

NARKA, THE NIHILIST.

BY KATHLEEN O'MEARA. CHAPTER XI.

The weather had improved, the wind had fallen, and it was now possible to get out. The deep snow of course put riding out of the question; Narka regretted this, for she was a perfect horse-woman, and there was a favorite Arab of Sibi's at the castle which was always at her orders. Her fearless command of the strong, spirited animal that bore her along with a stride as swift as a bound's gave her a sense of power that was exhilarating. When she was in the saddle, flying through the air like a bird, she felt like a prisoner enjoying a momentary escape from captivity. The flight of the body seemed to liberate the spirit and give her breathing space. In doors she was obliged to keep strict guard over every look and gesture; she had to keep down her very thoughts with a strong hand lest they should find their way into her face, and betray her to Madame Lark's watchful eyes. This constant pressure on her life—that inner life, which, to Narka, was so much more vital than the outward—made her sometimes feel as if she were, like the rivers, frozen and locked up in ice. When this feeling grew strong she would take out the betrothal ring that she wore round her neck like an amulet, and she would slip it on her finger, and recall every word, every caress, of Basil's when he had placed it there, until her spirits rose and her heart expanded, and she could look forward to the coming spring, when the sun would shine out upon her life, and unlock its frozen stream and set its waters free.

The next best thing to a ride was a drive; so the first day the weather grew genial enough to admit of it she sent up to the castle, where there were horses and vehicles of all sorts, to say she wanted a sleigh that afternoon. It was at the door at the hour she named.

The winter landscape was beautiful. The cabins and cottages, sheeted in smooth, hard snow, looked like marble shrines and tombs, from which the smoke curled up in blue spirals, like incense from thuribles. As the sleigh turned into the forest the sun shone out, and the spectacle was so dazzling that Narka made the Cossack pull up, and paused to admire it. The wilderness of white trees stretched on and on as far as the eye could reach, tossing up their arms in every fantastic form against the sky; every bough was festooned with garlands of snow flowers, or laden with bunches of crystals that sparkled like diamonds in the sunlight. The forest might have been a cathedral in ruins, so profound was the silence. Not the faintest murmur of insect life disturbed the deep hush. The very air held its breath. Suddenly a branch, not strong enough to support its mass of glittering stalactites, snapped and fell; the crash broke the stillness for a moment, but only to make it seem more profound the next.

There was something very impressive in this death-like silence of the white solitude that held so many secrets buried in its depths, so many mysteries that would never be revealed in this world. The forest was like the sea—it seldom gave up its dead. There was a pile of stones on the spot where Larchoff had been found. It had risen slowly; every stone that went to the heap had been flung with a curse, and this was the only monument which had been raised to the murdered man. As Narka noticed the snow crusted trophy, a chill crept over her. Would that dark secret ever be revealed? The thought of Father Christopher made her heart sick, and yet she could not deny that the crime—or the accident—might have been followed by even a more unbearable sacrifice than his cruel captivity.

She told the Cossack to drive on. She was sorry she had stopped; the sight of that mound chased away every other thought, and poisoned the pleasure of the drive. The sleigh bounded along for nearly an hour. Then she turned homeward, taking another road, that led past Ivan Gorff's house.

The absence of Ivan and Sophie was a great loss. They were not close friends; but Narka had known them all her life, and they were kind and pleasant neighbors. Moreover, Ivan would be sure to have news of Basil. Ivan's resources were numerous, and sometimes mysteriously so.

As the sleigh was passing the gate, Narka was surprised to see the windows of the first story, where Sophie's rooms were, open. Could the Gorffs have returned? She desired the Cossack to turn in. The gate stood open, and as the sleigh flew up the walk to the house, she saw Ivan at the window. Before they had reached the door, he was in the hall waiting for her.

"This is a good omen!" he said, his whole countenance beaming with delightful surprise. "I only arrived an hour ago. I was just going to see you." He was radiant with pleasure, but his face wore deep traces of suffering, either moral or physical; perhaps both.

"How are you, Ivan?" said Narka, in a tone of kind anxiety that he was not used to from her. "I am well," he answered, with a shrug of his broad shoulders; "better than I ought to be, considering. Sophie is not well."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Narka, feelingly. "Is it her chest?" "Yes, she has a cough that shakes her in pieces. It is always in my ears like a death knell. But I am a fool. She is better out of the world than in it. Have you had any news lately?" he asked, turning abruptly from the subject. It was evidently one he could not bear to discuss.

"No, Sibi's afraid to give me much news."

"She can't be too careful, or you either," Ivan added, with a significant nod. "That is why Basil does not dare write. Every line you write or receive is read. He is in good health. I saw him ten days ago. He was—" "Ten days ago!" Narka interrupted, eagerly. "How is he?" "What is he doing?"

"He is waiting," said Ivan, in his quiet way. "Have you heard about his confession?" "Confession?" repeated Narka, and she changed color. "No."

"As soon as he heard the trick they had played him about Father Christopher's release, he wrote to the Prince, telling him that it was he who shot Larchoff."

"What?—Basil?" "He said he had fired on him by mistake; that he would have acknowledged it at the moment, but he had not the courage to declare that he had accidentally taken the life of a man whom he was known to hate—to be on bad terms with. When Father Christopher was accused, he thought the best thing to do was to go to St. Petersburg and sue for his release. And they cheated him into believing he had made it all right."

"And then what did the Prince do?" Ivan gave a low smile. "He sent him word that his confession came too late to do any good to Father Christopher. Basil might have known this. What is written is written. The Prince said if he wanted to play heroics he might come back and give himself up as the murderer, and get sentence of death added to the sentence that was ready awaiting him for his other misdemeanors. This would not in the smallest degree help Father Christopher, but it would be a fine thing to do."

"And what did Basil answer?" "He wrote a letter to the Emperor, telling the whole story, and pledging his honor to go back and deliver himself up to justice, if His Majesty would sign an order for the Emperor's liberation."

"Oh my God! . . . Well?" "I never could have believed Basil was such a fool," continued Ivan, turning his face to Narka, with his slow smile, and his eyes brimming over with hilarity. "What do you think he did? He guessed as the Prince had so many friends in the imperial closet, there was little chance of this letter being allowed to reach the Emperor's hands, so he confided it to the servant who had brought him the Prince's letter, and gave him a lot of money to take it to a person in St. Petersburg, who was to convey it to the Emperor. Could you have believed Basil would be such a fool?" Ivan seemed quite to enjoy the revelation of Basil's foolishness.

"The servant did not deliver the letter," said Narka, breathless and impatient. "He did deliver it—to the Prince of course."

"Ah! And what did the Prince do?" "He put it into the fire. What else could he do?" Narka tried to steal a deep breath unnoticed. "I suppose," she said, "one could not expect he would have done otherwise." Then, after a pause, "Did Basil do anything after this?" "Basil, in due course, received an answer from Prince W., his Majesty's secretary, informing him that his august master was not deceived by his generous subterfuge for saving the life of Father Christopher; and, moreover, admitting even that this particular charge against Father Christopher was false, there were a score of others proved, some that would have hanged him had not the imperial clemency been extended toward him for the sake of Prince Zorokoff. After this, Basil gave up the game. He had played badly, luckily for himself."

Narka, in her heart, echoed "luckily for himself." But she was proud to know that Basil had done his utmost to set Father Christopher free, even at the sacrifice of his own liberty, and the risk of his life. After a pause, she said, "Do you believe Basil shot Larchoff?" "No, I don't," said Ivan. "You think he accused himself to obtain the Father's release?" "No, I don't."

"I believe he thought he shot Larchoff. He told me he fired at what he took for a fox crouching behind a tree; there was a sound of something falling with a heavy thud on the dry brambles but as it was growing dark he did not grope to the spot and examine his game; he meant to tell the keeper; but when he got home he forgot all about it, and it was only when the news came of Larchoff's being found murdered that, like a flash of lightning, he saw he had shot him."

"It looks likely enough," observed Narka in an undertone, as if communing with herself.

"If it had been Larchoff he would have cried out, for he was not shot dead; he did not even lose consciousness; he was sensible to the last, and the doctor said he had been bleeding for a couple of hours, and that half an hour earlier he would still have had strength most likely to tell everything. It was loss of blood that did for him."

"Then who do you suppose shot him?" inquired Narka. "Ivan's big shoulders went slowly up, and then slowly down. "It may as likely have been Father Christopher. The wood was too dark for any one to take aim with safety; but everybody was on the *qui vive* about the wolf, and anxious to get the reward Basil had put on the brute's head."

"Father Christopher would not have been looking out for that; and he did not carry arms when he went on sick calls," argued Narka.

"Not in a general way. But there was the wolf, remember. I don't want to fasten it on Father Christopher," Ivan continued, turning his candid glance on her; "I only want to show that it was as likely to be his doings as Basil's. I did my best to make Basil see this, but he will have it that his bullet hit Larchoff. And he accuses himself of having killed Father Christopher, as well as Larchoff, by not acknowledging the accident at once. If I had not come in the nick of time, he would have been off to St. Petersburg, and given himself up as a prisoner."

"Oh!" Narka exclaimed, with a shudder; "that would have been madness!" "Stark madness, and without compensation of any sort. In the first place he would not have released Father Christopher, and in the next place he would have ruined Princess Sibi—probably the Prince; the property would have been confiscated, and the sin of the son would most likely have been visited immediately on the father. But I had hard work to make Basil see this."

"But you did make him see it?" "Yes, I finally did."

"How did you hear all about the miscarriage of his letter?" Narka asked—"about the forged answer sent from the emperor?" "Not forged, false; the letter was written by Prince W.—Prince Zorokoff told me the story himself when I went to him to St. Petersburg with a letter from Basil."

It apparently did not occur to Ivan that there was anything shameful in the systematic trickery of the prince, or in his, Ivan's, making himself a tacit accomplice in it. To Narka it was a genuine satisfaction, an intense relief, to learn that Basil had endeavored to undo the wrong he had done, and to feel at the same time that Ivan and the prince stood between him and any future rash proceedings of honor and remorse.

"Are you going to make any stay here?" she asked. "No; I leave to-morrow morning."

"You are not likely to see Basil soon again?" "I shall see him at Easter. By the way, he gave me a letter for you," Ivan said, casting about for his pocket-book, as if it were by chance he had remembered it.

"And to think of your not telling me that at once!" said Narka, as he handed her the precious letter. "I had more to tell you than Basil has put in his letter; that I'll swear to," replied Ivan, good-humoredly. "Are you going? Won't you wait to read it?"

"No; I have waited so long, it can wait till I get home." Narka was not going to open that letter before him, and run the chance of betraying herself. "Give my love to Sophie," she said, "and ask her to write to me. Write to me yourself, and give us news of her; that will be better."

Ivan accompanied her down stairs, and assisted her into the sleigh, and stood watching her as it drove down the avenue and disappeared along the road.

THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

For those who have always lived, through God's goodness, with peaceful hearts in their Father's house—the Church—the truths which God has revealed and which are the inheritance of the faithful have become so familiar as to be accepted very frequently in a certain dull, matter-of-course way, and too often their immense value and importance are far from being sufficiently realized. We propose to speak about one of these well known truths, and to point out the advantage which even the simplest and humblest of Catholics possesses over the greatest and best of those who have not the light of faith. This advantage consists in the knowledge which every Catholic has of his own dignity and destiny. And in order that this may be seen more clearly, place in contrast with our knowledge the ignorance and blindness in which the minds of the greatest and most sincere and earnest men of past times were wrapped on these all-important points. A great philosopher has said: "Like the race of leaves the race of man is. The wind in autumn strews the earth with old leaves, then the spring the woods with new ones. All men are born in the spring season, and soon a wind hath scattered them, and thereafter the wood people itself again with another generation of leaves." Here we have the pagan summing-up of man's life. This is all it appeared to be worth in the eyes of its great philosophers. Men are as valueless as the leaves which come and go with spring and autumn.

And what shall we think of the actions of men, their toils and struggles? Listen again to our pagan teacher: "Hath the ball which one casteth from his hand any profit of its rising, or loss as it descendeth again, or in its fall? or the bubble as it groweth and breaketh on the air? or the flame of the lamp from the beginning to the end of its history?" In other words, the toils and labors of man, his struggles and aspirations, his joys and sorrows, are of no more profit to him than is its rising and falling to the ball which a man throws, or the bubble with a child blows.

Let us turn now to the teaching of the Church. What does she tell us man is? What in her eyes is the value of man's actions? Of course she admits, nay, insists, upon the fact that our sojourn here is but for a short time, but at the same time she tells us that we have a never-ending existence, that, for good or evil, for weal or woe, we shall never cease to be. She tells us, too, that our souls, each and every one of them, came from the hands of an all-perfect and infinitely holy Being, and that this all-perfect and infinitely holy Being gave them to us to take care of, and that according as we take good care of them or not for the few years we are in this world, so our lot and state will be for endless ages. She tells us that these souls of ours were made in the image and likeness of God, and that it is our duty to preserve and keep this image and likeness in which they were created, and that it is by the acts of our daily life that this image and likeness must be preserved and kept.

Scientific men say that we can not set in motion even a small object, we can not throw a ball into the air, without its having an effect which reaches to the utmost bounds of space. Something similar may be said of each and every one of our actions. Not one of them is indifferent. Not one of them but will have an effect in some way or another which will be felt for all eternity.

Do not these considerations open up to us a view of man's dignity and of the value and importance of his actions, which should render our lives precious in our own eyes, and renew the warmth of our attachment to those truths which we have always taken for granted, and to our holy Mother the Church who has so carefully preserved them for us.—Sacred Heart Review.

A Word to Mothers.

When the school days are finished and the homecomings over, many girls are more or less discontented in the home because there seems no special place for them to fill. In school they have had duties and occupations, and have become accustomed to regular hours of employment.

Wise is the mother who, at this trying time, is willing to make a place in the house for the little would be reformer, or the enthusiast who would like to put into practice some way her ideas of house keeping and home making. Let the new ways and the new ideas be tried, and show some hospitality to them and some sympathy to other views than your own.

A division of labors and responsibilities is a happier way of meeting the difficulty than a giving up and over of one's ideas and domain to the perhaps over zealous young woman who should have gained tact and sympathy and some knowledge of how to live happily with others if her school days have been of any value. Encourage her to use her gifts, not only in her own home, but for others.

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THE TREATING HABIT.

Far be it from us to say a word against a generous disposition; where it exists happiness is more likely to be widespread; for generosity presupposes unselfishness and unselfishness is of the very essence of happiness. We cannot be happy alone, and, mingling with others, our thoughts must be mostly for them if we would make ourselves agreeable to them and secure their being agreeable to us. In the case of those who are said to leave the world, but few instances, comparatively, are found of perfect isolation from fellow-creatures, and even in these instances the hermit in his isolated cell thinks and prays not only for himself, but also for others. Nor does he wrap himself up within himself. He walks in spirit continually with God and His angels, and studies to render himself more and more pleasing in their sight. Indeed a generous disposition shines out most conspicuously in the saints—they are ready always to make sacrifice of self for the sake of their fellowmen; they devote their lives in making up for the thoughtlessness and waywardness of worldlylings by their closer intimacy with spiritual things; their wills are kept continuously submissive to the will of God.

Of old it was said of Christians: "See how these Christians love one another." And why? Because they thought for one another, served one another, were careful to set each other good example and avoided scandalizing the least among them; in a word they were truly generous. But generosity does not suppose doing wrong that good may come of it. It is a fallacy, a fatal error to suppose that good can ever come of wrong doing. Whoever would serve his fellow creatures must keep strictly within the limits of right. He may not yield an iota in the wrong direction. There is plenty of room within the limits of right, and in fact there is no true enjoyment outside these limits.

The treating habit as generally understood is outside the limits of true generosity; for, as practiced, it induces to excess, and excess invariably does harm. We wish, therefore, that the treating habit was abolished. But it will not be abolished until what is called "public spirit" opposes it.

The majority must first resolve that an end shall be put to it and they must act upon that resolve. How often have not liquor dealers been heard to say that they would be glad to keep closed on Sundays if all liquor stores were kept closed? Each one awaits a general edict that will be conscientiously carried out before beginning this needed reformation on his own account. So with the treating habit. Until it becomes the fashion to avoid it, no one man, or few men, will undertake to stop it. Or, if perchance, an effort be made, it will soon be abandoned. Several such attempts have been made within our memory, but they failed to accomplish the desired effect. We poor mortals are so weak in presence of the criticism and the jeers of companions!

A very strong incentive to treating which existed for many years, but which, happily is gradually being eliminated, was the notion that in order to do business we should be hail-fellow-well-met; we should treat and be treated. Ah, how far have men gone to make money out of their fellowmen's weaknesses! The costliness of this way of doing business and the new idea of paying salesmen commissions only have well nigh abolished this practice, and it is now found that treating is no longer necessary to make a sale. Indeed the buyer nowadays suspects the quality of the goods offered by the man who treats and very wisely concludes that the seller is better able to provide good wares at reasonable prices when needless expenses in bringing them to his attention and gaining his favorable consideration are avoided.—Catholic Review.

The Congregationalist, in referring to what we said a few weeks ago about the coronation oath which Queen Victoria took on her accession, and which her successor is required by law to take, says: "We have never doubted that in a fair reading of the history of the English Reformation it must be decided that the Church of England intended to do and did put itself outside the line of the Roman corruptions of the Catholic faith." Really, by following that corrupt and lascivious monster, Henry VIII., who when he could not get rid of a wife by divorce or natural death, had her sent to the block through skilful manipulation of his interested followers. Truly, a fine founder for an incorrupt faith! And will the Congregationalist please tell us what are Roman corruptions, and what have they to do with the one unchanging Catholic Church, which, as its name implies, is universal?—Sacred Heart Review.

Strength for the Aged. As age advances the recuperative power of the body decreases. Fatigue clings like a burr to the already depleted store of energy, still further wasting and dissipating it, and in consequence, the elderly find it very hard to keep their spirits up to the "doing" point. An anchor of hope and safety is found in the energizing action of Maltine with Coca Wine, which imparts, almost magically, strength and vigor to the failing powers; and through its nutritive and tonic properties renews those functional activities upon which depend health of body and mind. Maltine with Coca Wine rapidly restores appetite, improves digestion, imparts tone and vigor to the nervous system; in a word is a strength-giver of unequalled excellence. Maltine with Coca Wine is prescribed and recommended by physicians. All druggists sell it.

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Saving a Husband's Life.

Only the other day the newspapers told the story of a plucky woman who saved her husband from drowning on the rock-bound Atlantic coast. There are other dangers beside that of drowning from which a shrewd woman may, by a little diplomacy, save her husband. Men are proverbially reckless about their health. They do not think it worth while to pay any heed to a slight indigestion, a trilling bilious attack, a little nervousness or sleeplessness, or a small loss of appetite. The first they know they have dyspepsia, liver complaint, malaria, rheumatism and nervous prostration. It is cases of 95 per cent. of all cases of consumption. An honest dealer will always give you what you ask for.

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