

CHAPTER V

The day after he had been received into the Lodge, Pierre was sitting at home reading a book and trying to fathom the significance of the Square, one side of which symbolized God, another moral things, a third physical things, and the fourth a combination of these. Now and then his attention wandered from the book and the Square and he formed in imagination a new plan of life. On the previous evening at the Lodge, he had heard that a rumor of his duel had reached the Emperor and that it would be wiser for him to leave Petersburg. Pierre proposed going to his estates in the south and there attending to the welfare of his serfs. He was joyfully planning this new life, when Prince Vasíli suddenly entered the room.

“My dear fellow, what have you been up to in Moscow? Why have you quarreled with H  l  ne, mon cher? You are under a delusion,” said Prince Vas  li, as he entered. “I know all about it, and I can tell you positively that H  l  ne is as innocent before you as Christ was before the Jews.”

Pierre was about to reply, but Prince Vas  li interrupted him.

“And why didn’t you simply come straight to me as to a friend? I know all about it and understand it all,” he said. “You behaved as becomes a man who values his honor, perhaps too hastily, but we won’t go into that. But consider the position in which you are placing her and me in the eyes of society, and even of the court,” he added, lowering his voice. “She is living in Moscow and you are here. Remember, dear boy,” and he drew Pierre’s arm downwards, “it is simply a misunderstanding. I expect you feel it so yourself. Let us write her a letter at once, and she’ll come here and all will be explained, or else, my dear boy, let me tell you it’s quite likely you’ll have to suffer for it.”

Prince Vas  li gave Pierre a significant look.

“I know from reliable sources that the Dowager Empress is taking a keen interest in the whole affair. You know she is very gracious to H  l  ne.”

Pierre tried several times to speak, but, on one hand, Prince Vas  li did not let him and, on the other, Pierre himself feared to begin to speak in the tone of decided refusal and disagreement in which he had firmly resolved to answer his father-in-law. Moreover, the words of the Masonic statutes, “be kindly and courteous,” recurred to him. He blinked, went red, got up and sat down again, struggling with himself to do what was for him the most difficult thing in life—to say an unpleasant thing to a man’s face, to say what the other, whoever he might be, did not expect. He was so used to submitting to Prince Vas  li’s tone of careless self-assurance that he felt he would be unable to withstand it now, but he also felt that on what he said now his future depended—whether he would follow the same old road, or that new path so attractively shown him by the Masons, on which he firmly

believed he would be reborn to a new life.

“Now, dear boy,” said Prince Vasíli playfully, “say ‘yes,’ and I’ll write to her myself, and we will kill the fatted calf.”

But before Prince Vasíli had finished his playful speech, Pierre, without looking at him, and with a kind of fury that made him like his father, muttered in a whisper:

“Prince, I did not ask you here. Go, please go!” And he jumped up and opened the door for him.

“Go!” he repeated, amazed at himself and glad to see the look of confusion and fear that showed itself on Prince Vasíli’s face.

“What’s the matter with you? Are you ill?”

“Go!” the quivering voice repeated. And Prince Vasíli had to go without receiving any explanation.

A week later, Pierre, having taken leave of his new friends, the Masons, and leaving large sums of money with them for alms, went away to his estates. His new brethren gave him letters to the Kiev and Odessa Masons and promised to write to him and guide him in his new activity.