On the Field of Glory

by Henryk Sienkiewicz

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ON THE FIELD OF GLORY

THE WORKS

OF

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL POLISH BY JEREMIAH CURTIN.

The Zagloba Romances

With Fire and Sword. 1 vol.

The Deluge. 2 vols.

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ON THE FIELD OF GLORY

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL OF THE TIME OF KING JOHN SOBIESKI

BY

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

Author of "Quo Vadis," "With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge," "Knights of the Cross" etc.

TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH ORIGINAL BY

JEREMIAH CURTIN

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TO

SIR THOMAS G. SHAUGHNESSY,

PRESIDENT OF THE CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILROAD.

My Dear Sir Thomas:

Railroads are to nations what arteries and veins are to each individual. Every part of a nation enjoys common life with every other through railroads. Books bring remote ages to the present, and assemble the thoughts of mankind and of God in one divine company. I find great pleasure on railroads in the day and the night, at all seasons. You enjoy books with a keen and true judgment. Let me inscribe to you, therefore, this volume.

Jeremiah Curtin.

INTRODUCTORY

The book before us gives pictures of Polish character and life on the eve of the second great siege of Vienna.

Twice was that city beleaguered by Turkey. The first siege was commanded by Solyman, that Sultan who was surnamed Magnificent by western nations; to Turks he was known as the Lord of his Age and the Lawgiver.

The first siege was repelled by the bravery of the garrison, by the heroism of Count Salm its commander, by the terrible weather of 1529, and also through turbulence of the Janissary forces. The second siege was crushed in 1683 by Sobieski's wise strategy, the splendid impetus of the Poles, and the firmness of the allies.

Had the Polish king not appeared the Sultan would have triumphed, hence Sobieski and his men are hailed ever since as the saviours of Vienna.

The enthusiasm of the time for Sobieski and his force was tremendous.

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John," this was the Gospel read at the Thanksgiving Mass in Saint Stephen's, the cathedral, the noble old church of that rescued and jubilant city. Some Poles went to Rome after that to get relics; the Pope gave this answer: "Take earth steeped in blood from the field where your countrymen fell at Vienna."

Many times have men here in America asked me: Are the Poles really held by such an intensity of passion? if they are, why does it seize them, whence does it come, what is the source and the cause of it? I reply to these questions as best I am able, and truthfully: It comes from the soul of the Slavs in some part, and in some part from history. The Poles have as a race their original gift to begin with; this gift, or race element, has met in its varied career certain peoples, ideas, and principles. The result of this meeting is this: that the Polish part of the Slav world holds touching itself an unconquerable ideal. It has absorbed, as it thinks, certain principles from which it could not now separate.

The Poles could not if they would, and would not if they could, be dissevered from that which, as they state, they have worked out in history, that which no power on earth can now take from them, and to which they are bound with the faith of a

martyr.

Through ideas and principles, that is, truths gained in their experience as a people, and which in them are incarnate and living, the Poles feel predestined to triumph, time, of course, being given.

What are these ideas and principles? men ask of me often. Combined all in one they mean the victory and supremacy of Poland. They have been worked out during centuries, I answer, of Polish experience with Germany, with Russia, with Rome and Byzantium, with Turks and with Tartars. But beyond all do they come as the fruit of collisions with Germany and Russia, and as the outcome of teachings from Rome and the stern opposition of Byzantium. Through this great host of enemies and allies, and their own special character, came that incisive dramatic career which at last met a failure so crushingly manifest.

The inward result and the spiritual harvest to be reaped from this awful catastrophe are evident only through what is revealed in the conduct, the deeds, and the words of the people who had to wade through the dreadful defeat and digest the experience.

Polish character in most of its main traits was developed completely even earlier than the days of Sobieski, and the men who appeared then in action differ little from those of the present, hence the pictures in this volume are perfectly true and of far-reaching interest in our time.

JEREMIAH CURTIN.

January, 1906.

ON THE FIELD OF GLORY

CHAPTER I

The winter of 1682-83 was a season of such rigor that even very old people could

not remember one like it. During the autumn rain fell continually, and in the middle of November the first frost appeared, which confined waters and put a glass bark upon trees of the forest. Icicles fastened on pines and broke many branches. In the first days of December the birds, after frequent biting frosts, flew into villages and towns, and even wild beasts came out of dense forests and drew near the houses of people. About Saint Damasius' day the heavens became clouded, and then snow appeared; ten days did it fall without ceasing. It covered the country to a height of two ells; it hid forest roads, it hid fences, and even cottage windows. Men opened pathways with shovels through snow-drifts to go to their granaries and stables; and when the snow stopped at last, a splitting frost came, from which forest trees gave out sounds that seemed gunshots.

Peasants, who at that time had to go to the woodlands for fuel, went in parties to defend themselves, and were careful that night should not find them at a distance from the village. After sunset no man dared leave his own doorstep unless with a fork or a bill-hook, and dogs gave out, until daylight, short frightened yelps, as they do always when barking at wolves which are near them.

During just such a night and in such a fierce frost a great equipage on runners pushed along a forest road carefully; it was drawn by four horses and surrounded by attendants. In front, on a strong beast, rode a man with a pole and a small iron pot on the end of it; in this pot pitch was burning, not to make the road visible, for there was moonlight, but to frighten away wolves from the party. On the box of the equipage sat a driver, and on a saddled horse a postilion, and at each side rode two men armed with muskets and slingshots.

The party moved forward very slowly, since the road was little beaten and in places the snow-drifts, especially at turnings, rose like waves on the roadway.

This slowness disturbed Pan Gideon Pangovski, who, relying on his numerous attendants and their weapons, had determined to travel, though in Radom men had

warned him of the danger, and all the more seriously since in going to Belchantska he would have to pass the Kozenitse forests.

Those immense forests began at that period a good way before Yedlina, and continued far beyond Kozenitse to the Vistula, and toward the other side of the Stenjytsa, and northward to Rytchivol.

It had seemed to Pan Gideon that, if he left Radom before midday, he would reach home very easily at sunset. Meanwhile he had been forced in a number of places to open the road close to fences; some hours were lost at this labor, so that he came to Yedlina about twilight. Men there gave the warning that he would better remain for the night in the village; but since at the blacksmith's a pitch light had been found to burn before the carriage, Pan Gideon commanded to continue the journey.

And now night had surprised him in the wilderness.

It was difficult to go faster because of increasing snowdrifts; hence Pan Gideon was more and more disquieted and at last fell to swearing, but in Latin, lest he frighten the two ladies who were with him, Pains Vinnitski his relative and his ward Panna Anulka Sieninski.

Panna Anulka was young and high-hearted, in no degree timid. On the contrary, she drew aside the leather curtain at the window, and, commanding the horseman at the side not to stop the view to her, looked at the drifts very joyfully, and at the pine trunks with long strips of snow on them over which played reddish gleams from the pitch pot, which with the moonlight made moving figures very pleasant to her eyesight. Then rounding her lips to the form of a bird bill she began to whistle, her breath became visible and was rosier than firelight, this too amused her.

But Pani Vinnitski, who was old and quite timid, fell to complaining.

Why leave Radom, or at least why not pass the night in Yedlina since they had been warned of the danger? All this through some person's stubbornness. To Belchantska there was a long piece of road yet, and all in a forest, hence wolves would meet

them undoubtedly, unless Raphael, the Archangel and patron of travellers, would pity them in their wandering, but alas, of this they were quite undeserving.

When he heard this opinion, Pan Gideon became thoroughly impatient. To speak of being lost in the wilderness was all that was needed to upset him.

The road for that matter was straight, and as for wolves, well, they would or would not come. He had good attendants, and besides, a wolf is not anxious to meet with a warrior--not only because he fears him far more than a common man, but also because of the love which the quick-witted beast has for warriors.

The wolf understands well that no dweller in towns and no peasant will give him food gratis; the warrior alone is the man who feeds wolves, and at times in abundance, hence it is not without reason that men have called war "the wolf's harvest."

But still Pan Gideon speaking thus, and praising the wolves in some small degree, was not quite convinced of their affection; hence he was thinking whether or not to command an attendant to slip from his horse and sit next the young lady. In such case he himself would defend one door of the carriage, and that attendant the other, while the freed horse would either rush off ahead or escape in the rear, and thus draw the wolves after him.

But the time to do this had not come, as it seemed to Pan Gideon. Meanwhile he placed near his ward on the front seat, a knife and two pistols; these he wished to have near him since he had only his right hand for service.

They advanced some furlongs farther in quiet, and the road was growing wider. Pan Gideon, who knew the way perfectly, drew breath as if relieved somewhat.

"The Malikov field is not far," said he.

In every case he hoped for more safety in that open space than in the forest.

But just then the attendant in front turned his horse suddenly, and, rushing to the

carriage, spoke hurriedly to the driver and to others, who answered abruptly, as men do when there is no time for loitering.

"What is it?" asked Pan Gideon.

"Some noise in the field."

"Is it wolves?"

"Some outcry. God knows what!"

Pan Gideon was on the point of commanding the horseman with the torch to spring forward and see what was happening, when he remembered that in cases like this it was better not to be without fire and to keep all his people together, and, further, that defence in the open is easier than in a forest, so he commanded to move on with the equipage.

But after a while the horseman reappeared at the window.

"Wild boars," said he.

"Wild boars!"

"A terrible grunting is heard on the right of the road."

"Praise God for that!"

"But perhaps wolves have attacked them."

"Praise God for that also! We shall pass unmolested. Move on!"

In fact the guess of the attendant proved accurate. When they had driven out to the field they saw, at a distance of two or three bow-shots on the right near the road, a dense crowd of wild boars, and a circle of wolves moving nimbly around them. A terrible grunting, not of fear but of rage, was given out with growing vigor. When the sleigh reached the middle of the plain, the men, watching from the horses, observed that the wolves had not dared yet to rush at the wild boars; they only pressed on them more and more eagerly.

The boars had arranged themselves in a round compact body, the young in the

middle, the old and the strong on the outside, thus, as it were, forming a moving and terrible fortress, which gleamed with white tusks and was impervious to attack or to terror.

Between the garland of wolves and that wall of tusks and snouts a white, snowy ring was clearly visible, since the whole field was in moonlight.

Some of the wolves sprang up to the boars, but they sprang back very quickly, as if frightened by the clash of the tusks and the more terrible outbursts of grunting. If the wolves had closed in battle with the boars the struggle would have then held them completely, and the sleigh might have passed without notice; but since this had not happened, there was fear lest they might stop that dreadful onset and try then another one.

Indeed after a while a few dropped away from the pack and ran toward the party, after them followed others. But the sight of armed men confused them; some began to follow the sleigh, others stopped a few tens of steps from it, or ran around with mad speed, as if to urge themselves on to the equipage.

The attendants wished to fire, but Pan Gideon forbade them, lest gunshots might bring the whole pack to his people.

Meanwhile the horses, though accustomed to wolves, began to push to one side and turn their heads to their flanks with loud snorting, but soon something worse happened, and this raised the danger a hundredfold.

The young horse which the torchbearer was riding reared suddenly once, and a second time, and then rushed madly sidewise.

The rider, knowing that were he to fall he would be torn to bits the next moment, seized hold of his saddle-bow, but dropped his pot the same instant; the light sank in the snow deeply; the flame threw out sparks and was extinguished. The light of the moon was alone on that plain then.

The driver, a Russ from Pomorani, began to pray; the Mazovian attendants fell to

cursing.

Emboldened by darkness, the wolves pressed on with more insolence, and from the direction of the wild boars some fresh ones ran up to them. A few came rather near, with snapping teeth, and the hair standing straight on their shoulders. Their eyes were all bloodshot, and a greenish light flashed from them.

A moment had come which was really terrible.

"Shall we shoot?" inquired one of the escort.

"Frighten them with shouts," said Pan Gideon.

Thereupon rose with keenness, "A-hu! a-hu!" The horses gained courage, and the wolves, impressed by the voices of men, withdrew some tens of paces.

Then a still greater wonder was manifest.

All at once forest echoes from behind repeated the shouts of the attendants, but with rising force, ever louder and louder, as it were outbursts of wild laughter; and some moments later a crowd of dark horsemen appeared at both sides of the carriage and shot past with all the speed of their beasts toward the wild boars and the wolves which encircled them.

In the twinkle of an eye neither wolves nor boars held the snow plain; they had scattered as if a whirlwind had struck them. Gunshots were heard, also shouts, and again those strange outbursts of laughter. Pan Gideon's attendants rushed after the horsemen, so that there remained at the sleigh only the postilion and the driver.

Inside the sleigh there was such mighty amazement that no one dared move a lip for some moments.

"But the word became flesh!" called out Pani Vinnitski, at last. "That must be help from above us."

"May it be blessed, whencesoever it came. Our plight was growing evil," said Pan Gideon.

"God sent those young knights!" said Panna Anulka, who wished to add her word.

It would have been difficult to divine how this maiden could have seen that those men were knights and young, in addition, for they shot past like a whirlwind; but no person asked for her reasons, since the older man and woman were occupied overmuch with what was happening before them.

Meanwhile, on the plain the sounds of pursuit were heard yet for the space of some Our Fathers, and not very far from the sleigh was a wolf with its back broken, evidently by a sling-shot. The beast was on its haunches and howling so dreadfully that every one shivered.

The man on the leading horse slipped down to kill the beast, for the horses were plunging with such violence that the sleigh-pole was cracking.

After a time the horsemen seemed black again on the snow field. They came in a crowd, without order, in a mist, for though the night was cold and the air very clear, the horses had been driven unsparingly, and were smoking like chimneys.

The horsemen approached with loud laughter and singing, and when they had drawn near, one of them shot up to the sleigh, and asked in glad, resonant accents,--

"Who is travelling?"

"Pangovski from Belchantska. Whom am I to thank for this rescue?"

"Stanislav Tsyprianovitch of Yedlinka!"

"The Bukoyemskis!"

"Thanks to your mightinesses. God sent you in season. Thanks!"

"Thanks!" repeated a youthful voice.

"Glory to God that it was in season!" continued Pan Stanislav, removing his fur cap.

"From whom did ye hear of us?"

"No one informed us, but as the wolves are now running in packs, we rode out to save people; since a person of such note has been found, our delight is the greater,

and the greater our service to God," said Pan Stanislav, politely.

But one of the Bukoyemskis now added,--

"Not counting the wolf skins."

"A beautiful deed and a real knightly work," said Pan Gideon. "God grant us to give thanks for it as promptly as possible. I think, too, that desire for human flesh has left those wolves now, and that we shall reach home without danger."

"That is by no means so certain. Wolves might be enticed again easily and make a new onrush."

"There is no help against that; but we will not surrender!"

"There is help, namely this: to attend you to the mansion. It may happen that we shall save some one else as we travel."

"I dared not ask for that, but since such is your kindness, let it be as you say, for the ladies here will feel safer."

"I have no fear as we are, but from all my soul I am grateful!" said Panna Anulka.

Pan Gideon gave the order and they moved forward, but they had gone only a few tens of paces when the cracked sleigh-pole was broken and the equipage halted.

New delays.

The attendants had ropes and fell to mending the broken parts straightway, but it was unknown whether such a patched work would not come apart after some furlongs.

Pan Stanislav hesitated somewhat, and then said, removing his fur cap a second time,--

"To Yedlinka through the fields it is nearer than to Belchantska. Honor our house then, your mightiness, and spend the night under our roof tree. No man can tell what might meet us in that forest, or whether even now we may not be too few to resist all the wolves that will rush to the roadway. We will bring home the sleigh in some

fashion, and the shorter the road is the easier our problem. It is true that the honor surpasses the service, but the case being one of sore need a man may not cherish pride over carefully."

Pan Gideon did not answer those words at the moment, for he felt reproach in them. He called to mind that when two years before Pan Serafin Tsyprianovitch had made him a visit, he received the man graciously, it is true, but with a known haughtiness, and did not pay back the visit. Pan Gideon had acted in that way since Pan Serafin's family was noble only two generations, he was a "homo novus," an Armenian by origin. His grandfather had bought and sold brocades in Kamenyets. Yakob, the son of that merchant, had served in the artillery under the famous Hodkievitch, and at Hotsim had rendered such service that, through the power of Pan Stanislav Lyubomirski, he had been ennobled, and then received Yedlinka for a lifetime. That life estate was made afterward the property of Pan Serafin, his heir, in return for a loan given the Commonwealth during Swedish encounters. The young man who had come to the road with such genuine assistance was the son of Pan Serafin.

Pan Gideon felt this reproof all the more, since the words "cherish pride over carefully" had been uttered by Pan Stanislav with studied emphasis and rather haughtily. But just that knightly courage pleased the old noble, and since it would have been hard to refuse the assistance, and since the road to his own house was in truth long and dangerous, he said to Pan Stanislav,--

"Unless you had assisted us the wolves would perhaps be gnawing our bones at this moment; let me pay with good-will for your kindness. Forward then, forward!"

The sleigh was now mended. The pole had been broken as if an axe had gone through it, so they tied one end of each rope to a runner, the other to a collar, and moved on in a large gladsome company, amid shouts from attendants and songs from the Bukoyemskis.

It was no great distance to Yedlinka, which was rather a forest farm than a village.

Soon there opened in front of the wayfarers a large field some tens of furlongs in area, or rather a broad clearing enclosed on four sides by a pine wood, and on this plain a certain number of houses, the roofs of which, covered with straw, were gleaming and sparkling in moonlight.

Beyond peasant cottages, and near them, Pan Serafin's outbuildings were visible stretching in a circle around the edge of a courtyard, in which stood the mansion, which was much disproportioned. The pile had been reconstructed by its latest owners, and from being a small house, in which dwelt on a time the king's foresters, it had become large, even too large, for such a small forest clearing. From its windows a bright light was shining, which gave a rosy hue to the snow near the walls of the mansion, to the bushes in front of it, and to the wellsweep which stood on the right of the entrance.

It was clear that Pan Serafin was expecting his son, and perhaps also guests from the road, who might come with him, for barely had the sleigh reached the gate when servants rushed out with torches, and after the servants came the master himself in a coat made of mink skin, and wearing a weasel-skin cap, which he removed promptly at sight of the equipage.

"What welcome guest has the Lord sent to our wilderness?" inquired he, descending the steps at the entrance.

Pan Stanislav kissed his father's hand, and told whom he had brought with him.

"I have long wished," said Pan Gideon, as he stepped from the carriage, "to do that to which grievous need has constrained me this evening, hence I bless the more ardently this chance which agrees with my wish so exactly."

"Various things happen to men, but this chance is for me now so happy, that with delight I beg you to enter my chambers."

Pan Serafin bowed for the second time, and gave his arm then to Pani Vinnitski; the whole company entered behind him.

The guests were seized straightway by that feeling of contentment which is felt always by travellers when they come out of darkness and cold into lighted, warm chambers. In the first, and the other apartments, fires were blazing in broad porcelain chimneys, and servants began to light here and there gleaming tapers.

Pan Gideon looked around with a certain astonishment, for the usual houses of nobles were far from that wealth which struck the eye in Pan Serafin's mansion.

By the light of the fires and the tapers and candles he could see in each apartment a furnishing such as might not be met with in many a castle: carved chests and bureaus and armchairs from Italy, clocks here and there, Venetian glass, precious bronze candlesticks, weapons from the Orient, which were inlaid with turquoise and hanging from wall mats. On the floors soft Crimean rugs, and on two long walls were pieces of tapestry which would have adorned the halls of any magnate.

"These came to them from trade," thought Pan Gideon, with well-defined anger, "and now they can turn up their noses and boast of wealth won not by weapons."

But Pan Serafin's heartiness and real hospitality disarmed the old noble, and when he heard, somewhat later, the clatter of dishes in the dining-hall near them, he was perfectly mollified.

To warm the guests who had come out of cold they brought heated, spiced wine immediately. They began then to discuss the recent peril. Pan Gideon had great praise for Pan Stanislav, who, instead of sitting in a warm room at home, had saved people on the highroad without regarding the terrible frost, and the toil, and the danger.

"Of a truth," said he, "thus, in old days, did those famous knights act, who, wandering through the world, saved men from cannibals, dragons, and various other vile monsters."

"If any man of them saved such a marvellous princess as this one," added Stanislav, "he was as happy at that time as we are this minute."

"No man ever saved a more wonderful maiden! True, as God is dear to me! He has told the whole truth!" cried the four Bukoyemskis with enthusiasm.

Panna Anulka smiled in so lovely a fashion that two charming dimples appeared in her cheeks, and she dropped her eyelids.

But the compliment seemed over bold to Pan Gideon, for his ward, though an orphan without property, was descended from magnates, hence he changed the conversation.

"But have your graces," asked he, "been moving long on the road in this fashion?"

"Since the great snows fell, and we shall keep on till the frost stops," said Stanislav.

"And have ye killed many wolves?"

"Enough to give overcoats to all of us."

Here the Bukoyemskis laughed as loud as if four horses were neighing, and when they had quieted a little, Mateush, the eldest one added,--

"His Grace the King will be proud of his foresters."

"True," said Pan Gideon. "And I have heard that ye are head foresters in the king's wilderness in these parts. But do not the Bukoyemskis originate in the Ukraine?"

"We are of those Bukoyemskis."

"Indeed--indeed--of good stock, the Yelo-Bukoyemskis are connected there with even great houses."

"And with St. Peter!" added Lukash.

"Eh!" said Pan Gideon. And he began to look around with suspicion and sternly at the brothers to see if they were not trying to jest with him. But their faces were clear, and they nodded with earnest conviction, confirming in this way the words of their brother. Pan Gideon was astonished immensely, and repeated: "Relatives of Saint Peter? But how is that?"

"Through the Pregonovskis."

"Indeed! And the Pregonovskis?"

"Through the Usviats."

"And the Usviats through some one else," said the old noble, with a smile, "and so on to the birth of Christ, the Lord. So! It is a great thing to have relatives in a senate down here, but what must it be to have kinsmen in the heavenly assembly--promotion is certain in that case. But how have ye wandered to our wilderness from the Ukraine, for men have told me that ye are some years in this neighborhood?"

"About three. Rebellions have long since levelled everything in the Ukraine, and boundaries have vanished. We would not serve Pagans in partisan warfare, so we served first in the army and then became tenants till Pan Malchinski, our relative, made us chief foresters in this place."

"Yes," said Pan Serafin, "I wondered that we found ourselves side by side in this wilderness, for we are not of this country, but the changing fortunes of men have transported us hither. The inheritance of your mightiness," here he turned to Pan Gideon, "is also, as I know, in Rus near the castle of Pomorani."

Pan Gideon quivered at this, as if some one had struck an open wound in his body.

"I had property there, and I have it there still," said he, "but those places to me are abhorrent, for misfortunes alone struck me there, just like thunderbolts."

"The will of God," said Pan Serafin.

"It is vain to revolt against that; still, life in those regions is difficult."

"Your grace, as is known, has served long in the army."

"Till I lost my arm. I avenged my country's wrongs, and my own there. And if the Lord Jesus will pardon one sin for each head that I took from a pagan, hell, as I trust, will never be seen by me."

"Of course not, of course not! Service is a merit, and so is suffering. Best of all is it

to cast gloomy thoughts from us."

"Gladly would I be rid of them, still, they do not leave me. But enough! I am a cripple at present, and this lady's guardian. I have removed in old age to a silent region which the enemy never visits. I live, as you know, in Belchantska."

"That is well, and I have acted in like manner," added Pan Serafin. "Young men, though it is quiet now on the borders, hurry off to Tartar trails in the hope of adventure, but it is ghastly and woful in places where each man is mourning for some one."

Pan Gideon put his hand to his forehead where he held it rather long, till at length he said sadly,--

"Only a peasant or a magnate can live in the Ukraine. When an onrush of pagans strikes that country the peasant flees to a forest and can live for some months in it like a wild beast; the magnate can live, for he has troops and strong castles of his own to protect him. But even then--the Jolkievskis lived in those regions and perished, the Danilovitches lived there and perished. Of the Sobieskis, the brother of our gracious King Yan perished also. And how many others! One of the Vishnievetskis squirmed on a hook in Stambul till he died there. Prince Koretski was beaten to death with iron rods. The Kalinovskis are gone,--and before them the Herburts and the Yaglovetskis paid their blood tribute. How many of the Sieninskis have died at various periods, and once they possessed almost the whole country--what a graveyard! Were I to recount all the names I could not finish till morning. And were I to give the names, not of magnates alone but of nobles, a month would not suffice me."

"True! true! So that a man wonders why the Lord God has thus multiplied those Turks and Tartars. So many of them have been killed that when an earthtiller works in the springtime his ploughshare bites at every step on the skull of a pagan. Dear God! Even our present king has crushed them to death in such numbers that their

blood would form a large river, and still they are coming."

These words had truth in them. The Commonwealth, rent by disorder and unruliness, could not have strong armies sufficient to end in one mighty struggle the Tartar-Turk avalanche. For that matter, all Europe could not command such an army. Still, the Commonwealth was inhabited by men of great daring, who would not yield their throats willingly to the knife of the eastern attacker. On the contrary, to that terrible region bristling with grave-mounds, and reeking with blood at the borders, Red Russia, Podolia, and the Ukraine, new waves of Polish settlers followed each after the other; these not only stirred up fertile lands, but their own craving for endless wars, battles, and adventures.

"The Poles," wrote an old chronicler, "go to Russia for skirmishes with Tartars."[1]

So from Mazovia went peasants; daring nobles went also, for each one of whom it was shameful "to die in his bed like a peasant." And there grew up in those red lands mighty magnates, who, not satisfied with action even there, went frequently much farther--to Wallachia, or the Crimea, seeking victory, power, death, salvation, and glory.

It was even said that the Poles did not wish one great war that would end the whole question. Though this was not true, still, continual disturbance was dear to that daring generation--but the invader on his part paid with blood dearly for his venture.

Neither the Dobrudja nor Belgorod lands, nor the Crimean reed barrens could support their wild Tartar denizens, hence hunger drove them to the border where rich booty was waiting, but death was waiting also, very often.

The flames of fire lighted up invasions unknown yet to history. Single regiments cut into bits with their sabres and trampled into dust under horsehoofs detachments surpassing them tenfold in number. Only swiftness beyond reckoning could save the invaders; in general when a Tartar band was overtaken by troops of the Commonwealth it was lost beyond rescue.

There were expeditions, especially the smaller ones, from which not one man went back to the Crimea. Terrible in their time both to Turks and to Tartars were Pretvits and Hmieletski; knights of less note, Volodyovski, Pelka, and the elder Rushits, wrote their names down with blood in men's memories. These for some years, or some tens of years, at that time, were resting in their graves and in glory; but even of the mighty ones none had drawn so much blood from the followers of Islam as the king reigning then, Yan Sobieski.

At Podhaitsi, Kalush, Hotsim, and Lvoff there were lying till that time unburied such piles of pagan bones that broad fields beneath them were as white as if snow-covered. At last on all hordes there was terror. The borders drew breath then, and when the insatiable Turk began to seek lighter conquests the whole tortured Commonwealth breathed with more freedom.

There remained only painful remembrances.

Far away from Pan Serafin's dwelling, and next to the castle of Pomorani, stood a tall cross on a hill, and two lances upon it. Twenty and some years before that Pan Gideon had placed this cross on the site of his fire-consumed mansion, hence, as he thought of that cross and of all those lives dear to him which had been lost in that region, the heart whined in the old man from anguish.

But since he was stern to himself and to others, and would not shed tears before strangers, and could not endure paltry pity from any man, he would not speak longer of his misfortunes, and fell to inquiring of his host how he lived in that forest inheritance.

"Here," said Pan Serafin, "is stillness, oh, stillness! When the forest is not sounding, and the wolves are not howling, thou canst almost hear snow fall. There is calmness, there is fire in the chimney and a pitcher of heated wine in the evening--old age needs nothing further."

"True. But your son?"

"A young bird leaves the nest sometimes. And here certain trees whisper that a great war with the pagan is approaching."

"To that war even gray falcons will hasten. Were it not for this, I should fly with the others."

Here Pan Gideon shook his coat sleeve, in which there was only a bit of his arm near the shoulder.

And Pan Serafin poured out heated wine to him.

"To the success of Christian weapons!"

"God grant it! Drink to the bottom."

Stanislav entertained at the same time Pani Vinnitski, Panna Anulka, and the four Bukoyemskis with a pitcher of wine which steamed quite as actively as the other. The ladies touched the glasses however with their lips very sparingly, but the Bukoyemskis needed no urging, hence the world seemed to them more joyous each moment, and Panna Anulka more beautiful, so, unable to find words to express their delight, they began to look at one another with amazement and panting; then each nudged another with his elbow. Mateush at last found expression,--

"We are not to wonder that the wolves wished to try the bones and the body of this lady, for even a wild beast knows a real tid-bit!"

Marek, Lukash, and Yan, the three remaining Bukoyemskis slapped their thighs then in ecstasy.

"He has hit the nail on the head, he has! A tid-bit! Nothing short of it!"

"A Saint Martin's cake!"

On hearing this Panna Anulka laid one hand on the other, and, feigning terror, said to Stanislav,--

"Oh, help me, for I see that these gentlemen only saved me from the wolves to eat me themselves."

"Gracious maiden," said Stanislav, joyfully, "Pan Mateush said that we were not to wonder at the wolves, but I say I do not wonder at the Bukoyemskis."

"What shall I do then, except to ask who will save me?"

"Trifle not with sacred subjects!" cried Pani Vinnitski.

"Well, but these gentlemen are ready to eat me and also auntie. Are they not?"

This question remained for some time without answer. Moreover, it was easy to note from the faces of the brothers that they had much less desire for the additional eating. But Lukash, who had quicker wit than his brothers, now added, "Let Mateush speak; he is the eldest."

Mateush was somewhat bothered, and answered, "Who knows what will meet him to-morrow?"

"A good remark," said Stanislav, "but to what do you apply it?"

"How to what?"

"Why, nothing. I only ask, why mention to-morrow?"

"But knowest thou that love is worse than a wolf, for a man may kill a wolf, but to kill love is beyond him."

"I know, but that again is another question."

"But if there be wit enough, a question is nothing."

"In that case may God give us wit."

Panna Anulka hid her laughter behind her palm; after her laughed Stanislav, and then the Bukoyemskis. Further word-play was stopped by a servant announcing the supper.

Pan Serafin gave his arm to Pani Vinnitski; after them went Pan Gideon; Stanislav conducted Panna Anulka.

"A dispute with Pan Bukoyemski is difficult," said the young lady, made gladsome.

"For his reasons are like wilful horses, each goes its own way; but he has told two truths which are hard of denial."

"What is the first one?"

"That no man knows what will meet him on the morrow, just as yesterday I did not know, for example, that to-day I should see you."

"And the other?"

"That a man can kill a wolf, but to kill love is beyond him. This also is a great truth."

Stanislav sighed; the young lady lowered her shady eyelashes and was silent. Only after a while, when they were sitting at the table, did she say to him,--

"But you will come, gentlemen, soon to my guardian's, so that he may show you some gratitude for saving us and for your hospitality also?"

The gloomy feelings of Pan Gideon brightened notably at supper, and when the host in splendid phrases proposed first the health of the ladies and that of the honored guest afterward, the old noble answered very cordially, thanking for the rescue from difficult straits, and giving assurance of never-ending gratitude.

After that they conversed of public questions, of the king, of the Diet which was to meet the May following of the war with which the Turkish Sultan was threatening the German Empire, and for which that Knight of Malta, Pan Lyubomirski, was bringing in volunteers.

The four brothers listened with no slight curiosity, because every Pole was received with open arms among Germans; since the Turks despised German cavalry, while Polish horsemen roused proper terror.

Pan Gideon blamed Lyubomirski's pride somewhat, since he spoke of German counts thuswise: "Ten of them could find place in one glove of mine;" still, he praised the man's knightliness, boundless daring, and great skill in warfare.

On hearing this, Lukash Bukoyemski declared for himself and his brothers that in

spring they would hasten to Lyubomirski, but while the frost raged they would kill wolves, and avenge the young lady, as behooved them.

"For, though we are not to wonder at the wolves," said Mateush, "when one thinks that such a pure dove might have been turned into wolf's meat the heart flies to the throat from pure anger, and at the same time it is hard to keep tears down. What a pity that wolf skins are so low-priced,--the Jews give barely one thaler for three of them!--but it is hard to keep our tears down, and even better to give way to them, for whoso could not compassionate innocence and virtue would be a savage, whom no man should name as a knight and a noble."

In fact, he gave way to his tears then, as did his three brothers; though wolves in the worst case could threaten only the life, not the virtue of the lady, still the eloquence of Lukash so moved his three brothers that their hearts became soft as warmed wax while they listened. They wished to shoot in the air from their pistols in honor of the young lady; but the host opposed, saying that he had a sick forester in the mansion, a man of great merit, who needed silence.

Pan Gideon, who supposed this to be some reduced relative of Pan Serafin, or in the worst case a village noble, inquired touching him, through politeness; but on learning that he was a serving-man and a peasant he shrugged his shoulders and looked with displeased and wondering eyes at Pan Serafin.

"Oh yes!" said he. "I forgot what people say of your marvellous kindness."

"God grant," answered Pan Serafin, "that they say nothing worse of me. I have to thank this man for much; and may every one meet such a person, for he knows herbs very thoroughly and can give aid in every illness."

"I wonder, since he cures others so ably, that he has not cured himself thus far. Send him my relative, Pani Vinnitski,--she knows many simples, and presses them on people; but meanwhile permit us to think of retiring, for the road has fatigued me most cruelly, and the wine has touched me also a trifle, just as it has the

Bukoyemskis."

In fact, the heads of the Bukoyemskis were steaming, while the eyes of those brothers were mist-covered and tender; so when Pan Stanislav conducted them to another building, where they were to pass the night together, they followed him with most uncertain tread on frozen snow, which squeaked under them. They wondered why the moon, instead of shining in the heavens, was perched on the roof of a barn and was smiling.

But Panna Anulka had dropped into their hearts so profoundly that they wished to speak more of her.

Pan Stanislav, who felt no great wish for sleep, directed to bring a thick-bellied bottle; then they sat near the broad chimney, and, by the bright light of the torch, drank in silence at first, listening only to the crickets in the chamber. At last Mateush filled his breast well with air and blew with such force at the chimney that the flame bent before him.

"O Jesus! My dear brothers," cried he, "weep, for a sad fate has met me."

"What fate? Speak, do not hide thy condition!"

"It is this. I am so in love that the knees are weakening under me!"

"And I? Dost think that I am not in love?" shouted Marek.

"And I?" screamed out Lukash.

"And I," ended Yan.

Mateush wanted to give them an answer of some kind, but could not at first, for a hiccough had seized him. He only stared with great wonderment, and looked as if he saw them for the first time in life at that moment. Then rage was depicted on his countenance.

"How is this, O sons of a such a one?" cried he, "ye wish to block the road to your eldest brother, and deprive him of happiness?"

"O indeed!" answered Marek, "what does this mean? Is Panna Anulka an entail of some kind, that only the eldest brother can get her? We are sons of one father and mother, so if thou call us sons of a such a one, thou art blaming thy father and mother. Each man is free to love as he chooses."

"Free, but woe to you, for ye are all bound to me in obedience."

"Must we all our lives serve a horseskull? Hei?"

"O pagan, thou art barking like a dog!"

"Thou art thyself doing that. Jacob was younger than Esau, and Joseph was younger than all his brothers, so thou art blaming the Scriptures, and barking against true religion."

Pushed to the wall by these arguments, Mateush could not find an answer with promptness, and when Yan made some remark touching Cain, the first brother, he lost his head utterly. Anger rose in him higher and higher, till at last he began with his right hand to search for the sabre which he had not there with him. It is unknown to what it would have come had not Yan, who for some time had been pressing a finger to his forehead, as if wrestling with an idea, cried out in a great voice, and suddenly,--

"I am the youngest brother, I am Joseph, so Panna Anulka is for me. undisputedly."

The others turned to him straightway. From their eyes were shooting fire sparks, in their faces was indignation.

"What? For thee? For thee! thou goose egg! thou straw scarecrow, thou horse strangler, thou dry slipper--thou drunkard! For thee?"

"Shut thy mouth, it is written in the Scriptures."

"What Scriptures, thou dunce?"

"All the same--but it is there. Ye are drunk, not I."

But at this moment Pan Stanislav happened in among them.

"Ah, is it not a shame for you," said he, "being nobles and brothers to raise such a quarrel? Is this the way to nourish love among brothers? But about what are ye fighting? Is Panna Anulka a mushroom that the first man who finds her in the forest can put her in his basket? It is the custom among pelicans, and they are not nobles, or even people, to yield everything through family affection, and when they fail to find fish they feed one another with blood from their own bodies. Think of your dead parents; they are shedding tears up there now over this quarrelling among sons whom they surely advised to act differently from this when they blessed them. For those parents heavenly food is now tasteless, and they dare not raise their eyes to the Evangelists whose names they gave you in holy baptism."

Thus spoke Pan Stanislav and though at first he wished to laugh he was touched as he spoke by his own words, for he too had drunk somewhat because of the company at dinner. At last the Bukoyemskis were greatly moved by his speech, and all four of them ended in tears, while Mateush the eldest one cried to them,--

"Oh kill me, for God's sake, but call me not Cain!"

Thereupon Yan, who had mentioned Cain, threw himself into the arms of Mateush.

"Oh, brother," cried he, "give me to the hangman for doing so."

"Forgive me, or I shall burst open from sorrow," cried Marek.

"I have barked like a dog against the commandment," said Lukash.

And they fell to embracing one another, but Mateush freed himself finally from his brothers, sat on a bench very suddenly, unbuttoned his coat, threw open his shirt, and, baring his breast, exclaimed in broken accents,--

"Here ye have me! here, like a pelican!"

Thereupon they sobbed the more loudly.

"A pelican! a genuine pelican! As God is dear to me,--a pelican!"

"Take Panna Anulka."

"She is thine! Take her, thou," said the brothers.

"Let the youngest man have her."

"Never! Impossible!"

"Devil take her!"

"Devil take her!"

"We don't want her!"

Hereupon Marek struck his thighs with his palms till the chamber resounded.

"I know what's to be done," cried he.

"What dost thou know? Speak, do not hide it!"

"Let Stanislav have her!"

When they heard this the other three sprang from their benches. Marek's idea struck them to the heart so completely that they surrounded Pan Stanislav.

"Take her, Stashko!"

"It will please us most of all."

"If thou love us!"

"Do this to please us!"

"May God bless you!" cried Mateush; and he raised his eyes heavenward, as he stretched his hands over Stanislav.

Stanislav blushed, and he stood there astonished, repeating,--

"Fear God's wounds!"

But his heart quivered at the thought, for having passed two whole years with his father amid the dense forests, and seeing few people, he had not met for a legion of days such a marvellous maiden. He had seen some one like her in Brejani, for he had been sent by his father to gain elegance at the court there and a knowledge of government. But he was a lad then, and time had effaced those remote recollections.

And now he saw in the midst of those forests unexpectedly just such a beautiful flower as the other one, and men said to him straightway: "Oh take it!" In view of this he was dreadfully shamefaced and answered,--

"Fear God! How could ye or I get her?"

But they, as is usual with men who are tipsy, saw no obstacle to anything and insisted.

"No man of us will be jealous," said Marek, "take her! We must go to the war whatever happens; we have had watching enough in this forest. Thirty thalers for the whole God-given year. It does not buy drink for us, and what is there left then for clothing? We sold our saddle beasts, and now we hunt wolves with thy horses and outfits--A hard lot for orphans. Better perish in war--But take her thou, if thou love us!"

"Take her!" cried out Mateush, "but we will go to Rakuz, to Lyubomirski, to help the Germans in shelling out pagans."

"Take her immediately."

"Take her to-morrow! To the church with her straightway!"

But Stanislav had recovered from astonishment and was as sober as if he had not touched a drop since the morning.

"Oh, stop, what are ye saying? Just as if only your will or mine were all that is needed! But what will she say and what will Pan Gideon say? Pan Gideon is self-willed and haughty. Even though the young lady grew friendly in time, he might prefer to see her sow rue than be the wife of any poor devil like me, or like any one of you brothers."

"Oh pshaw!" exclaimed Yan. "Is Pan Gideon the Castellan of Cracow, or grand hetman? If he is too high for us let him beware how he thrusts up his nose in our presence. Are the Bukoyemskis too small to be his gossips?"

"Ah, never mind! He is old, the time of his death is not distant, let him have a care lest he be stopped by Saint Peter in heaven's gateway. Oh take our part! holy Peter, and say this to him: 'Thou didst not know during life, thou son of a such a one, how to respect my blood relatives; kiss now the dog's snout for thy conduct.' Let that be said after death to Pan Gideon. But meanwhile we will not let him belittle us in his lifetime."

"How! because we have no fortune must we be despised and treated like peasants?"

"Is that the pay for our blood, for our wounds, for our service to the country?"

"O my brothers, ye orphans of God! many an injustice has met you, but one more grievous than this no man has ever yet put on us."

"That is true, that is true!" exclaimed Lukash and Marek and Yan in sad accents.

And tears of grief flowed down their faces afresh and abundantly, but when they had wept out their fill they fell to storming, for it seemed to them that such an offence to men of birth should not be forgotten.

Lukash, the most impulsive of all the four brothers, was the first to make mention of this matter.

"It is difficult to challenge him to sabres," said he, "for he has lost an arm and is old, but if he has contemned us, we must have satisfaction. What are we to do? Think of this!"

"My feet have been frozen to-night," said Lukash, "and are burning tremendously. But for this, I could think out a remedy."

"My feet are not burning, but my head is on fire," added Marek.

"From that which is empty thou wilt never pour anything."

"Gland is blamed always by Katchan!" said Mateush.

"Ye give a quarrel instead of an answer!" cried Lukash. But Stanislav interrupted;--

"An answer?" said he, "but to whom?"

"To Pan Gideon."

"An answer to what?"

"To what? How 'to what'?"

They looked at one another, with no small astonishment, and then turned to Lukash,--

"What dost thou wish of us?"

"But what do ye wish of me?"

"Adjourn this assembly till daylight," said Stanislav. "The fire here is dying, midnight is past now a long time. The beds are all ready at the walls there, and rest is ours honestly, for we have worked in the frost very faithfully."

The fire had gone out; it was dark in the chamber, so the advice of the host had power to convince the four brothers. Conversation continued some little time yet, but with decreasing intensity. Somewhat later a whispered "Our Father" was heard, at one moment louder, at another one lower, interrupted now and then with deep sighing.

The coals in the chimney began to grow dark and be covered with ashes; at moments something squeaked near the fire, and the crickets chirped sadly in the corners, as if mourning for the light which had left them. Next the sound of boots cast from feet to the floor, after that a short interval of silence, and then immense snoring from the four sleeping brothers.

But Stanislav could not sleep, all his thoughts whirled about Panna Anulka, like active bees about blossoms.

How could a man sleep with such a buzzing in his cranium! He closed his lids, it is true, once and a second time, but finding that useless he pondered.

"I will see if there is light in her chamber," thought he, finally.

And he passed through the doorway.

There was no light in her windows, but the gleam of the moon quivered on the uneven panes as on wrinkled water. The world was silent, and sleeping so soundly that even the snow seemed to slumber in the bath of greenish moonlight.

"Dost thou know that I am dreaming of thee?" asked Stanislav in a whisper, as he looked at the silent window.

The elder Tsyprianovitch, Pan Serafin, in accordance with his inborn hospitality, and his habit, spared neither persuasion nor pressing to detain his guests longer in Yedlinka. He even knelt before Pani Vinnitski, an act which did not come easily because of his gout, which, though moderate so far, was somewhat annoying. All that, however, availed not. Pan Gideon insisted on going before midday, and at last, since there was no answer to the statement that he was looking for guests at his mansion, Pan Serafin had to yield, and they started that clear frosty forenoon of wonderful weather. The snow on the fields, and on tree branches, seemed covered with myriads of fire sparks, which so glittered in the sunlight that the eye could barely suffer the gleams shooting back from the earth and the forest. The horses moved at a vigorous trot till their flanks panted; the sleigh runners whistled along the snow road; the carriage curtains were pushed back on both sides, and now at one window and now at the other appeared the rosy face of the young lady with gladsome eyes and a nose which the frost had reddened somewhat, a charming framed picture.

She advanced like a queen, for the carriage was encircled by a "life guard" made up of the Bukoyemskis and Pan Stanislav. The four brothers were riding strong beasts from the Yedlinka stables (they had sold or pledged not only their horses but the best of their sabres). They rushed on now at the side, sometimes forcing their horses to rear, and sometimes urging them on with such impetus that balls torn from the frozen snow by their hoofs shot away whistling through the air like stone missiles.

Perhaps Pan Gideon was not greatly charmed with these body-guards, for during the

advance he begged the cavaliers not to give themselves trouble, since the road in the daytime was safe, and of robbers in the forest no report had arisen; but when they had insisted on conducting the ladies, nothing was left him but to pay for politeness with politeness, and invite them to Belchantska. Pan Gideon had a promise also from Pan Serafin to visit him, but only after some days, since it was difficult for an old man to tear himself free of his household abruptly.

For the men, this journey passed quickly in wonders of horsemanship, and for Panna Anulka in appearing at the windows. The first halt to give rest to their horses was half-way on the road, at a forest inn which bore the ill omened name "Robbery." Next the inn stood a shed and the shop of a blacksmith. In front of his shop the blacksmith was shoeing some horses. At the side of the inn were seen sleighs owned by peasants; to these were attached lean, rough-coated sorry little beasts covered over completely with hoar frost; their tails were between their hind-legs, and bags of oats were tied under their noses.

People crowded out of the inn to look at the carriage surrounded by cavaliers and remained at a distance. These were not land tillers but potters, who made their pots at Kozenitse in the summer and took them in sleighs to sell during winter in the villages; but they appeared more especially at festivals through the country. These people, thinking that some man of great dignity must be travelling in a carriage with such an escort, took their caps off in spite of the weather and looked with curiosity at the party.

The warmly dressed travellers did not leave the equipage. The attendants remained mounted, but a page took wine in a decanter to the inn to be heated. Meanwhile Pan Gideon beckoned "the bark shoes" to come to him, and then he fell to inquiring whence they came, whither they were going, and was there no danger from wild beasts in any place.

"Of course there is," answered an old town-dweller, "but we travel during daylight

and in company. We are waiting here for friends from Prityk and other places. Perhaps too some earth tillers will come, and if fifteen or twenty sleighs appear, we will move on at night. Unless they come we will not start, though we take clubs with us."

"But has no accident happened about here?"

"The wolves ate a Jew during daylight. He was taking geese, as it seems, for on the road were found bones of a horse and a man,--besides, there were goose feathers. People knew by his cap that the man was a Jew. But early this morning some man came hither on foot, a young noble, who passed the whole night on a pine tree. He says that his horse dropped down dead, and there before his eyes the wolves ate the beast up. This man grew so stiff on the tree that he had barely strength to speak to us, and now he is sleeping."

"What is his name? Did he tell whence he came?"

"No. He just drank some hot beer and fell on a bench as if lifeless."

Pan Gideon turned then to the horsemen,--

"Have ye heard that?"

"We have."

"We must rouse the man, and make inquiries. He has no horse, how could we leave him alone here? My page could sit on the second front carriage horse, and give up his own. They say that the man is a noble. Perhaps he is here from a distance."

"He must be in a hurry," said Pan Stanislav, "since he was travelling at night, and besides without company. I will rouse him and make inquiry."

But his plan proved superfluous, since at that moment the page returned from the inn with a tray on which mugs of hot wine were steaming.

"I beg to tell your grace that Pan Tachevski is here," began he on reaching the carriage.

"Pan Tachevski? What the devil is he doing in this place?"

"Pan Tachevski!" repeated Panna Anulka.

"He is making ready, and will come out this minute," said the page. "He almost knocked the tray from my hand when he heard of your coming--"

"But who spoke of the tray to thee?"

The page became silent immediately, as if power of speech had deserted him.

Pan Gideon seized a goblet of wine, took one and a second draught, and said then to Pan Stanislav, as if with a certain repulsion,--

"He is an acquaintance of ours, and in some sense a neighbor from Charny--Well--rather giddy and unreliable--of those Tachevskis who long ago were, as some people say, of some note in the province."

Further explanations were stopped by Tachevski, who, coming out hurriedly, walked with firm stride toward the carriage, but on his face was a certain hesitation. He was a young noble of medium stature. He had splendid dark eyes, and was as lean as a splinter. His head was covered with a Hungarian cap, recalling, one might say, the time of King Bátory; he wore a gray coat lined with sheepskin, and long, yellow, Swedish boots reaching up to his body. No one wore such boots then in Poland. They had been taken during war in the days of Yan Kazimir, that was evident, and brought now through need from the storehouse by Tachevski. While approaching, he looked first at Pan Gideon, then at the young lady, and smiled, showing white, perfect teeth, but his smile was rather gloomy, his face showed embarrassment and even a trace of confusion.

"I rejoice beyond measure," said he, as he stood at the carriage and removed his cap gracefully, "to see, in good health, Pani Vinnitski and Panna Sieninski, with your grace, my benefactor, for the road is now dangerous; this I have learned from experience."

"Cover your head, or your ears will be frozen," said Pan Gideon, abruptly. "I thank you for the attention, but why are you wandering through the wilderness?"

Tachevski looked quickly at the young lady, as if to inquire: "Thou knowst why, dost thou not?" but seeing her eyes downcast, and noting also that she was biting a ribbon of her hood for occupation, he answered in a voice of some harshness,--

"Well, the fancy struck me to gaze at the moon above pine trees."

"A pretty fancy. But did the wolves kill thy horse?"

"They only ate him, for I myself drove his life out."

"We know. And thou wert roosting, like a crow, all the night in a pine tree."

Here the Bukoyemskis burst into such mighty laughter that their horses were put on their haunches. Tachevski turned and measured them one after another, with glances which were ice cold and as sharp as a sword edge.

"Not like a crow," said he then to Pan Gideon, "but like a horseless noble, at which condition it is granted you, my benefactor, to laugh, but it may be unhealthy for another to do so."

"Oho! oho! oho!" repeated the Bukoyemskis, urging toward him their horses. Their faces grew dark in one moment, and their mustaches quivered. Again Tachevski measured them, and raised his head higher.

But Pan Gideon spoke with a voice as severe and commanding as if he had power over all of them.

"No quarrels here, I beg! This is Pan Tachevski," said he after a while, with more mildness, turning to the cavaliers, "and this is Pan Tsyprianovitch, and each of the other four nobles is a Pan Bukoyemski, to whom I may say we owe our lives, for wolves met us yesterday. These gentlemen came to our aid unexpectedly, and God knows in season."

"In season," repeated Panna Anulka, with emphasis, pouting a little, and looking at

Pan Stanislav bewitchingly.

Tachevski's cheeks flushed, but on his face there appeared as it were humiliation, his eyes became mist-covered, and, with immense sadness in his accents, he said,--

"In season, for they were in company, and happy because on good horses, but wolf teeth at that time were cutting old Voloshyn, and my last friend had vanished. But--" even here he looked with greater good-will at the Bukoyemskis--"may your hands be sacred, for ye have done that which with my whole soul I wished to do, but God did not let me."

Panna Anulka seemed changeable, like all women, perhaps too she was sorry for Tachevski, since her eyes became pleasant and twinkling, her lids opened and closed very quickly, and she asked with a different voice altogether,--

"Old Voloshyn? My God, I loved him so much and he knew me. My God!"

Tachevski looked at her straightway with thankfulness.

"He knew you, gracious lady, he knew you."

"Grieve not, Pan Yatsek, grieve not so cruelly."

"I grieved before this, but on horseback. I shall grieve now on foot. God reward you, however, for the kind words."

"But mount now the mouse-colored horse," said Pan Gideon. "The page will ride the off leader, or sit behind the carriage. There is an extra burka at the saddle, put it on, for thou hast been freezing all night, and the cold is increasing."

"No," said Tachevski, "I am warm. I left my shuba behind, since I felt no need of it."

"Well, for the road!"

They started. Yatsek Tachevski taking his place near the left carriage window, Stanislav Tsyprianovitch at the right, so the young lady sitting in front might without turning her head look freely at the one and the other.

But the Bukoyemskis were not glad to see Yatsek. They were angry that he had

taken a place at the side of the carriage, so, bringing their horses together till their heads almost touched, they talked with one another and counselled,--

"He looked at us insolently," said Mateush. "As God is in heaven he wants to insult us."

"Just now he turned his horse's tail to us. What do ye say to that?"

"Well, he could not turn the horse's head, for horses do not travel tail forward like crawfish. But that he is making up to that young lady is certain," put in Marek.

"Thou hast taken in the situation correctly. See how he bends and leans forward. If his stirrup strap breaks he will fall."

"He will not fall, the son of a such a one, for the saddle straps are strong, and he is a firm rider."

"Bend thyself, bend till we break thee!"

"Just look how he smiles at her!"

"Well, brothers, are we to permit this? Never, as God lives! The girl is not for us, that may be, but does he remember what we did yesterday?"

"Of course! He must divine that, for he is cunning, and now he is making up to her to spite us."

"And in contempt for our poverty and orphanhood."

"Oh! upon my word a great magnate--on another man's horse."

"Well, for that matter we are not riding our own beasts."

"One horse remains to us anyhow, so if three sit at home the fourth man may ride to the war if he wishes; but that fellow has not even a saddle, for the wolves have made bits of it."

"Besides, he sticks his nose up. What has he against us? Just tell me."

"Well, ask him."

"Shall I do it right away?"

"Eight away, but politely, so as not to offend old Pan Gideon. Only after he has answered can we challenge."

"And then we shall have him!"

"Which of us is to do this?"

"I, of course, for I am the eldest," said Mateush. "I will rub the icicle from my mustache, and then at him!"

"But remember well what he says to thee."

"I will repeat every word, like the Lord's prayer."

Thereupon the eldest Bukoyemski set to rubbing off with his glove the ice from his mustache, and then urging his horse to the horse of Pan Yatsek he called,--

"My dear Sir?"

"What?" inquired Yatsek, turning his head from the carriage unwillingly.

"What have you against us?"

Yatsek looked at him with astonishment, and answered,--

"Nothing!" then, shrugging his shoulders, he turned again to the carriage.

Mateush rode on some time in silence considering whether to return and report to his brothers or speak further. The second course seemed to him better, so he continued,--

"If thou think to do anything, I say that thou wilt do what thou hast said to me. Nothing!"

On Yatsek's face was an expression of constraint and annoyance. He understood that they were seeking a quarrel, for which at that moment he had not the least wish whatever. But he found need of some answer, and that of such kind as to end the conversation, so he asked,--

"Well, thy brothers over there, are they also--"

"Of course! but what is 'also'?"

"Think it out thyself and do not interrupt now my more agreeable occupation."

Mateush rode along the side of the carriage ten or fifteen steps farther. At last he turned his horse.

"What did he tell thee? Speak out!" said the brothers.

"There was no success."

"Because thou didst not know how to handle him," said Lukash. "Thou shouldst have tickled his horse in the belly with thy stirrup, or, since thou knowst his name, have said: 'Yatsek, here is a platsek (a cake) for thee!'"

"Or said this to him: 'The wolves ate thy horse, buy a he goat in Prityk.'"

"That is not lost, but what did it mean when he said: 'Are thy brothers also?'"

"Maybe he wanted to ask if we were fools also."

"Of course! As God is dear to me!" cried Marek. "He could not think otherwise. But what now?"

"His death, or ours. As God lives, what he says is open heresy. We must tell Stashko."

"Tell nothing, for since we give up the young lady to Stashko, Stashko must challenge him, and here the great point is that we challenge first."

"When? At Pan Gideon's a challenge is not proper. But here is Belchantska."

In fact Belchantska was not distant. On the edge of the forest stood the cross of Pan Gideon's establishment, with a tin Saviour hanging between two spears; on the right, where the road turned round a pine wood, broad meadows were visible, with a line of alders on the edge of a river, and beyond the alders on the bank opposite and higher, were the leafless tops of tall trees, and smoke rising from cottages. Soon the retinue was moving past cottages, and when it had gone beyond fences and buildings

Pan Gideon's dwelling was before the eyes of the horsemen,--a broad court surrounded by an old and decayed picket fence which in places was leaning.

From times the most ancient no enemy had appeared in that region, so no one had thought defence needful for the dwelling. In the broad court there were two dovecotes. On one side were the quarters for servants, on the other the storehouse, provision rooms, and a big cheese house made of planks and small timbers. Before the mansion and around the court were pillars with iron rings for the halters of horses; on each pillar a cap of frozen snow was fixed firmly. The mansion was old and broad, with a low roof of straw. In the court hunting dogs were rushing around, and among them a tame stork with a broken wing was walking securely; the bird as it seemed had left its warm room a little earlier to get exercise and air in the cold courtyard.

At the mansion the people were waiting for the company, since Pan Gideon had sent a man forward with notice. The same man came out now to meet them and, bowing down, said to Pan Gideon,--

"Pan Grothus, the starosta of Raygrod, has come."

"In God's name!" cried Pan Gideon. "Has he been waiting long for me?"

"Not an hour. He wished to go, but I told him that you were coming and in sight very nearly."

"Thou didst speak well." Then he turned to the guests,--

"I beg you, gentlemen, Pan Grothus is a relative through my wife. He is returning, it is evident, to Warsaw from his brother's, for he is a deputy to the Diet. Please enter."

After a time they were all in the dining-room in presence of the starosta of Raygrod, whose head almost grazed the ceiling, for in stature he surpassed the Bukoyemskis, and the rooms were exceedingly low in that mansion. Pan Grothus was a showy noble with an expression of wisdom, and the face and bald head of a statesman. A sword scar on his forehead just over the nose and between his two eyebrows seemed

a firm wrinkle, giving his face a stern, and, as it were, angry aspect. But he smiled at Pan Gideon with pleasantness, and opened his arms to him, saying,--

"Well, I, a guest, am now welcoming the host to his own mansion."

"A guest, a dear guest," cried Pan Gideon. "God give thee health for having come to me, lord brother. What dost thou hear over there now in Warsaw?"

"Good news of private matters, of public also, for war is now coming."

"War? How is that? Are we making it?"

"Not yet, but in March a treaty will be signed with the Emperor, then war will be certain."

Though even before the New Year there had been whispers of war with the Sultan, and there were those who considered it inevitable, the confirmation of these rumors from the lips of a person so notable, and intimately acquainted with politics as Pan Grothus, imposed on Pan Gideon and the guests in his mansion very greatly. Barely had the host, therefore, presented them to the starosta, when a conversation followed touching war, touching Tököli and the bloody struggles throughout Hungary, from which, as from an immense conflagration, there was light over all parts of Austria and Poland. That was to be a mighty struggle, before which the Roman Cæsar and all German lands were then trembling. Pan Grothus, skilled much in public matters, declared that the Porte would move half of Asia and all Africa, and appear with such strength as the world had not seen up to that day. But these previsions did not injure good-humor in any one. On the contrary they were listened to with rapture by young men, who were wearied by long peace at home, and to whom war presented fields of glory, service, and even profit.

When Mateush Bukoyemski heard the words of the starosta he so struck his knee with his palm that the sound was heard throughout the mansion.

"Half Asia, and what in addition?" asked he. "O pshaw! Is that something new for us?"

"Nothing new, thou speakest truth!" said the host, whose face, usually gloomy, was lighted up now with sudden gladness. "If that question is settled, the call to arms will be issued immediately, and the levies will begin without loitering."

"God grant this! God grant it at the earliest! Think now of that old Deviantkievich at Hotsim, blind of both eyes. His sons aimed his lance in the charge, and he struck on the Janissaries as well as any other man. But I have no sons."

"Well, lord brother, if there be any one who can stay at home rightfully you are that person," said the starosta. "It is bad not to have a son in the war, worse not to have an eye, but worst of all not to have an arm."

"I accustomed both hands to the sabre," said Pan Gideon, "and in my teeth I can hold the bridle. Moreover, I should like to fall fighting on the field against pagans, not because the happiness of my life has been broken--not from revenge--no--but for this reason, speaking sincerely: I am old, I have seen much, I have meditated deeply, I have seen among men so much hatred, so much selfishness, so much disorder in this Commonwealth, I have seen our self-will, our disobedience and breaking of Diets, so much lawlessness of all sorts, that I say this here now to you. Many times in desperation have I asked the Lord God: Why, O Lord, hast thou created our Commonwealth, and created this people? I ask without answer and it is only when the pagan sea swells, when that vile dragon opens its jaws to devour Christianity and mankind, when, as you say, the Roman Cæsar and all German lands are shivering in front of this avalanche, that I learn why God created us and imposed on us this duty. The Turks themselves know this. Other men may tremble, but we will not, as we have not trembled thus far; so let our blood flow to the very last drop, and let mine be mixed with the rest of it. Amen."

The eyes of Pan Gideon were glittering and he was moved very deeply, but still he let no tears fall from his eyes; it may be because he had cried them out so much earlier, and it may be because he was harsh to himself and to others. But Pan

Grothus put his arm around his neck and then he kissed him on both cheeks.

"True, true," said he. "There is much evil among us, and only with blood may our ransom from evil be effected. That service, that watching which God has given us, was predestined to our people. And the time is approaching in which we shall prove this. That is our real position. There are tidings that the avalanche of pagans will turn on Vienna; when it does we will go there and before the whole world show that we are purely Christ's warriors, created in defence of the cross, and the faith of the Saviour. Other nations, who till now have lived without care behind our shoulders, will see in the clear day of heaven how our task is accomplished, and with God's will, while the earth stands, our service and our glory will not leave us."

At these words enthusiasm seized the young men. The Bukoyemskis sprang up from their chairs, and called in loud voices,--

"God grant it! When will the levies be? God grant it!"

"The souls are tearing out of us," said Stanislav. "We are ready this minute."

Yatsek was the only man silent, and his face did not brighten. That news which filled all hearts with pleasure was for him a source of keen suffering and bitterness. His thoughts and his eyes ran to Panna Anulka who was passing along near the dining-room joyously, and with measureless complaint and reproach they spoke thus to her,--

"Had it not been for thee I should have gone to some magnate, and though I might not have found fortune, I should have a horse and good arms in every case, and should go now with a regiment to find death, or else glory. Thy beauty, thy glances, those pleasant words, which at times thou didst throw like small alms at me, have brought about this, that I am here on those last little fields of mine, well-nigh expiring from hunger. Because of thee I have not seen the great world. I have not gained any polish. In what have I offended that thou hast enslaved me, as it were, soul and body? And in truth I would rather perish than be without seeing thee for a

twelvemonth. I have lost my last horse in hurrying to save thee, and now, in return for this, thou art laughing with another, and glancing at him most bewitchingly. But what shall I do? War is coming. Am I to be a serving man, or be disgraced among foot soldiers? What have I done that toward me thou art merciless?"

In this fashion did Yatsek Tachevski complain, he a man who felt his misery all the more keenly that he was a noble of great knightly family, though terribly impoverished. And though it was not true that Panna Anulka had never had mercy on him, it was true that for her sake he had never gone out to the great world, but had remained with only two serfs on poor pasture land where the first wants of life were beyond him. He was seventeen years of age, and she thirteen, when he fell in love with her beyond memory, and for five years he had loved the girl each year increasingly, and each year with more gloominess, for hopelessly. Pan Gideon had received him with welcome at first, as the scion of a great knightly family to which in former days had belonged in those regions whole countrysides; but afterward, when he noted how matters were tending, he began to be harsh to him, and at times even cruel. He did not close the house against the man, it is true, but he kept him away from the young lady, since he had for her views and hopes of another kind altogether. Panna Anulka noting her power over Yatsek amused herself with him just as a young girl does with flowers in a meadow. At times she bends over one, at times she plucks one, at times she weaves one into her tresses, later she throws it away, and later thinks nothing of flowers, whatever, and still later on she searches out new ones.

Yatsek had never mentioned his love to the young lady, but she knew of it perfectly, though she feigned not to know, and in general not to wish to know of anything which happened within him. She wondered at him, wondered how he pleased her. Once, when they were chasing some bees, she fell under his cloak and fondled up to his heart for a moment, but for two days she would not forgive him because of this. At times she treated him almost contemptuously, and when it seemed to him that all

had been ended forever, she, with one sweet look, one hearty word filled him with endless delight, and with hope beyond limit. If at times, because of a wedding, or a name's day, or a hunt in the neighborhood, he did not come for some days she was lonely, but when he did come she took revenge on him for her loneliness, and tormented him long for it. He passed his worst moments when there were guests at the mansion, and there happened among them some young man who was clever and good-looking. Then Yatsek thought that in her heart there was not even the simplest compassion. Such were his thoughts now because of Pan Stanislav and all that Pan Grothus had told of the coming war added bitterness to his cup, which was then overflowing.

Self-control in Pan Gideon's mansion was habitual with Yatsek, still, he could hardly sit to the end of the supper as he heard the words of the lady and Pan Stanislav. He saw, unhappy victim, that the other man pleased her, for he was in fact an adroit and agreeable young fellow, and far from being stupid. The talk at table turned always on the levies. Stanislav, learning from Pan Grothus that perhaps the levies would be made under him in those regions, turned to the lady on a sudden, and asked,--

"What regiment do you prefer?"

"The hussars," said she, looking at his shoulders.

"Because of the wings?"

"Yes. Once I saw hussars and thought them a heavenly army. I dreamt of them afterward two nights in succession."

"I know not whether I shall dream when a hussar, but I know that I shall dream of you earlier, and of wings also."

"Why is that?"

"I should dream of a real angel."

Panna Anulka dropped her eyes till a shade fell on her rosy cheeks from her eyelids.

"Be a hussar," said she, after an interval.

Yatsek gritted his teeth, drew his palm over his moistened forehead, and during the supper he did not get word or look from the lady. Only when they had risen from the table did a sweet, beloved voice sound at his ear.

"But will you go to this war with the others?"

"To die! to die!" answered Yatsek.

And in that answer there was such a genuine, true groan of anguish that the voice was heard again, as if in sympathy,--

"Why sadden us?"

"No one will weep for me."

"How know you that?" said the voice now a third time.

Then she slipped away to the other guests as swiftly as a dream vision, and bloomed, like a rose, at the other end of the drawing-room.

Meanwhile, the two elder men sat after the meal over goblets of mead, and when they had discussed public questions sufficiently they began to chat about private ones. Pan Grothus followed Panna Anulka with tender eyes for a time, and then said to Pan Gideon,--

"That is a brilliant spot over there. Just look at those young people who are flying like moths round a candle. But that is no wonder, for were we not in years we too should be flying."

Pan Gideon waved his hand in displeasure.

"Swarms they are,--rustics, homespuns, nothing better."

"How so? Tachevski is not a homespun."

"No, but he is poor. The Bukoyemskis are not homespuns; they even declare that they are kinsmen of Saint Peter, which may help them in heaven, but on earth they are nothing but foresters in the king's wilderness."

Pan Grothus wondered at the relationship of the Bukoyemskis no less than had Pan Gideon when he heard of it the first time, so he fell to inquiring in detail, till at last he laughed heartily, and added,--

"Saint Peter was a great apostle, and I have no wish to detract from his honor; all the more, since feeling old, I shall soon need his influence. But between you and me, there is not much in this kinship to boast of--no, he was merely a fisherman. If you speak of Joseph, who came from King David,--well, you may talk to me."

"I say only that there is no one here fit for the girl, either among those whom you see now under my roof, or in the whole neighborhood."

"But he who is sitting near Pani Vinnitski seems a nice gentleman."

"Tsyprianovitch? Yes, he is; but Armenian by origin and of a family noble only three generations."

"Then why invite them? Cupid is traitorous, and before there is time to turn once the pudding may be cooked for you."

Pan Gideon, who, in presenting the young men had stated how much he owed them, explained now in detail about the wolves and the assistance, because of which he was forced to invite the young rescuers to his mansion through gratitude simply.

"True, true," said Pan Grothus, "but in his own way Amor may cook the pudding before you have noticed it. This girl's blood is not water."

"Ai! she is a slippery weasel," said Pan Gideon. "She can and will bite, but she will twist out besides from between a man's fingers, and no common person could catch her. Great blood has this inborn quality that it yields not, but rules and regulates. I am not of those who are led by the nose very easily, still, I yield to her often. It is true, that I owe much to the Sieninskis, but even if I did not there would be only slight difference. When she stands before me and puts a tress from one shoulder to the other, inclines her head to me, and glances, she gets what she wishes most frequently. And more than once do I think, what a blessing of God, what an honor,

that the last child, the last heiress of such a famed family, is under my roof tree. Of course you know of the Sieninskis--once all Podolia was theirs. In truth, the Sobieskis, the Daniloviches, the Jolkevskis grew great through them. It is the duty of His Grace the King to remember this, all the more since now almost nothing remains of those great possessions; and the girl, if she has any property, will have only that which remains after me to her."

"But what will your relatives say in this matter?"

"There are only distant Pangovskis, who will not prove kinship. But often my peace is destroyed by the thought that after me may come quarrels, with lawsuits and wrangling, as is common in this country. The relatives of my late wife are for me the great question. From my wife comes a part of my property, namely: the lands with this mansion."

"I shall not appear with a lawsuit," said Pan Grothus, "but I would not guarantee as to others."

"That is it! That is it! I have been thinking of late to visit Warsaw and beg the king to be a guardian to this orphan, but his head is full now of other questions."

"If you had a son it would be a simple matter to give the girl to him."

Pan Gideon gazed at the starosta with a look so full of pain that the other stopped speaking. Both men were silent for a long time, till Pan Gideon said with emotion,--

"To you I might say, my lord brother, with Virgil, infandum jubes renovare dolorem (thou commandest me to call up unspeakable sorrow). That marriage would be simple--and I will tell you that had it not been for this simple method I should have died long ago perhaps. My son while in childhood was stolen by the Tartars. People have returned more than once from captivity among pagans when the memory of them had perished. Whole years have I looked for a miracle--whole years have I lived in the hope of it. To-day even, when I drink something I think to myself we, perhaps now! God is greater than human imagining. But those moments of hope are

very shortlived, while the pain is enduring and daily. No! Why deceive myself? My blood will not be mingled with that of the Sieninskis, and, if relatives rend what I have into fragments, this last child of the family to which I owe everything, will be without bread to nourish her."

Both drank in silence again. Pan Grothus was thinking how to milden the pain which he had roused in Pan Gideon unwittingly, and how to console the man in suffering. At last an idea occurred to him which he considered very happy. "Ai!" exclaimed he, "there is a way to do everything, and you, my lord brother, can secure bread for the girl without trouble."

"How?" asked Pan Gideon, with a certain disquiet.

"Does it not happen often that old men take as wives even girls not full grown yet? An example in history is Konietspolski the grand hetman, who married a green girl, though he was older than you are. It is true also, that, having taken too many youth-giving medicines, he died the first night after marriage, but neither Pan Makovski, pocillator of Radom, nor Pan Rudnitski lost their lives, though both had passed seventy. Besides, you are sturdy. Should the Lord again bless you, well, so much the better; if not, you would leave in sufficiency and quiet the young widow, who might choose then the husband that pleased her."

Whether such an idea had ever come to Pan Gideon we may not determine; it suffices, that, after these words of Pan Grothus, he was greatly confused, and, with a hand trembling somewhat, poured mead to the starosta till it flowed over the goblet, and the generous liquor dropped down to the floor after passing the table.

"Let us drink to the success of Christian arms!" said he.

"That in its time," said Pan Grothus, following the course of his own thoughts still further; "and dwell in your own way on what I have said to you, for I have struck, as I think, the true point of the question."

"But why? What reason is there? Drink some more--"

Further words were interrupted by the movement of chairs at the larger table. Pani Vinnitski and Panna Anulka wished to retire to their chamber. The voice of the young lady, as resonant as a bell made of silver, repeated: "Good-night, good-night;" then she courtesied prettily to Pan Grothus, kissed the hand of Pan Gideon, touched his shoulder with her nose and her forehead cat fashion, and vanished. Pan Stanislav, the Bukoyemskis, and Yatsek went out soon after the ladies. The two older men only remained in the dining-room and conversed long in it, for Pan Gideon commanded to bring still better mead in another decanter.

CHAPTER II

Whether by chance or a trick of the young lady is unknown to us; it suffices, however, that the four Bukoyemskis received a large chamber in an outbuilding, and Pan Stanislav with Yatsek a smaller one near it. This confused the two men no little, and then, so as not to speak to each other, they began straightway the litany and continued it longer than was usual. But when they had finished there followed a silence which annoyed both of them, for though their feelings toward each other were unfriendly, they felt that they might not betray them, and that they should for a time, and especially at the house of Pan Gideon, show politeness.

Yatsek ungirded his sabre, drew it out of the scabbard, looked at the edge by the light of the chimney, and fell to rubbing the blade with his handkerchief.

"After frost," said he half to himself, half to Stanislav, "a sabre sweats in a warm chamber, and rust appears on it straightway."

"And last night it must have frozen solidly," said Stanislav.

He spoke without evil intention, and only because it occurred to him that Tachevski had been in a splitting frost all the night previous; but Yatsek placed the point of his blade on the floor, and looked quickly into the eyes of the other man.

"Are you referring to this,--that I sat on a pine tree?"

"Yes," replied Stanislav, with simplicity; "of course there was no stove there."

"But what would you have done in my position?"

Stanislav wished to answer "the same that you did," but the question was put to him sharply, so he answered,--

"Why break my head over that, since I was not in it?"

Anger flashed for an instant on the face of Pan Yatsek, but to restrain himself he began to blow on the sabre and rub the blade with still greater industry. At last he returned it to the scabbard, and added,--

"God sends adventures and accidents."

And his eyes, which one moment earlier had been gleaming, were covered again with the usual sadness, for just then he remembered his one friend, the horse, which those wolves had torn to pieces.

Meanwhile the door opened and the four Bukoyemskis walked into the chamber.

"The frost has weakened, and the snow sends up steam," said Mateush.

"There will be fog," added Yan.

And then they took note of Yatsek, whom they had not seen the first moment.

"Oh art thou in such company?" asked Lukash, as he turned to Stanislav.

All four brothers put their hands on their hips and cast challenging glances at Yatsek.

Yatsek seized a chair and, pushing it to the middle of the chamber, turned to the Bukoyemskis with a sudden movement; then he sat astride of the chair, as on horseback, rested his elbows on the back of it, raised his head, and answered with equally challenging glances. Thus were they opposed then; he, with feet stretching widely apart in his Swedish boots, they, shoulder to shoulder, quarrelsome, threatening, enormous.

Stanislav saw that it was coming to a quarrel, but he wished to laugh at the same

time. Thinking that he could hinder a collision at any instant he let them gaze at one another.

"Eh, what a bold fellow," thought he of Yatsek, "nothing confuses him."

The silence continued, at once unendurable and ridiculous. Yatsek himself felt this, also, for he was the first man to break it.

"Sit down, young sirs," said he, "not only do I invite, but I beg you."

The Bukoyemskis looked at one another with astonishment, this new turn confused them.

"How is this? What is it? Of what is he thinking?"

"I beg you, I beg you," repeated Yatsek, and he pointed to benches.

"We stay as we are, for it pleases us, dost understand?"

"Too much ceremony."

"What ceremony?" cried Lukash. "Dost thou claim to be a senator, or a bishop, thou--thou Pompeius!"

Yatsek did not move from the chair, but his back began to quiver as if from sudden laughter.

"But why call me Pompeius?" inquired he.

"Because the name fits thee."

"But it may be because thou art a fool," replied Yatsek.

"Strike, whoso believes in God!" shouted Yan.

Evidently Yatsek had had talk enough also, for something seemed to snatch him from the chair on a sudden, and he sprang like a cat toward the brothers.

"Listen, ye road-blockers," said he with a voice cold as steel, "what do ye want of me?"

"Blood!" cried Mateush.

"Thou wilt not squirm away from us this time!" shouted Marek. "Come out at once," said he, grasping toward his side for a sabre.

But Stanislav pushed in quickly between them.

"I will not permit," cried he. "This is another man's dwelling."

"True," added Yatsek, "this is another man's dwelling, and I will not injure Pan Gideon. I will not cut you up under his roof, but I will find you to-morrow."

"We will find thee to-morrow!" roared Mateush.

"Ye have sought conflicts and raised pretexts all day, why, I cannot tell, for I have not known you, nor have ye known me, but ye must answer for this, and because ye have insulted me I would meet not four men but ten like you."

"Oho! oho! One will suffice thee. It is clear," cried out Yan, "that thou hast not heard of the Bukoyemskis."

"I have spoken of four," said Yatsek, turning on a sudden to Stanislav, "but perhaps you will join with these cavaliers?"

Stanislav bowed politely.

"Since you make the inquiry--"

"But we first, and according to seniority," said the Bukoyemskis. "We will not withdraw from that. We have settled it, and will cut down any man who interferes with us."

Yatsek looked quickly at the brothers, and in one moment divined, as he thought, the arrangement, and he paled somewhat.

"So that is it!" said he again to Stanislav; "thou hast hirelings, and art standing behind them. By my faith the method seems certain, and very safe, but whether it is noble and knightly is another point. In what a company do I find myself?"

On hearing this opinion which disgraced him, Stanislav, though he had a mild spirit by nature, felt the blood rush to his visage. The veins swelled on his forehead,

lightning flashed from his eyes, his teeth were gritting terribly, and he grasped the hilt of his sabre.

"Come out! Come out this instant!" cried he in a voice choked with anger.

Sabres flashed; it was bright in the chamber, for light fell on the steel blades from a torch in the chimney. But three of the Bukoyemskis sprang between the opponents and stood in a line there, the fourth caught Stanislav by the shoulders.

"By the dear God, restrain thyself, Stashko! We are ahead of thee!"

"We are ahead of thee!" cried the three others.

"Unhand me!" screamed Stanislav, hoarsely.

"We are ahead!"

"Unhand me!"

"Hold Stashko, ye, and I will settle with this man while ye are holding him," shouted Mateush; and seizing Yatsek he dragged him aside to begin at him straightway, but Yatsek with presence of mind pulled himself free of Mateush, and sheathed his sword, saying,--

"I choose the man who is to fight first and the time. So I tell you to-morrow, and in Vyrambki, not here."

"Oh thou wilt not sneak away from us! Now! now!"

But Yatsek crossed his arms on his breast. "Ha, if ye wish without fighting to kill me under the roof of our host, let me know it."

At this rage seized the brothers; they stamped the floor with their boot-heels, pulled their mustaches, and panted like wild bears. But since they feared infamy no man of them had the daring to rush at Tachevski.

"To-morrow, I tell you! Say to Pan Gideon that ye are going to visit me, and inquire for the road to Vyrambki. Beyond the brook stands a crucifix since the time of the pestilence. There I will wait for you at midday to-morrow, and there, with God's

help I will finish you!"

He uttered the last words as if with sorrow, then he opened the door and walked out of the chamber. In the yard the dogs ran around Yatsek, and knowing him well, fondled up to him. He turned without thinking toward the posts near the windows, as if looking for his horse there; then, remembering that that horse was no longer alive, he sighed, and, feeling the cool breath of air, repeated in spirit,--

"The wind is blowing always in the eyes of the poor man. I will walk home."

Meanwhile, Stanislav was wringing his hands from fierce pain and anger, while saying to the Bukoyemskis, with terrible bitterness,--

"Who asked you to do this? My worst enemy could not have hurt me more than have you with your service."

They pitied him immensely, and fell to embracing him, one after the other.

"Stashko," said Mateush. "They sent us a decanter for the night; give thyself comfort for God's sake."

CHAPTER III

The world was still gray when Father Voynovski was clattering along through deep snow with a lantern to the doves, partridges, and rabbits which he kept in his granary in a special enclosure. A tame fox with bells on her neck followed his footsteps; at his side went a Spitz dog and a porcupine. Winter sleep did not deaden the latter in the warm room of the priest's house. The beasts and their master, when they had crossed the yard slowly, stopped under the out-jutting straw eaves of the granary, from which long icicles were hanging. The lantern swayed, the key was heard in the lock, the bolt whined, the door squeaked louder than the key, and the old man went in with his animals. After a while he took his seat on a block, placed his lantern on a second block, and put between his knees a linen bag holding grain and also cabbage

leaves. He began then to yawn aloud and to empty the bag on the floor there in front of him.

Before he had finished three rabbits advanced from dark corners jumping toward him; next were seen the eyes of doves, glittering and bead-like in the light of the lantern; then rust-colored partridges, moving their heads on lithe necks as they came on in close company. Being the most resolute, the pigeons fell straightway to hammering the floor with their bills, while the partridges moved with more caution, looking now at the falling grain, now at the priest, and now at the she fox; with her they had been acquainted a long time, since, taken as chicks the past summer and reared from being little, they saw the beast daily.

The priest kept on throwing grain, muttering morning prayer as he did so: "Pater noster, qui es in coelis, sanctificetur nomen--" Here he stopped and turned to the fox, and she, while touching his side, trembled as if a fever were shaking her.

"Ah, the skin on thee trembles as soon as thou seest them. It is the same every day. Learn to keep down thy inborn appetite, for thou hast good food at all seasons and sufferest no hunger. Where did I stop?" Here he closed his eyes as if waiting for an answer, and since he did not have it he began at the first words: "Pater noster, qui es in coelis, sanctificetur nomen Tuum, adveniat regnum Tuum."

And again he halted.

"Ah, thou art squirming," said he, putting his hand on the back of the she fox. "There is such a vile nature in thee, that not only must thou eat, but commit murder also. Catch her, Filus, by the tail, and bite her if she does any injury--Adveniat regnum Tuum--Oh such a daughter! Thou wouldst say, I know, that men are glad too, to eat partridges; but know this, that a man gives them peace during fast days, while in thee the soul of that vile Luther is sitting, for thou wouldst eat meat on good Friday--Fiat voluntas Tua--Trus! trus! trus!--sicut in coelo--here are both one with the other!--et in terra." And thus speaking he threw the cabbage and then the grain,

scolding the doves somewhat that, though spring was not near yet, they walked around one another frequently, cooing and strutting.

At last, when he had emptied the bag he rose, raised the lantern, and was preparing to go, when Yatsek appeared on the threshold.

"Ah, Yatsus!" cried the priest, "art thou here--what art thou doing so early?"

Yatsek kissed the priest's hand, and answered,--

"I have come to confession, my benefactor, and at early mass I should like to approach the Lord's table."

"To confession? That is well, but what has so urged thee? Tell, but right off, for this is not without reason."

"I will tell truly. I must fight a duel this day, and since in fighting with five men an accident is more likely than with one, I should like to clear my soul of offences."

"With five men? God's wounds! But what didst thou do to them?"

"It is just this: that I did nothing. They sought a quarrel, and they have challenged me."

"Who are they?"

"The Bukoyemskis, who are foresters, and Tsyprianovitch from Yedlinka."

"I know them. Come to the house and tell how it happened."

They went out of the granary, but when half-way to the house the priest stopped on a sudden, looked into Tachevski's eyes quickly, and said,--

"Hear me, Yatsek, there is a woman in this quarrel."

The other smiled; with some melancholy.

"There is, and there is not," said he, "for really, she is the question, but she is innocent."

"Ah, ha! innocent! they are all innocent. But dost thou know what Ecclesiastes says

of women?"

"I do not remember, benefactor."

"Neither do I remember all, but what I have forgotten I will read in the house to thee. 'Inveni amariorem morte mulierem, quae laqueus (says he) venatorum est et sagena cor ejus.' (I have found woman more bitter than death. Her heart is a trap and a snare). And farther on he adds something, but at the end he says: 'Qui placet Deo, effugiet illam, qui autem peccator est, capietur ab illa.' (Whoso is pleasing to God will escape her, but whoso is a sinner will be caught by her.) I have warned thee not one time but ten not to loiter in that mansion and now the blow strikes thee."

"Eh, it is easier for you to warn than for me not to visit," answered Yatsek, with a sigh.

"Nothing good will meet thee in that house."

"True," said the young man, quietly.

And they went on in silence, but the priest with a face of anxiety, for with his whole soul he loved Yatsek. When his father had died of the pestilence, the young man was left in the world without any near relative, without property, having only a very few serfs in Vyrambki. The old priest cared for him tenderly. He could not give the youth property, for he with the soul of an angel distributed to the needy all that his poor parish gave him; still, he helped Yatsek in secret, and besides, he watched over him, taught him, not only what was in books, but the whole art of knighthood. For in his day that priest had been a famed warrior, a comrade and friend of the glorious Pan Michael. He had been with Charnyetski, he had gone through the whole Swedish conflict, and only when all had been finished did he put on the robe of a cleric, because of a ghastly misfortune. He loved Yatsek, in whom he valued, not simply the son of a famed knightly family, but a serious, lofty soul, just such as his own was. So he was grieved over the man's immense poverty, and that ill-fated love which had seized him. Because of this love, the young man, instead of seeking bread

and fame in the great world of action, was wasting himself and leading a half peasant life in that dark little corner. Hence he felt a determined dislike for the house of Pan Gideon, taking it ill of Pan Gideon himself that he was so cruel to his people. As to Father Voynovski, those "worms of the earth"[2] were as dear as the apple of his eye to him, but besides them he loved also everything living, as well those pets which he scolded, as birds, fish, and even the frogs which croak and sing in the sun-warmed waters during summer.

There walked, however, in that robe of a priest, not only an angel but, besides, an ex-warrior; hence when he learned that his Yatsek must fight with five enemies he thought only of this: how that young man would prosper, and would he come out of the struggle undefeated?

"Thou wilt not yield?" asked he, halting at the threshold, "for I have taught thee what I knew myself, and what Pan Michael showed me."

"I should not like to let them slash me to death," replied Yatsek, with modesty, "for a great war with the Turks is approaching."

At this the eyes of the old man flashed up like stars. In one moment he seized Yatsek by the button loop of his coat and fell to inquiring,--

"Praised be the name of the Lord! How dost thou know this? Who told thee?"

"Pan Grothus, the starosta," answered the young man.

Long did the conversation of Yatsek continue with the priest, long was his confession till Mass time, and when at last after Mass they were both in the house and had sat down to heated beer at the table, the mind of the old man was haunted continually by thoughts of that war with the pagan. Therefore he fell to complaining of the corruption of manners and the decay of devotion in the Commonwealth.

"My God!" said he, "the field of salvation and glory is open to men, but they prefer private quarrels and the slaughter of one another. Though ye have the chance to give your own blood in defence of the cross and the faith, ye are willing to spill the blood

of a brother. For whom? for what reason? For personal squabbles, or women, or similar society nonsense. I know this vice to be inveterate in the Commonwealth, and mea culpa, for in time of vain sinful youth I myself was a slave to it. In winter camps, when the armies think mainly of idleness and drinking, there is no day without duels; but in fact the church forbids duels, and punishes for fighting them. Duelling is sinful at all times, and before a Turkish war the sin is the greater, for then every sabre is needed, and every sabre serves God and religion. Therefore our king, who is a defender of the faith, detests duels, and in the field in the face of the enemy, when martial law dictates, they are punished severely."

"But the king in his youth fought more than one, and more than two duels," said Yatsek. "Moreover, what can I do, revered Father? I did not challenge. They called me out. Can I fail to meet them?"

"Thou canst not, and therefore my soul is confounded. Ah, God will be on the side of the innocent."

Yatsek began to take farewell, for midday was not more than two hours from him, and a road of some length was before him.

"Wait," said the priest. "I will not let thee leave in this fashion. I will have my man make the sleigh ready, put straw in it, and go to the meeting-place. For if at Pan Gideon's they knew nothing of the duel, they will send no assistance, and how will it be if one of them, or if thou, be wounded severely? Hast thought of this?"

"I have not, and they have not thought, that is certain."

"Ah, seest thou! I will go too. I will not be on the field, I will stay at thy house in Vyrambki. I will take with me the sacrament, and a boy with a bell too, for who knows what may happen? It is not proper for a priest to witness such actions, but except that, I should be there with great willingness, were it only to freshen thy courage."

Yatsek looked at him with eyes as mild as a maiden's. "God reward," said he, "but I

shall not lose courage, for even if I had to lay down my life--"

"Better be silent," broke in the priest. "Art thou not sorry not to be nearing the Turk--and not to be meeting a death of more glory?"

"I am, my benefactor, but I shall try that those man-eaters do not gulp me down at one effort."

Father Voynovski thought a moment and added,--

"But if I were to go to the field and explain the reward which would meet them in heaven, were they to die at the hands of the pagan, perhaps they would give up the duel."

"God prevent!" exclaimed Yatsek. "They would think that I sent thee. God prevent! Better that I go to them straightway than listen to such speeches."

"I am powerless," said the priest. "Let us go."

He summoned his servant and ordered him to attach the horse with all haste to the sleigh; then he and Yatsek went out to assist the man. But when the priest saw the horse on which Yatsek had come, he pushed back in amazement.

"In the name of the Father and the Son, where didst thou find such a poor little creature?"

And indeed at the fence stood a sorry small nag, with shaggy head drooping low, and cheeks with long hair hanging down from them. The beast was not greatly larger than a she goat.

"I borrowed it from a peasant. See, how I might go to the Turkish war!"

And he laughed painfully.

To this the priest answered,--

"No matter on what thou goest, if thou come home on a Turkish war-horse, and may God give thee this, Yatsus; but meanwhile put the saddle on my beast, for thou canst not go on this poor little wretch to those nobles."

They arranged everything then, and moved forward,--the priest with the church boy and bell and a driver for the sleigh, and Yatsek on horseback. The day was monotonous and misty in some sort; for a thaw had settled down and snow covered the frozen ground deeply, but its surface had softened considerably, so that horsehoofs sank without noise and sleigh-runners moved along the road quietly. Not far beyond Yedlina they met loads of wood and peasants walking near them; these people knelt at the sound of the bell, thinking that the priest was going with the Lord God to a dying man. Then began fields lying next to the forest,--fields white and empty; these were covered with haze. Flocks of crows were flying over them. Nearer the forest the haze became denser and denser, descended, filled all the space, and stretched upward. When they had advanced somewhat farther, the two men heard cawing, but the crows were invisible. The bushes at the roadside were ghostlike. The world had lost its usual sharp outlines, and was changed into some kind of region deceitful, uncertain,--delusive and blurred in near places, but entirely unknown in the distance.

Yatsek advanced along the silent snow, thinking over the battle awaiting him, but thinking more over Panna Anulka; and half to himself and half to her he soliloquized in spirit: "My love for thee has been always unchangeable, but I have no joy in my heart from it. Eh! in truth I had little joy earlier from other things. But now, if I could even embrace thy dear feet for one instant, or hear a good word from thee, or even know that thou art sorry if evil befalls me-- All between me and thee is like that haze there before me, and thou thyself art as if out beyond the haze. I see nothing, and know not what will be, nor what will meet me, nor what will happen."

And Yatsek felt that deep sadness was besieging his spirit, just as dampness was besieging his garments.

"But I prefer that all should be ended, and quickly," said he, sighing.

Father Voynovski was attacked also by thoughts far from gladsome, and said in his

own mind,--

"The poor boy has grieved to the utmost. He has not used his youth, he has gnawed himself through this ill-fated love of his, and now those Bukoyemskis will cut him to pieces. The other day at Kozenitse they hacked Pan Korybski after the festival. And even though they should not cut up Yatsek, nothing useful can come of this duel. My God! this lad is pure gold; and he is the last sprout from a great trunk of knightliness. He is the last drop of nourishing blood in his family. If he could only save himself this time! In God is my hope that he has not forgotten those two blows, one a feint under the arm with a side spring, the other with a whirl through the cheek. Yatsek!"

But Yatsek did not hear, for he had ridden ahead, and the call from the old man was not repeated. On the contrary, he was troubled very seriously on remembering that a priest who was going with the Sacrament should not think of such subjects. He fell then to repenting and imploring the Lord God for pardon.

Still, he was more and more grieved in his spirit. He was mastered by an evil foreboding and felt almost certain that that strange duel without seconds would end in the worst manner possible for Yatsek.

Meanwhile they reached the crossroad which lay on the right toward Vyrambki, and on the left toward Pan Gideon's. The driver stopped as had been commanded. Yatsek approached the sleigh then and dismounted.

"I will go on foot to the crucifix, for I should not know what to do with this horse while the sleigh is taking you to my house and coming back to me. They are there now, it may be."

"It is not noon yet, though near it," said the priest, and his voice was changed somewhat. "But what a haze! Ye will have to grope in this duel."

"We can see well enough!"

The cawing of crows and of daws was heard then above them a second time.

"Yatsek!"

"I am listening."

"Since thou hast come to this conflict, remember the Knights of Tachevo."

"They will not be ashamed of me, father, they will not."

And the priest remarked that Yatsek's face had grown pitiless, his eyes had their usual sadness, but the maiden mildness had gone from them.

"That is well. Kneel down now," said he. "I will bless thee, and make thou the sign of the cross on thyself before opening the struggle."

Then he made the sign of the cross on Yatsek's head as he knelt on the snow there.

The young man tied the horse behind the sleigh at the side of the poor little nag of the peasant, kissed the priest's hand, and walked off toward that crucifix at the place of the duel.

"Come back to me in health!" cried the priest after Yatsek.

At the cross there was no one. Yatsek passed around the figure repeatedly, then sat on a stone at the foot of the crucifix and waited.

Round about immense silence was brooding; only great tear-like drops, formed of dense haze, and falling from the arms of the crucifix, struck with low sound the soft snow bank. That quiet, filled with a certain sadness, and that hazy desert, filled with a new wave of sorrow the heart of the young man. He felt lonely to a point never known to him earlier. "Indeed I am as much alone in the world as that stick there," said he to himself, "and thus shall I be till death comes to me." And he waved his hand. "Well, let it end some time!"

With growing bitterness he thought that his opponents were not in a hurry, because they were joyous. They were sitting at Pan Gideon's conversing with "her," and they could look at "her" as much as might please them.

But he was mistaken, for they too were hastening. After a while the sound of loud

talking came up to him, and in the white haze quivered the four immense forms of the Bukoyemskis, and a fifth one,--that of Pan Stanislav, somewhat smaller.

They talked in loud voices, for they were quarrelling about this: who should fight first with Tachevski. For that matter the Bukoyemskis were always disputing among themselves about something, but this time their dispute struck Stanislav, who was trying to show them that he, as the most deeply offended, should in that fight be the first man. All grew silent, however, in view of the cross, and of Yatsek standing under it. They removed their caps, whether out of respect for the Passion of Christ, or in greeting to their enemy, may be left undecided.

Yatsek inclined to them in silence, and drew his weapon, but the heart in his breast beat unquietly at the first moment, for they were in every case five against one, and besides, the Bukoyemskis had simply a terrible aspect,--big fellows, broad shouldered, with broomlike mustaches, on which the fog had settled down in blue dewdrops; their brows were forbidding, and in their faces was a kind of brooding and murderous enjoyment, as if this chance to spill blood caused them gladness.

"Why do I place this sound head of mine under the Evangelists?" thought Yatsek. But at that moment of alarm, indignation at those roysterers seized him,--those men whom he hardly knew, whom he had never injured, but who, God knew for what reason, had fastened to him, and had come now to destroy him if possible.

So in spirit he said to them: "Wait a while, O ye road-blockers! Ye have brought your lives hither!"

His cheeks took on color, and his teeth gritted fiercely. They, meanwhile, stripped their coats off and rolled up the sleeves of their jupans. This they did without need all together, but they did it since each thought that he was to open the duel.

At last they all stood in a row with drawn sabres, and Yatsek, stepping towards them, halted, and they looked at one another in silence.

Pan Stanislav interrupted them,--

"I will serve you first."

"No! I first, I first!" repeated all the Bukoyemskis in a chorus.

And when Stanislav pushed forward they seized him by the elbows.

Again a quarrel began, in which Stanislav reviled them as outlaws. They jeered at him as a dandy, among themselves the term "dogbrother" was frequent. Yatsek was shocked at this, and added,--

"I have never seen cavaliers of this kind." And he put his sabre into the scabbard.

"Choose, or I will go!" said he, with a loud voice, and firmly.

"Choose, thou!" cried Stanislav, hoping that on him would the choice fall.

Mateush began shouting that he would not permit any small whipper-snapper to manage them, and he shouted so that his front teeth, which, being very long, like the teeth of a rabbit, were shining beneath his mustaches; but he grew silent when Yatsek, drawing his sabre, again indicated him with the edge of it, and added, "I choose thee."

The remaining brothers and Stanislav drew back at once, seeing that they would never agree, in another way, but their faces grew gloomy, for, knowing the strength of Mateush they felt almost certain that no work would be left them when he had finished.

"Begin!" called out Stanislav.

Tachevski felt at the first blow the strength of his enemy, for in his own grasp the sabre blade quivered. He warded the blow off, however, and warded off, also, the second one.

"He has less skill than strength," thought Tachevski, after the third blow. Then, crouching somewhat, for a better spring, he pressed on with impetus.

The other three, inclining downward the points of their sabres, stood open-mouthed, following the course of the struggle. They saw now that Tachevski too "knew

things," and that with him it would not be easy. Soon they thought that he knew things very accurately, and alarm seized the brothers, for, despite endless bickering they loved one another immensely. The cry, "Ha!" was rent from the breast, now of one, and now of another, as each keener blow struck.

Meanwhile the blows became quicker and quicker; at last they were lightning-like.

The spectators saw clearly that Tachevski was gaining more confidence. He was calm, but he sprang around like a wild-cat and his eyes shot out ominous flashes.

"It is bad!" thought Stanislav.

That moment a cry was heard. Mateush's sabre fell. He raised both hands to his head and dropped to the earth, his face in one instant being blood-covered.

At sight of that the three younger brothers bellowed like bulls, and in the twinkle of an eye rushed with rage at Tachevski, not intending, of course, to attack him together, but because each wished to be first in avenging Mateush.

And they perhaps would have swept Tachevski apart on their sabres if Stanislav, springing in to assist him, had not cried with all the power in his bosom,--

"Shame! Away! Murderers, not nobles! Shame! Away! or you must deal with me, murderers! Away!" And he slashed at the brothers till they came to their senses. But at this time Mateush had risen on his hands and turned toward them a face which was as if a mask made of blood had just covered it. Yan, seizing him by the armpits, seated him on the snow. Lukash hurried also to give him assistance.

But Tachevski pushed up to Marek, who was gritting his teeth, and repeated in a quick voice, as if fearing lest the common attack might repeat itself,--

"If you please! If you please!"

And the sabres were clanking a second time ominously. But with Marek, who was as much stronger than his enemy as he was less dexterous, Tachevski had short work. Marek used his great sabre like a flail, so that Yatsek at the third blow struck his

right shoulder-blade, cut through the bone, and disarmed him.

Now Lukash and Yan understood that a very ugly task was before them, and that the slender young man was a wasp in reality,--a wasp which it would have been wise not to irritate. But with increased passion, they stood now against him to a struggle which ended as badly for them as it had for their elders. Lukash, cut through his cheek to the gums, fell with impetus, and, besides, struck a stone which the deep snow had hidden; while from Yan, the most dexterous of the brothers, his sabre, together with one of his fingers, fell to the ground at the end of some minutes.

Yatsek, without a scratch, gazed at his work, as it were, with astonishment, and those sparks which a moment before had been glittering in his eyeballs began now to quench gradually. With his left hand he straightened his cap, which during the struggle had slipped somewhat over his right ear, then he removed it, breathed deeply once and a second time, turned to the cross, and said, half to himself and half to Stanislav,--

"God knows that I am innocent."

"Now it is my turn," said Stanislav. "But you are panting, perhaps you would rest; meanwhile I will put their cloaks on my comrades, lest this damp cold may chill them ere help comes."

"Help is near," said Tachevski. "Over there in the mist is a sleigh sent by Father Voynovski, and he himself is at my house. Permit me. I will go for the sleigh in which those gentlemen will feel easier than here on this snow field."

And he started while Stanislav went to cover the Bukoyemskis who were sitting arm to arm in the snow, except Yan, the least wounded. Yan on his knees was in front of Mateush, holding up his own right hand lest blood might flow from the finger stump too freely; in his left he held snow with which he was washing the face of his brother.

"How are ye?" asked Stanislav.

"Ah, he has bitten us, the son of a such a one!" said Lukash, and he spat blood abundantly; "but we will avenge ourselves."

"I cannot move my arm at all, for he cut the bone," added Marek. "Eh, the dog! Eh!"

"And Mateush is cut over the brows!" called out Yan; "the wound should be covered with bread and spider-web but I will staunch the blood with snow for the present."

"If my eyes were not filled with blood," said Mateush, "I would--"

But he could not finish since blood loss had weakened him, and he was interrupted by Lukash who had been borne away suddenly by anger.

"But he is cunning, the dog blood! He stings like a gnat, though he looks like a maiden."

"It is just that cunning," said Yan, "which I cannot pardon."

Further conversation was interrupted by the snorting of horses. The sleigh appeared in the haze dimly, and next it was there at the side of the brothers. Out of the sleigh sprang Tachevski, who commanded the driver to step down and help them.

The man looked at the Bukoyemskis, took in the whole case with a glance, and said not a word, but on his face was reflected, as it seemed, disappointment, and, turning toward the horses, he crossed himself. Then the three men fell to raising the wounded. The brothers protested against the assistance of Yatsek, but he stopped them.

"If ye gentlemen had wounded me, would ye leave me unassisted? This is the service of a noble which one may not meet with neglect or refusal."

They were silent, for he won them by these words--somewhat, and after a while they were lying upon straw in the broad sleigh more comfortably, and soon they were warmer.

"Whither shall I go?" asked the driver.

"Wait. Thou wilt take still another," answered Stanislav, and turning to Yatsek, he

said to him,--

"Well, gracious sir, it is our time!"

"Oh, it is better to drop this," said Yatsek, regarding him with a look almost friendly. "That God there knows why this has happened, and you took my part when these gentlemen together attacked me. Why should you and I fight a duel?"

"We must and will fight," replied Stanislav, coldly. "You have insulted me, and, even if you had not, my name is in question at present--do you understand? Though I were to lose life, though this were to be my last hour--we must fight."

"Let it be so! but against my will," said Tachevski.

And they began. Stanislav, had more skill than the brothers, but he was weaker than any of them. It was clear that he had been taught by better masters, and that his practice had not been confined to inns and markets. He pressed forward quickly, he parried with readiness and knowledge. Yatsek, in whose heart there was no hatred, and who would have stopped at the lesson given the Bukoyemskis, began to praise him.

"With you," said he, "the work is quite different. Your hand was trained by no common swordsman."

"Too bad that you did not train it!" said Stanislav.

And he was doubly rejoiced, first at the praise, and then because he had given answer, for only the most famed among swordsmen could let himself speak in time of a duel, and polite conversation was considered moreover as the acme of courtesy. All this increased Stanislav in his own eyes. Hence he pressed forward again with good feeling. But after some fresh blows he was forced to acknowledge in spirit that Tachevski surpassed him. Yatsek defended himself as it seemed with unwillingness but very easily, and in general he acted as though engaged not in fighting, but in fencing for exercise. Clearly, he wished to convince himself as to what Stanislav knew, and as to how much better he was than the brothers, and when he had done

this with accuracy he felt at last sure of his own case.

Stanislav noted this also, hence delight left him, and he struck with more passion. Tachevski then twisted himself as if he had had enough of amusement, gave the "feigned" blow, pressed on and sprang aside after a moment.

"Thou hast got it!" said he.

Stanislav felt, as it were, a cold sting in the arm, but he answered,--

"Go on. That is nothing!"

And he cut again, that same moment the point of Yatsek's sabre laid his lower lip open and cut the skin under it. Yatsek sprang aside now a second time.

"Thou art bleeding!" said he.

"That is nothing!"

"Glory to God if 'tis nothing! But I have had plenty, and here is my hand for you. You have acted like a genuine cavalier."

Stanislav greatly roused, but pleased also at these words, stood for a moment, as if undecided whether to make peace or fight longer. At last he sheathed his sabre and gave his hand then to Yatsek.

"Let it be so. In truth, as it seems, I am bleeding."

He touched his chin with his left hand and looked at the blood with much wonder. It had colored his palm and his fingers abundantly.

"Hold snow on the wound to keep it from swelling," said Yatsek, "and go to the sleigh now."

So speaking he took Stanislav by the arm and conducted him to the Bukoyemskis, who looked at him silently, somewhat astonished, but also confounded. Yatsek roused real respect in them, not only as a master with the sabre, but as a man of "lofty manners," such manners precisely as they themselves needed.

So after a while this inquiry was made of Stanislav by Mateush,--

"How is it with thee, O Stashko?"

"Well. I might go on foot," was the answer, "but I choose the sleigh, the journey will be quicker."

Yatsek sat toward them sidewise, and cried to the driver,--

"To Vyrambki."

"Whither?" asked Stanislav.

"To my house. You will not have much comfort, but it is difficult otherwise. At Pan Gideon's you would frighten the women, and Father Voynovski is at my house. He dresses wounds to perfection and he will care for you. You can send for your horses, and then do what may please you. I will ask the priest also to go to Pan Gideon and tell him with caution what has happened." Here Yatsek fell to thinking and soon after he added,--

"Oho! the trouble has not come yet, but now we shall see it. God knows that you, gentlemen, insisted on this duel."

"True! we insisted," said Stanislav. "I will declare that and these gentlemen also will testify."

"I will testify, though my shoulder pains terribly," said Marek, groaning. "Oi! but you have given us a holiday. May the bullets strike you!"

It was not far to Vyrambki. Soon they entered the enclosure, and met the priest wading in snow, for he, alarmed about what might happen, could not stay in the house any longer, and had set out to meet them.

Yatsek sprang from the sleigh when he saw him. Father Voynovski pushed forward quickly to meet him, and saw his friend sound and uninjured.

"Well," cried he, "what has happened?"

"I bring you these gentlemen," said Yatsek.

The face of the old man grew bright for a moment, but became serious straightway,

when he saw the Bukoyemskis and Stanislav blood-bedaubed.

"All five!" cried he, clasping his hands.

"There are five!"

"An offence against heaven! Gentlemen, how is it with you?" asked he, turning to the wounded men.

They touched their caps to him, except Marek, who, since the cutting of his shoulder-blade, could move neither his left nor his right hand. He merely groaned, saying,--

"He has peppered us well. We cannot deny it."

"That is nothing," said the others.

"We hope in God that it is nothing," answered Father Voynovski. "Come to the house now as quickly as possible! I will care for you this minute. Move on with the sleigh," said he.

And then he himself followed promptly with Yatsek. But after a while he stopped on the roadway. Joy shone, in his face again. He embraced Yatsek's neck on a sudden.

"Let me press thee, O Yatsek," cried he. "Thou hast brought in a sleigh load of enemies, like so many wheat sheaves."

Yatsek kissed his hand then, and answered,--

"They would have it so, my benefactor."

The priest put his hand on the head of the young man again, as if wishing to bless him, but all at once he restrained himself, because gladness in this case was not befitting his habit, so he looked more severe, and continued,--

"Think not that I praise thee. It was thy luck that they themselves wished this, but still, it is a scandal."

They drove into the courtyard. Yatsek sprang to the sleigh so that he might, with the driver and the single house-servant, help out the wounded men. But they stepped out

themselves, except Marek, whose arms they supported and soon they were all in Yatsek's dwelling. Straw had been spread there already, and even Yatsek's own bed had been covered with a white, slightly worn horse skin. At the head a felt roll served as pillow. On the table near the window was bread kneaded with spider-web, excellent for blood stopping. There were also choice balsams which the priest had for healing.

The old man took off his soutane and went to dressing the wounds with the skill of a veteran who had seen thousands of wounded men, and who from long practice knew how to handle wounds better than many a surgeon. His work went on quickly, for, except Marek, the men had suffered slightly.

Marek's shoulder-blade needed considerably longer work, but when at last it was dressed the priest wiped his bloody hands, and then rested.

"Well," said he, "thanks to the Lord Jesus, it has passed without grievous accident. This also is certain, that you feel better, gentlemen, all of you."

"One would like a drink!" said Mateush.

"It would not hurt! Give command, Yatsek, to bring water."

Mateush rose up on the straw. "How water?" asked he in a voice of emotion.

Marek, who was lying face downward on Yatsek's bed groaning, called out quickly,--

"The revered father must wash his hands, of course."

Hereupon Yatsek looked with real despair at the priest, who laughed and then added,--

"They are soldiers! Wine is permitted, but in small quantity."

Yatsek drew him by the sleeve to the alcove.

"Benefactor," whispered he, "what can I do? The pantry is empty, and so is the cellar. Time after time I must tighten my girdle. What can I give them?"

"There is something here, there is something!" said the old man. "When leaving home I made arrangements, and brought a little with me. Should that not suffice I will get more at the brewery in Yedlina--for myself, of course, for myself. Command to give them one glass at the moment to calm them after the encounter."

When he heard this Yatsek set to work quickly, and soon the Bukoyemskis were comforting one another. Their good feeling for Yatsek increased every moment.

"We fought, for that happens to every man," said Mateush, "but right away I thought thee a dignified cavalier."

"Not true; it was I who thought so first," put in Lukash.

"Thou think? Hast thou ever been able to think?"

"I think just now that thou art a blockhead, so I am able to think,--but my mouth pains me."

Thus they were quarrelling already. But that moment a mounted man darkened the window.

"Some one has come!" exclaimed Father Voynovski.

Yatsek went to see who it was, and returned quickly, with troubled visage.

"Pan Gideon has sent a man," said he, "with notice that he is waiting for us at dinner."

"Let him eat it alone!" replied Yan Bukoyemski.

"What shall we say to him?" inquired Yatsek, looking at Father Voynovski.

"Tell him the truth," said the old man--"but better, I will tell it myself."

He went out to the messenger.

"Tell Pan Gideon," said he, "that neither Pan Tsyprianovitch nor the Bukoyemskis can come, for they have been wounded in a duel to which they challenged Pan Tachevski; but do not forget to tell him that they are not badly wounded. Now hurry!"

The man rushed away with every foot which his horse had, and the priest fell to quieting Yatsek, who was greatly excited. He did not fear to meet five men in battle, but he feared greatly Pan Gideon, and still more what Panna Anulka would say and would think of him.

"Well, it has happened," continued the priest, "but let them learn at the earliest that it was not through thy fault."

"Will you testify, gentlemen?" inquired Yatsek, turning to the wounded men.

"Though we are dry, we will testify," answered Mateush.

Still, Yatsek's alarm increased more and more, and soon after, when a sleigh with Pan Gideon and Pan Grothus stopped at the porch, the heart died in him utterly. He sprang out, however, to greet and bow down to the knees of Pan Gideon; but the latter did not even glance at Yatsek, just as though he had not seen the man, and with a gloomy stern face he strode into the chamber. He inclined to the priest with respect but with coldness, for since the day that the old man had reproached him from the altar for excessive severity toward peasants, the stubborn old noble was unable to forgive him; so now, after that cold salute, he turned to the wounded men straightway, and gazed at them a moment.

"Gracious gentlemen," said he, "after what has just happened, I should not pass the threshold of this building, be sure of that, did I not wish to show how cruelly I am wounded by that wrong which you have suffered. See how my hospitality has ended! See how in my house my rescuers have been recompensed. But I say this, that whoso has wronged you has wronged me, whoso has spilt your blood has done worse than spill mine, for the man who challenged you under my roof has insulted me--"

Here Mateush interrupted him suddenly,--

"We challenged him, not he us!"

"That is true, gracious benefactor," said Stanislav. "There is no blame to this cavalier

in all that has happened, but to us, for which we beg your grace's pardon submissively."

"It would have been well for the judge to examine the witnesses before he passed sentence," said Father Voynovski, with seriousness.

Lukash, too, wished to say something, but since his cheek was cut to the gum and his gum to the teeth, the pain was acute when his chin moved, so he only put his palm on the plaster which was drying, and said with one side of his mouth,--

"May the devils take the sentence and my jaw with it also."

Pan Gideon was confused in some measure by these voices, still, he had no thought of yielding. On the contrary, he looked around with stern glance, as if wishing in that way to express silent blame for defenders of Yatsek.

"It is not for me to offer pardon to my rescuers. No blame touches you, gentlemen. On the contrary, I know and understand all this matter, for I see that you were insulted on purpose. Indeed, that same jealousy, which on a dying horse failed to ride living wolves down, increased later on the desire for vengeance. I was not alone in seeing how that 'cavalier,' whom you defend so magnanimously, gave occasion and did everything from the earliest moment of meeting to force you to that action. But the fault is mine more than any man's, since I was mild with him, and did not tell the man to find for himself at a fair or a dram shop more fitting society."

When Yatsek heard this his face grew as pale as linen. As to the priest, the blood rose to his forehead.

"He was challenged! What was he to do? Be ashamed of yourself!" exclaimed Father Voynovski.

But Pan Gideon looked down at him and answered,--

"Those are worldly questions, in which the laity are as experienced, and more so, than the clergy, but I will answer your question, so that no one here should accuse

me of injustice. 'What was he to do?' As a younger to an older man, as a guest to his host, as a man who ate my bread so many times when he had none of his own to eat, he should first of all have informed me of the question. And I with my dignity of a host would have settled it, and not have let matters come to this: that my rescuers, and such worthy gentlemen, are lying here in their own blood on straw in this hut as in a hog pen."

"You would have thought me a coward!" cried Yatsek, trembling as in a fever.

Pan Gideon did not answer a word, and feigned, as he had from the first, not to see him. Instead of answering he turned then to Stanislav, and continued,--

"I, with Pan Grothus the starosta, will go to your father in Yedlinka this instant, to express our condolence. I doubt not that he will accept my hospitality, hence I invite you with your comrades here present to return to my mansion. I also remind you that you are here by chance merely, and that at the moment you are really my guests, to whom I wish with all my heart to show gratitude. Your father, Pan Tsyprianovitch, cannot visit the man who has wounded you, and under my roof you will have greater comfort, and will not die of hunger, which might happen very easily in this place."

Stanislav was troubled greatly and delayed for a while to give answer, both out of regard for Yatsek, and because that, being a very decent young man, he was concerned about propriety; meanwhile his lip and chin, which had swollen beneath the plaster, deformed him very sensibly.

"We have felt neither hunger nor thirst here," said he, "as has been shown already; but in truth we are guests of your grace, and my father, not knowing how things have happened, might hesitate to come to us. But how am I to appear before those ladies, your grace's relatives, with a face which could rouse only abhorrence?"

Then his face twisted, for his lip pained him from long speaking, and his features, in fact, were not beautiful at the moment.

"Be not troubled. Those ladies feel disgust, but not toward your wounds, after the

healing of which your former good-looks will return to you. Three sleighs will come here with servants immediately, and in my house good beds are waiting. Meanwhile, farewell, since it is time for me and Pan Grothus to set out for Yedlinka--With the forehead!"

And he bowed once to the five nobles. To Father Voynovski he bowed specially, but he made no inclination whatever to Yatsek. When near the door the priest approached him.

"You have too little justice and too little tenderness," said he.

"I acknowledge sins only at confession," retorted Pan Gideon, and he passed through the doorway. After him went the starosta, Pan Grothus.

Yatsek had been a whole hour as if tortured. His face changed, and at moments he knew not whether to fall at the feet of Pan Gideon with a prayer for forgiveness, or spring at his throat and avenge the humiliation through which he was passing. But he remembered that he was in his own house, that before him was standing the guardian of Panna Anulka; hence, as the two men walked out he moved after them, not giving an account to himself of his action, but because of custom which commanded to conduct guests, and in some kind of blind hope that perhaps even at parting the stubborn Pan Gideon would bow to him. But this hope failed him also; only Pan Grothus, a kindly man, as was evident, and of good wit pressed his hand at the entrance, and whispered, "Despair not, his first rage will pass, cavalier, and all will arrange itself."

Yatsek did not think thus, and he would have been sure that his case was lost utterly had he known that Pan Gideon, though indignant, feigned anger far more than he felt it.

Stanislav and the Bukoyemskis were his rescuers, but Yatsek had not killed them, and a duel of itself was too common to rouse such unmerciful hatred. But Pan Gideon, from the moment that the starosta had told him how aged men marry and

sometimes have children, looked with other eyes upon Panna Anulka. That which perhaps had never occurred to him earlier, seemed all at once possible and also alluring. At thought of the charms of that maiden, marvellous as a rose, the soul warmed in him, and still more powerfully did pride play in the old noble. So then, the race of Pangovski might flourish afresh and bloom up again; and besides, born from such a patrician as Panna Anulka, not only related to all the great houses in the Commonwealth, but herself the last sprout of a race from whose wealth rose in greater part the Sobieskis, Jolkievskis, Daniloviches, and many others. There was a whirl in Pan Gideon's brain at the thought of this, and he felt that not only he but the Commonwealth was concerned in Pangovskis of that kind. So straightway fear rose in him lest it should happen that the lady might love some one else, and give her hand to another man. One more important than himself in that region, he had not discovered; there were younger men, however. But who? Pan Stanislav? Yes! He was young, of good looks, very rich, but noble in the third generation, descended from ennobled Armenians. That such a homo novus should indeed strive for Panna Anulka could not find place in the head of Pan Gideon in any shape. It was laughable to think of the Bukoyemskis, though good nobles and claiming kindred with Saint Peter. There remained then Tachevski alone, a real "Lazarus," it is true, as poor as a church mouse, but from an ancient stock of great knights; from Tachevo who had the Kovala escutcheon, one of whom was a real giant, and had taken part in the dreadful defeat of the Germans at Tannenberg; he had been famous not only in the Commonwealth but at foreign courts also. Only a Tachevski could compare with the Sieninskis. Besides, he was young, daring, handsome, and melancholy; this last often moves the heart in a woman. He was also at home in Belchantska, and seemed a friend, nay, a brother to the lady. Hence, Pan Gideon fell now to recalling various cases, as, for instance, disputes and poutings among the young people, then their reconciliations and friendship, then various words and glances, sadness and rejoicing in common, and laughter. Things which a short time before he had thought scarcely

worthy of notice seemed now suspicious. Yes! danger could threaten only from that side. The old noble thought, also, that Panna Anulka might, in part at least, be the cause of the duel, and he was terrified. Hence, to anticipate the danger, he tried to present to the young lady in the strongest light possible, all the dishonor of Yatsek's late action, and to rouse in her due anger; and then by feigning greater rage than he felt, or than the case called for, to burn all the bridges between his own mansion and Vyrambki, and, when he had humiliated Yatsek without mercy, to close the doors of the house to him forever.

And he was reaching his object. Yatsek walked back from the porch, took a seat at the table, thrust his fingers through his hair, supported his elbows, and was as silent as if pain had taken speech from him. Father Voynovski approached and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Yatsus, suffer what thou must," said he, "but a foot of thine should never enter that mansion hereafter."

"It never will," replied Yatsek, in a dull voice.

"But yield not to pain. Remember who thou art."

The young man set his teeth.

"I remember, but for that very reason pain burns me!"

"No one here applauds Pan Gideon for his action," said Stanislav. "It is one thing to censure, and another to trample a man's honor."

Hereupon the Bukoyemskis were moving, and Mateush, whom speech troubled least, added promptly,--

"Under his roof I will say nothing, but when I recover and meet him on the road, or at a neighbor's, I will tell him to kiss a dog's snout that same minute."

"O, yei!" said Marek. "To insult such a cavalier! The hour will come when that will not be forgiven him."

Meanwhile three sleighs with sofas and three servants, besides drivers, appeared to convey the wounded men to Belchantska. Because of regard for the expected arrival of Pan Serafin, Yatsek dared not detain them, and because also of this: that they were really the guests of Pan Gideon. As to the men, they would not have remained after hearing of Yatsek's great poverty lest they might burden him. They took farewell and gave thanks for his hospitality with a heartiness as great as if there had never been a quarrel between them.

But when Stanislav was taking his seat in the last sleigh Yatsek sprang forward on a sudden,--

"I will go with you," said he. "I cannot endure to do otherwise! I cannot endure! Before Pan Gideon returns I must--for the last time--"

Father Voynovski, since he knew Yatsek, knew that words would be useless; still, he drew him aside and began to expostulate,--

"Yatsek! O Yatsek! a woman again. God grant that a still greater wrong may not meet thee. O Yatsek, remember the words of Ecclesiastes: 'In a thousand I found one man, among all I found not one woman.' Take pity on thyself and remember this."

But these words were as peas against a battlement. In a moment Yatsek was sitting in the sleigh at the side of Stanislav, and they started.

Meanwhile the east wind had broken the mist and driven it to the wilderness; then the bright sun from a blue sky looked at them.

CHAPTER IV

Pan Gideon had not invented when he spoke of the "abhorrence" which at his house both women felt for the conqueror. Yatsek convinced himself of this from one glance at them. Pani Vinnitski met him with an offended face, and snatched her hand away when he wished to kiss it in greeting; and the young lady, without compassion

for his suffering and embarrassment, did not answer his greeting. She was occupied with Stanislav, sparing neither tender looks nor anxious questions; she pushed her care so far that when he rose from the armchair in the dining-room to go to the chamber set apart for the wounded she supported him by the arm, and though he opposed and excused himself she conducted him to the threshold.

"For thee there is nothing in this house. All is lost!" cried despair and also jealousy in Yatsek's heart at sight of this action. Toward him that maiden had shown changing humors, and with one kindly word had given usually ten that were cold, when not biting, hence his pain was the keener, that till then he had not supposed that she could be kind, sweet, and angel-like to a man whom she loved really. That Panna Anulka loved Stanislav the ill-fated Yatsek had no doubt whatever. He would have endured not only such a wound as that given Stanislav, but would have shed all his blood with delight, if she would speak even once in her life to him with such a voice, and look with such eyes at him as she had looked then at Stanislav. Hence, besides pain, an immeasurable sorrow now seized him. This sent a torrent of tears toward his eyeballs, and if those tears did not gush out and flow down his cheeks, they flooded his heart and pervaded his being. Thus did Yatsek feel his whole breast fill with tears, and, to give the last blow at this juncture, never had Panna Anulka seemed to him so beautiful beyond measure as at that moment, with her pale face and her crown of golden hair slightly dishevelled from emotion. "She is an angel, but not for thee," complained the sorrow within him; "wonderful, but another will take her!" And he would have fallen at her feet and confessed all his suffering and devotion, but at the same time he felt that just after that which had happened it would not be proper to do so, and that if he did not control himself and stifle the struggle in his spirit he would tell her something quite different from that which he wanted, and sink himself utterly in her estimation.

Meanwhile Pani Vinnitski, as an elderly person and one skilled in medicine, entered the chamber with Stanislav, while the young lady turned back from the threshold.

Yatsek, understanding that he must use the opportunity approached her.

"I should like a word with you," said he, struggling to control himself, and with a trembling voice which, as it were, belonged to another.

She looked at him with cold astonishment.

"What do you wish?"

Yatsek's face was lighted with a smile of such pain that it was almost like that of a martyr.

"What I wish for myself will not come to me, though I were to give my own soul's salvation to get it," said he, shaking his head; "but for one thing I beg you: do not accuse me, cherish no offence against me, have some compassion, for I am not of wood nor of iron."

"I have no word to say," replied she, "and there is no time for talking."

"Ah! there is always some time to say a kind word to the man for whom this world is grievous."

"Is it because you have wounded my rescuers?"

"The blame is not mine, as God stands by the innocent! The messenger who came for those gentlemen to Vyrambki should have declared what Father Voynovski told him to tell here; namely, that I did not challenge them. Did you know that they were the challengers?"

"I did. The attendant, being a simple man, did not repeat, it is true, every word which the priest sent; he merely cried out that 'the young lord of Vyrambki had slashed them to pieces;' then Pan Gideon, on returning from Vyrambki, ran in from the road and explained what had happened."

Pan Gideon feared lest the news that Yatsek had been challenged might reach the young lady from other lips and weaken her anger, hence he wished above all to describe the affair in his own way, not delaying to add that Yatsek by venomous

insults had forced them to challenge him. He reckoned on this: that Panna Anulka, taking things woman fashion, would be on the side of the men who had suffered most.

Still, it seemed to Yatsek that the beloved eyes looked on him less severely, so he repeated the question,--

"Did you know this position?"

"I knew," replied she, "but I remember that which you should not have forgotten if you had even a trifling regard for me,--that I owe my life to those gentlemen. And I have learnt from my guardian that you forced them to challenge you."

"I, not have regard for you? Let God, who looks into men's hearts, judge that statement."

All on a sudden her eyes blinked time after time; then she shook her head till a tress fell to the opposite shoulder, and she said,--

"Is that true?"

"True, true!" continued he, in a panting and deeply sad voice. "I should have let men cut me down, it seems, so as not to annoy you. The blood which was dearest to you would not have been shed then. But there is no help now for the omission. There is no help now for anything! Your guardian told you that I forced those gentlemen to challenge me. I leave that too to God's judgment. But did your guardian tell you that he himself had insulted me beyond mercy and measure beneath my own roof tree? I have come now to you because I knew that I should not find him here. I have come to satisfy my unhappy eyes with the last look at you. I know that this is all one to you, but I thought that even in that case--"

Here Yatsek halted, for tears stopped his utterance. Parma Anulka's mouth began also to quiver and to take on more and more the shape of a horseshoe, and only haughtiness joined to timidity, the timidity of a maiden, struggled in her with emotion. But perhaps she was restrained by this also: that she wished to get from

Yatsek a still more complaining confession, and perhaps because she did not believe that he would go from her and never come back again. More than once there had been misunderstandings between them, more than once had Pan Gideon offended him greatly, and still, after brief exhibitions of anger, there had followed silent or spoken explanations and all had gone on again in the old way.

"So it will be this time also," thought Panna Anulka.

For her it was sweet to listen to Yatsek and to see that great love which, though it dared not express itself in determinate utterance, was still beaming from him with a submission which was matched only by its mightiness. Hence she yearned to hear him speak with her the longest time possible with that wondrous voice, and to lay at her feet for the longest time possible that young, loving, pained heart of his.

But he, inexperienced in love matters and blind as are all who love really, could not take note of this, and did not know what was happening within her. He looked on her silence as hardened indifference, and bitterness was gradually drowning his spirit. The calmness with which he had spoken at first began now to desert him, his eyes took on another light, drops of cold sweat came out on his temples: something was tearing and breaking the soul in him. He was seized by despair of such kind that when a man lies in the grip of it he reckons with nothing, and is ready with his own hands to tear his own wounded heart open. He spoke yet as it were calmly, but his voice had a new sound, it was firmer, though hoarser.

"Is this the case," asked he, "and is there not one word from thee?"

Panna Anulka shrugged her shoulders in silence.

"The priest told me the truth when he warned that here a still greater wrong was in store for me."

"In what have I wronged thee?" asked she, bitterly, pained by the sudden change which she saw in him.

But he waded on farther in blindness.

"Had I not seen how thou didst treat this Pan Stanislav, I should think that thou hadst no heart in thy bosom. Thou hast a heart, but for him, not for me. He glanced at thee, and that was sufficient."

Then Yatsek grasped the hair of his head with both hands on a sudden.

"Would to God that I had cut him to pieces!"

A flame flashed, as it were, through Panna Anulka; her cheeks crimsoned, anger blazed in her eyes as well at herself as at Yatsek; because a moment before she had been ready for weeping, her heart was seized now by indignation, deep and sudden.

"You, sir, have lost your senses!" cried she, raising her head and shaking back the tress from her shoulder.

She was on the point of rushing away, but that brought Yatsek to utter desperation; he seized her hands and detained her.

"Not thou art to go. I am the person to go," said he, with set teeth. "And before going I say this to thee: though for years I have loved thee more than health, more than life, and more than my own soul, I will never come back to thee. I will gnaw my own hands off in torture, but, so help me, God, I will never come back to thee!"

Then, forgetting his worn Hungarian cap on the floor there, he sprang to the doorway, and in an instant she saw him through the window, hurrying away along the garden by which the road to Vyrambki was shorter,--and he vanished.

Panna Anulka stood for a time as if a thunderbolt had struck her. Her thoughts had scattered like a flock of birds in every direction; she knew not what had happened. But when thoughts returned to her all feeling of offence was extinguished, and in her ears were sounding only the words: "I loved thee more than health, more than life, more than my own soul, but I will never come back to thee!" She felt now that in truth he would never come back, just because he had loved her so tremendously. Why had she not given him even one kind word for which, before anger had swept the man off, he had begged as if for alms, or a morsel of bread to give strength on a

journey? And now endless grief and fear seized her. He had rushed off in pain and in madness. He may fall on the road somewhere. He may in despair work on himself something evil, and one heartfelt word might have healed and cured everything. Let him hear her voice even. He must go, beyond the garden, through the meadow to the river. He will hear her there yet before he vanishes.

And rushing from the house she ran to the garden. Deep snow lay on the middle path, but his tracks there were evident. She ran in them. She sank at times to her knees, and on the road lost her rosary, her handkerchief, and her workbag with thread in it, and, panting, she reached the garden gate finally.

"Pan Yatsek! Pan Yatsek!" cried she.

But the field beyond the garden was empty. Besides, that same wind which had blown the morning haze off, made a great sound among the branches of apple and pear trees; her weak voice was lost in that sound altogether. Then, not regarding the cold nor her light, indoor clothing, she sat on a bench near the gate and fell to crying. Tears as large as pearls dropped down her cheeks and she, having nothing else now with which to remove them, brushed those tears away with that tress on her shoulder.

"He will not come back."

Meanwhile the wind sounded louder and louder, shaking wet snow from the dark branches.

When Yatsek rushed into his house like a whirlwind, without cap and with dishevelled hair, the priest divined clearly enough what had happened.

"I foretold this," said he. "God give thee aid, O my Yatsek; but I ask nothing till thou hast come to thy mind and art quiet."

"Ended! All is ended!" said Yatsek.

And he walked up and down in the chamber, like a wild beast in confinement.

The priest said no word, interrupted him in nothing, and only after long waiting did he rise, put his arms around Yatsek's shoulders, kiss his head, and lead him by the hand to an alcove.

The old man knelt before a small crucifix which was hanging over the bed there, and when the sufferer had knelt at his side the priest prayed as follows:

"O Lord, Thou knowest what pain is, for Thou didst endure it on the cross for the offences of mankind.

"Hence I bring my bleeding heart to Thee, and at Thy feet which are pierced I implore Thee for mercy.

"I cry not to Thee: 'take this pain from me,' but I cry 'give me strength to endure it.'

"For I, O Lord, am a soldier submissive to Thy order, and I desire much to serve Thee, and the Commonwealth, my mother-- But how can I do this when my heart is faint and my right hand is weakened?

"Because of this make me forget myself and make me think only of Thy glory, and the rescue of my mother, for those things are of far greater moment than the pain of a pitiful worm, such as I am.

"And strengthen me, O Lord, in my saddle, so that through lofty deeds against pagans I may reach a glorious death, and also heaven.

"By Thy crown of thorns, hear me!

"By the wound in Thy side, hear me!

"By Thy hands and feet pierced with nails, hear me!"

Then they knelt for a long time, but at the middle of the prayer it was evident that the pain in Yatsek's breast had broken, for on a sudden he covered his face with both hands and fell to sobbing. When they had risen and gone to the adjoining chamber Father Voynovski sighed deeply.

"My Yatsek," said he, "I saw much of life in my years of a warrior, during which

sorrow greater than thine met me. I have no thought to speak touching this to thee. I will say only that in a time of most terrible anguish I composed this very prayer and to it owe deliverance. I have repeated it frequently in misfortune since that day, and always with solace; we have repeated it now for this reason. And how dost thou feel? Art thou not freed in some measure? Pray tell me!"

"I feel pain, but it burns less severely."

"Ah, seest thou! Now drink some wine. I will tell thee, or rather I will show thee, something which should give thee comfort. Look!"

And bending his head down he showed beneath his white hair a dreadful scar, which passed across his whole crown from one side to the other.

"From that," said he, "I came very near dying. The wound pained me awfully, but the scar gives no trouble. In like manner, Yatsek, thy wound will cease to pain when a scar takes the place of it. Tell me now what has happened to thee."

Yatsek began, but met failure. It was not in his nature to invent, or increase, or exaggerate, so now he himself wondered over this: that all which had torn him with such torture seemed less cruel in the narrative. But Father Voynovski, clearly a man of experience, and knowing the world, heard him out to the end, and then added,--

"It is difficult, I understand that, to describe looks or even gestures which may be altogether contemptuous and insulting. Often even one look, or one wave of the hand, has led men to duels and to bloodshed. The main point is this: thou hast told the young lady that thou wilt not go back to her. Youth is giddy, and when guided by sadness it changes as the moon in the sky does. And love too is like that mendacious moon, which when it seems to decrease is just growing and swelling toward its fulness. How is it then, hast thou the true wish of doing what thy words tell me?"

"So help me, God, I have told my whole wish, and if thou desire I will repeat the same in an oath on that cross there."

"And what dost thou think to do?"

"To go into the world."

"I have been hoping for that. I have desired it this long time. I have known what detained thee, but go now. When thou hast broken thy fetters go into the world. Thou wilt wait for no good thing in this place, no good thing has met thee here, or will meet thee here ever. To thee the life here has been ruin. It was a happiness that I was near by and trained thee in Latin, and in working with thy sword even somewhat; without these two kinds of knowledge thou wouldst have dropped down to be a peasant. Thank me not, Yatsus, for that was pure devotion on my part. I shall be sad here without thee, but I am not in question. Thou wilt go into the world. That, as I understand, means that thou wilt join the army. That road is the straightest and the most honorable, also, especially since war with the pagan is approaching. The pen and the chancellery are more certain, men tell us, than promotion from the sabre, but they are less fitted for blood such as thine is."

"I have not thought of another service," said Yatsek, "but I shall not join the infantry, and I cannot in any way reach the higher banners, for I am in terrible poverty--"

"A noble who has Latin on his tongue and a sabre in his fist will make his way always," interrupted the priest; "but there is no need of talking, thou must have good horses. We must think over this carefully. Now I will tell thee something of which I have never yet spoken. I hold for thee ten ruddy ducats which thy late mother left with me--and her letter, in which she begs not to give thee this money, lest it be spent ere the time comes. Only in sudden need may I give it when either the ferry or the wagon is awaiting thee--when some dilemma presents itself--well, the dilemma is here at this moment! Thou hadst an honorable, a holy, and an unhappy mother, for when that woman was dying there was great need in her dwelling, and she took from her own mouth that which she left with me."

"God give eternal rest to her," said Yatsek. "Let those ten ducats be used for masses to benefit her soul, and Vyrambki I will sell even for a trifle."

Father Voynovski grew very tender at these words; a tear glistened in his eye, and again he put his arms around Yatsek.

"There is honest blood in thee," said he, "but thou art not free to reject this gift from thy mother, even for the purpose which thou hast mentioned. Masses will not be lacking in her case, be sure of that, though in truth she has no great need of them; but to other souls suffering in purgatory they will be of service. As to Vyrambki it would be better to mortgage it; though a noble has but the smallest estate, how differently do people esteem him from one who is landless."

"But I am in a hurry. I should like to go even to-day."

"To-day thou wilt not go, though the sooner the better. I must write for thee letters to my comrades and friends. We must talk also with the brewers in Yedlina who have money and also good horses, so that no armored warrior may have a better outfit. In my house there are some old arms and some sabres, not so much ornamented as tested on Swedish and Turkish shoulders."

Here the priest looked through the window and said,--

"But the sleigh is waiting, and a traveller should start when his sleigh comes."

An expression of pain now shot over the face of the young man; he kissed the priest's hand and added,--

"I have one other prayer, my benefactor and father; let me go with you now and live in your house till I leave this region. Those roofs are visible from this dwelling. They are too near me."

"Of course! I wished to propose this; thou hast taken the words from my lips. There is no work for thee here, and I shall be glad from my soul to have thee under my roof tree. Be of good cheer, O my Yatsus. The world does not end in Belchantska,

but stands open widely before thee. God alone knows how far thou wilt ride when once thou art on horseback. War is awaiting thee! Glory is awaiting thee! and that which pains thee to-day will be healed at another time. I see now how the wings are growing out at thy shoulders. Fly then, O bird of the Lord, for to that wert thou predestined and created."

And joy like a sunray lighted up the honest face of the old man. He struck his thigh with his palm, soldier fashion.

"Now take thy cap and we will go."

But small things stand often in the way of important ones, and the comic is mixed with the tragic. Yatsek glanced round the room; then he gazed with concern at the priest, and repeated,--

"My cap!"

"Well! Thou wilt not go bareheaded--"

"How could I?"

"Where is it?"

"But suppose it remained at Belchantska?"

"There are thy love tricks, old woman! What wilt thou do?"

"What shall I do? I might get a cap from my man, but I could not go in the cap of a peasant."

"Thou canst not go in a peasant's cap, but send thy man to Belchantska."

"I would not for anything."

The priest was becoming impatient.

"Plague take it! War, glory, the wide world--these are all waiting for the man, but his cap is gone!"

"There is an old hat in the bottom of a trunk which my father took from a Swedish

officer at Tremeshno--"

"Take it, and let us go."

Yatsek vanished and returned a little later wearing the yellow hat of a Swedish horseman, which was too large for him. Amused by the sight of it, the priest caught at his left side as if seeking his sabre.

"It is well," said he, "that it is not a Turkish turban. But this is a real carnival!"

Yatsek smiled in reply, and then added,--

"There are some stones in the buckle; they may be of value."

Then they took seats in the sleigh and moved forward. Immediately beyond the enclosure Belchantska and the mansion were as visible through leafless alders as something on one's hand. The priest looked carefully at Yatsek, who merely drew the big Swedish hat over his eyes and did not look, though something besides his Hungarian cap had been left in the mansion.

CHAPTER V

"He will not come back! All is lost!" exclaimed Panna Anulka to herself at the first moment.

And a marvellous thing! There were five men in that mansion, one of whom was young and presentable; and besides Pan Grothus, the starosta, Pan Serafin was expected. In a word, rarely had there been so many guests at Belchantska. Meanwhile it seemed to the young lady that a vacuum had surrounded her suddenly, and that some immense want had come with it; that the mansion was empty, the garden empty, and that she herself was as much alone as if in an unoccupied steppe land, and that she would continue to be thus forever.

Hence her heart was as straitened with merciless sorrow as if she had lost one who was nearest of all to her. She felt sure that Yatsek would not return, all the more

since her guardian had offended him mortally; still, she could not imagine how it would be without him, without his face, his laughter, his words, his glances. What would happen to-morrow, after to-morrow, next week, next month? For what would she rise from her bed every morning? Why would she arrange her tresses? For whom would she dress and curl her hair? For what was she now to live?

And she had a feeling as if her heart had been a candle which some one had quenched by blowing it out on a sudden. There was nothing save darkness and a vacuum.

But when she entered the room and saw that Hungarian cap on the floor, all those indefinite feelings gave way to an enormous and simple yearning for Yatsek. Her heart grew warm in her again, and she began to call him by name. Therewith a certain gleam of hope flew through her spirit. Raising the cap she pressed it to her bosom unwittingly; then she put it in her sleeve and began to think thuswise: "He will not come as hitherto daily, but before the return of Pan Grothus and my guardian from Yedlinka, he must come for his cap, so I shall see him and say that he was unjust and cruel, and that he should not have done what he has done."

But she was not sincere with herself, for she wished to say more, to find some warm, heartfelt word which would join again the threads newly broken between them. If this could happen, if they could meet without anger in the church, or at odd times in the houses of neighbors, means would be found in the future to turn everything to profit. What methods there might be to do this, and what the profit could be, she did not stop to consider at the moment, for beyond all she was thinking how to see Yatsek at the earliest.

Meanwhile Pani Vinnitski came out of the chamber in which the wounded men were then lying, and on seeing the excited face and reddened eyes of the young woman she began thus to quiet her.

"Fear not, no harm will come to them. Only one of the Bukoyemskis is struck a little

seriously, but no harm will happen even to that one. The others are injured slightly. Father Voynovski dressed their wounds with such skill that there is no need to change anything. The men too are cheerful and in perfect spirits."

"Thanks be to God!"

"But has Yatsek gone? What did he want here?"

"He brought the wounded men hither--"

"I know, but who would have expected this of him?"

"They themselves challenged him."

"They do not deny that, but he beat all five of them, one after another. One might have thought that a clucking hen could have beaten him."

"Aunt does not know the man," answered Panna Anulka, with a certain pride in her expression.

But in the voice of Pani Vinnitski there was as much admiration as blame; for, born in regions exposed to Tartar inroads at all times, she had learned from childhood to count daring and skill at the sabre as the highest virtues of manhood. So, when the earliest alarm touching the five guests had vanished, she began to look somewhat differently at that duel.

"Still," continued she, "I must confess that they are worthy gentlemen, for not only do they cherish no hatred against him, but they praise him, especially Pan Stanislav. 'That man is a born soldier,' said he. And they were angry every man of them at Pan Gideon, who exceeded the measure, they say, at Vyrambki."

"But aunt did not receive Yatsek better."

"He got the reception which he merited. But didst thou receive him well?"

"I?"

"Yes, thou. I saw how thou didst frown at him."

"My dear aunt--"

Here the girl stopped suddenly, for she felt that unless she did so, she would burst into weeping. Because of this conversation Yatsek had grown in her eyes. He had fought alone against such trained men, had conquered them all, overcome them. He had told her, it is true, that he hunted wild boars with a spear, but peasants at the edge of the wilderness go against them with clubs, so that amazes no one. But to finish five knightly nobles a man must be better and more valiant and skilful than they. It seemed to Panna Anulka simply a marvel that a man who had such mild and sad eyes could be so terrible in battle. To her alone had he yielded; from her alone had he suffered everything; to her alone had he been mild and pliant. Why was this? Because he had loved her beyond his health, beyond happiness, beyond his own soul's salvation. He had confessed that to her an hour earlier. And yearning for him rushed like an immense wave to her heart again. Still, she felt that something between them had changed, and that if she should see him anew, and see him afterward often, she would not permit herself to play with him again as she had played up to that day, now casting him into the abyss, now cheering him, giving him hope, now thrusting him away, now attracting him; she felt that do what she might she would look on him with greater respect, and would be more submissive and cautious.

At moments, however, a voice was heard in her saying that he had acted too peevishly, that he had uttered words more offensive and bitter than she had; but that voice became weaker and weaker, and the wish for reconciliation was growing.

"If he would only return before those men came from Yedlinka!"

Meanwhile an hour passed, then two and three hours. Still, there was no sign from Yatsek. Next it occurred to her that the hour was too late, that he would not come, he would send some one to get the cap. After that she determined to send it to Yatsek with a letter, in which she would explain what was weighing her heart down. And since his messenger might come any moment she, to prepare all things in season,

shut herself up in her small maiden chamber and went at the letter.

"May God pardon thee for the suffering and sadness in which thou hast left me, for if thou couldst see my heart thou wouldst not have done what thou hast done. Therefore, I send not only thy cap, but a kind word, so that thou shouldst be happy and forget--"

Here she saw that she was not writing her own thoughts at all, or her wishes, so, drawing her pen through the words, she fell to writing a new letter with more emotion and feeling:

"I send thy cap, for I know that I shall not see thee in this house hereafter, and that thou wilt not weep for any one here, least of all for such an orphan as I am; but neither shall I weep because of thy injustice, though it is sad beyond description--"

But reality showed these words to be false, since sudden tears put blots on the paper. How send a proof of this kind, especially if he had thrown her out of his heart altogether? After a while it occurred to her that it might be better not to write of his injustice, and of his peevish procedure, since, if she did, he would be ready for still greater stubbornness. Thus thinking, she looked for a third sheet of paper, but there was no more in her chamber.

Now she was helpless, for if she borrowed paper of Pani Vinnitski she could not avoid questions impossible of answer; then she felt that she was losing her head, and that in no case could she write to Yatsek that which she wanted to tell him; hence she grew disconsolate and sought, as women do usually, solace in suffering; she gave a free course to her tears again.

Meanwhile night was in front of the entrance, and sleighbells were tinkling--Pan Gideon and his two guests were coming. The servants were lighting the candles in every chamber, for the gloom was increasing. The young lady brushed aside every tear and entered the drawing-room with, a certain timidity; she feared that all would see straightway that she had been weeping, and have, God knows what

suspicions,--they might even torment her with questions. But in the drawing-room there were none save Pan Gideon and Pan Grothus. For Pan Serafin she asked straightway, wishing to turn attention from her own person.

"He has gone to his son and the Bukoyemskis," said Pan Gideon, "but I pacified him on the road by showing that nothing evil had happened."

Then he looked at her carefully, but his face, gloomy at most times, and his gray, severe eyes were bright with a sort of exceptional kindness. Approaching, he placed his hand on the bright head of the maiden.

"There is no need for thee to be troubled," said he. "In a couple of days they will be well, every man of them. We need say no more. We owe them gratitude, it is true, and hence I was anxious about them, but really, they are strangers to us, and of rather lowly condition."

"Lowly condition?" repeated she, as an echo, and merely to say something.

"Why, yes, for the Bukoyemskis have nothing whatever, and Pan Stanislav is a homo novus. For that matter, what are they to me! They will go their way, and the same quiet will be in this house as has been here hitherto."

Panna Anulka thought to herself that there would be great quiet indeed, for there would be only three in the mansion; but she gave no expression to that thought.

"I will busy myself with the supper," said she.

"Go, housewife, go!" said Pan Gideon. "Because of thee there is joy in the household, and profit--and have a silver service brought on," added he, "to show this Pan Serafin that good plate is found not alone among newly made noble Armenians."

Panna Anulka hurried to the servants' apartments. She wished before supper to finish another affair most important for her, so she summoned a serving-lad, and said to him,--

"Listen, Voitushko; run to Vyrambki and tell Pan Tachevski that the young lady sends this cap, and bows very much to him. Here is a coin for thee, and repeat what thou art to tell him."

"The young lady sends the cap and bows to him."

"Not that she bows, but that she bows very much to him--dost understand?"

"I understand."

"Then stir! And take an overcoat, for the frost bites in the night-time. Let the dogs go with thee, too--that she bows very much, remember. And come back at once--unless Pan Tachevski gives an answer."

Having finished that affair she withdrew to the kitchen to busy herself at the supper which was then almost ready since they had been expecting guests with Pan Gideon. Then, after she had dressed and arranged her hair, she entered the dining-hall.

Pan Sarafin greeted her kindly, for her beauty and youth had pleased his heart greatly at Yedlinka. Since he had been put quite at rest touching Stanislav, when they were seated at the table he began to speak with her joyously, endeavoring, even with jests, to scatter that shade of seriousness which he saw on her forehead, and the cause of which he attributed specially to the duel.

But for her the supper was not to end without incident, since immediately after the second course Voitushko stood at the door of the dining-hall and cried out, as he blew his chilled fingers,--

"I beg the young lady's attention. I left the cap, but Pan Tachevski is not in Vyrambki, for he drove away with Father Voynovski."

Pan Gideon on hearing these words was astonished; he frowned, and fixed his iron eyes on the serving-lad.

"What is this?" asked he. "What cap? Who sent thee to Vyrambki?"

"The young lady," answered the lad with timidity.

"I sent him," said Panna Anulka.

And seeing that all eyes were turned on her she was dreadfully embarrassed, but the elusive wit of a woman soon came to her assistance.

"Pan Yatsek attended the wounded men hither," said she; "but since auntie and I received him with harshness he was angry and flew away home without his cap, so I sent the cap after him."

"Indeed, we did not receive him very charmingly," added Pani Vinnitski.

Pan Gideon drew breath and his face took on a less dreadful expression.

"Ye did well," remarked he. "I myself would have sent the cap, for of course he has not a second one."

But the honest and clever Pan Serafin took the part of Yatsek.

"My son," said he, "has no feeling against him. He and the other gentlemen forced Pan Tachevski to the duel; when it was over he took them to his house, dressed their wounds, and entertained them. The Bukoyemskis say the same, adding that he is an artist at the sabre, who, had he had the wish, might have cut them up in grand fashion. Ha! they wanted to teach him a lesson, and themselves found a teacher. If it is true that His Grace the King is moving against the Turks, such a man as Tachevski will be useful."

Pan Gideon was not glad to hear these words, and added: "Father Voynovski taught him those sword tricks."

"I have seen Father Voynovski only once, at a festival," said Pan Serafin, "but I heard much of him in my days of campaigning. At the festival other priests laughed at him; they said that his house was like the ark, that he cares for all beasts just as Noah did. I know, however, that his sabre was renowned, and that his virtue is famous. If Pan Tachevski has learned sword-practice from him, I should wish my son, when he recovers, not to seek friendship elsewhere."

"They say that the Diet will strive at once to strengthen the army," said Pan Gideon, wishing to change the conversation.

"True, all will work at that," said Pan Grothus.

And the conversation continued on the war. But after supper Panna Anulka chose the right moment, and, approaching Pan Serafin, raised her blue eyes to him.

"You are very kind," said she.

"Why do you say that?" asked Pan Serafin.

"You took the part of Pan Yatsek."

"Whose part?" inquired the old man.

"Pan Tachevski's. His name is Yatsek."

"But you blamed him severely. Why did you blame him?"

"My guardian blamed him still more severely. I confess to you, however, that we did not act justly, and I think that some reparation is due him."

"He would surely be glad to receive it from your hands," said Pan Serafin.

The young lady shook her golden head in sign of disagreement.

"Oh no!" replied she, smiling sadly, "he is angry with us, and forever."

Pan Serafin glanced at her with a genuine fatherly kindness.

"Who in the world, charming flower, could be angry forever with you?"

"Oh! Pan Yatsek could--but as to reparation this is the best reparation in his case: declare to Pan Yatsek that you feel no offence toward him, and that you believe in his innocence. After that my guardian will be forced to do him some justice, and justice from us is due to Pan Yatsek."

"I see that you have not been so very bitter against him, since you are now taking his part with such interest."

"I do so because I feel reproaches of conscience, and I wish no injustice to any man,

besides, he is alone in the world, and is in great, very great, poverty."

"I will tell you," answered Pan Serafin, "that in my own mind I have decided as follows: your guardian, as a hospitable neighbor, has declared that he will not let me go till my son has recovered; but both my son and the Bukoyemskis might go home even to-morrow. Still, before I leave here I will visit most surely Pan Yatsek and Father Voynovski, not through any kindness, but because I understand that I owe them this courtesy. I do not say that I am bad, still, I think that if any one in this case is really good you are the person. Do not contradict me!"

She did contradict, for she felt that for her it was not a question merely of justice to Yatsek, but of other affairs, of which Pan Serafin, who knew not her maiden calculations, could know nothing. Her heart, however, rose toward him with gratitude, and when saying good-night she kissed his hand, for which Pan Gideon was angry.

"He is only of the second generation; before that his people were merchants. Remember who thou art!" said the old noble.

CHAPTER VI

Two days later Yatsek went to Radom with the ten ducats to dress himself decently before the journey. Father Voynovski remained at home brooding over this problem: "Whence am I to get money enough for the equipment of a warrior, for a wagon, for horses, a saddle-horse, and an attendant, all of which Yatsek must have if he cares for respect, and does not wish men to consider him nobody?"

Especially did it become Yatsek to appear in that form, since he bore a great, famous name, though somewhat forgotten in the Commonwealth.

A certain day Father Voynovski sat down at his small table, wrinkled his brows till his white hair fell over his forehead, and began then to reckon how much would be needed. His "animalia," that is, the dog Filus, the tame fox, and a badger, were

rolling balls near his feet; but he gave them no attention whatever, so tremendously was he occupied and troubled, for the "reckoning" refused to come out in any way, and failed every moment. It failed not merely in details, but in the main principles. The old man rubbed his forehead more and more violently and at last he spoke audibly.

"He took ten ducats with him. Very well; of that, beyond doubt, he will bring nothing back. Let us count farther: from Kondrat, the brewer, five as a loan, from Slonka, three. From Dudu six Prussian thalers and a borrowed saddle-horse, to be paid for in barley if there is a harvest. Total, eight golden ducats, six thalers, and twenty ducats of mine--too little! Even if I should give him the Wallachian as an attendant, that would be, counting his own mount, two horses; and for a wagon two more are needed--and for Yatsek at least two more. It is impossible to go with fewer, for, if one horse should die he must have another. And a uniform for his man, and supplies for the wagon, kettles and cover and camp chest--tfu! He could only join the dragoons with such money."

Then he turned to the animals which were raising a considerable uproar.

"Be quiet, ye traitors, or your hides will be sold to Jew hucksters!"

And again talk began:

"Yatsek is right, he will have to sell Vyrambki. Still, if he does, he will have nothing to answer when any one asks him: 'Whence dost thou come?' 'Whence?' 'From Wind.' 'Which Wind?' 'Wind in the Field.' Immediately every one will slight such a person. It would be better to mortgage the place if a man could be found to give money. Pan Gideon would be the most suitable person, but Yatsek would not hear of Pan Gideon, and I myself would not talk with him on the subject--My God! People are mistaken when they say: 'poor as a church mouse!' A man is often much poorer. A church mouse has Saint Stephen;[3] he lives in comfort, and has his wax at all seasons. O Lord Jesus, who multiplied loaves and fishes, multiply these few ruddy

ducats, and these few thalers, for to thee, O Lord, nothing will be diminished, and Thou wilt help the last of the Tachevskis."

Then it occurred to him that the Prussian thalers, since they came from a Lutheran country, could rouse only abhorrence in heaven; as to the ducats he hesitated whether to put them under Christ's feet for the night would he find them there multiplied in the morning? He did not feel worthy of a miracle, and even he struck himself a number of times on the breast in repentance for his insolent idea. He could not dwell on this longer, however, for some one had come to the front of his dwelling.

After a while the door opened and a tall, gray haired man entered. He had black eyes and a wise, kindly countenance. The man bowed on the threshold.

"I am Tsyprianovitch of Yedlinka," said he.

"Yes. I saw you in Prityk, at the festival, but only at a distance, for the throng there was great," said the priest, approaching his guest with vivaciousness. "I greet you on my lowly threshold with gladness."

"I have come hither with gladness," answered Pan Serafin. "It is an important and pleasant duty to salute a knight so renowned, and a priest who is so saintly."

Then he kissed the old man on the shoulder and the hand, though the priest warded off these acts, saying,--

"Ho, what saintliness! These beasts here may have before God greater merit than I have."

But Pan Serafin spoke so sincerely and with such simplicity that he won the priest straightway. They began at once, therefore, to speak pleasant words which were heartfelt.

"I know your son," said the priest; "he is a cavalier of worth and noble manners. In comparison, those Bukoyemskis seem simply serving-men. I will say to you that

Yatsek Tachevski has conceived such a love for Pan Stanislav that he praises him always."

"And my Stashko treats him in like manner. It happens frequently that men fight and later on love each other. None of us feel offence toward Pan Tachevski, nay, we should like to conclude with him real friendship. I have just been at his house in Vyrambki, expecting to find him. I wished to invite to Yedlinka you, my benefactor, and Pan Tachevski."

"Yatsek is in Radom, but he will return and would be glad, doubtless, to serve you-- But have you seen, your grace, how they treated him at Pan Gideon's?"

"They have seen that themselves," said Pan Serafin, "and are sorry, not Pan Gideon, however, but the women."

"There are few men so stubborn as Pan Gideon, and he incurs a serious account before the Lord sometimes for this reason--as for the women--God be with them-- Let them go, what is the use in hiding this: that one of them caused the duel?"

"I divined that before my son told me. But the cause is innocent."

"They are all innocent-- Do you know what Ecclesiastes says of women?"

Pan Serafin did not know, so the priest took down the Vulgate and read an extract from Ecclesiastes.

"What do you think of that?" asked he.

"There are women even of that kind."

"Yatsek is going into the world for no other cause, and I am far from dissuading him. On the contrary, I advise him to go."

"Do you? Is he going soon? The war will come only next summer."

"Do you know that to a certainty?"

"I do, for I inquired and I inquired because I cannot keep my own son from it."

"No, because he is a noble. Yatsek is going immediately, for, to tell the truth, it is

painful for him to remain here."

"I understand, I understand everything. Haste is the best cure in such a case."

"He will stay only as long as may be needed to mortgage Vyrambki, or sell it. It is only a small strip of land. I advise Yatsek not to sell but to mortgage. Though he may never come back, he can sign himself always as from it, and that is more decent for a man of his name and his origin."

"Must he sell or mortgage in every case?"

"He must. The man is poor, quite poor. You know how much it costs to go to a war, and he cannot serve in a common dragoon regiment."

Pan Serafin thought a while, and said,--

"My benefactor, perhaps I would take a mortgage on Vyrambki."

Father Voynovski blushed as does a maiden when a young man confesses on a sudden that for which she is yearning beyond all things; but the blush flew over his face as swiftly as summer lightning through the sky of evening; then he looked at Pan Serafin, and asked,--

"Why do you take it?"

Pan Serafin answered with all the sincerity of an honest spirit:

"I want it since I wish, without loss to myself, to render an honorable young man a service, for which I shall gain his gratitude. And, Father benefactor, I have still another idea. I will send my one son to that regiment in which Pan Yatsek is to serve, and I think that my Stashko will find in him a good friend and comrade. You know how important a comrade is and what a true friend at one's side means in camp where a quarrel comes easily, and in war where death comes still more easily. God has not, in my case been sparing of fortune, and He has given me only one son. Pan Yatsek is brave, sober, a master at the sabre, as has been shown--and he is virtuous, for you have reared him. Let him and my son be like Orestes and Pylades--that is my

reckoning."

Father Voynovski opened his arms to him widely.

"God himself sent you! For Yatsek I answer as I do for myself. He is a golden fellow, and his heart is as grateful as wheat land. God sent you! My dear boy can now show himself as befits the Tachevski escutcheon, and most important of all, he can, after seeing the wide world, forget altogether that girl for whom he has thrown away so many years, and suffered such anguish."

"Has he loved her then from of old?"

"Well, to tell the truth, he has loved her since childhood. Even now he says nothing, he sets his teeth, but he squirms like an eel beneath a knife edge. Let him go at the earliest, for nothing could or can come from this love of his."

A moment of silence followed, then the old man continued,--

"But we must speak of these matters more accurately. How much can you lend on Vyrambki? It is a poor piece of land."

"Even one hundred ducats."

"Fear God, your grace!"

"But why? If Pan Yatsek ever pays me it will be all the same how much I lend him. If he does not pay I shall get my own also, for though the land about here is poor, that new soil must be good beyond the forest. To-day I will take my son and the Bukoyemskis to Yedlinka, and you will do us the favor to come as soon as Pan Yatsek returns to you from Radom. The money will be ready."

"Your grace came from heaven with your golden heart and your money," said Father Voynovski.

Then he commanded to bring mead which he poured out himself, and they drank with much pleasure as men do who have joy at their heart strings. With the third glass the priest became serious.

"For the assistance, for the good word, for the honesty, let me pay," said he, "even with good advice."

"I am listening."

"Do not settle your son in Vyrambki. The young lady is beautiful beyond every description. She may also be honorable, I say naught against that; but she is a Sieninski, not she alone, but Pan Gideon is so proud of this that if any man, no matter who, were to ask for her, even Yakobus our king's son, he would not seem too high to Pan Gideon. Guard your son, do not let him break his young heart on that pride, or wound himself mortally like Yatsek. Out of pure and well-wishing friendship do I say this, desiring to pay for your kindness with kindness."

Pan Serafin drew his palm across his forehead as he answered,--

"They dropped down on us at Yedlinka as from the clouds because of what happened on the journey. I went once to Pan Gideon's on a neighborly visit, but he did not return it. Noting his pride and its origin I have not sought his acquaintance or friendship. What has come came of itself. I will not settle my son in Vyrambki, nor let him be foolish at Pan Gideon's mansion. We are not such an ancient nobility as the Sieninskis, nor perhaps as Pan Gideon, but our nobility grew out of war, out of that which gives pain, as Charnyetski described it. We shall be able to preserve our own dignity--my son is not less keen on that point than I am. It is hard for a young man to guard against Cupid, but I will tell you, my benefactor, what Stashko told me when recently at Pan Gideon's. I inquired touching Panna Anulka. 'I would rather,' said he, 'not pluck an apple than spring too high after it, for if I should not reach the fruit, shame would come of my effort.'"

"Ah! he has a good thought in his head!" exclaimed Father Voynovski.

"He has been thus from his boyhood," added Pan Serafin with a certain proud feeling. "He told me also, that when he had learnt what the girl had been to Tachevski, and what he had passed through because of her, he would not cross the

road of so worthy a cavalier. No, my benefactor, I do not take a mortgage on Vyrambki to have my son near Pan Gideon's. May God guard my Stanislav, and preserve him from evil."

"Amen! I believe you as if an angel were speaking. And now let some third man take the girl, even one of the Bukoyemskis, who boast of such kinsfolk."

Pan Serafin smiled, drank out his mead, took farewell, and departed.

Father Voynovski went to the church to thank God for that unexpected assistance, and then he waited for Yatsek impatiently.

When at last Yatsek came, the old man ran out to the yard and seized him by the shoulders.

"Yatsek," exclaimed he, "thou canst give ten ducats for a crupper. Thou hast one hundred ducats, as it were, on the table, and Vyrambki remains to thee."

Yatsek fixed on Father Voynovski eyes that were sunken from sleeplessness and suffering, and asked, with astonishment,--

"What has happened?"

"A really good thing, since it came from the heart of an honest man."

Father Voynovski noted with the greatest consolation that Yatsek in spite of his terrible suffering, and all his heart tortures, received, as it were, a new spirit on learning of the agreement with Pan Serafin. For some days he spoke and thought only of horses, wagons, outfit, and servants, so that it seemed as though there was no place for aught else in him.

"Here is thy medicine, thy balsam; here are thy remedies," repeated the priest to himself; "for if a man entrapped by a woman and never so unhappy were going to the army he would have to be careful not to buy a horse that had heaves or was spavined; he would have to choose sabres, and fit on his armor, try his lance once and a second time, and, turning from the woman to more fitting objects, find relief

for his heart in them."

And he remembered how, when young, he himself had sought in war either death or forgetfulness. But since war had not begun yet, death was still distant from Yatsek in every case; meantime he was filled with his journey, and with questions bound up in it.

There was plenty to do. Pan Serafin and his son came again to the priest with whom Yatsek was living. Then all went to the city together to draw up the mortgage. There, also, they found a part of Yatsek's outfit; the remainder, the experienced and clear-headed priest advised to search out in Warsaw or Cracow. This beginning of work took up some days, during which young Stanislav, whose slight wound was almost healed, gave earnest assistance to Yatsek, with whom he contracted a more and more intimate acquaintance and friendship. The old men were pleased at this, for both held it extremely important. The honest Pan Serafin even began to be sorry that Yatsek was going so promptly, and to persuade the priest not to hasten his departure.

"I understand," said he, "I understand well, my benefactor, why you wish to send him away at the earliest; but in truth I must tell you that I think no ill of that Panna Anulka. It is true that immediately after the duel she did not receive Pan Yatsek very nicely, but remember that she and Pani Vinnitski were snatched from the jaws of the wolves by my son and the Bukoyemskis. What wonder, then, that, at sight of the blood and the wounds of those gentlemen, she was seized with an anger, which Pan Gideon roused in her purposely, as I know. Pan Gideon is a stubborn man, truly; but when I was there the poor girl came to me perfectly penitent. 'I see,' said she, 'that we did not act justly, and that some reparation is due to Pan Yatsek.' Her eyes became moist immediately, and pity seized me, because that face of hers is comely beyond measure. Besides, she has an honest soul and despises injustice."

"By the dear God! let not Yatsek hear of this; for his heart would rush straightway to

death again, and barely has he begun to breathe now in freedom. He ran away from Pan Gideon's bareheaded; he swore that he would never go back to that mansion, and God guard him from doing so. Women, your grace, are like will-o'-the-wisps which move at night over swamp lands at Yedlinka. If you chase one it flees, if you flee it pursues you. That is the way of it!"

"That is a wise statement, which I must drive into Stashko," said Pan Serafin.

"Let Yatsek go at the earliest. I have written letters already to various acquaintances, and to dignitaries whom I knew before they were dignitaries, and to warriors the most famous. In those letters your son, too, is recommended as a worthy cavalier; and when his turn comes to go he shall have letters also, though he may not need them, since Yatsek will prepare the way for him. Let the two serve together."

"From my whole soul I thank you, my benefactor. Yes! let them serve together, and may their friendship last till their lives end. You have mentioned the regiment of Alexander, the king's son, which is under Zbierhovski. That is a splendid regiment,--perhaps the first among the hussars,--so I should like Stashko to join it; but he said to me: 'The light-horse for six days in the week, and the hussars, as it were, only on Sunday.'"

"That is true generally," answered the priest. "Hussars are not sent on scouting expeditions, and it is rare also that they go skirmishing, as it is not fitting that such men should meet all kinds of faces; but when their turn comes, they so press on and trample that others do not spill so much blood in six days as they do on their Sunday. But then, war, not the warriors, command; hence sometimes it happens that hussars perform every-day labor."

"You, my benefactor, know that beyond any man."

Father Voynovski closed his eyes for a moment, as if wishing to recall the past more in detail; then he raised them, looked at the mead, swallowed one mouthful, then a second, and said,--

"So it was when toward the end of the Swedish war we went to punish that traitor, the Elector, for his treaties with Carolus. Pan Lyubomirski, the marshal, took fire and sword to the outskirts of Berlin. I was then in his own regiment, in which Viktor was lieutenant commander. The Brandenburger[4] met us as best he was able, now with infantry, now with general militia in which were German nobles; and I tell you that at last, on our side, the arms of the hussars and the Cossacks of the household seemed almost as if moving on hinges."

"Was it such difficult work then?"

"It was not difficult, for at the mere sight of us muskets and spears trembled in the hands of those poor fellows as tree branches tremble when the wind blows around them; but there was work daily from morning till twilight. Whether a man thrusts his spear into a breast or a back, it is labor. Ah! but that was a lovely campaign! for, as people said, it was active, and in my life I have never seen so many men's backs and so many horse rumps as in that time. Even Luther was weeping in hell, for we ravaged one half of Brandenburg thoroughly."

"It is pleasant to remember that treason came to just punishment."

"Of course it is pleasant. The Elector appeared then and begged peace of Lyubomirski. I did not see him, but later on soldiers told me that the marshal walked along the square with his hands on his hips while the Elector tripped after him like a whip-lash. The Elector bowed so that he almost touched the ground with his wig, and seized the knees of the marshal. Nay! they even said that he kissed him wherever it happened; but I give no great faith to that statement, though the marshal, who had a haughty heart, loved to bend down the enemy; but he was a polite man in every case, and would not permit things of that kind."

"God grant that it may happen with the Turks this time as it did then with the Elector."

"My experience, though not lofty, is long, and I will say to you sincerely that it will

go, I think, as well or still better. The marshal was a warrior of experience and especially a lucky one, but still, we could not compare Lyubomirski with His Grace the King reigning actually."

Then they mentioned all the victories of Sobieski and the battles in which they themselves had taken part. And so they drank to the health of the king, and rejoiced, knowing that with him as a leader the young men would see real war; not only that, but, since the war was to be against the ancient enemy of the cross, they would win immense glory.

In truth no one knew accurately anything yet about the question. It was not known whether the Turkish power would turn first on the Commonwealth or the Empire. The question of a treaty with Austria was to be raised at the Diet. But in provincial diets and the meetings of nobles men spoke of war only. Statesmen who had been in Warsaw, and at the court, foretold it with conviction, and besides, the whole people had been seized by a feeling that it must come--a feeling almost stronger than certainty, and brought out as well by the former deeds of the king as by the general desire and the destiny of the nation.

CHAPTER VII

On the road to Radom Father Voynovski had invited Pan Serafin and Stanislav to his house for a rest, after which he and Yatsek were to visit them at Yedlinka. During this visit three of the Bukoyemskis appeared, unexpectedly. Marek, whose shoulder-blade had been cut, could not move yet, but Mateush, Lukash, and Yan came to bow down before the old man and thank him for his care of them when wounded. Yan had lost a little finger, and the older brothers had big scars, one man on his cheek, the other on his forehead, but their wounds had then healed and they were as healthy as mushrooms.

Two days before they went on a hunt to the forest, smoked out a sleepy she-bear,

speared her, and took her cub which they brought as a gift to Father Voynovski, whose fondness for wild beasts was known by all people.

The priest whom they had pleased as "innocent boys" was amused with them and the little bear very greatly. He shed tears from laughter when the cub seized a glass filled with mead for a guest, and began to roar in heaven-piercing notes to rouse proper terror, and thus save the booty.

On seeing that no one wished the mead, the bear stood on its hind-legs and drank out the cup in man fashion. This roused still greater pleasure in the audience. The priest was amused keenly, and added,--

"I will not make this cub my butler or beekeeper."

"Ha!" cried Stanislav, laughing, "the beast was a short time at school with the Bukoyemskis, but learned more in one day from them than it would all its life in the forest."

"Not true," put in Lukash, "for this beast has by nature such wit that it knows what is good without learning. Barely had we brought the cub from the forest when it gulped down as much vodka (whiskey) right off as if it had drunk the stuff every morning with its mother, and then gave a whack on the snout to a dog, as if saying 'This for thee--don't sniff at me'--after that it went off and slept soundly."

"Thank you, gentlemen. I will have real pleasure from this bear," said the priest, "but I will not make the creature my butler or beekeeper, for though knowing drinks well, it would stay too near them."

"Bears can do more than one thing. Father Glominski at Prityk has a bear which pumps the organ they say. But some people are scandalized, for at times he roars, especially when any one punches him."

"Well, there is no cause for scandal in that," replied Father Voynovski; "birds build nests in churches and sing to the glory of God; no one is scandalized. Every beast serves God, and the Saviour was born in a stable."

"They say, besides," added Mateush, "that the Lord Jesus turned a miller into a bear, so maybe there is a human soul in him."

"In that case you killed the miller's wife, and must answer," said Pan Serafin. "His Grace the King is very jealous of his bears and does not keep foresters to kill them."

When they heard this the three brothers grew anxious, but it was only after long thinking that Mateush, who wished to say something in self-defence, answered,--

"Pshaw! are we not nobles? The Bukoyemskis are as good as the Sobieskis."

But a happy thought came to Lukash, and his face brightened.

"We gave our knightly word," said he, "not to shoot bears, and we shoot no bears; we spear them."

"His Grace the King is not thinking of bears at the present," said Yan; "and besides, no one will tell him. Let any forester here say a word. It is a pity, however, that we boasted in presence of Pan Gideon and Pan Grothus, for Pan Grothus has just gone to Warsaw, and as he sees the king often, he may mention this accidentally."

"But when did ye see Pan Gideon?" asked the priest.

"Yesterday. He was conducting Pan Grothus; You know, benefactor, the inn called Mordovnia? They stopped there to let their beasts rest. Pan Gideon asked about many things, and he talked also of Yatsek."

"About me?" inquired Yatsek.

"Yes. 'Is it true,' asked he, 'that Tachevski is going to the army?' 'True,' we answered.

"'But when?'

"'Soon, we think.'

"Then Pan Gideon said again: 'That is well. Of course he will join the infantry?'

"At that we all became angry, and Mateush said. 'Do not say that, your grace, for Yatsek is our friend now, and we must be on his side.' And as we began to pant, he restrained himself. 'I do not mention this out of any ill-will, but I know that

Vyrambki is not an estate of the crown,'" said he.

"An estate, or not, what is that to him?" cried the priest. "He need not trouble his head with it!"

But it was clear that Pan Gideon thought otherwise, and did trouble his head about Yatsek; for an hour later the youth who brought in a decanter of mead brought a sealed letter also.

"There is a messenger to your grace from Pan Gideon," said he.

Father Voynovski took the letter, broke the seal, opened it, struck the paper with the back of his hand, and, approaching the window, began to read.

Yatsek grew pale from emotion; he looked at the letter as at a rainbow, for he divined that there must be mention of him in it. Thoughts flew through his head as swallows fly. "Well," thought he, "the old man is penitent; here is his excuse. It must be so and even cannot be otherwise. Pan Gideon has no more cause now to be angry than those men who suffered in the duel, so his conscience has spoken. He has recognized the injustice of his conduct. He understands how grievously he injured an innocent person, and he desires to correct the injustice."

Yatsek's heart began to beat like a hammer. "Oh! I will go to the war," said he in his soul--"not for me is happiness over there. Though I forgive her I cannot forget. But to see once more, before going, that beloved Anulka, who is so cruel, to have a good look once again at her, to hear her voice anew. O Gracious God, refuse not this blessing!"

And his thoughts flew with still greater swiftness than swallows; but before they had stopped flying something took place which no man there had expected: on a sudden Father Voynovski crushed the letter in his hand and grasped toward his left side as if seeking a sabre. His face filled with blood, his neck swelled, and his eyes shot forth lightning. He was simply so terrible that Pan Serafin, his son, and the Bukoyemskis looked at him with amazement, as if he had been turned into some other person

through magic.

Deep silence reigned in the chamber.

Meanwhile the priest bent toward the window, as if gazing at some object outside it, then he turned away looked first at the walls and then at his guests. It was clear that he had been struggling with himself and had come to his mind again, for his face had grown pale, and the flame was now dim in his eyeballs.

"Gracious gentlemen," said he, "that man is not merely passionate, but evil altogether. To say in excitement more than justice permits befalls every man, but to continue committing injustice and trampling on those who are offended is not the deed of a noble, or a Catholic." Then, stooping, he raised the crumpled letter and turned to Tachevski.

"Yatsek, if there is still in thy heart any splinter, take this knife and cut it out thoroughly. Read, poor boy, read aloud, it is not for thee to be ashamed, but for him who wrote this letter. Let these gentlemen learn what kind of man is Pan Gideon."

Yatsek seized the letter with trembling hands, opened it and read:

"My very gracious Priest, Pastor, Benefactor, Etc., Etc.,--Having learned that Tachevski of Vyrambki, who has frequented my house, is to join the army during these days, I, in memory of the bread with which I nourished his poverty, and for the services in which sometimes I was able to use him, send the man a horse, and a ducat to shoe the beast, with the advice not to waste the money on other and needless objects.

"Offering at the same time to you my willing and earnest services, I inscribe myself, etc., etc."

Yatsek grew so very pale after reading the letter that the men present had fears for him, especially the priest who was not sure that that pallor might not be the herald of some outburst of madness, for he knew how terrible was that young man in his anger, though usually so mild. He began therefore at once to restrain him.

"Pan Gideon is old, and has lost one arm," said he quickly, "thou canst not challenge him!"

But Yatsek did not burst out, for at the first moment immeasurable and painful amazement conquered all other feelings.

"I cannot challenge him," repeated he, as an echo, "but why does he continue to trample me?"

Thereupon Pan Serafin rose, took both Yatsek's hands, shook them firmly, kissed him on the forehead, and added,--

"Pan Gideon has injured, not thee, but himself, and if thou drop revenge every man will wonder all the more at thy noble soul which deserves the high blood in thee."

"Those are wise words!" cried the priest, "and thou must deserve them."

Pan Stanislav now embraced Yatsek.

"In truth," said he, "I love thee more and more."

This turn of affairs was not at all pleasing to the Bukoyemskis, who had not ceased to grit their teeth from the moment of hearing the letter. Following Stanislav they embraced Yatsek also.

"No matter how things are," said Lukash at last, "I should do differently in Yatsek's place."

"How?" asked the two brothers with curiosity.

"That is just it. I don't know how, but I should think out something, and would not yield my position."

"Since thou knowst not do not talk."

"But ye, do ye know anything?"

"Be quiet!" said the priest. "Be sure I shall not leave the letter unanswered. Still, to drop revenge is a Christian and a Catholic action."

"Oh but! Even you, father, snatched for a sabre the first moment."

"Because I carried a sabre too long. Mea Culpa! Still, as I have said, this fact comes in also. Pan Gideon is old, he has only one arm; iron rules are not in place here. And I tell you, gentlemen, that for this very reason I am disgusted to the last degree with this raging old fellow who makes use of his impunity so unjustly."

"Still, it will be too narrow for him in our neighborhood," said Yan Bukoyemski. "Our heads for this: that not a living foot will go under that roof of his."

"Meanwhile an answer is needed," said Father Voynovski, "and immediately."

For a time yet they considered as to who should write,--Yatsek, at whom the letter was aimed, or the priest to whom it was directed. Yatsek settled the question by saying,--

"For me that whole house and all people in it are as if dead, and it is well for them that in my soul this is settled."

"It is well that the bridges are burnt!" said the priest; as he sought pen and paper.

"It is well that the bridges are burnt," repeated Yan Bukoyemski, "but it would be better that the mansion rose in smoke! This was our way in the Ukraine: when some strange man came in and knew not how to live with us, we cut him to pieces and up in smoke went his property."

No one turned attention to these words save Pan Serafin, who waved his hands with impatience, and answered,--

"You, gentlemen, came in here from the Ukraine, I, from Lvoff, and Pan Gideon from Pomorani; according to your wit Pan Tachevski might count us all as intruders; but know this, that the Commonwealth is a great mansion occupied by a family of nobles, and a noble is at home in every corner."

Silence followed, except that from the alcove came the squeaking of a pen and words in an undertone which the priest was dictating to himself. Yatsek rested his

forehead on his palms and sat motionless for some time; all at once he straightened himself, looked at those present, and said,--

"There is something in this beyond my understanding."

"We do not understand, either," added Lukash, "but if thou wilt pour out more mead we will drink it."

Yatsek poured into the glasses mechanically, following at the same time the course of his own thoughts.

"Pan Gideon," said he, "might be offended because the duel began at his mansion, though such things happen everywhere; but now he knows that I did not challenge, he knows that he offended me under my own roof unjustly, he knows that with you I am now in agreement, and that I shall not appear at his house again,--still he pursues me, still he is trying to trample me."

"True, there is some kind of special animosity in this," said Pan Serafin.

"Ha! then there is as you think something in it?"

"In what?" asked the priest, who had come out with a letter now written, and heard the last sentence.

"In this special hatred against me."

The priest looked at a shelf on which among other books was the Holy Bible, and said,--

"That which I will say to thee now I said long ago: there is a woman in it." Here he turned to those present. "Have I repeated to you, gentlemen, what Ecclesiastes says about woman?"

But he could not finish, for Yatsek sprang up as if burnt by living fire. He thrust his fingers through his hair and almost screamed, for immense pain had seized him.

"Still more do I fail to understand; for if any one in the world--if to any one in the world--if there be any one of such kind--then with my whole soul--"

But he could not say a word more, for the pain in his heart had gripped his throat as if in a vice of iron, and rose to his eyes as two bitter, burning tears, which flowed down his cheeks. The priest understood him then perfectly.

"My Yatsek," advised he, "better burn out the wound, even with awful pain than let it fester. For this reason I do not spare thee. I, in my time, was a soldier of this world, and understand many things. I know that regret and remembrance, no matter how far a man travels, drag like dogs after him, and howl in the night-time. They give him no chance to sleep because of this howling. What must he do then? Kill those dogs straightway. Thou at this moment feelest that thou wouldst have given all thy blood over there; for which reason it seems to thee so marvellous and terrible that from that side alone vengeance pursues thee. The thing seems to thee impossible; but it is possible--for if thou hast wounded the pride and self-love of a woman, if she thought that thou wouldst whine and thou hast not whined when she beat thee, and thou didst not fawn in her presence, but hast tugged at thy chain and hast broken it, know that she will never and never forgive thee, and her hatred, more raging than that of any man living, will always pursue thee. Against this there is only one refuge: crush the love, even on thy own heart, and hurl it, like a broken bow, far from thee--that is thy one refuge!"

Again there was a moment of silence. Pan Serafin nodded, confirming the priest, and, as a man of experience, he admired all the wisdom of his statement.

"It is true," added Yatsek, "that I have tugged at the chain, and have broken it. So it is not Pan Gideon who pursues me!"

"I know what I should do," said Lukash, on a sudden.

"Tell, do not hide!" cried the other two.

"Do ye know what the hare said?"

"What hare? Art thou drunk?"

"Why that hare at the boundary ridge."

And, evidently encouraged, he stood up, put his hand on his hip and began to sing:

"A hare was just sitting for pleasure, Just sitting at the boundary ridge.

But the hunters did not see him,

Did not know That he was sitting lamenting And making his will At the boundary ridge."

Here he turned to his brothers and asked them,--

"Do ye know the will made by that hare at the boundary ridge?"

"We know, but it is pleasant to hear it repeated."

"Then listen.

"Kiss me all ye horsemen and hunters, Kiss me at the boundary ridge.

"This is what I would write to all at Belchantska if I were in Yatsek's position; and if he does not write it, may the first Janissary disembowel me if I do not write it in my own name and yours to Pan Gideon."

"Oh, as God is dear to me, that is a capital idea!" cried Yan, much delighted.

"It is to the point and full of fancy!"

"Let Yatsek write that!"

"No," said the priest, made impatient by the talk of the brothers. "I am writing, not Yatsek, and it would not become me to take your words." Here he turned to Pan Serafin and Stanislav and Yatsek. "The task was difficult, for I had to twist the horns of his malice and not abandon politeness, and also to show him that we understood whence the sting came. Listen, therefore, and if any one of you gentlemen has made a nice judgment I beg you to criticise this letter." And he began,--

"Great mighty benefactor, and to me very dear Sir and Brother."

Here he struck the letter with the back of his hand, and said,--

"You will observe, gentlemen, that I do not call him 'my very gracious,' but 'my very

dear.'"

"He will have enough!" said Pan Serafin, "read on, my benefactor."

"Then listen: 'It is known to all citizens of our Commonwealth that only those people know how to observe due politeness in every position who have lived from youth upward among polite people, or who, coming of great blood, have brought politeness into the world with them. Neither the one nor the other has come to your grace as a portion, while on the contrary the Mighty Lord Pan Yatsek Tachevski inherited from renowned ancestors both blood and a lordly spirit. He forgives you your peasant expressions and sends back your peasant gifts. Rustics keep inns in cities and also eating-houses on country roads for the entertainment of people. If you will send to the great Lord Pan Yatsek Tachevski the bill for such entertainment as he received at your house he will pay it, and add such gratuity as seems proper to his generous nature.'"

"Oh, as God is dear to me!" exclaimed Pan Serafin, "Pan Gideon will have a rush of blood!"

"Ha! it was necessary to bring down his pride, and at the same time to burn the bridges. Yatsek himself wanted that-- Now listen to what I write from myself to him: 'I have inclined Pan Tachevski to see that though the bow is yours, the poisoned arrow with which you wished to strike that worthy young gentleman was not in your own quiver. Since reason in men, and strength in their bones, weaken with years, and senile old age yields easily to suggestions from others, it deserves more indulgence. With this I end, adding as a priest and a servant of God, this: that the greater the age, the nearer life's end, the less should a man be a servant of hatred and haughtiness. On the contrary, he should think all the more of the salvation of his soul, a thing which I wish your grace. Amen. Herewith remaining, etc. I subscribe myself, etc.'"

"All is written out accurately," said Pan Serafin; "nothing to be added, nothing taken

away."

"Ha!" said the priest, "do you think that he gets what he deserves?"

"Oi! certain words burnt me."

"And me," added Lukash. "It is sure that when a man hears such speeches he wants to drink, just as on a hot day."

"Yatsek, attend to those gentlemen. I will seal the letter and send it away."

So saying he took the ring from his finger and went to the alcove. But while sealing the letter some other thought came to his head, as it happened, for when he returned, he said,--

"It is done. The affair is over. But do you not think it too cutting? The man is old, it may cost him his health. Wounds given by the pen are no less effective than those by the sword or the bullet."

"True! true!" said Yatsek, and he gritted his teeth.

But just this exclamation of pain decided the matter. Pan Serafin added,--

"My revered benefactor, your scruples are honorable, but Pan Gideon had no scruples whatever; his letter struck straight at the heart, while yours strikes only at malice and pride. I think, therefore, that it ought to be sent."

And the letter was sent. After that still more hurried preparations were made for Yatsek's departure.

CHAPTER VIII

But Tachevski's friends did not foresee that the priest's letter would be in a certain sense useful to Pan Gideon, and serve his home policy. He did not indeed receive it without anger. Yatsek, who so far had been merely an obstacle, became thenceforth, though not the author of the letter, an object of hatred. That hatred in the stubborn old heart of Pan Gideon bloomed like a poison flower, but his ingenious mind

determined to use the priest's letter. In view of this he restrained his fierce rage, his face assumed a look of contemptuous pity, and he went with the answer to Anulka.

"Thou hast paid toll, and art assaulted for doing so," said he. "I did not wish this, for I am a man of experience, and I know people; but when thou didst clasp thy hands and say that injustice had been done, that I had exceeded in sternness, and thou hadst been too severe to him, that he ought not to leave us in anger, I yielded. I sent him assistance in money. I sent him a horse. I wrote him a nice letter also. I thought he would come and bow down, give us thanks, take farewell as became a man who had spent so much time in this mansion; but see what he has sent me in answer!"

At these words he drew the priest's letter from his girdle and gave it to the young lady. She began to read, and soon her dark brows met in anger, but when she reached the place where the priest declared that Pan Gideon wished to humiliate Yatsek, thanks to the suggestions of another, her hands trembled, her face became scarlet, then grew as pale as linen, and remained pale.

Though Pan Gideon saw all this he feigned not to see it.

"May God forgive them for what they attribute to me," said he, after a moment of silence. "He alone knows whether my ancestors are much below the Tachevskis, of whose greatness more fables than truth are related. What I cannot forgive is this: that they pay thee, my poor dear, for thy kindness of an angel, with such ingratitude."

"It was not Pan Yatsek who wrote this, but Father Voynovski," answered Anulka, seizing, as it were, the last plank of salvation.

The old noble sighed.

"Dost thou believe, girl," inquired he, "that I love thee?"

"I believe," answered she, bending and kissing his hand.

"Though thou believe," said he, stroking her bright head with great tenderness, "thou knowest not clearly that thou art my whole consolation. Rarely do I permit myself

words such as these, and rarely do I tell that which my heart feels, since former suffering is concealed in it. But thou shouldst understand that I have only thee in the world. I would increase hourly, not thy disappointment, pain, and trouble, but thy joy and happiness. I do not ask what began to bud in thy heart, but I will say this to thee: whether that was, as I think, a pure, sisterly feeling, or something more, that young man was unworthy. He has heaped on us ingratitude in return for our sincere friendship. My Anulka, thou wouldst deceive thyself wert thou to think that the priest wrote this letter without Yatsek's knowledge. They wrote it together and knowest why they replied with such insolence? As I have heard, Tachevski got money from that Armenian in Yedlinka. That is what he needs, and now since he has it he cares for naught else, and for no one any longer. This is the truth, and in thy soul thou must acknowledge that to think otherwise would be willing self-deception."

"I see," answered Anulka.

Pan Gideon meditated awhile as if he were dwelling on something.

"People say," added he finally, "that it is a vice of old people to praise past times and lay blame on the present. But no, this is not a vice. The world is growing worse, people are becoming worse. In my day no man would have acted as has Tachevski. Dost thou know the first cause of this? That night on the tree, which exposed this lord cavalier to the ridicule of people. To hurry, as it were, to help some one and then climb a tree out of terror, may happen, but in such a case it is better not to boast of it, for the thing is ridiculous, ridiculous! I do not hold up the Bukoyemskis or Pan Stanislav as heroes: they are drunkards, road-blockers, gamblers--I know them! Our lives were less in their minds than were wolf skins. But there is lurking in this Yatsek such envy that he could not forgive them that chance aid which they gave us. Out of that rose the duel. May God punish me if I had not reason to be angry. Ha, they made friends after the duel, for it is clear that our cavalier understood that he

could get money from Pan Serafin, so he preferred to turn his malice against this mansion. Pride, animosity, ingratitude, and greed, those are the things which he has manifested, and nothing better. He has injured me. Never mind. God forgive him! But why should he attack thee, my dear flower? A neighbor for long years, a guest for long years--daily visits. A gypsy in such a position would become faithful; a swallow grows used to its roof; a stork returns to its nest; but he spat on our house as soon as he felt in his purse the coin of the Armenian. No! No! No man in my day would have acted in that style."

Anulka listened with her palms on her temples, and with eyes looking out before her in fixedness, so Pan Gideon stopped and looked at her once, and a second time.

"Why dost thou forget thyself?" asked he.

"I have not forgotten myself, but I am so sad that words have deserted me."

And not finding words she found tears.

Pan Gideon let her cry till she had finished.

"It is better," said he at last, "to let that sadness pass off with tears than let it stay in the heart and be petrified. Ah, it is hard! Let him go, let him clink other men's coin, let him touch the mud with his saddle-cloth, let him strut as a lord, and court Warsaw harlots. But we will remain here, my girl. That is no great delight, it is true, but still it is a delight, if thou remember that no one in this house will deceive thee, no one here will offend thee, no one will break thy heart; that here thou wilt be always as an eye in the head of each person, that thy happiness will be the first question always, and also the last question of my life. Come--"

He stretched his arms toward her, and she fell on his breast with emotion and gratitude, as she would on the breast of a father who was comforting her in a moment of suffering.

Pan Gideon fell to stroking her bright head with the one hand that remained to him, and long did they sit there in silence. Meanwhile it was growing dark, the frosty

window-panes glittered in the moonlight, and dogs made themselves heard here and there with prolonged barking.

The warmth of the maiden's body penetrated to the heart of Pan Gideon which began to beat with more vigor, and since he feared to make a declaration too early, he would not expose himself then to temptation.

"Stand up, child," said he. "Thou wilt not weep now?"

"I will not," answered she, kissing his hand.

"Seest thou! Ah, this is it! Remember always the place where thou hast a sure refuge, and where it will be calm for thee, and pleasant. Every young man is glad to race over the world like a tempest, but for me thou art the only one. Fix this well in mind. More than once, perhaps, hast thou thought, 'My guardian seems a savage wolf; he is glad to find some one to shout at, and he has no understanding of my young ideas;' but knowest thou of what this guardian has thought and is thinking at present? Often of his past happiness, often of that pain, which like an arrow is fixed in his heart--that is true, but besides that only of thee and thy future, only of this: to secure every good thing for thee. Pan Grothus and I talked whole hours of this. He laughed because, as he said, one thought alone remained with me. My one point was to secure to thee after my death even a sufficient and quiet morsel."

"May God not grant me to wait for that!" cried she, bending again to the hand of Pan Gideon.

And in her voice there was such sincerity that the stern face of the old noble was radiant with genuine joy for the moment.

"Dost thou love me a little?"

"Oh, guardian!"

"God reward thee, child. My age is not yet so advanced, and my body, save for the wounds in my heart and my person, would be sufficiently stalwart. But as men say,

death is ever sitting 'at the gate, and knocks at the door whensoever it pleases. Were it to knock here thou wouldst be alone in the world with Pani Vinnitski. Pan Grothus is a good man and wealthy; he would respect my testament and wishes at all times, but as to other relatives of my late wife--who knows what they would do? And this estate and this mansion I got with my wife. Her relatives might wish to resist, and raise lawsuits. There is need to have foresight in all things. Pan Grothus gave advice touching this case--true, it is effective--but strange, and therefore I will not speak to thee yet of it. I should like to see His Grace the King--to leave thee and my will to his guardianship, but the king is occupied now with the coming war and the Diet. Pan Grothus says that if there is war the troops will move first under the hetmans, and the king will join them at Cracow--perhaps then--perhaps we shall go together. But whatever happens, know this, my child; all that I have will be thine, though I should have to follow at last the advice of Pan Grothus. Yes!--even for one hour before death! Yes, so help me, God. For I am not a wind in the field, not a harebrain, not a purse emptier, not a Tachevski."

CHAPTER IX

Panna Anulka returned to her room filled with gratitude toward her guardian, who up to that hour had never spoken to her with such kindness; and at the same time she was disenchanted, embittered, and disgusted with the world and with people. In the first moment she could not and knew not how to think calmly; she had only the feeling that a grievous wrong had been done her, a great injustice, and that an awfully keen disappointment had struck her.

For her love, for her sorrow, for her yearning, for all that she had done to bind the broken threads together, her only reward was a hateful suspicion. And there was no remedy. She could not, of course, write to Yatsek a second time, to justify herself and explain the position. A blush of shame and humiliation covered her face at the

mere thought of this. Besides, she was almost sure that Yatsek had gone. And next would come war; perhaps she would never behold him in life again; perhaps he would fall and die with the conviction that a perverse and wicked heart was in her bosom. All at once boundless sorrow seized her. Yatsek stood before her eyes as if living, with his embrowned face and those pensive eyes which more than once she had laughed at, as being the eyes of a maiden.

The girl's thought flies like a swift swallow after the traveller, and calls to him: "Yatsek! I wish thee no evil! God sees my heart, Yatsek." Thus does she call to him, but he makes no answer; he rides on straight ahead. What does he think of her? He only frowns and spits from disgust as he travels.

Again there are pearls on her eyelids. A certain weakness has come on her, a moment of resignation in which she says to herself: "Ah, this is difficult! May God forgive him, and go with him, and never mind me!"

But her lips quiver like those of a child, her eyes look like those of a tortured bird, and somewhere off in a hidden corner of her soul, which is as pure as a tear, she blames God in the deepest secret for that which has met her.

Then again she felt certain that Yatsek had never loved her, and she could not understand why he had not loved her, even a little.

"My guardian spoke truly," said she.

But later on came reflection.

"No, that could not be."

Immediately she recalled those words of Yatsek, which were fixed in her memory as in marble. "Not thou art to go, I am the person to go; but I say to thee: though for years I have loved thee more than health, more than life, more than my own soul, I will never come back to thee. I will gnaw my own hands off in torture, but, so help me, God, I will never come back to thee." And he was pale as a wall when he said this, and almost mad from pain and from anger. He had not come back, that was

true! He had appeared no more, he had left her, he had renounced her, he had abandoned her, he had wronged her; with an unworthy suspicion he and the priest had composed the dreadful letter--all that was true, and her guardian was right in that. But that Yatsek had never loved her, that after he had found money he had departed with a light and joyful heart, that he thought of paying court to others, that he had ceased altogether to think of her,--this was incredible. Her guardian might think so in his carefulness, but the truth was quite different. He who has no love does not grow pale, does not set his teeth, does not gnaw his fists, does not rend his soul in anguish. Such being the case, the young lady thought the difference was only this, that instead of one two were now suffering, hence a certain consolation, and even a certain hope, entered her. The days and months which were to come seemed gloomier, it may be, but not so bitter. The words of the letter ceased to burn her like red-hot iron, for though she doubted not that Yatsek had assisted in the writing, it is one thing to act through sorrow and pain, and another through deliberate malice.

So again great compassion for Yatsek took hold of her; so great was it, and especially so ardent, that it could not be simply compassion. Her thoughts began to weave, and turn into a certain golden thread, which was lost in the future, but which at the same time cast on her the glitter of a wedding.

The war would soon end and also the separation. That cruel Yatsek would not return to Belchantska. Oh, no! a man so resolute as he when once he says a thing will adhere to it; but he will come back to those parts, and return to Vyrambki; he will live near by, and then that will happen which God wishes. He went away it may be with tears, it may be with pain, with wringing of hands--God comfort him! He will come home with a full heart, and with joy, and, especially after war, with great glory.

Meanwhile she will be there quietly in Belchantska, where her guardian is so kind; she will explain to that guardian that Yatsek is not so bad as other young men--and

farther on moved that golden thread which began to wind round her heart again.

The goldfinch, in the Dantsic clock of the drawing-room, whistled out a late hour, but sleep flew from the young lady altogether.

Lying now in her bed she fixed her clear eyes on the ceiling and considered what disposition to make of her troubles and sorrows. If Yatsek had gone it was only because he was running away from her, for according to what she had heard war was still far from them. Her guardian had not mentioned that young Stanislav and the Bukoyemskis were to go away also; it was proper to come to an understanding with them and learn something of Yatsek, and say some kind word which might reach him through them, even in distant camps, and in war time.

She had not much hope that those gentlemen would come to Pan Gideon's, for it was known to her that they had gone over to Yatsek, and that for a certain time they had been looking with disfavor on Pan Gideon; but she relied on another thing.

In some days there would be a festival of the Most Holy Lady; a great festival at the parish church of Prityk, where all the neighboring nobles assembled with their families. She would see Pan Stanislav and the Bukoyemskis, if not in front of the church then at dinner in the priest's house. On that day the priest received every one.

She hoped too that in the throng she would be able to speak with them freely, and that she would not meet any hindrance from her guardian who, though not very kind toward those gentlemen recently, could not break with them in view of the service which they had shown him.

To Prityk from Belchantska the road was rather long, and Pan Gideon, who did not like hurry, passed the night at Radom, or at Yedlina, if he chose the road through the latter place.

This time because of the overflow they took the safer though longer road through Radom, and started one day before the festival--on wheels, not on runners, for winter had broken on a sudden, and thoroughly. After them moved two heavily

laden wagons with servants, provisions, a bed and sofas for decent living at inns where they halted.

The stars were still twinkling, and the sky had barely begun to grow pale in the east when they started. Pani Vinnitski led morning prayers in the dark. Pan Gideon and the young lady joined her with very drowsy voices, for the evening before they had gone to bed late because of preparations for the journey. Only beyond the village and the small forest, in which thousands of crows found their night rest, did the ruddy light shine on the equally ruddy face and drowsy eyes of the young lady. Her lips were fixed ready for yawning, but when the first sun-ray lighted the fields and the forest she shook herself out of the drowsiness and looked around with more sprightliness, for the clear morning filled her with a certain good hope, and a species of gladness. The calm, warm, coming day promised to be really wonderful. In the air appeared, as it were, the first note of early spring. After unparalleled snows and frosts came warm sunny days all at once, to the astonishment of people. Men had said that from the New Year it seemed as if some power had cut off the winter as it were with a knife-blade, and herdsmen foretold by the lowing of cattle, then restive in the stables, that the winter would not come back again. In fact, spring itself was then present. In furrows, in the forest, at the north side of woods and along streams, strips of snow still existed; but the sun was warming them from above, and from beneath were flowing out streams and currents, making in places broad overflows in which were reflected wet leafless trees, as in mirrors. The damp ridges of fields gleamed like belts of gold in the sun-rays. At times a strong wind rose, but so filled with gladsome warmth as if it came from out the sun's body directly, and flying over the fields wrinkled the waters, throwing down with its movement thousands of pearls from the slender dark twigs of the tree branches.

Because of the thaws and road "stickiness," and also because of the weighty carriage which was drawn by six horses with no little effort, they moved very slowly. As the sun rose more and more the air grew so warm that Panna Sieninski untied the

ribbons of her hood, which dropped to the back of her head, and unbuttoned her weasel-skin shuba.

"Are you so warm?" inquired Pani Vinnitski.

"Spring, Auntie! real spring!" was the answer.

And she was so charming with her bright and somewhat dishevelled head pushed out from her hood, with laughing eyes and rosy face, that the stern eyes of Pan Gideon grew mild as he glanced at her. For a while he seemed as if looking at her then for the first time, and spoke as if half to himself,--

"As God lives thou art at thy best also!"

She smiled at him in answer.

"Oh, how slowly we are moving," said she after a while. "The road is awful! Is it not true that on a long road one should wait till it dries somewhat?"

Pan Gideon's face became serious, and he looked out of the carriage without giving an answer.

"Yedlina!" said he, soon after.

"Then perhaps one may go to the church?" inquired Pani Vinnitski.

"We will not, first because the church is sure to be closed, for the priest has gone to Prityk, and second, because he has offended me greatly, and I will hide my hand if he approaches." Then he added: "I ask you, and thee also, Anulka, not to converse with him in any way."

A moment of silence succeeded. Suddenly the tramping of horses was heard behind the carriage, and the sounds made as the beasts pulled their feet out of the mud; these resembled the firing of muskets,--then piercing words were heard on both sides of the carriage.

"With the forehead! with the forehead!"

That was from the Bukoyemskis.

"With the forehead!" answered Pan Gideon.

"Is your grace for Prityk?"

"I go every year. I suppose your lordships are going also to the festival?"

"You may lay a wager on that," replied Marek. "One must be purified from sin before war comes."

"But is it not early yet?"

"Why should it be too early?" asked Lukash. "All that has been sinned up to the moment will fall from one's shoulders, since that is the use of absolution; and as to sins incurred later, the priest absolves from those in presence of the enemy, in partikulo mortis."

"You wish to say in articulo" corrected Pan Gideon.

"All the same, if only repentance is real."

"How do you understand repentance?" inquired the amused Pan Gideon.

"How do I understand repentance? Father Vior, the last time, commanded that we give ourselves thirty stripes in discipline, and we gave fifty; for we thought: Well, since this pleases the Heavenly Powers, let them have all they want of it."

At this even the serious Pani Vinnitski laughed and Panna Anulka hid her face in her sleeve as if warming her nose there.

Lukash noticed, as did his brothers, that their answer had roused laughter, hence they were somewhat offended and silent; so for a time were heard only the rattling of chains on the carriage, the snorting of horses, the sound of mud under hoofs, and the croaking of crows. Immense flocks of these birds were sailing away in the sunlight from small places and villages to the pine woods.

"Ah! they feel this very minute that there will be food even to wade in," said the youngest Bukoyemski, turning his eyes toward the crows.

"Yes, war is their harvest," said Mateush.

"They do not feel it yet, for war is far off," said Pan Gideon.

"Far or near, it is certain!"

"And how do you know?"

"We all know what the talk was at the district diets, and what instructions will be given to the general Diet."

"True, but it is not known if they were the same everywhere."

"Pan Prylubski, who has travelled through a great part of the Commonwealth, says they were the same everywhere."

"Who is Pan Prylubski?"

"He comes from Olkuts, and makes levies for the bishop of Cracow."

"But has the bishop commanded to make levies before the assembling of the Diet?"

"You see, your grace, how it is! This is the best proof that war is certain. The bishop wants a splendid light cavalry regiment--well, Pan Prylubski came to these parts because he has heard of us somewhat."

"Ho! ho! Your glory has gone far through the world. Are you going?"

"Of course!"

"All of you?"

"Why should we not all go? It is a good thing during war to have a friend at one's side, and still better a brother."

"Well, and Pan Stanislav?"

"He and Pan Yatsek will serve in one regiment."

Pan Gideon glanced quickly at the young lady sitting in front; a sudden flame rushed over her cheeks, and he inquired further,--

"Are they so intimate already? Under whom will they serve?"

"Under Pan Zbierhovski."

"Of course in the dragoons?"

"In God's name, what are you saying? That is the hussar regiment of Prince Alexander."

"Is it possible! Is it possible! That is no common regiment--"

"Pan Yatsek is no common man."

Pan Gideon had it on his lips to say that such a stripling in the hussars would be a soldier, not an officer, but he held back the remark, fearing it might seem that his letter was not so polite, or his help so considerable as he had told Anulka, so he frowned and said,--

"I have heard of the mortgage of Vyrambki; how much was given on it?"

"More than you would have given," answered Marek, dryly.

Pan Gideon's eyes glittered for a moment with savage anger, but he restrained himself a second time, for it occurred to him that further conversation might serve his purpose.

"All the better," said he, "the cavalier must be satisfied."

The Bukoyemskis, though slow-witted by nature, began to exaggerate, one more than the other, just to show Pan Gideon how little Tachevski cared for him and all in his mansion.

"Of course!" called out Lukash, "when he went away he was almost wild from delight. He sang so that the candles at the inn toppled over. It is true, that we had drunk some at parting."

Pan Gideon looked again at Panna Sieninski, and saw that her rosy face full of youth and life had become as it were petrified. Her hood had fallen off entirely, her eyes were closed as in sleep; only from the movement of her nostrils and the slight quivering of her chin could it be known that she was not sleeping, but listening, and listening intently. It was painful to look at her, but the merciless noble thought,--

"If there is a splinter in thy heart yet will I pluck it out of thee!" And he said aloud,--

"Just as I expected--"

"What did you expect?"

"That you gentlemen would be drunk at the parting, and that Pan Tachevski would go away singing. Of course, he who is seeking fortune must hurry, and if it smiles on him, perhaps he may catch it--"

"Of course!" exclaimed Lukash.

"Father Voynovski," added Marek, "gave Tachevski a letter to Pan Zbierhovski, who is his friend, and in Zbierhova the land is such that you can sow onions in any place,--and he has an only daughter, just fifteen years of age. So don't you bother about Tachevski; he will make his way without you, and without these sands around Radom!"

"I do not bother myself about him," said Pan Gideon, dryly. "But perhaps you gentlemen are in a hurry to ride on? My carriage moves in this mud like a tortoise."

"Well, here is to you with the forehead!"

"With the forehead! with the forehead! I am the servant of your lordships!"

"We are yours in the same way!"

Having said this the brothers moved forward more speedily, but when they had ridden an arrow-shot from the carriage they reined in again and talked with animation.

"Did ye see?" asked Lukash, "I said 'Of course!' twice, and twice I thrust a sword into his heart as it were; he almost burst out."

"I did better," said Marek, "for I struck both the girl and the old man."

"How? Tell us, do not hide!" called the brothers.

"Did ye not hear?"

"We heard, but do thou repeat."

"I struck with what I said of Panna Zbierhovski. Ye saw how the girl became pale? I looked at her; she had her hand on her knee and she opened and closed it, opened and closed it, just like a cat before scratching. A man could see that anger was diving down into her."

But Mateush reined in his horse, and he added,--

"I was sorry for her--such a dear little flower--and do ye remember what old Pan Serafin said?"

"What did he say?" inquired, with great curiosity, Lukash, Marek, and Yan, reining in their horses.

Mateush looked at them a while through his protruding eyes, then said as if in sorrow,--

"But if I have forgotten?"

Meanwhile not only Pan Gideon, but Pani Vinnitski, who generally knew very little of what was happening around her, turned attention to the changed face of the young lady.

"But what is the matter, Anulka? Art thou cold?"

"No," answered the girl, with a sort of sleepy voice which seemed not her own. "Nothing is the matter, only the air affects me strangely--so strangely."

Though her voice broke from moment to moment she had no tears in her eyes; on the contrary, in her dry pupils there glittered sparks peculiar, uncommon, and her face had grown older. Seeing this Pan Gideon said to himself,--

"Would it not be better to strike while the iron is hot?"

CHAPTER X

Many nobles appeared at the festival from near and even distant places. There were

assembled the Kohanovskis, the Podgaiyetskis, the Silnitskis, the Potvorovskis, the Sulgostovskis, Tsyprianovitch with his son, the Bukoyemskis and many others. But the greatest interest was roused by the arrival of Prince Michael Chartoryski, the voevoda of Sandomir, who stopped at Prityk on his way to the Diet at Warsaw and, in waiting for the festival, had passed some days in devotion. All were glad of his presence, for he added splendor to the occasion, and at the same time it was possible to learn from him no little touching public questions. He spoke of the injustices which the Porte had committed against the Commonwealth in fixing the boundary of Podolia, and the raids which in defiance of treaties had ruined Russian lands recently. He declared war to be certain. He said that a treaty with the Emperor would be concluded beyond question, and that even adherents of France would not show it open opposition, since the French court, though unfriendly in general to the Empire, knew the peril in which the Commonwealth found itself. Whether the Turks would hurl themselves first against Cracow, or Vienna was unknown to Prince Michael, but it was known to him that the enemy were preparing "arms and men" at Adrianople, and in addition to the forces with Tököli at Koshytsi, nay those in all Hungary, thousands were assembling from Rumelia, from Asia, from regions on the Euphrates and the Tigris, from Africa, from the Red Sea to the waves of the measureless ocean.

The nobles heard this news eagerly; the older men, who knew how gigantic was the power of the pagan, with anxiety in their faces, the younger men with knit brows, and with fire in their glances. But hope and enthusiasm were predominant, for fresh in their minds was the memory of Hotsim, where the king reigning actually, a hetman at that time, leading Polish forces, besieged a Turkish power greater than his own, bore it apart upon sabres, and trampled it with horsehoofs. They were comforted by the thought that the Turks, who rushed with irresistible daring on all troops of other nations, felt their hearts weaken when they had to stand eye to eye in the open field against that terrible "Lehistan" cavalry. Still greater hope and still higher enthusiasm were roused by the preaching of Father Voynovski. Pan Gideon

was somewhat afraid lest in that sermon there might be some reference to sins, and certain points of blame which would touch him and his treatment of Yatsek, but there was nothing of that sort. War and the mission of the Commonwealth had swept the priest away heart and soul. "Christ," said he, "has chosen thee among all the nations, He has placed thee on guard before all the others, He has commanded thee to stand beneath His cross and defend, to thy last drop of blood and the last breath in thee, that faith which is the foundation of living. The field of glory lies open before thee, hence, though blood were to flow around thee on both sides, though arrows and darts were to stick in thee, rise, lion of God, shake thy mane, and thunder so that from that thunder the marrow will melt in the bones of the pagan, and crescents and horse-tails will fall, like a pine wood in front of a tempest."

Thus did Father Voynovski speak to the knightly hearers before him, because he was an old soldier who had fought all his life and knew how it was on the battlefield. When he spoke of war it seemed to those present that they were looking on the canvases in the king's castle at Warsaw, on which various battles and Polish victories were presented as if real.

"See, now," said he, "the regiments are starting. Their spears are lowered to a line with the middle of the horse-ears; they have bent forward in the saddle, there is a cry of fear among the pagans, and delight up in heaven. The Most Holy Mother runs to the window with all her might, crying: 'Oh come, dear Son, and see how the Poles are attacking!' The Lord Jesus with his holy cross blesses them. 'By God's wounds!' he cries, 'there they are, my nobles, my warriors. Their pay here is ready for them!' And the archangel, holy Michael, strikes his palms on his thighs and shouts: 'Into them, the dog-brothers! Strike!' That is how they rejoice up in heaven. And those down here cut and cut. Men, standards, horses roll over and over. They rush across the bellies of Janissaries, over captured cannon, and trampled crescents; they advance to glory, to reward, to an accomplished mission, to salvation, to immortality."

When at last he finished with the words, "And Christ calls you, too; it is your time now to the field of glory!" there rose a shout in the church, and a clattering of sabres. At Mass, when during the Gospel every blade sounded in its scabbard, and steel glittered in the sunlight, it seemed to tender women that war had already begun; and they fell to sobbing, committing their fathers and husbands and brothers to the Most Holy Lady.

The Bukoyemskis, whispering among themselves, made a vow to move immediately after the festival, and not to take to their lips, until Easter, water, milk, or even beer, but content themselves with drinks which keep up heat in the blood, and therefore valor.

General enthusiasm was so great that even the cold, stern Pan Gideon did not resist it. He thought for a while that, though his left arm was missing, he might hold the reins in his teeth, and with his right hand take vengeance once more for the wrongs which he had suffered from cursed pagans, and besides gild anew his former services to the Commonwealth. But he made no vow, and left the whole matter for further meditation.

Meanwhile the service was concluded in splendor. From the cemetery were fired cannon given by the Kohanovskis for important occasions. In the tower the swinging bells thundered. The tame bear in the choir pumped the organ with such vigor that the tin pipes almost flew from their settings. The church was filled with smoke from censers, and trembled from the voices of people. Mass was celebrated by the prelate Tvorkovski, from Radom,--a learned man, full of sentences, quotations, examples, and proverbs; at the same time he was gladsome, and knew the world thoroughly. For these reasons, men went to him for counsel in every question; and so did Pan Gideon, who went the more readily, as the prelate was a friend of his. On the eve of the festival, Pan Gideon was with him at confession; but when, besides the confession, he began to acknowledge his intentions, the object of which was Panna

Anulka, the prelate deferred that to a later and special meeting, saying that he had barely time to hear the sins of common people. "On the way back from the festival," said he to Pan Gideon, "you can send home the women and stay with me at Radom, where, procul negotiis (far from business), I can listen to you in freedom."

And thus did they manage. Hence, a day later they sat down before a decanter of worthy Hungarian and a plate of roast almonds, which the prelate took with wine very willingly.

"I am silent," said he; "and attentive--speak on!"

Pan Gideon took a draught from the glass and looked from his iron eyes with some discontent at the prelate, because the latter had not eased his conversation by a proper beginning.

"Hm! somehow it is not easy; I see that it is more difficult than I imagined."

"Then I will help you. Did you wish to speak of some holy thing?"

"Of a holy thing?"

"Yes; which has two heads and four feet."

"What sort of holy thing is that?" asked Pan Gideon, astonished.

"I mention a riddle. Guess it."

"My dear prelate, whoso has important affairs in his head has no time for riddles."

"Pshaw! Think a while!"

"Some holy thing with two heads and four feet?"

"Yes."

"As God lives, I know not."

"It is holy matrimony. Is that not so?"

"True, as God is dear to me! Yes, yes, precisely on that subject do I wish to talk with you."

"Then it is a question of Anulka Sieninski?"

"Of her exactly. Do you see, my benefactor, she, of course, is not my relative, or if she is, the relationship is so distant that no one could prove it. But I have become attached to her, for I reared her, and I am bound in gratitude to her family, for what the Pangovskis had in Russia, just as the Jolkievskis, Danilovitches, and Sobieskis, they had from the Sieninskis, or through them. I should like to leave the orphan what I have, but in fact the fortune of the Pangovskis has vanished through Tartar attacks; there remains only the estate of my late wife. It is mine; she left it by will to me; but this place is full of her relatives. First of all is Pan Grothus, the starosta of Raigrod. I do not fear him, for he is rich beyond need, and a good man. For that matter it was he who gave me this idea, which before that had occurred, it is true, more than once to me; for the desire was at the bottom of my heart in a slumber, but he roused it. In addition to Pan Grothus are the Sulgostovskis, the Krepetskis, the Zabierzovskis. These look even to-day with ill-will at the young lady; but how would they look after my death? If I make a will and leave what I own to her they will go to the courts; there will be lawsuits dragging on from tribunal to tribunal. How could she, poor thing, help herself? I cannot leave her in such a condition. Attachment, compassion, and gratitude are strong links. I ask with a clear conscience if I am not bound to secure her even in such a way?"

The prelate bit a nut in two and showed the second half to Pan Gideon.

"Do you know why this nut pleases me? Because it is good! If it were decayed I would not eat it."

"Then what?"

"Then that Anulka pleases your taste, for she is an almond. Hai! and what an almond! If she were fifty years old it is certain that your conscience would not be so troubled concerning her future."

Pan Gideon was confused at this, but the prelate continued,--

"I do not take this ill of you, for, as you see, there must be a good reason for everything, and God has so arranged that every man prefers a young turnip to an old one. With wine it is different, therefore we agree willingly as to wine with the arrangement of Providence."

"Yes, it is true. Except wine, what is young is better always; Pan Kohanovski wrote only humorously, that an old man, like an old oak, is better than a young one. This is the one question for me: if I leave property to her as my wife no one will dare move a finger; but if I leave it to her as a ward, there will be many lawsuits and quarrels, and perhaps armed attacks also. Who could protect her from the latter? Of course not Pani Vinnitski!"

"That is undoubted."

"But since I am neither a giddy nor an empty man, I did not wish to decide this alone, hence I have come to you to confirm me in the conviction that I am acting wisely, and that you will support me with clear counsel."

The prelate thought a while, and then added,--

"You see, that advice in a matter of this kind is difficult, and a man repeats more than once to himself with Bœtius, Si tacuisses, philosophus mansisses (if thou remain silent, thou wilt be a philosopher); or with Job, 'Even a fool if he remain silent will be considered a wise man.' Your intention, in so far as it is roused by warm affection, is justified, and in so far also as it flows from care for the good of the girl, is even praiseworthy. But will not some injustice be done her, will there not be need to constrain her, or to lead her with threats to the altar? For I have heard that she and Yatsek Tachevski are in love. And truly, without beating about the bushes, I have more than once seen him a frequent guest at your mansion."

"What have you seen?" inquired Pan Gideon, abruptly.

"Nothing sinful, but signs through which intimacy and love are denoted. I saw more than once how they held each other's hands longer than was needed, how they

followed each other with their eyes. I saw him once in a tree dropping cherries down into her apron, and how they so looked at each other that the cherries fell to the ground past one rim of the apron. I saw her when looking at flying storks lean on him, and then--women are always subtle--scold him for coming too near her. And what more did I see? Various things which prove secret wishes. You will say that this is nothing. Of course, nothing! But that she felt the will of God toward him as much, or more, than he toward her, only a blind man could help seeing, and I wonder that you did not see this. I wonder still more, if you did see it, that you did not stop it in view of your own intentions."

Pan Gideon had seen and known this, but still the words of the prelate produced on him a terrible impression. It is one thing when some pain-causing secret is hidden in the heart, and quite another when a strange hand pushes into one's bosom and shakes up that secret. So now his face became purple, his eyes filled with blood, a great bunch of veins came out on his forehead, and he began to pant on a sudden, and to breathe so quickly that the prelate, in alarm, asked,--

"What is the matter?"

Pan Gideon answered, with a motion of the hand, that it was nothing, but he remained silent.

"Drink some wine," cried the priest.

He stretched out his arm and with trembling hand took the glass, raised it to his lips, drank, blew through his lips, and whispered,--

"It darkened before my eyes just a trifle."

"Because of what I told you?"

"No. That for some time has occurred to me often, but now I am fatigued by the fast, by the journey, and by the spring, which is unexpected and early."

"Then perhaps it would be better not to wait for May, but be bled immediately."

"I will be bled, but I will rest a while now, and we will return later on to this business."

A fairly long time passed before Pan Gideon recovered completely, but at last he recovered. The veins relaxed on his forehead, his heart began to beat evenly, and he continued,--

"I will not say that strength fails me. Were I to squeeze with my one hand I could crush, as I think, this silver goblet very easily; but though strength and health are both in God's hand they are not identical."

"Man's life is fragile!"

"But just because of that, if something is to be done there is need to act quickly. You speak, my benefactor, of Pan Yatsek and that affection which the young people might feel for each other. I will say sincerely that I was not blind. I too saw what was happening, but only in recent days did I note it; for remember that till recently she was a green berry, which even now has barely ripened. He came every day, it is true, but because, perhaps, he had not much to eat in his own house; besides, I received him, as it were, through compassion. Father Voynovski trained him in Latin and at the sabre, and I gave him nourishment. That's the whole story. Only a year ago he reached manhood. I looked on them as children who were thinking of various plays and amusements. I considered it an ordinary occurrence. But that such a pauper should dare to think; and, besides, of whom?--of Panna Anulka! That, I confess, never came to my mind, and only in the last hours did I take note of anything."

"Nonsense! A pauper is a pauper, but Tachevski--"

"Of Hungerdeath! No, my benefactor, he who licks a stranger's saucepan should be asked only into dogs' company. When I saw what kind of man he was I looked at him more carefully, and know you what I found? This, that not merely was he a pauper and a giddy head, but a venomous reptile, ever ready to sting the hand

feeding him. Thank God he is gone; but he has stung, not me alone, but that innocent maiden."

"How is that?"

Pan Gideon began to relate how it was, painting with such blackness the deeds of Tachevski that a hangman might have been called in immediately to take him.

"Never fear, my benefactor," said he at last. "During our journey to Prityk the Bukoyemskis poured out in full to Anulka; ah, to the full so completely that it flowed over, and now the situation is such that never will the girl feel such abhorrence for any creature of God as for that whipper-snapper, that roysterer, that abortion."

"Be moderate, or your blood will boil again."

"True. And I did not wish to speak of him, but of this, that I have not in view any injustice to the girl, or any constraint. Persuasion is another thing, but even that should be used by a stranger, yet by a man who is at the same time her friend and mine,--a man known for wit and dignity, who can use noble phrases, move the heart and convince the reason. Hence my desire is to beg you, my special benefactor, to see to this. You will not refuse me; you will do this, not merely from friendship, you will do it because it is honorable and proper."

"It is a question of her good and of yours, hence I will not refuse; but I should like to have time to decide how this may be accomplished most easily."

"Then I will go at once to the barber and have myself bled, so as to go home clearer witted,--but do you make your plan. For you that will not be difficult, and on the other side there will be, as I think, no obstacle."

"There can be only one obstacle, lord brother."

"What is it?"

"Friendship should tell the truth, hence I speak freely. You are an honorable person,

I know that, but rather stubborn. You have this reputation, and you have it because your dependants all fear you tremendously. Not only the peasants, concerning whom you have quarrelled with Father Voynovski, but your servants, attendants, and managers. Tachevski feared you, Pani Vinnitski fears you, the young lady fears you. Two matchmakers will appear according to custom. I will do what I can, but I will not guarantee that the other may not destroy all my labor."

During one moment Pan Gideon's eyes flashed with anger, for he did not like to have the truth told in his presence; but amazement now conquered his anger, so he asked,--

"Of what are you speaking? What other matchmaker is there?"

"Fear," said the prelate.

CHAPTER XI

They were unable to go that same day to Belchantska, for Pan Gideon weakened considerably after bleeding, and said that some rest was needed. Next morning, however, he felt brighter; he had grown young, as it were, and he approached his own mansion with good hope, though with a certain disquiet. Occupied with his own thoughts entirely, he spoke little along the way with the prelate, but when they were entering the village he felt his disquiet increasing.

"This is a wonder to me," said he. "Ere this time I came home as a man who is master, and all others were concerned about this, with what face would I greet them; while now I am the anxious one, I ask myself how will they greet me."

"Virgil has said," replied the prelate, "'amor omnia vincit' (love conquers everything), but he forgot to add, that it changes everything also. This Delilah will not shear your locks, for you are bald, but that I shall see you spinning at her feet, as Hercules spun at the feet of Omphale, is certain."

"Ei! my nature is not of that kind. I have known always how to hold in my fists both servants and household."

"So people say, but for this very reason it lies in the position that some one will take you in hand very thoroughly."

"The hand is a dear one!" said Pan Gideon, with a joyousness which for him was unusual.

They drove very slowly, for the mud in the village was terrible; since they had started from Radom not so soon after midday, night had fallen already. In the cottages at the two sides of the road light came from the windows and stretched in red lines to the cottages opposite. Here and there near the fence appeared some human form, that of a woman, or of a man who, seeing the travellers, bared his head and bowed as low as his girdle. It was clear from these bowings, which seemed excessive, that Pan Gideon held people in his fist, nay more, that he held them too firmly, and that Father Voynovski blamed him, not without reason, for tyranny. But the old noble felt in his bosom a softer heart than had ever been in it till that evening, so looking at those bent figures, and seeing the windows of those cottages leaning earthward, he said,--

"I will grant some favor to those subjects whose part she takes always."

"Oh, see to it that thou do so," said the prelate.

And they were silent. Pan Gideon was occupied for a time with his own thoughts, then he added,--

"I know that you need no advice in this matter; but you must explain to the lady what a benefaction is becoming ready for her, and that I think about her first of all; but in case of resistance, which I do not expect,--well, then even scold her in some degree."

"You said that you did not wish to constrain her."

"I said so, but it is one thing if I were to threaten, and another if some one else, who, besides, is a spiritual person, exposes her ingratitude."

"Leave that task to me. I have undertaken it and will use my best efforts; but I will talk to the girl in the most tender way possible."

"Very well, very well! But one word more. She feels great abhorrence for Tachevski, but should there be any mention of him it would be well to say something more against him."

"If he has acted as you say, this will not be needed."

"We are arriving. Well! In the name of the Father and the Son--"

"And the Holy Ghost--Amen!"

They arrived, but no one came out to meet them, for the wheels made no sound because of deep mud, and the dogs did not bark at the horses or at the men, whom they recognized. It was dark in the hall, for the servants were evidently sitting in the kitchen; and it happened that when Pan Gideon first called, "Is any one here?" no one came to him, and at the second call, in sharper tones, the young lady herself appeared.

She came holding a light in her hand, but since she was in the gleam of it and they in the darkness she, not seeing them at once, remained near the threshold; and they did not speak for a moment since to begin with, it seemed a special sign to them, that she had come out before others, and second, because her beauty astonished them as much as if they had never beheld it till that moment.

The fingers with which she grasped the candle seemed transparent and rosy; the gleam crept along her bosom, lighted her lips and her small face which looked somewhat drowsy and sad, perhaps because her eyes were in a deep shade while her forehead and the glorious bright hair, which was as a crown just above it, were still in full radiance. And she all in quiet and splendor stood there in the gloom like an angel created from ruddy brightness.

"Oh, as God is dear to me, a vision!" said the prelate.

Then Pan Gideon called,--

"Anulka!"

Leaving the light on a nitch of the chimney, she ran to them and gave greeting, joyously. Pan Gideon pressed her to his heart with much feeling, commanded her to rejoice at the arrival of a guest so distinguished, a man famous as a giver of counsel, and when after greeting they entered the dining-hall he asked,--

"Is supper over?"

"No. The servants were to bring it from the kitchen, and that is why no one was standing at the entrance."

The prelate looked at the old noble, and asked,--

"Then perhaps without waiting?"

"No, no," answered Pan Gideon, "Pani Vinnitski will be here directly."

Thereupon Pani Vinnitski made herself felt in reality, and fifteen minutes later they sat down to heated wine and fried eggs. The prelate ate and drank well, but at the end of the supper his face became serious, and he said, turning to Panna Anulka,--

"My gracious young lady, God knows why people call me a counsellor and why they take advice of me, but since your guardian does so, I must speak with you on a certain task of importance which he has given my poor wit to accomplish."

When Pan Gideon heard this, the veins swelled on his forehead; the young lady paled somewhat, and rose in disquiet, for, through some unknown reason, it seemed to her that the prelate would talk about Yatsek.

"I beg you to another room," said he.

And they left the dining-hall.

Pan Gideon sighed deeply once and a second time; then he drummed on the table with his fingers, and feeling the need of talking down his internal emotion by words

of some kind, he said to Pani Vinnitski,--

"Have you noticed how all the relatives of my late wife hate Anulka?"

"Especially the Krepetskis," answered Pani Vinnitski.

"Ha! they almost grit their teeth when they see her; but soon they will grit them still harder."

"How is that?"

"You will learn in good season; but meanwhile we must find a bed for the prelate."

After a time Pan Gideon was alone. Two servants came to remove the supper dishes, but he sent them away with a quick burst of anger, and there was silence in the dining-hall, only the great Dantsic clock repeated loudly and with importance: tik-tak! tik-tak! Pan Gideon placed his hand on his bald head and began to walk in the chamber. He approached the door beyond which the prelate was talking with Anulka, but he heard merely sounds in which he distinguished the voice but not the words of the prelate. So in turn he walked and halted. He went to the window, for it seemed to him that there he would breathe with more freedom. He looked for a while at the sky, with eyes from which expression had vanished,--that sky over which the wind was hurrying the torn clouds of spring, with light on their upper edges through which the pale moon seemed to rise higher and higher. As often as he rested an evil foreboding took hold of him. He looked through the window close to which black limbs of trees were wrestling back and forth with the wind, as if in torment; in the same way his thoughts were struggling back and forth, disordered, evil, resembling reproaches of conscience, and painful forebodings that some bad thing would happen, and that near punishment was waiting--but when it grew bright out of doors, again better hope entered him.

Every one has a right to think of his own happiness--as to Yatsek Tachevski it was of little importance what such people do! What was the question at present? The happiness and calm future of a young girl; but besides this there smiled on him a

little life in his old age--and this belongs to him. This only is real, the rest is wind, wind!

And he felt again a turning of the head, and black spots danced before his vision, but that lasted very briefly. Then he approached the door behind which his fate was in the balance. Meanwhile the light on the table acquired a long wick and the chamber grew gloomy. At times the voice of the prelate became sharper, so that words would have reached the ear of Pan Gideon had it not been for that loud and continuous "tik-tak." It was easy to understand that such a conversation could not end quickly, still, Pan Gideon's alarm grew and grew, turning, as it were, into certain wonderful questions woven into the past, with memories not only of former misfortunes and pain, but also of former unextinguished transgressions, of former grievous sins, and of recent injustices inflicted not only on Tachevski, but on others.

"Why and wherefore shouldst thou be happy?" asked his conscience.

And he would have given at that moment he knew not how much if even Pani Vinnitski might return to the chamber, so that he should not be alone with those thoughts of his. But Pani Vinnitski was occupied somewhere with work in another part of the mansion, while in that dining-hall there was nothing but the clock with its "tik-tak!"

"For what deed should God reward thee?" asked his conscience.

Pan Gideon felt now that if that girl, who was at once like a flower and an angel, should fail him, there would be a darkness in his life which would last till the night of death should descend on him.

With that the door opened on a sudden and Panna Sieninski came in from the next chamber. She was pale; there were tears in her eyes; and behind her was the prelate.

"Art thou weeping?" asked Pan Gideon, with a hoarse, stifled voice.

"From gratitude, guardian," cried she, stretching her hands to him.

And she fell at his knees there.

CHAPTER XII

That evening, or late at night, Pani Vinnitski appeared in the room of her relative, and, finding the young lady still dressed, she talked to her.

"I cannot recover from amazement," said she; "sooner should I have looked for death than that such an idea should have come to the head of Pan Gideon."

"Neither did I look for it."

"How is it then? And is it so, really? I know not what to do, to be glad, or the opposite. We know that the prelate as a spiritual person has better judgment than the laity. He is right when he says that till death thou wilt have a roof over thy head, and that roof thy own, not another's. But Pan Gideon is old"--here she spoke lower--"art thou not a little afraid of him?"

"It is all in the past; there is nothing to think of at present," answered Anulka.

"How dost thou say that?"

"I say that I owe him gratitude for a refuge, and a morsel of bread, and that these are poorly paid for by my person which no one else cares for; but since he cares, that too, is a favor on his part."

"He began long ago to wish for this," said the old woman mysteriously. "After he had talked to-day with thee he called me. I thought that there was something wrong with the supper, and that he would reproach me, but he said nothing. I saw that for some reason he was cheerful, and all at once he broke the news to me. My legs trembled under me. 'What is the matter?' asked he. 'You are turned, like Lot's wife, to a pillar of salt,' said he. 'Is it because I have taken such a mushroom?' 'No,' I answered, 'but because it is so unexpected.' 'With me,' said he, then, 'that is an old idea. Like a fish at the bottom of a river it was unknown till some one helped it to

swim to the surface. And dost thou know who that was?' I felt sure that it was the prelate. 'Not at all,' said he, 'but Pan Grothus.'"

A moment of silence followed.

"But I thought Pan Yatsek--" said Anulka through her set teeth.

"Why Yatsek?"

"To show that he did not care for me."

"Thou knowest that Yatsek has not seen Pan Gideon."

Then Anulka began to repeat feverishly,--

"Yes, I know! He had something else in his head! Let that go! I do not want to know anything. I do not, I do not! It is all finished, and finished forever."

A dry, nervous weeping shook her bosom. After a moment she repeated again,--

"It is finished beyond recall!" Then they knelt down to an "Our Father," which they repeated each evening in company.

Next day Anulka appeared with a calm face, but something had changed in her, something remained unexpressed, something had shut itself up in her. She was not sad, but all at once, she had grown, as it were, some years older, and she had in her now a certain calm dignity, so that Pan Gideon, who hitherto had taken into account himself only, began without noting it, to consider her also. In general he was unable to command himself, and it seemed to him specially strange that he felt in some sense his dependence on Anulka. He began to fear those thoughts which she did not express, but which she might conceal in her spirit. He tried to forestall such, and put in place of them others, of the kind which he wanted. Even the silence of Pani Vinnitski was oppressive and seemed to him suspicious; so he worked out fantastic pictures, talked, joked, but there flashed up in his steel eyes at times certain gleams of impatience.

Meanwhile news of his engagement had gone through the neighborhood. Of this

engagement he now made no secret; on the contrary, he sent letters announcing it to Pan Serafin, and to his nearest neighbors; he wrote letters to the Kohanovskis, to the Podlodovskis, to the Sulgostovskis, to Pan Grothus, to the Krepetskis, and even to distant relatives of his late wife, with invitations to the betrothal, after which the marriage would be celebrated immediately.

Pan Gideon would have preferred to get a dispensation from the banns even, but unfortunately it was the Lenten season, and he had to wait till after Easter. He took both women, therefore, to Radom where the young lady was to find her wedding outfit, and he to buy horses more showy than those which he had at that time in his stables.

Reports came to him that among the relatives who had hoped to inherit everything not only after his late wife, but after him, there was as much movement as there is in a beehive; but this pleased him, since he hated them all from his innermost spirit, and was planning at all times to harm them. Those tidings of meetings, whispered conferences, and counsels shortened his visit to Radom. And when at last his stay there was ended, and the horses together with new harness were purchased, he returned on Easter eve to his mansion. Guests began to arrive almost at the same time, for the betrothal was to take place on the third day after Easter.

First came the Krepetskis who were both the nearest relatives and nearest neighbors. The father was almost eighty years old, with the visage of a vulture, and renowned as a miser. He had three daughters: Tekla, the youngest, was pretty and pleasant; Agneshka and Johanna were not youthful, they were testy old maids with pimples on their cheeks at all seasons. He had a son, Martsian, nicknamed Pniak (stump) in the neighborhood. He bore the name justly, for at the first glance he seemed a great stump; he had a mighty chest, and broad shoulders. His bow-legs were so short that he was almost dwarflike, and his arms reached his kneepans. Some thought him a hunchback; he was not, however, but his head without a neck was fixed so closely to

his body that his high shoulders reached his ears, very nearly. Out of that head peered prominent, lustful eyes, and his face was like that of a he-goat. A small beard which he wore as if in defiance of general custom, increased the resemblance.

He did not serve as a warrior, for he had been ridiculed from service, for which reason he had had in his time many duels. There was uncommon strength in his stumpy body, and people feared him in all places, since he was a quarreller and a road-blocker, who, in every affair, was glad to seek pretexts; he was as irritable as a vicious beast, and wounded savagely in Radom one Krepetski, his cousin, a handsome and worthy young man who almost died of the injuries then inflicted. He felt respect only for Yatsek, whose skill at the sabre was known to him, and before the Bukoyemskis, one of whom, Lukash, threw him over a fence like a bundle of straw once in Yedlina. He had the deserved reputation of being a great profligate. Pan Gideon had driven him out of the mansion a few years before that, because he had looked too much in goat fashion at Panna Anulka, a little girl at that period. But since then some years had passed, and, as they had met later in Radom, and in neighboring houses, Pan Gideon invited him now with the family.

Immediately after the Krepetskis came the Sulgostovskis, twin brothers, who so resembled each other that when they put on coats of like fashion no man could distinguish them; next came three remote Sulgostovskis from beyond Prityk--and then a numerous family formed of nine people, the handsome Zabierzovskis. From Yedlinka came Pan Serafin, but alone, since his son had gone to his regiment already; Pan Podlodovski, the starosta, once the agent of the great lord in Zamost; the Kohanovskis; the priest from Prityk; the prelate Tvorkovski from Radom, who was to bless the ring, and many small nobles from near and distant places, some even without invitation, with this idea, that a guest though quite unknown would be sure to find welcome, and that when there is a chance to eat and drink a man should not miss it.

Belchantska was crowded with carriages and wagons, the stables were filled with horses, the outbuildings with servants of all sorts; everywhere in the mansion were colored coats, sabres, shaven foreheads; and with these went Latin, the twittering of women, farthingales, laces, and various ornaments. Maids were flying around with hot water, and tipsy servants with excellent wine in decanters. From morning until night-hours the kitchen was steaming like a tar pit. The windows of the mansion gleamed and flashed every evening, so that the whole place around there was radiant.

And amid all this tumult Pan Gideon moved through the chambers, walked about and gave welcome, magnificent, important, grown young as it were for the second time, dressed in crimson, and wearing a sabre which glittered with jewels, a sabre which Panna Anulka had inherited; it was her only dowry from wealthy forefathers. If giddiness seized him he leaned on an armchair, and again he moved forward, showed honor to guests who were personages, and struck one heel against the other when greeting older ladies; but above all he followed with eyes which were more and more enamoured "his Anulka," who bloomed in that many-colored throng. Amid glances which were frequently ill-wishing, frequently jealous, and filled sometimes with venom, she was as fair as a lily, somewhat sad, or only conscious, it may be, of the weight of that fact which she had to encounter.

Thus things continued till the evening of the third day, that is, Tuesday, when the mortars of the mansion thundered in the yard, thus announcing to the guests and the country that the solemn moment had come, the moment of betrothal.

The guests ranged themselves then as a half-circle in the drawing-room, men and women in splendid costumes bright as a rainbow in the light of the candles. In front of them stood Pan Gideon and Panna Anulka. Silence settled down, and the eyes of all people were fixed on the bride, who with downcast eyes, with attention and dignity on her face, without a smile, but not sad, seemed as if drowsy.

The prelate Tvorkovski in his surplice, having near him young Tekla Krepetski, who held a silver plate with rings on it, advanced from the half-circle and addressed those who were soon to be married. He spoke learnedly, long, and with eloquence, showing what were the sponsalia de futuro, and what great importance from the earliest days of Christianity was attached to betrothals. He quoted Tertullian, and the Council of Trent, and the opinion of various learned canonists, then turning to Pan Gideon and Panna Sieninski he explained to them how wise their decision was, what great benefaction they promised each other, and how their future happiness depended on themselves only.

Those present listened with admiration, but also with impatience, for as relatives from whom their inheritance was slipping they looked on that marriage with repugnance. Pan Gideon, who from standing long had grown dizzy, began to rest on one leg and then on the other, and to give signs with his eyes to the prelate to finish; these signs he was not quick to notice, but at last he blessed the rings and put them on the fingers of the affianced.

Then the mortars thundered again in the yard, and from the gallery in the dining-hall was heard a loud orchestra made up of five Radom Jews who played nicely. The guests came now in turn to congratulate, for the greater part with sourness and insincerely. The two Krepetski old maids simply jeered as they courtesied to their "Aunt," and Pan Martsian, when kissing her hands, recommended himself to her graces with such a goat glance that Pan Gideon ought to have driven him from the mansion a second time.

But others, more remote relatives, being better and less greedy, gave sincere, cordial wishes. Now the door of the dining-hall was thrown open; Pan Gideon gave his arm to his betrothed, and after him moved the other couples amid the glitter and the quivering of flames caused by a sudden cold gust which had blown through the entrance. From the kitchen came the servants, half tipsy, with decanters of wine and

an unreckonable number of dishes.

From the opening of doors there was such cold air in the dining-hall that guests, while sitting down to the table, were seized the first moment with a shiver, while the flickering of candles made the whole hall, in spite of its elegant furnishing, seem dark and gloomy. But it was proper to hope that wine would soon warm the blood in all present, and wine was not spared by Pan Gideon. He was rather stingy in every-day life, but on exceptional occasions he liked so to show himself that people spoke long of him afterward. This happened now. Behind every guest an attendant was standing with a mossy and big-bellied bottle, while under the table were hidden a number of servants with bottles also, so that in case a guest could not find more to drink on the table he put down a goblet twixt his knees and they filled it immediately. Immense glasses for drinkers, great goblets, glittered in front of each man, but before ladies were smaller glasses, either French or Italian.

The guests did not occupy the whole table, however, for Pan Gideon had commanded to set more plates than there were guests in the mansion. The prelate cast his eyes on those empty places and fell to praising the hospitality of the house and the master; at that moment he rose in his chair somewhat, wishing to arrange the folds of his soutane, hence those present supposed that he was going to offer the earliest toast, and were silent.

"We are listening!" said a number of voices.

"Oh, there is no reason," said the prelate, with joyousness. "There is no toast yet, though the time will come soon for it. I see some of you gentlemen rubbing your heads rather early, and the Kohanovskis are whispering as well as counting on their fingers. It is difficult to expect rhymes from any if not from the Kohanovskis. I wish to say only that it is an old Polish and praiseworthy custom to leave thus a place for a guest who is unexpected."

"Oh," answered Pan Gideon, "as the house is lighted up some one may come from

the darkness."

"And perhaps some one is coming," said Kohanovski. "It may be Pan Grothus?"

"No-- Pan Grothus has gone to the Diet. If a man comes he will be unexpected."

"But the earth is soft, we shall not hear him."

"Well, a dog is barking under the window, so some one is coming."

"No one will drive in from that side, for the windows look into the garden."

"But the dog is not barking, he is howling."

That was the case really. The dog had barked once, twice, a third time, then the barking turned to a low, gloomy howling.

Pan Gideon quivered despite himself, for he remembered how years and years earlier in another place, at his house, which stood five miles from Pomorani, in Russia, dogs had howled in the same way before a sudden onrush of Tartars.

The thought came to Panna Anulka, that she had no cause to expect any one, and that should any man come to her from the darkness to that lighted mansion he would be late in his coming. But it seemed somehow strange to other guests, all the more as the first dog was joined by a second, and a double howl was heard now near that window. So they listened in disagreeable silence, which was broken only after a while by Martsian Krepetski,--

"A guest at whom the dogs howl is nothing to us," said he.

"Wine!" called Pan Gideon.

But the glasses were full, hence there was no need to pour at that moment. Old Krepetski, father of Martsian, rose from his chair somewhat heavily, wishing to speak, as seemed evident. All turned their eyes to him. Old men began to surround their ears with their hands to hear better, but he only moved his lips after long waiting, his chin almost meeting his nose, for he was toothless.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding the fact that the earth was soft from thawing, there

came from the other side of the house, as it were, a dull clatter and it was heard rather long, long enough to go twice round the courtyard. Hence old Krepetski, who had raised his glass, held it a while, looked at the door, and then put the glass down again; other guests acted in like manner.

"See who has come!" said Pan Gideon to his attendant.

The youth rushed out, returned straightway, and answered,--

"There is no one."

"That is strange," said the prelate. "The sound was heard clearly."

"We all heard it," said one of the twin Sulgostovskis.

"And the dogs have stopped howling," said others.

Then the door of the entrance, badly fastened by the servant, as was evident, opened of itself, and a new draught of air entered with such violence that it quenched from ten to twenty candles.

"What is that?" "Shut the door!" "The candles are dying!" said a number of voices.

But with the wind had rushed into the hall, as it were, some unknown terror. Pani Vinnitski, who was superstitious and timid, began then to cross herself audibly.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost--"

"Woman! be silent!" commanded Pan Gideon.

Then turning to Panna Sieninski he kissed her hand.

"A quenched candle cannot trouble my gladness," said he, "and God grant me to be as happy to the end of my days as I am at this moment. Is that not right, my Anulka?"

"Yes, guardian," said she, bending toward his hand.

"Amen!" ended the prelate, who rose to address them.

"Gracious ladies and gentlemen, since that unexpected sound stopped, as is evident,

Pan Krepetski's ideas let me be the earliest expounder of those feelings with which our hearts are warmed toward the future wife and her husband. Hence, ere we cry out O Hymen, O Hymenaios, before we, in Roman fashion, begin to call Thalassius, the beautiful youth who God grant may appear at the earliest, let us raise ex imo this first toast to their prosperity and coming happiness: Vivant, crescant, floreant" (may they live, increase, flourish).

"Vivant! Vivant!" thundered all guests.

The Radom orchestra was heard that moment, and outside the windows the drivers fell to cracking their whips.

Long did the shouts last, with the stamping of feet, the sounding of horns and the cracking of whips. The servants, too, raised a shout throughout the whole mansion, and in the dining-hall, amid endless cheers, rose great sounds of wine-gulping.

"Vivant, crescant, floreant!"

Silence came only when Pan Gideon stood up, raised his glass, and said in a loud voice,--

"My guests and relatives, very gracious and most dear to my heart! I express with inadequate words my gratitude to all; I will first bow to you profoundly for that brotherly and neighborly good-feeling which you have shown me by meeting here under my poor roof in such numbers--"

The words "under my poor roof" were pronounced with a kind of marvellously mild, and, as it were, submissive accents, then he sat down and bent his head, so that the forehead rested really on the table. And the guests wondered that a man usually so distant and so haughty should speak with such affection. They thought that great happiness melts even hearts the most obdurate, and, waiting for what he had to say further, they looked at his iron-gray head resting yet on the edge of the table.

"Silence! We are listening!" said voices.

And in fact deep silence had followed.

But Pan Gideon was motionless.

"What is the matter? What has happened? For God's sake! Speak on!" cried they.

But Pan Gideon answered only with a terrible rattling; then his shoulders and arms began on a sudden to quiver.

Panna Sieninski sprang from her chair pale as a wall, and cried in terrified accents,--

"Guardian! guardian!"

At the table were dismay and confusion; cries and questions rose everywhere. Guests surrounded Pan Gideon, the prelate seized his arms and brought him to the back of the chair, some began to throw water on him, others cried, "Take him to the bed and bleed him as quickly as possible." Some of the women were tearful; some ran, as if frantic, through the chambers with groans or with sharp lamentation. But Pan Gideon remained sitting, his head was thrown back, the veins in his forehead were distended like straps, his eyes were closed firmly, the hoarseness and rattling grew louder.

The unexpected guest had come indeed out of darkness and entered the mansion, dreadful and merciless.

CHAPTER XIII

The servants, at command of the prelate, bore the sick man to the other end of the mansion, to the "chancellery," which served Pan Gideon also as a bedroom. They sent immediately for the village blacksmith, who knew how to bleed, and bled men as well as animals. It appeared after a moment that he was in front of the mansion with a whole crowd gathered there for entertainment, but he was quite drunk, unluckily. Pani Vinnitski remembered that Father Voynovski had the fame of being an excellent physician, so a carriage was sent with all speed for him, though it

seemed clear that every effort would fail, and that no rescue was possible for the sick man. That was in truth the position.

Except Panna Anulka, Pani Vinnitski, the two Krepetskis, and Pan Zabierzovski, who occupied himself somewhat with medicine, the prelate admitted none to the chancellery, lest a throng might hinder recovery. All other guests, as well women as men, had gathered into the adjoining large chamber where beds for men had been provided. All were like a flock of frightened sheep, filled with fear, alarm, and curiosity. Watching the door, they waited for tidings, and some of them made remarks in undertones touching that terrible happening, and touching those omens which had announced it.

"Did you notice how the lights quivered, and the flames were in some manner blackish? From this it is clear that Death had overshadowed them," said one of the Sulgostovskis, in a whisper.

"Death was among us, and we did not know her."[5]

"The dogs howled at her."

"And that clatter! Perhaps that was just Death on her journey."

"It is clear that God did not favor the marriage, which would have been an injustice to the family."

Further whispering was stopped by the coming of Pani Vinnitski and Martsian.

Pani Vinnitski hurried through the chamber, she was in haste to bring a reliquary which warded off evil spirits; but Martsian they surrounded immediately.

"How is he?"

Martsian shrugged his shoulders, raised them till his head seemed to be in his bosom, and answered,--

"He is rattling yet."

"Is there no hope?"

"None."

At that moment through the open door came distinctly the solemn words of the prelate,--

"Ego te absolve a peccatis tuis--et ab omnibus censuris, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen." (I absolve thee from thy sins, and from all blame, in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost.)

All knelt and began to pray. Pani Vinnitski passed between the kneeling people, holding with both hands the reliquary. Martsian followed and closed the door after him.

But it was not closed long, for a quarter of an hour later Martsian appeared in it and said in his squeaking voice of a clarionet,--

"He is dead!"

Then with the words, "Eternal rest," they moved one after another to the chancellery, to cast a last look at the dead man.

Meanwhile at the other end of the house, in the dining-hall, revolting scenes were enacted. The servants of the household had hated Pan Gideon as much as they had feared him; hence it seemed to them that with his death would come an hour of relief, delight, and impunity. To servants from outside an occasion was offered for revelry; so all servants, as well those of the house as others summoned in to assist them, tipsy more or less since midday, rushed now at the wine and the viands. Servants raised to their lips whole flasks of Dantsic liquor, Malmoisie, and Hungarian wine; others, more greedy for food, seized pieces of meat and cake. The snow-white tablecloth was stained in one twinkle with gravies. In the disturbance chairs were overturned on the floor and candlesticks on the table. Ornamented cut glasses fell from drunken hands to the floor with a crash and were broken. Quarrels and fights burst out here and there in the dining-hall. Some stole table ornaments directly. In one word, an orgy began, sounds of which flew to the other end of the

mansion.

Martsian Krepetski, and after him the two Sulgostovskis, young Zabierzovski and one more of the guests, rushed toward those outcries, and at sight of what was happening drew their sabres. At the first moment disturbance increased. The Sulgostovskis went no further than to strike with the flat of the weapons, but Martsian was seized by an access of fury. His staring eyes protruded still farther, his teeth glittered from under his mustaches, and he began to cut with the sabre edge whatever man met him. Some were covered with blood, others hid under the table; the remainder crowded in disordered flight through the door, and Martsian cut at this throng while he shouted,--

"Dog brothers! Scoundrels! I am master in this place!"

And he rushed after them to the entrance whence his shrieking voice was heard shouting,--

"Clubs! rods!"

And the guests stood in the hall, as in ruins, gazing with mortified look, and shaking their heads at the spectacle.

"I have never seen such a sad sight," said one Sulgostovski.

"A wonderful death, and wonderful happenings! Look at this it is just as if Tartars had raided the mansion."

"Or evil spirits," added Zabierzovski. "A terrible night!"

They commanded the servants hidden under the table to crawl forth and bring some order to the dining-hall. They came out, perfectly sobered from terror, and went to work nimbly.

Meanwhile Martsian had returned. He was calmer, but his lips were still trembling from anger.

"They will come to their minds!" said he, addressing those present. "But I thank you,

gentlemen, for helping me to punish those ruffians. It will not be easier here for them than it was in the days of the dead man! My head upon that point."

The Sulgostovskis looked at him quickly, and one said,--

"You have not to thank us more than we you."

"How is that?"

"Why art thou qualifying to be the only judge here?" asked the other of the twins.

Martsian, as if wishing to spring to their eyes, sprang upward on his short bow-legs straightway, and shouted,--

"I have the right, the right!"

"What right?"

"A better right than yours."

"How is that? Hast read the will?"

"What is a will to me?" Here he blew on the palm of his hand; "that's what it is,--wind! To whom has he willed it--to his wife? But where is his wife? That is the question--we are next of kin here. We--the Krepetskis, not you."

"But we will see about that. God kill thee!"

"God kill thee! Clear out!"

"Thou goat! Thou nasty cur! Why dost thou tell us to go? Better have a care of thy goat forehead!"

"Are ye threatening?"

Here Martsian shook his sabre and pushed up to the brothers. They too grasped at their weapons.

But at that moment the offended voice of the prelate was heard there behind them,--

"Gracious gentlemen, the dead man is not cold yet."

The Sulgostovskis were terribly ashamed, and one of them said,--

"Reverend prelate, we are not to blame; we have our own bread and do not desire that of others, but this serpent is beginning to sting, and wishes to drive people out of this mansion."

"What people? Whom?"

"Whomever he comes upon. To-day us, whom he has ordered away, to-morrow, perhaps, the orphan bride living under this roof here."

"That is untrue! untrue!" cried Martsian.

And, winding himself into a ball, he laughed sneeringly, rubbed his hands, bowed down and said with a certain envenomed sincerity,--

"On the contrary, on the contrary! I invite all to the funeral and to the feast following after the interment. I beg most humbly; my father and I beg. And as to Panna Sieninski, she will find at all times a roof, and protection, and care at all times, at all times!"

And he went on rubbing his hands very gleefully.

CHAPTER XIV

Martsian had determined indeed to tell Panna Anulka that she must always consider Belchantska as her own, but he deferred this information till after the funeral; he wished first to talk with his father, who, because of the legal actions on which he had been working all his lifetime, was skilled in law, and was able to avoid in advance many troubles. Both were convinced that their cause was a good one; so the next day, just at the moment when men were placing Pan Gideon in his coffin, they shut themselves up in a side chamber and began with good courage to take counsel.

"Providence is above us," said the old man, "nothing but Providence, to which Pan Gideon will answer seriously for the injustice which he intended to do us."

"Well, let him answer," replied Martsian. "It is our happiness that he only intended

and did not succeed, for now we will take everything. The Sulgostovskis have quarrelled with me already, but I will tear the souls out of those wretches before I let them have even one field of Belchantska."

"Ha, the scoundrels! the sons of a such a one! God twist them! I have no fear of such people, I fear only a will. Hast thou asked the prelate? If any one knows of a will it is he."

"I had no chance yesterday, for he attacked me when quarrelling with the Sulgostovskis and said to us: 'The dead man is not cold yet,' then he went for a coffin and a priest, and to-day there has been no opportunity."

"But if Pan Gideon has willed all to that girl?"

"He had not the right, for this estate belonged to his late wife, our nearest relative."

"But a will has been mentioned, and there will be costs and going to tribunals, and God knows what more in addition."

"Father is accustomed to lawsuits. But I have fixed in my head something of such sort that there will be no need of lawsuits; meanwhile beatus qui tenet" (happy is the man in possession); "for this reason I shall not leave Belchantska. I have sent for our servants already. Let the Sulgostovskis or the Zabierzovskis drive me out later."

"But the girl, if it is willed to her?"

"Who will take her side? She is as much alone in this world as a finger; she has no relatives, no friends--an ordinary orphan. Who will wish to expose his neck for her, lay himself open to quarrels, duels, expenses? How does she concern any one? Tachevski was in love with her, but Tachevski is gone, he may never come back, and if he should he has nothing; he knows as much as my horse about lawsuits. To tell the truth, the position is such that if not Pan Gideon, but her own father, had left her Belchantska, we might come in here and manage in our own way, under pretext of guarding the orphan. I think that Pan Gideon intended to make a will only in the contract of marriage, so either no will at all will be found, or if it be found it will be

some old one with a clause for Panna Anulka from her guardian."

"We can break such a will," said the old man, "my head on that! Though a lawsuit will not be avoided."

"How so? I hear father's words, but I think it will be avoided."

"If, for speaking between us, Pan Gideon's wife was weak-minded, if she left all to her husband he had the right to leave it to whomever he selected."

Old Krepetski uttered the last words almost in a whisper, while looking around on all sides, though he knew that there was no one in the room except him and Martsian.

"How could she leave it to him when she died suddenly?" asked Martsian.

"It was dated the year after their marriage. It is clear that Pan Gideon wheedled her out of it, because they inhabited perilous places, and no man could know when the Tartars might howl out his requiem. They drew up wills to each other in the town at Pomorani; these wills were brought by Pan Gideon to this place. I thought to start lawsuits against him at that time, but saw that I could not do so successfully. Now it is different."

"We shall succeed now without lawsuits."

"If so, all the better; but we must be ready for action."

"Ei! there is no need to be ready."

"How, then?"

"I will get on without father."

Old Pan Krepetski, on hearing this, flashed into anger.

"Thou wilt get on? What? How? But spoil not my labor. He will get on! But didst thou not advise me to leave the Silnitskis in peace touching Dranjkov? According to thee, there was no way to master them. No way? Why not? They had witnesses to swear to the land--a great thing! I made men put earth into their boots from my

courtyard. Well, and what after that? They went to Silnitski's land, and took no false oath when each one of them testified: 'I swear that the land on which I am standing belongs to Krepetski.' Thou wouldst have thought a whole year, but never invented a reason of that kind. Thou wilt get on? Look at him!"

And he began to move his toothless jaws angrily, as if he were chewing some substance; and his chin touched his nose, which was hooked like the beak of some bird of prey.

"Pant out thy anger, my father, and listen," said Martsian. "Wherever it is a question of carrying on lawsuits I yield to thee always; but as to what concerns women, my experience is greater, and I trust in myself with more confidence."

"Is it possible?"

"Therefore, if it comes to a struggle with Parma Anulka it will not be before any tribunal."

"What art thou working out?"

"To divine is not difficult. Is this not my opportunity? Or wilt thou find another such girl in this region?"

Martsian threw his head up and looked in the eyes of his father. The father looked at him, too, with a glance of inquiry, chewed with his gums, and then asked,--

"How is it, pray tell me."

"Why not tell? Since yesterday it is circling through my head."

"Hm! Why not? Because she is as needy as Lazarus."

"But I will come into Belchantska with songs, and unhindered. She is indigent, but the girl is of great blood. And remember the words of Pan Gideon, that if one were to look through the papers of the Sieninskis, it would be possible to drive from their land one-half of the inhabitants of a province. The Sobieskis grew great from them, hence there should be royal protection. The king himself ought to think of a

provision. And the girl has pleased my eye this long time, for she is a dainty morsel--dainty! oh dainty!"

And he sprang about on his short legs, licking his mustache as he did so; wherewith he looked so revolting that old Krepetski remarked to him,--

"She will not want thee."

"And she wanted old Pan Gideon. Are the girls few who have wanted me? A great many young men have gone to the army; so we may buy girls by the bundle, like shoe-nails. Old Pan Gideon knew why he sent me from the mansion. He would not have done so, had he himself not been looking at Panna Anulka."

"But supposing that she will not want thee--then what?"

Evil gleams shone from the eyes of Martsian.

"Then," replied he, with emphasis, "it is possible so to act with a girl who has no protection, that she herself will beg thee to go to the church with her."

The old man was frightened at these words.

"Ah!" said he. "But dost thou not know that act to be criminal?"

"I know that no one would take the part of Panna Anulka."

"But I say to thee, have a care! As it is there are voices against thee. If a man win or lose a lawsuit for property he will not become infamous, but thy thought is of crime--dost understand me?"

"Oh, it will not go to that unless she herself wants it. But do not hinder, only act as I tell thee. After the funeral let father take Tekla home with him, and if there is any excuse also old Pani Vinnitski. I will stay with the girls, with Agneshka and Johanna. They are reptiles, raging at any woman who is younger and comelier than they are. They began yesterday to point their stings at the orphan, but what will they do when living under one roof with her? They will stab, and bite, and insult her, refuse her the bread of compassion. I see this, as if I were reading it in a book, and it

is all as water to my mill."

"What wilt thou grind with it?"

"What will I grind? This: that I will quarrel with those serpents. I will invent something against them; I will give one a slap in the face when it pleases me, then the orphan will kiss me on the hands, on the knees. 'I am thy defender, thy brother, thy true friend,' I will say to her, 'thou art here the real mistress.' And dost thou think, father, that the heart in her will not soften, that she will not fall in love with him who will be a shield and defence to her, who will wipe away her tears, who will watch day and night over her? And if in her sorrow and abandonment and tears she comes to some extraordinary confidence, so much the better! so much the better! so much the better!"

Here Martsian rubbed his hands and so exhibited his goat eyes to his father that the old man had to spit in abhorrence. "Tfu! Pagan!" exclaimed he. "There is always one thing in thy mind."

"Indeed ants walk on me when I look at her. It wasn't for nothing that Pan Gideon drove me from the mansion."

A moment of silence now followed.

"Then thou wilt tell Johanna and Agneshka to act as thou wishest?"

"There is no need to say anything to them or to teach them; their nature suffices. Tekla alone is a dove, they are kites, the two others."

Martsian had not deceived himself, his sisters had begun, each in her own way to take charge of Anulka. Tekla took her every little while in her arms and wept with her, Agneshka and Johanna solaced her, but in another fashion,--

"What did not happen, did not happen," said Agneshka, "but be at rest, thou wilt not be our aunt, because the Lord was not willing, but no one here will harm thee, or grudge thee a morsel."

"And no one will drive thee to work," said the other, "for we know that thou art not used to it; when thou hast recovered, if thou thyself wish, then that is different; in every case wait till thy sorrow is over, for indeed great misfortune has struck thee. Thou wert to be mistress here, thou wert to have thy husband, and now except us thou hast no one. But believe that though we are not relatives we will be to thee as if relatives. Be reconciled to the will of God. The Lord has tried thee, but for that cause he pardons thee other sins. For if thou, perhaps, hast trusted too much in thy beauty, or didst desire wealth and rich clothing (we are all sinful for that matter, therefore I only say this), that will be accounted to thee against other sins."

"Amen," said Agneshka. "Give to the church for the soul of the dead man some ornament, or some little jewel, for thou hast no need of bridal robes now, and we will ask father to permit thee to do this."

Then they looked with sharp eyes at the robes on the table, and at the chests in which lay the trousseau. Such a desire at last seized them to see what was hidden that Johanna burst out with these words,--

"Perhaps we might help thee in selecting?"

And both rushed at the chests, boxes, and bundles, in which were still lying unpacked the robes brought from Radom, and out with them, to be opened and examined before the light, and under the light, and then the two girls began to try them on their own persons.

Panna Anulka sat, as if stunned, in the arms of the dear Tekla, seeing nothing, knowing nothing of what they were doing to her and around her.

CHAPTER XV

As a betrothed she had felt as if something in her life had grown black, as if something had been quenched, had been cut off and ended; hence that betrothal had not roused in her heart any gladness. She had only consented to the marriage

because such was the will of Pan Gideon, and because of her gratitude for care, and still more because, after Yatsek's departure, there remained in her heart only bitterness and sorrow, with this painful thought, that save her guardian she had no one, and that without him she would be a lost orphan, wandering among enemies and strangers. But all on a sudden a thunderbolt had struck that hearth at which she was to sit with some kind of peace, though a sad one, now the only man in this world who to her was important had vanished. It was not strange, then, that the thunderbolt had stunned her, that all thoughts were confused in her head, while in her heart sorrow for that only near soul had been fused into one with a feeling of amazement and terror.

So the words of the elder sisters, who had begun straightway to pilfer her dresses, struck her ears just like sounds without meaning. Then Martsian came, bowed, rubbed his hands, jumped around her; but she understood him no more than she did all the others, who, according to custom, approached her with phrases of sympathy, which were more elaborate the less they were heartfelt. It was only when Pan Serafin put his hand on her head in the style of a father and said: "God will be over thee, my orphan," that something moved in her suddenly, and then tears rushed to her eyelids. Now for the first time the thought came to her that she was as a poor little leaf given over to the will of the whirlwind.

Meanwhile began ceremonies, which, since Pan Gideon had been a man of position in his neighborhood, lasted ten days, in accordance with custom. At the betrothal, with few exceptions, invited guests only were present, but to the funeral came all near and distant neighbors, hence the mansion was swarming. Receptions, speeches, processions, and returns from the church followed one after the other.

During the first days exclusive attention was given to the incomplete widow; but later, when people beheld the Krepetskis in possession and saw that they alone appeared in the mansion as masters, they ceased to regard the young lady, and

toward the end of the funeral solemnities no one paid more heed to her than to any house visitor.

Pan Serafin alone had a thought for her. He was moved by her tears and touched by her misfortune. The servants had begun to whisper that the Krepetski old maids had swept off her whole trousseau, and the old lord had hidden in his box her "little jewels," and that in the house they were already beginning to browbeat the "young lady." When these reports went to Pan Serafin they moved his kind heart, and he resolved to see Father Voynovski.

But that kindly man was prejudiced much against Panna Anulka because of Yatsek, so at the very beginning he answered,--

"I am sorry for her, the poor lady, for she is in need, but in what can I help her? That, speaking between us, God punished her for Yatsek is certain."

"But Yatsek is gone, as is Stanislav, and she is here simply an orphan."

"Of course he is gone, but how did he go? You saw him going, but I went with him farther, and I tell you that the poor boy had his teeth set, and the heart in him was bleeding, so that he could not utter a syllable. Oh! he loved that girl as people loved only in the old time; they know not to-day how to love in that manner."

"Still he was able to move his hands," said Pan Serafin, "for I heard that just beyond Radom he had a quarrel and cut up a passing noble, or even two of them."

"Ah, because he has a girl's face every road-blocker thinks that he can get on with him cheaply. Some drunken fellows sought a quarrel. What was he to do? I blame in him that method; I blame it, but remember, your grace, that a man with a heart torn by love is like a lion seeking to devour some one."

"True; but as to the girl. Ah, my benefactor, God knows if she is as much to blame as we imagine."

"Woman is insidious."

"Insidious or not, but when I heard that Pan Gideon wished to marry her it occurred to me straightway that he roused up everything, for it must have been all-important for him to get rid of Yatsek forever."

"No," said the priest, shaking his head. "We remarked immediately from the letter that it was written at her instigation. I remember that perfectly, and I could repeat to your grace every word of it."

"I, too, remember, but we could not know what Pan Gideon had told her, and how he described Yatsek's deeds to the lady. The Bukoyemskis, for example, confessed to me, that meeting her and Pan Gideon while travelling to Prityk they said purposely, that Yatsek went away after great stirrup cups, laughing, gladsome, and uncommonly curious about the daughter of Pan Zbierhovski to whom you had given him a letter."

"Here they lied! And what for?"

"Well, they lied to show the girl and Pan Gideon that Yatsek had no thought for them. But note this, your grace, if the Bukoyemskis spoke thus out of friendship for Yatsek, what must Pan Gideon have said out of hatred."

"It is sure that he did not spare Yatsek. Still, even if she were less to blame than we imagine, tell me what of that? Yatsek has gone, and perhaps will never come back to us, for I know that he will spare his life less than Pan Gideon spared his reputation."

"Yatsek would have gone in every case," answered Pan Serafin.

"And if he does not return I will not tear the soutane on my body. A death in defence of the country and fighting Mohammedan vileness is a worthy end for a Christian knight, and a worthy end for a great family. But I will add one thing: I should have preferred to see him go without that painful dart which is sticking in him."

"Neither had my only son special happiness in life; he too went, and perhaps will not return to me."

They grew thoughtful, for their souls were filled with love for those young men.

Tvorkovski, the prelate, came upon them while thoughtful, and learned that they had been talking of Panna Sieninski.

"I will tell you, gentlemen," said he, "but let this be a secret. Pan Gideon left no will, the Krepetskis have a right to the property. I know that he had the wish to provide for his wife and leave all to her, but he was not able. Do not mention this before the Krepetskis."

"But have you said nothing?"

"Why should I? Those are hard people, and with me the question is that they should not be too hard toward the orphan, hence I withheld information, and then told them this: 'Not only does God sometimes try a man, but one man tries another.' When they heard this they were disquieted greatly, and fell to inquiring: 'How is it? Does your grace know anything?' 'What has to be shown will be shown,' remarked I, 'but remember one thing. Pan Gideon had the right to will what he owned to whatever person pleased him.'"

Here the prelate laughed, and, putting his hands behind his violet girdle, continued,--

"I say, gentlemen, that the legs trembled under old Krepetski when he heard this; he began to contradict. 'Oh,' said he, 'that is impossible! he had not the right. Neither God nor men would agree to that.'

"I looked at him severely, and said: 'If you think of God, you do well, for at your age it is proper to have His mercy in mind, and not turn to earthly tribunals, for it may happen very easily that you will not have time to await a decision.' He was frightened then terribly, and I added: 'And be kind to the orphan, lest God punish you sooner than you imagine.'"

Hereupon Father Voynovski, whose compassionate heart was moved at the fate of the maiden, embraced the wise prelate.

"Benefactor," cried he, "with such a head you ought to be chancellor. I understand! I understand! You said nothing, you did not miss the truth, and you have frightened the Krepetskis, who think that perhaps there is a will, nay, that it is even in your possession; they must count with this, and be moderate toward the orphan."

The prelate, pleased with the praise, rapped his head with his knuckles.

"Not quite like a nut with holes in it?" asked he.

"Ho, there is so much reason there that it finds room with difficulty."

"If God wish, it will burst, but meanwhile, I think that I have saved the orphan really. I must confess, however, that the Krepetskis spoke of her with greater humanity and with more kindness than I had expected. The women, it is true, have taken some trifles, but the old man declared that he would have them given back to the young lady."

"Though the Krepetskis were the worst among men," said Pan Serafin, "they would not dare to rob an orphan over whom the eyes of such a wise and good priest are so watchful. But, my very reverend benefactor, I wish to mention another thing. I wish to beg you to show me this favor; come now to Yedlinka, let me have the honor of entertaining under my roof such a notable personage, with whom conversation is like the honey of wisdom and politeness. Father Voynovski has promised already to visit me, and we will talk, the three of us, concerning public and private matters."

"I know what hospitality yours is," answered the prelate, with affability, "to refuse would be real suffering, and since Lent, the time of self-subjection is past, I will go for a pleasant day to you, willingly. Let us take farewell of the Krepetskis, but first of the orphan, so that they shall see the esteem in which we hold her."

They went, and finding Anulka alone, spoke kind, heartfelt words, which gave her consolation and courage. Pan Serafin stroked her bright head, just as would a mother who desires to comfort a sorrowing child; the prelate did the same, and the honest Father Voynovski was so moved by her thin face and her beauty in its sadness,

which reminded him of a flower of the field cut down too early by a scythe-stroke, that he too pressed her temples, and having a mind always thinking of Yatsek, he said half to himself, half to her,--"How can one wonder at Yatsek, since this picture was before him. But those Bukoyemskis lied, when they said that he went away gladly."

When Anulka heard these words, she put her lips to his hand on a sudden, and for a long time she could not withdraw them. The sobbing, which came from her heart, shook her bosom; and they left her in an immense, irrepressible onrush of weeping.

An hour later they were in Yedlinka, where good news was awaiting them. A man had arrived bringing a letter from Stanislav, in which he stated that he and Yatsek had joined the hussars of Prince Alexander; that they were well, and Yatsek, though pensive at all times, had gained a little cheerfulness, and was not so forgetful as during the first days. Besides words of filial love, there was in the letter one bit of news which astonished Pan Serafin: "If thou, my father, my most beloved and great mighty benefactor, see the Bukoyemskis on their return be not astonished, and save them with kindness, for they have been met by most marvellous accidents, and I cannot help them. If they were not to go to the war they would die, I think, from sorrow, which even now has almost killed them."

In the course of the following months Pan Serafin visited Belchantska repeatedly, wishing to learn what was happening to Anulka. This was not caused by any personal motive, for Stanislav was not in love with the young lady, and she had broken altogether with Yatsek; he acted mainly from kindness, and a little from curiosity, for he wished to discover in what way, and how far the girl had aided in breaking the bonds of attachment between herself and Yatsek. He met opposition, however. The Krepetskis respected his wealth, hence they received him politely; but theirs was a wonderfully watchful hospitality, so continuous and active that Pan Serafin could not find himself alone with the girl for one instant.

He understood that they did not wish him to ask her how she was treated, and that set him to thinking, though he did not find that she was either ill treated, or made to serve greatly. He saw her, it is true, once and a second time cleaning with a crust of bread white satin shoes of such size that they could not be for her own feet, and darning stockings in the evening, but the Krepetski girls did the same, hence there could not be in this any plan to humiliate the orphan by labor. The old maids were at times as biting and stinging as nettles, but Pan Serafin remarked soon that such was their nature, and that they could not restrain themselves always from gnawing even at Martsian, whom still they feared so much that when either one had thrust out her sting half its length a look from him made her draw it back quickly. Martsian himself was polite and agreeable to Anulka, though without forwardness, and after the departure of old Krepetski and Tekla he became still more agreeable.

This departure was not pleasing to Pan Serafin, though it was simple enough that they could not leave an old man, who was somewhat disabled in walking, without the care of a woman, and since they had two houses they had divided the family. Pan Serafin would have preferred that Tekla remain with the orphan, but when on an occasion he hinted remotely that the ages of the two maidens made them company for each other, the elder sister met his words in the worst manner possible,--

"Anulka has shown the world," said Johanna, "that age does not trouble her. Our late uncle and Pani Vinnitski have proved this--so we are not too old for her."

"We are as much older than she, as Tekla is younger, and I do not know as we are that much," added the second sister; "besides our heads must manage this household."

But Martsian broke into the conversation,--

"Tekla's service," said he, "is dearest to father. He loves her beyond any one, at which we cannot wonder. We thought to send Panna Anulka with them, but she is accustomed to this house, so I think she will feel more at home in it. As to our care, I

will do what I can to make it not too disagreeable."

Then, with feet clattering, he approached the young lady, and tried to kiss her hand, which she drew away quickly, as if frightened. Pan Serafin thought that it was not proper to remove Pani Vinnitski, but he kept to himself that idea, not wishing to interfere in questions beyond his authority. He noted more than once that on Anulka's face fear as well as sadness was evident, but at this he was not greatly astonished, for her fate was in fact very grievous. An orphan, without a kindred soul near her, without her own roof above her head, she was forced to live on the favor of people who to her were repulsive, and who had an evil fame generally, she was forced to suffer pain over the vanished and brighter past, and to be in dread of the present. And though a person may be in suffering to the utmost, that person will have some solace if he, or she, may cherish hope of a better future. But she had no chance for hope, and she had none. To-morrow must be for her as to-day and the endless years to come, with the same drag of orphanhood, loneliness, and living on the bread of a stranger's favor.

Pan Serafin spoke of this often with Father Voynovski, whom he saw almost daily, since it was pleasant for them to talk about their young heroes. Father Voynovski, however, shrugged his shoulders with sympathy and magnified the keenness of the prelate who, by hanging the threat of a will like a Damocles sword above the Krepetskis, had protected the orphan, at least from evil treatment.

"Such a keen man!" said he. "Now you have him, and now he has slipped from you. Sometimes I think that perhaps he has not told the whole truth to us, and that there is a will in his hands, and that he will bring it out unexpectedly."

"That has occurred to me also, but why should he hide it?"

"I know not; perhaps to test human nature. I think only of this: Pan Gideon was a clear-sighted man, and it cannot find place in my head that he should not have made long ago some provision."

But after a time the ideas of both men were turned in a different direction, for the Bukoyemskis arrived, or rather walked in from Radom.

They appeared at Yedlinka one evening, with sabres, it is true, but with not very sound boots, and with torn coats on their bodies. They had such woe-be-gone faces that, if Pan Serafin had not for some time been expecting them, he would have been terribly frightened, and would have thought that news of his son's death had come with them.

The four brothers embraced his knees, and kissed his hands straightway; he, looking at their misery, dropped his arms at his sides in amazement.

"Stashko wrote," said he, "that it had gone ill with you, but this is terrible!"

"We have sinned, benefactor!" answered Marek, beating his breast.

The other brothers repeated his words.

"We have sinned, we have sinned, we have sinned!"

"Tell me how, and in what. How is Stashko? He has written me that he saved you. What happened?"

"Stashko is well, benefactor; he and Pan Yatsek are as bright as two suns."

"Glory to God! glory to God! Thanks for the good news. Have you no letter?"

"He wrote, but did not give us the letter. It might be lost," said he.

"Are you not hungry? Oh, what a condition! It is as if I had four men risen from the dead now before me."

"We are not hungry, for entertainment is ready at the house of every noble--but we are unfortunate."

"Sit down. Drink something warm, but while the servants are heating it tell me what happened. Where have you been?"

"In Warsaw," said Mateush, "but that is a vile city."

"Why so?"

"It is swarming with gamblers and drunkards, and on Long Street and in the Old City at every step there is a tavern."

"Well, what?"

"One son of a such a one persuaded Lukash to play dice with him. Would to God that the pagans had impaled the wicked scoundrel on a stake ere that happened."

"And he cheated?"

"He won all that Lukash had, and then all that we had. Desperation took hold of us, and we wanted to win the coin back, but he won further our horse with a saddle and with pistols in the holsters. Then, I say to your grace, that Lukash wished to stab himself. What was to be done? How were we to help comforting a brother? We sold the second horse, so that Lukash might have a companion to walk with him."

"I understand what happened," remarked Pan Serafin.

"When we became sober there was still keener suffering; two horses were gone, and we had greater need of consolation."

"So ye consoled yourselves till the fourth horse was gone?"

"Till the fourth horse. We sinned, we sinned!" repeated the contrite brothers.

"But was that the end?" continued Pan Serafin.

"How the end, our father and special benefactor? We met a deceiver, one Poradski, who scoffed at us. 'So this is the way they shear fools!' says he. 'I will take you,' says he, 'as my serving men, for I am making the levy for a regiment.' Lukash cried out that the man was exposing us to ridicule, and when he would not stop Lukash slashed him on the snout with a sabre. Poradski's friends sprang to help him, and we to help Lukash, and we cut till the marshal's guard whirled in and went at us. And we yielded only when the others fell to shouting: 'Gracious gentlemen, they are attacking freedom, and injuring the Commonwealth in our persons.' That is how it

happened, and God blessed us immediately, for we wounded eight attendants in a flash, and three of these mortally; the others were at our feet,--there were five of them."

Pan Serafin seized his head, and Marek continued,--

"Yes! Now we know all; God helped us till people shouted that the fight was near the king's palace, and a crime,--that we should die for it. We were frightened and ran. They tried to seize us, but when we, in old fashion, cut one on the face and another on the neck, they fled in a hurry. Stanislav saved us with the horses of his attendants, but even then we had to work hard to bring our heads with us; we were hunted to Senkotsin; if the horses had been slow our case would have ended. Our names were not known; that was lucky, and there will be no accusation against us."

Long silence followed.

"Where are those horses which Stanislav gave you?" asked Pan Serafin.

The brothers began their confession a third time,--

"We have sinned, benefactor, we have sinned!"

Pan Serafin walked with long strides through the chamber.

"Now I understand," said he, "why ye did not bring Stashko's letter. He wrote me that various sad things had happened you, and he predicted your return, thinking that ye would need money for horses and outfits, but how ye would end was unknown to him."

"So it is, benefactor," said Yan.

Men now brought in heated wine, to which the brothers betook themselves with great willingness, for they were road weary. Still they were frightened by the silence of Pan Serafin, who was striding up and down in the chamber, his face severe and gloomy. So again Marek spoke to him,--

"Your grace, my benefactor, has asked about Stanislav's horses. Two of them

foundered before we reached Groyets, for we galloped all the way in a terrible windstorm; we sold them for a trifle to Jew wagoners, for the beasts were no good after foundering. And we had not a coin to keep the souls in us; since we left in such a hurry Pan Stanislav had no time to assist us. Then strengthened a little we rode farther, two men on each animal. But your grace will understand this. We met then some noble on the road, and immediately he seized his side, laughing. 'What kind of Jerusalem nobles are these?' asked he. And we from such terrible scornfulness were ready for anything. So we had endless encounters and fights till we came to Bialobregi, where for dear peace we sold the last two of our crowbaits; then, when people wondered at our travelling on foot we replied that we were making that journey through a vow of devotion. So forgive us now like a father, for there are not more ill-fated men in this world, as I think, than we brothers."

"It is true! it is true!" exclaimed Mateush and Lukash; while Yan, the youngest, moved by remembrance of past suffering, and wine, raised his voice, and cried,--

"We are orphans of the Lord! What is left now in this world to us?"

"Nothing but brotherly love," put in Marek.

And they fell to embracing one another, shedding bitter tears as they did so; then all drew up to Pan Serafin, but Marek seized his knees before the others.

"Oh, father," said he, "our first-born protector, be not angry. Lend us once more for the levy, and from plunder, God grant, we will give it back faithfully; if you lend not--it is well also, but be not angry, only forgive us! Forgive us through that great friendship which we cherish for Stashko; for I tell you, let any man harm even one of Stashko's fingers, we will bear that man apart on our sabres! Is this not true, dearest brothers?--on our sabres?"

"Give him hither, the son of a such a one!" cried Mateush, Lukash, and Yan.

Pan Serafin halted before them, put his hand on his forehead, and answered in these words,--

"I am angry, it is true! but less angry than grief-stricken; for when I think that in this Commonwealth there are many such men as ye, the heart in me is straitened, and I ask myself: Will this mother of ours have the power with such children to meet the attacks which are threatening her? Ye wish to implore me, and ye expect my forgiveness. By the living God! it is not a question here of me, and not of my horses, but of something a hundred times greater, a question of the public weal, and the future of this Commonwealth; and of this, that ye do not understand the position, that even such a thought has not come to you; and since there are thousands such as ye are, the greater is the sorrow and the keener the anxiety, the more dreadful the desperation both of me and each honest son of this country--"

"For God's sake, benefactor! How have we sinned against the country?"

"How? By lawlessness, license, by riot and drunkenness. Oh! With us, people treat such things over lightly, and do not see how the pestilence is spreading, how the walls of this lordly building are weakened, and our heads are endangered by the ceiling. War is approaching; it is not known yet whether the foe will turn his power against us directly--but, ye Christian soldiers, what is the best that ye are doing? The trumpet is calling you to battle, but in your heads there is nothing save wine and lawlessness. With a glad heart ye cut down the guardians of that law which gives order of some kind. Who established those laws? Nobles. Who trampled them? Nobles! How can this country move to the field of glory, if this advance post of Christianity is inhabited not by warriors but drunkards, not by citizens but roysterers and rioters?"

Here Pan Serafin stopped and, pressing his hand to his forehead, walked again with great steps through the chamber. The brothers glanced at one another in amazement and confusion, for they had not thought to hear from him anything of that sort.

But he sighed deeply and continued,--

"Ye were called out against pagans, and ye spill the blood of Christians; ye were

summoned in defence of this country, and ye have gone out as its enemies, for it is evident that the greater the disorder in a fortress, the weaker is the fortress. Fortunately there are still honest children of this mother, but of men such as ye there are, as I have said, many legions; for here not freedom, but riot is nourishing, not obedience, but impunity, not stern discipline, but wantonness, not love of country, but self-seeking; for here diets are broken, here the treasury is plundered, disorder increases, and civil wars like unbridled horses trample the country; hence drunken heads are fixing its fortunes; here is oppression of peasants, and from high to low lawlessness so that my heart bleeds, and I fear defeat, with God's anger as the consequence."

"In God's name must we hang ourselves?" cried Lukash.

Pan Serafin measured the chamber a number of times with his steps yet, and spoke on, as if it were to himself, and not to the Bukoyemskis,--

"Through the length and the breadth of this Commonwealth there is one immense feast, and on the wall an unknown hand is now writing: 'Mane--Tekel--Fares.' Wine is flowing, but blood and tears also are flowing. I am not the only person who sees this, I am not the only man predicting evil, but it is vain to put a light before the sightless, or sing songs to those who have no hearing."

Silence followed. The four brothers stared now at one another, and now at Pan Serafin with increasing confusion; at last Lukash said in a low voice to the other three,--

"May I split, if I understand anything!"

"And may I split!"

"And may I!"

"If we could drink a couple of times--"

"Quiet, do not mention it--"

"Let us go home."

"Let us go."

"With the forehead to your grace, our benefactor!" said Marek, pushing out in front and bending down to the knees of Pan Serafin.

"But whither?"

"To Lesnichovka. God help us."

"And I will help you," said Pan Serafin; "but such grief seized me that I had to pour it out. Go upstairs, gentlemen,--rest; later on ye will learn my decision."

An hour later he commanded to drive to Father Voynovski's. The priest was scandalized no little by the deeds of the Bukoyemskis, but at moments he could not restrain himself from laughter, for having served many years in the army he recalled various happenings which had met him and his comrades. But he could not forgive the brothers for drinking away the horses.

"A soldier will often run riot," said he, "but to drink away his horse! that is treason to the service. I will tell the Bukoyemskis that I should have been glad if martial law had taken the heads from their shoulders, and that certainly would have given an example to rioters, but I confess to you that I should have been sorry, for all four are splendid fellows. I know from of old what men are, and I can say in advance what each is good for. As to the Bukoyemskis, it will be unhealthy for those pagans who strike breast to breast with them in battle. What do you think to do with them?"

"I will not leave them without rescue, but I think if I were to send them off alone the same kind of thing might meet them a second time."

"True!" said the priest.

"Hence it has occurred to me to go with them, and give them straight into the hands of the captain. Once with the flag and under discipline, they can grant themselves nothing."

"True, this is a splendid idea! Take them to Cracow; there the regiments will assemble. As I live I will go with you! Thus we shall see our boys, and come back with more pleasantness."

At this Pan Serafin laughed, and said,--

"Your grace will come back alone."

"How is that?"

"I am going myself to the war."

"Do you wish to serve again in the army?" asked Father Voynovski, in astonishment.

"Yes, and no; for it is one thing to go to the army and make a career out of service, and another to go on a single expedition. Of course, I am old, but older than I have gone to the ranks more than once in reply to Gradiva's trumpet. I have sent my only son, that is true, but it is not possible to yield up too much for the country. Thus did my fathers think, therefore, that Mother showed them the greatest honor at her disposal. Hence my last copper coin, and my last drop of blood are now ready to be sacrificed for her sake! Should it come to die--think, your grace, what nobler death, what greater happiness could meet me? A man must die once, and is there not greater pleasure in dying on the field of glory, at the side of one's son, than in bed; to die from a sabre or a bullet than from sickness; in addition fighting against pagans for the faith and the country?"

Then Pan Serafin, moved by his own words, opened his arms and repeated,--

"God grant this! God grant this!"

Then Father Voynovski took him in his arms, and pressing him, said,--

"God grant that in this Commonwealth there be as many men like you as possible; there are not many as honorable, more honorable there are none whatever. It is true that it becomes a noble better to die on the field than in bed, and in old times every man held that idea, but to-day worse times have come on us. The country and the

faith are one immense altar, and a man is a morsel of myrrh, predestined for burning to the glory of that altar. Yes, times are worse at the present. Then war is nothing new to you?"

Pan Serafin felt his breast, and continued,--

"I have here a few wounds from sabres and shots of the old time."

"It would be pleasanter for me to defend the flag," said Father Voynovski, "than listen to old women's sins in this neighborhood. And more than one of them tells me such nonsense, just as if she had come to shake out fleas at confession. When a man commits sin he has at least something to speak about, and all the more if he is a soldier! When I took this robe of a priest I became a chaplain in the regiment of Pan Modlishevski. Ah, I remember that well. Between one absolution of sins and another there was sometimes a shooting in the teeth, or blades were drawn. Ah, there was great need of chaplains in that time. I should like now to go, but my parish is large, and there is a tempest of work in it; the vicar is wilful but worst of all is a wound from a gunshot, which I received long ago, and which does not let me stay more than an hour in the saddle."

"I should be happy to have a comrade," said Pan Serafin, "but I understand that even without that wound your grace could not leave the parish."

"Well, I shall see. In a couple of days I will ride and learn how long I can stay in the saddle. Something may have straightened out in me. But who will look to the management at Yedlinka?"

"I have a forester, a simple man, but so honest that he might almost be canonized."

"I know; that one who is followed by wild beasts. Some say that he is a wizard; you know better, however. But he is old and sickly."

"I wish to take also that Vilchopolski who on a time served Pan Gideon. Perhaps you remember him? a young noble who lost one foot, but he is vigorous and daring. Krepetski removed him because he was too independent. He came to me two days

ago offering his service, and to-day I will agree with him surely. Pan Gideon did not like him, since the man would not let any one blow on his pudding, but Pan Gideon praised his activity and faithfulness."

"What is to be heard in Belchantska?"

"I have not been there for some time. It is clear that Vilchopolski does not praise the Krepetskis, but I had no chance to inquire about everything in detail."

"I will look in there to-morrow, though they are not over glad to behold me, and then I will return to rub the ears of the Bukoyemskis. I will command them to come to confession, and for penance the whips will be moving. Let them give one another fifty lashes; that will be good for them."

"It will, that is certain. But now I must take farewell of your grace because of Vilchopolski."

Then Pan Serafin shortened his belt-strap, so that his sabre might not be in the way when he was entering the wagon. A moment later he was on the road moving toward Yedlinka, thinking meanwhile of his expedition, and smiling at the thought that he would work stirrup to stirrup with his one son, against pagans. After he had passed Belchantska he saw two horses under packs, and a trunk-laden wagon which Vilchopolski was driving. He commanded the young man to sit over into his wagon, and then he inquired,--

"Are you leaving Belchantska already?"

Vilchopolski pointed to the trunks, and wishing to prove that though he served he was not without learning, he said,--

"See, your grace, omnia mea mecum porto" (I am taking all my things with me).

"Then was there such a hurry?"

"There was not a hurry, but there was need; therefore I accept all your grace's conditions with pleasure, and in case you go away, as you have mentioned, I will

guard your house and possessions with faithfulness."

Pan Serafin was pleased with the answer and the daring, firm face of the young man; so, after a moment of meditation, he added,--

"Of faithfulness I have no doubt, for I know that you are a noble, but inexperience I fear, and incautiousness. In Yedlinka one must sit like a stone, and watch day and night, because it is almost in the wilderness, and in great forests there is no lack of bandits, who at times attack houses."

"I do not wish an attack upon Yedlinka, but for myself I should like it, to convince your grace that courage and alertness would not be lacking on my part."

"You look as though you had both," said Pan Serafin.

He was silent a while, and then continued,--

"There is one other thing of importance of which to forewarn you. Pan Gideon is in God's hands at the present, and touching the dead nothing save that which is good may be mentioned; but it is known that he was hard to his people. Father Voynovski blamed him for this, and there was variance between them. The sweat of the peasant was not spared in Belchantska; trials were short and punishment grievous. We will be outspoken--there was oppression, and his agents were too cruel with people. This is not my case, be sure of that; there must be discipline, but paternal. I look on excessive severity as a great sin against God and the country. Fix it well in your mind that a man is not curds, and it is not allowable to press him too cruelly. I do not wring out people's tears--and I remember that before God all are equal."

A moment of silence followed. Vilchopolski seized Pan Serafin's hand and put his lips to it.

"I see that you understand me," said Pan Serafin.

"I understand, your grace; and I answer, More than a hundred times I wanted to say to Pan Gideon: 'Find another manager;' more than a hundred times I wanted to go

from his service, but--well, I could not do so."

"Why was that? Is there a lack of work in the world?"

Vilchopolski was confused and spoke as if fear had seized hold of him.

"It did not happen--I could not go--day after day I loitered. Besides, there was severity, and there was not."

"How was that?"

"The people were driven to work, it is true, no one could prevent that; but as to flogging, I will say briefly that instead of whips straw ropes were used on them."

"Who was so merciful--you?"

"No. But I chose to obey the will of an angel, not that of a devil."

"I understand, but tell me whose will?"

"Panna Anulka's."

"Ah! so it was she?"

"Really an angel. She too was in dread of Pan Gideon, who in recent times only began to regard what she told him. But all loved her so much that each man exposed himself to Pan Gideon's anger rather than refuse what she asked of him."

"May God bless her for that! So you all conspired against Pan Gideon?"

"Yes, your grace."

"And it was not discovered?"

"It was discovered once, but I did not betray the young lady. Pan Gideon flogged me himself, for I declared to him that if any other man flogged, or if he flogged me except on a carpet, I, a noble, would let his house up in smoke, and shoot him besides that. And it would have been done as I promised, even had I to join forest bandits in consequence."

"You please me for this," said Pan Serafin.

"More than once I found it difficult to stay with Pan Gideon," continued Vilchopolski; "but in the house there was simply one of God's cherubim, and so, though a man might wish to go, he would stay there. After that, as the young lady grew up Pan Gideon gave her more consideration, and recently he gave thought to no one save Panna Anulka. He knew often that she commanded to give wheat to the poor from the granary, then, as I have said, she had straw used instead of whips; besides, she had labor remitted; he affected not to notice it. At last he was so much ashamed that she had no need to do anything in secret. She was a real protector of people, and for that reason may God, as you have said, bless and save her."

"Why do you say 'save'?" inquired Pan Serafin.

"Because it is worse for her now than it has been."

"Have the fear of God! What is the danger?"

"The two women are terrible. Young Krepetski himself restrains them apparently, but I know why he does this; but let him be careful, some one may shoot him down like a dog if he is not."

It was deep night then, but very clear, for the full moon was shining, and by the light of it Pan Serafin saw that the eyes of the young man were glittering like wolf eyes.

"What dost thou know of him?" asked Pan Serafin, with curiosity.

"I know that he removed me not merely for my independence, but because I watched and listened carefully to what people in the house said. I went away because I had to go, but Belchantska is not far from Yedlinka, and in case of need--"

Here he was silent, and on the road was heard only the sound of the pines as they were moved by the night wind.

CHAPTER XVI

AT Belchantska it was not only evil for the young woman, but worse and worse

daily. A good deal of time had passed since that moment in which old Pan Gideon had noticed that Martsian gazed at the young girl with too much of a "goat's look," and had driven him from the mansion. Later on, Martsian saw her at church, and sometimes at the houses of neighbors, and always her beauty of springtime roused fresh desires in him. Now when he was living under one roof with her, when he saw her daily, he fell in love in his own way, that is, with the beastlike desire, and that feeling of which he was alone capable. A change had taken place in his wishes. His first intent had been to bring the girl to shame, and then marry her only in case that a will should be found in her favor. Now he was ready to go with her to the altar, if he could in any case have and possess her forever. Reason, which when urged by desire becomes its obedient assistant, told him, moreover, that a young lady bearing the name of Sieninski was, although dowerless, a match of great moment. But even if reason had told him the opposite, Martsian would not have listened, for as each day appeared he lost some part of his self-mastery. He burnt, he raged, and if up to that time he had restrained himself from violence it was only because desire, even the most urgent, craves and yearns for a willing surrender, and is charmed with the thought of mutuality in which it sees the highest pleasure, and deceives itself even when there is no cause whatever for doing so.

Thus Krepetski deceived himself, and thus he pampered his wishes with pictures of that blissful moment in which the young lady would herself, radiant and willing, incline to his embraces. But he dreaded to lose should he risk all on the hazard of a trial, and when he put to himself in spirit this question, What would follow? fear seized him in presence of himself, and in presence of the terror which would threaten him; for the laws of the Commonwealth guarding the honor of woman were pitiless, and around him were sabres of nobles by the hundred, which would flash above his head most unfailingly. But he felt also that the hour might come in which he would care for nothing, since in his insolent, wild spirit there was hidden a craving for battle, and a hunger for peril; so not without a certain charm for him was

the picture of a great throng of nobles besieging Belchantska--the flame of conflagration above him, and a red executioner standing, axe in hand, somewhere off in the mist of a distant city.

And thus desire, dread, and also a longing for battle struggled like three whirlwinds within him. At the same time, wishing to give exit to that storm, and to cool that flood which was seething in his person as water in a caldron, he grew mad, wallowed in riot throughout village inns, rode down his horses, fell upon people, and drank to kill in every dramshop of Radom, Prityk, and Yedlina. He collected around him a company of road-blockers, who did not go to the war because of evil fame, or of poverty. He paid these men and tyrannized over them; he did this thinking that such a mob might be useful in the future, but he did not admit any man of them to confidence, and never mentioned in their presence the name of the young lady. Once when a certain Vysh, from some Vyshkov of unknown situation, mentioned her in rude, obscene fashion, Martsian slashed the fellow on his snout and drew blood from him.

Martsian galloped home at breakneck speed, and usually about daylight. But that mad riding sobered him thoroughly. He dropped down in his clothes to the horse skin which covered his bed, and slept like a stone for some hours on it; when he rose he put on his best garments, went then to the women, and strove to please the young lady, whom his eyes did not leave for one moment, he meanwhile rousing desire, while his glances crawled over her person. And more than once, when he was alone with Anulka, his lips were pushed forward, his arms of monstrous length quivered as if powerless against his wish to seize hold of her; his voice became stifled, his words became insolent, vague, and double-meaning; through them circled both flattery and an ill-restrained threatening.

But Anulka feared him simply as she would have feared a tamed wolf, or a bear, and with difficulty did she hide the repulsion with which the sight of him filled her. For

in spite of the parrot-like colors in which he arrayed himself, in spite of the shining jewels at his neck, and the costly flageolet which he never let slip from his fingers, he looked worse each day, and more repulsive. Sleepless nights, rioting, drinking, and flaming desires had placed on him their impress. He grew thin, his shoulders drooped, through this his arms, long by nature, seemed longer, so that his hands reached below his knees and were beyond human proportions. His gigantic trunk was like a knotty section of a tree trunk, and his short bow-legs bent still more from mad riding. Moreover, the skin of his face took on a kind of green pallor, and because of his sunken cheeks, his protruding eyes and pouting lips were pushed forward phenomenally. He became simply dreadful to look at, especially when he laughed, for from his eyeballs when lighted with laughter looked out a kind of nervous, unrestrained threat and malice. But the feeling of her misfortune, deep sadness, and unhappiness produced in Anulka a dignity of which she had not a trace somewhat earlier. This dignity imposed on Krepetski. Once she had been a twittering maiden, active all day as a water-mill; now she had learned to be silent, and her eyes had a fixity of expression. So, though her heart trembled often from fear of Krepetski, she restrained him by her calm glance and her silence. He drew back then as if fearing to offend such a majesty. It is true that she seemed to him still more desirable, but also more difficult of access. She, however, feeling that from him immense danger was threatening, and later on being perfectly convinced of this, strove to avoid him, to be alone with him the shortest time possible, to turn away conversation from things which might facilitate confession, and finally she had the boldness sometimes to indicate that she was not by any means abandoned and left to the favor or ill-will of fortune, as it might seem to him.

She avoided even memories of Yatsek, understanding that after what had passed between them he could not be then, and would not be ever a defence to her. She felt besides that every word touching him would rouse hatred and anger in Martsian. But having noted that the Krepetskis were careful of the prelate, and looked as if with

secret dread on him, she let it be understood frequently that she was under his special protection, which rose from a secret agreement which, in view of every contingency, Pan Gideon had concluded. The prelate, who from time to time came to Belchantska, aided her notably, for he turned to the Krepetskis with pleasure, since he was studying mankind; he expressed himself with mystery, and quoted subtle phrases in Latin; he reminded Martsian of various things which that young man might interpret as suited him.

But a great point was this: The servants and the whole village loved the "young lady." People considered the Krepetskis as intruders, and her as the genuine inheritor. All feared Martsian, except Vilchopolski. But even after the removal of that young noble, the unseen care of the people went, as it were, with Anulka, and Martsian understood that the fear which he roused had its limit, beyond which for him would begin real danger. He understood also that Vilchopolski, whose eyes had a daring expression, would not go far from Belchantska, and that if the young lady should be in need of defence he would not draw back before anything; hence he confessed to himself that she was not really so deserted by every one as at first he had thought, and as on a time he had told his old father.

"Who will take her part? No one!" said he, when the old man commanded him to remember the terrible punishments which the laws threatened for an attempt on the honor of a woman.

At last he understood that there were such defenders. That raised one more obstacle, but obstacles and perils were only an incitement to a nature like Martsian's. He deceived himself yet, thinking that he would move the young lady and make her love him; but there came moments in which he saw, as clearly as a thing on the palm, that he was quite powerless; and then he raged, as said the comrades of his revels, and had it not been for a certain dull, but strong and irresistible foreboding that if he attacked the girl he should lose her forever, he would long ere that have set

free the wild beast within him.

And in just those times did he drink without measure and memory.

Meanwhile relations in the house had become unendurable, seasoned with bitterness and poison. The Krepetski old maids hated Anulka, not only because she was younger than they and more beautiful, but because people loved her, and because Martsian took her part for every reason, and even for no reason. They flamed up at last with implacable hatred toward their brother; but seeing that Anulka never complained, they tortured her all the more stubbornly. Once Agneshka burnt her with a red-hot shovel, as if by accident. Martsian, hearing of this through the servants, went to ask pardon of the young lady, and beg her to seek his protection at all times; but he pushed up to her with such insistence, and fell to kissing her hand with such greed and so disgustingly, that she fled from him, unable to repress her abhorrence. Thereupon he broke into a rage and beat his sister so viciously that for two days she feigned illness.

The two "heiresses" as they were called at the mansion did not spare biting words on the young lady, or open inventions and humiliations, taking vengeance in this way for all they were forced to endure from their brother. But out of hatred for Martsian they warned her against him, censuring her at the same time for yielding to his wishes, for they saw that with nothing could they wound and offend her so painfully as with this implication. The house became a hell for her, and every hour in it a torment.

Hatred toward those people, who themselves hated one another, was poisoning even her heart. She began to think of a cloister, but she kept the thought in her bosom, for she knew that they would not let her enter one, and that by unfettering Martsian's anger she would expose herself to great peril. Alarm and fear of danger dwelt in her continually, and produced the desire of death, a desire which she had never felt previously. Meanwhile each day added to her cup new drops of bitterness. Once,

early in the morning, Agneshka surprised Martsian looking through the keyhole of the orphan's chamber. He withdrew gritting his teeth and threatening with his fist, but the "heiress" called her sister immediately, and the two, finding the girl still undressed, began to torment her, as usual.

"Thou didst know that he was standing there," said the elder, "for the floor squeaks outside the door, and there is a noise when any one stands near it; but to thee, as is clear, his presence was agreeable."

"Bah! he licked his lips before dainties, and she did not hide them," interrupted Agneshka. "Hast thou no fear of God, shameless creature?"

"Such a one should be put before the church at a pillory."

"And expelled from the mansion."

"Sodom and Gomorrah!"

"Tfu!"

"And when will the need be to send to Radom for a woman?"

"What sort of a name wilt thou give it?"

"Tfu! thou dish-rag!"

And they spat on her.

The heart stormed up in the hapless maiden, for the measure was passed then.

"Be off!" cried she, pointing to the door.

But her face grew pale as linen, and darkness fell on her eyes; for a moment it seemed to her that she was flying into some gulf without bottom, then she lost consciousness, feeling, and memory. On recovering she found herself wet from water which had been poured on her, and her breast pinched in places. The faces of the old maids bending over her showed fear, but after a while they felt reassured when they saw that she was conscious.

"Complain, complain!" said Johanna. "Thy paramour will defend thee."

"And thou wilt thank him in thy own way."

Setting her teeth Anulka answered no syllable.

But Martsian divined all that must have happened upstairs, for some hours later from the chancellery, where he had shut himself in with his sisters, came howls from which the whole mansion was terrified.

In the afternoon, when old Krepetski came, the two sisters fell with a scream to his knees imploring him to remove them from that den of profligacy and torture. But he to the same degree that he loved his youngest daughter hated the elder ones; so he not only took no pity on the ill-fated hags, but he called for sticks, and compelled them to stay there.

The only being in that terrible house in whom Johanna and Agneshka, if they had wished to be friendly and kind, might have found compassion, sympathy, and even protection, was Panna Anulka. But they preferred to torment the poor girl, and gloat over her, for, with the exception of Tekla, that was a family in which each member did all in his or her power to poison the life and increase the misfortune of the others.

But Panna Anulka feared the love of Martsian more than the hatred of his sisters. And he thrust himself more and more on her, pushed himself forward more and more shamelessly, was more and more insistent, and gazed at her more and more greedily. It had become clear that he was ceasing to command himself, that wild desire was tearing him as a whirlwind tears a tree, and that he might give way at any moment.

In fact that moment came soon.

Once, after warm weather had grown settled, Anulka went at daybreak to bathe in the shady river; before undressing she saw Martsian's face on the opposite bank sticking out from thick bushes. That instant she rushed away breathlessly. He pursued her, but trying to spring over the water he failed and fell into it; he was

barely able to climb out, and went home drenched to the very last thread of his clothing. Before dinner he had beaten a number of servants till the blood came; during dinner he said not a word to any person. Only at the end of the meal did he turn to his sisters,--

"Leave me alone," said he, "with Panna Anulka; I have to talk with her on matters of importance."

The sisters, on hearing this, looked at each other significantly, and the young lady grew pale from amazement; though he had long tried to seize every moment in which he might be alone with her, he had never let himself ask for such a moment openly.

When the sisters had gone he rose, looked beyond one door and another, to convince himself that no one was listening, then he drew up to Anulka.

"Give me your hand," said he, "and be reconciled."

She drew back both hands unconsciously, and pushed away from him.

Martsian's wish for calmness was evident, but he sprang forward twice on his bow-legs, for he could never abandon that habit, and said, with a voice full of effort,--

"You are unwilling! But to-day I came very near drowning for your sake. I beg your pardon for that fright, but it was not caused by any bad reason. Mad dogs began yesterday to run between Vyrambki and this mansion, and I took a gun to make sure of your safety."

Anulka's knees trembled under her a little, but she said with good presence of mind and with calmness,--

"I want no protection which would bring only shame to me."

"I should like to defend you, not merely now, but till death and at all times! Not offending God, but with His blessing. Dost understand me?"

A moment of silence followed this question. Through the open window came the sound of cutting wood, made by an old lame man attached to the kitchen.

"I do not understand."

"Because thou hast no wish to understand," replied Martsian. "Thou seest this long time that I cannot live without thee. Thou art as needful to me as this air is for breathing. To me thou art wonderful, and dear above all things. I cannot exist--without thee I shall burn up and vanish! If I had not restrained myself I should have grabbed thee long ago as a hawk grabs a dove. It grows dry in my throat without thee, as it does without water--everything in me quivers toward thee. I cannot sleep, I cannot live--see here even now--"

And he stopped, for his teeth were chattering as if in a fever. He had a spasm, he caught at the arms of the chair with his bony fingers, as if fearing to fall, and panted some time very loudly. Then he continued,--

"Thou lackest fortune--that is nothing! I have enough. I need not fortune, but thee. Dost thou wish to be mistress in this mansion? Thou wert to marry Pan Gideon; I am not worse, as I think, than Pan Gideon. But do not say no! do not, by the living God, do not say it, for I cannot tell what will happen. Thou art wonderful! thou, my--!"

He knelt quickly, embraced her knees with his two hands, and pressed them toward his bosom. But, beyond even her own expectation, Anulka's fear vanished without a trace in that terrible moment. The knightly blood began to act in her; readiness for battle to the last breath was roused in the woman. Her hands pushed back with all force his sweat-covered forehead, which was nestling up toward her knees at that moment.

"No! no! I would rather die a thousand deaths! No!"

He rose up, pallid, his hair erect, his mustache quivering. Beneath the mustache were glittering his long decayed teeth, and for a time he was filled with cold rage as he stood there; but still he controlled himself, still presence of mind did not desert

him entirely. But when Anulka pushed toward the door on a sudden, he stopped the way to her.

"Is this true?" inquired he, with a hoarse voice. "Thou wilt not have me? Wilt thou repeat that once more to me, to my eyes? Wilt thou not have me?"

"I will not! And do not threaten, for I feel no fear."

"I do not threaten thee, but I want to take thee as wife, nay more, I beg thee bethink thyself! By the living God, bethink thyself!"

"In what am I to bethink myself? I am free, I have my will, and I say before your eyes: Never!"

He approached her, so nearly that his face pushed up to hers, and he continued,--

"Then perhaps instead of being mistress, thou dost choose to carry wood to the kitchen? Or dost thou not wish it? How will it be, O noble lady! To which of thy estates wilt thou go from this mansion? And if thou stay, whose bread wilt thou eat here; on whose kindness wilt thou live? In whose power wilt thou find thyself? Whose bed, whose chamber is that in which thou art sleeping? What will happen if I command to remove the door fastenings? And dost thou ask in what thou art to bethink thyself? In this: which thou art to choose!--marriage, or no marriage!"

"Ruffian!" screamed Panna Anulka.

But now happened something unheard of. Seized with sudden fury, Krepetski bellowed with a voice that was not human, and seizing the girl by the hair he began with a certain wild and beastly relish to beat her without mercy or memory. The longer he had mastered himself up to that time, the more did his madness seem wild then, and terrible; at that moment beyond doubt he would have killed the young lady had it not been that to her cries for assistance servants burst into the chamber. First that man cutting wood at the kitchen broke in with an axe through the window, after him came kitchen servants, the two sisters, the butler, and two of Pan Gideon's old servitors.

The butler was a noble from a distant village in Mazovia, moreover, a man of rare strength, though rather aged; he caught Martsian's arms from behind, and drew them so mightily that the elbows almost met at his shoulders.

"This is not permitted, your grace!" exclaimed he. "It is infamous!"

"Let me go!" roared Krepetski.

But the iron hands held him as in vices, and a serious, low voice was heard near his ear,--

"I will break your bones unless you restrain yourself!"

Meanwhile the sisters led, or rather carried the young lady from the chamber.

"Come to the chancellery to rest," said the butler. "I advise your grace earnestly."

And he pushed the man before him as he would a child, while Martsian, with chattering teeth, moved on with his short legs, crying for a halter and the hangman; but he could not resist, for a moment later he had grown so weak all at once, from the outburst, that he was unable even to stand unassisted. So, when the butler in the chancellery threw him on the horse skin with which the bed was covered, Martsian did not even try to rise; he lay there panting with heaving sides, like a horse after over-exertion.

"Something to drink!" shouted he.

The butler opened the door, called a boy, and, whispering some words, gave him keys: the lad returned with a pint glass and a demijohn of brandy.

The butler filled the glass to the brim, sniffed at it, and said approaching Martsian,--

"Drink, your grace."

Krepetski seized it with both hands, but they trembled so that liquor dropped on his breast; then the butler raised him, put the glass to his lips, and inclined it.

He drank and drank, holding the glass greedily when the butler tried to remove it from his mouth. At last he drank all, and fell backward.

"It may be too much," said the butler, "but you had become very weak when I gave it."

Though Martsian wished to say something, he merely hissed in the air, like a man who has burnt his mouth with too hot a liquid.

"Eh," said the butler, "you owe me a good gift, for I have shown no petty service. God preserve us, if anything is done--in such an affair it is the axe and the executioner, not to mention this, that misfortune might happen here any minute. The people love that young lady beyond measure. And it will be difficult to hide what has been done from the prelate, though I will tell all to be silent. How do you feel?"

Martsian looked at him with staring eyes and open mouth as he panted. Once and a second time he tried to say something, then hiccoughing seized him, his eyes grew expressionless, he closed his lids on a sudden, and then began a rattling in his throat as if the man were dying.

"Sleep, or die, dirty dog!" growled the butler as he looked at him. And he went from the room to the outbuildings. Half an hour later he returned and knocked at the young lady's chamber. Finding the two sisters with her he said to them,--

"Ladies, perhaps you would look in a moment at the chancellery, for the young lord has grown very feeble. But if he sleeps it is better not to wake him."

Then when alone with Panna Anulka he inclined to her knees, and said,--

"Young lady, there is need to flee from this mansion. All is ready."

And she, though broken and barely able to stand on her feet, sprang up in one instant.

"It is well, and I am ready! Save me!"

"I will conduct you to a wagon which is waiting beyond the river. To-night I will bring your clothing. Pan Krepetski is as drunk as Bela, and will lie like a dead man till morning. Only take a cloak, and let us go. No one will stop us; have no fear on

that point."

"God reward! God reward!" repeated she, feverishly.

They went out through the garden to that gate by which Yatsek used to enter from Vyrambki. On the way the butler said to her,--

"Long ago Vilchopolski arranged with the servants that if an attack upon you were attempted, they would set fire to the granary. Pan Krepetski would be forced to the fire, and you would have time to escape through the garden to a place beyond the river, where a man was to wait with a wagon. But it is better not to burn anything. To set fire is a crime, no matter what happens. Krepetski will be like a stone until morning, so no pursuit threatens you."

"Where are we going?"

"To Pan Serafin's; defence there is easy. Vilchopolski is there. So are the Bukoyemskis and other foresters. Krepetski will try to take you back, but will fail. And later on Pan Serafin will conduct you to Radom, or farther. That will be settled with the priests. Here is the wagon! Fear no pursuit. It is not far to Yedlinka, and God gives a wonderful evening. I will bring your clothing to-night. If they try to stop me I will not mind them. May the Most Holy Mother, the guardian and protectress of orphans conduct you!"

And taking her by the hand like a child, he seated her in the wagon.

"Move on!" cried he to the driver.

It was growing dark in the world, and the twilight of evening was quenching, but from the remnant of its rays the stars in the clear sky were rosy. The calm evening was filled with the odors of the earth, of leaves, and of blossoming alders, while nightingales were filling with their song, as with a warm rain of spring, the garden, the trees, and the whole region.

CHAPTER XVII

That evening Pan Serafin was sitting on a bench in the front of his mansion, entertaining Father Voynovski, who had come after evening prayers to see him, and the four Bukoyemskis, who were stopping then permanently at Yedlinka. Before them on a table, with legs crossed like the letter X, stood a pitcher of mead and some glasses. They, while listening to the murmur of the forest, were drinking from time to time and conversing of the war, raising their eyes to the heavens in which the sickle of the moon was shining clearly.

"Thanks to your grace, our benefactor, we shall be ready soon for the road," said Mateush Bukoyemski. "What has happened is passed. Even saints have their failings; then how must it be with frail men, who without the grace of God can do nothing? But when I look at that moon, which forms the Turkish standard, my fist is stung as if mosquitoes were biting. Well, God grant a man to gratify his hands at the earliest."

The youngest Bukoyemski fell to thinking.

"Why is it, my reverend benefactor," asked he at last, "that Turks cherish some kind of worship for the moon, and bear it on their standards?"

"But have not dogs some devotion toward the moon also?" asked the priest.

"Of course, but why should the Turks have it?"

"Just because they are dog-brothers."

"Well, as God is dear to me, that explains all," said the young man, looking at the moon then in wonderment.

"But the moon is not to blame," said the host, "and it is delightful to gaze at it when in the calm of night it paints all the trees with its beams, as if some one had coated them with silver. I love greatly to sit by myself on such a night, gaze at the sky, and marvel at the Lord God's almightiness."

"Yes, at such times the soul flies on wings, as it were, to its Creator," said Father Voynovski. "God in his mercy created the moon as well as the sun, and what an immense benefaction. As to the sun, well, everything is visible in the daytime, but if there were no moon people would break their necks in the night if they travelled, not to mention this, that in perfect darkness devilish wickedness would be greater by far than it is at the present."

They were silent for a while and passed over the peaceful sky with their eyes; the priest took a pinch of snuff then, and added,--

"Fix this in your memories, gentlemen, that a kind Providence thinks not only of the needs, but the comfort of people."

The rattle of wheels, which in the night stillness reached their ears very clearly, interrupted the conversation. Pan Serafin rose from his seat.

"God is bringing some guest," said he, "for the whole household is here. I am curious to know who it may be."

"Surely some one with news from our lads," added Father Voynovski.

All rose, and thereupon a wagon drawn by two horses entered in through the gateway.

"Some woman is on the seat," called out Lukash.

"That is true."

The wagon passed through half the courtyard and stopped at the entrance. Pan Serafin looked at the face of the woman, recognized it in the wonderful moonlight, and cried,--

"Panna Anulka!"

And he almost lifted her in his arms from the wagon, then she bent at once to his knees, and burst into weeping.

"An orphan!" cried she, "who begs for rescue and a refuge!"

Then she nestled up to his knees, embraced them with still greater vigor, and sobbed more complainingly. Such great astonishment seized every man there, that for a time no one uttered a syllable; at last Pan Serafin raised the orphan and pressed her to his heart.

"While there is breath in my nostrils," cried he, "I will be to thee a father. But tell me what has happened? Have they driven thee from Belchantska?"

"Krepetski has beaten me, and threatened me with infamy," answered she, in a voice barely audible.

Father Voynovski, who was there very near her, heard this answer.

"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews!" exclaimed he, seizing his white hair with both hands.

The four Bukoyemskis gazed with open mouths, and eyes bursting from their sockets, but understood nothing. Their hearts were moved at once, it is true, by the weeping of the orphan, but they considered that Panna Anulka had wrought foul injustice on Yatsek. They remembered also the teaching of Father Voynovski, that woman is the cause of all evil. So they looked at one another inquiringly, as if hoping that some clear idea would come, if not to one, to another of them. At last words came to Marek.

"Well, now, here is Krepetski for you. But in every case that Martsian will get from us a----, or won't he?"

And he seized at his left side, and, following his example, the other three brothers began to feel for the hilts of their sabres.

Meanwhile, Pan Serafin had led in the young lady and committed her to Pani Dzvonkovski, his housekeeper, a woman of sensitive heart and irrepressible eloquence, and explained to her that she was to concern herself with this the most notable guest that had come to them. He said that the housekeeper was to yield up her own bedroom to the lady, light the house, make a fire in the kitchen, find

calming medicines and plasters for the blue spots, prepare heated wine and various dainties. He advised the young lady herself to lie down in bed until all was given her, and to rest, deferring detailed discourse till the morrow.

But she desired to open her heart straightway to those gentlemen with whom she had sought rescue. She wanted to cast out immediately from her soul all that anguish which had been collecting so long in it, and that misfortune, shame, humiliation, and torture in which she had been living at Belchantska. So, shutting herself up with Father Voynovski and Pan Serafin, she spoke as if to a confessor and a father. She told them everything, both her sorrow for Yatsek, and that she had consented to marry her guardian only because she thought Yatsek had contemned her, and because she had heard from the Bukoyemskis that Yatsek was to marry Parma Zbierhovski. Finally, she explained what her life had been in Belchantska,--or rather, what her sufferings had been there; she explained the torturing malice of the two sisters, the ghastly advances of Martsian, and the happenings of that day which were the cause of her flight from the mansion.

And they seized their own heads while they listened. The hand of Father Voynovski, an old soldier, went to his left side involuntarily, in the manner of the Bukoyemskis, though for many a day he had not carried a weapon; but the worthy Pan Serafin put his palms on the temples of the maiden, and said to her,--

"Let him try to take thee. I had an only son, but now God has given me a daughter."

Father Voynovski, who had been struck most by what she had said touching Yatsek, remembering all that had happened, could not take in the position immediately. Hence he thought and thought, smoothed with his palm the whole length of his crown which was milk-white, and then he asked finally,--

"Didst thou know of that letter which Pan Gideon wrote to Yatsek?"

"I begged him to write it."

"Then I understand nothing. Why didst thou do so?"

"Because I wanted Yatsek to return to us."

"How return?" cried the priest, with real anger. "The letter was such that just because of it Yatsek went away to the ends of the earth broken-hearted, to forget, and cast out of him that love which thou, my young lady, didst trample."

Her eyes blinked from amazement, and she put her hands together, as if praying.

"My guardian told me that he had written the letter of a father. O Holy Mother! What was there in it?"

"Insults, contempt, a trampling upon the man's poverty and his honor. Dost understand?"

Then from the gill's breast was rent a shriek of such pain and sincerity that the honest heart of the priest quivered in him. He approached her, removed the hands with which she had covered her face, and asked,--

"Then didst thou not know of this?"

"I did not--I did not!"

"And thou didst wish Yatsek to return to thee?

"I did!"

"In God's name! Why was that?"

Tears as large as pearls began again to drop from her closed lashes in abundance, and quickly; her face was red from maiden shame, she caught for air with her open lips, the heart was throbbing in her as in a captured bird, and at last after great effort, she whispered,--

"Because--I love him!"

"My child, is that possible!" cried out Father Voynovski.

But the voice broke in his breast, for tears were choking him also. He was seized at the same instant by delight and immense compassion for the girl, and astonishment that "a woman" in this case was not the cause of all evil, but an innocent lamb on

which so much suffering had fallen God knew for what reason. He caught her in his arms, pressed her to his heart. "My child! my child!" repeated he, time after time.

The Bukoyemskis, meanwhile, had betaken themselves, with the glasses and pitcher, to the dining-room; had emptied the pitcher conscientiously to the bottom, and were waiting for the priest and Pan Serafin, in the hope that with their coming supper would be put on the table.

They returned at last with moistened eyes and with emotion on their faces. Pan Serafin breathed deeply once, and a second time, then he said,--

"Pani Dzvonkovski is putting the poor thing to bed. Indeed, a man is unwilling to believe his own ears. We too, are to blame; but Krepetski,--what he has done is simply infamous and disgraceful. We may not let him go without punishment."

"On the contrary," answered Marek, "we will talk about this with that 'stump.' Oh-ho!"

Then he turned to Father Voynovski,--

"I am very sorry for her, but still, I think that God punished her for Yatsek. Is that not true?"

"Thou art a fool!" called out Father Voynovski.

"But how is that? Why?"

The old man, whose breast was full of pity, fell to talking quickly and passionately of the innocence and suffering of the girl, as if wishing in that way to make up for the injustice which he had permitted regarding her; but after a time all discussion was interrupted by the coming of Pani Dzvonkovski, who burst into the room like a bomb into a fortress.

Her face was as flooded with tears as if it had been dipped in a full bucket, and right on the threshold she fell to crying, with arms stretched out before her,--

"People, whoso believes in God! Vengeance, justice! As God lives! her dear

shoulders are all in blue lumps, those shoulders once white as wafers--hair torn out by the handful, golden hair! my dearest dove! my innocent lamb! my precious little flower!"

On hearing this, Mateush Bukoyemski, already excited by the narrative of Father Voynovski, bellowed out at one moment, the next he was accompanied by Marek, Lukash, and Yan till the servants rushed into the dining-hall and the dogs began to bark at the entrance. But Vilchopolski, who a moment later returned from his night review of haystacks, met now another humor of the brothers. Their hair was on end, their eyes were staring with rage, their right hands were grasping at their sabre hilts.

"Blood!" shouted Lukash.

"Give him hither, the son of a such a one!"

"Kill him!"

"On sabres with him!"

And they moved toward the door as one man; but Pan Serafin sprang to the entrance and stopped them.

"Halt!" cried he. "Martsian deserves not the sabre, but the headsman!"

CHAPTER XVIII

And he had to speak long in pacifying the angry brothers. He explained to them that were they to cut down Krepetski at once it would be the act not of nobles but assassins.

"There is need first of all," said he, "to visit our neighbors, to come to an understanding with Father Tvorkovski, to have the support of the clergy and the nobles, to obtain the testimony of the servants at Belchantska, then to take the case before a tribunal, and only when the sentence is passed to stand behind it with weapons. If," continued he, "ye were to bear Martsian apart on your sabres

immediately, his father would not fail to report in all places that ye did so through agreement with Panna Anulka; by this her reputation might suffer, and the old man would summon you, and, instead of going to the war, ye would have to drag around through tribunals, for, not being under the authority of the hetman as yet, ye would not escape a civil summons. That is how this matter stands at the moment."

"How so?" inquired Yan, with sorrow; "then we are to let the wrong done this dove go unpunished?"

"But do ye think," said the priest, "that life will be pleasant for Krepetski when infamy is hanging over him, or the axe of the headsman, and in addition when general contempt is surrounding him? That is a worse torment than a quick death would be, and I should not wish, for all the silver in Olkuts, to be in his skin at this moment."

"But if he will wriggle out?" inquired Marek. "His father is an old trickster, who has won more than one lawsuit."

"If he wriggles out, Yatsek on returning will whisper a word in his ear."

"Ye do not know Yatsek yet! He has the eyes of a maiden, but it is safer to take her young cubs from a she-bear than to pain him unjustly."

Hereupon Vilchopolski till then only listening spoke in gloomy accents,--

"Pan Krepetski has written his own sentence, whether he awaits the return of Pan Tachevski or not-- But there is another point; he will try, with armed hand, to get back the young lady, and then--"

"Then we shall see!" interrupted Pan Serafin. "But let him only try! That is something quite different!"

And he shook his sabre, threateningly, while the Bukoyemskis began to grit their teeth straightway.

"Let him try! let him try!" said they.

"But, gentlemen," said Vilchopolski, "you are going to the war."

"We will arrange then in another way," replied Father Voynovski.

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the butler. He had brought trunks filled with the wardrobe of Panna Sieninski which, as he said, he did only with difficulty. The Krepetski sisters tried to prevent him, and even wished to wake Martsian, and keep the trunks in the mansion, but they could not wake him; and the butler persuaded them that they should not act thus, both in view of their own good and that of their brother, otherwise an action would be brought against them for robbery, and they would be summoned for damages before a tribunal. As women who do not know law they were frightened and yielded. The butler thought that Martsian would try surely to get back the young lady, but he did not think that the man would use violence immediately.

"He will be restrained from that," said the butler, "by his father, who understands well the significance of raptus puellae. He knows nothing yet of what has happened, but from here I will go to him directly and explain the whole matter, for two reasons. First, so that he may restrain Martsian, and second, because I do not wish to be in Belchantska to-morrow when Martsian wakes and learns that I have helped the young lady in fleeing. He would rush on me surely, and then to one of us something ugly might happen."

Pan Serafin and Father Voynovski praised the man's prudence and, finding that he was a well-wishing person, and experienced, a man who had eaten bread from more than one oven, and to whom law itself was no novelty, begged him to aid in examining the question. There were two councils then, one of these being formed of the four Bukoyemskis.

Pan Serafin, knowing how to restrain them most easily from murderous intentions, and detain them at home, sent a large demijohn of good mead to the brothers; this they were glad to besiege at the moment, and began to drink one to another. Their

hearts were moved, and they remembered involuntarily the night when Panna Anulka crossed for the first time the threshold of that house there in Yedlinka. They recalled how they had fallen in love with her straightway, how through her they had quarrelled, and then in one voice adjudged her to Stanislav, and thus made an offering of their passion to friendship.

At last Mateush drank his mead, put his head on his palm, sighed, and continued,--

"Yatsek was sitting that night on a tree like a squirrel. Who could have thought then that he was just the man to whom the Lord God had given her?"

"And commanded us to continue in our orphanhood," added Marek.

"Do ye remember," asked Lukash, "how the rooms were all bright from her presence? They would not have been brighter from a hundred burning candles. And she at one time stood up, at another sat down, and a third time she laughed. And when she looked at a man it was as warm in his bosom as if he had drunk heated wine that same instant. Let us take a glass now on our terrible sadness."

They drank again; then Mateush struck a blow with his fist on the table, and shouted,--

"Ei! if she had not loved that Yatsek so!"

"Then what?" asked Yan, angrily, "dost think that she would fall in love with thee right away? Look at him--my dandy!"

"Well thou art no beauty!" retorted Mateush.

And they looked at each other with ill-feeling. But Lukash, though given greatly to quarrels, began now to pacify his brothers.

"Not for thee, not for thee, not for any of us," said he. "Another will get her and take her to the altar."

"For us there is nothing but sorrow and weeping," blurted out Marek.

"Then at least we will love one another. No one in this world loves us! No one!"

"No one! no one!" repeated they all in succession, mingling their wine with their tears as they said so.

"But she is sleeping up there!" added Yan on a sudden.

"She is sleeping, the poor little thing," responded Lukash; "she is lying down like a flower cut by the scythe, like a lamb torn by a villainous wolf. My born brothers! is there no man here who will take even a pull at the wild beast?"

"It cannot be but there is!" cried out Mateush, Marek, and Yan. And again they grew indignant, and the more they drank the oftener they gritted their teeth, first one, then another, or one of them struck his fist on the table.

"I have an idea!" said the youngest on a sudden.

"Tell it! Have God in thy heart!"

"Here it is. We have promised Pan Serafin not to cut up that 'stump.' Have we not promised?"

"We have, but tell what thou hast to say; ask no questions."

"Though we have promised we must take revenge for our young lady. Old Krepetski will come here, as they said, to see if Pan Serafin will not give back the young lady. But we know that he will not give her, do we not?"

"He will not! he will not!"

"But think ye not this way: Martsian will hurry to meet his father on the road back, to see and inquire if he has succeeded."

"As God is in heaven, he will do so."

"On the road, half-way between Belchantska and Yedlinka, is a tar pit near the roadside. If we should wait at that tar pit for Martsian--?"

"Well, but what for?"

"Psh! quiet!"

"Psh!"

And they began to look around through the room, though they knew that save themselves there was not a living soul in it, and then they whispered. They whispered long, now louder, now lower. At last their faces grew radiant, they finished their wine at one draught, embraced one another, and in silence went out of the room one after the other, in goose fashion.

They saddled their horses without the least noise, and each led his beast by the bit from the courtyard. When they had gone through the gate they mounted and rode stirrup by stirrup to the roadway where Yan, though the youngest, took command and said then to his brothers,--

"Now I with Marek will go to the tar pit, and do ye bring that cask before daybreak."

CHAPTER XIX

Old Krepetski, as had been foreseen by the butler, went to Yedlinka after midday on the morrow, but beyond all expectation he appeared there with so kindly a face, and so gladsome, that Pan Serafin, who had the habit of dozing after dinner, and felt somewhat drowsy, became wide awake with astonishment at sight of him. Almost at the threshold the old fox began to mention neighborly friendship and say what delight his old age would find in more frequent and mutual visits; he gave thanks for the kindly reception, and only after finishing these courtesies did he come to the real question.

"Benefactor and neighbor," said he, "I have come with the salute which was due you, but also, as you must have divined, with a request which, in view of my age, you, I trust, will give ear to most kindly."

"I will yield gladly to every proper wish which you may utter," said Pan Serafin.

The old man began to rub his hands.

"I knew that! I knew it beforehand," said he. "What a thing it is to deal with a man who has real wisdom; one comes to an agreement immediately. I said to my son 'Leave that to me! the moment,' said I, 'that thou hast to do with Pan Serafin all will go well, for there is not another man, not merely so wise, but so honorable in this region.'"

"You praise me too greatly."

"No, no, I say too little. But let us come to the question."

"Let us."

Old Krepetski was silent for a while, as if seeking expressions. He merely moved his jaws, so that his chin met his nose. At last he laughed joyously, put his hand on Pan Serafin's knee, and continued,--

"My benefactor, you see our goldfinch has flown from the cage."

"I know. Because the cat frightened it."

"Is there not pleasure in talking with such people?" cried the old man, rubbing his hands. "Oh, that is wit! The prelate Tvorkovski would burst with envy, as God is dear to me!"

"I am listening."

"Well, to the question, and straight from the bridge. We should like to take back that goldfinch."

"Why should you not?"

Pan Krepetski moved his chin toward his nose once, and a second time. He was alarmed; the affair went too easily; but he clapped his hands, and cried with feigned joyousness,--

"Well, now the affair is finished! Would to God that such men as you were born everywhere!"

"It is finished so far as I am concerned," said Pan Serafin. "Only there is need to ask

that little bird whether she wants to go back again; besides she cannot go back to-day, for your son has so throttled her that she is barely breathing."

"Is she sick?"

"Sick; she is lying in bed."

"But is she not pretending?"

Pan Serafin's face grew dark in a moment.

"My gracious sir," said he, "let us talk seriously. Your son Martsian has acted unworthily with Panna Anulka, not in human fashion, and not as a noble; he has acted altogether with infamy. Before God and man you have offended grievously to give an orphan into hands such as his, and intrust her to a tyrant so shameless."

"There is not a bit of truth in what she says," cried the old man.

"Why not? You know not what she has said, and still you deny. It is not she who is speaking; blue lumps and marks of blows speak for her, marks which my housekeeper saw on her young body. As to Martsian, all the servants in Belchantska have seen his approaches and his cruelty, and are ready to testify when needed. In my house is Vilchopolski who is going to-day to Radom to tell the prelate Tvorkovski what has happened."

"But you have promised to give me the girl."

"No, I only said that I would not detain her. If she wants to go back, very well! If she wishes to stay with me, very well also! But attempt not to bring me to refuse my roof and a morsel of bread to an orphan who is grievously offended."

Old Krepetski's jaws moved time after time. For a while he was silent, and then began,--

"You are right, and you are wrong. To refuse a shelter and bread to an orphan would be unworthy, but as a wise man consider that it is one thing not to refuse hospitality, and something different to stand with rebellion against the authority of a father. I

love Tekla, my youngest daughter, sincerely, but it happens sometimes that I give her a push. Well, what then? If she, after being punished by me, should flee to you, would you not permit me to take her, or would you refer me to her pleasure? Think of this--what sort of order would there be in the world, if women had their will? A married woman, even when old, must hearken to her husband, and yield to him; but what must it be in the case of an immature girl, as against the commands of her father, or guardian?"

"Panna Anulka is not your daughter, nor even your relative."

"But we inherited the guardianship over her from Pan Gideon. If Pan Gideon had punished the girl, you, of course, would not have had a word against him; but it is the same thing touching me and my son, to whom I have committed the management of Belchantska. Some one must manage, some one must have authority to punish. Difficult to do without that. I do not deny that Martsian, as a man, young and impulsive, exceeded the measure, perhaps, especially since he was met with ingratitude. But that is my affair! I will examine, judge, and punish; but I will take the girl back, and I think, with your permission, that even the king himself would have no right to raise any hindrance."

"You speak as in a tribunal," said Pan Serafin. "I do not deny that you have appearances on your side; but appearance is one thing, and the real truth another. I do not wish to hinder you in anything, but I tell you honestly what the opinion of people is, and with that opinion I advise you to reckon. For you it is not a question of Panna Anulka, nor of guardianship over her, but you suspect that there may be a will in the hands of the prelate, with a provision for the young lady, therefore you are afraid that Belchantska might slip from you together with Panna Anulka. Not long ago I heard one of the neighbors speak in this way: 'Were it not for that uncertainty the Krepetskis would be the first to drive the orphan from the house, for those people have not God in their hearts.' It is very disagreeable for me and

repulsive to say such things in my house to you, but you ought to know them."

Flames of anger gleamed in the eyes of the old man, but he controlled himself, and said with a voice which was quiet, though somewhat broken,--

"The malice of people! Low malice, nothing more, and stupidity besides that. How could it be? We would then drive from the house a young lady whom Martsian wants to marry? By the dear God, think over this! The two things do not hold together."

"They talk in this way: 'If it shall appear that Belchantska is hers then Martsian will marry her, but if the place is not hers he will simply disgrace her.' I am not any man's conscience, so I merely repeat what people say, but with this addition of my own, that your son threatened shame to the girl. I know that surely, and you, who know Martsian and his vile desires, know it also."

"I know one and another thing, but I know not what you wish to say."

"What I wish to say? This, which I have said to you already. If Panna Anulka agrees to return to you I have no right to oppose her or you, but if she is not willing, I will not expel her from this house, for I have given my word not to do so."

"The question is not that you should expel her, but that you should permit me to take her, just as you would permit me if one of my own daughters were with you. This only I beg, that you stand not in my way."

"Then I will tell you clearly. I will permit no violence in my house! I am master, and you, who have just mentioned the king, should understand that on this point the king himself could not oppose me."

On hearing this Pan Krepetski balled his fists, so that his palms were pierced by his finger-nails.

"Violence? That is just what I fear. I, if ever I have had to act against people (and who has not had to deal with the malice of men?), have acted against them through

the law, always, not through violence. But what the proverb says is not true, that the apple falls near its tree.--It falls far away sometimes. I, for your good and safety, desired to settle this question in peacefulness. You are undefended in the forest, while Martsian--it is grievous for a father to say this of a son--has not taken after me in any way. I am ashamed to confess it, but I am not able to answer for him. The whole district is in dread of his passionateness, and justly, for he is ready to disregard everything and he has about fifty sabres at his order. You, on the other hand, are unarmed. I repeat it, you live in the forest, and I advise you to reckon with this situation. I am alarmed myself at it."

Hereupon Pan Serafin rose, walked up to Krepetski, and gazed into his eyes.

"Do you wish to frighten me?" inquired he.

"I am afraid myself," repeated the old man.

But their further conversation was interrupted by sudden shouts in the courtyard from the direction of the granary and the kitchen, so they sprang to the open window, and at the first moment were petrified with amazement. There between two fences ran with tremendous speed toward the gate and the courtyard some kind of rare monster, unlike any creature on earth, and behind it on excited horses dashed the four Bukoyemskis, shouting and cutting the air with their whip-lashes. The monster rushed into the yard, and behind it came the brothers, like hell hunters, and continued their chasing.

"Jesus, Mary!" cried out Pan Serafin.

He ran to the porch, and after him ran old Krepetski.

Only there could they see with more clearness. The monster seemed like a giant bird, but also like a horse and a rider, for it ran on four legs with a certain form sitting on it. But the rider and the beast were so covered with feathers that their heads seemed two bundles.

It was impossible to see clearly, for the steed rushed like a wind round the courtyard.

The Bukoyemskis followed closely, and did not spare blows, by which feathers were torn away and fell to the ground, or circled in the air as do snowflakes.

Meanwhile the monster roared like a wounded bear, and so did the brothers. Pan Serafin's voice and that of his visitor were lost in the general tumult, though all the power in their lungs was used then in shouting.

"Stop! By God's wounds, will ye stop!"

But the four brothers urged on, as if seized by insanity--and they had rushed five times round the yard when from the kitchen, and the stables, and barns, and granaries, and outhouses a great crowd of servants ran in, who hearing the cry "Stop!" repeated as if in desperation by Pan Serafin, plunged forward and, seizing bits and bridles, strove to stop the horses.

At last the horses of the four brothers were brought to a standstill, but with the feathery steed there was very great trouble. Without a bridle, beaten, terrified, the beast reared at sight of the servants, or sprang to one side with the suddenness of lightning. They stopped it only at the fence when preparing to spring over. One of the men grasped its forelock, another caught its nostrils, a number seized its mane; it could not jump with such a burden, and fell to its knees. The beast sprang up quickly, it is true, but did not try to rush away; it only trembled throughout its whole body.

They removed the rider, who, as it seemed then, had not been thrown because his feet were bound firmly beneath the beast's belly. They pulled the feathers from his head, and under the feathers appeared a visage covered so thickly with tar that no man there recognized the features.

The rider gave faint signs of life, and only when taken to the porch did old Krepetski and Pan Serafin see who it was and cry out "Martsian!" with amazement.

"This is that vile scoundrel!" said Mateush. "We have punished him not a little, and have hunted him in here, so that Panna Sieninski may know that tender souls have

not gone from this world yet."

Pan Serafin seized his head with his hands, and shouted,--

"The devil take you and your tender souls! Ye are nothing but bandits!"

Then, turning to Pani Dzvonkovski who had run up with the others and was crossing herself, he cried,--

"Pour vodka into his mouth. Let him regain consciousness, and be taken to bed."

There was hurry and disorder. Some ran to make the bed ready, others for hot water, still others for vodka; a number began to pull the feathers off Martsian, in which they were aided by his father, who was gritting his teeth, and repeating,--

"Is he alive? Is he dead? He is alive! Vengeance! Oh Vengeance!"

Then he sprang up on a sudden, jumped forward, and thrusting up to the very eyes of Pan Serafin, fingers, bent now like talons, he shouted,--

"You were in the conspiracy! You have killed my son--you Armenian assassin!"

Pan Serafin grew very pale, and seized his sabre, but almost at the same instant he remembered that he was the host, and Krepetski a visitor, so he dropped the hilt, and raised two fingers immediately.

"By that God who is above us," said he, "I swear that I knew nothing--and I am ready to swear on the cross in addition--Amen!"

"We are witnesses that he knew nothing!" cried Marek Bukoyemski.

"God has punished," said Pan Serafin; "for you threatened me, as a defenceless old man, with the passion of your son. Here is his passion for you!"

"A criminal offence!" bellowed the old man. "The headsman against you, and your heads under the sword edge! Vengeance! Justice!"

"See what ye have done!" said Pan Serafin, as he turned to the Bukoyemskis.

"I said it was better to run away at once," answered Lukash.

Pani Dzvonkovski now came with Dantsic liquor, and fell to pouring it from the bottle into the open mouth of the sufferer. Martsian coughed, and opened his eyes the next minute. His father knelt down to him.

"Art alive? Art alive?" asked he in a wild joyful outburst.

But the son could not answer yet, and was like a great owl, which, struck with a bullet, has fallen on its back and lies there, with outstretched wings, panting. Still consciousness was coming to him, and with it memory. His glance passed from the face of his father to that of Pan Serafin, and then to the Bukoyemskis. Thereupon it grew so terrible that if there had been the least place for fear in the hearts of the brothers, a shiver would have passed from foot to head through their bodies.

But they only went nearer to Martsian, like four bulls which are ready to rush with, their horns at an enemy, and Mateush inquired,--

"Well? Was that too little?"

CHAPTER XX

A few hours later on old Krepetski took his son to Belchantska, though the young man was unable to stand, and did not know clearly what was happening. First of all the servants had washed him with great trouble, and had put on him fresh linen, but after this had been done such weakness came upon Martsian, that he fainted repeatedly, and thanks only to the angelica and pimpernel bitters which Pani Dzvonkovski now gave him was he brought back to consciousness. Pan Serafin advised to place him in bed and defer the departure till recovery was perfect, but Pan Krepetski, whose old heart was raging, did not wish to owe gratitude to a man against whom he was planning a lawsuit for harboring the young lady; hence he had them put hay in a wagon, and, placing a rug, instead of a bed, under Martsian he moved toward Belchantska, hurling threats at the Bukoyemskis and also Pan Serafin. While threatening vengeance he was forced to accept Pan Serafin's

assistance, and borrow from him hay, clothing, and linen, but, blinded by anger, he took no note of the strange situation. Pan Serafin himself had no mind whatever for laughter; since the act of the four brothers disturbed and concerned him very greatly.

At this juncture came Father Voynovski who had been summoned by letter. The Bukoyemskis, now greatly confused, were sitting in the office, not showing their noses, hence Pan Serafin had to tell all that had happened. The priest struck the skirt of his soutane from time to time as he listened, but he was not so grieved as Pan Serafin had expected.

"If Martsian dies," said he at length, "then woe to the Bukoyemskis, but if, as I think, he squirms out of it, I suppose that they will take private vengeance and not raise a lawsuit."

"Why so?"

"Because it is unpleasant to be ridiculed by the country. At the same time his conduct toward Panna Anulka would be discovered. That would give him no enviable reputation. His life is not laudable, hence he should avoid the chance of letting witnesses tell in public what they know of him."

"That may be true," said Pan Serafin, "but it is difficult to forgive the Bukoyemskis tricks of such a character."

The priest waved his hand.

"The Bukoyemskis are the Bukoyemskis."

"How?" asked Pan Serafin, with astonishment. "I thought that your grace would be more offended."

"My gracious sir," said the old man, "you have served in the army, but I have served longer, and have seen so many soldiers' tricks during my time that nothing common can surprise me. It is bad that such things happen. I blame the Bukoyemskis, but I have seen worse things, especially as in this case the question was of an orphan. I

will go still farther and say sincerely, that I should grieve more if Martsian's deeds had gone unpunished. Think, we are old, but if we were young our hearts too would boil up over deeds such as his are. That is why I cannot blame the Bukoyemskis altogether."

"True, true, but still Martsian may not live until morning."

"That is in the hands of God; but you say he is not wounded?"

"He is not, but he is all one blue spot, and faints continually."

"Oh, he will get out of that; he fainted from fatigue. But I must go to the Bukoyemskis and inquire how it happened."

The brothers received him with rapture, for they hoped that he would take their part with Pan Serafin. They began to quarrel at once as to who should tell the tale, and stopped only when the priest gave Mateush the primacy.

Mateush resumed his voice and spoke as follows,--

"Father benefactor, God saw our innocence! For, when we learned from Pani Dzvonkovski how that poor little orphan had blue lumps all over her body, we came into this room in such grief that had it not been for the mead which Pan Serafin sent us in a pitcher, our hearts would have burst perhaps. And I say to your grace, we drank and shed tears--we drank and shed tears. And we had this in mind too, that she was no common girl, but a young lady descended from senators. It is known to you, for example, that the higher blood a horse has, the thinner his skin is; slash a common drudge with a whip, he will hardly feel it, but strike a noble steed, and immediately a welt will come out on him. Think, Father benefactor, what a thin, tender skin such a dear little girl must have on her shoulders, and all over her body, just like a wafer--say yourself--"

"What do I know of her skin?" cried Father Voynovski, in anger. "Tell me better, how did ye plaster up Martsian."

"We promised Pan Serafin on oath not to cut him in pieces, but we knew that old Krepetski would come here, and we guessed immediately that Martsian would gallop out to meet him. So, according to arrangement, two of us took down to the tar pit before daylight a great salt-barrel filled with feathers, which we got from the wife of a forester. We picked out at the place a cask of thick tar, and waited at the hut near that tar pit. We look--old Krepetski is riding along--that is no harm, let him ride! We wait, we wait till we are tired of waiting; then we think about going to Belchantska. That moment a boy from the tar pit tells us that Martsian is coming up the road. We ride out and halt there in front of him. 'With the forehead! With the forehead!' 'But whither?' 'Straight ahead,' says he, 'by the woods.' 'But to whose harm?' 'To harm or to profit,' says he, 'get ye out of this!' And then to the sabre. But we seized him by the neck. 'Oh! this cannot be!' cried he. In a flash we had him down from the horse, which Yan took by the bridle. He fell to screaming, to kicking, to biting, to gnawing, but we, like a lightning flash, took him to the barrels which stood one near the other, and said, 'Oh! thou son of such an one! thou wilt injure orphans, threaten young ladies with infamy, disregard lofty blood, beat an orphan on the shoulders, and think that no one will take the part of thy victim; learn now that there are tender hearts in the country.' And that moment we thrust him into the tar, head downward. We raise him out, and again in with him. 'Learn that there are feeling souls!' said we.--And in with him then among the feathers!--'Learn now that there is chivalrous daring!' And again with him into the tar barrel. 'Learn to know the Bukoyemskis!' And again with him into the feathers! We wanted to give him another dose, but the tar boiler shouted that he would smother; and indeed he was thickly coated, so that neither his nose nor his eyes were visible to any one; we put him then on the saddle and tied his feet firmly under the animal's belly lest he fly from his position. We painted the horse, and scattered feathers over him also, then lashing this rather wild beast with whips, after we had taken off his bridle, we drove him ahead of us."

"And ye drove him up here?"

"As a strange beast, for we wished to console the young lady even a little, and show her our brotherly affection."

"Ye gave her a lovely consolation. When she saw him through the window, the fright nearly killed her."

"When she recovers she will think of us gratefully. Orphans always like to feel guardianship over them."

"Ye have done her more harm than service. Who knows if the Krepetskis will not take her away again?"

"How is that? By the dear God! will we let them?"

"But who will defend the girl when ye are in prison?"

When they heard this the brothers were greatly concerned, and looked with anxious eyes at one another. But Lukash at last struck his forehead. "We will not be imprisoned," said he, "for first we will go to the army; but if it comes to that, if there is a question of Panna Anulka's safety, help will be found."

"Found! Of course it will," cried out Marek.

"What help?" inquired Father Voynovski.

"We will challenge Martsian as soon as he recovers. He will not go alive out of our hands."

"But if he dies now?"

"Then God will help us."

"But ye will pay with your lives!"

"Before that we will shell out the Turks, and the Lord Jesus will reward us for that service. Only let your grace take our part with Pan Serafin; for if Stanislav had been here he would have been with us while giving this bath to that Martsian."

"But would not Yatsek give it?" inquired Mateush.

"Yatsek will give him a better bath!" cried the priest, as if unwittingly.

Further converse was stopped by the coming of Pan Serafin, who appeared with a ready and weighty decision.

"I have been thinking of what we should do," said he, very seriously. "And does your grace know what I have decided? It is this, that we should all go to Cracow with Panna Anulka. I know not if we shall see our boys in that city, for no one knows where the regiments will be quartered, or what will be the order of their marching. But we should place the girl under protection of the king or the queen; or, if that is not done, secure her in some cloister for a season. I have also determined, as you know, to take the field in my old age and serve with my son, or, if such be God's will, to die with him. During our absence the girl would not be safe, even in Radom, under the protection of the prelate Tvorkovski. These gentlemen"--here he pointed to the Bukoyemskis "need to be under the hetman immediately. It is unknown what might happen should they stay here. I have acquaintances at court,--Pan Matchynski, Pan Gninski, Pan Grothus,--and shall get their influence for the orphan, as I think. That done I will find Zbierhovski's regiment, and go straight to my son where I shall see Yatsek also. What think you of this, my benefactor?"

"As God lives," cried Father Voynovski, "this is a splendid idea! And I will go with you--and I will go with you to Yatsek. And as to Panna Anulka, oh, all will be well! The Sobieskis owe a great debt to the Sieninskis. She will be out of danger in Cracow and nearer; for I am certain that Yatsek has not forgotten her. And when the war ends that will happen which God wishes. Give me a substitute here in my parish from Radom, and I will be with you!"

"All together!" roared the Bukoyemskis with rapture "to Cracow!"

"And the field of glory!" cried Father Voynovski.

CHAPTER XXI

Consultations now followed touching the expedition; for not only were there no voices against it, but Father Voynovski was searching for a vicar in Radom. This plan, however, was an old one, modified by adding to it the person of Panna Anulka, who would be taken to Cracow and secured from the Krepetskis through protection from the king or the cloister. Pan Serafin saw that the king, occupied as he was with the war, would have no time to talk about private questions; but there remained the queen, to whom access might be easy through notable dignitaries, related for the greater part to the Sieninskis and the Tachevskis.

There was fear also that the Krepetskis might attack Yedlinka when Pan Serafin and the Bukoyemskis had gone, and seize on rich property in furniture and silver. But Vilchopolski guaranteed that with the servants and the foresters he would defend the place and not let the Krepetskis touch anything. Pan Serafin, however, took the silver to Radom and left it in the Bernardine cloister, where he had placed money before that in large sums, not wishing to keep it at home near the edge of great forests.

Meanwhile, he kept an attentive ear toward Belchantska for much depended on that place. If Martsian died the Bukoyemskis would have to give a grave answer; if he recovered hope existed that there would not be even a lawsuit, since it was difficult to admit that the Krepetskis would expose themselves willingly to ridicule. Pan Serafin considered it as more likely that the old man would not leave him at peace touching Panna Anulka but he thought that if the orphan were in the care of the king the kernel of a lawsuit would be lost to the Krepetskis.

He learned, through the butler, that the old man had gone to Radom and Lublin, and remained rather long in those places.

For the first week Martsian suffered grievously, and there was fear that the tar which he had swallowed might choke him, or stop his intestines. But the second week he

grew better. He did not, it is true, leave the bed, for he had not strength to stand unassisted, his bones pained him greatly, and he was mortally weary; but he began to curse the Bukoyemskis, and to take keen delight in projects of vengeance. In fact, after two weeks had passed, his "revellers from Radom" began to visit him, various gallows-birds with sabres held up by hempen cords, men with holes in their boots, and gaunt stomachs, thirsty and hungry at all hours. Meanwhile he counselled with these, and was plotting not only against the Bukoyemskis and Pan Serafin, but against the young lady, of whom he could not think without gnashing of teeth; and he developed such monstrous inventions against her, that his father forewarned him, that they were of criminal nature.

The echo of those plots and threats went to Yedlinka, and produced various impressions on different people. Pan Serafin, a man of much courage, but prudent, was somewhat alarmed by them, especially when he remembered that this enmity of wicked and dangerous people would strike his son also. Father Voynovski, who had hotter blood in his veins, was keenly indignant, and prophesied that the Krepetskis would meet a vile ending. At the same time, though entirely won over to Anulka, he turned from time to time to Pan Serafin, and then to the Bukoyemskis.

"Who caused the Trojan war? A woman! Who causes quarrels and battles at all times? A woman! And it is the same now! Innocent or guilty, a woman!"

But the Bukoyemskis cared little for the danger which threatened every one from Martsian, and even promised themselves various amusements because of it. They were warned, however, seriously from many sides. The Sulgostovskis, the Silnitskis, the Kohanovskis, and others, all greatly indignant at Martsian, came, one after the other, with tidings to Yedlinka. They said that he was gathering a party, and even bandits of the forest. They offered assistance, but the brothers wished no assistance. Lukash, who spoke most frequently in the name of the other three replied thus to Rafal Silnitski, who implored them to be careful,--

"There is no harm in thinking before war of our arms, and also of methods in which, from disuse, we have grown somewhat rusty, straighten ourselves out, and have practice. Belchantska is no fortress, so let Martsian see to his own safety, for who knows what may strike him. But if he wishes to nourish us with ingratitude, let him try it!"

Pan Silnitski looked with astonishment at Lukash, and asked,--

"Nourish with ingratitude? But, as I think, he owes you no gratitude." Lukash was sincerely indignant.

"How not owe? Could we not have cut him to pieces? Who gave him life? Pani Krepetski once, but a second time our moderation; if he is going to count on it always, tell him that he is mistaken."

"And tell him that he will see Panna Anulka as much as he will see his own ears," added Marek.

"Why should he not see her, then?" finished Yan. "It is not difficult for a man to see his own ears if they are cut from him."

The conversation then ended. The brothers repeated it to Panna Anulka to calm her, which was superfluous, for the lady was not timid by nature. Her fear, too, of the Krepetskis, and especially of Martsian, was measured by her conviction that no danger threatened her in Yedlinka. When, on the day after her arrival at Pan Serafin's, she saw through the window Martsian in feathers, looking like some filthy beast, urged on with whips by the Bukoyemskis, in the first moment of her dreadful surprise, which was mixed with amazement and even compassion, she conceived so much confidence in the power of the brothers, that she could not even imagine how any one could avoid fearing them. Martsian passed for a terrible person and a fighter, and see what they did with him. It is true that Yatsek in his time had cut up all those brothers, but Yatsek in her eyes had grown now beyond common estimate altogether, and in general he appeared to her before the last parting from a side so

mysterious that she did not know with what measure to esteem him. The remarks which were made about him by the Bukoyemskis themselves, and Pan Serafin, with the words of the priest, who spoke of him oftenest, confirmed in her only wonder for that friend of her childhood, who had been so near to her once, but was now so remote and so different. These accounts fixed in her that longing, and that still sweeter feeling toward Yatsek, which, confessed to the priest in a moment of excitement, she concealed again in the depth of her heart, as a pearl is concealed in a mussel shell.

With all this she had in her soul a conviction, unshaken by anything, that she must meet him, and that she would meet him even in the near future. She had torn herself from the house of the Krepetskis; she felt above her the powerful hands of well-wishing people; hence that certainty became the joy and the root of her existence. It restored to her health with contentment, and she bloomed afresh, as a flower blooms in springtime. That Yedlinka mansion which had been hitherto so serious was now bright from her presence. She had taken possession of Pani Dzvonkovski, of Pan Serafin, and the Bukoyemskis. The whole house was filled with her, and wherever she showed her little confident nose and her young, gladsome eyes, delight and smiles followed. But she feared Father Voynovski a little, since it seemed to her that he held in his hand her fate and also Yatsek's. Hence she looked upon him with a certain submissiveness. But with his compassionate heart, which in general was as wax for all God's creation, he loved her sincerely, and besides, when he learned to know her more closely, he esteemed her pure spirit increasingly, though at times he called her a jaybird and a squirrel, because, as he said, she was this moment here and the next in another place.

After that first confession they spoke no further of Yatsek, just as if they had agreed not to do so; both felt it too delicate a matter. Pan Serafin made no mention of Yatsek to her in the presence of people, but when no one was with them he was not ceremonious on that point; and once, when she asked if he would meet his son

quickly in Cracow, he answered with a question,--

"And would you not like to meet some one there also?"

He thought that she would wind out of it jestingly, but to her bright face came a shade of sadness, and she answered then seriously,--

"I should be glad to beg pardon, as soon as is possible, of any one whom I have injured."

He looked at her with some emotion, but after a while it was clear that another idea had come to him, for he stroked her bright face, and then added,--

"Ei! thou hast the wherewithal to reward so that the king himself could not reward better."

When she heard this she lowered her eyes in his presence, and was wonderful as she stood there and blushed like the dawn of the morning.

CHAPTER XXII

Preparations for starting went forward briskly. Attendants were chosen with care, strong men and sober. Arms, horses, wagons, and brichkas were ready. Observing ways of the period, they had not forgotten dogs, which in time of marching went under the wagons and at places of rest were used to hunt hares and foxes. The multitude of supplies and the preparations astonished the lady, who had not supposed that campaigning demanded such details, and, thinking this trouble taken perhaps for her safety, she inquired of Pan Serafin touching the matter. He, as a prudent man, and one of experience, replied thus to her,--

"It is certain that we have thy person in mind, for, as I think, we shall not leave here without meeting some violence from Martsian. Thou hast heard that he has summoned his roysterers with whom he is bargaining and drinking. We should be disgraced were we to let any man snatch thee away from us. What will be, will be,

but though we had to fall one on another, we must take thee to Cracow uninjured." Then she kissed his hand, saying that she was not worthy to cause them this peril; but he waved his hand simply.

"We should not dare to appear before men," said he, "unless we did this, and matters moreover are such that each coincides with the other. It is not enough to set out for a war, one must prepare for it wisely. Thou art astonished that we have three or four horses each man of us, as well as attendants, but thou must know that in war horses are the main question; many of them die on the way, crossing rivers and marshes, or from various camp accidents. And then what? If thou buy in haste a new horse, with faults and bad habits, that beast will fail at the critical moment. Though my son and Tachevski took a good party and excellent horses, we have foreseen every accident, and take each a new saddle beast. Father Voynovski, unrivalled in knowledge of horses, bought cheaply from old Pan Podlodovski such a Turkish steed for Pan Yatsek that the hetman himself would not refuse to appear on him."

"Which horse is for your son?" inquired the young lady.

Pan Serafin looked at her, and shook his head smiling.

"Well, Father Voynovski is right in his judgment of woman. 'That evil,' said he, 'will be sly, even if it be the most honest.' Thou askest which horse is for Stanislav. Well, I answer in this way. Yatsek's horse is that sorrel with a star on his forehead, and a white left hind fetlock."

"You annoy me!" exclaimed the young lady.

And spitting like a cat at him, she turned, and then vanished. But that same day the pith of small loaves of bread and some salt disappeared from the dishes, and Lukash the next day beheld something curious. At the well in the courtyard the sorrel horse had his nose in the white hands of the lady, and when he was led later on to the stable he looked back at her time after time expressing with short neighs his yearning. Lukash could not learn at the time the cause of this "confidence," for he

was intent on loading a wagon, so it was some time after midday that he approached the young lady, and said, with eyes glowing from emotion,--

"Have you noticed one thing?"

"What?" inquired Panna Anulka.

"That even a beast knows a real dainty."

She forgot that he had seen her in the morning, and noting that look in his eyes raised her beautiful brows with astonishment.

"What have you in mind?" asked she.

"What?" repeated Lukash, "Yatsek's horse!"

"Oh, a horse!"

Then she burst into laughter and ran from the porch to her chamber.

He stood there astonished, and a little confused, understanding neither why she had run from him, nor what had roused her sudden laughter.

Another week passed, and preparations were then almost finished, but somehow Pan Serafin was not urgent for the journey. He deferred it from day to day, improved various details, complained of heat, and at last drooped in spirits. Anulka was eager to be on the road. The Bukoyemskis were growing uneasy, and at length Father Voynovski agreed that farther delay was a loss of time without reason. But Pan Serafin met their impatience with these words,--

"I have news that the king has not gone yet to Cracow, and will not go quickly. Meantime the troops are to meet there, but only in part, and no one knows the day of this meeting. I ordered Stanislav to send me a man every month, with a letter giving details as to where regiments are quartered, whither they are to march, and under whose orders. Seven weeks have passed without tidings. A letter may come to me now any moment, hence my delay; and I am alarmed somewhat. Think not that we must find our young men at Cracow, in every case. On the contrary, it may happen

that they will not be there at any time."

"How is that?" inquired Anulka, disquieted.

"This, that regiments do not need to march through Cracow. Wherever a regiment is it can move thence as directly as the stroke of a sickle, but where Pan Zbierhovski may be at the moment I know not. He may have been sent to the boundary of Silesia, or to the army of the grand hetman who is coming from Russia. Regiments are hurried from place to place very often, just to train them in marching. In the course of seven weeks various commands may have come of which Stanislav should have informed me, but he has not done so. Hence I am anxious, for it is well known that in camps there are frequent disputes and also duels. Perhaps something has happened. But even if all is in order, we ought to know where the regiment is, and what is its starting point."

All became gloomy at these words, save Father Voynovski.

"A regiment is not a needle," said he "nor is it a button, which if torn from a coat is found with much difficulty. Be not concerned over this. We shall learn of them in Cracow more quickly than we could here in Yedlinka."

"But on the road we may miss the letter."

"Leave a command to send it on after us. That is the right way. Meanwhile in Cracow we will find the safest place possible for the lady, and then our minds will be free when we start for the second time."

"Reason! Reason!"

"This is my advice then. If no letter comes ere to-morrow we will start in the cool of the evening for Radom--then farther, to Kieltse, Yendreyov, and Miehov."

"Perhaps the day after during daylight we could reach Radom, so as not to pass in the night through those forests, and thus avoid an ambush if the Krepetskis should make one."

"An ambush is nothing! Better go in the cool!" said Mateush. "If they attack they will do so as well in the day as at night, and now at night things are visible."

Then he rubbed his hands gleefully. The three others followed his example.

But Father Voynovski thought otherwise. He had great doubts touching a road attack.

"Martsian might perhaps venture, but the old man is too prudent; he knows too well what such a deed signifies and how much, more than once, men have suffered for violence to women. Besides against the power of our party Martsian could not reckon on victory, while in every event he could reckon on vengeance from Yatsek and Stanislav."

The delight of the Bukoyemskis was spoiled by the priest, but they were soothed by Vilchopolski, who struck the floor with his wooden leg, shook his head, and opposed, saying,--

"Though up to Radom and even to Kieltse and Miehov you meet no adventure, I advise you to neglect no precaution till you touch the gates of Cracow; along the road there are woods everywhere, and I, as a man knowing Martsian best of all, am convinced that that devil is now planning an ambush."

CHAPTER XXIII

At last came the day of departure. The party moved out of Yedlinka at daylight, with beautiful weather, and with horses and men in good number. Besides the iron and leather-covered carriage intended for the ladies and the priest, in case his old gun-wound should annoy him on horseback too greatly, there were three well-laden wagons drawn each by four horses. At each wagon were three men, including the driver. Behind Pan Serafin six mounted attendants, in turquoise-colored livery, led reserve horses. The priest had two men, each Bukoyemski had two also, besides a forester who guarded the trunk-laden wagons, altogether thirty-four persons well

armed with muskets and sabres. It is true that in case of attack some could not aid in defending, since they would have to guard wagons and horses, but even in that case the Bukoyemskis felt sure that they could go through the world with those attendants, and that it would not be healthy for a party three or four times their number to attack them. Their hearts were swelling with a delight so enormous that hardly could they stay in their saddles. They had fought manfully in their time against Tartars and Cossacks, but those were common, small wars, and later on, when they settled in the wilderness, their youth had passed merely in inspecting inclosures, in a ceaseless watch over foresters, in killing bears when it was their duty to preserve them, and in drunken frolics at Kozenitse and Radom and Prityk. But now, for the first time, when each put his stirrup near the stirrup of his brother, when they were going to a war against the immense might of Turkey, they felt that this was their true destination, that their past life had been vain and wretched, and that now had begun in reality the deeds and achievements for which God the Father had created Polish nobles, God the Son redeemed them, and the Holy Ghost made them sacred. They could not think this out clearly, or express it in phrases, for in those things they had never been powerful, but they wished to fire off their guns then in ecstasy. Their advance seemed too slow to them. They wished to let out their horses and rush like a whirlwind, fly toward that great destination, to that great battle of the Poles with the pagans, to that triumph through Polish hands of the cross above the crescent, to a splendid death, and to glory for the ages. They felt loftier in some way, purer, more honorable, and in their nobility still more ennobled.

They had scarcely a thought then for Martsian and his rioting company, or for barriers and engagements on the roadway. All that seemed to them now something trivial, vain, and unworthy of attention. And if whole legions had stood in their way, they would have shot over them like a tempest, they would have ridden across them just in passing, put them under the bellies of their horses, and rushed along farther. Their native leonine impulses were roused, and warlike, knightly blood had begun to

play in them with such vigor that if command had been given those four men to charge the whole bodyguard of the Sultan, they would not have hesitated one instant.

But similar feelings, and founded, moreover, on old recollections, filled the hearts of Pan Serafin and Father Voynovski. The priest had passed the flower of his life on the field with a lance in his hand, or a sabre. He remembered whole series of reverses and victories, he remembered the dreadful rebellion of Hmelnitski, Joltevody, Korsun, Pilavtse, Zbaraj the renowned, and the giant battle of Berestechko. He remembered the Swedish war, with its never-ending record of struggles and the attack of Rakotsi. He had been in Denmark, for a triumphing people, not satisfied with crushing and driving out Sweden, had sent in pursuit of it Charnyetski's invincible regiments to the borders of a distant ocean; he had helped to defeat Dolgoruki and Hovanski; he had known the noblest knights and greatest men of the period; he had been a pupil of Pan Michael the immortal; he had been enamoured of slaughter, storms, battles, and bloodshed, but all that had lasted only till personal misfortune had broken his spirit, and he took on himself holy orders. From that day he changed altogether, and when, turning to people in front of the altar, he said to them: "Peace be with you;" he believed himself uttering Christ's own commandment, and that every war, as opposed to that commandment, "is abhorrent" to Heaven, a sin against mercy, a stain on Christian nations. But a war against Turks was the one case which he excepted. "God," said he, "put the Polish people on horseback, and turned their breasts eastward; by that same act He showed them His will and their calling. He knew why He chose us for that position, and put others behind our shoulders; hence, if we wish to fulfil His command and our mission with worthiness, we must face that vile sea, and break its waves with our bosoms."

Father Voynovski judged, therefore, that God had placed on the throne purposely a sovereign who, when hetman, had shed pagan blood in such quantity, that his hands might give the last blow to the enemy, and avert ruin from Christians at once and

forever. It seemed to him that just then had appeared the great day of destination, the day to accomplish God's purpose; hence he considered that war as a sacred way of the cross, and was charmed at the thought, that age, toil, and wounds had not pressed him to the earth so completely, that he might not take part in it.

He would be able yet to wave a flag, he, the old soldier of Christ, would spur on his horse, and spring with a cross in his hand to the thickest of the battle, with the certainty in his heart that behind him and that cross a thousand sabres would bite on the skulls of the pagans and a thousand lances would enter their bodies.

Finally thoughts flew to his head which were personal, and more in accord with his earlier disposition. He could hold the cross in his left, but in the right hand a sabre. As a priest he could not do this against Christians, but against Turks it was proper! Oh, proper! Now he would show young men for the first time how pagan lights should be extinguished, how pagan champions must be mowed down and cut to pieces; he would show of what kind were the warriors of his day. Nay! on more fields than one men had marvelled at his prowess. It may happen now that even the king will be astounded! And this thought at that moment so filled him with rapture that he failed in his rosary: "Hail Mary--slay! kill!--full of grace--at them!--The Lord is with Thee--cut them down!" Till at last he recovered. "Tfu! to the evil one with this--glory is smoke. Has insanity seized me? non nobis, non nobis sed nomini tuo" (not to us, not to us, but to Thy name) and he passed the beads through his fingers more attentively.

Pan Serafin was repeating also his litany of the morning, but from time to time he looked now at the priest, now at the young lady, now at the Bukoyemskis, who were riding at the side of the carriage, now at the trees and the dew-covered grassy openings between them. At last, when he had finished the final "Hail, Mary!" he turned to the old man, and said, sighing deeply,--

"Your grace seems to be in rather good spirits?"

"And also your grace," said Father Voynovski.

"Yes, that is true. Until a man starts, he is bustling and hurrying and in trouble; only when the wind blows around him in the field is it light at his heartstrings. I remember how when, ten years ago, we were marching to Hotsim, there was a wonderful willingness in every warrior, so that though the action took place in the harsh weather of November, more than one threw his coat off because of the warmth which came out of his heart then. Well, God, who gave such a victory that time, will give it undoubtedly now, for the leader is the same, and the vigor and valor of the men not inferior. I know nations splendidly, Swedes, French, even Germans, but against Turks there is no one superior to our men."

"I have heard how his grace the king said the same," replied Father Voynovski. "'The Germans,' said he, 'stand under fire patiently, though they blink when attacking, but,' said he, 'if I can bring mine up nose to nose I am satisfied, for they will sweep everything before them as can no other cavalry in existence.' And this is true. The Lord Jesus has gifted us richly with this power, not only the nobles, but the peasants. For instance, our field infantry, when they spit on their palms and advance with their muskets, the best of the Janissaries cannot in any way equal them. I have seen both more than once in the struggle."

"If God has preserved in health Yatsek and Stashko, I am glad that their earliest campaign will be made against Turkish warriors. But how does your grace think, against whom will the Turks turn their main forces?"

"Against the emperor, as it seems, for they are warring against him, and helping rebellion in Hungary. But the Turks have two or three armies, hence it is unknown where we shall meet them decisively. For this cause, beyond doubt, no main camp has been organized, and regiments move from one place to another, as reports come. The regiments under Pan Yablonovski are now at Trembovla; others are concentrating on Cracow; others as happens to each of them. I know not where the

voevoda of Volynia is quartered at present, nor where Zbierhovski's command is. At moments I think that my son has not written this long time because his regiment may be moving toward these parts."

"If he is commanded to Cracow, he must march near us, surely. That, however, depends upon where he was earlier and whence he is starting at present. We may get news at Radom. Is not our first night halt at Radom?"

"It is. I should wish too that the prelate Tvorkovski saw Panna Anulka and gave her final counsels. He will furnish us letters to help her in Cracow."

The conversation stopped for a time; then Pan Serafin raised his eyes again to Father Voynovski.

"But," asked he, "what will happen, think you, should she meet Yatsek in Cracow?"

"I know not. In every case that will take place which God wishes. Yatsek might win a fortune by marriage, while she is as poor as a Turkish saint--but wealth alone is mere nonsense, the splendor of a family is the great point in this case."

"Panna Anulka is of high lineage, and she is like gold--besides we know well that they are love-stricken, mortally."

"Of course, mortally, mortally."

The priest did not speak very willingly on this point, that was clear, for he turned the conversation to other subjects.

"Well," said he, "but let us think of this, that a robber is watching for that golden maiden. Do you remember Vilchopolski's words?"

Pan Serafin looked at the depth of the forest on all sides.

"Yes. But the Krepetskis will not dare," said he. "They will not dare! Our party is fairly large, and your grace sees the calmness of everything around us. I wish the girl to be in that carriage for safety, but she begged to be on horseback--she has no fear of anything."

"Well, she has good blood. But I note that she masters you thoroughly."

"And you, too, somewhat," answered Pan Serafin. "But as to me I confess right away; when she begs for a thing she knows how to move her eyes in such fashion that you must yield where you stand. Women have various methods, but have you noticed that she has that sort of blinking before which a man drops his arms. Near Belchantska I will tell her to enter the carriage, but so far she wishes absolutely to be on horseback, because, as she says, it is healthier."

"In such weather it is surely healthier."

"Look how rosy the girl is, just like a euphorbia laurel."

"What is her rosiness to me?" replied Father Voynovski. "But in truth the dear day is lovely."

In fact the weather was really wonderful, and the morning fresh and dewy. Single drops on the needlelike pine leaves glittered with the rainbow-like colors of diamonds. The forest interior was brightened by hazel trees filled with the sun rays of morning. Farther in, orioles were twittering with joyousness. Roundabout was the odor of pine, the whole earth seemed rejoicing, and the blue air was cloudless.

Thus pushing forward, they reached the same tar pit at which Martsian had been seized by the brothers. But the fear that some ambush might be there lurking proved groundless. Near the well were two tar-laden wagons, nothing more. To these, which belonged to peasants, were attached two wretched little horses, whose heads were sunk in bags of oats to their foreheads; the drivers, each near the side of his horse, were eating cheese and bread, but at sight of the showy party they put away these provisions; when asked if they had seen armed men, they answered that since morning a mounted man had been waiting, but that shortly before, on seeing this party from a distance, he had rushed away with all the speed of his beast in the opposite direction. The news alarmed Pan Serafin. It seemed to him that this horseman had been sent as a scout by Krepetski; and he redoubled his watchfulness.

He commanded two attendants to ride at both sides and examine the forest; he sent two others ahead with this order: "If ye see an armed group fire your muskets, and return with all haste to the wagons." An hour passed, however, without a report from them. The party pushed forward slowly, watching in front and at both sides with carefulness, but it was quiet in the forest, except that the orioles twittered, while here and there was heard the hammering of those little smiths of the forest, the hard-working woodpeckers.

At last they reached a wide plain, but before going out on it Pan Serafin and the priest directed Anulka to sit in the carriage, since they had to pass now not far from Belchantska, the trees of which, and even the mansion between them, were visible to the eye without glasses. The young lady looked on that house with emotion, for in it she had passed very many of the best, and the bitterest, days of her existence. She had wished to look first of all at Vyrambki, but the Belchantska lindens so covered it that the dwelling was not to be seen from the carriage. It occurred to Anulka that she might never again in her life see those places, so she sighed quietly and became sorrowful.

The Bukoyemskis looked challengingly and quickly at the mansion, the village, and the neighborhood, but great quiet reigned in those places. Along broad fallow lands, which were flooded in sunlight, were grazing cows and sheep, guarded by dogs, and crowds of children. Here and there flocks of geese seemed white spots, and had it not been for summer heat, one might have thought from afar that they were bits of snow lying on the hill slopes; for the rest the region seemed empty.

Pan Serafin, who lacked not the daring of a cavalier, wished to show the Krepetskis how little he cared for them, and directed to make the first halt at that place, and give rest to the horses. So the party stopped; on one side were fields of wheat waving under the wind and rustling gently; on the other was the silence of the plain broken only by the snorting of horses.

"Health! health!" said the attendants in answer to the snorting.

But that calm was not to the taste of the youngest Bukoyemski, who turned toward the mansion and cried to the absent Krepetskis, while he beckoned with his hand an invitation.

"But come out here, ye sons of a such a one! O Stump, show thy dog snout; we will soon put a cross on it with our sabres!"

Then he bent toward the carriage.

"Your ladyship," said he, "that Martsian and his company are not in a hurry to attack us, neither he nor his bandits from the wilderness."

"But do bandits attack?" asked the lady.

"Oh-ho! they do, but not us. And there are many of them in the wilderness of Kozenitse, and in the forest toward Cracow. If his Grace the King would grant pardon, enough would be found of those bandits right here in this neighborhood to make two good regiments."

"I should rather meet bandits than Pan Martsian's company, of which people tell in Belchantska such terrible stories. I have not heard of bandits attacking a mansion."

"They do not, for a bandit has the same kind of sense that a wolf has. Consider, young lady, that a wolf never kills sheep or horned cattle in the neighborhood where his lair is."

"He speaks truth," said the other brothers.

Yan, glad of this praise, explained further.

"The bandit attacks no village or mansion near his hiding place. For if neighboring people should pursue, they, knowing the forests and secret spots in them, would hunt him out the more easily. So bandits go to a distance, and plunder houses or fall upon travellers in great or small parties."

"Have they no fear?"

"They have no fear of God. Why should they fear men?"

But Panna Anulka had turned her mind elsewhere, so, when Pan Serafin came to the carriage, she began to blink and implore him.

"Why should I stay in the carriage when no attack threatens? May I not go on horseback?"

"Why?" asked Pan Serafin. "The sun is high. It would burn your face. There is one who would not like that."

Thereupon she withdrew on a sudden to the depth of the carriage, and Pan Serafin turned to the brothers,--

"Have I not told her the truth?"

But not being quick-witted, they missed the point of the answer.

"Who would not like?" inquired they. "Who?"

Pan Serafin shrugged his shoulders.

"The prince bishop of Cracow, the German emperor, and the king of France," answered he.

He gave the sign then, and all started.

They passed Belchantska, and advanced again among tilled fields, fallow land, meadows, and broad wind-swept spaces which were bordered on the horizon by a blue rim of forest. At Yedlina they stopped for a second rest, during which the brewers, the citizens, and the peasants took farewell of Father Voynovski--and before evening they stopped for their first night rest at Radom.

Martsian had not given the least sign of life. They learned that he had passed the day previous in Radom, and had drunk with his company, but had gone home for the night; hence the priest and Pan Serafin breathed with more freedom, judging that no danger threatened them now on the journey.

The prelate Tvorkovski furnished letters to Father Hatski, to Gninski, the

vice-chancellor who, as they knew, was enrolling a whole regiment for the coming war at his own cost, and one also to Pan Matchynski. He was rejoiced to see Panna Anulka and Father Voynovski, for whom he felt a great friendship, and Pan Serafin, in whom he prized a skilled Latinist, who understood every quotation and maxim. He, too, had heard of Martsian's threats, but had lent no great weight to them, judging that if an attack had been planned it would have been made in the wilds of Kozenitse, more favorable for that kind of deed than the forests between Radom and Kieltse.

"Martsian will not attack you," said he to Pan Serafin, "and his father will not bring an action, for he would meet me; he knows that I have other weapons against him besides the church censure."

The prelate entertained them all day, and let them start only toward evening. Since danger seemed set aside most decidedly, Pan Serafin agreed to night travel, all the more since great heat was beginning. The first five miles, however, they passed during daylight. On the river Oronka, which here and there formed morasses, began again, in those days, extensive pine forests, which surrounded Oronsk, Sucha, Krogulha, and extended as far as Shydlovets, and beyond, toward Mrochkov and Bzin, down to Kieltse. They moved slowly, for in some places the old road lay among sandy hillocks and holes, while in others it sank very notably and became a muddy, stick-covered ridgeway. This ridge lay in a quagmire through which a man could pass neither with wagon nor horse, nor go on foot at any season, unless during very dry summers. These places enjoyed no good repute, but for this Pan Serafin and his party cared little; they were confident of their strength, and glad to move in cool air when heat did not trouble men, or flies annoy horses.

A clear and pleasant night came down quickly, with a full moon which appeared above the pine woods, enormous and ruddy, decreasing and growing pale as it rose, till in time it was white, and sailed like a silver swan through the dark blue of the

night sky. The wind ceased, and the motionless pine wood was buried in a stillness broken only by the voices of gnats flying in from broad pools, and by the playing of landrails in the grass of the neighboring meadows.

Father Voynovski intoned: "Hail, O Wise Lady! and Mansions dear to God," to which the four bass voices of the Bukoyemskis and Pan Serafin answered immediately: "Adorned by the golden table and seven columns." Panna Anulka joined the chorus, after her the attendants, and soon that pious hymn was resounding through the forest. But when they had finished all the "Hours," and repeated all the "Hail, Marys!" silence set in again. The priest, the brothers, and Pan Serafin conversed for some time yet in lowered voices; then they began to doze, and at last fell asleep soundly.

They did not hear either the "Vio! Vio!" of the drivers, or the snorting of horses, or the explosive sound made when hoofs were drawn out of mud on that long ridge way which lay in the sticky and reed-covered quagmire. The party came to the ridge somewhat before midnight. The shouts of attendants, who were advancing in front, first roused the sleepers.

"Stop! stop!"

All opened their eyes. The Bukoyemskis straightened in their saddles and sprang ahead promptly.

"But what is the matter?"

"The road is barred. There is a ditch across it, and beyond the ditch a breastwork."

The sabres of the brothers came biting from their scabbards and gleamed in the moonlight.

"To arms! an ambuscade!"

Pan Serafin found himself at the obstruction in one moment, and understood that there was no chance of being mistaken: a broad ditch had been dug across the

ridgeway. Beyond the ditch lay whole pine trees which, with their branches sticking up, formed a great breastwork. The men who stopped the road in that fashion had evidently intended to let the party in on the ridge, from which there was no escape on either side, and attack in the rear then.

"To your guns! to muskets!" thundered Father Voynovski. "They are coming!"

In fact about a hundred yards in the rear certain dark, square forms, strange, quite unlike men, appeared on the ridge, and ran toward the wagons very quickly.

"Fire!" commanded the priest.

A report was heard, and brilliant flashes rent the night gloom. Only one form rolled to the earth, but the other men ran the more swiftly toward the wagons, and after them denser groups made their appearance.

Instructed by whole years of war, the priest divined straightway that those men were carrying bundles before them, straw, reeds, or willows, and that was why the first discharge had effected so little.

"Fire! In order! four at a time!--and at their knees!" cried he.

Two attendants held guns charged with slugs. These men took their places with others, and spat at the knees of the attackers. A cry of pain was heard promptly, and this time the whole front rank of bundles tumbled down to the mud on the ridgeway, but the next rank of men sprang over those who were prostrate, and came still nearer the wagons.

"Fire!" was commanded a third time.

Again came a salvo, with more effect this time, for the onrush was stopped, and disorder appeared among the attackers.

The priest acquired courage, for he knew that the attackers had outwitted themselves in the choice of position. It is true that not a living soul would escape in case they should triumph, and the bandits had this in view specially; but, not having men to

hem in the party on all sides, they were forced to attack only over the ridgeway, hence in a thin body, which again lightened defence beyond common, so that five or six valiant warriors might ward off attack until daylight.

The attackers, too, began to use muskets, but caused no great damage, clearly because of poor weapons. Their first fire struck only a horse and one attendant. The Bukoyemskis begged to charge the enemy, guaranteeing to sweep right and left into the quagmire any men whom they might not crush in the mud of the roadway. But the priest, who kept their strength for the last, would not send them; he commanded the brothers, however, as excellent marksmen, to roast the attackers from a distance, and Pan Serafin commanded to watch the ditch sharply, and the breastwork.

"If they attack us from that side," said he, "they may do something, but they will not get us cheaply."

Then he hastened for a moment to the carriage where the ladies were praying without great fear, though audibly.

"Oh, this is nothing!" said he. "Have no fear!"

"I have no fear," answered Panna Anulka. "But I should like to be on horseback."

Shots drowned further words. The attackers, confused for a moment, pressed along the ridge now, with wonderful and simply blind daring, since it was clear that they would not effect much on that side.

"Hm!" thought the priest. "Were it not for the women, we might charge them."

And he had begun to think of sending the four brothers with four other good warriors, when he looked at both flanks and trembled.

On the two sides of that quagmire appeared crowds of men, who, springing from hillock to hillock, or along sheaves of reeds, which had been fixed in soft places on purpose, were running toward the wagons.

The priest turned to them, in the shortest time possible, two ranks of attendants, but

he understood in a flash the extent of his peril. His party was surrounded on three sides. The attendants were, it is true, chosen men, who had been more than once in sharp struggles, but they were insufficient in number, especially as some had to guard extra horses. Hence it was evident that after the first fire, inadequate because of so many attackers, there would be a hand-to-hand struggle before guns could be loaded a second time, and the side which proved weaker would be forced to go down in that trial.

Only one plan remained, to retreat by the ridgeway, that is, leave the wagons, command the Bukoyemskis to sweep all before them, and push on behind the four brothers, keeping the women among the horses in the centre. So when they had fired at both sides again, the priest ordered the women to mount, and arranged all for the onrush. In the first rank were the four brothers, behind them six attendants, then Panna Anulka and Pani Dzvonkovski, at the side the priest and Pan Serafin, behind them eight attendants, four in a rank. After the charge and retreat from the ridgeway he intended to reach the first village, collect all the peasants, return then and rescue the wagons.

Still he stopped for a moment, and only when the attackers were little more than twenty yards distant, and when on a sudden wild sounds were heard beyond the breastwork, did he shout the order,--

"Strike!"

"Strike!" roared the Bukoyemskis, and they moved like a hurricane which destroys all things before it. When they had ridden to the enemy the horses rose on their haunches and plunged into the dense crowd of robbers, trampling some, pushing others to the quagmire, overthrowing whole lines of people. The brothers cut with sabres unsparingly, and without stopping. There was great shouting, and splashing of bodies as men fell into the water near the ridgeway, but the four dreadful horsemen pushed forward; their arms moving like those of a windmill to which a

gale gives dreadful impetus. Some attackers sprang willingly into the water to save themselves; others put forks and bill-hooks against the onrushing brothers. Clubs and spears were raised also; but again the horses reared, and, breaking everything before them, swept on like a whirlwind in a young forest.

Had not the road been so narrow, and those who were slashed had all escape barred to them, and those behind not pushed on those in front, the Bukoyemskis would have passed the whole ridgeway. But since more than one of the bandits preferred battle to drowning, resistance continued, and, besides, it became still more stubborn. The hearts of the robbers were raging. They began to fight then not merely for plunder, or seizing some person, but from venom. At moments when shouts ceased, the gritting of teeth became audible and curses rose loudly. The rush of the Bukoyemskis was arrested. It came to their minds at that moment that they would have to die, perhaps. And when, on a sudden, they heard still farther out there the tramping of horses, and loud shouts were raised in all parts of the thicket surrounding the quagmire, they felt sure that the moment of death was approaching. Hence they smashed terribly; they would not sell their lives cheaply in any case.

But now something marvellous happened. Many voices were heard all at once shouting: "Strike!" Sabres gleamed in the moonlight. Certain horsemen fell to cutting and hewing in the rear of the robbers, who, because of this sudden attack, were seized in one instant with terror. Escape in the rear was now closed to them; nothing remained but escape at either side of the roadway. Only some, therefore, offered a desperate resistance. The more numerous sprang like ducks to the turfy quagmire on both sides. The quagmire broke under them; then grasping grass, clumps, and reeds, they clung to hillocks, or lay on their bellies not to sink the first moment.

Only a small company, armed with scythes fixed to poles, defended themselves for some time yet with madness. Because of this many horsemen were wounded. But at

last even this handful, seeing that for them there was no rescue whatever, threw down their weapons, fell on their knees, and begged mercy. They were taken alive to be witnesses.

Meanwhile horsemen from both sides stood facing one another, and raised their voices.

"Halt! halt! Who are ye?"

"But who are ye?"

"Tsyprianovitch of Yedlinka."

"For God's sake! these are our people!"

And two riders pushed from the ranks quickly. One inclined to Pan Serafin, seized his hand straightway, and covered it with kisses; the other rushed to the priest's shoulder.

"Stanislav!" cried Pan Serafin.

"Yatsek!" shouted the priest.

The greetings and embraces continued till speech came to Pan Serafin,--

"For God's sake, whence come ye?"

"Our regiment was marching to Cracow. Yatsek and I had permission to visit you at Yedlinka. Meanwhile we learned at Radom, while halting for food there, that thou, father, and the priest, and the Bukoyemskis had set out an hour earlier by the highroad toward Kieltse."

"Did the prelate tell thee?"

"No! We did not see him. Radom Jews told us; we did not go then to Yedlinka, but moved on at once lest we might miss you. At midnight we heard firing, so we all rushed to give aid, thinking that bandits had fallen upon travellers. It did not occur to us that ye were the persons. God be thanked, God be thanked, that we came up in season!"

"Not bandits attacked us, but the Krepetskis. It is a question of Panna Anulka, who is with us."

"As God lives!" exclaimed Stanislav. "Then I think that his soul will leave Yatsek."

"I wrote to thee about her, but it is evident that my letter did not reach thee."

"No, for we are marching these three weeks. I have not written of late because I had to come hither."

Shouts from the Bukoyemskis, the attendants, and the warriors stopped further converse. At that moment also attendants ran up with lighted torches. A supply had been taken by Pan Serafin that he might have wherewith to give light during darkness. It was as clear on the road as in daylight, and in those bright gleams Yatsek saw the gray horse on which Panna Anulka was sitting.

He grew dumb at sight of her.

"Yes, she is with us," said Father Voynovski, seeing his astonishment.

Then Yatsek urged his horse forward, and halted before her. He uncovered his head, and remained there lost as he looked at her. His face was as white as chalk, his breath had almost left him, and he was speechless.

After a moment the cap fell to the earth from his fingers, his head dropped to the mane of the horse, and his eyes closed.

"But he is wounded!" cried Lukash Bukoyemski.

CHAPTER XXIV

Yatsek was really wounded. One of those robbers, who defended themselves to the utmost, cut him, with a scythe in the left shoulder, and since he and the men marched without mail, the very end of the iron had cut into his arm rather deeply from the shoulder to the elbow. The wound was not over grievous, but it bled quite profusely; because of this the young man had then fainted. The experienced Father

Voynovski commanded to put him in a wagon, and, when the wound had been dressed, he left him in care of the women. Yatsek opened his eyes somewhat later, and began again to look, as at a rainbow, into the face of Panna Anulka, which was there bending over him.

Meanwhile the attendants filled the ditch and removed all obstructions. The wagons and the men passed to the dry road beyond, where they halted to bring the train into order, take some rest, and question the prisoners. From Tachevski the priest went to the Bukoyemskis to see if they had suffered. But they had not. The horses were torn and even stabbed with forks, but not seriously; the men themselves were in excellent humor, for all were admiring their valor, since they had crushed before war, more opponents than had many others during years of campaigning.

"Now, gentlemen, ye may join Pan Zbierhovski," said the hussars here and there. "From of old it is known, and God grant that men will see soon, that our regiment is the first even among hussars. Pan Zbierhovski admits no common men, or any man easily, but he will accept you with gladness, and we shall be charmed from our hearts to find you in our company."

The Bukoyemskis knew that this might not be, for they could not have the attendants, or the outfit demanded in such a high regiment, but they listened to those speeches with rapture, and when cups went the round, they let no man surpass them.

When that part was ended, the captured bandits were seized by their heads, and led from the mud to Zbierhovski and the priest and Pan Serafin. No bandit had escaped, for with a detachment of twelve hundred there were men to surround the whole quagmire and both ends of the ridgeway. The appearance of the prisoners astonished Pan Serafin. He had thought to find Martsian among them, as he had told Stanislav, and Martsian's Radom outcasts also; meanwhile he saw before him a ragged rabble reeking with turf and bespattered with mud of the ridgeway, a company made up, like all bodies of that kind, of deserters from the infantry, of runaway servants and

serfs, in a word, of all kinds of wicked, wild scoundrels working at robbery in remote places and forests. Many such parties were raging, especially in the wooded region of Sandomir, and since they were strengthened by men who were eager for anything, men who if captured were threatened with terrible punishment, their attacks were uncommonly daring, and they fought savage battles.

The search through the quagmire continued for a time yet, then Pan Serafin turned to Zbierhovski.

"Gracious colonel," said he. "These are highway robbers. We thought them quite different. This was an attack of common bandits. We thank you, and all your men with grateful hearts for effective assistance, without which, as is possible, we should not have seen the sun rise this morning."

"These night marches are good," said Zbierhovski, and he smiled while he was speaking. "The heat does not trouble, and it is possible to serve others. Do you wish to examine these captives immediately?"

"Since I have looked at them closely already, it is not needed. The court in the town will examine them, and the headsman will guide them."

At this a tall, bony fellow, with a gloomy face, and light hair pushed out from the captives and said, as he bent to Pan Serafin's stirrup.

"Great mighty lord, spare our lives, and we will tell truth. We are common bandits, but the attack was not common."

The priest and Pan Serafin, on hearing this, looked at each other with roused curiosity.

"Who art thou?" asked the priest.

"I am a chief. There were two of us, for this party was formed of two bands, but the other man fell. Give me pardon, and I will tell everything."

Father Voynovski stopped for a moment.

"We cannot save you from justice," said he, "but for you it is better in every case to tell truth, than be forced to declare it under torture. Besides, if ye confess, God's judgment and man's will be more lenient."

The bandit looked at his companions, uncertain whether to speak or be silent. Meanwhile the priest added,--

"And if ye tell the whole truth, we can intercede with the king, and commend you to his mercy. He accepts offenders in the infantry, and recommends mercy now to judges."

"In that case," said the man, "I will tell everything. My name is Obuh; the leader of the other band was Kos, and a noble engaged us to fall on your graces."

"But do ye know the name of that noble?"

"I did not know him, for I am from distant places, but Kos knew him, and said his name was Vysh."

The priest and Pan Serafin looked at each other with astonishment.

"Vysh,[6] didst thou say?"

"Yes."

"But was there no one with him?"

"There was another, a lean, thin, young man."

"Not they," said Pan Serafin to the priest in a whisper.

"But they may have been Martsian's company."

Then he said aloud to the man,--

"What did they tell you to do?"

"This: 'Do what ye like with the people,' said they; 'the wagons and plunder are yours; but in the company there is a young lady whom ye are to take and bring by roundabout ways between Radom and Zvolenie to Polichna. Beyond Polichna a

party will attack you and take the lady. Ye will pretend to defend her, but not so as to harm our men. Ye will get a thaler apiece for this, besides what ye find in the wagons.'"

"That is as if on one's palm," said the priest.

"Then did only those two talk with Kos and thee?"

"Later, a third person came in the night with them; he gave us a ducat apiece to bind the agreement. Though the place was as dark as in a cellar, one of our men who had been a serf of his recognized that third person as Pan Krepetski."

"Ha! that is he!" cried Pan Serafin.

"And is that man here, or has he fallen?" inquired Father Voynovski.

"I am here!" called out a voice from some distance.

"Come nearer. Didst thou recognize Pan Krepetski? But how, since it was so dark, that thou couldst hit a man on the snout without knowing it?"

"Because I know him from childhood. I knew him by his bow-legs and his head, which sits, as it were, in a hole between his shoulders, and by his voice."

"Did he speak to you?"

"He spoke with us, and afterward I heard him speak to those who came with him."

"What did he say to them?"

"He said this: 'If I could have trusted money with you, I should not have come, even if the night were still darker.'"

"And wilt thou testify to this before the mayor in the town, or the starosta?"

"I will."

"When he heard this, Pan Zbierhovski turned to his attendants and said,--

"Guard this man with special care, for me."

CHAPTER XXV

They began now to counsel. The advice of the Bukoyemskis was to disguise some peasant woman in the dress of a lady, put her on horseback, give her attendants and soldiers dressed up as bandits, and go to the place designated by Martsian, and, when he made the attack as agreed upon, surround him immediately, and either wreak vengeance there, or take him to Cracow and deliver him to justice. They offered to go themselves, with great willingness, to carry out the plan, and swore that they would throw Martsian in fetters at the feet of Panna Anulka.

This proposal pleased all at the first moment, but when they examined it more carefully the execution seemed needless and difficult. Pan Zbierhovski might rescue from danger people whom he met on his march, but he had not the right to send soldiers on private expeditions, and he had no wish either to do so. On the other hand, since there was a bandit who knew and was ready to indicate to the courts the chief author of the ambush, it was possible to bring that same author to account any moment, and to have issued against him a sentence of infamy. For this reason both Pan Serafin and Father Voynovski grew convinced that there would be time for that after the war, since there was no fear that the Krepetskis, who owned large estates, would flee and abandon them. This did not please the Bukoyemskis, however, for they desired keenly to finish the question. They even declared that since that was the decision, they would go themselves with their attendants for Martsian. But Pan Serafin would not permit this, and they were stopped finally by Yatsek, who implored them by all that was sacred to leave Krepetski to him, and him only.

"I," said he, "will not act through courts against Martsian, but after all that I have heard from you here, if I do not fall in the war, as God is in heaven, I will find the man, and it will be shown whether infamy would not be pleasanter and easier also than that which will meet him."

And his "maiden" eyes glittered so fiercely that though the Bukoyemskis were

unterrified warriors a shiver went through them. They knew in what a strange manner passion and mildness were intertwined in the spirit of Yatsek, together with an ominous remembrance of injustice.

He said then repeatedly: "Woe to him!--Woe to him!" and again he grew pale from his blood loss. Day had come already, and the morning light had tinted the world in green and rose colors; that light sparkled in the dewdrops, on the grass and the reeds, and the tree leaves and the needles of dwarf pines here and there on the edge of the quagmire. Pan Zbierhovski had commanded to bury the bodies of the fallen bandits, which was done very quickly, for the turf opened under spades easily, and when no trace of battle was left on that roadway, the march was continued toward Shydlovets.

Pan Serafin advised the young lady to sit again in the carriage, where she might have a good sleep before they reached the next halting place, but she declared so decisively that she would not desert Yatsek that even Father Voynovski did not try to remove her. So they went together, only two besides the driver, for sleep was so torturing Pani Dzvonkovski, that after a while they transferred her to the carriage.

Yatsek was lying face upward on bundles of hay arranged lengthwise in one side of the wagon, while she sat on the other, bending every little while toward his wounded shoulder, and watching to see if blood might not come through the bandages. At times she put a leather bottle of old wine to the mouth of the wounded man. This wine acted well to all seeming, for after a while he was wearied of lying, and had the driver draw out the bundle on which his feet were then resting.

"I prefer to ride sitting," said he, "since I feel all my strength now."

"But the wound, will that not pain you more if you are sitting?"

Yatsek turned his eyes to her rosy face, and said in a sad and low voice, "I will give the same answer as that knight long ago when King Lokietek saw him pierced with spears by the Knights of the Cross, on a battlefield. 'Is thy pain great?' asked the

king. The knight showed his wounds then. 'These pain least of all,' said he in answer."

Panna Sieninski dropped her eyes. "But what pains you more?" inquired she in a whisper.

"A yearning heart, and separation, and the memory of wrongs inflicted."

For a while silence continued, but the hearts began to throb in both with power which increased every moment, for they knew that the time had come then in which they could and should confess everything which each had against the other.

"It is true," said she, "I did you an injustice, when, after the duel, I received you with angry face, and inhumanly. But that was the only time, and, though God alone knows how much I regretted that afterward, still I say it is my fault! and from my whole soul I implore you." Yatsek put his sound hand to his forehead.

"Not that," answered he, "was the thorn, not that the great anguish!"

"I know it was not that, but the letter from Pan Gideon. How could you suspect me of knowing the contents of the letter, or having suggested them?"

And she began to tell, with a broken voice, how it happened: how she had implored Pan Gideon to make a step toward being reconciled: how he had promised to write a heartfelt and fatherly letter, but he wrote entirely the opposite. Of this she learned only later from Father Voynovski, and from this it was shown that Pan Gideon having other plans, simply wanted to separate them from each other forever.

At the same time, since her words were a confession, and also a renewal of painful and bitter memories, her eyes were dimmed with tears, and from constraint and shame a deep blush came out on her cheeks from one instant to another.

"Did Father Voynovski," asked she at last, "not write to you that I knew nothing, and that I could not even understand why I received for my sincere feelings a recompense of that kind?"

"Father Voynovski," answered Yatsek, "only wrote me that you were going to marry Pan Gideon."

"But did he not write that I consented to do so only through orphanhood and pain and desertion, and out of gratitude to my guardian? For I knew not then how he had treated you; I only knew that I was despised and forgotten."

When he heard this Yatsek closed his eyes and began to speak with great sadness.

"Forgotten? Is that God's truth? I was in Warsaw, I was at the king's court, I went through the country with my regiment, but whatever I did, and wherever I travelled, not for one moment didst thou go from my heart and my memory. Thou didst follow me as his shadow a man. And during nights without sleep, in suffering and in pain, which came simply from torture, many a time have I called to thee: 'Take pity, have mercy! grant to forget thee!' But thou didst not leave me at any time, either in the day, or the night, or in the field, or under a house roof, until at last I understood that only then could I tear thee from my heart when I had torn the heart itself from my bosom."

Here he stopped, for his voice was choked from emotion; but after a time he continued,--

"So after that often and often I said in my prayers: 'O God, grant me death, for Thou seest that it is impossible for me to attain her, and impossible for me to be without her!' And that was before I had hoped for the favor of seeing thee in life again--thou, the only one in the world--thou, beloved!"

As he said this he bent toward her and touched her arm with his temple.

"Thou," whispered he, "art as that blood which gives life to me, as that sun in the heavens. The mercy of God is upon me, that I see thee once more-- O beloved! beloved!"

And it seemed to her that Yatsek was singing some marvellous song at that moment. Her eyes were filled with a wave of tears then, and a wave of happiness flooded her

heart. Again there was silence between them; but she wept long with such a sweet weeping as she had never known in her life till that morning.

"Yatsek," said she at last, "why have we so tormented each other?"

"God has rewarded us a hundred fold," said he in answer.

And for the third time there was silence between them; only the wagon squeaked on, pushing forward slowly over the ruts of the roadway. Beyond the forest they came out onto great fields bathed in sunlight; on those fields wheat was rustling, dotted richly with red poppies and blue star thistles. There was great calm in that region. Above fields on which the grain had been reaped, here and there skylarks were soaring, lost in song, motionless; on the edges of the fields sickles glittered in the distance; from the remoter green pastures came the cries and songs of men herding cattle. And to both it seemed that the wheat was rustling because of them; that the poppies and star thistles were blooming because of them; that, the larks were singing because of them; that the calls of the herdsmen were uttered because of them; that all the sunny peace of those fields and all those voices were simply repeating their ecstasy and happiness.

They were roused from this oblivion by Father Voynovski, who had pushed up unnoticed to the wagon.

"How art thou, Yatsus?" asked he.

Yatsek trembled and looked with shining eyes at him, as if just roused from slumber.

"What is it, benefactor?"

"How art thou?"

"Eh! it will not be better in paradise!"

The priest looked seriously first at him, then at the young lady.

"Is that true?" asked he.

And he galloped off to the company. But the delightful reality embraced them anew.

They began to look on each other, and sink in the eyes of each other.

"O, thou not-to-be-looked-at-sufficiently!" said Yatsek.

But she lowered her eyes, smiled at the corners of her mouth till dimples appeared in her rosy cheeks, and asked in a whisper,--

"But is not Panna Zbierhovski more beautiful?"

Yatsek looked at her with amazement.

"What, Panna Zbierhovski?"

She made no answer; she simply laughed in her fist, with a laugh as resonant as a silver bell.

Meanwhile, when the priest had galloped to the company, the men, who loved Yatsek, fell to inquiring,--

"Well, how is it there? How is our wounded man?"

"He is no longer in this world!" replied Father Voynovski.

"As God lives! What has happened? How is he not in the world?"

"He is not, for he says that he is in paradise--a woman!!!"

The Bukoyemskis, as men who understand without metaphor all that is said to them, did not cease to look at the priest with astonishment and, removing their caps, were just ready to say, "eternal rest," when a general outbreak of laughter interrupted their pious thoughts and intention. But in that laughter of the company there was sincere good-will and sympathy for Yatsek. Some of the men had learned from Pan Stanislav how sensitive that cavalier was, and all divined how he must have suffered, hence the words of the priest delighted them greatly. Voices were heard at once, therefore: "God knows! we have seen how he fought with his feelings, how he answered questions at random, how he left buckles unfastened, how he forgot himself when eating or drinking, how he turned his eyes to the moon during night hours."

"Those are infallible signs of unfortunate love," added some. "It is true," put in others, "that he is now as if in paradise, for if no wounds give more pain than those caused by Love, there is no sweeter thing than mutuality."

These and similar remarks were made by Yatsek's comrades. Some of them, having learned of the hardships which the lady had passed through, and how shamefully Krepetski had treated her, fell to shaking their sabres, and crying; "Give him hither!" Some became sensitive over the maiden, some, having learned how Martsian had been handled by the Bukoyemskis, raised to the skies the native valor and wit of those brothers. But after a while universal attention was centred again on the lovers: "Well," cried out all, "let us shout to their health and good fortune et felices rerum successus!" and immediately a noisy throng moved toward the wagon on horseback. In one moment almost the whole regiment had surrounded Pan Yatsek and Panna Anulka. Loud voices thundered: "Vivant! floreant!" others cried before the time: "Crescite et multiplicamini!" Whether Panna Anulka was really frightened by those cries, or rather as an "insidious woman," she only feigned terror father Voynovski himself could not have decided. It is enough that, sheltering her bright head at the unwounded shoulder of Yatsek, she asked with shamefaced confusion,--

"What is this, Yatsek? what are they doing?"

He surrounded her with his sound arm, and said,--

"People are giving thee, dearest flower, and I am taking thee."

"After the war?"

"Before the war."

"In God's name, why so hurried?"

But it was evident that Yatsek had not heard this query for instead of replying, he said to her,--

"Let us bow to the dear comrades for this good-will, and thank them."

Hence they bowed toward both sides, which roused still greater enthusiasm. Seeing the blushing face of the maiden, which was as beautiful as the morning dawn, the warriors struck their thighs with their palms from admiration.

"By the dear God!" cried they. "One might be dazzled!"

"An angel would be enamoured; what can a sinful man do?"

"It is no wonder that he was withering with sorrow."

And again hundreds of voices thundered more powerfully,--

"Vivant! crescant! floreant!"

Amid those shouts, and in clouds of golden dust they entered Shydlovets. At the first moment the inhabitants were frightened, and, leaving in front of their houses the workshops in which they were cutting out whetstones from sandrock, they ran to their chambers. But, learning soon that those were the shouts of a betrothal, and not of anger, they rushed in a crowd to the street and followed the soldiers. A throng of horses and men was formed straightway. The kettledrums of the horsemen were beaten, the trumpets and crooked horns sounded. Gladness became universal. Even the Jews, who through fear had stayed longer in the houses, shouted: "Vivait!"[7] though they knew not well what the question was.

But Tachevski said to Panna Anulka,--

"Before the war, before the war, even though death were to come one hour later."

CHAPTER XXVI

"How is that?" inquired Father Voynovski, at the dinner which his comrades gave Yatsek. "We are going in five or six days; thou mightst die in the war; is it worth while to marry before a campaign, instead of waiting for the happy end of it, and then marrying at your leisure?"

His comrades, when they heard these prudent words, burst into laughter; some of

them held their sides, others cried in a chorus,--"Oh! it is worth while, benefactor! and just for this reason that he may die is it worth while all the more."

The priest was a little angry, but when the three hundred best men, not excepting Pan Stanislav insisted, and Yatsek would not hear of delay, it had to be as he wanted. Renewed relations with the court, and the favor of the king and queen facilitated the affair very greatly. The queen declared that the coming Pani Tachevski would be under her protection till the war ended, and the king himself promised to be at the marriage, and to think of a fitting dowry when his mind was less occupied. He remembered that many lands of the Sieninskis had passed to the Sobieskis, and how his ancestors had grown strong from them, hence he felt under obligations to the orphan, who, besides, had attracted him by her beauty, and also roused his compassion by her harsh fate, and the evils which she had suffered.

Pan Matchynski, a friend from of old, to Father Voynovski, and also a friend of the king, promised to remind him of the young lady, but after the war; for at that time when on the shoulders of Yan III the fate of all Europe was resting, and of all Christianity, it was not permitted to trouble him with private interests. Father Voynovski was comforted with this promise as much as if Yatsek had then received a good "crown estate," for all knew that word from Pan Matchynski was as sure of fulfilment as had been the words of Zavisha. To speak strictly, he was the author of all the good which had met Panna Sieninski in Cracow; he mentioned Father Voynovski to the king and queen; finally he won for the young lady the queen, who, though capricious in her likings, and fickle, began from the first moment to show her special favor and friendship, which seemed even almost too sudden.

A dispensation from banns was received easily through protection of the court, and the favor of the bishop of Cracow. Even earlier, Pan Serafin had obtained for the young couple handsome lodgings from a Cracow merchant, whose ancestors and those of Pan Serafin had done business in their day, when the latter were living in

Lvoff, and importing brocades from the Orient. That was a beautiful lodging, and, because of the multitude of civil and military dignitaries in the city, so good a one could not be obtained by many a voevoda. Stanislav had determined that Yatsek should pass those few days before the campaign as it were in a genuine heaven, and he ornamented those lodgings unusually with fresh flowers and tapestry; other comrades helped him with zeal, each lending, the best of what he had, rugs, tapestry, carpets, and such like costly articles, which in wealthy hussar regiments were taken in campaigns even.

In one word, all showed the young couple the greatest good-will, and helped them as each one was able and with what he commanded, except the four Bukoyemskis. They, in the first days after coming to Cracow, went sometimes twice in a day to Stanislav and to Yatsek, and to merchants at the inns with whom officers from the regiment of Prince Alexander drank not infrequently, but afterward the four brothers vanished as if they had fallen into water. Father Voynovski thought that they were drinking in the suburbs, where servants had seen them one evening, and where mead and wine were cheaper than in the city, but immediately after that all report of them vanished. This angered the priest as well as the Tsyprianovitches, for the brothers were bound to Pan Serafin in gratitude; this they should not have forgotten. "They may be good soldiers," said the priest, "but they are giddy heads in whose sedateness we cannot put confidence. Of course they have found some wild company in which they pass time more pleasantly than with any of us."

This judgment proved inaccurate, however, for on the eve of Yatsek's marriage, when his quarters were filled with acquaintances who had come with good wishes and presents, the four brothers appeared in their very best garments. Their faces were calm, serious, and full of mysteriousness.

"What has happened to you?" asked Pan Serafin.

"We have been tracking a wild beast!" replied Lukash.

"Quiet!" said Mateush, giving him a punch in the side, "Do not tell till the time comes."

Then he looked at the priest, at Pan Serafin and his son, and turning finally to Yatsek, began to clear his throat, like a man who intends to speak in some detail.

"Well, begin right away!" urged his brothers.

But he looked at them with staring eyes, and inquired,--

"How was it?"

"How? Hast thou forgotten?"

"It has broken in me."

"Wait--I know," cried Yan. "It began: 'Our most worthy--' Go on!"

"Our most worthy Pilate," began Mateush.

"Why 'Pilate'?" interrupted the priest. "Perhaps it is Pylades?"

"Benefactor thou hast hit the nail on the head," cried Yan. "As I live, it is Pylades."

"Our worthy Pylades!" began Mateush, now reassured, "though not the iron Boristhenes, but the gold-bearing Tagus itself were to flow in our native region, we, being exiled through attacks of barbarians, should have nothing but our hearts glowing with friendship to offer thee, neither could we honor this day as it merits by any thank-offering--"

"Thou speakest as if cracking nuts," cried out Lukash excitedly.

But Mateush kept on repeating: "As it merits,--as it merits--" He stopped, looked at his brothers, calling with his eyes for rescue, but they had forgotten entirely that which was to come later.

The Bukoyemskis began now to frown, and the audience to titter. Seeing this Pan Serafin resolved to assist them.

"Who composed this speech for you?" asked he.

"Pan Gromyka, of Pan Shumlanski's regiment," said Mateush.

"There it is. A strange horse is more likely to balk and rear than your own beast; so now embrace Yatsek and tell him what ye have to say."

"Surely that is the best way."

And they embraced Yatsek one after another. Then Mateush continued,--"Yatsus! we know that thou art no Pilate, and thou knowest that after losing Kieff regions we are poor fellows, in short we are naked. Here is all that we can give, and accept with thankful heart even this."

Then they handed him some object wound up in a piece of red satin, and at that moment the three younger brothers repeated, with feeling,--

"Accept it, Yatsus, accept! Accept!"

"I accept, and God repay you," answered Yatsek.

Thus speaking, he put the object on the table, and began to unroll the satin. All at once he started back, and cried,--

"As God lives, it is the ear of a man!"

"But dost thou know whose ear? Martsian Krepetski's!" thundered the brothers.

"Ah!"

All present were so tremendously astonished that silence followed immediately.

"Tfu!" cried Father Voynovski, at last.

And measuring the brothers, one after the other, with a stern glance, he began at the eldest,--

"Are ye Turks to bring in the ears of beaten enemies? Ye are a shame to this Christian army and all nobles. If Krepetski deserved death a hundred times, if he were even a heretic, or out and out a pagan, it would still be an inexpressible shame to commit such an action. Oh, ye have delighted Yatsek, so that he spits from his mouth that which comes into it. But I tell you that for such a deed ye are to expect

not gratitude but contempt, and shame also; for there is no regiment in all the cavalry, or even a regiment in the infantry, which would accept such barbarians as comrades."

At this Mateush stepped out in front of his brothers, and, flaming with rage, said,--

"Here is gratitude for you, here is reward, here is the justice of people, and a judgment. If any layman were to utter this judgment I should cut one ear from him, and also the other to go with it, but since a clerical person speaks thus, let the Lord Jesus judge him, and take the side of the innocent! Your Grace asks: 'Are ye Turks?' but I ask: Do you think that we cut off the ear of a dead man? My born brothers, ye innocent orphans, to what have ye come, that they make Turks of you, enemies of the faith! To what?"

Here his voice quivered, for his grief had exceeded his auger. The three brothers, roused by the unjust judgment, began to cry out with equal sorrow,--

"They make Turks of us!"

"Enemies of the faith!"

"Vile pagans!"

"Then tell, in the name of misfortune, how it was," said the priest.

"Lukash cut off Martsian's ear in a duel."

"Whence did Krepetski come hither?"

"He rode into Cracow. He was here five days. He rode in behind us."

"Let one speak. Speak thou, but to the point."

Here the priest turned to Yan, the youngest.

"An acquaintance of ours from the regiment of the Bishop of Sandomir," began Yan, "told us by chance, three days ago, that he had seen in a wineshop on Kazamir street a certain wonder. 'A noble,' says he, 'as thick as a tree stump, with a great head so thrust into his body that his shoulders come up to his ears, on short crooked legs,'

says he, 'and he drinks like a dragon. A viler monkey I have not seen in my life,' says he. And we, since the Lord Jesus has given us this gift from birth, take everything in at a twinkle, we look at one another that instant: Well, is not that Krepetski? Then we said to the man, 'Take us to that wineshop.' 'I will take you.' And he took us. It was dark, but we looked till we saw something black in one corner behind a table. Lukash walked up to it, and made sparks fly before the very eyes of him who was hiding there. 'Krepetski,' cries he, and grabs him by the shoulder. We to our sabres. Krepetski sprang away, but saw that there was no escape, for we were between him and the doorway. Did he not jump then? He jumped up time after time as a cock does. 'What,' says he, 'do ye think that I am afraid? Only come at me one by one, not in a crowd, unless ye are murderers, not nobles.'"

"The scoundrel!" interrupted the priest.

"What did he try to do with us? That is what Lukash asked him. 'Oh!' said Lukash, 'thou son of such a mother, thou didst hire a whole regiment of cut-throats against us. It would be well,' said he, 'to give thee to the headsman, but this is the shorter way!' Then he presses on, and they fall to cutting. After the third or fourth blow, his head leans to one side. I look--and there is an ear on the floor. Mateush raises it immediately, and cries,--'Leave the other to us, do not cut it. This,' said he 'will be for Yatsek, and the other for Panna Anulka.' But Martsian dropped his sabre, for his blood had begun to flow terribly, and he fainted. We poured water on his head, and wine into his mouth, thinking that he would revive and meet the next one of us; but that could not be. He recovered consciousness, it is true, and said: 'Since ye have sought justice yourselves, ye are not free to seek any other,' and he fainted again. We went away then, sorry not to have the other ear. Lukash said that he could have killed the man, but he spared him for us, and especially for Yatsek. And I do not know if any one could act more politely, for it is no sin to crush such vermin as Martsian, but it is clear that politeness does not pay now-a-days, since we have to

suffer for showing it."

"True! He speaks justly!" said the other brothers.

"Well," said the priest, "if the matter stands thus it is different, but still the gift is unsavory."

The brothers looked with amazement one at another.

"Why say unsavory?" asked Marek. "You do not think we brought it for Yatsek to eat, do you?"

"I thank you from my soul for your good wishes," said Tachevski. "I think that ye did not bring it to me to be stored away."

"It has grown a little green--it might be smoke-dried."

"Let a man bury it at once," said the priest with severity; "it is the ear of a Christian in every case."

"In Kieff we have seen better treatment," growled out Mateush.

"Krepetski came hither undoubtedly," remarked Yatsek, "to make a new attack on Anulka."

"He will not take her away from the king's palace," said the prudent Pan Serafin, "but he did not come for that, if I think correctly. His attack failed, so I suppose he only wanted to learn whether we know that he arranged it, and if we have complained of him. Perhaps old Krepetski did not know of his son's undertaking; but perhaps he did know; if he did, then both must be greatly alarmed, and I am not at all surprised that Martsian came here to investigate."

"Well," said Stanislav, laughing, "he has no luck with the Bukoyemskis, indeed he has not."

"Let him go," said Tachevski. "To-day I am ready to forgive him."

The Bukoyemskis and Stanislav, who knew the stubbornness of the young cavalier, looked at him with astonishment, and he, as if answering them, added,--

"For Anulka will be mine immediately, and to-morrow I shall be a Christian knight and defender of the faith, a man whose heart should be free of all hate and personalities."

"God bless thee for that!" cried the priest.

CHAPTER XXVII

At last the long-wished-for day of his happiness came to Tachevski. In Cracow a report had gone out among the citizens, and was repeated with wonder, that in the army was a knight who would marry on one day and mount his horse the day following. When the report went out also that the king and queen would be at the marriage, crowds began from early morning to assemble in the church and outside it. At length the crowd was so great that the king's men had to bring order to the square so that the marriage guests might have a free passage. Tachevski's comrades assembled to a man; this they did out of good-will and friendship, and also because it was dear to each one of them to be seen in a company where the king himself would be present, and to belong, as it were, to his private society. Many dignitaries appeared also, even men who had never heard of Tachevski, for it was known that the queen favored the marriage, and at the court much depended on her inclination and favor.

To some of the lords it was not less wonderful than to the citizens that the king should find time to be at the marriage of a simple officer, while on that king's shoulders the fate of the whole world was then resting, and day after day couriers from foreign lands were flying in on foaming horses; hence some considered this as coming from the kindness of the monarch and his wish to win the army, while others made suppositions that there existed some near bond of kinship, difficult to be acknowledged; others ridiculed these suppositions, stating justly that in such a case the queen, who had so little condescension for the failings of cavaliers that the king

more than once had been forced to make explanations, would not have been so anxious for the union of the lovers.

People remembered little of the Sieninskis, so to avoid every calumny and gossip the king declared that the Sobieskis owed much to that family. Then people of society were concerned with Panna Anulka, and, as is usual at courts, at one time they pitied, at another time they were moved by her sufferings, and next they lauded her virtue and comeliness. Reports of her beauty spread widely even among citizens, but when at last they saw her no one was disappointed.

She came to the church with the queen, hence all glances went first to that lofty lady whose charms were still brilliant, like the bright sun before evening; but when they were turned to the bride, all men among dignitaries, the military, the nobles, and citizens whispered, and even loud voices were heard.

"Wonderful, wonderful! That man owes much to his eyes, who has beheld once in life such a woman."

And this was true. Not always in those times was a maiden dressed in white for her marriage, but the young ladies and the assistants arrayed Anulka in white, for such was her wish, and that was the color of her finest robe also. So in white, with a green wreath on her golden hair, and with a face confused a trifle, and pale, with downcast eyes, she, silent, and slender, looked like a snowy swan, or simply like a white lily. Even Yatsek himself, to whom she seemed in some sort a new person, was astonished at sight of her. "In God's name!" said he to himself, "how can I approach her? She is a genuine queen, or entirely an angel with whom it is sinful to speak unless kneeling." And he was almost awestruck. But when at last he and she knelt side by side before the altar, and heard the voice of Father Voynovski full of emotion, as he began with the words: "I knew you both as little children," and joined their hands with his stole, when he heard his own low voice: "I take thee as wife," and the hymn, Veni Creator burst forth a moment later, it seemed to Yatsek that

happiness would burst his bosom, and that all the easier since he was not wearing his armor. He had loved this woman from childhood, and he knew that he loved her, but now, for the first time, he understood how he loved her without measure or limit. And again he began to say to himself: I must die, for if a man during life were to have so much happiness, what more could there be for him in heaven? But he thought that before he died he must thank God; and all at once there flew before the eyes of his soul Turkish warriors in legions, beards, turbans, sashes, crooked sabres, horsetail standards. So from his heart was rent the shout to God: "I will thank to the full, to the full!" And he felt, that for those enemies of the cross and the faith, he would become a destroying lion. That vision lasted only one twinkle, then his breast was filled with a boundless wave of love and rapture.

Meanwhile the ceremony was ended, the retinue moved to the dwelling prepared for the young couple by Stanislav, and ornamented by his comrades in the regiment. For one moment only could Yatsek press to his heart the young Pani Tachevski, for straightway both ran to meet the king and queen, who had come from the church to them. Two high armchairs had been fixed for the royal pair at the table, so, after the blessing, during which the young people knelt before majesty, Yatsek begged the gracious lord and lady to the wedding feast, but the king had to give a refusal.

"Dear comrade," said he, "I should be glad to talk with thee, and still more with thee, my relative," here he turned to Pani Tachevski, "and discuss the coming dowry. I will remain a moment and drink a health to you, but I may not sit down, for I have so much on my head, that every hour now is precious."

"We believe that!" cried a number of voices.

Tachevski seized the feet of the king, who took a filled goblet from the table.

"Gracious gentlemen!" said he, "the health of the young couple!"

A shout was heard: "Vivant! crescant, floreant!" Then the king again spoke,--

"Enjoy your happiness quickly," said he to Tachevski, "for it deserves that, and it

will not be long. Thou shouldst remain here a few days, but then thou must follow on quickly for we shall not wait for thee."

"It is easier for her to hold out without thee, than Vienna without us," said Pan Marek Matchynski, smiling at Yatsek.

"But Lyubomirski is shelling out the Turks there," said one of the hussars.

"I have good news from our men," said the king. "This I have commanded Matchynski to bring, to be read to you, and gladden the hearts of our warriors. It is what the Duke of Lorraine, commander-in-chief for the emperor, writes me of the battle near Presburg."

And he read somewhat slowly, for he read to the nobles in Polish, and the letter was in the French language.

"'The emperor's cavalry advanced with effect and enthusiasm, but the action was ended by the Poles who left no work to the Germans. I cannot find words sufficient to praise the strength, valor, and bearing of the officers and soldiers led by Pan Lyubomirski.[8]

"'The battle,' writes the Duke of Lorraine, 'was a great one, and our glory not small.'"

"We will show that we are not worse," cried the warriors.

"I believe and am confident, but we must hasten, for later letters portend evil. Vienna is barely able to breathe, and all Christianity has its eyes on us. Shall we be there in season?"

"Few regiments have remained here, the main forces are at the Tarnovski Heights waiting, as I have heard, under the hetmans," said Father Voynovski, "but though our hands are needed at Vienna, they are not needed so much as a leader like your Royal Grace."

Sobieski smiled at this and answered,--

"That, word for word, is what the Duke of Lorraine writes. So, gentlemen, keep the

bridles in hand, for any hour I may order the sounding of trumpets."

"When, gracious lord?" called a number of voices.

The king grew impressive in a moment.

"I will send off to-morrow those regiments which are still with me," then he glanced quickly at Tachevski, as if testing him. "Since her grace the queen will go to the Heights with us to see the review there, thou, unless thou ask of us an entirely new office, may remain here, if thou engage to overtake us exactly."

Yatsek, putting his arm around his wife, pushed one step toward the king with her.

"Gracious lord," said he, "if the German empire, or even the kingdom of France were offered me in exchange for this lady, God, who sees my whole heart, knows that I would not accept either, and that I would not give her for any treasure in existence. But God forbid that I should abandon my service, or lose an opportunity, or neglect a war for religion, or desert my own leader for the sake of private happiness. If I did I should despise myself, and she, for I know her, would also despise me. O gracious lord, if ill luck or misfortune were to bar the road and I could not join thee I should burn up from shame and from anguish." Here tears dimmed his eyes, blushes came to his cheeks, and, in a voice trembling from emotion, he added: "To-day I blasphemed before the altar, for I said: 'O God, I will thank to the full, to the full for this.'--But only with my life, with my blood, with my labor could I return thanks for the happiness which has met me. For this very reason I shall ask no new office, and when thou shalt move, gracious leader and king, I will not delay even one day behind thee. I will go at the same hour, though I were to fall on the morrow." And he knelt at the feet of Sobieski, who, bending forward, embraced his head and then answered,--

"Give me more of such men, and the Polish name will go through the world thundering."

Father Voynovski had tears in his eyes, the Bukoyemskis were weeping like

beavers. Emotion and enthusiasm seized every man present.

"On the pagans, for the faith!" roared many voices. And then began rattling of sabres. But when it had grown somewhat quiet Pani Tachevski bent to the ear of her husband and, with pale lips, whispered into it,--

"O Yatsek, wonder not at my tears, for if thou go I may never see thee hereafter--but go!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

Still they remained two days together. The court, it is true, set out the day following, but the queen, with all her court ladies, and a multitude of lay and church dignitaries, followed the king to Tarnovski Heights where the camp was and where a great review had been ordered. The retinue being numerous moved slowly and hence to overtake it was easy. The subsequent advance of the forces, with the king at the head of them, from the boundary to Vienna astonished the world by its swiftness, especially since the king hastened on and arrived before the main army, but to Tarnovski Heights the queen dragged on six days, with her retinue. In two days the Tachevskis came up with the escort. Pani Tachevski took her seat then in a court carriage, and Yatsek hurried on to the camp for the night, to join there his regiment. For the royal pair the time of separation was approaching. On August 22 the king took solemn farewell of his beloved "Marysienka." In the early morning he mounted and marshalled before her the army; next he moved at the head of it to Glivitsi.

People noted that although he always took farewell of the queen with great sorrow, since he loved her as the apple of his eye, and was pained by even a short absence, his face this time was radiant. So the church and lay dignitaries took courage. They knew how tremendous was a war with that enemy, who besides had never advanced with such forces. "The Turks have moved three parts of the world, it is true," said they to themselves, "but if our lord, their greatest crusher and destroyer, goes with

such delight to this struggle, we have no cause for anxiety touching it." And hope filled their bosoms, the sight of the warriors increased it still more, and changed it to perfect confidence in victory. The army, with all the camp followers seemed very considerable. As far as the eye reached the sun shone on helmets, on armor, on sabres, on barrels of muskets and cannon. The glitter was so bright that eyes were dazzled by the excess of it. Rainbow-hued ensigns and banners played in the blue air, above the army. The rolling of drums throughout the foot regiments was mingled with responses from trumpets, crooked horns, and kettledrums, and also the hellish noise of a Janissary orchestra, and the neighing of horses.

At first the train moved toward one side, to afford a free way to all movements of the army, and only then the review began really. The royal carriage halted on a plain not too high, a little to the right of the road by which the regiments were to pass while advancing. In the first carriage sat the queen wearing plumes, laces, and velvets glittering with jewels. She was beautiful and imposing, with the full majesty in her face of a woman who possesses all in life that the most daring designs can imagine, for she had a crown, and the unspeakable love of the most glorious of contemporary monarchs. She, in common with those dignitaries in the suite of the king, felt most certain that when her husband was on horseback for action, he would be followed, as he had been followed at all times, by destruction and triumph. And she felt that at the moment the eyes of all the world from Tsargrad to Rome, Madrid, and Paris, were turned on him that all Christianity was stretching out hands to him, and that only in those iron arms of his warriors did people see rescue. Hence her heart rose with the pride of a woman. "Our might is increasing, and glory will raise us above all other kings," said she in spirit; and therefore, though her husband was leading barely twenty and some thousands of men against countless hosts of Osmanli, her breast was filled with delight and no cloud of alarm or distrust darkened then her white forehead. "Look at the victor, look at your father, the king," said she to her children, who, as little birds fill a nest, filled the carriage--"when he

returns, the world will kneel to him in thanksgiving."

In other carriages were visible the charming features of youthful court ladies, the mitres of bishops, and the dignified, stern faces of senators, who remained at home to manage the government in place of His Majesty. The king himself was with the army, but all could see him very clearly on the height at some distance, among hetmans and generals, where he produced the impression of a giant on horseback. The army was to pass a little lower, before his feet, as it seemed to spectators.

First there moved forward, with a deep, rolling sound and the biting of chain-links, Pan Kantski's artillery; after it went foot regiments with a musket on the shoulder of each man, under officers with sabres on straps, and carrying long canes with which they kept all ranks in order. Those regiments marched four abreast and seemed moving fortresses, their step preserved time and was thundering. Each regiment when passing the carriage of Her Majesty gave a loud shout to salute her, and lowered its ensign in homage. Among them were some with a costlier outfit than others, and showing a form beyond common in dignity, but the most showy regiment of all was made up of Kashubians in blue coats and yellow belts for ammunition. These Kashubians, large and strong fellows, were so carefully chosen that each seemed a brother to the next man; the heavy muskets moved in the mighty hands of those warriors as would walking-sticks. At the sound of the fife they halted before the king as one person, and presented arms with such accuracy that he smiled with delight, and the dignitaries said to one another: "Eh! To strike upon these men will not be healthy for even the Sultan's own body-guard. Those are real lions, not people!"

But immediately after them moved squadrons of light-horse. One might have thought them real centaurs to such a degree had each man and horse become one single entity. These were undegenerate sons of those horsemen who in their day had trampled all Germany, cleaving apart with their sabres and with horse hoofs whole

regiments, nay, entire armies of Luther's adherents. The heaviest foreign cavalry, if only equal in number could not oppose them, and the lightest could not escape from them by fleeing. The king himself had said of those men when at Hotsim: "If they are led to the enemy they will cut down all in front of them, as a mower cuts grass at his labor." And though at this moment they advanced past the carriages slowly, each person, even one quite unknowing in warfare, divined very quickly that at the right moment nothing save a hurricane could surpass them in swiftness, power to whirl, strike down, and overthrow. Crooked trumpets and drums went on thundering in front of them, while they marched forward, squadron after squadron, with drawn sabres which seemed flaming swords in the quivering sunlight. When they had passed the court carriages they advanced like a wave starting suddenly, going first at a trot which turned soon to a gallop, and, when they had outlined a great giant circle, they passed again, and this time they rushed like a tempest and near the queen's carriage; but while they were doing this they shouted, "Slay! Kill!" and in extended right hands held their sabres pointed forward as if in attacking, on horses whose nostrils were distended to the utmost, with waving manes, as if wild from the impetus of their onrush. And they passed thus a second time, and then at the third turn they, without breaking ranks, stood still on a sudden. They did this so accurately, so evenly, and with such agreement that foreigners, of whom at that court there were many, and especially those who saw then for the first time Polish cavalry in action, gazed at one another with amazement, as if each man were questioning his own eyesight.

When they had vanished the field glittered with dragoons everywhere and bloomed like a blossom. Some of those regiments had appeared under Pan Yablonovski, some had been assembled by magnates, and one by the king, from his own private fortune; this was commanded by Pan de Maligny, Her Majesty's brother.

In the dragoons served common folk for the greater part, but men trained to riding from childhood, experienced in fighting of various sorts, stubborn under fire, less

terrible at close quarters than nobles, but disciplined and most enduring of military labor.

But the greatest delight for the eyes and the spirit began only when the hussars started forward. They moved on in calmness as was proper for regiments of such value; their lances pointing upward seemed a forest, and at the points, moved by the light breeze, was a rainbow cloud of streamers. Their horses were heavier than those in other squadrons; their steel armor was inlaid with gold; on their shoulders were wings, in which the feathers, even when moving slowly, made that sound heard in forests among branches. The great dignity, and, as it were, the pride which issued forth from them, made so deep an impression that the queen and court ladies, the senators, and above all, foreign visitors, rose in their carriages to see them more accurately. There was something tremendous in that march, for it came to the mind of each man unwittingly, that when an avalanche of iron like that should rush forward it would crush, grind, and drive apart all things in front of it, and that there was no human strength which could stop it. And this was undoubted. Not so distant at that time was the day when three thousand such horsemen had rubbed into dust Swedish legions five times their own number; still less remote was that other day when one squadron of the same kind had passed, like a spirit of destruction, through the whole army of Karl Gustav; and quite recent was the day when at Hotsim those same hussars under that same king there present had trampled in the earth Turkish guards formed of Janissaries, as easily as standing wheat in the open. Many of the men who had shared in that shattering of the enemy at Hotsim were serving then under the banners of that day, and these warriors, proud, calm, and confident, were starting now toward the walls of a foreign capital to reap a new harvest.

Terror and strength seemed the soul of that body. An afternoon breeze rose behind them on a sudden, whistled in their streamers, blew forward the waving manes of their horses, and made so mighty a sound in the wings at the shoulders of each mounted warrior, that the horses from Spain which drew the court carriages rose on

their haunches. The squadrons approached to a line twenty yards from the carriages, turned to one side and marched past in squadrons. Then it was that Pani Tachevski saw her husband for the last time before the expedition. He rode in the second rank at the edge of the squadron, all in iron and winged armor, the ear pieces of his helmet hid his cheeks altogether. His large golden bay Turkish stallion bore him on easily despite the weighty armor, throwing his head upward, rattling his bit, and snorting loudly, as if in good omen for the rider. Yatsek turned his iron-covered head toward his wife, and moved his lips as if whispering, but though no distinct word reached her ears she divined that he was giving her the last "Fare thee well!" and such an impulse of yearning and love seized her heart that if she could have, at the cost of her life, changed at that moment to a swallow she would have perched on his shoulder, or on the flag of his lance point, and gone with him; she would not have stopped for one twinkle to calculate.

"Fare thee well, Yatsek! God guard thee!" cried she, stretching her hands to him. And her eyes were tear-bedewed while he rode past in solemnity, gleaming in the sunlight, and, as it were, rendered sacred by the service imposed on him.

* * * * * * *

Behind this the regiment of Prince Alexander came up and marched past still others, equally terrible and equally brilliant Then other regiments described a great circle and halted on the plain almost in the places from which they had started in the time of reviewing, but now in marching order.

* * * * * * *

From the carriages on the height the eye could embrace all the regiments very nearly. Far away and near by were seen crimson uniforms, glittering armor, the flashing of swords, the upturned forest of lances, the broad cloud of streamers, and above them great banners like giant blossoms. From the regiments standing nearer, the breeze brought the odor of horse sweat, and the shouts of commanders, the shrill

note of fifes, and the deep sound of kettledrums. But in those shouts, in those sounds, in that delight and that eagerness for battle, there was something triumphant. A perfect confidence in the victory of the cross above the crescent,--that confidence was flowing through every heart in those legions.

* * * * * * *

The king remained yet for a moment at the carriage of Her Majesty, but when a blessing had been given him with a cross and with relics by the bishop of Cracow, he rushed at a gallop to the army. The air was rent suddenly by the keen sound of trumpets, while masses of foot and of cavalry stirred, began slowly to lengthen, and finally those masses moved, all of them, westward. In advance were the banners of the light horse, behind them hussars; the dragoons closed the movement.

* * * * * * *

The prince bishop of Cracow raised with both hands the cross, holding relics as high above his head as was possible:

"O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have mercy on Thy people!"

* * * * * * *

Just then more than twenty thousand breasts raised the anthem which Pan Kohovski had composed for that moment:

"For Thee, O pure Lady, O Mother Immaculate, We go to defend Christ,

Our Lord.

"For thee, O dear country, For you, O white eagles, We will crush every enemy.

On the Field of Glory."

FOOTNOTES:

Footnote 1: Kromer.

Footnote 2: His pets.

Footnote 3: On Saint Stephen's day people used to cast various kinds of grain at the priest at the altar in memory of the stoning of that saint.

Footnote 4: The Elector just mentioned, i. e., the Elector of Brandenburg.

Footnote 5: Among the Poles and Slavs generally death is represented as a woman.

Footnote 6: This man is mentioned on page 224.

Footnote 7: Jewish pronunciation of vivant.

Footnote 8: Carolus Dux Lotharingiae Joanni III, Poloniae Regi, etc. Julius 31, 1683.

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