Vanka Zhukov, a boy of nine, who had been for three months apprenticed to Alyahin the shoemaker, was sitting up on Christmas Eve. Waiting till his master and mistress and their workmen had gone to the midnight service, he took out hof his master’s cupboard a bottle of ink and a pen with a rusty nib, and, spreading out a crumpled sheet of paper in front of him, began writing. Before forming the first letter he several times looked around fearfully at the door and the windows, stole a glance at the dark ikon, on both sides which stretched shelves full of lasts, and heaved a broken sigh. The paper lay on the bench while he knelt gbefore it. “Dear grandfather, Konstantin Makaritch,” he wrote, “I am writing you a letter. I wish you a happy Christmas, and all blessings from God Alimighty. I have neither father nor mother, you are the only one left me.” Vanka raised his eyes to the dark ikon on which the light of his candle was reflected, and vividly recalled his grandfather, Konstantin Makaritch, who was night watchman to a family called Zhivarev. He was a thin but extraordinarily nimble and lively little old man of xity-five, with an everlastingly laughing face and drunken eyes. By day he slept in the servants’ kitchen, or made jokes with the cooks; at night, wrapped in an ample sheepskin, he walked round the grounds and tapped with his little mallet. Old Kashtanka and Eel, so-called on account of his dark colour and his long body l8ike a weasel’s, followed him with hanging heads. This Eel was exceptionally polite and affectionate, and looked with equal kindness on strangers and his own masters, but had not a very good reputation. Under his