

**ГЕНРИК
СЕНКЕВИЧ**

ON THE FIELD
OF GLORY

Генрик Сенкевич
On the Field of Glory

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Henryk Sienkiewicz
On the Field of Glory: An Historical
Novel of the Time of King John Sobieski

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.

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 Tsypryanovitch 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 Tsypryanovitch 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 Stanislaw 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 Stanislaw 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 Stanislaw, -

"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 Stanislaw 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 Jolkiewskis 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

¹ Kromer.

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 Stanislaw, -

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

"Gracious maiden," said Stanislaw, 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 Stanislaw, "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 Stanislaw, 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; Stanislaw 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."

Stanislaw 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 Stanislaw 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 Stanislaw 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 Tsypryanovitch, 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 Stanislaw, "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 Stanislaw, 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 Batory; 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 Tsypryanovitch, 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 Tsypryanovitch 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."

"Tsypryanovitch? 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, Yatus!" 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 Tsypryanovitch 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 amariorum 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.

² His pets.

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 Stanislaw interrupted them, -

"I will serve you first."

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

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

Again a quarrel began, in which Stanislaw 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 Stanislaw, 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 Stanislaw 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 Stanislaw.

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 Stanislaw.

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 Stanislaw, 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 Stanislaw.

"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 Stanislaw. "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 Stanislaw 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."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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