

ГЕНРИК СЕНКЕВИЧ

IN VAIN

Генрик Сенкевич

In Vain

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Henryk Sienkiewicz

In Vain

INTRODUCTORY

"In Vain," the first literary work of Sienkiewicz, was written before he had passed the eighteenth year of his life and while he was studying at Warsaw.

Though not included in his collected works by the author, this book will be received with much favor; of this I feel certain.

The first book of the man who wrote "With Fire and Sword" and "Quo Vadis" will interest those of his admirers who live in America and the British Empire. These people are counted at present by millions.

This volume contains pictures of student life drawn by a student who saw the life which he describes in the following pages. This student was a person of exceptional power and exceptional qualities, hence the value of that which he gives us.

JEREMIAH CURTIN.

*Jerusalem, Palestine,
March 8, 1899.*

CHAPTER I

"And this is Kieff!"

Thus spoke to himself a young man named Yosef Shvarts, on entering the ancient city, when, roused by toll-gate formalities, he saw himself unexpectedly among buildings and streets.

The heart quivered in him joyfully. He was young, he was rushing forward to life; and so he drew into his large lungs as much fresh air as he could find place for, and repeated with a gladsome smile, —

"And this is Kieff!"

The Jew's covered wagon rolled forward, jolting along on the prominent pavement stones. It was painful to Shvarts to sit under the canvas, so he directed the Jew to turn to the nearest inn, while he himself walked along by the side of the wagon.

Torrents of people, as is usual in a city, were moving in various directions; shops were glittering with a show of wares; carriages were passing one after another; merchants, generals, soldiers, beggars, monks pushed along before the eyes of the young man.

It was market-day, so the city had taken on the typical complexion of gatherings of that sort. There was nothing unconsidered there; no movement, no word seemed to be wasted. The merchant was going to his traffic, the official to his office, the criminal to deceit, — all were hastening on with some well-defined object; all pushed life forward, thinking of the morrow, hastening toward something. Above that uproar and movement was a burning atmosphere, and the sun was reflected in the gleaming panes of great edifices with just the same intensity as in any little cottage window.

"This uproar is life," thought Shvarts, who had never been in Kieff before, or in any large city.

And he was thinking how immensely distant was life in a little town from the broad scene of activity in a great city, when a well-known voice roused him from that meditation.

"Yosef, as God lives!"

Shvarts looked around, gazed some seconds at the man who called him by name; at last he opened his arms widely, and exclaimed, —

"As God lives, it is Gustav!"

Gustav was a man small and thin, about twenty-three years of age; long hair of a chestnut color fell almost to his shoulders; his short reddish mustache cut even with his lip made him seem older than he was in reality.

"What art thou doing, Yosef? Why hast thou come? To the University, hast thou not?"

"Yes."

"Well done. Life is wretched for the man without knowledge," said Gustav, as he panted. "What course wilt thou choose?"

"I cannot tell yet; I will see and decide."

"Think over it carefully. I have been here a year now, and have had a chance to look at things coolly. I regret much a choice made too hastily, but what is one to do afterward? Too late to turn back, to go on there is lack of power. It is easier to commit a folly than correct it. To-morrow I will go with thee to the University; meanwhile, if thou hast no lodgings, let the Jew take thy things to my room, it is not far from here. Thou mayst begin with me; when thou art tired of me, look for another man."

Yosef accepted Gustav's offer, and in a few moments they were in the narrow lodgings of the student.

"Ei, it is long since we have seen each other. We finished our school course a year ago," said Gustav, putting aside Yosef's small trunk and bundle. "A year is some time. What hast thou done this whole year?"

"I have been with my father, who would not let me come to the University."

"What harm could that be to him?"

"He was a good man, though ignorant – a blacksmith."

"But he has let thee come now?"

"He died."

"He did well," said Gustav, coughing. "The cursed asthma is tormenting me these six months. Dost wonder at my hard breathing? Thou too wilt breathe hard when thou hast bent over books as I have. Day after day without rest for a moment. And fight with poverty as one dog with another. – Hast money?"

"I have. I sold the house and property left by my father. I have two thousand rubles."

"Splendid! For thee that will be plenty. My position is poverty! Oh the cursed asthma! Oi! that is true. One must learn. Barely a little rest in the evening; the day at lectures, the night at work. Not time enough for sleep. That is the way with us. When thou enterest our life, thou wilt see what a University is. To-day I will take thee to the club, or simply to the restaurant; thou must learn to know our students immediately. Today, right away thou wilt go with me."

Gustav circled about the room without intermission; he panted and coughed. To look at his bent shoulders, sunken visage, and long hair, one might have taken him rather for a man tortured by joyous life than by labor; but the printed volumes and manuscripts in piles, the poverty in the furnishing of the room, gave more proof than was needed to show that the occupant belonged to that species of night birds who wither away while bent over books, and die thinking whether a certain syllable should or should not be accented.

But Yosef breathed the atmosphere of the chamber with full breast; for him that was a world at once new and peculiar. "Who knows," thought he, "what ideas are flashing through the heads of dwellers in fourth and fifth stories? Who knows what a future those garrets are preparing for science?"

"Thou wilt make the acquaintance to-day of many of our fellows," said Gustav, drawing out from beneath his bed a one-legged samovar and putting a broken dish under it in place of the two other legs. "But let not this evening offend thee," continued the student, as he let charcoal drop into the samovar. "I will make tea. Let not heads partly crazy offend thee. When thou hast looked round about at the city, thou wilt discover that there is no lack of fools here as in other places; but it moves forward with no laggard steps. There is no lack among us of originals, though there is much that is empty and colorless. This last is ridiculous, and the dullest of all the stupidities. In some heads there are blazes of light, in other heads darkness like that out of doors at this moment."

Silence reigned for a time in the chamber; there was no noise there save that made by Gustav while puffing and blowing at the samovar. In fact, night had been coming gradually, on the walls and ceiling of the room an increasing darkness was falling; the fiery circle reflected from the samovar widened or narrowed as Gustav blew or stopped blowing. At last the water began to sound, to hiss, to sputter. Gustav lighted a candle.

"Here is tea for thee. I will go now to the lecture," continued he; "wait thou here, or better sleep on my bed. When thy time to pay money comes, thou wilt have also to look after lectures. The work is dreary, but there is no escape from it. Student life has its bitter side, but why mention this in advance? Our student world and the rest of society are entirely separate. People here neither like nor receive us, and we quarrel with all persons, even with one another. Oh, life here is difficult! If thou fall ill, no man, who is not a student, will reach a hand to thee. This is the fate of us poor fellows; moreover people are angry because we play no comedies, we call things by their names."

"Thou seest objects in black," remarked Yosef.

"Black or not black," answered Gustav, with bitterness, "thou wilt see. But I tell thee that thou wilt not rest on roses. Youth has both rights and demands. They will laugh in thy eyes at these rights, these demands; they will say that thou art not cooked enough, they will call thy wants exaltation. But devil take it, the name matters little if the thing it describes hurts or pains thee. As to that thou wilt see. – Pour tea for thyself, and lie down to rest. I shall be here in an hour; and now give me that hat, and good-by!"

For a while the panting, puffing, and steps of Gustav were heard on the stairway. Yosef was alone.

Those words of Gustav impressed his friend strangely. Yosef remembered him as different. To-day a certain disappointment and peevishness were heard in his voice, mental gloom of a certain kind broke through those words half interrupted, half sad. Formerly he had been healthy in mind and in body; to-day his breathing was difficult, in his movements and speech appeared wonderful feverishness, like that of a man who is exhausted.

"Has life tortured him that much already?" thought Yosef. "Then one must struggle here, go against the current somewhat; but this poor fellow had not the strength, it seems. A man must conquer in this place. It is clear that the world does not lay an over-light hand on us. Devil take it! the question is no easy one. Gustav is in some sort too misanthropic; he must exaggerate rather easily. But he is no idler and must go forward. Perhaps this is only a mask, the misanthropy, under which he finds his position more convenient and safer. But really, if one must take things by storm or perish? Ha, then I will go through!" exclaimed the young man, with strength, though in this interjection there was more resolution than passion.

An hour after this monologue panting was heard on the stairway a second time, and Gustav entered, or rather pushed in.

"Now follow!" cried he. "Thou art about to enter the vortex of student life; today thou wilt see its gladder aspect. But lose no time!"

While speaking, he turned his cap in his hand, and cast his eyes on every side; finally he went to a small table, and taking a comb began to arrange his long yellow, or rather his long faded hair.

At last they went out to the street.

At that time in Kieff there were restaurants where students assembled. Circumstances were such that it was not possible to live with the city society. Those various city circles were unwilling to receive young persons whom the future alone was to form into people. On the student side lack of steadiness, violence of speech, insolence, and other native traits usual to youth were not very willing to bend themselves to social requirements; as to the country, that furnished its social contingent only in winter, or during the time of the contracts. So the University was a body entirely confined to itself, living a life of books in the day, and leading a club life at night. For many reasons there was more good in this than evil, for though young men went into the world without polish, they had energy and were capable of action. Wearied and worn-out individuals were not found among them.

Our acquaintances passed through the street quickly, and turned toward the gleaming windows of a restaurant. Under the light of the moon it was possible to distinguish the broad, strong figure of Yosef near the bent shoulders and large head of Gustav. The latter hurried on in advance somewhat, conversing with Yosef or with himself; at last he halted under a window, seized the sill, and drawing himself up examined the interior carefully. Finally he dropped down, and said, while wiping off whitewash from his knees, —

"She is not there."

"Who is not there?"

"Either she has been there or she will not come."

"Who is she?"

"What o'clock is it?"

"Ten o'clock. Whom art thou looking for through the window?"

"The widow."

"The widow? Who is she?"

"I fear that she is sick."

"Is she thy acquaintance?"

"Evidently. If I did not know her I should not be occupied with her."

"Well, that is clear," answered Yosef. "Let us go in."

He raised the door-latch; they entered.

A smoky, hot atmosphere surrounded them. At some distance in the hall faces of various ages were visible. Amid clouds of smoke, which dimmed the light of the wall lamps, and outbursts of laughter, wandered the tones of a piano, as if wearied and indifferent. The piano was accompanied by a guitar, on which thrummed at intervals a tall, slender youth, with hair cut close to his skull and with scars on his face. He played with long fingers on the strings carelessly, fixed his great blue eyes on the ceiling, and was lost in meditation.

The person sitting at the piano had barely grown out of childhood. He had a milk-white complexion, dark hair combed toward the back of his head, sweetness on his red lips, and melancholy in his eyes. He was delicate, of a slight build of body, and good looking. It was evident that he had played a long time, for red spots on both cheeks showed great weariness.

With their backs to the light stood a number of men from the Pinsk region, all strong as oaks, and at the same time so eager for music of every sort given in the restaurant that they formed a circle around the player, drooped their heads, and listened with sighs or delight.

Other young fellows were on benches or in armchairs; a few tender girls, of the grasshopper order who sing away a summer, circled here and there. It was noisy; goblets clinked in places. In the room next the hall some were playing cards madly, and through a half-open door the face of one player was visible. Just then he was lighting a cigar at a candle standing on the corner of a table, and the flame either smothered or rising for an instant shone on his sharply cut features.

The woman at the refreshment counter examined near the light, with perfect indifference, the point of the pen with which she entered down daily sales; at her side, leaning on a table, slumbered her assistant in wondrous oblivion. A cat sitting on a corner of the counter opened his eyes at moments, and then closed them with an expression of philosophic calm and dignity.

Yosef cast a glance around the assembly.

"Ho! How art thou, Yosef?" called a number of voices.

"I am well. How are ye?"

"Hast come for good?"

"For good."

"I present him as a member of this respected society. Do thou on thy part know once for all the duty of coming here daily, and the privilege of never sleeping in human fashion," said Gustav.

"As a member? So much the better! Soon thou wilt hear a speech. – Hei, there, Augustinovich, begin!"

From that room of card-players came a young man with stooping shoulders and a head almost bald, ugly in appearance. He threw his cap on a table, and sitting in an armchair began, —

"Gentlemen! If ye will not remain quiet, I shall begin to speak learnedly, and I know, my dear fellows, that for you there is nothing on earth so offensive as learned discourses. In Jove's name! Silence, I say, silence! I shall begin to discourse learnedly."

Indeed, under the influence of the threat silence reigned for a season. The speaker looked around in triumph, and continued, —

"Gentlemen! If we have met here, we have met to seek in rest itself the remembrance of bitter moments. ["Very well."] Some one will say that we meet here every night. ["Very well."] I come here nightly, and I do not dream of denying it; I do not deny, either, that I am here on this occasion! [Applause; the speaker brightens and continues.] Silence! Were I forced to conclude that every effort of mine which is directed toward giving a practical turn to our meetings is shattered by general frivolousness, for I can call it general ["You can, you can!"], not directed by the current of universal agreement which breaks up in its very beginning ["Consider, gentlemen, in its very beginning"] the uniform efforts of individuals – if efforts marked by the regular object of uniting disconnected thoughts into some organic whole, will never issue from the region of imagination to the more real field of action, then, gentlemen, I am the first, and I say that there are many others with

me who will agree to oppose the sense of the methods of our existence so far [Applause], and will take other methods ["Yes, yes!"] obliging, if not all, at least the chosen ones [Applause]."

"What does this mean?" asked Yosef.

"A speech," answered Gustav, shrugging his shoulders.

"With what object?"

"But how does that concern any one?"

"What kind of person is he?"

"His name is Augustinovich. He has a good head, but at this moment he is drunk, his words are confused. He knows, however, what he wants, and, as God lives, he is right."

"What does he want?"

"That we should not meet here in vain, that our meetings should have some object. But those present laugh at the object and the speech. Of necessity the change would bring dissension into the freedom and repose which thus far have reigned in these meetings."

"And what object does Augustinovich wish to give them?"

"Literary, scientific."

"That would be well."

"I have told him that he is right. If some one else were to make the proposal, the thing would pass, perhaps."

"Well, but in his case."

"On everything that he touches he leaves traces of his own ridiculousness and humiliation. Have a care, Yosef! Thou in truth art not like him in anything so far as I know, but here any man's feet may slip, if not in one, in another way."

Gustav looked with misty eyes on Augustinovich, shrugged his shoulders, and continued, —

"Fate fixed itself wonderfully on that man. I tell thee that he is a collection of all the capacities, but he has little character. He has lofty desires, but his deeds are insignificant, an eternal dissension. There is no balance between his desires and his strength, hence he attains no result."

A number of Yosef's acquaintances approached; at the glass conversation grew general. Yosef inquired about the University.

"Do all the students live together?"

"Impossible," answered one of the Lithuanians. "There are people here of all the most varied conceptions, hence there are various coteries."

"That is bad."

"Not true! I admit unity as to certain higher objects; the unity of life in common is impossible, so there is no use in striving for it."

"But the German Universities?"

"In those are societies which live in themselves only. A life of feelings and thoughts, at least among us, should agree with practice; therefore dissension in feelings and thoughts produces dissension in practice."

"Then will you never unite?"

"That, again, is something different. We shall unite in the interest of the University, or in that which concerns all. For that matter, I think that the contradictions which appear prove our vitality; they are a sign that we live, feel, and think. In that is our unity; that which separates unites us."

"Under what banner do you stand, then?"

"Labor and suffering. We have no distinguishing name. Those who are peasant enthusiasts call us 'baker's apprentices.'"

"How so?"

"According to facts. Life will teach thee what these mean. Each one of us tries to live where there is a bakery, to become acquainted with the baker, and gain credit with him. That is our method;

he trusts us. The majority of us eat nothing warm, but a cake on credit thou wilt get as long as thou wishest."

"That is pleasant!"

"Besides our coterie, which is not united by very strong bonds, there are peasant enthusiasts. Antonevich organized and formed them. Rylski and Stempkowski led them for a time, but today these are all fools who know not what they want, they talk Little Russian and drink common vodka – that is the whole matter."

"And what other coteries are there?"

"Clearly outlined, there are no more; but there are various shades. Some are connected by a communion of scientific ideas, others by a common social standpoint. Thou wilt find here democrats, aristocrats, liberals, ultra-montanes, frolickers, women-hunters, idlers, if thou wish, and finally sunburnt laborers."

"Who passes for the strongest head?"

"Among students?"

"Yes."

"That depends on the branch. Some say that Augustinovich knows much; I will add that he does not know it well. For connected solid work and science Gustav is distinguished."

"Ah!"

"But they talk variously about him. Some cannot endure him. By living with him thou wilt estimate the man best, – for example, his relations with the widow. That is a sentimental bit of conduct; another man would not have acted as he has. Indeed, it is not easy to get on with her now."

"I have heard Gustav speak of her, but tell me once for all, what sort of woman is she?"

"She is a young person acquainted with all of us. Her history is a sad one. She fell in love with Potkanski, a jurist, and loved him perhaps madly. I do not remember those times – I remember Potkanski, however. He was a gifted fellow, very wealthy and industrious; in his day he was the idol of his comrades. How he came to know Helena, I cannot tell you; it is explained variously. This only is certain, that they loved each other to the death. She was not more than eighteen years of age. At last Potkanski determined to marry her. It is difficult to describe what his family did to prevent him, but Potkanski, an energetic man, stuck to his point, and married her despite every hindrance. Their married life lasted one year. He fell ill of typhoid on a sudden, and died leaving her on the street as it were, for his family seized all his property. A child which was living when he died, died also soon after. The widow was left alone, and had it not been for Gustav – well, she would have perished."

"What did Gustav do?"

"Gustav did wonders. With wretched means he prosecuted the Potkanskis. God knows whether he would have won the case, for that is a family of magnates, but he did this much: to avoid scandal, they engaged to pay the widow a slight life annuity."

"He acquitted himself bravely!"

"Of course he did, of course he did! Leave that to him! What energy! And remember it was during his first year at the University, without acquaintances, in a strange city, without means. And it is this way, my dear: a rich man can, a poor man must, help himself."

"But what obligation had he toward the widow?"

"He was Potkanski's friend, but that is still little; he loved her before she became Potkanski's wife, perhaps, but held aloof; now he makes no concealment."

"But she?"

"Oh, from the time of the misfortunes through which she passed the woman has fallen into utter torpor; she has become insane simply. She does not know what is happening to her, she is indifferent to everything. But beyond doubt thou wilt see her on this occasion, for she comes here every evening."

"And with what object?"

"I say that she is a maniac. The report is that she made the acquaintance of Potkanski here, so now she does not believe, it seems, that he is dead, and she goes around everywhere, as maniacs do usually. In fact, were he to rise from the dead, and not go to her straightway, she would surely find him here, nowhere else. We remind her, perhaps, of Potkanski; many students used to visit them."

"Does Gustav permit her to come here?"

"Potkanski never would have permitted her to come, but Gustav does not forbid her anything."

"How does she treat Gustav?"

"Like a table, a bench, a plate, or a ball of thread. She seems not to see him, but she does not avoid him, – she is always indifferent, apathetic. That must pain him, but it is his affair. – Ah! there she is! that woman coming in on the right."

When the widow entered, it grew somewhat silent. The appearance of that mysterious figure always produced an impression. Of stature a little more than medium, slender; she had a long face, bright blond hair, and dark eyes; her shoulders and bosom were rather slight, but she had the round plumpness of maiden forms; a forehead thrown back in a way scarcely discernible. She was pensive, and as dignified as if of marble. Her eyes, deeply set beneath her forehead, as it were in a shadow, were pencilled above with one delicate arch of brow. Those eyes were marvellous, steel-colored; they gleamed like polished metal, but that was a genuine light of steel. It was light and nothing more; under the glitter warmth and depth of thought were lacking. One might have said of those eyes, "They look, but they see not." They gave no idea of an object, they only reflected it. They were cold beyond description; we will add that their lids almost never blinked, but the pupils possessed a certain movement as if investigating, inquiring, seeking; still the movement was mechanical.

The rest of the widow's face answered to her eyes. Her mouth was pressed downward a little, as might be the case in a statue; the complexion monotonous, dull, pale, had a swarthy tinge. She was neither very charming nor very beautiful; she was accurately pretty.

This in the woman was wonderful, that though her face was torpid apparently, she had in her whole person something which attracted the masculine side of human nature inexplicably. In that lay her charm. She was statuesque to the highest degree, but to the highest degree also a woman. She attracted and also repelled. Gustav felt this best. It was difficult to reconcile with that cold torpor the impression which she produced, which seemed as it were not of her, but aside from her.

She was like a sleeping flower; pain had so put her to sleep. In reality the blows which she had received were like strokes of an axe on the head. Let us remember that in the career of the woman brief moments of happiness were closed by two coffins. As a maiden she had loved; he whom she had loved was no longer alive. As a wife she had given birth to a child; the child was dead. That which law had given her, which had been the cause and effect of her life, had vanished. Thenceforth she ceased to live, she only existed. Imagine a plant which is cut at the top and the root; such was Helena. Torn from the past and debarred from the future, at first she bore within her a dim belief that a shameful injustice had been wrought on her. At the moment of her pain she threw out, it is difficult to know at whom, this question, as unfathomable as the bottomless pit: Why has this happened? No answer came from the blue firmament, or the earth, or the fields, or the forest; the injustice remained injustice. The sun shone and the birds sang on as before. Then that unfortunate heart withdrew into itself with its own pain and became deadened.

No answer came, but her mind grew diseased – she lost belief in the death of her husband, she thought that he had taken the weeping child in his arms and gone somewhere, but that he might return any moment. Then, altogether incapable of another thought, she sought him with that bitter mechanical movement of the eyes. She went to the restaurant, thinking to find him there where she had made his acquaintance.

Unfortunately she did not die, but found a valiant arm which strove to snatch her from error, and a breast which wished to give her warmth. The effort was vain, but it saved her life. Gustav's love secured her rescue and protection, as it were by the tenure of a spider-web which did not let her go

from the earth. His voice cried to her, "Stay," and though there was no echo in her, she remained, without witness of herself, indifferent, a thing, not a human being.

Such was the widow.

She entered the room and stood near the door, like a stone statue, in gloomy majesty. It was warm and smoky around her, the last sounds of a song were quivering in the air yet. A little coarse and a little dissolute was the song, and on that impure background bloomed the widow like a water-lily on a turbid pool.

Silence came. They respected her in that place. In her presence even Augustinovich became endurable. Some remembered Potkanski, others inclined their heads before her misfortune. There were also those who revered her beauty. The assembly assumed in her presence its seemliest aspect.

Gustav brought up an armchair to Pani Helena, and taking her warm shawl went to a corner to Yosef, who, attracted and astonished, turned his gleaming eyes at the widow.

Gustav began a conversation with him.

"That is she," said he, in an undertone.

"I understand."

"Do not show thyself to her much. The poor woman! every new face brings her disappointment, she is always looking for her husband."

"Art thou acquainted with her long?"

"This is the second year. I was a witness and best man at Potkanski's wedding." Gustav smiled bitterly. "Since his death I see her daily."

"Vasilkevich says that thou hast given her aid and protection."

"I have, and I have not; some one had to attend to that, and I occupied myself with it; but such protection as mine – Do what is possible, work, fly, run – misery upon misery! so that sometimes despair seizes hold of a man."

"But the family?"

"What family?"

"His."

"They injure her!" cried Gustav, with violence.

"But they are rich, are they not?"

"Aristocrats! Hypocrites! They and I have not finished yet. They will remember long the injustice done to this dove. Listen to me, Yosef. Were a little child of that family to beg a morsel of bread of me from hunger, I would rather throw the bread to a dog."

"Oh, a romance!"

"Wrong me not, Yosef. I am poor, I waste no words. Potkanski when in the hospital regained consciousness just before death, and said, 'Gustav, to thee I leave my wife; care for her.' I answered, 'I will care for her.' 'Thou wilt not let her die of hunger?' 'I will not,' said I. 'Let no one offend her; take vengeance on any one who tries to do her an injury.' 'As God is merciful in life to me, I will avenge her,' said I. He quenched after that, like a candle. There thou hast the whole story."

"Not the whole story, not all, brother!"

"Vasilkevich told thee the rest. Very well! I will repeat the same to thee. I have no one on earth, neither father nor mother. I myself am in daily want, and she alone binds me to life." He indicated the widow with his eyes.

And here Yosef, little experienced yet, had a chance to estimate what passion is when it rises in a youthful breast and adds fire to one's blood. That dry and bent Gustav seemed to him at that moment to gain strength and vigor; he seemed to him loftier, more manly; he shook his hair as a lion shakes his mane, and on his face a flush appeared.

"Well, gentlemen," began Vasilkevich, "the hour is late, and sleep is not awaiting all of us after leaving this meeting-place. One more song, and then whoso wishes may say his good-night."

He of the maiden face who sat at the piano struck some well-known notes, then a few youthful voices sounded, but afterward a whole chorus of them raised the song dear to students, "Gaudeamus" (Let us rejoice).

Yosef went nearer the piano than others. He stood with his side face turned to the widow, under the light; but the lamp hanging near the wall cast his profile in one line of light. After a while the widow's eyes fell on that line, connecting it unquietly with her own thoughts. On a sudden she rose, as pale as marble, with a feverish gleam in her eyes, stretched forth her arms, and cried, —

"My Kazimir, I have found thee!"

In her voice were heard hope, alarm, joy, and awakening. All were silent. Every eye turned toward Yosef, and a quiver ran through those who had known Potkanski. In the light and shade that tall, strong figure seemed a repetition of the dead man.

"I was not careful," muttered Gustav, on his way home about daybreak. "H'm! well, her trouble has passed, but she was excited! He is really like him — The devils take it! But the cursed asthma stifles me to-day."

CHAPTER II

Yosef meditated long over the choice of his course. "I have given my clear word of honor not to waste myself in life, therefore I meditate," said he to Vasilkevich.

And here it must be confessed that the University roused him in no common manner. From various points of the world youth journeyed thither, like lines of storks. Some were entering to satisfy their mental thirst, others were going away. Some hurried in to gain knowledge as bees gather honey. They assembled, they scattered, they went in crowds, they drew from science, they drew from themselves, they drew from life. They gave animation and they received it, they spared life or they squandered it, they pressed forward, they halted, they fell, they conquered, and they were broken with their lives. Bathing in that sea, some of them were drowned, others swam to shore. Movement, uproar, activity dominated immensely.

The University was like a general ovarium where brains were to be propagated. It opened every year, giving forth ripe fruits, and taking in straightway new nurslings. Men were born there a second time. It was beautiful to see how youth, like waves of water, rolled forth to the world yearly, bearing light to the ignorant, as it were provisions to the human field. To such a sea the boat of life brought Yosef. Where was he to attach himself? Various courses of study, like harbors, enticed him. Whither was he to turn? He meditated long; at last he sailed in.

He chose the medical course.

"Happen what may, I must be rich," said he, deciding the question of choice.

But this decision was only because Yosef, with his open mind, had immense regard for the secrets of science. Both literature and law attracted him, but natural sciences he looked on as the triumph of human thought. He had brought even from school this opinion of those sciences. In his school there had been a young teacher of chemistry, a great enthusiast, who, placing his hand on his heart, spoke thus one day to those of his pupils who were finishing their course, —

"Believe me, my boys, except natural science there is nothing but guesswork."

It is true that the prefect of the school while closing religious exercises, affirmed that only the science of the Church can bring man to everlasting happiness. At this Yosef, whom the prefect had already called a "vile heretic," made such an ugly grimace that he roused the laughter of all who were present, but he drew down on his own head thunders partly deserved.

So he chose the medical course.

Vasilkevich influenced him in this regard. Vasilkevich, a student himself, had, rightly or wrongly, an immense influence on his comrades. It happened that at a students' talk a certain grammarian, a philologist, showed with less truth than hypocrisy that a man given to science should devote himself to it exclusively, forget the world, forget happiness, and incarnate himself in science, — be simply its expression, its basis, its word. In this deduction there was more of false enthusiasm and stiltedness than sincerity. "People tell us," continued the speaker, "that an Icelandic fisherman, who had forgotten himself in gazing at the aurora borealis, did not guard against currents. The waters bore him away to deep places, and he, with eyes fixed on those northern lights, became entirely ruddy in their gleams, till at last the spirit of the abyss bore him away and confined him under the glassy wave, but in the fisherman's eyes the lights remained pictured.

"There is science and life!" added he. "The man who has once inclined his forehead before science may let the waves of life bear him to any depth, the light will remain with him."

There are principles in the world which one does not recognize, but to come out against them a man needs no small share of courage. So among students one and another were silent, but Vasilkevich panted angrily and rose from his seat; at last he burst out, —

"Tfu! empty words! Let a German consort himself in that way with science, not us! In my mind science is for men, not men for science. Let the German turn himself into a parchment. Thy

fisherman was a fool. If he had worked with his oar, he might have seen the lights and brought fish to his children. But again look at the question in this way: Poor people suffer and perish from hunger and cold, and wilt thou tear thyself free of the world and be for men a burden instead of an assistance?

"Oi, Tetvin, Tetvin!" This was the name of the previous speaker. "Consider the sense, not the sound of thy words. Thou art able to unite folly with reason! To-day it seems to thee that thou wilt predict luck from a few faded cards. Not true! When the moment comes and thy breast aches about the heart, thou wilt yearn honestly for happiness in love. For example, in Lithuania, I have a pair of old people in a cottage, my father and mother, as white as doves, and one of them says to the other things of me which are beyond my merits, things which might be told of a golden king's son. What would my worth be were I to shut myself up in a book, not think of them, and neglect them in their old age? None whatever. – Well, I come here and I forget neither science nor them nor myself. And I am not alone. Every man who tills a field has the right to eat bread from it. That to begin with! Science is science; let not a scholar tear himself loose from life, let him not be an incompetent. A scholar is a scholar; but if he cannot button his shirt, if he does not support his own children, and has no care for his wife? Why not reconcile the practice of life with science? Why not bring science into one's career and enliven science itself with life?"

Thus spoke Vasilkevich. He spoke and panted with excitement.

The point is not in this whether he spoke truth or falsehood; we have repeated the conversation because Yosef, by nature inclined to be practical, took it to heart; he considered, meditated, thought, and chose the medical course.

Happen what may, a man brings to the world certain tendencies.

Yosef's mind was realistic by nature, in some way he clung rather to things than ideas – he had therefore no love for dialectics of any sort. He preferred greatly to see an object as it was, and had no wish to have it seem better than it was. The movement of mind in men's heads is of two sorts: one starts eternally from the centre of existence, the other refers each object to some other. Men of the first kind enter into things already investigated, and give them life by connecting them with the main source of existence by a very slender thread of knowledge. The first are the so-called creative capacities; the second grasp things in some fashion, compare them, classify them, and understand them only through arranging and bringing them into classes, – those are the scientific capacities. The first men are born to create, the second to investigate. The difference between them is like that between a spendthrift and a miser, between exhaling and inhaling. It is difficult to tell which is the better: the first have the gift of creating; the second of developing, and above all of digesting. In the second this is active; true, the stomach has that power also. A perfect balance between these powers constitutes genius. In such a case there is a natural need of broad movements.

Yosef had the second capacity, the classifying. He not only had it, but he knew that he had it; this conviction preserved him in life from many mistakes, and gave a certain balance to his wishes and capacities. He never undertook a thing that for him was impossible. He calculated with himself. And, finally, he had much enthusiasm, which in his case might have been called persistence in science. Having a mind which was fond of examining everything soberly, he wanted to see everything well; but to see well one must know thoroughly. He was unable to guess, he wished to know.

This was why he never learned anything half-way. As a spider surrounds a fly, he surrounded his subject of investigation diligently with a network of thought, he drew it into himself; it might be said that he sucked it out of the place where it was and finally digested it. His thoughts had also a high degree of activity. He desired, a natural attribute of youth. He was free of conceit. Frequently he rejected an opinion accepted by all, specially for this reason, that it had importance behind it. It must be confessed, however, that in this case he endeavored to find everything that was against it; when he did not find enough, he yielded. He had, besides, no little energy in thinking and doing.

All this composed his strength, his weapon, partly acquired, partly natural. We forgot to say that he had in addition two thousand rubles.

When he had estimated these supplies, he betook himself to medicine. But the greater the enthusiasm with which he betook himself to his specialty the more was he disenchanted at first. He wanted to know, but now only memory was required. In that case any man might succeed; at least it was a question of memory and will, not of reason. One needed a memory of the eyes, a memory of the hands; one had to put into the head seriously the first and second and tenth, from time to time like grain into a storehouse. That was well-nigh the work of a handicraftsman; the mental organism gained no profit from these supplies, for it did not digest nor work them over. Nutrition was lacking there. The philosophy of the physical structure of organisms may be compared in subtlety and in immensity of result with all others; but Yosef was only beginning to become acquainted with the organism itself; indications as to whether there existed any philosophy of those sciences were not given him thus far.

But having once begun he had to wade farther. He waded. But the technical side of scientific labor was disagreeable, thankless, full of hidden difficulties and unexpected secrets, frequently obscure, often barely visible, most frequently repelling, always costing labor. One might have said that nature had declared war against the human mind at this stage. Yosef struggled with these moral difficulties, but he advanced. That technic had a gloomy side also in his eye: it had an evil effect morally.

It disclosed the end of life without indicating whether a continuation existed. The veil was removed from death without the least hesitation. All the deformity of that subterranean toiler was exhibited with unconcealed insolence. That which remained of the dead was also a cynical promise to the living. Death appeared to say in open daylight, "Till we meet in the darkness!" This seemed an announcement bearing terrible proofs of the helplessness of man before an implacable, malicious, loathsome, and shameless power. This power when seen face to face, roused in young minds a violent reaction, – a reaction expressed in the following manner: "Let us lose no time, let us make use of life, for sooner or later the devils will take everything!"

In such occupations delicacy of feeling was dimmed by degrees; indifference was degraded to coarseness, ambition to envy, love passed into passion, passion into impulse. Love was like the sun seen through a smoked glass; one felt the heat, but saw not the radiance.

Yosef warded off these impressions; he shook himself free of them, he cast them away, and went forward.

Finally, he had to be true to his principle. He who has confidence in one career has not in another; that which he has chosen seems best to him. In that which Yosef had chosen everything from the time of Hippocrates downward reposed on experience. Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling are the only criteria on which the whole immense structure stands even in our day.

So men believe, especially young men, as the most different in everything from their elders. All that has come to science by ways aside from experience, is doubtful. Each man judges according to his own thought the ideas of others. The hypothesis of anything existing outside of experience, even if true, seems through such a glass frivolous. "Only investigated things have existence. The connection between cause and effect is a necessity of thought, but only in man. History is a chronicle more or less scandalous; law rests on experience of modes of living in society, speculation is a disease of the mind."

Yosef did not ward off these thoughts, since they did not hinder him in advancing.

As to the rest he worked on.

CHAPTER III

A month passed.

The evening was fair, autumnal; the sun was quenching slowly on the towers of Kieff and on the distant grave-mounds of the steppe. Its light was still visible on the roof above Yosef and Gustav. Both were bent over their work and, sitting in silence, used the last rays of evening with eagerness. Gustav had returned from the city not long before; he was suffering and pale, he panted more than usual. On his face a certain uneasiness was manifest, vexation, even pain; this he strove to conceal, but still it was evident from the fever of his eyes. Both men were silent. It was clear, however, that Gustav wished to break the silence, for he turned to Yosef frequently; but since it seemed as though the first word could be spoken only with difficulty, he sank back to his book again. At last evident impatience was expressed on his face; he seized his cap from the table, and rose.

"What o'clock is it now?" asked he.

"Six."

"Why art thou not going to the widow's? Thou goest every day to visit her."

Yosef turned toward Gustav, —

"It was at her request that I went with thee to her lodgings the first time. Let us not mention the subject. I do not care to speak of that which would be disagreeable to both of us; for that matter, we understand each other perfectly. I will not see the widow to-day, or to-morrow, or any day. Thou hast my word and hand on that."

They stood then in silence, Yosef with extended hand. Gustav, hesitating and disturbed by the awkward position, finally pressed the palm of his comrade.

Evidently words came to both with difficulty; one did not wish to use heartfelt expressions, the other heartfelt thanks. After a while they parted.

Men's feelings are strange sometimes, and the opposite of those which would seem the reward of noble deeds. Yosef promised Gustav not to see Pani Helena, the widow. Whether he loved her or not, that was a sacrifice on his part, for in his toilsome and monotonous existence she was the only bright point around which his thought loved to circle. Though thinking about her was only the occupation of moments snatched from hard labor and devoted to rest and mental freedom, to renounce such moments was to deprive rest of its charm, it was to remove a motive from life at a place where feeling might bud out and blossom.

Yosef, after thinking a little, did this without hesitation. He made a sacrifice.

Still, when Gustav had gone from the room, there was on Yosef's face an expression of distaste, even anger. Was that regret for the past, or for the deed done a moment before?

No.

When he extended his hand to Gustav, the latter hesitated in taking it. Not to accept a sacrifice given by an energetic soul is to cover the deed of sacrifice itself with a shadow of ridicule; and this in the mind of him who makes the sacrifice is to be ungrateful, and to cast a grain of deep hatred into the rich field of vanity.

But to accept a rival's sacrifice is for a soul rich in pride to place one's own "I" under the feet of some other man morally; it is to receive small coppers of alms thrust hastily into a hand which had not been stretched forth for anything.

Pride prefers to be a creditor rather than a debtor.

Therefore Gustav when on the street twisted his mouth in bitter irony, and muttered through his pressed lips.

Better and better. Favor, favor! Bow down now to Pan Yosef daily, and thank him. A pleasant life for thee, Gustav!

And he fell into bitter, deep meditation. He ceased even to think of himself, he was merely dreaming painfully. He felt a kind of gloomy echo in his soul, while striving to summon up the remembrance of even one happy moment. That echo sounded in him like a broken chord. The mind and soul in the man were divided. One tortured half cried hurriedly for rest; the other half, energetic and gloomy, strove toward life yet. One half of his mind saw light and an object; the other turned moodily toward night and nothingness. To finish all, there was something besides in this sorrowing man which made sport of its own suffering; something like a malicious demon which with one hand indicated his own figure to him, pale, ugly, bent, and pointed out with the other, as it were in the clouds in the brightness of morning, Helena Potkanski, in marble repose, in splendid beauty.

Torn apart with the tumult of this internal battle, he went forward alone, almost without knowing whither. Suddenly he heard behind a well-known voice singing in bass the glad song: —

"Hop! hop! hop! hop!

And the horseshoe firmly fastened."

He looked around – it was Vasilkevich and Augustinovich.

"Whither art thou hastening, Gustav?" asked the first.

"I? Ha! whither – " He looked at his watch. "It is too early to visit Pani Helena. I am going at present to the club."

"Well, go straight to the widow."

"What? Why?"

"Woe!" exclaimed Augustinovich, raising his hand toward heaven; and without noticing passers-by, he fell to declaiming loudly: —

"The castle where joyousness sounded

Is shrouded in mourning to-day;

On its wall the wild weeds are growing,

At its gate the faithful dog howls."

"Thou hast no reason to visit the club," added Vasilkevich.

"What has happened?"

"Gloom is there now incubating a tempest," replied Augustinovich.

"But say what has happened."

"Misfortune."

"Of what sort?"

"Ghastly!"

"Vasilkevich, speak in human fashion!"

"The University government has closed our club. Some one declared that students assemble there."

"When did this happen?"

"Two hours since."

"We must go there and learn on the spot."

"I do not advise thee to do so. They will put thee in prison."

"They will bind thy white palms with a rope – "

"Augustinovich, be quiet! Why did they not do this in the evening? They might have caught us all like fish in a net."

"Well, they cared more for closing the club than for seizing us; but were a man to go now, beyond doubt they would seize him."

"But whither are ye going?"

"We are going with a watchword of alarm; the clans send a fiery cross – "

"Speak low, I beg thee!"

"Yes, valiant Roderic."

"True, true," interrupted Vasilkevich; "we are on the way to warn others, so farewell, or go with us."

"I cannot."

"Where wilt thou go?"

"To Pani Helena's."

"Farewell."

"Till we meet again!"

When he was alone, Gustav rubbed his hands, a smile of satisfaction lighted up his gloomy face for a moment. He was pleased with the closing of the club, for he ceased to fear that Helena, on learning of Yosef's decision, might wish to visit the club to see him there. His fears were well founded. Gustav remembered that despite prayers and arguments he had barely, by the promise of bringing Yosef to her lodgings, been able to restrain her from this improper step. Now he had no cause for fear.

After a while he pulled the bell at the widow's dwelling.

"How is thy mistress?" asked he of the servant girl.

"She is well, but walking in the room and talking to herself."

Gustav entered.

Pani Helena's dwelling was composed of two narrow chambers, with windows looking out on a garden; the first chamber was a small drawing-room, the second she used as a bed-chamber, which Gustav now entered. The upper part of the window in the bed-chamber was divided by a narrow strip of wood from the lower part, and had colored panes arranged in the form of a flower, blue and red alternately. In one corner stood a small mahogany table covered with a soft velvet spread. On the table stood two portraits; one in an inlaid wooden frame represented a young man with a high forehead, blond hair, and handsome aristocratic features, – that was Potkanski; the other was Pani Helena. On her knees was her little daughter dressed in white. Before the portraits lay a garland of immortelles entwined with crape and with a sprig of dry myrtle.

At the opposite end of the room, between two beds divided by a narrow space, was a small cradle, now empty, once filled with the twittering and noise of an infant. Its cover, colored green by the light of the panes, seemed to move slightly. One might have thought that a little hand would be thrust out any moment, and a joyous head look at its mother.

Silent sadness was in the atmosphere of the place. The leaves of the acacia which looked in through the window were outlined darkly on the floor, and, moved by the wind, yielded to the quivering light and returned again. Near the door was a small statuette, representing the angel of baptism with hands extended as if to bless; at its feet was a holy-water pot.

At the moment of which we are speaking the head of the angel was bright in colored gleams, as if with a mild glory of sweetness, of repose and innocence. There was, moreover, great silence in the chamber. The sorrow of that day equalled former gladness. What delight and prattling when Potkanski, returning in the evening tired with toil, embraced his wife with one arm, and putting back her golden hair, kissed her forehead, which at that time was calm and serene. How much quiet, deep joy when they stood in silence breast to breast and eye to eye, like statues of Love! Afterward they ran to the cradle where the little one, twittering with itself in various ways, and raising its tiny feet, laughed at the happy parents.

Now the cradle was empty. Marvellously affecting was that cradle. It seemed that the child was there.

More than once, in the first period of her misfortune, the widow, when she woke in the night, put her hand carefully into the cradle with the conviction that God must have pitied her, and, removing the child from the coffin, placed it back in the cradle.

In a word, those walls had seen much joy, lulled by the happiness of serene love, then tears as large as pearls, then despair, which was silent, deathlike, and finally stubborn, mad.

Such was the sleeping-room of that widow, and such were the thoughts which were roused at sight of the apartment. The little drawing-room, like all of its kind, had a sort of slight elegance and much emptiness. In that chamber, too, the echoes of past moments seemed to wander. It was well lighted, clean, but common; the room of the servant adjoined it, – a small dark closet with an entrance on the stairway and a wooden partition.

Such was the former residence of Potkanski. After his death it was difficult to understand whence the means came to keep up such lodgings; this, however, pertained to Gustav, he knew what he was doing. There were no claims on the part of the owner; how this was managed we shall explain somewhat later.

As often as Gustav entered that dwelling he trembled.

In a place which was full of her presence, where everything that was not she was for her, he felt always a kind of weight on his breast, as if some hand were pressing his heart down more deeply. But that pressure was for him delightful. It was a contraction of his breast as if to inhale more air. To be pressed down by a feeling of happiness is almost to be happy, except that beyond it lies an immense shoreless space of desires. It inundates the whole man then, enters into his blood, manifests itself in the trembling of his words, in the glitter of his eyes. That desire itself does not know what it wants. Between too little and too much there is no boundary in the present case. This is the bashful desire of everything. A man is more daring externally than internally; his own words frighten him; it seems to him that some one else is saying something, he guards his own glances, he wants to laugh spasmodically or to burst out sobbing. He loves, he honors, he makes an angel of a woman, and then desires that same angel as a woman.

Gustav experienced this when he entered the widow's apartments. Every kind of desire which spirit and blood joined together can summon, flew to him from all sides, like flocks of winged creatures.

She stood before him. She was pale; on her lips appeared a slight trace of ruddiness. Her delicate profile was outlined on the background of the window like a silhouette. She held a comb in her hand, and, standing before the small silver-framed mirror, was combing her hair. Luxuriant tresses wound like waves around her pale forehead. That golden mass flowed down over her shoulders and breast, and seemed to drop like amber.

Seeing Gustav, she greeted him with her hand and with a barely perceptible smile.

The widow had emerged from her former lethargy. That sudden and violent shock which the sight of Yosef at the restaurant had called forth roused her, enlivened her. She began to think. One thing alone was she unable at first to explain. Yosef's form was so confounded in her mind with that of Potkanski that she did not know herself which was her former husband. That was the remnant of her insanity. But soon a ray of light returned to that beclouded mind. She begged Gustav to let her see Yosef. Gustav, though unwilling, agreed to this. With yearning did she wait for the evening when she was to look at that reminder of her former happiness. Not Yosef was she seeking, but the reminder; hence he was for her an absolute necessity.

Then gradually and quite imperceptibly the past changed into the present, the dream into a reality. Yosef, noting this, had promised Gustav not to visit her; to prepare Helena and announce this news to her pertained to Gustav.

It was easy to foresee the impression which this would make. She clasped her hands and threw back her head. A torrent of hair covered her shoulders with a rustle.

"Where shall I see him?" asked she, insistently.

Gustav was silent.

"I must see him here or elsewhere. He is so like Kazimir – My God, I live entirely by that memory, Pan Gustav."

Gustav was silent. He was made almost indignant by that blind egotism of Pani Helena. The drama began to play in him again. She begged him to do everything to undermine his own happiness. No! to act thus he would have to be a fool. But on the other hand – it was Helena who made the prayer. He bit his lips till the blood came, and was silent. Moreover, something belongs to him even from life. Everything that in him made up the man opposed her prayers with desperate energy. Meanwhile she continued to urge, —

"Pan Gustav, you will arrange so that I shall see him? I wish to see him. Why do you do me such an injustice?"

Cold sweat covered Gustav's forehead; he stretched his hands to his face, and in a gloomy voice answered, —

"I do you no injustice, but" – here his voice quivered, he made an effort not to fall at her feet and cry out, "But I love thee, do not torture me!" – "he does not wish to come here," concluded he, almost inaudibly.

He would have given much to avoid this moment. Helena covered her face with her hands and dropped into the armchair. Silence continued for a while, and the rustling of leaves was heard outside the window; inside the soul of a man was writhing in a conflict with itself. To bring Yosef, to take Helena from him, was for Gustav to unbridle misfortune.

The struggle was brief; he knelt before Helena, and putting his lips to her hand, said in a broken voice, —

"I shall do what I can. He will come here. What am I to any one? He will come, but I cannot tell when – I will bring him myself."

Soon after, in leaving the widow's lodgings, he muttered through his set teeth, —

"Yes, he will come; but it is not I who will bring him – he will come in a month – in two months – perhaps I shall be at rest."

An attack of coughing interrupted further meditation. Gustav wandered through the streets for a long time; when he returned home, it struck two in the church belfry.

Yosef was sleeping; he was breathing uniformly, quietly; the light of the lamp fell on his high forehead and open breast. Gustav looked feverishly at that breast. His eyes gleamed with hatred. He sat thus about an hour. All at once he trembled, he came to himself. A sensation was roused in him entirely opposite to any which he had felt up to that moment, a sensation of hunger; he went to the book-shelves, and taking a piece of brown bread, fell to eating it hastily.

CHAPTER IV

Autumn was approaching. It was cold in the rooms of the poorer students. Wrapped in their blankets and wearing caps, they warmed themselves with study. The rooms of those who had something with which to heat their stoves were swarming with comrades. No one visited the club any longer. At first there were efforts to select some other place for a club, but it ended in nothing, because Gustav on the one hand, and on the other Yosef, who had acquired considerable influence among students, resisted together; more especially Yosef, who held that clubs consumed too much time and were of small utility. He desired to introduce reform in this regard, and at last he succeeded. In spite of all opposing opinions he combated for that idea in the University, and especially at Vasilkevich's rooms, where students met with more willingness than elsewhere.

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