

CHAPTER IV

Soon after this there came into the dark chamber to fetch Pierre, not the Rhetor but Pierre's sponsor, Willarski, whom he recognized by his voice. To fresh questions as to the firmness of his resolution Pierre replied: "Yes, yes, I agree," and with a beaming, childlike smile, his fat chest uncovered, stepping unevenly and timidly in one slippers and one booted foot, he advanced, while Willarski held a sword to his bare chest. He was conducted from that room along passages that turned backwards and forwards and was at last brought to the doors of the Lodge. Willarski coughed, he was answered by the Masonic knock with mallets, the doors opened before them. A bass voice (Pierre was still blindfolded) questioned him as to who he was, when and where he was born, and so on. Then he was again led somewhere still blindfolded, and as they went along he was told allegories of the toils of his pilgrimage, of holy friendship, of the Eternal Architect of the universe, and of the courage with which he should endure toils and dangers. During these wanderings, Pierre noticed that he was spoken of now as the "Seeker," now as the "Sufferer," and now as the "Postulant," to the accompaniment of various knockings with mallets and swords. As he was being led up to some object he noticed a hesitation and uncertainty among his conductors. He heard those around him disputing in whispers and one of them insisting that he should be led along a certain carpet. After that they took his right hand, placed it on something, and told him to hold a pair of compasses to his left breast with the other hand and to repeat after someone who read aloud an oath of fidelity to the laws of the Order. The candles were then extinguished and some spirit lighted, as Pierre knew by the smell, and he was told that he would now see the lesser light. The bandage was taken off his eyes and, by the faint light of the burning spirit, Pierre, as in a dream, saw several men standing before him, wearing aprons like the Rhetor's and holding swords in their hands pointed at his breast. Among them stood a man whose white shirt was stained with blood. On seeing this, Pierre moved forward with his breast toward the swords, meaning them to pierce it. But the swords were drawn back from him and he was at once blindfolded again.

"Now thou hast seen the lesser light," uttered a voice. Then the candles were relit and he was told that he would see the full light; the bandage was again removed and more than ten voices said together: "Sic transit gloria mundi."

Pierre gradually began to recover himself and looked about at the room and at the people in it. Round a long table covered with black sat some twelve men in garments like those he had already seen. Some of them Pierre had met in Petersburg society. In the President's chair sat a young man he did not know, with a peculiar cross hanging from his neck. On his right sat the Italian abbé whom Pierre had met at Anna Pávlovna's two years before. There were also present a very distinguished dignitary and a Swiss who had formerly been tutor at the Kurágins'. All maintained a solemn silence, listening to the words of the President, who held a mallet in his hand. Let into the wall was a star-shaped light. At one side of the table was a small carpet with

various figures worked upon it, at the other was something resembling an altar on which lay a Testament and a skull. Round it stood seven large candlesticks like those used in churches. Two of the brothers led Pierre up to the altar, placed his feet at right angles, and bade him lie down, saying that he must prostrate himself at the Gates of the Temple.

“He must first receive the trowel,” whispered one of the brothers.

“Oh, hush, please!” said another.

Pierre, perplexed, looked round with his shortsighted eyes without obeying, and suddenly doubts arose in his mind. “Where am I? What am I doing? Aren’t they laughing at me? Shan’t I be ashamed to remember this?” But these doubts only lasted a moment. Pierre glanced at the serious faces of those around, remembered all he had already gone through, and realized that he could not stop halfway. He was aghast at his hesitation and, trying to arouse his former devotional feeling, prostrated himself before the Gates of the Temple. And really, the feeling of devotion returned to him even more strongly than before. When he had lain there some time, he was told to get up, and a white leather apron, such as the others wore, was put on him: he was given a trowel and three pairs of gloves, and then the Grand Master addressed him. He told him that he should try to do nothing to stain the whiteness of that apron, which symbolized strength and purity; then of the unexplained trowel, he told him to toil with it to cleanse his own heart from vice, and indulgently to smooth with it the heart of his neighbor. As to the first pair of gloves, a man’s, he said that Pierre could not know their meaning but must keep them. The second pair of man’s gloves he was to wear at the meetings, and finally of the third, a pair of women’s gloves, he said: “Dear brother, these woman’s gloves are intended for you too. Give them to the woman whom you shall honor most of all. This gift will be a pledge of your purity of heart to her whom you select to be your worthy helpmeet in Masonry.” And after a pause, he added: “But beware, dear brother, that these gloves do not deck hands that are unclean.” While the Grand Master said these last words it seemed to Pierre that he grew embarrassed. Pierre himself grew still more confused, blushed like a child till tears came to his eyes, began looking about him uneasily, and an awkward pause followed.

This silence was broken by one of the brethren, who led Pierre up to the rug and began reading to him from a manuscript book an explanation of all the figures on it: the sun, the moon, a hammer, a plumb line, a trowel, a rough stone and a squared stone, a pillar, three windows, and so on. Then a place was assigned to Pierre, he was shown the signs of the Lodge, told the password, and at last was permitted to sit down. The Grand Master began reading the statutes. They were very long, and Pierre, from joy, agitation, and embarrassment, was not in a state to understand what was being read. He managed to follow only the last words of the statutes and these remained in his mind.

“In our temples we recognize no other distinctions,” read the Grand Master, “but those between virtue and vice. Beware of making any distinctions which may infringe equality. Fly to a brother’s aid whoever he may be, exhort him who goeth astray, raise him that falleth,

never bear malice or enmity toward thy brother. Be kindly and courteous. Kindle in all hearts the flame of virtue. Share thy happiness with thy neighbor, and may envy never dim the purity of that bliss. Forgive thy enemy, do not avenge thyself except by doing him good. Thus fulfilling the highest law thou shalt regain traces of the ancient dignity which thou hast lost.”

He finished and, getting up, embraced and kissed Pierre, who, with tears of joy in his eyes, looked round him, not knowing how to answer the congratulations and greetings from acquaintances that met him on all sides. He acknowledged no acquaintances but saw in all these men only brothers, and burned with impatience to set to work with them.

The Grand Master rapped with his mallet. All the Masons sat down in their places, and one of them read an exhortation on the necessity of humility.

The Grand Master proposed that the last duty should be performed, and the distinguished dignitary who bore the title of “Collector of Alms” went round to all the brothers. Pierre would have liked to subscribe all he had, but fearing that it might look like pride subscribed the same amount as the others.

The meeting was at an end, and on reaching home Pierre felt as if he had returned from a long journey on which he had spent dozens of years, had become completely changed, and had quite left behind his former habits and way of life.