

CHAPTER XIII

In external ways Pierre had hardly changed at all. In appearance he was just what he used to be. As before he was absent-minded and seemed occupied not with what was before his eyes but with something special of his own. The difference between his former and present self was that formerly when he did not grasp what lay before him or was said to him, he had puckered his forehead painfully as if vainly seeking to distinguish something at a distance. At present he still forgot what was said to him and still did not see what was before his eyes, but he now looked with a scarcely perceptible and seemingly ironic smile at what was before him and listened to what was said, though evidently seeing and hearing something quite different. Formerly he had appeared to be a kindhearted but unhappy man, and so people had been inclined to avoid him. Now a smile at the joy of life always played round his lips, and sympathy for others shone in his eyes with a questioning look as to whether they were as contented as he was, and people felt pleased by his presence.

Previously he had talked a great deal, grew excited when he talked, and seldom listened; now he was seldom carried away in conversation and knew how to listen so that people readily told him their most intimate secrets.

The princess, who had never liked Pierre and had been particularly hostile to him since she had felt herself under obligations to him after the old count's death, now after staying a short time in Orël—where she had come intending to show Pierre that in spite of his ingratitude she considered it her duty to nurse him—felt to her surprise and vexation that she had become fond of him. Pierre did not in any way seek her approval, he merely studied her with interest. Formerly she had felt that he regarded her with indifference and irony, and so had shrunk into herself as she did with others and had shown him only the combative side of her nature; but now he seemed to be trying to understand the most intimate places of her heart, and, mistrustfully at first but afterwards gratefully, she let him see the hidden, kindly sides of her character.

The most cunning man could not have crept into her confidence more successfully, evoking memories of the best times of her youth and showing sympathy with them. Yet Pierre's cunning consisted simply in finding pleasure in drawing out the human qualities of the embittered, hard, and (in her own way) proud princess.

“Yes, he is a very, very kind man when he is not under the influence of bad people but of people such as myself,” thought she.

His servants too—Terénty and Váska—in their own way noticed the change that had taken place in Pierre. They considered that he had become much “simpler.” Terénty, when he had helped him undress and wished him good night, often lingered with his master's boots in his hands and clothes over his arm, to see whether he would not start a talk. And Pierre, noticing that Terénty wanted a chat, generally kept him there.

“Well, tell me... now, how did you get food?” he would ask.

And Terénty would begin talking of the destruction of Moscow, and of the old count, and would stand for a long time holding the clothes and talking, or sometimes listening to Pierre’s stories, and then would go out into the hall with a pleasant sense of intimacy with his master and affection for him.

The doctor who attended Pierre and visited him every day, though he considered it his duty as a doctor to pose as a man whose every moment was of value to suffering humanity, would sit for hours with Pierre telling him his favorite anecdotes and his observations on the characters of his patients in general, and especially of the ladies.

“It’s a pleasure to talk to a man like that; he is not like our provincials,” he would say.

There were several prisoners from the French army in Orël, and the doctor brought one of them, a young Italian, to see Pierre.

This officer began visiting Pierre, and the princess used to make fun of the tenderness the Italian expressed for him.

The Italian seemed happy only when he could come to see Pierre, talk with him, tell him about his past, his life at home, and his love, and pour out to him his indignation against the French and especially against Napoleon.

“If all Russians are in the least like you, it is sacrilege to fight such a nation,” he said to Pierre. “You, who have suffered so from the French, do not even feel animosity toward them.”

Pierre had evoked the passionate affection of the Italian merely by evoking the best side of his nature and taking a pleasure in so doing.

During the last days of Pierre’s stay in Orël his old Masonic acquaintance Count Willarski, who had introduced him to the lodge in 1807, came to see him. Willarski was married to a Russian heiress who had a large estate in Orël province, and he occupied a temporary post in the commissariat department in that town.

Hearing that Bezúkhov was in Orël, Willarski, though they had never been intimate, came to him with the professions of friendship and intimacy that people who meet in a desert generally express for one another. Willarski felt dull in Orël and was pleased to meet a man of his own circle and, as he supposed, of similar interests.

But to his surprise Willarski soon noticed that Pierre had lagged much behind the times, and had sunk, as he expressed it to himself, into apathy and egotism.

“You are letting yourself go, my dear fellow,” he said.

But for all that Willarski found it pleasanter now than it had been

formerly to be with Pierre, and came to see him every day. To Pierre as he looked at and listened to Willarski, it seemed strange to think that he had been like that himself but a short time before.

Willarski was a married man with a family, busy with his family affairs, his wife's affairs, and his official duties. He regarded all these occupations as hindrances to life, and considered that they were all contemptible because their aim was the welfare of himself and his family. Military, administrative, political, and Masonic interests continually absorbed his attention. And Pierre, without trying to change the other's views and without condemning him, but with the quiet, joyful, and amused smile now habitual to him, was interested in this strange though very familiar phenomenon.

There was a new feature in Pierre's relations with Willarski, with the princess, with the doctor, and with all the people he now met, which gained for him the general good will. This was his acknowledgment of the impossibility of changing a man's convictions by words, and his recognition of the possibility of everyone thinking, feeling, and seeing things each from his own point of view. This legitimate peculiarity of each individual which used to excite and irritate Pierre now became a basis of the sympathy he felt for, and the interest he took in, other people. The difference, and sometimes complete contradiction, between men's opinions and their lives, and between one man and another, pleased him and drew from him an amused and gentle smile.

In practical matters Pierre unexpectedly felt within himself a center of gravity he had previously lacked. Formerly all pecuniary questions, especially requests for money to which, as an extremely wealthy man, he was very exposed, produced in him a state of hopeless agitation and perplexity. "To give or not to give?" he had asked himself. "I have it and he needs it. But someone else needs it still more. Who needs it most? And perhaps they are both impostors?" In the old days he had been unable to find a way out of all these surmises and had given to all who asked as long as he had anything to give. Formerly he had been in a similar state of perplexity with regard to every question concerning his property, when one person advised one thing and another something else.

Now to his surprise he found that he no longer felt either doubt or perplexity about these questions. There was now within him a judge who by some rule unknown to him decided what should or should not be done.

He was as indifferent as heretofore to money matters, but now he felt certain of what ought and what ought not to be done. The first time he had recourse to his new judge was when a French prisoner, a colonel, came to him and, after talking a great deal about his exploits, concluded by making what amounted to a demand that Pierre should give him four thousand francs to send to his wife and children. Pierre refused without the least difficulty or effort, and was afterwards surprised how simple and easy had been what used to appear so insurmountably difficult. At the same time that he refused the colonel's demand he made up his mind that he must have recourse to artifice when leaving Orël, to induce the Italian officer to accept some money of which he was evidently in need. A further proof to Pierre of his own

more settled outlook on practical matters was furnished by his decision with regard to his wife's debts and to the rebuilding of his houses in and near Moscow.

His head steward came to him at Orël and Pierre reckoned up with him his diminished income. The burning of Moscow had cost him, according to the head steward's calculation, about two million rubles.

To console Pierre for these losses the head steward gave him an estimate showing that despite these losses his income would not be diminished but would even be increased if he refused to pay his wife's debts which he was under no obligation to meet, and did not rebuild his Moscow house and the country house on his Moscow estate, which had cost him eighty thousand rubles a year and brought in nothing.

"Yes, of course that's true," said Pierre with a cheerful smile. "I don't need all that at all. By being ruined I have become much richer."

But in January Savélich came from Moscow and gave him an account of the state of things there, and spoke of the estimate an architect had made of the cost of rebuilding the town and country houses, speaking of this as of a settled matter. About the same time he received letters from Prince Vasili and other Petersburg acquaintances speaking of his wife's debts. And Pierre decided that the steward's proposals which had so pleased him were wrong and that he must go to Petersburg and settle his wife's affairs and must rebuild in Moscow. Why this was necessary he did not know, but he knew for certain that it was necessary. His income would be reduced by three fourths, but he felt it must be done.

Willarski was going to Moscow and they agreed to travel together.

During the whole time of his convalescence in Orël Pierre had experienced a feeling of joy, freedom, and life; but when during his journey he found himself in the open world and saw hundreds of new faces, that feeling was intensified. Throughout his journey he felt like a schoolboy on holiday. Everyone—the stagecoach driver, the post-house overseers, the peasants on the roads and in the villages—had a new significance for him. The presence and remarks of Willarski who continually deplored the ignorance and poverty of Russia and its backwardness compared with Europe only heightened Pierre's pleasure. Where Willarski saw deadness Pierre saw an extraordinary strength and vitality—the strength which in that vast space amid the snows maintained the life of this original, peculiar, and unique people. He did not contradict Willarski and even seemed to agree with him—an apparent agreement being the simplest way to avoid discussions that could lead to nothing—and he smiled joyfully as he listened to him.