

The House of the Dead

Fyodor Dostoevsky

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The House of the Dead was published in 1862 and portrays the life of convicts in a Siberian prison camp. The novel is a loosely-knit collection of facts and events connected to life in a Siberian prison, organised by “theme” rather than as a continuous story. Dostoyevsky himself spent four years in exile in such a camp following his conviction for involvement in the Petrashevsky circle. This experience allowed him to describe with great authenticity the conditions of prison life and the characters of the convicts.

The narrator, Aleksandr Petrovich Goryanchikov, has been sentenced to deportation to Siberia and ten years of hard labour. Life in prison is particularly hard for Aleksandr Petrovich, since he is a “gentleman” and suffers the malice of the other prisoners, nearly all of whom belong to the peasantry. Gradually Goryanchikov overcomes his revulsion at his situation and his fellow convicts, undergoing a spiritual re-awakening that culminates with his release from the camp. The House of the Dead is a work of great humanity, as Dostoyevsky portrays the inmates of the prison with sympathy for their plight, expressing admiration for their energy, ingenuity and talent, regardless of their social background. He concludes that the existence of the prison, with its absurd practices and savage corporal punishments is a tragic fact, both for the prisoners and for Russia itself.

Part I

Chapter I: Ten Years a Convict

Among the mountains and impenetrable forests of the Siberian desert one comes from time to time across little towns of a thousand or two inhabitants. They are built entirely of wood and are very ugly, with two churches—one in the centre of the town, the other in the cemetery. These places are, in fact, much more like good-sized villages on the outskirts of Moscow than towns properly so called, and are generally administered by an inspector of police, a body of assessors, and some minor officials. It is cold in Siberia, but the great advantages of Government service compensate for that. The inhabitants are simple folk without liberal ideas; their manners are old-fashioned, solid, and unchanged by time. The officials who, of course, form the nobility in Siberia, either belong to the country, deep-rooted Siberians, or have migrated from Russia. The latter come straight from the large cities, tempted by the high pay, the extra allowance for travelling expenses, and by hopes (not less seductive) for the future. Those who know how to adapt themselves to conditions in Siberia almost always remain there; the abundant and richly flavoured fruit which they gather recompenses them amply for what they lose.

As for the others, light-minded persons who are unable to deal with the problem, they are soon bored in Siberia, and ask themselves with regret why they were so foolish as to come. They impatiently kill the three years for which they are obliged by their sentence to remain, and as soon as their time is up they ask to be sent back, and return to their original homes, decrying and ridiculing Siberia. They are wrong; for it is a happy country, not only as regards the Government service, but also from many other points of view.

The climate is excellent, the merchants are rich and hospitable, the Europeans in easy circumstances are numerous. As for the girls, they are like roses and their morality is irreproachable. Game is to be found in the streets, and throws itself upon the sportsman's gun. People drink champagne in prodigious quantities. The caviare is astonishingly good and most abundant. In a word, it is a blessed land, out of which it is only necessary to be able to make profit; and much profit is in fact made.

It was in one of these little towns—gay and perfectly self-satisfied, whose population left upon me the most agreeable impression—that I met an exile, Alexander Petrovitch Goriantchikoff, formerly a landed proprietor in Russia. He had been condemned to hard labour of the second degree for assassinating his wife. After undergoing his punishment

often years' hard labour, he lived quietly and unnoticed as a colonist in the little town of K. To tell the truth, he was on the register of a neighbouring district; but he resided at K, where he managed to get a living by giving lessons to children. In the towns of Siberia one often meets exiles thus engaged: they are not looked down upon, for they teach the French language which is so necessary in life, and of which without them no one in the distant parts of Siberia would have the least idea.

I saw Alexander Petrovitch for the first time at the house of an official, Ivan Ivanitch Gvosdikof, a venerable old man, very hospitable, and the father of five daughters for whom the highest hopes were entertained. Four times a week Alexander Petrovitch gave them lessons, at the rate of thirty silver kopecks a lesson. His external appearance interested me. He was excessively pale and thin, still young-about thirty-five years of age-short and weak, and always very neatly dressed in the European style. When you spoke to him he looked at you most attentively, listening to your words with strict politeness and a reflective air, as though you had set him a problem or wished to extract a secret from him. He replied clearly and shortly; but in doing so weighed each word, so that one felt ill at ease without knowing why, and was glad when the conversation came to an end. I asked Ivan Gvosdikof about him. He told me that Goriantchikoff was of irreproachable morals, otherwise he would not have entrusted him with the education of his children; but that he was a terrible misanthrope, who avoided all society; that he was very learned, a great reader, and that he spoke but little, and never entered freely into a conversation. Some people said he was mad; but that was not looked upon as a very serious defect. Accordingly, the most important persons in the town were ready to treat Alexander Petrovitch with respect, for he could be useful to them in writing petitions. It was believed that he was well connected in Russia. Perhaps, among his relations, there were some who were highly placed; but it was known that since his exile he had broken off all contact with them. In a word, he was his own executioner. Everyone knew his story, and was aware that he had killed his wife through jealousy less than a year after his marriage and that he had given himself up to justice, which had made his punishment much less severe. Such crimes are always looked upon as misfortunes, which must be treated with pity. Nevertheless, this extraordinary man kept himself obstinately apart, and never showed himself except to give lessons. In the first instance I paid no attention to him; then, without knowing why, I found myself interested in him. He was rather enigmatic; to converse with him was quite impossible. Certainly he replied to all my questions, he seemed to regard it as a duty to do so; but when once he had answered I was afraid to question him further.

After such conversations one could observe on his countenance signs of suffering and exhaustion. I remember one fine summer's evening leaving Gvosdikof's house in his company. It suddenly occurred to me to invite him to come in and smoke a cigarette. I can scarcely describe the fright which showed itself in his countenance. He became confused, muttered incoherently, gave me an angry look, then suddenly fled in the opposite direction. I was astonished afterwards when he met me: he seemed to experience,

on seeing me, a sort of terror, but I did not lose courage. There was something in him which attracted me.

A month later I called on Petrovitch without pretext, and it is evident that, in doing so, I behaved foolishly and without the least delicacy. He lived in one of the farthest points of the town with an old woman whose daughter suffered from tuberculosis and had a little girl about ten years old, very pretty and very lively.

When I entered Alexander Petrovitch was seated beside the child, teaching her to read. When he saw me he became confused, as if I had detected him in a crime. Losing all self-control, he jumped up and looked at me with awe and astonishment. Then we both of us sat down. He followed attentively all my looks, as if I suspected him of some mysterious intention. I realized that he was horribly mistrustful. He looked at me as if I were some kind of spy, and seemed to be on the point of saying: ‘Are you not going soon?’

I spoke to him of our little town, of the news of the day; but he was silent, or smiled with an air of displeasure. I could see that he was absolutely ignorant of all that went on in the town, and that he was in no way curious to know. I spoke to him next of the country generally, and of its men. He listened to me in silence, fixing his eyes upon me in such a strange way that I felt ashamed of what I was doing. I apparently offended him by offering him some books and newspapers which I had just received by post. He cast a greedy look upon them, but seemed to alter his mind, and declined my offer, giving his want of leisure as a pretext.

At last I wished him good-bye, and felt a weight fall from my shoulders as I left the house. I regretted having harassed a man whose tastes kept him apart from the rest of the world, but the mistake had been made. I noticed that he possessed very few books: it was not true, then, that he read so much. Nevertheless, on two occasions when I drove past I saw a light in his lodging. What could make him sit up so late? Was he writing; and if that were so, what was he writing?

I was absent from town for about three months, and on my return in the winter I learned that Petrovitch was dead. He had not even sent for a doctor. He was already forgotten, and his lodging was unoccupied. I at once made the acquaintance of his landlady, in the hope of learning from her what her lodger had been writing. For twenty kopecks she brought me a basket full of papers left by the deceased, and confessed that she had already used four sheets to light her fire. She was a morose and taciturn old woman and I could elicit nothing of interest. She could tell me nothing about her lodger. She gave me to understand all the same that he scarcely ever worked, and that he remained for months together without opening a book or touching a pen. On the other hand, he walked all night up and down his room, given up to his reflections. Sometimes, indeed, he spoke aloud. He was very fond of her little grandchild, Katia, above all when he knew her name; on her name-day-the feast of St Catherine -he always had a requiem mass said in the parish church for somebody’s soul. He detested receiving visits, and never went out except to give lessons. Even his landlady he looked

upon with an unfriendly eye when, once a week, she came into his room to put it in order.

During the three years he had lived under her roof, he had scarcely ever spoken to her. I asked Katia if she remembered him. She looked at me in silence, and turned weeping to the wall. This man, then, was loved by someone! I took away the papers and spent the day examining them. They were for the most part of no importance, merely children's exercises. At last I came to a rather thick packet: the sheets were covered with delicate handwriting which ended abruptly. It had perhaps been forgotten by the writer. It was the narrative- incoherent and fragmentary-of the ten years Alexander Petrovitch had passed in hard labour. The story was interrupted here and there by anecdotes or strange, terrible recollections thrown in convulsively as if torn from the writer. I read some of these fragments again and again and began to suspect that they had been written in moments of madness. But his memories of the convict prison-Recollections of the House of the Dead, as he himself called them somewhere in his manuscript-seemed to me not without interest. They revealed quite a new world unknown till then; and in the strangeness of his facts, together with his singular remarks on this fallen people, there was enough to tempt me to go on. I may perhaps be wrong, but I shall publish some chapters from this narrative, and the public may judge for itself.

Chapter II: The House of the Dead

Our prison was at the far end of the citadel behind the ramparts. Peering through the crevices in the palisade in the hope of glimpsing something, one sees nothing but a little corner of the sky, and a high earthwork covered with the long grass of the steppe. Night and day sentries walk to and fro upon it. Then one suddenly realizes that whole years will pass during which one will see, through those same crevices in the palisade, the same sentinels pacing the same earthwork, and the same little corner of the sky, not just above the prison, but far and far away. Imagine a courtyard two hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty feet broad, enclosed by an irregular hexagonal palisade formed of stakes thrust deep into the ground. So much for the external surroundings of the prison. On one side of the palisade is a great gate, solid and nearly always shut; watched perpetually by the sentries, and never opened except when the convicts go out to work. Beyond this there are light and liberty, the life of free people! Beyond the palisade one thought of the marvellous world, fantastic as a fairy-tale. It was not the same on our side. Here there was no resemblance to anything. Habits, customs, laws were all precisely fixed. It was the house of living death. It is this corner that I have undertaken to describe. Entering the enclosure, one sees a few buildings. On two sides of a vast courtyard are long wooden buildings made of logs, and only one storey high. These are convict barracks. Here the prisoners are confined, divided into several classes. At the end of the enclosure may be seen a house, which serves as a kitchen, divided into two compartments. Behind it is another building, which does duty at once

as cellar, loft, and barn. The centre of the enclosure, completely barren, is a large open space. Here the prisoners are drawn up in ranks three times a day. They are identified and must answer to their names morning, noon, and evening, besides several times in the course of the day if the soldiers on guard are suspicious and clever at counting. All around, between the palisade and the buildings, there remains a fairly wide space, where some of the prisoners who are misanthropes, or of a sombre turn of mind, like to walk about when they are not at work. There they go turning over their favourite thoughts, shielded from all observation.

Meeting them on those walks, I took pleasure in observing their sad, deeply marked countenances, and in guessing their thoughts. The favourite occupation of one convict, during the moments allowed him from hard labour, was to count the palisades. There were fifteen hundred of them. He had counted them all, and knew them nearly by heart. Every one of them represented to him a day of confinement; and, numbering them daily in this manner, he knew exactly the number of days that he had still to pass in prison. He was sincerely happy when he had finished one side of the hexagon, although he had to wait many long years for his liberation. But one learns patience in a prison.

One day I saw a prisoner who had undergone his punishment take leave of his comrades. He had done twenty years' hard labour. More than one convict remembered seeing him arrive, quite young, careless, thinking neither of his crime nor of his punishment. He was now an old man with grey hair, his countenance sad and morose. He walked in silence through our six barracks. As he entered each of them he prayed before the icon, made a deep bow to his former companions, and begged them to remember him kindly.

I also remember a prisoner who was supposed to have been a well-to-do Siberian peasant. Six years before he had had news of his" wife's remarrying, which had caused him great pain. One evening she came to the prison and asked for him in order to give him a present! They talked together for two minutes, wept together, and then separated never to meet again. I saw the expression on that man's face when he reentered the barracks. There, indeed, one learns to endure all.

When darkness set in we had to be indoors and were shut up for the night. I always found it painful to leave the courtyard for the barrack-room. Think of a long, low, stifling room, dimly lit by tallow candles, and full of heavy, disgusting odours. I cannot now understand how I lived there for ten whole years. My camp bedstead was made of three boards. It was the only place in the room that belonged to me. More than thirty of us were herded together in one room. It was, indeed, no wonder that we were shut up early. At least four hours passed before everyone was asleep, and until then there was a tumult of laughter and oaths; rattling of chains and a poisonous atmosphere of thick smoke; a confusion of shaved heads, branded foreheads, and clothes that were no more than filthy rags.

Yes, man is a pliable animal-he must be so defined: a being who grows accustomed to everything! That would be, perhaps, the best definition that could be given of him.

There were altogether two hundred and fifty of us in the same; prison, and that number remained almost invariably the same. Whenever some of us had done our time, other criminals arrived; and there were a few deaths. The population of that prison included all sorts of people: I believe that each region of Russia had furnished its representatives. There were foreigners, too, and even mountaineers from the Caucasus.

All these people were divided into different classes according to the gravity of their crimes; and consequently the length of their sentences was reflected in the class to which they were assigned. The majority had been condemned to hard labour of the civil class- 'strongly condemned,' as the prisoners used to say. They were criminals deprived of all civil rights, men rejected by society, vomited forth, whose brows were marked by the iron to testify for ever to their disgrace. They were incarcerated for periods of from eight to ten years, and at the expiration of their punishment they were sent as colonists to various parts of Siberia.

As to the criminals of the military section, they were not deprived of their civil rights-as is generally the case in Russian disciplinary companies-and were punished for a relatively short period. As soon as they had undergone their punishment they had to return to their units, whence they were posted to battalions of the Siberian Line.¹

Many of them came back to us later for serious crimes, this time not for a short spell, but for twenty years at least. They then formed part of the in perpetuo section. Nevertheless, the 'perpetuals' were not deprived of their civil rights. There was another and sufficiently numerous class, composed of the worst malefactors. These were nearly all veterans in crime, and were called the Special section. It included convicts from all the Russias. They looked upon one another with reason as imprisoned for ever, for the term of their confinement was indefinite: the law required them to receive double and treble tasks, and they remained in prison until work of the most painful character had to be undertaken in Siberia.

'You are only here for a fixed time,' they used to tell the other convicts; 'we, on the contrary, are here for life.' I have heard that this section has since been abolished.

At the same time, civil convicts are still kept apart, in order that the military convicts may be organized by themselves into a homogeneous 'disciplinary company.' The administration, too, had of course been changed; consequently what I describe are the customs and practices of another time- things which have since been abolished. Yes, it was a long time ago; it all seems to me like a dream. I remember entering the prison one December evening as darkness fell. The convicts were returning from work, and the roll was about to be called. An under-officer with large moustaches opened to me the gate of this strange house where I was to remain so many years, to experience so many emotions, of which I could not form even an approximate idea if I had not gone through them. Thus, for example, could I ever have imagined the poignant and terrible suffering of never being alone even for one minute during ten years? Working

¹ Goriantchikoff himself became a soldier in Siberia when he had finished his term of imprisonment.

under escort in the barracks together with two hundred 'companions': never alone, never!

However, I was obliged to get accustomed to it. Among them there were men guilty of wilful murder and manslaughter, burglars, master pickpockets, cutpurses, petty thieves, and shoplifters.

It would have been difficult, however, to say why and how certain convicts found themselves in prison. Each of them had his history, confused and heavy, painful as the morning after a debauch.

The convicts, as a rule, spoke very little of their past life, which they did not like to think of. They endeavoured, even, to dismiss it from their memory.

Among my companions in chains I have known murderers who were so gay and so carefree that one might have made a bet that their consciences never for a moment reproached them. But there were also men of sombre countenance, who remained almost always silent. It was very rarely anyone told his history: that sort of thing was not done. Indeed, it was not tolerated. Every now and again, however, by way of a change, one prisoner would tell another his life story, and the other would listen coldly to the narrative. No one, to tell the truth, could have said anything to astonish his neighbour. 'We're not fools,' they would sometimes say with singular pride.

I remember one day an intoxicated ruffian-it was sometimes possible for the convicts to obtain drink-relating how he had killed and cut up a child of five. He had first tempted the child with a toy, and then taking it to a loft had cut it up to pieces. The entire barrack, which generally speaking laughed at his jokes, uttered one unanimous cry. The blackguard was obliged to shut up. But if the convicts interrupted him, it was not by any means because his recital had aroused their indignation, but because it was forbidden to speak of such things.

I must here observe that the convicts as a community possessed a certain degree of education. Half of them, if not more, knew how to read and write. Where in Russia, in no matter what district, could two hundred and fifty men be found able to read and write? Since then I have heard people say, and conclude on the strength of the literate criminal, that education demoralizes the people. This is a mistake. Education has nothing whatever to do with moral deterioration; and if one must admit that it develops a resolute spirit among the people, that is far from being a defect.

Each section was differently dressed. The uniform of one consisted of a cloth vest, half brown and half grey, and trousers with one leg brown, the other grey. One day while we were at work, a little girl who sold scones of white bread came towards the convicts. She looked at them for a time and then burst into a laugh. 'Oh, how ugly they are!' she cried; 'they have not even enough grey cloth or brown cloth to make their clothes.' Every convict wore a vest made of grey cloth, except the sleeves, which were brown. Their heads, too, were shaved in different styles. The crown was bared sometimes longitudinally, sometimes latitudinally, from the nape of the neck to the forehead, or from one ear to another.

This strange family had a general likeness so pronounced that it could be recognized at a glance.

Even the most striking personalities, those who involuntarily dominated their fellow convicts, could not help taking the general tone of the house.

All, with the exception of a few who were childishly gay and by that alone drew upon themselves general contempt, were morose, envious, atrociously vain, presumptuous, susceptible, and excessively ceremonious. To be astonished at nothing was in their eyes the first and indispensable quality: accordingly, their first aim was to bear themselves with dignity. But often the most composed demeanour vanished with Lightning rapidity. Together with grovelling humility, however, some possessed genuine strength: these were naturally all sincere. But strangely enough they were for the most part excessively and morbidly vain. Vanity was always their salient quality.

The majority of the prisoners were depraved and perverted, so that calumny and detraction rained amongst them like hail. Our life was a constant hell, a perpetual damnation; but no one would have dared to raise a voice against the internal regulations of the prison or established usage. Accordingly, willingly or unwillingly, they had to be obeyed. Certain indomitable characters yielded with difficulty, but they yielded all the same. Men who had run amok and, urged by overweening pride, had committed the most terrible crimes as it were unconsciously and in delirium, men who had terrorized whole towns, were quickly subdued by our prison system. The 'new boy,' taking stock of his surroundings, soon found that he could astonish no one. Insensibly he submitted, took the general tone, and assumed a sort of personal dignity which almost all maintained, as if the denomination of convict were a title of honour. Not the least sign of shame or of repentance, but a kind of external submission which seemed to have been reasoned out as the best line of conduct to pursue. 'We are lost men,' they said to themselves. 'We were unable to live as free men, and we must now go to Green Street.'²

'You would not obey your father and mother; you will now obey leather thongs.' The man who would not sow must now break stones.'

These things were said and repeated as moral aphorisms, sentences, and proverbs, but without anyone taking them seriously. They were but words in the air. There was not one man among us who admitted his iniquity. Let a stranger who was not a convict endeavour to reproach one with his crime, and he would meet with an endless storm of abuse. And how refined are convicts in the matter of insults! They insult delicately, like artists; insult with the most delicate science. They endeavour not so much to offend by the expression as by the meaning, the spirit of an envenomed phrase. Their incessant quarrels developed this method into a fine art.

As they worked only under threat of the big stick, they were idle and depraved. Those who were not already corrupt when they arrived were very soon perverted.

² An allusion to the two rows of soldiers, armed with green rods, between which convicts condemned to corporal punishment had to pass.

Brought together in spite of themselves, they were perfect strangers to one another. 'The devil wore out three pairs of shoes before he rounded us up,' they would say. Intrigue, calumny, scandal of all kinds, envy, and hatred reigned above all else. In this slothful life no ordinary spiteful tongue could make headway against these murderers with insults constantly in their mouths.

As I said before, there were to be found among them men of open character, resolute, intrepid, accustomed to self-command. These were held involuntarily in esteem. Although they were very jealous of their reputation, they endeavoured to annoy no one, and never insulted one another without a motive. Their conduct was on all points full of dignity. They were rational, and almost always obedient, not on principle, or from any respect for duty, but as if in virtue of a mutual convention between themselves and the administration-a convention of which the advantages were plain enough.

The officials, moreover, behaved prudently towards them. I remember that one prisoner of the resolute and intrepid -type, known to possess the instincts of a wild beast, was summoned one day to be whipped. It was during the summer, and no work was being done. The governor of the prison was in the orderly room near the principal entrance, ready to assist at the punishment. This officer was dreaded by the prisoners, whom he had brought to such a state that they trembled before him. Severe to the point of insanity, 'he threw himself upon them,' to use their expression. But it was above all his look, as penetrating as that of a lynx, that was feared. It was impossible to conceal anything from him: he saw, so to say, without looking. On entering the prison, he knew at once what was going on. Accordingly the convicts one and all called him the man with eight eyes. His system was bad, for it had the effect of irritating men who were already irascible. But for the deputy governor, a well-bred and reasonable man who moderated the savage onslaughts of his superior, the latter would have caused sad misfortunes by his incompetent administration. I do not understand how he managed to retire from the service safe and sound. It is true that he left after being called before a court martial.

A prisoner, though he turned pale when summoned, generally lay down courageously and without uttering a word to receive the terrible rods; then he got up and shook himself. He bore the misfortune calmly, philosophically, it is true, though he was never punished at random, nor before careful inquiries had been made. But this time the victim considered himself innocent. Pale with fear, he walked quietly towards the escort of soldiers, but as he did so he managed to conceal in his sleeve a shoemaker's awl. Now the prisoners were strictly forbidden to carry sharp instruments about them; examinations were frequently, minutely, and unexpectedly made, and all infractions of the rule were severely punished.

But as it is difficult to deprive a criminal of what he is determined to conceal, and as, moreover, sharp instruments are necessarily used in the prison, they were never destroyed. If an official managed to confiscate them the convicts very soon procured new ones.

On the occasion in question all the convicts were pressed against the palisade, with palpitating hearts, peering through the crevices. It was known that this time Petroff would not allow himself to be flogged, that the governor's end had come. But at the critical moment the latter got into his carriage and departed, leaving the direction of the punishment to a subordinate. 'God has saved him!' said the convicts. As for Petroff, he underwent his punishment quietly. Once the governor had gone his anger abated. Prisoners are submissive and obedient up to a point, but there is a limit which must not be crossed. Nothing is more curious than these strange outbursts of disobedience and rage. Often a man who has for years endured the cruellest punishment will revolt for a trifle, for a mere nothing. He might pass for a madman; that, in fact, is what is said of him.

I have already stated that during many years I never remarked the least sign of repentance nor even the slightest uneasiness in a man with regard to his crime, and that most of the convicts considered neither honour nor conscience, holding that they had a right to act as they thought fit. Certainly vanity, bad example, deceitfulness, and false shame were responsible for much. On the other hand, who can claim to have sounded the depths of those hearts given over to perdition, and to have found them closed to all light? It would seem indeed that during all those years I should have been able to detect some indication, however fugitive, of some regret, of some moral suffering. I positively saw nothing of the kind. One cannot judge of crime with ready-made opinions: its philosophy is a little more complicated than people think. It is acknowledged that neither convict prisons, nor the hulks, nor any system of hard labour ever reformed a criminal. These forms of chastisement only punish him and reassure society against the offences he might commit. Confinement, regulation, and excessive work have no effect but to develop in these men profound hatred, a thirst for forbidden enjoyment, and frightful recalcitration. On the other hand I am convinced that the celebrated cellular system gives results which are specious and deceitful. It deprives a criminal of his initiative, of his energy, enervates his soul by weakening and frightening it, and at last exhibits a dried-up mummy as a model of repentance and amendment.

The criminal who has revolted against society hates it, and considers himself in the right; society was wrong, not he. Has he not, moreover, undergone his punishment? Accordingly he is absolved, acquitted in his own eyes. In spite of different opinions, everyone will acknowledge that there are acts which everywhere and always, under no matter what legal system, are beyond doubt criminal, and should be regarded as such so long as man is man. It is only in prison that I have heard related with childish, unrestrained laughter the strangest, most atrocious offences. I shall never forget a certain parricide, formerly a nobleman and a public functionary. A true prodigal son, he had caused his father great grief. The old man had tried in vain to restrain him by remonstrance on the fatal slope down which he was sliding. But the son was heavily in debt, and as his father was suspected of having, besides an estate, a sum of ready money, he killed him in order to enter more quickly into the inheritance. This crime was not

discovered until a month afterwards, during which time the murderer, who meanwhile had informed the police of his father's disappearance, continued his debauches. At last, during his absence, the police discovered the old man's corpse in a drain. The grey head was severed from the trunk, but replaced in its original position. The body was entirely dressed. Beneath, as if in derision, the assassin had placed a cushion.

The young man confessed nothing. He was degraded, deprived of his nobiliary privileges, and condemned to twenty years' hard labour. As long as I knew him I always found him to be indifferent to his position. He was the most light-minded, inconsiderate man that I ever met, although he was far from being a fool. I never observed in him any strong tendency to cruelty. The other convicts despised him, not on account of his crime, of which there was never any question, but because he was without dignity. He sometimes spoke of his father. One day for instance, boasting of the hereditary good health of his family, he said: 'My father, for example, until his death was never ill.'

Animal insensibility carried to such a point is most remarkable-it is, indeed, phenomenal. There must have been in this case some organic defect in the man, some physical and moral monstrosity hitherto unknown to science, and not simply crime. Naturally I did not believe so atrocious a crime; but people from the same town as himself, who knew all the details of his history, told me of it. The facts were so clear that it would have been madness not to accept them. The prisoners once heard him cry out during his sleep: 'Hold him! hold him! Cut his head off, his head, his head!'

Nearly all the convicts dreamed aloud, or were delirious in their sleep. Insults, words of slang, knives, hatchets, seemed constantly present in their dreams. 'We are crushed!' they would say; 'we are without entrails; that is why we shriek at night.'

Hard labour in our fortress was not an occupation, but an obligation. The convicts did their job; they worked the number of hours fixed by law, and then returned to the prison. They hated their free time. If a convict did not do some voluntary work, he could not have endured his confinement. How could these men, all strongly constituted who had lived sumptuously and desired so to live again, who had been brought together against their will after society had cast them off-how could they live in a normal and natural manner? Man cannot exist without work, without legal, natural property. Depart from these conditions, and he becomes perverted and changed into a wild beast. Accordingly, every convict, through natural requirements and by the instinct of self-preservation, had a trade-an occupation of some kind.

The long summer days were occupied almost entirely by hard labour. The night was so short that we had only just time to sleep. It was not the same in winter. According to regulations, prisoners had to be shut up in the barracks at nightfall. What was to be done during these long, sad evenings but work? Consequently each barrack, though locked and bolted, assumed the appearance of a large workshop. That work was not, of course, forbidden in itself; but it was forbidden to have tools, without which work is evidently impossible. But we laboured in secret, and the administration seemed to shut its eyes. Many prisoners arrived without knowing how to make use of their ten

fingers; but they learnt a trade from some of their companions, and became excellent workmen.

We had among us cobblers, bootmakers, tailors, masons, locksmiths, and gilders. A Jew named Esau Boumstein was at the same time a jeweller and a usurer. Everyone worked, and so earned a few pence-for many orders came from the town. Money is a kind of freedom that can be felt and heard; it is an inestimable treasure for a man entirely deprived of true liberty. If he feels some money in his pocket, he consoles himself a little, even though he cannot spend it: but one can always and everywhere spend money, the more so as forbidden fruit is doubly sweet. One can often buy spirits in prison. Although pipes are severely forbidden, everyone smokes. Money and tobacco protect the convicts against scurvy, as work protects them from crime; for without work they would mutually have destroyed one another like spiders shut up in a closed bottle. Work and money were nevertheless forbidden. Often during the night strict searches were made, during which everything that was not legally authorized was confiscated. However successfully the little hoards had been concealed, they were sometimes discovered, which was one of the reasons why they were not kept very long. They were exchanged as soon as possible for drink, and that is how it was that spirits penetrated into the prison. The delinquent was not only deprived of his hoard, but was also cruelly flogged.

After every search, however, it was not long before the convicts procured again the objects which had been confiscated, and things returned to normal. The administration knew it; and although the condition of the convicts was a good deal like that of the inhabitants of Vesuvius, they never murmured at the punishment inflicted for these peccadilloes. Those who had no manual skill did business somehow or other. The modes of buying and selling were original enough: things changed hands which no one expected a convict would ever have thought of selling or buying, or even of regarding as of any value whatever. The least rag had its value, and might be turned to account. In consequence, however, of the convicts' poverty, money acquired in their eyes a superior value to that really belonging to it.

Long and painful tasks, sometimes of a very complicated kind, brought in a few kopecks. Several of the prisoners lent by the week, and did good business that way. The prisoner who was ruined and insolvent carried to the usurer the few things belonging to him and pledged them for some halfpence, which were advanced at a fabulous rate of interest. If he did not redeem them at the fixed time the usurer sold them pitilessly by auction, and without the least delay.

Usury flourished so well in our prison that money was lent even on Government property: linen, boots, etc.-things that were always in demand. When the lender accepted such pledges the affair might take an unexpected turn. The proprietor would go, immediately after he had received his money, and tell the under-officer in charge that objects belonging to the State were being concealed; upon which everything was taken away from the usurer without even the formality of a report to the higher authority. But never was there any quarrel-and that is very curious indeed-between the usurer

and the owner. The first gave up in silence, with a morose air, the things demanded from him, as if he had been waiting for the request. Sometimes, perhaps, he confessed to himself that, in the borrower's position, he would not have acted differently. Accordingly, if he felt aggrieved after this restitution, it was less from hatred than simply as a matter of conscience.

The convicts robbed one another without shame. Each prisoner had his little box fitted with a padlock, in which he kept the things entrusted to him by the administration. Although these boxes were authorized, that did not prevent them from being broken into. The reader can easily imagine what clever thieves were found among us. A prisoner who was sincerely devoted to me—I say it without boasting—stole my Bible, the only book allowed in prison. He told me of it the same day, not from repentance, but because he pitied me when he saw me looking for it everywhere. Among our companions in chains there were several convicts known as 'innkeepers,' who sold spirits and thereby became comparatively rich. I shall speak of this further on, for the liquor traffic deserves special consideration.

A great number of prisoners had been deported for smuggling, which explains how it was that drink was brought secretly into the prison under so severe a surveillance as ours was. In passing it may be remarked that smuggling is an offence apart. Would it be believed that money, the solid profit from the affair, possesses often only secondary importance for the smuggler? It is none the less true. He works by vocation. In his way he is a poet. He risks all he possesses and exposes himself to terrible dangers; he intrigues, invents, gets out of a scrape, and brings everything to a happy end as it were by inspiration. This passion is as violent as that of play.

I knew a prisoner of colossal stature, who was the mildest, the most peaceable, and the most manageable of men. Indeed, we often asked one another why he had been deported. He had such a calm, sociable character that during the whole period of his imprisonment he never quarrelled with anyone. Born in western Russia, where he lived on the frontier, he had been sent to hard labour for smuggling. Naturally, then, he could not resist his desire to smuggle spirits into the prison. He was punished for it time and again, and heaven knows he was terrified of the rods. This dangerous trade brought him in but slender profits: it was the speculator who got rich at his expense. Each time he was punished he wept like an old woman, and swore by all that was holy that he would never be caught at such things again. He kept his vow for a whole month, but ended by yielding once more to his passion. Thanks to these amateur smugglers, spirits were always to be had.

Another source of income which, without enriching the prisoners, was constantly and beneficently turned to account, was alms-giving. The upper classes of our Russian society do not know to what an extent merchants, shopkeepers, and our people generally commiserate with the 'Unfortunate.'³ Alms were always forthcoming: they consisted generally of little white loaves, and sometimes, though very seldom, of money.

³ Men condemned to hard labour, and exiles generally, were so called by the Russian peasantry.

Without alms, the existence of the convicts, and above all that of those awaiting sentence (who are badly fed) would be too painful. These alms are shared equally between all the prisoners. If they are not sufficient the little loaves are divided into halves, and sometimes into six pieces, so that each man may have his share. I remember the first alms, a small piece of money, that I received. One morning soon after my arrival, as I was returning from work under military escort, I met a woman and her daughter, a child of ten, who was beautiful as an angel. I had already seen them once before. The mother was the widow of a poor soldier who, while still young, had been sentenced by court martial and had died in the prison infirmary while I was there. They wept hot tears when they came to bid him good-bye. On seeing me the little girl blushed, and murmured a few words into her mother's ear. The woman stopped, and took from a basket a kopeck which she gave to the little girl. The little girl ran after me. 'Here, poor man,' she said, 'take this in the name of Christ.' I took the money which she slipped into my hand. The little girl returned joyfully to her mother. I kept that kopeck for a long time.

Chapter III: First Impressions

Those first few weeks, and indeed all the early part of my imprisonment, made a deep impression on my imagination. The following years, on the other hand, are all mixed up together, and leave but a confused recollection. Whole periods, in fact, have been effaced from my memory. Generally speaking, however, I remember the life as the same-always painful, monotonous, and stifling. What I experienced during the first days of my imprisonment seems to me as if it took place but yesterday. Nor is that unnatural. I remember so well in the first place my surprise that prison routine afforded no outstanding feature, nothing extraordinary, or, perhaps I should say, unexpected. It was only when I had been there for some time that I took notice of all that was strange and unimagined. The discovery was astonishing: I confess that this sense of wonder never left me during the remainder of my time, and I never became fully acclimatized to my surroundings.

First of all, I experienced an invincible repugnance on arriving; but oddly enough the life seemed to me less painful than I had imagined on the journey.

Indeed, prisoners, though encumbered by their irons, moved about quite freely. They abused one another, sang, worked, smoked their pipes, and drank spirits. But there were not many drinkers. There were also regular card parties during the night. The labour did not seem to me particularly arduous; I fancied, indeed, that it could not be the real 'hard labour.' I did not understand till long afterwards what in fact made it hard and even excessive. It was less by reason of its difficulty than because it was forced, imposed, obligatory; and because it was done only through fear of the stick. The peasant certainly works harder than the convict, for during the summer he works night and day. But it is in his own interest that he fatigues himself. His aim is reasonable, so

that he suffers less than the convict who performs hard labour from which he derives no profit. It once occurred to me that if one desired to reduce a man to nothing-to punish him atrociously, to crush him in such a manner that the most hardened murderer would tremble before such a punishment and take fright beforehand-one need only render his work completely useless, even to the point of absurdity.

Hard labour, as it is now organized, affords the convict no interest; but it has its utility. The convict makes bricks, digs the earth, builds; and all his occupations have a meaning and an end. Sometimes the prisoner may even take an interest in what he is doing. He then wishes to work more skilfully, more advantageously. But let him be constrained to pour water from one vessel into another, or to transport a quantity of earth from one place to another, in order to perform the contrary operation immediately afterwards, then I am persuaded that at the end of a few days he would strangle himself or commit a thousand capital offences rather than live in so abject a condition and endure such torment. It is evident that such punishment would be torture, atrocious: vengeance, rather than correction. It would be absurd, for it would have no natural end.

I did not, however, arrive until the winter-in the month of December-and the labour was then unimportant in our fortress. I had no idea of the summer labour-five times as fatiguing. During the winter season we worked on the Irtysh, breaking up old boats belonging to the Government, found occupation in the workshops, cleared the buildings from snow-drifts, or burned and pounded alabaster. As the days were very short, work ended early, and everyone returned to the prison, where there was scarcely anything to do except the supplementary work which the convicts did for themselves.

Scarcely a third of the convicts worked seriously: the others idled their time and wandered about without aim in the barracks, scheming and insulting one another. Those who had a little money got drunk on spirits, or lost what they had saved at gambling. And all this from idleness, weariness, and want of something to do.

I experienced, moreover, one form of suffering which is perhaps the sharpest, the most painful that can be experienced in a house of detention cut off from law and liberty. I mean forced association. Association with one's fellow men is to some extent forced everywhere and always; but nowhere is it so horrible as in a prison, where there are men with whom no one would consent to live. I am certain that every convict, unconsciously perhaps, has suffered from this.

Our food seemed to me not too bad; some even declared that it was incomparably better than in any Russian prison, I cannot confirm this, for I was never in prison anywhere else. Many of us, besides, were allowed to procure whatever nourishment we wished. Those who always had money allowed themselves the luxury of eating fresh meat, which cost only three kopecks a pound; but the majority of the prisoners were contented with the regular ration.

Those who praised the diet were thinking chiefly of the bread, which was distributed at the rate of so much per room, and not individually or by weight. This latter system would have been terribly severe, for a third of the men at least would have been

constantly hungry; but under the existing regulation everyone was satisfied. Our bread was particularly good, and was even renowned in the town. Its quality was attributed to the excellent construction of the prison ovens. As for our cabbage soup, it was cooked and thickened with Hour, and had not an appetizing appearance. On working days it was clear and thin; but what particularly disgusted me was the way it was served. The other prisoners, however, paid no attention to that.

During the three days following my arrival I did not go to work. Some respite was always given to convicts just arrived, in order to allow them to recover from their fatigue. On the second day I had to go outside the prison in order to be ironed. My chain was not of the regulation pattern; it was composed of rings, which gave forth a clear sound, so I heard other convicts say. I had to wear them externally over my clothes, whereas my companions had chains formed not of rings, but of four links, as thick as the finger, and fastened together by three links which were worn beneath the trousers. To the central ring was fastened a strip of leather, tied in its turn to a girdle fastened over the shirt.

I can see again my first morning in prison. A drum beat in the orderly room near the principal entrance. Ten minutes later the under-officer opened the barracks. The convicts woke up one after another and rose trembling with cold from their plank bedsteads by the dim light of a tallow candle. Nearly all of them were morose; they yawned and stretched themselves. Their foreheads, marked by the iron, were contracted. Some made the sign of the Cross; others began to talk nonsense. The cold air from outside rushed in as soon as the door was opened. Then the prisoners hurried round the pails full of water, and one after another took a mouthful of water, spat it out into their hands, and washed their faces. Those pails had been brought in on the previous night by a prisoner specially appointed, according to the rules, to clean the barrack. The convicts chose him themselves. He did not work with the others, for it was his business to examine the camp bedsteads and floors, and also to fetch and carry the water used in the morning for the prisoners' ablutions, and during the rest of the day for drinking. That very morning there were disputes on the subject of one of the pitchers.

'What are you doing there with your branded forehead?' grumbled one of the prisoners, tall, dry, and sallow.

He was remarkable for the strange protuberances which covered his skull; and now he pushed against another convict, round and small, with a lively rubicund face.

'Just wait.'

'What are you shouting about? You know there's a fine to be paid when others are kept waiting. Get out of the way. What a monument, my brethren.'

'A little calf,' he went on muttering. 'See, the white bread of the prison has fattened him.'

'What do you take yourself for? A fine bird, indeed!'

'You're about right.'

'What kind of bird?'

'You needn't ask.'

‘How so?’

‘Find out.’

They devoured one another with their eyes. The little man, waiting for a reply with clenched fists, was apparently ready to fight. I thought they would come to blows: it was all quite new to me, and I watched the scene with curiosity. Later on I learned that such quarrels were perfectly harmless, that they served for entertainment. Like an amusing comedy, such episodes scarcely ever ended in violence, and this fact taught me a great deal about the character of my fellow prisoners.

The tall fellow remained calm and majestic. He felt that some answer was expected from him if he was not to be dishonoured and covered with ridicule. He had to show that he was a wonderful bird, a personage. Accordingly, he cast a sidelong glance at his adversary, endeavouring, with inexpressible contempt, to irritate him by looking at him over his shoulder, up and down, as he would have done an insect. At last the little fat man was so irritated that he would have thrown himself upon his antagonist had not his companions surrounded the combatants to prevent a serious quarrel.

‘Fight with your fists not with your tongues,’ cried a spectator from a corner of the room.

‘No, hold them,’ answered another, ‘they are going to fight. We are fine fellows, one against seven is our style.’

Fine fighting men! One was here for having sneaked a pound of bread, the other was a pot-stealer; he was whipped by the executioner for stealing a pot of curdled milk from an old woman.

‘Enough, keep quiet!’ cried a retired soldier, whose business it was to keep order in the barrack, and who slept in a corner of the room on a bedstead of his own.

‘Water, my children, water for Nevalid Petrovitch, water for our little brother, who has just woken up.’

‘Your brother! Am I your brother? Did we ever drink a rouble’s worth of spirits together?’ ‘muttered the old soldier as he passed his arms through the sleeves of his greatcoat.

The roll was about to be called, for it was already late. The prisoners were hurrying towards the kitchen. They had to put on their pelisses, and then go to receive in their particoloured caps the bread which one of the cooks-one of the bakers, that is to say-was distributing. These cooks, like the men who did the household work, were chosen by the prisoners themselves. There were two for the kitchen making four servants in all for the prison. They had at their disposal the only kitchen knife authorized in the prison, which was used for cutting up the bread and meat. The prisoners arranged themselves in groups around the tables as best they could in caps and pelisses, with leather girdles round their waists, all ready to begin work. Some of the convicts had kyas before them, in which they steeped pieces of bread. The noise was insupportable. Many of the convicts, however, were talking together in corners with a steady, tranquil air.

‘Good morning and good appetite, Antonitch,’ said a young prisoner, sitting down by the side of an old man who had lost his teeth.

‘If you are not joking, well, good morning,’ said the latter without raising his eyes, and endeavouring to masticate a piece of bread with his toothless gums.

‘I declare I fancied you were dead, Antonitch.’

‘You die first; I’ll follow you.’

I sat down beside them. On my right two convicts were conversing with an attempt at dignity.

‘I’m not likely to be robbed,’ said one of them. ‘I’m more afraid of stealing myself.’

‘It wouldn’t be a good idea to rob me. The devil! I’d pay the man out.’

‘But what would you do? You’re only a convict. We have no other name. You’ll see she’ll rob you, the wretch, without even saying “Thank you.” The money I gave her was wasted. Just fancy, she was here a few days ago! Where were we to go? Shall I ask permission to go into the house of Theodore, the executioner? He has still his house in the suburb, the one he bought from that Solomon, you know, that scurvy Jew who hanged himself not long ago.’

‘Yes, I know him, the one who sold liquor here three years ago, and who was called Grichka-the secret drinking-shop.’

‘I know.’

‘All brag. You don’t know. In the first place it’s another drinking-shop.’

‘What do you mean, another? You don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ll bring you as many witnesses as you like.’

‘Oh, you will, will you? Who are you? Do you know to whom you are speaking?’

‘Yes, indeed.’

‘I’ve thrashed you often enough, though I don’t boast of it. Don’t give yourself airs then.’

‘You’ve thrashed me? The man who’ll thrash me has yet to be born; and the man who did is six feet below ground.’

‘Plague-stricken rascal of Bender!’

‘May the Siberian leprosy devour you with ulcers!’

‘May a chopper cleave your dog of a head.’

Insults were falling like rain.

‘Come, now, they’re going to fight. When men can’t behave properly they should keep quiet. They’re only too glad to come and eat Government bread, the rascals!’

They were soon separated. They fight with their tongues as much as they wish; that is allowed. It is a diversion at everyone’s disposal. But no blows. It was, indeed, only in extraordinary cases that blows were exchanged. If there was a fight, it was reported to the governor, who ordered an inquiry or directed one himself; and then woe to the culprits! Accordingly the prisoners set their faces against anything like a serious quarrel; besides, they insulted one another chiefly to pass the time, as an oratorical exercise. They get excited; the quarrel takes on a furious, ferocious character; they

seem about to slaughter one another. But nothing of the kind happens: as soon as their anger has reached a certain pitch they separate.

That astonished me much, and if I relate certain conversations between the convicts I do so with a purpose. Could I have imagined that people could have insulted one another for pleasure, that they could find enjoyment in it?

We must not forget the gratification of vanity. A dialectician who knows how to insult artistically is respected. A little more, and he would be applauded like an actor.

Already on the previous night I had noticed some glances in my direction, and several convicts had even hung around me as if they had suspected that I had brought money with me. They endeavoured to get into my good graces by teaching me how to carry my irons without inconvenience, and gave me-of course in return for money-a box with a lock, in which to keep the equipment entrusted to me by the authorities, and the few shirts that I had been allowed to bring with me. Yet the very next morning those same prisoners stole my box, and drank the money which they had taken out of it.

One of them afterwards became a great friend of mine, though he robbed me whenever opportunity offered. He was, all the same, vexed at what he had done. He committed these thefts almost unconsciously, as if in the way of a duty. Consequently I bore him no grudge.

These convicts let me know that one could have tea, and that I should do well to get myself a teapot. They found me one, which I hired for a certain time. They also recommended me a cook, who, for thirty kopecks a month, would arrange the dishes I might desire, if it was my intention to buy provisions and take my meals apart. Of course they borrowed money from me. The day of my arrival I was asked for a loan on three separate occasions.

We noblemen who had been degraded and incarcerated here were frowned upon by our fellow prisoners; although we had lost all our rights like the other convicts, we were not regarded as comrades.

In this instinctive repugnance there was an element of reason. To them we were always gentlemen, although they often jeered at our fall.

‘Ah! it’s all over now. Mossieu’s carriage formerly crushed the passers-by at Moscow. Now Mossieu picks hemp!’

They knew our sufferings, though we hid them as much as possible. It was principally when we were all working together that we had most to endure, for our strength was not so great as theirs, and we were really not of much assistance to them. Nothing is more difficult than to gain the confidence of the common people, especially such people as these!

There were only a few of us in the whole prison who were of noble birth. First, there were five Poles, of whom I shall later speak in detail. They were detested by the convicts more, perhaps, than the Russian nobles. The Poles-I speak only of the political convicts-always behaved to them with a constrained and offensive politeness, scarcely ever speaking to them, and making no endeavour to conceal the disgust which

they experienced in such company. The convicts understood all this, and paid them back in their own coin.

Two years passed before I could gain the goodwill of my companions; but the greater part of them liked me, and declared that I was a good fellow.

There were altogether-counting myself-five Russian nobles in the convict prison. I had heard of one of them even before my arrival as a vile and base creature, horribly corrupt, doing the work of spy and informer. Accordingly, from the very first day I refused to enter into relations with this man. The second was the parricide to whom I have already referred. The third was Akimitch. I have seldom met such an extraordinary man, and I have still a lively recollection of him.

Tall, thin, weak-minded, and terribly ignorant, he was as argumentative and as meticulous as a German. The convicts laughed at him; but they feared him on account of his susceptible, excitable, and quarrelsome disposition. As soon as he arrived he was on a footing of perfect equality with them. He insulted them and beat them. Phenomenally just, it was sufficient for him that there was injustice to interfere in a matter which did not concern him. He was, moreover, extremely simple. When he quarrelled with the convicts he reproached them with being thieves, and exhorted them in all sincerity to steal no more. He had served as a sublieutenant in the Caucasus. I made friends with him the first day, and he related to me his 'affair.' He had begun as a cadet in a Line regiment. After waiting some time for his commission as sub-lieutenant, he at last received it, and was sent into the mountains to command a small fort. Some tributary princeling in the neighbourhood set fire to the fort, and made an unsuccessful attack.

Akimitch was very cunning, and pretended not to know who was the author of the attack, which he attributed to some insurgents wandering about the mountains. A month later, he extended a friendly invitation to the prince to call and see him. The prince, suspecting nothing, arrived on horseback. Akimitch drew up the garrison in fine of battle, and harangued his troops upon the treason and villainy of his visitor. He reproached him with his conduct; proved to him that to set fire to the fort was a shameful crime; explained to him minutely the duties of a tributary prince; and then, by way of peroration to his harangue, had him shot. He at once informed his superior officers of this execution, with all the details necessary. Thereupon Akimitch was brought to trial. He appeared before a court martial, and was condemned to death; but his sentence was commuted, and he was sent to Siberia as a convict of the second class-condemned, that is to say, to twelve years' hard labour and imprisonment in a fortress. He readily admitted that he had acted illegally, and that the prince ought to have been tried in a civil court and not by a court martial. Nevertheless, he could not understand that his action was a crime.

'He had burned my fort; what was I to do? Was I to thank him for it?' he answered to my objections.

Although the convicts laughed at Akimitch, and pretended that he was a little mad, they yet esteemed him by reason of his cleverness and his precision.

He knew all possible trades, and could do whatever you wished. He was cobbler, bootmaker, painter, carver, gilder, and locksmith. He had acquired these talents in prison, for it was sufficient for him to see an object in order to imitate it. He sold in the town, or caused to be sold, baskets, lanterns, and toys. Thanks to his work, he had always some money, which he employed in buying shirts, pillows, and so on. He had himself made a mattress, and as he slept in the same room as myself he was very useful to me at the beginning of my imprisonment.

Before leaving prison to go to work, the convicts were drawn up in two ranks before the orderly-room, surrounded by an escort of soldiers with loaded muskets. An officer of Engineers then arrived with the superintendent of the works and a few soldiers, who watched operations. The superintendent counted the convicts, and sent them in parties to their places of work.

I went with some other prisoners to the engineers' workshop-a low brick building in the centre of a large courtyard full of materials. There was a forge there, and carpenters', locksmiths', and painters' workshops. Akimitch was assigned to the last. He boiled the oil for the varnish, mixed the colours, and painted tables and other pieces of furniture in imitation walnut.

While I was waiting to have additional irons put on, I communicated to him my first impressions.

'Yes,' he said, 'they do not like nobles, above all those who have been condemned for political offences, and they take a pleasure in wounding their feelings. Surely that is understandable? We do not belong to them, we do not suit them. They have all been serfs or soldiers. Tell me, what sympathy can they have for us? The life here is hard, but it is nothing in comparison with that of the disciplinary companies in Russia. There it is hell, those who have been in them praise our prison: it is as paradise compared with purgatory. Not that the work is harder. It is said that towards the convicts of the first class the authorities, who are not exclusively military as here, act quite differently from what they do towards us. They have their little houses, or so I have been told, for I have not seen for myself. They wear no uniform, nor are their heads shaved, though, in my opinion, uniforms and shaved heads are not bad things. All is neater, and also it is more agreeable to the eye, yet these men do not like it. Oh, what a Babel this place is! Soldiers, Circassians, Old Believers, peasants who have left their wives and families, Jews, gipsies, people come from heaven knows where, and all this variety of men are to live quietly together side by side, eat from the same dish, and sleep on the same planks. Not a moment's liberty, no enjoyment except in secret; they must hide their money in their boots; and then there are always the prison walls-perpetual imprisonment! Involuntarily wild ideas come to one.'

As I already knew all this, I was above all anxious to question Akimitch in regard to our governor. He concealed nothing, and the impression which his story left upon me was far from agreeable.

I had to live for two years under the authority of this officer; all that Akimitch told me about him was strictly true. He was a spiteful, ill-regulated man, terrible above all

things because he possessed almost unlimited power over two hundred human beings. He looked upon the prisoners as his personal enemies-his first (and a very serious) fault. His rare capacity, and, perhaps, even his good qualities, were perverted by his intemperance and his spitefulness. He sometimes descended like a bombshell upon the barracks in the middle of the night. If he noticed a prisoner asleep on his back or his left side, he awoke him and said: 'You must sleep as I ordered!' The convicts detested him and feared him like the plague. His repulsive, crimson countenance made everyone tremble. We all knew that the governor was entirely in the hands of his servant Fedka, and that he had nearly gone mad when his dog Treasure fell ill. He preferred this dog to every other living creature.

When Fedka told him that a certain convict, who had picked up some veterinary knowledge, made wonderful cures, he immediately sent for him and said: 'I entrust my dog to your care. If you cure Treasure I will reward you royally.' The man, a very intelligent Siberian peasant, was indeed a good veterinary surgeon, but he was above all a cunning peasant. Long afterwards he used to tell his comrades the story of his visit to the governor.

'I looked at Treasure, who lay on a sofa with his head on a white cushion. I saw at once that he had inflammation, and that he wanted bleeding. I think I could have cured him, but I said to myself: "What will happen if the dog dies? It will be my fault."

"No, your highness," I said to him, "you have called me too late. If I had seen your dog yesterday or the day before, he would now be restored to health; but I can do nothing. He will die." And Treasure died.'

I was told one day that a convict had tried to assassinate the governor. This prisoner had for several years been noted for his submissive attitude and for his silence: he was even regarded as a madman. As he was not altogether illiterate he spent his nights reading the Bible. When everybody was asleep he rose, climbed up on to the stove, lit a church taper, opened his Gospel, and began to read. He did this for a whole year.

One fine day, however, he left the ranks and declared that he would not go to work. He was reported to the governor, who flew into a rage and hurried to the barracks. The convict rushed forward, hurled a brick at him, which he had procured beforehand, and missed. He was seized, tried, and whipped-it was a matter of a few moments-and was carried to the hospital, where he died three days later. He declared during his last moments that he hated no one, and that, although he had wished to suffer he belonged to no sect of fanatics. Afterwards, whenever his name was mentioned in the barracks, it was always with respect.

At last they put new irons on me. While they were being soldered a number of young women, selling little white loaves, came into the forge one after another. They were, for the most part, quite little girls who came to sell the loaves that their mothers had baked. As they got older they still continued to hang about us, but they no longer brought bread. There were always some of them about together with a number of married women. Each roll cost two kopecks, and nearly all the prisoners bought them. I noticed one convict who worked as a carpenter. He was already growing grey, but

had a ruddy, smiling complexion. He was joking with the vendors of rolls. Before they arrived he had tied a red handkerchief round his neck. A fat woman, much marked with the small-pox, put down her basket on the carpenter's table, and they began to talk.

'Why didn't you come yesterday?' asked the convict with a self-satisfied smile.

'I did come; but you had gone,' replied the woman boldly.

'Yes; they marched us off, otherwise we should have met. The day before yesterday they all came to see me.'

'Who did?'

'Why, Mariashka, Khavroshka, Tchekunda, Dougrochva.' This last woman charged four kopecks.

'What,' I said to Akimitch, 'is it possible that?'

'Yes; it happens sometimes,' he replied, lowering his eyes, for he was a very proper man.

Yes; it happened sometimes, but rarely, and with unheard-of difficulties. The convicts preferred to spend their money on drink. It was very difficult to meet these women. One had to agree on place and time, arrange a meeting, find solitude, and, most difficult of all, avoid the escort-almost an impossibility-and spend relatively prodigious sums. I have sometimes, however, witnessed love scenes. One day three of us were heating a brick-kiln on the banks of the Irtysh. The soldiers of the escort were good-natured fellows. Two 'blowers,' as they were called, soon appeared.

'What kept you so long?' asked one fellow who had evidently been expecting them. 'Was it at the Zvierkoffs that you were detained?'

'At the Zvierkoffs? It will be fine weather, and the fowls will have teeth, when I go to see them,' replied one of the women.

She was the dirtiest woman imaginable. She was called Tchekunda, and had arrived in company with her friend (she of the four kopecks), who was beyond all description.

'It's a long time since we saw anything of you,' says the gallant to Miss Four Kopecks; 'you seem to have grown thinner.'

'Perhaps. I was once good-looking and plump, but now you might fancy I had swallowed eels.'

'And you still run after the soldiers, eh?'

'That's all wicked gossip; in any case, if I was to be flogged to death for it, I like soldiers.'

'Never mind your soldiers, we're the people to love; we have money.'

Imagine this gallant with his shaved crown, with fetters on his ankles, dressed in a coat of two colours, and watched by an escort.

My irons had now been fixed, and I had to return to the prison. I wished Akimitch good-bye and moved off, escorted by a soldier. Those who do task work return first, and, when I got back to the barracks, a good number of convicts were already there.

As the kitchen could not have held the whole barrack-full at once, we did not all dine together. Those who came in first were first served. I tasted the cabbage soup,

but, not being used to it, could not eat it, so I prepared myself some tea. I sat down at one end of the table with a convict of noble birth like myself. The prisoners were going in and out; but there was no want of room, for there were not many of them. Five men sat down apart from the large table. The cook gave each of them two ladles full of soup, and brought them a plate of fried fish. These men were having a holiday. They looked at us in a friendly manner. One of the Poles came in and took his seat by our side.

‘I was not with you, but I know that you are having a feast,’ exclaimed a tall convict who now came in.

He was a man of about fifty years, thin and muscular. His face indicated cunning and, at the same time, liveliness. His lower lip, fleshy and pendent, gave him a soft expression.

‘Well, have you slept well? Why don’t you say how do you do? Well, now my friend of Kursk,’ he said, sitting down by the side of the diners, ‘good appetite? Here’s a new guest for you.’

‘We are not from the province of Kursk.’

‘Then my friends from Tambof, shall we say?’

‘We are not from Tambof either. You’ve no claim on us; if you want to enjoy yourself go to some rich peasant.’

‘I have Maria Ikotishna⁴ in my belly, otherwise I should die of hunger. But where is your peasant to be found?’

‘Good heavens! We mean Gazin. Go to him.’

‘Gazin is on the drink to-day; he’s devouring his capital.’

‘He has at least twenty roubles,’ says another convict. ‘It’s profitable keeping a drinking-shop.’

‘You won’t have me? Then I must eat Government food.’

‘Will you have some tea? If so, ask these noblemen for some.’

‘What noblemen? They’re no longer noblemen. They’re no better than us,’ droned a convict who was seated in the corner and had not yet ventured a word.

‘I should like a cup of tea, but I’m ashamed to ask for it. I have self-respect,’ said the fellow with the heavy lip, looking at me with a good-humoured air.

‘I’ll give you some if you like,’ I said. ‘Will you have some?’

‘What do you mean-will I have some? Who wouldn’t have some?’ he said, coming towards the table.

‘Only think! When he was free he ate nothing but cabbage soup and black bread, but now he’s in prison he must have tea like a perfect gentleman,’ continued the convict with the sombre air.

‘Does no one here drink tea?’ I asked him; but he did not think me worthy of a reply.

‘White rolls, white rolls. Who’ll buy?’

⁴ From ikot, hiccough.

A young prisoner was carrying in a net a load of calachi (scones), which he proposed to sell in the prison. For every ten that he sold the baker gave him one for his trouble. It was precisely on this tenth scone that he counted for his dinner.

‘White rolls, white rolls,’ he cried, as he entered the kitchen, ‘white Moscow rolls, all hot. I’d eat the lot of them, but I want money, lots of money. Come, lads, there’s only one apiece for every mother’s son.’

This appeal to filial love made everyone laugh, and several of his white rolls were purchased.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘Gazin has drunk in such a style, it’s downright sinful. He’s chosen the right moment too. If the man with eight eyes should arrive-we shall hide him.’

‘Is he very drunk?’

‘Yes, and ill-tempered too-unmanageable.’

‘There’ll be some fighting, then?’

‘Of whom are they speaking?’ I asked the Pole who sat next to me.

‘Of Gazin. He is a prisoner who sells spirits. When he has gained a little money by his trade he drinks it to the last kopeck; a cruel, malicious brute when he has been drinking. When sober he is quiet enough, but when he is in drink he shows himself in his true character. He attacks people with a knife until it is taken from him.’

‘How do they manage that?’

‘Ten men throw themselves upon him and beat him like sack, without mercy, until he loses consciousness. When he is half dead with the beating, they lay him down on his plank bedstead and cover him over with his pelisse.’

‘But they might kill him.’

‘Anyone else would die of it, but not he. He is excessively robust; he is the strongest of all the convicts. His constitution is so hard that the day after one of these punishment he gets up perfectly sound.’

‘Tell me, please,’ I continued, still addressing the Pole, ‘why these people keep their food to themselves, and at the same time seem to envy me my tea.’

‘Your tea has nothing to do with it. They are envious of you. Are you not a gentleman? You in no way resemble them. They would be glad to pick a quarrel with you in order to humiliate you. You don’t know what you will have to put up with. It is martyrdom for men like us to be here. Our life is doubly painful, and great strength of character alone can accustom us to it. You will be vexed and tormented in all sorts of ways on account of your food and your tea. Although quite a number of men buy their own food and drink tea daily, they have a right to do so; you have not!’

A few minutes later he rose and left the table. His predictions were very soon fulfilled.

Chapter IV: First Impressions (Continued)

Hardly had M. cki, the Pole to whom I had been

speaking, gone out when Gazin, completely drunk, threw himself all in a heap into the kitchen.

To see a convict drunk in the middle of the day, when everyone was about to be sent out to work, and considering the well-known severity of the governor, who at any moment might visit the barracks; the watchfulness of the under-officer, who never left the prison; the presence of the old soldiers and the sentinels; all this quite upset the ideas I had formed of our prison. A long time passed before I was able to understand and explain to myself the effects, which in the first instance were indeed strange.

I have already said that all convicts had a private occupation, and that this occupation was for them a natural and imperious one. They are passionately fond of money, and think more of it than of anything else-almost as much as of liberty. A convict is half-consolated if he can ring a few kopecks in his pocket. On the contrary, he is sad, restless, and despondent if he has no money. He is ready then to commit no matter what crime in order to get some. Nevertheless, in spite of its importance in convicts' eyes, money does not remain long in their pockets. It is difficult to keep it. Sometimes it is confiscated, sometimes stolen. When the governor, on one of his sudden raids, discovered a small sum that had been amassed with great trouble, he confiscated it. It may be that he laid it out in improving the food of the prisoners, for all money taken from them went into his hands. But generally speaking it was stolen. A means of preserving it was however, discovered. An old man from Starodoub, one of the Old Believers, took upon himself to conceal the convicts savings.

I cannot resist the desire to say a few words about this man, although it will interrupt my narrative. He was about sixty years old, thin, and growing very grey. He excited my curiosity the first time I saw him, for he was not like any of the others; his look was so tranquil and mild, and I always saw with pleasure his clear and limpid eyes, surrounded by a number of little wrinkles. I often talked with him, and rarely have I met with so kind, so benevolent a being. He had been condemned to hard labour for a serious crime. A certain number of the Old Believers at Starodoub had been converted to the orthodox religion. The Government had done everything to encourage them, and, at the same time, to convert the remaining dissenters. This old man and some other fanatics had resolved to 'defend the faith.' When the Orthodox church was being constructed in their town they set fire to the building, and this offence had brought upon its author the sentence of deportation. This well-to-do shopkeeper-he was in trade-had left a wife and family whom he loved, and had gone off courageously into exile, believing in his ignorance that he was 'suffering for the faith.'

When one had lived some time by the side of this kind old man, one could not help asking the question, How could he have rebelled? I spoke to him several times about his faith. He gave up none of his convictions, but in his answers I never noticed the slightest hatred; and yet he had destroyed a church, and was far from denying it. In his view, the offence he had committed and his martyrdom were things to be proud of.

There were other Old Believers among the convicts- Siberians for the most part- men of well-developed intelligence, and as cunning as all peasants. Dialecticians in their way, they followed blindly their law, and delighted in discussing it. But they had great faults: they were haughty, proud, and very intolerant. The old man in no way resembled them. With far more belief in religious exposition than others of the same faith, he avoided all controversy. As he was of a gay and expansive disposition he often laughed-not with the coarse cynical laugh of the other convicts, but with a clarity and simplicity in which there was something of the child, and which harmonized perfectly with his grey head. I may perhaps be wrong, but it seems to me that a man's character may be recognized by his mere laugh. If you know a man whose laugh inspires you with sympathy, be assured he is an honest man.

The old fellow had won the respect of all the prisoner! without exception; but he was not proud of it. They called him grandad, and he took no offence. I thus understood what an influence he must have exercised on his co-religionists.

In spite of the fortitude with which he endured prison life, one felt that he was tormented by a profound, incurable melancholy. I slept in the same barrack with him. One night, towards three o'clock in the morning, I woke up and heard a slow, stifled sob. The old man was sitting on the stove-the same place where the convict who had wished to kill the governor used to pray-and was reading from his manuscript prayer-book. As he wept I heard him repeating 'Lord, do not forsake me. Master, strengthen me. My poor little children, my dear little children, we shall never see one another again.' I cannot say how much this moved me.

We used, then, to entrust our money to this old man. Heaven knows how the idea got abroad in our barrack that he could not be robbed. It was well known that he hid the savings deposited with him, but no one had been able to discover where. He revealed it to us-to the Poles and myself. One of the stakes in the palisade bore a branch which appeared to belong to it, but which could be removed and put back again. When it was removed a hole could be seen, and this was his hiding-place.

But to return to my story. Why is it that a convict never saves his money? Well, not only is it difficult for him to keep it, but prison life is so miserable that a man, of his very nature, thirsts for freedom of action. His position in society makes him so irregular a being that the idea of swallowing up his capital in orgies, of intoxicating himself with revelry seems to him quite natural if only he can procure himself one moment's forgetfulness. It was strange to see certain individuals bent over their labour with the sole object of spending their earnings in a single day, even to the last kopeck. Then they would set to work again until they could afford another debauch, which was looked forward to months beforehand.

Some convicts were fond of new clothes, more or less singular in style, such as fancy trousers and waistcoats; but it was above all for coloured shirts that they had a pronounced taste; also for belts with metal clasps.

On holidays the prison dandies wore their Sunday best. They were worth seeing as they strutted about their part of the barracks. Their pleasure in feeling themselves well

dressed amounted to childishness; indeed, in many things convicts are only children. Their fine clothes, however, disappeared very soon, often in the evening of the very day on which they had been bought. Their owners pledged them or sold them again for a trifle.

Merry-making generally took place at fixed times. It coincided with religious festivals, or with the name-day of some bibulous convict. On getting up in the morning he would place a wax taper before the ikon; then he said his prayers, dressed, and ordered his dinner. He had previously bought meat, fish, and little patties, which he gorged like an ox and almost always alone. It was very rare to see one convict invite another to share his repast. At dinner vodka was produced. The convict would suck it up like the sole of a boot, and then walk through the barracks swaggering and tottering. He was anxious to show his companions that although he was drunk* he was carrying on, and thus obtain their particular esteem.

The Russians always feel a measure of sympathy for a drunken man; among us it amounted really to esteem. In prison intoxication was regarded as a sort of aristocratic distinction.

As soon as he felt himself in high spirits the convict sent for a musician. We had among us a little fellow—a deserter from the army—very ugly, but who was the happy possessor of a violin on which he could play. As he had no trade he was always ready to follow the festive convia from barrack to barrack grinding out dance tunes for him with all his strength. His countenance often expressed the fatigue and disgust which his music—always the same—caused him; but when his employer shouted at him, ‘Go on playing, aren’t you paid for it?’ he attacked his violin more strenuously than ever. These drunkards felt sure that they would be taken care of, and in case of the governor arriving would be concealed from his watchful eye. This service we rendered in the most disinterested spirit. On their side the under-office and the old soldiers who remained in the prison to keep order, were perfectly reassured. The drunkard would cause no disturbance. At the least scare of revolt or riot he would have been silenced and tied up. Accordingly the subordinate officials closed their eyes; they knew that if vodka was forbidden all would go wrong. How was this vodka procured?

It was bought in the prison itself from drink-sellers, as they were called, who followed this trade—a very lucrative one, although the tipplers were not very numerous, for revelry was expensive, especially when it is considered how hardly money was earned. The drink business began, continued, and ended in rather an original manner. A prisoner who knew no trade, who would not work, but who, nevertheless, desired to get rich quickly, made up his mind, when he possessed a little money, to buy and sell vodka. The enterprise was risky and required great daring, for the speculator hazarded his skin as well as his liquor. But the drink-seller hesitated before no obstacles. At the outset he brought the vodka himself to the prison and got rid of it on the most advantageous terms. He repeated this operation a second and a third time. If he had not been discovered by the officials, he now possessed a sum which enabled him to

extend his business. He became a capitalist with agents and assistants; he risked much less and gained much more. Then his assistants incurred the risk instead of him.

Prisons are always full of degraded types who have never learned to work, but who are endowed with skill and daring: their only capital is their back. They often decide to put it into circulation, and propose to the drink-seller to introduce vodka into the barracks. There is always in the town a soldier, a shopkeeper, or some loose woman who, for a stipulated sum-quite a small one-buys vodka with the drink-seller's money, hides it in a place known to the convictsmuggler, near the workshop where he is employed. The person who supplies the vodka almost always tastes the precious liquid as he is carrying it to the hiding-place, and never hesitates to replace what he has drunk with pure water. The purchaser may take it or leave it, but he cannot take a high hand. Rather, he thinks himself very lucky that his money has not been stolen, and that he has received some kind of vodka in exchange. The man who is to take it into the prison-to whom the drink-seller has made known the hiding-place-goes to the source of supply with bullock's intestines (which have been washed and ruled with water, and which thus preserve their softness and suppleness), fills them with vodka, and rolls them round his body. Now all the cunning, the adroitness of this daring convict is shown. The man's honour is at stake. It is necessary for him to deceive the escort and sentry; and deceive them he will. If the carrier is artful, the escort-sometimes a mere recruit- notices nothing unusual, for the prisoner has studied him thoroughly and has artfully combined the hour and the place of meeting. If the convict-a bricklayer, for example- climbs up on a wall that he is building, the escort will certainly not climb up after him to watch his movements. Who then, will see what he is about? On nearing the prison, he gets ready a piece of fifteen or twenty kopecks, and waits at the gate for the corporal on guard.

The corporal examines, feels, and searches each convict on his return to barracks, "and then opens the gate to him. The smuggler hopes he will be too modest to search him too much in detail. But if the corporal is a cunning fellow, that is just what he will do: and in that case he finds the contraband vodka. The convict has now only one chance of salvation. He slips into the corporal's hand the coin which he holds ready, and often, thanks to this manuvre, the vodka arrives safely in the hands of the drink-seller. Sometimes, however, the trick does not succeed, and it is then that the smuggler's sole capital really enters into circulation. A report is made to the governor, who sentences the unhappy culprit to a thorough flogging. As for the vodka, it is confiscated. The smuggler undergoes his punishment without betraying the speculator, not because such a denunciation would disgrace him, but because it would bring him nothing. He would be flogged all the same, and his only consolation would be that the drink-seller would share his punishment; but as he needs him he does not denounce him, although, having allowed himself to be surprised, he will receive no payment.

Denunciation, however, flourishes in prison. Far from hating spies or keeping apart from them, the convicts often make friends of them. If anyone had taken it into his head to try and prove to them the baseness of betraying a fellow prisoner, no one would

have understood. The former nobleman of whom I have already spoken, that cowardly and violent creature with whom I had broken off all relations immediately after my arrival in the fortress, was a friend of Fedka, the governor's body-servant. He used to tell him everything that went on, all of which was naturally passed on to the servant's master. Everyone knew it, but no one thought of showing any ill will against the man, or of reproaching him with his conduct. When the vodka arrived without accident, the speculator paid the smuggler and made up his accounts. His merchandise had already cost him sufficiently dear; and in order that his profit might be greater, he diluted it still further by adding fifty per cent water. He was then ready, and had only to wait for customers.

On the first holiday, or perhaps even on a week-day, he would be approached by a convict who had been working like a Negro for many months in order to save up, kopeck by kopeck, the small sum which he was resolved to spend all at once. He had for long looked forward to days of rejoicing, dreamed of them during the endless winter nights, during his hardest labour; and the prospect had supported him under the severest trials. The dawn of this day so impatiently awaited has just appeared. He has some money in his pocket. It has been neither stolen from him nor confiscated. He is free to spend it. Accordingly he takes his savings to the drink-seller, who, to begin with, gives vodka which is almost pure-it has been only twice baptized-but gradually, as the bottle gets more and more empty, he fills it up with water. Accordingly the convict pays for his vodka five or six times as much as he would in a tavern.

It may be imagined how many glasses, and, above all, what sums of money are required before he is drunk. However, as he has lost the habit of drinking the little alcohol which remains in the liquid intoxicates him rapidly enough. He goes on drinking until there is nothing left; he pledges or sells all his new clothes-for the drink-seller is at the same time a pawnbroker. As his personal garments are not very numerous he next pledges the clothes supplied to him by the Government. When the drink has made away with his last shirt, his last rag, he lies down and wakes up the next morning with a fearful headache. In vain he begs the drink-seller to give him credit for a drop of vodka in order to remove his de-pression; he meets with a direct refusal. So that very day he sets to work again, and for several months together he will weary himself out while looking forward to one more debauch like that which has now vanished into the past. Little by little he regains courage while waiting for such another day which is still far off, but which will ultimately arrive. As for the drink-seller, if he has gained a large sum-perhaps a dozen roubles or so-he procures some more vodka, but this time he does not baptize it, because he intends it for himself. Enough of trade! it is time for him to amuse himself. Accordingly he eats, drinks, pays for a little music-his means allow him to grease the palm of the junior officials. This festival lasts sometimes for several days. When his stock of vodka is exhausted, he goes and drinks with the other drink-sellers who are waiting for him. There he swallows his last kopeck. However careful the convicts may be in watching over their companions in debauchery, it sometimes happens that the governor or the officer on guard notices what is going

on. The drunkard is then dragged to the orderly-room, his money is confiscated if he has any left, and he is flogged. The convict shakes himself like a beaten dog, returns to barracks, and, after a few days, resumes his trade as a drink-seller.

It sometimes happens that among the convicts there are admirers of the fair sex. For a sufficiently large sum of money they succeed, accompanied by a soldier whom they have corrupted, in getting secretly out of the fortress into a suburb instead of going to work. There, in an apparently quiet house, a banquet is held, at which large sums of money are spent. The convicts' money is not to be despised; accordingly the soldiers will sometimes arrange these temporary escapes beforehand, sure as they are of being generously recompensed. Generally speaking, these soldiers are themselves candidates for the convict prison. The escapades are scarcely ever discovered. I must add that they are very rare, for they are very expensive, and the admirers of the fair sex are obliged to have recourse to other less costly means.

Soon after my arrival, a young convict with very regular features excited my curiosity. His name was Sirotkin, and he was in many respects an enigmatic being. It was his face that particularly interested me. He was not more than twenty three years of age, and he belonged to the special section; that is to say, he was condemned to hard labour for life. He was accordingly to be looked upon as one of the most dangerous of military criminals; yet he was mild and tranquil, spoke little, and rarely laughed. His blue eyes, clear complexion and fair hair gave him a soft expression, which even his shaver crown did not destroy. Although he had no trade, he managed to obtain money from time to time. He was remarkably lazy, and always slovenly dressed; but if anyone was generous enough to present him with a red shirt he was beside himself with joy at having a new garment, and exhibited it everywhere. Sirotkin neither drank nor played, and scarcely ever quarrelled with other convicts. He walked about with his hands in his pockets, peacefully and with a pensive air. What he was thinking of I cannot say. When anyone called to him and asked him a question, he answered with deference precisely, and without chattering like the others. He had in his eyes the expression of a child often. When he had money he bought none of those things which others looked upon as indispensable. His vest might be torn, but he did not get it mended, any more than he bought himself new boots. He was particularly fond of the little white rolls and also of gingerbread, which he would eat with the satisfaction of a child of seven. When not at work he wandered about the barracks; when everyone else was occupied, he stood with his arms hanging at his sides; if anyone joked with him or laughed at him-which happened often enough-he turned on his heel without speaking and went elsewhere. If the pleasantry was too strong he blushed. I often asked myself for what crime he could have been condemned to hard labour. One day, when I was ill and lying in hospital, Sirotkin was also there, stretched out on a bedstead not far from me.

I struck up a conversation with him; he became animated, and told me freely how he had been conscripted, how his mother had followed him in tears, and what treatment he had suffered in the army. He added that he had never been able to accustom himself

to this life; everyone was severe and angry with him about nothing, his officers were always against him.

‘But why did they send you here-and into the special section above all-eh, Sirotkin?’

‘Yes, Alexander Petrovitch, although I was only one year with the battalion, I was sent here for killing my captain, Gregory Petrovitch.’

‘I heard about that, but I did not believe it; how was it that you killed him?’

‘All you heard was true; my life was insupportable.’

‘But other recruits stuck it well enough. It’s very hard at the beginning, but men get accustomed to it and end by becoming excellent soldiers. Your mother must have pampered and spoiled you. I ‘m sure that she fed you on gingerbread and sweet milk until you were eighteen.’

‘Yes, mother was very fond of me. When I left her she look to her bed and remained there. My life in the army was terrible, and everything went wrong from the start. I was always being punished; but why} I obeyed every order, I was smart and efficient. I didn’t drink or borrow money- it’s all up with a man when he begins to borrow-and yet everyone around me was harsh and cruel. I sometimes hid myself in a corner and did nothing but sob. One day, or rather one night, I was on guard. It was autumn: there was a strong wind, it was so dark you couldn’t see, and I was sad, so sad! I unfixed my bayonet and laid it by my side. Then I put the musket to my breast, and with my big toe-I had taken my boot off-pressed the trigger. It missed fire. I examined it and reloaded it with a charge of fresh powder. Then I broke off the corner of my flint, and once more placed the muzzle against my breast. Again there was a misfire. What was I to do, I asked myself. I put my boot on, fixed bayonet, sloped, and then paced up and down. Let them do what they like, I said to myself; but I will not be a soldier any longer. Half an hour afterwards the captain arrived, making his rounds. He came straight up to me. “Is that the way you carry yourself when you ‘re on guard?” I gripped the musket, and drove the bayonet into him. Then I had to walk forty-six versts. That is how I came to be in the special section.’

He was not lying, but I did not understand how they could have sent him there: such crimes deserve much less severe punishment. Sirotkin was the only one of the convicts who was really handsome. As for his companions of the special section-to the number of fifteen-they were frightful to behold with their hideous, disgusting physiognomies. Grey heads were plentiful among them. I shall speak of these men again. Sirotkin was often on good terms with Gazin, the drink-seller whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

This Gazin was a terrible man: the impression he made on everyone was confusing or appalling. It seemed to me that a more ferocious, a more monstrous creature could not exist. Yet at Tobolsk I had seen the notorious brigand Kameneff. Later, I saw Sokoloff, the escaped convict, formerly a deserter who was a ferocious creature. Neither of them, however filled me with so much disgust as did Gazin. I often fancied that I had before my eyes an enormous, gigantic spider the size of a man. He was a Tartar, and there was no convict so strong as he. It was less by his great height and his herculean

build, than by his enormous deformed head, that he inspired terror. The strangest reports were current about him. Some said that he had been a soldier, others that he had escapee from Nertchinsk, and that he had been exiled several time to Siberia but had always succeeded in getting away. He ended at last in our prison, where he belonged to the special section. It appeared that he used to delight in luring small children to some lonely spot. There he would frighten and torture them, gloat over the terror and convulsions of the poor little things, and finally dispatch them with fiendish glee. These horrors had perhaps been imagined because of the revolting impression that the monster produced upon us; but they seemed probable, and harmonized with his physiognomy. Nevertheless, when Gazin was not drunk he conducted himself well enough.

He was always quiet, never quarrelled, avoided all disputes as if from contempt for his companions, just as though he had entertained a high opinion of himself. He spoke very little, and all his movements were measured, calm, resolute. His look was not without intelligence, but its expression was cruel and derisive like his smile. Of all the convicts who sold vodka he was the richest. Twice a year he got completely drunk, and it was then that all his brutal ferocity was laid bare. Little by little he became excited, and began to tease his fellow prisoners with venomous satire thought out long beforehand. At length when he was quite drunk, he had attacks of furious rage, and, seizing a knife, would rush upon his companions. The convicts, who knew his herculean strength, avoided him and protected themselves against him, for he would throw himself on the first person he met. A means of disarming him had been discovered. Some dozen prisoners would rush suddenly upon Gazin, and give him violent blows in the pit of the stomach, in the belly, and generally below the region of the heart, until he lost consciousness. Anyone else would have died under such treatment, but Gazin soon recovered. When he had been well beaten they would wrap him up in his pelisse, and throw him upon his plank bedstead, leaving him to digest his drink. The next day he woke up almost well, and went about his work silent and sombre. Every time Gazin got drunk, the whole prison knew how his day would finish. He knew also, but he drank all the same. Several years passed in this way. Then it was noticed that Gazin had lost his energy, and that he was beginning to weaken. He did nothing but groan, complaining of all kinds of illness. His visits to the hospital became more and more frequent. 'He is giving in,' said the prisoners.

On one occasion Gazin had gone into the kitchen followed by the little fellow who scraped the violin, and whom the convicts, during their festivities, used to hire to play for them. He stopped in the middle of the hall, silently examining his companions one after another.. No one breathed a word. When he saw me with my companions, he looked at us in his malicious, jeering way, and smiled horribly with the air of a man pleased with a good joke that had just occurred to him. He tottered over to our table.

'Might I ask,' he said, 'where you get the money which enables you to drink tea?'

I exchanged a look with my neighbour. I realized that the best thing for us was to be silent, and not to answer. The least contradiction would have thrown Gazin in a passion.

‘You must have money,’ he continued, ‘you must have a good deal of money to drink tea; but, tell me, are you sent to hard labour to drink tea; I say, did you come here for that purpose? Please answer, I should like to know.’

Seeing that we were resolved on silence and that we had determined not to pay any attention to him, he ran towards us, livid and trembling with rage. A couple of yards away, he caught sight of a heavy box which ordinarily contained loaves for issue at dinner and supper, and held enough bread for the meal of half the prisoners. At this moment, however, it was empty. Gazin seized it with both hands and brandished it above our heads. Although murder, or attempted murder, was a source of endless trouble for the convicts-examinations, counter-examinations, and inquiries without end would be the natural consequence-and though quarrels were generally cut short when they did not lead to such serious results, yet everyone remained silent and waited.

Not one word in our favour, not one cry against Gazin. The hatred felt for all who were of gentle birth was so great that everyone was evidently pleased to see us in danger. But a fortunate incident cut short this scene which must otherwise have a tragic ending. Gazin was about to let fly the enormous box, which he was turning and twisting above his head, when a convict ran in from the barracks and cried out:

‘Gazin, they’ve stolen your vodka!’

The terrible brigand let fall the box with a frightful oath, and ran out of the kitchen.

‘Well, God has saved them,’ said the prisoners among themselves, repeating the words several times.

I never knew whether his vodka had been stolen, or whether it was only a stratagem invented to save us.

That same evening, before the barracks were locked up but when it was already dark, I walked to the side of the palisade. A heavy feeling of sadness weighed upon my soul. During the whole period of my imprisonment I never felt so miserable as on that evening, though the first day is always the hardest, whether at hard labour or confined to the prison. One thought in particular had left me no respite since my deportation- a question insoluble then and insoluble now. I reflected on the inequality of the punishments inflicted for the same crimes. Often, indeed, one crime cannot be compared even approximately with another. Two murderers kill a man under circumstances which in each case are minutely examined and weighed. They each receive the same punishment; and yet by what an abyss are their two actions separated! One has committed a murder for a trifle-for an onion. He has killed a passing yokel on the high-road and found on him no more than an onion.

‘Well, I was sent to hard labour for killing a peasant who had nothing but an onion!’

‘Well, you’re a fool! An onion is worth a kopeck. If you’d killed a hundred peasants you would have had a hundred kopecks, or one rouble.’ The foregoing is a prison joke.

Another criminal has killed a debauchee who was oppressing or dishonouring his wife, his sister, or his daughter.

A third, a vagabond half dead with hunger and pursued by a whole band of police, was defending his liberty, his life. He is to be regarded as on an equal footing with the brigand who assassinates children for amusement, for the pleasure of feeling their warm blood flow over his hands, of seeing them shudder in a last bird-like palpitation beneath the knife which tears their flesh!

They will all alike be sent to hard labour, though the sentence will perhaps not be for the same number of years. Degrees of punishment, however, are not very numerous, whereas different kinds of crime may be reckoned by thousands. There are as many crimes as there are characters.

Let us admit that it is impossible to get rid of this first inequality of punishment, that the problem is insoluble and, in the sphere of penal law, like trying to square the circle. Let all that be admitted; but even if this inequality cannot be avoided, there is another thing to be thought of—the consequences of the punishment. Here is a man who is wasting away like a candle; there is another, on the contrary, who had no idea before going into exile that there could be such a gay, such an idle life, where he would find a circle of such agreeable friends. Individuals of this latter class are to be found in every prison.

Now take a man who is sensitive, cultured, and of delicate conscience. What he feels kills him more surely than the material punishment. The judgment which he himself pronounces on his crime is more pitiless than that of the most severe tribunal, the most Draconian law. He lives side by side with another convict, who has not once during all his time in prison reflected on the murder he is expiating. He may even consider himself innocent. Are there not, also, poor devils who commit crimes in order to be sent to hard labour, and thus to escape from a freedom which is much more painful than confinement? So-and-so has led a miserable life; he has never, perhaps, been able to satisfy his hunger. He is worked to death in order to enrich his master. In prison his work will be less severe, less crushing. He will eat as much as he wants, better than he could ever have hoped to eat had he remained free. On holidays he will have meat, and fine people will give him alms, and his evening's work will bring him in some money. And then again, is prison society to be counted for nothing? The convicts are clever, wide-awake people, who are up to everything. The new arrival can scarcely conceal the admiration he feels for his companions in labour. He has seen nothing like it before, and he will consider himself in the best company possible.

Is it possible that men so differently situated can feel in an equal degree the punishment inflicted? But why think about questions that are insoluble? The drum beats, and we must return to barracks.

Chapter V: First Impressions (Continued)

We were inside once more. The doors of the barracks were locked, each with a special padlock, and the prisoners remained shut up until next morning.

The roll was checked by a non-commissioned officer accompanied by two soldiers. When an officer happened to be present, the convicts were drawn up in the courtyard, but generally speaking they were identified in the buildings. As the soldiers often made mistakes, they went out and came back in order to count us again and again, until their reckoning was satisfactory; then the barracks were closed. Each one housed about thirty prisoners, and we were very closely packed on our camp bedsteads. As it was too early to go to sleep, the convicts occupied themselves with work.

Besides the old soldier (of whom I have spoken) who slept in our dormitory and represented the prison authority, there was in our barrack another veteran who wore a good-conduct badge. It happened not infrequently, however, that the good-conduct men themselves committed offences for which they were sentenced to be whipped. They then lost their rank, and were immediately replaced by comrades whose behaviour was considered satisfactory.

Our good-conduct man was none other than Akim Aki-mitch. To my great astonishment, he was very hard on the prisoners, but they only retaliated with jests. The other old soldier was more prudent and interfered with no one; if he opened his mouth it was only as a matter of form, as an affair of duty. For the most part he remained silent, seated on his little bedstead, occupied in mending his own boots.

That day I could not help remarking to myself-and the accuracy of my observation afterwards became apparent- that all those, whoever they be, who are not convicts but have dealings with convicts, beginning with the soldiers of the escort and the sentinels, look upon their charges in a false and exaggerated light, expecting that for a yes or a no, these men will throw themselves upon them knife in hand. The prisoners, perfectly conscious of the fear they inspire, show a certain arrogance. Accordingly, the best prison director is the one who shows no emotion in their presence. In spite of the airs they give themselves, the convicts prefer that confidence should be placed in them. By such means, indeed they may be conciliated. I have more than once had occasion to notice their astonishment at an official entering their prison without an escort, and certainly their astonishment was not unflattering. A visitor who is intrepid imposes respect. If anything unfortunate happens, it will not be in his presence. The terror inspired by convicts is general, and yet I saw no foundation for it. Is it their appearance, their brigand-like looks, that causes a certain repugnance? Is it not rather the feeling that overwhelms you directly you enter the prison that in spite of all efforts, all precautions, it is impossible to turn a living man into a corpse, to stifle his feelings, his thirst for vengeance and for life, his passions, and his imperious desire to satisfy them? However that may be, I declare that there is no reason to fear the convicts. A man does not throw himself so quickly nor so easily upon his fellow man, knife in hand.

Few accidents happen; they are, indeed, so rare that the danger may be considered non-existent.

I speak, it must be understood, only of prisoners already condemned, who are undergoing their punishment, and some of whom are almost happy to find themselves in prison; so attractive under any circumstances is a new form of life. These men live quiet and contented. As for the turbulent ones, the convicts themselves keep them in restraint, and their arrogance never goes too far. A condemned criminal, audacious and reckless as he may be, is afraid of every prison official. It is by no means the same with an accused person whose fate has not been decided. Such a one is quite capable of attacking no matter whom, without any motive of hatred but solely because he is to be whipped next day. If, indeed, he commits a fresh crime his offence becomes complicated punishment is delayed, and he gains time. The act of aggression is explained: it has a cause, an object. The convict wishes at all hazards to change his fate, and that as soon as possible. In connection with this, I myself have witnessed a physiological fact of the strangest kind.

In the military section was an old soldier who had been condemned to two years' hard labour. He was a great boaster, and at the same time a coward. Generally speaking, the Russian soldier does not boast; he has no time to do so, even had he the inclination. But when such a one does appear among a crowd of others, he is always a coward and a rogue. Dutoff—that was the name of the prisoner of whom I am speaking—underwent his punishment, and then returned to his battalion in the Line; but, like all who are sent to prison to be corrected, he had been thoroughly corrupted. A 'return horse' reappears after two or three weeks' liberty, not for a comparatively short time, but for fifteen or twenty years. So it happened in the case of Dutoff. Three weeks after he had been set at liberty he robbed one of his comrades, and was, moreover, mutinous. He was taken before a court martial and sentenced to a severe form of corporal punishment. Horribly frightened, like the coward that he was, at the prospect of punishment, he attacked the officer of the guard with a knife as the latter entered his cell on the day before he was to run the gauntlet of his company. He quite understood that he was aggravating his offence, and that the duration of his punishment would be increased; but all he wanted was to postpone for some days, or at least for some hours, a terrible moment. He was such a coward that the officer was not even wounded. He had, indeed, only committed this assault in order to add a new crime to the last already against him, and thus defer the sentence.

The moment preceding punishment is terrible for a man condemned to the rods. I have seen many of them on the eve of the fatal day: I generally met with them in the hospital when I was ill, which happened often enough. In Russia the people who show most compassion for the convicts are certainly the doctors, who never draw those distinctions between the prisoners which are observed by other persons brought into direct relations with them. In this respect the common people can alone be compared with the doctors, for they never reproach a criminal with the crime that he has com-

mitted, whatever it may be. They forgive him in consideration of the sentence passed upon him.

It is well known that the common people throughout Russia call crime a 'misfortune,' and the criminal an 'unfortunate.' This definition is expressive and profound, though unconscious and instinctive. To the doctor the convicts have naturally recourse, above all when they are to undergo corporal punishment. The prisoner who has been before a court martial knows almost to the hour when his sentence will be executed. To escape it he gets himself sent to the hospital, in order to postpone for some days the terrible moment. When he is, declared restored to health, he knows that the day after he leaves the hospital this moment will arrive. Accordingly, on quitting the hospital the convict is always in a state of agitation. Some of them may endeavour from vanity to conceal their anxiety, but no one is taken in by that; everyone understands the cruelty of such a moment, and is silent from motives of humanity.

I knew one young convict, an ex-soldier, sentenced for murder, who was to undergo the maximum punishment. On the eve of the day on which he was to suffer, he had resolved to drink a bottle of vodka into which he had infused a quantity of snuff.

A prisoner condemned to the rods always drinks, before the critical moment arrives, a certain amount of spirits which he has procured long beforehand, and often at a fabulous price. He would deprive himself of the necessities of life for six months rather than not be in a position to swallow half a pint of vodka before the flogging. The convicts are convinced that a drunken man suffers less from the rods or the whip than one who is stone-cold sober.

To return to my narrative. A few moments after swallowing his bottle of vodka the poor devil felt sick. He coughed up blood, and was carried unconscious to the hospital. His lungs were so much injured by this accident that phthisis set in and carried him off within a few months. The doctors who had attended him never discovered the origin of his malady.

If examples of cowardice are not rare among the prisoners, it must be added that there are some whose intrepidity is quite astounding. I remember many instances of extraordinary courage. The arrival of a terrible bandit in hospital remains fixed in my memory.

One fine summer day word went round the infirmary that the notorious prisoner Orloff was to be flogged the same evening, and that he would be brought into hospital afterwards. The patients already there said that the punishment would be a cruel one, and all-including myself, I must admit-awaited with curiosity the arrival of this villain, about whom the most unheard-of tales were told. He was a malefactor of a rare kind, capable of assassinating old men and children in cold blood. He possessed an indomitable force of will, and was fully conscious of his power. He had been found guilty of several crimes and condemned to be flogged through the ranks.

Towards evening he was brought, or, rather carried in. The place was already dark, and candles were lighted. Orloff was excessively pale, almost unconscious, with his thick curly hair of dull, lack-lustre black. His back was torn and swollen, blue, and

stained with blood. The prisoners nursed him throughout the night; they changed his poultices, placed him on his side, prepared the lotion ordered by the doctor; in a word, they showed as much solicitude for him as for a relation or benefactor.

Next day he had fully recovered his faculties, and took one or two turns round the room. I was much astonished, for he was broken down and powerless when he was brought in. He had received only half the number of blows ordered by the sentence when the doctor stopped the punishment, convinced that if it were continued Orloff's death would inevitably ensue.

This criminal was of a feeble constitution, weakened by long imprisonment. Anyone who has seen convicts after Hogging will remember their thin, drawn features and feverish looks. Orloff soon recovered his powerful energy, which enabled him to overcome his physical weakness. He was no ordinary man. From curiosity I made his acquaintance, and was able to study him at leisure for an entire week. Never in my life did I meet a man whose will was more firm or inflexible.

I had seen at Tobolsk just such another celebrity of the same kind—a brigand chief. This fellow was a veritable wild beast; one had only to be near him, without even knowing him, in order to recognize him as a dangerous man. What scared me above all was his utter lack of intelligence. In his case matter had won such an ascendancy over mind, that one could see at a glance that he cared for nothing in the world but the brutal satisfaction of his physical desires. And yet I felt certain that Kareneff (for such was his name) would have fainted on being condemned to the severe corporal punishment which Orloff had undergone, but that he would have murdered the nearest man to him without blinking.

Orloff, on the contrary, was a brilliant example of the triumph of spirit over matter. He had a perfect command over himself. He despised punishment, and feared nothing in the world. His dominant characteristic was boundless energy, a thirst for vengeance, and an inflexible will when he had some object to attain.

I was not astonished at his haughty air. He looked down upon all around him from the height of his grandeur. Not that he took the trouble to pose, for his pride was an innate quality. I don't believe anything had the least influence over him. He looked upon everything with the calmest eye, as if nothing in the world could surprise him. He knew well that the other prisoners respected him but he never took advantage of it or gave himself airs.

Nevertheless, vanity and conceit are defects from which scarcely any convict is exempt. Orloff was intelligent and strangely frank in talking too much about himself. He replied point-blank to all the questions I put to him, and confessed that he was waiting impatiently for his return to health in order to take the remainder of the punishment he was to undergo.

'Now,' he said to me with a wink, 'it is all over. I shall take the remainder, and then be sent to Nertchinsk with a convoy of prisoners. I shall use the opportunity to escape, and am confident I shall succeed. If only my back would heal a little quicker!'

For five days he was burning with impatience to be in a condition to leave hospital. At times he was gay and in the best of humours, and I profited by those rare occasions to ask him about his adventures.

He would contract his eyebrows a little, but always answered my questions straightforwardly. When he realized that I was endeavouring to see through him and discover in him some trace of repentance, he looked at me with a haughty and contemptuous air, as if I were a foolish little boy whom he honoured too highly with his conversation.

I detected in his countenance a sort of compassion for me. After a moment's pause he would laugh out loud, but without the least irony, and I fancy he must, more than once, have laughed in the same manner when my words returned to his memory. At last he signed himself out as cured, although his back was not yet completely healed. As I too was almost well again, we left the infirmary together. I returned to barracks, while he was shut up in the guard-room, where he had been formerly detained. On parting he shook hands with me, which in his eyes was a signal mark of favour. I fancy he did so because at that moment he was in a good humour; but in reality he must have despised me, for I was a feeble being, in all respects contemptible, and guilty above all of resignation. Next day he underwent the second half of his punishment.

When the doors of our barrack had been locked at night there was, in less than no time, a different atmosphere: the air of a private house, almost indeed of home. It was only then that I saw my comrades at their ease. For during the day the under-officers, or some other official, might suddenly arrive, so that the prisoners were always on the alert and never quite relaxed. As soon, however, as the bolts had been shot and the doors padlocked, everyone sat down in his place and began to ply his trade. The room was lighted up in an unexpected manner: each convict had his candle in its wooden sconce. Some of them stitched boots, others sewed various kinds of garment. The air, already poisonous, became more and more impure.

Some of the prisoners, huddled together in a corner, played at cards on a piece of carpet. In each barrack there was a prisoner who possessed a small piece of carpet, a candle, and a pack of horribly greasy cards. The owner of the cards received from the players fifteen kopecks (about sixpence) a night. They generally played at 'three leaves'-Gorka, that is to say-a game of chance. Each player placed before him a pile of copper money-all that he possessed-and did not get up until he had either lost it or broken the bank.

Play continued far into the night, and daybreak sometimes found the gamblers still at their game. Often, in fact, they did not cease until a few minutes before the doors were opened. In our room, as in every room, there were beggars ruined by drink and play, beggars by nature. I purposely say 'by nature'; for in every class of Russians there are, and always will be, strange easy-going people whose destiny it is always to remain beggars. They are poor devils all their lives, creatures broken down who remain under the domination or guardianship of someone, generally a prodigal or a man who has suddenly made his fortune. All initiative is for them an intolerable burden. They only exist on condition of undertaking nothing for themselves, of serving and living

perpetually subject to another's will. They are destined to act by and through others. Under no circumstances, even of the most unexpected kind, can they get rich; they are always beggars. I have met these persons in all classes of society, in all coteries, in all associations, including the literary world.

As soon as a card party was made up, one of these beggars (who were quite indispensable to the game) was summoned. He received five kopecks for a whole night's employment- and what employment! His duty was to keep guard in the corridor, in thirty degrees (Reaumur) of frost and in total darkness, for six or seven hours. The man on watch had to listen for the slightest noise; for the governor or one of the officers of the guard would sometimes make a round quite late at night. They used to arrive unexpectedly, and sometimes caught players and the watchers in the act-thanks to the candle-light which could be seen from the courtyard.

When the key was heard grating in the padlock it was too late to put the lights out and he down on the plank bedsteads. Such surprises were, however, rare. Five kopecks was a ridiculous payment even in prison, and the gamblers' harsh demands astonished me in these as in many other cases:

'You are paid, you must do what you are told.' This was the argument, and it admitted of no reply. If you paid someone a few kopecks you had the right to turn him to the best possible account, and even a claim to his gratitude. More than once I saw convicts spend their money extravagantly, throwing it around, and at the same time cheating the man employed to watch. I have witnessed this kind of thing in several barracks on numerous occasions.

I have already said that, with the exception of the gamblers, everyone worked. Five only of the convicts remained completely idle, and went to bed at the first opportunity. My bed was near the door. Next to me was Akim Akimitch, and when we were lying down our heads touched. He used to work until ten or eleven o'clock, pasting together pieces of paper to make multicoloured lanterns which had been ordered by someone in the town, and for which he was well paid. He excelled in this kind of work, and did it methodically and regularly. When he had finished he carefully put away his tools, unfolded his mattress, said his prayers, and slept the sleep of the just. He carried his love of order even to pedantry, and must have secretly believed himself a man of brains, as do most narrow, mediocre persons. I did not like him the first day, although he afforded me plenty of food for thought: I was astonished to find such a man in prison. I shall have occasion to speak of Akimitch again.

But I must proceed with my description of those with whom I was to live for years. They were to be my companions every moment of that time, and it will be understood that I regarded them with anxious curiosity.

On my left slept a group of mountaineers from the Caucasus, nearly all of them exiled for brigandage, but condemned to different punishments. There were two Lesghians, a Circassian, and three Tartars from Daghestan. The Circassian was a morose and sombre fellow. He scarcely ever spoke, and looked at you sideways with a sly, sulky, wild-beast expression. One of the Lesghians, an old man with an aquiline nose,

tall and thin, looked a real brigand, but the other (Nourra was his name) impressed me most favourably. He was of middle height, still young, built like a Hercules, with fair hair and violet eyes; his nose was slightly turned up, while his features were somewhat of a Finnish cast. Like all horsemen, he walked with his toes in. His body was striped with scars, ploughed by bayonet wounds and bullets. Although he belonged to the conquered region of the Caucasus, he had joined the rebels, with whom he used to make continual incursions into our territory. Everyone in prison liked him because of his gaiety and affability. He worked without murmuring, always calm and peaceful. Thieving, cheating, and drunkenness filled him with disgust, or threw him into a rage—not that he wished to quarrel with anyone; he simply turned away with indignation. During his confinement he committed no breach of the rules. Fervently pious, he said his prayers every evening, observed all the Mohammedan fasts like a true fanatic, and passed whole nights in prayer. Everyone liked him, and considered him a thoroughly honest man. ‘Nourra is a lion,’ they used to say; and the name ‘Lion’ stuck to him. He was quite convinced that as soon as he had finished his sentence he would be sent back to the Caucasus. Indeed, this hope alone kept him alive, and I believe he would have died had he been deprived of it. I noticed it the very day of my arrival. One could not but be struck by that calm, honest countenance in the midst of so many sombre, sardonic, and repulsive faces.

Before I had been half an hour in the prison he passed by and touched me gently on the shoulder, smiling innocently. I did not at first understand what he meant, for he spoke Russian very badly; but soon afterwards he passed again, and, with a friendly smile, again touched me on the shoulder. For three days running he repeated this strange proceeding. As I soon found out, he wished to show that he pitied me, and that he felt how painful my first hours of imprisonment must be. He wished to testify his sympathy, to keep up my spirits, and to assure me of his good will. Kind innocent Nourra!

Of the three Daghestan Tartars, all brothers, the elder two were well-developed men, while the youngest, Ali, was not more than twenty-two and looked still younger. He slept by my side, and when I observed his frank, intelligent countenance, thoroughly natural, I was at once attracted to him and thanked my fate that I had him for a neighbour and not some other prisoner. His whole soul could be read in his beaming countenance. His confident smile had a certain childish simplicity. His large black eyes expressed such friendliness, such tender feeling, that I always took pleasure in looking at him: it was a relief to me in moments of sadness and anguish. One day his eldest brother—he had five, of whom two were working in the mines of Siberia—had ordered him to take his yataghan, mount on horseback, and follow him. The respect of the mountaineers for their elders is so great that young Ali dared not ask the object of the expedition. He probably knew nothing about it, nor did his brothers consider it necessary to tell him. They were going to plunder the caravan of a rich Armenian merchant, and they succeeded in their enterprise. They assassinated the merchant and stole his goods. Unhappily for them, their crime was discovered. They were tried, flogged, and sent to

hard labour in Siberia. The court admitted no extenuating circumstances, except in the case of Ali. He was condemned to the minimum punishment-four years' imprisonment. His brothers loved him, with a father's rather than a brother's love. He was the only consolation of their exile. Dull and sad as a rule, they had always a smile for him. When they spoke to him (which they rarely did for they looked upon him as a child to whom it would be useless to speak seriously) their forbidding countenances lightened up. I always used to fancy they addressed him in a jocular tone, as they would an infant. When he replied the brothers exchanged glances and smiled good-naturedly.

His respect for them forbade him to speak to them first. How this young man preserved his tender heart, his native honesty, his frank cordiality without becoming perverted and corrupted during his period of hard labour is quite inexplicable. In spite of his gentleness, however, he had a strong stoical nature, as I later discovered. Chaste as a young girl, everything that was foul, cynical, shameful, or unjust filled his fine black eyes with indignation, and made them finer than ever. Although no coward, he would allow himself to be insulted with impunity. He avoided quarrels and abuse, and maintained his dignity. With whom, indeed, was he to quarrel? Everyone loved and cherished him.

At first he was only polite to me; but little by little we got into the habit of talking together in the evening. In a few months he had learnt to speak Russian perfectly, whereas his brothers never gained a correct knowledge of the language. He was intelligent, and at the same time modest and full of delicate feeling.

Ah was an exceptional being, and I always think of my meeting him as one of the lucky events of my life. There are some natures so spontaneously good, and endowed by God with such great qualities, that the idea of their perversion seems absurd. One is never anxious about them. Accordingly I never feared for Ah. Where is he now?

One day, some considerable time after my arrival at the prison, I was stretched out on my camp-bedstead agitated by painful thoughts. Ali, though always industrious, was not working at that moment. It was not yet time for him to retire to bed. His brothers, who were celebrating some Mussulman festival, were also at rest. Ali lay with his head in his hands in a state of reverie. Suddenly he said to me:

'Well, you're very sad!'

I gazed at him in astonishment. Such a remark from Ali, who was always so delicate, so full of tact, seemed strange. But on looking closer I saw so much grief, so much repressed suffering in his countenance-suffering caused no doubt by sudden memories-that I understood his anguish and told him so. He sighed deeply, and smiled with a melancholy air. I always liked his charming smile: it showed two rows of teeth which the world's greatest beauty might have envied.

'Ah, I suppose you were thinking how this festival is celebrated in Daghestan. Ah, you were happy there.'

'Yes,' he replied with enthusiasm, and his eyes sparkled. 'How did you know I was thinking of such things?'

'How could I fail to know? You were much better off than you are here.'

‘Why do you say that?’

‘What beautiful flowers there are in your country! Yes, it’s a real paradise.’ Please, say no more.’

He was much agitated.

‘Listen, Ali. Have you a sister?’

‘Yes. Why do you ask?’

‘She must have been very beautiful if she is like you?’

‘Oh, there’s no comparison between us. In all Daghestan you’d never meet so beautiful a girl. My sister is, indeed, charming. I am sure that you’ve never seen anyone like her. My mother also is very handsome.’

‘And your mother was fond of you?’

‘What do you mean? Of course she was. I’m sure she has died of grief, she was so fond of me. I was her favourite child. Yes, she loved me more than my sister, more than all the others. This very night she appeared to me in a dream and shed tears for me.’

He was silent, and never spoke again for the rest of the night; but from that moment he sought my company and my conversation, although he remained most respectful and never ventured to address me first. On the other hand he was happy when I spoke to him. He often talked of the Caucasus and of his past life. His brothers did not forbid him to converse with me; in fact I think they even encouraged him to do so, and when they saw that I was fond of him they became more affable towards me.

Ali often helped me in my work. In barracks he did everything he could to please me and save me trouble. In his attentions there was neither servility nor the hope of any advantage, but only a warm, cordial feeling which he did not try to hide. He had an extraordinary aptitude for the mechanical arts: he had learnt to sew very tolerably and to mend boots, and even understood something of carpentry -everything, in short, that could be learnt in prison. His brothers were proud of him.

‘Listen, Ali,’ I said to him one day, ‘why don’t you learn to read and write Russian? It might be very useful to you here in Siberia.’

‘I should like to, but who would teach me?’

‘There are plenty of people here who can read and write. I’ll teach you myself if you like.’

‘Oh, do teach me, please,’ said Ali, raising himself up in bed. He joined his hands and looked at me with a suppliant air.

We set to work the very next evening. I had a Russian translation of the New Testament, the only book that was not forbidden in prison. With that book alone, and without an alphabet, Ali learned to read in a few weeks, and after a few months he could do so perfectly. He brought an extraordinary zeal and warmth to his studies.

One day we were reading together the Sermon on the Mount. I noticed that he read certain passages with much feeling and I asked him if he liked the Gospel. He glanced up at me, and his face suddenly lighted up.

‘Yes, yes, Jesus is a holy prophet. He speaks the language of God. How beautiful it is!’

‘But tell me what it is that particularly pleases you.’

‘The passage which says, “Forgive those that hate you!” Ah! how divinely He speaks!’

He turned towards his brothers, who were listening to our conversation, and said a few eager words. They talked together seriously for some time, approving what their young brother had said by a nodding of their heads. Then with a grave, kindly smile, quite a Mussulman smile (I liked its gravity), they assured me that Isu (Jesus) was a great prophet. He had done great miracles. He had created a bird with a little clay into which He breathed the breath of life, and the bird had flown away. That, they said, was written in their books. They were convinced that they would please me much by praising Jesus. As for Ali, he was happy to see that his brothers approved of our friendship, and that they were saying what he thought would gratify. My success in teaching Ali to write was quite extraordinary. He had obtained paper at his own expense (for he would not allow me to buy any), also pens and ink; and in less than two months he had learned to write. His brothers were astonished at such rapid progress. Their satisfaction and their pride were without bounds, and they were at a loss to express their gratitude. If we happened to be together in the workshop, they disputed as to which of them should help me. I am not, of course, speaking of Ali, who felt more affection for me than for his own brothers. I shall never forget the day of his release. He took me outside, threw himself on my neck and sobbed. He had never before embraced me, and never before wept in my presence.

‘You have done so much for me,’ he said; ‘neither my father nor my mother have ever been kinder. You have made a man of me. God will bless you, I shall never forget you, never!’

Where is he now, where is my good, kind, dear Ali?

Besides the Circassians, we had a certain number of Poles, who formed a separate group. They had scarcely any relations with the other convicts. I have already said that, thanks to their hatred of the Russian prisoners, they were detested by everyone. All six of them were of a restless, morbid disposition; some were men of education, of whom I shall have more to say later.

It was from them that during the last days of my imprisonment I obtained a few books, and indeed the first work I read made a profound impression on me. I shall speak further on of that experience, which I look upon as very curious, though it will be difficult for the reader to understand. Of this I am certain, for there are certain things of which one cannot judge without having experienced them oneself. It will be enough for me to say that intellectual privation is more difficult to support than the most dreadful physical torture.

A common man sent to hard labour finds himself in kindred society, perhaps even in more interesting society than he has been accustomed to. He loses his native place and family, but his ordinary surroundings are much the same as before. An educated man, condemned by law to the same punishment as the other, suffers incomparably

more. He must stifle all his needs, all his habits; he must descend into a lower sphere, must breathe another air. He is like a fish thrown upon the sand. The punishment which he undergoes, equal in the eyes of the law for all criminals, is ten times more severe and more painful for him than for the common man. This is an incontestable truth, even if one thinks only of material comforts that must be sacrificed.

I was saying that the Poles formed a group by themselves. They lived together and took no notice of any of their fellow convicts, except a Jew, and that for no other reason than because he amused them. Our Jew was generally liked, although everyone laughed at him. We only had one, and even now I cannot think of him without a smile. Whenever I looked at him I thought of the Jew Jankel in Gogol's *Tarass Boulba*, who, when undressed and ready to go to bed with his wife in a sort of cupboard, resembled a fowl; for Isaiah Fomitch Bumstein and a plucked fowl were as like one another as two drops of water. He was already about fifty years of age, small, feeble, cunning, and at the same time very stupid, bold, and boastful, though a horrible coward. His face was covered with wrinkles; his forehead and cheeks were scarred from the burning he had received in the pillory. I never understood how he had been able to live through the sixty strokes to which he had been condemned for murder.

He carried on his person a medical prescription given him by other Jews immediately after his exposure in the pillory. They had promised that with the aid of that ointment his scars would disappear in less than a fortnight; but he had been afraid to use it, and was waiting for the end of his twenty years' penal servitude, when he would become a colonist and put the famous remedy to better use.

'Otherwise I shall not be able to get married,' he would say; 'and it is essential that I marry.'

We were great friends, for his good humour was inexhaustible. Prison life did not seem to disagree with him. A goldsmith by trade, he received more orders than he could execute, for there was no jeweller's shop in the town. He thus escaped hard labour, and as a matter of course he lent money on pledges to the convicts, who paid him heavy interest. He had arrived at the prison before me, but one of the Poles described to me his triumphal entry. It is quite a history, and I shall relate it further on, for there is much to tell of Isaiah Fomitch Bumstein.

As for the other prisoners there were, first of all, four Old Believers, among whom were the old man from Staradoub, two or three Little Russians (very morose persons), and a young convict with delicate features and a finely chiselled nose. He was only about twenty-three years of age, but had already committed eight murders. Then there was a band of coiners, one of whom was the buffoon of our barrack, and, finally, some sombre, sour-tempered convicts, shorn and disfigured, always silent, and full of envy. They looked askance at all who came near them, and must have been doing so for many years. I noticed all these people at a glance on the first night of my arrival. They were veiled in thick smoke; the atmosphere was poisonous, and vibrant with obscene oaths, the rattling of chains, insults, and cynical laughter. I stretched myself out on the bare planks, my head resting on my coat, rolled up to do duty for a pillow, with which

I had not yet been supplied. Then I covered myself with my sheepskin, but, owing to the painful impressions of the evening, I was unable for some time to get to sleep. My new life was only just beginning. The future held much that I had not foreseen, of which I had never had the least idea.

Chapter VI: The First Month

Three days after my arrival I was ordered to go to work. The impression made upon me by my surroundings remain to this day very clear. There was nothing particularly striking about them, unless one considers that my position was in itself extraordinary. First sensations count for a good deal, and as yet everything was unfamiliar. The first three days were certainly the most unpleasant in the whole term of imprisonment.

I told myself over and over again that I had reached my journey's end. I was now in prison, my home for many years. Here I would have to live. I had arrived overwhelmed with grief. Who knew but when I left I should do so with regret? I told myself all this as one touches a wound, the better to feel its pain. That I might regret my stay was a terrible thought: already I felt to what an intolerable degree man is a creature of habit. But that belonged to the future. The present, meanwhile, was sufficiently grim.

The eager curiosity with which my fellow convicts examined me, their harshness towards a former nobleman now joining their society, a harshness which sometimes took the form of hatred—all this tormented me to such a degree that I was only too glad to go to work in order to measure at one stroke the whole extent of my misfortune, to begin at once to share the common life, and to fall with my companions into the abyss.

But all convicts are not alike, and I had not yet begun to distinguish from the general hostility a certain sympathy which here and there was manifested towards me.

After a time the affability and goodwill shown by several of the prisoners gave me a little courage and restored my spirits. Most friendly among them was Akim Akimitch, and I soon noticed other kind, good-natured faces in the dark and hateful crowd. I consoled myself with the thought that bad men are to be found everywhere, but even among the worst there may be something good. Who knows? These fellows may be no worse than others who are free. Reflecting thus, I felt some doubt, but how right I proved to be!

There was Suchiloff, for example, a man whose acquaintance I did not make until long afterwards, although he was a near neighbour during almost the whole period of my confinement. Whenever I speak of the better type of convict who is no worse than other men, my thoughts turn involuntarily to him. He acted as my servant, together with another prisoner named Osip whom Akim Akimitch had recommended to me immediately after my arrival. For thirty kopecks a month this man agreed to cook me a separate dinner, since I could pay for my own food and might not be able to stomach the ordinary prison fare. Osip was one of the four cooks chosen by the prisoners to work

in our two kitchens. Incidentally, they were at liberty to refuse these duties, and to give them up whenever they thought fit. The cooks were men who were not expected to do hard labour: they had to bake bread and prepare the cabbage soup. They were called 'cook-maids,' not from contempt (for the men chosen were always the most intelligent) but merely in fun, and they took no offence at the name.

For many years past Osip had been regularly chosen as one of the 'cook-maids.' He never refused the duty except when he was out of sorts, or when he saw an opportunity of smuggling vodka into the barracks. Although he had been condemned as a smuggler, he was remarkably honest and good-tempered, as I have already observed; at the same time he was a dreadful coward, and feared the rod above all things. Of a peaceful, patient disposition, affable towards everyone, he never became involved in quarrels. But he could never resist the temptation of bringing in spirits, notwithstanding his cowardice: it was simply his love of the game. Like the other cooks he dealt in spirits, but on a far smaller scale than Gazin because he was afraid of the risks involved. I always lived on good terms with Osip. To have a separate table it was not necessary to be very rich; it cost me only one rouble a month apart from the bread, which was supplied free. Sometimes when I was very hungry I determined to eat the cabbage soup, in spite of the disgust with which it invariably filled me, until after a time my revulsion entirely disappeared. I generally bought one pound of meat a day, which cost me two kopecks.

The old soldiers who watched over the internal discipline of the barracks were kindly souls, ready to go every day to market and make purchases for the convicts. For this they received nothing except a small gift from time to time. They did it for the sake of peace, for had they refused their life in the prison would have been a perpetual torment. They used to bring in tobacco, tea, meat—anything, in short, that was desired, always excepting spirits.

For many years Osip prepared for me every day a piece of roast meat. How he managed to cook it remained a secret. The strangest part of the arrangement was that during all this time I scarcely exchanged two words with him. I tried many times to make him talk, but he was incapable of keeping up a conversation. He would only smile and answer my questions with 'yes' or 'no.' He was of Herculean stature, but had no more intelligence than a child of seven.

Suchiloff was also one of those who helped me. I had never asked him for his assistance; he attached himself to me of his own accord, and I scarcely remember when he began to do so. His principal duty consisted in washing my linen. For this purpose there was a basin in the middle of the courtyard, round which the convicts washed their clothes in prison buckets.

Suchiloff found means of rendering me a number of small services. He boiled my samovar, ran to perform various commissions for me, got me all kinds of things, mended my clothes, and greased my boots four times a month. He did all this with the utmost zeal, with a business-like air, as if he was conscious of the importance of what he performed. He seemed to have linked his fate to mine, and interested himself in all

my affairs. He never said, for instance, 'You have so many shirts,' or 'your waistcoat is torn'; but 'We have so many shirts,' our waistcoat is torn.' I had somehow inspired him with admiration, and I really believe I was his sole concern in life. As he knew no trade whatever, his only source of income was from me. It must be understood that I paid him very little, but he was always delighted with whatever he received. He would have been destitute had he not been my servant; he preferred me to others because of my greater affability, and, above all, my larger generosity. He was one of those fellows who never get rich, and never know how to manage their affairs; one of those who were hired by the gamblers to watch all night in the corridor, listening for the least noise that might announce the arrival of the governor, and who, in the event of a night inspection received nothing, unless it were a flogging for their lack of watchfulness. One characteristic of this type is a complete lack of personality, which seems altogether to have deserted them.

Suchiloff was a poor, meek fellow; all the courage seemed to have been beaten out of him, although he had in fact been born like that. On no account whatever would he have raised his hand against anyone in the prison. I always pitied him without knowing why, and I could not look at him without feeling the deepest compassion. If asked to explain this, I should find it impossible to do so. I could never get him to talk, and he never became animated except when, to put an end to all attempts at conversation, I gave him something to do or sent him on an errand. I soon found that he loved to be ordered about. Neither tall nor short, neither ugly nor handsome, neither stupid nor intelligent, neither old nor young, it would be difficult accurately to describe this man, except that his face was slightly pitted after small-pox, and that he had fair hair. He belonged, as far as I could make out, to the same company as Sirotkin. The prisoners sometimes laughed at him because he had 'exchanged.' During the march to Siberia he had 'exchanged' for a red shirt and a silver rouble. It was thought comic that he should have sold himself for such a small sum, to take the name of another prisoner in place of his own, and consequently to accept the other's sentence. Strange as it may appear, it was nevertheless true. This custom, which had become traditional and was still practised at the time I was sent to Siberia, I at first refused to believe, but found afterwards that it really existed. This is how the exchange was effected:

A company of prisoners starts for Siberia. Among them there are exiles of all kinds, some condemned to hard labour, others to labour in the mines, others to simple colonization. On the way out, no matter at what stage of the journey, in the Government of Perm, for instance, a prisoner wishes to exchange. Let us say his name is Mikhailoff, that he has been condemned to hard labour for a capital offence and does not like the prospect of passing long years in captivity. He is a cunning fellow and knows just what to do. He looks among his comrades for some simple, weak-minded fellow whose punishment is less severe, who has been condemned for a few years to the mines or hard labour, or has perhaps been simply exiled. At last he finds someone like Suchiloff, a former serf, sentenced only to become a colonist. The man has travelled fifteen hundred versts (about one thousand miles) without a kopeck, for the good reason that he

and his kind are always without money. Fatigued and exhausted, he can get nothing to eat beyond the fixed rations, nothing to wear apart from his convict's uniform.

Mikhailoff strikes up a conversation with Suchiloff; they suit one another, and are soon on friendly terms. Finally, at some station, Mikhailoff makes his comrade drunk, and then asks him to exchange.

'My name is Mikhailoff,' he says, 'I'm condemned to hard labour but in my case it will be nothing of the kind, as I am to enter a particular special section. I'm classed with the hard-labour men, but in this special division the work is not so severe.'

Before the special section was abolished many persons, even in the official world of St Petersburg, were unaware of its existence. It was stationed in some remote corner of one of the most distant regions of Siberia, and one was unlikely to hear much about it. It was insignificant, moreover, on account of its limited numbers, which in my time did not exceed seventy. I have since met men who have served in Siberia and know the country well, and yet have never heard of the 'special section.' In the rules and regulations there are only six lines about this institution.

Now, attached to the convict establishment at is a special section reserved for the most dangerous criminals, and where the severest forms of labour await them. The prisoners themselves know nothing of this section. Was it a temporary or permanent institution? Neither Suchiloff nor any of his companions, nor Mikhailoff himself even can guess the significance of those two words. Mikhailoff, however, has his suspicions as to the true character of the section: from the gravity of the crime for which he is forced to march three or four thousand versts on foot. It is certain he is on his way to no soft spot. Suchiloff, on the other hand, is to be a colonist, and what could Mikhailoff desire better than that?

'Won't you exchange?' he asks. Suchiloff is a little drunk, he is a simple-minded man, full of gratitude to the comrade who entertains him, and dare not refuse; he has heard, moreover, from other prisoners, that these exchanges are made, and understands, therefore, that there is nothing extraordinary or outlandish in the proposition made to him. An agreement is reached: the cunning Mikhailoff, profiting by Suchiloff's simplicity, buys his name for a red shirt and a silver rouble which are handed over before witnesses. Next day Suchiloff is sober, but he is given more liquor; he drinks up his own rouble, and after a while the red shirt suffers the same fate.

'If you don't like the bargain we made, give me back my money,' says Mikhailoff. But where is Suchiloff to get a rouble? If he does not give it back, the convicts' association will force him to keep his promise. The prisoners are most sensitive on such points; he must carry out his obligations. The association requires it, and in case of disobedience woe to the offender! He will be killed, or at least seriously intimidated. Indeed, if the association once showed mercy to men who had broken their word, it would cease to exist. if a promise can be revoked, and a contract voided after the stipulated sum has been paid, who would be bound by such an agreement? It is a question of life or death for the association, and prisoners in consequence adhere strictly to the rule.

Suchiloff accordingly finds it impossible to withdraw, that nothing can save him, and he therefore agrees to all that is required of him. The bargain is then made known to the whole convoy, and if denunciation is feared those whose loyalty is suspect are liberally treated. In any case, what does it matter to others whether Mikhailoff or Suchiloff goes to the devil? They have had free drinks, they have been entertained without cost to themselves, and none reveals the secret.

At the next station there is a roll-call. When Mikhailoff's name is called, Suchiloff answers 'Present,' Mikhailoff does the same for Suchiloff, and the journey is continued. The matter is now as good as forgotten. At Tobolsk the convoy breaks up: Mikhailoff becomes a colonist, while Suchiloff is sent to the special section under double escort. It would be useless now to cry out and protest. What proof would there be? It would take years to decide the case, and what benefit would the complainant derive? Where, moreover, are the witnesses? They would deny everything, even if they could be found.

This is how Suchiloff, for a silver rouble and a red shirt, landed up in the special section. He was a laughing-stock, not because he had exchanged-though in general the convicts despised a man who had been foolish enough to exchange an easy task for a harder one-but simply because he had received nothing for the bargain except a red shirt and a rouble, which was certainly a ridiculous consideration.

As a rule those exchanges were made for relatively large sums: several ten-rouble notes sometimes changed hands. But Suchiloff was so devoid of character, so insignificant, such a perfect nonentity, that one could scarcely even laugh at him. He and I had lived a considerable time together, I had grown accustomed to him, and he had formed an attachment for me, when one day-I can never forgive myself for what I did-he failed to carry out an order. When he came to ask for his money I had the cruelty to say: 'You don't forget to ask for your money, but you don't do what you're told.' Suchiloff remained silent and hastened to do as he was bid, but he suddenly became very sad. Two days passed, and I could scarcely believe that my remark had affected him so deeply. I knew that someone named Vassilieff was constantly dunning him for a small debt; he was probably short of money, and dared not ask me for any.

'Suchiloff,' I said, 'you're in need of cash, to pay Vassilieff. Take this.'

I was seated on my camp-bedstead. Suchiloff remained standing before me, amazed that I had myself proposed giving him money, and that I had remembered his difficult position; the more so as he had recently on several occasions asked me to advance him money, and scarcely hoped that I would oblige him once again. He stared at the paper I held out to him, then looked at me, turned sharply on his heel, and went out. Astonished at his behaviour, I followed, and discovered him behind the barrack. He was standing with his head against the palisade and his arms resting on the stakes.

'What's the matter, Suchiloff?' I asked.

He made no reply, and to my great surprise I saw that he was on the verge of tears.

'You think, Alexander Petrovitch,' he said, in a trembling voice and trying not to look at me, 'that I care only for your money, but I'

He turned away from me, laid his forehead against the palisade, and began to sob. It was the first time I had seen a man weep in prison. I had much trouble consoling him, and thenceforward he served me, if possible, more diligently than ever. He was always on the alert for my orders, but by almost imperceptible signs I could tell that in his heart he would never forgive my reproach. The others continued to laugh at him, pull his leg, and even insult him at every opportunity. But he never lost his temper; on the contrary, he remained on good terms with all. It is indeed difficult really to know a man, even when you have lived with him for years.

It was some time before I began to understand the significance of prison life. Although I kept my eyes open I did not at first appreciate a number of facts that stared me in the face: I was looking at them from the wrong angle, and the only impression I received was one of unmitigated gloom. What contributed more than anything else to this view was

my meeting with Af, a convict who had entered the prison

before me, and whose character had shocked me in those first few days. His baseness increased my mental suffering, which was already sufficiently acute. He offered the most repulsive example of that degradation to which a man may fall when all feeling of honour has died within him. This young man of noble birth-I have spoken of him before-used to inform the governor, through his servant Fedka, of everything that went on in barracks. Here is the man's history.

While still a student, his evil ways had led to a quarrel with his parents. He went to St Petersburg and earned his living as a common informer, never hesitating to sell the blood of ten men in order to gratify his insatiable thirst for the grossest and most licentious pleasures. He was not without intelligence; but he gradually became so perverted in the taverns and brothels of St Petersburg that he finally took part in an affair which he knew must lead to disaster. He was condemned to exile and ten years' hard labour in Siberia. One might have thought that such a frightful blow would have brought him to his senses, that it would have caused some reaction, some change of heart, and brought about a crisis; but he accepted his fate without the least concern. It did not frighten him; the only thing he disliked was the necessity of working and of abandoning for ever his evil life. The label of convict had no effect but to prepare him for new acts of baseness and more hideous villainies than any of which he had previously been guilty.

'I am now a convict, and can crawl at ease, without shame.' That was the light in which he regarded his new condition. I think of this disgusting creature as of some monstrous! phenomenon. During the many years I lived with murderers, debauchees, and proved rascals, I never met a case of such complete moral abasement, determined corruption, and shameless wickedness. Among us there was a parricide of noble birth, to whom I have already alluded. Yet there was plenty of evidence that he was much better, far more humane than Af. During the whole term of my imprisonment, Af was never anything more in my eyes than a lump of flesh furnished with teeth and stomach, greedy for the most vile and bestial enjoyments, for the satisfaction of which he was

prepared even to commit murder I do not exaggerate in the least. I recognized in him one of the most perfect specimens of animal passion, restrained by no principles, no rule. How his eternal smile disgusted me! He was a monster—a moral Quasimodo. At the same time he was intelligent, cunning, good-looking, had received some education, and possessed considerable ability. Fire, plague, famine, no matter what scourge, is preferable to the presence of such a man in human society. I have already said that espionage and denunciation flourished in prison as the natural product of degradation, without the convicts thinking much of it. On the contrary, they maintained friendly relations with A-f. They were more affable with him than with anyone

else. The favour shown towards him by our drunken friend, the governor, gave him a certain importance and even moral superiority in the eyes of the convicts. Later on this cowardly wretch escaped with another convict and their escort; but of that I shall speak at the proper time and place. At first he hung about me, thinking I did not know his story. I repeat, he poisoned the first days of my imprisonment so as to drive me nearly to despair. I was terrified by the mass of baseness and cowardice into the midst of which I had been thrown. I imagined that everyone else was as foul and cowardly as he, but I made a mistake in supposing that everyone resembled A-f.

During the first three days, when I was not lying stretched out on my bed, I did nothing but wander about the prison. The authorities had supplied me with a piece of linen, and I entrusted it to a reliable man to be made up into shirts. On the advice of Akim Akimitch, too, I obtained a folding mattress: it was of felt, covered with linen, as thin as a pancake, and very hard to anyone who was not accustomed to it. Akim Akimitch promised to get me all the most essential things, and with his own hands made me a patchwork blanket from a pile of old trousers and waistcoats which I had bought from various prisoners. Clothes issued to convicts become their property when they have been worn the regulation time. Then they are sold without delay; for however much worn an article of clothing may be, it always possesses a certain value. All this surprised me, especially at my first contact with this strange new world. I became as low as my companions, as typical a convict as they. Their customs, their habits, their ideas influenced me thoroughly and externally became my own, without, however, affecting my inner self. I was astonished and confused as though I had never heard of or suspected anything of the kind before; and yet I had known, or at least been told, what to expect. Direct experience, however, made a different impression on me from the mere description. How could I suppose, for instance, that old rags still possessed some value? And yet my blanket was made entirely of tatters. It is difficult to describe the cloth used for prison uniform. It resembled that thick, grey cloth manufactured for the army, but after being worn some little time it became threadbare and tore with abominable ease. The uniform was supposed to last for a whole year, but it never did so. The prisoner works and carries heavy burdens, and the cloth naturally wears out, and is soon full of holes. Our sheepskins were intended to be worn for three years. During the whole of that time they served as overcoats, blankets, and pillows; they were very durable. Nevertheless, at the end of the third year, it was not uncommon to

see them mended with ordinary linen. Although they were now very much worn, it was always possible to sell them at the rate of forty kopecks apiece. The better preserved ones even fetched sixty kopecks, which was a very large sum in prison.

Money, as I have said, has a sovereign value in those places, and a prisoner who has some pecuniary resources certainly suffers ten times less than one who has nothing.

‘When the Government supplies all the convict’s needs, what can he want with money?’ reasoned our chief.

Nevertheless, I maintain that if the prisoners had not been allowed to possess anything of their own, they would have gone mad or died like flies. They would have committed unheard-of crimes-some from weariness or grief, the rest in order to get sooner punished and, as they say, ‘have a change.’ If a convict earns a few kopecks by the sweat of his brow or at considerable risk spends his money recklessly, like a silly child, that does not prove, as might be thought, he does not appreciate its value. The convict is greedy for money, to the point of madness, and if he throws it away he does so in order to procure what he values far above money-liberty, or at least a semblance of liberty.

Convicts are dreamers; I will speak of that further on in more detail. At present I will only remark that I have heard men condemned to twenty years’ hard labour say quietly: ‘When I’ve finished my time, please God I’ll-’ The very words hard labour, or forced labour, indicate that the man has lost his freedom; and when he spends his money he is merely satisfying a natural craving.

In spite of the branding-iron and chains, in spite of the palisade which hides the free world from his eyes, and encloses him in a cage like some wild beast, he can still obtain vodka and other delights. He may even, on rare occasions, manage to bribe his immediate superiors, the veteran soldiers and non-commissioned officers, and persuade them to close their eyes to his breaches of prison discipline. He loves, moreover, to swagger, that is to say, impress his companions and persuade himself for a time that he enjoys more liberty than in fact he does. In short, the poor devil longs to convince himself of the impossible. This is why convicts take such pleasure in boasting and exaggerating their own unhappy personalities to the point of burlesque.

They find in boasting the one thing they long for-a semblance of life and liberty. A millionaire, indeed, with a rope round his neck would surely give all his millions for one breath of air. Yet there is danger in boasting. Suppose a prisoner has lived quietly for several years and by good conduct won certain privileges. Suddenly, to the astonishment of his superiors, he becomes mutinous, plays the very devil, and even ventures upon some capital crime such as murder, violation, etc. All wonder at the cause of this extraordinary conduct on the part of a man believed to be incapable of such a thing; but it is simply the convulsive manifestation of his personality, an instinctive melancholia, an uncontrollable desire for self-assertion which obscures his reason. It is a sort of epileptic fit, a spasm. Even so must a man who is buried alive and suddenly wakes up strike against the lid of his coffin. He tries to rise, to push it from him, though reason must convince him that his efforts are useless.

Reason, however, has no part in this convulsion. It must not be forgotten that almost every act of self-assertion on the part of a convia is regarded as a crime. Accordingly, he takes no account of the importance or triviality of his act: a debauch is a debauch, danger is danger; as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. It is the first step that counts.

Little by little the man becomes excited, intoxicated, and can no longer contain himself. For that reason it would be better not to drive him to extremes; everybody would be much better for it.

But how can that be managed?

Chapter VII: The First Month (Continued)

When I first entered the prison I possessed a small sum of money; but I carried very little of it about with me lest it should be confiscated. I had gummed some bank-notes into the binding of my New Testament, which had been given to me at Tobolsk by someone who had been exiled many years previously, and who was accustomed to regard other 'unfortunates' as his brethren.

There are men in Siberia who spend their lives giving brotherly assistance to the 'unfortunates.' They feel the same sympathy for them as they would for their own children: their compassion is something sacred and wholly disinterested. I cannot help here relating quite briefly an encounter which I had at about this time.

In the neighbouring town there lived a widow, Nastasia Ivanovna. None of us, of course, was in direct contact with this woman. She had made it the object of her life to assist all those in exile, and particularly us convicts. Had there been some misfortune in her family? Had someone dear to her suffered punishment similar to ours? I do not know. In any case, she did what she could for us, though it was little enough for she was very poor. But we felt, when shut up in prison, that we had a devoted friend outside. She often brought us news, which we were very glad to hear, for nothing of the kind reached us.

When I left the prison to be taken to another town I had the opportunity of calling upon her and making her acquaintance. She lived in one of the suburbs, at the house of a near relation.

Nastasia Ivanovna was neither old nor young, neither pretty nor ugly. It was difficult, impossible even, to know whether she was intelligent and well-bred. But through her actions there shone an infinite compassion, an irresistible desire to please, to solace, to be in some way helpful. All this could be read in the sweetness of her smile.

I spent a whole evening at her house with other prisoners. She looked us straight in the face, laughed when we laughed, did everything we asked her, agreed with all we said, and did her best in every way to entertain us. She gave us tea and various little delicacies. We felt sure that she would have enjoyed being rich only in order to entertain us the better and offer us more substantial consolation.

When we wished her good-bye, she presented each of us with a cardboard cigar-case as a souvenir. She had made them herself-heaven knows how-with coloured paper, the paper with which schoolboys' copy-books are covered. All round this cardboard cigar-case she had gummed, by way of ornament, a narrow fringe of gilt paper.

'As you smoke, these cigar-cases will perhaps be of use to you,' she said, as if excusing herself for making such a present.

I have both read and heard it said that love of one's neighbour is only a form of selfishness. What selfishness could there have been in this woman's charity? That I could never understand.

Although I had not much money when I arrived at the prison, I could never feel seriously annoyed with men who, after borrowing and letting me down in the first few days, expected me to lend a second, a third time, and even oftener. What I did not like was the thought that these people, with their smiling knavery, took me for a fool and laughed at me just because I lent money for the fifth time. I must have seemed to them a veritable dupe. If, on the contrary, I had refused and sent them away, I am certain that they would have had much more respect for me. Still, though it vexed me very much, I could not refuse them.

I was rather anxious during the first days to discover where I stood, and to decide what rule of conduct I should follow in my relations with others. I felt and perfectly understood that, the place being in every way new to me, I was walking in darkness, and that it would be impossible to live ten years in darkness. I decided to act frankly, according to the dictates of my conscience and personal feeling. But I also realized that while this decision might be all very well in theory, I should, in practice, be guided by events as yet unforeseen. Therefore, in addition to all the petty annoyances caused to me by my confinement, one terrible anguish laid hold of me and tormented me more and more.

'The house of the dead!' I said to myself as night fell and watched from the doorway of our barrack the prisoners just come from work walking about the courtyard, passing between the kitchen and the barracks. As I studied their movements and their faces I tried to guess what sort of men they were, and what their dispositions might be.

They lounged about there, some with lowered brows, others full of gaiety-one of those two expressions was seen on very convict's face-exchanged insults, or talked of trivialities. Sometimes, too, they wandered about alone, apparently occupied with their own reflections; some of them with a worn-out, pathetic look, others with the conceited air of superiority. Yes, here, even here!-caps balanced on the side of their heads, their sheepskin coats flung picturesquely over their shoulders, insolence in their eyes, and mockery on their lips.

'Here is the world to which I am condemned, in which, despite myself, I must somehow live,' I said.

I endeavoured to question Akim Akimitch, with whom, for the sake of company, I liked to take my tea; for I wanted to know something about the different convicts. In parenthesis we may say that tea was almost my only nourishment in the early days of

my imprisonment. Akim Akimitch never refused to share it with me, and he himself heated our tin samovars, which were made in prison and hired out by M-.

Akim Akimitch generally drank a glass of tea (he had classes of his own) calmly and silently, then thanked me and at once went to work on my blanket; but he had not been able to tell me what I wanted to know, and could not even understand my desire to know the characters of the men around me. He merely listened with a cunning smile which is still vivid in my memory. 'No,' I thought, 'I must find out for myself; it is useless to interrogate others.'

Early on the morning of the fourth day, the convicts were drawn up in two ranks in the courtyard before the guardhouse, close to the prison gates. Before and behind them were soldiers with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets.

A soldier has the right to fire on any convict who tries to escape, but he is answerable for his shot if there is no absolute necessity to open fire. The same thing applies to mutiny. But who would think of openly taking to flight?

The engineer officer arrived accompanied by the so-called conductor and some non-commissioned officers of the Line, together with sappers and soldiers told off to superintend the work.

The roll was called, and the convicts who were going to the tailors' shop were marched off first. These men worked inside the prison, and made clothes for all the inmates. Others went to the outer workshops, until it was the turn of those detailed for field labour. I was of this group: there were altogether twenty of us. Behind the fortress on the frozen river were two Government barges. They were useless, and had to be broken up so that the timber might not be lost. This timber was itself almost worthless, for fire-wood can be bought in the town at a nominal price, the whole countryside being covered with forests.

The work was simply intended to give us something to do, as was understood on both sides; and accordingly we went to it apathetically. Things were very different when there was a useful job or some definite scheme to be carried out. In that case, although the men themselves derived no profit, they tried to get it done as soon as possible, and took a pride in doing it quickly. But when the labour was a matter of form rather than of necessity, no high-powered effort could be expected. We had to work until the eleven o'clock drum told us to cease.

The day was warm and foggy, the snow was on the point of melting. Our group walked towards the bank behind the fortress, our chains rattling beneath our garments; the sound was clear and ringing. Two or three convicts went to collect tools from the depot.

I walked ahead with the others, rather excited, for I was anxious to discover in what this field labour consisted, to what sort of work I was condemned, and how I should do it for the first time in my life.

I remember the smallest particulars. As we walked along we met a townsman with a long beard, who stopped and slipped his hand into his pocket. One man fell out, took off his cap and received alms to the extent of five kopecks- then hurried back. The

townsman made the sign of the cross and went his way. Those five kopecks were spent the same morning in buying scones of white bread which were shared equally amongst us. Some of my squad were gloomy and taciturn, others indifferent and indolent. There were some who kept up a perpetual chatter. One of them was extremely gay, heaven knows why; he sang and danced as we went along, shaking and ringing his chains at every step. He was a huge fat man, the same who, on the day of my arrival at washing time, had quarrelled with one of his companions about the water, and had ventured to compare him to some sort of bird. His name was Scuratoff. He finished by shouting out a lively song of which I remember the burden:

‘They married me without my consent, When I was at the mill.’

Nothing was wanting but a balalaika.

His extraordinary good humour was justly reproved by several of the prisoners, who took offence at it.

‘Listen to his row,’ said one of the convicts, ‘why can’t he shut up?’

‘The wolf has but one song, and this Tuliak is stealing it from him,’ said another whose accent proclaimed him a Little Russian.

‘Of course I’m from Tula,’ replied Scuratoff; ‘but we don’t stuff ourselves to bursting as you do in Pultava.’

‘Liar! What did you eat yourself? Bark shoes and cabbage soup?’

‘You talk as if the devil fed you on sweet almonds,’ broke in a third.

‘I admit, my friend, that I’m softly nurtured,’ said Scuratoff with a gentle sigh, as though he were really reproaching himself for his softness. ‘I was lapped in luxury from earliest childhood, fed on plums and dainty cakes. My brothers even now have a large business at Moscow: they’re wholesale dealers in the wind that blows-immensely rich men, as you may imagine.’

‘And what did you sell?’

‘I was very successful, and when I received my first two hundred’

‘Roubles? Impossible!’ interrupted one of the prisoners, struck with amazement at hearing of so large a sum.

‘No, my good fellow, not two hundred roubles, two hundred strokes. Luka! I say Luka!’

‘Some have the right to call me Luka, but to you I’m Luka Kouzmitch,’ retorted a small, feeble convict with a pointed nose.

‘The devil take you, you’re really not worth speaking to; yet I wanted to be civil to you. But to continue my story. This is how it happened that I left Moscow. I received my last fifteen strokes and was then sent off, and was at’

‘But what were you sent for?’ asked another convict who had been listening attentively.

‘Don’t ask stupid questions. I was explaining to you how it was I did not make my fortune at Moscow; and yet you can’t imagine how anxious I was to be rich.’

Several prisoners began to laugh. Scuratoff was one of those lively persons, full of animal spirits, who take a pleasure in amusing their graver companions, and who, as

a matter of course, received no reward except insults. He belonged to a type of men of whose characteristics I shall, perhaps, have occasion to say more.

‘And what a fellow he is now!’ observed Luka Kouzmitch. ‘His clothes alone must be worth a hundred roubles.’

Scuratoff had the oldest and greasiest sheepskin imaginable. It was patched in many different places with pieces that scarcely hung together. He looked at Luka attentively from head to foot.

‘It’s my head, friend,’ he said, ‘my head that’s worth the money. When I said good-bye to Moscow I felt that at any rate my head was going to make the journey on my shoulders. Farewell, Moscow, I shall never forget your free air, nor the tremendous flogging I got. As for my sheepskin, you’re not! obliged to look at it.’

‘Perhaps you ‘d like me to look at your head?’

‘If it was really his own natural property, but it was given him in charity,’ cried Luka Kouzmitch. ‘It was a gift made; to him at Tumen when the convoy was passing through the town.’

‘Scuratoff, had you a workshop?’

‘Workshop! He was only a cobbler,’ said one of the convicts.

‘It’s true,’ said Scuratoff, without noticing the caustic tone of the speaker. ‘I tried to mend boots, but never got beyond a single pair.’

‘And were you paid for them?’

‘Well, I found a fellow who certainly neither feared God nor honoured either his father or his mother, and as a punishment Providence made him buy the work of my hands.’

The group round Scuratoff burst out laughing.

‘I also worked once at the prison,’ continued Scuratoff, with imperturbable coolness. ‘I mended boots for Stepan Fedoritch, the lieutenant.’

‘And was he satisfied?’

‘No, my dear fellows, indeed he wasn’t; he blackguarded me enough to last me for the rest of my life. He kicked my backside, too. What a rage he was in! Ah! my life’s been a failure. I see no fun whatever in prison.’ He began to sing again.

‘Akolina’s husband is in the courtyard. There he waits.’

Again he sang, and again he danced and leaped.

‘Most unbecoming!’ murmured the Little Russian, who was walking by my side.

‘Frivolous man!’ said another in a serious, decided tone.

I could not make out why they insulted Scuratoff, nor why they despised those convicts who were light-hearted, as they seemed to do. I attributed the anger of the Little Russian and the others to a feeling of personal hostility, but in this I was wrong. They were vexed that Scuratoff had not that puffed-up air of false dignity with which the whole prison was impregnated.

They did not, however, disapprove of all the jokers, nor treat them all like Scuratoff. Some of them were men who would stand no nonsense, and neither forgive nor forget. It was necessary to treat them with respect. One of these fellows was a good-natured,

lively type, whom I did not see in his true colours until later on. He was a tall young man, with pleasant manners and not without good looks. His face, too, wore a comic expression. He was known as the Sapper because he had served in the Engineers. He belonged to the special section.

But all the serious-minded convicts were not so particular as the Little Russian, who could not bear to see people gay.

There were several prisoners who wished to be thought superior, either by virtue of their manual skill, of their general ingenuity, of their character, or of their wit. Many of them were intelligent and energetic, and achieved what they desired -a reputation for pre-eminence, that is to say, and the enjoyment of moral influence over their companions. They often hated one another, and were envied by the remainder of their fellow prisoners, upon whom they looked down with an air of dignity and condescension, never deigning to quarrel without good cause. Enjoying the favour of officialdom, they exercised some measure of authority at the place of work, and none of them would have lowered himself so far as to quarrel about a song. These men were most polite to me throughout my imprisonment, though by no means communicative.

At last we reached the river bank; a little lower down lay the old hulk which we were to break up, stuck fast in the ice. On the other side of the water was the blue steppe and the sad horizon. I expected to see the whole party set to work. Nothing of the kind happened: some immediately sat down casually on logs of wood that lay near the bank, and nearly all took from their pockets pouches of native tobacco-which was sold in leaf at the market at the rate of three kopecks a pound-and short wooden pipes. They lighted them while the soldiers encircled us and looked on with obvious boredom.

‘Who the devil had the idea of sinking this barge?’ asked one of the convicts in a loud voice, without addressing anyone in particular.

‘Were they very anxious, then, to have it broken up?’

‘The people were not afraid to give us work,’ said another.

‘Where are all those peasants going to work?’ said the first, after a short silence. He had not even heard his companion’s answer, and was pointing to the distance, where a troop of peasants were marching in file across the virgin snow.

All the convicts turned slowly in that direction, and began from mere idleness to laugh at the peasants as they approached.

One of them, the last of the line, was the source of particular amusement: he walked with his arms apart, his head on one side, and wore a tall pointed cap. His shadow was cast in clear outline on the white snow.

‘Look at Petrovitch,’ said one of my companions, imitating the local accent. Oddly enough, the convicts looked down on the peasants, although they were for the most part peasants themselves.

‘Look at that fellow on the end, he looks as if he were planting radishes.’

‘He’s an important chap, he has lots of money,’ said a third.

They all began to laugh without, however, seeming genuinely amused.

Meanwhile a scone-seller had approached. She was a brisk, lively person, and it was with her that the five kopecks given by the townsman were spent.

The young fellow who sold white bread in the prison took two dozen of her scones, and then tried beating down the price. She would not, however, agree to his terms.

At this point the sergeant in charge arrived, cane in hand.

‘What are you sitting down for? Get on with your work.’

‘Detail us off, Ivan Matveitch,’ said one of our so-called foremen, as he slowly got up.

‘You know your jobs. Dismantle that barge and quick about it.’

At last the convicts rose and made their way slowly down to the river. Instructions now fell thick and fast. The barge, it seemed, was not to be actually broken up: the skeleton of the hull was to be left intact, and this was not an easy thing to manage.

‘Pull this beam out, that’s the first thing to do,’ cried one convict, a mere navvy who knew nothing whatever about it. This man, very quiet and a little stupid, had not previously spoken. He now bent down, took hold of a heavy beam with both hands, and waited for someone to help him. No one, however, seemed inclined to do so.

‘You! You’ll never manage it; not even your grandad the bear could do it,’ muttered someone between his teeth.

‘Well, chum, are we going to make a start? I can’t carry on alone,’ said the other morosely, and he stood upright.

‘Well, what’s the hurry unless you’re going to do the whole job on your own?’

‘I was only making a remark,’ said the poor fellow, excusing himself for his forwardness.

‘Must you have blankets to keep yourselves warm, or do you want to be otherwise heated this winter?’ bellowed a corporal at the twenty men who seemed to loathe to begin work. ‘Get on with it at once.’

‘It’s never any use being in a hurry, Ivan Matveitch.’

‘Look here, Savelieff, you’re doing nothing at all. What are you looking about for? Are your eyes for sale, by any chance? Come along now.’

‘But I can’t do the work single-handed.’

‘Tell each of us what to do, Ivan Matveitch.’

‘I told you before that I have no special tasks to give you. Get to work on the barge, and when you’ve finished we’ll go back home. Get on with your work, I tell you.’

The prisoners began work, but without much vigour or goodwill, and the sergeant in charge was understandably furious. While the first rivet was being drawn it suddenly snapped.

‘It broke in pieces,’ said a convict in self-justification. Impossible, they all clamoured, to carry on like this. What was to be done? A long discussion took place between the prisoners, and little by little they began to quarrel; nor did this seem likely to be the end of it. The sergeant was yelling and brandishing his cane, but the second rivet snapped like the first. It was then agreed that hatchets were of no use, and that other tools must be procured. Accordingly, two prisoners were sent under escort to the fortress to

get the proper instruments. Awaiting their return, the others quite calmly sat down on the bank, pulled out their pipes, and began once more to smoke. Finally, the sergeant spat with contempt.

‘Well,’ he exclaimed, ‘you people won’t die from overwork. My God, what a crowd!’ he grumbled, ill-humouredly. He shrugged his shoulders and went off towards the fortress, waving his stick.

An hour later the clerk of works arrived. He listened quietly to what the convicts had to say, told them that the job he wanted them to do was only to detach four rivets without breaking them, and partially dismantle the barge. As soon as this was done, they could go home. The task was not easy, but, lord! how the convicts now set to work! Where now was their idleness, their want of skill? Hatchets began to dance, and the rivets were quickly sprung. Those who had no hatchets made use of thick sticks to push beneath the rivets, and thus in due time and in artistic fashion they levered them out. The convicts seemed suddenly to have become intelligent in their conversation, and no more insults were heard. Everyone knew perfectly what to say, to do, and what to advise. Exactly half an hour before the beating of the drum, the appointed task was finished, and we returned to the prison fatigued, but pleased to have knocked off thirty minutes from the regular working hours.

As regards myself, I have only one remark to make: I seemed all the time to be in somebody’s way, I was told to ‘get out of the light,’ and generally abused. Any one of the ragged lot, the most miserable, numbskull, ham-handed navvy, who would not have dared to utter a syllable to the other convicts, took upon himself to swear at me if I approached him, under pretext that I interfered with him in his work. At last one of the better types said to me frankly but coarsely:

‘What are you doing here? Clear off! No one asked for your help.’

‘Hear, hear!’ added another.

‘You’d do better to take a pitcher,’ said a third, ‘and carry water to the building site, or go to the tobacco factory. You’re no use here.’

I was obliged to keep apart. To remain idle while others were working seemed a shame; but when I moved to the opposite end of the barge I was insulted anew.

‘A fine crew we’ve got!’ they cried. ‘What can you do with fellows like him?’

Nor was this good-natured fun: they were delighted with the opportunity of scoffing at a gentleman.

The reader will now understand why in those early days I was at a loss to know how I should ever manage to get on with such people. I foresaw that such incidents would often recur; but I resolved not to alter my line of conduct in any way, whatever the result might be. I had decided to live simply and intelligently, without manifesting the least desire to be on familiar terms with my fellow prisoners, but also without repelling them if they sought my company; to appear indifferent to their hatred and their threats; and to pretend as far as possible not to notice them. Such was my plan for I realized from the outset that they would despise me if I adopted any other course.

When I returned to prison in the evening, fatigued and harassed at the end of an afternoon's Work, a deep sadness took possession of me. How many thousand days must I pass like this one? That thought was constantly in my mind. Towards nightfall I was wandering about alone near the palisade at the rear of our barrack, deep in meditation, when I suddenly caught sight of my friend Bull running to meet me.

Bull was the prison dog. Every prison has its dog as companies of infantry, batteries of artillery, and squadrons of cavalry have theirs. He had been there for a long time, belonged to no one, looked upon everyone as his master, and lived on scraps from the kitchen. He was a large black-and-white dog, not very old, with intelligent eyes and a bushy tail. No one ever caressed him or paid the least attention to him; but as soon as I arrived I made friends with him by giving him a piece of bread. When I patted his back he stood motionless, looked at me with a pleased expression, and gently wagged his tail.

That evening, not having seen me the whole day-me, the first person who in so many years had thought of stroking him- he ran towards me, leaping and barking. I was so deeply moved that I could not help embracing him. I laid his head against my body; he placed his paws on my shoulders and looked me in the face.

'Here is a heaven-sent friend,' I told myself, and during those first unhappy weeks my first act on returning from work was to hurry with Bull to the back of the barrack, where he leaped around me with joy. I took his head in my hands and kissed it. At the same time a troubled, bitter feeling pressed my heart. I well remember thinking (and taking pleasure in the thought) that this was my one, my only friend in the world-my faithful dog, Bull.

Chapter VIII: New Acquaintances-petroff

Time passed, and little by little I accustomed myself to my new life. The scenes I witnessed day by day no longer afflicted me so keenly. In a word, the prison, its inhabitants, and its manners left me indifferent. To grow completely reconciled to the life was impossible, but I had to accept it as an inevitable fact. I had thrown off my earlier anxiety: I no longer wandered about the prison like a lost soul, and no longer allowed myself to be obsessed with worry. The ill-mannered curiosity of the convicts had somewhat abated, and I was no longer looked upon with that affectation of insolence previously displayed. They were no longer interested in me, and I was very glad of it. I began to feel at home in the barrack. I knew where to lie down and sleep at night; I gradually became accustomed to things the very idea of which would formerly have repelled me. I went regularly every week to have my head shaved. We were called every Saturday, one after another, to the guard-house, where the regimental barbers lathered our skulls with cold water and soap, and then scraped us with their saw-like razors.

The bare memory of this torture makes me shudder. However, I soon discovered a remedy, for Akim Akimitch introduced me to a prisoner in the military section who for one kopeck shaved his customers with his own razor. It was his trade. Many of the prisoners went to him merely to avoid the military barbers, though the latter were not men of weak nerves. Our barber was known as 'the governor.' Why, I cannot say; for so far as I could see he bore no resemblance whatever to any such official. As I write these Unes I can see him clearly with his thin, drawn face. He was a tall fellow, silent, rather stupid, and entirely absorbed in his business. He was never to be seen without a strop, upon which day and night he sharpened a razor which was always in admirable condition. He had certainly made this work the supreme object of his life; he was really happy when his razor was quite sharp and his services in demand. His lather was always warm, and he had a very light hand—a hand of velvet. He was proud of his skill, and used to take his kopeck with an air of nonchalance; one might have thought that he worked for love of his art, and not for material gain.

One Af was severely reprimanded by the prison governor because he had the misfortune to use the word 'governor' when referring to the barber who shaved him. The governor was in a violent rage.

'Blackguard,' he shouted, 'don't you know who is governor?'

and according to his habit he shook Af violently. 'The idea of calling a low-down convict "governor" in my presence!'

From the first day of my imprisonment I began to dream of my release. My favourite occupation was to count thousands and thousands of times, in a thousand different ways, the number of days that I had still to spend in prison. To regain my freedom; that was my one ambition, as I am sure it is of every man deprived of his liberty. I cannot affirm that every convict entertained the same degree of hope, but their sanguine disposition often surprised me. Hope in a prisoner differs essentially from that enjoyed by a free man. The latter may desire to improve his condition, or to succeed in some enterprise which he has undertaken, but meanwhile he goes about his business and is swept away in the whirlwind of daily life. It is very different with a convict under life sentence. He too may be said to live, but having been condemned to an indefinite term, he takes a more indefinite view of his situation than does one who knows how many years he has to serve. The man condemned to a comparatively short period feels that he is temporarily away from home; he considers himself, so to speak, as on a visit; he regards the twenty years of his punishment as two years at most; he is sure that at fifty, when he has finished his sentence, he will be as young and as lively as at thirty-five. 'I have time before me,' he thinks, and strives obstinately to dispel discouraging thoughts. Even a man condemned for life believes that some day an order may arrive from St Petersburg: 'Transport So-and-so to the mines at Nertchinsk and fix a term for his detention.' That would be grand, first because it takes six months to get to Nertchinsk, and life on the road is a hundred times preferable to the prison. He will serve his time at Nertchinsk, and then. More than one grey-haired old man speculates in this way.

At Tobolsk I saw men fastened to the wall at the bedside by a chain about two yards long. That is the punishment for serious crime committed on the way to Siberia; they are kept chained up for five or even ten years. They are nearly all brigands, and I saw only one who looked like a man of good breeding. He had been in some branch of the civil service, and spoke softly with a lisp; his smile was sweet but sickly. He showed us his chain, and pointed out the most convenient way of lying down. He must have been a pleasant fellow! All these poor wretches are perfectly well-behaved; they all seem satisfied, and yet they are eaten up with desire to finish their period in chains. Why? it will be asked. Simply because they will then leave their low, damp, stifling cells for the prison courtyard. But they will never be released from prison; they are aware that those who have once been chained up will never regain their freedom and will die in irons. They know all this, and yet they look forward anxiously to the day when they are no longer chained. Without that hope they could never remain five or six years fastened to a wall, without dying or going mad.

I soon understood that work alone could save me, by fortifying my bodily health, whereas incessant restlessness of mind, nervous irritation, and the close air of the barrack would ruin it completely. I should leave prison vigorous and resilient. I did not deceive myself, work and movement were invaluable.

I was horrified to see one of my comrades melt away like a piece of wax. At the beginning of my sentence he was young, handsome, and full of vigour; yet when he left his health was ruined, and his legs could no longer support him. His chest, too, was oppressed by asthma.

‘No,’ I said to myself as I watched him. ‘I wish to live, and I will live.’

My love of work exposed me at first to the contempt and bitter sarcasm of my comrades; but I paid no attention to them, and went with a light heart to every task. Sometimes, for instance, I was ordered to calcine and pound alabaster. This work, the first I was given, is easy. The engineers did their utmost not to overtax a gentleman; it was not indulgence, but simple justice. It would have been ridiculous to expect the same work from a labourer as from a man whose strength was less by half, and who had never worked with his hands. But this never meant that we were spoilt, for the leniency was unofficial, and we were strictly supervised. As really heavy work was by no means uncommon, it often happened that the task was beyond the strength of a gentleman, who thus suffered twice as much as his comrades.

Generally three or four men were sent to pound the alabaster, and old, feeble men were nearly always chosen. We were of the latter class. A skilled workman accompanied us, and for several years he was always the same one, Almazoff. He was stern, already advanced in years, sunburnt, and very thin; by no means communicative, moreover, and difficult to get on with. He despised us profoundly, but was of such a reserved disposition that he never broke into open abuse.’ The shed in which we calcined the alabaster was built on a sloping and deserted bank of the river. On a foggy winter’s day the view on the river and far beyond the opposite bank; was gloomy. There was something heart-rending in this dull, naked landscape; but it was still more depressing

when a brilliant sun shone above the boundless white plain. How! one would have liked to fly away beyond this steppe which, beginning on the opposite shore, stretched like a huge tablecloth for fifteen hundred versts to the south.

Almazoff went to work silently, with a disagreeable air. We were ashamed not to be able to help him more effectually, but he managed to do his work without our assistance, and seemed to wish us to understand that we were unfair towards him, and that we ought to repent our uselessness. Our work was to heat the oven for calcining the alabaster which we had gathered into heaps.

Next day, when the alabaster was fully calcined, we turned it out. Each man filled a box with the stuff which he then proceeded to crush; it was not an unpleasant job. The fragile stone soon became a brilliant white dust. We brandished our heavy hammers, and dealt such formidable blows that we admired our own strength. When we were tired we felt lighter, our cheeks were red, the blood circulated more rapidly in our veins. Almazoff would then look at us in a condescending manner, as he would have at little children. He smoked his pipe with an indulgent air, unable, however, to prevent himself from grumbling. He never opened his mouth except to complain; he was the same with everyone. At bottom, I believe, he was a kindly soul.

I had another job: it consisted in working the lathe wheel. This wheel was large and heavy; great strength was necessary to make it revolve, especially when the fellows in the engineering shop were making the balustrade of a staircase, or the foot of a large table, from a length of tree-trunk. No one man could have done the work alone. B(a gentleman) and I were regularly appointed to this task during several years.

B, though still young, was weak, but very friendly. He had been sent to prison a year before me, with two companions who were also of noble birth. One of them, an old man, used to pray day and night, and was greatly respected for it. He died in prison. The other was quite a young fellow, fresh-coloured, strong, and courageous. He had carried his companion B for several hundred versts, when, at the end of the first half-stage, he collapsed through fatigue. Their mutual love was worth seeing.

B was a perfectly well-bred man, of noble and generous disposition, but spoiled and irritated by illness. We used to turn the wheel well together, and the work interested us. Indeed, I found the exercise most beneficial.

I was, moreover, very fond of shovelling away the snow, which we generally did after the frequent gales of the winter. When a hurricane had been raging for an entire day, more than one house would be covered to the windows, if not completely buried. The wind died down, the sun reappeared, and we were ordered to dig out the buildings from the snowdrifts.

We were told off in large groups which sometimes consisted of the entire prison population. Each man received a shovel, and had to move a given quantity of snow, which sometimes appeared an impossible task. But we all set to work with a good will. The light powdery snow had not yet congealed, and was frozen only on the surface. We removed it in enormous shovelfuls, and scattered it over a wider area. In the air the snow-dust was as brilliant as diamonds; the shovel sank easily into the white glittering

mass. The convicts almost always appeared happy at this work, animated by exercise and the cold wintry air. Everyone felt himself in better spirits, laughter and jokes were heard, snowballs were exchanged. After a time this excited the indignation of the serious-minded convicts, who liked neither laughter nor gaiety, and the performance was generally concluded in showers of abuse.

Little by little my circle increased, although I never intentionally made new acquaintances. I was always restless, morose, and mistrustful; but one seemed to make friends involuntarily. The first who came to visit me was a man named Petroff. I purposely say visit, because he belonged to the special division which was housed at the opposite end of the courtyard. It seemed as if no understanding could exist between us, for we had nothing in common.

Nevertheless, during the early days of my imprisonment, Petroff thought it his duty to call on me nearly every day, or at least to stop me at the rear of our barrack where, after a day's work, I used to stroll as far as possible from the eyes of men. His persistence was disagreeable to me; but he managed so well that his visits became at last a pleasing diversion, although he was by no means of a communicative disposition. He was short, strongly built, agile, and skilful. He had quite a pleasing voice, high cheek-bones, a bold look, and white, regular teeth. He had always a quid of tobacco in his mouth between the lower lip and the gums. Many of the convicts had the habit of chewing. He seemed to me younger than he really was, for although forty years of age, he looked no more than thirty. He addressed me without ceremony, and behaved with civility and attention as though we were on an equal footing. If, for instance, he saw that I wished to be alone, he would talk to me for about two minutes and then go away. He thanked me, moreover, each time for my kindness in conversing with him, a thing he never did to anyone else. I must add that his relationship with me remained unaltered during the first period of my story and for several years afterwards; that they never became more intimate, although he was in fact my friend. I could never properly understand what he expected from my society, nor why he came every day to see me. He sometimes robbed me, but it was almost an involuntary act. He never came to me to borrow money; so that what attracted him was not personal interest.

It seemed to me, I know not why, that this man was not a fellow convict, but lived some distance away in the town. It was as if he had come to the prison by chance in search of news, to inquire after me, in fact, to see how I was getting on. He was always in a hurry, as though he had momentarily left someone who was waiting for him, or as if he had left his business for an hour or so. And yet he never hurried himself. He wore a fixed look, with a slight air of levity and irony. He had a habit of gazing into the distance high above the objects nearer at hand, as though he were trying to get a glimpse of something behind the person to whom he was talking. He always seemed absent-minded. I sometimes asked myself where he went when he left me, and where he could be so anxiously expected. He would simply go with a light step to one of the barracks or to the kitchen, sit down and listen to the conversation. He would listen attentively, join in with eagerness, and then suddenly fall silent. But whether he spoke

or kept silent, one seemed always to discern in his countenance that he had business somewhere else, and that someone was waiting for him in the neighbouring town. The most astonishing thing was that he never had any business-apart, of course, from the hard labour assigned to him. He knew no trade, and had scarcely ever any money; but that did not seem to upset him. Why did he speak to me? His conversation was as strange as he himself was singular. When he noticed me walking alone behind the barrack he stopped and turned towards me. He walked very fast, and when I turned he was suddenly on his heel. He approached me at a walking pace, but so quickly that he seemed to be running.

‘Good evening.’

‘Good evening.’

‘I’m not disturbing you?’

‘No.’

‘I want to ask you something about Napoleon. Is he any relation of the one who invaded Russia in 1812?’

Petroff was a soldier’s son, and knew how to read and write.

‘Of course he is.’

‘People say he is President. How President-and of what?’

His questions were always rapid and abrupt, as though he required an immediate answer. I explained Napoleon’s position and added that he might become emperor.

‘How will that be?’

I explained it to him as well as I could; Petroff listened with attention. He understood perfectly all I told him, and then, leaning towards me, said:

‘Er, can you tell me, Alexander Petrovitch, if there are really monkeys that have hands instead of feet, and are as tall as men?’

‘Yes.’

‘What are they like?’

I described them to him, and told him what I knew on the subject.

‘And where do they live?’

‘In warm climates. There are some to be found in the island of Sumatra.’

‘Is that in America? I have heard that people there walk with their heads downwards.’

‘No, no; you are thinking of the Antipodes.’ I explained to him as well as I could what America was, and what the Antipodes. He listened to me as attentively as if the question of the Antipodes alone had caused him to approach me.

‘I see. Now I read last year the story of the Countess de la Vallière; Arevieff borrowed the book from the adjutant. Is it truth or fiction? It’s by Dumas.’

‘Fiction, of course.’

‘Really? Well, good-bye, I’m much obliged to you.’

And he disappeared. The above may be taken as a fair specimen of our conversation.

I made inquiries about Petroff. M- decided he ought to speak to me on the subject when he learned what an acquaintance I had made. He told me that many convicts

had excited his horror on their arrival; but not one of them, not even Gazin, had made upon him so bad an impression as had this fellow Petroff.

‘He is the most determined and unreliable villain in the place,’ said M-. ‘He’s capable of anything, nothing can withstand his whims. He’ll assassinate you if the fancy takes him, without hesitation and without the least remorse. I often think he is not in his right senses.’

This declaration was most interesting; but M- was never able to tell me why he entertained so low an opinion of Petroff. Strangely enough, I used to see and talk with this man almost every day for years; he was always my sincere friend, though I could not at the time tell why, and during all that time he lived very quietly and did nothing extraordinary. And yet I feel sure that M- was right, that

Petroff may after all have been a violent character and the most difficult of any of the convicts to restrain.

I do not know why I should believe that; but Petroff was the man who, when called up to receive his punishment, had tried to kill the governor. I have already explained how the governor was saved as by a miracle, having left a moment before the sentence was carried out.

Once when he was still a soldier, before his arrival at the prison, his colonel had struck him on parade. He had no doubt often been beaten before, but that day he was in no humour to endure an insult in broad daylight in front of the whole battalion drawn up in fine. He killed the colonel. I do not know all the details of the story, for he never told it to me himself. It must be understood, however, that these outbursts occurred only when nature within him spoke too loudly, and such occasions were rare; as a rule he was serious and even quiet. His strong, ardent passions had not burned out, but smouldered like burning coals beneath ashes.

I never noticed that he was vain or given to bragging like so many other convicts. He scarcely ever quarrelled, but he was friendly towards very few, except, perhaps, Sirotkin, and then only when he had need of him. One day, however, I saw him thoroughly roused. Someone had offended him by refusing a request. He was arguing the point with a tall convict, as vigorous as an athlete, named Vassili Antonoff, who was known for his nagging, spiteful disposition. But this man belonged to the class of civil convicts and was certainly no coward. They shouted at one another for some time, and I thought the quarrel would finish like so many others of the same kind, by simple exchange of abuse. As it was, the affair took an unexpected turn. Petroff suddenly turned pale, his lips trembled and turned blue, his respiration became difficult. He got up, and slowly, very slowly, with imperceptible steps-he liked to walk about with his feet naked-approached Antonoff. The shouting at once gave place to deathly silence-a passing fly might have been heard -and everyone waited anxiously to see what happened. Antonoff pointed to his adversary; his face was no longer human. I was unable to endure the scene, and left the room. I was certain that before I reached the staircase I would hear the shrieks of a dying man, but nothing of the kind took place. Before Petroff could lay hands on

him, Antonoff threw him the object which had caused the quarrel—a miserable rag, a worn-out piece of lining.

Later, of course, Antonoff made a point of abusing Petroff, but rather as a matter of honour, from a sense of duty, in order to show that he had not really been afraid. Petroff, however, paid no attention to his insults, and did not reply. He had won the day, and insults went by almost unnoticed; he was glad to have obtained his rag.

A quarter of an hour later he was strolling leisurely about the barracks, looking for some group whose conversation might perhaps gratify his curiosity. Everything seemed to interest him, and yet he appeared to be indifferent to all he heard. He might have been compared to a labourer, one of those fellows who are such devils for work but who is for the moment idle, and therefore condescends to spend a little while playing with his children. I could never understand why he stayed in prison, why he did not escape. He would not have hesitated to run for it had he really wished to do so. Reason has no power over men like Petroff when they take the bit between their teeth. If they desire something they allow no obstacle to stand in their way. I am certain that he would have been sufficiently clever to escape, that he could have deceived everyone, and remained for a time, without food, bidden in the forest or a patch of bulrushes; but the idea had evidently not occurred to him. I never observed him to have much judgment or common sense. Men like him are born with one idea, which, without their being aware of it, pursues them all their lives. They wander about until they spy some object which excites their cupidity, and are then prepared to risk their heads. I was sometimes astonished that a man who had assassinated his colonel for striking him was ready to bow down before the rods, for Petroff was regularly flogged for smuggling vodka into prison. Like all those with no definite occupation, he traded in spirits, and, if caught, admitted himself in the wrong and took a flogging as though he welcomed punishment; otherwise he would have died rather than submit. More than once I was surprised to catch him robbing me in spite of his affection for me; but so it happened from time to time. On one occasion, for instance, he stole my Bible, which I had asked him to restore to its place. He had only a few yards to go; but on the way he met a purchaser, to whom he sold the book, and immediately spent the money on vodka. He probably felt a violent craving for drink that day, for when he desired something he had to have it. A man like Petroff will commit murder for twenty-five kopecks, simply in order to buy himself a pint of vodka; yet on other occasions he will despise hundreds and thousands of roubles. He confessed his theft the same evening, non-chalandy, without a trace of remorse or embarrassment, and as if he were relating some commonplace incident. I did my best to reprove him as he deserved, for I was annoyed at the loss of my Bible. He listened attentively, agreed that the Bible was a very useful book, and sincerely regretted that I no longer had it; but not for one moment was he sorry for having stolen it. He looked at me with such assurance that I left off scolding. He bore my reproaches because he believed I could not do otherwise. He knew he deserved to be punished for his act, and consequently presumed that it was my duty to reprimand him in order to vent my feelings and to console myself for my

loss. But deep down in his heart he considered the whole thing nonsense, something to which an intelligent man would be ashamed to descend. I even believe that he regarded me as a little child, who does not yet understand the simplest things in the world. If I spoke to him of anything, except books and learning, he would answer me, but only from politeness and in laconic phrases. I wondered what made him question me so much on the subject of books, and watched him closely during our conversation in order to assure myself that he was not laughing at me; but no, he listened gravely, and with an attention which was genuine, if not always sustained, a fact which sometimes irritated me. However, the questions he asked were clear and precise, and he seemed always anxious for my reply. He had made up his mind once for all that it was useless speaking to me about anything except books, apart from which I knew nothing. I am certain, and indeed was often surprised, that he was attached to me; but he looked upon me as a child, or at least as not yet quite grown up. He felt towards me that sort of compassion which the stronger always feels for the weaker; he took me for-I really don't know for what! Although this compassion did not prevent him robbing me, I am sure that even while he did so he felt sorry for me.

'What a strange fellow!' he must have told himself, as he laid hands on my property. 'He doesn't even know how to take care of his own belongings.' That, I think, is why he liked me.

One day he suddenly remarked: 'You're too good-natured, you're so simple, so simple that one cannot help pitying you.' And a moment later he added: 'Don't be offended at what I said just now, Alexander Petrovitch, I didn't mean it like that.'

Fellows like Petroff often express themselves forcibly when they are upset or excited. At such times they come as it were to life, though ordinarily they are men of few words. They could never incite or plan a rebellion, but they are well fitted to carry out another's order; they act deliberately, and hurl themselves against an obstacle without thought or trace of fear. All will follow them to the foot of the wall, where, however, they generally lay down their lives. I do not think Petroff can have, however, met any but a violent end. If he is still alive, it only means he has never yet been in the neighbourhood of death. But who knows? He may, perhaps, die in extreme old age, quite quietly, after having wandered aimlessly through life. Yes, I still believe Mwas right, and that Petroff was the most determined man in the whole of that prison.

Chapter IX: Dangerous Characters-luka

It is hard to describe a certain type which is as rare in prison as elsewhere. They may be recognized by the terror they inspire, and are instinctively avoided. My first reaction was to shun their company; but later on I took a different view, even of the most loathsome murderers. Some men have never gone so far as to kill, but are more repulsive than others who have taken half a dozen lives; for there are crimes so strange as to baffle the imagination.

One sometimes comes across a man who has led a perfectly decent life under the most trying circumstances: a serf, maybe, a domestic, a shopkeeper, or a soldier. At last his patience is exhausted; his resistance vanishes, and he plunges a knife into his enemy. He does not stop there: the first murder is understandable—he was provoked beyond endurance, but now he kills for pleasure and at sight. He deals out death in return for a harsh word, for a look, perhaps simply to make an equal number of victims, or merely because someone stands in his way. He behaves like a drunken man, like one in delirium. Having once crossed the border-line, he is himself astonished to find that he holds nothing sacred. He violates every law, defies the highest authority, and indulges his blood-lust without restraint. He enjoys the turmoil of his own soul and the terror he inspires, knowing all the while that fearful punishment awaits him. His emotions are probably like those of a man who, looking down from a high tower into the abyss yawning at his feet, feels the urge to throw himself headlong and put an end to his life. That may happen to the meekest and most commonplace of men. There are some who even take pride in their ungovernable passion. The quieter and more self-effacing they have been, the more they swagger and seek to inspire fear. These desperate characters revel in the horror which they cause; they gloat over the disgust which they excite; they take part in the most outrageous acts from sheer despair, and either care nothing for their inevitable fate, or seem impatient to meet their end as soon as possible. The most curious thing is that their excitement, their exaltation, will last until they stand in the pillory. Then the thread is broken; that moment is decisive, and the man becomes suddenly calm or, rather, lifeless, a thing devoid of feeling. In the pillory all his strength fails him, and he begs pardon of the people. Once in prison, he is quite different: no one would ever imagine that this lily-livered, chicken-hearted creature had killed five or six men.

There are, however, some whom prison life does not so easily subdue; they preserve a degree of swagger, a spirit of bravado.

‘I say, I’m not what you take me for; I’ve sent six fellows out of the world,’ you will hear them boast; but sooner or later they must all submit. From time to time a murderer will amuse himself by recalling his audacity, his lawlessness when he was in a state of despair. He likes at such moments to have some silly fellow before whom he can brag, and to whom he will relate his heroic deeds, as if there were nothing extraordinary. ‘That’s the sort of man I am,’ he says.

And with what cultivated yet reserved conceit he watches his companion while he tells his tale! It can be observed in his accent, in his every word. Where did he learn this artfulness?

During the long evening on one of the first days of my confinement I was listening to one of these conversations. Owing to my inexperience I took the criminal who spun his narrative for a man of iron character, with whom Petroff was not to be compared. He was a man named Luka Kouzmitch, who had knocked down an officer for no other reason than that it pleased him to do so. This Luka Kouzmitch was the smallest and thinnest man in our barrack. He came from the south, and had been a serf, one of

those not attached to the soil but who serve their masters as domestics. There was something cold and aloof in his demeanour. He was quite a little bird, but with beak and talons. Convicts sum up a man instinctively, and they had no very high opinion of Luka, who was too easily offended and too conceited.

On the evening in question he was seated on his camp-bedstead stitching a shirt. Close by him was a narrow-minded, stupid, but good-natured and obliging fellow, a sort of Colossus, named Kobylin. Luka often quarrelled with him in a neighbourly way, and treated him with a haughtiness which, thanks to his good nature, Kobylin did not notice in the least. He was knitting a stocking, and listening to Luka with an indifferent air. Luka spoke in a loud voice and very distinctly. He wished everyone to hear him, though he was apparently speaking only to Kobylin.

‘I was deported,’ said Luka, sticking his needle in the shirt, ‘as a brigand.’

‘How long ago?’ asked Kobylin.

‘When the peas are ripe it will be just a year. Well, we reached Kv, and I was imprisoned. Around me there were a dozen men from Little Russia, well-built, solid, robust fellows, like oxen, and how quiet! The food was bad, and the governor did what he liked. The days went by, and I soon realized that all these fellows were cowards.

“‘You’re afraid of an idiot like So-and-so?’” I would ask them.

“‘Go and talk to him yourself,’” and they burst out laughing like the brutes they were. I held my tongue.

‘There was one fellow so droll, so droll,’ added the narrator, now leaving Kobylin to address all who chose to listen.

‘This droll fellow was telling them how he had been tried, what he had said, and how he had wept hot tears.

“‘There was a dog of a clerk there,’” he said, “‘who did nothing but write and take down every word I said. I told him to go to hell, and he actually wrote that down! He troubled me so, that I quite lost my head.’”

‘Give me some thread, Vassili; the prison thread’s bad, rotten.’

‘Here’s some from the tailor’s shop,’ replied Vassili, handing it to him.

‘Well, but about this governor?’ said Kobylin, who had been quite forgotten.

Luka was only waiting for that. He did not go on at once with his story, as though Kobylin were not worth notice. He threaded his needle quietly, tucked his legs lazily underneath him, and then continued as follows:

‘I excited the fellows to such an extent that they all complained of the governor. That same morning I had borrowed the rascal (prison slang for knife) from my neighbour, and hidden it, so as to be ready for anything. When the governor arrived, he was mad with rage. “Come now, you Little Russians,” I whispered to them, “this is not the time for fear.” But, Lord! all their courage had slipped down to the soles of their feet; they trembled! The governor entered the room. He was quite drunk.

“‘What’s all this about? How dare you? I am your tsar, your God,’” he yelled.

‘When he said that he was the tsar and God, I went up to him with the knife in my sleeve.

“No, Excellency,” I said, drawing nearer and nearer to him, “that cannot be. Your Excellency cannot be tsar and God.”

“ Ah, you ‘re the fellow then,” cried the governor. “ You’re the ringleader.”

“No,” I replied, and came still closer. “No, your Excellency, as everyone knows, and as you yourself know, there is only one Almighty God, and He’s in heaven. And there’s only one tsar set over us all by God Himself; he’s our monarch, your Excellency. And, your Excellency, you are as yet only the governor of this prison, and you’re our chief only by the grace of the tsar and because of your own merits.”

“How? How? How?” stammered the governor, speechless with amazement.

My answer was to throw myself at him and thrust my knife into his belly up to the hilt. It was soon over; the governor tottered, turned, and fell.

‘I had thrown my life away.

“Now, you fellows,” I cried, “it’s for you to pick him up.’”

Here I must interrupt my narrative. Expressions like ‘I am the tsar! I am God!’ were, unfortunately, too often in the good old times heard on the lips of senior officials. Their usage is far less frequent to-day, and ‘I am God’ is probably quite obsolete. Moreover, I should point out that those who used such expressions were chiefly men who had risen from the ranks. Promotion seems to have disordered their brains. After having laboured long years beneath the knapsack, they suddenly found themselves with rank and authority. Their new-found dignity and the first flush of excitement aroused by their advancement gave them an exaggerated idea of their power and importance in relation to their subordinates. Such men are abjectly servile in the presence of their superiors; they will even go so far as to assure the latter that they have been common soldiers, and have not forgotten their place. But towards an inferior they are merciless despots. Nothing irritates a convict so much as abuse of this kind. This overweening confidence in their own importance, this exaggerated idea of their immunity from natural obligations, rouses hatred in the hearts of the most submissive men, and drives the most patient to excess. Fortunately, such conduct belongs to an almost forgotten past; and even then the superior authorities dealt very severely with abuse of power, I know from several examples. What exasperates convicts above all is the manifestation of contempt or repugnance in the behaviour of their officers. Those who think it is only necessary to feed and clothe a prisoner, and to treat him strictly according to law, are much mistaken. Howsoever debased, a man instinctively demands respect for his humanity as such. Every prisoner is well aware that he has been condemned as a reprobate, and knows the distance which separates him from his superiors; but neither branding iron nor chains will make him forget that he is a man. He must, therefore, be humanely treated. Humane treatment may raise up one in whom the divine image has long been obscured. The Unfortunate, above all men, needs a light hand. It is his salvation, his only joy. I have met with some officials kind and indeed noble characters, and I have seen what a beneficent influence they exercised over the poor, humiliated men entrusted to their care. A few affable words have a splendid moral effect upon the prisoners, making them happy as children and sincerely grateful to their masters.

On the other hand, convicts have no time for undue familiarity on an officer's part. They wish to respect him, and familiarity destroys respect. A convict will feel proud, for instance, if the prison governor has a number of decorations, if he has good manners, if he enjoys the esteem of some higher authority, if he tempers justice with mercy, and if he is conscious of his own dignity. Better by far a man who recognizes his worth without insulting others.

'You got well skinned for that, I suppose,' said Kobylin

'As for being skinned, indeed, there's no denying it. Ali, pass me the scissors. But, what next. Aren't we playing cards to-night?'

'We drank the cards up long ago,' remarked Vassili. 'If we hadn't sold them to buy drink they'd be here now.'

'If!-Ifs fetch a hundred roubles apiece on the Moscow market.'

'Well, Luka, what did you get for sticking him?' asked Kobylin.

'It earned me five hundred strokes, my friend. It did indeed. They almost killed me,' said Luka, once more addressing the assembly and without heeding his neighbour Kobylin. 'When they gave me those five hundred strokes I was treated with great ceremony. I had never been flogged before. What a mass of people came to see me! The whole town turned out to see the brigand, the murderer, take his punishment: I can't tell you how stupid the populace is. Timoshka the executioner stripped me and laid me down crying, "Now tien, I'm going to grill you!" I waited for the first stroke. I wanted to cry out, but couldn't. It was no use opening my mouth, my voice had gone. At the second stroke-you needn't believe me unless you please- I never heard them count two. When I regained consciousness I heard "seventeen." Four times they untied me to let me breathe for half an hour, and to souse me with cold water. I stared at them with eyes starting from my head and told myself "I shall die here."'

'But you didn't die,' remarked Kobylin innocently.

Luka looked at him contemptuously, and everyone burst out laughing.

'What an idiot! Is he wrong in the upper storey?' said Luka, as if he regretted that he had condescended to speak to such a fool.

'He is a little mad,' said Vassili.

Although Luka had killed six men, no one in prison was ever afraid of him, although he liked to be regarded as a dangerous character.

Chapter X: Isaiah Fomitch-the Bath- Baklouchin

The Christmas holidays were approaching, and the convicts looked forward to them with eager anticipation. From their mere appearance it was easy to see that something extraordinary was about to happen. Four days before the holiday we were to be taken to the bath; everyone was pleased and was making preparations. We were to go there after dinner, for on that day there was no afternoon work. The best pleased and most active man in the whole prison was a certain Isaiah Fomitch Bumstein, a Jew, of whom

I spoke in my fifth chapter. He liked to remain stewing in the bath until he dropped off to sleep. Whenever I think of those baths (and they are unforgettable), the first thought which presents itself to my memory is that of the glorious and ever-memorable Isaiah Fomitch Bumstein, my fellow prisoner. Good Lord! What a strange fellow he was! I have already said a few words about his personal appearance. He was fifty years old, his face was wrinkled, with frightful scars on his cheeks and forehead, and he had the thin, weak body of a fowl. His look expressed undying self-confidence and, I may almost say, perfect happiness. I do not think he was at all sorry to be condemned to hard labour. He was a jeweller by trade, and as there was no other in the town, he had always plenty of work to do, and was more or less well paid. He wanted nothing, and lived, one might almost say, sumptuously and without spending all that he earned, for he saved money and lent it out to other convicts at interest. He possessed a samovar, a mattress, a tea-cup, and a blanket. Nor did the local Jews refuse him their patronage; every Saturday he went under escort to the synagogue as was authorized by law. Although he lived like a fighting cock, he looked forward to the expiration of his term of imprisonment, when he intended to marry. He was the most comic mixture of simplicity, stupidity, cunning, timidity, and bashfulness; but the strangest thing was that the convicts never held him up to serious ridicule—they only teased him for amusement. Isaiah Fomitch was a source of distraction and entertainment for everyone.

‘We have only one Isaiah Fomitch, and we’ll take care of him,’ they seemed to say; and as if understanding this, he was proud of his own importance. From what I was told, it appeared he had entered the prison in the most laughable manner some time before my arrival. Suddenly one evening a report began to circulate that a Jew had been brought there, and was at that moment being shaved in the guard-house, and that he would immediately afterwards be taken to the barracks. As there was not a single Jew in the prison, the convicts looked forward to his entry with impatience, and surrounded him as soon as he passed the great gates. The officer on duty took him to the civil prison and pointed out the place where his plank bedstead would stand.

Isaiah Fomitch carried a bag containing his prison kit and a few things of his own. He set down the bag, and sat down on his bedstead with his legs crossed and without daring to raise his eyes. The other fellows were all laughing at him simply because he was a Jew. Suddenly a young man left the group and came up to him, carrying in his hand an old pair of summer trousers which were dirty, torn, and mended with old rags. He sat down by the side of Isaiah Fomitch, and clapped him on the shoulder.

‘Well, my dear fellow,’ said he, ‘I’ve been waiting for the last six years; look up and tell me how much you’ll give for this article,’ holding up his rags for him to see.

Isaiah Fomitch was so dumbfounded that he dared not look at the mocking crowd, whose scarred and hideous faces were now gathered round him. He was so scared that he could not utter a word. When he saw who was speaking to him he shuddered, and began to examine the rags carefully. All waited to hear him speak.

‘Well, can’t you give me a silver rouble for it? It’s certainly worth that,’ said the would-be vendor, smiling and looking towards Isaiah Fomitch with a wink.

‘A silver rouble? No; but I’ll give you seven kopecks.’

These were the first words Isaiah ever spoke in prison. Loud laughter broke out on all sides.

‘Seven kopecks! Well, let’s have them; you’re certainly a lucky man. Look! Take care of the pledge, you’ll answer for it with your head.’

‘The interest will be three kopecks; that will make ten kopecks you owe me,’ said the Jew, at the same time slipping his hand into his pocket for the sum agreed upon.

‘Three kopecks interest-for a year?’

‘No, not for a year, for a month.’

‘You’re a terrible screw. What’s your name?’

‘Isaiah Fomitch.’

‘Well, Isaiah Fomitch, you ought to get on. Good-bye.’

The Jew once more examined the rags on which he had lent seven kopecks, folded them up, and put them carefully away in his bag. The convicts continued to laugh at him.

Indeed everyone was always laughing at him; but, although everyone owed him money, no one insulted him. And when he saw they were all well disposed towards him, he gave himself great airs; but he was so comic that they were at once forgiven.

Luka, who before his imprisonment had known many Jews, often teased him, less from malice than for amusement, as one plays with a dog or a parrot. Isaiah Fomitch knew this and took no offence.

‘You’ll see, Jew, how I’ll flog you.’

‘If you give me one blow I will return you ten,’ replied Isaiah Fomitch valiantly.

‘Scurvy Jew!’

‘As scurvy as you like, but I have plenty of money.’

‘Bravo! Isaiah Fomitch. We must take care of you. You’re the only Jew we have; but they’ll send you to Siberia all the same.’

‘I am already in Siberia.’

‘They’ll send you still further.’

‘Will not the Lord God be there?’

‘Of course, He’s everywhere.’

‘Well, then! With the Lord God, and money, one has all that is necessary.’

‘What a fellow he is!’ they all cried.

The Jew saw that he was being laughed at, but did not lose heart. He strutted about, delighted with the false flattery that greeted him, and began to sing in that high, squeaky falsetto that one hears in every barrack room, ‘La, la, la, la.’ The tune was absurd, but it was the only song he was heard to sing during the whole of his imprisonment. When he made my acquaintance he assured me solemnly that it was the song, and the very air, that was sung by 600,000 Jews, small and great, when they crossed the Red Sea, and that every Israelite was ordered to sing it after a victory gained over an enemy.

Every Friday evening men came over from the other barracks expressly to see Isaiah Fomitch celebrate the Sabbath. He was so vain, so innocently conceited, that this general curiosity flattered him immensely. He covered the table in his little corner with a pedantic self-importance, opened a book, lighted two candles, muttered some mysterious words, and clothed himself in a kind of striped chasuble with sleeves, which he kept carefully stowed away at the bottom of his trunk. He fastened leather bracelets on his wrists, and finally attached to his forehead, by means of a ribbon, a little box, which looked like a horn starting from his head. Then he began to pray. He read in a drawling voice, shouted, spat, and threw himself about with wild fantastic gestures. All this was prescribed by the ceremonial of his religion. There was nothing ridiculous or even strange about it, except the vanity Isaiah Fomitch himself displayed as he performed his rites. He would suddenly cover his head with both hands, and begin to read with many sobs. His tears increased, and in his grief he almost laid his head with its little ark upon the book, howling all the while. But all at once he would break off in the middle of his lamentation, burst into a laugh, and recite with a nasal twang a hymn of triumph, as if he were overwhelmed by an excess of happiness.

‘Can’t understand it,’ the convicts would sometimes say to one another. One day I asked Isaiah Fomitch what these sobs signified, and why he passed so suddenly from despair to triumphant happiness. He was delighted at my questions, and at once explained. The sobs and tears, he told me, were provoked by the destruction of Jerusalem, and the law ordered every pious Jew to groan and strike his breast; but at the moment of his most acute grief he was suddenly to remember that a prophecy had foretold the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, and he was therefore to manifest overflowing joy by singing, laughing, and reciting his prayers with happiness expressed in voice and look. This sudden passage from one emotion to another pleased Isaiah Fomitch, and he expounded the ingenious prescription of his faith with the greatest satisfaction.

One evening, while he was at his prayers, the governor entered, followed by the officer of the guard and an escort of soldiers. The prisoners immediately lined up in front of their beds; Isaiah Fomitch alone continued to shriek and gesticulate. He knew that his form of worship was authorized and that no one might interrupt him, so that he ran no risk by howling in the presence of the governor. He liked to perform under the eyes of the chief.

The governor approached to within a few steps. Isaiah Fomitch turned round, and began to sing his hymn of triumph in the officer’s face, gesticulating and drawling out certain syllables. When he came to the part where he had to assume an expression of extreme happiness, he did so by blinking, laughing, and nodding his head in the governor’s direction. The latter was at first much astonished; then he burst out laughing, shouted ‘Idiot!’ and went away, while the Jew continued to shriek. An hour later, when he had finished, I asked him what he would have done if the governor had been so wicked or so foolish as to lose his temper.

‘What governor?’ he said.

‘The governor, man. Didn’t you see him? He was only two steps from you, and watching you all the time.’ But Isaiah Fomitch assured me in all seriousness that he had not seen the governor, for while he was saying his prayers he was in such a state of ecstasy that he neither saw nor heard anything that was taking place around him.

I can see Isaiah Fomitch wandering about the prison on Saturday endeavouring to do nothing, as the Law ordains every Jew. What improbable anecdotes he told me! Every time he returned from the synagogue he always brought me some news of St Petersburg and the most absurd rumours imaginable from his fellow Jews of the town, who were supposed to have it at first hand. But enough of Isaiah Fomitch.

There were only two public baths in the town. One, kept by a Jew, was divided into compartments, for which one paid fifty kopecks. It was frequented by the local aristocracy.

The other was old, dirty, and stuffy; it was for the use of the common people, and it was there that the convicts were taken. The air was cold and clear, the prisoners were delighted to leave the fortress and take a walk through the town. During that walk their laughter and jokes never ceased. A platoon of soldiers with loaded muskets accompanied us, which provided quite a sight for the townsfolk. On reaching our destination, we found the bath so small that we could not all enter at once. We were divided into two groups, one of which waited in the cold room while the other bathed in the hot one. But the room was so narrow that it was hard to understand how even half our number managed to pile in.

Petroff kept close to me; of his own accord he remained at my side without having been asked to do so, and offered to rub me down. Baklouchin, a convict in the special section, also offered me his services. I remember him (he was known as the ‘Sapper’) as the gayest and most agreeable of all my companions. We had become intimate friends. Petroff helped me to undress, because I was generally a long time getting my things off, not being yet accustomed to the operation, and it was almost as cold in the dressing-room as out of doors.

It is very difficult for a convict who is still a novice to get his things off. He must first learn how to undo the leather straps with which his chains are fastened. These straps are buckled over the ankle, underneath the ring which encloses the leg. One pair of straps costs sixty kopecks, and each convict is obliged to buy himself a pair, for it would be impossible to walk without their assistance. The ring does not grip the leg too tightly. One can pass a finger between the iron and the flesh, but the ring chafes the ankle, and any convict who walks without leather straps for a single day will find his skin raw.

To remove the straps presents no serious difficulty. It is a different matter with the clothes. Taking off one’s trousers is in itself a most elaborate operation, and the same may be said of the shirt whenever it has to be changed. The first to give us lessons in this art was Koreneff, a former brigand chief who had once been condemned to be chained up for five years. The convicts are very skilful at the work, and manage it with ease.

I gave a few kopecks to Petroff to buy soap and a bunch of the twigs with which one rubs oneself down in the bath. Bits of soap were issued to the convicts, but they were no larger than two-kopeck pieces. The soap was sold in the dressing-room, as well as mead and cakes of white flour. Each convict received one pailful of boiling water according to an agreement between the proprietor of the bath and the prison authorities. Convicts who wished to make themselves thoroughly clean could for two kopecks buy a second pailful, which the proprietor handed through a window pierced in the wall for that purpose. As soon as I was undressed Petroff took me by the arm and remarked that I should find it difficult to walk with my chains.

‘Pull them up on to your calves,’ he said, holding me by the arms as if I were an old man. I was ashamed at his attention, and assured him that I could walk well enough by myself, but he did not believe me. He took the same care of me as one does of an awkward child. Petroff was no servant in any sense of the word; if I had offended him he would have known how to deal with me. I had promised him nothing for his assistance, nor had he asked me for anything. I wonder what inspired his extraordinary solicitude.

Imagine a room of twelve feet long and of equal width, in which a hundred men are crowded together; or say eighty, for we were in all two hundred divided into two sections. The steam blinded us; the sweat, the dirt, and lack of space were such that we could hardly find room to stand. I was frightened and wished to leave, but Petroff hastened to reassure me. With great difficulty we managed to climb on to the benches, by stepping over the heads of convicts whom we persuaded to bend down and let us pass. The benches, however, were already occupied, and Petroff informed me that I would have to buy a place. He at once entered into negotiation with the convict who was near the window, and for a kopeck this man consented to cede me his place. After receiving the money, which Petroff held tight in his hand, and with which he had wisely provided himself beforehand, the man crept into a dark and dirty corner just below me, where there was at least half an inch of filth. Even the places above the benches were occupied; the convicts swarmed everywhere. As for the floor there was not a place as large as the palm of the hand which was not occupied by the convicts. They tossed the water from their pails; those who were standing up poured it over themselves, and the dirty water, running down their bodies, fell on the shaved heads of those who were sitting down. Other convicts crowded on the upper bench and the steps leading to it. They washed themselves more thoroughly, but there were relatively few of them. The common people do not care to wash with soap and water; they prefer the horrible method of stewing and then douching themselves with cold water. Below I could see fifty bundles of twigs rising and falling; the holders were whipping themselves into a state akin to intoxication. The steam became thicker and thicker every minute, so that what one now felt was not a warm but a burning sensation, as from boiling pitch. The convicts shouted and howled to the accompaniment of the hundred chains shaking on the floor. Those who tried to move from one position to another got their chains mixed up with those of their neighbours, and knocked against the heads of the men who were

lower down than they. There were volleys of abuse as those who fell dragged down those whose chains had become entangled in theirs. They were all in a state of frenzy, of wild exultation. Cries and shrieks were heard on all sides. There was much crowding and crushing at the window of the dressing-room through which the hot water was delivered, and a good deal was spilt on the heads of those seated on the floor before it reached its destination. We seemed to be quite free; but from time to time one could see through the dressing-room or the open door the moustached face of a soldier with his musket at his feet, watching that no serious disorder took place.

The shaved heads of the convicts, and their red bodies, which the steam had turned to the colour of blood, seemed more monstrous than ever. On their backs stood out in striking relief the scars left by whips or rods—scars made long before, but so thoroughly that the flesh seemed to have been torn quite recently. Strange marks; a shudder passed through me at the mere sight of them. Again the volume of steam increased, and the bath-room was now covered with a thick, burning cloud, concealing movement, stifling cries. Through this cloud emerged torn backs, shaved heads, and, to complete the picture, Isaiah Fomitch howling with joy on the highest bench. He was saturating himself with steam. Any other man would have fainted away, but no temperature is too high for him; he engages the services of a rubber for a kopeck but after a few moments the latter is unable to continue, throws away his bunch of twigs, and runs to douche himself with cold water. Isaiah Fomitch is undaunted, he quickly hires a second rubber, then a third; on these occasions he thinks nothing of expense, and changes his rubber four or five times. 'He stews well, the gallant Isaiah Fomitch,' cry the convicts from below. The Jew feels that he surpasses all the others, that he has beaten them; he triumphs with his hoarse falsetto voice, and sings out his favourite air, which rises above the general hubbub. It seemed to me that if ever we met in hell we should be reminded of this place. I could not help saying so to Petroff, who looked all round him but made no answer.

I wanted to buy him a place at my side on the bench, but he sat down at my feet and declared that he felt quite at ease. Baklouchin meanwhile had bought us some more hot water and offered to bring it to us as soon as we required it. Petroff offered to clean me from head to foot, and he begged me to go through the preliminary stewing process, but I could not bring myself to do so. At last he rubbed me all over with soap. I tried to make him understand that I could wash myself, but it was no use contradicting him and I let him have his way.

When he had finished he took me back to the dressing-room, holding me up and telling me at each step to take care, as if I had been made of porcelain. He helped me to dress, and when he had finished his kindly work he rushed back to the bath to have a good stew.

When we returned to the barracks I offered him a glass of tea, which he did not refuse. He drank it and thanked me. I wished to go to the expense of a glass of vodka in his honour, and I succeeded in obtaining some without difficulty. Petroff was exceedingly pleased. He swallowed his vodka with a murmur of satisfaction, declared that I had

restored him to life, and then suddenly rushed to the kitchen as if the men who were talking there could decide nothing of importance without him.

And now another man came and chatted with me. This was Baklouchin, of whom I have already spoken and whom I had also invited to take tea.

I never knew a man of a more agreeable disposition than Baklouchin. It must be admitted that he never forgave a wrong, and that he often became involved in disputes. Above all, he could not tolerate others meddling in his affairs. He knew, in a word, how to take care of himself; but his quarrels never lasted long, and I believe he was generally liked. Wherever he went he was well received, and even in the town he was looked upon as the most amusing man in the world. He was a man of lofty stature, thirty years old, with a frank, determined countenance, and rather good-looking with his tuft of hair on his chin. He possessed the art of changing his expression to imitate the first person he happened to see, so that he kept his fellow prisoners in fits of laughter. He was a professed joker, but never allowed himself to be slighted by those who did not enjoy his fun. Accordingly, no one ever spoke disparagingly of him. He was full of life and high-spirited. Baklouchin made my acquaintance at the very beginning of my imprisonment, and told me of his military career as a sapper in the Engineers, to whom he had been posted through the influence of friends. He asked me a number of questions about St Petersburg, and even read books when he came to tea with me. He amused the whole company by describing how roughly Lieutenant Khad that morning handled the governor. He told me, moreover, with a satisfied air, as he took his seat by my side, that we should probably have a theatrical performance in the prison. The convicts proposed to stage a play during the Christmas holiday. Suitable actors were found and little by little the scenery was prepared. Some persons in the town had promised to lend women's clothes for the performance, and hopes were even entertained of obtaining, through the medium of an officer's servant, a uniform with epaulettes, provided the governor did not decide to forbid the performance, as he had done last year. On that occasion he was disgruntled through having lost at cards; he had been annoyed by something that had occurred in the prison, and in a fit of ill humour had forbidden the performance. It was possible, however, that this year he would allow it. Baklouchin was in a state of exultation. It was clear that he would be one of the principal supporters of the show. I made up my mind to be present at the performance. The ingenuous joy which Baklouchin manifested when he spoke of the undertaking was quite touching, and from vague hints we gradually proceeded to discuss his past quite openly. He told me, among other things, that he had not served only at St Petersburg; he had been sent to R with the rank of non-commissioned officer in a garrison battalion.

'From there they sent me on here,' he added.

'What for?' I asked him.

'What for? You'd never guess, Alexander Petrovitch. Because I was in love.'

'Come, now. A man is not exiled for that,' I said with a laugh.

‘I should have added,’ continued Baklouchin, ‘that it led me to shoot a German. Was it fair to condemn me to hard labour for killing a German? Just think.’

‘How did it happen? Tell me the story. It must be a strange one.’

‘An amusing story indeed, Alexander Petrovitch.’

‘So much the better. Tell me.’

‘You wish me to? Well, then, listen.’

And he told me the story of his crime. It was not amusing, but it was certainly strange.

‘This is how it happened,’ began Baklouchin. ‘I had been sent to Riga, a fine, handsome city, which has only one fault -there are too many Germans there. I was still a young man, and was respected by my officers. I wore my cap at a jaunty angle and led a most agreeable life and made love to the German girls, one of whom, named Luisa, pleased me very much. She and her aunt were dressers of fine linen. The old woman was a real caricature, but she had money. At first I used merely to pass under the young lady’s window; but I soon made her acquaintance. Luisa spoke Russian well enough, though with a slight accent. She was charming; I never saw anyone like her. I was most pressing in my advances, but she only replied that she would preserve her innocence, that as a wife she might prove worthy of me. She was an affectionate, smiling girl, and wonderfully neat. In fact, I can assure you that I never met anyone like her. She herself had suggested that I should marry her, and how could I do otherwise? One day she failed to keep an appointment. It happened a second and a third time. I wrote her a letter, but she did not reply. “What’s to be done?” I asked myself. If she had been deceiving me she could easily have done so once more; she could have answered my letter and kept the appointment; but she was incapable of falsehood. She had simply jilted me. “This is her aunt’s work,” I said to myself. I was afraid to call on her.

‘Although she recognized our engagement, she acted as if she were ignorant of it. I wrote a fine letter and told her: “If you don’t come, I will come to your aunt’s for you.” She was afraid and came. Then she began to weep, and told me that a rich, middle-aged German named Schultz, a distant relation of theirs, a clockmaker by trade, had expressed a wish to marry her, in order to make her happy, as he said, and that he himself might not find himself without a wife in his old age. He had loved her for a long time, so she told me, and had been nourishing this idea for years; but he had kept it a secret, and had never ventured to speak out. “You see, Sasha,” she said to me, “it’s a question of happiness. He’s rich. Surely you wouldn’t prevent my happiness.” I looked her in the face; she wept, embraced me, clasped me in her arms.

“Well, she’s quite right,” I said to myself, “what good is there in marrying a soldier-even a non-commissioned officer? So farewell, Luisa. God protect you. I have no right to stand in the way of your happiness.”

“What sort of fellow is he?” I asked. “Good-looking?” “No, he’s old, and has ever such a long nose.” ‘ She burst into a fit of laughter. I left her. It was just my luck. She had told me where Schultz lived, and next day I passed his shop. I looked through the window and saw a German mending a watch. He was forty-five years of age, with

aquiline nose, protruding eyes, and a dress-coat with a very high collar. I spat with contempt as I watched him. At that moment I could gladly have broken the shop window, but "What's the use?" I asked myself. "There's nothing more to be done; it's over, all over." I returned to barracks as darkness fell, lay down on my bed, and--will you believe it, Alexander Petrovitch?--began to sob--yes, to sob. One day passed, then a second, then a third. I saw Luisa no more. I had learned, however, from an old woman (she too was a washerwoman, and the girl I loved used sometimes to visit her) that this German knew of our relations, and had therefore made up his mind to marry her as soon as possible, otherwise he would have waited two years longer. He had made Luisa swear that she would see me no more. It appeared that on account of me he had refused to loosen his purse-strings, and was keeping Luisa and her aunt very short of money. He might yet change his mind, for he was not very resolute. The old woman told me that he had invited them to take coffee with him the next day, Sunday, and that another relation, a former shopkeeper, now very poor, and an assistant in some liquor store, would also be there. When I realized that the business was to be settled on Sunday, I was so furious that I could not regain my equanimity, and the following day I did nothing but reflect. I believe I could have devoured that German. By Sunday morning I had still come to no decision. Immediately after mass I ran out, put on my greatcoat, and went to the German's house. I thought I should find them all there. Why I went to the German, and what I meant to say to him, I had no idea.

'I slipped a pistol into my pocket to be ready for everything --a little pistol that was not worth a curse, with an old-fashioned lock--a thing I had used as a boy, and which was really quite useless. I loaded it, however, because I thought they would try to kick me out and that the German would insult me. In that case I would pull out my pistol and scare them. When I arrived there was no one on the staircase; they were all in the workroom. The one servant-girl who waited upon them was absent. I walked through the shop and saw that the door was closed--an old door fastened from the inside. My heart beat; I stopped and listened. They were speaking German. I kicked the door open and looked around. The table was laid; on it stood a large coffee-pot with a spirit-lamp underneath, and a plate of biscuits. Standing on a tray there was a small decanter of brandy with some herrings, sausages, and a bottle of wine. Luisa and her aunt, both in their Sunday best, were seated on a sofa. Opposite them the German sprawled in his chair, dressed like a bridegroom in his high-collared coat and his hair carefully combed. On the other side there was another German, old, fat, and grey, but he took no part in the conversation. When I entered, Luisa turned very pale. The aunt jumped up and sat down again. The German became angry. What a rage he was in! He rose, and, walking towards me, said:

"What do you want?"

'I should have lost my self-possession if anger had not supported me.

"What do I want? Is this the way to receive a guest? Why don't you offer me a drink? I've come to pay you a visit."

'The German reflected a moment, and then said: "Sit down."

'I sat down.

"Here's some vodka. Do help yourself."

"And let it be good," I cried, my anger rising.

"It is good."

'I was enraged to see him looking me up and down. The most frightful part of it was that Luisa was looking on. I took a drink and said to him:

"Look here, German, why be rude to me? Let's get better acquainted. I've come to see you as friends."

"I cannot be your friend," he replied. "You are a private soldier.'

'Then I lost control of myself.

"You damned German! You sausage-seller! You're completely in my power. Look here; do you wish me to break your head with this?"

'I drew out my pistol, got up, and struck him on the forehead. The women were more dead than alive; they were afraid to breathe. The elder of the two men, quite white, was trembling like a leaf.

'The German seemed much astonished. But he soon recovered himself.

"I am not afraid of you," he said, "and I beg of you, as a well-bred man, to make an end of this pleasantry. I am not afraid of you!"

"You are afraid! You dare not move while this pistol is pointed at you."

"You dare not do such a thing!" he cried.

"And why should I not dare?"

"Because you would be severely punished."

'May the devil take that idiot of a German! If he had not goaded me he would have been alive to-day.

"So you think I dare not?"

"No."

"I dare not, you think?"

"You would not dare!"

"Wouldn't I, sausage-maker?" I fired the pistol, and he sank down in his chair. The others screamed. I put the pistol in my pocket, but on returning to the fortress I threw it among some weeds near the principal entrance.

'I lay on my bed and thought: "I shall soon be arrested." An hour passed, then another, but no one came for me.

'Towards evening I felt so sad that I went out intending to see Luisa at all costs. I passed by the clockmaker's house; there were a number of people there, including the police. I ran on to the old woman's and said:

"Call Luisa!"

'I had only a moment to wait. She came immediately, and threw herself on my neck in tears.

"It is my fault," she said. "I should not have listened to my aunt."

‘She then told me that her aunt had returned home immediately after the assassination. She was in such a fright that she collapsed without speaking a word; she had said nothing. On the contrary, she had ordered her niece to be as silent as herself.

“No one has seen her since,” said Luisa.

‘The clockmaker had previously sent his servant away: he was afraid of her, for she was jealous, and would have scratched his eyes out had she known that he intended to get married.

‘There were no workmen in the house; he had sent them all away. He had himself prepared the coffee and collation. As for the relative, he had scarcely spoken a word all his life: he took his hat and departed without opening his mouth.

“He is quite sure to be silent,” added Luisa.

‘So, indeed, he was. For two weeks I was neither arrested nor even suspected.

‘You needn’t believe me if you don’t wish, Alexander Petrovitch.

‘Those two weeks were the happiest in my life. I saw Luisa every day. And how devoted she had become!

‘She said to me through her tears: “If you are exiled, I will go with you. I will leave everything to follow you.”

‘I thought of making away with myself, so much had she moved me; but at the end of the fortnight I was arrested. The old man and the aunt had agreed to denounce me.’

‘But Baklouchin,’ I interrupted, ‘for that they would only have given you ten to twelve years’ hard labour, and in the civil section; yet you are in the special section. How is that?’

‘That’s another matter,’ said Baklouchin. ‘When I appeared before the court martial the captain appointed to conduct the case began by insulting me, and calling me names before the tribunal. I could not stand it, and shouted: “Why do you insult me? Don’t you see, you scoundrel, that you’re only looking at yourself in the glass?”

‘This resulted in a second charge against me. I was tried a second time, and for the two crimes was condemned to four thousand strokes and the special section. As I was led out to receive my punishment in “Green Street,” that captain left. He had been degraded from his rank, and was dispatched to the Caucasus as a private soldier. Good-bye, Alexander Petrovitch. Don’t fail to come to our performance.’

Chapter XI: The Christmas Holidays

The holidays were approaching. On the eve of the great day only a few convicts went to work. Those who had been assigned to the tailors’ shop, and a few others, did so as usual, but they returned almost immediately, separately or in groups. There was no work at all after dinner. From early morning the majority were occupied with their own affairs, not with those of the administration. Some were arranging to bring in spirits, while others sought permission to visit their friends or to collect small accounts due to them for services rendered. Baklouchin and others who were to take part in

the theatrical performance were trying to persuade some of their acquaintance, mostly officers' servants, to procure for them the necessary costumes. Some bustled about with a businesslike air simply because others were genuinely occupied. They had no money to collect, and yet seemed to expect payment. Everyone, in short, seemed to be looking for some kind of change. Towards evening the guards, who executed the convicts' commissions, brought them all kinds of victuals-meat, sucking-pigs, and geese. Many of the simplest and least extravagant fellows, who had saved their kopecks for a whole year, decided to spend something on that day, and to celebrate Christmas Eve in a worthy manner. Christmas Day itself was an even greater festival, their right to celebrate which was recognized by the regulations. Prisoners could not be sent to work on that day, and there were not three occasions like it in all the year.

What memories, too, must have troubled the souls of those reprobates at the approach of so solemn a festival! The common people always retain their childhood memories of Christmas, and these men must have recalled with anguish the days when work was laid aside and they rested in the bosom of the family. There was something impressive about the convicts' respect for Christmas. There were few cases of drunkenness; nearly everyone was serious, and even preoccupied, though there was little enough to do. Even those who did themselves really well were quieter than usual; laughter seemed out of place. A sort of intolerant susceptibility reigned throughout the prison, and if anyone interfered, even accidentally, with the general repose, he was quickly reminded of the fact with shouts of abuse. He was condemned as though he lacked respect to the festival itself.

This attitude was as touching as it was remarkable. Apart from the innate veneration they have for the feast, they feel that by observing it they enter into communion with the rest of mankind; that they are not altogether reprobates, lost and cast off by society. The rejoicings that took place in prison were the same as those outside. That was the general feeling: I saw it, and experienced it myself.

Akim Akimitch had made great preparations for the festival. He had no memories of family life, being an orphan, born in a strange house, and sent into the army at the age of fifteen. He could never have experienced any profound joy, having always and everywhere lived in the dread of infringing regulations. Nor was he very religious; for his acquired formality had stifled in him all human feeling, all passion and prejudice, good or evil. He therefore prepared to spend Christmas without undue excitement. He was saddened by no painful and fruitless recollection. He did everything with the punctuality required in the execution of his duty, in order to get through the ceremony as quickly as was compatible with decorum. Moreover, he did not trouble to reflect upon the significance of the day; he had never given it a thought, even punctiliously while he fulfilled his religious duties. Had he been ordered next day to do the opposite of what he had done the previous evening, he would have shown himself no less submissive. Once, and once only in his life he had followed his own will- and had been sent to hard labour in consequence.

This lesson had not been lost upon him, though fate had ordained that he should never understand his fault. He had yet learned the salutary moral principle, that he must never reason about anything because his mind was not equal to the task of forming a judgment. Blindly devoted to ceremonies, he looked with respect at the sucking-pig which he had stuffed with millet-seed, and which he had roasted himself (for he had some culinary skill), just as if it had been no ordinary sucking-pig which could have been bought and roasted at any time, but a particular kind of animal born specially for Christmas Day. Perhaps he had been accustomed from earliest years to see a sucking-pig served up on that day, and concluded that a sucking-pig was indispensable for the proper celebration of the festival. I am certain that if through some mischance he had failed to eat that particular dish on that particular day, he would have been troubled all his life with remorse for having failed in his duty. Until Christmas morning he wore his old vest and his old trousers, which had long been threadbare. I then learned that he kept carefully in his box some new clothes which had been given to him four months before; he had not worn them before, as he wished to do so for the first time on Christmas Day. It was perfectly true. On the previous evening he took the new clothes out of his trunk, unfolded, examined, and cleaned them; then he blew on them to remove the dust, and being convinced that they were in good order, probably tried them on. They suited him admirably, and all the garments matched. The coat buttoned up to the neck; the collar, straight and stiff like cardboard, kept his chin in place. There was a military cut about those clothes, and Akim Akimitch smiled with satisfaction, turning himself round and round, not without swagger, before a little mirror adorned with a gilt border.

One of the buttons alone seemed out of place. Akim Akimitch noticed it, and at once made the necessary alteration. He tried on the coat once more and found it irreproachable. Then he folded everything up as before, and with a satisfied mind locked them up in his box until the following day. His head was well shaved, but after careful examination he decided that it was not good enough; his hair had grown imperceptibly. Accordingly he hurried off to his barber. In point of fact no one would have dreamed of looking at him on Christmas morning, but he was acting conscientiously so as to do his duty. This care lest the smallest button, the least thread of an epaulette, the slightest string of a tassel should be out of place was engraved upon his mind as an imperious obligation. He looked upon it as the reflection of perfect order. As one of the 'old hands' he made himself responsible for seeing that hay was brought and strewed on our barrack floor, as was done in the other buildings. I do not know why, but hay was always strewed on the ground at Christmas time.

As soon as Akim Akimitch had finished his work he said his prayers, lay down on his bed, and went to sleep. He slept like a child, determined to wake up as early as possible next day. The other convicts did the same; in fact they retired much earlier than usual. No one plied his customary evening task; and as for playing cards, no one would have dared even to mention such a thing. All looked forward anxiously to the morning.

At last that morning arrived. At an early hour, even before it was light, the drum beat, and the under-officer whose duty it was to count the prisoners wished them a happy Christmas. They returned his greeting in a cheerful and friendly manner. Akim Akimitch, and many others who had their geese and sucking-pigs, went to the kitchen, after saying their prayers in a hurried manner, to see where their victuals were and how they were being cooked.

Through the little windows of our barrack-room, obscured by snow and ice, we could see flaring the bright light from the two kitchens where six stoves had been lighted. Across the courtyard, which was still plunged in darkness, convicts, each with a half pelisse round his shoulders or perhaps fully dressed, hurried towards the kitchens. A very few had already visited the drink-sellers. They were the impatient ones, but they were quite well behaved; better, perhaps, than on ordinary days. There was no quarrelling or abuse; all realized that this was a great festival. Some even went to visit other barracks in order to wish the inmates a happy Christmas, for a sort of friendship seemed to exist between them all. I should mention in passing that anything like close friendship is almost unknown in convict establishments. It was very rare to see a man on confidential terms with another as in the world outside. We were generally harsh and abrupt towards one another. With some rare exceptions that was the general tone purposely adopted and rigidly maintained.

I went outside with the others. Day was breaking, the stars were paling; a light, cold mist was rising from the earth, and spirals of smoke were ascending from the chimneys. Several convicts whom I met smiled and wished me a happy Christmas. I thanked them and returned their wishes. Some of them had never spoken to me before.

On my way to the kitchen a prisoner from the military barracks, with his sheep-skin on his shoulder, recognized me, and called out from the middle of the courtyard, 'Alexander Petrovitch!' He ran towards me and I waited for him. He was a young fellow, with a round face and soft eyes, and not at all communicative as a rule. He had not spoken to me since my arrival, and appeared never even to have noticed me. As for me, I did not know so much as his name. He came up and stood before me, smiling with a vacuous but none the less a happy expression.

'What do you want?' I asked, not without surprise.

He remained standing there, still smiling and staring, but without replying to my question.

'Why, it's Christmas Day,' he muttered.

He discovered that he had nothing more to say, and hurried away to the kitchen.

Incidentally, we scarcely ever met again, and he never afterwards spoke another word to me.

Around the flaming kitchen stoves the convicts pushed and jostled. Everyone was watching his own property. The cooks were preparing dinner, which was to be served a little earlier than usual. No one began eating before the appointed time, though a good many would have liked to do so; but one had to behave properly in company! We

were waiting for the priest, and the fast preceding Christmas would not be over until he arrived.

It was not quite light when the corporal, standing just inside the main gate, shouted: 'Kitchens!'

This call was repeated at intervals for about two hours. The cooks were wanted in order to receive gifts brought from all parts of the town in enormous numbers: loaves of white bread, scones, rusks, pancakes, and pastry of various kinds. I do not think there was a shopkeeper in the whole town who did not send something to the Unfortunates. Some of these gifts were magnificent, and included a good many cakes of the finest flour. Others were very humble, such as rolls worth two kopecks apiece, and a couple of brown loaves covered lightly with sour cream. These were offerings from the poor to the poor, who had in many cases spent their last kopeck to procure them.

All these gifts were accepted with equal gratitude, without reference to the value or to the giver. When a convict received anything he took off his cap and thanked the donor with a low bow wishing him a happy Christmas, and then carried his present to the kitchen.

As soon as a number of loaves and cakes had been collected, the senior men of each barrack assembled and distributed the heap in equal portions among all the various sections. The distribution excited neither envy nor protest: it was made honestly and equitably. Akim Akimitch, with the help of another prisoner, distributed the share allotted to our barrack, and gave to each his due. All were satisfied: no objection was made by anyone, there was not the smallest sign of envy, and no one dreamed of deceiving his neighbour.

When Akim Akimitch had finished in the kitchen he proceeded with the solemn rite of dressing. He fastened his coat punctiliously, button by button, and thus arrayed he began his prayers, which lasted for a considerable time. The numerous convicts who fulfilled their religious duties were for the most part old men. The younger men scarcely ever prayed; at best they made the sign of the cross on rising from table, and then only on festival days.

When he had finished praying, Akim Akimitch came and offered me the usual good wishes. I invited him to take tea, and he returned the compliment by offering me some of his sucking-pig. Later Petroff came and wished me a happy Christmas. I think he had been drinking, for although he seemed to have much to say, he scarcely uttered a word. He stood there for some moments, and then went back to the kitchen. The priest was now expected in the military section. Their barrack was arranged differently from the rest. Bedsteads stood against the walls, and not in the middle of the room. The idea was probably to facilitate the parading of convicts in an emergency.

A small table had been prepared in the middle of the room; on it stood an ikon before which burned a little lamp. At last the priest arrived with the cross and holy water. He prayed and chanted before the ikon, and then turned towards the convicts, who came and kissed the crucifix one after another. The priest then walked through each barrack, sprinkling it with holy water. When he entered the kitchen he remarked

on the excellence of prison bread, which had, indeed, quite a reputation in town. The convicts at once volunteered to send him a couple of fresh loaves straight from the oven, and a soldier was detailed to take them to his house forthwith. The convicts escorted the cross on its return journey with the same respect as that with which they had received it.

Very soon afterwards, the governor and deputy governor arrived. The deputy was liked, and even respected. He accompanied his chief on a tour of inspection, wished the convicts a happy Christmas, and then went into the kitchen where he tasted the cabbage soup. It was excellent that day; each convict was entitled to nearly a pound of meat in addition to which there was millet-seed, and the butter had certainly not been spared. The governor saw his deputy to the door, and then ordered the convicts to start dinner. Each man tried to avoid his notice; they hated his spiteful, inquisitorial look from behind his spectacles as he strode up and down, apparently looking for some disorder to repress, some crime to punish.

We dined. Akim Akimitch's sucking-pig was admirably roasted. I could never understand how it was that within five minutes of the governor's departure the room was full of drunken men, all of whom had appeared stone-cold sober as long as he remained. Ruddy, radiant faces were now everywhere, and balalaiki (Russian banjos) were soon produced. Next came the little Polish fiddler whom some convivial fellow had engaged for the day to play lively dance-tunes. The conversation became more animated and more noisy, but dinner ended without serious trouble. Everyone had had enough, and some of the older, more serious-minded convicts went straight to bed. So did Akim Akimitch, who probably thought it his duty to sleep after dinner on festival days.

The Old Believer from Starodoub took forty winks and then climbed on to the stove, where he opened his book and continued to pray until late in the evening. He declared himself shocked at the sight of so shameless an orgy. All the Cir-cassians left the table. They looked with curiosity, but with a touch of disgust, at this drunken crowd. I met Nourra.

'Aman, aman,' he said, with a burst of honest indignation, and shaking his head. 'What an offence to Allah!' Isaiah Fomitch with an arrogant and obstinate air lit a candle in his favourite corner, and set to work in order to show that in his eyes this was no holiday. Here and there card parties were arranged. The players were not worried about the soldiers, but men were placed on the look-out in case the officer of the guard came along. He, however, was careful to turn a blind eye to what was going on. He made altogether three rounds: the prisoners, if they were drunk, promptly hid themselves, and the cards disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. I believe he had resolved to overlook minor breaches of regulations, for drunkenness was not treated as an offence that day. Little by little everyone became more or less gay. There were occasional quarrels, but the majority of prisoners remained calm, amusing themselves with the spectacle of their drunken companions, some of whom had put away enormous quantities of liquor.

Gazin was triumphant. He strutted about with a self-satisfied air by the side of his bed, underneath which he had hidden a store of vodka. Until Christmas Day he had kept it concealed in the snow behind our barrack-room. He smiled knowingly when he saw customers arrive in crowds. He was perfectly sober; indeed he had drunk nothing at all, for he intended to regale himself on the last day of the holidays after he had emptied everyone else's pocket. The prison was becoming an inferno of drunkenness. Singing was heard, and songs gradually gave way to tears. Some of the prisoners walked about in bands, sheepskins on shoulders, proudly plucking the strings of their balalaiki. A chorus of from eight to ten men had been formed in the special section; the singing here was excellent, with its accompaniment of balalaiki and guitars.

Songs of a truly popular kind were rare. I remember one which was admirably sung: Yesterday I, a young girl, Went to the feast.

A variation hitherto unknown to me was introduced, and at the end of the song the following lines were added:

At my house, the house of a young girl,
Everything is in order.
I have washed the spoons,
I have turned out the cabbage-soup.
I have wiped down the panels of the door,
I have cooked the patties.

But for the most part they sang prison songs, one of them called 'As it happened,' which was most amusing. It told how a man amused himself and lived like a prince until he was sent to prison, where he fared very differently. Another very popular number explained how the hero had once owned capital, but now possessed nothing but captivity. Here is a true convict song:

The day breaks in the heavens,
We are waked up by the drum.
The old man opens the door,
The warder comes and calls us.
No one sees us behind the prison walls,
Nor how we live in this place.
But God, the Heavenly Creator, is with us.
He will not let us perish.

Another, still more melancholy but set to glorious music, was spoiled by its tame and inaccurate wording. I can remember a few of the verses:

My eyes no more will see the land,
Where I was born;
To suffer torments undeserved,
Will be my punishment.
The owl will shriek upon the roof,
And raise the echoes of the forest.
My heart is broken down with grief.

No, never more shall I return.

This is a favourite solo piece, and is seldom sung in chorus. When the day's work is done, a prisoner will go outside, squat on the doorstep, and meditate with his chin in his hand. Presently he begins to drawl a song in high falsetto. We listen, and the effect is heart-rending. Some of the men had beautiful voices.

Dusk was closing in. Wearisomeness and general depression were making themselves felt after drunkenness and debauchery. One fellow, who an hour beforehand was holding his sides with laughter, now sat in a corner maudlin drunk; others fought or tottered about the barracks, pale, very pale, and looking for someone with whom to quarrel. The poor creatures had meant to spend a merry Christmas, but for most of them it had proved an unhappy day. They had looked vaguely for a joy that was beyond their reach. For instance, on the two occasions that I ran across Petroff he was sober enough, having drunk next to nothing. Yet right up to the last he was expecting something extraordinary to happen. He did not say so, but you could read it in his eyes. He ran tirelessly from one barrack to another, but found nothing but general intoxication, the meaningless abuse of drunken men, and the giddiness of overheated brains.

Sirotkin too wandered about the barracks, dressed in a brand new red shirt and good-looking as ever. He too was on the watch for something to happen. The spectacle was most unpleasant; indeed, it became quite nauseating. There were some amusing incidents, but I was too sad to be entertained. I felt a deep pity for all these men, whose company seemed to strangle, stifle me. Here are two convicts disputing as to which of them should treat the other. The argument lasts long; they have almost come to blows. One of them has for long borne a grudge against the other. Stammering with indignation, he tries to prove his companion acted dishonestly a year before by selling a pelisse for him and keeping back the money. Nor is this the end of it. The complainant is a tall, well-developed young fellow, quiet, by no means stupid, but who, when drunk, wishes to make friends with everyone and to pour out his grief. He insults his adversary for the sake of the reconciliation that he hopes will follow. The other man, a big, massive person with a round face and as cunning as a fox, has perhaps drunk more than his companion, but he appears only slightly intoxicated. He is supposed to be rich and may therefore be presumed to have no ulterior motive in irritating his companion, whom he accordingly leads to one of the drink-sellers. The other fellow declares that his companion owes him money in any case, and is therefore bound to stand him a drink 'if he has any pretensions to be considered an honest man.'

The drink-seller, not without respect for the customer and a touch of contempt for his argumentative friend who was going to drink at someone else's expense, took a glass and filled it with vodka.

'No, Stepka, you'll have to pay; after all, you owe me money.'

'I won't tire my tongue talking to you any longer,' replied Stepka.

'No, Stepka, you lie,' continued his friend, seizing the glass offered by the drink-seller. 'You owe me money, you can't have any conscience. You haven't a thing on

you that's not borrowed, I don't believe your very eyes are your own. In fact, Stepka, you're a blackguard.'

'What are you whining about? Look, you're spilling your vodka.'

'Since you're being treated, why don't you drink up?' cries the drink-seller to the argumentative friend. 'I can't wait here all night.'

'I'll drink up, don't you fear. What are you worrying about? My best wishes for the day. My best wishes for the day, Stepka Doroveitch,' and he bows, glass in hand, towards Stepka whom a moment ago he called a blackguard. 'Good health to you, and may you live another hundred years.' He drinks, gives a grunt of satisfaction, and wipes his mouth. 'What a lot of brandy I've drunk,' he says, gravely speaking to everyone but without addressing anyone in particular, 'but I've finished now. Say thank you, Stepka Doroveitch.'

'There's nothing to thank you for.'

'Ah! you won't thank me. Then I'll tell everyone what you did to me, and that you're a scoundrel.'

'Then I shall have something to tell you, you drunkard,' interrupts Stepka, who at last loses patience. 'Listen to me now. Let us divide the world in two. You shall take one half, I the other. Then I shall have peace.'

'Then you'll not give me back my money?'

'What money, you drunken sot?'

'My money that I earned with the sweat of my brow and the labour of my hands. You'll be sorry for it in the next world. You'll be roasted for those five kopecks.'

'Go to the devil.'

'What are you driving me for? Am I a horse?'

'Be off, be off.'

'Blackguard!'

'Convict!'

And the insults exchanged were worse than they had been before the visit to the drink-seller.

Another couple of friends are seated, each on his own bed. One is tall, vigorous, fleshy, with a red face-a regular butcher. He is on the verge of weeping, for he has been deeply moved. The other is tall, thin, conceited, with an immense nose which always seems to have a cold, and little blue eyes fixed upon the ground. He is a clever, well-bred man, and was formerly a secretary. He treats his friend with a trace of contempt which the latter cannot endure. They have been drinking together all day.

'You've taken a liberty with me,' cried the stout one, shaking his companion's head with his left hand. To take a liberty means, in prison slang, to strike. This convict, formerly a non-commissioned officer, secretly envies his neighbour's elegance, and endeavours to make up for his material grossness by refined conversation.

'I tell you, you are wrong,' says the secretary, in a dogmatic tone, with his eyes obstinately fixed on the ground, and without looking at his companion.

‘You struck me. Do you hear?’ continued the other, still shaking his dear friend. ‘You’re the only man in the world I care for, but you shan’t take a liberty with me.’

‘Confess, my dear fellow,’ replies the secretary, ‘that all this is the result of too much drink.’

The corpulent friend staggers backward, peers drunkenly at the secretary, whom he suddenly hits with all his strength right between the eyes. Thus terminates the day’s friendship. The victim disappears unconscious beneath the bedstead.

An acquaintance of mine now entered the room. He belonged to the special section and was a very good-natured,; gay fellow, far from stupid, and jocular without malice. He was the man who, on my arrival at the prison, was looking out for a rich peasant, the man who spoke so much of his self-respect and ended by drinking my tea. He was forty years old, had enormous lips, and a fat, fleshy, red nose. He held a balalaika, and idly plucked its strings. He was followed by a little convict with a large head, whom I knew very little and to whom no one paid any attention. Now that he was drunk he had attached himself to Vermaloff and followed him about like his shadow, at the same time gesticulating and striking the wall and bedsteads. He was almost in tears. Vermaloff took as much notice of him as if he had not existed. The most curious fact was that these two men had absolutely nothing in common; they were utterly different in outlook and occupation. They belonged to different sections, and lived in separate barracks. The little fellow’s name was Bulkin.

Vermaloff smiled when he saw me seated by the stove. He stopped at some distance from me, reflected for a moment, tottered, and then came towards me with an affected swagger. Then he swept the strings of his instrument and sang, or rather recited, beating time with the toe of his boot:

My darling!
With her full, fair face,
Sings like a nightingale;
In her satin dress,
With its brilliant trimming,
She is very fair.

This song roused Bulkin to an extraordinary pitch of excitement. He waved his arms, and shouted for the benefit of all and sundry: ‘He lies, my friends; he lies like a quack doctor. There is not a shadow of truth in what he sings!’

‘My respects to the venerable Alexander Petrovitch,’ said Vermaloff, looking at me with a knowing smile. I fancied he was even going to embrace me. He was drunk. That expression, ‘My respects to the venerable So-and-so,’ is used by the common people throughout Siberia, and may refer even to a young man of twenty. To call a man ‘old’ is a sign of respect, and may amount even to flattery.

‘Well, Vermaloff, how are you?’ I replied.

‘So, so. Nothing to boast of. Those who really enjoy the holiday have been drinking since early morning...’

The rest of the sentence was inaudible.

‘He lies; he lies again,’ said Bulkin, striking the beds as if in despair.

Still Vermaloff ignored him, so deliberately that he might have sworn on oath to do so. That was really the most comic thing about it, for Bulkin had not quitted his side the whole day, finding fault with every word he spoke, wringing his hands, and striking his fists against the wall and the beds till he made them bleed, he suffered visibly from his conviction that Vermaloff ‘lied like a quack doctor.’ If Bulkin had had any hair on his head he would certainly have torn it out in a fury of disappointment. One might have thought he had assumed responsibility for Vermaloff’s behaviour, and that all Vermaloff’s faults troubled his conscience. The amusing part of it was that Vermaloff continued as before.

‘He lies! He lies! He lies!’ cried Bulkin.

‘What can it matter to you?’ replied the convicts, with a laugh.

‘I must tell you, Alexander Petrovitch, that I was very good-looking when I was a young man, and the young girls were very fond of me,’ said Vermaloff suddenly.

‘He lies! He lies!’ interrupted Bulkin with a groan. The convicts burst out laughing.

‘And I dressed to kill, too: red shirt and broad trousers of cotton velvet. I was happy in those days. I got up when I liked and did whatever I pleased. In fact’

‘He lies,’ declared Bulkin.

‘I inherited from my father a house built of stone and two storeys high. Within two years I had spent both storeys; nothing remained to me but the street door. But what of it? Money comes and goes like a bird.’

‘He lies!’ declared Bulkin, more resolutely than before.

‘When I had spent all my money I wrote and asked my relations for more. They considered that I had defied them and been disrespectful. It is now seven years since I posted that letter.’

‘Any answer?’ I asked, with a smile.

‘No,’ he replied, also laughing and thrusting his face close to mine.

He then informed me that he had a sweetheart.

‘You a sweetheart?’

‘Onufrield said to me the other day: “My girl’s marked with small-pox-ugly as hell; but she has plenty of dresses. Yours may be pretty, but she’s a beggar.”’

‘Is that so?’

‘Certainly, she is a beggar,’ he answered.

He roared with laughter, and everyone joined in, for they all knew he had a liaison with a beggar woman, to whom he gave ten kopecks every six months.

‘Well, what do you want with me?’ I asked, wishing now to get rid of him.

He remained silent, and then, looking at me in a most insinuating manner, said:

‘Couldn’t you let me have enough to buy half a pint? I’ve drunk nothing but tea the whole day,’ he added, taking the money I offered him, ‘and tea doesn’t agree with me, I’m afraid of becoming asthmatic. Besides, it gives me wind.’

When Bulkin saw him accept the money, his indignation knew no bounds. He gesticulated like a man possessed.

‘Good people all,’ he cried, ‘the man lies. Everything he says-it’s all a lie.’

‘What’s that to do with you?’ the convicts shouted, astonished at his behaviour. ‘You’re possessed.’

‘I will not allow him to he,’ continued Bulkin, rolling his eyes, and striking his fist with energy on the bed-boards. ‘He shall not lie.’

There was more laughter. Vermaloff had obtained what he wanted; he bowed and ran off grimacing to the drink seller. Then only did he notice Bulkin.

‘Come!’ he said, as if Bulkin were indispensable for the execution of some design. ‘Idiot!’ he added contemptuously as his companion passed before him.

Enough of this tumultuous scene, which was soon over.

The convicts turned in and slept heavily, talking and raving in their sleep more than on other nights. A few continued playing cards. The festival looked forward to with such impatience was now over, and to-morrow the daily round, the hard labour, would begin again.

Chapter XII: The Play

On the evening of the third day of the holidays there took place our first theatrical performance. Its organization had caused endless trouble, but those who were to act had undertaken full responsibility, and the other convicts knew nothing about the show except that it was to take place. We were not even told the name of the piece. The principal concern of the actors was to obtain the largest possible number of costumes. Whenever I met Baklouchin he snapped his fingers with satisfaction, but told me nothing. I think the governor was well disposed; but we were not certain whether he knew what was going on or not, whether he had authorized it, or whether he had determined to shut his eyes and say nothing, after assuring himself that there would be no disturbance. I fancy he must have known what was afoot but said nothing about it for fear of worse consequences. The soldiers would give trouble, or at least get drunk, unless they had something to divert them. That was a natural conclusion. Indeed, if the convicts themselves had not organized some form of entertainment during the holidays, the authorities would have been obliged to do so. However, the governor was full of idiosyncrasies, and I may be quite wrong in assuming that he both knew and had authorized our project. A man like him must be for ever interfering and disappointing others, taking something away, depriving someone of his rights. He was known far and wide as a kill-joy and a martinet.

It mattered nothing to the governor that his severity made the men rebellious. For such offences there were suitable punishments (there are some people who reason in this way), and the only way to deal with a rascally gang of convicts was to treat them harshly and with the full rigour of the law. An incompetent officer can never understand that to apply the law without understanding its spirit is to invite opposition. He is surprised if you tell him that, besides invoking regulations, he should display a measure

of common sense. He looks upon sweet reasonableness as superfluous; to expect such a thing is in his eyes vexatious, intolerant.

However this may be, no objection was made to the performance, and that was all the convicts hoped for. I will go so far as to say that if there were no disorders, no violence, no robberies throughout the holiday period, it was only because the prisoners were allowed to organize their own amusement. I saw with my own eyes how they avoided anyone who was drunk, and how they prevented quarrels on the grounds that their play would be forbidden. They were asked to give their word of honour that they would behave well and that all would go off quietly. They gave it with pleasure, and religiously kept that promise. They took it as a compliment that they were trusted in this way. Let me add that the show cost the authorities nothing whatsoever. The theatre could be erected and taken down within a quarter of an hour, and, in case an order stopping the performance suddenly arrived, the scenery could have been put away in a few minutes. Costumes were stowed in the convicts' boxes. Let me say a word or two about the programme. There was no written playbill, not, at any rate, for the first performance; it was ready only for the second and third. Baklouchin composed it for the officers and other distinguished visitors who might deign to honour the performance with their presence, including the officer of the guard, the officer of the watch, and an Engineer officer. It was in their honour that the thing was written out at all.

It was supposed that the reputation of our theatre would extend to the whole fortress, and even to the town, for at N there was no theatre except a few amateur performances. The convicts delighted in the smallest success, and boasted of it like children.

'Who knows?' they said to one another; 'when the officers hear of it they will perhaps come and see. Then they'll realize what convicts are worth. This is no mere sketch done by soldiers, but genuine theatre played by genuine actors; nothing like it could be seen anywhere in the town. General Abrosimoff had a show at his house, and they say he's going to have another. Well, they may beat us in the matter of costumes, but as for the dialogue, that's a very different matter. The commander-in-chief himself will perhaps hear of it, and-who knows?-he may come himself.'

There was certainly no theatre in the town, and the convicts, especially after their initial success, went so far as to imagine that they would be rewarded and that their period of hard labour might be shortened. A moment later they were the first to laugh at the idea. In a word, they were children, real children, at the age of forty! I knew something about the various pieces in spite of the fact that there was as yet no bill. The title of the first was *Philatka and Miroshka, Rivals*. Baklouchin boasted to me at least a week before the performance that the part of *Philatka* for which he had cast himself would be played as it had never been played before, even on the St Petersburg stage. He strutted about the barracks puffed up with boundless self-importance. Now and again he would declaim a speech from his part, and everyone would burst out laughing, regardless of whether it was amusing or not; they laughed at the fellow's

absent-mindedness. It must be admitted that the convicts as a whole were restrained and full of dignity; the only ones who showed themselves enthusiastic over Baklouchin's tirades were the young ones, who had no false modesty, or those who were as greatly respected, and whose authority was so firmly established, that they were not afraid to commit themselves. The others listened in silence, without blaming or contradicting; but they did their best to show that the performance left them indifferent.

It was not until the very last moment, the very day of the first performance, that all showed a genuine interest in what their companions had undertaken. 'What,' they asked, 'will the governor say? Will the show succeed as well as that one two years ago?' etc. etc. Baklouchin assured me that all the actors would be quite at home on the stage, and that there would even be a curtain. Sirotkin was to play a woman's part. 'You'll see how well I look in women's clothes,' he said. The Lady Bountiful was to have a dress with skirts and trimmings, as well as a parasol; while her husband, the Lord of the Manor, was to wear an officer's uniform with epaulettes, and carry a cane.

The second piece was entitled *Kedril the Glutton*. The title intrigued, but it was useless to ask questions. I could only learn that the piece had never been printed; it was to be acted from a manuscript copy lent by a retired non-com-missioned officer in the town, who had no doubt once taken part in it on some military stage. There are, indeed, in the more remote towns and governments, a number of such pieces, which, I believe, are perfectly unknown and have never been printed, but which appear to have grown up of themselves in connection with the popular theatre in certain ones of Russia. Speaking of the popular theatre, it would be a good thing if students of folk literature would take the trouble to investigate its history, for it certainly exists, and is, perhaps, not so insignificant as may be thought.

I cannot believe that everything I saw on the prison stage was the work of the convicts. It must have sprung from old traditions handed down from generation to generation, and preserved among soldiers, among workmen in industrial towns,

and even among shopkeepers in some poor, out-of-the-way places. These traditions have been preserved in certain villages and Government towns by the servants of the large landed proprietors, whom I believe to have made numerous copies of these ancient pieces.

The old Muscovite landowners and nobles had their private theatres in which their own servants used to perform. Our present-day popular theatre has developed from them; but its true origins are lost in antiquity. As for *Kedril the Glutton*, in spite of my lively curiosity I could learn nothing about it, except that demons appeared on the stage and carried *Kedril* off to hell. What did the name of *Kedril* signify? Why was he called *Kedril* and not *Cyril*? Was the name Russian or foreign? I could not resolve those questions.

It was announced that the performance would end with a musical pantomime. All this promised to be most interesting. There were fifteen actors, all intelligent fellows. They were wonderfully energetic, held several rehearsals, which sometimes took place behind the barracks, kept away from the others, and gave themselves mysterious airs.

They evidently wished to surprise us with something extraordinary and quite unexpected.

On work days the barracks were shut in the early evening, but an exception was made during the Christmas holidays, when we were not locked up until nine o'clock. This favour had been granted specially in view of the play. During the whole duration of the holidays a deputation was sent every evening to the officer of the guard humbly requesting him 'to allow the performance and not to shut at the usual hour.' It was pointed out that on previous nights there had been no disorderly conduct.

The officer of the guard must have reasoned as follows: There was no disorder, no breach of discipline at the last performance; from the moment they give their word that at to-night's show they will be equally well behaved, they mean to act as their own police force-the most rigorous police of all. Moreover, it was certain that if he forbade the performance, these fellows (convicts are always unpredictable) might commit some offence which would place him in a very difficult position. One final reason insured his consent: guard-duty is a wearisome job, and if he authorized the performance he would at least see a play, acted not by soldiers, but by convicts-a curious set of people. It would certainly be interesting, and he had a right to be present.

If his superior officer arrived and asked for the officer of the guard, he would be told that the latter had gone to count the prisoners and close the barracks; it was a straightforward answer which could not be disproved. That is why our masters authorized the entertainment and allowed the barracks to remain unlocked until evening throughout the Christmas holiday. The convicts already knew that they would meet with no opposition from the officer of the guard, and they gave him no trouble.

Towards six o'clock Petroff came to fetch me, and we went together to the theatre. Every prisoner in our barrack was there, with the exception of the Old Believer from Tchernigoff, and the Poles. The latter decided not to attend until the last performance on 4th January, after they had been assured that there would be no unseemliness. The haughtiness of these Poles irritated the other convicts. Accordingly they were received on 4th January with frigid politeness, and conducted to the best places. As for the Circassians and Isaiah Fomitch, they took genuine delight in the play. Isaiah Fomitch gave three kopecks at each performance, except the last, when he placed ten kopecks in the plate; and how happy he looked!

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

The barrack-room of the military section, which had been turned into a theatre, was fifteen feet long. From the courtyard one entered, first, an ante-chamber, and then the barrack itself. The interior, as I have already mentioned, was laid out in a peculiar manner, the beds being placed against the wall so as to leave an open space in the

middle. One half of the room was reserved for the spectators, while the other, which communicated with a second building, formed the stage. What astonished me, directly I entered, was the curtain, which was about ten feet long. It was indeed a marvel, for it was painted in oils, and represented trees, tunnels, ponds, and stars.

It was made of pieces of linen, old and new (shirts, bandages which the Russian peasant wears round his feet in lieu of socks, etc. etc.), given by the convicts and all sewn together, well, or ill, to form an immense sheet. Where there was not enough linen, it had been replaced by writing paper, gathered sheet by sheet from various office desks. Our painters (among whom was one Bruloff) had painted it all over, and the effect was very remarkable.

This luxurious curtain delighted even the most sombre and morose of the convicts. These, like the rest, showed themselves mere children as soon as the play began. They all felt pleased and were satisfied, not without a touch of vanity. The theatre was lighted with candle-ends. Two benches, which had been brought from the kitchen, were placed before the curtain, together with three or four large chairs borrowed from the non-commissioned officers' mess. These chairs were for the officers, should they think fit to honour the performance. As for the benches, they were for any noncommissioned officers, engineers, clerks, directors of the works, and other minor officials who might care to look in on the show. In fact, there was no lack of visitors. They came in greater or smaller numbers, according to the day, but for the last performance there was not a single place unoccupied on the benches.

Behind them the convicts stood crowded together; they remained standing up out of respect to the visitors, and were dressed in their coats or short pelisses, in spite of the suffocating heat. As might have been expected, the place was too small and the prisoners in the audience stood closely packed, especially in the last few rows. The bedsteads were all occupied, and some enthusiasts could be seen arguing in the room beyond the stage, where they viewed the performance from behind. Petroff and I were invited to stand in the front row near the benches, whence a good view could be obtained. They looked upon me as a good judge, a connoisseur, a regular playgoer. The convicts remarked that Baklouchin had often consulted me and taken my advice. Consequently they decided that I should be treated with respect and given one of the best places. These men are vain and frivolous, but only on the surface. They laughed at me when I was at work because I was an unskilled workman. Almazoff, for instance, had a right to despise us gentlemen and to boast of his superior skill in pounding alabaster. His laughter and raillery were directed against our origin, for we belonged by birth to the caste of his former masters, of whom he retained no single happy memory. But here in the theatre these same men made way for me, for they knew that on this subject I knew more than they did. Even those who were not at all well disposed towards me were glad to hear me praise the performance, and gave way to me without the least servility. Looking back, I realize that this temporary change of heart involved no self-abasement. Rather, it implied a sense of their own dignity.

The most striking characteristic of the Russians is their conscientiousness and love of justice. There is no false vanity, no sly ambition to rise without merit: such faults are alien to our people. Take them from their rough shell, and you will perceive, if you study them closely, attentively, and without prejudice, qualities which you would never have suspected. Our philosophers have very little to teach the common folk. I will go further and say that those sages might even take lessons from them.

Before escorting me to the theatre, Petroff had told me in all simplicity that they would pass me to the front because they expected a handsome donation from me. There were no fixed prices for a place: each one gave what he liked and what he could afford. Nearly everyone placed a piece of money in the plate when it was handed round. Even if they had invited me forward in the hope that I would give more than others, was there not in that a sense of personal dignity?

‘You are richer than I am. Go to the front row. We are all equal here, it is true; but you pay more, and the actors prefer a spectator like you. Take first place then, for we have no money, and must sort ourselves out anyhow.’

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

Before the curtain rose, the room presented a strange and animated appearance. In the first place there was the crowd -pressed, crushed, jammed together on all sides, but impatient, full of expectation, and every face glowing with delight. At the back was a grovelling, confused mass of convicts, many of whom had brought logs of wood on which they stood leaning against the wall. They relieved the fatigue consequent on this awkward position by placing both hands upon the shoulders of their companions, who seemed quite at ease. Others stood on tiptoe with their heels against the stove, and thus remained throughout the performance, supported by their neighbours. Massed against the beds was another compact crowd, for here were some of the best places of all. Five convicts had hoisted themselves to the top of the stove, whence they had a commanding view. These fortunates were extremely happy. Elsewhere swarmed the late arrivals, unable to find good places.

Everyone was well behaved, and made no noise. Each man wished to show to advantage before the distinguished visitors. Simple and natural was the expression on these ruddy faces, damp with perspiration, as the rise of the curtain was eagerly awaited. What a strange look of infinite delight, of unalloyed pleasure, was painted on these scarred countenances, these branded foreheads, so dark and menacing at ordinary times! They were all without their caps, and as I looked back at them from my place, it seemed to me that their heads were entirely shaved.

Suddenly the signal is given, and the orchestra begins to play. This orchestra deserves special attention. It consisted of eight musicians: two violins, one of which was

the property of a convict while the other had been borrowed from outside; three balalaiki made by the convicts themselves; two guitars, and a tambourine. The violins sighed and shrieked, and the guitars were worthless, but the balalaiki were remarkably good, and the agile fingering of the artists would have done honour to the cleverest executant.

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

At last two mouth-organs joined the orchestra. I had no idea until then of what these popular and vulgar instruments could do. I was astonished. The harmony and, above all, the expression, the very conception of the motif, were admirably rendered. I then understood perfectly, and for the first time, the remarkable boldness, the striking abandonment, which are expressed in our popular dance tunes and our folk-songs.

At last the curtain rose. Everyone stirred. Those at the back raised themselves on tiptoe; someone tumbled off his log, and at once there were looks enjoining silence. The performance now began.

I was not far from Ah, who was in the midst of a group formed by his brothers and the other Circassians. They had a passionate love of the stage, and did not miss a single evening. I have noticed that all Mohammedans, Circassians, and others of their kind are fond of all kinds of theatrical performance. Near them was Isaiah Fomitch, almost in ecstasy. As soon as the curtain rose he was all ears and eyes; his countenance revealed his expectation of some marvel, and I should have been sorry had he been disappointed. Ali's charming face shone with a childish joy, so pure that I was quite happy to behold it. Involuntarily, whenever a general laugh echoed an amusing remark, I turned towards him to watch his expression. He did not notice me; he was too intent upon the play.

Not far to his left stood a convict, already advanced in years, sombre, discontented, and always grumbling. Yet he too had noticed Ali, and more than once I saw him cast furtive glances, so charming was the young Circassian. For some reason unknown to me, the prisoners always called him Ali Simeonitch.

In the first piece, Philatka and Miroshka, Baklouchin, in the part of Philatka, was really marvellous. He played his role to perfection. It was obvious that he had weighed every speech and every movement. He managed to give to each word, each gesture, a meaning which agreed perfectly with the character he represented. Apart from the conscientious study he had made of the part, he was gay, simple, natural, irresistible. If you had seen Baklouchin you would certainly have said that he was a born actor, an actor by vocation, and of great talent. I have seen Philatka several times at the St Petersburg and Moscow theatres, and I declare that none of our celebrated actors

was equal to Baklouchin in this part. They were not real peasants, not true Russian moujiks, and their artificiality was all too apparent. Baklouchin was spurred by rivalry; for it was known that in the second piece Kedril would be played by a convict named Potsiakin. I do not know why, but it was assumed that he would prove more talented than Baklouchin. The latter was childishly annoyed at this supposition, and had opened his heart to me on several occasions during the last few days. Two hours before the performance he was in a state of feverish anxiety; but when the audience burst out laughing and shouted 'Bravo, Baklouchin! Well done!' his face was radiant with joy, and real inspiration shone in his eyes. The love scene between Kiroshka and Philatka, where they kiss and Philatka tells the girl 'Wipe your mouth,' and then wipes his own, was extremely amusing. It evoked loud laughter.

I was particularly interested in the spectators. They were all at their ease, and gave themselves up frankly to their mirth. Cries of approbation became more and more numerous. A convict would nudge his companion and make a hurried comment without even troubling to find out who was by his side. When a comic song began one man might be seen waving his arms as if inviting his companions to laugh; after which he would suddenly turn again towards the stage. A third smacked his tongue against his palate, and could not keep quiet for a moment; but as there was not room for him to change his position, he hopped first on one leg and then on the other. Towards the end of the piece the general gaiety reached its climax. I am in no way exaggerating. Imagine the prison, the chains, the captivity, the long years of confinement, the hard labour, the monotony, falling away drop by drop like rain on an autumn day; imagine all this despair alleviated by permission given to the convicts to amuse themselves, to breathe freely for an hour, to forget their nightmare, and to organize a play-and what a play! One that excited the envy and admiration of our town.

'Fancy those convicts!' people said. They were certainly interested in everything: take the costumes, for example. You see, it would be quite an event to watch Nietsvitaeff or Baklouchin in a costume so different from that which they had worn for years on end.

Imagine a convict, a genuine convict, whose chains ring when he walks; and there he is, out on the stage, with a frock-coat and a round hat and a cloak, like any ordinary civilian. He is wearing a false moustache. He takes a red handkerchief from his pocket and shakes it, like a real nobleman. What enthusiasm! The lord of the manor arrives in an aide-de-camp's uniform, a very old one, it is true, but with epaulettes, and a cocked hat. The effect produced is indescribable. There had been two candidates for this costume, and-will it be believed?-they had quarrelled like two little schoolboys as to which of them should play the part. Both wanted to appear in military uniform with epaulettes. The other actors separated them, and by a majority of voices the part was allotted to Nietsvitaeff; not because he was a better actor or because he bore a greater resemblance to a nobleman, but simply because he had assured them all that he would carry a cane, and that he would twirl it and rap it on the ground like a real nobleman-a dandy of the latest fashion- which was more than Vanka and Ospiety could

do, seeing they had never met a nobleman. In fact, when Nietsvitaëff appeared on the stage with his 'wife' he did nothing but draw circles on the floor with his light bamboo cane, evidently thinking that that was a sign of good breeding, of supreme elegance. Probably in his childhood, when he still ran barefooted, he had been impressed by the skill of some landowner in twirling his cane, and this impression had remained in his memory for more than thirty years.

Nietsvitaëff was so engrossed in his part that he saw no one, and recited his part of the dialogue without even raising his eyes. The most important thing for him was the end of his cane and the circles he drew with it. The Lady Bountiful was also most remarkable; she came on in an old worn-out muslin dress, which looked like a rag. Her arms and neck were bare. She had a little calico cap on her head, with strings under her chin, an umbrella in one hand, and in the other a fan of coloured paper, with which she constantly fanned herself. This great lady was welcomed with a howl of laughter; she, too, was unable to restrain herself, and burst out more than once. The part was taken by a man named Ivanoff. As for Sirotkin, he looked exceedingly well, dressed as a girl. The couplets were all well sung. In a word, the piece was played to the satisfaction of everyone; not a word of hostile criticism was passed—who, indeed, was there to criticize? The air 'Sieni moi Sieni' was played again by way of overture, and the curtain once more rose.

Kedril the Glutton was the next piece. Kedril is a sort of Don Juan. The comparison is fair enough, for master and servant are both carried off by devils at the end of the play. So far as the convicts knew, the drama was complete; but the beginning and the end must have been lost, for it had neither head nor tail. The scene is laid in an inn somewhere in Russia. The landlord enters with a nobleman wearing a cloak and a battered round hat. The valet, Kedril, follows his master; he carries a valise and a fowl wrapped up in blue paper; he wears a short pelisse and a footman's cap. This fellow is the glutton. The part was played by Potsiakin, Baklouchin's rival, while the part of the nobleman was filled by the same Ivanoff who played Lady Bountiful in the first piece. The innkeeper (Nietsvitaëff) warns the nobleman that the room is haunted by demons, and withdraws. The nobleman is interested and preoccupied; he murmurs aloud that he has known that for a long time, and orders Kedril to unpack his things and prepare supper.

Kedril is a coward as well as a glutton. When he hears tell of devils he turns pale and trembles like a leaf; he would like to run away, but is afraid of his master; besides, he is hungry, he is voluptuous, he is sensual, stupid, though cunning in his way, and, as I have said, a poltroon. He is constantly cheating his master, though he fears him like fire. He belongs to a well-known type of servant in whom may be recognized the principal characteristics of Leporello, but indistinctly and confusedly. The part was played in really superior style by Potsiakin, whose talent was beyond discussion, surpassing as it did in my opinion that of Baklouchin himself. But when I spoke to Baklouchin next day I concealed my impression from him, knowing that it would cause him bitter disappointment. As for the convict who played the nobleman, he was not

at all bad. Everything he said was meaningless and unlike anything I had ever heard before, but his enunciation was clear and his gestures becoming.

While Kedril is busy with the valise, his master paces up and down, and announces that from that day forth he means to lead a quiet life. Kedril listens, makes grimaces, and amuses the spectators with his asides. He has no pity for his master; but he has heard of devils, would like to know what they are like, and thereupon questions him. The nobleman replies that some time ago, being in danger of death, he had asked the aid of hell. The devils had come to his assistance and delivered him, but the term of his liberty has now expired; and if the devils come that evening, it will be to demand his soul, as was agreed in their compact. Kedril begins to tremble in earnest, but his master does not lose courage, and orders him to prepare supper. At mention of victuals, Kedril revives, and, taking out a bottle of wine, he marks it for his own benefit. The audience shakes with laughter; but the door grates on its hinges, the wind shakes the shutters, Kedril trembles, and hastily, almost unconsciously, puts into his mouth an enormous piece of fowl, which he is unable to swallow. There is another gust of wind.

‘Is supper ready?’ cries his master, still striding about the room.

‘Directly, sir. I am preparing it,’ says Kedril, who sits down and, taking care that his master does not see him, begins to eat the supper himself. The audience show their approval of the cunning of a servant who so cleverly makes game of a nobleman, and it must be admitted that Potsiakin, who played the part, deserved high praise. His pronunciation of the words ‘Directly, sir. I-am-preparing-it’ was admirable.

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

‘Kedril, will it soon be ready?’ cries the nobleman.

‘It is ready now,’ replies Kedril boldly, when all at once he perceives that there is scarcely anything left. Nothing remains but one leg. The master, still sombre and preoccupied, notices nothing and takes his seat while Kedril places himself behind the chair with a napkin over his arm. Every word, every gesture, every grimace from the servant, as he turns towards the audience to laugh at his master’s expense, excites the greatest mirth among the convicts. Just at the moment, as the young nobleman begins to eat, the devils arrive. They resemble nothing human or terrestrial. A side-door opens, and the phantoms appear dressed entirely in white, with lighted lanterns in lieu of heads, and scythes in their hands. Why the white dress, the scythe, and the lantern? No one could tell me, and the matter did not trouble the convicts. They were sure that this was how it should be done. The master comes forward courageously to meet the apparitions, and calls out to them that he is ready and they may take him. But Kedril, as timid as a hare, hides under the table, not forgetting, in spite of his terror, to take a bottle with him. The devils disappear, Kedril comes out of his hiding-place, and the master begins to eat his fowl. Three devils now re-enter and seize him.

‘Save me, Kedril!’ he cries. But Kedril has something else to think of. He has with him in his hiding-place not only the bottle, but also the plate of fowl and the bread. He is alone. The demons are far away, and his master also. Kedril emerges from beneath the table, looks around, and his face suddenly lights up. He winks like the rogue he is, sits down in his master’s place, and whispers to the audience: ‘Now I’ve no master but myself.’

Everyone laughs at seeing him masterless, and he says, always in an undertone and with a confidential air: ‘The devils have carried him off!’

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

The curtain falls amid general laughter, and everyone is delighted. The orchestra now attacks the famous dance tune ‘Kamarinskaia.’ First it is played softly, pianissimo; but the motive is gradually developed and played more lightly. The tempo increases, and the wood-wind joins the balalaiki sound. The musicians enter thoroughly into the spirit of the dance. Glinka, who arranged ‘Kamarinskaia’ in the most ingenious manner and with harmonies of his own devising for full orchestra, should have heard it as it was performed in our prison.

It forms the accompaniment of the musical pantomime and is played throughout. The stage represents the interior of a hut. A miller and his wife are seated, one mending clothes, the other spinning flax. Sirotkin plays the part of the wife, and Nietsvitaëff that of the husband. Our scenery was very poor, and in this piece, as in the preceding ones, imagination had to supply what was wanting. Instead of a wall at the back of the stage, there was a carpet or blanket; to the right, shabby screens; to the left, where the stage was not enclosed, the bedsteads could be seen; but the spectators were not exacting, and were well able to imagine all that lacked. It was an easy task, for all convicts are great dreamers. Directly they are told ‘this is a garden,’ it is, so far as they are concerned, a garden. Informed that ‘this is a hut,’ they accept the description without difficulty: to them it is a hut. Sirotkin was charming in woman’s dress. The miller finishes his work, takes his cap and whip, goes up to his wife, and gives her to understand by signs, that if during his absence she is so foolish as to receive anyone, she will answer for it-and he shows her his whip. The wife listens and nods her head affirmatively. She has evidently had a taste of that whip; the hussy has often deserved

it. Exit her husband. Hardly has he turned upon his heel than his wife shakes her fist after him. There is a knock; the door opens, and in comes a neighbour who is also a miller by trade. He is bearded, is in a caftan, and brings her a red handkerchief as a present. The woman smiles. Another knock is heard at the door. Where shall she hide him? She conceals him under the table, and resumes her distaff. Another admirer now presents himself-a farrier in the uniform of a non-commissioned officer.

Until now the pantomime had proceeded splendidly. The gestures of the actors were beyond criticism, and it was astounding to see these amateur actors perform their parts so correctly. Involuntarily one thought: 'What a deal of talent is lost to Russia, left to stagnate in prisons and other places of exile!'

The convict who played the farrier had doubtless taken part in a performance at some provincial theatre, or had played with amateurs. It seemed to me, however, that these fellows knew nothing of acting as an art, and their movements were gauche beyond words. When it was his turn to appear, he came on like one of the classical heroes of the old repertory -taking a long stride with one foot before he raised the other from the ground, throwing back his head on his shoulders and casting proud looks around him. If such a gait was ridiculous on the part of classical heroes, still more so was it when the actor was representing a comic character. But the audience thought it quite natural, and accepted the actor's triumphant walk as a necessary fact, without criticizing.

A moment after the entry of the second admirer there is yet another knock. The wife loses her head. Where is the farrier to be concealed? In the chest. Fortunately it is open. The farrier jumps in, and the lid falls upon him.

The new arrival is a Brahmin in full costume. His entry is hailed by the spectators with a roar of laughter. This character is played by the convict Cutchin, who fills the role to perfection, thanks largely to a suitable physiognomy. He explains in pantomime his love of the miller's wife, raises his hands to heaven, and then clasps them on his breast.

There is now a fourth knock-a vigorous one this time. There can be no mistake: it is the master of the house. The miller's wife loses her head; the Brahmin runs about frantically, begging to be hidden. She helps him to slip behind the cupboard, begins to spin, and continues to do so without thinking to open the door. In her fright she gets the thread twisted, drops the spindle, and, in her agitation, pretends to turn it when it is, in fact, lying on the floor. Sirotkin's representation of her alarm was perfect.

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

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

The only one now remaining is the Brahmin, for whom the husband seeks for some time without finding him. He is at length discovered in his corner behind the cupboard. The miller bows to him politely, and then draws him by his beard into the middle of the stage. The Brahmin tries to defend himself, and cries out, 'Accursed, accursed!'-the only words pronounced throughout the pantomime. But the husband will not listen, and, after settling accounts with him, turns to his wife. Seeing that her turn has come, she throws away both wheel and spindle and runs out, causing an earthen pot to fall as she shakes the room in her fright. The convicts burst out laughing, and Ah, without looking at me, takes my hand, and calls out, 'See, see the Brahmin!' He is bent double with laughter. The curtain falls and another song begins.

There were two or three more, all broadly humorous and very droll. They were not composed by the convicts, but the latter had contributed something to them. Every actor improvised to such purpose that the text was different each evening. The pantomime ended with a ballet, in which there was a burial. The Brahmin went through various incantations over the corpse, and with effect. The dead man returns to life, and in their joy all present begin to dance. The Brahmin dances in Brahminical style with the dead man. That was the finale. The convicts now separated, happy, delighted, and full of praise for the actors and of gratitude towards the non-commissioned officers. There was not the least disorder, and they all went to bed with peaceful hearts to sleep a less troubled sleep than usual.

This is no mere imagination on my part, but the truth, the very truth. These unhappy men had been permitted to live their own lives for a few brief hours, to amuse themselves as human beings, to escape for a short while from their miserable status as convicts; and a moral change was effected, at least temporarily.

The night is now quite dark. Something makes me stir, and I awake. The Old Believer is still praying on top of the high porcelain stove, and he will continue so to pray until dawn. Ali is sleeping peacefully by my side. I remember that when he went to bed he was still laughing and talking with his brothers about the theatre. Little by little I began to remember everything: the preceding day, the holiday period, and all the month of December. Fearfully I raise my head and in the fitful candlelight gaze at my slumbering companions. I watch their unhappy countenances, their miserable beds. I view their nakedness, their wretchedness, and then convince myself that it is no nightmare but simple reality. Yes, it is reality. I hear a groan. Someone has moved his arm and caused his chains to rattle. Another is troubled in his dreams and speaks aloud, while the old grandfather prays for the 'Orthodox Christians.' I listen to his prayer, uttered regularly and in soft, rather drawling tones: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.'

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

Part II

Chapter I: The Hospital

Shortly after the Christmas holidays I fell sick, and was sent to the military hospital, which was situated about half a verst from the fortress. It was a one-storey building, very long, and painted yellow. Every summer a great quantity of ochre was expended in brightening it up. In the great courtyard there were buildings, including the doctors' residences. The main block contained only wards. There were a good many of them, but as only two were reserved for convicts, these were nearly always full, especially in summer, and it was often necessary to crowd the beds. The two convict wards were occupied by Unfortunates of various classes: there were the civilians, then the military prisoners who had previously been incarcerated in the guard-houses. There were others, again, who were awaiting trial, or who were merely passing through the place. In this hospital, too, were invalids from the Disciplinary Company, a melancholy institution for bringing together soldiers of bad conduct with a view to their correction. At the end of a year or two they come back the most thorough-going rascals on earth.

When a convict felt sick, he told a non-commissioned officer, who wrote the man's name down on a card, which he then gave to him and sent him to the hospital under escort. On arrival the patient was examined by a doctor, who authorized the convict, if he were really ill, to remain in hospital. My name was duly written down, and towards one o'clock, when my companions had started for their afternoon work, I went to the hospital. Every prisoner took with him such money and bread as he could (for food was not to be expected the first day), a little pipe, and a pouch of tobacco with flint, steel, and match-paper. He concealed these articles in his boots. On entering the hospital I was curious to learn something about this new aspect of life.

The day was hot, cloudy, sad-one of those days when places like a hospital assume a particularly disagreeable and repulsive look. Together with the soldier escorting me I entered the reception hall, where there were two copper baths. Two other convicts and their escorts waited there. An assistant-surgeon came in, looked at us with a careless and patronizing air, and went away still more indifferently to inform the physician on duty of our arrival. It was not long before the doctor arrived. He was most affable, examined me, and gave me a paper on which my name was inscribed. The physician-in-ordinary of the convict wards was to diagnose my trouble, and prescribe treatment and diet. I had already heard the convicts say that the doctors could not be too highly praised. 'They're fathers to us,' they used to say.

The three of us next changed our clothes. Our uniforms and linen were taken away, and we were supplied with hospital linen, to which were added long stockings, slippers, cotton nightcaps, and a dressing-gown made of very thick brown cloth which was lined, not with linen, but with filth. The dressing-gown was certainly foul but I soon discovered its utility. We were afterwards taken to the convict wards which were at the end of a long corridor; they were very high, and spotlessly clean. The external cleanliness was quite satisfactory: everything visible shone; so, at least, it seemed to me after the dirtiness of the convict prison.

The two prisoners whom I had found in the entrance hall turned to the left of the corridor while I entered another room. A sentry with musket on shoulder marched up and down before the padlocked door; not far off was his relief. The sergeant of the hospital guard ordered him to let me pass, and suddenly I found myself in the middle of a long narrow room, with twenty-two beds arranged against the walls. Three or four of them were as yet unoccupied. These wooden beds were painted green, and, as is notoriously the case with all hospital beds in Russia, were doubtless inhabited by bugs. I was allotted one in a corner near the windows. There were very few prisoners dangerously ill and confined to bed.

The patients were mostly convalescent or men who were slightly indisposed. My new companions lay on their couches, or walked up and down between the rows of beds. There was just space enough for them to do so. The atmosphere of the ward was stifling, and had the odour peculiar to hospitals. It was composed of various emanations, each more disagreeable than the other, and of the smell of drugs. My bed was covered with a counterpane, but as the stove was kept well heated all day long I removed it. The bed itself consisted of a cloth blanket lined with linen, and coarse sheets of more than doubtful cleanliness. By the side of the bed was a little table with a pitcher and pewter mug, together with a diminutive napkin. The table could also hold a samovar if the patient were rich enough to drink tea. These men of means, however, were not very numerous. The pipes and tobacco pouches-for all the patients, even the consumptives, smoked -could be hidden under the mattress. The doctors and other officials scarcely ever made a search, and when they caught a man with a pipe in his mouth, they pretended not to have seen. The patients, however, were very cautious, and always smoked at the back of the stove. They never smoked in bed except at night, when the officers in charge made no rounds.

I had never before been a patient in any hospital, and everything was quite new to me. I noticed that my entry had a strange effect on some of the prisoners: they had heard of me, and all the inmates now looked upon me with that slight shade of superiority which recognized members of no matter what society show towards a newcomer. On my right lay a man who had been committed for trial on a charge of coining. An ex-secretary and the illegitimate son of a retired captain, he had been in the hospital for almost a year. There was nothing whatever wrong with him, but he had assured the doctors that he had an aneurism, and he so thoroughly deceived them that he escaped both the hard labour and the corporal punishment to which he had been sentenced.

Twelve months later he was transferred to an asylum at Tk. He was a vigorous young fellow of eight-and-twenty, cunning, a self-confessed rogue, and something of a lawyer. He was intelligent, had easy manners, but was very presumptuous and suffered from morbid self esteem. Convinced that there was no one on earth more honest or just than himself, he considered himself innocent and made no secret of his opinion.

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

Soon afterwards an invalid from the Disciplinary Company came and told me that he knew a great many noblemen in exile, and, to convince me, he rolled off their Christian names and their patronymics. It was only necessary to watch the face of this soldier to understand that he was an abominable liar. His name was Tchekounoff, and he took an interest in me simply because he suspected me of having money. When he saw that I possessed a packet of tea and some sugar, he at once offered me his services to procure me a samovar and boil the water. M. D. S. Khad promised to send me my own by one of the prisoners who worked in the hospital, but Tchekounoff arranged to get me one forthwith. He obtained one made of tin, boiled my water, and, in a word, showed such extraordinary zeal that he drew down upon himself the scorn of a consumptive patient whose bed was just opposite mine. This man was named Usteantseff; he was the soldier who, when condemned to the rods, stricken with terror, swallowed a bottle of vodka in which he had infused tobacco and thus brought on lung disease.

I have already spoken of him. He had remained silent until now, stretched out on his bed and breathing with difficulty. His serious look was always turned in my direction and he never lifted his gaze from Tchekounoff, whose civility irritated him. His extraordinary gravity rendered his indignation comic. At last he could stand it no longer.

'Look at that fellow! He's found his master,' he said stammering out the words in a voice strangled by weakness for he had now not long to live.

Tchekounoff, much annoyed, turned round.

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

'Why, you're a flunkey,' replied Usteantseff, as confidently as if he had the right to call Tchekounoff to order.

'I a flunkey?'

'Yes, you're a flunkey; a true flunkey. Listen, my good friends. He won't believe me. He's quite astonished, the brave fellow.'

'Well, what of it? It's obvious when a man doesn't know how to make use of his hands that he's not used to being without servants. Why shouldn't I give him a hand, you buffoon with a hairy snout?'

'Who has a hairy snout?'

'You!'

‘I have a hairy snout?’

‘Yes, you certainly have.’

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

‘Hairy snout! The merciful Lord has settled your account. You’d do much better to keep quiet and die.’

‘Why? I’d rather prostrate myself before a boot than a slipper. My father never kowtowed himself, and never made me do so.’

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

I quite understood that the consumptive patient hated me far more bitterly than Tchekounoff. No one would have thought of being angry with him or of despising him for the services he rendered me and the few kopecks that he tried to earn from me. It was generally recognized that he did it all in order to obtain a little money. The Russian people are not at all susceptible in such matters, and know perfectly well how to take them.

I had displeased Usteantseff, just as my tea had displeased him. What irritated him was that, in spite of all, I was a gentleman, even with my chains; that I could not do without a servant, though I neither asked for nor desired one. In fact I tried to do everything for myself, so as not to appear a white-handed, effeminate person, and not to play a part which excited so much envy.

I even felt a little pride on this point, but, in spite of everything-I don’t know why-I was always surrounded by officious, complaisant folk who attached themselves to me of their own free will, and who ended by ruling me. It was I, rather, who was their servant; so that, whether I liked it or not, I was made to appear a nobleman, who could not do without the services of others and who gave himself airs. This exasperated me.

Usteantseff was consumptive and, therefore, irascible. The other patients showed me nothing more than indifference tinged with a shade of contempt. They were preoccupied with a circumstance which I can still recall.

I learned, as I listened to their conversation, that then was to be brought into hospital that evening a convict who at that moment was being flogged. They were looking forward with keen curiosity to this new arrival, but they said that his punishment was not severe-only five hundred strokes.

I looked round the ward. The majority of genuine patient were, as far as I could see, suffering from scurvy and disease of the eyes-both peculiar to this country. The remainder suffered from fever, tuberculosis, and other illnesses. There was no segregation of the various diseases; all the patient were together in the same room.

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

There were even men who took pleasure in this kind of life. They nearly all belonged to the Disciplinary Company, examined my new companions with curiosity, and one of them puzzled me very much. He was consumptive, and was dying. His bed was a little way beyond Usteantseff's and almost next to mine. His name was Mikhailoff. I had seen him in the prison two weeks before, when he was already seriously ill. He ought to have been under treatment long before, but he bore up against his malady with surprising courage. He did not go to the hospital until just before the Christmas holidays, and died three weeks later of galloping consumption. He seemed to have burned out like a candle. What astonished me most was the terrible change in his countenance. I had noticed him on the very first day of my imprisonment. Next to him lay a soldier of the Disciplinary Company-an old man with an evil expression, and whose general appearance was disgusting.

But I am not going to describe every patient. I refer to this old man simply because he made an impression on me, and at once initiated me into certain peculiarities of the ward. He had a severe cold in the head, which caused him to sneeze every few moments. This he did even in his sleep, as if firing a salute of five or six guns, while each time he called out, 'My God, what torture!'

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

Prisoners condemned to the rods, having undergone their punishment, were brought straight to the hospital with their backs still bleeding. As compresses and poultices were placed on their wounds, the dressing-gowns they wore over their wet shirts received and retained the droppings.

During the period of my imprisonment I was in hospital on several occasions, and it was always with mistrust and abhorrence that I put on the dressing-gown provided for me. As soon as Tchekounoff had given me my tea (I may say in parenthesis that

the water brought in in the morning, and not renewed throughout the day, was soon corrupted, soon poisoned by the fetid air), the door opened, and the soldier who had received the rods was brought in under double escort. I saw for the first time a man who had just been whipped. The event was by no means infrequent, but whenever it happened it caused great distress to the other patients. These unfortunate men were received with grave composure, but the nature of their reception usually depended on the enormity of their crime, and consequently on the number of strokes administered.

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

I have seen many convicts who had been frequently and cruelly whipped, but I do not remember one of them uttering a groan. After such an experience, however, the countenance is pale and distorted, the eyes glitter, the look wanders, and the lips tremble so that a patient sometimes bites them till they bleed.

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

Meanwhile it grew dark and the lamp was lighted; some of the patients possessed candlesticks of their own, but they were not many. In the evening the doctor came

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

The prisoners could not speak too highly of the doctors. They looked upon them as true fathers and held them in great respect. Those doctors had always something pleasant to say, a kindly word even for reprobates, who appreciated it all the more because they knew it was spoken in sincerity.

Yes, those kindly words were indeed sincere, for no one would have thought of blaming the doctors had they shown themselves ill-tempered or even quite inhuman. They were gentle purely from compassion. They understood perfectly that a convict who is sick has as much right to breathe pure air as anyone else, even though the latter be a great personage. The convalescents were allowed to walk freely through the corridors for exercise, and to breathe air less pestilential than that of the ward, which was close and saturated with poisonous exhalations.

Once the doors had been locked in the evening, they had to remain so throughout the night, and under no pretext was anyone allowed to leave the room.

For many years I was unable to understand a certain fact which plagued me like an insoluble problem. I must speak of it before continuing my narrative. I am thinking of the chains which every convict is obliged to wear, however ill he may be; even consumptives have died beneath my eyes, their legs weighed down with irons.

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

The danger to a healthy convict is not so great, but the same cannot be said of the sick. For those who were seriously ill, for the consumptives, whose arms and legs dry up of themselves, this additional burden is insupportable. Even if the medical authorities claimed exemption for the consumptive patients only, I am certain that it would prove an immense benefit. I shall be told that convicts are malefactors, unworthy of compassion; but ought we to show increased severity towards those on which the hand of God already weighs? No one will believe that the object of this aggravation is to reform the criminal, and after all, the consumptive prisoners are exempted by the courts from corporal punishment.

There must be some mysterious and important reason for the present system, but what it is, it is impossible to understand. No one believes-indeed, one cannot believe-that a consumptive man will run away. Who could even imagine such a thing, especially if the disease has reached a certain point? It is impossible to deceive the doctors and

lead them to mistake a convict in good health for a consumptive, for this particular malady can be recognized at a glance. Do irons help to prevent a sick convict from escaping? Not in the least. The irons are degrading and shameful, a physical and moral burden; but they will not hinder a man attempting to escape. The most awkward and least intelligent convict can saw through them, or break the rivets by hammering at them with a stone. Chains, then, are a useless precaution, and if they are worn as a punishment, should not that punishment be spared to dying men?

As I write these lines, one face stands out in my memory: that of a dying man, a man who died in consumption, the same Mikhailoff whose bed was nearly opposite to mine, and who expired, I think, four days after my arrival in hospital. When I spoke above of the consumptive patients, I was only reviving involuntarily ideas and sensations which occurred to me at the time of this death. I knew Mikhailoff very little; he was a young man of twenty-five at most, not very tall, thin, and with a fine face. He belonged to the special section, and was remarkable for his strange, but soft and sad taciturnity; he seemed to have 'dried up' in prison, to use an expression of the convicts who remembered him well. For some strange reason I recall that he had very fine eyes.

He died at three o'clock in the afternoon on a clear, dry day. The sun shed its brilliant rays obliquely through the greenish, frozen panes of our room. A torrent of light inundated the unhappy patient, who had lost consciousness and was several hours dying. Early in the morning his sight began to fail, and he was unable to recognize those who approached him. The convicts would gladly have done anything to relieve him, for they saw he was in great suffering. His respiration was painful, deep, and irregular; his breast rose and fell violently, as though he were in want of air; he cast off his blanket and his clothes. Then he began to tear up his shirt, which seemed to him a terrible burden. It was taken off, and I was horrified to see that immensely long body, with fleshless arms and legs, with beating breast, and ribs which were as clearly marked as those of a skeleton. There was nothing now on this living corpse but a crucifix and the irons, from which his dried-up legs might easily have freed themselves. A quarter of an hour before he died all was silent in the ward; the patients spoke only in whispers and walked on tiptoe. From time to time they exchanged remarks on other subjects, and cast a furtive glance at the dying man. The rattling in his throat grew more and more painful. At last, with a trembling hand, he felt for the cross on his breast and endeavoured to tear it off; it was too heavy and suffocated him. It was removed. Ten minutes later he died. Someone then knocked on the door in order to warn the sentinel; the warder entered, looked at the dead man with a vacant air, and went away to fetch the assistant-surgeon. The latter was quite a good fellow, but a little too preoccupied with his personal appearance; otherwise he was most agreeable. He soon arrived, approached the corpse with long strides which re-echoed in the silent ward, and felt the dead man's pulse with an unconcerned air which seemed to have been assumed for the occasion. He then made a vague gesture with his hand and went out.

The guard-house was notified of this death: the man belonged to the special section, and certain formalities had to be carried out in the registration of his death. While we were awaiting the hospital guard, one of the prisoners said in a whisper: 'The eyes of the deceased might as well be closed.' Another took heed of this remark, and approaching Mikhailoff in silence, closed his eyes; then, noticing the cross which had been taken from his neck lying on the pillow, he took it up and looked at it, put it down, and crossed himself. The face of the dead man was becoming ossified; a ray of white light was playing on the surface and illuminated two rows of fine white teeth which gleamed between his thin drawn lips.

The sergeant of the guard at last arrived, musket on shoulder and helmet on head, accompanied by two soldiers; he approached the corpse, slackening his pace as if uncertain what he should do next. He looked furtively at the prisoners, but they remained silent and gazed at him with a sombre expression. A yard or so from the dead man he stopped short, as if suddenly nailed to the spot; the naked, dried-up body, loaded with irons, had impressed him. He undid his chin-strap, removed his helmet (which he was not bound to do), and made the sign of the cross; he had a grey head, the head of a soldier who had seen much service. I remember that by his side stood Tchekounoff, an old man who was also grey. He kept his eyes upon the sergeant and followed his every movement with strange attention. They glanced across, and I saw that Tchekounoff also trembled. He clenched his teeth, nodded in the direction of the dead man, murmured almost involuntarily to the sergeant: 'He too had a mother!' Those words went to my heart. Why had he uttered them, and why had the idea occurred to him? The corpse was raised on its mattress and the straw creaked. The chains dragged on the floor with a sharp ring; they were taken up and the body was carried out. Everyone suddenly began to talk again. The sergeant could be heard in the corridor calling to someone to go for the blacksmith, who would remove the dead man's irons. But I have digressed from my subject.

Chapter II: The Hospital (Continued)

The doctors used to visit the wards at about eleven o'clock in the morning; they appeared all together and formed a procession which was headed by the chief physician. An hour and a half earlier, the ordinary physician had made his round. He was a quiet young man, always affable and kind, much liked by the prisoners, and thoroughly versed in his art. His patients found only one fault with him—he was 'too soft.' He was, in fact, by no means communicative: he seemed embarrassed in our presence, blushed sometimes, and changed the quantity of food as soon as he was asked to do so. I think he would have given them any medicine they liked. In other respects he was an excellent young man.

A Russian doctor often enjoys the affection and respect of the people, and with reason, as far as I have been able to see. I know that my words may seem paradoxical,

especially when one remembers the mistrust in which the Russian people hold foreign drugs and foreign doctors. They prefer, even when seriously ill, to address themselves year after year to a witch, or to employ old women's remedies (which, however, are by no means to be despised), rather than to consult a doctor or go into hospital. In truth, these prejudices may be chiefly ascribed to causes which have nothing to do with medicine, namely, the popular mistrust of anything which bears an official and administrative character; nor must it be forgotten that the common people are frightened and prejudiced in regard to the hospitals by the stories, which are often absurd, of fantastic horrors said to take place within them. There may, however, be an element of truth in some of these tales.

But what repels them more than anything else is the 'Germanism' of the hospitals—the idea that they will be attended in sickness by foreigners, the severity of the diet, the heartlessness of the surgeons and physicians, the dissection and autopsy of the bodies, etc. The lower classes imagine, moreover, that they will be treated by noblemen—for in their view the doctors belong to the nobility; but with the exception of a few rare cases, once they have made their acquaintance, their fears vanish. This success must be attributed to the doctors themselves, especially the young ones who, for the most part, know how to win the respect and affection of the people. I speak now of what I myself have seen and experienced on many occasions and in many places, and I think the same holds good everywhere. In some remote localities the doctors are said to receive presents, make profit out of their hospitals, neglect the patients, and sometimes even forget their art. All this may be true; but I am speaking of the majority, inspired as they are by that wave of generosity which is regenerating the medical art. As for the apostates, the wolves in the sheep-fold, they may excuse themselves and blame the circumstances in which they live. But they are foolish as well as inexcusable, especially if they are no longer humane, for it is precisely the humanity, affability, and brotherly compassion of a doctor which prove the most efficacious remedies for his patients. It is time these useless lamentations about circumstances were ended. There may be truth in what is alleged, but a cunning rogue who knows how to take care of himself never fails to blame his environment when he wishes to excuse his faults—above all, if he is a good writer or speaker.

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

Our doctor generally stopped before the bed of each patient, examined him carefully, and then prescribed the remedies, potions, etc. He sometimes noticed that a pretended invalid was not ill at all: he had come to take a rest after hard labour, and to sleep on a mattress in a warm room, which was so much better than bare boards in a damp guard-house among a mass of pale, broken-down men awaiting trial. The inhabitants of a Russian guard-house are almost always in bad health, which proves their condition, both moral and material, to be worse than that of the convicts.

In cases of malingering our doctor would describe the patient as suffering from febris catharalis, and sometimes allow him to remain a week in hospital. Everyone laughed at this febris catharalis, for it was known to be a formula agreed upon by both doctor and patient to indicate no malady at all. A malingerer would often take advantage of the doctor's compassion and remain in hospital until he was turned out by force. Our doctor was worth seeing on such an occasion. Embarrassed by the prisoner's obstinacy, he did not like to tell him plainly that he was cured and hand him his discharge, although he had the right to send him out without explanation by writing the words, sanat. est. He would first drop a hint that it was time to leave, and would then politely request him to do so.

'You must go; you know you are cured now, and we have no room for you; we're terribly overcrowded,' etc.

At last, ashamed to remain any longer, the patient would consent to go. The physician-in-chief, although compassionate and just (the patients were much attached to him), was incomparably more severe and more firm than our ordinary physician. In certain cases he showed merciless severity which only gained for him the respect of the convicts. He always entered the room accompanied by every doctor on the staff, and leaving his assistants to call at every bed and diagnose the various cases, he would stop longest at the bedsides of those who were seriously ill, and had an encouraging word for each. He never threw out those who arrived with febris catharalis; but if one of them appeared determined to remain in hospital, he certified the man as cured. 'Come,' he would say, 'you have had your rest. Now go, you must not take advantage.'

Those who insisted on remaining were principally the convicts who were worn out by field labour during the great summer heat, or prisoners who had been sentenced to be whipped. I remember one occasion upon which the hospital staff were obliged to be particularly severe in order to get rid of one such man. He was suffering from acute inflammation of the eyes, and complained of a sharp pain in his eyelids.

He was incurable: plasters, blisters, leeches, nothing did him any good, and the diseased organ remained in the same condition.

It then occurred to the doctors that there was nothing at all wrong with him, for the inflammation became neither worse nor better, and despite the man's refusal to admit it they soon realized that the whole thing was a complete farce. He was a fine young fellow, not bad-looking, though his companions found him disagreeable. He was suspicious, sombre, full of dissimulation, and never looked anyone straight in the face; he also kept himself apart as if he mistrusted us all. I remember that many were afraid he would do someone harm.

Having committed some small theft in the army, he had been arrested and condemned to receive a thousand strokes, and afterwards to pass into a penal battalion.

I have already explained that in order to postpone their punishment, convicts will do incredible things. On the eve of the fatal day they will stab one of their officers or a comrade, which will necessitate their being tried again for this new offence, and thereby delay the punishment for a month or two. It matters little to them that they

will ultimately suffer a fate twice or three times as terrible if only they can escape this time. What they desire is to put off temporarily the dreaded moment at whatever cost, so utterly does their heart fail them.

Many of the patients thought the man with the sore eyes should be watched, lest in his despair he should assassinate someone during the night; but no precaution was taken, not even by those who slept next to him. It was remarked, however, that he rubbed his eyes with plaster from the wall and with something else besides, in order that they might appear red when the doctor came round. At last the surgeon threatened to cure him by means of an operation, for when the malady will not yield to ordinary treatment, the practice is to try some more drastic and painful remedy. But the poor devil did not wish to get well—he was either too obstinate or too cowardly, for, however painful the process may be, it cannot be compared with the rods.

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

At last he agreed to his discharge, and in less than a day his eyes had quite recovered. As soon as his neck was healed he was sent to the guard-house, which he left next day to receive his first thousand strokes.

The moments preceding that punishment are so appalling that I may be wrong in charging those who fear it with cowardice.

It must indeed be terrible for a man to risk a double or even triple sentence merely in order to postpone it. I have made mention, however, in an earlier chapter, of convicts who have been anxious to leave hospital before the wounds caused by the first installment of the flogging were healed, and get the whole thing over. Life in the guard-room is certainly worse than in a convict prison.

In some cases flogging tends to embolden a convict. Those who have been often flogged are hardened both in body and mind, and come at last to regard the punishment as no more than a disagreeable incident no longer to be feared.

One of our fellows in the special section was a converted Tartar; his name was Alexander, though the prisoners used to call him Alexandrina in fun. This man told me that he once received four thousand strokes. He never referred to the incident except with amusement and laughter, but he swore emphatically that if his horde had not reared him on the whip from his earliest years (as was testified by the scars which covered his back and refused to disappear), he would never have been able to endure those four thousand strokes. He blessed his education under the rod.

‘I was beaten for the least thing, Alexander Petrovitch,’ he said one evening as we sat down before the fire. ‘I was beaten without reason for fifteen years, as long as I can remember, and several times a day. Anyone beat me who cared to do so, until at last it made no impression upon me.’

I do not know how it was that he became a soldier; perhaps he was lying, and had always been a deserter and vagabond. But I do remember his telling me on that occasion how terrified he was when they condemned him to receive four thousand strokes for having killed one of his officers.

‘I know that they’ll punish me severely,’ he told himself. ‘Accustomed as I am to being flogged, I may die under it. The devil!’ he said to me, ‘four thousand strokes is no trifle-and every officer in the regiment had his knife into me over this affair. I knew well that it would not be rose-water. I even believed I should die under the rods so I determined to get baptized. Like that there was just a chance they would not flog me: at any rate it was worth trying. My comrades told me it would be no good; but one could never tell, there was always that faint hope of a pardon; they were more lenient to a Christian than a Mohammedan. Anyway, they baptized me and gave me the name of Alexander, but in spite of that I had to take my flogging-I was not spared a single stroke. I was enraged and said to myself: “Wait a bit, and I’ll take you all in”; and, would you believe it, Alexander? I did take them all in. I knew how to look like a dead man; not that I appeared altogether without life, but I certainly appeared to be on the point of breathing my last. They led me in front of the battalion to receive my first thousand; my skin was burning, I began to howl. They gave me my second thousand, and I said to myself: “It’s all over now.” I was frantic and my legs seemed broken, so I fell to the ground with the eyes of a dead man. My face blue, and frothing at the mouth, I no longer breathed. When the doctor came he said I was on the point of death. I was carried to the hospital and at once returned to life. Twice again they flogged me. What a rage they were in! I took them all in on each occasion. I received my third thousand, and “died” again. On my word, when they gave me the last thousand each stroke ought to have counted for three, it was like a knife in my heart. Oh, how they beat me! They were so severe with me. Oh, that cursed fourth thousand! It was as bad as the first three together. If I had pretended to be dead when I had still two hundred to receive, I think they would have finished me off; but they did not get the better of me.

I had them again and again, for they always thought it was all over with me, and how could they have thought otherwise? The doctor was sure of it. But as for those two hundred, they might have struck as hard as they liked-two hundred or two thousand, it was all the same to me; I only laughed at them. Why? Because, when I was a youngster, I had grown up under the whip. Well, I’m alive and well now, but I have been beaten in the course of my life,’ he murmured indifferently as he ended his story. He seemed to remember it all and to be counting once again the blows he had received.

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

‘Do you know, Alexander Petrovitch, when I dream at night I always dream that I’m being flogged. I dream of nothing else.’ He did in fact talk in his sleep, and woke up the other prisoners.

‘What are you yelling about, you demon?’ they would ask him.

This strong, robust fellow was short in stature, about forty-four years of age, active, and good-looking. He lived on good terms with everyone, though he was very fond of taking what did not belong to him, and afterwards got beaten for it. But any convict who stole got beaten for his theft.

For the rest, I will only remark that I was always surprised at the extraordinary good nature, the absence of rancour with which these unhappy men spoke of their punishment and of the officers superintending it. In these stories, which often gave me palpitation of the heart, not a shadow of hatred or bitterness could be detected; they laughed like children at their sufferings.

There was, however, an exception-Mtski. As he was not of the nobility, he had been sentenced to be flogged but had never mentioned the fact to me. When I asked him if it were true, he replied affirmatively in two brief words but with evident pain and without looking at me. He flushed and when he raised his eyes I saw flames burning in them while his lips, trembled with indignation. I felt that he would not forget, that he could never forget this page of his history. But generally speaking my companions recalled their misfortunes in quite a different spirit. ‘It is impossible,’ I sometimes thought, ‘that they can be conscious of their guilt and not acknowledge the justice of their punishment, especially when their offences were against their own fellows and not against a superior.’ Most, however, did not acknowledge their guilt. I have already said that I never observed in them the least remorse, even for a crime committed against people of their own station. As for those against a superior, they were simply not mentioned. It seems to me that they took a peculiar view of such cases, regarding them as accidents caused by fate, into which they had fallen unwittingly as the result of some extraordinary impulse. The convict always justifies the crimes he has committed against his superiors; he does not trouble himself about the matter. But he admits that the victim cannot share his view, and consequently that proper punishment will restore the balance.

The struggle between authority and the prisoner is very bitter on both sides. What in great measure justifies the criminal in his own eyes is his conviction that the people among whom he has been born and has lived will acquit him. He is certain that the common people will not consider him a renegade, unless, indeed, he has sinned against persons of his own class, against his brethren. In that respect his mind is quite at rest: supported by his conscience, his heart will remain tranquil, and that is the principal thing. He feels himself on firm ground, and has no particular hatred for the knout when once the punishment is over. He knows that it was inevitable, and consoles himself with the knowledge that he was not the first and will not be the last to receive it. Does the soldier detest the Turk whom he fights? Not in the least! Yet he sabres him, hacks him to pieces, kills him.

It must not be thought, however, that all of these stories were told with indifference and in cold blood. When the name of Jerebiatnikof was mentioned it was always with indignation. I made the acquaintance of this officer during my first stay in hospital-

though, of course, only by hearsay. Some time later I saw him in command of the prison guard. He was about thirty years old, very stout and very strong, with pendulous red cheeks, white teeth, and a formidable laugh. One could see at once that he was by no means intelligent. He took the greatest pleasure in whipping and flogging whenever he had to superintend the punishment. I must hasten to add that the other officers looked upon Jerebiatnikof as a monster, and the convicts did the same. That was in the good old days of not so very long ago, when (though it is hard to believe) the executioner delighted in his office, but the strokes were usually administered without enthusiasm.

This lieutenant was an exception: he took real pleasure and satisfaction from inflicting punishment. He had a passion for it, and liked it for its own sake; he looked to this art for unnatural delights in order to excite the base passions of his soul. A prisoner is conducted to the place of punishment; Jerebiatnikof is the officer superintending the execution. After posting two long ranks of soldiers armed with heavy rods, he walks down the line with a satisfied air, and exhorts each one to do his duty conscientiously, otherwise. The soldiers know what 'otherwise' means! The criminal is brought out. If he does not yet know Jerebiatnikof, if he is not yet initiated into the mystery, the lieutenant plays him the following trick: it is one of his own inventions, for he is most ingenious in this kind of thing. The prisoner is stripped to the waist, and non-commissioned officers fasten him to the butt end of a musket preparatory to dragging him through the whole length of 'Green Street.' He begs the officer in charge with a plaintive and tearful voice not to have him thrashed too hard, not to double the punishment by any undue severity.

'Your Excellency!' cries the unhappy wretch, 'have pity on me, treat me like a brother, and I'll pray for you as long as I live. Don't kill me, show some mercy!'

Jerebiatnikof has been waiting for this. He now suspends the execution and engages the prisoner in conversation, addressing him with a show of feeling and compassion.

'But, my good fellow,' he says, 'what am I to do? It is the law that punishes you-it is the law.'

'Your Excellency! Your word can make all the difference; have pity upon me.'

'Do you really think that I feel no pity for you? Do you think it's any pleasure to me to see you whipped? I'm a man, am I not? Answer me, am I not a man?'

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

'Then, my friend, judge for yourself. You've a brain to think with, you know I'm human, and it's my duty to take compassion on you, sinner though you be.'

'Your Excellency is absolutely right.'

'Yes, I ought to show mercy however guilty you may be. But it's not I who punish you, it's the law. I serve God and my country, and consequently I commit a grave sin if I mitigate the punishment fixed by law. Just think of that!'

'Your Excellency!'

‘Well, what am I to do? Well, listen; I know I’m doing wrong, but I’ll do as you wish. I’ll have mercy on you, you shall be punished lightly. But if I do so on this one occasion, if I show mercy, if I punish you lightly, you’ll rely on my doing so another time, and you’ll repeat your folly, what?’

‘Your Excellency, preserve me! Before the throne of the heavenly Creator, I’

‘No, no. You swear you’ll behave yourself?’

‘May the Lord strike me dead here and hereafter.’

‘Don’t swear like that, it’s sinful. I shall believe you if you give me your word.’

‘Your Excellency.’

‘Very well, I’ll have mercy on you because of your tears, your orphan’s tears-you are an orphan, aren’t you?’

‘Orphan on both sides, your Excellency; I’m alone in the world.’

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

The procession moves forward, the drum rolls, the soldiers brandish their rods. ‘Flog him!’ Jerebiatnikof roars at the top of his voice, ‘flog him! burn him! skin him alive! Harder! harder! Lay in to the orphan! Give it to him, the rogue.’

The soldiers lay in to the back of the unhappy wretch, whose eyes dart fire, and who howls while Jerebiatnikof runs down the line after him, holding his sides with laughter-he puffs and blows so that he can scarcely hold himself upright. He is happy. He thinks it droll. From time to time his raucous laugh is heard, as he keeps repeating: ‘Flog him! thrash him! the brigand! the orphan!’

He had devised a variation on this theme. Suppose a prisoner has been brought out to undergo his punishment. He begs the lieutenant to have pity on him. This time Jerebiatnikof does not play the hypocrite, but is frank with him.

‘Look, my dear fellow, I shall punish you as you deserve,’ but I can do you one good turn: I’ll not have you fastened to the musket. We’ll try a new arrangement: you run as hard as you can between the lines; each rod will strike you as a matter of course, but it will be over sooner. What do you say to that? Will you try?’

The prisoner, who has listened, full of mistrust and doubt, says to himself: ‘Perhaps this way will not be so bad as the other. If I really put on speed, it won’t last quite so long, and perhaps some of the rods will miss me.’

‘Right, your Excellency, I will.’

‘Good! Carry on!’ cries the lieutenant to the soldiers. He is quite sure that not one rod will spare the back of the unfortunate wretch; the soldier who misses knows what to expect.

The condemned man tries to run the gauntlet, but he has not passed fifteen files before the rods rain upon his poor spine like hail; the hapless wretch shrieks, and falls as if struck by a bullet.

‘No, your Excellency, I prefer to be flogged in the ordinary way,’ he says, struggling to his feet, pale and frightened. Jerebiatnikof, who has foreseen how the affair will end, holds his sides and bursts out laughing.

It would, however, be impossible to relate all the diversions invented by this man, and all the stories told about him.

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

My fellow convicts, like most Russians, were ready to forget their tortures if a kind word was said to them; I state the fact without attempting to analyse or examine it. It is not difficult, then, to gain the affections of such a people and become popular. Lieutenant Smekaloff had achieved popularity in this way, and when the punishments which he had directed were referred to it was always with a measure of appreciation.

‘He was as kind as a father,’ the convicts would often sigh, comparing him with his successor.

He was a simple-minded man, and good-hearted in his own way. There are some officers who are naturally kind and merciful, but who are both unpopular and objects of scorn. Smekaloff, on the other hand, had so conducted himself that all the prisoners had a special regard for him. This was due to certain innate qualities which those who possess them do not understand. Strange as it seems, there are men who, though far from kind, yet have the gift of making themselves popular. They do not despise those under their authority; that, I think, is the cause of their success. They do not lord it over others; they have no sense of caste; they have the common touch although they are high-born, and the people immediately sense it. They will do anything for that type; they will gladly exchange the mildest and most humane of men for the sternest master. And if with those gifts he has a genial way about him, why, then he is beyond price.

Lieutenant Smekaloff, as I have said, sometimes dealt out very severe punishments. But he seemed to do so in such a way that the prisoners felt no rancour against him. On the contrary, they recalled his whippings with laughter. He did not punish frequently, for he had no artistic imagination, and had invented only one practical joke, which amused him for almost a whole year. He was proud of that joke, probably because it was his sole achievement, and indeed it was not without an element of humour.

Smekaloff himself assisted at the executions, joking all the time, and laughing at the victim, whom he questioned about most out-of-the-way things such as his private life. He did this without any evil motive but simply because he really wished to know

something of the man's affairs. A chair is brought, together with the rods which are to be used. The lieutenant sits down and lights his long pipe; the prisoner implores mercy.

'No, comrade, lie down. What's the matter with you?'

The convict stretches himself on the ground with a sigh.

'Can you read fluently?'

'Of course, your Excellency. I'm baptized, and I was taught to read when I was a child.'

'Then read this.'

The convict already knows what it is he is asked to read; he knows, too, how the reading will end, because this joke has been repeated more than thirty times. Smekaloff, however, knows also that the convict is not his dupe any more than is the soldier who now holds the rod suspended over the unhappy victim's back. The convict begins to read; the soldier, armed with his rod, stands motionless. Smekaloff ceases even to smoke, raises his hand, and waits for a word agreed upon beforehand. At that word, which from some double meaning might be interpreted as the order to start, the lieutenant lets fall his hand and the flogging begins. The officer bursts into fits of laughter, and the troops all laugh with him; the executioner laughs too, as does the victim himself.

Chapter III: The Hospital (Continued)

I have spoken of corporal punishment and those responsible for its administration, because I obtained a very clear idea of the subject during my stay in hospital. Until then my knowledge was entirely dependent upon hearsay. In our room were confined all military prisoners who were to receive the rods, as well as those from the local garrison.

During my first few days I watched all that went on around me with such greedy eyes that these strange customs, these men who had just been flogged, or were about to be flogged, left upon me a terrible impression. I was worried and frightened.

As I listened to the conversation or narratives of other prisoners on the subject, I asked myself questions which I tried in vain to solve. I wanted to know all about the various kinds of punishment and their degrees, and to learn what the convicts themselves thought about it. I tried to imagine the psychological condition of a man who had been flogged.

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

During my years of imprisonment I was able to study at leisure those prisoners who were anxious to leave the hospital and undergo the remainder of their sentence.

This interruption of the punishment is always required by the doctor assisting at the execution.¹

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

Five hundred, one thousand, and even one thousand five hundred strokes with the stick may be administered at once; but if there is question of two or three thousand the sentence is carried out in two or three doses.

Those whose backs had healed after the first series, and who were to undergo a second, were sad, sombre, and silent on the day they went out and the evening before. They were in a state bordering on torpor; they engaged in no conversation, and remained perfectly silent.

It is worthy of remark that prisoners avoid speaking to those who are going to be flogged, and certainly never make any allusion to the subject, either by way of consolation or in superfluous words. No attention whatever is paid to them,¹ which is certainly the best thing for the prisoners. There are, however, exceptions.

One convict named Orloff, of whom I have already spoken, was sorry that his back did not heal more quickly: he was anxious to obtain his discharge and take the rest of his flogging, after which he would have to join a convoy and intended to escape during the journey. He had a passionate, ardent nature which was concentrated upon that single object.

A cunning rascal, he seemed very pleased when he entered hospital; he was, however, in a state of abnormal excitement, though he endeavoured to conceal it. He had been afraid of being left on the ground and of dying before he had undergone half of his punishment. While standing his trial he had heard that the authorities were taking certain measures in his case, as a result of which, he thought, he could not survive. But having received the first dose, his courage revived.

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

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

Two days after leaving hospital he returned to die on the very couch which he had occupied during my stay there. He had been unable to support the second half of his punishment. For the rest, I have already spoken of this man.

All the prisoners without exception, even the most pusillanimous, even those who were tormented beforehand night and day with dread, faced suffering courageously

¹ What I have written about corporal punishment took place during my time in prison. I am told that things are now very different and that further reforms are contemplated.

when it came. I scarcely ever heard groans during the night following an execution; our people, as a rule, knew how to endure pain.

I frequently questioned my companions about this pain in an attempt to discover with what kind of suffering it might be compared. It was no idle curiosity that urged me. I repeat, I was moved and frightened. But it was all in vain; I could get no satisfactory reply.

‘It burns like fire!’ was the general answer. They all said the same thing.

First I tried to question Mtski. ‘It burns like fire!’

Like hell! It seems as if one’s back were in a furnace.’

One day I reached an interesting conclusion which may or may not have been well founded, although the opinion of the convicts themselves confirms my view, namely, that the rods are the most terrible punishment in use among us.

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

‘Rods hurt more and for longer!’ they said.

They must hurt more than sticks, that is quite certain, for they cause a far greater shock to the nervous system, which they excite beyond measure. I do not know whether such people exist to-day, but not long ago there were some who derived such pleasure from the whipping of a victim that they reminded one of the Marquis de Sade or the Marchioness Brinvilliers. I think such delight must consist in a kind of horror, and that these noble ladies and gentlemen must have experienced pain and pleasure at the same time.

There are people who, like tigers, are greedy for blood. Those who enjoy unlimited power over the flesh, blood, and soul of their fellow creatures, of the brethren in Christ; those, I say, who enjoy that power and can so utterly degrade another being made in the image of God, are incapable of resisting their desires and their thirst for excitement. Tyranny is a habit which may be developed until at last it becomes a disease. I declare that the noblest nature can become so hardened and bestial that nothing distinguishes it from that of a wild animal. Blood and power intoxicate; they help to develop callousness and debauchery. The mind then becomes capable of the most abnormal cruelty, which it regards as pleasure; the man and the citizen are swallowed up in the tyrant; and then a return to human dignity, repentance, moral resurrection, becomes almost impossible.

It cannot be denied that the possibility of such licence has a contagious effect on the whole of society. A society which looks upon such things with an indifferent eye is already infected to the marrow. In a word, the right granted to a man of inflicting

corporal punishment on his fellows is one of the plague-spots of our nation. It is the means of annihilating all civic spirit; it contains in germ the elements of inevitable, imminent decomposition.

Society despises the professional executioner, but not one who is of gentle blood. Every manufacturer, every foreman, must feel a measure of satisfaction when he reflects that the workman and his family are entirely dependent upon him. A generation does not, I am sure, soon extirpate from itself what is hereditary. A man cannot renounce what is in his blood, what has been transmitted to him with his mother's milk; these revolutions are not quickly accomplished. It is not enough to confess one's fault—that is very little; very little indeed. It must be rooted out, and that takes time.

I have spoken of the executioners. The instincts of an executioner exist potentially in almost every one of my contemporaries, but those animal propensities have not developed in all alike. When they stifle all other faculties, the man becomes a hideous monster.

There are two kinds of executioner, those who choose the function and those upon whom it is imposed by duty or in virtue of their office. The former is in all respects more vile than the salaried executioner, upon whom, nevertheless, men look with repugnance, and who inspires them with disgust, with an instinctive, an almost mystical terror. Whence comes this almost superstitious horror for the one, when the other is regarded with indifference if not with indulgence?

I know strange examples of honourable men, kindly and esteemed by all their friends, who yet saw fit to have a culprit whipped until he begged for mercy; it seemed quite natural to them, a measure recognized as indispensable. If the victim did not choose to cry out, his executioner, whom in other respects I should consider a good man, looked upon it as a personal affront. He meant, in the first instance, to inflict only a light punishment, but directly he failed to hear the habitual supplication: 'Your Excellency! Have mercy! Be a father to me. Let me thank God for you all my life!' he became furious, and ordered fifty more strokes, hoping thus at last to force the desired appropriate howls and supplications; and at last they came. 'Impossible! The man is too insolent,' he cries in all seriousness.

As for the official executioner, he is a convict chosen for this purpose. He is apprenticed to an old hand, and as soon as he knows his trade he resides in the prison, where he lives alone. He has a room, which he shares with no one. Sometimes, indeed, he has a separate establishment, but he is always under guard. A man is not a machine. Although he whips by virtue of his office, he is sometimes maddened, and beats for pleasure. Although he entertains no malice towards his victim, a desire to show his skill in the art of whipping may sharpen his vanity. He works as an artist; he knows well that he is a reprobate and that he excites universal, superstitious dread. That very fact is bound to influence him and arouse his brutal instincts.

Even little children say that the executioner has neither father nor mother. Strange!

All the executioners I have known were intelligent men with a degree of self-conceit. The latter had developed as a result of that contempt with which they invariably met,

and was strengthened, perhaps, by their consciousness of that fear with which they inspired their victims, and of their power over such unfortunate wretches as fell into their hands.

It may well be, moreover, that the theatrical paraphernalia surrounding them gave rise to a certain arrogance. I had an opportunity over a period of time to meet and observe at close quarters an ordinary executioner. He was a man about forty, muscular, dry, and with an agreeable, intelligent face surrounded by long curly hair. His manners were quiet and grave, and his general demeanour was in no way objectionable. He replied clearly and sensibly to every question I asked him, but with an air of condescension as if he were in some way my superior. The officers of the guard addressed him with a respect which he fully appreciated; for which reason, in presence of his superiors, he became polite and more dignified than ever.

He was never anything but studiously polite, though I am sure that when I spoke to him he felt immeasurably superior to his interlocutor. I could read that in his countenance. Sometimes in summer, when it was very hot, he would be sent under escort to kill dogs in the town with a long, very thin spear. These wandering animals multiplied with such prodigious rapidity, and became so dangerous during the dog days, that the authorities decided that the executioner be ordered to destroy them. This degrading office in no way injured his dignity. It was worth observing with what gravity he walked through the streets accompanied by his escort; how, with a single glance, he frightened the women and children; and how, from the height of his grandeur, he looked down upon the passers-by.

Executioners enjoy a leisured existence. They have money to travel in comfort and drink vodka. They derive most of their income from presents slipped into their hands by condemned prisoners before execution. When they have to deal with a convict who is rich, they fix a sum to be paid in proportion to the victim's wealth, and will sometimes exact thirty roubles or more. The executioner has no right to spare his victim, and he does so at the risk of his own back; but for a suitable present he will agree not to strike too hard. He almost always receives what he asks, for in the event of refusal he will flog without mercy-as, indeed, he has the right to do. He may sometimes demand a large sum from a poor man. Then all the victim's relatives bestir themselves. They bargain, try to beat him down, and implore his leniency; but woe betide if they fail to satisfy him. In such a case the superstitious fear inspired by the executioner stands him in good stead. I had been told the most wonderful things- that, for instance, the executioner can kill his man with a single blow.

'Is this your experience?' I asked.

'Maybe. Who knows?' If any doubt remained, their tone seemed to convey the answer. They also told me that an executioner can strike in such a way that the victim will not feel the least pain, and without leaving a scar.

Even when he has been bribed not to whip too severely, he administers the first stroke with all his might. It is the custom! He continues with less severity, especially if he has been paid handsomely.

I do not know why this is done. It may be in order, as it were, to prepare the condemned for the succeeding blows, which will appear less painful by comparison; or it may be intended to frighten the criminal, so that he may understand with whom he has to deal; or it may be no more than vanity, to display the executioner's own strength. In any case, he is pleased with himself before an execution, and conscious of his power and vigour. He is the central figure of the drama; the public admires him and is filled with terror. Accordingly, it is not without satisfaction that he cries out to his victim: 'Now then, you're for it!'-traditional and fatal words preceding the first blow.

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

On my first day in hospital I listened attentively to the convicts' stories which broke the monotony of the long days.

In the morning, the doctor's visit was the first diversion. Then came dinner, which it will be believed was the most important episode of our daily routine. The portions varied according to each man's condition: some received nothing but broth with groats in it; others only gruel; others a kind of semolina, which was much liked. The convicts ended by becoming soft and fastidious. The convalescents received a piece of boiled beef. The best food, which was reserved for the scorbutic patients, consisted of roast beef with onions, horse-radish, and sometimes a small glass of spirits. The bread was, according to one's illness, black or brown; the precision observed in distributing the rations would make the patients laugh.

There were some who took absolutely nothing. Portions were exchanged in such a way that the food intended for one patient was eaten by another; those who were on low diet and received only small rations bought those of the scorbutic patients; others would give any price for meat. There were some who ate two entire portions, but it cost them a good deal, for the usual price was five kopecks apiece. If no one in our room had meat to sell the warder was sent to another section, and if he could obtain none there he was asked to get some from the military infirmary-the free infirmary, as we called it.

There were always patients ready to sell their rations. Poverty was the rule, and those who possessed a few kopecks used to send out to buy cakes and white bread, or other delicacies, at the market. Warders executed these commissions without reward. The most unpleasant period was that following dinner. Some went to sleep, if they had no other way of passing their time, others either wrangled or told stories in a loud voice.

When no new patients were brought in, things became exceedingly dull. The arrival of a new patient always caused a certain amount of excitement, especially when no one knew anything about him; he was questioned about his past life.

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

Of course, they never spoke of their own 'peccadilloes': if a prisoner did not volunteer information on that subject no one asked questions. All he was asked was, where he

came from, who were with him on the road, what state the road was in, where he was being taken to, etc. Stimulated by the stories of the newcomers, our comrades in their turn began to tell what they had seen and done. The principal topics of conversation were the convoys, those in command of them, and the men who carried out sentences.

About this time, that is to say, towards evening, convicts who had been scourged came up. As I have said, their arrival always created something of a sensation; but it was not every day that we welcomed one of these, and everybody was bored to extinction when nothing happened to relieve the general sense of boredom. It seemed, then, as though the sick themselves were exasperated at the very sight of those near them. Sometimes they squabbled violently.

The convicts were in high glee when a 'madman' was taken off for medical examination. Those who had been sentenced to scourging sometimes feigned insanity in hope of escaping punishment. The trick was perhaps found out, or they themselves might voluntarily abandon the pretence. When that happened, men who for several days had done all sorts of wild things suddenly became steady and sensible people, quieted down, and, with a gloomy smile, asked to be discharged from hospital. Neither their fellow convicts nor the doctors spoke a word of protest against their deceit, or made the least reference to their mad pranks. Their names were put down on a list without a word being said, and they were simply taken elsewhere; after the lapse of some days they returned with their backs all wounds and blood.

On the other hand, the arrival of a genuine lunatic was one of the most distressing sights. A mental patient who was gay and lively, who shouted, danced and sang, was at first greeted with enthusiasm.

'Here's fun!' said they, as they watched the grimaces and contortions of the unhappy wretch. But the sight was horrible and depressing-I have never been able to look upon a madman calmly or with indifference. There was one who spent three weeks in our room; we would have hidden ourselves, had there been any place in which to hide. When things were at the worst another case was brought in and he affected me profoundly.

In the first year, or, to be more exact, during the first month of my exile, I went to work with a gang of kiln men to the tileries which were situated two versts from prison. Our job was to repair the kiln in which the bricks were baked during the summer. That morning Mtski and B. pointed out to me a non-commissioned officer who was superintendent of the works. This man was a Pole already well on in years (he was at least sixty). Tall, lean, of decent and even somewhat imposing exterior, he had done long service in Siberia. Although he belonged to the lower classes he had been a soldier at the time of the 1830 rising; Mtski and B. loved and esteemed him. He was always reading the Vulgate. I spoke to him, and found his conversation agreeable and intelligent; he could tell an interesting story; he was straightforward and of excellent temper. For two years I never saw him again, but only heard that he had become a 'case,' and that they were inquiring into it. And then one fine day they brought him into our room; he had gone raving mad.

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

The convicts were wild with enthusiasm; but, for my part, account for it as you will, I felt utterly miserable. Three days later there was utter confusion: he picked violent quarrels with everyone, fought, groaned, and sang in the dead of night; his aberrations were so outlandish and disgusting as to make our very stomachs turn.

He feared nobody. They put him in a strait jacket, but we were no better off, for he went on quarrelling and fighting all round. At the end of three weeks we unanimously petitioned the chief physician to have the fellow transferred to the other convict ward. But after two days the patients there had him moved back again. As there were now two madmen, each ward continually passed them from one to the other until it was agreed that each should take one at a time, turn and turn about. Everyone breathed more freely when they were removed altogether.

There was another lunatic whom I remember-a very remarkable creature. During the summer they had brought in a condemned man who looked like a solid and vigorous fellow of about forty-five years. His face was sombre and sad, pitted with small-pox, and with little red swollen eyes. He settled in next to me. He was extremely quiet, and spoke to nobody, and seemed utterly absorbed in his own deep reflections.

When night fell he addressed me, and, without a word of preface, told me in a hurried and excited way-as if he were confiding some awful secret-that he was to have two thousand strokes with the rod; but that he had nothing to fear, as Colonel G.'s daughter was taking steps on his behalf.

I looked at him with surprise, feeling sure that a colonel's daughter could be of little use in such a matter. I had not yet realized what was wrong with him, for he had been admitted to hospital as physically sick, not as a mental case. I then asked him from what illness he suffered.

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

After that she had visited the guard-house three times on various pretexts. The first time she had come with her father, ostensibly to visit her brother who was the officer on duty; on the second occasion she had accompanied her mother, to distribute alms to the prisoners. As she passed by she had muttered that she loved him and would get him out of prison.

He told me all this nonsense with minute and exact details; all of it pure figment of his poor disordered brain. He believed whole-heartedly that his punishment would be graciously remitted. He spoke quite calmly and with full assurance of the passionate love he had inspired in the young lady.

That odd, romantic delusion about a young gentlewoman's love for a man of nearly fifty years, afflicted with a gloomy and disfigured face, only proved the terrible effect produced by fear of the punishment he was to receive upon this poor, timid creature.

It may be that he had really seen someone through the bars of the window, and insanity, germinating under excess of fear, had taken shape and form in the present delusion.

This unfortunate soldier, who, you may be certain, had never given a thought to young ladies, had begotten this romance in his diseased imagination, and clung convulsively to this desperate hope. I listened without interrupting him, and then repeated the story to other patients. They were naturally curious, and questioned him; but he preserved a chastely discreet silence.

Next day the doctor examined him. As the poor man swore there was nothing wrong with him, he was entered on the list of those to be discharged. When we learned that the physician had scribbled 'Sanat. est' against his name it was much too late to warn him. Besides, we were far from certain ourselves what was really the matter with the man.

The error lay with the authorities who had sent him to us without specifying the reason for requiring his admittance to hospital-an unpardonable oversight.

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

As there was no longer room in our ward they sent him to the infirmary. I heard that for eight entire days he did not utter a single word, paralysed with misery and bewilderment. When his back was healed they took him away, and I never heard any more about him.

As to the treatment of the sick and the remedies prescribed those who were but slightly indisposed paid no attention whatever to doctor's orders, and never took their medicine. Generally speaking, those who were more seriously ill were strict in their observance of medical advice. They took their mixtures and powders, and looked after themselves with the greatest care. But they preferred external to internal remedies.

Cupping-glasses, leeches, cataplasms, blood-lettings-in all which things the common people have so blind a confidence -were held in high honour in our hospital. Inflictions of that sort were regarded with approval.

I noticed a curious phenomenon which interested me. Men who could endure without a murmur the frightful tortures caused by the rods and scourges, howled, grimaced and moaned at the least little ailment. Whether it was all pretence or not I really cannot say.

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

Twelve incisions are necessary for a cupping; with a machine these are not painful at all, for it makes them instantaneously; with the lancet it is a different matter altogether.

-the lancet cuts slowly, and causes the patient to suffer. If you have to make ten openings there will be about one hundred and twenty pricks, and these are very painful. I myself had 10 undergo it: besides pain, it caused great nervous irritation, but the suffering was not so great that one could not help groaning if one tried.

It was laughable to see great, hulking fellows wriggling and howling. One could not help comparing them with a certain type of man who is firm and calm enough in a crisis, but ill-tempered and capricious in the bosom of their families for no reason at all. If dinner is late, for example, they'll scold and swear; everything annoys them and they fall out with everyone; the more comfort they have, the more troublesome are they to other people. Characters of this sort, which are common enough among the lower orders, were all too numerous in prison because each man's company was forced upon his neighbour.

Sometimes the prisoners chaffed or insulted the tetchy fellows of whom I have been speaking. These would then hide their discontent: it seemed that a word of abuse was enough to bridle their tongues.

Oustiantsef had no use for a man who whined under the lancet and never let slip an opportunity of rebuking the delinquent. Besides, he was fond of scolding; it was a sort of necessity with him, engendered by illness and also his stupidity. He would gaze at you fixedly for some time, and then treat you to a long speech of threatening and warning, all in a tone of calm and impartial conviction. It seemed as though he thought his function in this world was to watch over order and morality in general.

'He must poke his nose into everything,' the prisoners used to laugh, for they pitied him, and did what they could to avoid conflict with him.

'Can he talk? Why, three wagons wouldn't be too many to carry away all his chatter.'

'Well, why not? No one's going to put up with a mere idiot. What's there to cry out about at the mere touch of a lancet? What harm in the world do you fancy that is going to do you?'

'Hear, hear!' another man interrupts. 'Cupping's a mere nothing. I know by experience. But the most horrid thing is when they keep pulling your ears. That just shuts you up.'

All the prisoners burst out laughing.

'Have you had them pulled?'

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

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

The fellow in question, Chapkin by name, certainly had long, pointed ears. He had led a vagabond life, but was still quite young, intelligent, and quiet. He used to talk with a sort of dry humour and a show of gravity which made his stories most amusing.

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

'Well, who did pull your ears for you?' someone asked.

‘Why, the police superintendent, of course! Our offence was wandering abroad and sleeping in the open. We had just arrived at K, I and another tramp called Eptinie; he had no surname, that fellow. On the way we had stayed a little while in the hamlet of Tolmina; yes, there’s actually a hamlet called Tolmina. Well, we get to the town, and are just looking around to see if there’s any business doing, after which we mean to flit. You know, out in the open country you’re as free as air, but it’s not exactly the same thing in the town. First we go into a public-house, and as we open the door we give a sharp look round. What should we see but a sunburnt fellow in a German coat all out at elbows. He walks straight up to us. After chatting about one thing and another he asks us:

“Excuse my asking, but have you passports?”

“No, we haven’t.”

“Nor have we. Incidentally, I’ve a couple of mates with me, also in the service of General Cuckoo.² We’ve been seeing a bit of life, and just now haven’t a penny to bless ourselves with. May I take the liberty of asking you to be so good as to order a quart of brandy?”

“With the greatest pleasure,” we answer. So we drink together, and they tell us of a place where there’s a real good stroke of business to be done—a house at the end of the town belonging to a wealthy merchant fellow; lots of good things there, so we make up our minds to have a shot at it during the night. There are five of us, and just as we’re starting on the job they nab us, take us to the police-station, and then before the superintendent. “I shall examine them myself,” he says. He lights his pipe, and they bring him in a cup of tea. He was a sturdy fellow with whiskers. Besides us five, there were three other tramps just brought in. You know, comrades, that there’s nothing in this world more funny than a tramp, because he always forgets everything he’s done. You may cudgel his head till you’re tired, but you’ll always get the same answer, that he’s forgotten all about everything.

‘The police superintendent then turns to me and asks me squarely:

“Who are you?”

‘I answer just like all the rest of them:

“I’ve forgotten all about it, sir.”

“Just you wait; I’ve a word or two more to say to you. I know your face.”

‘Then he gives me a good long stare; but I hadn’t seen him anywhere before, that’s a fact.

‘Then he asks another of them: “Who are you?”

“Mizzle-and-scud, sir.”

“They call you Mizzle-and-scud?”

“Precisely that, sir.”

“Right, you’re Mizzle-and-scud! And you?” to a third.

“Along-o’-him, sir.”

² i.e. tramps like himself who wander through the forests and hear the birds sing.

“But what’s your name-your name?”
 “Me? I’m called Along-o’-him, sir.”
 “Who gave you that name, hound?”
 ‘ “ Very worthy people, sir. There are lots of worthy people about; nobody knows that better than you, sir.”
 “And who may these worthy people be?”
 “O Lord! It’s slipped my memory, sir. Please, please forgive me.”
 “So you’ve forgotten them, all of them, these worthy people?”
 “Every mother’s son of them, sir.”
 “But you must have had relations-a father, a mother. Do you remember them?”
 “I suppose I must have had, sir; but I’ve forgotten about ‘em, my memory’s so bad. Now I come to think about it, I’m sure I had some, sir.”
 “But where have you been living till now?”
 ‘ “ In the woods, sir.”
 “Always in the woods?”
 “Always in the woods.”
 “Winter too?”
 “Never saw any winter, sir.”
 ‘ “ Get along with you! And you-what’s your name?”
 ‘ “ Hatchets-and-axes, sir.”
 “And yours?”
 ‘ “ Sharp-and-mum, sir.”
 “And you?”
 ‘ “ Keen-and-spry, sir.”
 “And not a soul of you remembers anything that ever happened to you.”
 “Not a mother’s son of us anything whatever.”
 ‘He couldn’t help it; he laughed out loud. Then all the others began to laugh at seeing him laugh! But that doesn’t always happen. Sometimes they lay about them, these police, with their fists, till every tooth in your jaw is smashed. Devilish big and strong these fellows, I can tell you.
 “Take them off to the lock-up,” said he. “I’ll see to them in a bit. As for you” (meaning me), “you wait here! Just sit down over there, will you.”
 “Over there” was paper, a pen, and ink; so thinks I, “What’s he up to now?”
 “Sit down,” he says again. “Take the pen and write.”
 ‘And then he goes and seizes my ear and gives it a good pull. I looked at him in the sort of way the devil may look at a priest.
 “I can’t write, sir.”
 “Write, write!”
 “Have mercy on me, sir!”
 “Write your best. Write, write!”
 ‘And all the while he keeps pulling my ear, pulling and twisting. Pals, I ‘d rather have had three hundred strokes of the cat; I tell you it was hell.

“‘Write, write!’ was all he said.’

‘Had the fellow gone mad? What the hell was he up to?’

‘No, he wasn’t mad. A little while before, a secretary had done a “job” at Tobolsk: he had robbed the local treasury and gone off with the money. He had very big ears, just as I have. They had published the fact all over the country. I answered to that description; that’s why he tormented me with his “Write, write!” He wanted to find out if I could write, and to see my hand.’

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

‘O Lord! Don’t say a word about it, I beg.’

Everybody burst out laughing.

‘Well, you did write?’

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

‘Do you really know how to write?’

‘Of course I did. What d’ye mean? Used to very well; forgotten the whole blessed thing, though, ever since pens came into fashion.’

Thanks to the patients’ gossip time passed fairly quickly. But even so, Lord, how wearied and bored we were! Those long days were suffocating in their monotony—one exactly like another. If only I had had a single book!

For all that, I often went into hospital, especially in the early days of my imprisonment, either because I was ill or because I needed rest, just to get out of the barrack where life was indeed made burdensome and which was far worse even than the hospital, especially as regards its effect upon moral sentiment and good feeling. We gentlemen were the abiding objects of envious dislike: incessant quarrels picked with us, ourselves for ever in the wrong, and looks filled with menacing hate unceasingly directed at us! Here, in the sick-rooms, one lived on a sort of footing of equality, there was something of comradeship.

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

Then I would begin to muse dreamily on the future. When should I leave this confinement, this dreadful prison? Whither betake myself? What would then happen

to me? Would I return to the place of my birth? So I brooded and brooded until hope revived in my soul.

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

Then there was Oustiantsef's coughing, that cough of the advanced consumptive. He would groan feebly, and stammer: 'My God, I've sinned, I've sinned!'

How frightful it was, that voice of the sick man, that broken, dying voice, in the midst of that silence so dead and so complete! In a corner there are some patients not yet asleep, stretched on their pallets, and talking in low voices. One of them is telling the story of his life, all about things infinitely far away-things that are for ever fled. He is talking of his wandering through the world, of his children, his wife, and his life in the old days. And the very accent of the man's voice tells you that all those things belong to an irrevocable past, that he is as a limb cut off from the body of mankind and cast aside. There is another, listening intently to what he is saying. A weak, feeble sort of muttering and murmuring comes to one's ear from far off in the dreary room, a sound as of some distant river... I remember how, one winter's night that seemed as if it would never end, I heard a story which seemed at first like the stammerings of a soul in nightmare or the delirium of fever. Here it is.

Chapter IV: Akoulka's Husband

Late one night at about eleven o'clock I had been sleeping some time and woke up with a start. The wan, fitful flame of the distant lamp barely illumined the room. Nearly everyone was fast asleep, even Oustiantsef; in the quiet of the night I heard his laboured respiration, the rattling in his throat with every breath. Outside, in the corridor, sounded the muffled tread of an approaching patrol. A rifle-butt struck the floor with a low, dull sound.

The door opened; the corporal entered and counted the sick, stepping softly about the room. After a minute or so he withdrew, leaving a fresh sentry at the door; the patrol went off, and silence reigned once more. It was only then that I noticed not far from me two prisoners who were not asleep; they seemed to be holding a muttered conversation. That was by no means uncommon, for it often happened that a couple of patients whose beds adjoined and who had not exchanged a word for weeks, would all of a sudden break out into conversation in the dead of night, and one of them would tell the other his life-story.

They had probably been talking for some considerable time. I had not heard the beginning of it, and could not at first grasp what they were saying; but little by little I grew familiar with the muttered sounds, and understood all that was going on. I had not the least desire to sleep, and could not but listen.

One man was telling his story with some warmth, propped up on his elbow and leaning towards his companion. He was plainly excited to no little degree; the necessity of speech was upon him.

The other sat on his pallet with a gloomy and indifferent air, his legs stretched out flat on the mattress. Now and again he murmured some reply, more out of politeness than interest, and continually took snuff from a horn box. This was a soldier named Tchérévine from the penal battalion, a morose, cold-reasoning pedant, an idiot full of self-esteem. The narrator was one Chichkof: he was about thirty years old, a civilian convict whom I had never observed; indeed, during the whole time I was in prison I could never work up the smallest interest in him, for he was a conceited, heady fellow.

Sometimes he would hold his tongue for weeks together, and look sulky and brutal enough for anything; then all of a sudden he would interrupt a conversation, behave outrageously, fly into a white-hot rage about nothing at all, and tell long, ridiculous yarns about one barrack or another, blowing abuse on all the world, and acting like a man beside himself. Then someone would give him a hiding, and he would have another fit of silence. He was a mean and cowardly fellow, and the object of general contempt. Short of stature, he had little flesh on him, but his wandering gaze sometimes became abstracted and seemed to reflect some vague form of thought. When he told you anything he worked himself into a fever of excitement, gesticulated wildly, broke off suddenly and passed to another subject, lost himself in fresh details, and at last forgot altogether what he was talking about. He was often embroiled in argument, was Chichkof, and as he poured abuse on his adversary, he spoke with a sentimental whine and was affected almost to tears. He was not a bad hand at playing the balalaika, and had a weakness for it; on festival days he would display his prowess as a dancer when encouraged by others, and he danced by no means badly. It was quite easy to make him do what you wanted-not that he was compliant by nature, but he liked to please and to strike up an intimacy.

For some considerable while that night I could not follow Chichkof's story. It seemed to me as though he were constantly rambling from the point to talk of something else. Perhaps he noticed that Tchérévine paid little attention to his narrative, but I fancy that he was minded to overlook this indifference so as not to take offence.

'... When he went out on business,' he continued, 'everyone saluted him politely, paid him every respect-a fellow with money, that.'

'You say he was in some trade or other.'

'Yes; trade indeed! The trading class in my country is wretchedly poor-poverty-stricken, in fact. The women walk miles to the river to fetch water for their gardens. They wear themselves to the bone, and yet when winter comes they haven't enough to make even cabbage soup. I tell you it's starvation. But that fellow had a good parcel of land, which was cultivated by his three serfs. He had bee-hives, too, and sold his honey; he was also a cattle-dealer, and was a much respected man in the neighbourhood. He was aged and quite grey; his seventy years lay heavy on his old bones. When he came to market in his fox-fur pelisse everyone saluted him.'

“Good day, Aukoudim Trophimtych!”

“Good day,” he’d return. “How are you getting along?” He never despised any man.

“God keep you, Aukoudim Trophimtych!”

“How goes business with you?”

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

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

“Lord preserve you, Aukoudim Trophimtych!”

‘He never despised any man. His advice was always worth having; every one of his words was worth a rouble. A great reader he was—quite a scholar; but he stuck to religious books. He would call his wife and say to her: “Listen, woman, mark well what I say”; then he would embark on some explanation. Marie Stépanovna was not exactly an old woman. She was his second wife, and he had married her in order to beget the children whom his first wife had failed to bear him. He had two boys who were still quite young, for the second of them was born when his father was close on sixty. His daughter, Akoulka, was eighteen years old, and she was the eldest.’

‘Your wife, eh?’

‘Wait a bit, wait a bit. Anyway Philka Marosof begins to kick up a row. Says he to Aukoudim: “Let’s split the difference. Give me back my four hundred roubles. I’m not your beast of burden; I don’t want to do any more business with you, and I don’t want to marry your Akoulka. I want to have my fling now that my parents are dead. I’ll drink my money and then join the army. In ten years I’ll come back here a field-marshal!” Aukoudim gave him back his money—all he had of his. You see, he and Philka’s father had been business partners.

“You’re a lost man,” he said to Philka.

“Whether I’m a lost man or not, old greybeard, you’re the biggest cheat I know. You’d try to screw a fortune out of four farthings, and pick up all the dirt to do it with. Bah! Look at you, piling up here, digging deep there, the devil only knows why. I’ve got a will of my own, I tell you. All the same I won’t take your Akoulka; I’ve slept with her already.”

“How dare you insult a respectable father, a respectable girl! When did you sleep with her, you spawn of a sucker,

you dog, you hound, you?” cried Abkoudim, shaking with wrath. (Philka told us all this later.)

“I’ll not only not marry your daughter, but I’ll take good care that no one else does, not even Mikita Grigoritch, the disreputable wench. We had a fine time together, she and I, all last autumn; but I don’t want her at any price. All the money in the world wouldn’t make me take her.”

‘Then the fellow went and had high jinks for a while, and the town was unanimous in condemning him. He gathered a whole lot of other fellows round him, for he had a heap of money. He carried on like that for three months—such recklessness as you never heard of. Every penny went.

“I want to see the end of this money,” he said. “I’ll sell the house, everything; then I’ll enlist or go on the tramp.”

‘He was drunk from morning to night, and went about with a carriage and pair.

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

‘Then it’s true that he had been intimate with this girl Akoulka?’

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

‘You were very wrong to beat her; that’s a great sin.’

‘ Sometimes I was drunk the whole blessed day. We had a house that was just tumbling to pieces with dry rot; still it was our own. We were as near famished as could be; for weeks together we had nothing but rags to chew. Mother nearly killed me with one stupid trick or another, but I didn’t care a curse. Philka Marosof and I were always together day and night. “Play the guitar to me,” he’d say, “and, I’ll lie in bed the while. I’ll throw money to you, for I’m the richest chap in the world!” The fellow could not speak without lying. There was only one thing: he wouldn’t touch a thing if it had been stolen. “I’m no thief, I’m an honest man. Let’s go and daub Akoulka’s door with pitch,³ for I won’t have her marry Mikita Grigoritch, I’ll stick to that.”

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

‘ So we went and daubed Akoulka’s door all over with pitch. When we’d done that her folks almost beat her to death.

‘Her mother, Marie Stépanovna, cried “I shall die of it,” while the old man said, “ If we were living in the days of the patriarchs, I’d have hacked her to pieces on a block. But now everything in this world is rottenness and corruption.” Sometimes the neighbours from one end of the street to the other heard Akoulka’s screams. She was whipped from morning to evening, and Philka would cry out in the marketplace before everybody: “Akoulka’s a jolly girl to get drunk with. I’ve given it those people between the eyes; they won’t forget me in a hurry.”

‘Well, one day I met Akoulka. She was going for water with her bucket, so I cried out to her: “A fine morning, Akoulka Koudimovna, my pet! You’re the girl who knows how to please the chaps. Who’s living with you now, and where do you get the money for your finery?” That’s just what I said to her; she opened her eyes as wide as you please. No more flesh on her than on a log of wood. She had only just given me a look, but

³ Daubing the door of a house where a young girl lives is done to show that she has been dishonoured.

her mother thought she was larking with me, and cried from her doorstep: "Impudent hussy, what do you mean by talking with that fellow?" And from that moment they began to beat her again. Sometimes they thrashed her for an hour on end. Her mother said: "I give her the whip because she isn't my daughter any more."

'So she was as bad as they said?'

'Now you just listen to my story, nunky, will you? Well, Philka and I were always drunk. One day when I was abed, mother comes and says:

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

"But," says I, "all the world knows that she's a bad girl"

"Tush! The marriage ceremony cures all that; besides, she'll always be in fear of her life from you, so you'll be in clover together. Their money would make us comfortable. I've spoken about the marriage already to Marie Stépanovna; we're of one mind about it."

'So I say: "Let's have twenty roubles down, and I'll take her."

'Well, believe it or not, but I was drunk right up to the wedding-day. Philka Marosof was threatening me all the time.

"I'll break every bone in your body. A nice fellow you are to be engaged-and to Akoulka. If I like I'll sleep every blessed night with her when she's your wife."

"You're a hound, and a liar," I replied. But he insulted me so in the street, before everybody, that I ran to Aukoudim's and said: "I won't marry her unless I have fifty roubles down this moment."

'And did they really let you have her?'

'Me? Why not, indeed? We were quite respectable people. Father was ruined by a fire shortly before he died; he's been a richer man than Aukoudim Trophimtych.'

"A fellow like you, without a shirt to his back, ought to be only too happy to marry my daughter," retorted Aukoudim.

"Just remember your door and its coat of pitch," I answered back.

"Stuff and nonsense," said he. "There's no proof whatever that the girl's done wrong."

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

'Then Philka Marosof and I agreed to send Mitri Bykoff to old Aukoudim to tell him that we'd insult him to his face in front of everyone. Well, as I say, I was full of drink right up to the wedding-day; I wasn't sober till I got into church. As they were escorting us home from church the girl's uncle, Mitrophone Stépantytsch, said:

"This isn't a nice business, but it's over and done with now."

'Old Aukoudim was sitting there crying, the tears rolling down his grey beard. Comrade, shall I tell you what I'd done? I'd put a whip in my pocket before we went to church, and I 'd made up my mind to have it out of her with that, so that all the

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

'I see, and you wanted her to know what was in store for her. Er, was?'

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

'Impossible!'

'True, I swear; as honest a girl as any good family could wish for.'

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

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

'She was seated on the bed, and gazed at me fixedly. Putting both her hands on my shoulders, she began to laugh, but the tears were running down her cheeks. She cried and laughed together.

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

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

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

'You ought to have seen how we were dressed the first Sunday after our marriage-when we left church! I'd got a long coat of fine cloth, a fur cap, and plush breeches. She wore a pelisse of hareskin, quite new, and a silk kerchief on her head. One was as fine as the other. Everybody admired us. I must say I looked well, and little Akoulka did too. One oughtn't to boast, but one mustn't sing small. I tell you, people like us are not turned out by the dozen.'

'I don't doubt it.'

'Just you listen, now. The day after the wedding I left my guests, drunk as I was, and ran about the streets crying: "Where's that scoundrel Philka Marosof? Just let him come near me, the hound, that's all!" I went all through the market-place yelling like that. I was only just able to stand.

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

‘Well, the whole thing was the talk of the village. The girls said, when they met in the market-place: “Well, you’ve heard the news-Akoulka was all right!”

‘Not long afterwards I ran across Philka Marosof, who said to me before everybody, strangers included: “Sell your wife, and spend the money on drink. Jackka the soldier only married for that; he didn’t sleep one night with his wife, but he got enough drink to keep his skin full for three years.”

‘I answered: “You hound!”

““But,” says he, “you’re an idiot! You didn’t know what you were doing when you married-you were drunk. How could you know anything about it?”

‘So off I went to the house, and shouted at them: “You married me when I was drunk.”

‘Akoulka’s mother tried to fasten herself on me, but I cried: “Mother, you know nothing about anything except money. You bring me Akoulka!”

‘And didn’t I beat her! I tell you, I beat her for two hours running, till I dropped on the floor with fatigue. She couldn’t leave her bed for three weeks.’

‘It’s a dead sure thing,’ said Tchérévine phlegmatically,

‘if you don’t beat them they Did you find her with her lover?’

‘No. To tell the truth, I never actually caught her,’ said Chichkoff after a pause, speaking with an effort; ‘but I was hurt, a good deal hurt, because everyone made fun of me. The cause of it all was Philka. “Your wife’s just made to be looked at,” said he.

‘One day he invited us round to his place and started in: “Do just look what a good little wife he has! Isn’t she tender, isn’t she fine, nicely brought up, affectionate, and full of kindness for all the world? I say, my lad, have you forgotten how we daubed their door with pitch?” At the moment I was hopelessly drunk; he seized me by the hair and had me on the floor before I knew where I was. “Come along-dance. Aren’t you Akoulka’s husband? I’ll hold your hair for you, and you shall dance. It’ll be good fun.”

“Dog! ‘I said. “I’ll bring some jolly fellows to your house,” he went on, “and I’ll whip your Akoulka before your very eyes just as long as I please.” Would you believe it? For a whole month I daren’t go out of the house, I was so afraid he’d come and drag my wife through the dirt. And how I beat her for it!’

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

Chichkoff remained quite silent for a few moments.

‘I was very much hurt,’ he continued. ‘I began it again just as before-beating her from morning till night for nothing; because she didn’t get up from her seat the way I liked; because she didn’t walk to suit me. When I wasn’t hiding her time hung heavy on my hands. Sometimes she sat by the window crying silently-it hurt my feelings sometimes to see her cry, but I beat her all die same. Sometimes her mother abused me for it: “You’re a scoundrel, a gallows-bird!”

“Don’t say a word or I’ll kill you. You made me marry her when I was drunk; you swindled me.” Old Aukoudim wanted at first to have his finger in the pie. Said he to me one day: “Look here, you’re not such a tremendous fellow that one can’t put you down”; but he didn’t get far on that track. Marie Stépanovna had become as sweet as milk. One day she came to me, crying her eyes out, and said: “My heart is almost broken, Ivan Semionytch. What I’m going to ask of you is only a little thing for you, but it means a good deal to me. Let her go, let her leave you, Ivan.” Then she threw herself at my feet. “Do give up being so angry! Wicked people slander her. You know quite well she was good when you married her.” Once again she knelt before me and cried. But I was as hard as nails. “I won’t hear a word you have to say. What I choose to do, I do, to you or anybody, for I’m crazed with it all. As for Philka Marosof, he’s my best and dearest friend.”

‘You’d begun to play your pranks together again, had you?’

‘No, by Jove! He was out of the way by this time; he was killing himself with drink, nothing less. He’d spent all he had on drink, and had joined the army as substitute for another citizen. In my part of the world, when a lad makes up his mind to enlist as substitute for another, he is master of the latter’s house and everybody in it until he’s called to the colours. He receives an agreed sum on the day he leaves, but until then he lives in the house of the man who pays him, sometimes for six whole months, and there isn’t a horror in the whole world those fellows are not guilty of. It’s enough to make folks remove the ikons from the house. From the moment he consents to be substitute for a son of the family he considers himself their patron and benefactor, and makes them dance as he pipes, otherwise he calls off the bargain.

‘So Philka Marosof played merry hell in the home of this citizen. He slept with the daughter, pulled the master of the house by the beard after dinner, and, in fact, did anything that came into his head. They had to heat the bath for him every day, and, what’s more, give him brandy fumes with the steam of the bath; and he’d have the women lead him by the arms to the bath-room.⁴

‘When he came back to the man’s house after a revel elsewhere, he would stop right in the middle of the road and shout:

“‘I won’t go in by the gate-pull down the fence!’”

‘And they actually had to pull down the fence, though there was the gate right in front of him. But all that came to an end the day he joined the regiment. That day he was perfectly sober. The crowd gathered all along the street.

“‘They’re taking away Philka Marosof!’”

‘He saluted right and left. Just at that moment Akoulka was returning from the kitchen garden, and immediately Philka saw her he cried out:

“‘Stop!’” and down he jumped from the cart and threw himself at her feet.

“‘My soul, my sweet little strawberry. I’ve loved you two long years. Now they’re taking me off to the regiment with the band playing. Forgive me, good honest daughter

⁴ Once a mark of respect in Russia, but no longer used.

of a good honest father, for I 'm nothing but a hound, and all you've gone through is my fault."

'Then he flings himself down before her a second time. At first Akoulka was exceedingly frightened, but she made him a low bow, bending almost double.

"Forgive me, too, dear boy; but I am really not at all angry with you."

'As she re-entered the house I was at her heels.

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

'Now would you believe it, she looked at me as bold as you please, and answered:

"I love him better than anything or anybody in this world."

"I say!"

'For the rest of that day I never uttered one single word. Only towards evening I said to her: "Akoulka, I'm going to kill you now." I didn't close an eye the whole night. I went into the little room leading off ours and drank kvass. At daybreak I returned. "Akoulka, get ready and come into the fields." I had already arranged to go there, and my wife knew it.

"You are right," said she. "It's quite time to begin reaping. I've heard that our labourer is ill and not working."

'I harnessed the cart without another word. As you go out of the town there's a forest fifteen versts long; at the end of it is our field. When we had gone about three versts through the wood I stopped the horse.

"Come, get up, Akoulka; your end is come."

'She looked at me in terror, but got up without a word.

"You've tormented me enough. Say your prayers."

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

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

'And Akoulka?'

'She got up to come back to the house. They found her later, a hundred yards from the place.'

'So you hadn't finished her off?'

'No.' Chickoff was silent for a while.

'Yes,' said Tchérévine, 'there's a particular artery; if you don't sever it at once the victim will continue struggling; the blood may flow fast enough, but he won't die.'

'But she was dead all the same. They found her in the evening, and she was cold. They told the police, and searched for me. They found me at night in the old bath.'

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

‘Yes, if you don’t beat ’em you make no way at all,’ said Tchérévine sententiously, taking out his snuff-box once again. He took his pinches very slowly, with long pauses. ‘For all that, my lad, you behaved like a fool. Why, I myself-I caught my wife with a lover. I called her into the shed, doubled a halter, and said:

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

‘And then I gave it her with my halter-beat her and beat her for an hour and a half, till at last she was quite spent, and cried out:

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

‘Her name was Crodotia.’

Chapter V: The Summer Season

April is here; Holy Week is not far off. We set about our summer tasks. The sun becomes hotter and more brilliant every day; there is spring in the air, and it has a powerful effect upon one’s nervous system. The convict in his chains feels the trembling influence of the lovely days, just like any other creature; it rouses desires in him, inexpressible longings for his home, and many other things. I think a man misses his liberty and 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 clearly in prison; if the convicts experience a little happiness on a beautiful clear day, they react more readily towards impatience and irritability.

I noticed that in spring there was much more squabbling and more noise; the men shouted louder, and fought more frequently. During working hours one would sometimes notice a man apparently deep in meditation. His gaze seemed lost somewhere in the blue distance on the far bank of the Irtych, where the boundless plain stretched for hundreds of versts, the free Kirghiz Steppe. One would hear long, deep-drawn sighs, as if the air of those wide and free regions, haunted by the convict’s thought, forced him to breathe deeply, and was a kind of solace to his crushed and fettered soul.

At length one poor fellow cries out ‘Ah!’-a long wailing sound-then seizes his pick-axe or gathers up his load of bricks. After a few moments he seems to have forgotten his unhappiness: he begins laughing, or insulting his fellow workers, so fitful in his humour. Then he sets furiously to work with unwonted vigour; he labours for all he is worth, as if hoping that fatigue will stifle the grief which has him by the throat. You see, these convicts are all able-bodied men, all in the flower of their age, with every faculty still unimpaired.

How heavy the irons are during this season! What I say is not sentimentality, it is the report of careful observation. During the hot season, under a fiery sun, when all one’s being, all one’s soul, is vividly conscious of, and feels intimately, the immense

force of nature's resurrection all around, 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 do their best to escape from prison into the woods. After working in some suffocating ditch or at the boats, after enduring the irons, the rods and whips, they wander where they please, wherever their footsteps lead them; they eat and drink what they can get (it is always pot-luck with them); and by night they sleep undisturbed in field or forest without a care, without the agony of knowing themselves in prison, as if they were God's own birds; their 'good night' is whispered 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 chew for days on end. 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 throws himself on all he sees'; that is what people say of those transported to Siberia. The saying may be applied even more fitly to tramps. They are almost all brigands and thieves, of necessity rather than by inclination. Many of them are hardened to the life, beyond reclaim. There are convicts who take to the road after serving their time, even after being given land of their own. They ought to be happy in their new state, with their daily bread assured» But it is not so; an irresistible impulse drives them to wander.

This life in the woods, wretched and fearful as it is, yet still free and adventurous, has a mysterious allure for those who have experienced it. Among these fugitives you may be surprised to find people of sound judgment and peaceable temper, who had shown every promise of becoming good husbandmen. A convict will marry, have children, and live for five years in the same place; then all of a sudden, one fine morning, he will disappear to the astonishment of his family and the whole neighbourhood, abandoning his wife and children.

When I was in prison one of these fugitives from house and home was pointed out to me. He had committed no crime-at least, he was under suspicion of none-but throughout his life he had deserted post after post. He had visited the southern frontiers of the empire, he had journeyed beyond the Danube, in the Kirghiz Steppe, in Eastern Siberia, the Caucasus, and many other regions. Who knows but that under other conditions the fellow might have been a Robinson Crusoe, so strong a hold the passion of travel had over him. These details I learned from other convicts, for he did not like talking, and never opened his mouth except when absolutely necessary. He was a peasant, short of stature, about fifty years old, and very quiet in demeanour, with a face so still as to seem quite vacant, so impassive as to suggest weak-mindedness. His delight was to sit for hours in the sun humming a sort of song between his teeth so softly that he was inaudible five yards away. His "features were, so to speak, petrified; he ate little, principally black bread; he never bought white bread or spirits. My belief is that 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 feeding dogs from the hand). It was said that he had been twice married, and that he had children somewhere. Why he had been sent to Siberia 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 that deep surface-calm that one could trust, although to escape would have profited him little.

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

Comparatively few make any settled plans for flight, they fear the obstacles with which they will meet and the punishment that may ensue. Only one in a hundred, certainly not more, makes up his mind to escape, but the means of doing so never cease to haunt the minds of the other ninety-nine. Filled as their thoughts are with this longing, anything that looks like offering a chance of success consoles them, and they set about comparing the facts with cases of successful escape. I speak only of those prisoners who have already been sentenced, for those awaiting trial are much more ready to attempt escape. A condemned man rarely manages to get away unless he attempts it in early days of his imprisonment. After two or three years a convict credits the time he has then served to a sort of mental banking account, and concludes that it is better to pay off the law and settle on the land as a free man, rather than forfeit that period if he fails to escape, which is always possible. Certainly not more than one convict in ten succeeds in changing his lot. Those who do have almost invariably been sentenced to a very long term of imprisonment, perhaps even for life: fifteen, twenty years seem like an eternity to them. Even so, branding makes it extremely difficult to escape detection.

'Changing one's lot' is prison jargon. When a convict is caught trying to escape, he is subjected to formal interrogation, and will say that he wished to 'change his lot.' This somewhat literary formula exactly describes the act in question. No escaped prisoner ever hopes to become a perfectly free man, for he knows that it is almost impossible; what he hopes for is to be sent to some other convict establishment or put on the land, or tried again for some offence committed while on the tramp; in a word, to be sent somewhere else, no matter where, provided he can leave his present place of confinement, which has become unendurable. All these fugitives, unless they find some unexpected shelter for the winter, unless they meet someone ready to conceal them, or unless, as a last resort, they can procure (even at the cost of murder) a passport, flock to the towns in autumn, present themselves at the prison gates, and give themselves up as escaped convicts. They spend the winter in jail, hoping to get away again in the following summer.

I too felt the influence of spring. I well remember how eagerly I gazed at the horizon through gaps in the fence; I would stand for hours on end with my head glued to the palings, watching intently the grass grow green in the moat, and the deepening blue of the distant sky. My anguish, my melancholy, were heavier on me; as each day wore away the jail became odious, detestable. Hatred towards me as a gentleman filled the convicts' hearts during those first years, and their animosity poisoned my whole life. I often begged to be sent to the hospital, though there was no need of it, simply to escape from the barrack-room and feel myself out of range of that unrelenting and implacable hostility.

'You nobles have beaks of iron; you tore us to pieces when we were serfs,' my neighbours used to say. How I envied prisoners from the lower classes! It was so different for them, they were mates with everyone from the start. So it was that in springtime, when Freedom showed herself as it were a phantom of the season, and joy was diffused throughout Nature, they roused in my soul redoubled melancholy and nervous irritability.

As the sixth week of Lent approached I had to fulfil my religious duties. The convicts were divided by the authorities into seven groups of about thirty men-answering to the weeks in Lent-each of which had to perform its devotions in turn. That week was a great solace to me; we went two or three times a day to the church not far from 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 memory of things long, long past, and awoke my earliest impressions to fresh life. I remember so clearly how happy I was when in the morning we were marched off to God's house, treading the frozen earth under an escort of soldiers with loaded muskets; the escort remained outside the church.

Once within, we were massed close to the door, so that we could scarcely hear anything except the deep voice of the deacon; now and again we caught a glimpse of a black chasuble or the bare head of the priest. Then I recalled how, as a child, I used to look at the common people who stood huddled at the door; how they made way in servile fashion for some important fellow with epaulettes, some nobleman with a big paunch. Or it might be some pious lady in her splendid gown hurrying for a front seat and ready to make trouble if there was any unwillingness to honour her with the best place. As it seemed to me then, it was only there, near the church door, just inside the porch, that prayer was offered with genuine fervour and humility; only there that folk prostrated with true self-abasement and a full sense of their unworthiness.

And now I myself ranked with the common people; no, not even that, for we were outcast and in chains. Everyone shunned us. We were feared, and alms were slipped into our hands as if we were beggars. I remember that all this gave me the strange sensation of a refined and subtle pleasure. 'So be it!' 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 the collection for 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.'

At the end of six o'clock mass we went up to communion. When the priest, ciborium in hand, recited the words 'Have mercy on me as Thou had'st on the thief whom Thou didst save,' nearly all the convicts prostrated themselves, and their chains rattled. I think they took these words literally as applied to themselves, and not as being from 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 kindness. As at Christmas, there was the priest's visitation with the cross, inspection by heads of departments, larded cabbage, general enlargement of soul, and unlimited lounging. The only difference was that one could now walk about in the courtyard, and warm oneself in the sun. Everything seemed filled with more light, larger than in winter, but also more fraught with sadness. The long, endless summer days seemed peculiarly unbearable on Church holidays. Work days seemed at least to pass more rapidly owing to the fatigue of labour.

Our tasks were now far more trying than in winter; they consisted principally in engineering work. Some of us were set to building, digging, bricklaying, or repairing Government premises, to locksmith's work, carpentering, or painting. Others went into the brick-fields, and that was considered the hardest of all jobs. The brick-fields were situated about four versts from the prison, and throughout the summer a gang of fifty men set out every morning at six o'clock. This gang was chosen from workmen who had no special trade. We took with us a day's ration of bread. The distance was too great for us to travel eight useless versts there and back simply in order to dine with the others, so we had a meal when we returned in the evening.

We were each told off to do a definite amount of work, but there was so much of it that one could scarcely, if ever, manage to get through it. First, we had to dig and carry the clay, moisten it, and mould it in the trough, and then make a goodly quantity of bricks, two hundred or so, and sometimes fifty more than that. I was only twice sent to the brick-field. Those detailed for the work used to come back in the evening dead tired; everyone complained that the others were slack and that he himself had had to do most of the work. I believe that they found some pleasure and consolation in these reproaches. Some, however, enjoyed the brick-field because it took them away from the town to the banks of the Irtych where the country was open and the sky shone overhead; the surroundings were more agreeable than those frightful Government buildings. They were quite free to smoke and to lie down for half an hour or so, which was delightful.

As for me, I was generally sent to one of the shops, or else to pound alabaster or to carry bricks, which last job I once did for two months on end. I had to carry my load of bricks from the river bank for a distance of about a hundred and forty yards, over the moat of the fortress to a barrack which they were putting up. This work suited me well enough, although the cord used for carrying bricks cut my shoulders; what particularly pleased me was that my strength sensibly increased. At first I could not carry more than eight bricks at once-each of them weighed about twelve pounds; but I was eventually able to carry twelve, or even fifteen, which afforded me great

satisfaction. You wanted physical as well as moral strength to be able to support all the discomforts of that accursed life.

There was another consideration: I wanted, when I left the place, to be able really to live and not just exist. I took pleasure in carrying my bricks then; it was not merely that the work strengthened my body, but it took me so frequently to the banks of the Irtych. I refer to this spot: it was the only place where we saw God's world—a pure and bright horizon, the free desert steppes whose bareness always made a strange impression on me. All the other work-yards were in the fortress itself, or in its immediate neighbourhood; and from the earliest days of my imprisonment I loathed the fortress, especially its surrounding buildings. The governor's house seemed to me a repulsive, accursed place: I could never pass without turning upon it a look of detestation. But on the river-bank I could forget my miserable self as I gazed over the immense stretch of desert, just as a prisoner may do when he looks at the world of freedom through the barred window of his dungeon. Everything there 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 stand for a long time watching 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 little spring flower fading in a cleft of the bank fixed my attention and would draw my tears... The melancholy of that first year of prison life and its hard labour was unendurable. The anguish of it was so great, that I hardly noticed my immediate surroundings; I merely shut my eyes and would not see. Among the broken-down creatures with whom I was obliged to live, I had not yet recognized those who were capable of thinking and feeling in spite of their repulsive appearance. I never heard (or if one was spoken I was not aware of it) one kindly word amidst the constant hail of venom. Still, there was one such utterance, simple, straightforward, and pure in motive; it came from the heart of a man who had suffered and endured more than myself. But it is useless to enlarge on that.

The great fatigue which I suffered was a source of content, for it gave me hope of sound sleep. In summer sleep was a torment, more intolerable than the closeness and infection winter brought in its train. Some nights were certainly very beautiful. The sun, which had not ceased all day to flood the courtyard, hid itself at last. The air freshened, and night, the night of the steppe, became comparatively cool. The convicts, until it was time to lock them in, walked about in groups, especially on the kitchen side, for that was where questions of general interest were by preference discussed. Comments were exchanged upon rumours from the outside world, often absurd indeed, but always keenly exciting to these poor creatures cut off from their fellow men. For example, we suddenly hear that the governor has been summarily dismissed. Convicts are as credulous as children; they know the news to be false, or most unlikely, and that

Kvassoff, who brings it, is a past master in the art of lying; for all that they clutch at the nonsensical story, exult over it, express their satisfaction, but at last are quite ashamed of having been duped by a man like 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 fellow 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’s an old fellow, growing grey; he always takes his sour cabbage soup into a corner and eats it there.’

‘Do you think his superiors will take your advice as to whether they should show him the door or not?’ adds a fourth, twanging his balalaika and seeming quite indifferent.

‘Well, why not?’ replied the second angrily. ‘If you are asked, answer what’s in your mind. But no, with us fellows it’s all mere talk, and when we ought to go to it with a will, we all slink away.’

‘That’s so!’ says the balalaika player. ‘What with hard labour and prison life that can’t be helped.’

‘It was like that the other day,’ says the second man, without having heard that last remark. ‘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 to whom can you complain?’

‘To whom? Why, the inspector who’ll be here soon.’

‘What inspector?’

‘It’s true, pals, an inspector’s coming soon,’ said a young convict who had had a smattering of education, had read the *Duchesse de la Valliere* or some such book, and who had been quartermaster in a regiment. He was a bit of a wag, and was held in some sort of respect as a knowing fellow. Without paying the least attention to the exciting debate, he goes straight to the cook and asks him for some fiver. 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 the cook.

‘A four-kopeck cut; I’ll eat, the others can watch me and feel hungry,’ he says... ‘Yes, pals,’ he resumes, ‘a general, a real general’s coming from Petersburg to inspect 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 in 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 start an argument and quarrel about their generals. Curses fly, all in honour of these high officers-and there is fighting, too, sometimes. What interest can they possibly have in such things? When one hears

convicts speaking of generals and high officials one begins to understand just how much intelligence they had when they were free. It cannot be concealed that in Russia, 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 given our governor the right about, don’t you?’ observes Kvassoff, a little rubicund, choleric, small-brained fellow.

‘He’ll just grease their palms for them,’ this in staccato tones from a 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’s stolen money enough, the scoundrel. And, think, he was only a major in the army 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 a poor specimen. A fine type 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’s more like an inch than a mile,’ observes Skouratoff, who had just joined in the conversation.

‘Don’t fancy we’re going to amuse ourselves by discussing you?’ says the ex-quartermaster in a superior tone. ‘Kvassoff, I tell you you’re a big idiot! If you fancy the governor can grease the palm of an inspector-general you’ve got things hopelessly muddled. Do you fancy they send a man from Petersburg just to inspect your governor? You’re a precious dolt, my lad, take it from me.’

‘And you fancy because he’s a general he doesn’t take what’s offered?’ someone says in a sceptical tone.

‘I should think he does indeed, and plenty of it whenever he can.’

‘Sure thing; gets bigger, and more, and worse, the higher the rank.’

‘A general always has his palm greased,’ says Kvassoff, sententiously.

‘Did you ever give one anything, seeing you’re so sure of it?’ asks Baklouchin, suddenly chiming in on a note 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 tell us which one. Come, quick about it. I know ’em all, every man jack of ’em.’

‘I’ve seen General Zibert,’ says Kvassoff, far from sure of himself.

‘Zibert! There’s no general of that name. That’s the general, perhaps, who watched your back while they gave you the cat. This Zibert was probably 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 really was a general of that name, a German but a Russian subject. He confessed to the bishop 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 cured himself 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 balalaika.

'Be quiet, you fellows, can't you—one tries to talk seriously, and there you are beginning your nonsense again. Who's the inspector that's coming?'

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

'Lying crowd!' 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 dogmatically. He had remained majestically silent until now. 'The man who's coming is big and fat, about fifty years old, with regular features and proud, contemptuous manners on which he prides himself.'

Koulikoff is a Tsigan, a sort of veterinary surgeon; he makes money by treating horses in the town, and sells wine in prison. He is no fool, but has plenty of brain. His memory is well stocked, and he lets his words fall as carefully as if every one of them was worth a rouble.

'It's true,' he went on very calmly; 'I heard it only last week. He's a general with bigger epaulettes than most, and he's going to inspect every prison in Siberia. They grease his palm well, that's sure enough, but not our governor with eight eyes in his head. The general won't dare to touch him; you see, there are generals and generals, as there are faggots and faggots. That's how it is, and you may take it from me our governor will remain where he is. As for us, we're fellows with no tongues, we've no right to speak; and as for our officers, they're not going to say a word against him. The inspector will arrive, take a look round, and clear off at once. He'll say everything's all right.'

'Yes, but the governor'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'll be a devil of a shame if the general does nothing about him,' said the convicts, and began to grow highly excited.

News of the arrival of the inspector went through the prison, and the convicts went about the courtyard retailing this important fact. Some held their tongues and kept cool, trying to look important; some were quite indifferent. Some sat on the doorstep and played the balalaika, while others went on gossiping. Some groups were singing in a drawling voice, but the whole courtyard was astir and generally excited. About nine o'clock they counted us, ordered us indoors, and locked us up for the night. A short summer's night it was, so we were roused up at five o'clock in the morning. No one, however, had managed to sleep before eleven, for until that hour there was conversation and restless movement; some of the men even played cards 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 and turning on their wooden beds as if delirious.

Fleas swarmed everywhere. There were enough of them in winter, but when spring came they multiplied in proportions so formidable that I could not have believed it, had I not endured them. And as summer advanced the situation grew worse. I discovered that one can get used to fleas; but for all that they are such a nuisance that they throw you into a frenzy. Even when you manage to doze off you are not properly asleep; you are half delirious, and well aware of it.

At last, towards morning, when the enemy is tired and you are enjoying a sound slumber in the freshness of the early hours, suddenly you hear the pitiless morning drum-call. How you curse as you hear listening to those short, sharp beats. You cower in your shirt, and then one can't help it comes the thought that it will be the same to-morrow and the day after for many, many years, until you are set free. When will it come, this freedom, freedom? Where is it to be found in this world? Where is it hiding? You are obliged to get up, the others are walking about the room. The usual noisy row begins. The convicts dress, and hurry to their work. It's true you can take a nap at midday.

What we had been told about the inspector was perfectly true; the reports became more certain every day. At last it was clear that a high-ranking general was coming from Petersburg to inspect all Siberia, that he was already at Tobolsk. Every day we learned something fresh about him. These rumours came from the town. It appeared that there was alarm in all quarters, and that everyone was making preparations to show himself in as favourable a light as possible. The authorities were organizing receptions, balls, fêtes of every kind. Gangs of convicts were sent to level the paths in the fortress and to smooth away hummocks in the ground, paint the palings and other woodwork, to plaster, do up, and generally repair everything that was conspicuous.

The prisoners understood clearly 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 certain demands to be set before the general on his arrival, but that did not prevent their continuing to quarrel and make violent speeches. The governor was on hot bricks! He was constantly visiting the jail, shouting and threatening us with unwonted regularity, sending us to the guard-room and dealing out punishment for mere trifles. He also watched very strictly over the cleanliness and good order of the barracks. It was at this time that there occurred a little event which was by no means as unwelcome to the governor as one might have expected. On the contrary, it caused him lively satisfaction. One of the convicts struck another with an awl right in the chest, quite close to the heart.

The culprit's name was Lomof. The victim was known in prison as Gavrilka. He was one of those seasoned tramps about whom I have already spoken. Whether he had another name, I do not know. I never heard him referred to by any other than Gavrilka.

Lomof had been a fairly wealthy peasant in the Government of T, and district of K. There were five members of his family living together, two brothers Lomof, and three sons. They were quite comfortably off, and local rumour had it that they had more than 300,000 roubles in paper money. They were carriers and tanners by trade, but their principal business was usury, harbouring tramps, and receiving stolen goods—all sorts of petty irregularities. Half the peasants of their district owed them money, and so were in their power. They passed as being intelligent and full of cunning, and gave themselves extraordinary airs. Some great personage of the province had once called at their father's house and taken a fancy to him because of his rough and unscrupulous talk. From that time they considered it safe to do exactly as they pleased, and became more deeply involved in criminal practices. Everyone had a grudge against them, and would like to have seen them a hundred feet underground; but they grew bolder and bolder every day. They were not afraid of the local police or of the district tribunals.

Fortune at length betrayed them. Ruin overtook them, not as a result of their secret crimes, but in consequence of an accusation which was in fact false and calumnious. Ten versts from their hamlet they had a farm where six Kirghiz labourers, whom they had long since reduced to the condition of slaves, used to spend the autumn. One fine day these Kirghiz were found murdered. A prolonged inquiry followed, thanks to which innumerable atrocities were brought to light. The Lomofs were accused of having assassinated their workmen. They had themselves told their story to the convicts, the whole prison knew it by heart: they were suspected of owing a great deal of money to the Kirghiz, and, as they were greedy and avaricious in spite of their large fortunes, it was believed they had paid the debt by taking the poor fellows' lives. While the inquiry and trial dragged on, their property dwindled to nothing. The father died and his sons were transported; one of them, together with his uncle, was condemned to fifteen years' hard labour.

Now, they were perfectly innocent of the crime imputed to them. One day Gavrilka, who was a thorough-going rascal, known as a tramp but of very gay and lively disposition was revealed as the author of the crime. I am not certain whether he actually confessed, but the convicts undoubtedly held him to have murdered the Kirghiz.

This man Gavrilka, while still on the road, had been mixed up in some way with the Lomofs (he had been imprisoned for quite a short term on a charge of deserting from the army and wandering abroad). He had cut the throats of the Kirghiz—three other rogues had been his accomplices—in the hope of establishing themselves with plunder from the farm.

The Lomofs were unpopular in prison, though I really don't know why. One of them, the nephew, was a sturdy fellow, intelligent and sociable; but his uncle, the fellow who stabbed Gavrilka, was a choleric, stupid rustic, always quarrelling with the convicts, who knocked him about like plaster. We all liked Gavrilka for his gaiety and good humour. The Lomofs had also learned that he was guilty of the crime for which they had been condemned. They had never quarrelled with him, however, and Gavrilka had so far paid no attention whatsoever to them.

The row with Uncle Lomof started over some disreputable girl. Gavrilka had boasted of her favour; 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 as very rich. They had money, a samovar, and drank tea. The governor knew all about it, and hated them both, and spared them no vexation.: The victims of his hatred explained it by a desire to have them grease his palm, but they could not, or would not, bring themselves to do so.

If Uncle Lomofs awl had penetrated one hair's breadth deeper into Gavrilka's breast he would certainly have killed him; as it was, the wound was not serious. The affair was reported to the governor. I can seem 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? No, I think it will be better to have a horse. Let them harness a horse this moment!' he shouted to a junior officer.

'But I don't feel it at all, your Excellency. He's only given me a bit of a prick, your Excellency.'

'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's caught you just below the heart, the scoundrel. Wait, wait!' he roared at Lomof. 'You're under arrest. 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 was extended by several years, and they gave him a thousand strokes with the rod. The governor was delighted.

The inspector arrived at last.

The day after his arrival in town he came to inspect the prison. It was a regular festival. For some days everything had been brilliantly clean, washed with the utmost care. The convicts were all newly shaven, their linen spotlessly white. (According to the regulations, their summer dress consisted of jackets and canvas pantaloons. Everyone had a circle of black material sewn on to the back of his jacket.) The prisoners had been given an hour's careful instructions as to what answers they should give, the very words they should use if the high functionary addressed them.

There had even been regular rehearsals. The governor seemed to have lost his head. An hour before the inspector's arrival all the convicts were at their posts, stiff as statues, with their little fingers on the seams of their pantaloons. At last, at about one o'clock, he entered. He was a general, with a look of great self-importance, so much so, indeed, that the mere sight of him must have sent a tremor through the heart of every official in Western Siberia.

He came in with a stern, majestic air, followed by a crowd of generals and colonels from the local garrison. There was a civilian, too, a tall man with regular features, wearing a frock-coat and shoes. This personage bore himself with an air of independence, and the general always addressed him with exquisite politeness. He too had come from Petersburg. All the convicts were terribly curious as to who he could be,

that such an important general should show him such deference. We learned later who he was and what was his office, but he was the object of much conversation until we knew the truth.

The governor, spick and span in his orange-coloured collar, made none too favourable an impression upon the general; the bloodshot eyes and fiery rubicund complexion told their story all too plainly. Out of respect for his superior he had removed his spectacles, and stood some way off, as straight as a dart in feverish expectation of being asked to do something when he would run and carry out his excellency's wish; but there seemed to be no particular demand for his services.

The general went all through every barrack without saying a word, and glanced 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 been guilty of this, that, and the other.

'Ah!' replied the general. 'And how does he behave?' 'Satisfactorily at present, your Excellency, satisfactorily.' The general nodded, and left the jail after a couple of minutes or so. The convicts were dazzled and disappointed and did not know what to make of it. As to laying complaints against the governor, that was forgotten, unthinkable. He had, no doubt, been well assured of this beforehand.

Chapter VI: Prison Animals

Gniedko, a bay horse, was bought a little while afterwards, and the event furnished the convicts with a much more agreeable and interesting diversion than the visit of the high personage of whom I have been speaking. We required a horse for carrying water, refuse, etc. He was put in the charge of a prisoner, who drove him, of course, under escort. Our horse had plenty to do all day. He was a worthy beast, but almost worn out, having been in service for a long time.

One fine morning, the eve of St Peter's Day, our bay, Gniedko, who was dragging a barrel of water, fell all of a heap, and in a few minutes gave up the ghost. He was much regretted, and everyone gathered round to discuss his death. Ex-cavalrymen, gipsies, veterinary surgeons, and others showed a profound knowledge of horses in general and fiercely argued the question; but they could not bring the bay to life again; there he was stretched out and dead, with his belly all swollen. Everyone thought it his duty to handle the poor corpse. The governor was ultimately informed of what Providence had done to the horse, and it was decided that another should be bought at once.

On St Peter's Day, quite soon after mass when the convicts were assembled, a number of horses that were for 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 deceive two hundred and fifty men who had been horse-dealers by trade. Gipsies, Lesghians, professional horse-copers, and townsmen arrived to bargain. The convicts showed extraordinary keenness as each fresh horse was brought up, and were as delighted as children. It seemed to tickle their fancy very much, that they had

to buy a horse like free men, just as if the animal were to be their own property and the money was to come out of their own pockets. Three horses were brought and taken away before purchase; the fourth proved satisfactory. The dealers seemed astonished and a little awed by the soldiers of the escort who watched the business. Two hundred men, clean shaven and branded as they were, with chains on their feet, were well calculated to inspire respect, all the more as they were on their own ground, at home so to speak, in their own convict's den, where nobody was ever allowed to come.

Our fellows seemed up to no end of tricks for discovering the real worth of a horse. They examined it carefully, handled it gravely, and behaved as if the welfare of the establishment depended upon 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 that they were doing their best to read from the fellows' eyes whether or not the horse was good. But what could it matter to a convict, especially to some of them, who were utterly abandoned creatures, and 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 to do so. The opinion of the Circassians appeared to be principally relied upon, and next to them those gipsies who had formerly been horse-dealers were most prominently in the debate.

There was a regular duel between two convicts-the gipsy Koulikoff, who had been a horse-dealer and thief, and Jolkin, who had been a professional veterinary surgeon, a tricky Siberian peasant who had been doing hard labour for some considerable time, and who had succeeded in getting all Koulikoff's practice in the town. I should mention that our veterinary surgeons, though without diploma, were very much sought after, and that not only the townsfolk and tradesmen, but also high officials in the city took their advice when their horses fell ill, rather than that of several properly qualified practitioners whose services were available.

Before Jolkin came, the Siberian peasant Koulikoff had had numerous clients from whom he had taken fees in good hard cash. Looked upon as being the head of his profession, he was a typical gipsy, a liar, a cheat, and by no means the master of his art he claimed to be. His earnings had raised him to almost aristocratic rank among the prisoners. He was listened to and obeyed, but he spoke little and expressed his opinion only in great emergencies. He blew his own trumpet loudly, but he was really a most energetic fellow, of ripe age and marked intelligence. When he spoke of the aristocracy, it was with exquisite politeness and perfect dignity. I am sure that if he had been suitably dressed, and introduced as a count to a Petersburg club, he would have lived up to the part, played whist, talked to admiration like a man used to command, but who knew when to hold his tongue. I am sure that a whole evening might have passed without anyone guessing that the 'count' was nothing but a vagabond. He had very

probably had a large and varied experience of life, but we knew nothing about his past. He lived apart, segregated with the special section.

No sooner had Jolkin arrived—he was a simple peasant, one of the Old Believers, but just as cunning as it was possible for a moujik to be—than Koulikoff's veterinary glory sensibly declined. In less than two months the Siberian had won all his practice in town, for he cured in a very short time horses which Koulikoff had declared incurable, and which had been given up by the regular practitioners. Jolkin had been condemned to hard labour for coining. It is odd that he should ever have ventured into that line of business. He told us all about it, and joked about the fact that three genuine gold coins were required to make one false one.

Koulikoff was not a little annoyed by 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 was now obliged to turn tavern-keeper; so everyone expected a regular row when the new horse was bought. It was most interesting: each had his partisans, and the more zealous among them came to angry words without delay. Jolkin's cunning face was wrinkled into a sarcastic smile, but things turned out quite differently from what was anticipated. 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 took him up sharply on some chance remark, and pointed out to him modestly but firmly that he was all wrong. In a word, Jolkin was utterly discomfited in a surprisingly clever way, at which Koulikoff's party was delighted.

'I say, boys, it's no use talking; you can't trip him up. He knows what he's about,' said one.

'Jolkin knows more about the matter than he does,' said others, but without offence. Both sides were prepared to make concessions.

'Then, he's got a lighter hand, besides having more in his head. I tell you, 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 absolutely irreproachable beast. When the bargaining began, the owner asked thirty roubles; the convicts would not give more than twenty-five. The higgling continued for long and with much heat. At length the convicts began to laugh.

'Does the money come out of your own purse?' said one. 'What's the good of all this?'

'Do you want to help the Treasury?' cried others.

'But it's money that belongs to all of us, pals,' said one.

'All of us! It's plain enough that you needn't trouble to cultivate idiots, they'll grow of themselves without that.'

At last the business was settled at twenty-eight roubles. The governor was informed and the purchase sanctioned. Bread and salt were brought at once, and the new boarder

led in triumph into the jail. There was not one convict, I think, who did not pat his neck or stroke his head.

He was set the same day to carting water. All the convicts watched with curiosity as he pulled at the barrel.

Our waterman, a convict named Roman, kept his eyes on the beast with a kind of stupid satisfaction. Formerly a peasant, he was about fifty years of age, serious and silent like all Russian coachmen, whose grave demeanour appears to be enhanced by their constant companionship of horses.

Roman was a quiet creature, affable to all; he said little and took snuff from a box. He had tended the prison horse for some considerable time. The new acquisition was the third entrusted to his care since his arrival.

The horseman's job fell as a matter of course to Roman; nobody would have dreamed of contesting his right to it. When the bay horse dropped dead, no one, not even the governor, thought of accusing Roman of carelessness. It was the will of God, that was all; as for Roman, well, he knew his business.

That bay horse became at once the prison pet. The convicts were not particularly tender-hearted, but they could not help frequently going up to stroke him.

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

'Get along, you know the way,' Roman would cry. Then Gniedko would go off peaceably to the kitchen and wait while the cooks and other servants filled their buckets with water, which Gniedko seemed to expect.

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

'That's true. He's only an animal, but he understands everything that's said to him.'

'No end of a horse, our Gniedko!'

At which the horse would shake his head and snort, just as if he really understood that he was being praised; then someone would bring him bread and salt. When he had finished he would once more shake his head, as if to say: 'I know you; I know you. I'm a good horse, and you're a good fellow.'

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

The convicts were fond of living things, and, if they had been allowed, would have filled the barracks with birds and domestic animals. What could have been better calculated to soften and ennoble their fierce tempers than to look after such creatures? But it was not permitted, it was not in the regulations; and, indeed, there was no room for many animals.

However, during my time there a number of animals had established themselves in the jail. Besides Gniedko, we had some dogs, geese, a billy-goat called Vaska, and an eagle, which latter remained for only a short time.

I believe I have already mentioned that our dog was known as Bull, and that he and I had struck up a friendship, but as the lower classes regard dogs as impure beasts unworthy of attention, nobody cared for him. He lived in the jail itself, slept in the courtyard, ate the leavings of the kitchen, and had no hold whatever on the prisoners' sympathy. He knew them all, however, and regarded them as his masters and owners. When the men returned from work, he would hear their cry 'Corporal!' come running to the great gate, and gaily welcome the gang, wagging his tail and looking into each man's eyes, as though he expected a caress. But for several years his little efforts were as useless as they were engaging. Nobody but myself caressed him, so that he preferred me to all others. By some means, of which I am uncertain, we got another dog. He was called Snow. Finally there was a third, named Koultiapka, whom I myself brought into prison when he was only a puppy.

Snow was an odd creature. A telega had gone over him and crushed his spine, making it curve which, when you saw him running at a distance, made him look like twin-dogs born with a ligament. He was very mangy, too, with bleary eyes, his tail was hairless, and always hung between his legs.

A victim of ill fate, he seemed to have made up his mind to remain always quite impassive; he never barked at anyone, seeming to be afraid of getting into fresh trouble. He was nearly always lurking at the back of the buildings, and if anybody approached he would immediately roll on his back, as though he meant to say: 'Do what you like with me; I've not the least idea of resisting.' As the dog lay there with his legs in the air, every prisoner felt obliged to give him a passing kick. 'Ough! the dirty brute!' they would say. But Snow dared not so much as utter a groan; if he were very much hurt, he would only utter a little dull, strangled yelp. He threw himself down in just the same way before Bull or any other member of the species when he went to try his luck at the kitchen, and he would stretch himself out flat if a mastiff or other large dog came barking at him. Dogs like submission and humility in other dogs; so the angry brute immediately quietened down and stopped short reflectively before the poor, humble beast, and then sniffed him curiously all over.

I wonder what poor Snow was thinking of at such moments as he trembled with fright. 'Is this brigand going to bite me?'-something of the kind, no doubt. Having sniffed his fill without discovering anything of interest, the big brute would wander off. Snow used then to jump to his feet, and join a crowd of his own tribe, chasing some yutchka.

Snow knew full well that no yutchka would ever condescend to such as he, that she was too proud for that, but it was some consolation to him in his troubles to be able to limp after her. He had but the vaguest notion of anything like decent behaviour. Being devoid of hope for his future, his highest aim was to get a bellyful of victuals, and he was cynical enough in making that fact known.

I once tried to caress him. This was the very last thing that he expected; he dropped on the ground quite helpless, quivering and whimpering with delight. As I was really sorry for him I used often to caress him and, as soon as he caught sight of me he began to whine in a plaintive, tearful way. He met his end in a ditch at the back of the jail; some dogs tore him to pieces.

Koultiapka was quite a different type of dog. I don't know why I brought him in from one of the workshops, where he had just been born, but it gave me pleasure to feed him and watch him grow. Bull took Koultiapka under his protection and slept with him. When the puppy began to grow up Bull was remarkably patient with him, allowing him to bite his ears and take his skin in his teeth; he played with him as mature dogs generally do with youngsters. It was a strange thing, but Koultiapka never grew in height but 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 trying to say: 'As long as he sees how delighted I am, I don't care; let etiquette go to the devil!'

Wherever I was, I had only to call 'Koultiapka' for him to leave his corner and come towards me with noisy satisfaction, curling up into a ball and rolling over and over. I was exceedingly fond of this little wretch, and I used to fancy that destiny had reserved for him only joy and pleasure in this world of ours; but one fine day a prisoner named Neustroief, who made women's shoes and prepared skins, cast his eye on him. Something had evidently occurred to him, for he called Koultiapka, felt his skin, and turned him over on the ground in a friendly way. The unsuspecting 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 and used his skin to make some boots of fur-lined velvet ordered by the young wife of an official. He showed them to me when they were finished: the inside lining was magnificent—all Koultiapka, poor fellow!

A good many convicts worked at tanning, and often brought in dogs with a nice skin. These animals had been bought or stolen, and thus quickly vanished. I remember one day seeing a couple of prisoners behind the kitchens laying their heads together. One of them held on a leash a very fine black dog of particularly good breed. A rascally 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 dogs. Then they would remove the skin and throw the body into a rubbish-dump in the farthest corner of the courtyard, which stank most horribly during the summer heat, for it was rarely attended to.

I think the poor beast understood the fate in store for him. He looked at us one after another with curiosity and obvious distress. At intervals he gave a timid little wag with his bushy tail that lay between his legs, as though trying to reach our hearts by a show of confidence. I hurried away, and left the others to finish their vile work.

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

They had been hatched somewhere in the jail, and their headquarters was the kitchen, whence they used to emerge in gaggles when the men went out to work. But as soon as the drum beat and the prisoners assembled at the great gate, out ran the geese after them, cackling, flapping their wings, and finally jumping over one another over the raised threshold of the gateway. While the convicts were at work, the geese pecked about at a little distance from them. As soon as they had done and set out for the jail, the geese rejoined the procession, and the passers-by would cry out: 'I say, look! There are the prisoners with their friends the geese!' 'How did you teach them to follow you?' someone would ask. 'Here's some money for your geese,' another might say, putting his hand in his pocket. In spite of their devotion to the convicts, however, they had their necks twisted one year to make a feast at the end of Lent.

Nobody would ever have decided to kill our goat Vaska had not something extraordinary happened. I don't know how it came to be in the prison, or who had brought it. It was a white kid, and very pretty. After some days it had won all hearts with its diverting and winning ways. As some excuse was needed for keeping it in the jail, it was given out that it was absolutely necessary to have a goat in the stables. Vaska did not, however, live there, but chiefly in the kitchen, and after a while he used to roam about all over the place. The creature was full of grace and as playful as could be; he jumped on the tables, wrestled with the convicts, came when called, and was always full of fun and high spirits.

One evening the Lesghian Babaï, who was seated with a crowd of fellows on the stone steps at the door of the barrack, took it into his head to have a wrestling bout with Vaska, whose horns were fairly long.

They were butting one another with their foreheads, a procedure whereby the men used often to amuse themselves, when all of a sudden Vaska jumped on the highest step, reared on his hind legs, drew up his forefeet, and managed to strike the Lesghian on the back of the neck with all his might, and with such effect that Babai went headlong down the steps, to the great delight of all the bystanders, as well as of Babai himself.

Yes, we all adored our Vaska. When he reached the age of puberty a solemn conclave was held, as a result of which he was subjected to an operation performed with great skill by one of the prison vets.

'Well,' said the convicts, 'he won't have any goat-smell about him, that's one comfort.'

Vaska then began to put on fat in the most surprising manner, though I must confess that we overfed him. He became a most beautiful fellow with magnificent horns, and corpulent beyond words. Sometimes as he walked he rolled over heavily on the ground through sheer obesity. He used to accompany us to work, which amused the convicts and everyone else who watched. There was nobody who was unacquainted with Vaska, the jail-bird.

Whilst at work on 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 would return at the head of the gang splendidly arrayed; we followed, full of pride at seeing him so beautiful.

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

'Halt!' yelled the governor. 'Whose goat is that?'

They told him.

'What, a goat in the prison! and without my leave? Sergeant!'

The sergeant was ordered 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 cabbage soup.

The occurrence was much discussed and the goat was much mourned, but nobody dared disobey the governor. Vaska was put to death close to the rubbish-dump to which I have alluded. One of the convicts bought the carcass, paying a rouble and fifty kopecks, and with this money white bread was bought for everybody. The man who had purchased the goat afterwards sold it at retail when it had been roasted. The meat was delicious.

We also kept for some time a steppe eagle, quite a small species. A convict brought it in, wounded and half dead. Everyone gathered round. The bird could not fly, its right wing being quite powerless and one of its legs was badly hurt. It gazed angrily upon the curious crowd, and opened its crooked beak as if prepared to sell its life dearly. After watching it for some time the crowd dispersed; the lamed bird went off, hopping on one leg and flapping his wing, hid itself in the farthest corner of the prison which it could find, and there cowered against the palings.

During the three months that he remained in the courtyard he never left that corner. At first we went to look at him fairly often. Bull was sometimes set at him: furiously he would rush, but was frightened to go too near, which greatly amused the convicts. 'A wild chap that! He won't stand any nonsense!' But after a while Bull overcame his fear, and began to worry the eagle. When roused, the dog would catch hold of his broken wing. The creature would defend itself with beak and claws, and then huddle even closer in its corner with the proud, savage look of a wounded king, fixing his gaze steadily upon those who beheld his misery.

The men tired of this sport after a while, and the eagle seemed quite forgotten; but there was someone who every day set by him a piece of fresh meat and a vessel with some water. At first, and for several days, the eagle would touch nothing; but at last he decided to take what was left for him, though he would never be persuaded to take anything from the hand or in public. Sometimes I managed to observe his proceedings from some distance.

When he saw nobody and thought he was alone, he ventured out of his corner, limped along the palisade for a dozen yards or so, and then returned. So he would go, backward and forward, as if he were taking exercise for his health under doctor's orders. As soon as he caught sight of me he would make for his corner as quickly as possible, limping and hopping. He would then throw back his head, open his mouth, ruffle himself, and apparently prepare to 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 near him he kept his wicked, piercing eye upon me. Lonely and revengeful he waited for death, defiant and refusing to be reconciled.

At last, after two months of oblivion, the convicts remembered him; then they showed a sympathy which I had not expected of them. It was unanimously agreed to carry him outside.

'Let him die, but let him die in freedom,' said they.

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

'He's not like us,' said 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 work, they took the eagle, tied his beak (for he assumed a desperate attitude), and took him out on to the ramparts. The twelve convicts forming the gang were extremely anxious to know where he would go. It was a strange thing; they all seemed as happy as though they had themselves obtained 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 go, 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 the end of autumn, a grey, cold day. The wind whistled on the bare steppe and went groaning through the yellow dried-up grass. The eagle made off at once, flapping his wounded wing, as if in a hurry to quit us and find shelter from our inquisitive gaze. The convicts watched him intently as he went along with his head just above the grass.

'Do you see him, eh?' said one very pensively.

‘He doesn’t look round,’ said another; ‘he hasn’t looked behind once.’
‘Did you by any chance imagine he’d come back to thank us?’ said a third.
‘Ay, he’s free; he feels it. It’s freedom!’
‘Yes, freedom.’
‘You won’t see him any more, pals.’
‘What are you loitering about for? March, march!’ yelled the escort, and all went slowly to their work.

Chapter VII: Grievances

At the outset of this chapter, the editor of this work by 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. He was put forward as an instance of the insensibility with which convicts speak of their crimes. 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 proved beyond all doubt. These persons 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 in order to inherit his property. Besides, the whole town where this parricide was imprisoned told exactly the same story, a fact of which the editor of these *Recollections* has fully satisfied himself. It was further stated that the murderer, even when in jail, was of quite a joyous and cheerful frame of mind, a sort of inconsiderate giddy-pated person although 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, could never bring myself to believe him guilty.’

Some time ago the present editor had word from Siberia concerning the discovery that the ‘parricide’ was in fact innocent and had done ten years’ hard labour for nothing. That was recognized 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 testimony.

To say more would be useless: the tragic facts speak too clearly for themselves. Words fail in such cases, when a life has been ruined by an accusation of this kind. 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, as we see, may contain innocent as well as guilty men.

To continue. I have said that I at last became accustomed, if not reconciled, to the conditions of prison life; but it was a long and dreadful time before I did. It took me almost a year to get used to the prison, and I shall always regard those months as the most terrible in my life: they are graven deep in my memory, down to the very smallest

details. I think I could recall every single event and the emotions of each successive hour in it.

I have said that other prisoners, too, found it equally difficult to get used to the life they were obliged to lead. During the whole of that 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 already said, every convict felt himself in an alien element to which he could not reconcile himself. The sense of home was an impossibility; he felt as if he were lodging at some vile inn, a mere stage upon a journey. These men, exiles for and from life, seemed to be either in a perpetual smouldering agitation, or else in deep depression; but there was not one who had not his own everyday ideas about one thing and another. That restlessness which, if it did not come to the surface, was still unmistakable; those vague hopes which the poor creatures entertained in spite of themselves, hopes so ill founded that they were more like the illusions of approaching insanity than anything else; all stamped the place with a character, an originality, peculiarly its own. One could not but feel that there was nothing like it anywhere else in the world. Everybody moved in a sort of waking dream; nor was there anything to relieve or qualify the impression made by the place on each man's personality. All seemed to suffer from a sort of remote hypersensitivity, 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 cherished in secret and in vain. The result was that anything like ingenuousness or truthfulness was the object of general contempt. Precisely because these wild hopes were impossible of fulfilment and, in spite of everything, well known and confessed to their more lucid selves to be so, they kept them jealously concealed in the most secret recesses of their hearts. Yet to renounce them was beyond the power of self-control. It may be they were ashamed of their imagination. God knows. The Russian character is normally 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 underlay the impatience and intolerance shown by the convicts towards one another, and the cruel biting words they spoke to each other. If one of them, more naïve or confiding than the rest, 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 silenced him with brutal promptitude, and made the poor fellow's life a burden with their sarcasms and jests. And I think those who did so most unscrupulously had perhaps themselves gone furthest in cherishing futile hopes, indulging senseless aspirations. I have said more than once that those among them who were noticeable for their simplicity and candour tended to be considered stupid and idiotic; they earned nothing but contempt. The convicts were so soured and hypersensitive that they positively hated anything resembling amiability or unselfishness. I should be disposed to classify them all broadly as either good or bad men, morose or cheerful, and to recognize as a class apart those ingenuous fellows who could not hold their tongues. But the sour-tempered were in far the greatest ma-

jority. Some of them 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 anyone catch a glimpse of their own secret thoughts; that would have been against the fashion and convention of this strange little world. As to the fellows who were really good-very few indeed were they-they were always very quiet and peaceable, and buried their hopes (if they had any) in strict silence; but those hopes were accompanied by more real faith than was the case with the gloomy-minded. There was, however, yet another category which ought not to be forgotten-the men who had lost all hope, the despairing and the desperate, such, for example, as the old man from Starodoub. But they were very few indeed.

That old man from Starodoub! He was extraordinarily subdued and quiet; but there were certain indications of what went on in his mind, indications which he could not hide and from which I could not but see that his inward life was one of intolerable anguish. Nevertheless, he had one source of help and consolation-prayer, and the belief in his own martyrdom. The convict who was always reading the Bible, of whom I spoke earlier-the one who went mad and attacked the governor with a brickbat-was also probably one of those whom hope had altogether abandoned; and, as it is quite 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 governor though he had no particular grievance; all he wanted was to suffer torment.

Now, what sort of psychological process had been going on in that man's soul? No man lives, or can live, without having some object in view, and without making efforts to attain that object. But when there is no such object and hope is entirely fled, anguish often turns a man into a monster. The object we all had in view was liberty, the remission of our confinement and hard labour.

I have tried to separate the convicts into sharply defined classes and categories, but it cannot be done satisfactorily. 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 in which we so delight. Reality tends to infinite subdivision of things, and truth is a matter of infinite shadings and differentiations. Every one of us in that prison had his own peculiar, interior, strictly personal life which lay altogether outside the world of regulations and 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 short of hatred for those 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, their 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 me, and every one of them tried to keep himself as much as possible to himself. This envious hatred of them, which came to me in moments of irritation, was at least excusable,

for those who tell you so confidently that a cultured man of the upper class does not suffer as a mere peasant does are utterly wrong. That is a thing I have often heard said, and read too. In the abstract, the notion seems correct and is founded in generous sentiment, for all convicts are human beings. But in reality it is different. At the heart of the problem lie a number of practical complications upon which experience alone can pronounce, 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 reduce all souls alike to one common level or standard; neither the grade of education nor anything else 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 those men who suffered so terribly under a vile and barbarous system, I found abundant proof that the elements of moral development were not wanting. In our prison there were men with whom I was familiar for several years, upon whom I looked as wild beasts and abhorred as such. Well, all of a sudden, when I least expected it, those very men would manifest such a wealth of fine feeling, so keen a comprehension of the sufferings of others, seen in the light of the consciousness of their own, that one could almost fancy that scales had fallen from one's eyes. It was so sudden as to be astonishing; one could scarcely believe one's eyes or ears. Sometimes, however, it was just the other way about: well bred and educated men would occasionally display a savage, cynical brutality which nearly turned one's stomach. Their conduct was such that it could be neither excused nor justified, however charitably one might feel disposed.

I lay no stress on the fundamental change in habits of life, the food, etc. in respect of which a gentleman suffers so much more keenly than the peasant or working man, who often goes hungry when free, but whose belly is always filled in prison. I will not emphasize that, for it must be admitted that for a man with any strength of character these external things are trifling when compared with privations of a very different kind. None the less, such total change of material conditions and habits is neither inconsiderable nor easy to endure. On the other hand, the status of a convict involves considerations before which all other horrors pale, even the ubiquitous mud and filth, the scantiness and uncleanness of the food, the irons, and the suffocating sense of being always gripped as in a vice.

The capital, the most important point of all, is that after a couple of hours or so every newcomer from the lower classes shakes down into equality with the rest: he is at home among them, he has the 'freedom' of this city of slaves, this criminal community 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 it is quite otherwise with a gentleman. However kindly, fair-minded, and intelligent such a man may be, he will be hated and despised by all for years; he will never be understood or trusted. He will be considered neither as friend nor comrade. If he can persuade the others to stop insulting him it will be as much as he can do, for he will be alien

to them from first to last, he is doomed to experience the grief of unending, hopeless, causeless solitude and sequestration. It may sometimes be that this state of affairs is not due to any malice on the part of his fellow prisoners: it simple cannot be helped; the gentleman is not one of the gang, and therein lies the whole secret.

There is nothing more terrible than to have to live outside the social sphere to which you properly belong. The peasant, transported from Taganrog to Petropavlosk, finds there other Russian peasants like himself; between him and them there can be mutual understanding; within the hour they will be friends, and live comfortably together in the same izba or the same barrack. With the gentleman it is wholly otherwise: a great gulf separates him from the lower classes. How deep and impassible that gulf is appears only when he forfeits his position and becomes as one of the common herd. You may perhaps spend your whole life in daily contact with the peasant, during forty years your official position or other duties may lead you to do business with him as regularly as day follows night. You may be his benefactor, all but a father to him-but you will never know what lies at the bottom of the man's mind or heart. You may think you know something about him, but it is all illusion, nothing more. My readers will no doubt charge me with exaggeration, but I am convinced that I speak the literal truth. I do not found my judgment upon theory or book-reading; the realities of life have given me only too ample time and opportunity to review and correct my ideas, which in this matter have become unshakable convictions. Perhaps my fellow men will some day learn how well founded are my assertions.

At the beginning of my imprisonment these truths still required demonstration, but events and close observation quickly confirmed my views, and what I experienced so affected me as to undermine my 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 convicts who, in the sequel, managed to care for me a little in spite of the gulf that always remained between us. There were there men of my own position, ex-noblemen like myself, but I found their companionship repugnant.

Here is one incident which forced me to realize from the outset how solitary a creature I was, and all the strangeness of my position. On a fine, warm August day, at about one o'clock in the afternoon, a time when, as a rule, everyone took a nap before resuming work, the convicts rose as one man and assembled in the courtyard. I had not the slightest idea until then that anything unusual was afoot. So deeply had I been sunk in my own thoughts, that I had scarcely noticed what was going on around me. It seems, however, that the convicts had been smouldering with unwonted discontent for three days. It may have started even earlier; so, at any rate, I thought later when I recalled stray remarks, snatches of conversation that had reached my ears, the palpable increase of ill humour among the prisoners, and their unusual irritability for some time past. I had attributed it all to the trying summer work, the insufferably long days; to their dreaming about the woods and freedom, which the season revived; to the nights too short for rest. It may be that all these things combined to generate a ferment of

discontent that only needed a tolerably good reason to explode. That reason was found in the food.

For several days a good deal of plain speaking in barracks had revealed their dissatisfaction, to which they gave voice when assembled for dinner or supper. One of the cooks had been changed, but after a couple of days the newcomer was sacked and his predecessor brought back. The 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 blancmange?’ said another.

‘Sour cabbage soup, why, that’s good. I love 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 you’re through with the work there you’re hungry, hungry, and you don’t get anything to satisfy your hunger.’

‘It’s true, the food’s simply damnable.’

‘He fills his pockets, don’t you fear!’

‘It’s none of your business.’

‘Whose business is it, then? 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, you fool?’

‘True enough! What’s done in a hurry is never well done. And how would you set about making a fuss, tell me that?’

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

‘There’s a fellow with eyes that do their job, 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 rogues! Let’s have a go at them.’

‘What’s the good? I tell you you 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 put up with 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. Old Eight Eyes has got nice and fat on it; he’s bought a pair of grey horses.’

‘He doesn’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 halfpenny 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.’

‘Speak for yourself! You’ll get his fist on your pate; that’s all.’

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

All the prisoners were in a state of acute agitation. The truth is, the food was execrable. The general anguish, suffering, and suspense seemed to be coming to a head. Convicts are naturally quarrelsome and rebellious, but a general revolt is rare, for they can never agree among themselves. We all of us felt that, because there was, as a rule, more violent talk than action.

This time, however, the agitation did not die down. The men gathered in groups in their barracks, talking things over excitedly, reciting in detail the governor’s misdeeds and trying to get to the bottom of them. In every affair of this kind there are ringleaders and firebrands. The ringleaders are generally rather remarkable fellows, not only in convict establishments, but among all large organizations of workmen, military detachments, etc. They are always people of a peculiar type, enthusiastic men with a thirst for justice, very naïve, simple, strong, and convinced that their ambitions can be fully realized. They have as much sense as other people, but some, though of high intelligence, are too full of warmth and zeal to exercise self-control. When you come across men who really know how to lead the masses and get what they want, you are face to face with a very different type: one that is extremely uncommon in Russia. The more usual type of leader, the one I first alluded to, does certainly in one sense fulfil his purpose, so far as instigating rebellion is concerned, but in the end he succeeds only in filling the prisons. Because of his impetuosity he always comes off second best, but it is this very impetuosity that gives him influence over the masses whose ardent, honest indignation does its work, and encourages the less resolute. His 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 such a man’s influence is that he takes the lead and forges ahead without flinching. He rushes forward, head down and often without any real understanding of what he is about. He has nothing about him of practical outlook in virtue of which a vile and worthless man often achieves his end, and even emerges white from a tub of ink. He inevitably dashes his skull against a stone wall. Under ordinary circumstances these fellows are bilious, irascible, intolerant, contemptuous, and often passionate, which, after all, is part of the secret of their strength. The deplorable thing is that they never aim at what is the essential, the vital part of their task; they invariably concern themselves from the outset with details instead of with essentials, and

that is their ruin. But they and the mob understand one another, which makes them formidable.

I must say a few words about this particular 'grievance.'

Some of the convicts had been transported as the result of a 'grievance,' and these were the most articulate, especially one Martinoff, who had formerly served in the Hussars, an eager, restless, and choleric, but worthy and truthful fellow. Another, Vassili Antonoff, could work himself up into a rage coolly and collectedly; he generally wore an impudent expression and smiled sarcastically, but he, too, was honest, a man of his word, and of no mean education. I will not describe them all; they were numerous. Petroff hurried from one group to another. He spoke few words, but he was quite as excited as anyone else, for he was the first to run out of the barrack when the others assembled in the courtyard.

Our sergeant, who was acting sergeant-major, was quickly on the scene, and quite alarmed. The convicts fell into ranks, and politely asked him to inform the governor that they wished to speak with him and ask him a few questions. Behind the sergeant stood all the invalids, in rank and facing the convicts. The sergeant, on hearing their request, was frightened almost out of his wits; but he dared not refuse to go and report to the governor, for if the convicts mutinied, God only knew what might happen. All our officers had proved themselves completely incompetent in handling prisoners. Besides, even if nothing worse happened, if the convicts thought better of it and dispersed, the sergeant remained in duty bound to inform the authorities of the occurrence. Pale, and trembling with fright, he hurried off to the governor, without attempting to reason with the convicts. He realized, no doubt, that they were not inclined to listen.

Without having the least idea of what was going on, I joined the ranks (it was only later that I heard the earlier details of the story). I thought there was going to be a roll-call, but could not see the soldiers who checked the lists. Surprised, I began to look about me. 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 governor. I observed that many of them seemed to wonder at my presence among them, but they looked away from me. No doubt they thought it strange that I should come and take part in their demonstrations, and could scarcely believe their eyes. But they turned again to look at me with curiosity.

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

I looked at him perplexed and trying to understand what he meant; I began to see that something unusual was afoot in the prison.

'Yes, indeed, what are you about here? Get back to barracks,' said a young soldier-convict whom I had never met till then, a good, quiet lad. 'This has nothing to do with you,' he added.

'Haven't we fallen in?' I answered. 'Isn't there going to be a roll-call?'

'Why, he's here, too,' cried one of them.

'Iron-nose,'⁵ said another.

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

'These fellows are in clover everywhere. We're in prison doing hard labour, I rather fancy; they get wheat bread and sucking-pig, like the great lords they are. Don't you get private supplies of food? What are you doing here?'

'You've no business here,' said Koulikoff brusquely, taking me by the hand and leading me out of the ranks.

He was himself very pale; his dark eyes sparkled with fire, and he had bitten his under lip till the blood came. He was not one of those who awaited the governor's arrival without losing his self-possession.

I liked to look at Koulikoff battling in circumstances like these; he appeared in his true colours in all his strength and weakness. He struck an attitude, but he did know how to act. I think he would have gone to his death with a certain affected elegance. While everybody was insulting me by their words or tone of voice, his politeness was greater than ever; but he spoke in firm and resolute accents 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 the Poles at the open window of the kitchen, in company with a good many other convicts. I hardly knew what to do but went there followed by laughter, abuse, and those muffled growls that are the prison substitute for the hissings and cat-calls of the world outside.

'He doesn't like it at all! Chu, chu, chu! Seize him!'

I had never been so bitterly insulted since my arrival. It was a very painful situation, but no more than was to be expected in the abnormal excitement under which the men were labouring. In the ante-room I met Tvski, a young nobleman of not much information but of firm, generous character. The others excepted him from the hatred they entertained for convicts of noble birth; they were almost fond of him. His every gesture denoted a brave and upright man.

'What are you doing, Goriantchikoff?' he called out. 'Come here, come here!'

'But what's it all about?'

'They are going to make a formal complaint. Haven't you heard? 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're among them they'll blame it all on us. Just remember what we've been transported for. They'll only get a whipping, but we shall be put on trial. The governor detests us all, and would be only too happy to ruin us; all their sins will fall on our shoulders.'

⁵ An insulting phrase which is untranslatable.

‘The convicts would bind us hand and foot and sell us outright,’ added Mtski, when we reached the kitchen.

‘They’d never have mercy on us,’ added Tvski.

Besides the noblemen there were in the kitchen about thirty other prisoners who did not wish to join in the general complaint, 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 keen interest to see the end of the business, about which he did not care a jot. He was perfectly convinced that the authorities would suppress it on the spot.

Isaiah Fomitch’s nose drooped visibly as he listened with a sort of fearful curiosity to our conversation; 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 with melancholy looks 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 because they believed this half-revolt an absurdity which could not succeed. It seemed to me that these fellows were considerably 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 governor. Jolkin—the long-headed Siberian peasant who had been sent to hard labour for coining, the man who obtained for himself Koulikoff’s veterinary practice—was also there, as well as the old man from Starodoub. None of the cooks had left their post, perhaps because they looked upon themselves as being more closely related to the authorities of the place, whom it would therefore be unbecoming to oppose.

‘For all that,’ said I to Mtski, ‘with the exception of these fellows, everyone’s involved’; and no doubt I spoke in a way which betrayed my 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 if we’d joined them, shouldn’t we? Je haïs ces brigands. Why, do you think they’ll manage to pull it off? I can’t see what they want, putting their heads in the lion’s mouth, the fools.’

‘It’ll all come to nothing,’ said someone, an obstinate, sour-tempered old fellow. With which Almazoff, who was also with us, heartily agreed.

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

‘Here’s the governor!’ cried someone, and everybody ran to the windows.

The governor had arrived, spectacles and all, looking evil as might be, towering with rage, and red as a turkey-cock. He strode in silence right up to the line. In crises like this he showed uncommon pluck and presence of mind, but it ought not to be 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 Mephisto-phelian appearance in my excited fancy. Behind him came the quartermaster, Diatloff, who was quite a

personage in the establishment, for he was really at the back of all official proceedings. He was an extremely capable and cunning fellow, and enjoyed great influence with the governor. He was by no means a bad sort, and the convicts were generally well inclined towards him. The sergeant followed with three or four soldiers, no more. He had already been severely reprimanded, and there was plenty more of the same to come, if he had only known it. The convicts, who had remained uncovered, caps in hand, from the moment they sent for the governor, stiffened to attention, every man shifting his weight to the other leg. They remained there, motionless, and awaited his first word, or rather his first shout.

They had not long to wait. Before he had uttered a single coherent word, the governor began yelling at the top of his voice; he was beside himself with rage. We saw him from the windows storming down their line, every now and again shooting an angry question. As we were a fair distance off, we could not hear what he said or their replies. We only heard his shouts, or rather what seemed like shouting, groaning, and grunting all beautifully blended.

‘Scoundrels, mutineers! To the cat with ye! Whips and sticks! The ringleaders? You’re a ringleader!’ throwing himself at one of them.

We did not hear the answer, but a minute later 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. ‘Come here, the lot of you! Drive ’em all out, every man!’

Diatloff, the quartermaster, came towards the kitchens.

When we told him that we were making no complaint he returned and reported to the governor 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 humiliated; all of us went along with our heads down.

‘Ah, Prokofief! Jolkin too; and you, Almazof! Here, come here, the whole crowd of you!’ cried the governor with a gasp; but he was somewhat softened, his tone was almost affable. ‘Mtski, you’re here too?... Take their 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 prison commissioners... I’ll... scoundrels!’

This word list had its effect.

‘We’ve nothing to complain of!’ cried one of the malcontents in a half-strangled 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!’ others exclaimed.

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

‘What do you mean by that?’ cried a voice in the crowd.

‘Where is the fellow who said that?’ roared the governor, turning quickly in the direction from which the voice had come. ‘ It was you, Rastorgoulef, you. To the guard-house with you.’

Rastorgoulef, a young, chubby fellow of tall stature, left the ranks and went with slow steps to the guard-house. It was not he who had spoken, but as he was called out he dared not contradict.

‘You fellows are too fat. That’s what makes you unruly!’ roared the governor. ‘ You wait, you hulking rascal, in three days you’ll Wait! I’ll have it out with you all. Fall out all those who have no complaint.’

‘We’re not complaining of anything, your Excellency,’ said some of the men dejectedly; the rest preserved an obstinate silence. But the governor wished to hear no more; it was to his own interest to terminate the affair with as little friction as possible.

‘Ah, now I see! No one has anything to complain of,’ said he. ‘I knew it, I saw it all. It’s the ringleaders. There are ringleaders, by God,’ he went on, addressing Diadoff. ‘ 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 had left, the governor betook himself to the guard-house, where he proceeded to deal with 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 accused 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 governor 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 about the food did not amount really to mutiny (it had been reported only to the governor and the commanding officer), yet it was an uncomfortable and dangerous affair. What caused him most anxiety was that the prisoners had been unanimous in their movement, so their discontent had to be pacified somehow, at any price. The ringleaders were soon set free. Next day the food was passable, but the improvement did not last long; on the days immediately following the Governor visited the prison more often than usual, and always found some irregularity to be stopped and punished. The 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 them a long time to settle 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, grumbling and conscious of their helplessness. A good many said biting things about their own proceedings, as though they were thoroughly dissatisfied with themselves.

‘I say, pal, take and eat!’ said one.

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

‘Let’s consider ourselves lucky he didn’t have us all soundly thrashed.’

‘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, clear off.’

‘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.

After work on the evening of the day the ‘mutiny’ took place, I met Petroff behind the barracks. He was looking for me. As he approached I heard him muttering something which I did not understand; he said no more, but walked by my side in a listless, mechanical fashion.

‘I say, Petroff, your fellows are not annoyed with us, are they?’

‘Who’s annoyed?’ he asked, as if waking from a dream.

‘The convicts with us—with us noblemen.’

‘Why should they be annoyed?’

‘Well, because we didn’t back them up.’

‘Oh, why should you have kicked up a dust?’ he answered, as if trying to understand my meaning. ‘You have a table to yourselves, you fellows.’

‘Oh, well, there are some of you who are not nobles and who don’t eat the regulation food, and yet they sided with you. We ought to have backed you up. We’re all in prison, and we should all be comrades.’

‘Heavens! You our comrades?’ he asked, with unfeigned astonishment.

I looked at him; it was clear that he had not the least idea of what I meant; I, on the other hand, understood him thoroughly. I now saw quite clearly something of which I had before only a confused idea. What I had previously guessed was now a sad certainty.

I was forced to realize that any sort of true fellowship between the convicts and myself could never be, even if I remained for the rest of my life in the place. I belonged to a kind of ‘special section,’ I was a creature for ever apart. The expression on Petroff’s face when he said, ‘Are we com-rades, how can that be?’ remains, and will always remain before my eyes. It was a look of such frank, naïve surprise, such ingenuous astonishment, that I could not help asking myself if there was not some lurking irony in the man, a slight shade of sarcasm. Not at all, he was quite sincere. I was not their comrade, and could never be; that was all. Go you to the right, we’ll go to the left! Your business is yours, ours is ours.

After the mutiny I honestly believed they would show us as little mercy as they dared and could, and that our life would become hell. But nothing of the sort happened. We heard not the slightest reproach, there was not the least criticism of what had occurred, it was simply passed over. They went on teasing us as before whenever they had an

opportunity, but no more frequently. No one seemed to bear malice against those who stayed in the kitchen and who had not taken part, or against those who had been the first to back down and proclaim that they had no complaint. To my astonishment, it was all forgotten.

Chapter VIII: My Companions

It will be understood that those to whom I was most drawn, especially in the early days, were men of my own class, that is, men of gentle birth. But of the three Russian ex-nobles in the place, I knew and spoke to only one, Akim Akimitch; the other two were the spy An and the supposed parricide. Even with Akim I never exchanged a word except when I felt at the end of my tether, in moments when my sadness was simply unendurable, and when I really thought I should never again have the chance of getting close to another human being.

In the last chapter I have tried to show that the convicts were of different types, and to classify them accordingly; but when I think of Akim Akimitch I cannot place him satisfactorily. He was *sui generis* in that establishment so far as I was able to observe.

There may have been elsewhere other men like him, to whom it seemed a matter of complete indifference whether they were free or in jail doing hard labour. In our prison Akim was unique by his curious imperturbability of temperament. He had settled down in jail as if he was going to pass his whole life there and didn't mind it at all. All his belongings-mattress, cushions, utensils-were so arranged as to give the impression that he was living in a furnished house of his own; there was nothing provisional, temporary, transitory, about him, either in speech or behaviour. He had still a good many years of his sentence to run, but I much doubt whether he ever gave a thought to the day when he would be set free. He was entirely reconciled to his condition, not as the result of conscious effort, but simply out of natural submissiveness; as far as his own comfort was concerned, it was all the same to him. He was not at all a bad fellow, and in the early days I found his advice and assistance most useful, though I must confess that his peculiarities sometimes deepened my natural melancholy until it became almost intolerable anguish.

When I became desperate with silence and solitude of soul, I would make conversation with him. I longed to hear and to reply to human speech in any form; and the more filled with gall and hatred of our surroundings that speech had been, the more closely it would have been in sympathy with my wretched mood. But he never said much; he would continue quietly sizing his lanterns, and then begin to tell me some story of how he had taken part in a review of troops in 18-: their divisional commander was So-and-so, the manoeuvring was neatly performed, that there had been a change in the skirmisher's system of signalling, and so on. It was all told in level imperturbable tones, like water falling drop by drop. He put no life into his descriptions, even when he told me of a sharp skirmish at which he had been present in the Caucasus, after

which his sword was decorated with the Ribbon of St Anne. The only difference was that his voice became a little more measured and grave: he lowered his tone when he pronounced the words 'St Anne,' as though he were revealing a great secret. Then he remained silent for at least three minutes, looking solemn but not uttering a word.

During the whole of that first year there were moments when I felt only bitter hatred towards Akim Akimitch. I simply cannot say why, but at such times I would despairingly curse the fate which had set his bed next to mine, so close indeed that our heads nearly touched. An hour afterwards I deeply regretted such extravagance. It was, however, only during the first year of my 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 do not remember that he and I ever become involved in anything like an open quarrel.

Besides the three Russians of whom I have spoken, there were eight other noblemen in the prison while I was there. Some of them became close friends of mine. Even the best of them, however, were morbid, aloof, and intolerant to the very last degree, and with two of them I was obliged to discontinue all spoken intercourse. There were only three who had any education: Bski, Mtski, and the old man Jski who had formerly been a professor of mathematics, an excellent fellow, but highly eccentric and of very narrow mental horizon in spite of his learning. Mtski and Bski were of a very different mould. Mtski and I were on the best of terms from the start. We never disagreed, but although I had the greatest respect for him, I never managed to become sincerely attached to him. He was sour, embittered, mistrustful, and most reserved. That tended to repel me; the man had a closed soul, closed against all the world, and he made one feel it. Indeed, I was so conscious of the fact that I may have judged him unfairly. After all, his character bore the stamp of nobility and strength. His ineradicable scepticism made him very reserved when in company, and he guarded his own drougths with extraordinary skill. Sceptic as he was, there was another and a reverse side to his nature, for in some respects he was a profound and unalterable believer, with unshakable faith and hope. In spite of his tact in dealing with others, he quarrelled openly with Bski and his friend Tski.

The first of these, Bski, was a man of poor health, tending to consumption, irascible, and of a weak, nervous disposition; but he was, for all that, a good and generous man. His nervous irritability made him capricious as a child; that kind of temperament was too much for me under those conditions, and I soon began to see as little as possible of Bski, though I never ceased to like him very much.

It was just the other way about with Mtski: with him I was always on easy terms, though I did not care for him at all.

When I began to avoid Bski, I had more or less to break also with Tski, of whom I spoke in the last chapter.

I much regretted that for, though not well educated, he had an excellent heart; a worthy, and deeply spiritual man. He loved and respected Bski, so much so that he regarded those who broke with his friend as personal enemies. He quarrelled with

Mtski on account of Bski, and it was a long time before the breach was healed. All these people were as ill-humoured as they could be, tetchy and mistrustful, morally and physically hypersensitive. It is not to be wondered at; their situation was trying in the extreme, far more so than ours. They had been exiled and transported for ten or twelve years, and what made their imprisonment yet more difficult to endure was their rooted, ingrained prejudice, especially the unfortunate but insuperable disgust with which they viewed their fellow prisoners. In their eyes the poor fellows were no more than wild beasts, without a single quality that could be recognized as human. Everything in their previous careers and their present circumstances combined to produce this unhappy aversion.

Their life in jail was a perpetual torment. They were kindly and talkative with the Circassians, the Tartars, and Isaiah Fomitch; but for the other prisoners they had nothing but contempt and dislike. The only one for whom they had any respect was the aged Old Believer. Nevertheless, I never heard a single prisoner reproach them with their birth, their religious beliefs, or their convictions, as the Russian peasant so often does to persons of different condition, especially if they happen to be foreigners. The fact is, he cannot take a foreigner seriously: to him the foreigner seems no more than a grotesque figure of fun. The convicts manifested far more respect for the Polish nobles than for us Russians, but I don't think the Poles cared one way or the other, or took any notice of the fact.

I spoke just now of Tski, and have something more to say of him. When he and B-ski were ordered from their first place of exile to our fortress, he carried his friend nearly the whole way. Bski was frail and in bad health: he became exhausted before they had accomplished half the first stage of the journey. They had first been banished to Ygorsk, where they lived in tolerable comfort and where conditions were far less severe than with us. But in consequence of a correspondence with some exiles in another town—a quite innocent exchange of letters—it was decided to remove them to our jail, where they would be under more direct Government surveillance. Before their arrival

M — tski

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

Jski was the old man, always deep in prayer, to whom I referred above. Most political prisoners were comparatively young men while Jski was at least fifty years old.

He was a worthy, gentlemanly fellow, if a little eccentric.

Tski and Bski detested him and never spoke to him;

they insisted that he was obstinate and troublesome beyond endurance, and I was obliged to admit the truth of their opinion. I believe that in prison—as in every place where men are obliged to live in one another's company, whether they like it or not—quarrelling and personal hatreds are more common than under normal circumstances. Many causes contributed to those squabbles that were, alas! all too common.

Jski was really disagreeable and narrow-minded; not one of his companions was on good terms with him. He and I never came to open rupture, but we were never

really friendly. I fancy that he was a good mathematician. One day he explained to me in his half-Russian, half-Polish jargon an astronomical system of his own invention. I have been told that he had written a work upon the subject, which the learned world had received with derision, and I believe his reason was partially deranged. He used sometimes to spend a whole day on his knees in prayer, which earned the convicts' respect during the remainder of his imprisonment. He died in my presence after a very painful illness. He had won the esteem of the prisoners from the first moment of his arrival in consequence of an incident between the governor and himself. They had not been shaved once on the road from Ygorsk, and their hair and beards had grown very long by the time they met the governor. That worthy raged like a madman; he was wild with indignation at such a breach of discipline, though it was not their fault.

'My God! Did you ever see anything like it?' he roared. 'They're vagabonds, brigands!'

Jski knew very little Russian, and thought 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 governor. 'To the guard-house with him. A hundred strokes of the rod, this instant, I say!'

They gave the old man his punishment. He lay flat on the ground under the strokes without the slightest resistance, kept his hand between his teeth, and bore it all without a murmur, without moving a muscle. Bski and Tski reached the jail while this was in progress. Mski was waiting for them at the principal gate, having heard of their arrival, and threw himself on their necks, although he had never seen them before. Utterly disgusted at the way the governor had received them, they told Mski all about the cruel business that had just occurred. Mski told me later that he was beside himself with rage when he heard it.

'I could not contain my wrath,' he said, 'I shook as though with fever. I waited for Jski at the main gate, through which he would come from the guard-house after his punishment. The gate was opened, and there I saw Jski pass before me, his lips all white and trembling, his face pale as death. He looked neither to right nor left, but passed through the groups of convicts assembled in the courtyard-they knew a nobleman had just been flogged-entered the barrack-room, went straight to his place, and, without a word, dropped down on his knees in prayer. The prisoners were surprised and touched. When I saw that old man with his white hairs, who had left behind him a wife and children, kneeling and praying after that scandalous treatment, I fled from the barrack, and for a couple of hours felt as if I were stark, staring, raving mad, or blind drunk... From that first day the convicts showed a marked deference to and consideration for Jski.

What particularly pleased them was that he had not uttered a cry while undergoing his punishment.'

But one must be fair and truthful in this matter; the distressing story is not an example of the usual treatment accorded by the authorities to transported noblemen,

Russian or Polish; and this isolated case affords no basis for passing judgment upon the system as a whole. My anecdote merely shows that you may meet a bad man anywhere and everywhere. If that type of man happens to be in absolute command of a jail, and if he happens to have a grudge against a prisoner, the poor fellow's lot will be indeed very far from enviable. But the prison commissioners who regulate and supervise convict labour in Siberia, and from whom subordinates take their tone as well as their orders, are careful to exercise discrimination when dealing with persons of noble birth, and sometimes allow them special privilèges not granted to convicts of lower condition. There are obvious reasons for this: the commissioners are themselves gentlemen, they know that men of that class must not be driven to extremes. Cases have been known where noblemen have refused to submit to corporal punishment, and flung themselves in desperation upon their tormentors with the gravest consequences indeed. Moreover-and this, I think, is the principal cause of leniency-some thirty-five years ago a large party of Russian nobles⁶ was transported to Siberia: their behaviour was so correct, they bore themselves with such dignity, that the authorities adopted the practice, which they never abandoned, of treating criminals of gentle birth quite differently from ordinary convicts; and subordinate officials took their cue from them.

Many of these underlings, no doubt, were little pleased with the attitude of their superiors; they were only happy when they were free to behave exactly as they liked in the matter. But they had few chances to do so, for they were kept strictly within the rules; I have reason to know this, as I shall now explain. I was put in the second category, which consisted mainly of convicts who had been serfs. We were under military supervision. Now this second category, or class, was much harder than either the first, which worked in the mines, or the third, which was employed in manufacture. It was harder, not only for the nobles but for the other convicts too, because the governing and administrative system and personnel in it were military throughout, and were pretty much the same in type as those of the convict establishments in Russia itself. The officials were more severe, and 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, and you were always or nearly always within stone walls. Things were quite different in the other categories, so, at least, I was told by the convicts, many of whom had every reason to know. They would all gladly have gone to the mines, which the law classified as the extreme penalty: indeed it was their constant dream and desire to do so. All those who had been in Russian convict establishments spoke of them with horror, 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 prison where I served my sentence under direct control of the commander-in-chief, and where the administration was entirely on military lines, there must have been even greater leniency shown convicts of the first and third categories. I think I can speak

⁶ The Decembrists.

with some authority about conditions in Siberia; for the rest I base my views upon what I learned from convicts who had experience of all three classes. We, in our prison, were under much more rigorous surveillance than elsewhere; we enjoyed no sort of exemption from the ordinary rules as regards work, confinement, and the wearing of chains; we could do nothing to obtain relaxation of those. I at any rate was well aware that in the 'good old days' not so very long ago there had been so much intrigue to undermine the reputation of officials that the authorities were terrified of informers, and that, under existing circumstances, to show indulgence to a convict was regarded as a crime. Everyone, therefore, authorities and convicts alike, lived in constant fear, and we aristocrats were reduced to the common level. The only point on which we were favoured was that of corporal punishment. Even so I do not think we should have been spared that, had we done anything for which it was prescribed, for equality of punishment was strictly enjoined or at least practised. What I am trying to make clear is that we were not wantonly, causelessly ill-treated as were so many prisoners.

When the commander-in-chief heard of the punishment inflicted on Jski, he was extremely angry with the governor, and ordered him to be more careful in future. The facts became widely known. We learned also that the commander-in-chief, who had great confidence in our governor, liked him because of his exact observance of regulations, and regarded him as a most efficient officer, sternly reprimanded him. The governor had taken the lesson to heart, and I have no doubt it was that which prevented his having Mski flogged, as he would have much liked to do, influenced as he was by the slanderous things Af said about Mski.

But he could never find a pretext for inflicting the punishment, however much he persecuted or set spies upon his intended victim. He had to deny himself that pleasure. The Jski affair was noised abroad, and public opinion condemned the governor; some persons openly reproached him for what he had done, and some even abused him to his face.

I may as well describe my first encounter with the governor. Another gentleman and myself had heard, while still at Tobolsk, of the governor's atrocious character. Certain noblemen who had been condemned a long while before to twenty-five years of this living death, kindly visited us in the transit prison and warned us of the type of man under whom we should find ourselves. They also promised to use what influence they could with their friends in order to ensure that we suffered as little ill-treatment as possible. And, in fact, they did write to the three daughters of the commander-in-chief, who, I believe, interceded on our behalf with their father. But what could he do? No more, of course, than tell the governor to be fair in applying the rules and regulations. It was about three in the afternoon that my companion and I reached the town; the escort took us at once before the tyrant. We awaited his arrival in an ante-room while the deputy was summoned. No sooner had that gentleman entered, than in walked the governor. We saw an inflamed scarlet face that boded no good and filled us with alarm; he seemed like some kind of spider about to hurl itself at a poor fly struggling in its web.

‘What’s your name, man?’ he asked my companion, speaking in a harsh, jerky voice as if he wanted to overawe us.

My friend gave his name.

‘And you?’ he said, turning to me and glaring at me from behind his spectacles.

I gave mine.

‘Sergeant! Take ’em to the prison, have ’em shaved at the guard-house, civilian-fashion-hair off half their skulls- and put ’em in irons to-morrow. Why, what sort of cloaks have you got there?’ he said brutally, when he saw the grey cloaks with yellow patches at the back which had been issued to us at Tobolsk. ‘Why, that’s a new uniform, begad-a new uniform! They’re always inventing something or other. That’s a Petersburg trick,’ he said, as he inspected us one after the other. ‘Got anything with ’em?’ he said abruptly to the sentry who escorted us.

‘They’ve got their own clothes, your Excellency,’ replied he, and the man presented arms, just as if he were on parade, but not without a nervous tremor. Everyone knew the governor and feared him.

‘Take away their clothes: they can’t keep anything but their white linen. Confiscate all coloured articles if they’ve got any, sell them off at the next sale and put the money to the prison account. A convict has no property,’ said he, looking at us severely. ‘Listen! See you behave yourselves; don’t let me hear any complaints. If I do-cat-’o-nine-tails! The smallest offence, and I’ll have you flogged!’

The manner of my reception, which was so different from anything I had ever known, almost made me ill that night. It was a terrible experience on my very first day in 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 they inflicted on us, no relaxtion from the common lot, but friends tried to help Bski and me by getting us sent for three months to the Engineers’ office to do copying work. This was done quietly and without comment, a kindness we owed to the head engineer during the short time that Lieutenant-Colonel Gkof was commander-in-chief. This gentleman held his command for only six months: he soon went back to Russia. He seemed to us all like an angel sent from heaven: the convicts were absolutely devoted to him. It was not mere respect, but something akin to worship. I cannot help saying so. How he managed it I do not know, but their hearts went out to him from the moment they set eyes on him.

‘He’s more like a father than anything else,’ the prisoners would often repeat during all the time he was there at the head of the engineering department. He was a brilliant, joyous fellow. Short of stature, and with a bold, confident expression, he was kindness itself to the convicts, for whom he appeared to entertain a sort of paternal affection. Why was he so fond of them? It is hard to say, but he seemed never to be able to pass a prisoner without stopping for a chat, a laugh, and a joke. There was nothing that smacked of authority in his pleasantries, nothing that reminded one of his official status. He behaved just as if he was one of ourselves. In spite of this kindness and condescension, I don’t remember anyone failing in respect towards him or taking the

slightest liberty-quite the opposite. The convict's face would suddenly light up in an extraordinary manner when he met the chief; it was odd to see how the man's face smiled all over, and his hand went to his cap, when he saw the chief approaching. A word from him was regarded as a signal honour. There are some people like that, who know how to win all hearts.

Gkof had a bold, jaunty air, walked with long strides, and held himself erect; 'a regular eagle,' the convicts used to call him. He could not do much to lighten their lot materially, for his duty was to superintend the engineering work, the manner and quantity of which was absolutely and unalterably fixed by the regulations. But if he happened to notice a gang of convicts who had finished their task, he allowed them to be back to quarters before the drum beat to mark the end of work. The prisoners loved him for the confidence he placed in them, and because of his aversion for all those mean, trifling, and exasperating interferences on the part of officious overseers. I am absolutely certain that if he had lost a thousand roubles in notes, and the most hardened thief in prison had found them, the fellow would not have hesitated to return them. I am quite sure of that.

The prisoners all sympathized with him when they learned that he was at daggers drawn with our detested governor, which happened about a month after his arrival. Their delight knew no bounds. The governor had formerly served with him in the same regiment, 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 Gkof became the governor's sworn enemy. Some would have it that it was more than figuratively, that they came to actual fisticuffs, a likely enough occurrence as far as the Governor was concerned, for the man had no objection to a scrimmage.

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

'Old Eight-eyes and the chief get on finely together! He's an eagle, but the other's a bad 'uni'

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 that they had never actually come to blows, I think the convicts would have been bitterly disappointed.

'The chief gave him fits, you may bet your life on it,' they said; 'he's a little 'un, but as bold as a Hon. The other one got into a blue funk, and hid under the bed.'

But Gkof left all too soon, and was keenly regretted.

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

'Our eagles never remain very long with us,' said the prisoners; 'especially when they're good, kind fellows.'

It was Gkof who sent Bski and myself to work in his office, for he was partial to exiled nobles. When he left, our condition was still fairly endurable, for his successor showed us much sympathy and friendship. We spent some time copying reports, and our handwriting was becoming excellent, when an order came from the authorities that

we were to return to hard labour as before; some spiteful person had been at work. At bottom, however, we were rather pleased, for we had grown tired of copying.

For two whole years I worked in company with Bski in the shops, and many a gossip we had about our hopes for the future, our ideas, and our beliefs. Bski had a very odd mind, which worked in a strange, unconventional way. There are some very intelligent folk who indulge in endless paradox; but when they have endured great suffering and made great sacrifices for their ideals it is not easy, in fact it is cruel, to try to alter their outlook. When you objected to any of Bski's propositions he was really hurt, and answered you with much heat.. He was, perhaps, more in the right than I was as to some things wherein we differed; but we were obliged to cut short our friendship. I was sorry, for we had many thoughts in common.

As years went on Mtski became more and more sombre and melancholy, a prey to despair. In the early period of my imprisonment he was communicative enough, and shared his thoughts with me. When I arrived 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 asked questions, listened eagerly, and showed emotion. Little by little, however, his reserve grew on him and there was no getting at his thoughts. The glowing coals were covered up with ashes, but it was plain that his temper grew increasingly sour. 'Je haïs ces brigands,' he would say, speaking of convicts whose acquaintance I had made; I could never make him see any good in them. He never seemed to enter fully into the meaning of anything I said in their favour, though he would sometimes appear to yield a listless assent. Next day, however, it would be just as before: 'Je haïs ces brigands.' As we often used to converse in French, one of the overseers of the works, a soldier named Dranichnikof, used always to call us *aides chirurgiens*,

God knows why! Mtski never seemed to shake off his usual apathy except when he spoke of his mother.

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

Mtski was not of noble birth, and had been whipped before he was transported. When he recalled the episode he would gnash his teeth, and could not look anybody in the face. Towards the end of his imprisonment he used to walk to and fro, generally quite alone. One day, at noon, he was summoned by the chief, who received him with a smile.

'Well, Mtski, what did you dream about last night?' he asked.

Mtski afterwards told me: 'When he said that a shudder ran through me; I felt stricken at heart.'

He replied: 'I dreamed that I had a letter from my mother.'

'Better than that, much better!' said the chief. 'You're free; your mother has petitioned the emperor, and he has granted her prayer. Here, here's her letter, and the order for your discharge. You're to leave prison immediately.'

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

We congratulated him. He took our hands in his, 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 he was shortly given some land of his own. He used often to visit the jail, bring us news, and keep us informed of all that went on, as often as he was allowed to talk with us. It was mainly political news that interested him.

Besides the four Polish political prisoners, of whom I have already spoken, there were two others of that nation, who had been sentenced for very short periods. They were not well educated, but were good, simple, straightforward fellows.

Then there was Atchoukooski, an utterly colourless type.

Nor must I forget Bin, a man well on in years, who impressed us all most unfavourably. I do not know for what he had been condemned, although he used quite often to tell us some story in that connection. He was a vulgar, mean creature, with the coarse manners of a shopkeeper grown rich. He was quite without education, and seemed to take interest in nothing except what concerned his trade. He was a kind of scene-painter and showed a good deal of talent in his work. The authorities soon heard of his ability, and he was regularly employed in the town to decorate walls and ceilings. In two years he adorned the rooms of every prison official. He was well paid and was able to live fairly comfortably. He was sent to work with three other prisoners, two of whom learned the business thoroughly. One of them, in fact, a man named Tjwoski, painted nearly as well as Bin himself. The governor, who had rooms in one of the official residences, sent for Bin and gave him a commission to decorate the walls and ceilings there, which he did so effectively that the commander-in-chief's apartments were far surpassed by those of the governor. The house itself was a ramshackle old place, while the interior, thanks to Bin, was as gay as a palace. Our worthy governor 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 said-and meant it! Bin and his assistants advanced in the governor's good graces. They took a month to complete the work at his house. During those memorable days the governor seemed to regard us in a new light, and began to be quite kind to us political prisoners. One day he sent for Jski.

'Jski,' 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, the governor.'

Jski answered that he understood perfectly.

'Do you understand? I, your superior, have sent for you to ask your pardon. You can hardly realize 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,⁷ am governor. Governor, do you understand?'

⁷ The Governor was not the only officer who spoke of himself in that lofty way; many others did the same, especially those who had risen from the ranks.

Jski answered that he understood perfectly.

‘Well, I want to be friends with you. But can you realize what I’m doing? Can you appreciate my magnanimity- feel and appreciate it? Just think of it. I, I, the governor!’ etc. etc.

Jski told me of this scene. There was, after all, some human feeling left in this drunken, licentious, and tormenting brute. Allowing for the man’s outlook and feeble-minded-ness, one cannot deny that this was generosity indeed on his part. Perhaps he was a little less drunk than usual, perhaps more. Who can tell?

The governor’s glorious idea of taking a wife proved abortive; the rooms were arrayed in all their splendour, but the wife was not forthcoming. Instead of taking that blissful journey to the altar, he was summoned before the authorities, committed for trial, and was ordered to send in his resignation. It appears that some of his old sins had found him out, irregularities of which he had been guilty while superintendent of police in the neighbouring town. This crushing blow fell upon him quite suddenly and without notice. All the convicts were delighted when they heard the great news; there was rejoicing and holiday throughout the jail. The story went abroad that the governor sobbed, and cried, and howled like an old woman. But he was helpless in the matter. He lost his job, had to sell his two grey horses and everything he had in the world, and fell into complete destitution. Later on we used to meet him occasionally in threadbare civilian clothes, and wearing a cap with a cockade; he would glance at us convicts with all the spite and malice at his command. But all his glory was fled with his uniform. As prison governor he used to give himself the airs of a god in coat and breeches; now that was all over, he looked like the lackey he was, and a disgraced lackey at that.

With fellows of that sort, a uniform is the only saving grace; lose it, and they lose all.

Chapter IX: Escape

Soon after the governor’s resignation the prison was reorganized throughout. The hard labour hitherto inflicted, and other regulations were abolished, and the place put upon the footing of the military convict establishments in Russia. Consequently, prisoners of the second category were no longer sent there; that category would in future consist of prisoners who were regarded as still on the military footing, men, that is to say, who, in spite of their sentence, did not forfeit for ever their civic status. They were still soldiers, but had undergone corporal punishment; they were sentenced for comparatively short periods, six years at most; and when they had served their time, or in case of pardon, they rejoined their regiments. Men guilty of a second offence were condemned to twenty years of imprisonment. Up to the time of which I speak we had amongst us a section of soldier-prisoners, but only because there was nowhere else to send them. Now the place was to be occupied exclusively by soldiers. As to the civilian convicts who were stripped of all civic rights, branded, cropped, and shaven, they were

to remain in the fortress to finish their time; but as no fresh prisoners of this class were to come in, and those already there would be gradually discharged, at the end of ten years there would be no civilian convicts left in the place. The line of division between the classes of prisoners was maintained; from time to time other high-ranking military criminals were sent to our place for security on their way to Eastern Siberia and the more severe penalties that awaited them.

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. A military commandant was placed in charge of the prison; under his orders were four junior 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 from among them; their authority over the others, as may be supposed, was only nominal. Akim Akimitch, of course, was thus promoted.

The carrying out of these new arrangements was entrusted to the commander-in-chief, who retained his general command over the whole establishment. There were no other changes. At first the convicts were not a little excited by these reforms, and discussed their new superiors a good deal among themselves, trying to make out what sort of fellows they were; but when they saw that everything went on very much as usual they quieted down, and life resumed its normal course. We had got rid of the governor, and that was something for which to be thankful; everyone drew fresh breath and his courage revived. The fear that inspired 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 be, unless by mistake.

Spirits were smuggled in as before, although we now had non-commissioned officers in place of 'invalids.' These noncommissioned officers were all worthy, conscientious men, who knew their place and business. There were some among them who had the idea that they might exceed their authority and treat us like common soldiers, but they soon gave it up and behaved like the others. Those who seemed unable to understand our prison customs received more than one sharp reminder from the convicts themselves, which led to some lively scenes. One of them was given brandy, which was of course too much for him. When he was sober again we had a little chat with him, pointed out that he had been drinking with prisoners, and that, accordingly, etc. etc. He became quite tractable. The end of it was that the non-commissioned officers closed their eyes to the brandy traffic: they went to market for us, just as the 'invalids' used to do, and brought the prisoners white bread, meat, anything that could be smuggled in without too much risk. I never could understand, therefore, why they had gone to the trouble of turning the place into a military prison. The change was made two years before my discharge; I still had that amount of time to serve.

I see little use in recording all I saw and experiences in prison day by day. If I were to attempt a diary of those hours and days, this book would contain twice or thrice as many chapters as my space allows.- Not only that, but I should simply tire the reader

and myself. The substance of my recollections is already embodied in the foregoing pages, and the reader has been able to obtain a fair idea of what the life of a convict in the second category was like. I have tried to present an accurate and vivid picture of conditions as seen through my own eyes. Whether I have succeeded others must judge. I cannot pronounce upon my own work, but I think I should bring it to a close; for as I move among these recollections of a dreadful past, the old suffering revives and all but strangles me.

Besides, I cannot be sure of my memory as to all I saw in those last years, for my faculties seem blunted in respect of the latter period of my imprisonment: I feel sure there is much I have forgotten. However, I remember only too well how very, very slowly these last two years passed, how sadly, and how the days seemed as if they would never fade into evening, like water falling drop by drop. I remember, too, that I was filled with a mighty longing for my resurrection from that grave, a longing which gave me strength to endure, to wait, and to hope. And so I became hardened and long-suffering; I lived on expectation, and counted every day as it passed; if there had been a thousand more, I would have found satisfaction in dunking that one of them was gone, only nine hundred and ninety-nine remained. I remember, too, that although I had a hundred neighbours in exactly the same situation as myself, I felt more and more solitary, and though the solitude was terrible I came to love it. Isolated among the convict-crowd, I meditated upon my past life, analysing minutely its events and thoughts. I reviewed my former activity, and was sometimes pitiless in condemning myself. Sometimes I went so far as to thank destiny for the privilege of such loneliness, for only in solitude could I have scrutinized my past so carefully, or examined so closely my interior and outward life. What strong and strange new germs of hope were born in my soul during those memorable hours! 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 the future, and vowed that I would strictly adhere to it. I had a sort of blind and overwhelming conviction that, once away from that place, I should be able to carry out all my resolutions. I looked forward to my freedom with transports of eager desire. I wished to try my strength 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 recall these things, most painful. No one, I am sure, can be greatly interested, other than 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 youth and in the full enjoyment of their faculties.

Enough. Let me end my memoirs with an interesting story and avoid too abrupt an ending.

What shall it be? Well, I may, perhaps, be asked whether it was quite impossible to escape from jail, and whether such an attempt was made while I was there. I have already said that a prisoner who has served two or three years thinks a good deal about escaping, but generally concludes that it is best to finish his sentence without

running more risks, so that he may settle on the land or elsewhere after his discharge. Those, however, who reckon in this way are convicts sentenced for comparatively short periods; those who have many years to serve are always ready to take a chance. For all that, attempts at escape were by no means frequent. Whether that was attributable to want of spirit on the convicts' part, to the severity of military discipline, or, rather, to the situation of the town (being in the midst of the open steppe, it made escape difficult), I really cannot say. All these considerations no doubt contributed to make a man think twice. It was hard enough to leave the prison at all. During my time it was tried by two famous criminals.

After the governor's dismissal, the spy Av found himself alone with no support. He was still quite young, but his character grew more forceful with every year; he was a bold, self-assertive fellow, of considerable intelligence. I believe that if he had been set free he would have continued to spy and obtain money by every shameful means, but I don't think he would have allowed himself to be caught a second time. He would have turned his prison experience to much better account. One trick he practised was that of forging passports, at least so I heard from some of the convicts. I think the fellow was ready to risk everything if only he could improve his lot. Circumstances enabled me to probe this fellow's mind and discover its true ugliness; his cold, deep wickedness was revolting, and my disgust at him was invincible. I believe that if he had wanted a drink of brandy which he could obtain only by murder, he would not have hesitated one moment, provided he was reasonably sure his crime would not be detected. He had learned in prison to view everything in the coolest, calculating way. It was on him that Koulikoff's choice fell, as we shall see.

I have already mentioned Koulikoff of the special section. He was no longer young, but full of ardour, life, and vigour, and endowed with extraordinary faculties. He was conscious of his strength, and still yearned to lead his own life: some men, indeed, crave for rich, abundant life, even when old age has them in its grip. I should have been a good deal surprised if Koulikoff had not tried to escape; as it was, he did.

Which of the two, Koulikoff or Av, had the greater influence over the other I cannot say; they were a goodly pair, and exactly suited to each other, and were soon as thick as thieves. I fancy that Koulikoff relied upon Av to forge him a passport; besides, Av belonged to the upper classes and had moved in good society, a circumstance which might mean a great deal if they managed to get back into Russia. Heaven only knows what compacts they made, what plans and hopes they formed; if they got as far as Russia they would at all events leave behind them Siberia and destitution. Koulikoff was a versatile man, capable of playing many different parts on the stage of life; and had plenty of ability, whatever direction his efforts might take. Such men are strangled, suffocated by life in jail, so the two set about plotting their escape.

But to leave the prison walls except under escort was quite impossible: a soldier must be bribed. In one of the units stationed at our fortress there was a middle-aged Pole, an energetic fellow worthy of a better fate—serious, courageous. When he first arrived in Siberia as a young man he had deserted from the army, being unable to

endure the anguish of nostalgia. He was recaptured and flogged; then, after serving two years in a penal battalion, he rejoined his regiment and proved himself so efficient a soldier that he was rewarded with promotion to the rank of corporal. He had a good deal of pride, and spoke like a man who had no small opinion of himself.

I sometimes watched this man closely when he was on escort duty, for the Poles had told me something about him. I became convinced that longing for his native land had taken the form of a chill, fixed, deadly hatred for those who prevented his return. He was the sort of fellow to stick at nothing, and Koulikoff showed sound judgment when he picked upon this man as an accomplice of his flight. The 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 its immediate neighbourhood was fairly equable, especially in summer, which is fortunate for tramps and vagabonds. It was out of the question to travel far after getting clear of the fortress, which was situated on rising ground in open country: the encircling forest is some considerable distance away. A disguise was indispensable, and to procure it they must manage to reach the outskirts of the town, where Koulikoff had taken care some time before to provide a hiding-place. I don't know whether his worthy friends in that part of the town were in the secret. We may presume that they were, though there is no evidence to prove it. That year, however, a young woman who led a gay life and was very pretty had settled herself in that same part of the city, on the edge of the country. She 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 planned the escape together, for Koulikoff lavished a good deal of attention and money upon her for more than a year.

When the working parties were formed each morning Koulikoff and Av managed to get themselves sent out with a convict named Chilkin, whose trade was that of stove-maker and plasterer, to repair the empty barracks when the soldiers went into camp. Av and Koulikoff were to help in carrying the necessary materials. Kohler saw to it that he formed part of the escort; as the regulations required two soldiers to act as escort for three prisoners, he was accompanied by a young recruit from his own training squad. Our fugitives must have exercised a powerful influence over Kohler in order to persuade him to cast in his lot with them, for he was a serious, intelligent, and reflective man, with only a few more years of military service before him.

They reached the barracks about six o'clock in the morning; there was no one else with them. After having worked about an hour, Koulikoff and Av told Chilkin that they were going to the workshop to see someone 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, taciturn, fragile in appearance, and with little flesh on his bones. He was the sort of person who might have been expected to spend his 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 ordained.

What had he done to deserve such severe punishment? I had not the slightest idea; he never showed the least resentment or bitterness, and went his own quiet, inoffensive way. Now and then he got as drunk as a lord, but apart from that his conduct was excellent. He was not, of course, in the secret and 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. That suited Chilkin to perfection; he had not the least notion of what was afoot, and remained alone with the young recruit while Koulikoff, Av, and Kohler made off to the suburbs of the town.

Half an hour passed; the men had 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 Av; he was

sure of that, and the whole thing seemed to him suspicious. Kohler's behaviour had struck him, too: when he left with the two convicts, the corporal had instructed the recruit what to do in his absence, which he had never before known him to do. The more Chilkin thought over the matter the less he liked it. Time passed; the convicts did not return. His anxiety was great; he foresaw that the authorities would suspect him of connivance with the fugitives and realized that his own skin was in danger. If he delayed in reporting the matter suspicion would grow into certainty that he knew what his companions intended when they left him, and he would be dealt with as their accomplice. There was no time to lose.

It then occurred to him that Koulikoff and Av had been markedly intimate for some time, and that they had often been seen with heads together behind the barracks, all by themselves. He remembered, too, that he had more than once fancied that they were up to something.

He looked attentively at his escort; the fellow was leaning on his musket, yawning and scratching his nose in the most innocent manner imaginable. Chilkin therefore decided that it was not necessary to reveal his anxiety to this man: he simply asked him to accompany him to the engineers' workshops. His object was to ask if anybody there had seen his companions; but nobody had, and Chilkin's suspicions grew stronger and stronger. If only he could believe that they had gone to get drunk and have a spree in the suburbs, 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 found the sergeant-major and mentioned his suspicions. That officer was alarmed, and at first could not believe there was anything wrong. 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 governor, who in his turn ran to the commanding officer.

In a quarter of an hour all necessary measures had been taken and the commander-in-chief informed. As the convicts in question were persons of importance, it might be expected that a serious view would be taken of the matter at St Petersburg. Av was classed as a political prisoner, for no very clear reason it would seem; Koulikoff was a

convict of the special section, that is to say, a criminal of the blackest dye and, what was worse, an ex-soldier. It then appeared that according to the regulations each convict of the special section should have an escort of two soldiers when he went to work; the regulations had not been observed in this case, and everybody was exposed to serious trouble. Express messengers 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 to give a full description of their persons. Cossacks were sent to hunt them down; letters went to the authorities of all adjoining governmental districts; and everyone was scared to death.

There was no less excitement among the prisoners; as they 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 profound. The affair broke the monotony of their lives and gave them something to think about; but, above all, it was an escape and, as such, something to evoke their sympathy and stir fibres that had long been without exciting stimulus; something like hope and a disposition to confront their fate set their hearts beating faster, for the incident seemed to show that their hard lot was not hopelessly unchangeable.

‘Well, you see they’ve managed to get away! Why shouldn’t we?’

The same thought was in every man’s mind, and made him stiffen his back and look defiantly at his neighbours. All the convicts seemed to grow an inch taller on the strength of it, and to look down condescendingly upon the non-commissioned officers. Senior officials hurried on the scene, and the commander-in-chief now arrived in person. We fellows looked at them all with some assurance, with a touch of contempt, and with hard-set faces, 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 search of everything and everybody; so all contraband goods were carefully hidden, for the authorities would want to show their precious wisdom, which may be relied upon after the event. The expectation was verified; there was a mighty turning of everything upside down and topsy-turvy, a general rummage- the discovery of exactly nothing, as they might have known.

When the time came for afternoon work the usual escorts were doubled. When night came, the officers and N.C.O.s on duty came pouncing in upon us ever few minutes to see if they could catch us off our guard, and obtain any information from us; an extra roll was called, and the additional muster only gave them more trouble for nothing. We were hunted out on to the courtyard to have our names checked again. Then, when we were indoors, they counted us yet once more, as if they were incapable of stopping the process.

The convicts were in no way disturbed by all this absurd bustle. They looked quite unconcerned, and, as always happens in such cases, were on their best behaviour all that evening and night. ‘We won’t give them any handle at all,’ was the general feeling. The authorities were asking themselves whether some of us were not in league with the

fugitives, so a careful watch was kept upon our actions, and an attentive ear listened to our conversations; but without success.

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

‘When you try that sort of game you lie low and play low!’

‘Koulikoff and Av are clever enough to have covered up their tracks. They’ve done the trick in first-rate style, keeping the secret to themselves; they’ve mizzled, the, rascals; clever chaps, those, they could get through closed doors!’

The glory of Koulikoff and Av had grown a hundred cubits higher than it was. Everyone was proud of them. Their exploit, it was felt, would be 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’s got away? Tip-top fellows. You can’t hold a candle to them.’

At any other time a man to whom such a remark was made would have flared up in anger, and defended himself; now the observation was met with modest silence.

‘True enough,’ they said. ‘Everybody’s not a Koulikoff or an Av. You’ve got to show what you’re made of before you’ve a right to boast.’

‘I say, pals, after all, why do we stay here?’ exclaimed a prisoner seated by the kitchen window. He spoke in a drawling voice, but you could see he was enjoying himself; he rubbed his cheek slowly with the palm of his hand. ‘Why do we stay? It’s no life at all; we’ve been buried alive now, haven’t we?’

‘Dammit! 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 lamenting the fact?’

‘But, look, there’s 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 Av, pals, there’s a lad for you!’

‘Aye, aye, he’ll get Koulikoff just where he wants him, and 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 turned to details: Had they got far from the town? What direction did they take? Which road would give them the best chance? Then they discussed distances, and those convicts who knew the neighbourhood well were listened to attentively.

Next, they talked about the inhabitants of neighbouring villages, of whom they seemed to have a very low opinion. There was nobody in the neighbourhood, the convicts believed, who would hesitate as to the course to be pursued. Nothing would induce them to help the runaways; on the contrary, they would hunt them down.

‘If you only knew what scoundrels these peasants are! Rascally brutes!’

‘Peasants, indeed! Worthless rogues!’

‘These Siberians are rotten types. 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’ll get clean away?’

‘I’m dead certain 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?’

Everyone burst out laughing. They would hardly condescend to listen to him; but Skouratof was not to be silenced.

‘I tell you I’d stake my life on it!’ he cried. ‘Why, I made up my mind about that long ago. I’d find means of going through a key-hole rather than let them catch me.’

‘Oh, don’t you fear, when your belly got empty you ‘d just go creeping to a peasant and ask him for a morsel of something.’

Fresh laughter.

‘I ask him for food? You’re a liar!’

‘Hold your tongue, can’t you? We know what you were sent here for. You and your Uncle Varia killed a peasant for bewitching your cattle.’

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 Varia; 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 quite a small boy. 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’”; then 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,” etc.

I tell you that’s what used to happen when I was quite a little fellow.’

All laughed heartily again: that was what Skouratof wanted, he liked playing the clown. Soon the talk became serious again, especially among the older men and those who knew something about escapes. Those among the younger convicts who controlled themselves and listened seemed highly delighted. A great crowd was assembled in and about the kitchen. There was no patrol about, so everybody could give vent to his feelings in conversation or otherwise. I noticed one man enjoying himself particularly, a little Tartar 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.

‘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 wagged his head and brandished his arms.

‘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 forced his cap down over his eyes, and went out in high glee, and Mametka was quite crestfallen.

For a week or so a very tight hand was kept on everyone in jail, and the whole neighbourhood was repeatedly and carefully searched. How they managed it I cannot tell, but the prisoners always seemed to know exactly what steps were being taken to recapture the fugitives. For some days, according to all we heard, fortune favoured them; no trace of them could be found. The convicts made very light of official measures, and were quite at their ease about their friends. They repeated over and over again that the two runaways would never be found.

All the local peasantry were said to have been enrolled and were watching all likely places, woods, ravines, etc.

‘Rubbish!’ said our fellows, grinning broadly. ‘They’ve hidden at some friend’s place.’

‘That’s certain. They’re not the fellows to run risks, they’ve made their plans.’

The general idea was, in fact, that they were still concealed in a suburban cellar, waiting till the hue and cry died down and their hair had grown; that they might remain for as long as six months, and then quietly move. Imaginations had run riot when 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 it seemed to be confirmed. The convicts were wildly excited. Next morning it was reported in 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 from the town. At last we learned the truth. Our sergeant-major positively asserted, immediately after an interview with the governor, that they would be brought into the guard-house that very night. They had been recaptured; there could be no doubt of that.

It is difficult to convey an adequate idea of the effect which this news had upon the convicts. At first they were angry, then hopelessly dejected. Finally they began to be bitter and sarcastic, pouring their scorn not on the authorities, but on the runaways who had been such fools as to get caught. It began with a few, then all joined in, except a handful of the more serious and thoughtful types who held their tongues, and seemed to regard the rest with supreme contempt.

Poor Koulikoff and Av were now just as heartily abused as they had been previously extolled; the men seemed to take a delight in running them down, as though their recapture was an insult to their mates. It was said contemptuously that the fellows had probably got hungry, couldn’t stand it, and had entered a village to beg bread. According to the etiquette of the road, to do that is to descend very low in the social scale. The rumour, however, proved untrue: what had happened was that the fugitives’

tracks had been picked up and followed. They led to a wood which was forthwith surrounded, so that the poor fellows had no recourse but to give themselves up.

They were brought in that night, bound hand and foot, under armed escort. All hurried to the palisades to see what would happen, but they saw nothing except the carriages of the commander-in-chief and the governor, which were waiting in front of the guard-house. The fugitives were ironed and locked up separately, their punishment being adjourned till next day. The prisoners began to sympathize with the hapless wretches when they heard how they had been taken despite all their precautions, and the anxiety about the issue was keen.

‘They’ll get a thousand at least.’

‘A thousand? I tell you they’ll have the life beaten out of them. Av may get off with a thousand, but they’ll kill the other chap. Why, he’s in the special section.’

They were wrong. Av 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 revealed no one’s name as having helped them, and declared that they had made straight for the wood without entering a house. I was very sorry for Koulikoff; to say nothing of the heavy beating he received, he had thrown away all his chances of having his burden lightened. Later he was sent to another prison. Av’s sentence was remitted; the physicians interfered, and he was released. But as soon as he was safe in hospital he began bragging again, said he would stick at nothing now, and that they would soon see what he would do. Koulikoff was not one whit altered: suave as ever, he continued his pose, and even after his punishment there was nothing in his manner or words to show that he had had such an adventure. But the convicts no longer admired him; he seemed to have fallen a good deal in their estimation, and to be on their own level instead of a superior being. So it was that poor Koulikoff’s star waned; success is everything in this world.

Chapter X: Freedom

This incident occurred during the last year of my imprisonment. My recollection of those last months is as vivid as that of the first years, but I have given a sufficiently detailed account of my experiences. In spite of my impatience to be free, this year was the least trying of all those I spent there.: I had many friends and acquaintances among the convicts, who had by this time come to regard me with favour. Many of them, indeed, held me in sincere and genuine affection. The soldier appointed to escort my friend and myself—we were released simultaneously—out of the prison very nearly cried when the time came to part. And when at last we were in full possession of our freedom, and were staying in rooms placed at our disposal in the Government building for the month we had yet to spend in town, this man came to see us almost every day. On the other hand, there were some men whose hatred I could never soften, whose

regard I could never win. God knows why, but they showed the same hard aversion for me at the last as at the first; some insuperable obstacle stood between us.

I had more privileges during my last year. I found some old acquaintances and even some old schoolfellows among the officers of the garrison, and the renewal of intercourse with them helped me. Thanks to them I got permission to keep some money, to write to my family, and even to have a certain number of books. For some years I had not had a single volume, and no words can describe the strange, deep emotion and excitement caused by the first book that I read in jail. I began to devour it at night, when the doors were locked, and read till break of day. It was a copy of some review, and it seemed to me like a messenger from the other world. As I read, my old life seemed to rise up before me in sharp outline, as it were of some independent being, some other soul than mine. I tried to get some clear idea of my relation to current events and things: my arrears of knowledge and experience were too great to be made up. The free world had lived through many stirring events during my absence, but my chief anxiety was thoroughly to understand what was going on now, that I could at last know something about it. All the words I read were as tangible things, which I desired rather to feel sensibly than to use as mere media of knowledge; I tried to see more in the text than could be found there. I imagined it to contain mysterious meanings, and tried to see on every page allusions to the past with which my mind was familiar, whether they were there or not. As I turned each leaf I sought for traces of what had moved men deeply before the days of my bondage, and I was extremely depressed when I realized that a new state of things had arisen; a new kind of human existence which was alien to my knowledge and my sentiments. I felt like a straggler, left behind and lost in the onward march of mankind.

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

For the truth is that another generation had come into being: I knew it not, and it knew not me. At the foot of one article I saw the name of an old friend; with what avidity I scanned it! But the other names were nearly all new to me; new workers had come upon the scene, and I was eager to learn something of themselves and their achievements. It made me feel almost desperate to have so few books, and to know how hard it would be to get more. At an earlier date, in the old governor's time, it was a very dangerous thing to bring books into the jail. If one was found during one of his regular general searches there was trouble, and no efforts were spared to find out how they had been smuggled in, and who was privy to the offence. I did not wish to be subjected to a humiliating scrutiny, and, if I had, it would have been useless. I was obliged to live without books, and spent years shut up within myself, tormented with many a question and problem upon which I had no means of throwing light. But I can never tell the whole dreadful story.

It was in winter that I arrived at the prison, and it was on the anniversary of that winter's day that I was to be released.

Oh, with what impatience I looked forward to that thrice-blessed winter! How gladly I watched the summer fade, the leaves turn yellow on the trees, and the grass dry out

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 is really, at last, at last, close at hand. Yet, strange to say, as the time; of times, the day of days, drew near, so did my soul become more tranquil. I was annoyed at myself, and even reproached myself with being cold, indifferent. Many of the convicts whom I met in the courtyard when the day's work was done used to stop and talk with me to wish me joy.

'Ah, Alexander Petrovitch, you'll soon be free now! And you'll be leaving us poor devils behind!'

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

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

The poor fellow sighed with a far-away, wandering look, as if gazing into those intolerable days to come... Yes, many of my companions congratulated me in a way that showed they really meant what they said. I saw, too, that they were more ready to address me as man to man; they drew nearer to me as I was about to leave them. The halo of freedom began to surround me, and because of that they esteemed me the more. It was in this spirit that they bade me farewell.

Kschniski, a young Polish noble, a sweet and amiable person, was very fond, at about this time, of walking in the courtyard with me. The stifling nights in barracks did him much harm, so he tried to preserve his health by taking all the exercise and fresh air he could.

'I am looking forward impatiently to the day of your; release,' he said with a smile one day, 'for when you go I shall realize that I have just one more year to do.'

I need hardly say, though say it I must, that the prospect of freedom was for us prisoners something more than the reality. That was because our fancy constantly dwelt upon it. Prisoners always exaggerate when they think of freedom and see a free man. We certainly did: the poorest servant of one of the officers seemed to us like a king; compared with ourselves he was our ideal of the free man. 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 my release, as night fell, I went for the last time all through and all round the prison. How many thousand times had I made the circuit of those palisades during those ten years! There, at the rear of the barracks, I had walked 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! Here the corner where the poor wounded eagle pined away; Petroff used often to join me there. It seemed now as if he would never leave me; he would walk along at my side without speaking a word, as though he knew all my thoughts as well as myself, and there was always a strange, inexplicable, wondering look on the man's face.

How many a secret farewell I took of the black, squared beams in our barrack-room! Alas! how much joyless youth, how much fruitless strength was lost and buried in those walls!-youth and strength of which the world might surely have made some use. I cannot help expressing my conviction that amongst that hapless throng there were perhaps the strongest and, in some respects, 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?

Early next day, before the men were mustered for work, I went through every barrack to bid them a last farewell. Many a vigorous, horny hand was held out to me with right goodwill. Some grasped and shook my hand as though all their hearts were in the act; they were the more generous souls. Most of the poor fellows seemed to consider me as already changed by my impending good fortune, and, indeed, they could scarcely have felt otherwise. They knew that I had friends in the town, that I was leaving at once to mix with gentlemen, at whose tables I should sit as their equal. Of this the poor fellows were acutely conscious, and, although they did their best as they took my hand, that hand could never be the hand of an equal. No; I, too, was a gentleman from now. Some turned their back on me, and made no reply to my parting words. I think, moreover, that I saw unfriendly looks on certain faces.

The drum beat; the convicts went to work, and I was left to myself. Souchiloff had risen before anyone else that morning, and now set himself tremblingly to the task of preparing me a final cup of tea. Poor Souchiloff! How he cried when I gave him my clothes, my shirts, my trouser straps, and some money.

‘Tain’t that, ‘tain’t that,’ he said, and bit his trembling lips, ‘it’s that I am going to lose you, Alexander Petrovitch. What shall I do without you?’

Then there was Akim Akimitch; him, also, I bade farewell

‘Your turn will come soon, I hope,’ 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 departed, my companion and I left the jail ‘for ever.’ We went to the blacksmith’s shop, where our irons were struck off. We had no armed escort, but were attended by a single N.C.O. Convicts 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 their business methodically, as though they wanted to make a perfect job of it.

‘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 the last time. I could not realize that only a moment before they had encircled 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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Fyodor Dostoevsky
The House of the Dead

Translated by Constance Garnett.

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