odour, which contact with my body helped to bring out. It smelt of plasters and medicaments of all kinds. It seemed as though it had been worn by patients from time immemorial. The lining had, perhaps, been washed once, but I would not swear to it. Certainly, at the time I put it on, it was saturated with lotions, and stained by contact with poultices and plasters of all imaginable kinds.

The men condemned to the rods, having undergone[Pg 202] their punishment, were brought straight to the hospital, their backs still bleeding. As compresses and as poultices were placed on their wounds, the dressing-gown they wore over their wet shirt received and retained the droppings.

During all the time of my hard labour I had to go to the hospital, which often happened, I always put on, with mistrust and abhorrence, the dressing-gown that was delivered to me. As soon as Tchekounoff had given me my tea (I will say, in parenthesis, that the water brought in in the morning, and not renewed throughout the day, was soon corrupted, soon poisoned by the fetid air), the door opened, and the soldier, who had just received the rods, was brought in under a double escort. I saw, for the first time, a man who had just been whipped. Later on many were brought in, and whenever this happened it caused great distress to the patients. These unfortunate men were received with grave composure, but the nature of the reception depended nearly always on the enormity of the crime committed, and, consequently, the number of strokes administered.

The criminals most cruelly whipped, and who were celebrated as brigands of the first order, enjoyed more respect and attention than a simple deserter, a recruit, like the one who had just been brought in. But in neither case was any particular sympathy manifested, nor were any annoying remarks made. The unhappy man was attended to in silence, above all if he was incapable of attending to himself. The assistant-surgeons knew that they were entrusting their patients to skilful and experienced hands. The usual treatment consisted in applying very often to the back of the man who had been whipped a shirt or a piece of linen steeped in cold water. It was also necessary to withdraw skilfully from the wounds the twigs left by the rods which had been broken on the criminal's back. This last operation was particularly painful to the patients. The extraordinary stoicism with which they supported their sufferings astonished me greatly.

I have seen many convicts who had been whipped,[Pg 203] and cruelly, I can tell you. Well, I do not remember one of them uttering a groan. Only after such an experience, the countenance becomes pale, decomposed, the eyes glitter, the look wanders, and the lips tremble so that the patient sometimes bites them till they bleed.

The soldier who had just come in was twenty-three years of age; he had a good muscular development, and was rather a fine man, tall, well-made, with a bronzed skin. His back, uncovered down to the waist, had been seriously beaten, and his body now trembled with fever beneath the damp sheet with which his back was covered. For about an hour and a half he did nothing but walk backwards and forwards in the room. I looked at his face: he seemed to be thinking of nothing; his eyes had a strange expression, at once wild and timid; they seemed to fix themselves with difficulty on the various objects. I fancied I saw him looking attentively at my hot tea; the steam was rising from the full cup, and the poor devil was shivering and clattering his teeth. I invited him to have some; he turned towards me without saying a word, and taking up the cup, swallowed the tea at one gulp, without putting sugar in it. He tried not to look at me, and when he had finished he put the cup back in silence without making a sign, and then began to walk up and down as before. He was in too much pain to think of speaking to me or thanking me. As for the other prisoners, they abstained from questioning him; when once they had applied compresses they paid no more attention to him, thinking probably it would be better to leave him alone, and not to worry him by their questions and compassion. The soldier seemed quite satisfied with this view.

Meanwhile, night came on and the lamp was lighted; some of the patients possessed candlesticks of their own, but these were not numerous. In the evening the doctor

came round, after which a non-commissioned officer on guard counted the patients and closed the room.

The prisoners could not speak in too high terms of their doctors. They looked upon them truly as fathers and respected them. These doctors had always something[Pg 204] pleasant to say, a kind word even for reprobates, who appreciated it all the more because they knew it was said in all sincerity.

Yes, these kind words were really sincere, for no one would have thought of blaming the doctors had they shown themselves cross and inhuman; they were kind purely from humanity. They understood perfectly that a convict who is sick has as much right to breathe pure air as any other person, even though the latter might be a great personage. The convalescents there had a right to walk freely through the corridors to take exercise, and to breathe air less pestilential than that of our infirmary, which was close and saturated with deleterious emanations. In our ward, when once the doors had been closed in the evening, they had to remain closed throughout the night, and under no pretext was one of the inmates allowed to go out.

For many years an inexplicable fact troubled me like an insoluble problem. I must speak of it before going on with my description. I am thinking of the chains which every convict is obliged to wear, however ill he may be; even consumptives have died beneath my eyes with their legs loaded with irons.

Everybody was accustomed to it, and regarded it as an inevitable fact. I do not think any one, even the doctors, would have thought of demanding the removal of the irons from convicts who were seriously ill, not even from the consumptive ones. The chains, it is true, were not exceedingly heavy; they did not in general weigh more than eight or ten pounds, which is a supportable burden for a man in good health. I have been told, however, that after some years the legs of the convicts dry up and waste away. I do not know whether it is true. I am inclined to think it is; the weight, however light it may be (say not more than ten pounds), if it is fixed to the leg for ever, increases the general weight in an abnormal manner, and at the end of a certain time must have a disastrous effect on its development.

For a convict in good health this is nothing, but the same cannot be said of one who is sick. For the [Pg 205]convicts who were seriously ill, for the consumptive ones whose arms and legs dry up of themselves, this last straw is insupportable. Even if the medical authorities claimed alleviation for the consumptive patients alone, it would be an immense benefit, I assure you. I shall be told convicts are malefactors, unworthy of compassion; but ought increased severity to be shown towards him on whom the finger of God already weighs? No one will believe that the object of this

aggravation is to reform the criminal. The consumptive prisoners are exempted from corporal punishment by the tribunal.

There must be some mysterious, important reason for all this, but what it is, it is impossible to understand. No one believes—it is impossible to believe—that a consumptive man will run away. Who can think of such a thing, especially if the illness has reached a certain degree of intensity? It is impossible to deceive the doctors and make them mistake a convict in good health for one who is in a consumption, for this malady is one that can be recognised at the first glance. Moreover, can the irons prevent the convict not in good health from escaping? Not in the least. The irons are a degradation and shame, a physical and moral burden; but they would not hinder any one attempting to escape. The most awkward and least intelligent convict can saw through them, or break the rivets by hammering at them with a stone. Chains, then, are a useless precaution; and if the convicts wear them as a punishment, should not this punishment be spared to dying men?

As I write these lines, a face stands out from my memory: that of a dying man, a man who died in consumption, this same Mikhailoff, whose bed was nearly opposite me, and who expired, I think, four days after my arrival at the hospital. When I spoke above of the consumptive patients, I was only reproducing involuntarily the sensations and ideas which occurred to me on the occasion of this death. I knew Mikhailoff very little; he was a young man of twenty-five at most, not very tall, thin, and with a fine face; he belonged to the “special section,” and was remarkable for his strange, but soft[Pg 206] and sad taciturnity; he seemed to have “dried up” in the convict prison, to use an expression employed by the convicts who had a good recollection of him. I remember he had very fine eyes. I really cannot tell why I think of that.

He died at three o’clock in the afternoon on a clear, dry day. The sun was darting its brilliant rays obliquely through the greenish, frozen panes of our room. A torrent of light inundated the unhappy patient, who had lost all consciousness, and was several hours dying. From the early morning his sight became confused; he was unable to recognise those who approached him. The convicts would gladly have done anything to relieve him, for they saw he was in great suffering. His respiration was painful, deep, and irregular; his breast rose and fell violently, as though he were in want of air; he cast his blanket and his clothes far from him. Then he began to tear up his shirt, which seemed to him a terrible burden. It was taken off. Then it was frightful to see this immensely long body, with fleshless arms and legs, with beating breast, and ribs which were as clearly marked as those of a skeleton. There was nothing now on this skeleton but a cross and the irons, from which his dried-up legs might easily have freed themselves. A quarter of an hour before his death everything was silent in our

ward, and the inmates spoke only in whispers. The convicts walked on the tips of their toes. From time to time they exchanged remarks on other subjects, and cast a furtive glance at the dying man. The rattling in his throat grew more and more painful. At last, with a trembling hand, he felt the cross on his breast and endeavoured to tear it off; it was also weighing upon him, suffocating him. It was taken off. Ten minutes afterwards, he died. Some one then knocked at the door in order to give notice to the sentinel; the warder entered, looked at the dead man with a vacant air, and went away to get the assistant-surgeon. The assistant-surgeon was a good fellow enough, but a little too much occupied with his personal appearance, otherwise very agreeable; he soon arrived, went up to the corpse with[Pg 207] long strides which made a noise in the silent ward, and felt the dead man's pulse with an unconcerned air which seemed to have been put on for the occasion. He then made a vague gesture with his hand and went out.

Information was given at the guard-house; for the criminal was an important one (he belonged to the special section), and in order to register his death it was necessary to go through some formalities. While we were waiting for the hospital guard to come, one of the prisoners said in a whisper, "The eyes of the defunct might as well be closed." Another one profited by this remark, and approaching Mikhailoff in silence, closed his eyes; then perceiving on the pillow the cross which had been taken from his neck, he took it and looked at it, put it down, and crossed himself. The face of the dead man was becoming ossified; a ray of white light was playing on the surface and illuminated two rows of white, good teeth which sparkled between his thin lips, glued to the gums by the mouth.

The non-commissioned officer on guard arrived at last, musket on shoulder, helmet on head, accompanied by two soldiers; he approached the corpse, slackening his pace with an air of uncertainty. Then he examined with a side glance the silent prisoners, who looked at him with a sombre expression. At one step from the dead man he stopped short, as if suddenly nailed to the spot; the naked, dried-up body, loaded with irons, had impressed him; he undid his chin-strap, removed his helmet (which was not at all necessary for him to do), and made the sign of the cross; he had a gray head, the head of a soldier who had seen much service. I remember that by his side stood Tchekounoff, an old man who was also gray. He looked all the time at the non-commissioned officer, and followed all his movements with strange attention. They glanced across, and I saw that Tchekounoff also trembled. He bit and closed his teeth, and said to the non-commissioned officer, as if involuntarily, at the same time nodding his head in the direction of the dead man, "He had a mother, too!"

These words went to my heart. Why had he said[Pg 208] them? and how did this idea occur to him? The corpse was raised with the mattress; the straw creaked, the chains dragged along the ground with a sharp ring; they were taken up and the body was carried out. Suddenly all spoke once more in a loud voice. The non-commissioned officer in the corridor could well be heard crying out to some one to go for the blacksmith. It was necessary to take the dead man's irons off. But I have digressed from my subject.

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CHAPTER II. THE HOSPITAL (*continued*).

The doctors used to visit the wards in the morning, towards eleven o'clock; they appeared all together, forming a procession, which was headed by the chief physician. An hour and a half before, the ordinary physician had made his round. He was a quiet young man, always affable and kind, much liked by the prisoners, and thoroughly versed in his art; they only found one fault with him, that he was "too soft." He was, in fact, by no means communicative, he seemed confused in our presence, blushed sometimes, and changed the quantity of food at the first representation of the patient. I think he would have consented to give them any medicine they desired: in other respects an excellent young man.

A doctor in Russia often enjoys the affection and respect of the people, and with reason, as far as I have been able to see. I know that my words would seem a paradox, above all when the mistrust of this same people for foreign drugs and foreign doctors is taken into account; in fact, they prefer, even when suffering from a serious illness, to address themselves year after year to a witch, or employ old women's remedies (which, however, ought not to be despised), rather than consult a doctor, or go into the[Pg 210] hospital. In truth, these prejudices may be above all attributed to causes which have nothing to do with medicine, namely, the mistrust of the people for anything which bears an official and administrative character; nor must it be forgotten that the common people are frightened and prejudiced in regard to the hospitals, by the stories, often absurd, of fantastic horrors said to take place within them. Perhaps, however, these stories have a basis of truth.

But what repels them above all, is the Germanism of the hospitals, the idea that during their illness they will be attended to by foreigners, the severity of the diet, the heartlessness of the surgeons and doctors, the dissection and autopsy of the bodies, etc. The common people reflect, moreover, that they will be attended by nobles—for

in their view the doctors belong to the nobility. Once they have made acquaintance with them (there are exceptions, no doubt, but they are rare), their fears vanish. This success must be attributed to our doctors, especially the young ones, who, for the most part, know how to gain the respect and affection of the people. I speak now of what I myself have seen and experienced in many cases and in different parts, and I think matters are the same everywhere. In some distant localities the doctors receive presents, make profit out of their hospitals, and neglect the patients; sometimes they forget even their art. This happens, no doubt; but I am speaking of the majority, inspired as it is by that spirit, that generous tendency which is regenerating the medical art. As for the apostates, the wolves in the sheep-fold, they may excuse themselves, and cast the blame on the circumstances amid which they live; but they are absurd, inexcusable, especially if they are no longer humane; it is precisely the humanity, affability, and brotherly compassion of the doctor which prove most efficacious remedies for the patients. It is time to stop these apathetic lamentations on the circumstances surrounding us. There may be truth in the lament, but a cunning rogue who knows how to take[Pg 211] care of himself never fails to blame the circumstances around him when he wishes his faults to be forgiven—above all, if he writes or speaks with eloquence.

I have again departed from my subject; I wish only to say that the common people mistrust and dislike officialism and the Government doctors, rather than the doctors themselves; but on personal acquaintance many prejudices disappear.

Our doctor generally stopped before the bed of each patient, questioned him seriously and attentively, then prescribed the remedies, potions, etc. He sometimes noticed that the pretended invalid was not ill at all; he had come to take rest after his hard work, and to sleep on a mattress in a warm room, far preferable to the naked planks in a damp guard-house among a mass of pale, broken-down men, waiting for their trial. In Russia the prisoners in the House of Detention are almost always broken down, which shows that their moral and material condition is worse even than those of the convicts.

In cases of feigned sickness our doctor would describe the patient as suffering from *febris catharalis*, and sometimes allowed him to remain a week in the hospital. Every one laughed at this *febris catharalis*, for it was known to be a formula agreed upon between the doctor and the patient to indicate no malady at all. Often the robust invalid who abused the doctor's compassion remained in the hospital until he was turned out by force. Our doctor was worth seeing then. Confused by the prisoner's obstinacy, he did not like to tell him plainly that he was cured and offer him his leaving ticket, although he had the right to send him away without the least explanation on

writing the words, *sanat. est*. First he would hint to him that it was time to go, and then would beg him to leave.

“You must go, you know you are cured now, and we have no place for you, we are very much cramped here, etc.”

At last, ashamed to remain any longer, the patient[Pg 212] would consent to go. The physician-in-chief, although compassionate and just (the patients were much attached to him), was incomparably more severe and more decided than our ordinary physician. In certain cases he showed merciless severity which only gained for him the respect of the convicts. He always came into the room accompanied by all the doctors of the hospital, when his assistants visited all the beds and diagnosed on each particular case; he stopped longest at the beds of those who were seriously ill, and had an encouraging word for them. He never sent back the convicts who arrived with *febris catharalis*; but if one of them was determined to remain in the hospital, he certified that the man was cured. “Come,” he would say, “you have had your rest; now go, you must not take liberties.”

Those who insisted upon remaining, were, above all, the convicts who were worn out by field labour, performed during the great summer heat, or prisoners who had been sentenced to be whipped. I remember that they were obliged to be particularly severe, merely in order to get rid of one of them. He had come to be cured of some disease of the eyes, which were red all over; he complained of suffering a sharp pain in the eyelids. He was incurable; plasters, blisters, leeches, nothing did him any good; and the diseased organ remained in the same condition.

Then it occurred to the doctors that the illness was feigned, for the inflammation neither became worse nor better; and they soon understood that a comedy was being played, although the patient would not admit it. He was a fine young fellow, not ill-looking, though he produced a disagreeable impression upon all his companions; he was suspicious, sombre, full of dissimulation, and never looked any one straight in the face; he also kept himself apart as if he mistrusted us all. I remember that many persons were afraid that he would do some one harm.

When he was a soldier he had committed some small theft, he had been arrested and condemned to[Pg 213] receive a thousand strokes, and afterwards to pass into a disciplinary company.

To put off the moment of punishment, the prisoners, as I have already said, will do incredible things. On the eve of the fatal day, they will stick a knife into one of their chiefs, or into a comrade, in order that they may be tried again for this new offence,

which will delay their punishment for a month or two. It matters little to them that their punishment be doubled or tripled, if they can escape this time. What they desire is to put off temporarily the terrible minute at whatever cost, so utterly does their heart fail them.

Many of the patients thought the man with the sore eyes ought to be watched, lest in his despair he should assassinate some one during the night; but no precaution was taken, not even by those who slept next to him. It was remarked, however, that he rubbed his eyes with plaster from the wall, and with something else besides, in order that they might appear red when the doctor came round; at last the doctor-in-chief threatened to cure him by-means of a seton.

When the malady resists all ordinary treatment, the doctors determine to try some heroic, however painful, remedy. But the poor devil did not wish to get well, he was either too obstinate or too cowardly; for, however painful the proposed operation may be, it cannot be compared to the punishment of the rods.

The operation consists in seizing the patient by the nape of the neck, taking up the skin, drawing it back as much as possible, and making in it a double incision, through which is passed a skein of cotton about as thick as the finger. Every day at a fixed hour this skein is pulled backwards and forwards in order that the wound may continually suppurate and may not heal; the poor devil endured this torture which caused him horrible suffering, for several days.

At last he consented to quit the hospital. In less than a day his eyes became quite well; and, as soon as his neck was healed, he was sent to the guard-house[Pg 214] which he left next day to receive the first thousand strokes.

Painful is the minute which precedes such a punishment; so painful, that perhaps I am wrong in taxing with cowardice those convicts who fear it.

It must be terrible; for the convicts to risk a double or triple punishment, merely to postpone it. I have spoken, however, of convicts who have thus wished to quit the hospital before the wounds caused by the first part of the flogging were healed, in order to receive the last part and make an end of it. For life in a guard-room is certainly worse than in a convict prison.

The habit of receiving floggings helps in some cases to give intrepidity and decision to convicts. Those who have been often flogged, are hardened both in body and mind, and have at last looked upon such a punishment as merely a disagreeable incident no longer to be feared.

One of our convicts of the special section was a converted Tartar, who was named Alexander, or Alexandrina, as they called him in fun at the convict prison; who told me how he had received 4,000 strokes. He never spoke of this punishment except with amusement and laughter; but he swore very seriously that if he had not been brought up in his horde, from his most tender infancy, on whipping and flogging—and as the scars which covered his back, and which refused to disappear, were there to testify—he would never have been able to support those 4,000 strokes. He blessed the education of sticks that he had received.

“I was beaten for the least thing, Alexander Petrovitch,” he said one evening, when we were sitting down before the fire. “I was beaten without reason for fifteen years, as long as I can ever remember, and several times a day. Any one who liked beat me; so that, at last, it made no impression upon me.”

I do not know how it was he became a soldier, for perhaps he lied, and had always been a deserter and vagabond. But I remember his telling me one day of[Pg 215] the fright he was seized with when he was condemned to receive 4,000 strokes for having killed one of his officers.

“I know that they will punish me severely,” he said to himself, “that, accustomed as I am to be whipped, I shall perhaps die on the spot. The devil! 4,000 strokes is not a trifle; and then all my officers were in a fearful temper with me on account of this affair. I knew well that it would not be ‘rose-water.’ I even believed that I should die under the rods. I determined to get baptized. I said to myself, that perhaps they would not then flog me, at any rate it was worth trying, my comrades had told me that it would be of no good. But,’ I said to myself, ‘who knows? perhaps they will pardon me, they will have more compassion on a Christian than on a Mohammedan. They baptized me, and give me the name of Alexander; but, in spite of that, I had to take my flogging; they did not let me off a single stroke; I was, however, very savage. ‘Wait a bit,’ I said to myself, ‘and I will take you all in’; and, would you believe it, Alexander? I did take them all in. I knew how to look like a dead man; not that I appeared altogether without life, but I looked as if I were on the point of breathing my last. They led me in front of the battalion to receive my first thousand; my skin was burning, I began to howl. They gave me my second thousand, and I said to myself, ‘It’s all over now.’ I had lost my head, my legs seemed broken, so I fell to the ground, with the eyes of a dead man. My face blue, my mouth full of froth, I no longer breathed. When the doctor came he said I was on the point of death. I was carried to the hospital, and at once returned to life. Twice again they flogged me. What a rage they were in! I took them all in on each occasion. I received my third thousand, and died again. On my word, when they gave me the last thousand each stroke ought to have counted for three, it was like

a knife in my heart. Oh, how they did beat me! They were so severe with me. Oh, that cursed fourth thousand! it was well[Pg 216] worth three firsts put together. If I had pretended to be dead when I had still 200 to receive, I think they would have finished me; but they did not get the better of me. I had them again and again, for they always thought it was all over with me, and how could they have thought otherwise? The doctor was sure of it. But as for the 200 which I had still to receive, they might have struck as hard as they liked—they were worth 2,000; I only laughed at them. Why? Because, when I was a youngster, I had grown up under the whip. Well, I am well, and alive now; but I have been beaten in the course of my life," he repeated, with a passive air, as he brought his story to an end. As he did so, he seemed to recollect and count anew the blows he had received.

After a brief silence, he said: "I cannot count them, nor can any one else; there are not figures enough." He looked at me, and burst into a laugh, so simple and natural, that I could not help smiling in return.

"Do you know, Alexander Petrovitch, when I dream at night, I always dream that I am being flogged. I dream of nothing else." He, in fact, talked in his sleep, and woke up the other prisoners.

"What are you yelling about, you demon?" they would say to him.

This strong, robust fellow, short in stature, about forty-four years of age, active, good-looking, lived on good terms with every one, though he was very fond of taking what did not belong to him, and afterwards got beaten for it. But each of our convicts who stole got beaten for their thefts.

I will add to these remarks that I was always surprised at the extraordinary good-nature, the absence of rancour with which these unhappy men spoke of their punishment, and of the chiefs superintending it. In these stories, which often gave me palpitation of the heart, not a shadow of hatred or rancour could be detected; they laughed at what they had suffered like children.

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It was not the same, however, with M—tçki, when he told me of his punishment. As he was not a noble, he had been sentenced to be flogged. He had never spoken to me of it, and when I asked him if it were true, he replied affirmatively in two brief words, but with evident suffering, and without looking at me. He at the same time turned red, and when he raised his eyes, I saw flames burning in them, while his lips trembled with indignation. I felt that he would not forget, that he could never forget this page of his history. Our companions generally on the other hand (though theirs might have been

exceptions), looked upon their adventures with quite another eye. It is impossible, I sometimes thought, that they can be conscious of their guilt, and not acknowledge the justice of their punishment; above all, when their offences were against their companions and not against some chief. The greater part of them did not acknowledge their guilt. I have already said that I never observed in them the least remorse, even when the crime had been committed against people of their own station. As for the crimes committed against a chief, they did not even speak of them. It seems to me that for those cases, they had special views of their own. They looked upon them as accidents caused by destiny, by fatality, into which they had fallen unconsciously as the result of some extraordinary impulse. The convict always justifies the crimes he has committed against his chief; he does not trouble himself about the matter. But he admits that the chief cannot share his view, and consequently, that he must naturally be punished, and then he will be quits with him.

The struggle between the administration and the prisoner is of the severest character on both sides. What in a great measure justifies the criminal in his own eyes, is his conviction that the people among whom he has been born and has lived will acquit him. He is certain that the common people will not look upon him as a lost man, unless, indeed, his crime has bean committed against persons of his own class, against[Pg 218] his brethren. He is quite calm about that; supported by his conscience, he will not lose his moral tranquillity, and that is the principal thing. He feels himself on firm ground, and has no particular hatred for the knout, when once it has been administered to him. He knows that it was inevitable, and consoles himself by thinking that he was neither the first nor the last to receive it. Does the soldier detest the Turk whom he fights? Not in the least! yet he sabres him, hacks him to pieces, kills him.

It must not be thought, moreover, that all of these stories were told with indifference and in cold blood.

When the name of Jerebiatnikof was mentioned, it was always with indignation. I made the acquaintance of this officer during my first stay in the hospital—only by the convicts' stories, it must be understood. I afterwards saw him one day when he was commanding the guard at the convict prison; he was about thirty years old, very stout and very strong, with red cheeks hanging down on each side, white teeth, and a formidable laugh. One could see in a moment that he was in no way given to reflection. He took the greatest pleasure in whipping and flogging, when he had to superintend the punishment. I must hasten to say that the other officers looked upon Jerebiatnikof as a monster, and the convicts did the same. This was in the good old time, which is not very very far off, but in which it is already difficult to believe

executioners delighted in their office. But, generally speaking, the strokes were administered without enthusiasm.

This lieutenant was an exception, and he took a real pleasure and delight in punishment. He had a passion for it, and liked it for its own sake; he looked to this art for unnatural delights in order to tickle and excite his base soul. A prisoner is conducted to the place of punishment. Jerebiatnikof is the officer superintending the execution. Arranging a long line of soldiers, armed with heavy rods, he walks along the front with a satisfied[Pg 219] air, and encourages each one to do his duty, conscientiously or otherwise—the soldiers know before what "otherwise" means. The criminal is brought out. If he does not yet know Jerebiatnikof, if he is not in the secret of the mystery, the Lieutenant plays him the following trick—one of the inventions of Jerebiatnikof, very ingenious in this style of thing. The prisoner, whose back has been bared, and whom the non-commissioned officers have fastened to the butt end of a musket in order to drag him afterwards through the whole length of the "Green Street." He begs the officer in charge, with a plaintive and tearful voice, not to have him struck too hard, not to double the punishment by any undue severity.

"Your nobility!" cries the unhappy wretch, "have pity on me, treat me fraternally, so that I may pray God throughout my life for you. Do not destroy me, show mercy!"

Jerebiatnikof had waited for this. He now suspended the execution, and engaged the prisoner in conversation, speaking to him in a sentimental, compassionate tone.

"But, my good fellow," he would say, "what am I to do? It is the law that punishes you—it is the law."

"Your nobility! You can make it everything; have pity upon me."

"Do you really think that I have no pity on you? Do you think it is any pleasure to me to see you whipped? I am a man, am I not? Answer me, am I not a man?"

"Certainly, your nobility. We know that the officers are our fathers and we their children. Be to me a venerable father," the prisoner would cry, seeing some possibility of escaping punishment.

"Then, my friend, judge for yourself. You have a brain to think with, you know I am human, I ought to take compassion on you, sinner though you be."

"Your nobility says the absolute truth."

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“Yes, I ought to be merciful to you however guilty you may be. But it is not I who punish you, it is the law. I serve God and my country, and consequently I commit a grave sin if I mitigate the punishment fixed by the law. Only think of that!”

“Your nobility!”

“Well, what am I to do? Only think, I know that I am doing wrong, but it shall be as you wish; I will have mercy upon you, you shall be punished lightly. But if I really do this on one occasion, if I show mercy, if I punish you lightly, you will think that at another time I shall be merciful, and you will recommence your follies. What do you say to that?”

“Your nobility, preserve me! Before the throne of the heavenly Creator, I——”

“No, no; you swear that you will behave yourself.”

“May the Lord cause me to die this moment and in the next world.”

“Do not swear in that way, it is a sin; I shall believe you if you will give me your word.”

“Your nobility.”

“Well, listen, I will have mercy on you on account of your tears, your orphan’s tears, for you are an orphan, are you not?”

“Orphan on both sides, your nobility, I am alone in the world.”

“Well, on account of your orphan’s tears I have pity on you,” he added, in a voice so full of emotion, that the prisoner could not sufficiently thank God for having sent him so good an officer.

The procession went out, the drum rolled, the soldiers brandished their arms. “Flog him,” Jerebiatnikof would roar from the bottom of his lungs, “flog him! burn him! skin him alive! Harder! harder! Give it harder to this orphan! Give it him, the rogue.”

The soldiers lay on the strokes with all their might on the back of the unhappy wretch, whose eyes dart fire, and who howls while Jerebiatnikof runs after him in[Pg 221] front of the line, holding his sides with laughter—he puffs and blows so that he can scarcely hold himself upright. He is happy. He thinks it droll. From time to time his formidable resonant laugh is heard, as he keeps on repeating, “Flog him! thrash him! this brigand! this orphan!”

He had composed variation on this motive. The prisoner has been brought to undergo his punishment. He begs the lieutenant to have pity on him. This time Jerebiatnikof does not play the hypocrite; he is frank with the prisoner.

“Look, my dear fellow, I will punish you as you deserve, but I can show you one act of mercy. I will not attach you to the butt end of the musket, you shall go along in a new style, you have only to run as hard as you can along the front, each rod will strike you as a matter of course, but it will be over sooner. What do you say to that, will you try?”

The prisoner, who has listened, full of mistrust and doubt, says to himself: Perhaps this way will not be so bad as the other. If I run with all my might, it will not last quite so long, and perhaps all the rods will not touch me.

“Well, your nobility, I consent.”

“I also consent. Come, mind your business,” cries the lieutenant to the soldiers. He knew beforehand that not one rod would spare the back of the unfortunate wretch; the soldier who failed to hit him would know what to expect.

The convict tries to run along the “Green Street,” but he does not go beyond fifteen men before the rods rain upon his poor spine like hail; so that the unfortunate man shrieks out, and falls as if he had been struck by a bullet.

“No, your nobility, I prefer to be flogged in the ordinary way,” he says, managing to get up, pale and frightened. While Jerebiatnikof, who knew beforehand how this affair would end, held his sides and burst into a laugh.

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But I cannot relate all the diversions invented by him, and all that was told about him.

My companions also spoke of a Lieutenant Smekaloff, who fulfilled the functions of Commandant before the arrival of our present Major. They spoke of Jerebiatnikof with indifference, without hatred, but also without exalting his high achievements. They did not praise him, they simply despised him, whilst at the name of Smekaloff the whole prison burst into a chorus of laudation. The Lieutenant was by no means fond of administering the rods; there was nothing in him of Jerebiatnikof’s disposition. How did it happen that the convicts remembered his punishments, severe as they were, with sweet satisfaction. How did he manage to please them. How did he gain the popularity he certainly enjoyed?

Our companions, like Russian people in general, were ready to forget their tortures if a kind word was said to them; I speak of the effect itself without analysing or examining it. It is not difficult, then, to gain the affections of such a people and become popular. Lieutenant Smekaloff had gained such popularity, and when the punishments he had directed were spoken of, they were always mentioned with a certain sympathy.

“He was as kind as a father,” the convicts would sometimes say, as, with a sigh, they compared him with their present chief, the Major who had replaced him.

He was a simple-minded man, and kind in a manner. There are chiefs who are naturally kind and merciful, but who are not at all liked and are laughed at; whereas, Smekaloff had so managed that all the prisoners had a special regard for him; this was due to innate qualities, which those who possess them do not understand. Strange thing! There are men who are far from being kind, and who have yet the talent of making themselves popular; they do not despise the people who are beneath their rule. That, I think, is the cause of this popularity. They do not give themselves lordly airs; they have no feeling of “caste;” they have a certain odour of the[Pg 223] people; they are men of birth, and the people at once sniff it. They will do anything for such men; they will gladly change the mildest and most humane man for a very severe chief, if the latter possesses this sort of odour, and especially if the man is also genial in his way. Oh! then he is beyond price.

Lieutenant Smekaloff, as I have said, ordered sometimes very severe punishments. But he seemed to inflict them in such a way, that the prisoners felt no rancour against him. On the contrary, they recalled his whipping affairs with laughter; he did not punish frequently, for he had no artistic imagination. He had invented only one practical joke, a single one which amused him for nearly a year in our convict prison. This joke was dear to him, probably, because it was his only one, and it was not without humour.

Smekaloff assisted himself at the executions, joking all the time, and laughing at the prisoner as he questioned him about the most out-of-the-way things, such, for instance, as his private affairs. He did this without any bad motive, and simply because he really wished to know something about the man’s affairs. A chair was brought to him, together with the rods which were to be used for chastising the prisoner. The Lieutenant sat down and lighted his long pipe; the prisoner implored him.

“No, comrade, lie down. What is the matter with you?”

The convict stretched himself on the ground with a sigh.

“Can you read fluently?”

“Of course, your nobility; I am baptized, and I was taught to read when I was a child.”

“Then read this.”

The convict knows beforehand what he is to read, and knows how the reading will end, because this joke has been repeated more than thirty times; but Smekaloff knows also that the convict is not his dupe any more than the soldier who now holds the rods suspended over[Pg 224] the back of the unhappy victim. The convict begins to read; the soldiers armed with the rods await motionless. Smekaloff ceases even to smoke, raises his hand, and waits for a word fixed upon beforehand. At the word, which from some double meaning might be interpreted as the order to start, the Lieutenant raises his hand, and the flogging begins. The officer bursts into a laugh, and the soldiers around him also laugh; the man who is whipping laughs, and the man who is being whipped also.

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CHAPTER III. THE HOSPITAL[4] (*continued*).

I have spoken here of punishments and of those who have administered them, because I got a very clear idea on the subject during my stay in the hospital. Until then I knew of them only by general report. In our room were confined all the prisoners from the battalion who were to receive the spitzruten [rods], as well as those from the military establishment in our town and in the district surrounding it.

During my first few days I looked at all that surrounded me with such greedy eyes that these strange manners, these men who had just been flogged or were about to be flogged, left upon me a terrible impression. I was agitated, frightened.

As I listened to the conversation or narratives of the other prisoners on this subject, I put to myself questions which I endeavoured in vain to solve. I wished to know all the degrees of the sentences; the punishments, and their shades; and to learn the opinion of the convicts[Pg 226] themselves. I tried to represent to myself the psychological condition of the men flogged.

It rarely happened, as I have already said, that the prisoner approached the fatal moment in cold blood, even if he had been beaten several times before. The condemned man experiences a fear which is very terrible, but purely physical—an unconscious fear which upsets his moral nature.

During my several years' stay in the convict prison I was able to study at leisure the prisoners who wished to leave the hospital, where they had remained some time to have their damaged backs cured before receiving the second half of their punishment.

This interruption in the punishment is always called for by the doctor who assists at the execution.

If the number of strokes to be received is too great for them to be administered all at once, it is divided according to advice given by the doctor on the spot. It is for him to see if the prisoner is in a condition to undergo the whole of his punishment, or if his life is in danger.

Five hundred, one thousand, and even one thousand five hundred strokes with the stick are administered at once. But if it is two or three thousand the punishment is divided into two or three doses.

Those whose back had been cured after the first administration, and who are to undergo a second, were sad, sombre and silent the day they went out, and the evening before. They were almost in a state of torpor. They engaged in no conversation, and remained perfectly silent.

It is worthy of remark that the prisoners avoid addressing those who are about to be punished, and, above all, never make any allusion to the subject, neither in consolation nor in superfluous words. No attention whatever is paid to them, which is certainly the best thing for the prisoner.

There are exceptions, however.

The convict Orloff, of whom I have already spoken,[Pg 227] was sorry that his back did not get more quickly cured, for he was anxious to get his leave-ticket in order that he might take the rest of his flogging, and then be assigned to a convoy of prisoners, when he meant to escape during the journey. He had a passionate, ardent nature, and with only that object in view.

A cunning rascal, he seemed very pleased when he first came; but he was in a state of abnormal excitement, though he endeavoured to conceal it. He had been afraid of being left on the ground, and dying before half of his punishment had been undergone. He had heard steps taken in his case, by the authorities, when he was still being tried, and he thought he could not survive the punishment. But when he had received his first dose he recovered his courage.

When he came to the hospital I had never seen such wounds as his; but he was in the best spirits. He now hoped to be able to live. The stories which had reached him were untrue, or the execution would not have been interrupted.

He now began to think of a long Siberian journey, possibly of escaping to liberty, fields, and forests.

Two days after he had left the hospital he came back to die—on the very couch which he had occupied during my stay there.

He had been unable to support the second half of his punishment; but I have already spoken of this man.

All the prisoners without exception, even the most pusillanimous, even those who were beforehand tormented night and day, supported it courageously when it came. I scarcely ever heard groans during the night following the execution; our people, as a rule, knew how to endure pain.

I questioned my companion often in reference to this pain, that I might know to what kind of suffering it might be compared. It was no idle curiosity which urged me. I repeat that I was moved and[Pg 228] frightened; but it was in vain, I could get no satisfactory reply.

“It burns like fire!” was the general answer; they all said the same thing.

First I tried to question M—tski. “It burns like fire! like hell! It seems as if one’s back were in a furnace.”

I made one day a strange observation, which may or may not have been well founded, although the opinion of the convicts themselves confirms my views; namely, that the rods are the most terrible punishment in use among us.

At first it seems absurd, impossible, yet five hundred strokes of the rods, four hundred even, are enough to kill a man. Beyond five hundred death is almost certain; the most robust man will be unable to support a thousand rods, whereas five hundred sticks are endured without much inconvenience, and without the least risk in the world of losing one’s life. A man of ordinary build supports a thousand sticks without danger; even two thousand sticks will not kill a man of ordinary strength and constitution. All the convicts declared that rods were worse than sticks or ramrods.

“Rods hurt more and torture more!” they said.

They must torture more than sticks, that is certain, that is evident; for they irritate much more forcibly the nervous system, which they excite beyond measure. I do not know whether any person still exists, but such did a short time ago, to whom the whipping of a victim procured a delight which recalls the Marquis de Sade and the Marchioness Brinvilliers. I think this delight must consist in the sinking of the heart, and that these nobles must have experienced pain and delight at the same time.

There are people who, like tigers, are greedy for blood. Those who have possessed unlimited power over the flesh, blood, and soul of their fellow-creatures, of their brethren according to the law of Christ, those who have possessed this power and who[Pg 229] have been able to degrade with a supreme degradation, another being made in the image of God; these men are incapable of resisting their desires and their thirst for sensations. Tyranny is a habit capable of being developed, and at last becomes a disease. I declare that the best man in the world can become hardened and brutified to such a point, that nothing will distinguish him from a wild beast. Blood and power intoxicate; they aid the development of callousness and debauchery; the mind then becomes capable of the most abnormal cruelty in the form of pleasure; the man and the citizen disappear for ever in the tyrant; and then a return to human dignity, repentance, moral resurrection, becomes almost impossible.

That the possibility of such license has a contagious effect on the whole of society there is no doubt. A society which looks upon such things with an indifferent eye, is already infected to the marrow. In a word, the right granted to a man to inflict corporal punishment on his fellow-men, is one of the plague-spots of our society. It is the means of annihilating all civic spirit. Such a right contains in germ the elements of inevitable, imminent decomposition.

Society despises an executioner by trade, but not a lordly executioner. Every manufacturer, every master of works, must feel an irritating pleasure when he reflects that the workman he has beneath his orders is dependent upon him with the whole of his family. A generation does not, I am sure, extirpate so quickly what is hereditary in it. A man cannot renounce what is in his blood, what has been transmitted to him with his mother's milk; these revolutions are not accomplished so quickly. It is not enough to confess one's fault. That is very little! Very little indeed! It must be rooted out, and that is not done so quickly.

I have spoken of the executioners. The instincts of an executioner are in germ in nearly every one of our contemporaries; but the animal instincts of the man have not developed themselves in a uniform manner.[Pg 230] When they stifle all other faculties, the man becomes a hideous monster.

There are two kinds of executioners, those who of their own will are executioners and those who are executioners by duty, by reason of office. He who, by his own will, is an executioner, is in all respects below the salaried executioner, whom, however, the people look upon with repugnance, and who inspires them with disgust, with instinctive mystical fear. Whence comes this almost superstitious horror for the latter, when one is only indifferent and indulgent to the former?

I know strange examples of honourable men, kind, esteemed by all their friends, who found it necessary that a culprit should be whipped until he would implore and beg for mercy; it seemed to them a natural thing, a thing recognised as indispensable. If the victim did not choose to cry out, his executioner, whom in other respects I should consider a good man, looked upon it as a personal offence; he meant, in the first instance, to inflict only a light punishment, but directly he failed to hear the habitual supplications, “Your nobility!” “Have mercy!” “Be a father to me!” “Let me thank God all my life!” he became furious, and ordered that fifty more blows should be administered, hoping thus, at last, to obtain the necessary cries and supplications; and at last they came.

“Impossible! he is too insolent,” cried the man in question, very seriously.

As for the executioner by office, he is a convict who has been chosen for this function. He passes an apprenticeship with an old hand, and as soon as he knows his trade remains in the convict prison, where he lives by himself. He has a room, which he shares with no one. Sometimes, indeed, he has a separate establishment, but he is always under guard. A man is not a machine. Although he whips by virtue of his office, he sometimes becomes furious, and beats with a certain pleasure. Notwithstanding he has no hatred for his victim, a desire to show his skill in the art of whipping may sharpen his[Pg 231] vanity. He works as an artist; he knows well that he is a reprobate, and that he excites everywhere superstitious dread. It is impossible that this should exercise no influence upon him, and not irritate his brutal instincts.

Even little children say that this man has neither father nor mother. Strange thing!

All the executioners I have known were intelligent men, possessing a certain degree of conceit. This conceit became developed in them through the contempt which they everywhere met with, and was strengthened, perhaps, by the consciousness of the fear with which they inspired their victims, and of the power over unfortunate wretches.

The theatrical paraphernalia surrounding them developed, perhaps, in them a certain arrogance. I had for some time an opportunity of meeting and observing at close quarters an ordinary executioner. He was a man about forty, muscular, dry, with an agreeable, intelligent face, surrounded by long curly hair. His manners were quiet and grave, his general demeanour becoming. He replied clearly and sensibly to all questions put to him, but with a sort of condescension as if he were in some way my superior. The officers of the guard spoke to him with a certain respect, which he fully appreciated, for which reason, in presence of his chiefs, he became polite, and more dignified than ever.

He never departed from the most refined politeness. I am sure that, when I was speaking to him, he felt incomparably superior to the man who was addressing him. I could read that in his countenance. Sometimes he was sent under escort, in summer, when it was very hot, to kill the dogs of the town with a long, very thin spear. These wandering dogs increased in numbers with such prodigious rapidity, and became so dangerous during the dog days, that, by the decision of the authorities, the executioner was ordered to destroy them. This degrading duty did not in any way humiliate him. It should have been seen with what gravity he walked[Pg 232] through the streets of the town, accompanied by a soldier escorting him; how, with a single glance, he frightened the women and children; and how, from the height of his grandeur, he looked down upon the passers-by generally.

Executioners live at their ease. They have money to travel comfortably, and drink vodka. They derive most of their income from presents which the prisoners condemned to be flogged slip into their hands before the execution. When they have to do with convicts who are rich, they then fix a sum to be paid in proportion to the means of the victim. They will exact thirty roubles, sometimes more. The executioner has no right to spare his victim; and he does so at the risk of his own back. But for a suitable present he agrees not to strike too hard. People almost always give what he asks; should they in any case refuse, he would strike like a savage; and it is in his power to do so. He sometimes exacts a heavy sum from a man who is very poor. Then all the relations of the victim are put in movement. They bargain, try and beat him down, supplicate him; but it will not be well if they do not succeed in satisfying him. In such a case the superstitious fear inspired by the executioner stands them in good part. I had been told the most wonderful things—that at one blow the executioner can kill his man.

“Is this your experience?” I asked.

Perhaps so. Who knows? Their tone seemed to decide, if there could be any doubt about it. They also told me that he can strike a criminal in such a way that he will not feel the least pain, and without leaving a scar.

Even when the executioner receives a present not to whip too severely, he gives the first blow with all his strength. It is the custom! Then he administers the other blows with less severity, above all if he has been well paid.

I do not know why this is done. Is it to prepare the victim for the succeeding blows, which will appear[Pg 233] less painful after the first cruel one; or do they want to frighten the criminal, so that he may know with whom he has to deal; or do they simply wish to display their vigour from vanity? In any case the executioner is slightly

excited before the execution, and he is conscious of his strength and of his power. He is acting at the time; the public admires him, and is filled with terror. Accordingly, it is not without satisfaction that he cries out to his victim, “Look out! you are going to have it!”—customary and fatal words which precede the first blow.

It is difficult to imagine a human being degraded to such a point.

The first day of my stay at the hospital I listened attentively to the stories of the convicts, which broke the monotony of the long days.

In the morning, the doctor’s visit was the first diversion. Then came dinner, which it will be believed was the most important affair of our daily life. The portions were different according to the nature of the illness: some of the prisoners received nothing but broth with groats in it; others nothing but gruel; others a kind of semolina, which was much liked. The convicts ended by becoming effeminate and fastidious. The convalescents received a piece of boiled beef. The best food, which was reserved for the scorbutic patients, consisted of roast beef with onions, horseradish, and sometimes a small glass of spirits. The bread was, according to the illness, black or brown; the precision preserved in distributing the rations would make the patients laugh.

There were some who took absolutely nothing; the portions were exchanged in such a way that the food intended for one patient was eaten by another: those who were being kept on low diet, who received only small rations, bought those of the scorbutic patients; others would give any price for meat. There were some who ate two entire portions; it cost them a good deal, for they were generally sold at five kopecks each. If one[Pg 234] had no meat to sell in our room the warder was sent to another section, and if he could not find any there he was asked to get some from the military “infirmary”—the free infirmary, as we called it.

There were always patients ready to sell their rations; poverty was general, and those who possessed a few kopecks used to send out to buy cakes and white bread, or other delicacies, at the market. Warders executed these commissions in a disinterested manner. The most painful moment was that which followed the dinner; some went to sleep, if they had no other way of passing their time; others either wrangled or told stories in a loud voice.

When no new patients were brought in, everything became very dull. The arrival of a new patient caused always a certain excitement, above all, if no one knew anything about him; he was questioned about his past life.

The most interesting ones were the birds of passage: they had always something to tell.

Of course they never spoke of their own little faults. If the prisoner did not enter upon this subject himself, no one questioned him about it.

The only thing he was asked was, what quarter he came from? who were with him on the road? what state the road was in? where he was being taken to? etc. Stimulated by the stories of the new comers, our comrades in their turn began to tell what they had seen and done; what was most talked about was the convoys, those in command of them, the men who carried the sentences into execution.

About this time, too, towards evening, the convicts who had been scourged came up; they always made a rather strong impression, as I have said; but it was not every day that any of these were brought to us, and everybody was bored to extinction, when nothing happened to give a fillip to the general relaxed and indolent state of feeling. It seemed, then, as though the sick themselves were exasperated at the very[Pg 235] sight of those near them. Sometimes they squabbled violently.

Our convicts were in high glee when a madman was taken off for medical examination; sometimes those who were sentenced to be scourged, feigned insanity that they might get off. The trick was found out, or it would sometimes be that they voluntarily gave up the pretence. Prisoners, who during two or three days had done all sorts of wild things, suddenly became steady and sensible people, quieted down, and, with a gloomy smile, asked to be taken out of the hospital. Neither the other convicts nor the doctors said a word of remonstrance to them about the deceit, or brought up the subject of their mad pranks. Their names were put down on a list without a word being said, and they were simply taken elsewhere; after the lapse of some days they came back to us with their backs all wounds and blood.

On the other hand, the arrival of a genuine lunatic was a miserable thing to see all through the place. Those of the mentally unsound who were gay, lively, who uttered cries, danced, sang, were greeted at first with enthusiasm by the convicts.

“Here’s fun!” said they, as they looked on the grins and contortions of the unfortunates. But the sight was horribly painful and sad. I have never been able to look upon the mad calmly or with indifference. There was one who was kept three weeks in our room: we would have hidden ourselves, had there been any place to do it. When things were at the worst they brought in another. This one affected me very powerfully.

In the first year, or, to be more exact, during the first month of my exile, I went to work with a gang of kiln men to the tileries situate at two versts from our prison. We were

set to repairing the kiln in which the bricks were baked in summer. That morning, in which M—tski and B. made me acquainted with the non-commissioned officer, superintendent of the works. This was a Pole already well on in life, sixty years old at least, of[Pg 236] high stature, lean, of decent and even somewhat imposing exterior. He had been a long time in service in Siberia, and although he belonged to the lower orders he had been a soldier, and in the rising of 1830—M—tski and B. loved and esteemed him. He was always reading the Vulgate. I spoke to him; his talk was agreeable and intelligent; he told a story in a most interesting way; he was straightforward and of excellent temper. For two years I never saw him again, all I heard was that he had become a "case," and that they were inquiring into it; and then one fine day they brought him into our room; he had gone quite mad.

He came in yelling, uttering shouts of laughter, and began to dance in the middle of the room with indecent gestures which recalled the dance known as Kamarinskaïa.

The convicts were wild with enthusiasm; but, for my part, account for it as you will, I felt utterly miserable. Three days after, we were all of us upset with it; he got into violent disputes with everybody, fought, groaned, sang in the dead of the night; his aberrations were so inordinate and disgusting as to bring our very stomachs up.

He feared nobody. They put the strait-waistcoat on him; but we were no whit better off for it, for he went on quarreling and fighting all round. At the end of three weeks, the room put up an unanimous entreaty to the head doctor that he might be removed to the other apartment reserved for the convicts. But after two days, at the request of the sick people in that other room, they brought him back to our infirmary. As we had two madmen there at once, both rooms kept sending them back and forward, and ended by taking one or the other of the two lunatics, turn and turn about. Everybody breathed more freely when they took them away from us, a good way off, somewhere or other.

There was another lunatic whom I remember—a very remarkable creature. They had brought in, [Pg 237]during the summer, a man under sentence, who looked like a solid and vigorous fellow enough, of about forty-five years. His face was sombre and sad, pitted with small-pox, with little red and swollen eyes. He sat down by my side. He was extremely quiet; spoke to nobody, and seemed utterly absorbed in his own deep reflections.

Night fell; then he addressed me, and, without a word of preface, told me in a hurried and excited way—as if it were a mighty secret he were confiding—that he was to have two thousand strokes with the rod; but that he had nothing to fear, as the daughter of Colonel G—— was taking steps on his behalf.

I looked at him with surprise, and observed that, as I saw the affair, the daughter of a Colonel could be of little use in such a case. I had not yet guessed what sort of person I had to do with, for they had brought him to the hospital as a bodily sick person, not mentally. I then asked him what illness he was suffering from.

He answered that he knew nothing about it; that he had been sent among us for something or other; but that he was in good health, and that the Colonel's daughter had fallen in love with him. Two weeks before she had passed in a carriage before the guard-house, where he was looking through the barred window, and she had gone head over ears in love at the mere sight of him.

After that important moment she had come three times to the guard-house on different pretexts. The first time with her father, ostensibly to visit her brother, who was the officer on service; the second with her mother, to distribute alms to the prisoners. As she passed in front of him she had muttered that she loved him and would get him out of prison.

He told me all this nonsense with minute and exact details; all of it pure figment of his poor disordered head. He believed devoutly and implicitly that his punishment would be graciously remitted. He spoke[Pg 238] very calmly, and with all assurance of the passionate love he had inspired in this young lady.

This odd and romantic delusion about the love of quite a young girl of good breeding, for a man nearly fifty years and afflicted with a face so disfigured and gloomy, simply showed the fearful effect produced by the fear of the punishment he was to have, upon the poor, timid creature.

It may be that he had really seen some one through the bars of the window, and the insanity, germinating under excess of fear, had found shape and form in the delusion in question.

This unfortunate soldier, who, it may be warranted, had never given a thought to young ladies, had got this romance into his diseased fancy, and clung convulsively to this wild hope. I heard him in silence, and then told the story to the other convicts. When these questioned him in their natural curiosity, he preserved a chastely discreet silence.

Next day the doctor examined him. As the madman averred that he was not ill, he was put down on the list as qualified to be sent out. We learned that the physician had scribbled "*Sanat. est*" on the page, when it was quite too late to give him warning. Besides, we were ourselves not by any means sure what was really the matter with the man.

The error was with the authorities who had sent him to us, without specifying for what reason it was thought necessary to have him come into the hospital—which was unpardonable negligence.

However, two days later the unhappy creature was taken out to be scourged. We understood that he was dumbfounded by finding, contrary to his fixed expectation, that he really was to have the punishment. To the last moment he thought he would be pardoned, and when conducted to the front of the battalion, he began to cry for help.

As there was no room or bedding-place now in our apartment they sent him to the infirmary. I heard that[Pg 239] for eight entire days he did not utter a single word, and remained in stupid and misery-stricken mental confusion. When his back was cured they took him off. I never heard a single further word about him.

As to the treatment of the sick and the remedies prescribed, those who were but slightly indisposed paid no attention whatever to the directions of the doctors, and never took their medicines; while, speaking generally, those really ill were very careful in following the doctor's orders; they took their mixtures and powders; they took all the possible care they could of themselves; but they preferred external to internal remedies.

Cupping-glasses, leeches, cataplasms, blood-lettings—in all which things the populace has so blind a confidence—were held in high honour in our hospital. Inflictions of that sort were regarded with satisfaction.

There was one thing quite strange, and to me interesting. Fellows, who stood without a murmur the frightful tortures caused by the rods and scourges, howled, and grinned, and moaned for the least little ailment. Whether it was all pretence or not, I really cannot say.

We had cuppings of a quite peculiar kind. The machine with which instantaneous incisions in the skin are produced, was all out of order, so they had to use the lancet.

For a cupping, twelve incisions are necessary; with a machine these are not painful at all, for it makes them instantaneously; with the lancet it is a different affair altogether—that cuts slowly, and makes the patient suffer. If you have to make ten openings there will be about one hundred and twenty pricks, and these very painful. I had to undergo it myself; besides the pain itself, it caused great nervous irritation; but the suffering was not so great that one could not contain himself from groaning if he tried.

It was laughable to see great, hulking fellows[Pg 240] wriggling and howling. One couldn't help comparing them to some men, firm and calm enough in really serious circumstances, but all ill-temper or caprice in the bosom of their families for nothing at all; if dinner is late or the like, then they'll scold and swear; everything puts them out; they go wrong with everybody; the more comfortable they really are, the more troublesome are they to other people. Characters of this sort, common enough among the lower orders, were but too numerous in our prison, by reason of our company being forced on one another.

Sometimes the prisoners chaffed or insulted the thin-skins I speak of, and then they would leave off complaining directly; as if they only wanted to be insulted to make them hold their tongues.

Oustiantsef was no friend of grimacings of this kind, and never let slip an opportunity of bringing that sort of delinquent to his bearings. Besides, he was fond of scolding; it was a sort of necessity with him, engendered by illness and also his stupidity. He would first fix his gaze upon you for some time, and then treat you to a long speech of threatening and warning, and a tone of calm and impartial conviction. It looked as though he thought his function in this world was to watch over order and morality in general.

"He must poke his nose into everything," the prisoners with a laugh used to say; for they pitied, and did what they could to avoid conflicts with him.

"Has he chattered enough? Three waggons wouldn't be too much to carry away all his talk."

"Why need you put your oar in? One is not going to put himself about for a mere idiot. What's there to cry out about at a mere touch of a lancet?"

"What harm in the world do you fancy *that* is going to do you?"

"No, comrades," a prisoner strikes in, "the cuppings are a mere nothing. I know the taste of them. But the most horrid thing is when they pull[Pg 241] your ears for a long time together. That just shuts you up."

All the prisoners burst out laughing.

"Have you had them pulled?"

"By Jove, yes, I should think he had."

"That's why they stick upright, like hop-poles."

This convict, Chapkin by name, really had long and quite erect ears. He had long led a vagabond life, was still quite young, intelligent, and quiet, and used to talk with a dry sort of humour with much seriousness on the surface, which made his stories very comical.

“How in the world was I to know you had had your ears pulled and lengthened, brainless idiot?” began Oustiantsef, once more wrathfully addressing Chapkin, who, however, vouchsafed no attention to his companion’s obliging apostrophe.

“Well, who did pull your ears for you?” some one asked.

“Why, the police superintendent, by Jove, comrades! Our offence was wandering about without fixed place of abode. We had just got into K——, I and another tramp, Eptinie; he had no family name, that fellow. On the way we had fixed ourselves up a little in the hamlet of Tolmina; yes, there is a hamlet that’s got just that name—Tolmina. Well, we get to the town, and are just looking about us a little to see if there’s a good stroke of tramp-business to do, after which we mean to flit. You know, out in the open country you’re as free as air; but it’s not exactly the same thing in the town. First thing, we go into a public-house; as we open the door we give a sharp look all round. What’s there? A sunburnt fellow in a German coat all out at elbows, walks right up to us. One thing and another comes up, when he says to us:

“‘Pray excuse me for asking if you have any papers [passport] with you?’

“‘No, we haven’t.’

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“‘Nor have we either. I have two comrades besides these with me who are in the service of General Cuckoo [forest tramps, *i.e.*, who hear the birds sing]. We have been seeing life a bit, and just now haven’t a penny to bless ourselves with. May I take the liberty of requesting you to be so obliging as to order a quart of brandy?’

“‘With the greatest pleasure,’ that’s what we say to him. So we drink together. Then they tell us of a place where there’s a real good stroke of business to be done—a house at the end of the town belonging to a wealthy merchant fellow; lots of good things there, so we make up our minds to try the job during the night; five of us, and the very moment we are going at it they pounce on us, take us to the station-house, and then before the head of the police. He says, ‘I shall examine them myself.’ Out he goes with his pipe, and they bring in for him a cup of tea; a sturdy fellow it was, with whiskers. Besides us five, there were three other tramps, just brought in. You know, comrades, that there’s nothing in this world more funny than a tramp, because he

always forgets everything he's done. You may thump his head till you're tired with a cudgel; all the same, you'll get but one answer, that he has forgotten all about everything.

"The police superintendent then turns to me and asks me squarely,

"'Who may you be?'

"I answer just like all the rest of them:

"'I've forgotten all about it, your worship.'

"'Just you wait; I've a word or two more to say to you. I know your phiz.'

"Then he gives me a good long stare. But I hadn't seen him anywhere before, that's a fact.

"Then he asks another of them, 'Who are you?'

"'Mizzle-and-scud, your worship.'

"'They call you Mizzle-and-scud?'

"'Precisely that, your worship.'

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"'Well and good, you're Mizzle-and-scud! And you?' to a third.

"'Along-of-him, your worship.'

"'But what's your name—your name?'

"'Me? I'm called Along-of-him, your worship.'

"'Who gave you that name, hound?'

"'Very worthy people, your worship. There are lots of worthy people about; nobody knows that better than your worship.'

"'And who may these "worthy people" be?'

"'Oh, Lord, it has slipped my memory, your worship. Do be so kind and gracious as to overlook it.'

"'So you've forgotten them, all of them, these "worthy people"?'

"'Every mother's son of them, your worship.'

"'But you must have had relations—a father, a mother. Do you remember them?'

“‘I suppose I must have had, your worship; but I’ve forgotten about ’em, my memory is so bad. Now I come to think about it, I’m sure I had some, your worship.’

“‘But where have you been living till now?’

“‘In the woods, your worship.’

“‘Always in the woods?’

“‘Always in the woods!’

“‘Winter too?’

“‘Never saw any winter, your worship.’

“‘Get along with you! And you—what’s your name?’

“‘Hatchets-and-axes, your worship.’

“‘And yours?’

“‘Sharp-and-mum, your worship.’

“‘And you?’

“‘Keen-and-spry, your worship.’

“‘And not a soul of you remembers anything that ever happened to you.’

“‘Not a mother’s son of us anything whatever.’

“He couldn’t help it; he laughed out loud. All the[Pg 244] rest began to laugh at seeing him laugh! But the thing does not always go off like that. Sometimes they lay about them, these police, with their fists, till you get every tooth in your jaw smashed. Devilish big and strong these fellows, I can tell you.

“‘Take them off to the lock-up,’ said he. ‘I’ll see to them in a bit. As for you, stop here!’

“That’s me.

“‘Just you go and sit down there.’

“Where he pointed to there was paper, a pen, and ink; so thinks I, ‘What’s he up to now?’

“‘Sit down,’ he says again; ‘take the pen and write.’

“And then he goes and clutches at my ear and gives it a good pull. I looked at him in the sort of way the devil may look at a priest.

“‘I can’t write, your worship.’

“‘Write, write!’

“‘Have mercy on me, your worship!’

“‘Write your best; write, write!’

“And all the while he keeps pulling my ear, pulling and twisting. Pals, I’d rather have had three hundred strokes of the cat; I tell you it was hell.

“‘Write, write!’ that was all he said.”

“Had the fellow gone mad? What the mischief was it?

“Bless us, no! A little while before, a secretary had done a stroke of business at Tobolsk: he had robbed the local treasury and gone off with the money; he had very big ears, just as I have. They had sent the fact all over the country. I answered to that description; that’s why he tormented me with his ‘Write, write!’ He wanted to find out if I could write, and to see my hand.

“‘A regular sharp chap that! Did it hurt?’

“‘Oh, Lord, don’t say a word about it, I beg.’

“Everybody burst out laughing.

“‘Well, you did write?’

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“‘What the deuce was there to write? I set my pen going over the paper, and did it to such good account that he left off torturing me. He just gave me a dozen thumps, regulation allowance, and then let me go about my business: to prison, that is.’

“‘Do you really know how to write?’

“‘Of course I did. What d’ye mean? Used to very well; forgotten the whole blessed thing, though, ever since they began to use pens for it.’”

Thanks to the gossip talk of the convicts who filled the hospital, time was somewhat quickened for us. But still, Almighty God, how wearied and bored we were! Long, long were the days, suffocating in their monotony, one absolutely the same as another. If only I had had a single book.

For all that I went often to the infirmary, especially in the early days of my banishment, either because I was ill or because I needed rest, just to get out of the worse parts of

the prison. In those life was indeed made a burden to us, worse even than in the hospital, especially as regards the effect upon moral sentiment and good feeling. We of the nobility were the never-ceasing objects of envious dislike, quarrels picked with us all the time, something done every moment to put us in the wrong, looks filled with menacing hatred unceasingly directed on us! Here, in the sick-rooms, one lived on a sort of footing of equality, there was something of comradeship.

The most melancholy moment of the twenty-four hours was evening, when night set in. We went to bed very early. A smoky lamp just gave us one point of light at the very end of the room, near the door. In our corner we were almost in complete darkness. The air was pestilential, stifling. Some of the sick people could not get to sleep, would rise up, and remain sitting for an hour together on their beds, with their heads bent, as though they were in deep reflection. These I would[Pg 246] look at steadily, trying to guess what they might be thinking of; thus I tried to kill time. Then I became lost in my own reveries; the past came up to me again, showing itself to my imagination in large powerful outlines filled with high lights and massive shadows, details that at any other time would have remained in oblivion, presented themselves in vivid force, making on me an impression impossible under any other circumstances.

Then I would begin to muse dreamily on the future. When shall I leave this place of restraint, this dreadful prison? Whither betake myself? What will then befall me? Shall I return to the place of my birth? So I brood, and brood, until hope lives once again in my soul.

Another time I would begin to count, one, two, three, etc., to see if sleep could be won that way. I would set sometimes as far as three thousand, and was as wakeful as ever. Then somebody would turn in his bed.

Then there's Oustiantsef coughing, that cough of the hopelessly-gone consumptive, and then he would groan feebly, and stammer, "My God, I've sinned, I've sinned!"

How frightful it was, that voice of the sick man, that broken, dying voice, in the midst of that silence so dead and complete! In a corner there are some sick people not yet asleep, talking in a low voice, stretched on their pallets. One of them is telling the story of his life, all about things infinitely far off; things that have fled for ever; he is talking of his trampings through the world, of his children, his wife, the old ways of his life. And the very accent of the man's voice tells you that all those things are for ever over for him, that he is as a limb cut off from the world of men, cut off, thrown aside; there is another, listening intently to what he is saying. A weak, feeble sort of muttering and murmuring comes to one's ear from far-off in the dreary room, a sound as of[Pg 247] far-off water flowing somewhere.... I remember that one time, during a

winter night that seemed as if it would never end, I heard a story which at first seemed as if it were the stammerings of a creature in nightmare, or the delirium of fever. Here it is:

FOOTNOTES:

[4]What I relate about corporal punishment took place during my time. Now, as I am told, everything is changed, and is changing still.

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CHAPTER IV. THE HUSBAND OF AKOULKA

It was late at night, about eleven o'clock. I had been sleeping some time and woke up with a start. The wan and weak light of the distant lamp barely lit the room. Nearly everybody was fast asleep, even Oustiantsef; in the quiet of the night I heard his difficult breathing, and the rattlings in his throat with every respiration. In the ante-chamber sounded the heavy and distant footsteps of the patrol as the men came up. The butt of a gun struck the floor with its low and heavy sound.

The door of the room was opened, and the corporal counted the sick, stepping softly about the place. After a minute or so he closed the door again, leaving a fresh sentinel there; the patrol went off, silence reigned again. It was only then that I observed two prisoners, not far from me, who were not sleeping, and who seemed to be holding a muttered conversation. Sometimes, in fact, it would happen that a couple of sick people, whose beds adjoined and who had not[Pg 249] exchanged a word for weeks, would all of a sudden break out into conversation with one another, in the middle of the night, and one of them would tell the other his history.

Probably they had been speaking for some considerable time. I did not hear the beginning of it, and could not at first seize upon their words, but little by little I got familiar with the muttered sounds, and understood all that was going on. I had not the least desire for sleep on me, so what could I do but listen.

One of them was telling his story with some warmth, half-lying on his bed, with his head lifted and stretched towards his companion. He was plainly excited to no little degree; the necessity of speech was on him.

The man listening was sitting up on his pallet, with a gloomy and indifferent air, his legs stretched out flat on the mattress, and now and again murmured some words in reply, more out of politeness than interest, and kept stuffing his nose with snuff from a

horn box. This was the soldier Techérévin, one of the company of discipline; a morose, cold-reasoning pedant, an idiot full of *amour propre*; while the narrator was Chichkof, about thirty years old; this was a civilian convict, whom up to that time I had not at all observed; and during the whole time I was at the prison I never could get up the smallest interest in him, for he was a conceited, heady fellow.

Sometimes he would hold his tongue for weeks together, and look sulky and brutal enough for anything; then all of a sudden he would strike into anything that was going on, behave insufferably, go into a white heat about nothing at all, and tell you long stories with nothing in them whatever about one barrack or another, blowing abuse on all the world, and acting like a man beside himself. Then some one would give him a hiding, and he would have another fit of silence. He was a mean and cowardly fellow, and the[Pg 250] object of general contempt. His stature was low, he had little flesh on him, he had wandering eyes, though they sometimes got mixed and seemed filled with a stupid sort of thinking. When he told you anything he worked himself into a fever, gesticulated wildly, suddenly broke off and went to another subject, lost himself in fresh details, and at last forgot altogether what he was talking about. He often got into squabbles, this Chichkof, and when he poured insult on his adversary, he spoke with a sentimental whine and was affected nearly to tears. He was not a bad hand at playing the *balalaika*, and had a weakness for it; on fête days he would show you his dancing powers when others set him at it, and he danced by no means badly. You could easily enough make him do what you wanted … not that he was of a complying turn, but he liked to please and to get intimate with fellows.

For some considerable time I couldn't understand the story Chichkoff was telling; that night I mean. It seemed to me as though he were constantly rambling from the point to talk of something else. Perhaps he had observed that Tchérévine was paying little attention to the narrative, but I fancy that he was minded to overlook this indifference, so as not to take offence.

"When he went out on business," he continued, "every one saluted him politely, paid him every respect … a fellow with money that."

"You say that he was in some trade or other."

"Yes; trade indeed! The trading class in my country is wretchedly ill-off; just poverty-stricken. The women go to the river and fetch water from ever such a distance to water their gardens. They wear themselves to the very bone, and, for all that, when winter comes, they haven't got enough to make a mere cabbage soup. I tell you it's starvation. But that fellow had a good lump of land, which his labourers cultivated; he had three. Then he had hives, and sold his honey; he was a cattle-dealer too; a much

respected man in our parts. He was very old and quite gray, his[Pg 251] seventy years lay heavy on his old bones. When he came to the market-place with his fox-skin pelisse, everybody saluted him.

“‘Good-day, daddy Aukoudim Trophimtych!’

“‘Good-day,’ he’d return.

“‘How are you getting along;’ he never looked down on any one.

“‘God keep you, Aukoudim Trophimtych!’

“‘How goes business with you?’

“‘Business is as good as tallow’s white with me; and how’s yours, daddy?’

“‘We’ve just got enough of a livelihood to pay the price of sin; always sweating over our bit of land.’

“‘Lord preserve you, Aukoudim Trophimtych!’

“He never looked down on anybody. All his advice was always worth having; every one of his words was worth a rouble. A great reader he was, quite a man of learning; but he stuck to religious books. He would call his old wife and say to her, ‘Listen, woman, take well in what I say;’ then he would explain things. His old Marie Stépanovna was not exactly an old woman, if you please; it was his second wife; he had married her to have children, his first wife had not brought him any. He had two boys still quite young, for the second of them was born when his father was close on sixty; Akoulka, his daughter, was eighteen years old, she was the eldest.”

“Your wife? Isn’t it so?”

“Wait a bit, wait. Then Philka Marosof begins to kick up a row. Says he to Aukoudim: ‘Let’s split the difference. Give me back my four hundred roubles. I’m not your beast of burden; I don’t want to do any more business with you, and I don’t want to marry your Akoulka. I want to have my fling now that my parents are dead. I’ll liquor away my money, then I’ll engage myself, ’list for a soldier; and in ten years I’ll come back here a field-marshal!’ Aukoudim gave him back his[Pg 252] money—all he had of his. You see he and Philka’s father had both put in money and done business together.

“‘You’re a lost man,’ that’s what he said to Philka.

“‘Whether I’m a lost man or not, old gray-beard, you’re the biggest cheat I know. You’d try to screw a fortune out of four farthings, and pick up all the dirt about to do it with. I spit upon it. There you are piling up here, digging deep there, the devil only knows why.

I've got a will of my own, I tell you. All the same I won't take your Akoulka; I've slept with her already.'

"'How dare you insult a respectable father—a respectable girl? When did you sleep with her, you spawn of the sucker, you dog, you hound, you——?' said Aukoudim shaking with passion. (Philka told us all this later).

"'I'll not only not marry your daughter, but I'll take good care that nobody marries her, not even Mikita Grigoritch, for she's a disreputable girl. We had a fine time together, she and I, all last autumn. I don't want her at any price. All the money in the world wouldn't make me take her.'

"Then the fellow went and had high jinks for a while. All the town was as one man in sending up a cry against him. He got a lot of other fellows round him, for he had a heap of money. Three months he had of it. Such recklessness as you never heard of. Every penny went.

"'I want to see the end of this money. I'll sell the house; everything; then I'll 'list or go on the tramp.'

"He was drunk from morning to evening, and went about with a carriage and pair.

"The girls liked him well, I tell you, for he played the guitar very nicely."

"Then it is true that he had been too well with this Akoulka?"

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"Wait, wait, can't you? I had just buried my father. My mother lived by baking gingerbread. We got our livelihood by working for Aukoudim; barely enough to eat, a precious hard life it was. We had a bit of land the other side of the woods, and grew corn there; but when my father died I went on a spree. I made my mother give me money; but I had to give her a good hiding first."

"You were very wrong to beat her; a great sin that?"

"Sometimes I was drunk the whole blessed day. We had a house that was just tumbling to pieces with dry rot, still it was our own; we were as near famished as could be; for weeks together we had nothing but rags to chew. Mother nearly killed me with one stupid trick or another, but I didn't care a curse. Philka Marosof and I were always together day and night. 'Play the guitar to me,' he'd say, 'and I'll lie in bed the while. I'll throw money to you, for I'm the richest chap in the world!' The fellow could not speak without lying. There was only one thing. He wouldn't touch a thing if it had

been stolen. ‘I’m no thief, I’m an honest man. Let’s go and daub Akoulka’s door with pitch,[5] for I won’t have her marry Mikita Grigoritch, I’ll stick to that.’

“The old man had long meant to give his daughter to this Mikita Grigoritch. He was a man well on in life, in trade too, and wore spectacles. When he heard the story of Akoulka’s bad conduct, he said to the old father, ‘That would be a terrible disgrace for me, Aukoudim Trophimtych; on the whole, I’ve made up my mind not to marry; it’s to late.’

“So we went and daubed Akoulka’s door all over with pitch. When we’d done that her folks beat her so that they nearly killed her.

“Her mother, Marie Stépanovna, cried, ‘I shall die of it,’ while the old man said, ‘If we were in the days of[Pg 254] the patriarchs, I’d have hacked her to pieces on a block. But now everything is rottenness and corruption in this world.’ Sometimes the neighbours from one end of the street to the other heard Akoulka’s screams. She was whipped from morning to evening, and Philka would cry out in the market-place before everybody:

“Akoulka’s a jolly girl to get drunk with. I’ve given it those people between the eyes, they won’t forget me in a hurry.’

“Well, one day, I met Akoulka, she was going for water with her bucket, so I cried out to her: ‘A fine morning, pet Akoulka Koudimovna! you’re the girl who knows how to please fellows. Who’s living with you now, and where do you get your money for your finery?’ That’s just what I said to her; she opened her eyes as wide as you please. No more flesh on her than on a log of wood. She had only just given me a look, but her mother thought she was larking with me, and cried from her door-step, ‘Impudent hussy, what do you mean by talking with that fellow?’ And from that moment they began to beat her again. Sometimes they hided her for an hour together. The mother said, ‘I give her the whip because she isn’t my daughter any more.’”

“She was then as bad as they said?”

“Now you just listen to my story, nunky, will you? Well, we used to get drunk all the time with Philka. One day when I was abed, mother comes and says:

“‘What d’ye mean by lying in bed, you hound, you thief!’ She abused me for some time, then she said, ‘Marry Akoulka. They’ll be glad to give her to you, and they’ll give three hundred roubles with her.’

“‘But,’ says I, ‘all the world knows that she’s a bad girl——’

“‘Hist, the marriage ceremony cures all that; besides, she’ll always be in fear of her life from you, so you’ll be in clover together. Their money would[Pg 255] make us comfortable; I’ve spoken about the marriage already to Marie Stépanovna, we’re of one mind about it.’

“So I say, ‘Let’s have twenty roubles down on the spot, and I’ll have her.’

“Well, you needn’t believe it unless you please, but I was drunk right up to the wedding-day. Then Philka Marosof kept threatening me all the time.

“‘I’ll break every bone in your body, a nice fellow you to be engaged, and to Akoulka; if I like I’ll sleep every blessed night with her when she’s your wife.’

“‘You’re a hound, and a liar,’ that’s what I said to him. But he insulted me so in the street, before everybody, that I ran to Aukoudim’s and said, ‘I won’t marry her unless I have fifty roubles down this moment.’”

“And they really did give her to you in marriage?”

“Me? Why not, I should like to know? We were respectable people enough. Father had been ruined by a fire a little before he died; he had been a richer man than Aukoudim Trophimtych.

“‘A fellow without a shirt to his back like you ought to be only too happy to marry my daughter;’ that’s what old Aukoudim said.

“‘Just you think of your door, and the pitch that went on it,’ I said to him.

“‘Stuff and nonsense,’ said he, ‘there’s no proof whatever that the girl’s gone wrong.’

“‘Please yourself. There’s the door, and you can go about your business; but give back the money you’ve had!’

“Then Philka Marosof and I settled it together to send Mitri Bykoff to Father Aukoudim to tell him that we’d insult him to his face before everybody. Well, I had my skin as full as it could hold right up to the wedding-day. I wasn’t sober till I got into the church. When they took us home after church the girl’s uncle, Mitrophone Stépanytch, said:

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“‘This isn’t a nice business; but it’s over and done now.’

“Old Aukoudim was sitting there crying, the tears rolled down on his gray beard. Comrade, I’ll tell you what I had done: I had put a whip into my pocket before we went to church, and I’d made up my mind to have it out of her with that, so that all the world

might know how I'd been swindled into the marriage, and not think me a bigger fool than I am."

"I see, and you wanted her to know what was in store for her. Ah, was——?"

"Quiet, nunky, quiet! Among our people I'll tell you how it is; directly after the marriage ceremony they take the couple to a room apart, and the others remain drinking till they return. So I'm left alone with Akoulka; she was pale, not a bit of colour on her cheeks; frightened out of her wits. She had fine hair, supple and bright as flax, and great big eyes. She scarcely ever was known to speak; you might have thought she was dumb; an odd creature, Akoulka, if ever there was one. Well, you can just imagine the scene. My whip was ready on the bed. Well, she was as pure a girl as ever was, not a word of it all was true."

"Impossible!"

"True, I swear; as good a girl as any good family might wish."

"Then, brother, why—why—why had she had to undergo all that torture? Why had Philka Marosof slandered her so?"

"Yes, why, indeed?"

"Well, I got down from the bed, and went on my knees before her, and put my hands together as if I were praying, and just said to her, 'Little mother, pet, Akoulka Koudimovna, forgive me for having been such an idiot as to believe all that slander; forgive me. I'm a hound!'

"She was seated on the bed, and gazed at me fixedly. She put her two hands on my shoulders and began to[Pg 257] laugh; but the tears were running all down her cheeks. She sobbed and laughed all at once.

"Then I went out and said to the people in the other room, 'Let Philka Marosof look to himself. If I come across him he won't be long for this world.'

"The old people were beside themselves with delight. Akoulka's mother was ready to throw herself at her daughter's feet, and sobbed.

"Then the old man said, 'If we had known really how it was, my dearest child, we wouldn't have given you a husband of that sort.'

"You ought to have seen how we were dressed the first Sunday after our marriage—when we left church! I'd got a long coat of fine cloth, a fur cap, with plush breeches. She had a pelisse of hareskin, quite new, and a silk kerchief on her head. One was as

fine as the other. Everybody admired us. I must say I looked well, and pet Akoulka did too. One oughtn't to boast, but one oughtn't to sing small. I tell you people like us are not turned out by the dozen."

"Not a doubt about it."

"Just you listen, I tell you. The day after my marriage I ran off from my guests, drunk as I was, and went about the streets crying, 'Where's that scoundrel of a Philka Marosof? Just let him come near me, the hound, that's all!' I went all over the market-place yelling that out. I was as drunk as a man could be, and stand.

"They went after me and caught me close to Vlassof's place. It took three men to get me back again to the house.

"Well, nothing else was spoken about all over the village. The girls said, when they met in the market-place, 'Well, you've heard the news—Akoulka was all right!'

"A little while after I do come across Philka Marosof, who said to me before everybody, strangers to the place, too, 'Sell your wife, and spend the money on drink. Jackka the soldier only married for that; he[Pg 258] didn't sleep one night with his wife; but he got enough to keep his skin full for three years.'

"I answered him, 'Hound!'

"'But,' says he, 'you're an idiot! You didn't know what you were about when you married—you were drunk. How could you tell all about it?'

"So off I went to the house, and cried out to them 'You married me when I was drunk.'

"Akoulka's mother tried to fasten herself on me; but I cried, 'Mother, you don't know about anything but money. You bring me Akoulka!'

"And didn't I beat her! I tell you I beat her for two hours running, till I rolled on the floor myself with fatigue. She couldn't leave her bed for three weeks."

"It's a dead sure thing," said Tchérévine phlegmatically; "if you don't beat them they—— Did you find her with her lover?"

"No; to tell the truth, I never actually caught her," said Chichkoff after a pause, speaking with effort; "but I was hurt, a good deal hurt, for every one made fun of me. The cause of it all was Philka. 'Your wife is just made for everybody to look at,' said he.

"One day he invited us to see him, and then he went at it. 'Do just look what a good little wife he has! Isn't she tender, fine, nicely brought up, affectionate, full of kindness for all the world? I say, my lad, have you forgotten how we daubed their door with

pitch?' I was full at that moment, drunk as may be; then he seized me by the hair and had me down upon the ground before I knew where I was. 'Come along—dance; aren't you Akoulka's husband? I'll hold your hair for you, and you shall dance; it will be good fun.' 'Dog!' said I to him. 'I'll bring some jolly fellows to your house,' said he, 'and I'll whip your Akoulka before your very eyes just as long as I please.' Would you believe it? For a whole month I daren't go out of the house, I was so afraid he'd come to us and drag my wife through the dirt. And how I did beat her for it!"

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"What was the use of beating her? You can tie a woman's hands, but not her tongue. You oughtn't to give them a hiding too often. Beat 'em a bit, then scold 'em well, then fondle 'em; that's what a woman is made for."

Chichkoff remained quite silent for a few moments.

"I was very much hurt," he went on; "I began it again just as before. I beat her from morning till night for nothing; because she didn't get up from her seat the way I liked; because she didn't walk to suit me. When I wasn't hiding her, time hung heavy on my hands. Sometimes she sat by the window crying silently—it hurt my feelings sometimes to see her cry, but I beat her all the same. Sometimes her mother abused me for it: 'You're a scoundrel, a gallows-bird!' 'Don't say a word or I'll kill you; you made me marry her when I was drunk, you swindled me.' Old Aukoudim wanted at first to have his finger in the pie. Said he to me one day: 'Look here, you're not such a tremendous fellow that one can't put you down;' but he didn't get far on that track. Marie Stépanovna had become as sweet as milk. One day she came to me crying her eyes out and said: 'My heart is almost broken, Ivan Semionytch; what I'm going to ask of you is a little thing for you, but it is a good deal to me; let her go, let her leave you, daddy Ivan.' Then she throws herself at my feet. 'Do give up being so angry! Wicked people slander her; you know quite well she was good when you married her.' Then she threw herself at my feet again and cried. But I was as hard as nails. 'I won't hear a word you have to say; what I choose to do, I do, to you or anybody, for I'm crazed with it all. As to Philka Marosof, he's my best and dearest friend.'"

"You'd begun to play your pranks together again, you and he?"

"No, by Jove! He was out of the way by this time; he was killing himself with drink, nothing less. He had spent all he had on drink, and had 'listed for a soldier, as substitute for a citizen body in the town. In[Pg 260] our parts, when a lad makes up his mind to be substitute for another, he is master of that house and everybody there till he's called to the ranks. He gets the sum agreed on the day he goes off, but up to then

he lives in the house of the man who buys him, sometimes six whole months, and there isn't a horror in the whole world those fellows are not guilty of. It's enough to make folks take the holy images out of the house. From the moment he consents to be substitute for the son of the family then he considers himself their patron and benefactor, and makes them dance as he pipes, or else he goes off the bargain.

"So Philka Marosof played the very mischief at the home of this townsman. He slept with the daughter, pulled the master of the house by the beard after dinner, did anything that came into his head. They had to heat the bath for him every day, and, what's more, give him brandy fumes with the steam of the bath: and he would have the women lead him by the arms to the bath room.[6]

"When he came back to the man's house after a revel elsewhere, he would stop right in the middle of the road and cry out:

"'I won't go in by the door; pull down the fence!'

"And they actually *had* to pull down the fence, though there was the door right at it to let him in. That all came to an end though, the day they took him to the regiment. That day he was sobered sufficiently. The crowd gathered all through the street.

"'They're taking off Philka Marosof!'

"He made a salute on all sides, right and left. Just at that moment Akoulka was returning from the kitchen-garden. Directly Philka saw her he cried out to her:

"'Stop!' and down he jumped from the cart and threw himself down at her feet.

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"'My soul, my sweet little strawberry, I've loved you two years long. Now they're taking me off to the regiment with the band playing. Forgive me, good honest girl of a good honest father, for I'm nothing but a hound, and all you've gone through is my fault.'

"Then he flings himself down before her a second time. At first Akoulka was exceedingly frightened; but she made him a great bow, which nearly bent her double.

"'Forgive me, too, my good lad; but I am really not at all angry with you.'

"As she went into the house I was at her heels.

"'What did you say to him, you she-devil, you?'

"Now you may believe it or not as you like, but she looked at me as bold as you please, and answered:

“‘I love him better than anything or anybody in this world.’

“‘I say!’

“That day I didn’t utter one single word. Only towards evening I said to her: ‘Akoulka, I’m going to kill you now.’ I didn’t close an eye the whole night. I went into the little room leading to ours and drank kwass. At daybreak I went into the house again. ‘Akoulka, get ready and come into the fields.’ I had arranged to go there before; my wife knew it.

“‘You are right,’ said she. ‘It’s quite time to begin reaping. I’ve heard that our labourer is ill and doesn’t work a bit.’

“I put to the cart without saying a word. As you go out of the town there’s a forest fifteen versts in length. At the end of it is our field. When we had gone about three versts through the wood I stopped the horse.

“‘Come, get up, Akoulka; your end is come.’

“She looked at me all in a fright, and got up without a word.

“‘You’ve tormented me enough. Say your prayers.’

“I seized her by the hair—she had long, thick[Pg 262] tresses—I rolled them round my arm. I held her between my knees; took out my knife; threw her head back, and cut her throat. She screamed; the blood spurted out. Then I threw away my knife. I pressed her with all my might in my arms. I put her on the ground and embraced her, yelling with all my might. She screamed; I yelled; she struggled and struggled. The blood—her blood—splashed my face, my hands. It was stronger than I was—stronger. Then I took fright. I left her—left my horse and began to run; ran back to the house.

“I went in the back way, and hid myself in the old ramshackle bath-house, which we never used now. I lay myself down under the seat, and remained hid till the dead of the night.”

“And Akoulka?”

“She got up to come back to the house; they found her later, a hundred steps from the place.”

“So you hadn’t finished her?”

“No.” Chichkoff stopped a while.

“Yes,” said Tchérévine, “there’s a vein; if you don’t cut it at the first the man will go on struggling; the blood may flow fast enough, but he won’t die.”

“But she was dead all the same. They found her in the evening, and she was cold. They told the police, and hunted me up. They found me in the night in the old bath.

“And there you have it. I’ve been four years here already,” added he, after a pause.

“Yes, if you don’t beat ’em you make no way at all,” said Tchérévine sententiously, taking out his snuff-box once more. He took his pinches very slowly, with long pauses. “For all that, my lad, you behaved like a fool. Why, I myself—I came upon my wife with a lover. I made her come into the shed, and then I doubled up a halter and said to her:

“‘To whom did you swear to be faithful?—to whom did you swear it in church? Tell me that?’

“And then I gave it her with my halter—beat her[Pg 263] and beat her for an hour and a half; till at last she was quite spent, and cried out:

“‘I’ll wash your feet and drink the water afterwards.’

“Her name was Crodotia.”

FOOTNOTES:

[5]Daubing the door of a house, where a young girl lives, is done to show that she is dishonoured.

[6]A mark of respect paid in Russia formerly, now disused.

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