CHAPTER V. THE SUMMER SEASON

April is come; Holy Week is not far off. We set about our summer tasks. The sun becomes hotter and more brilliant every day; the atmosphere has the spring in it, and acts upon our nervous system powerfully. The convict, in his chains, feels the trembling influence of the lovely days like any other creature; they rouse desires in him, inexpressible longings for his home, and many other things. I think that he misses his liberty, yearns for freedom more when the day is filled with sunlight than during the rainy and melancholy days of autumn and winter. You may observe this positively among convicts; if they *do* feel a little joy on a beautiful clear day, they have a reaction into greater impatience and irritability.

I noticed that in spring there was much more squabbling in our prison; there was more noise, the yelling was greater, there were more fights; during the working hours we would see a man sometimes fixed in a meditative gaze, which seemed lost in the blue distance somewhere, the other side of the Irtych, where stretched the boundless plain, with its flight of hundreds of versts, the free Kirghiz Steppe. Long-drawn sighs came to one's ear, sighs breathed from the depths of the chest; it might seem that the air of those wide and free regions, haunted by their thought, forced the[Pg 265] convicts to draw deep respirations, and was a sort of solace to their crushed and fettered souls.

"Ah!" cries at last the poor prisoner all at once, with a long, sighing cry; then he seizes his pick furiously, or picks up the bricks, which he has to carry from one place to another. But after a brief minute he seems to forget the passing impression, and begins laughing, or insulting people near, so fitful is his humour; then he attacks the work he has to do with unusual fire, labours with might and main, as if trying to stifle by fatigue the grief that has him by the throat. You see they are fellows of unimpaired vigour, all in the very flower of life, with all their physical and other strength about them.

How heavy the irons are during this season! All this is not sentimentality, it is the report of rigorous observation. During the hot season, under a fiery sun, when all one's being, all one's soul, is vividly conscious of, and intimately feels, the unspeakably strong resurrection of nature going on everywhere, it is more difficult to support the confinement, the perpetual surveillance, the tyranny of a will other than one's own.

Besides this, it is in spring with the first song of the lark that throughout all Siberia and Russia men set out on the tramp; God's creatures, if they can, break their prison and escape into the woods. After the stifling ditch where they work, after the boats, the irons, the rods and whips, they go vagabondizing where they please, wherever they

can make it out best; they eat and drink what they can get, 'tis all the time pot-luck with them; and by night they sleep undisturbed in the woods or in a field, without a care, without the agony of knowing themselves in prison, as if they were God's own birds; their "good-night" is said to the stars, and the eye that watches them is the eye of God. Not altogether a rosy life, by any means; sometimes hunger and fatigue are heavy on them "in the service of General Cuckoo." Often enough the wanderers have not a morsel of bread to keep their teeth[Pg 266] going for days and days. They have to hide from everybody, run to earth like marmots; sometimes they are driven to robbery, pillage—nay, even murder.

"Send a man there and he becomes a child, and just throws himself on all he sees"; that is what people say of those transported to Siberia. This saying may be applied even more fitly to the tramps. They are almost all brigands and thieves, by necessity rather than inclination. Many of them are hardened to the life, irreclaimable; there are convicts who go off after having served their time, even after they have been put on some land as their own. They ought to be happy in their new state, with their daily bread assured them. Well, it is not so; an irresistible impulse sends them wandering off.

This life in the woods, wretched and fearful as it is, but still free and adventurous, has a mysterious seduction for those who have experienced it; among these fugitives you may find to your surprise, people of good habit of mind, peaceable temper, who had shown every promise of becoming settled creatures—good tillers of the land. A convict will marry, have children, live for five years in the same place, then all of a sudden he will disappear one fine morning, abandoning wife and children, to the stupefaction of his family and the whole neighbourhood.

One day, I was shown at the convict establishment one of these deserters of the family hearthstone. He had committed no crime—at least, he was under suspicion of none—but all through his life he had been a deserter, a deserter from every post. He had been to the southern frontier of the empire, the other side of the Danube, in the Kirghiz Steppe, in Eastern Siberia, the Caucasus, in a word, everywhere. Who knows? under other conditions this man might have been a Robinson Crusoe, with the passion of travel so on him. These details I have from other convicts, for he did not like talk, and never opened his mouth except when absolutely necessary. He was a peasant, of quite small size, of some fifty years, very quiet in demeanour, with a face so still as to seem quite[Pg 267] without any sort of meaning, impassive almost to idiotcy. His delight was to sit for hours in the sun humming a sort of song between his teeth so softly, that five steps off he was inaudible. His features were, so to speak, petrified; he ate little, principally black bread; he never bought white bread or spirits;

my belief is, he never had had any money, and that he couldn't have counted it if he had. He was indifferent to everything. Sometimes he fed the prison dogs with his own hand, a thing no one else was known to do; (speaking generally, Russians don't like giving dogs things to eat from the hand). People said that he had been married, twice even, and that he had children somewhere. Why he had been sent as a convict, I have not the least idea. We fellows were always fancying that he would escape; but his hour did not come, or perhaps had come and gone; anyhow, he went through with his punishment without resistance. He seemed an element quite foreign to the medium wherein he had his being, an alien, self-concentrated creature. Still, there was nothing in this deep surface calm which could be trusted; yet, after all, what good would it have been to him to escape from the place?

Compared with life at the convict prison, the vagabond age of the forests is as the joys of Paradise. The tramp's lot is wretched enough, but at least free. So it is that every prisoner all over the soil of Russia, becomes restless with the first rays of the smiling spring.

Comparatively few form any settled plan for flight, they fear the hindrances in the way and the punishment that may ensue; only one in a hundred, not more, make up his mind to it, but how to do it is a thought that never ceases to haunt the minds of the ninety-nine others. Filled as they are with this longing, anything that looks like giving a chance of success is a comfort to them; then they set about comparing the facts with cases of successful escape. I speak only of prisoners after and under sentence, for prisoners not yet tried and condemned, are much more ready to try at an escape. And those who have been sentenced, rarely get[Pg 268] away unless they attempt it in early days. When they have spent two or three years of their time, they put them to a sort of credit-account in their minds, and conclude that it is better to finish with the law and be put on land as a free man, rather than forfeit that time if they fail in escaping, which is always a possibility. Certainly not more than one convict in ten succeeds in *changing his lot*. Those who do, are nearly always men sentenced to an extremely long punishment, or for life. Fifteen, twenty years seem like an eternity to them. Then there is the branding, which is a great difficulty in the way of complete escape.

Changing your lot is a technical expression. When a convict is caught trying to escape, he is subjected to formal interrogatory, and will say he wanted to *change his lot*. This somewhat literary formula exactly represents the act in question. No escaped prisoner ever hopes to become a perfectly free man, for he knows that it is nearly impossible; what he looks for is to be sent to some other convict establishment, or to be put on the land, or to be tried again for some offence committed when on the

tramp; in a word, to be sent anywhere else, it matters not where, so that he get out of his present prison which has become insufferable to him. All these fugitives, unless they find some unexpected shelter for the winter, unless they meet some one interested in concealing them, or if—last resort—they cannot procure—and sometimes a murder does it—the legal document, which enables them to go about unmolested everywhere; all these fugitives present themselves in crowds, during the autumn, in the towns and at the prisons; they confess themselves to be escaped tramps, pass the winter in jail, and live in the secret hope of getting away the following summer.

On me, as well as others, the spring exercised its influence. Well do I remember the avidity with which my gaze fed upon the horizon through the gaps in the palisades; long, long did I stand with my head glued to the pickets, obstinately and insatiably gazing on the[Pg 269] grass greening in the ditch surrounding the fortress, and at the blue of the distant sky as it grew denser and denser. My anguish, my melancholy, were heavier on me; as each day wore away the jail became odious, detestable. Hatred for me, as a man of the nobility, filled the hearts of the convicts during these first years, and this feeling of theirs simply poisoned my life for me. Often did I ask to be sent to the hospital, when there was no need of it, merely to be out of the punishment part of the place, to feel myself out of the range of this unrelenting and implacable hostility.

“You nobles have beaks of iron, and you tore us to pieces with your beaks when we were serfs,” is what the convicts used to say to us. How I envied the people of the lower class who came into the place as prisoners! It was different with them, they were in comradeship with all there from the very first moment. So was it that in the spring, Freedom showing herself as a sort of phantom of the season, the joy diffused throughout all Nature, translated themselves within my soul into a more than doubled melancholy and nervous irritability.

As the sixth week of Lent came I had to go through my religious exercises, for the convicts were divided by the sub-superintendent into seven sections—answering to the weeks in Lent—and these had to attend to their devotions according to this roster. Each section was composed of about thirty men. This week was a great solace to me; we went two or three times a day to the church, which was close to the prison. I had not been in church for a long time. The Lenten services, familiar to me from early childhood in my father’s house, the solemn prayers, the prostrations—all stirred in me the fibres of the memory of things long, long past, and woke my earliest impressions to fresh life. Well do I remember how happy I was when at morn we went into God’s house, treading the ground which had frozen in the night, under the escort of soldiers with loaded guns; the escort remained outside the church.

Once within we were massed close to the door so that[Pg 270] we could scarcely hear anything except the deep voice of the ministering deacon; now and again we caught a glimpse of a black chasuble or the bare head of the priest. Then it came into my mind how, when a child, I used to look at the common people who formed a compact mass at the door, and how they would step back in a servile way before some important epauletted fellow, or some nobleman with a big paunch, some lady splendidly dressed and of high devotion who, in a hurry to get at the front benches, and ready for a row if there was any difficulty as to their being honoured with the best of places. As it seemed to me then, it was only *there*, near the church door, not far from the entry, that prayer was put up with genuine fervour and humility, only there that, when people did prostrate themselves on the floor it was done with real abasement of self and full sense of unworthiness.

And now I myself was in that place of the common people, no, not in their place, for we who were there were in chains and degradation. Everybody kept himself at a distance from us. We were feared, and alms were put in our hands as if we were beggars; I remember that all this gave me the strange sensation of a refined and subtle pleasure. “Let it even be so!” such was my thought. The convicts prayed with deep fervour; every one of them had with him his poor farthing for a little candle, or for their collection for the church expenses. “I too, I am a man,” each one of them perhaps said, as he made his offering; “before God we are all equal.”

After the six o’clock mass we went up to communion. When the priest, *ciforium* in hand, recited the words, “Have mercy on me as Thou hadst on the thief whom Thou didst save,” nearly all the convicts prostrated themselves, and their chains clanked; I think they took these words literally as applied to themselves, and not as being in Scripture.

Holy Week came. The authorities presented each of us with an Easter egg, and a small piece of wheaten bread. The townspeople loaded us with benevolences.[Pg 271] As at Christmas there was the priest’s visitation with the cross, inspecting visit of the heads of departments, larded cabbage, general enlargement of soul, and unlimited lounging, the only difference being, that one could now walk about in the court-yard, and warm oneself in the sun. Everything seemed filled with more light, larger than in the winter, but also more fraught with sadness. The long, endless, summer days seemed peculiarly unbearable on Church holidays. Work days were at least shortened to our sense by the fatigue of work.

Our summer labours were much more trying than the winter tasks; our business was principally that of carrying out engineering works. The convicts were set to building,

digging, bricklaying, or repairing Government buildings, locksmith's work, or carpentering, or painting. Others went into the brick-fields, and that was looked upon by us as the hardest of all we had laid on us. The brick-fields were situated about four versts from the fortress; through all the summer they sent there, every morning at six o'clock, a gang of fifty convicts. For this gang they used to pick out workmen who had learned no trade in particular. The convicts took with them their bread for the day, the distance was too great for them to come back, eight useless versts, for dinner with the others, so they had a meal when they returned in the evening.

Work was assigned to each for the day, but there was so much of it that it was all a man could do, nay, more, to get to the end of it. First, we had to dig and carry the clay, moisten it, and mould it in the ditch, and then make a goodly quantity of bricks, two hundred or so, sometimes fifty more than that. I was only twice sent to the brick-field. The convicts sent to this labour came back in the evening dead tired, and every one of them complained of the others, that he had had the worst of the work put on him. I believe that reproaches of this kind were a pleasure, a consolation to them. Some of them, however, liked the brick-field work, because they got away from the[Pg 272] town, and to the banks of the Irtych into open, agreeable country, with the sky overhead; the surroundings were more agreeable than those frightful Government buildings. They were allowed to smoke there in all freedom, and to remain lying down for half-an-hour or so, which was a great pleasure.

As for me, I was sent to one of the shops, or else to pound up alabaster, or to carry bricks, which last job I had for two months together. I had to take my tale of bricks from the banks of the Irtych to a distance of about 140 yards, and to pass the ditch of the fortress before getting to the barrack which they were putting up. This work suited me well enough, although the cord with which I carried my bricks sawed my shoulders; what particularly pleased me was that my strength increased sensibly. At the outset I could not carry more than eight bricks at once; each of them weighed about twelve pounds. I got to be able to carry twelve, or even fifteen, which delighted me much. You wanted physical as well as moral strength to be able to bear all the discomforts of that accursed life.

There was this, too: I wanted, when I left the place, really to live, not to be half-dead. I took pleasure in carrying my bricks, then; it was not merely that this labour strengthened my body, but because it took me always to the banks of the Irtych. I speak often of this spot, it was the only one where we saw God's *own* world, a pure and bright horizon, the free desert steppes, whose bareness always produced a strange impression on me. All the other workyards were in the fortress itself, or in its neighbourhood; and the fortress, from the earliest days I was there, was the object of

my hatred, and, above all, its appurtenant buildings. The house of the Major Commandant seemed to me a repulsive, accursed place. I never could pass it without casting upon it a look of detestation; while at the river-bank I could forget my miserable self as I sent my gaze over the immense[Pg 273] desert space, just as a prisoner may when he looks at the world of freedom through the barred casement of his dungeon. Everything in that place was dear and gracious to my eyes; the sun shining in the infinite blue of heaven, the distant song of the Kirghiz that came from the opposite bank.

Sometimes I would fix my sight for a long while upon the poor smoky cabin of some *baïgouch*; I would study the bluish smoke as it curled in the air, the Kirghiz woman busy with her two sheep.... The things I saw were wild, savage, poverty-stricken; but they were free. I would follow the flight of a bird threading its way in the pure transparent air; now it skims the water, now disappears in the azure sky, now suddenly comes to view again, a mere point in space. Even the poor wee floweret fading in a cleft of the bank, which would show itself when spring began, fixed my attention and would draw my tears.... The melancholy of this first year of convict life and hard labour was unendurable, too much for my strength. The anguish of it was so great, I could not notice my immediate surroundings at all; I merely shut my eyes and would not see. Among the creatures with spoiled lives with whom I had to live, I did not yet note those who were capable of thinking and feeling, in spite of their external repulsiveness. There came not to my ears (or if there did I knew it not) one word of kindliness in the midst of the rain of poisonous talk that came down all the time. Still one such utterance there was, simple, straightforward, of pure motive, and it came from the heart of a man who had suffered and endured more than myself. But it is useless to enlarge on this.

The great fatigue I underwent was a source of satisfaction, it gave me hope of sound sleep. During the summer sleep was torment, more intolerable than the closeness and infection winter brought with it. Some of the nights were certainly very beautiful. The sun, which had not ceased to inundate the court-yard all[Pg 274] the day, hid itself at last. The air freshened, and the night, the night of the steppe, became comparatively cold. The convicts, until shut up in their barracks, walked about in groups, especially on the kitchen side; for that was the place where questions of general interest were by preference discussed, and comments were made upon the rumours from without, often absurd indeed, but always keenly exciting to these men cut off from the world. For example, we suddenly learn that our Major had been roughly dismissed from his post. Convicts are as credulous as children; they know the news to be false, or most unlikely, and that the fellow who brings it is a past master in

the art of lying, Kvassoff; for all that they clutch at the nonsensical story, go into high delight over it, are much consoled, and at last quite ashamed to have been duped by a Kvassoff.

“I should like to know who’ll show *him* the door?” cries one convict; “don’t you fear, he’s a fellow who knows how to stick on.”

“But,” says another, “he has his superiors over him.” This one is a warm controversialist, and has seen the world.

“Wolves don’t feed on one another,” says a third gloomily, half to himself. *This* one is an old fellow, growing gray, and he always takes his sour cabbage soup into a corner, and eats it there.

“Do you think his superiors will take *your* advice whether they shall show him the door or not?” adds a fourth, who doesn’t seem to care about it at all, giving a stroke to his balalaïka.

“Well, why not?” replies the second angrily; “if you *are* asked, answer what’s in your mind. But no, with us fellows it’s all mere cry, and when you ought to go at things with a will, everybody sneaks out.”

“That’s *so*!” says the one playing with the balalaïka. “Hard labour and prison are just the things to cause *that*.”

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“It was like that the other day,” says the second one, without hearing the remark made to him. “There was a little wheat left, sweepings, a mere nothing; there was some idea of turning the refuse into money; well, look here, they took it to him, and he confiscated it. All economy, you see. Was that *so*, and was it right—yes or no?”

“But whom can you complain to?”

“To whom? Why, the ’spector (*Inspector*) who’s coming.”

“What ’spector?”

“It’s true, pals, a ’spector is coming soon,” said a youthful convict, who had got some sort of knowledge, had read the “Duchesse de la Vallière,” or some book of that sort, and who had been Quartermaster in a regiment; a bit of a wag, whom, as a man of information, the convicts held in a sort of respect. Without paying the least attention to the exciting debate, he goes straight to the cook, and asks him for some liver. Our

cooks often deal in victuals of that kind; they used to buy a whole liver, cut it in pieces, and sell it to the other convicts.

“Two kopecks’ worth, or four?” asks cook.

“A four-kopeck cut; I’ll eat, the others shall look on and long,” says this convict. “Yes, pals, a general, a real general, is coming from Petersburg to ’spect all Siberia; it’s so, heard it at the Governor’s place.”

This news produces an extraordinary effect. For a quarter of an hour they ask each other who this General can be? what’s his title? whether his grade is higher than that of the Generals of our town? The convicts delight in discussing ranks and degrees, in finding out who’s at the head of things, who can make the other officials crook their backs, and to whom he crooks his own; so they get up an argument and quarrel about their Generals, and rude words fly about, all in honour of these high officers—fights, too, sometimes. What interest can *they* possibly have in it? When one[Pg 276] hears convicts speaking of Generals and high officials one gets a measure of their intelligence as they were while still in the world before the prison days. It cannot be concealed that among our people, even in much higher circles, talk about generals and high officials is looked upon as the most serious and refined conversation.

“Well, you see, they *have* sent our Major to the right about, don’t ye?” observes Kvassoff, a little, rubicund, choleric, small-brained fellow, the same who had announced the supersession of the Major.

“We’ll just grease their palm for them,” this, in staccato tones from the morose old fellow in the corner who had finished his sour cabbage soup.

“I should think he would grease their palms, by Jove,” says another; “he has stolen money enough, the brigand. And, only think, he was only a regimental Major before he came here. He’s feathered his nest. Why, a little while ago he was engaged to the head priest’s daughter.”

“But he didn’t get married; they turned him off, and that shows he’s poor. A pretty sort of fellow to get engaged! He’s got nothing but the coat on his back; last year, Easter time, he lost all he had at cards. Fedka told me so.”

“Well, well, pals, I’ve been married myself, but it’s a bad thing for a poor devil; taking a wife is soon done, but the fun of it is more like an inch than a mile,” observes Skouratoff, who had just joined in the general talk.

“Do you fancy we’re going to amuse ourselves by discussing *you*?” says the ex-quartermaster in a superior manner. “Kvassoff, I tell you you’re a big idiot! If you fancy

that the Major can grease the palm of an Inspector-General you've got things finely muddled; d'ye fancy they send a man from Petersburg just to inspect your Major? You're a precious dolt, my lad; take it from me that it is so."

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"And you fancy because he's a General he doesn't take what's offered?" said some one in the crowd in a sceptical tone.

"I should think he did indeed, and plenty of it whenever he can."

"A dead sure thing that; gets bigger, and more, and worse, the higher the rank."

"A General *always* has his palm greased," says Kvassoff, sententiously.

"Did *you* ever give them money, as you're so sure of it?" asks Baklouchin, suddenly striking in, in a tone of contempt; "come, now, did you ever see a General in all your life?"

"Yes."

"Liar!"

"Liar, yourself!"

"Well, boys, as he *has* seen a General, let him say *which*. Come, quick about it; I know 'em all, every man jack."

"I've seen General Zibert," says Kvassoff in tones far from sure.

"Zibert! There's no General of that name. That's the General, perhaps, who was looking at your back when they gave you the cat. This Zibert was, perhaps, a Lieutenant-Colonel; but you were in such a fright just then, you took him for a General."

"No! Just hear me," cries Skouratoff, "for I've got a wife. There was really a General of that name, a German, but a Russian subject. He confessed to the Pope, every year, all about his peccadilloes with gay women, and drank water like a duck, at least forty glasses of Moskva water one after the other; that was the way he got cured of some disease. I had it from his valet."

"I say! And the carp didn't swim in his belly?" this from the convict with the balalaïka.

"Be quiet, fellows, can't you—one's talking seriously, and there they are beginning their nonsense again.[Pg 278] Who's the 'spector that's coming?" This was put by a

convict who always seemed full of business, Martinof, an old man who had been in the Hussars.

“Set of lying fellows!” said one of the doubters. “Lord knows where they get it all from; it’s all empty talk.”

“It’s nothing of the sort,” observes Koulikoff, majestically silent hitherto, in dogmatic tones. “The man coming is big and fat, about fifty years, with regular features, and proud, contemptuous manners, on which he prides himself.”

Koulikoff is a Tsigan, a sort of veterinary surgeon, makes money by treating horses in town, and sells wine in our prison. He’s no fool, plenty of brain, memory well stocked, lets his words fall as carefully as if every one of ’em was worth a rouble.

“It’s true,” he went on very calmly, “I heard of it only last week; it’s a General with bigger epaulettes than most, and he’s going to inspect all Siberia. They grease his palm well for him, that’s sure enough; but not our Major with his eight eyes in his head. He won’t dare to creep in about *him*, for you see, pals, there are Generals and Generals, as there are fagots and fagots. It’s just this, and you may take it from me, our Major will remain where he is. *We’re* fellows with no tongue, we’ve no right to speak; and as to our chiefs here, they’re not going to say a word against him. The ’spector will come into our jail, give a look round, and go off at once; he’ll say it was all right.”

“Yes, but the Major’s in a fright; he’s been drunk since morning.”

“And this evening he had two van-loads of things taken away; Fedka says so.”

“You may scrub a nigger, he’ll never be white. Is it the first time you’ve seen him drunk, hey?”

“No! It will be a devil of a shame if the General does nothing to him,” said the convicts, who began to get highly excited.

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The news of the arrival of the Inspector went through the prison. The prisoners went everywhere about the court-yard retailing the important fact. Some held their tongues and kept cool, trying to look important; some were really indifferent to it. Some of the convicts sat down on the steps of the doors to play the balalaïka, while some went on with their gossip. Some groups were singing in a drawling voice, but the whole court-yard was upset and excited generally.

About nine o’clock they counted us, and quartered us in our barracks, which were closed for the night. A short summer night it was, so we were roused up at five o’clock

in the morning, yet nobody had managed to sleep before eleven, for up to that hour there was conversation and all sort of movement was going on; sometimes, too, games of cards were made up, as in winter. The heat was intolerable, stifling. True, the open window let in some of the cool night air, but the convicts kept tossing themselves on their wooden beds as if delirious.

Fleas countless. There were enough of them in winter; but when spring came they multiplied in proportions so formidable that I couldn't believe it before I had to endure them. And as the summer went on the worse it was with them. I found out that one *could* get used to fleas; but for all that, the torment of them is so great that it throws you into a fever; even when you get slumber you quite feel it is not sleep, you are half delirious, and know it.

At last, towards morning, when the enemy is tired and you are deliciously asleep in the freshness of the early hours, suddenly sounds the pitiless morning drum-call. How you curse as you hear them, those sharp, quick strokes; you cower in your semi-pelisse, and then—you can't help it—comes the thought that it will be so to-morrow, the day after, for many, many years, till you are set at liberty. When *will* it come, this freedom, freedom? Where *is* it in this world? *Where* is it hiding? You *have* to get up, they are walking about you in all directions. The usual noisy row begins. The[Pg 280] convicts dress, and hurry to their work. It's true you have an hour you can spend in sleep at noon.

What we had been told about the Inspector was really true. The reports were more confirmed every day; and at last it became certain that a General, high in office, was coming from Petersburg to inspect all Siberia, that he was already at Tobolsk. Every day we learned something fresh about it. These rumours came from the town. They told us that there was alarm in all quarters, and that everybody was making preparations to show himself in as favourable a light as might be. The authorities were organising receptions, balls, fêtes of every kind. Gangs of convicts were sent to level the ways in the fortress, smooth away hummocks in the ground, paint the palings and other wood-work, to plaster, do up, and generally repair everything that was conspicuous.

Our prisoners perfectly well understood the object of this labour, and their discussions became all the more animated and excited. Their imaginations passed all bounds. They even set about formulating some demands to be set before the General on his arrival, but that did not prevent their going on with their quarrels and violent speeches. Our Major was on hot coals. He came continually to visit the jail, shouted, and threw himself angrily on the fellows more than usual, sent them to the guard-

room and punishment for a mere nothing, and watched very severely over the cleanliness and good order of the barracks. Just then, there occurred a little event which did not at all painfully affect this officer as one might have expected, but, on the contrary, caused him a lively satisfaction. One of the convicts struck another with an awl right in the chest, in a place quite near the heart.

The delinquent's name was Lomof; the name the victim was known by in the jail was Gavrilka. He was one of those seasoned tramps I've spoken about earlier. Whether he had any other name, I don't know; I never heard any attributed to him, except that one, Gavrilka.

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Lomof had been a peasant comfortably off in the Government of T——, and district of K——. There were five of them living together, two brothers Lomof, and three sons. They were quite rich peasants; the talk throughout the district was that they had more than 300,000 roubles in paper money. They worked at currying and tanning; but their chief business was usury, harbouring tramps, and receiving stolen goods; all sorts of petty irregular doings. Half the peasants of their district owed them money, and so were in their clutches. They passed for being intelligent and full of cunning, and gave themselves very great airs. A great personage of their province had stopped on his way once at the father Lomof's house, and this official had taken a fancy to him, because of his hardy and unscrupulous talk. Then they took it in their heads they might do exactly as they pleased, and mixed themselves up more and more with illegal doings. Everybody had a grievance against them, and would like to have seen them a hundred feet under the ground; but they got bolder and bolder every day. They were not afraid of the local police or the district tribunals.

At last fortune betrayed them; their ruin came, not out of their secret crimes, but from an accusation which was all calumny and falsehood. Ten versts from their hamlet they had a farm where six Kirghiz labourers, long since brought down by them to be no better than slaves, used to pass the autumn. One fine day these Kirghiz were found murdered. An inquiry was set on foot that lasted long, thanks to which no end of atrocious things were brought to light. The Lomofs were accused of having assassinated their workmen. They had themselves told their story to the convicts, all the jail knew it perfectly; they were suspected of owing a great deal of money to the Kirghiz, and, as they were full of greed and avarice in spite of their large fortunes, it was believed they had paid the debt by taking the lives of the poor fellows. While the inquiry and trial went on, their property melted away utterly. The[Pg 282] father died,

the sons were transported; one of these, with the uncle, was condemned to fifteen years of hard labour.

Now, they were perfectly innocent of the crime imputed to them. One fine day Gavrilka, a thorough-paced rascal, known as a tramp, but of very gay and lively turn, avowed himself the author of the crime. As a matter of fact I don't know whether he actually made this avowal himself, but what is sure is that the convicts held him to be the murderer of the Kirghiz.

This Gavrilka, while still tramping about, had been mixed up in some way with the Lomofs (his confinement in one jail was for quite a short sentence, for desertion from the army and tramping). He had cut the throats of the Kirghiz—three other marauding fellows had been in it with him—in the hope of setting themselves up a bit with the plunder of the farm.

The Lomofs were no favourites with us, I really don't know why. One of them, the nephew, was a sturdy fellow, intelligent and sociable; but his uncle, the one that struck Gavrilka with the awl, was a choleric, stupid rustic, always quarrelling with the convicts, who knocked him about like plaster. All the jail liked Gavrilka for his gaiety and good-humour. The Lomofs got to know, like the rest, that he was the man who committed the crime they were condemned for; but they never got into any quarrel with him. Gavrilka paid no attention whatever to them.

The row with Uncle Lomof began about some disgusting girl they had quarrelled over. Gavrilka had boasted of the favour she had shown him. The peasant, mad with jealousy, ended by driving an awl into his chest.

Although the Lomofs had been ruined by their trial and sentence, they passed in the jail for being very rich. They had money, a samovar, and drank tea. Our Major knew all about it, and hated the two Lomofs, sparing them no vexation. The victims of his hate explained it by a desire to have them grease his palm[Pg 283] well, but they could not, or would not, bring themselves to do it.

If Uncle Lomof had struck his awl one hair's breadth further in Gavrilka's breast he would certainly have killed him; as it was, the wound did not much signify. The affair was reported to the Major. I think I see him now as he came up out of breath, but with visible satisfaction. He addressed Gavrilka in an affable, fatherly way:

"Tell me, lad, can you walk to the hospital or must they carry you there? No, I think it will be better to have a horse; let them put a horse to this moment!" he cried out to the sub-officer with a gasp.

“But I don’t feel it at all, your worship; he’s only given me a bit of a prick, your worship.”

“You don’t know, my dear fellow, you don’t know; you’ll see. A nasty place he’s struck you in. All depends upon the place. He has given it you just below the heart, the scoundrel. Wait, wait!” he howled to Lomof. “I’ve got you tight; take him to the guard-house.”

He kept his promise. Lomof was tried, and, though the wound was slight, there was plainly malice aforethought; his sentence of hard labour was extended for several years, and they gave him a thousand strokes with the rod. The Major was delighted.

The Inspector arrived at last.

The day after he reached the town, he came to the convict establishment to make his inspection. It was a regular fête-day. For some days everything had been brilliantly clean, washed with great precision. The convicts were all just shaven, their linen quite white and without a stain. (According to the regulations, they wore in summer waistcoats and pantaloons of canvas. Every one had a round black piece sown in at the back, eight centimetres in diameter.) For a whole hour the prisoners had been drilled as to what they should answer, the very words to be used, particularly if the high functionary should take any notice of them.

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There had been even regular rehearsals. The Major seemed to have lost his head. An hour before the coming in of the Inspector, all the convicts were at their posts, as stiff as statues, with their little fingers on the seams of their pantaloons. At last, just about one o’clock the Inspector made his entry. He was a General, with a most self-sufficing bearing, so much so, that the mere sight of it must have sent a tremor into the hearts of all the officials of West Siberia.

He came in with a stern and majestic air, followed by a crowd of Generals and Colonels doing service in our town. There was a civilian, too, of high stature and regular features, in frock-coat and shoes. This personage bore himself very independently and airily, and the General addressed him every moment with exquisite politeness. This civilian also had come from Petersburg. All the convicts were terribly curious as to who he could be, such an important General showing him such deference? We learned who he was and what his office later, but he was a good deal talked about before we knew.

Our Major, all spick and span, with orange-coloured collar, made no too favourable impression upon the General; the blood-shot eyes and fiery rubicund complexion

plainly told their own story. Out of respect for his superior he had taken off his spectacles, and stood some way off, as straight as a dart, in feverish expectation that something would be asked of him, that he might run and carry out His Excellency's wishes; but no particular need of his services seemed to be felt.

The General went all through the barracks without saying a word, threw a glance into the kitchen, where he tasted the sour cabbage soup. They pointed me out to him, telling him that I was an ex-nobleman, who had done this, that, and the other.

"Ah!" answered the General. "And how does he conduct himself?"

"Satisfactorily for the time being, your Excellency, satisfactorily."

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The General nodded, and left the jail in a couple of minutes more. The convicts were dazzled and disappointed, and did not know what to be at. As to laying complaints against the Major, that was quite over, could not be thought of. He had, no doubt, been quite well assured as to this beforehand.

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CHAPTER VI. THE ANIMALS AT THE CONVICT ESTABLISHMENT

Gniedko, a bay horse, was bought a little while afterwards, and the event furnished a much more agreeable and interesting diversion to the convicts than the visit of the high personage I have been talking about. We required a horse at the jail for carrying water, refuse matter, etc. He was given to a convict to take care of and use; this man drove him, under escort, of course. Our horse had plenty to do morning and night; it was a worthy sort of beast, but a good deal worn, and had been in service for a long time already.

One fine morning, the eve of St. Peter's Day, Gniedko, our bay, who was dragging a barrel of water, fell all of a heap, and gave up the ghost in a few minutes. He was much regretted, so all the convicts gathered round him to discuss his death. Those who had served in the cavalry, the Tsigans, the veterinary fellows, and others, showed a profound knowledge of horses in general and fiercely argued the question; but all that did not bring our bay horse to life again; there he was stretched out and dead, with his belly all swollen. Every one thought it incumbent on him to feel about the poor thing with his hands; finally the Major was[Pg 287] informed of what Providence had done in the horse's case, and it was decided that another should be bought at once.

St. Peter's Day, quite early after mass, all the convicts being together, horses that were on sale were brought in. It was left to the prisoners to choose an animal, for there were some thorough experts among them, and it would have been difficult to take in 250 men, with whom horse-dealing had been a speciality. Tsigans, Lesghians, professional horse-dealers, townsmen, came in to deal. The convicts were exceedingly eager about the matter as each fresh horse was brought up, and were as amused as children about it all. It seemed to tickle their fancy very much, that they had to buy a horse like free men, just as if it was for themselves and the money was to come out of their own pockets. Three horses were brought and taken away before purchase; the fourth was settled on. The horse-dealers seemed astonished and a little awed at the soldiers of the escort who watched the business. Two hundred men, clean shaven, branded as they were, with chains on their feet, were well calculated to inspire respect, all the more as they were in their own place, at home so to speak, in their own convict's den, where nobody was ever allowed to come.

Our fellows seemed to be up to no end of tricks for finding out the real value of a horse brought up; they carefully examined it, handled it with the most serious demeanour, went on as if the welfare of the establishment was bound up with the purchase of this beast. The Circassians took the liberty of jumping upon his back: their eyes shone wildly, they chatted rapidly in their incomprehensible dialect, showed their white teeth, dilating the nostrils of their hooked copper-coloured noses. There were some Russians who paid the most lively attention to their discussion, and seemed ready to jump down their throats; they did not understand a word, but it was plain they did what they could to gather from the expression of the eyes of the fellows whether[Pg 288] the horse was good or not. But what could it matter to a convict, especially to some of them, who were creatures altogether down and done for, who never ventured to utter a single word to the others? What *could* it matter to such as these, whether one horse or another was bought? Yet it seemed as if it did. The Circassians appeared to be most relied on for their opinion, and besides these a foremost place in the discussion was given to the Tsigans, and those who had formerly been horse-dealers.

There was a regular sort of duel between two convicts—the Tsigan Koulikoff, who had been a horse-dealer and stealer, and another who had been a professional veterinary, a tricky Siberian peasant, who had been at the establishment and at hard labour for some time, and who had succeeded in getting all Koulikoff's practice in the town. I ought to mention that the veterinary practitioners at the prison, though without diploma, were very much sought after, and that not only the townspeople and tradespeople, but high officials in the city, took their advice when their horses fell ill, rather than that of several regularly diplomatised veterinaries who were at the place.

Till Jolkin came, the Siberian peasant Koulikoff had had plenty of clients from whom he had had fees in good hard cash. He was looked on as quite at the head of his business. He was a Tsigan all over in his doings, liar and cheat, and not at all the master of his art he boasted of being. The income he made had raised him to be a sort of aristocrat among our convicts; he was listened to and obeyed, but he spoke little, and expressed an opinion only in great emergencies. He blew his own trumpet loudly, but he really was a fellow of great energy; he was of ripe age, and of quite marked intelligence. When he spoke to us of the nobility, he did so with exquisite politeness and perfect dignity. I am sure that if he had been suitably dressed, and introduced into a club at the capital with the title of Count, he would have lived up to it; played whist, talked to admiration like a man used[Pg 289] to command, and one who knew when to hold his tongue. I am sure that the whole evening would have passed without any one guessing that the "Count" was nothing but a vagabond. He had very probably had a very large and varied experience in life; as to his past, it was quite unknown to us. They kept him among the convicts who formed a special section reserved from the others.

But no sooner had Jolkin come—he was a simple peasant, one of the "old believers," but just as tricky as it was possible for a moujik to be—the veterinary glory of Koulikoff paled sensibly. In less than two months the Siberian had got from him all his town practice, for he cured in a very short time horses Koulikoff had declared incurable, and which had been given up by the regular veterinaries. This peasant had been condemned and sent to hard labour for coining. It is an odd thing he should ever have been tempted to go into that line of business. He told us all about it himself, and joked about their wanting three coins of genuine gold to make one false.

Koulikoff was not a little put out at this peasant's success, while his own glory so rapidly declined. There was he who had had a mistress in the suburbs, who used to wear a plush jacket and top-boots, and here he was now obliged to turn tavern-keeper; so everybody looked out for a regular row when the new horse was bought. The thing was very interesting, each of them had his partisans; the more eager among them got to angry words about it on the spot. The cunning face of Jolkin was all wrinkled into a sarcastic smile; but it turned out quite differently from what was expected. Koulikoff had not the least desire for argument or dispute, he managed cunningly without that. At first he gave way on every point, and listened deferentially to his rival's criticisms, then he caught him up sharply on some remark or other, and pointed out to him modestly but firmly that he was all wrong. In a word, Jolkin was utterly discomfited in a [Pg 290]surprisingly clever way, so Koulikoff's side was quite well pleased.

“I say, boys, it’s no use talking; you can’t trip *him* up. He knows what he is about,” said some.

“Jolkin knows more about the matter than he does,” said others; not offensively, however. Both sides were ready to make concessions.

“Then, he’s got a lighter hand, besides having more in his head. I tell you that when it comes to stock, horses, or anything else, Koulikoff needn’t duck under to anybody.”

“Nor need Jolkin, I tell you.”

“There’s nobody like Koulikoff.”

The new horse was selected and bought. It was a capital gelding—young, vigorous, and handsome; an irreproachable beast altogether. The bargaining began. The owner asked thirty roubles; the convicts wouldn’t give more than twenty-five. The higgling went on long and hotly. At length the convicts began laughing.

“Does the money come out of your own purse?” said some. “What’s the good of all this?”

“Do you want to save for the Government cashbox?” cried others.

“But it’s money that belongs to us all, pals,” said one.

“Us all! It’s plain enough that you needn’t trouble to grow idiots, they’ll come up of themselves without it.”

At last the business was settled at twenty-eight roubles. The Major was informed, the purchase sanctioned. Bread and salt were brought at once, and the new boarder led in triumph into the jail. There was not one of the convicts, I think, that did not pat his neck or caress his head.

The day we got him he was at once put to fetching water. All the convicts gazed on him curiously as he pulled at his barrel.

Our waterman, the convict Roman, kept his eyes on[Pg 291] the beast with a stupid sort of satisfaction. He was formerly a peasant, about fifty years of age, serious and silent, like all the Russian coachmen, whose behaviour would really seem to acquire some extra gravity by reason of their being always with horses.

Roman was a quiet creature, affable all round, said little, took snuff from a box. He had taken care of the horses at the jail for some time before that. The one just bought was the third given into his charge since he came to the place.

The coachman's office fell, as a matter of course, to Roman; nobody would have dreamed of contesting his right to it. When the bay horse dropped and died, nobody dreamed of accusing Roman of imprudence, not even the Major. It was the will of God, that was all; as to Roman, he knew his business.

That bay horse had become the pet of the jail at once. The convicts were not particularly tender fellows; but they could not help coming to pet him often.

Sometimes when Roman, returning from the river, shut the great gate which the sub-officer had opened, Gniedko would stand quite still waiting for his driver, and turning to him as for orders.

"Get along, you know the way," Roman would cry to him. Then Gniedko would go off peaceably to the kitchen and stop there, and the cooks and other servants of the place would fill their buckets with water, which Gniedko seemed to know all about.

"Gniedko, you're a trump! He's brought his water-barrel himself. He's a delight to see!" they would cry to him.

"That's true; he's only a beast, but he knows all that's said to him."

"No end of a horse is our Gniedko!"

Then the horse shook his head and snorted, just as if he really understood all about his being praised; then some one would bring him bread and salt; and when he had finished with them he would shake his head again,[Pg 292] as if to say, "I know you; I know you. I'm a good horse, and you're a good fellow."

I was quite fond of regaling Gniedko with bread. It was quite a pleasure to me to look at his nice mouth, and to feel his warm, moist lips licking up the crumbs from the palm of my hand.

Our convicts were fond of live things, and if they had been allowed would have filled the barracks with birds and domestic animals. What could possibly have been better than attending to such creatures for raising and softening the wild temper of the prisoners? But it was not permitted; it was not in the regulations; and, truth to say, there was no room there for many creatures.

However, in my time some animals had established themselves in the jail. Besides Gniedko, we had some dogs, geese, a he-goat—Vaska—and an eagle, which remained only a short time.

I think I have said before that *our* dog was called Bull, and that he and I had struck up a friendship; but as the lower orders regard dogs as impure animals undeserving of

attention, nobody minded him. He lived in the jail itself; slept in the court-yard; ate the leavings of the kitchen, and had no hold whatever on the sympathy of the convicts; all of whom he knew, however, and regarded as masters and owners. When the men assigned to work came back to the jail, at the cry of “Corporal,” he used to run to the great gate and gaily welcome the gang, wagging his tail and looking into every man’s eyes, as though he expected a caress. But for several years his little ways were as useless as they were engaging. Nobody but myself did caress him; so I was the one he preferred to all others. Somehow—I don’t know in what way—we got another dog. Snow he was called. As to the third, Koultiapka, I brought him myself to the place when he was but a pup.

Our Snow was a strange creature. A telega had gone over him and driven in his spine, so that it made a[Pg 293] curve inside him. When you saw him running at a distance, he looked like twin-dogs born with a ligament. He was very mangy, too, with bleary eyes, and his tail was hairless, and always hanging between his legs.

Victim of ill-fate as he was, he seemed to have made up his mind to be always as impassive as possible; so he never barked at anybody, for he seemed to be afraid of getting into some fresh trouble. He was nearly always lurking at the back of the buildings; and if anybody came near he rolled on his back at once, as though he meant to say, “Do what you like with me; I’ve not the least idea of resisting you.” And every convict, when the dog upset himself like that, would give him a passing obligatory kick, with “Ouh! the dirty brute!” But Snow dared not so much as give a groan; and if he was too much hurt, would only utter a little, dull, strangled yelp. He threw himself down just the same way before Bull or any other dog when he came to try his luck at the kitchen; and he would stretch himself out flat if a mastiff or any other big dog came barking at him. Dogs like submission and humility in other dogs; so the angry brute quieted down at once, and stopped short reflectively before the poor, humble beast, and then sniffed him curiously all over.

I wonder what poor Snow, trembling with fright, used to think at such moments. “Is this brigand of a fellow going to bite me?”—no doubt something like that. When he had sniffed enough at him, the big brute left him at once, having probably discovered nothing in particular. Snow used then to jump to his feet, and join a lot of four-footed fellows like him who were running down some yutchka or other.

Snow knew quite well that no yutchka would ever condescend to the like of him, that she was too proud for that, but it was some consolation to him in his troubles to limp after her. As to decent behaviour, he had but a very vague notion of any such thing.

Being[Pg 294] totally without any hope in his future, his highest aim was to get a bellyful of victuals, and he was cynical enough in showing that it was so.

Once I tried to caress him. This was such an unexpected and new thing to him that he plumped down on the ground quite helplessly, and quivered and whined in his delight. As I was really sorry for him I used to caress him often, so as soon as he caught sight of me he began to whine in a plaintive, tearful way. He came to his end at the back of the jail, in the ditch; some dogs tore him to pieces.

Koultiapka was quite a different style of dog. I don't know why I brought him in from one of the workshops, where he was just born; but it gave me pleasure to feed him, and see him grow big. Bull took Koultiapka under his protection, and slept with him. When the young dog began to grow up, Bull was remarkably complaisant with him. He allowed the pup to bite his ears, and pull his skin with his teeth; he played with him as mature dogs are in the habit of doing with the youngsters. It was a strange thing, but Koultiapka never grew in height at all, only in length and breadth. His hide was fluffy and mouse-coloured; one of his ears hung down, while the other was always cocked up. He was, like all young dogs, ardent and enthusiastic, yelping with pleasure when he saw his master, and jumping up to lick his face precisely as if he said: "As long as he sees how delighted I am, I don't care; let etiquette go to the devil!"

Wherever I was, at my call, "Koultiapka," out he came from some corner, dashing towards me with noisy satisfaction, making a ball of himself, and rolling over and over. I was exceedingly fond of the little wretch, and I used to fancy that destiny had reserved for him nothing but joy and pleasure in this world of ours; but one fine day the convict Neustroief, who made women's shoes and prepared skins, cast his eye on him; something had evidently struck him, for he[Pg 295] called Koultiapka, felt his skin, and turned him over on the ground in a friendly way. The unsuspicious dog barked with pleasure, but next day he was nowhere to be found. I hunted for him for some time, but in vain; at last, after two weeks, all was explained. Koultiapka's natural cloak had been too much for Neustroief, who had flayed him to make up with the skin some boots of fur-trimmed velvet ordered by the young wife of some official. He showed them me when they were done, their inside lining was magnificent; all Koultiapka, poor fellow!

A good many convicts worked at tanning, and often brought with them to the jail dogs with a nice skin, which soon were seen no more. They stole them or bought them. I remember one day I saw a couple of convicts behind the kitchens laying their heads together. One of them held in a leash a very fine black dog of particularly good breed. A scamp of a footman had stolen it from his master, and sold it to our shoemakers for

thirty kopecks. They were going to hang it; that was their way of disposing of them; then they took the skin off, and threw the body into a ditch used for *ejecta*, which was in the most distant corner of the court, and which stank most horribly during the summer heats, for it was rarely seen to.

I think the poor beast understood the fate in store for him. It looked at us one after another in a distressed, scrutinising way; at intervals it gave a timid little wag with its bushy tail between its legs, as though trying to reach our hearts by showing us every confidence. I hastened away from the convicts, who finished their vile work without hindrance.

As to the geese of the establishment, they had established themselves there quite fortuitously. Who took care of them? To whom did they belong? I really don't know; but they were a huge delight to our convicts, and acquired a certain fame throughout the town.

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They had been hatched in the convict establishment somewhere, and their head-quarters was the kitchen, whence they emerged in gangs of their own, when the gangs of convicts went out to their work. But as soon as the drum beat and the prisoners massed themselves at the great gate, out ran the geese after them, cackling and flapping their wings, then they jumped one after the other over the elevated threshold of the gateway; while the convicts were at their work, the geese pecked about at a little distance from them. As soon as they had done and set out for the jail, again the geese joined the procession, and people who passed by would cry out, "I say, there are the prisoners with their friends, the geese!" "How did you teach them to follow you?" some one would ask. "Here's some money for your geese," another said, putting his hand in his pocket. In spite of their devotion to the convicts they had their necks twisted to make a feast at the end of the Lent of some year, I forget which.

Nobody would ever have made up his mind to kill our goat Vaska, unless something particular had happened; as it did. I don't know how it got into our prison, or who had brought it. It was a white kid, and very pretty. After some days it had won all hearts, it was diverting and winning. As some excuse was needed for keeping it in the jail, it was given out that it was quite necessary to have a goat in the stables; but he didn't live there, but in the kitchen principally; and after a while he roamed about all over the place. The creature was full of grace and as playful as could be, jumped on the tables, wrestled with the convicts, came when it was called, and was always full of spirits and fun.

One evening, the Lesghian Babaï, who was seated on the stone steps at the doors of the barracks among a crowd of other convicts, took it into his head to have a wrestling bout with Vaska, whose horns were pretty long.

They butted their foreheads against one another[Pg 297]—that was the way the convicts amused themselves with him—when all of a sudden Vaska jumped on the highest step, lifted himself up on his hind legs, drew his fore-feet to him and managed to strike the Lesghian on the back of the neck with all his might, and with such effect that Babaï went headlong down the steps to the great delight of all who were by as well as of Babaï himself.

In a word, we all adored our Vaska. When he attained the age of puberty, a general and serious consultation was held, as the result of which, he was subjected to an operation which one of the prison veterinaries executed in a masterly manner.

“Well,” said the prisoners, “he won’t have any goat-smell about him, that’s one comfort.”

Vaska then began to lay on fat in the most surprising way. I must say that we fed him quite unconscionably. He became a most beautiful fellow, with magnificent horns, corpulent beyond anything. Sometimes as he walked, he rolled over on the ground heavily out of sheer fatness. He went with us out to work too, which was very diverting to the convicts and all others who saw; and everybody got to know Vaska, the jailbird.

When they worked at the river bank, the prisoners used to cut willow branches and other foliage, and gather flowers in the ditches to ornament Vaska. They used to twine the branches and flowers round his horns and decorate his body with garlands. Vaska then came back at the head of the gang in a splendid state of ornamentation, and we all came after in high pride at seeing him such a beauty.

This love for our goat went so far that prisoners raised the question, not a very wise one, whether Vaska ought not to have his horns gilded. It was a vain idea; nothing came of it. I asked Akim Akimitch, the best gilder in the jail, whether you really could gild a goat’s horns. He examined Vaska’s quite closely, thought a bit, and then said that it could be done, but that it would[Pg 298] not last, and would be quite useless. So nothing came of it. Vaska would have lived for many years more, and, no doubt, have died of asthma at last, if, one day as he returned from work at the head of the convicts, his path had not been crossed by the Major, who was seated in his carriage. Vaska was in particularly gorgeous array.

“Halt!” yelled the Major. “Whose goat is that?”

They told him.

“What! a goat in the prison! and that without my leave? Sub-officer!”

The sub-officer received orders to kill the goat without a moment’s delay; flay him, and sell his skin; and put the proceeds to the prisoners’ account. As to the meat, he ordered it to be cooked with the convicts’ cabbage soup.

The occurrence was much discussed; the goat was much mourned; but nobody dared to disobey the Major. Vaska was put to death close to the ditch I spoke of just now. One of the convicts bought the carcase, paying a rouble and fifty kopecks. With this money white bread was bought for everybody. The man who had bought the goat sold him at retail in a roasted state. The meat was delicious.

We had also, during some time, in our prison a steppe eagle; a quite small species. A convict brought it in, wounded, half-dead. Everybody came flocking around it; it could not fly, its right wing being quite powerless; one of its legs was badly hurt. It gazed on the curious crowd wrathfully, and opened its crooked beak, as if prepared to sell its life dearly. When we had looked at him long enough, and the crowd dispersed, the lamed bird went off, hopping on one paw and flapping his wing, and hid himself in the most distant part of the place he could find; there he huddled himself in a corner against the palings.

During the three months that he remained in our court-yard he never came out of his corner. At first we[Pg 299] went to look at him pretty often, and sometimes they set Bull at him, who threw himself forward with fury, but was frightened to go too near, which mightily amused the convicts. “A wild chap that! He won’t stand any nonsense!” But Bull after a while got over his fright, and began to worry him. When he was roused to it, the dog would catch hold of the bird’s bad wing, and the creature defended itself with beak and claws, and then got up closer into his corner with a proud, savage sort of demeanour, like a wounded king, fixing his eyes steadily on the fellows looking at his misery.

They tired of the sport after a while, and the eagle seemed quite forgotten; but there was some one who, every day, put close to him a bit of fresh meat and a vessel with some water. At first, and for several days, the eagle would eat nothing; at last, he made up his mind to take what was left for him, but he never could be got to take anything from the hand, or in public. Sometimes I succeeded in watching his proceedings at some distance.

When he saw nobody, and thought he was alone, he ventured upon leaving his corner and limping along the palisade for a dozen steps or so, then went back; and so

forwards and backwards, precisely as if he were taking exercise for his health under medical orders. As soon as ever he caught sight of me he made for his corner as quickly as he possibly could, limping and hopping. Then he threw his head back, opened his mouth, ruffled himself, and seemed to make ready for fight.

In vain I tried to caress him. He bit and struggled as soon as he was touched. Not once did he take the meat I offered him, and all the time I remained by him he kept his wicked, piercing eye upon me. Lonely and revengeful he waited for death, defying, refusing to be reconciled with everything and everybody.

At last the convicts remembered him, after two months of complete forgetfulness, and then they showed[Pg 300] a sympathy I did not expect of them. It was unanimously agreed to carry him out.

“Let him die, but let him die in freedom,” said the prisoners.

“Sure enough, a free and independent bird like that will never get used to the prison,” added others.

“He’s not like us,” said some one.

“Oh well, he’s a bird, and we’re human beings.”

“The eagle, pals, is the king of the woods,” began Skouratof; but that day nobody paid any attention to him.

One afternoon, when the drum beat for beginning work, they took the eagle, tied his beak (for he struck a desperate attitude), and took him out of the prison on to the ramparts. The twelve convicts of the gang were extremely anxious to know where he would go to. It was a strange thing: they all seemed as happy as though they had themselves got their freedom.

“Oh, the wretched brute. One wants to do him a kindness, and he tears your hand for you by way of thanks,” said the man who held him, looking almost lovingly at the spiteful bird.

“Let him fly off, Mikitka!”

“It doesn’t suit *him* being a prisoner; give him his freedom, his jolly freedom.”

They threw him from the ramparts on to the steppe. It was just at the end of autumn, a gray, cold day. The wind whistled on the bare steppe and went groaning through the yellow dried-up grass. The eagle made off directly, flapping his wounded wing, as if in

a hurry to quit us and get himself a shelter from our piercing eyes. The convicts watched him intently as he went along with his head just above the grass.

“Do you see him, hey?” said one very pensively.

“He doesn’t look round,” said another; “he hasn’t looked behind once.”

“Did you happen to fancy he’d come back to thank us?” said a third.

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“Sure enough, he’s free; he feels it. It’s *freedom*!”

“Yes, freedom.”

“You won’t see him any more, pals.”

“What are you about sticking there? March, march!” cried the escort, and all went slowly to their work.

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CHAPTER VII. GRIEVANCES

At the outset of this chapter, the editor of the “Recollections” of the late Alexander Petrovitch Goriantchikoff thinks it his duty to communicate what follows to his readers.

“In the first chapter of the ‘Recollections of the House of the Dead,’ something was said about a parricide, of noble birth, who was put forward as an instance of the insensibility with which the convicts speak of the crimes they have committed. It was also stated that he refused altogether to confess to the authorities and the court; but that, thanks to the statements of persons who knew all the details of his case and history, his guilt was put beyond all doubt. These persons had informed the author of the ‘Recollections,’ that the criminal had been of dissolute life and overwhelmed with debts, and that he had murdered his father to come into the property. Besides, the whole town where this parricide was imprisoned told his story in precisely the same way, a fact of which the editor of these ‘Recollections’ has fully satisfied himself. It was further stated that this murderer, even when in the jail, was of quite a joyous and cheerful frame of mind, a sort of inconsiderate giddy-pated person, although[Pg 303] intelligent, and that the author of the ‘Recollections’ had never observed any particular signs of cruelty about him, to which he added, ‘So I, for my part, never could bring myself to believe him guilty.’

“Some time ago the editor of the ‘Recollections of the House of the Dead,’ had intelligence from Siberia of the discovery of the innocence of this ‘parricide,’ and that he had undergone ten years of the imprisonment with hard labour for nothing; this was recognised and avowed by the authorities. The real criminals had been discovered and had confessed, and the unfortunate man in question set at liberty. All this stands upon unimpeachable and authoritative grounds.”

To say more would be useless. The tragical facts speak too clearly for themselves. All words are weak in such a case, where a life has been ruined by such an accusation. Such mistakes as these are among the dreadful possibilities of life, and such possibilities impart a keener and more vivid interest to the “Recollections of the House of the Dead,” which dreadful place we see may contain innocent as well as guilty men.

To continue. I have said that I became at last, in some sense, accustomed, if not reconciled, to the conditions of convict life; but it was a long and dreadful time before I was. It took me nearly a year to get used to the prison, and I shall always regard this year as the most dreadful of my life, it is graven deep in my memory, down to the very least details. I think that I could minutely recall the events and feelings of each successive hour in it.

I have said that the other prisoners, too, found it as difficult as I did to get used to the life they had to lead. During the whole of this first year, I used to ask myself whether they were really as calm as they seemed to be. Questions of this kind pressed themselves upon me. As I have mentioned before, all the convicts felt themselves in an alien element to which they could not reconcile themselves. The sense of home was an impossibility;[Pg 304] they felt as if they were staying, as a stage upon a journey, in an evil sort of inn. These men, exiles for and from life, seemed either in a perpetual smouldering agitation, or else in deep depression; but there was not one who had not his ordinary ideas of one thing or another. This restlessness, which, if it did not come to the surface, was still unmistakable; those vague hopes of the poor creatures which existed in spite of themselves, hopes so ill-founded that they were more like the promptings of incipient insanity than aught else; all this stamped the place with a character, an originality, peculiarly its own. One could not but feel when one went there that there was nothing like it anywhere else in the whole world. There everybody went about in a sort of waking dream; nor was there anything to relieve or qualify the impressions the place made on the system of every man; so that all seemed to suffer from a sort of hyperæsthetic neurosis, and this dreaming of impossibilities gave to the majority of the convicts a sombre and morose aspect, for which the word morbid is not strong enough. Nearly all were taciturn and irascible,

preferring to keep to themselves the hopes they secretly and vainly cherished. The result was, that anything like ingenuousness or frank statement was the object of general contempt. Precisely because these wild hopings were impossible, and, despite themselves, were felt to be so, confessed to their more lucid selves to be so, they kept them jealously concealed in the most secret recesses of their souls; while to renounce them was beyond their powers of self-control. It may be they were ashamed of their imagination. God knows. The Russian character is, in its normal conditions, so positive and sober in its way of looking at life, so pitiless in criticism of its own weaknesses.

Perhaps it was this inward misery of self-dissatisfaction which was at the bottom of the impatience and intolerance the convicts showed among themselves, and of the cruel biting things they said to each other. If one of them, more naïve or impartial than the rest,[Pg 305] put into words what every one of them had in his mind, painted his castles in the air, told his dreams of liberty, or plans of escape, they shut him up with brutal promptitude, and made the poor fellow's life a burden to him with their sarcasms and jests. And I think those did it most unscrupulously who had perhaps themselves gone furthest in cherishing futile hopes, and indulging in senseless expectations. I have said, more than once, that those among them who were marked by simplicity and candour were looked on rather as being stupid and idiotic; there was nothing but contempt for them. The convicts were so soured and, in the wrong sense, sensitive, that they positively hated anything like amiability or unselfishness. I should be disposed to classify them all broadly, as either good or bad men, morose or cheerful, putting by themselves, as a sort of separate creatures, the ingenious fellows who could not hold their tongues. But the sour-tempered were in far the greatest majority; some of these were talkative, but these were usually of slanderous and envious disposition, always poking their noses into other people's business, though they took good care not to let anybody have a glimpse of the secret thoughts of their *own* souls; that would have been against the fashions and conventions of this strange, little world. As to the fellows who were really good—very few indeed were they—these were always very quiet and peaceable, and buried their hopes, if they had any, in strict silence; but more of real faith went with their hopes than was the case with the gloomy-minded among the convicts. Stay, there was one category further among our convicts, which ought not to be forgotten; the men who had lost all hope, who were despairing and desperate, like the old man of Starodoub; but these were very few indeed.

The old man of Starodoub! This was a very subdued, quiet, old man; but there were some indications[Pg 306] of what went on in him, which he could not help giving, and

from which, I could not help seeing, that his inward life was one of intolerable horror; still he had *something* to fall back upon for help and consolation—prayer, and the notion that he was a martyr. The convict who was always reading the Bible, of whom I spoke earlier, the one that went mad and threw himself, brick in hand, upon the Major, was also probably one of those whom hope had altogether abandoned; and, as it is perfectly impossible to go on living without hope of some sort, he threw away his life as a sort of voluntary sacrifice. He declared that he attacked the Major though he had no grievance in particular; all he wanted was to have some torments inflicted on himself.

Now, what sort of psychological operation had been going on in *that* man's soul? No man lives, can live, without having *some* object in view, and making efforts to attain that object. But when object there is none, and hope is entirely fled, anguish often turns a man into a monster. The object *we* all had in view was liberty, and getting out of our place of confinement and hard labour.

So I try to place our convicts in separately-defined classes and categories; but it cannot well be done. Reality is a thing of infinite diversity, and defies the most ingenious deductions and definitions of abstract thought, nay, abhors the clear and precise classifications we so delight in. Reality tends to infinite subdivision of things, and truth is a matter of infinite shadings and differentiations. Every one of us who were there had his own peculiar, interior, strictly personal life, which lay altogether outside of the world of regulations and our official superintendence.

But, as I have said before, I could not penetrate the depths of this interior life in the early part of my prison career, for everything that met my eyes, or challenged my attention in any way, filled me with a sadness for which there are no words. Sometimes I felt nothing[Pg 307] short of hatred for poor creatures whose martyrdom was at least as great as mine. In those first days I envied them, because they were among persons of their own sort, and understood one another; so I thought, but the truth was that their enforced companionship, the comradeship where the word of command went with the whip or the rod, was as much an object of aversion to them as it was to myself, and every one of them tried to keep himself as much to himself as possible. This envious hatred of them, which came to me in moments of irritation, was not without its reasonable cause, for those who tell you so confidently that a cultivated man of the higher class does not suffer as a mere peasant does, are utterly in the wrong. That is a thing I have often heard said, and read too. In the abstract, the notion seems correct, and it is founded in generous sentiment, for all convicts are human beings alike; but in reality it is different. In the real living facts of the problem there come in a quantity of practical complications, and only experience can

pronounce upon these: experience which I have had. I do not mean to lay it down peremptorily, that the nobleman and the man of culture feel more acutely, sensitively, deeply, because of their more highly developed conditions of being. On the other hand, it is impossible to bring all souls to one common level or standard; neither the grade of education, nor any other thing, furnishes a standard according to which punishment can be meted out.

It is a great satisfaction to me to be able to say that among these dreadful sufferers, in a state of things so barbarous and abject, I found abundant proof that the elements of moral development were not wanting. In our convict establishment there were men whom I was familiar with for several years, and whom I looked upon as wild beasts and abhorred as such; well, all of a sudden, when I least expected it, these very men would exhibit such an abundance of feeling of the best kind, so keen a comprehension of the sufferings of others, seen in[Pg 308] the light of the consciousness of their own, that one might almost fancy scales had fallen from their eyes. So sudden was it as to cause stupefaction; one could scarcely believe one's eyes or ears. Sometimes it was just the other way: educated men, well brought up, would occasionally display a savage, cynical brutality which nearly turned one's stomach, conduct of a kind impossible to excuse or justify, however much you might be charitably inclined to do so.

I lay no stress on the entire change in the habits of life, the food, etc., as to which there come in points where the man of the higher classes suffers so much more keenly than the peasant or working man, who often goes hungry when free, while he always has his stomach-full in prison. We will leave all that out. Let it be admitted that for a man with some force of character these external things are a trifle in comparison with privations of a quite different kind; for all that, such total change of material conditions and habits is neither an easy nor a slight thing. But in the convict's *status* there are elements of horror before which all other horrors pale, even the mud and filth everywhere about, the scantiness and uncleanness of the food, the irons on your limbs, the suffocating sense of being always held tight, as in a vice.

The capital, the most important point of all is, that after a couple of hours or so, every new-comer to a convict establishment, who is of the lower class, shakes down into equality with the rest; he is *at home* among them, he has his "freedom" of this city of the enslaved, this community of convicted scoundrels, in which one man is superficially like every other man; he understands and is understood, he is looked upon by everybody as *one of themselves*. Now all this is *not* so in the case of the nobleman. However kindly, just-minded, intelligent a man of the higher class may be, every soul there will hate and despise him during long years; they will neither

understand nor believe in him, not one whit. He will be neither friend nor comrade in their[Pg 309] eyes; if he can get them to stop insulting him it will be as much as he can do, but he will be alien to them from the first to the last, he will have to feel the grief of a ceaseless, hopeless, causeless solitude and sequestration. Sometimes it is the case that sheer ill-will on the part of the prisoners has nothing to do with bringing about this state of things, it simply cannot be helped; the nobleman is not one of the gang, and there's the whole secret.

There is nothing more horrible than to live out of the social sphere to which you properly belong. The peasant, transported from Taganrog to Petropavlosk, finds there Russian peasants like himself; between him and them there can be mutual intelligence; in an hour they will be friends, and live comfortably together in the same izba or the same barrack. With the nobleman it is wholly otherwise; a bottomless abyss separates him from the lower classes, *how* deep and impassable is only seen when a nobleman forfeits his position and becomes as one of the populace himself. You may be your whole life in daily relations with the peasant, forty years you may do business with him regularly as the day comes—let us suppose it so, at all events—by the calls of official position or administrative duty; you may be his benefactor, all but a father to him—well, you'll never know what is at the bottom of the man's mind or heart. You may think you know something about him, but it is all optical illusion, nothing more. My readers will charge me with exaggeration, but I am convinced I am quite right. I don't go on theory or book-reading in this; in my case the realities of life have given me only too ample time and opportunity for reviewing and correcting my theoretic convictions, which, as to this, are now fixed. Perhaps everybody will some day learn how well founded I am in what I say about this.

All this was theory when I first went into the convict establishment, but events, and things observed, soon came to confirm me in such views, and what I experienced so affected my system as to undermine its[Pg 310] health. During the first summer I wandered about the place, so far as I was free to move, a solitary, friendless man. My moral situation was such that I could not distinguish those among the convicts who, in the sequel, managed to care for me a little in spite of the distance that always remained between us. There *were* there men of my own position, ex-nobles like myself, but their companionship was repugnant to me.

Here is one of the incidents which obliged me to see at the outset, how solitary a creature I was, and all the strangeness of my position at the place. One day in August, a fine warm day, about one o'clock in the afternoon, a time when, as a rule, everybody took a nap before resuming work, the convicts rose as one man and massed themselves in the court-yard. I had not the slightest idea, up to that moment, that

anything was going on. So deeply had I been sunk in my own thoughts, that I saw nearly nothing of what was happening about me of any kind. But it seems that the convicts had been in a smouldering sort of unusual agitation for three days. Perhaps it had begun sooner; so I thought later when I remembered stray remarks, bits of talk that had come to my ears, the palpable increase of ill-humour among the prisoners, their unusual irritability for some time past. I had attributed it all to the trying summer work, the insufferably long days; to their dreamings about the woods, and freedom, which the season brought up; to the nights too short for rest. It may be that all these things came together to form a mass of discontent, that only wanted a tolerably good reason for exploding; it was found in the food.

For several days the convicts had not concealed their dissatisfaction with it in open talk in their barracks, and they showed it plainly when assembled for dinner or supper; one of the cooks had been changed, but, after a couple of days, the new comer was sent to the right-about, and the old one brought back. The [Pg 311]restlessness and ill-humour were general; mischief was brewing.

“Here are we slaving to death, and they give us nothing but filth to eat,” grumbled one in the kitchen.

“If you don’t like it, why don’t you order jellies and blanc-mange?” said another.

“Sour cabbage soup, why, that’s *good*. I delight in it; there’s nothing more juicy,” exclaimed a third.

“Well, if they gave you nothing but beef, beef, beef, for ever and ever, would you like *that*?”

“Yes, yes; they ought to give us meat,” said a fourth; “one’s almost killed at the workshops; and, by heaven! when one has got through with work there one’s hungry, hungry; and you don’t get anything to satisfy your hunger.”

“It’s true, the victuals are simply damnable.”

“He fills his pockets, don’t you fear!”

“It isn’t your business.”

“Whose business is it? My belly’s my own. If we were all to make a row about it together, you’d soon see.”

“Yes.”

“Haven’t we been beaten enough for complaining, dolt that you are?”

“True enough! What’s done in a hurry is never well done. And how would you set about making a raid over it, tell me that?”

“I’ll tell you, by God! If everybody will go, I’ll go too, for I’m just dying of hunger. It’s all very well for those who eat at a better table, apart, to keep quiet; but those who eat the regulation food——”

“There’s a fellow with eyes that do their work, bursting with envy *he* is. Don’t his eyes glisten when he sees something that doesn’t belong to him?”

“Well, pals, why don’t we make up our minds? Have we gone through enough? They flay us, the brigands! Let’s go at them.”

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“What’s the good? I tell you ye must chew what they give you, and stuff your mouth full of it. Look at the fellow, he wants people to chew his food for him. We’re in prison, and have got to stand it.”

“Yes, that’s it; we’re in prison.”

“That’s it always; the people die of hunger, and the Government fills its belly.”

“That’s true. Our eight-eyes (*the Major*) has got finely fat over it; he’s bought a pair of gray horses.”

“He don’t like his glass at all, that fellow,” said a convict ironically.

“He had a bout at cards a little while ago with the vet; for two hours he played without a half-penny in his pocket. Fedka told me so.”

“That’s why we get cabbage soup that’s fit for nothing.”

“You’re all idiots! It doesn’t matter; *nothing* matters.”

“I tell you if we all join in complaining we shall see what he has to say for himself. Let’s make up our minds.”

“*Say* for himself? You’ll get his fist on your pate; that’s just all.”

“I tell you they’ll have him up, and try him.”

All the prisoners were in great agitation; the truth is, the food was execrable. The general anguish, suffering, and suspense seemed to be coming to a head. Convicts are, by disposition, or, as such, quarrelsome and rebellious; but a general revolt is

rare, for they can never agree upon it; we all of us felt that since there was, as a rule, more violent talk than doing.

This time, however, the agitation did not fall to the ground. The men gathered in groups in their barracks, talking things over in a violent way, and going over all the particulars of the Major's misdoings, and trying to get to the bottom of them. In all affairs of that sort there are ringleaders and firebrands. The ringleaders on such occasions are generally rather[Pg 313] remarkable fellows, not only in convict establishments, but among all large organisations of workmen, military detachments, etc. They are always people of a peculiar type, enthusiastic men, who have a thirst for justice, very naïve, simple, and strong, convinced that their desires are fully capable of realisation; they have as much sense as other people; some are of high intelligence; but they are too full of warmth and zeal to measure their acts. When you come across people who really do know how to direct the masses, and get what they want, you find a quite different sort of popular leaders, and one excessively rare among us Russians. The more usual type of leader, the one I first alluded to, does certainly in some sense accomplish their object, so far as bringing about a rising is concerned; but it all ends in filling up the prisons and convict establishments. Thanks to their impetuosity they always come off second-best; but it is this impetuosity that gives them their influences over the masses; their ardent, honest indignation does its work, and draws in the more irresolute. Their blind confidence of success seduces even the most hardened sceptics, although this confidence is generally based on such uncertain, childish reasons that it is wonderful how people can put faith in them.

The secret of their influence is that they put themselves at the head, and *go* ahead, without flinching. They dash forward, heads down, often without the least knowledge worth the name of what they are about, and have nothing about them of the jesuitical practical faculty by dint of which a vile and worthless man often hits his mark and comes uppermost, and will sometimes come all white out of a tub of ink.
They *must* dash their skulls against stone walls. Under ordinary circumstances these people are bilious, irascible, intolerant, contemptuous, often very warm, which really after all is part of the secret of their strength. The deplorable thing is that they never go at what is the essential, the vital part of their task, they always go off at once[Pg 314] into details instead of going straight to their mark, and this is their ruin. But they and the mob understand one another; that makes them formidable.

I must say a few words about this word "grievance."

Some of the convicts had been transported in connection with a “grievance;” these were the most excited among them, notably a certain Martinoff, who had formerly served in the Hussars, an eager, restless, and choleric, but a worthy and truthful, fellow. Another, Vassili Antonoff, could work himself up into anger coolly and collectedly; he had a generally impudent expression, and a sarcastic smile, but he, too, was honest, and a man of his word, and of no little education. I won’t enumerate; there were plenty of them. Petroff went about in a hurried way from one group to another. He spoke few words, but he was quite as highly excited as any one there, for he was the first to spring out of the barrack when the others massed themselves in the court-yard.

Our sergeant, who acted as sergeant-major, came up very soon in quite a fright. The convicts got into rank, and politely begged him to tell the Major that they wanted to speak with him and put him a few questions. Behind the sergeant came all the invalids, who ranked themselves in face of the convicts. What they asked the sergeant to do frightened the man out of his wits almost, but he dared not refuse to go and report to the Major, for if the convicts mutinied, God only knows what might happen. All the men set over us showed themselves great poltroons in handling the prisoners; then, even if nothing further worse happened, if the convicts thought better of it and dispersed, the sub-officer was still in duty bound to inform the authorities of what had been going on. Pale, and trembling with fright, he went headlong to the Major, without even an effort to bring the convicts to reason. He saw that they were not minded to put up with any of his talk, no doubt.

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Without the least idea of what was going on, I went into rank myself (it was only later that I heard the earlier details of the story). I thought that the muster-roll was to be called, but I did not see the soldiers who verify the lists, so I was surprised, and began to look about me a little. The men’s faces were working with emotion, and some were ghostly pale. They were sternly silent, and seemed to be thinking of what they should say to the Major. I observed that many of the convicts seemed to wonder at seeing me among them, but they turned their glances away from me. No doubt they thought it strange that I should come into the ranks with them, and join in their remonstrances, and could not quite believe it. Then they turned round to me again in a questioning sort of way.

“What are you doing here?” said Vassili Antonoff, in a loud, rude voice; he happened to be close to me, and a little way from the rest; the man had always hitherto been scrupulously polite to me.

I looked at him in perplexity, trying to understand what he meant by it; I began to see that something extraordinary was up in our prison.

“Yes, indeed, what are you about here? Go off into the barrack,” said a young fellow, a soldier-convict, whom I did not know till then, and who was a good, quiet lad, “this is none of *your* business.”

“Have we not fallen into rank,” I answered, “aren’t we going to be mustered?”

“Why, *he’s* come, too,” cried one of them.

“Iron-nose,”[7] said another.

“Fly-killer,” added a third, with inexpressible contempt for me in his tone. This new nickname caused a general burst of laughter.

“These fellows are in clover everywhere. We are in prison, with hard labour, I rather fancy; they get wheat-bread and sucking-pig, like great lords as they are. Don’t you get your victuals by yourself? What are you doing here?”

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“Your place is not here,” said Koulikoff to me brusquely, taking me by the hand and leading me out of the ranks.

He was himself very pale; his dark eyes sparkled with fire, he had bitten his under lip till the blood came; he wasn’t one of those who expected the Major without losing self-possession.

I liked to look at Koulikoff when he was in trying circumstances like these; then he showed himself just what he was in his strong points and weak. He attitudinised, but he knew how to act, too. I think he would have gone to his death with a certain affected elegance. While everybody was insulting me in words and tones, his politeness was greater than ever; but he spoke in a firm and resolved tone which admitted of no reply.

“We are here on business of our own, Alexander Petrovitch, and you’ve got to keep out of it. Go where you like and wait till it’s over … here, your people are in the kitchens, go there.”

“They’re in hot quarters down there.”

I did in fact see our Poles at the open window of the kitchen, in company with a good many other convicts. I did not well know what to be at; but went there followed by

laughter, insulting remarks, and that sort of muttered growling which is the prison substitute for the hissings and cat-calls of the world of freedom.

“He doesn’t like it at all! Chu, chu, chu! Seize him!”

I had never been so bitterly insulted since I was in the place. It was a very painful moment, but just what was to be expected in the excessive excitement the men were labouring under. In the ante-room I met T—vski, a young nobleman of not much information, but of firm, generous character; the convicts excepted him from the hatred they felt for the convicts of noble birth; they were almost fond of him;[Pg 317] every one of his gestures denoted the brave and energetic man.

“What are you about, Goriantchikoff?” he cried to me; “come here, come here!”

“But what is *it* all about?”

“They are going to make a formal complaint, don’t you know it? It won’t do them a bit of good; who’ll pay any attention to convicts? They’ll try to find out the ringleaders, and if we are among them they’ll lay it all on us. Just remember what we have been transported for. They’ll only get a whipping, but we shall be put regularly to trial. The Major detests us all, and will be only too happy to ruin us; all his sins will fall on our shoulders.”

“The convicts would tie us hands and feet and sell us directly,” added M—tski, when we got into the kitchen.

“They’ll never have mercy on *us*,” added T—vski.

Besides the nobles there were in the kitchen about thirty other prisoners who did not want to join in the general complaints, some because they were afraid, others because of their conviction that the whole proceeding would prove quite useless. Akim Akimitch, who was a decided opponent of everything that savoured of complaint, or that could interfere with discipline and the usual routine, waited with great phlegm to see the end of the business, about which he did not care a jot. He was perfectly convinced that the authorities would put it all down immediately.

Isaiah Fomitch’s nose drooped visibly as he listened in a sort of frightened curiosity to what we said about the affair; he was much disturbed. With the Polish nobles were some inferior persons of the same nation, as well as some Russians, timid, dull, silent fellows, who had not dared to join the rest, and who waited in a melancholy way to see what the issue would be. There were also some morose, discontented convicts, who remained in the kitchen, not because they were afraid, but that they[Pg 318] thought this half-revolt an absurdity which could not succeed; it seemed to me that these

were not a little disturbed, and their faces were quite unsteady. They saw clearly that they were in the right, and that the issue of the movement would be what they had foretold, but they had a sort of feeling that they were traitors who had sold their comrades to the Major. Jolkin—the long-headed Siberian peasant sent to hard labour for coining, the man who got Koulikoff's town practice from him—was there also, as well as the old man of Starodoub. None of the cooks had left their post, perhaps because they looked upon themselves as belonging specially to the authorities of the place, whom it would be unbecoming, therefore, to join in opposing.

"For all that," said I to M—tski, "except these fellows, all the convicts are in it," and no doubt I said it in a way that showed misgivings.

"I wonder what in the world *we* have to do with it?" growled B——.

"We should have risked a good deal more than they had we gone with them; and why? *Je hais ces brigands*.[8] Why, do you think that they'll bring themselves up to the scratch after all? I can't see what they want putting their heads in the lion's mouth, the fools."

"It'll all come to nothing," said some one, an obstinate, sour-tempered old fellow. Almazoff, who was with us too, agreed heartily in this.

"Some fifty of them will get a good beating, and that's all the good they'll all get out of it."

"Here's the Major!" cried one; everybody ran to the windows.

The Major had come up, spectacles and all, looking as wicked as might be, towering with passion, red as a turkey-cock. He came on without a word, and in a determined manner, right up to the line of the convicts. In conjunctures of this sort he showed uncommon pluck and presence of mind; but it ought not to be [Pg 319]overlooked that he was nearly always half-seas over. Just then his greasy cap, with its yellow border, and his tarnished silver epaulettes, gave him a Mephistophelic look in my excited fancy. Behind him came the quartermaster, Diatloff, who was quite a personage in the establishment, for he was really at the bottom of all the authorities did. He was an exceedingly capable and cunning fellow, and wielded great influence with the Major. He was not by any means a bad sort of man, and the convicts were, in a general way, not ill-inclined towards him. Our sergeant followed him with three or four soldiers, no more; he had already had a tremendous wigging, and there was plenty more of the same to come, if he knew it. The convicts, who had remained uncovered, cap in hand, from the moment they sent for the Major, stiffened themselves, every man shifting his

weight to the other leg; then they remained motionless, and waited for the first word, or the first shout rather, to come from him.

They had not long to wait. Before he had got more than one word out, the Major began to shout at the top of his voice; he was beside himself with rage. We saw him from the windows running all along the line of convicts, dashing at them here and there with angry questions. As we were a pretty good distance off, we could not hear what he said or their replies. We only heard his shouts, or rather what seemed shouting, groaning, and grunting beautifully mingled.

“Scoundrels! mutineers! to the cat with ye! Whips and sticks! The ringleaders? *You’re* one of the ringleaders!” throwing himself on one of them.

We did not hear the answer; but a minute after we saw this convict leave the ranks and make for the guard-house.

Another followed, then a third.

“I’ll have you up, every man of you. I’ll—— Who’s in the kitchen there?” he bawled, as he saw us at the open windows. “Here with all of you! Drive ’em all out, every man!”

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Diatloff, the quartermaster, came towards the kitchens. When we had told him that *we* were not complaining of any grievance, he returned, and reported to the Major at once.

“Ah, those fellows are not in it,” said he, lowering his tone a bit, and much pleased. “Never mind, bring them along here.”

We left the kitchen. I could not help feeling humiliation; all of us went along with our heads down.

“Ah, Prokofief! Jolkin too; and you, Almazof! Here, come here, all the lump of you!” cried the Major to us, with a gasp; but he was somewhat softened, his tone was even obliging. “M—tski, you’re here too?... Take down the names. Diatloff, take down all the names, the grumblers in one list and the contented ones in another—all, without exception; you’ll give me the list. I’ll have you all before the Committee of Superintendence.... I’ll ... brigands!”

This word “*list*” told.

“We’ve nothing to complain of!” cried one of the malcontents, in a half-strangled sort of voice.

“Ah, you’ve nothing to complain of! *Who’s* that? Let all those who have nothing to complain of step out of the ranks.”

“All of us, all of us!” came from some others.

“Ah, the food is all right, then? You’ve been put up to it. Ringleaders, mutineers, eh? So much the worse for them.”

“But, what do you mean by that?” came from a voice in the crowd.

“Where is the fellow that said that?” roared the Major, throwing himself to where the voice came from. “It was you, Rastorgouïef, you; to the guard-house with you.”

Rastorgouïef, a young, chubby fellow of high stature, left the ranks and went with slow steps to the guard-house. It was not he who had said it, but, as he was called out, he did not venture to contradict.

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“You fellows are too fat, that’s what makes you unruly!” shouted the Major. “You wait, you hulking rascal, in three days you’d—— Wait! I’ll have it out with you all. Let all those who have nothing to complain of come out of the ranks, I say——”

“We’re not complaining of anything, your worship,” said some of the convicts with a sombre air; the rest preserved an obstinate silence. But the Major wanted nothing further; it was his interest to stop the thing with as little friction as might be.

“Ah, *now* I see! *Nobody* has anything to complain of,” said he. “I knew it, I saw it all. It’s ringleaders, there are ringleaders, by God,” he went on, speaking to Diatloff. “We must lay our hands on them, every man of them. And now—now—it’s time to go to your work. Drummer, there; drummer, a roll!”

He told them off himself in small detachments. The convicts dispersed sadly and silently, only too glad to get out of his sight. Immediately after the gangs went off, the Major betook himself to the guard-house, where he began to make his dispositions as to the “ringleaders,” but he did not push matters far. It was easy to see that he wanted to be done with the whole business as soon as possible. One of the men charged told us later that he had begged for forgiveness, and that the officer had let him go immediately. There can be no doubt that our Major did not feel firm in the saddle; he had had a fright, I fancy, for a mutiny is always a ticklish thing, and although this complaint of the convicts about the food did not amount really to mutiny (only the Major had been reported to about it, and the Governor himself), yet it was an uncomfortable and dangerous affair. What gave him most anxiety was that the

prisoners had been unanimous in their movement, so their discontent had to be got over somehow, at any price. The ringleaders were soon set free. Next day the food was passable, but this improvement did not last long; on the days ensuing the disturbance, the Major went about the prison[Pg 322] much more than usual, and always found something irregular to be stopped and punished. Our sergeant came and went in a puzzled, dazed sort of way, as if he could not get over his stupefaction at what had happened. As to the convicts, it took long for them to quiet down again, but their agitation seemed to wear quite a different character; they were restless and perplexed. Some went about with their heads down, without saying a word; others discussed the event in a grumbling, helpless kind of way. A good many said biting things about their own proceedings as though they were quite out of conceit with themselves.

“I say, pal, take and eat!” said one.

“Where’s the mouse that was so ready to bell the cat?”

“Let’s think ourselves lucky that he did not have us all well beaten.”

“It would be a good deal better if you thought more and chattered less.”

“What do *you* mean by lecturing me? Are you schoolmaster here, I’d like to know?”

“Oh, you want putting to the right-about.”

“Who are you, I’d like to know?”

“I’m a man! What are you?”

“A man! You’re——”

“You’re——”

“I say! Shut up, do! What’s the good of all this row?” was the cry from all sides.

On the evening of the day the “mutiny” took place, I met Petroff behind the barracks after the day’s work. He was looking for me. As he came near me, I heard him exclaim something, which I didn’t understand, in a muttering sort of way; then he said no more, and walked by my side in a listless, mechanical fashion.

“I say, Petroff, your fellows are not vexed with us, are they?”

“Who’s vexed?” he asked, as if coming to himself.

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“The convicts with us—with us nobles.”

“Why should they be vexed?”

“Well, because we did not back them up.”

“Oh, why should you have kicked up a dust?” he answered, as if trying to enter into my meaning: “you have a table to yourselves, you fellows.”

“Oh, well, there are some of you, not nobles, who don’t eat the regulation food, and who went in with you. We ought to back you up, we’re in the same place; we ought to be comrades.”

“Oh, I *say*. Are you our comrades?” he asked, with unfeigned astonishment.

I looked at him; it was clear that he had not the least comprehension of my meaning; but I, on the other hand, entered only too thoroughly into his. I saw now, quite thoroughly, something of which I had before only a confused idea; what I had before guessed at was now sad certainty.

It was forced on my perceptions that any sort of real fellowship between the convicts and myself could never be; not even were I to remain in the place as long as life should last. I was a convict of the “special section,” a creature for ever apart. The expression of Petroff when he said, “are we comrades, how can that be?” remains, and will always remain before my eyes. There was a look of such frank, naïve surprise in it, such ingenuous astonishment that I could not help asking myself if there was not some lurking irony in the man, just a little spiteful mockery. Not at all, it was simply meant. I was not their comrade, and could not be; that was all. Go you to the right, we’ll go to the left! your business is yours, ours is ours.

I really fancied that, after the mutiny, they would attack us mercilessly so far as they dared and could, and that our life would become a hell. But nothing of the sort happened; we did not hear the slightest reproach, there was not even an unpleasant allusion to what had happened, it was all simply passed over. They went on teasing us as before when opportunity served,[Pg 324] no more. Nobody seemed to bear malice against those who would not join in, but remained in the kitchens, or against those who were the first to cry out that they had nothing to complain of. It was all passed over without a word, to my exceeding astonishment.

FOOTNOTES:

[7]An insulting phrase which is untranslatable.

[8]French in the original Russian.

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CHAPTER VIII. MY COMPANIONS

As will be understood, those to whom I was most drawn were people of my own sort, that is, those of "noble" birth, especially in the early days; but of the three ex-nobles in the place, who were Russians, I knew and spoke to but one, Akim Akimitch; the other two were the spy A—v, and the supposed parricide. Even with Akim I never exchanged a word except when in extremity, in moments when the melancholy on me was simply unendurable, and when I thought I really never should have the chance of getting close to any other human being again.

In the last chapter I have tried to show that the convicts were of different types, and tried to classify them; but when I think of Akim Akimitch I don't know how to place him, he was quite *sui generis*, so far as I could observe, in that establishment.

There may be, elsewhere, men like him, to whom it seemed as absolutely a matter of indifference whether he was a free man, or in jail at hard labour; at that place he stood alone in this curious impartiality of temperament. He had settled down in the jail as if he was going to pass his whole life, and didn't mind it at all. All his belongings, mattress, cushions, utensils, were so ordered as to[Pg 326] give the impression that he was living in a furnished house of his own; there was nothing provisional, temporary, bivouac-like, about him, or his words, or his habits. He had a good many years still to spend in punishment, but I much doubt whether he ever gave a thought to the time when he would get out. He was entirely reconciled to his condition, not because he had made any effort to be so, but simply out of natural submissiveness; but, as far as his comfort went, it came to the same thing. He was not at all a bad fellow, and in the early days his advice and help were quite useful to me; but sometimes, I can't help saying it, his peculiarities deepened my natural melancholy until it became almost intolerable anguish.

When I became desperate with silence and solitude of soul, I would get into talk with him; I wanted to hear, and reply to *some* words falling from a living soul, and the more filled with gall and hatred with all our surroundings they had been, the more would they have been in sympathy with my wretched mood; but he would just barely talk, quietly go on sizing his lanterns, and then begin to tell me some story as to how he had been at a review of troops in 18—, that their general of division was so-and-so, that the manœuvring had been very pretty, that there had been a change in the skirmisher's system of signalling, and the like; all of it in level imperturbable tones,

like water falling drop by drop. He did not put any life into them even when he told me of a sharp affair in which he had been, in the Caucasus, for which his sword had got the decoration of the Riband of St. Anne. The only difference was, that his voice became a little more measured and grave; he lowered his tones when he pronounced the name "St. Anne," as though he were telling a great secret, and then, for three minutes at least, did not utter a word, but only looked solemn.

During all that first year I had strange passages of feeling, in which I hated Akim Akimitch with a bitter hatred, I am sure I cannot say why, moments[Pg 327] when I would despairingly curse the fate which made him my next neighbour on my camp-bed, so close indeed that our heads nearly touched. An hour afterwards I bitterly reproached myself for such extravagance. It was, however, only during my first year of confinement that these violent feelings overpowered me. As time went on, I got used to Akim Akimitch's singular character, and was ashamed of my former explosions. I don't remember that he and I ever got into anything like an open quarrel.

Besides the three Russian nobles of whom I have spoken, there were eight others there during my time; with some of whom I came to be on a footing of intimate friendship. Even the best of them were morbid in mind, exclusive, and intolerant to the very last degree; with two of them I was obliged to discontinue all spoken intercourse. There were only three who had any education, B—ski, M—tski, and the old man, J—ski, who had formerly been a professor of mathematics, an excellent fellow, highly eccentric, and of very narrow mental horizon in spite of his learning. M—tski and B—ski were of a mould quite different from his. Between M—tski and myself there was an excellent understanding from the first set-off. He and I never once got into any sort of dispute; I respected him highly, but could never become sincerely attached to him, though I tried to. He was sour, embittered, and mistrustful, with much self-control; this was quite antipathetic to me; the man had a closed soul, closed to everybody, and he made you feel it. I felt it so strongly that perhaps I was wrong about it. After all, his character, I must say, was stamped with both nobleness and strength. His inveterate scepticism made him very prudent in his relations with everybody about him, and in conducting these he gave proof of remarkable tact and skill. Sceptic as he was, there was another and a reverse side in his nature, for in some things he was a profound and unalterable believer with faith and hope unshakable. In spite of his tact in[Pg 328] dealing with men, he got into open hostilities with B—ski and his friend T—ski.

The first of these, B—ski, was a man of infirm health, of consumptive tendency, irascible, and of a weak, nervous system; but a good and generous man. His nervous irritability went so far that he was as capricious as a child; a temperament of that kind

was too much for me there, so I soon saw as little of B—ski as I could possibly help, though I never ceased to like him much. It was just the other way so far as M—tski was concerned; with him I always was on easy terms, though I did not like him at all. When I edged away from B—ski, I had to break also, more or less, with T—ski, of whom I spoke in the last chapter, which I much regretted, for, though of little education, he had an excellent heart; a worthy, very spiritual man. He loved and respected B—ski so much that those who broke with that friend of his he regarded as his personal enemies. He quarrelled with M—tski on account of B—ski, and they kept up the difference a long while. All these people were as bilious as they could be, humoursome, mistrustful, the victims of a moral and physical supersensitiveness. It is not to be wondered at; their position was trying indeed, much more so than ours; they were all exiled, transported, for ten or twelve years; and what made their sojourn in the prison most distressing to them was their rooted, ingrained prejudice, especially their unfortunate way of regarding the convicts, which they could not get over; in their eyes the unhappy fellows were mere wild beasts, without a single recognisable human quality. Everything in their previous career and their present circumstances combined to produce this unhappy feeling in them.

Their life at the jail was perpetual torment to them. They were kindly and conversible with the Circassians, with the Tartars, with Isaiah Fomitch; but for the other prisoners they had nothing but contempt and aversion. The only one they had any real respect[Pg 329] for was the aged “old believer.” For all this, during all the time I spent at the convict establishment, I never knew a single prisoner to reproach them with either their birth, or religious opinions, or convictions, as is so usual with our common people in their relations with people of different condition, especially if these happen to be foreigners. The fact is, they cannot take the foreigner seriously; to the Russian common people he seems a merely grotesque, comical creature. Our convicts had and showed much more respect for the Polish nobles than for us Russians, but I don’t think the Poles cared about the matter, or took any notice of the difference.

I spoke just now of T—ski, and have something more to say of him. When he had with his friend to leave the first place assigned to them as residence in their banishment to come to our fortress, he carried his friend B—— nearly the whole way. B—— was of quite a weak frame, and in bad health, and became exhausted before half of the first march was accomplished. They had first been banished to Y—gorsk, where they lived in tolerable comfort; life was much less hard there than in our fortress. But in consequence of a correspondence with the exiles in one of the other towns—a quite innocent exchange of letters—it was thought necessary to remove them to our jail to be under the more direct surveillance of the government. Until they came M—tski had

been quite alone, and dreadful must have been his sufferings in that first year of his banishment.

J—ski was the old man always deep in prayer, of whom I spoke a little earlier. All the political convicts were quite young men while J—ski was at least fifty years old. He was a worthy, gentlemanlike person, if eccentric. T—ski and B—ski detested him, and never spoke to him; they insisted upon it that he was too obstinate and troublesome to put up with, and I was obliged to admit it was so. I believe that at a convict establishment—as in every place where people[Pg 330] have to be together, whether they like it or not—people are more ready to quarrel with and detest one another than under other circumstances. Many causes contributed to the squabbles that were, unfortunately, always going on. J—ski was really disagreeable and narrow-minded; not one of those about him was on good terms with him. He and I did not come to a rupture, but we were never on a really friendly footing. I fancy that he was a strong mathematician. One day he explained to me in his half-Russian, half-Polish jargon, a system of astronomy of his own; I have been told that he had written a work upon the subject which the learned world had received with derision; I fancy his reasonings on some things had got twisted. He used to be on his knees praying for a whole day sometimes, which made the convicts respect him exceedingly during the remnant of life he had to pass there; he died under my eyes at the jail after a very trying illness. He had won the consideration of the prisoners, from the first moment of his coming in, on account of what had happened with the Major and him. When they were brought afoot from Y—gorsk to our fortress, they were not shaved on the road at all, their hair and beards had grown to great lengths when they were brought before the Major. That worthy foamed like a madman; he was wild with indignation at such infraction of discipline, though it was none of their fault.

“My God! did you ever see anything like it?” he roared; “they are vagabonds, brigands.”

J—ski knew very little Russian, and fancied that he was asking them if they were brigands or vagabonds, so he answered:

“We are political prisoners, not rogues and vagabonds.”

“So-o-o! You mean impudence! Clod!” howled the Major. “To the guard-house with him; a hundred strokes of the rod at once, this instant, I say!”

They gave the old man the punishment; he lay[Pg 331] flat on the ground under the strokes without the slightest resistance, kept his hand in his teeth, and bore it all without a murmur, and without moving a muscle. B—ski and T—ski arrived at the jail as this was all going on, and M—ski was waiting for them at the principal gate,

knowing that they were just coming in; he threw himself on their neck, although he had never seen them before. Utterly disgusted at the way the Major had received them, they told M—ski all about the cruel business that had just occurred. M—ski told me later that he was quite beside himself with rage when he heard it.

“I could not contain myself for passion,” he said, “I shook as though with ague. I waited for J—ski at the great gate, for he would come straight that way from the guard-house after his punishment. The gate was opened, and there I saw pass before me J—ski, his lips all white and trembling, his face pale as death; he did not look at a single person, and passed through the groups of convicts assembled in the court-yard—they knew a noble had just been subjected to punishment—went into the barrack, went straight to his place, and, without a word, dropped down on his knees for prayer. The prisoners were surprised and even affected. When I saw this old man with white hairs, who had left behind him at home a wife and children, kneeling and praying after that scandalous treatment, I rushed away from the barrack, and for a couple of hours felt as if I had gone stark, staring, raving mad, or blind drunk.... From that first moment the convicts were full of deference and consideration for J—ski; what particularly pleased them, was that he did not utter a cry when undergoing the punishment.”

But one must be fair and tell the truth about this sort of thing; this sad story is not an instance of what frequently occurs in the treatment by the authorities of transported noblemen, Russian or Polish; and this isolated case affords no basis for passing judgment upon that treatment. My anecdote merely shows that[Pg 332] you may light upon a bad man anywhere and everywhere. And if it happen that such a one is in absolute command of a jail, and if he happen to have a grudge against one of the prisoners, the lot of such a one will be indeed very far from enviable. But the administrative chiefs who regulate and supervise convict labour in Siberia, and from whom subordinates take their tone as well as their orders, are careful to exercise a discriminating treatment in the case of persons of noble birth, and, in some cases, grant them special indulgences as compared with the lot of convicts of lower condition. There are obvious reasons for this; these heads of departments are nobles themselves, they know that men of that class must not be driven to extremity; cases have been known where nobles have refused to submit to corporal punishment, and flung themselves desperately on their tormentors with very grave and serious consequences indeed; moreover—and this, I think, is the leading cause of the good treatment—some time ago, thirty-five years at least, there were transported to Siberia quite a crowd of noblemen;[9] these were of such correct and irreproachable demeanour, and held themselves so high, that the heads of departments fell into the way, which they never afterwards left, of regarding criminals of noble birth and

ordinary convicts in quite a different manner; and men in lower place took their cue from them.

Many of these, no doubt, were little pleased with that disposition in their superiors; such persons were pleased enough when they could do exactly as they liked in the matter, but this did not often happen, they were kept well within bounds; I have reason to be satisfied of this and I will say why. I was put in the second category, a classification of those condemned to hard labour, which was primarily and principally composed of convicts who had been serfs, under military superintendence; now this second category, or[Pg 333] class, was much harder than the first (of the mines) or the third (manufacturing work). It was harder, not only for the nobles but for the other convicts too, because the governing and administrative methods and *personnel* in it were wholly military, and were pretty much the same in type as those of the convict establishments in Russia. The men in official position were severer, the general treatment more rigorous than in the two other classes; the men were never out of irons, an escort of soldiers was always present, you were always, or nearly so, within stone walls; and things were quite different in the other classes, at least so the convicts said, and there were those among them who had every reason to know. They would all have gladly gone off to the mines, which the law classified as the worst and last punishment, it was their constant dream and desire to do so. All those who had been in the Russian convict establishments spoke with horror of them, and declared that there was no hell like them, that Siberia was a paradise compared with confinement in the fortresses in Russia.

If, then, it is the case that we nobles were treated with special consideration in the establishment I was confined in, which was under direct control of the Governor-General, and administered entirely on military principles, there must have been some greater kindliness in the treatment of the convicts of the first and third category or class. I think I can speak with some authority about what went on throughout Siberia in these respects, and I based my views, as to this, upon all that I heard from convicts of these classes. We, in our prison, were under much more rigorous surveillance than was elsewhere practised; we were favoured with no sort of exemptions from the ordinary rules as regards work and confinement, and the wearing of chains; we could not do anything for ourselves to get immunity from the rules, for I, at least, knew quite well that, *in the good old time which was quite of yesterday*, there had been so much intriguing to undermine the credit of officials that[Pg 334] the authorities were greatly afraid of informers, and that, as things stood, to show indulgence to a convict was regarded as a crime. Everybody, therefore, authorities and convicts alike, was in fear of what might happen; we of the nobles were thus quite down to the level of the other

convicts; the only point we were favoured in was in regard to corporal punishment—but I think that we should have had even that inflicted on us had we done anything for which it was prescribed, for equality as to punishment was strictly enjoined or practised; what I mean is, that we were not wantonly, causelessly, mishandled like the other prisoners.

When the Governor got to know of the punishment inflicted on J—ski, he was seriously angry with the Major, and ordered him to be more careful for the future. The thing got very generally known. We learned also that the Governor-General, who had great confidence in our Major, and who liked him because of his exact observance of legal bounds, and thought highly of his qualities in the service, gave him a sharp scolding. And our Major took the lesson to heart. I have no doubt it was this prevented his having M—ski beaten, which he would much have liked to do, being much influenced by the slanderous things A—f said about M——; but the Major could never get a fair pretext for doing so, however much he persecuted and set spies upon his proposed victim; so he had to deny himself that pleasure. The J—ski affair became known all through the town, and public opinion condemned the Major; some persons reproached him openly for what he had done, and some even insulted him.

The first occasion on which the man crossed my path may as well be mentioned. We had alarming things reported to us—to me and another nobleman under sentence—about the abominable character of this man, while we were still at Tobolsk. Men who had been sentenced a long while back to twenty-five years of the misery, nobles as we were, and who had visited us so kindly during our provisional sojourn in the first prison,[Pg 335] had warned us what sort of man we were to be under; they had also promised to do all they could for us with their friends to see that he hurt us as little as possible. And, in fact, they did write to the three daughters of the Governor-General, who, I believe, interceded on our behalf with their father. But what could he do? No more, of course, than tell the Major to be fair in applying the rules and regulations to our case. It was about three in the afternoon that my companion and myself arrived in the town; our escort took us at once to our tyrant. We remained waiting for him in the ante-chamber while they went to find the next-in-command at the prison. As soon as the latter had come, in walked the Major. We saw an inflamed scarlet face that boded no good, and affected us quite painfully; he seemed like a sort of spider about to throw itself on a poor fly wriggling in its web.

“What’s your name, man?” said he to my companion. He spoke with a harsh, jerky voice, as if he wanted to overawe us.

My friend gave his name.

“And you?” said he, turning to me and glaring at me behind his spectacles.

I gave mine.

“Sergeant! take ’em to the prison, and let ’em be shaved at the guard-house, civilian-fashion, hair off half their skulls, and let ’em be put in irons to-morrow. Why, what sort of cloaks have you got there?” said he brutally, when he saw the gray cloaks with yellow sewn at the back which they had given to us at Tobolsk. “Why, that’s a new uniform, begad—a new uniform! They’re always getting up something or other. That’s a Petersburg trick,” he said, as he inspected us one after the other. “Got anything with them?” he said abruptly to the gendarme who escorted us.

“They’ve got their own clothes, your worship,” replied he; and the man carried arms, just as if on parade, not without a nervous tremor. Everybody knew the fellow, and was afraid of him.

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“Take their clothes away from them. They can’t keep anything but their linen, their white things; take away all their coloured things if they’ve got any, and sell them off at the next sale, and put the money to the prison account. A convict has no property,” said he, looking severely at us. “Hark ye! Behave prettily; don’t let me have any complaining. If I do—cat-o’-nine-tails! The smallest offence, and to the sticks you go!”

This way of receiving me, so different from anything I had ever known, made me nearly ill that night. It was a frightful thing to happen at the very moment of entering the infernal place. But I have already told that part of my story.

Thus we had no sort of exemption or immunity from any of the miseries inflicted there, no lightening of our labours when with the other convicts; but friends tried to help us by getting us sent for three months, B—ski and me, to the bureau of the Engineers, to do copying work. This was done quietly, and as much as possible kept from being talked about or observed. This piece of kindness was done for us by the head engineers, during the short time that Lieutenant-Colonel G—kof was Governor at our prison. This gentleman had command there only for six short months, for he soon went back to Russia. He really seemed to us all like an angel of goodness sent from heaven, and the feeling for him among the convicts was of the strongest kind; it was not mere love, it was something like adoration. I cannot help saying so. How he did it I don’t know, but their hearts went out to him from the moment they first set eyes on him.

“He’s more like a father than anything else,” the prisoners kept continually saying during all the time he was there at the head of the engineering department. He was a brilliant, joyous fellow. He was of low stature, with a bold, confident expression, and he was all gracious kindness to the convicts, for whom he really did seem to entertain a fatherly sort of affection.[Pg 337] How was it he was so fond of them? It is hard to say, but he seemed never to be able to pass a prisoner without a bit of pleasant talk and a little laughing and joking together. There was nothing that smacked of authority in his pleasantries, nothing that reminded them of his position over them. He behaved just as if he was one of themselves. In spite of this kind condescension, I don’t remember any one of the convicts ever failing in respect to him or taking the slightest liberty—quite the other way. The convict’s face would light up in a wonderful, sudden way when he met the Governor; it was odd to see how the face smiled all over, and the hand went to the cap, when the Governor was seen in the distance making for the poor man. A word from him was regarded as a signal honour. There are some people like that, who know how to win all hearts.

G—kof had a bold, jaunty air, walked with long strides, holding himself very straight; “a regular eagle,” the convicts used to call him. He could not do much to lighten their lot materially, for his office was that of superintending the engineering work, which had to be done in ways and quantities, settled absolutely and unalterably by the regulations. But if he happened to come across a gang of convicts who had actually got through their work, he allowed them to go back to quarters before beat of drum, without waiting for the regulation moment. The prisoners loved him for the confidence he showed in them, and because of his aversion for all mean, trifling interferences with them, which are so irritating when prison superiors are addicted to that sort of thing. I am absolutely certain that if he had lost a thousand roubles in notes, there was not a thief in the prison, however hardened, who would not have brought them to him, if the man lit on them. I am sure of it.

How the prisoners all felt for him, and with him when they learned that he was at daggers drawn with our detested Major. That came about a month[Pg 338] after his arrival. Their delight knew no bounds. The Major had formerly served with him in the same detachment; so, when they met, after a long separation, they were at first boon companions, but the intimacy could not and did not last. They came to blows—figuratively—and G—kof became the Major’s sworn enemy. Some would have it that it was *more* than figuratively, that they came to actual fisticuffs, a likely thing enough as far as the Major was concerned, for the man had no objection to a scrimmage.

When the convicts heard of the quarrel they really could not contain their delight.

“Old Eight-eyes and the Commandant get on finely together! *He’s* an eagle; but the other’s a *bad ’un*!”

Those who believed in the fight were mighty curious to know which of the two had had the worst of it, and got a good drubbing. If it had been proved there had been no fighting our convicts, I think, would have been bitterly disappointed.

“The Commandant gave him fits, you may bet your life on it,” said they; “he’s a little ’un, but as bold as a lion; the other one got into a blue funk, and hid under the bed from him.”

But G—kof went away only too soon, and keenly was he regretted in the prison.

Our engineers were all most excellent fellows; we had three or four fresh batches of them while I was there.

“Our eagles never remain very long with us,” said the prisoners; “especially when they are good and kind fellows.”

It was this G—kof who sent B—ski and myself to work in his bureau, for he was partial to exiled nobles. When he left, our condition was still fairly endurable, for there was another engineer there who showed us much sympathy and friendship. We copied reports for some time, and our handwriting was getting to be very good, when an order came from the authorities that we were to be sent back to hard labour as[Pg 339] before; some spiteful person had been at work. At bottom we were rather pleased, for we were quite tired of copying.

For two whole years I worked in company with B—ski, all the time in the shops, and many a gossip did we have about our hopes for the future and our notions and convictions. Good B—ski had a very odd mind, which worked in a strange, exceptional way. There are some people of great intelligence who indulge in paradox unconscionably; but when they have undergone great and constant sufferings for their ideas and made great sacrifices for them, you can’t drive their notions out of their heads, and it is cruel to try it. When you objected something to B—ski’s propositions, he was really hurt, and gave you a violent answer. He was, perhaps, more in the right than I was as to some things wherein we differed, but we were obliged to give one another up, very much to my regret, for we had many thoughts in common.

As years went on M—tski became more and more sombre and melancholy; he became a prey to despair. During the earliest part of my imprisonment he was communicative enough, and let us see what was going on in him. When I arrived at the prison he had just finished his second year. At first he took a lively interest in the news

I brought, for he knew nothing of what had been going on in the outer world; he put questions to me, listened eagerly, showed emotion, but, bit by bit, his reserve grew on him and there was no getting at his thoughts. The glowing coals were all covered up with ashes. Yet it was plain that his temper grew sourer and sourer. "*Je hais ces brigands*,"[10] he would say, speaking of convicts I had got to know something of; I never could make him see any good in them. He really did not seem to fully enter into the meaning of anything I said on their behalf, though he would sometimes seem to agree in a listless sort of way. Next day it was just as before:[Pg 340] "*je hais ces brigands*." (We used often to speak French with him; so one of the overseers of the works, the soldier, Dranichnikof, used always to call us *aides chirurgiens*, God knows why!) M—tski never seemed to shake off his usual apathy except when he spoke of his mother.

"She is old and infirm," he said; "she loves me better than anything in the world, and I don't even know if she's still living. If she learns that I've been whipped——"

M—tski was not a noble, and had been whipped before he was transported. When the recollection of this came up in his mind he gnashed his teeth, and could not look anybody in the face. In the latest days of his imprisonment he used to walk to and fro, quite alone for the most part. One day, at noon, he was summoned to the Governor, who received him with a smile on his lips.

"Well, M—tski, what were your dreams last night?" asked the Governor.

Said M—tski to me later, "When he said that to me a shudder ran through me; I felt struck at the heart."

His answer was, "I dreamed that I had a letter from my mother."

"Better than that, better!" replied the Governor. "You are free; your mother has petitioned the Emperor, and he has granted her prayer. Here, here's her letter, and the order for your dismissal. You are to leave the jail without delay."

He came to us pale, scarcely able to believe in his good fortune.

We congratulated him. He pressed our hands with his own, which were quite cold, and trembled violently. Many of the convicts wished him joy; they were really glad to see his happiness.

He settled in Siberia, establishing himself in our town, where a little after that they gave him a place. He used often to come to the jail to bring us news, and[Pg 341] tell us all that was going on, as often as he could talk with us. It was political news that interested him chiefly.

Besides the four Poles, the political convicts of whom I spoke just now, there were two others of that nation, who were sentenced for very short periods; they had not much education, but were good, simple, straightforward fellows. There was another, A—tchoukooski, quite a colourless person; one more I must mention, B—in, a man well on in years, who impressed us all very unfavourably indeed. I don't know what he had been sentenced for, although he used to tell us some story or other about it pretty frequently. He was a person of a vulgar, mean type, with the coarse manner of an enriched shopkeeper. He was quite without education, and seemed to take interest in nothing except what concerned his trade, which was that of a painter, a sort of scene-painter he was; he showed a good deal of talent in his work, and the authorities of the prison soon came to know about his abilities, so he got employment all through the town in decorating walls and ceilings. In two years he beautified the rooms of nearly all the prison officials, who remunerated him handsomely, so he lived pretty comfortably. He was sent to work with three other prisoners, two of whom learned the business thoroughly; one of these, T—jwoski, painted nearly as well as B—in himself. Our Major, who had rooms in one of the government buildings, sent for B—in, and gave him a commission to decorate the walls and ceilings there, which he did so effectively, that the suite of rooms of the Governor-General were quite put out of countenance by those of the Major. The house itself was a ramshackle old place, while the interior, thanks to B—in, was as gay as a palace. Our worthy Major was hugely delighted, went about rubbing his hands, and told everybody that he should look out for a wife at once, "a fellow *can't* remain single when he lives in a place like that;" he was quite serious about it. The Major's[Pg 342] satisfaction with B—in and his assistants went on increasing. They occupied a month in the work at the Major's house. During those memorable days the Major seemed to get into a different frame of mind about us, and began to be quite kind to us political prisoners. One day he sent for J—ski.

"J—ski," said he, "I've done you wrong; I had you beaten for nothing. I'm very sorry. Do you understand? I'm very sorry. I, Major ——"

J—ski answered that he understood perfectly.

"Do you understand? I, who am set over you, I have sent for you to ask your pardon. You can hardly realise it, I suppose. What are you to me, fellow? A worm, less than a crawling worm; you're a convict, while I, by God's grace,[11] am a Major; Major ——, *do* you understand?"

J—ski answered that he quite well understood it all.

“Well, I want to be friends with you. But can you appreciate what I’m doing? Can you feel the greatness of soul I’m showing—feel and appreciate it? Just think of it; I, I, the Major!” etc. etc.

J—ski told me of this scene. There was, then, some human feeling left in this drunken, unruly, and tormenting brute. Allowing for the man’s notions of things, and feeble faculties, one cannot deny that this was a generous proceeding on his part. Perhaps he was a little less drunk than usual, perhaps more; who can tell?

The Major’s glorious idea of marrying came to nothing; the rooms got all their bravery, but the wife was not forthcoming. Instead of going to the altar in that agreeable way, he was pulled up before the authorities and sent to trial. He received orders to send in his resignation. Some of his old sins had found him out, it seems; things done when he had been superintendent of police in our town. This crushing blow came down upon[Pg 343] him without notice, quite suddenly. All the convicts were greatly rejoiced when they heard the great news; it was high day and holiday all through the jail. The story went abroad that the Major sobbed, and cried, and howled like an old woman. But he was helpless in the matter. He was obliged to leave his place, sell his two gray horses, and everything he had in the world; and he fell into complete destitution. We came across him occasionally afterwards in civilian, threadbare clothes, and wearing a cap with a cockade; he glanced at us convicts as spitefully and maliciously as you please. But without his Major’s uniform, all the man’s glory was gone. While placed over us, he gave himself the airs of a being higher than human, who had got into coat and breeches; now it was all over, he looked like the lackey he was, and a disgraced lackey to boot.

With fellows of this sort, the uniform is the only saving grace; that gone, all’s gone.

FOOTNOTES:

[9]The Decembrists.

[10]French in the original Russian.

[11]Our Major was not the only officer who spoke of himself in that lofty way; a good many officers did the same, men who had risen from the ranks chiefly.

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CHAPTER IX. THE ESCAPE

A little while after the Major resigned, our prison was subjected to a thorough reorganization. The "hard labour" hitherto inflicted, and the other regulations, were abolished, and the place put upon the footing of the military convict establishments of Russia. As a result of this, prisoners of the second category were no longer sent there; this class was, for the future, to be composed of prisoners who were regarded as still on the military footing, that is to say, men who, in spite of sentence, did not forfeit for ever their civic *status*. They were soldiers still, but had undergone corporal punishment; they were sentenced for comparatively short periods, six years at most; when they had served their time, or in case of pardon, they went into the ranks again, as before. Men guilty of a second offence were sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment. Up to the time I speak of, we had a section of soldier-prisoners among us, but only because they did not know where else to dispose of them. Now the place was to be occupied by soldiers exclusively. As to the civilian convicts, who were stripped of all civic rights, branded, cropped, and shaven, these were to remain in the fortress[Pg 345] to finish their time; but as no fresh prisoners of this class were to come in, and those there would get their discharge successively, at the end of ten years there would be no civilian convicts left in the place, according to the arrangements. The line of division between the classes of prisoners there was maintained; from time to time there came in other military criminals of high position, sent to our place for security, before being forwarded to Eastern Siberia, for the more aggravated penalties that awaited them there.

There was no change in our general way of life. The work we had to do and the discipline observed were the same as before; but the administrative system was entirely altered, and made more complex. An officer, commandant of companies, was assigned to be at the head of the prison; he had under his orders four subaltern officers who mounted guard by turns. The "invalids" were superseded by twelve non-commissioned officers, and an arsenal superintendent. The convicts were divided into sections of ten, and corporals chosen among them; the power of these over the others was, as may be supposed, nominal. As might be expected, Akim Akimitch got this promotion.

All these new arrangements were confided to the Governor to carry out, who remained in superior command over the whole establishment. The changes did not go further than this. At first the convicts were not a little excited by this movement, and discussed their new guardians a good deal among themselves, trying to make out what sort of fellows they were; but when they saw that everything went on pretty much as usual they quieted down, and things resumed their ordinary course. We had got rid of the Major, and that was something; everybody took fresh breath and fresh courage.

The fear that was in all hearts grew less; we had some assurance that in case of need we could go to our superiors and lodge our complaint, and that a man could not be punished without cause, and would not, unless by mistake.

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Brandy was brought in as before, although we had subaltern officers now where "invalids" were before. These subalterns were all worthy, careful men, who knew their place and business. There were some among them who had the idea that they might give themselves grand airs, and treat us like common soldiers, but they soon gave it up and behaved like the others. Those who did not seem to be well able to get into their heads what the ways of our prison really were, had sharp lessons about it from the convicts themselves, which led to some lively scenes. One sub-officer was confronted with brandy, which was of course too much for him; when he was sober again we had a little explanation with him; we pointed out that he had been drinking with the prisoners, and that, accordingly, etc. etc.; he became quite tractable. The end of it was that the subalterns closed their eyes to the brandy business. They went to market for us, just as the invalids used to, and brought the prisoners white bread, meat, anything that could be got in without too much risk. So I never could understand why they had gone to the trouble of turning the place into a military prison. The change was made two years before I left the place; I had two years to bear of it still.

I see little use in recording all I saw and went through later at the convict establishment day by day. If I were to tell it all, all the daily and hourly occurrences, I might write twice or thrice as many chapters as this book ought to contain, but I should simply tire the reader and myself. Substantially all that I might write has been already embodied in the narrative as it stands so far; and the reader has had the opportunity of getting a tolerable idea of what the life of a convict of the second class really was. My wish has been to portray the state of things at the establishment, and as it affected myself, accurately and yet forcibly; whether I have done so others must judge. I cannot pronounce upon my own work, but I think I may well draw it to a close; as I move among these[Pg 347] recollections of a dreadful past, the old suffering comes up again and all but strangles me.

Besides, I cannot be sure of my memory as to all I saw in these last years, for the faculty seems blunted as regards the later compared with the earlier period of my imprisonment, there is a good deal I am sure I have quite forgotten. But I remember only too well how very, very slow these last two years were, how very sad, how the days seemed as if they never would come to evening, something like water falling drop

by drop. I remember, too, that I was filled with a mighty longing for my resurrection from that grave which gave me strength to bear up, to wait, and to hope. And so I got to be hardened and enduring; I lived on expectation, I counted every passing day; if there were a thousand more of them to pass at the prison I found satisfaction in thinking that one of them was gone, and only nine hundred and ninety-nine to come. I remember, too, that though I had round me a hundred persons in like case, I felt myself more and more solitary, and though the solitude was awful I came to love it. Isolated thus among the convict-crowd I went over all my earlier life, analysing its events and thoughts minutely; I passed my former doings in review, and sometimes was pitiless in condemnation of myself; sometimes I went so far as to be grateful to fate for the privilege of such loneliness, for only that could have caused me so severely to scrutinise my past, so searchingly to examine its inner and outer life. What strong and strange new germs of hope came in those memorable hours up in my soul! I weighed and decided all sorts of issues, I entered into a compact with myself to avoid the errors of former years, and the rocks on which I had been wrecked; I laid down a programme for my future, and vowed that I would stick to it; I had a sort of blind and complete conviction that, once away from that place, I should be able to carry out everything I made my mind up to; I looked for my freedom with transports of eager desire; I wanted to try my strength[Pg 348] in a renewed struggle with life; sometimes I was clutched, as by fangs, by an impatience which rose to fever heat. It is painful to go back to these things, most painful; nobody, I know, can care much about it at all except myself; but I write because I think people will understand, and because there are those who have been, those who yet will be, like myself, condemned, imprisoned, cut off from life, in the flower of their age, and in the full possession of all their strength.

But all this is useless. Let me end my memoirs with a narrative of something interesting, for I must not close them too abruptly.

What shall it be? Well, it may occur to some to ask whether it was quite impossible to escape from the jail, and if during the time I spent there no attempt of the kind was made. I have already said that a prisoner who has got through two or three years thinks a good deal of it, and, as a rule, concludes that it is best to finish his time without running more risks, so that he may get his settlement, on the land or otherwise, when set at liberty. But those who reckon in this way are convicts sentenced for comparatively short times; those who have many years to serve are always ready to run some chances. For all that the attempts at escape were quite infrequent. Whether that was attributable to the want of spirit in the convicts, the severity of the military discipline enforced, or, after all, to the situation of the town,

little favourable to escapes, for it was in the midst of the open steppe, I really cannot say. All these motives no doubt contributed to give pause. It was difficult enough to get out of the prison at all; in my time two convicts tried it; they were criminals of importance.

When our Major had been got rid of, A—v, the spy, was quite alone with nobody to back him up. He was still quite young, but his character grew in force with every year; he was a bold, self-asserting fellow,[Pg 349] of considerable intelligence. I think if they had set him at liberty he would have gone on spying and getting money in every sort of shameful way, but I don't think he would have let himself be caught again; he would have turned his experiences as a convict to far too much good for that. One trick he practised was that of forging passports, at least so I heard from some of the convicts. I think this fellow was ready to risk everything for a change in his position. Circumstances gave me the opportunity of getting to the bottom of this man's disposition and seeing how ugly it was; he was simply revolting in his cold, deep wickedness, and my disgust with him was more than I could get over. I do believe that if he wanted a drink of brandy, and could only have got it by killing some one, he would not have hesitated one moment if it was pretty certain the crime would not come out. He had learned there, in that jail, to look on everything in the coolest calculating way. It was on him that the choice of Koulikoff—of the special section—fell, as we are to see.

I have spoken before of Koulikoff. He was no longer young, but full of ardour, life, and vigour, and endowed with extraordinary faculties. He felt his strength, and wanted still to have a life of his own; there are some men who long to live in a rich, abounding life, even when old age has got hold of them. I should have been a good deal surprised if Koulikoff had *not* tried to escape; but he did. Which of the two, Koulikoff and A—v, had the greater influence over the other I really cannot say; they were a goodly couple, and suited each other to a hair, so they soon became as thick as possible. I fancy that Koulikoff reckoned on A—v to forge a passport for him; besides, the latter was of the noble class, belonged to good society, a circumstance out of which a good deal could be made if they managed to get back into Russia. Heaven only knows what compacts they made, or what plans and hopes they formed; if they got as far as Russia they would at all events leave[Pg 350] behind them Siberia and vagabondage. Koulikoff was a versatile man, capable of playing many a part on the stage of life, and had plenty of ability to go upon, whatever direction his efforts took. To such persons the jail is strangulation and suffocation. So the two set about plotting their escape.

But to get away without a soldier to act as escort was impossible; so a soldier had to be won. In one of the battalions stationed at our fortress was a Pole of middle life—an

energetic fellow worthy of a better fate—serious, courageous. When he arrived first in Siberia, quite young, he had deserted, for he could not stand his sufferings from nostalgia. He was captured and whipped. During two years he formed part of the disciplinary companies to which offenders are sent; then he rejoined his battalion, and, showing himself zealous in the service, had been rewarded by promotion to the rank of corporal. He had a good deal of self-love, and spoke like a man who had no small conceit of himself.

I took particular notice of the man sometimes when he was among the soldiers who had charge of us, for the Poles had spoken to me about him; and I got the idea that his longing for his native country had taken the form of a chill, fixed, deadly hatred for those who kept him away from it. He was the sort of man to stick at nothing, and Koulikoff showed that his scent was good, when he pitched on this man to be an accomplice in his flight. This corporal's name was Kohler. Koulikoff and he settled their plans and fixed the day. It was the month of June, the hottest of the year. The climate of our town and neighbourhood was pretty equable, especially in summer, which is a very good thing for tramps and vagabonds. To make off far after leaving the fortress was quite out of the question, it being situated on rising ground and in uncovered country, for though surrounded by woods, these are a considerable distance away. A disguise was indispensable, and to procure it they must manage to get into the outskirts of[Pg 351] the town, where Koulikoff had taken care some time before to prepare a den of some sort. I don't know whether his worthy friends in that part of the town were in the secret. It may be presumed they were, though there is no evidence. That year, however, a young woman who led a gay life and was very pretty, settled down in a nook of that same part of the city, near the county. This young person attracted a good deal of notice, and her career promised to be something quite remarkable; her nickname was "Fire and Flame." I think that she and the fugitives concerted the plans of escape together, for Koulikoff had lavished a good deal of attention and money on her for more than a year. When the gangs were formed each morning, the two fellows, Koulikoff and A—v, managed to get themselves sent out with the convict Chilkin, whose trade was that of stove-maker and plasterer, to do up the empty barracks when the soldiers went into camp. A—v and Koulikoff were to help in carrying the necessary materials. Kohler got himself put into the escort on the occasion; as the rules required three soldiers to act as escort for two prisoners, they gave him a young recruit whom he was doing corporal's duty upon, drilling and training him. Our fugitives must have exercised a great deal of influence over Kohler to deceive him, to cast his lot in with them, serious, intelligent, and reflective man as he was, with so few more years of service to pass in the army.

They arrived at the barracks about six o'clock in the morning; there was nobody with them. After having worked about an hour, Koulikoff and A—v told Chilkin that they were going to the workshop to see some one, and fetch a tool they wanted. They had to go carefully to work with Chilkin, and speak in as natural a tone as they could. The man was from Moscow, by trade a stove-maker, sharp and cunning, keen-sighted, not talkative, fragile in appearance, with little flesh on his bones. He was the sort of person who might have been expected to pass his[Pg 352] life in honest working dress, in some Moscow shop, yet here he was in the "special section," after many wanderings and transfers among the most formidable military criminals; so fate had ordered.

What had he done to deserve such severe punishment? I had not the least idea; he never showed the least resentment or sour feeling, and went on in a quiet, inoffensive way; now and then he got as drunk as a lord; but, apart from that, his conduct was perfectly good. Of course he was not in the secret, so he had to be thrown off the scent. Koulikoff told him, with a wink, that they were going to get some brandy, which had been hidden the day before in the workshop, which suited Chilkin's book perfectly; he had not the least notion of what was up, and remained alone with the young recruit, while Koulikoff, A—v, and Kohler betook themselves to the suburbs of the town.

Half-an-hour passed; the men did not come back. Chilkin began to think, and the truth dawned upon him. He remembered that Koulikoff had not seemed at all like himself, that he had seen him whispering and winking to A—v; he was sure of that, and the whole thing seemed suspicious to him. Kohler's behaviour had struck him, too; when he went off with the two convicts, the corporal had given the recruit orders what he was to do in his absence, which he had never known him do before. The more Chilkin thought over the matter the less he liked it. Time went on; the convicts did not return; his anxiety was great; for he saw that the authorities would suspect him of connivance with the fugitives, so that his own skin was in danger. If he made any delay in giving information of what had occurred, suspicion of himself would grow into conviction that he knew what the men intended when they left him, and he would be dealt with as their accomplice. There was no time to lose.

It came into his mind, then, that Koulikoff and[Pg 353] A—v had become markedly intimate for some time, and that they had been often seen laying their heads together behind the barracks, by themselves. He remembered, too, that he had more than once fancied that they were up to something together.

He looked attentively at the soldier with him as escort; the fellow was yawning, leaning on his gun, and scratching his nose in the most innocent manner imaginable; so Chilkin did not think it necessary to speak of his anxieties to this man: he told him simply to come with him to the engineers' workshops. His object was to ask if anybody there had seen his companions; but nobody there had, so Chilkin's suspicions grew stronger and stronger. If only he could think that they had gone to get drunk and have a spree in the outskirts of the town, as Koulikoff often did. No, thought Chilkin, that was *not* so. They would have told him, for there was no need to make a mystery of that. Chilkin left his work, and went straight back to the jail.

It was about nine o'clock when he reached the sergeant-major, to whom he mentioned his suspicions. That officer was frightened, and at first could not believe there was anything in it all. Chilkin had, in fact, expressed no more than a vague misgiving that all was not as it should be. The sergeant-major ran to the Major, who in his turn ran to the Governor. In a quarter-of-an-hour all necessary measures were taken. The Governor-General was communicated with. As the convicts in question were persons of importance, it might be expected that the matter would be seriously viewed at St. Petersburg. A—v was classed among political prisoners, by a somewhat random official proceeding, it would seem; Koulikoff was a convict of the "special section," that is to say, as a criminal of the blackest dye, and, what was worse, was an ex-soldier. It was then brought to notice that according to the regulations each convict of the "special section" ought to have two soldiers assigned as escort when[Pg 354] he went to work; the regulations had not been observed as to this, so that everybody was exposed to serious trouble. Expresses were sent off to all the district offices of the municipality, and all the little neighbouring towns, to warn the authorities of the escape of the two convicts, and a full description furnished of their persons. Cossacks were sent out to hunt them up, letters sent to the authorities of all adjoining Governmental districts. And everybody was frightened to death.

The excitement was quite as great all through the prison; as the convicts returned from work, they heard the tremendous news, which spread rapidly from man to man; all received it with deep, though secret satisfaction. Their emotion was as natural as it was great. The affair broke the monotony of their lives, and gave them something to think of; but, above all, it was an escape, and as such, something to sympathise with deeply, and stirred fibres in the poor fellows which had long been without any exciting stimulus; something like hope and a disposition to confront their fate set their hearts beating, for the incident seemed to show that their hard lot was not hopelessly unchangeable.

"Well, you see they've got off in spite of them! Why shouldn't we?"

The thought came into every man's mind, and made him stiffen his back and look at his neighbours in a defiant sort of way. All the convicts seemed to grow an inch taller on the strength of it, and to look down a bit upon the sub-officers. The heads of the place soon came running up, as you may imagine. The Governor now arrived in person. We fellows looked at them all with some assurance, with a touch of contempt, and with a very set expression of face, as though to say: "Well, you there? We can get out of your clutches when we've a mind to."

All the men were quite sure there would be a general searching of everything and everybody; so everything that was at all contraband was carefully hidden; for[Pg 355] the authorities would want to show that precious wisdom of theirs which may be reckoned on after the event. The expectation was verified; there was a mighty turning of everything upside down and topsy-turvy, a general rummage, with the discovery of exactly nothing, as they might have known.

When the time came for going out to work after dinner the usual escorts were doubled. When night came, the officers and sub-officers on service came pouncing on us at every moment to see if we were off our guard, and if anything could be got out of us; the lists were gone over once more than the usual number of times, which extra mustering only gave more trouble for nothing; we were hunted out of the court-yard that our names might be gone through again. Then, when in barrack, they reckoned us up another time, as if they never could be done with the exercise.

The convicts were not at all disturbed by all this bustling absurdity. They put on a very unconcerned demeanour, and, as is always the case in such a conjuncture, behaved in the prettiest manner all that evening and night. "We won't give them any handle anyhow," was the general feeling. The question with the authorities was whether some among us were not in complicity with those who had got away, so a careful watch was kept over our doings, and a careful ear for our conversations; but nothing came of it.

"Not such fools, those fellows, as to leave anybody behind who was in the secret!"

"When you go at that sort of thing you lie low and play low!"

"Koulikoff and A—v know enough to have covered up their tracks. They've done the trick in first-rate style, keeping things to themselves; they've mizzled, the rascals; clever chaps, those, they could get through shut doors!"

The glory of Koulikoff and A—v had grown a hundred cubits higher than it was. Everybody was proud of them. Their exploit, it was felt, would be[Pg 356] handed down to the most distant posterity, and outlive the jail itself.

“Rattling fellows, those!” said one.

“Can’t get away from here, eh? *That’s* their notion, is it? Just look at those chaps!”

“Yes,” said a third, looking very superior, “but who *is* it that has got away? Tip-top fellows. *You* can’t hold a candle to them.”

At any other time the man to whom anything of that sort was said would have replied angrily enough, and defended himself; now the observation was met with modest silence.

“True enough,” was said. “Everybody’s not a Koulikoff or an A—v, you’ve got to show what you’re made of before you’ve a right to speak.”

“I say, pals, after all, why do we remain in the place?” struck in a prisoner seated by the kitchen window; he spoke drawlingly, but the man, you could see, enjoyed it all; he slowly rubbed his cheek with the palm of his hand. “Why do we stop? It’s no life at all, we’ve been buried, though we’re alive and kicking. Now *isn’t* it so?”

“Oh, curse it, you can’t get out of prison as easy as shaking off an old boot. I tell you it sticks to your calves. What’s the good of pulling a long face over it?”

“But, look here; there is Koulikoff now,” began one of the most eager, a mere lad.

“Koulikoff!” exclaimed another, looking askance at the young fellow. “Koulikoff! They don’t turn out Koulikoffs by the dozen.”

“And A—v, pals, there’s a lad for you!”

“Aye, aye, he’ll get Koulikoff just where he wants him, as often as he wants him. He’s up to everything, he is.”

“I wonder how far they’ve got; that’s what *I* want to know,” said one.

Then the talk went off into details: Had they got far from the town? What direction did they go off in?[Pg 357] *Which* gave them the best chance? Then they discussed distances, and as there were convicts who knew the neighbourhood well, these were attentively listened to.

Next, they talked over the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, of whom they seemed to think as badly as possible. There was nobody in the neighbourhood, the convicts believed, who would hesitate at all as to the course to be pursued; nothing would induce them to help the runaways; quite the other way, these people would hunt them down.

“If you only knew what bad fellows these peasants are! Rascally brutes!”

“Peasants, indeed! Worthless scamps!”

“These Siberians are as bad as bad can be. They think nothing of killing a man.”

“Oh, well, our fellows——”

“Yes, that’s it, they may come off second best. Our fellows are as plucky as plucky can be.”

“Well, if we live long enough, we shall hear something about them soon.”

“Well, now, what do you *think*? Do you think they really will get clean away?”

“I am sure, as I live, that they’ll never be caught,” said one of the most excited, giving the table a great blow with his fist.

“Hm! That’s as things turn out.”

“I’ll tell you what, friends,” said Skouratof, “if I once got out, I’d stake my life they’d never get me again.”

“*You?*”

Everybody burst out laughing. They would hardly condescend to listen to him; but Skouratof was not to be put down.

“I tell you I’d stake my life on it!” with great energy. “Why, I made my mind up to *that* long ago. I’d find means of going through a key-hole rather than let them lay hands on me.”

“Oh, don’t you fear, when your belly got empty[Pg 358] you’d just go creeping to a peasant and ask him for a morsel of something.”

Fresh laughter.

“I ask him for victuals? You’re a liar!”

“Hold your jaw, can’t you? We know what you were sent here for. You and your Uncle Vacia killed some peasant for bewitching your cattle.”[12]

More laughter. The more serious among them seemed very angry and indignant.

“You’re a liar,” cried Skouratof; “it’s Mikitka who told you that; I wasn’t in that at all, it was Uncle Vacia; don’t you mix my name up in it. I’m a Moscow man, and I’ve been on the tramp ever since I was a very small thing. Look here, when the priest taught me to

read the liturgy, he used to pinch my ears, and say, ‘Repeat this after me: Have pity on me, Lord, out of Thy great goodness;’ and he used to make me say with him, ‘They’ve taken me up and brought me to the police-station out of Thy great goodness,’ and the like. I tell you that went on when I was quite a little fellow.”

All laughed heartily again; that was what Skouratof wanted; he liked playing clown. Soon the talk became serious again, especially among the older men and those who knew a good deal about escapes. Those among the younger convicts who could keep themselves quiet enough to listen, seemed highly delighted. A great crowd was assembled in and about the kitchen. There were none of the warders about; so everybody could give vent to his feelings in talk or otherwise. One man I noticed who was particularly enjoying himself, a Tartar, a little fellow with high cheek-bones, and a remarkably droll face. His name was Mametka, he could scarcely speak Russian at all, but it was odd to see the way he craned his neck forward into the crowd, and the childish delight he showed.

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“Well, Mametka, my lad, *iakchi*.”

“*Iakchi, ouk, iakchi!*” said Mametka as well as he could, shaking his grotesque head. “*Iakchi*.”

“They’ll never catch them, eh? *Iok*.”

“*Iok, iok!*” and Mametka waggled his head and threw his arms about.

“You’re a liar, then, and I don’t know what you’re talking about. Hey!”

“That’s it, that’s it, *iakchi*!” answered poor Mametka.

“All right, good, *iakchi* it is!”

Skouratof gave him a thump on the head, which sent his cap down over his eyes, and went out in high glee, and Mametka was quite chapfallen.

For a week or so a very tight hand was kept on everybody in the jail, and the whole neighbourhood was repeatedly and carefully searched. How they managed it I cannot tell, but the prisoners always seemed to know all about the measures taken by the authorities for recovering the runaways. For some days, according to all we heard, things went very favourably for them; no traces whatever of them could be found. Our convicts made very light of all the authorities were about, and were quite at their ease about their friends, and kept saying that nothing would ever be found out about them.

All the peasants round about were roused, we were told, and watching all the likely places, woods, ravines, etc.

“Stuff and nonsense!” said our fellows, who had a grin on their faces most of the time, “they’re hidden at somebody’s place who’s a friend.”

“That’s certain; they’re not the fellows to chance things, they’ve made all sure.”

The general idea was, in fact, that they were still concealed in the suburbs of the town, in a cellar, waiting till the hue and cry was over, and for their hair to grow; that they would remain there perhaps six months at least, and then quietly go off. All the prisoners were in the[Pg 360] most fanciful and romantic state of mind about the things. Suddenly, eight days after the escape, a rumour spread that the authorities were on their track. This rumour was at first treated with contempt, but towards evening there seemed to be more in it. The convicts became much excited. Next morning it was said in the town that the runaways had been caught, and were being brought back. After dinner there were further details; the story was that they had been seized at a hamlet, seventy versts away from the town. At last we had fully confirmed tidings. The sergeant-major positively asserted, immediately after an interview with the Major, that they would be brought into the guard-house that very night. They were taken; there could be no doubt of it.

It is difficult to convey an adequate idea of the way the convicts were affected by the news. At first their rage was great, then they were deeply dejected. Then they began to be bitter and sarcastic, pouring all their scorn, not on the authorities, but on the runaways who had been such fools as to get caught. A few began this, then nearly all joined, except a small number of the more serious, thoughtful ones, who held their tongues, and seemed to regard the thoughtless fellows with great contempt.

Poor Koulikoff and A—v were now just as heartily abused as they had been glorified before; the men seemed to take a delight in running them down, as though in being caught they had done something wantonly offensive to their mates. It was said, with high contempt, that the fellows had probably got hungry and couldn’t stand it, and had gone into a village to ask bread of the peasants, which, according to tramp etiquette, it appears, is to come down very low in the world indeed. In this supposition the men turned out to be quite mistaken; for what had happened was that the tracks of the runaways out of the town were discovered and followed up; they were ascertained to have got into a wood, which was surrounded, so that[Pg 361] the fugitives had no recourse but to give themselves up.

They were brought in that night, tied hands and feet, under armed escort. All the convicts ran hastily to the palisades to see what would be done with them; but they saw nothing except the carriages of the Governor and the Major, which were waiting in front of the guard-house. The fugitives were ironed and locked up separately, their punishment being adjourned till the next day. The prisoners began all to sympathise with the unhappy fellows when they heard how they had been taken, and learned that they could not help themselves, and the anxiety about the issue was keen.

“They’ll get a thousand at least.”

“A thousand, is it? I tell you they’ll have it till the life is beaten out of them. A—v may get off with a thousand, but the other they’ll kill; why, he’s in the ‘special section.’”

They were wrong. A—v was sentenced to five hundred strokes, his previous good conduct told in his favour, and this was his first prison offence. Koulikoff, I believe, had fifteen hundred. The punishment, upon the whole, was mild rather than severe.

The two men showed good sense and feeling, for they gave nobody’s name as having helped them, and positively declared that they had made straight for the woods without going into anybody’s house. I was very sorry for Koulikoff; to say nothing of the heavy beating he got; he had thrown away all his chances of having his lot as a prisoner lightened. Later he was sent to another convict establishment. A—v did not get all he was sentenced to; the physicians interfered, and he was let off. But as soon as he was safe in the hospital he began blowing his trumpet again, and said he would stick at nothing now, and that they should soon see what he would do. Koulikoff was not changed a bit, as decorous as ever, and gave himself just the same airs as ever[Pg 362]; manner or words to show that he had had such an adventure. But the convicts looked on him quite differently; he seemed to have come down a good deal in their estimation, and now to be on their own level every way, instead of being a superior creature. So it was that poor Koulikoff’s star paled; success is everything in this world.

FOOTNOTES:

[12]The expression of the original is untranslatable; literally “you killed a cattle-kill.” This phrase means murder of a peasant, male or female, supposed to bewitch cattle. We had in our jail a murderer who had done this cattle-kill.—Dostoïeffsky’s Note.

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CHAPTER X. FREEDOM!

This incident occurred during my last year of imprisonment. My recollection of what occurred this last year is as keen as of the events of the first years; but I have gone into detail enough. In spite of my impatience to be out, this year was the least trying of all the years I spent there. I had now many friends and acquaintances among the convicts, who had by this time made up their minds very much in my favour. Many of them, indeed, had come to feel a sincere and genuine affection for me. The soldier who was assigned to accompany my friend and myself—simultaneously discharged—out of the prison, very nearly cried when the time for leaving came. And when we were at last in full freedom, staying in the rooms of the Government building placed at our disposal for the month we still spent in the town, this man came nearly every day to see us. But there were some men whom I could never soften or win any regard from—God knows why—and who showed just the same hard aversion for me at the last as at the first; something we could not get over stood between us.

I had more indulgences during the last year. I found among the military functionaries of our town old acquaintances, and even some old schoolfellows, and the renewal of these relations helped me. Thanks to them I got permission to have some money, to write to my family, and even to have some books. For some years I had not had a single volume, and words would fail to tell the strange, deep emotion and excitement[Pg 364] which the first book I read at the jail caused me. I began to devour it at night, when the doors were closed, and read it till the break of day. It was a number of a review, and it seemed to me like a messenger from the other world. As I read, my life before the prison days seemed to rise up before me in sharp definition, as of some existence independent of my own, which another soul had had. Then I tried to get some clear idea of my relation to current events and things; whether my arrears of knowledge and experience were too great to make up; whether the men and women out of doors had lived and gone through many things and great during the time I was away from them; and great was my desire to thoroughly understand what was *now* going on, *now* that I could know something about it all at last. All the words I read were as palpable things, which I wanted rather to feel sensibly than get mere meaning out of; I tried to see more in the text than *could* be there. I imagined some mysterious meanings that *must* be in them, and tried at every page to see allusions to the past, with which my mind was familiar, whether they were there or not; at every turn of the leaf I sought for traces of what had deeply moved people before the days of my bondage; and deep was my dejection when it was forced on my mind that a new state of things had arisen; a new life, among my kind, which was alien to my knowledge and my sentiments. I felt as if I was a straggler, left behind and lost in the onward march of mankind.

Yes, there were indeed arrears, if the word is not too weak.

For the truth is, that another generation had come up, and I knew it not, and it knew not me. At the foot of one article I saw the name of one who had been dear to me; with what avidity I flung myself on *that* paper! But the other names were nearly all new to me; new workers had come upon the scene, and I was eager to know their doings and themselves.[Pg 365] It made me feel nearly desperate to have so few books, and to know how hard it would be to get more. At an earlier date, in the old Major's time, it was a dangerous thing indeed to bring books into the jail. If one was found when the whole place was searched, as was regularly done, great was the disturbance, and no efforts were spared to find out how they got in, and who had helped in the offence. I did not want to be subjected to insulting scrutiny, and, if I had, it would have been useless. I *had* to live without books, and did, shut up in myself, tormenting myself with many a question and problem on which I had no means of throwing any light. But I can *never* tell it all.

It was in winter that I came in, so in winter I was to leave, on the anniversary-day. Oh, with what impatience did I look forward to the thrice-blessed winter! How gladly did I see the summer die out, the leaves turn yellow on the trees, the grass turn dry over the wide steppe! Summer is gone at last! the winds of autumn howl and groan, the first snow falls in whirling flakes. The winter, so long, long-prayed for, is come, come at last. Oh, how the heart beats with the thought that freedom was really, at last, at last, close at hand. Yet it was strange, as the time of times, the day of days, grew nearer and nearer, so did my soul grow quieter and quieter. I was annoyed at myself, reproached myself even with being cold, indifferent. Many of the convicts, as I met them in the court-yard when the day's work was done, used to get out, and talk with me to wish me joy.

"Ah, little Father Alexander Petrovitch, you'll soon be out now! And here you'll leave us poor devils behind!"

"Well, Mertynof, have you long to wait still?" I asked the man who spoke.

"I! Oh, good Lord, I've seven years of it yet to weary through."

Then the man sighed with a far-away, wandering look, as if he was gazing into those intolerable days[Pg 366] to come.... Yes, many of my companions congratulated me in a way that showed they really felt what they said. I saw, too, that there was more disposition to meet me as man to man, they drew nearer to me as I was to leave them; the halo of freedom began to surround me, and caring for that they cared more for me. It was in this spirit they bade me farewell.

K—schniski, a young Polish noble, a sweet and amiable person, was very fond, about this time, of walking in the court-yard with me. The stifling nights in the barracks did him much harm, so he tried his best to keep his health by getting all the exercise and fresh air he could.

“I am looking forward impatiently to the day when *you* will be set free,” he said with a smile one day, “for when you go I shall *realise* that I have just one year more of it to undergo.”

Need I say what I can yet not help saying, that freedom in idea always seemed to us who were there something *more* free than it ever can be in reality? That was because our fancy was always dwelling upon it. Prisoners always exaggerate when they think of freedom and look on a free man; we did certainly; the poorest servant of one of the officers there seemed a sort of king to us, everything we could imagine in a free man, compared with ourselves at least; he had no irons on his limbs, his head was not shaven, he could go where and when he liked, with no soldiers to watch and escort him.

The day before I was set free, as night fell I went *for the last time* all through and all round the prison. How many a thousand times had I made the circuit of those palisades during those ten years! There, at the rear of the barracks, had I gone to and fro during the whole of that first year, a solitary, despairing man. I remember how I used to reckon up the days I had still to pass there—thousands, thousands! God! how long ago it seemed. There’s the corner where the poor prisoned eagle wasted away; Petroff used often to come[Pg 367] to me at that place. It seemed as if the man would never leave my side now; he would place himself by my side and walk along without ever saying a word, as though he knew all my thoughts as well as myself, and there was always a strange, inexplicable sort of wondering look on the man’s face.

How many a mental farewell did I take of the black, squared beams in our barracks! Ah, me! How much joyless youth, how much strength for which use there was none, was buried, lost in those walls!—youth and strength of which the world might surely have made *some* use. For I must speak my thoughts as to this: the hapless fellows there were perhaps the strongest, and, in one way or another, the most gifted of our people. There was all that strength of body and of mind lost, hopelessly lost. Whose fault is that?

Yes; whose fault *is* that?

The next day, at an early hour, before the men were mustered for work, I went through all the barracks to bid the men a last farewell. Many a vigorous, horny hand was held

out to me with right good-will. Some grasped and shook my hand as though all their hearts went with the act; but these were the more generous souls. Most of the poor fellows seemed so much to feel that, for them, I was already a man changed by what was coming, that they could feel scarce anything else. They knew that I had friends in the town, that I was going away at once to *gentlemen*, that I should sit at their table as their equal. This the poor fellows felt; and, although they did their best as they took my hand, that hand could not be the hand of an equal. No; I, too, was a gentleman now. Some turned their backs on me, and made no reply to my parting words. I think, too, that I saw looks of aversion on some faces.

The drum beat; all the convicts went to their work; and I was left to myself. Souchiloff had got up before everybody that morning, and now set himself tremblingly to the task of getting ready for me a last cup of tea. Poor Souchiloff! How he cried[Pg 368] when I gave him my clothes, my shirts, my trouser-straps, and some money.

"'Tain't that, 'tain't that," he said, and he bit his trembling lips, "it's that I am going to lose you, Alexander Petrovitch! What *shall* I do without you?"

There was Akim Akimitch, too; him, also, I bade farewell.

"Your turn to go will come soon, I pray," said I.

"Ah, no! I shall remain here long, long, very long yet," he just managed to say, as he pressed my hand. I threw myself on his neck; we kissed.

Ten minutes after the convicts had gone out, my companion and myself left the jail *for ever*. We went to the blacksmith's shop, where our irons were struck off. We had no armed escort, we went there attended by a single sub-officer. It was convicts who struck off our irons in the engineers' workshop. I let them do it for my friend first, then went to the anvil myself. The smiths made me turn round, seized my leg, and stretched it on the anvil. Then they went about the business methodically, as though they wanted to make a very neat job of it indeed.

"The rivet, man, turn the rivet first," I heard the master smith say; "there, so, so. Now, a stroke of the hammer!"

The irons fell. I lifted them up. Some strange impulse made me long to have them in my hands for one last time. I couldn't realise that, only a moment before, they had been on my limbs.

"Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!" said the convicts in their broken voices; but they seemed pleased as they said it.

Yes, farewell!

Liberty! New life! Resurrection from the dead!

Unspeakable moment!

THE END

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