WHAT SHALL WE DO by Leo Tolstoy

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CHAPTER 11 This visit gave the last blow to my self-deception. It became very evident to me that my aim was not only foolish, but even productive of evil. Yet, though I knew this, it seemed my duty to continue the project a little longer: first, because of the article I had written and by my visits I had raised the expectations of the poor; secondly, because what I had said and written had awakened the sympathy of some benefactors, many of whom had promised to assist me personally and with money. And I was expecting to be applied to by both, and hoped to satisfy them as well as I was able. As regards the applications made to me by those who were in need, the following details may be given: I received more than a hundred letters, which came exclusively from the “rich poor,” if I may so express myself. Some of them I visited, and some I left unanswered. In no instance did I succeed in doing any good. All the applications made to me were from persons who were once in a privileged position (I call such persons privileged who receive more from others than they give in return), had lost that position, and were desirous of regaining it. One wanted two hundred rubles in order to keep his business from going to ruin, and to enable him to finish the education of his children; another wanted to have a photographic establishment; a third wanted money to pay his debts, and take his best clothes out of pawn; a fourth was in need of a piano, in order to perfect himself and to earn money to support his family by giving lessons. The

majority did not name any particular sum of money: they simply asked for help; but when I began to investigate what was necessary, it turned out that their wants increased in proportion to the help offered, and nothing satisfactorily resulted. I repeat again, the fault may have been in my want of understanding; but in any case I helped no one, notwithstanding the fact that I made every effort to do so. As for the philanthropists who were to co-operate with me, something very strange and quite unexpected occurred: of all who promised to assist with money, and even stated the amount they would give, not one contributed anything for distribution among the poor. The promises of pecuniary assistance amounted to about three thousand rubles; but of all these people, not one recollected his agreement, or gave me a single kopek. The students alone gave the money which they received as payment for visiting, about twelve rubles; so that my scheme, which was to have collected tens of thousands of rubles from the rich, and to have saved hundreds and thousands of people from misery and vice, ended in my distributing at random some few rubles offered by the students, with twenty-five more sent me by the town-council for my labour as manager, which I positively did not know what to do with. So ended the affair. Then, before leaving Moscow for the country, on the Sunday before the Carnival, I went to the Rzhanoff house in the morning in order to distribute the thirty-seven rubles among the poor. I visited all whom I knew in the lodgings, but found only one invalid, to whom I gave something—five rubles, I think. There was nobody else to give to. Of course, many began to beg; but, as I did not know them, I made up my mind to take the advice of Iván Fedotitch, the tavern-keeper, respecting the distribution of the remaining thirty-two rubles. It was the first day of the carnival. Everybody was smartly dressed, all had had food, and many were drunk. In the yard near the corner of the house stood an old-clothes man, dressed in a ragged peasant’s coat and

bark shoes. He was still hale and hearty. Sorting his purchases, he was putting them into different heaps—leather, iron, and other things—and was singing a merry song at the top of his voice. I began to talk with him. He was seventy years of age; had no relatives; earned his living by dealing in old clothes, and not only did not complain, but said he had enough to eat, drink, and to spare. I asked him who in the place were particularly in want. He became cross, and said plainly that there was no one in want but drunkards and idlers; but on learning my object in asking, he begged me five kopeks for drink, and ran to the tavern for it. I also went to the tavern to see Iván Fedotitch, to ask him to distribute the money for me. It was full; gayly-dressed tipsy prostitutes were walking to and fro; all the tables were occupied; many people were already drunk; and in the small room someone was playing a harmonium, and two people were dancing. Iván Fedotitch, out of respect for me, ordered them to leave off, and sat down next me at a vacant table. I asked him, as he knew his lodgers well, to point out those most in want, as I was intrusted with a little money for distribution, and wished him to direct me. The kind-hearted man (he died a year after) gave me his attention for a time in order to oblige me, although he had to wait on his customers. He began to think it over, and was evidently puzzled. One old waiter had overheard us, and took his part in the conference. They began to go over his lodgers, some of whom were known to me, but they could not agree. “Paramonovna,” suggested the waiter. “Well; yes, she does go hungry sometimes; but she drinks.” “What difference does that make?” “Well, Spiridon Ivanovitch, he has children; that’s the man for you.” But Iván Fedotitch had doubts about Spiridon too. “Akulina, but she has a pension. Ah, but there is the blind man!” To him I myself objected: I had just seen him. This was an old man of eighty years of age, without any relatives. One could scarcely imagine any condition to be

worse; and yet I had just seen him lying drunk on a feather bed, cursing at his comparatively young mistress in the most filthy language. They then named a one-armed boy and his mother. I saw that Iván Fedotitch was in great difficulty owing to his conscientiousness, for he knew that every thing given away by me would be spent at his tavern. But as I had to get rid of my thirty-two rubles, I insisted, and we managed somehow or other to distribute the money. Those who received it were mostly well-dressed, and we had not far to go to find them: they were all in the tavern. The one-armed boy came in top-boots and a red shirt and waistcoat. Thus ended all my benevolent enterprises; and I left for the country vexed with everyone, as it always happens when one does something foolish and harmful. Nothing came of it all, except the train of thoughts and feelings which it called forth in me, which not only did not cease, but doubly agitated my mind.

CHAPTER 12 What did it all mean? I had lived in the country and had entered into relations with the country-poor. It is not out of false modesty, but that I may state the truth, which is necessary in order to understand the run of all my thoughts and feelings, that I must say that in the country I had done perhaps but little for the poor, the help which had been required of me was so small; but even the little I had done had been useful, and had formed round me an atmosphere of love and sympathy with my fellow-creatures, in the midst of whom it might yet be possible for me to quiet the gnawing of my conscience as to the unlawfulness of my life of luxury. On going to the city I had hoped for the same happy relations with the poor, but here things were upon quite another footing. In the city, poverty was at once less truthful, more exacting, and more bitter, than in the country. It was chiefly because there was so much more of it accumulated together, that it produced upon me a most harrowing impression. What I experienced

at Liapin’s house made my own luxurious life seem monstrously evil. I could not doubt the sincerity and strength of this conviction; yet, notwithstanding this, I was quite incapable of carrying out a revolution which demanded an entire change in my mode of life: I was frightened at the prospect, and so I resorted to compromises. I accepted what I was told by everyone, and what has been said by everybody since the world began—that riches and luxury are in themselves no evil, that they are given by God, and that whilst continuing to live luxuriously it is possible to help those in need. I believed this and wanted to do so. And I wrote an article in which I called upon all rich people to help. These all admitted themselves morally obliged to agree with me, but evidently did not wish to do or give anything for the poor, or could not do so. I then began visiting, and discovered what I had in no way expected to see. On the one hand, I saw in these dens (as I had at first called them) men whom it was impossible for me to help, because they were working-men, accustomed to labour and privation, and therefore having a much firmer hold on life than I had. On the other hand, I saw miserable men whom I could not aid because they were just such as I was myself. The majority of the poor whom I saw were wretched, merely because they had lost the capacity, desire, and habit of earning their bread; in other words, their misery consisted in the fact that they were just like myself. Whereas, of poor people to whom it was possible to give immediate assistance—those suffering from illness, cold, and hunger—I found none, except the starving Agafia; and I became persuaded that, being so far removed from the life of those whom I wished to succour, it was almost impossible to find such need as I sought, because all real need was attended to by those amongst whom these unhappy creatures lived: and my principal conviction now was, that, with money, I could never reform that life of misery which these people led. I was persuaded

of this: yet a feeling of shame to leave off all I had begun, and self-deception as to my own virtues, made me continue my plan for some time longer till it died a natural death; thus, only with great difficulty and the help of Iván Fedotitch, I managed to distribute in the tavern at Rzhanoff's house the thirty-seven rubles which I considered were not my own. Of course I might have continued this style of thing and have transformed it into a kind of charity; and, by importuning those who promised to give me money, I might have obtained and distributed more, thus comforting myself with the idea of my own excellence: but I became convinced on the one hand that we rich people do not wish—and are also unable—to distribute to the poor a portion of our superfluities (we have so many wants ourselves), and that money should not be given to any one if we really wish to do good, instead of merely distributing it at random as I had done in the Rzhanoff tavern. So I dropped the affair entirely and in despair quitted Moscow for my own village. I intended on returning home to write a pamphlet on my experience, and to state why my project had not succeeded. I wanted to justify myself from the imputations which resulted from my article on the census; I wanted also to denounce society and its heartless indifference; and I desired to point out the causes of this town misery, and the necessity for endeavouring to remedy it, as well as the means which I thought were requisite for this purpose. I began even then to write, and fancied I had many very important facts to communicate. But in vain did I rack my brain: I could not manage it, notwithstanding the super-abundance of material at my command, because of the irritation under which I wrote, and because I had not yet learned by experience what was necessary to grasp the question rightly; still more because I had not become fully conscious of the cause of it all—a very simple cause, deep-rooted in myself. So the pamphlet was not finished at the commencement of the present year (1884-1885). In the

matter of moral law we witness a strange phenomenon to which men pay too little attention. If I speak to an unlearned man about geology, astronomy, history, natural philosophy, or mathematics, he receives the information as quite new to him, and never says to me, “There is nothing new in what you tell me; every one knows it, and I have known it for a long time.” But tell a man one of the highest moral truths in the simplest manner, in such a way as it has never been before formulated, and every ordinary man, particularly one who does not take any interest in moral questions, and, above all, one who dislikes them, is sure to say, “Who does not know that? It has been always known and expressed.” And he really believes this. Only those who can appreciate moral truths know how to value their elucidation and simplification by a long and laborious process, or can prize the transition from a proposition or desire at first vaguely understood to a firm and determined expression calling for a corresponding change of conduct. We are all accustomed to consider moral doctrine to be a very insipid and dull affair in which there can be nothing new or interesting; whereas, in reality, human life, with all its complicated and varied actions which seem to have no connection with morals—political activity, activity in the sciences, in the arts, and in commerce—has no other object than to elucidate moral truths more and more, and to confirm, simplify, and make them accessible to all. I recollect once while walking in a street in Moscow I saw a man come out and examine the flag-stones attentively; then, choosing one of them, he sat down by it and began to scrape and rub it vigorously. “What is he doing with the pavement?” I wondered; and, having come up close to him, I discovered he was a young man from a butcher’s shop, and was sharpening his knife on the flag-stone. He was not thinking about the stones when examining them, and still less while doing his work; he was merely sharpening his knife. It was necessary for him to do so in order to cut the

meat, but to me it seemed that he was doing something to the pavement. In the same way mankind seems to be occupied with commerce, treaties, wars, sciences, arts; and yet for them one thing only is important, and they do only that—they are elucidating those moral laws by which they live. Moral laws are already in existence, and mankind has been and is merely re-discovering them: this elucidation appears to be unimportant and imperceptible to one who has no need of moral law, and who does not desire to live by it. Yet this is not only the chief but is the sole business of all men. The elucidation is imperceptible in the same way as the difference between a sharp knife and a blunt one is imperceptible. A knife remains a knife; and one who has not to cut anything with it will not notice its edge: but for one who understands that all his life depends more or less upon whether his knife is blunt or sharp, every improvement in sharpening it is important; and such a man knows that there must be no limit to this improvement, and that the knife is only really a knife when it is sharp, and when it cuts what it has to cut. The conviction of this truth flashed upon me when I began to write my pamphlet. Previously it seemed to me that I knew everything about my subject, that I had a thorough understanding of everything connected with those questions which had been awakened in me by the impressions made in Liapin’s house and during the census; but when I tried to sum them up, and to put them on paper, it turned out that the knife would not cut, and had to be sharpened: so it is only now after three years that I feel my knife is sharp enough for me to cut out what I want. It is not that I have learned new things: my thoughts are still the same; but they were blunt formerly; they kept diverging in every direction; there was no edge to them; nor was anything brought, as it is now, to one central point, to one most simple and plain conclusion.

CHAPTER 13 I recollect that during the whole time of my unsuccessful endeavours to help the unfortunate inhabitants of Moscow, I felt I was like a man trying to help others out of a bog, who was all the time stuck fast in it himself. Every effort made me feel the instability of the ground upon which I was standing. I felt that I myself was in this bog, but the acknowledgement did not help me to look more closely under my feet to find out the nature of the ground on which I stood: I kept looking for some external means to remedy the evil. I felt my life was a bad one, and that people ought not to live so; yet I did not come to the most natural and obvious conclusion: that I must first reform my own mode of life before I could have any conception of how to reform others. And so I began at the wrong end, as it were. I was living in town, and wished to improve the lives of the men there; but I soon became convinced that I had no power to do so; and then I began to ponder over the nature of town life and town misery. I said to myself over and over again, “What is this town life and town misery? And why, while living in town, am I unable to help the town poor?” The only reply I found was, that I was powerless to do anything for them, First, because there were too many collected together in one place; Secondly, because none of them were at all like those in the country. And again I asked myself, “Why are there so many here, and in what do they differ from the country poor?” To both these questions the answer was the same. The poor are numerous in towns because all who have nothing to subsist on in the country are collected there round the rich; and their peculiarity is due to the fact that they have all come into the towns from the country to get a living. (If there are any town poor born there, whose fathers and grandfathers were town born, these in their turn originally came there to get a living.) But what are we to understand by the expression, “getting a living in town”? There is something strange in the expression; it sounds like a joke when we

reflect on its meaning. How is it that from the country—i.e., from places where there are woods, meadows, corn and cattle, where the earth yields the treasures of fertility—men come away, to get a living in a place where there are none of these advantages, but only stones and dust? What then, do the words, “getting a living in town,” mean? Such a phrase is constantly used, both by the employed and their employers, as if it were quite clear and intelligible. I remember now all the hundreds and thousands of town people living well or ill with whom I had spoken about their object in coming here; and all of them, without exception, told me they had quitted their villages “to get a living”; that “Moscow neither sows nor reaps, yet lives in wealth”; that in Moscow there is abundance of everything; and that, therefore, in Moscow one may get the money which is needed in the country for corn, cottages, horses, and the other essentials of life. But, in fact, the country is the source of all wealth; there, only, are real riches—corn, woods, horses, and everything necessary. Why go to towns, then, to get what is to be had in the country? And why should people carry away from the country into the towns the things that are necessary for country people—flour, oats, horses, and cattle? Hundreds of times I have spoken thus with peasants who live in towns; and from my talks with them, and from my own observations, it became clear to me that the accumulation of country people in our cities is partly necessary, because they could not otherwise earn their livelihood, and partly voluntary, because they are attracted by the temptations of a town life. It is true that the circumstances of a peasant are such, that, in order to satisfy the pecuniary demands made on him in his village, he cannot do otherwise than sell that corn and cattle which he knows very well will be necessary for himself; and he is compelled, whether he will or not, to go to town to earn back what was his own. But it is also true that he is attracted to town by the charms of a comparatively easy

way of getting money, and by the luxury of life there; and, under the pretext of earning his living, he goes there in order to have easier work and better food, to drink tea three times a day, to dress himself smartly, and even to get drunk and lead a dissolute life. The cause is a simple one; for property passing from the hands of the agriculturalists into those of non-agriculturalists accumulates in towns. Observe towards autumn how much wealth is gathered together in the villages. Then come the demands of taxes, rents, recruiting; then the temptations of vodka, marriages, feasts, peddlers, and all sorts of other snares; so that in one way or other, this property, all in its various forms (sheep, calves, cows, horses, pigs, poultry, eggs, butter, hemp, flax, rye, oats, buckwheat, peas, hemp-seed, and flax-seed), passes into the hands of strangers, and is taken first to provincial towns, and thence to the capitals. A villager is compelled to dispose of all these things in order to satisfy the demands made upon him and the temptations offered him; and, having thus parted with his goods, he is left in want, and must follow where his wealth has been taken; and there he tries to earn back the money which is necessary for his most urgent needs at home; and so, being partly carried away by these temptations, he himself, along with others, makes use of the accumulated wealth. Everywhere throughout Russia, and, I think, not only in Russia but all over the world, the same thing happens. The wealth of the country people who produce it passes into the hands of tradespeople, landowners, government officials, manufacturers. The men who receive this wealth want to enjoy it, and to enjoy it fully they must be in town. In the country, in the first place, it is difficult for the rich to gratify all their desires, owing to the inhabitants being scattered: you do not find there the shops, banks, restaurants, theatres, and various kinds of public amusements. Secondly, another of the chief pleasures procured by wealth—vanity, the desire to astonish, to make

a display before others—cannot be gratified in the country for the same reason: its inhabitants being too scattered. There is no one in the country to appreciate luxury; there is no one to astonish. There you may have what you like to embellish your dwelling—pictures, bronze statues, all sorts of carriages, and fine toilets—but there is nobody to look at them or to envy you. The peasants do not understand the value of all this, and cannot make head or tail of it. Thirdly, luxury in the country is even disagreeable to a man who has a conscience, and is an anxiety to a timid person. One feels uneasy or ashamed at taking a milk bath, or in feeding puppies with milk, when there are children close by needing it; one feels the same in building pavilions and gardens among a people who live in cottages covered with stable litter, and who have no wood to burn. There is no one in the village to prevent the stupid, uneducated peasants from spoiling our comforts. Therefore, rich people gather together in towns, and settle near those who, in similar positions, have similar desires. In towns, the enjoyment of luxuries is carefully protected by a numerous police. The principal inhabitants of towns are government officials, round whom all the rich people, master-workmen, and artisans have settled. There, a rich man has only to think about a thing, and he can get it. It is also more agreeable for him to live there, because he can gratify his vanity; there are people with whom he may try to compete in luxury, whom he may astonish or eclipse. But it is especially pleasant for a wealthy man to live in town, because, where his country life was uncomfortable, and even somewhat incongruous because of his luxury, in town, on the contrary, it would be uncomfortable for him not to live splendidly, as his equals in wealth do. What seemed out of place there, appears indispensable here. Rich people collect together in towns, and, under the protection of the authorities, enjoy peacefully all that has been brought there by the villagers. A countryman often cannot help going to

town, where a ceaseless round of feasting is going on, where what has been procured from the peasants is being spent. He comes into the town to feed on those crumbs which fall from the tables of the rich; and partly by observing the careless, luxurious, and generally approved mode of living of these men, he begins to desire to order his own affairs in such a manner that he, too, may be able to work less and avail himself more of the labour of others. At last he decides to settle down in the neighbourhood of the wealthy, trying by every means in his power to get back from them what is necessary for him, and submitting to all the conditions which the rich enforce. These country people assist in gratifying all the fancies of the wealthy: they serve them in public baths, in taverns, as coachmen, and as prostitutes. They manufacture carriages, make toys and dresses, and little by little learn from their wealthy neighbours how to live like them, not by real labour, but by all sorts of tricks, squeezing out from others the money they have collected—and so they become depraved, and are ruined. It is then this same population, depraved by the wealth of towns, which forms that city misery which I wished to relieve, but could not. Indeed, if one only reflects on the condition of these country folk coming to town to earn money to buy bread or to pay taxes, and who see everywhere thousands of rubles squandered foolishly, and hundreds very easily earned while they have to earn their pence by the hardest of labour, one cannot but be astonished that there are still many such people at work, and that they do not all have recourse to a more easy way of getting money—trading, begging, vice, cheating, and even robbery. It is only we who join in the ceaseless orgie going on in the towns who can get so accustomed to our own mode of life that it seems quite natural to us that one fine gentleman should occupy five large rooms heated with sufficient firewood to enable twenty families to warm their homes and cook their food with. To drive a short distance,

we employ two thoroughbreds and two men; we cover our inlaid floors with carpets, and spend five or ten thousand rubles on a ball, or even twenty-five for a Christmas-tree, and so on. Yet a man who needs ten rubles to buy bread for his family, or from whom his last sheep has been taken to meet a tax of seven rubles which he cannot save by the hardest of labour, cannot get accustomed to all this which we imagine must seem quite natural to the poor. There are even people naïve enough to say that the poor are thankful to us because we feed them by living so luxuriously! But poor people do not lose their reasoning powers because they are poor: they reason quite in the same manner as we do. When we have heard that some one has lost a fortune at cards, or squandered ten or twenty thousand rubles, the first thought that comes into our minds is: “How stupid and bad this man must be to have parted with such a large sum without any equivalent; and how well I could have employed this money for some building I have long wanted to get done, or for the improvement of my estate,” and so on. The poor reason in the same way on seeing how foolishly we waste our wealth; all the more forcibly, because this money is needed, not to satisfy their whims, but for the chief necessaries of life, of which they are in want. We are greatly mistaken in thinking that the poor, while able to reason thus, still look on unconcernedly at the luxury around them. They have never acknowledged, and never will, that it is right for one man to be always idling, and for another to be continually working. At first they are astonished and offended; then, looking closer into the question, they see that this state of things is acknowledged to be legal, and they themselves try to get rid of work, and to take part in the feasting. Some succeed in so doing, and acquire similar wanton habits; others, little by little, approach such a condition; others break down before they reach their object, and, having lost the habit of working, fill the night-houses and the haunts of vice. The year before

last we took from the village a young peasant to be our butler’s assistant. He could not agree with the footman, and was sent away; he entered the service of a merchant, pleased his masters, and now wears a watch and chain, and has smart boots. In his place we took another peasant, a married man. He turned out a drunkard, and lost money. We took a third: he began to drink, and, having drunk all he had, was for a long time in distress in a night-lodging-house. Our old cook took to drinking in the town, and fell ill. Last year a footman who used formerly to have fits of drunkenness, but who, while living in the village kept himself from it for five years, came to live in Moscow without his wife (who used to keep him in order), began again to drink, and ruined himself. A young boy of our village is living as butler’s assistant at my brother’s. His grandfather, a blind old man, came to me while I was living in the country, and asked me to persuade this grandson to send ten rubles for taxes, because, unless this were done, the cow would have to be sold. “He keeps telling me that he has to dress himself respectably,” said the old man. “He got himself long boots, and that ought to be enough; but I actually believe he would like to buy a watch!” In these words the grandfather expressed what he felt was the utmost degree of extravagance. And this was really so; for the old man could not afford a drop of oil for his food during the whole of Lent, and his wood was spoilt because he had not the ruble and a quarter necessary for cutting it up. But the old man’s irony turned out to be reality. His grandson came to me dressed in a fine black overcoat, and in long boots for which he had paid eight rubles. Recently he had got ten rubles from my brother, and spent them on his boots. And my children, who have known the boy from his infancy, told me that he really considers it necessary to buy a watch. He is a very good boy, but he considers that he will be laughed at for not having one. This year a housemaid, eighteen years of age, formed an intimacy with

the coachman, and was sent away. Our old nurse, to whom I related the case, reminded me of a girl whom I had quite forgotten. Ten years ago, during a short stay in Moscow, she formed an intimacy with a footman. She also was sent away, and drifted at last into a house of ill-fame, and died in a hospital before she was twenty years of age. We have only to look around us to become alarmed by the infection which (to say nothing of manufactories and workshops existing only to gratify our luxury) we directly, by our luxurious town life, spread among those very people whom we desire afterwards to help. Thus, having got at the root of that town misery which I was not able to alleviate, I saw that its first cause is in our taking from the villagers their necessaries and carrying them to town. The second cause is, that in those towns we avail ourselves of what we have gathered from the country, and, by our foolish luxury, tempt and deprave the peasants who follow us there in order to get back something of what we have taken from them in the country.

CHAPTER 14 From another point of view than the one stated, I also came to the same conclusion. Recollecting my connection with the town-poor during this period, I saw that one cause which prevented me from helping them was their insincerity and falseness. They all considered me, not as an individual but merely as a means to an end. I felt I could not become intimate with them; I thought I did not perhaps understand how to do so; but without truthfulness, no help was possible. How can one help a man who does not tell all his circumstances? Formerly I accused the poor of this (it is so natural to accuse others), but one word spoken by a remarkable man, Sutaief, who was then on a visit at my house, cleared up the difficulty, and showed me wherein lay the cause of my failure. I remember that even then what he said made a deep impression on me; but I did not understand its full meaning until afterwards. It

happened that while in the full ardour of my self-deception I was at my sister's house, Sutaief being also there; and my sister was questioning me about my work. I was relating it to her; and, as is always the case when one does not fully believe in one's own enterprises, I related with great enthusiasm, ardour, and at full length, all I had been doing, and all the possible results. I was telling her how we should keep our eyes open to what went on in Moscow; how we should take care of orphans and old people; how we should afford means for impoverished villagers to return to their homes, and pave the way to reform the depraved. I explained, that, if we succeeded in our undertaking, there would not be in Moscow a single poor man who could not find help. My sister sympathized with me; and while speaking, I kept looking now and then at Sutaief; knowing his Christian life, and the importance attached by him to works of charity, I expected sympathy from him, and I spoke so that he might understand me; for, though I was addressing my sister, yet my conversation was really more directed to him. He sat immovable, dressed in his black-tanned-sheepskin coat, which he, like other peasants, wore in-doors as well as out. It seemed that he was not listening to us, but was thinking about something else. His small eyes gave no responding gleam, but seemed to be turned inwards. Having spoken out to my own satisfaction, I turned to him and asked him what he thought about it. "The whole thing is worthless," he replied. "Why?" "The plan is an empty one, and no good will come of it," he repeated with conviction. "But why will nothing come of it? Why is it a useless business, if we help thousands, or even hundreds, of unhappy ones? Is it a bad thing, according to the gospel, to clothe the naked, or to feed the hungry?" "I know, I know; but what you are doing is not that. Is it possible to help thus? You are walking in the street; somebody asks you for a few kopeks; you give them to him. Is that charity? Do him some spiritual good; teach him.

What you give him merely says, ‘Leave me alone.’” “No; but that is not what we were speaking of: we wish to become acquainted with the wants, and then to help by money and by deeds. We will try to find for the poor people some work to do.” “That would be no way of helping them.” “How then? must they be left to die of starvation and cold?” “Why left to die? How many are there of them?” “How many?” said I, thinking that he took the matter so lightly from not knowing the great number of these men; “you are not aware, I dare say, that there are in Moscow about twenty thousand cold and hungry. And then, think of those in St. Petersburg and other towns!” He smiled. “Twenty thousand! And how many households are there in Russia alone? Would they amount to a million?” “Well; but what of that?” “What of that?” said he, with animation, and his eyes sparkled. “Let us unite them with ourselves; I am not rich myself, but will at once take two of them. Here is a fellow you settled in your kitchen; I asked him to go with me, but he refused. If there were ten times as many, we should take them all into our families. You one, I another. We shall work together; he will see how I work; he will learn how to live, and we shall eat out of one bowl, at one table; and they will hear a good word from me, and from you also. That is charity; but all this plan of yours is no good.” These plain words made an impression upon me. I could not help recognizing that they were true. But it seemed to me then, that, notwithstanding the justice of what he said, my proposed plan might perhaps be useful also. But the longer I was occupied with this affair; and the closer my intercourse with the poor, the oftener I recollected these words and the greater meaning I found in them. I, indeed, go in an expensive fur coat, or drive in my own carriage to a man who is in want of boots: he sees my house which costs two hundred rubles a month, or he notices that I give away, without thinking, five rubles, only because of a caprice; he is then aware that if I give away rubles in such

a manner, it is because I have accumulated so many that I have a lot to spare which I am not only never in the habit of giving to any one, but which I have taken away from others without compunction. What can he see in me but one of those persons who have become possessed of something which should belong to him? And what other feelings can he have towards me than the desire to get back as many as possible of these rubles which were taken by me from him and from others? I should like to become intimate with him, and complain that he is not sincere. But I am afraid to sit down upon his bed for fear of lice or some infectious disease; I am also afraid to let him come into my room; and when he comes to me half-dressed, he has to wait, if fortunate, in the entrance-hall, but oftener in the cold porch. And then I say that it is all his fault that I cannot become intimate with him, and that he is not sincere. Let the most hard-hearted man sit down to dine upon five courses among hungry people who have little or nothing to eat except dry bread, and no one could have the heart to eat while these hungry people are around him licking their lips. Therefore, before one can eat well when living among half-starved men, the first thing necessary is to hide ourselves from them, and to eat so that they may not see us. This is the very thing we do in the first place. I looked into our own mode of life without prejudice, and became aware that it was not by chance that closer intercourse with the poor is difficult for us, but that we ourselves are intentionally ordering our lives in such a way as to make this intercourse impossible. And not only this; but, on looking at our lives, or at the lives of rich people from without, I saw that all that is considered as the happiness of these lives consists in being separated as much as possible from the poor, or is in some way or other connected with this desired separation. In fact, the entire aim of our lives, beginning with food, dress, dwelling and cleanliness, and ending with our education, consists in

placing a gulf between us and them. And we spend nine-tenths of our wealth to erect impassable barriers in order to establish this distinction and separation. The first thing a man who has grown rich does is to leave off eating with others out of one bowl. He arranges plates for himself and his family, and separates himself from the kitchen and the servants. He feeds his servants well so that their mouths may not water, and he dines alone. But eating alone is dull. He invents whatever he can to improve his food, embellish his table; and the very manner of taking food, as at dinner-parties, becomes a matter of vanity and pride. His manner of eating his food is a means of separating himself from other people. For a rich man it is out of the question to invite a poor person to his table. One must know how to hand a lady to table, how to bow, how to sit, to eat, to use a finger-bowl, all of which the rich alone know how to do. The same holds good with dress. If a rich man wore ordinary dress—a jacket, a fur coat, felt shoes, leather boots, an undercoat, trousers, a shirt—he would require very little to cover his body and protect it from cold; and, having two fur coats, he could not help giving one away to somebody who had none. But the wealthy man begins with wearing clothes which consist of many separate parts, of use only on particular occasions, and therefore of no use to a poor man. The man of fashion must have evening dress-coats, waistcoats, frock-coats, patent-leather shoes; his wife must have bodices, and dresses which, according to fashion, are made of many parts, high-heeled shoes, hunting and travelling jackets, and so on. All these articles can be useful only to people in a condition far removed from poverty. And thus dressing also becomes a means of isolation. Fashions make their appearance, and are among the chief things which separate the rich man from the poor one. The same thing shows itself more plainly still in our dwellings. In order that one person may occupy ten rooms we must manage so that he may not be seen by the people who are

living by tens in one room. The richer a man is, the more difficult it is to get at him; the more footmen there are between him and people not rich, the more impossible it is for him to receive a poor guest, to let him walk on his carpets and sit on his satin-covered chairs. The same thing happens in travelling. A peasant who drives in a cart or on a carrier's sledge must be very hard-hearted if he refuses to give a pedestrian a lift; he has enough room, and can do it. But the richer the carriage is, the more impossible it is to put any one in it besides the owner. Some of the most elegant carriages are so narrow as to be termed "egotists." The same thing applies to all the modes of living expressed by the word "cleanliness." Cleanliness! Who does not know human beings, especially women, who make a great virtue of cleanliness? Who does not know the various phrases of this cleanliness, which have no limit whatever when it is procured by the labour of others? Who among self-made men has not experienced in his own person the pains with which he carefully accustomed himself to this cleanliness, which illustrates the saying, "White hands are fond of another's labour"? To-day cleanliness consists in changing one's shirt daily; to-morrow it will be changed twice a day. At first, one has to wash one's hands and neck every day, then one will have to wash one's feet every day, and afterwards it will be the whole body, and in peculiar methods. A clean table-cloth serves for two days, then it is changed every day, and afterwards two table-cloths a day are used. To-day the footman is required to have clean hands; to-morrow he must wear gloves, and clean gloves, and he must hand the letters on a clean tray. There are no limits to this cleanliness, which is of no other use to anyone except to separate us, and to make our intercourse with others impossible while the cleanliness is obtained through the labour of others. Not only so, but when I had deeply reflected upon this, I came to the conclusion that what we term education is a similar thing. Language cannot deceive:

it gives the right name to everything. The common people call education fashionable dress, smart conversation, white hands, and a certain degree of cleanliness. Of such a man they say, when distinguishing him from others, that he is an educated man. In a little higher circle men denote by education the same things, but add playing on the piano, the knowledge of French, good Russian spelling, and still greater cleanliness. In the still higher circle education consists of all this, with the addition of English, and a diploma from a high educational establishment, and a still greater degree of cleanliness. But in all these shades, education is in substance quite the same. It consists in those forms and various kinds of information which separate a man from his fellow-creatures. Its object is the same as that of cleanliness: to separate us from the crowd, in order that they, hungry and cold, may not see how we feast. But it is impossible to hide ourselves, and our efforts are seen through. Thus I became aware that the reason why it was impossible for us rich men to help the town poor was nothing more or less than the impossibility of our having closer intercourse with them, and that this barrier we ourselves create by our whole life and by all the uses we make of our wealth. I became persuaded that between us rich men and the poor there stood, erected by ourselves, a barrier of cleanliness and education which arose out of our wealth; and that, in order to be able to help them, we have first to break down this barrier and to render possible the realization of the means suggested by Sutaief: to take the poor into our respective homes. And so, as I have already said at the beginning of this chapter, I came to the same conclusion from a different point of view from that to which the train of thought about town misery had led me; namely, the cause of it all lay in our wealth.

CHAPTER 15 I began again to analyze the matter from a third and purely personal point of view. Among the

phenomena which particularly impressed me during my benevolent activity, there was one—a very strange one—which I could not understand for a long time. Whenever I happened, in the street or at home, to give a poor person a trifling sum without entering into conversation with him, I saw on his face, or imagined I saw, an expression of pleasure and gratitude, and I myself experienced an agreeable feeling at this form of charity. I saw that I had done what was expected of me. But when I stopped and began to question the man about his past and present life, entering more or less into particulars, I felt it was impossible to give him 3 or 20 kopeks; and I always began to finger the money in my purse, and, not knowing how much to give, I always gave more under these circumstances; but, nevertheless, I saw that the poor man went away from me dissatisfied. When I entered into still closer intercourse with him, my doubts as to how much I should give increased; and, no matter what I gave, the recipient seemed more and more gloomy and dissatisfied. As a general rule, it always happens that if, upon nearer acquaintance with the poor man I gave him three rubles or even more, I always saw gloominess, dissatisfaction, even anger depicted on his face; and sometimes, after having received from me ten rubles, he has left me without even thanking me, as if I had offended him. In such cases I was always uncomfortable and ashamed, and felt myself guilty. When I watched the poor person during weeks, months, or years, helped him, expressed my views, and became intimate with him, then our intercourse became a torment, and I saw that the man despised me. And I felt that he was right in doing so. When in the street a beggar asks me, along with other passers-by, for three kopeks, and I give it him, then, in his estimation, I am a kind and good man who gives “one of the threads which go to make the shirt of a naked one”: he expects nothing more than a thread, and, if I give it, he sincerely blesses me. But if I stop and speak to

him as man to man, show him that I wish to be more than a mere passer-by, and, if, as it often happened, he shed tears in relating his misfortune, then he sees in me not merely a chance helper, but that which I wish him to see—a kind man. If I am a kind man, my kindness cannot stop at twenty kopeks, or at ten rubles, or ten thousand. One cannot be a slightly kind man. Let us suppose that I give him much; that I put him straight, dress him, and set him on his legs so that he can help himself; but, from some reason or other, either from an accident or his own weakness, he again loses the great-coat and clothing and money I gave him, he is again hungry and cold, and he again comes to me, why should I refuse him assistance? For if the cause of my benevolent activity was merely the attainment of some definite, material object, such as giving him so many rubles or a certain great-coat, then, having given them I could be easy in my mind; but the cause of my activity was not this: the cause of it was my desire to be a kind man—i.e., to see myself in everybody else. Everyone understands kindness in this way, and not otherwise. Therefore if such a man should spend in drink all you gave him twenty times over, and be again hungry and cold, then, if you are a benevolent man, you cannot help giving him more money, you can never leave off doing so while you have more than he has; but if you draw back, you show that all you did before was done not because you are benevolent, but because you wish to appear so to others and to him. And it was because I had to back out of such cases, and to cease to give, and thus to disown the good, that I felt a painful sense of shame. What was this feeling, then? I had experienced it in Liapin’s house and in the country, and when I happened to give money or anything else to the poor, and in my adventures among the town people. One case which occurred lately reminded me of it forcibly, and led me to discover its cause. It happened in the country. I wanted twenty kopeks to give to a pilgrim. I sent my son to borrow it from somebody. He

brought it to the man, and told me that he had borrowed it from the cook. Some days after, other pilgrims came, and I was again in need of twenty kopeks. I had a ruble. I recollected what I owed the cook, went into the kitchen, hoping that he would have some more coppers. I said— “I owe you twenty kopeks: here is a ruble.” I had not yet done speaking when the cook called to his wife from the adjoining room: “Parasha, take it,” he said. Thinking she had understood what I wanted, I gave her the ruble. I must tell you that the cook had been living at our house about a week, and I had seen his wife, but had never spoken to her. I merely wished to tell her to give me the change, when she briskly bowed herself over my hand and was about to kiss it, evidently thinking I was giving her the ruble. I stammered out something and left the kitchen. I felt ashamed, painfully ashamed, as I had not felt for a long time. I actually trembled, and felt that I was making a wry face; and, groaning with shame, I ran away from the kitchen. This feeling, which I fancied I had not deserved, and which came over me quite unexpectedly, impressed me particularly, because it was so long since I had felt anything like it and also because I fancied that I, an old man, had been living in a way I had no reason to be ashamed of. This surprised me greatly. I related the case to my family, to my acquaintances, and they all agreed that they also would have felt the same. And I began to reflect: Why is it that I felt so? The answer came from a case which had formerly occurred to me in Moscow. I reflected upon this case, and I understood the shame which I felt concerning the incident with the cook’s wife, and all the sensations of shame I had experienced during my charitable activity in Moscow, and which I always feel when I happen to give anything beyond trifling alms to beggars and pilgrims, which I am accustomed to give, and which I consider not as charity, but as politeness and good breeding. If a man asks you for a light, you must light a

match if you have it. If a man begs for three or twenty kopeks, or a few rubles, you must give if you have them. It is a question of politeness, not of charity. The following is the case I referred to. I have already spoken about the two peasants with whom I sawed wood three years ago. One Saturday evening, in the twilight, I was walking with them back to town. They were going to their master to receive their wages. On crossing the Dragomilor bridge we met an old man. He begged, and I gave him twenty kopeks. I gave, thinking what a good impression my alms would make upon Simon, with whom I had been speaking on religious questions. Simon, the peasant from Vladímir, who had a wife and two children in Moscow, also stopped, turned up the lappet of his kaftan, and took out his purse; and, after having looked over his money, he picked out a three-kopek piece, gave it to the old man, and asked for two kopeks back. The old man showed him in his hand two three-kopek pieces and a single kopek. Simon looked at it, was about to take one kopek, but, changing his mind, took off his cap, crossed himself, and went away, leaving the old man the three-kopek piece. I was acquainted with all Simon’s pecuniary circumstances. He had neither house nor other property. When he gave the old man the three kopeks, he possessed six rubles and fifty kopeks, which he had been saving up, and this was all the capital he had. My property amounted to about six hundred thousand rubles. I had a wife and children, so also had Simon. He was younger than I, and had not so many children; but his children were young, and two of mine were grown-up men, old enough to work, so that our circumstances, independently of our property, were alike, though even in this respect I was better off than he. He gave three kopeks, I gave twenty. What was, then, the difference in our gifts? What should I have given in order to do as he had done? He had six hundred kopeks; out of these he gave one, and then another two. I had six hundred thousand rubles. In order to

give as much as Simon gave, I ought to have given three thousand rubles, and asked the man to give me back two thousand; and, in the event of his not having change, to leave him these two also, cross myself, and go away calmly, conversing about how people live in the manufactories, and what is the price of liver in the Smolensk market. I thought about it at the time, but it was long before I was able to draw from this case the conclusion which inevitably follows from it. This conclusion appears to be so uncommon and strange, notwithstanding its mathematical accuracy, that it requires time to get accustomed to it. One is inclined to think there is some mistake, but there is none. It is only the terrible darkness of prejudice in which we live. This conclusion, when I arrived at it and recognized its inevitableness, explained to me the nature of my feelings of shame in the presence of the cook's wife, and before all the poor to whom I gave and still give money. Indeed, what is that money which I give to the poor, and which the cook's wife thought I was giving her? In the majority of cases it forms such a minute part of my income that it cannot be expressed in a fraction comprehensible to Simon or to a cook's wife—it is in most cases a millionth part or thereabout. I give so little that my gift is not, and cannot be, a sacrifice to me: it is only a something with which I amuse myself when and how it pleases me. And this was indeed how my cook's wife had understood me. If I gave a stranger in the street a ruble or twenty kopeks, why should I not give her also a ruble? To her, such a distribution of money is the same thing as a gentleman throwing gingerbread nuts into a crowd. It is the amusement of people who possess much "fool's money." I was ashamed, because the mistake of the cook's wife showed me plainly what ideas she and all poor people must have of me. "He is throwing away 'fool's money'"; that is, money not earned by him. And, indeed, what is my money, and how did I come by it? One part of it I collected in the shape of rent for my

land, which I had inherited from my father. The peasant sold his last sheep or cow in order to pay it. Another part of my money I received from the books I had written. If my books are harmful, and yet sell, they can only do so by some seductive attraction, and the money which I receive for them is badly earned money; but if my books are useful, the thing is still worse. I do not give them to people, but say, “Give me so many rubles, and I will sell them to you.” As in the former case a peasant sells his last sheep, here a poor student or a teacher does it: each poor person who buys denies himself some necessary thing in order to give me this money. And now that I have gathered much of such money what am I to do with it? I take it to town, give it to the poor only when they satisfy all my fancies and come to town to clean pavements, lamps, or boots, to work for me in the factories, and so on. And with this money I draw from them all I can. I try to give them as little as I can and take from them as much as possible. Now, quite unexpectedly, I begin to share all this said money with these same poor persons for nothing; but not with everyone, only as fancy prompts me. And why should not every poor man expect that his turn might come to-day to be one of those with whom I amuse myself by giving them my “fool’s money”? So everyone regards me as the cook’s wife did. And I had gone about with the notion that this was charity—this taking away thousands with one hand, and with the other throwing kopeks to those I select! No wonder I was ashamed. But before I can begin to do good I must leave off the evil and put myself in a position in which I should cease to cause it. But all my course of life is evil. If I were to give away a hundred thousand, I should not yet have put myself in a condition in which I could do good, because I have still five hundred thousand left. It is only when I possess nothing at all that I shall be able to do a little good; such as, for instance, the poor prostitute did who nursed a sick woman and her child for three days. Yet this seemed to me

to be but so little! And I ventured to think of doing good! One thing only was true, which I at first felt on seeing the hungry and cold people outside Liapin’s house—that I was guilty of that; and that to live as I did was impossible, utterly impossible. What shall we do then? If somebody still needs an answer to this question, I will, by God’s permission, give one, in detail.