

## A SHADOW OF RUSSIAN LIFE.

In a wretched faubourg of Moscow, hard by the barrier where the poorest inhabitants of the city dwelt, stood a low, two-storied wooden house of uninviting appearance. Its cracked window-panes were thickly encrusted with dust. One looked as though it might fall in at any moment.

In the courtyard, beside a ruined well, stood a little boy, bucket in hand, patiently waiting until a woman in patched and faded garments, in the act of drawing water, made way for him. The child was fair, but of that fairness which is so common in Russia. His hair had faded from early exposure to the burning sun. His little pinched face bore a touching expression of mute agony. His cotton shirt, soiled and torn, barely covered his lean shoulders, and revealed around his sun-burnt neck a tiny metal cross, suspended from a faded ribbon. He looked about ten years old, although younger, and when questioned by inquisitive neighbours, was fain to confess that he did not know his age.

"Well, Illouscha," said the woman in tattered garments, as she raised her pail and prepared to leave the well, "is your mother at home?"

"Yes, she is just come in," replied the child, as he threw his whole weight upon the handle of the well in order to bring it to the ground.

"And has she brought you anything nice?"

Illouscha was for a moment silent, and then answered briefly: "Only papa brings me nice things."

"Ay, ay, it is sad to lose one's father," murmured the woman, as with a deep sigh she turned with her pail towards the house.

The child filled his bucket with difficulty, and seizing his heavy burden, dragged it down the steep stones, stumbling at each step, and scattering the water on every side.

"Take care you don't roll down the stairs," said an old man in a shabby overcoat who was watching him from below. "What are you spilling the water for, you young rascal?" shouted the old man angrily. "Isn't it damp enough here in the house without flooding us like this? At your age you ought to be able to carry water properly."

The little fellow, breathless from exertion, passed on in silence, and then, stopping before a door he set the pail on the ground, lifted the latch, and walked in.

There Illouscha found his mother stretched motionless on the bed, her face buried in the pillow. He fixed his eyes on a disordered mass of black hair—for she had seized her head with her hands, and the kerchief with which she generally bound her hair had fallen to the ground.

The little boy leant against the doorpost and watch this figure without venturing to open his lips. The song of a workman in the yard was distinctly audible through the open window. He also heard the incessant trills of a canary, and the harsh voice of a matron scolding her cook. A *fiacre* rattled by, its driver shouting lustily, as he lashed his jaded beast; and presently, in striking contrast to the whirl of life, a funeral cortege crept slowly down the street.

Illouscha remained motionless, gazing fixedly upon the form stretched on the bed. Once or twice a slight shiver ran through his body, and a strange expression settled in his eyes, but he did not cry. It seemed to him as though his mother were dead. He remembered that she had complained of a pain in her side; how often had she told him that her legs swelled, and that she felt a heavy weight upon her chest! Only the day before, on going to bed, she had murmured plaintively: "I feel it is nearly ended—my time will soon come." But in the morning she had risen at daybreak to scrub the floors of a neighbouring office. She had come back weary, and had remained on her bed, mute and motionless, ever since.

The child shuddered at the thought of losing his mother. She was very severe, even cruel to him sometimes, ay! and beat him very often; but she was all that he had in this world. His father had gone to the war, and his kind old granny had been dead two years. Sometimes when his mother said, "Listen, you little rascal, if I were to die, you will have to wander about the world and beg," he would cry bitterly, for he had noticed how beggars were hunted, insulted, and accused of stealing, whenever they came near to his neighbours. He remembered also how on one occasion his mother had flung a crust of dry bread to a beggar, with the bitter reproach of kindred suffering, "Begone! I am no richer than thou!"

At thoughts of the sad prospect before him large tears rolled down his cheeks. At this moment the figure moved on the bed.

"Mother," he said softly, "mother—what ails you?"

At these words she raised herself slightly. Her face was pallid as wax, her eyes glassily fixed.

"Mother, I have brought some water," said Illouscha in a timid, hesitating manner. The woman put her feet to the ground, and looked round her sadly and sternly.

"Oh! life, cursed life!" she murmured; and then turning sharply to the boy, said: "Go and buy some bread." As she spoke she drew from under her pillow a handkerchief, in the corner of which she had knotted two twenty-kopeck pieces. Handing one of these to Illouscha she bade him not to lose it, and to be sure to count the change very carefully.

The child held the money tightly in his little hand, and as he turned to leave the room looked back and said gently, "Shall I buy some *kras* as well?"

"Do what I tell you," replied the woman irritably.

The patter of little bare feet was heard running down the stairs; then the child's fair head passed the windows of the *rez-de-chaussee* and disappeared round the corner of the house.

In five minutes Illouscha returned. His mother was once more stretched on the bed; this time she did not groan, but was breathing painfully.

"Mother darling, what is the matter with you?" asked the child. She made a sign with her hand, but could not speak. Then she began to toss about on the bed, first on one side, then on the other, her lips pressed tightly together. Illouscha stood apart, his eyes wide open, and holding tightly in his hand his copper kopecks.

He now became thoroughly frightened. His mother's sufferings touched him to the heart; he did not know what to say or do to help her; he did not even dare approach her.

For a long time he remained in this position; at last, feeling tired, he sat down. A quarter of an hour had passed, and yet the woman did not arise. The child at length got tired of remaining quiet, and seeing an earthenware bowl full of *kras* and chopped onions on the table, he took up a spoon and began to eat.

Through the narrow window he could see the workmen opposite preparing their midday meal. A woman had brought an enormous bowl of cabbage soup, which she placed on the table before them. The canary still trilled his merry song, the sun filled the room with his bright beams, and the child began to be more cheerful. His mother was quiet now, and he thought that she was no longer suffering.

All of a sudden the thought flashed across him: "Did they give me exactly the right change?" He laid the money, which he had held all this while tightly in his hand, very gently on the table, and began to count it. Twice he seemed to have a kopeck too little, and terror brought a cold sweat out on his forehead. The third time he counted with a trembling hand, for his mother never overlooked mistakes about money. He

had often heard her say: "I earn money very hardly by the sweat of my brow; what misery, what hardships have I not to undergo in order to earn these few kopecks, and I feel sure this striving for money will be my death. Day after day I slave from morning till night for strangers. I can scarcely move, but must work on, or we shall die of hunger. When, oh! my God—when shall I have a moment's repose? It will not be this side of the grave."

After counting his money for the third time, Illouscha breathed more freely, for it was right—not a kopeck short!

Beyond twenty he did not know how to count; all his knowledge of arithmetic stopped there, for his mother never gave him a larger sum than twenty kopecks. He knew that there were higher numbers, but had never troubled his head about them. The poor little fellow had not learnt much. He had been told that it was wrong to dip his bread into the salt; it was wrong to put the left shoe on before the right; and that no work would end prosperously that had begun on a Friday. His grandmother had also taught him that there was to be a double year before the last judgment; indeed she had taught him many such things, and he believed them all implicitly. Once, while sitting on a bench, crooning as children are wont to do, he happened to swing his little legs.

"What are you swinging your legs for?" cried his grandmother, "what evil spirit do you wish to amuse?" At these words Illouscha became quiet and confused, for he would not for the whole world conciliate a devil.

When his grandmother died, all her wise sayings were deeply imprinted on the boy's brain. Since then no one had concerned himself much about Illouscha or his education. His mother had no time to spare, for she worked from morn till night for their daily bread. His father only came home on *feite* day, when he brought Illouscha little presents, got drunk, beat his wife, and returned to barracks. "There is no help for it," he would say: "our life is such; a soldier cannot exist without brandy—he belongs to a race different from all others." Then turning to the child he would say: "Do you know, my boy, what answer the soldier will give to his God in the next world? I was born little, stupid I grew, drank in my prime, in old age was ignorant, and thus I died." These words were calculated to give the poor boy an insight into the deep miseries and temptations of a soldier's life. But he loved his father dearly, for to his child he was always kind. He petted him, and brought *bonbons*, chatted with him as with an old comrade, and confided all his troubles to him in spite of the great difference in age. But Illouscha's heart had been won by the riddles his father bade him guess, even more than by his *bonbons*. For instance, the old soldier would stand erect before his son, and in a serious tone of voice say: "A black sheet walks in at the window—guess what that can be?"

"It is a wolf," replies the child smartly.

"What an idea! a wolf! why should a wolf come in at the window?"

"The wind then?" replied the boy confusedly.

"No, no; guess again."

"A robber?"

"Wrong again," shouted the old soldier, as Illouscha ransacked his little brain for an answer.

"It is the night," quoth the father, with an air of importance, and then chuckled with a delight equal to that felt by the boy. This singular creature really loved his child, and well knew that his affection was returned with all the intensity of child love. The soldier's huge brown hands, his sunburnt neck, his loud laugh, all were dear to the boy—he seemed adorable. Illouscha was never weary of kissing his father's rough cheek, and would follow him up the street to see the last of him whenever he was forced to return to his regiment. A few months previous to the period

at which this story opens, the old soldier had left his home for the Crimean War.

Illouscha had long wept bitterly, and felt his absence acutely. His mother also cried, but silently and by fits and starts—sometimes rudely brushing away her tears to scold her child. She had a violent temper, and was detested by the other inhabitants of the house. There remained none with whom she had not at one time or other had a serious quarrel. The neighbours, who were in the habit of paying each other visits at odd moments, in quest of soap, candle-ends, or butter, studiously avoided her—they knew only too well the kind of answer they would receive:—

"Just go next door, please, they eat cabbage soup daily at my neighbour's."

None could guess why she was always so ill-tempered, and were content to suppose that she had been born so, and that her husband's blows had not softened her character. Alas! the dislike borne toward the mother fell also upon her child. The lodgers allowed him no peace. They called him "son of a dog;" drove him away when he came to draw water, and jostled him on the staircase as he went up or down. This cruel treatment, which seemed so unjust to Illouscha, made him timid and resentful. He shunned the neighbours persistently, and always choose the moment when the courtyard was deserted to take his bucket to the well. If some one by chance happened to say a kind word to him, he drew back abashed, not believing it possible that such advances could be sincere.

He had but two friends—two half-starved dogs, who passed their time prowling about the courtyard seeking in vain for something to eat. One of these dogs was a noted thief, and if by chance a door was left open, he would slip in and seize upon whatever he could find. The other one kept honest, although his only sustenance was the garbage scattered around the courtyard. This was Illouscha's especial friend. In his saddest moments he would go in quest of him, and having enticed him to some obscure corner, would kiss his wet muzzle affectionately, sobbing out bitterly; "I am poor, Orelka! thou also art poor, we are both very, very miserable!"

The dog appeared to understand the child's grief, and as he licked his face would gaze at him with his intelligent eyes as much as to say: "What can we do? nothing. It is evidently our fate, let us bear it patiently."

Night had crept over Moscow—the neighbouring clocks struck ten. The sky was black with storm-clouds, which swept swiftly over the roofs. Thunder growled from afar, and whirlwinds of dust in the streets betokened a coming tempest. Darkness pervaded the sick-room. Illouscha had shrunk terrified into its farthest corner. His mother stirred not, but lay there with her face buried in the pillow. Twice the lightning flashed through the room—he had always been afraid of lightning—he could bear the darkness no longer. Hitherto he had remained sitting in the dark because his mother forbade him to light candles in the summer-time, but fear of the storm gradually overcame the fear of his mother's displeasure, which generally found vent in blows. Illouscha crept softly across the room to the stove, and groping inside drew out an old lantern containing a small bit of candle. He next hunted about under the stove, and at length found, besides a piece of soap and an old stocking, a box of matches. Illouscha lit the candle, anxiously watching to see if his mother would wake. She groaned afresh, and tossed convulsively about, but without opening her eyes.

(To be continued)

SELF-DECIPLINE constitutes one of the principal and most essential elements of human character. It enables us in all circumstances to persevere in the performance of the great duties of life.

ONCE a 1  
Hen  
Toget  
The Fro  
And le

The wor  
Who l  
And bui  
And s

One day  
She fo  
She said  
brea  
Said t

.. Nor I,  
in t  
Red F  
But fle  
And r

.. Who'l  
Said t  
And, sc  
Frog

The litt  
But a  
And wh  
.. Wh

.. Not I  
yav  
.. Nor  
So the t  
.. Wh

.. I will  
squ  
As th  
.. Not n  
Re  
And

ONE  
with l  
her blu  
ment.  
cried,  
ing lik  
are sw

.. Sa  
fully,  
least b  
the fa

when  
she m  
would  
in the  
Patty  
were s

idea of  
mothe:  
.. Sure  
.. Y

Her  
True  
that of  
air, an  
little b

.. I  
.. But  
and w  
little t

sop's,  
no, I'l  
ing th  
once b

swarm  
.. M  
mothe  
and to

.. Y  
and do  
So  
shaker