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Title: 'Neath the Hoof of the Tartar; Or, The Scourge of God

Author: báró Miklós Jósika

Author of introduction, etc.: R. Nisbet Bain

Translator: Selina Gaye

Release date: May 24, 2011 [EBook #36203]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Steven desJardins and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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*'NEATH THE HOOF OF THE TARTAR*



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**'Neath the Hoof of the Tartar  
OR  
*THE SCOURGE OF GOD***

BY  
BARON NICOLAS JÓSIKA  
ABRIDGED FROM THE HUNGARIAN BY  
SELINA GAYE  
*WITH PREFACE BY R. NISBET BAIN*



*And Photogravure Portrait of the Author*

LONDON  
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1904

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## INTRODUCTION.

Baron Miklós Jósika, the Walter Scott of Hungary, was born at Torda, in Transylvania, on April 28th, 1796. While quite a child, he lost both his parents, and was brought up at the house and under the care of his grandmother, Anna Bornemissza, a descendant of Jókai's heroine of the same name in "Midst the Wild Carpathians." Of the young nobleman's many instructors, the most remarkable seems to have been an *émigré* French Colonel, who gave him a liking for the literature of France, which was not without influence on his future development. After studying law for a time at Klausenberg to please his friends, he became a soldier to please himself, and in his seventeenth year accompanied the Savoy dragoon regiment to Italy. During the campaign of the Mincio in 1814, he so distinguished himself by his valour that he was created a first lieutenant on the field of battle, and was already a captain when he entered Paris with the allies in the following year. In 1818, at the very beginning of his career, he ruined his happiness by his unfortunate marriage with Elizabeth Kalláy. According to Jósika's biographer, Luiza Szaák,<sup>[1]</sup> young Jósika was inveigled into this union by a designing mother-in-law, and any chance of happiness the young couple might have had, if left to themselves, was speedily dashed by the interference of the father of the bride, who defended all his daughter's caprices against the much-suffering husband. Even the coming of children could not cement this woeful wedding, which terminated in the practical separation of spouses who were never meant to be consorts.

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Jósika further offended his noble kinsmen by devoting himself to literature. It may seem a paradox to say so, yet it is perfectly true, that in the early part of the present century, with some very few honourable exceptions, the upper classes in Hungary addressed only their *servants* in Hungarian. Latin was the official language of the Diet, while polite circles conversed in barbarous French. These were the days when, as Jókai has reminded us, the greatest insult you could offer to an Hungarian lady was to address her in her native tongue. It required some courage, therefore, in the young Baron to break away from the feudal traditions of his privileged caste and use the plebeian Magyar dialect as a literary vehicle. His first published book, "Abafi" (1836), an historical romance written under the direct influence of Sir Walter Scott, whom Jósika notoriously took for his model, made a great stir in the literary world of Hungary. "Hats off, gentlemen," was how Szontagh, the editor of the *Figyelmező*, the leading Hungarian newspaper of the day, began his review of this noble romance. Jósika was over forty when he first seriously began to write, but the grace and elegance of his style, the maturity of his judgment, the skilfulness of his characterization—all pointed to a long apprenticeship in letters. Absolute originality cannot indeed be claimed for him. Unlike Jókai, he owed very much to his contemporaries. He began as an imitator of Scott, as we have seen, and he was to end as an imitator of Dickens, as we shall see presently. But he was no slavish copyist. He gave nearly as much as he took. Moreover, he was the first to naturalize the historical romance in Hungary, and if, as a novelist, he is inferior to Walter Scott, he is inferior to him alone.

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In Hungary, at any rate, his rare merits were instantly recognised and rewarded.

Two years after the publication of "Abafi," he was elected a member of the Hungarian Academy, four years later he became the President of the Kisfaludy Társaság, the leading Magyar literary society. All classes, without exception, were attracted and delighted by the books of this new novelist, which followed one another with bewildering rapidity. "Zolyomi," written two years before "Abafi," was published a few months later, together with "Könnyelműek." Shortly afterwards came the two great books which are generally regarded as his masterpieces, "Az utolsó Bátor" and "Csehek Magyarországon," and a delightful volume of fairy tales, "Élet és tündérhón," in three volumes. In 1843 was published "Zrinyi a Költő," in which some critics saw a declension, but which Jókai regards as by far the greatest of Jósika's historical romances. Finally may be mentioned as also belonging to the pre-revolutionary period, "Jósika István," an historical romance in five volumes, largely based upon the family archives; "Egy kétemeletes ház," a social romance in six volumes; and "Ifju Békesi Ferencz kalandjai," a very close and most clever imitation of the "Pickwick Papers," both in style and matter, written under the pseudonym of Moric Alt. It is a clever skit of the peccadilloes and absurdities of the good folks of Budapest of all classes, full of genuine humour, and was welcomed with enthusiasm.

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On the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1848, Baron Jósika magnanimously took the popular side, though he was now an elderly man, and had much to lose and little to gain from the Revolution. He was elected a member of the Honvéd Government; countenanced all its acts; followed it from place to place till the final collapse, and then fled to Poland. Ultimately he settled at Brussels, where for the next twelve years he lived entirely by his pen, for his estates were confiscated, and he himself was condemned to death by the triumphant and vindictive Austrian Government, which had to be satisfied, however, with burning him in effigy.

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Jósika was to die an exile from his beloved country, but the bitterness of banishment was somewhat tempered by the touching devotion of his second wife, the Baroness Julia Podmaniczky, who also became his amanuensis and translator. The first novel of the exilic period was "Eszter," written anonymously for fear his works might be prohibited in Hungary, in which case the unhappy author would have run the risk of actual want. For the same reason all the novels written between 1850 and 1860 (when he resumed his own name on his title-pages) are "by the author of 'Eszter.'" In 1864, by the doctor's advice, Jósika moved to Dresden, and there, on February 27th, 1865, he died, worn out by labour and sorrow. He seems, at times, to have had a hard struggle for an honourable subsistence, and critics, latterly, seem to have been neglectful or unkind. Ultimately his ashes were brought home to his native land and deposited reverently in the family vault at Klausenberg; statues were raised in his honour at the Hungarian capital, and the greatest of Hungarian novelists, Maurus Jókai, delivered an impassioned funeral oration over the remains of the man who did yeoman's service for the Magyar literature, and created and popularized the historical novel in Hungary.

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For it is as the Hungarian historical romancer *par excellence* that Jósika will always be remembered, and inasmuch as the history of no other European country is so stirring and so dramatic as that of Hungary, and Jósika was always at infinite pains to go direct to original documents for his facts and local colouring, he will always be sure of an audience in an age, like our own, when the historical novel generally (witness the immense success of Sienkiewicz) is once more the favourite form of fiction. Among the numerous romances "by the author of 'Eszter,'" the work, entitled "Jö a Tatár" ("The Tartar is coming"), now presented to the English public under the title of "Neath the Hoof of the Tartar," has long been recognised by Hungarian critics as "the most pathetic" of Jósika's historical romances. The groundwork of the tale is the terrible Tartar invasion of Hungary during the reign of Béla IV. (1235-1270), when the Mongol hordes devastated Magyarland from end to end. Two love episodes, however, relieve the gloom of this terrific picture, "and the historical imagination" of the great Hungarian romancer has painted the heroism and the horrors of those far distant times every whit as vividly as Sienkiewicz has painted the secular struggle between the Red Cross Knights and the semi-

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## 'Neath the Hoof of the Tartar.

### CHAPTER I. RUMOURS.

"Well, Talabor, my boy, what is it? Anything amiss?" asked Master Peter, as the page entered the hall, where he and his daughter were at breakfast.

It was a bare, barn-like apartment, but the plates and dishes were of silver.

"Nothing amiss, sir," was the answer, "only a guest has just arrived, who would like to pay his respects, but—he is on foot!"

It was this last circumstance, evidently, which was perplexing Talabor.

"A guest?—on foot?" repeated Master Peter, as if he too were puzzled.

"Yes, sir; Abbot Roger, he calls himself, and says you know him!"

"What! good Father Roger! Know him? Of course I do!" cried Peter, springing from his chair. "Where is he? Why didn't you bring him in at once? I am not his Grace of Esztergom to keep a good man like him waiting in the entry!"

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"The servants are just brushing the dust off him, sir," replied the page, "and he wants to wash his feet, but he will be ready to wait upon you directly, sir, if you please!"

"By all means! but he is no 'Abbot,' Talabor; he is private chaplain to Master Stephen, my brother!"

Talabor had not long been in Master Peter's service, and knew no more of Master Stephen than he did of Father Roger, so he said nothing and left the room with a bow.

"Blessed be the name of the Lord Jesus, Father Roger!" cried Master Peter, hurrying forward to meet his guest, as he entered the dining-hall.

"For ever and ever!" responded the Father, while Dora raised his hand to her lips, delighted to see her old friend again.

"But how is this, Father Roger?" Peter asked in high good humour, after some inquiry as to his brother's welfare; "how is this? Talabor, *deák* announced you as 'Abbot.' What is the meaning of it?"

"Quite true, sir! Thanks to his Holiness and the King, I have been 'Abbot' the last month or two; but just now I am on my way to Pest by command of his Majesty."

"What! an abbot travel in this fashion, on foot! Why, our abbots make as much show as the magnates, some of them. Too modest, too modest, Father! Besides, you'll never get there! Is the King's business urgent?"

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"Hardly that, I think; though—but, after all, why prophesy evil before one must!"

"Prophesy evil?" repeated Dora.

"Prophecies are in the hands of the Lord!" interposed her father quickly. "Good or bad, it rests with Him whether they shall be fulfilled. So, Father Roger, let us have it, whatever it is."

"The King's commands were that I should be at Pest by the end of the month," answered Roger, "so I shall be in time, even if I do travel somewhat slowly. As for the prophesying—without any gift of prophecy I can tell you so much as this, that *something* is coming! True, it is far off as yet, but to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and I fancy the King is one who likes to look well ahead."

"But what is it, Father Roger? do tell us!" cried Dora anxiously.

"Nothing but rumours so far, dear child, but they are serious, and it behoves us to be on our guard."

"Oktai and his brethren, eh?" said Master Peter, with some scorn. "Oh, those Tartars! The Tartars are coming! the Tartars are coming! Why, they have been coming for years! When did we first

hear that cry? I declare I can't remember," and he laughed.

"I am afraid it is no laughing matter, though," said Father Roger. "I daresay you have not forgotten Brother Julian, who returned home only two or three years ago."

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But here Dora interposed. She remembered Father Roger telling her a story of the Dominican brothers, who had gone to try and find the "old home" of the Magyars and convert to Christianity those who had stayed behind, and she wanted to hear it again, if her father did not mind.

Father Roger accordingly told how, of the first four brothers, only one had returned home, and he had died soon after, but not before he had described how, while travelling as a merchant, he had fallen in with men who spoke Hungarian and told him where their home, "Ugria," was to be found.<sup>[2]</sup> Four more brothers had been despatched on the same quest by King Béla, who was desirous of increasing the population of his country, and particularly wished to secure "kinsmen" if he could. Two only of the brothers persevered through the many perils and privations which beset their way. One of these died, and Julian, the survivor, entering the service of a wealthy Mohammedan, travelled with him to a land of many rich towns, densely populated.<sup>[3]</sup> Here he met a woman who had actually come from the "old home," and still farther north he had found the "brothers of the Magyars," who could understand him and whom he could understand.

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[2] Ugria extended from the North Sea to the rivers Kama, Irtisch, and Tobol, west and east of the Ural Mountains. The Ugrians had come in more ancient times from the high lands of the Altai Mountains. Hungarian was still spoken in Ugria, then called Juharia, as late as the beginning of the sixteenth century.

[3] Great Bulgaria, lying on both sides of the Volga, at its junction with the Kama.

They were, of course, heathen, but not idolaters; they were nomads, wandering from place to place, living on flesh and mare's milk, and knowing nothing of agriculture. They were greatly interested in all that Julian told them, for they knew from old traditions that some of their race had migrated westwards.

But at the time of his visit they were much perturbed by news brought to them by their neighbours on the east. These were Tartar, or Turkish, tribes, who, having several times attacked them and been repulsed, had finally entered into an alliance with them. A messenger from the Tartar Khan had just arrived to announce, not only that the Tartar tribes were themselves on the move and but five days' journey away, but that they were moving to escape from a "thick-headed" race, numerous as the sands of the sea which was behind them, on their very heels, and threatening to overwhelm all the kingdoms of the world, as it had already overwhelmed great part of Asia.

Brother Julian hastened home to report his discoveries and warn his country, which he had reached between two and three years before our story begins; but nothing more had come of his pilgrimage, no more had been heard of the "Magyar"<sup>[4]</sup> brothers."

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[4] Europeans called them Ugrians-Hungarians, but they called themselves "Magyars"—"children of the land," as some think to be the meaning of the word.

"But why, Father Roger?" asked Dora, with wide eyes.

"Because the 'thick-headed people' have not only overrun nearly the whole of Central Asia as far as Peking, covering it with ruins and reducing it to a desert, but have streamed westward like a flood, a torrent, and have submerged nearly the whole of Eastern Europe."

"Then they are not Tartars?"

"No, Mongolians<sup>[5]</sup>; but they have swallowed up many Tartar tribes and have forced them to join their host. Tartars we have known before, but Mongols are new to us, so most people keep to the name familiar to them, which seems appropriate too—Tatars, Tartari, you know, denizens of Tartarus, the Inferno, as we Italians call it; and their deeds are 'infernal' enough, Heaven knows!"

[5] Temudschin was but thirteen when he became chief (in A. D. 1175) of one horde, consisting of thirty to forty thousand families. After some vicissitudes, he entered upon a career of conquest, and, between 1204 and 1206, he summoned the chiefs of all the hordes and tribes who owned his sway to an assembly, at which he caused it to be proclaimed that "Heaven had decreed to him the title of 'Dschingiz' (Highest), for he was to be ruler of the whole world." From this time he was known as Dschingiz, or Zenghiz Khan.

"And are they coming, really?"

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"As to whether they will come here, God alone knows; but Oktai, son of Dschingiz, who is now chief Khan, has sent a vast host westward, and, as I said, they have overrun great part of Russia; it is reported that they have burnt Moscow."

"Come, come, Father," interrupted Peter, who had been growing more and more restless, "you are not going to compare us Magyars with the Russians, I hope, or with the Chinese and Indians either. If they show their ugly dog's-heads here, they will find us more than a match for such a rabble."

"I hope so!" said Father Roger. But he spoke gravely, and added, "You have heard, of course, of the Cumani, Kunok, you call them, I think."

"To be sure! Peaceable enough when they are let alone, but brave, splendid fellows when they are attacked, as Oktai has found, for I know they have twice defeated him," said Master Peter triumphantly.

"Yes, there was no want of valour on their part; but you know the proverb: 'Geese may be the death of swine, if only there be enough of them!' And so, according to the last accounts, the brave King has been entirely overwhelmed by Oktai's myriads, and he, with 40,000 families of Kunok, are now in the Moldavian mountains on the very borders of Erdély" (Transylvania).

"Ah, indeed," said Master Peter, a little more gravely, "that I had not heard! but if it is true, I must tell you that my chief object would be to prevent the report from spreading and being exaggerated. If it does, the whole country will be in a state of commotion, and all for nothing! There is hardly any nation which needs peace more than ours does, and we have quite enough to do with sweeping before our own door, without going and mixing ourselves up in other people's quarrels."

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But Father Roger went on to say that the rumour had spread already, and that was why the King was wishing to call his nobles, and, in fact, the whole nation, together to take measures of defence in good time.

"Defence!" cried Peter; "defence against whom? Why, we have no enemies on any of our borders, unless you mean the Kunok, and they are far enough off at present; besides, we don't look on them as foes. It is always the way, Father Roger! always the way! We go conjuring up spectres! and though I am his Majesty's loyal and devoted subject, I may say here, just between ourselves, that I do think him too quick to take alarm."

"You think so, sir?" returned the Abbot; "well, of course, it is a mere opinion, but to my mind the King is not far wrong."

And then the good Father reminded his host that Oktai had already overthrown the Russians, great numbers of whom had been forced to join his army; and now that he had driven out the Kunok was it to be supposed that he would stop short? Dschingiz Khan, his father, had been a conqueror; conquest was his sole object in life, and he would have conquered the whole world if he had lived. His sons, especially Oktai, took after him; they, too, considered themselves destined to conquer the world, and now that Kuthen had shown him the way into Transylvania he would be forcing a passage across the frontier before they knew where they were. His rapidity was something marvellous, unheard of!

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Again Master Peter only laughed. Where was the use of alarming the country? and would not a call to arms look as if they were afraid, and actually tempt the Mongols to come and attack them?

Father Roger shook his head, as he replied in Latin:

"If you wish for peace, prepare for war, as the old Romans used to say, and it is wise not to despise your foe."

The two went on arguing. Master Peter, like many another noble in those days, would not see danger. Though valiant enough, he was always an easy-going man, and, again like many another, he was quite confident that Hungary would be able to beat any enemy who might come against her, without worrying herself beforehand. Father Roger did not know the Hungarians, though he had lived so long among them!

"Well, well," he concluded, "you go to Pest, Mr. Abbot; but think it well over by the way, and when you see the King, you tell him plainly that Peter Szirmay advises his Majesty not to give the alarm before it is necessary."

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Roger shook his head but said nothing. Italian though he was, he understood the Hungarian nobility very well. He knew how they disliked being turned out of their ordinary course; but he knew too that once roused, they would not hesitate to confront any enemy who threatened them, and that though they might be hot-headed, foolhardy, over-confident, they were certainly not cowards!

"Well," thought the Abbot, "you are no wiser, I am afraid, than others; but when the King does succeed in routing you out of your old fastness and getting you down into the plain, you will give as good an account of yourself as the rest!"

Master Peter was glad to drop the subject, and to feel that there was at all events no immediate prospect of his being disturbed; yet he was so far an exception to the majority of his fellow-nobles that he determined to ascertain the truth about these rumours, and, if necessary, not to delay placing himself and his daughter beyond the reach of danger.

Father Roger's gravity had impressed Dora much, but she was young, and she had such entire confidence in her father, that she could not feel any actual anxiety.

"What do you think, Father Roger?" she said presently, "if Oktai Khan really should want to fight us, about how long would it take him to get here?"

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"That no one can say, dear child," answered the Italian. "He might reach the frontier in three years, or it might be in two, or—it might be in one!"

"In one year!" Dora repeated in a startled tone.

"It is impossible to say for certain, my dear. It all depends upon how long our neighbours can keep back the flood. One thing is certain, that, as they retreat in our direction, they will draw the enemy after them, and what is more, unless we are wise and prudent we may make enemies of the fugitives themselves; that is if we give them reason to suppose us not strong enough, or not trustworthy enough, to be their friends. Well, God is good, and we must hope that the danger will be averted."

"Come, come, Father Roger," said Master Peter, "that is enough, that's enough! Let us eat, drink, and sleep upon it, and time will show! There is not the least reason for worrying at present at all events, and if this disorderly crew does pour across our frontiers at last, well, we shall be there to meet them! And it won't be the first time that we have done such a thing."

And then, by way of entertaining his guest, he proposed to take him all over the house, stables, and courtyard.

Master Peter was not wealthy as his brother Stephen was, but for all that he was sufficiently well off. Stephen, the younger brother, had had a large fortune with his wife; Peter, a much smaller one with his. The family mansion, or castle,<sup>[6]</sup> belonged equally to both; and, being both widowers, and much devoted to one another, they had agreed to share it, and had done so most amicably for several years.

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[6] Any country house was a castle, or château, as the French would say.

Without being covetous, Stephen had a warm appreciation of this world's goods; and of all the forty male members of the Szirmay family living at this time, he was certainly the most wealthy. He was devoted to his children, and gave them the best education possible at the time of which we are speaking, the first half of the thirteenth century. His son, Akos, now one of the King's pages, had learnt to read and write; he had, too, a certain knowledge of Latin, and sometimes in conversation he would use a Latin word or two, with Hungarian terminations. In fact, he knew somewhat more than most of his class, and, needless to say, he was a good horseman and a good marksman, and well-skilled in the use of arms and in all manly exercises.

Stephen's daughter and niece, Jolánta and Dora, were as good scholars as his son; and all three owed their secular as well as religious knowledge to Father Roger, in later years the famous author of the "Carmen Miserabile," and already known as one of the most cultivated men of the day. He was making his home with the Szirmays, and acting as chaplain, merely for the time being; and Stephen was glad to secure his services for the children, who loved the gentle Father, as all did who came in contact with him.

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Learning was held in such high honour in Hungary in these days, that many a man coveted, and had accorded to him, the title of "Magister"—Master—(borne by the King's Notary and Chancellor) if he had but a little more scholarship than his neighbours, though that often of the slenderest description, and sometimes but few degrees removed from ignorance itself. A man such as Roger was not likely therefore to be overlooked by a King such as Béla; and his advancement was certain to come in time, notwithstanding the fact that he was an Italian.

It was when Dora was about eighteen that her father had resolved to go and live on his own property, in one of the northernmost counties of Hungary.

Now Peter had never been a good landlord; from his youth up his pursuits and interests had not been such as to make him take pleasure in agriculture. Accounts and calculations were not at all in his way either, and accordingly, no one was more imposed upon and plundered by his stewards than himself. He was generous in everything, open-handed, a true gentleman, delighted to help or oblige anyone, and much more thoughtlessly profuse than many who were far richer than himself.

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The dwelling-house on that one of his estates to which he had decided to go, was, it is hardly needful to say, very much out of repair, almost a ruin in fact. It had never been handsome, being, in truth, but a great shapeless barn, or store-house, which consisted merely of a ground floor nearly as broad as it was long. The original building had been of stone, built in the shape of a tent, and, of course, open to the roof; for ceilings, except in churches, were long looked upon as luxuries.

The first inhabitants had slept and cooked, lived and died, all in this one great hall, or barn; and their successors, as they found more space needed, had made many additions, each with its own separate roof of split fir-poles, straw, or reeds. By degrees the original building had been surrounded by a whole colony of such roofs, with broad wooden troughs between them to carry off the rain water. Most of these additions had open roofs, and were as much like barns as the first; but some were covered in with great shapeless beams; and in a few there were even fireplaces, built up of logs thickly coated with plaster.

Various alterations and improvements had been made before Master Peter's arrival, the most important of which was that the openings in the walls which had hitherto done duty as windows, had been filled in with bladder-skin, and provided with wooden lattices. The floors were not boarded, but the earth had been carefully levelled, and was concealed by coarse reed-mats, while the walls had been plastered and whitened.

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Altogether, the place was not uncomfortable, according to the ideas of the time, and Dora was not at all disgusted with its appearance, even coming from her uncle's house, where she was

accustomed to a good deal of splendour of a certain kind.

Hungarians, even in those days, could make a splendid appearance upon occasion, as they did at the King's wedding, when all the guests wore scarlet, richly embroidered with gold. But their chief luxuries at home took the form of such articles as could be easily converted into money in case of need.

They had, for instance, plates and dishes of gold and silver, precious stones, court-dresses, not embroidered and braided in the present fashion, but adorned with pearls and stones of great value, as well as with plates of beaten gold and silver. Master Peter's great dining-hall contained many valuables of this description. Huge, much-carved oak chests were ranged along the bare walls, some open, some closed, these latter being laden with silver plates and dishes, gold and silver cups, tankards and numberless other articles required at table. Here and there, the statue of a saint, a piece of Grecian or Roman armour, and various antique curiosities were to be seen.

Seats had not been forgotten, and the high-backed chairs and broad benches were supplied with comfortable cushions of bright colours. Similar gay cushions were in use throughout that part of the house inhabited by Peter and his daughter; and whatever deficiencies there were, everything at least was now in good order and scrupulously clean.

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As for Dora's own room, her father had done all that he could think of to make it pleasant and comfortable; and though many a village maiden in these days would look on it with disdain, Dora was well satisfied. There were even a few pictures on the bare white walls, though of course they were not in oil; but the special luxury of her little apartment was that the window was filled with horn, which was almost as transparent as glass, and was, moreover, decorated with flowers and designs, painted in bright colours.

Window glass was not unknown at this date, but it was too precious to be commonly used, and was reserved for churches and the palaces of kings and magnates. Bladders and thin skins were in ordinary use, or, where people were very wealthy, plates of horn; but there were plenty of gentlemen's houses in which the inhabitants had no light at all in winter but such as came from the great open hearths and fireplaces, for the windows were entirely closed up with reeds or rush mats.

One of the additions made to the original building had been what was called a "far-view" or "pigeon tower," much higher than the house itself, and the top of which could not be reached without the help of a ladder. This tower, which was more like a misshapen obelisk in shape, was roofed in with rough boards. In the lower storey there was a good-sized room, with a door opening from it into the large hall. It contained a wooden, four-post bedstead, clean and warm, and a small table; and all along the walls were clothes-pegs and shelves, such necessaries as we call "furniture" being very uncommon in the days we are speaking of. Dora's chests had been placed here, and served the purpose of seats, and there were also a few chairs, a praying-desk, and a few other little things. The walls were covered with thick stuff hangings, and the lower part of them was also protected by coarse grey frieze to keep out the cold and damp. This was Dora's own room.

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Like all gentlemen of the time, even if they were reduced in means, Peter had a considerable train of servants, and these were lodged in the very airy, barn-like buildings already mentioned.

The courtyard was enclosed by a wall, high and massive, provided with loopholes, parapet, bastions, and breastwork; and the great gate, which had not yet been many weeks in its place, was so heavy that it was as much as four men could do to open and close it.

Master Peter had been anxious to have his horses as well lodged as they had been at his brother's; but, after all, the stables, which were just opposite the house, were not such as horses in these days would consider stables at all. They were, in fact, mere sheds with open sides, such as are now put up to shelter the wild horses of the plains.

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When all this was done there still remained the digging of a broad, deep ditch or moat, in which the master himself and all his servants took part, assisted by some of the neighbouring peasants; and in about three months' time all was finished, and the curious assemblage of irregular buildings was more or less fortified, and capable of being defended if attacked by any wandering band of brigands.

It merely remains to add that Master Peter's castle stood in a contracted highland valley, and was surrounded by pine-woods and mountains. Behind it was the village, of which some few straggling cottages, or rather huts, had wandered away beyond it into the woods. The inhabitants were not Hungarians, except in so far as that they lived in Hungary; they were not Magyars, that is, but Slovacks, remnants of the great Moravian kingdom, who had retired, or been driven, into the mountains, when the Magyars occupied the land. The Magyars loved the green plains, the lakes—full of fish, and frequented by innumerable wild fowl—to which they had been accustomed in Asia; the Slovacks, whether from choice or necessity, loved the mountains.

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These latter were an industrious, honest people, no trouble to anyone, and able to make a living in spite of the hard climate. They had suffered in more ways than one by the absence of the family; for the gentry at the great house had as a rule been good to them; and when they were away, or coming but seldom, and then only for sport with the bears, boars, and wolves which abounded, the poor people were treated with contempt and tyranny by those in charge of the property. They no doubt were glad when Master Peter came to live among them, and as for their



landlord, time had passed pleasantly enough with him in spite of his being so far out of the world.

What with looking after the estate, in his own fashion, hunting, riding, sometimes going on a visit or having friends to stay, he had found enough to occupy him; but being a hospitable soul, he was always delighted to welcome the rare guests whom chance brought into the neighbourhood, and considered that he had a right to keep them three days—if they could be induced to stay longer, so much the better for him!

As for companionship, besides Dora, who could ride and shoot too, as well as any of her contemporaries, he had Talabor the page, who had come to him a pale, delicate-looking youth, but had gained so much in health and strength since he had been in service that his master often pitied him for not having parents better able to advance his prospects in life. They were gentry, originally "noble," as every free-born Magyar was, but they were poor gentry, and had been glad to place their son with Master Peter to complete his education, as was the custom of the time. The great nobles sent their sons to the King's court to be instructed in all manly and courtly accomplishments; the lower nobility and poor gentlefolk sent theirs to the great nobles, who often had in their households several pages. These occupied a position as much above that of the servants as beneath that of the "family," though they themselves were addressed as "servant," until they were thought worthy the title of "*deák*," which, though meaning literally "Latinist," answered pretty much to "clerk" or "scholar," and implied the possession of some little education.

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Master Peter was so well satisfied with Talabor that he now always addressed him as "clerk" in the presence of strangers. He was growing indeed quite fond of him, and was pleased to see how much he had gained in strength and good looks, and how well able he was to take part in all the various forms of exercise, the long hunting excursions, the feats of arms, to which he was himself devoted.

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## CHAPTER II. GOOD NEWS OR BAD?

Father Roger had been shown all over the house, had seen all the additions and improvements, inside and out, and now felt as much at home in Master Peter's castle as he had done in Master Stephen's.

It had been finally settled that he should start for Pest the next morning, and Master Peter insisted on supplying him with a horse and an armed escort.

"And then," said he, unconsciously betraying the curiosity which was devouring him, in spite of his assumed indifference, "then, when you send the horses back, you know, you can just write a few lines and tell me what the King wants to see you about."

Peter was quite anxious for him to be off that he might hear the sooner; but it struck him that, as Father Roger would be in Pest long before the end of the month if he made the journey on horse-back, and yet could not present himself at Court until the time appointed, he might perhaps be glad of a lodging of his own, though, of course, there were monasteries which would have received him. He offered him, therefore, the use of an old house of his own (in much the same condition, he confessed, as his present dwelling had been in), but in which he knew there were two habitable rooms, for he had lived in them himself on the occasion of his last visit to the capital.

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All was settled before supper-time, and Master Peter was just beginning to wonder when that meal would make its appearance, when the sharp, shrill sound of a horn gave him something else to think of.

"Someone is coming! They are letting down the drawbridge," he exclaimed, with much satisfaction at the prospect of another guest; and shortly after, ushered in by Talabor, there entered the hall a young man, somewhat dusty, but daintily apparelled. His black hair had been curled and was shining from a recent application of oil, and in his whole appearance and demeanour there was the indescribable something which tells of the "rising man."

"Ah, Clerk, it is you, is it?" said Peter, without rising from his seat. "My brother is well, I hope?"

"Master Stephen was quite well, sir, when I left him three days ago," returned the youth, as he made an elaborate bow to the master, another less low, but delivered with an amiable smile to Dora, and bestowed a careless third upon Father Roger.

"Well, and what is the news?"

"Both good and bad, Mr. Szirmay," was the answer, with another bow.

"Out with the bad first then, boy," said Master Peter quickly, knitting his brows as he spoke. "Let us have the good last, and keep the taste of it longest! Now then!"

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"You have heard, no doubt, sir, what rumours the land is ringing with?" began the clerk with an

air of much importance.

"We have!" said Peter, shrugging his shoulders; "let them ring till they are tired! If that is all you have jogged here about, gossip, you might as well have stayed quietly at home."

"Matters are more serious than you are perhaps aware, sir," said the clerk; and with that he drew from his breast a packet done up in cloth, out of which he produced a piece of parchment about the size of his first finger. This he handed proudly to Master Peter, who snatched it from his hand and passed it on to Father Roger, saying:

"Here, Father, do you take it and read it! I declare if it does not look like a summons to the Diet! There, there! blowing the trumpet, beating the drum in Pest already, I suppose!"

"Quite true, sir, it is a summons to the Diet," said Libor. "His Majesty, or his Excellency the Palatine, I am not certain which of the two, was under the impression that you were still with us, and so sent both summonses to Master Stephen."

"With *you!*" laughed Master Peter. "All right, *kinsman*, we shall obey his Majesty's commands, and I hope it may not all prove to be much ado about nothing."

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With kindly consideration for his host's imperfect Latin, Father Roger proceeded to translate the summons into Hungarian.

The King never made many words about things, and his order was plain and direct. The Diet was to be held on such a date, at such a place, and it was Master Peter's bounden duty to be present; that was all!

"Ah, didn't I tell you so, Father?" said he gravely; "we shall be lighting our fires before the cold sets in, and pitching our tents before there is any camp! People are mad! and they are hurrying on that good King of ours too fast. Well, *kinsman*," he went on sarcastically, "tell us all you know, and if there is any more bad news let us have it at once."

"Bad news? it depends upon how you take it, sir; many call it good, and more call it bad," returned Libor, a trifle abashed by Master Peter's mode of address.

"And pray what is it that is neither good nor bad? I don't like riddles, let me tell you, and if you can't speak plainly you had better not speak at all!"

"Sir," said Libor, "I am only telling you what other people say——" and then, as Master Peter made a gesture of impatience, he went on, "Kuthen, King of the Kunok, has sent an embassy to his Majesty asking for a settlement for his people——"

"Ah! that's something," interrupted Peter, "and I hope his Majesty sent them to the right-about at once?"

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"His Majesty received the ambassadors with particular favour, and in view of the danger which threatens us, declared himself ready to welcome such an heroic people."

"Danger! don't let me hear that word again, clerk!"

"It is not my word," protested Libor, with an appealing glance at Dora, intended to call attention to Master Peter's injustice.

"It's a bad word, whosoever it is," insisted Peter. "Well, what more? are we to be saddled with this horde of pagans then?"

"Pagans no longer! at least they won't be when they come to settle. They are all going to be baptized, the King and his family and all his people. The ambassadors promised and were baptized themselves before they went back."

"What!" cried Father Roger, his face lighting up, "forty thousand families converted to the faith! Why, it is divine, and the King is almost an Apostle!"

The good Father quite forgot all further fear of danger from the Kunok, and from this moment took their part. He could see nothing but good in this large accession of numbers to the Church.

"New Christians!" said Peter, shaking his head doubtfully, as he saw the impression made upon Roger. "Are such people Christians just because the holy water has been poured upon their faces? They are far enough from Christianity to my mind. Who can trust such folk? And then, to admit them without consulting the nation, by a word of command—I don't like the whole thing, and so far as the country is concerned, I see no manner of use in it."

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"You see, Mr. Szirmay," said Libor, with a little accession of boldness, "I was quite right. There are two of you here, and while one thinks the news bad, the other calls it 'divine.'"

"Silence, gossip!" said Peter haughtily, "you are not in your own house, remember. Be so good as to wait till your opinion is asked before you give it." Then, turning to Roger, he went on: "Well, if it is so, it is, and we can't alter it; but there will be a fine piece of work when the Diet does meet. It must be as his Majesty wills, but I for one shall not give my consent, not though the Danube and Tisza both were poured upon them. One thing is clear, we are called to the Diet and we must go, and as for the rest it is in God's hands."

So saying, Master Peter began to pace up and down the room, and no one ventured to interrupt

him. But presently he came to a standstill in front of the clerk, and said gloomily, "You have told us ill news enough to last a good many years; so, unless there is more to come, you may go on to the next part, and tell us any good news you have."

"I can oblige you with that, too," said the clerk, who evidently felt injured by Peter's contemptuous way of speaking; "at least," he added, "I hope I shall not have to pay for it as I have done for my other news, though I am sure I am not responsible, for I neither invited the Kunok nor summoned your Honour to the Diet."

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"Stop there!" said Peter, with some little irritation. "It seems to me, young man, that you have opened your eyes considerably since you left my brother; you talk a great deal and very mysteriously. Now then, let us have any good news you can tell us!"

"His Majesty has appointed Father Roger to be one of the Canons of Nagyvárad (Grosswardein), and Master Peter's long suit has terminated in a favourable judgment. The land in dispute is given back, with the proceeds for the last nine years."

"That is good news, if you will," cried Peter, both surprised and pleased; and without heeding a remark from Libor that he was glad he had been able to say something which was to his mind at last, he went on: "Now, Dora, my dear, we shall be able to be a little more comfortable, and we will spend part of the winter in Pest. Young ladies want a little amusement, and you, my poor girl, have had to live buried in the woods, where there is nothing going on."

"The Hédervárys are in Pest too," the clerk chimed in, "and you will have a delightful visit, my dear young mistress. His Majesty's Court was never more brilliant than it is now; the Queen likes to see noble young dames about her."

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Dora and Peter both looked at the clerk in amazement. He had been four years in Master Stephen's house, without ever once venturing to make Dora such a long speech as this.

"What has come to this man?" and "How very odd!" were the thoughts which passed through the minds of Peter and his daughter.

But, forward as she thought him, Dora would not quite ignore the young man's remark, so she turned to Father Roger, saying, "I know it is a very gay life in Pest, and no doubt there is plenty of amusement at the Court, but I am not at all anxious to leave this place. It is not like a convent after all, and we have several nice people not far off who are glad to see us."

But having made a beginning, Libor had a great desire to prolong the conversation.

Roger and Peter were now both walking up and down the room, while Dora was standing at one of the windows, so the opportunity seemed to be a favourable one, and he proceeded to say gallantly that Dora was wronging the world as well as herself by shutting herself out from amusement—that there was more than one person who was only waiting for a little encouragement—that her many admirers were frightened away—and so on, and so on, until Dora cut him short, saying that she was sorry he should oblige her to remind him of what Master Peter had just said about not giving his opinion until it was asked for; and with that she left him and joined her father.

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"What a haughty little thing it is for a forest flower, to be sure," said Libor to himself; but he felt just a little ashamed nevertheless, as he was well aware that he had taken an unheard-of liberty. Conversation of any sort between the pages and the daughters of the house was not "the thing" in those old days; and, quite apart from the turn which Libor had been so little respectful as to give to his remarks, Dora had felt uncomfortable at being forced into what she considered unbecoming behaviour.

"Ah! well," Libor reflected, "if she never moves from here she will find herself left on the shelf, and then—why then she won't be likely to get a better castle offered her than *mine!*"

And thereupon Libor (whose eyes had certainly been "opened," as Master Peter said) walked up to the two gentlemen, as if he were quite one of the company, and joined in their conversation at the first pause.

"Thunder and lightning! something has certainly come to this fellow. Let us find out what it is," was Master Peter's inward comment. He was beginning to be as much amused as irritated by the young gentleman's newly acquired audacity; but it annoyed him to have him walking beside him, so he came to a standstill and said, "Well, Libor, you have talked a good deal about one thing and another, according to your lights; now tell us something about your worthy self. Are you still in my brother's service and intending to remain permanently? or have you other and more brilliant prospects? A youth such as you, clerk, may do and be anything if he sets about it in the right way. Let us hear something about yourself."

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"Sir," replied Libor, "it is true that I have been so fortunate as to share with many noble youths the privilege of living in Mr. Stephen's household, and of winning his confidence; also I have enjoyed your own favour in times past, Master Peter. 'Service' you call it, and rightly too; but to-day I have discharged the last of Mr. Stephen's commissions. He has treated me with a fatherly kindness and marked consideration beyond my deserts, but I am now on my way to Pest to see Mr. Paul Héderváry, who has offered me the post of governor of one of his castles."

"Governor! at four or five and twenty! That is remarkable, Mr. Libor," said Peter, with evident

surprise. "A governor in the service of the Hédervárys is a very important person! I can only offer my best congratulations—to yourself, I mean."

Libor was no fool, and he perfectly understood; but he made answer, with his nose well in the air, "I can only thank you, sir, but I hope the time may come when Mr. Héderváry also will be able to congratulate himself on the choice which does me so much honour."

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"Ah! I hope so, I hope so," laughed Master Peter cheerily. He was pleased with himself for finding out how the clerk had been promoted, and he reflected that true, indeed, was the old Latin proverb: *Honores mutant mores*.

As for Libor, though he felt injured, as much by Master Peter's manner as by his words, he lost nothing of his self-complacency. Self-confidence, self-esteem, his new title, and his brilliant prospects were enough to prevent his being put out of countenance for more than a moment by the snubs he had received both from father and daughter. As for Canon Roger, he, good man, was just as humble now as before his advancement, and either did not, or would not, see the young man's bumptiousness; he continued to treat him, therefore, in the same friendly way as when they were house-mates.

"And so you are on your way to Pest," said Peter; "Father Roger is also on his way thither. It is always safer to travel in company when there are so many ruffians about, so I hope you will attend him."

"I shall be very willing if Father Roger has no objection; we can travel together."

"The Canon of Grosswardein, remember," said Peter a little sharply.

"And Mr. Héderváry's governor," concluded Libor boldly and without blinking.

"Well, Mr. Governor, in the meantime you may like to look round the place a little before it is too dark; I may perhaps ask you to do a commission or two for myself by-and-by, but for the present will you leave us to ourselves?"

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This was such an unmistakable dismissal that Libor actually lost his self-possession. Hesitatingly, and with a bad grace enough, he advanced towards the door, but there he stopped, recovered himself, and exclaimed:

"Dear me! how forgetful I am! But perhaps the reception I have met with may account for it."

"Reception!" burst forth Peter, whose gathering wrath now boiled over at this last piece of insolence. "I don't know, gossip, or rather Mr. Governor, I don't know what sort of reception you expected other than that which you have always found here! Hold your greyhounds in, clerk. If Mr. Stephen and Mr. Héderváry are pleased to make much of you, that is their affair. For my own part I value people according to their worth, and the only worth I have as yet discovered in you, let me tell you, is that at which you rate yourself."

Master Peter was not the man to be trifled with, and for a moment Libor felt something of the old awe and deference usual with him in the presence of his superiors. But a deep sense of injury speedily overcame his fear, and after a short pause he made answer:

"As you will, sir. Since you assign Héderváry's governor a place among the dogs, I have nothing further to do save to take my leave."

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With that he again turned to the door.

"If there is any message which you have forgotten, boy, you don't stir from here until you have given it. That done, you may go when you like, and where you like, and no one will detain you."

Master Peter spoke as one who intended to be obeyed, and Libor was impressed, not to say cowed. He was very well aware that, as they would say in these days, it was "not well to eat cherries from the same dish" as the Szirmay nobles. (At the time of which we are writing a dish of cherries was a sight rarely to be seen.) He held it, therefore, wiser to yield, and mastering himself as well as he could, he said:

"Mr. Stephen wished me to inform you that Bishop Wánca has been inquiring whether you would be disposed to let your house in Pest to his Majesty."

"The King? Let it? Is Mr. Wánca out of his mind? Do their Majesties want to hire a great heap of stone like that, where even I have never been comfortable!"

"That is my message, but I can explain it. His Majesty wants the house prepared for the King of the Kunok and his family. You are at liberty to agree or not, but in any case Mr. Stephen will expect your answer by messenger, unless you are pleased to send it direct to the Bishop by myself, or the Canon, as we shall find him in Pest and it will reach him the sooner."

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"What! Matters have gone so far that they are getting quarters ready for Kuthen, and the nation is still left in ignorance."

Libor merely shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, as the question was not particularly addressed to himself.

"Hem!" said Peter thoughtfully. "I should have liked to spend part of the winter in my own house in Pest, but it is in a bad state, very bad, and if the King is willing to repair and put it in order, he

shall have it free for three years. It will be time enough to talk about rent after that."

"May I take the answer to Mr. Wánicsa?" inquired Libor, who was still standing at the open door.

"Yes, Governor, you may!" answered Peter, really at heart one of the best-natured men, who was always and almost instantly sorry when he had lost his temper and "pulled anyone's nose."

"You may, Libor, and we will not let the sun go down upon our wrath, so you will remain here, if you please, sup well and sleep well. Talabor will see that you have all you want, and then you will travel on with the good Father and some of my men-at-arms."

Then turning, and giving his hand to Roger, he added:

"I am sorry, Father, that as things are you see I can't give you quarters in my house; but the King comes before all." [Pg 49]

As for Libor, he chose to consider that Peter had made him some sort of amends by his last speech; it pleased him much to play the part of an injured person who has accepted an apology, and he therefore at once resumed his polite manners, and bowing and smiling he replied with all due deference:

"As far as I am concerned, sir, nothing can give me greater pleasure, and since you permit me to do so, I will remain."

With another bow he left the room, not the house, which indeed he had never intended to leave, if he could help himself.

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### **CHAPTER III. MASTER STEPHEN'S PAGE.**

Libor, as already remarked, had never had the least intention of leaving Master Peter's house so soon after his arrival as he had threatened to do, if he could by any possibility avoid doing so.

The fact was he had a little business of his own on hand, as anyone observant might have found out from his air of mystery, and the fact that, if he was on his way to Pest, he had had to come so far out of it, that Master Stephen would certainly have employed another messenger had Libor not particularly desired to come.

Master Peter was not very observant, but even he wondered in himself once or twice what the fellow wanted, and came to the conclusion that his new dignity had turned his head.

Dora wondered a little also, and felt that the young man had been impertinent, not only in his remarks, but in the way in which he had followed her about with his eyes throughout the interview.

He was not a person of much consequence, however, and both father and daughter quickly dismissed him from their thoughts. [Pg 51]

And here, by way of explaining matters, we must mention that many years ago, when Dora was quite a tiny child, it had been settled between her father and Héderváry the Palatine, that she should marry the latter's son Paul. Héderváry was Master Peter's oldest and closest friend, one to whom he was much attached; and Dora, though no heiress, was a daughter of one of the proudest and noblest houses in Hungary. The match was considered perfectly suitable, therefore, and the Hédervárys were much attached to their "little daughter," as they constantly called her. Paul himself admired and liked the bride chosen for him quite as much as was necessary, and it is needless to say that Dora's father thought him extremely fortunate in having a girl so sweet, so clever, so well-educated, so good-looking, so altogether charming, for his wife.

Dora herself no one thought of consulting. As a good, dutiful daughter, she would, of course, accept without question the husband approved by her father; and there was no denying that Paul was calculated to win any girl's admiration, for he was an imposing, gallant-looking personage, and accomplished withal. They would certainly make a handsome, even a striking pair.

Every time Paul came to stay he found Dora more attractive; and though he had never in any way alluded to his hopes, of which she was quite ignorant, he could not help feeling that she was the very bride he would choose, or rather, would have chosen for himself, but for one unfortunate defect—her small dowry! It was a very serious defect in his eyes, though his parents thought little of it, for he was ambitious. His great desire was to make a fine figure in the eyes of the world, to be admired, courted, looked up to; and though the Hédervárys were wealthy, more wealth never comes amiss to those who wish to shine in society. [Pg 52]

Was it any wonder therefore that Paul should presently begin to reflect that Dora's cousin Jolánta would suit him better than herself? Not that he liked her as well, for, though a pretty, gentle girl, she had not much character, and she was not nearly so clever and amusing; but she was an

heiress, a considerable heiress, and Paul was convinced that he liked her quite well enough to make her his wife.

Dora was now nearly eighteen, and very soon he would be expected to ask her father's consent to their marriage. To Dora herself he would of course not say a word until he had her father's leave.

He was in a most difficult position, poor fellow! He was fond of Dora; and he was fond of his parents, who would be greatly vexed if he disappointed them in this matter. It was a serious thing to vex one's parents, especially when they had it in their power to disinherit one! His father was a generous, hot-tempered soldier; he would warmly resent any insult put upon his old friend's daughter; Master Peter might resent it too, though no word had yet passed between himself and his intended son-in-law. Truly a difficult position! But for all that, he meant to please himself, if he could safely do so.

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Paul was turning these things over in his mind, and was pitying himself and racking his brains to discover some way by which his parents might be induced to take a reasonable view of things, when it occurred to him that two heads were better than one.

He was staying just now with the Szirmays at their castle, where he was always made much of, and Master Stephen was constantly arranging hunting parties and other country amusements in his honour.

Somehow, he never quite knew how it was, he found himself, during a moment of leisure, near the room occupied by one of the pages; and just for the sake of talking to somebody he went in, and was received with obsequious delight by Libor, who murmured his thanks for the great honour done him by the visit of so high and mighty a gentleman.

The little room was of the plainest description, and not too light, but the unglazed windows were at least filled in with bladder-skin, and the bare walls were painted white; the furniture consisted of a small open stove of earthenware, a roughly-made, unpainted bedstead, a primitive wooden table, and two or three stools. It was bare enough for a monk's cell, and it was unceiled, open to the roof, which appeared to consist of old boards and lattice-work of a rough description.

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Libor was attired in a pair of red trousers, rather the worse for wear, and fastened round his waist by a leather strap, a waistcoat of the same colour, and a coarse shirt with wide, hanging sleeves. He was wearing neither coat nor jacket, and he had a slender reed pen stuck behind his ear. There were writing materials and a book or two on the table, and the page was busy with his pen, when, to his immense surprise, there entered the haughty young noble, a tall handsome personage clad in a "dolmány" of bright blue woollen stuff which reached down to his ankles, and was not unlike a close-fitting dressing-gown.

Libor started to his feet, and bowed almost to the ground as he expressed his sense of the great man's condescension, while he wondered in his own mind to what it was due, and what was wanted of him—something, he felt pretty confident, and he was quite ready to serve such an one as Paul, who would be sure to make it worth his while. But what could it be?

After a little beating about the bush, and a little judicious flattery, which drew forth many humble thanks for his good opinion from Libor, coupled with an expression of his hope that Mr. Héderváry would find that opinion justified if ever he should need his services, Paul at once proceeded to business.

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Some men would have been disgusted to see a fellow-man, bowing, bending, and cringeing before them, as Libor was doing, but to Paul it was merely natural, and it pleased him, as showing that the clerk had a proper respect for his "betters."

"I am going to tell you something, clerk, which I have not told to another soul," began Paul, and Libor bowed again and felt as if he were on hot coals.

"You have guessed, I daresay, that I don't come here merely to pay an ordinary visit?"

Libor said nothing, judging it more prudent not to mention any surmises if he had them.

"Well, the fact is that I am here this time by desire of my parents to ask the hand of Master Peter's daughter."

Libor smiled.

"Yes, Libor, *deák*, but—well, I have the deepest respect for my parents, and I would not willingly cross their wishes, but for all that, I am of age, I am four-and-twenty, and such matters as this I should prefer to manage in my own way."

"Most natural, sir, I am sure," said Libor, with another deep bow; "marriage is an affair which— which—"

"Which needs careful deliberation, you mean; just so! And the more I consider and weigh matters, the more I feel that it is Master Stephen's daughter Jolánta who is the one for me."

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"A most charming young lady! and I quite understand Mr. Héderváry's choice; and, if I might hazard the remark, I would suggest, with all possible deference, that the fair Mistress Dora is not nearly as well provided for as Mr. Stephen's daughter; though her father has a quantity of gold and silver plate, his property is not large, and he cannot give her much."

"Say 'nothing,' Libor, and you will be nearer the mark! I know it, and I am glad to see you don't try to hide anything from me. Well, of course, property never comes amiss even to the wealthiest, and 'if the master provides dinner, it is well for the mistress to provide supper,' as they say. But I had rather take Jolánta empty-handed than Dora with all the wealth of the world. I like property, I don't deny it, who does not? But I don't care a straw for Dora, and I do for Jolánta."

"Ah, then of course that settles it! But suppose Master Peter should have suspected your intentions?"

"There is just the rub! He is an old friend of my father's, and I should be sorry to hurt him; but I have made up my mind to ask for Jolánta."

"H-m, h-m," murmured the page thoughtfully. "Rather an awkward state of things, sir."

"Of course it is! but look you here, Libor, if you can help me out of it, I will make it worth your while. I know how modest and unselfish you are, but I shall be able to find you something, something which will set you up for life."

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Libor's eyes sparkled. This was even more than he had looked for.

But Paul was growing rather impatient; this long interview with a person so far beneath him was distasteful to him, and he cut short the page's servile protestations of devotion and gratitude. What was to be done? that was the question.

"First make sure of Mistress Jolánta herself, before anything was said to her father," suggested Libor, "and then finish his visit and take his leave without proposing for either. Visits were not always bound to end with a proposal, and Master Peter could not possibly be hurt therefore. As for Mr. Stephen, when the time should come to ask his consent, he would certainly not refuse such a son-in-law as the son of the Palatine. Mr. Héderváry's parents"—Libor hesitated a little—"they could not blame him if—suppose—disappointed they might be, but they could not blame him—if he were able to say that Dora had another suitor, and one whom she preferred to himself, though Master Peter was not aware of the fact."

"H-m!" said Paul, "that would settle it, of course; but—there is none."

"No, there is not," said the clerk thoughtfully, with one of his deferential laughs, "but—we might find or invent someone."

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"Find someone! Who is there?"

"Well, let us see—if—if we can invent no one else, there is myself!"

"You!" cried Paul, with evident and intense disgust, "you! But how? in what way?" and he broke into a laugh.

"That is my affair, sir; and if you have confidence in me——"

"Hush! I hear footsteps. Not another word now, I will contrive to see you again privately before I go from here. Just one thing more. I wonder whether you would undertake to do me a small service without telling the Mr. Szirmays, and without leaving this house."

"What am I to understand, sir?" asked the page, with marked attention.

And Paul explained that if he succeeded in arranging matters with Mistress Jolánta, he should want someone on whom he could depend, to keep him informed of all that went on in the house, in case, for instance, Master Stephen should be thinking of another match for his daughter, and—in fact, there might be many things which he ought to know; and then if he came again himself during the winter, he should want someone to see that he had comfortable quarters prepared for him on the road, and so on.

Libor was only too delighted to serve such a magnificent gentleman, a gentleman who was so open-handed and so condescending moreover, and the bargain was struck. Paul handed the page a well filled purse, telling him to keep a fourth part of the contents for himself, and to use the remainder to cover any expenses to which he might be put in sending messengers, etc.

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"And look you here, Libor, from to-day you are in my service, remember—one of my honourable pages; and if ever you should wish to try your fortune elsewhere, there will be a place ready for you in my establishment."

Libor bowed himself to the ground as he answered, "With heart and soul, sir."

Meantime the footsteps had drawn nearer, and a tap at the door put a stop to the conversation.

"The gentlemen are waiting, sir," said the governor, or seneschal, of the castle, a dignified-looking man clad in a black gown, and wearing at his girdle a huge bunch of keys; for the governor of such a castle as that of the Szirmays, was keeper, steward, seneschal, as well as captain of the men-at-arms.

"In a moment," replied Paul, and as soon as the old man's back was turned, he whispered hurriedly, "If anyone should happen to ask what I came to your room for, you can say that I wanted a letter written."

Paul stayed yet a few days longer, and was so well entertained with hunting, horse-races, foot-

races, feats of arms, and banquets that he could hardly tear himself away from the cordial hospitality of his hosts. He and Libor met but once again in private; but when he was gone Libor held his head higher than he had ever done before. Up to this time he had been the least well off of the pages, and had been deferential to his companions, but now all this was changed. To the Szirmays, on the other hand, and especially to Master Peter, he was more deferential, more attentive, than ever before.

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Weeks, months passed, and if Master Peter was somewhat surprised that his old friend's son had not yet declared himself, he was much too proud to show it. And he was far too proud also to show how much hurt he was when he presently learnt that Paul was a suitor for the hand of his niece, and had been accepted by her father and herself.

Master Peter was deeply hurt indeed, and he felt too that his brother had not behaved well to him, knowing, as he did, the arrangement between himself and his friend.

Stephen also felt guilty; and the end of it was, that, though the brothers were sincerely attached to one another, and though no word on the subject passed between them, both felt a sort of constraint. The old happy intercourse was impossible; and for this reason Master Peter came reluctantly to the conclusion that he should be wiser to set up a home of his own again, and leave his brother in possession of the family-dwelling.

Paul had had considerable trouble with his parents, however. They would not hear a word in depreciation of Dora, and at the first insinuation of anything to her actual discredit, Héderváry had flown into a rage, denounced it as idle, shameless gossip, and declared hotly that Paul ought to be ashamed of himself for giving a moment's heed to such lying rumours.

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When Paul went a step further and obstinately asserted his belief that Dora was carrying on a secret flirtation with Libor the page, the old warrior's fury was great, and he vowed that he would ride off instantly and tell his friend everything.

Yet, after all, he did nothing of the sort! (Paul and Libor perhaps could have told why.) So far from taking any step of the kind, he held his peace altogether, and finally acquiesced in his son's choice. He gave his consent, very unwillingly, it is true, but he gave it!

Master Peter came to him on a visit not long after, and was so far from betraying any annoyance that he joked and congratulated his friend on having a rich daughter-in-law instead of a poor one, and was full of praise of Jolánta, whom he declared to be a dear girl whom no one could help loving. If Dora's father did not care, why should Paul's?

All difficulties in Paul's way seemed to have been removed; but it would be necessary, as he reminded Libor, to keep up the fiction of Dora's attachment for some little time to come, or he would be found out, and his father's anger in that case would be something not easily appeased. It hurt his pride to employ the clerk in such a matter, and to have it supposed that a girl who might have married his honourable self could possibly look with favour upon such a young man as Libor, but there seemed to be no help for it. He was already in Libor's power.

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And Libor was more than willing to play the part assigned to him. He had as keen an eye to the main chance as Paul, and Paul had not only been liberal in money for the present, but had held out brilliant hopes for the future.

If he stayed on with Master Stephen, argued Libor with himself, he would be called "clerk" all the days of his life, and end by marrying some little village girl. If, on the other hand, he obliged young Héderváry, made himself necessary to him, and, above all, entered into a partnership with him of such a nature as Héderváry would not on any account wish to have betrayed—why then he might kill two birds with one stone! He had already had a few acres of land promised him; if, in addition to this, he could obtain some gentlemanly situation such as that of keeper, or governor, or perhaps even marry a distant connection of the family, an active, sensible man such as himself might rise to almost anything! Young Héderváry might be to him a mine of wealth.

This settled the matter, and no sooner had Master Peter left his brother's house than Libor found reasons without end for going to see him. There were various articles to be sent after him in the first place; then there were settlements, arrangements to be made, letters or messages from Jolánta to be carried; and Libor was always ready and eager to be the messenger. The other pages had not a chance now, for he was always beforehand with them; so much so indeed that both they, the servants, and at last even Master Stephen, could not help noticing that, whereas formerly Libor had been a stay-at-home, now he seemed never to be so well pleased as when he was on the move.

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Master Stephen wondered what he could want with his brother Peter, and the young pages, and sometimes the servants, joked him and tried to find out what made him so ready to undertake these more or less adventurous journeys. Libor said nothing, but looked volumes; and they noticed, too, that the old red trousers and waistcoat had quite disappeared, and that the page now thought much of his appearance and came out quite a dandy whenever he was going on his travels.

Master Stephen held it beneath his dignity to joke with his inferiors, but Jolánta had been more condescending to Libor of late than she had ever been before; and naturally so, as he was in Paul's confidence, and every now and then had news of him, or even a message from him to give her. It brought them nearer together, and, innocently enough, Jolánta once asked him merrily

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what it was that made him like to go on such long-expeditions, when it would have been just as easy to send someone else. Whereupon Libor assumed such an expression of shamefaced modesty that Jolánta, who had spoken in the merest jest, began to fancy that perhaps the page really had a reason, and might be courting one of Dora's maids. That it could possibly be Dora herself, never crossed her mind for a moment.

But others saw matters in a different light. The servants had their gossip and their suspicions; the young pages jested, and looked on Libor with eyes of envy; and Libor, though careful not to commit himself, managed somehow to encourage the idea that he and Dora were deeply attached to one another.

Of course, neither servants nor pages held their tongues, and soon people were whispering about Dora Szirmay in a way that would have horrified herself and all her family had they known it. But those chiefly concerned are the last to be reached by such rumours. Whether in any shape they had reached Paul's parents it is impossible to say; but, at all events, he had married Jolánta with their consent, and Libor had continued his visits to Master Peter whenever he could find or devise a pretext.

On the occasion of his present visit, when he had been the bearer of the summons to the Diet, "on his way to Pest," he availed himself of Master Peter's suggestion that he should take a look round the place, to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the ins and outs of the court-yard, stables, and other out-buildings; for, as he reflected, such knowledge never came amiss, and one could never tell when it might be useful. He even noticed absently that one part of the outer wall had not been repaired. More than this, while prowling about in the dusk, he had accidentally fallen in, not for the first time, with Dora's maid, Borka, whose favour he had won long ago by a few pretty speeches, not unaccompanied by some more solid token of his goodwill.

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It was always well to have a friend at Court.

But just as he turned away from Borka, he came face to face with Talabor; and Talabor actually had the impudence to cross-question him as to what he was about. He was not to be shaken off, moreover, and at last, apparently making a virtue of necessity, Libor confessed that he had given the maid a note for Mistress Dora; but he begged and implored Talabor not to betray him, for it would be the utter ruin of him if he did.

Of course he knew that it was most presumptuous that a poor young man like himself could ever aspire to the hand of a daughter of the Szirmays; they both knew that their attachment was hopeless, but—well, they had spent several years under the same roof, and had had opportunities of meeting, and—could not Mr. Talabor understand?

Mr. Talabor understood perfectly, inasmuch as his own admiration of Miss Dora had been growing ever since the first day he saw her. He had worshipped her as something far above him, as all that was good, upright, and honourable, and it was a shock to have it even suggested that she could condescend to underhand dealings with anyone. It was odd, too, if she really cared for Libor, that she should have received and behaved to him as she had done, and though Libor might protest that Master Peter had always shown him marked favour, Talabor was of opinion that he shared his own dislike to the young man, and had shown it pretty plainly.

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"Master Peter ought to know what is going on," he said sturdily; but Libor thereupon became frantic in his entreaties. He implored, he positively writhed in his anguish, not for himself, oh no! what did it matter about a poor, insignificant fellow like him? it might ruin all his prospects with the Hédervárys, probably would, and he should not even be able to return to Master Stephen; he should be a vagabond, and beggar—but that was no matter of course compared with Mistress Dora! She would be ruined in the eyes of the world if it came abroad that she had stooped to care for such as he, and it was certain to get about if Talabor betrayed them. Whereas now no one but themselves and Borka knew anything about it; and she was faithful, she would not open her lips, for he had made it worth her while to keep silence.

"An odd sort of fidelity," it seemed to Talabor; but he was not quite clear as to whether it were his business to interfere; and, if it were, to injure Mistress Dora—

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Libor saw his advantage and pressed it. He reminded Talabor that Master Peter was hasty, and so incautious when his wrath was aroused that some one would be sure to hear of it; he would certainly tell his brother, Master Stephen would dismiss himself, and—well, the whole thing would come out. Dora would be scorned by the world, and—besides, this was probably his last visit; he was going to a distance, and what was more, they had both realised that their attachment must be given up—it was hopeless.

"If it can't be, it can't!" said Libor, with a deep-drawn sigh.

He threw himself upon Talabor's mercy, and Talabor promised.

"But remember," said he, "it is only because speaking might do more harm than good, as you are not coming again, but if ever you do, and I catch you tampering with Borka, I go straight to Master Peter."

"If I come, and if you catch me, so you may!" said Libor, with a sneer.

"I understand all about it," he added to himself, as he turned away with the announcement that he was going to see Moses *deák*, the governor. "I understand! You would give your eyes to be in

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my shoes, Mr. Talabor, or what you suppose to be mine! And why shouldn't they be? The ball has been set rolling, and the farther it rolls the bigger it will grow. Borka will do her part with the servants, and they won't keep their mouths shut! So! my scornful little beauty, you are not likely to get many suitors whom Master Peter will favour, and who knows? Next time we meet—next time we meet—we may both sing a different song."

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## **CHAPTER IV. MISTAKE THE FIRST.**

Father Roger was gone, and Libor the clerk was gone, but Dora and her father were not long left alone. More acquaintances than usual found it convenient to take the mountain castle "on the way to Pest," or elsewhere.

But what was more remarkable than this sudden influx of guests was the fact that so many of them made polite inquiry after Libor the clerk, "keeper," or "governor," as they began to call him.

"What on earth is the matter with the folk!" said Master Peter more than once. "What makes them so interested all at once in that raw, long-eared, ink-stained youth! They ask questions and seem to expect me to know as much about him as if he and I were twin-brethren!"

"I can't think!" returned Dora with a merry laugh, which might have re-assured Talabor had he heard it. "It is very odd, but they ask me too, and really I quite forgot the good man's existence from one time to another."

"Well," said Master Peter, "I suppose one ought not to dislike a man without cause, and I have nothing positively against the jackanapes, but I don't trust him, for all his deferential ways, and I fancy that when once he "gets hold of the cucumber-tree" we shall see a change in him. Your uncle has been kind to him, but not because he liked him, I know! I'll tell you what it must be! he has been boasting, and exaggerating what we have done for him," Master Peter went on in his simplicity, "making himself out a favourite, and counting up the number of visits he has paid us here, until he has made people think we have adopted him, and they will be taking him for my son and heir next, faugh! Ha! ha! A pushing young man! I never could think why he wanted to be coming here, but no doubt it gave him importance, and very likely Paul thought we had special confidence in him, otherwise I don't see what made him give such an appointment to a youth of his age. That must be it!"

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And yet, while he said the words, Peter had a vague feeling that there was something behind which he could neither define nor fathom.

Delighted as he was to welcome guests, he had not enjoyed their society of late so much as was usual with him. Sometimes he told himself that it was all fancy, and then at another he would be annoyed by a something not quite to his taste in their manner to Dora, while the frequent reference to Libor was so irritating that he had more than once almost lost his temper, and he had actually told some inquiries with haughty dignity that if they wanted to know what the young man was doing they had better ask the servants.

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This had had the desired effect; so far, at least, that Master Peter was not troubled again; but people talked all the same, and even more than before, for his evident annoyance and the proud way in which he had repelled them made the busy-bodies put two and two together and conclude that he really had some secret trouble which he wanted to hide from the world. And so, by way of helping him, they naturally confided their suspicions one to the other, and to their friends.

Gossip about people of such importance as the Szirmays naturally had a peculiar zest, and the fact that Dora was first cousin to Jolánta, one of the Queen's favourite attendants and wife of Paul Héderváry, of course gave it additional flavour.

Maids who came with their mistresses questioned Borka, who answered them as she had been instructed to do, with earnest injunctions as to secrecy. Talabor, being sent out with a message to Master Stephen, heard similar gossip from the pages of his household, gossip which distressed him greatly, though he vowed that he did not believe a word of it.

He could not get it out of his head during his lonely ride home, but as he thought over all that he had heard, it suddenly struck him that, supposing it to be true, Borka was not as "faithful" as Libor fancied. The story must have come abroad through her, unless—an idea suddenly flashed across his mind—Libor might have trumped the whole thing up by way of increasing his own importance. But then he had actually caught him with Borka! Talabor resolved to have a word with Miss Borka at the first opportunity.

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In due time Master Peter set out for Pest, and thither we must now follow him.

Oktai, the Great Khan, found himself on the death of Dschingis at the head of a million and a half of fighting men, and at once determined to carry out his father's plans of conquest by sending his nephew Batu westward to attack the peaceful Kunok, the "Black Kunok," as the chronicles call

them, who dwelt between the Volga and Dnieper in Great or Black Cumania.

Twice the Mongols had been beaten back, but in the end numbers had prevailed, and to save what remained of this people, their King had led them into Moldavia, then occupied in part by the Little, or White Kunok.

Meanwhile, alarming rumours of what had occurred had reached Hungary, but were credited by few, and as to being themselves in any real, still less immediate danger, that the Hungarians would not bring themselves to believe. Their King, Béla (Albert) took a very different view of the situation. One of the most energetic kings Hungary had ever had, and brave in meeting every difficulty, though he did not fear danger, he did not despise it, and while the great nobles spent their time in amusing themselves, he was following with the most careful attention all that was going on among his neighbours. He was kept well informed, and nothing of that which Oktai was doing escaped him. He knew how Russia had been conquered, how the Kunok had been hunted, and how the countless Mongol hordes were gaining ground day by day.

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He knew, but he could not make others see with his eyes. More than once he appealed to the great nobles, urging them to make ready, while he himself strove gradually to raise troops and take measures for the defence of the kingdom. But it was all in vain; they heard, but they heeded not. And then one day they were quite surprised, when, after many perils and dangers, Kuthen's messengers appeared in Buda, having come, as they said, from the forests of Moldavia.

They were no brilliant train, but men who had fought and suffered, and endured many hardships; and they had come, as Libor told Master Peter, to ask for an asylum. Hungary was but thinly populated at this time, and the King was always glad to welcome useful immigrants. Knowing which, they asked him confidently, in their own king's name, to say where they might settle, promising on his part that he and his people would be ever faithful subjects, and more than this, that they would all become Christians.

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Béla felt that he must make up his mind at once. He could not send the messengers away without a decided answer; he thought the Kuns would be valuable, especially just now, as they were men who knew what war was, and could fight well.

But in bidding them welcome to Hungary without consulting the Diet, Béla made a mistake—a pardonable mistake, perhaps, for he knew as well as anybody that Diets were sometimes stormy affairs, and not without dangerous consequences; and he knew too that the majority of those who would assemble either did not know of the peril which was so close at hand, or were so obstinate in their apathy that they did not wish to know of it; nevertheless it was a mistake.

As for Kuthen, he had two alternatives before him. Either he might submit to Oktai and join him in his career of conquest; or, he might offer his services and faithful devotion to a king who was well known to be both wise, chivalrous, and honourable.

Kuthen made the better choice; but if his offer were refused, or if Béla did not make speed to help him, why, then, it was plain that the country would be inundated by 40,000 fighting men.

The King could not wait, and Kuthen's messengers were at once sent back to Moldavia, laden with presents, and bearing the welcome news that King Béla was willing to receive the Black Kunok on the terms offered. The White Kunok of Moldavia already acknowledged the Hungarian king as their sovereign.

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Kuthen lost no time in setting out with his people, and Béla, in the warmth of his heart, determined to give him a magnificent reception. He would receive him as a king should be received, whose power and dominions had been till lately at least equal to his own; he would receive him as if he were one of his most powerful neighbours; he would receive him as a brother.

Béla cared little for pomp and show on his own account, and the splendour of his train on this occasion was all the more striking. Never had such a sight been seen in Hungary before as when, one morning in early summer, the King rode out to the wide plain where he was to receive his guests.

Before him went sixty men on horseback, clad in scarlet, all ablaze with gold and silver, wearing caps of bearskin or wolfskin, and producing wild and wonderful music from trumpets, pipes, and copper drums. After them came the King in a purple mantle over a long white "dolmány," which sparkled with precious stones and was covered in front by a silver breast-plate. Right and left of him rode a bishop in full canonicals and bearing each his crozier.

These were followed by some two hundred of the more prominent nobles, among whom were Paul Héderváry, Master Peter, and his brother Stephen, and the latter's son Akos, who, as already mentioned, was attached to the King's household. The rear was brought up by soldiers armed with bows, all mounted like the rest.

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Truly it was an imposing spectacle, as Master Peter admitted when he afterwards described it to Dora; but it afforded him little satisfaction.

No sooner was the army of bowmen drawn up in order than the war-song of the advancing Kunok was to be heard.

On they came, Kuthen and all his family on horseback, his retinue, and his army which followed

him at a respectful distance, part mounted, part on foot, and behind these again a long thick cloud of dust.

The pilgrims did not present a grand appearance. They looked as those look who have come through many toils and dangers; but the King was not without a certain pathetic dignity of his own, in spite of his somewhat Mongolian features, slanting eyes, low, retreating forehead, and long beard, already slightly touched with grey. He looked like a man who had suffered, was suffering rather, and who could not forget his old home, with its boundless plains, its vast flocks and herds, and its free open-air life; but he looked also like a man who knew what it was to be strong and powerful.

Kuthen's followers came to a halt, while he and his family rode forward, preceded by a horseman, not far short of a hundred years old, who carried a double cross in token of the submission of his people both to Christianity and to the sovereignty of the Hungarian king. [Pg 77]

The King and Queen, their two sons, and two daughters, all wore loose garments of white woollen, fastened round the waist by unpolished belts of some sort of metal; and on their heads were pointed fur caps, such as are still worn by the Persians. The King and his sons had heavy swords of a peculiar shape, while the Queen and Princesses carried feather fans decorated with countless rows of red beads and bits of metal.

What trust Kuthen felt in King Béla was shown by the fact that his bodyguard numbered no more than two or three hundred men armed for the most part with spears.

Master Peter had much to tell when he returned home of the beautiful horses covered with the skins of wild beasts, on which Kuthen and his family were mounted, and which naturally excited the admiration of such horse-lovers as the Hungarians; also he told of the band of singers who preceded the chiefs, and marked the pauses between their songs by wild cries and the beating of long narrow drums; of the servants, women, and children, who journeyed in the rear of the army, those of the latter too small to walk being carried in fur skins slung on their mothers' backs; and of the immense flocks and herds reaching far away into the distance, whose herdmen, mounted on small, rough horses, drove their charges forward with long whips and the wildest of shouts. [Pg 78]

He told her, too, how King Béla had galloped forward to welcome his guest with outstretched hand, and had made the most gracious and friendly of speeches.

"Much too gracious!" grunted Peter with a shrug of his shoulders. "All very fine, but the country will have to pay for it!"

"Oh, yes, and when all sorts of compliments had been exchanged (through the interpreters of course, for they can't speak decent Hungarian) then up came the baggage-horses, and the tents were pitched in a twinkling side by side. They sprang up like mushrooms, and before long there was a regular camp, such a camp as you never saw!"

Béla's tent was of bright colours without, and sparkled with silver and gold within; but Kuthen's, which was larger (for it accommodated his whole family), was meant not for show, but for use, and to be a defence against wind and rain, and was composed of wild-beast skins.

There was a banquet in the royal tent in the evening, and the haughty Hungarian nobles saw, to their astonishment and relief, that, though their dress was simple, not very different in fact from that in which they had travelled, the King and Queen and their family actually knew how to behave with the dignity befitting their exalted rank. [Pg 79]

The Kunok performed one of their war dances in front of the tent while dinner was going on; and at the close of the entertainment, Béla presented Kuthen, his family, and the principal chiefs, with such gifts as betokened the generous hospitality of the Hungarian and the lavish munificence of the King.

But Master Peter, though at other times he could be as lavish and generous as anyone, was not over well pleased to see this "extravagance," as he considered it; and his feelings were shared not only by his brother and nephew, but by many another in the King's retinue.

"No good will come of it," muttered they to themselves.

And the Kun chiefs, "barbarians" though they were in the eyes of the Hungarian nobles, were, some of them at least, shrewd enough to notice their want of cordiality, and sensitive enough to be hurt by their proud bearing and the brilliant display they made.

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The whole camp was early afoot, and the two bishops in their vestments, attended by many of the lower clergy in white robes, appeared before the royal tents, in one of which stood Béla and his courtiers all fully accoutred, with helmets on their heads and richly ornamented swords at their sides, while in the other were assembled Kuthen and his family, bare-headed and unarmed. [Pg 80]

Béla's own body-guard, mounted and carrying their lances, battle-axes, clubs, and swords, were stationed on each side of the royal tents, while their officers rode up and down, or stopped now and again to exchange a few words with one another in a low tone. A number of Kunok, bare-headed and unarmed like their sovereign, stood round in a semicircle. Far away in the distance might be heard every now and then the deep-mouthed bay of the great sheep-dogs, and the shrill neigh of the horses, but otherwise there seemed to be a hush over all.

Presently, a camp-table was brought forward covered with a white cloth and having a silver crucifix in the midst, with golden vessels on each side, and then, all being ready, a solemn mass was said by one of the bishops, interspersed with singing and chanting, by the choir, all of which evidently impressed the Kunok, who had never seen the like, or anything at all resembling it, before. By the expression of their wild faces it was plain to see that while utterly surprised, and, in spite of themselves, awed and subdued, some were doubtful, some more or less rebellious, and many full of wonder as to what it all meant and whether it portended good or evil.

But there was yet more to follow. The service over, two of the younger white-robed clergy took up a large silver basin, another pair carried silver ewers, while the remainder, with lighted torches, formed up in two lines and all followed the bishops to Kuthen's tent, in front of which he, his family and retinue, were now standing with King Béla beside them. [Pg 81]

If the Kunok had looked doubtful and uneasy before, they looked yet more disturbed now by the mysterious ceremony which followed. It was all utterly unintelligible to them; they heard words in a strange tongue uttered over their King and Queen, over the Princes and Princesses, and they saw water poured upon the faces of each in turn, and no doubt concluded that they were witnessing some magic rite, which might have the effect of bringing their sovereign completely under the influence of the Hungarians.

And not only the royal family, but their attendants, the chiefs, and last of all themselves had to submit to the same ceremony, without having the least conception of what the faith was into which they had been thus hastily baptized.

The main body of the Kunok arrived a few weeks later, and they, too, were baptized in batches, with an equal absence of all instruction and preparation, and in equal ignorance of what was being done for them.

That was the way in which the heathen were "converted" in too many instances in bygone times. Is it wonderful that they remained pagans at heart, or that traces of pagan superstition are to be found in Christian lands even to the present day? [Pg 81]

Well, the Kunok were now "Christians," and within a few months settlements were allotted to them in those thinly populated districts which the King was desirous of seeing occupied by inhabitants of kin to his own people.

Meanwhile, Kuthen and his train had reached Pest, and he had made his entry with much pomp and state, Béla being determined that his guest should be received with all respect. The two Kings therefore rode side by side, wearing their crowns and long flowing mantles, and the narrow, crooked streets were thronged with people, all curious to see, if not animated by any very friendly feeling towards the new arrivals.

Some of the more prominent chiefs Béla determined to keep about himself that he might win their confidence and attachment by kindness.

But Kuthen and his family were conducted at once to Master Peter's old mansion near the Danube, Béla promising that he would have a proper residence built for them as soon as he could find a site.

Peter's house was of an original description, and consisted, in fact, of six moderate-sized houses, connected one with the other by doors and passages added by his father; but it had at least been made habitable and provided with present necessities, and afforded better shelter, as well as more peace, than their tents, and the caves and woods of Moldavia, where they had dwelt in perpetual fear of their enemies. [Pg 82]

All this Master Peter duly reported to Dora, with comments of his own, and many a shake of the head, and still her curiosity was not satisfied.

"What more did she want? He had emptied his wallet so far as he knew."

"You have hardly said a word about the Queen and the Princesses," returned Dora.

Whereupon Master Peter gave a short laugh.

"H-m! You had better ask your cousin Akos what he thinks of them the next time you see him," said he.

"Why, does he see much of them? I thought he was as much against their coming as you were."

"So he was! So he was! as strongly as any one! but—well, you know a page must go where he is sent, and his Majesty seems to want a good many messages taken. At all events, Akos is often with the Kun folk, and what is more, one never hears a word against them from him now! Bright eyes, Dora, bright eyes! and a deal of mischief they do."

"But can Akos understand them?"

"It seems so; he has picked the language up pretty quickly, hasn't he? It is all jargon to me, but then I have not had his practice! Father Roger says their tongue is something like our Magyar, a sort of uncouth relation, but I don't see the likeness myself." [Pg 83]

"And the Princesses are really pretty?" Dora asked again.

"Prettier than their parents by a good deal! Yes, they are pretty girls enough, I suppose," said Peter grudgingly, "some people admire them much, particularly the younger one, Mária, as she is now. She used to be Marána, but that's the name they gave her at her baptism, and the other they called Erzsébet (Elizabeth). The King and Queen and their sons all have Magyar names now. But they will bring no good to the country," Master Peter added, after a pause, "no good, that I am sure of! Why, there have been quarrels already where they have settled them. Everybody hates the sight of them and their felt tents, and the King has had to divide them. What have they been doing? Why, plundering their neighbours to be sure, as anyone might have known they would. Mere barbarians, that's what they are, and we shall have a pretty piece of work with them before we have done."

"And Jolánta, you saw her?" Dora interposed, by way of diverting her father's attention from a topic which invariably excited him.

"Yes, I saw Jolánta," was the answer, given with such a grave shake of the head that Dora asked whether there were anything amiss with her.

"Amiss? h-m! Dora, my girl," said Master Peter, laying his hand affectionately on her shoulder, "I am glad that *you* did not marry him!" [Pg 85]

"I?" laughed Dora, "why should I?"

"Ah, you have forgotten how they used to call you 'Paul's little wife,' when you were only a baby, and you did not know, of course, that your old father was fool enough to be disappointed when he chose your cousin instead."

"But isn't he kind to her? Isn't she happy?" inquired Dora.

"That is a question I did not ask, child, so I can't say. But she is just a shadow of what she was."

"Selfish scoundrel!" burst forth Master Peter the next moment, unable to keep down his indignation, which was not solely on Jolánta's account.

He had heard a good deal in Pest. Honest friends had not been wanting to tell him of the reports about his daughter, and his pride had been deeply wounded by the half pitying tone in which some of his acquaintances had inquired for her, as also by the fact that the Queen had *not* asked for her, though she was on quite intimate terms with Jolánta, and in the natural course of things would have wished to see Dora also at Court.

Peter had longed to "have it out" with somebody, and make all who had repeated gossip about his Dora eat their own words.

But for once he was prudent, and bethought himself in time that some matters are not bettered by being talked about. If he blurted out his wrath there would be those who would say that "there must be something in it, or he would not fly into such a rage," as he knew he should do, if once he let himself go. Besides, although he had convinced himself that Paul was at the bottom of all the gossip, and was burning to go and take him by the throat and make him own it on his knees, yet, after all, where was the use of making a charge which he could not actually prove? [Pg 86]

Accordingly, Master Peter held his tongue, but he determined that nothing should induce him to take Dora to Pest while there was any risk of her being slighted and made uncomfortable. If he could have looked forward only a few months perhaps he would have recognised that slights were not the worst evils to be encountered in the world.

"Selfish scoundrel!" he repeated vehemently, "from what I hear, he has been driving the poor girl about from morning till night, and from night till morning! Paul Héderváry's wife must be seen everywhere, at all the Court functions, all the entertainments in Pest, and even in the country there is no rest for her, but she must be dragged to hunting parties, which you know she never cared for. She never had much spirit you know, poor Jolánta! and now she is like a shadow, all the flesh worn off her bones! Could you fancy Jolánta killing a bear?"

"A bear! why, she was terrified whenever there were bears about!" [Pg 87]

"Ay, but of course Paul's wife must be something to be proud of, something unlike the rest of the world, an Amazon! Well, he made her go out bear-hunting, for I'll never believe she went of her own free will; she killed a bear, they say, with her own hand, looked on more likely, while he did it! But any way, there's the skin, and it's called 'Jolánta's bear,' and she had a swoon or a fit or something after, and has never been herself since, so I was told. She sent you a number of messages, poor girl, and wished you were coming back with me to Pest."

"Poor Jolánta," murmured Dora, "I should like to see her, but not in Pest."

"Ah! and you remember that young jackanapes, Libor?" said Master Peter.

"Paul Héderváry's governor? Oh, yes, isn't he gone to his castle yet?"

"Not he! He is 'climbing the cucumber-tree' as fast as he can! I can't think what made Paul take him up; can't do without him now it seems, looks to him for everything, and has him constantly at his elbow; and yet there is not a prouder man 'on the back of this earth' than Paul."

"But the Mongols, father?" asked Dora, who cared little for Paul and less for his governor, but who could not shake off the impression made upon her by Father Roger.

"My dear child, they have been coming for years! And if they come at last it will be thanks to the Kunok. But they will go back quicker than they came, you may be sure, so don't you trouble your little head about them!"

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Master Peter spoke with the confidence he felt; and when he returned to Pest, where his presence was required by the King, he returned alone, a circumstance which set the gossips' tongues wagging anew, for surely he must have some strong reason for not bringing Dora with him. His stay was likely to be a long one this time, and he had never been away from her hitherto for more than a few days together.

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## CHAPTER V. AS THE KING WILLS.

Kuthen had no idea that he should occupy Master Peter's town-house for long, nor indeed had he any wish to do so; but still he had done his best to make it home-like. It was he who, as father of the family, had apportioned to each of the household his place and duties.

To the serving men was assigned a large hall, with the greater part of the roof taken off that they might not miss the airiness of their tents, and with the wooden flooring replaced by stone slabs, that they might keep a fire burning without danger. Here they lived, and cooked, and slept, sharing their beds—rough skins spread upon the floor—with their faithful companions, the large dogs brought with them from the steppes.

The King's own apartments, with their reed mats, coarse, gaudy carpets, bladder-skin windows, and rough furniture, were not altogether comfortless or tasteless, for King Béla had presented the royal family with sundry articles of a better description, and some of the bishops had followed his example.

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As for the exterior of the house, Kuthen had introduced a few changes there also. Leaving a good space all round, he had had the whole block of buildings enclosed by strong, thick walls; and as he had employed a large number of workmen and paid well, the fortifications were ready in a few weeks. They were further strengthened by the digging of a broad moat, whose drawbridge led to the gateway which formed the sole entrance.

Kuthen had many visitors, among whom Akos Szirmay was certainly the most frequent; but King Béla also came from time to time, besides often inviting the whole family to the palace. Some of the nobles also came—because the King did.

Akos was a sympathetic listener, and Kuthen, who had taken a great liking to him, enjoyed telling him his adventures and experiences. But it was quite evident to all that Akos was drawn to the house by someone more attractive than Kuthen, and also that Marána, or, as she must now be called Mária, was well aware of the impression she had made, and was by no means displeased.

The whole family were out riding one day, a few months after their arrival. This was the recreation which they loved best, and Akos, as usual, was in attendance upon Mária. The two were somewhat in advance of the rest of the party, sufficiently so to be out of hearing, when Akos presently asked his companion whether she were beginning to be accustomed to her new home, and whether she thought she could ever learn to forget the steppes and magic woods of her native land.

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"Could anyone in the world forget his own home, do you think?" she answered simply, and then added, "Oh, it is all so different! You live in stone houses, which you can't move about. One might almost as well be in prison. And the walls are so thick that one can't hear anything of what is going on outside, or even in the next room; but when we lived in our open tents, far away from here, I knew in a moment who was in trouble, and who was laughing for joy. And then our family is one; what pains one, grieves the rest, and all share one another's joys and sorrows, fears and wishes."

"And isn't it so here?" said Akos; "and if we have towns and castles, don't we live much in the open air too? Have we no family-life, and are we not all united in our love for our country?"

"I don't know; maybe it is so, but I am a stranger here, and one thing strikes me—there is no unity among you! Your proud, overbearing nobles despise the people, and the people look on them with fear and envy. You are of one race, one family—at least you Magyars are, and yet there are hardly any true friends among you, or any who are ready to make great sacrifices for their country."

"You don't know us," returned Akos quickly, though he knew how much truth there was in what the girl said. "You judge from what you see around you; here in the capital there is so much gaiety, and everyone wants to be first; but it is not so in our mountains and valleys, and on the great plains. There we know what it is to love and sympathise with one another, and to be of one mind; and we are not bad neighbours. There are several different races dwelling in our beautiful land, and they all live at peace one with the other."

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"Well, I don't know, but—I am afraid! I don't understand books, but I do understand faces, and there is no need for people to open their lips—I might not understand them if they did—but they speak plainly enough to me without uttering a word. *You don't love us!* Oh! that we had stayed among the mountains, in the cool caves, or in our tents, not knowing what the morning might bring us, but with our own people all about us, ready at a word for anything! There was a sort of pleasure even in living in a state of fear, always on our guard, listening to the very rustling of the leaves. Ah! how can I make you understand?"

Mária's thoughts went back to the old times, and she saw herself once again living the old tent life in the forest shades. Perhaps her companion's thought for a moment followed hers, and he tried to picture himself as also living in those far-off regions, sharing a tent with the sweet-looking girl at his side.

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Something he said to her in a low tone, to which she answered with a smile,

"Oh, you, Akos, that is different! If they were all like you, one might perhaps forget all but the things which are never to be forgotten, and the graves of our ancestors. But you, don't you know that it annoys your friends and relations to see you liking to spend so much time with us?"

"Why should my friends and relations mind? My rivals, perhaps yes!"

"There are no rivals!"

"None? not a single one?"

"Not one, Akos, for you are good; you honour my poor father in his misfortune, you honour my mother; and my brothers and Erzsébet are fond of you. How should you have any rival?"

"Marána!" said Akos gently; and when the girl turned to look at him, he saw that, though she was smiling, her eyes had filled with tears at the sound of her old name, coming from his lips.

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It was an evening in autumn, and King Kuthen and all his family were gathered together in their largest apartment, where a fire was burning on the hearth, and the table was spread for their evening meal.

All looked grave; and indeed, since the time of his first arrival in Pest, in spite of all the festivities, and in spite of Béla's unfeigned kindness, Kuthen had always looked like a man who had something on his mind, something which oppressed him, and which refused to be shaken off.

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As chief of an untamed, lawless people, far surpassing his followers in sense and understanding, he was the first to see that the polite attentions shown him by others than the King and his family, were all more or less forced. All was not gold that glittered, and his pride was wounded by the sort of condescension he met with from the Magyar nobles, when he remembered that not so long ago he had ruled a kingdom larger than the whole of Hungary.

Something, perhaps, was due to the change in his mode of life, something to the fact that he did not feel at ease when he took part in the court ceremonials and festivities, that he felt as if he were caged, and sighed for the freedom of the mountains and steppes. However it was, Kuthen had become quite grey during the comparatively short time he had spent in Hungary, and was already showing signs of age.

His family did not fully share his anxieties, for they were not as far-sighted as he; but the Queen and her sons and daughters were shrewd enough to see that their visitors were not all as sincere as they seemed, or wished to seem; though they ascribed this chiefly to the fact that they themselves were foreigners; and, as both sons and daughters were well-looking, and the latter something more, they had little reason to complain of any want of attention or courtesy.

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Just now the King was seated at table, with the Queen and his daughters on his right hand, and his sons on his left. They were all at supper; but it was evident that Kuthen ate rather from habit than because he had any appetite.

As we have said, the dwelling was surrounded by a wide moat, and the only entrance was by the drawbridge. Whenever anyone wanted to come in, the Kunok sentinel posted at the bridge-head always blew a short blast on his horn, and this evening, just as supper was coming to an end, the horn was heard.

Whereupon the King made a sign to one of the many servants to go and see who was there, for he kept strict order in his household, and never allowed the drawbridge to be lowered, or anyone to be admitted without his permission.

On this occasion, however, it seemed that his permission was not waited for, as only a few moments passed before Akos Szirmay walked into the room, and was received with evident pleasure by the King and all his family.

It was clear enough that Marána's parents quite understood the state of affairs, and already looked on the young man as one of the family; for, with the exception of King Béla, he was the only person ever admitted without question, on his merely giving the password.

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Akos came in hurriedly, his face flushed, and with something in his manner which showed plainly that he had not come on a mere ordinary visit.



Kuthen welcomed the young man with a smile, but quickly relapsed into gravity, and Akos himself, when he had taken the seat placed for him, next to Mária, glanced at the servants and held his peace.

"What is it, Akos?" Kuthen asked after a short pause, during which his visitor's manifest embarrassment had not escaped him.

"I would rather speak when there are fewer to hear me, your Highness," answered Akos.

All eyes were at once turned upon him, for the rising feeling against the Kunok was well known; and as the people of Pest had noticed, Kuthen had lately doubled the guards round his house. Whatever the news Akos had brought, they at once concluded that it must be something unpleasant.

"If there is any hurry," said Kuthen, who had regained his composure as soon as he scented danger, "let us go into the next room."

"No need for that, your Highness," returned Akos, also recovering himself. "In fact, if you will allow me, I will share your supper. There is no need for immediate action, but we must be prepared," he added in a low tone.

"Ah," sighed the Queen, "our soothsayers had good reason to warn us against coming here! We are in a state of constant unrest, and I am weary of it. For my part, I can't think why we did not leave this gilded prison long ago, and join our people in their new settlements, where we should at least be among those who love and honour us."

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"You are right there, wife, and you all know it is what I have long wished," said Kuthen. "Where is the good of being called 'King,' when one has no kingdom? My people are being ruled by foreigners, and, though I sit at the King's Council, nothing that I say has any weight. No, what I want is to be the father of my large family again, as I used to be, until I go and join my ancestors. No, I will stay here no longer! The King has always been kind to us, and I will open his eyes to what is going on unknown to him."

But here a sign from Akos made the King hold his peace, and the subject was dropped for the present.

It was not Kuthen's way to betray anything like fear; and now when, to his imagination at least, the storm was already beginning to blow about his ears, he would not on any account that the servants should have so much as an inkling of that which filled his own mind.

He remained at table exactly as long as usual, and, when they all rose, he repeated as usual the Lord's Prayer, the only one he had learnt. He recited it in Latin, in an uncouth accent, and with sundry mistakes, but he said it calmly and collectedly as usual, and the rest followed his example.

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Then, passing between a double row of servants, he led the way through an adjoining room to the spacious hall in which he and his family usually passed their evenings and received their guests.

The Queen and her daughters took up some sort of needle-work, and Kuthen signed to his sons to bring him one of the many dog-wood bows which hung on the wall. This he proceeded with their help to fit with a string stout enough to deserve the name of rope, for it was as big round as an ordinary finger.

The making of these unusually long and powerful bows, the chief weapon of the Kunok, and the sharpening and feathering of the arrows, was the King's favourite occupation, and one in which he displayed no little skill. The string also was of home manufacture, and, as the work went on, the young men moistened it from time to time with water.

Many a time Akos had joined them in their evening work, but to-night, as they sat round the blazing fire, his hands were idle.

"Akos, my son, we are alone now," began Kuthen composedly, "speak out, and keep back nothing. You need not be afraid, for this grey head of mine has weathered many a storm before now."

"Your Highness—father! if I may call you so"—said Akos, giving his hand to Mária, "there is a storm coming without doubt, for the wind is blowing from two quarters at once, and we are caught between the two."

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"I don't understand," said Kuthen, twanging the bowstring, while one son took a second bow down from the wall, and the other got a fresh string ready.

"You will directly, sir; the Mongols are coming nearer and nearer, burning and destroying everything before them—that's the last news!"

"Haven't I told the King a hundred times how it would be?"

"You have, and he knows! But there are certain persons who seem to be expecting miracles; and meantime, to excuse themselves for sitting still, they have been whispering suspicions of other people. A few hours ago they went to the King and told him plainly what was in their minds."

"Suspicions! whom do they suspect?"

"*You*, your Highness! you and your people."

"Shame!" cried Kuthen, starting from his seat, and looking Akos straight in the face. At that moment Kuthen was every inch a king, and it was easy to understand how, though he had lost his kingdom, lost his crown, nevertheless his word had been enough to induce 40,000 families to follow him to a new home.

"And why do they suspect me?" he asked with angry resentment.

"Why?" repeated Akos, who had also risen to his feet, and now stood erect facing the King, "because there is not a creature in this world so strong as to be able to stand up against panic!" [Pg 100]

"Is that the way you speak of your nation? and you a Magyar!" said Kuthen.

"My nation!" shouted Akos, all aflame in a moment. "I should like to hear anyone dare to speak ill of my nation! No! but father, you who own such vast flocks and herds, you know that in every fold there are sure to be a few sickly sheep; and if they are scared, no matter by what, and make a rush, you know what happens, the rest of the flock follow them; not that they are frightened themselves, but because they see the others running. A dog, or the crack of a whip is enough."

"And pray, what are these sick sheep bleating about to the King?"

"Well, to be plain, they say that the Kunok are nothing but Oktai's vanguard. That you have come in the guise of guests to spy out the land for those who sent you—for the Tartars!"

"What! I prepare the way for the robbers, who have driven us from the graves of our ancestors! who have slain our people by the thousand and made miserable slaves of others! We in league with the Tartars, our hateful foes! It is a cowardly lie! The King is too noble-hearted ever to believe such a thing! It is the talk of madmen!"

"And the King does not believe it; quite the contrary, for he spoke warmly in defence of you and \_\_\_"

"Ah! that is like himself," interposed Kuthen. [Pg 101]

"Yes; but, my good King, you have many enemies, and they have taken it into their stupid heads that, as I said before, the Kunok are the forerunners of the Tartars. They are saying, shouting, that half the danger would be done away if we had not enemies in our midst, who would turn upon us at the first signal from the Mongols."

"That is what is said by Magyars? That those whom they have received as guests, with whom they have shared their bread and their wine, will betray them! Have I spent my days among lions and tigers, that anyone dares to say such a thing of Kuthen? Oh! the cowards! Let Batu Khan come, and the King shall soon see what our arrows will do."

"I believe you!" said Akos warmly, "and so does the King, but he cannot do all that he would, and so it is for your own safety's sake, in your own interest, as he said, and to prevent greater danger—he is going to station a guard outside."

"Put me and my family under guard! imprison me! in return for my trust, and because I have brought hither through countless dangers, 40,000 families to do and die for the king, and the nation who have received me——"

Kuthen broke off suddenly here to bid his sons go and see to the horses. Late as it was, he and they would go at once to the King, unarmed, and unprotected, to learn how much a sovereign's word was worth.

In a few moments they were all three on horseback, and in court dress, for Kuthen had already adopted the Hungarian usage in this respect, as he had also learnt the language, and done all else he could to accommodate himself to the manners and customs of his new home, by way of making himself more acceptable to his hosts. [Pg 102]

But no sooner was the drawbridge lowered than Kuthen saw himself face to face with a party of Hungarian soldiers on horseback, under the command of one of his most bitter enemies, Jonas Agha, who told the King, in curt and not the most respectful terms, that he could not be allowed to leave his dwelling.

"Then I am a prisoner! and without so much as a hearing!" exclaimed Kuthen. "Be it so then. I am the King's guest, and my friend will explain things to me. Back now, my sons! Let us set an example of submission!"

As he uttered the words, he found Akos at his side, Akos, who, though he had heard from one of the courtiers that such an order was in contemplation, had never suspected that it was already an accomplished fact. And indeed, knowing that both the King and Queen, as well as Duke Kálmán, the King's brother, were doing all in their power to defeat the intentions of the hostile party, he suspected that the present action had been taken by some over-zealous official in a subordinate position, and he now hastened forward to set right any misunderstanding. [Pg 103]

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, standing erect in his stirrups and looking like a statue.

"The King's orders," replied Agha haughtily.

Akos was about to make some fiery reply, but Kuthen interrupted him, saying quietly, "Let it be as the King wills!" and with that he turned his horse's head from the gate.

## CHAPTER VI. MISTAKE THE SECOND.

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The day had closed gloomily, ominously, for the refugees; and to understand how it was that a king so chivalrous as Béla could consent to make a prisoner of his guest, we must go back and see what had taken place a few hours earlier.

Béla, as already said, was fully alive to the danger which threatened his land and people, and at the first news of the advance of the Mongols, he had sent Héderváry the Palatine to block all the roads and passes between Transylvania and Wallachia, and make full arrangements for their defence. But even this prudent step was not approved by every one. The wiseacres, and the sort of people who always see farther than their fellows, attributed the King's orders to fear, and said so too, openly and unreservedly.

There were others who simply refused to believe any alarming reports, alleging that they were all got up by the bishops and chief clergy, that they might have an excuse for staying at home at ease, instead of attending the Pope's Council in Rome.

Others accused the King, the Kunok, and other foreign guests who had lately arrived at the Court of Pest. [Pg 105]

Some of these, the most timorous, actually wanted to force the King to send an embassy to the Great Khan, offering him an annual tribute and other shameful conditions.

Béla was a courageous man, and a true Magyar and king in the best sense of the words. He was calm, brave, and energetic. He saw through the cowards and despised their accusations; for it is the poltroon who is ever the first to accuse others of cowardice, and there is, moreover, one thing which he can never pardon—the being discovered trembling by men braver than himself.

King Béla paid no heed to the wagging of these many tongues, and himself went all round the eastern frontiers of the kingdom, to see personally to the defences. His plans were well considered and well adapted to the object in view. They failed in one point only, but that a fatal one—they were never carried out!

On the King's return to Pest, he found the capital given up to festivity. Nearly every noble in the place must be giving entertainments. If there was a banquet at one house to-day, there was one at another to-morrow. There was no trace of any preparations for war or defence, though there was plenty of nervous alarm.

Shortly after his arrival, the King called a Council, and the heads of Church and State met in a spacious hall often used for Court balls and assemblies, now presenting a very different appearance, and with its walls draped in sober green cloth. [Pg 106]

The King was seated in a canopied armchair raised above the rest, and he wore a white silk mantle, with a clasp something like the ancient Roman fibula, but set with precious stones. On his head was a crown, simple but brilliant, in his hand he held a golden war-club, and from the plain leather belt which confined his white dolmány at the waist, there hung a long, straight sword, with a hilt in the form of a large cross.

The Council consisted of about sixty members, some wearing their ecclesiastical vestments, and others the long Hungarian dolmány. Of all those present no one looked so entirely calm as the King, and those who knew him best could read firm resolve in his face.

Béla knew Hungary and the strength of its various races, and he was never afraid of dangers from without. What he did fear was the spirit of obstinacy and envy, and at last of blindness, which has so often shown itself, just when clear sight and absolute unity were especially needed to enable the country to confront the most serious difficulties.

He knew that he must prove the existence of danger by facts, if he wanted to silence the contentious tongues of those who did not wish to believe; and he had determined to lay convincing proofs before them on this particular day. [Pg 107]

When all were assembled and in their places, the King made a sign to Paul Héderváry, who at once left the hall, the door of which was shortly after again thrown open for the entrance of two gloomy-looking men, with swords and daggers at their belts, whom Paul ushered up to the King's throne. Their robes, trimmed with costly furs, showed that they were persons of importance; and what with the richness of their attire, and their manly deportment, they did not fail to make an impression upon the assembly, though one of the younger members muttered to his neighbour, "Hem! Flat noses and glittering eyes! Who may these be?"

The two bowed low before the king, and then one of them, Románovics by name, said: "Your Majesty, we are both Russian dukes, and have been driven from the broad lands of our ancestors, by Batu Khan, one of Oktai's chiefs. We have now come to your footstool, to entreat your hospitality, and to offer you our services."

"More guests!" whispered the same young man who had spoken before. "Kunok, Russians, and next, of course, the Tartars, not a doubt of it!" The broad smile on his face showed that he was highly pleased with his own wit.

"Honourable guests will always find the door open in Hungary," said the King, when the short speech had been interpreted to him; "and all who are oppressed shall have whatever protection we are able to afford them."

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"More too! Oh, what generous fellows we are!" muttered another still younger man at the table.

The King went on to say that he had heard of the Russian disasters, but that as the news which had reached him might have lost or gained something on the way, he should be glad if they would tell him and the Council just what had really happened.

Whereupon, the Duke who had spoken before gave a short account of all that had taken place since the death of Dschingis, and the partition of his vast dominions. And then the younger Duke, Wsewolodovics, took up the tale.

"Lord King!" he began, "these Mongols don't carry on warfare in an honourable, chivalrous way. They fight only to destroy, they are bloodthirsty, merciless; their only object is to plunder, slay, murder, and burn, not even to make any use of what lands they conquer. They are like a swarm of locusts. They stay till everything is eaten up, till all are plundered, and what they can't carry off, that they kill, or reduce to ashes. They are utterly faithless; their words and promises are not in the least to be trusted, and those who do make friends with them are the first upon whom they wreak their vengeance if anything goes wrong. We are telling you no fairy tales! We know to our own cost what they are, we tell you what we have seen with our own eyes. And let me tell you this, my lord king, their lust of conquest and devastation knows *no bounds*! If it is our turn to-day, it will be yours to-morrow! And, therefore, while we seek a refuge in your land, we at the same time warn you to be prepared! for the storm is coming, and may sweep across your frontiers sooner than you think for."

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"We will meet it, if it comes," said the King coolly. "But I bid you both heartily welcome as our guests for the present, and as our companions in arms, if the enemy ventures to come hither."

The Dukes found nothing to complain of in the King's reception of them. He had been cordial and encouraging, and he had heard them out; though, what with their own long speeches, and the interpreting of them, the interview had lasted a considerable time.

But if the King had listened attentively and courteously, so had not the Council; and the contrast was marked. Some listened coldly and without interest, some even wore a contemptuous smile, and there was a restless shrugging of shoulders, a making of signs one to the other, and at times an interchange of whispers among the members, which showed plainly enough that they thought the greater part of what the Russians said ridiculously exaggerated.

Councils, even those held in the King's presence, were by no means orderly in those days. Everyone present wanted to put in his word, and that, too, just as and when he pleased, so the Duke had hardly finished speaking, when up rose one of the elder and more important-looking nobles, exclaiming impatiently, "Your Majesty! These foreign lords have told us very fully to what we owe their present kind visit; and they have told us, too, that our country is threatened by ruffianly, contemptible brigands and incendiaries. There is but one thing they have forgotten. I should like to know whether this horde of would-be conquerors have any courage, discipline, or knowledge of war among them. It seems to me important that they should tell us this in their own interests, for it needs no great preparation to scatter a disorderly rabble, but valiant warriors are, of course, another thing."

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"Very true, Master Tiböracs," said the King calmly, patiently.

But when the matter was explained to the Russian Duke, he exclaimed, with an expression of the utmost horror and contempt, "Valiant! disciplined! military knowledge! Why, my lord king, who could expect anything of the sort from such thieves and robbers! But, despicable as they are as soldiers, they are dangerous for all that! They are cowards! They are as wild as cattle, as senseless as stones, but—they have numbers, countless numbers, on their side. They fall in thousands, and they use the dead and wounded to bridge the rivers! And they are swift as the very wind."

Several at the table here exclaimed that the Duke must be magnifying, or at least that he had heard exaggerated reports; and one of the most timorous added that to a man who was terrified danger always looked greater than it did to anyone else in the world. That man, at all events, knew what he was talking about!

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"We are not afraid, gentlemen," said Románovics, turning at once towards those seated at the table. "We are exhausted with fighting ourselves, and their blood, too, has flowed in torrents; ten of them have fallen to every one of our men, but then their numbers are ten times ours."

"Afraid of them?" continued the other, "No! who would be afraid of such cowardly robbers? Why, ten will run before one man, if he meets them face to face! We don't say they are invincible, quite the contrary. We come here in the belief that the heroic nation from whom we seek assistance is quite strong enough to be a match even for such a torrent as this! Nevertheless, there is one thing which must not be forgotten. Though there is no military knowledge among them, though they are not trained soldiers, they are extremely clever with their war-machines. Nothing can stand against them! And there is another thing. Those who are conquered are forced into their army; what is more, they are put in the forefront of the battle, in the place of greatest danger, and they are driven forward, or murdered if they attempt to escape! So, with danger before and

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behind, the miserable wretches fight with all the strength of despair; the victors share the spoil, and those who are defeated have nothing to expect but death any way, and sometimes a death of fearful torture too. This, together with their extraordinary rapidity of movement, their cunning, and powers of endurance, is the secret of their strength."

So spoke the Russian Dukes, and their words made a certain impression, though even now some of the Council were hardly convinced of the importance of the danger. Many were scornful of the new-comers, and various contrary opinions were being expressed, when all at once there was a roar outside as if a battle were already going on in the streets, and some of the palace guards rushed into the Council chamber.

All leapt to their feet. Swords all flashed simultaneously from their scabbards, and in a moment, Béla was surrounded, and over his head there was a canopy of iron blades. To do them justice, their first thought was for the safety of the King.

"What has happened?" he asked of the guards, when the hubbub around him had subsided.

"The people have risen! They are asking for the head of Kuthen," was the answer.

There was a shout of "Treachery, treachery, treachery!" without, and the next instant the mob burst into the hall.

"Gentlemen! to your places! put up your swords," said the King, in such a peremptory tone that his command was at once obeyed. Then rising from his chair and turning to the intruders with perfect calm and dignity, he bade them come forward.

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"The King is always ready to hear the complaints of his people! What is it you want, children? But let one speak at a time, that will be the wiser way, for if you all clamour together, my sons, I shall not be able to understand any one of you. Ah! you are there, I see Barkó *deák*; come here, you are a sensible man, I know; you tell me what is the matter."

Barkó was a notable man in his own set, and his sobriquet of *deák* showed that he possessed some learning, at least to the extent of being able to write, and having some knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as of the laws, called "customs."

He was a man whose judgment was respected, and when first suspicion fell upon the Kunok, he was besieged by those who wanted his advice as to how they ought to act in these dangerous circumstances.

Now, on the days when Barkó got out of bed right foot foremost, he would calm his inquirers by saying wisely enough that until Kuthen himself was detected in some suspicious act, the time had not come for accusing him. But, unfortunately, Barkó was not without his domestic troubles in the shape of a wife, who would always have the last word, and so sometimes it happened that he got up left foot foremost.

It was on one of these unlucky days that the people of Pest and the neighbourhood, having somehow heard, as people always do hear, that the King was holding a Council for the purpose of taking measures of defence against the Mongols, "Tartars," as they called them, came with one consent to Barkó's house, and swarmed into it in such numbers that he leapt out of the window to escape them. But no sooner had his feet touched the ground than they were at once taken off it again, and he was caught up and raised on high, amid loud shouts from the crowd that he must be their leader and spokesman.

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"What am I to do? What do you want?" he cried.

"Let's go to the King! Treachery! The Kunok are bringing the Tartars upon us! We want the head of Kuthen!"

Such were the cries which assailed him on all sides, and Barkó let them shout till they were tired.

"Very well, children," he said, as soon as there was a chance of making himself heard. "Very well, we will go to his Majesty. He will listen to his faithful people and find some way of putting an end to the mischief."

"We will go now!" they shouted.

"No! let's wait!" roared a grey-beard, with a shake of his shaggy head, using his broad shoulders and sharp elbows to force a way through the crowd.

"We won't go to the King! We'll go straight to the other King, the vagabond and traitor Kuthen. We will take his treacherous head to our own good King!"

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"Good! good!" cried the mob.

"It is not good!" shouted Barkó. "It is for the King to command, it is for us to ask. If I am to be your leader, trust the matter to me."

"Let us trust it to Mr. Barkó," cried some voices again.

"So then, I am the leader, and if we want to go before the King's Majesty, let us do it respectfully, not as if we were a rabble going to a tavern. Here! make room for me! put me down!"

And Barkó puffed and panted, and shook himself, as if he had swum across the Danube.

Then he called three or four of the crowd to him to help in forming up some sort of procession.

"There! I go in the middle, as the leader, and you, the army, will march in two files after me."

"But we are here, too, Mr. Barkó!" cried some shriller voices.

"The petticoats will bring up the rear!" said Mr. Barkó authoritatively.

And in this order the crowd proceeded on its way; but, notwithstanding all Barkó's precautions, it was a very tumultuous crowd which burst into the King's presence.

Barkó had made the journey bare-headed; and now, being called upon to speak, he bowed low before the King, saying: "Your Majesty! Grace be upon my head. Since the devil is bringing the Tartars upon us, the people humbly beg the head of the traitor Kuthen! And we will bring it to you, if you will only give us the command, your Majesty!"

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"It shall be here directly, and the heads of all his brood, too!" cried Barkó's followers.

Barkó, seeing that the King did not speak, turned to them, saying in a tone of command, "Silence! I will speak, asking the King's grace upon my head."

And turning again to the King he added, "If we don't root them out, my lord King, the Tartars will find the banquet all made ready for them when they come. The vagabonds in the country-districts are already laying hands on property not their own, and behaving just as if they were at home."

One or two voices from among the crowd echoed these complaints, and added others as to the disrespect shown to the Magyar women.

"Silence," interrupted Barkó. "Let us hear his Majesty, our lord the King. What he commands that we will do, and we must not do anything else," he added, by way of showing that he could read writing, and was acquainted with the style in which the royal commands were expressed.

The King heard all without appearing in the least disturbed, while those at the table kept their hands all the time on their swords, and it was by no means without emotion that the two Russian Dukes looked on at this, to them, very novel kind of Council, and at this unconventional way of approaching the King's presence.

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At last there was silence. Barkó had said his say, and the cries and exclamations of his followers having subsided, the King addressed them and him.

First he praised him for his discretion in coming to seek counsel of the King, and then he reminded him that a good king was also a just judge. But a just judge always heard both sides of a question before he gave judgment. If, therefore, he were now to give his consent to what his faithful children wished, and were to deliver King Kuthen, who was both his guest and theirs, into their hands, and that without hearing him as he had heard them, why, then he would be a bad judge, and therefore not a good king. Moreover, if he were unjust in one case he might be so in another.

"If, for instance," said he, "Paul came to me with a complaint against Peter, we might have Mr. Peter's head cut off; and if Peter accused Paul, we might have Paul beheaded. For, my children, others have as much right to justice as ourselves; therefore, hear our commands, and as my faithful servant, the honourable Mr. Barkó has said, observe them and do nothing else."

All eyes were fixed upon the King, and they listened with wrapt attention and in perfect silence as he proceeded:

"Strict inquiry shall be made as to whether there be any real ground of suspicion against King Kuthen; and if there is, he and his people shall be punished! But we must let the law take its course, and my dear citizens of Pest may wait quietly and confidently while it does. From this day forth the King will not leave his residence, a guard shall be placed at his gate, and we will have the matter regularly investigated without delay."

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There was a burst of "Eljens" (vivas) as the King concluded. The people appeared to be thoroughly satisfied, and when Barkó, after a low reverence, turned to leave the hall, his followers made a way for him through their midst, and cleared out after him, quickly at all events, if not with much dignity.

History tells us that the King's Council was satisfied also, no less than the people, who had, indeed, been purposely excited by some of the nobles, and used more or less as a cat's paw. The order that Kuthen should be guarded was, as we have seen, given and executed forthwith. Béla had given it most unwillingly, only, in fact, to appease the excitement, and in the hope of avoiding still worse evils; and though some were still dissatisfied, this was the case with but few of the cooler heads.

And the Russian Dukes, when they were able to speak to the King in private, admitted that numbers of Kunok had indeed been forced by Batu Khan to serve in his army; but they added that these recruits were only waiting the first favourable opportunity to desert and join with their kinsmen, and with the Hungarians, in exterminating the common enemy. And what they feared was that, if the Kunok heard that their King, whom they worshipped, was being kept under restraint, they would actually do what the majority and so many of the chief nobles now without reason suspected them of.

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Béla understood human nature, and to him it seemed that to throw some sort of sop to Cerberus was wiser than to risk the exciting of greater discontent.

But again the King made a mistake!

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## **CHAPTER VII. AT THE VERY DOORS.**

The time of which we are writing was a critical one in Hungary's history. "She was sick, very sick, and the remedy for her disease was bitter in proportion to the gravity of her condition." (Jókai Mór.)

The power and prestige of the sovereign had lost much under Béla's predecessors, first his uncle and then his father; for the latter had rebelled against his brother, and the civil war had increased the importance of the magnates, while it diminished that of the sovereign. Béla's father András had succeeded his brother, and had shown himself as weak, as vain, and as untrustworthy, as king, as he had done as subject.

Béla had inherited many difficulties, and in his eagerness to set matters right, had been over-hasty, over-arbitrary, and had made enemies of many of the great nobles by curtailing their extorted privileges.

András, always in need of money, had given and pawned Crown property, until there was little left. Béla, succeeding to an almost empty treasury, had recalled some of those donations which never ought to have been made; and also, by way of instilling respect for the King's majesty, had withdrawn from the great nobles certain privileges, which they bitterly resented, for some of them had attained such a pitch of might and wealth as rendered them independent of the King and the law. There were two classes of nobles, the magnates and the lesser nobility, the latter being more and more oppressed by the former. All who owned a piece of land were "noble," but as their possessions differed greatly in amount, so some were rich and others very much the reverse.

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The nobles of both classes, and the clergy attended the Diets; but the mass of the people were as yet unrepresented.

Standing army there was hardly any, and when the King wanted troops he had to raise them, and pay them as he could. Those who held crown-fiefs were bound to obey the King's call to arms, but at his cost, and not their own, and all nobles of whatever degree were bound to join his standard if the country was attacked, not otherwise. If the King wanted them to cross the frontier, he must bear the expense; and if they did not choose to go, he was helpless and could not punish them.

But, to be first in the field is often half the battle. To wait until the enemy is actually in the country may spell disaster and even ruin.

Béla was well aware of the danger which threatened. He had heard much from Kuthen, and he had other sources of information as well, men who kept him well posted in all that was going on. Troops he must have if the country was to be saved; and as the Kunok were always ready for war he felt obliged to favour them; and, to raise money for the pay of others, he was obliged to pledge the Crown revenues and to debase the coinage.

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If Hungary had been of one mind in those days, if all had been ready to rise in her defence as once they would have done, she would have had little difficulty in driving back the Mongols; but some of the magnates secretly hoped for a reverse, if so be the King might be thereby humbled. They little knew!

Rumours as to the advance of the Mongols were rife throughout the winter; but the month of March, 1241, had arrived, and still there was nothing to be called an army, in spite of the sending round of the bloody sword, and in spite of the King's most urgent commands, entreaties, and personal exertions.

On the 11th of the month came the first note of actual alarm in a despatch from Héderváry the Palatine, who was guarding the north-eastern frontier. He announced that the Mongols had reached the pass of Versecz (almost in a straight line with Kaschau), and that it was impossible for him to hold them back unless large reinforcements were sent to him at once.

The King, meanwhile, had despatched ambassadors to his old enemy Friedrich, of Austria, urging him in his own interest to come to the help of Hungary. To the Kunok in their new settlements he had also sent orders to mount at once, and they required no second bidding, but set out immediately for the camp.

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The Queen and Court had left Pest for Pressburg, whither all who took the coming danger in the least seriously, and many even who professed to think little of it, had sent their womankind. The few who dared run the risk of leaving them in country houses, with moats and walls as their sole

defence, were nobles whose castles were believed to be inaccessible, or so far from the frontier and so buried in the woods, that they had every reason to hope that they would remain undiscovered. The Hédervárys and the Szirmays were not of this number, always excepting Master Peter; for, such was their reputation for wealth, that it seemed only too likely that, to save their own skins and perhaps share the spoil, some of their servants and dependants might turn traitors and betray them to the Mongols. They, therefore, were among the first to send their wives and children to Pressburg, lavishly provided with all that they might need, and accompanied by brilliant trains of men-at-arms.

Pressburg was full to overflowing, and to every man there were at least ten women. Jolánta, of course, was there, and was daily looking forward to the pleasure of seeing Dora; not doubting for a moment that her uncle would send her with all speed as soon as he himself left home to join the army. [Pg 124]

But the days had passed, and not only had Dora not come, but no one knew where she was, or anything about her. There was no little wonderment at this among those whose minds were sufficiently at leisure to wonder about anything not immediately concerning themselves or their families. It was odd that Master Peter should have stayed so long in Pest without her, a thing he had never done before; it was odder still that he should not have sent her to Pressburg, out of harm's way. Surely he must have placed her somewhere to be taken care of! He could never think of leaving her at home, and alone, when the time of his absence was likely to be so uncertain. They knew, indeed, that his ancient hall was so buried in dense woods, and so surrounded by ravine-like valleys, that no one would be likely to find it unless they knew of its existence and went there for the purpose; yet at the same time, as he and Stephen had been busy collecting their troops, and seemed to consider preparations of some sort necessary, he would surely never be satisfied to leave Dora alone in a place which, though strong enough to resist any ordinary foe, would certainly not be safe from the thieving, burning Tartars, if they should discover it.

And yet, in spite of all these conjectures, that was precisely what Master Peter had done. We have already mentioned his reasons for not taking his daughter to Pest. The same reasons prevented his sending her to Pressburg. He would not have her exposed to sneers, perhaps insults, when he was not at hand to protect her. [Pg 125]

Dora herself was quite against going to swell the Queen's train; and her father was more than a little hurt that, whereas her Majesty (so Paul's mother told him with satisfaction) had especially summoned Jolánta to join her with all speed, she had not said a word to show that she even remembered Dora.

What Dora wished was to follow her father and share all his dangers, labours, and hardships—no such very uncommon thing in those days, when women were often safer with their fathers, husbands, and brothers, than they could be anywhere else. Her father was Dora's first thought, as she was his; but at first he would not give her any decided answer. The Mongols were not yet in the country; and he and his brother, though they loyally obeyed the King's orders, were among those who thought him far too anxious, and his preparations more than were necessary.

At all events, he would not take her with him when he set out with his troop for the camp at Pest, but he promised, if he could not find any better way of ensuring her safety, that he would come later on, put her in a coat of armour, and take her with him. The only question was where she had better stay meantime, and he decided that on the whole home would be best. [Pg 126]

The seneschal, or governor, was a gloomy and rather lazy man, but thoroughly honourable. Peter knew what a bold, brave man he was when it was a question of bears, wolves, and wild boars, and in his simplicity he argued with himself that courage was courage and that a man courageous in one way must needs be courageous in all!

Peter would have liked much to take with him Talabor, of whom he had lately grown quite fond, but it suddenly flashed across him that in any case of unexpected danger, the younger man, full of life and energy, would not be less courageous than the portly seneschal, while he would certainly be more active and resourceful. Talabor, who was burning to accompany his good master, was therefore told that for the present he was to remain at home. Master Peter had a long conversation with him before his own departure, and gave him full instructions, so far as that was possible, as to what he was to do in case of accidents, which Peter himself never in the least expected to occur.

And then he rode away at the head of a very respectable troop, or "banderium," consisting of the lesser nobility of the neighbourhood, and of such recruits as he had been able to enlist; and on reaching Pest he found that the Szirmay contingent, furnished by himself and his brother, was first in the field. Soon after arrived the King with the troops which he had been raising himself in the two home-counties. [Pg 127]

Pest was becoming daily more like a camp. The streets, the open spaces, were turned into bivouacs, the officers slept in tents; and, as most of the men were mounted, on all sides was to be heard the neighing of horses, tethered by long ropes in the open air. Earthworks were being hastily thrown up at a considerable distance beyond the walls of the town, these walls themselves being low and hardly capable of defence, as they were not everywhere provided even with moats.

Impossible to describe the state of bustle and excitement in which everyone in Pest was living just then, and at first sight no one would have discovered anything like fear in the animated and hilarious crowd which filled the thoroughfares. The Mongols were spoken of in terms of the



utmost contempt as a wild, undisciplined, unorganized rabble, who would fly at the mere sight of "real troops," properly armed!

Everywhere was to be heard the sound of music and boisterous mirth on the part of the younger nobles, who made great display of gaudy apparel, fashionable armour from Germany, huge plumes, and high-spirited horses.

Like peacocks in their pride, they loved in those days to make a show of magnificence. And if this was true more or less of all the higher and wealthier nobility, particularly of the younger members, it cannot be said that the lower classes, or the less wealthy, were at all behind-hand in following the example of their betters. [Pg 128]

The King himself hated display, though he did not despise a becoming state and magnificence when occasion required; but those who were attached to his Court, or to the retinue of the great lords, spiritual and temporal, delighted to imitate the young magnates as far as they could. Foremost among these was now Libor the clerk, Héderváry's well-known governor, whom his young master found so prompt and ready, so helpful in carrying out, and so quick to approve all his whims, that it became more and more impossible to him to dispense with his services, and he kept him constantly about him.

Libor sported a gigantic plume in his cap, and his sword made such a clanking as he walked, that people knew him by it afar off. Whenever he had the chance, he might be heard declaiming in praise of the heroic King, and affirming that everyone who did not support him was a scoundrel. All who were in favour of active measures highly approved of Libor; even the King knew him, at least by name, for there was not such another fire-eating Magyar in the whole of Pest, and all were agreed that the King had no more devoted subject than this exemplary young clerk.

Bishops, abbots, magnates, and the King's brother, Duke Kálmán, were arriving now with their expected troops; but on March 14th arrived one who was not expected, and at whom people looked in terror and amazement. [Pg 129]

He rode up slowly, wearily, at the head of a few hundred men, as worn and weary as himself; and as he came nearer, people whispered under their breath, "Héderváry the Palatine!" Héderváry, who was supposed to be defending the passes of the Carpathians!

His armour was battered, his helmet crushed, and a sabre cut across the face had made him hardly recognisable. He rode straight up to the King's tent, before which the Diet was assembled, no one, not even his old friend Peter, daring to speak to him, though he gazed on him hardly able to believe his eyes, and with a sudden chill of alarm as he thought of Dora.

For a few moments no one spoke, but after more than one attempt, the Palatine got out the broken words, "God and the Holy Virgin protect your Majesty!"

Then, turning to the assembled Diet, he added, "Comrades! the enemy is in our land! Our small force held the pass seven days; on the eighth the flood burst through and flowed over dead bodies. You see before you all who escaped! God and the Holy Virgin protect our country!"

Héderváry bowed his head upon his horse's neck to hide his face.

The sensation was immense, the news flew quickly from mouth to mouth, and before long all Pest knew of the disaster, and knew, too, that in the Palatine's opinion the enemy might reach Pest itself within a day or two—a day or two! with such awful speed did the torrent rush forward. [Pg 130]

If Peter had been incredulous before, he was anxious enough now, when he heard of the lightning-like rapidity with which the Mongols were advancing, of the 40,000 pioneers who went before them, cutting a straight road through the thickest forests, of the catapults for throwing stones and masses of rock, against which nothing, not even the strongest walls, could stand. He could not leave his post, it was even questionable whether he could reach Dora now if he made the attempt; for, when the scouts came in they more than confirmed all that the Palatine had said, with the additional information that five counties had been already devastated, and that Batu's army was within half a day's journey of Pest itself.

That same night the red glare in the sky told of burning towns and villages only a few miles off; and the day after Héderváry's return small bodies of Mongols actually appeared on the very confines of Pest, laying hands on all that they could find, and then vanishing again like the lightning, as suddenly as they had come.

The fortifications of the city were pushed on with redoubled energy, and all were wildly eager to go out at once and challenge the enemy. But the King's orders were strict; no one was to go out and attempt to give battle until the whole army was assembled, when he himself would take the command. Not a third part had come in yet, and the men chafed impatiently at the delay. Even now, however, with danger facing them, there was little unity in the camp, little order, little discipline; everyone who had any pretension to be "somebody," wanted to give orders, not obey them, and, in fact, do everything that he was not asked to do. [Pg 131]

But as the troops continued to come in, as the earthworks rose higher, and the ditches and trenches grew broader; as, above all, the King seemed to have no fears, confidence revived, and those who had been timorous ran to the opposite extreme, and began to believe that the King had but to give the signal for battle, and the enemy's hosts would at once be scattered like chaff. They not only believed it, but loudly proclaimed it. Libor was especially loud and emphatic in his

expressions of confidence, and went about from one commander to another, trying his utmost to obtain a post of some sort in the army.

He succeeded at last, for Héderváry the Palatine had lost his best officers, and knowing how highly his son thought of Libor, he gave him a command in his own diminished army. Whereupon Paul presented the young governor with a complete suit of armour, and from that day forward Libor did not know how to contain himself. He was a great man indeed now, and he might rise still higher. In fact, so he told himself, the very highest posts were open to him!

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## **CHAPTER VIII. THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR.**

On the 17th March, six days after Héderváry's imploring cry for help, three after his return, one enormous division of Mongols was in the neighbourhood of Pest, while another was in front of Vác (Waitzen), a town twenty miles to the north.

That morning very early, Paul Héderváry and Ugrin, the Archbishop of Kalócsa, had sallied forth unknown to anyone, to satisfy themselves as to whether the scattered parties of Mongols who had been seen several times beneath the very walls of Pest, were mere bands of brigands, or whether they were part of Batu Khan's army. Paul was a daring, not to say foolhardy man, and it was not the first time he had been out to reconnoitre, taking only Libor and a few horsemen with him. Of course, he wanted Libor this morning, but the governor, being with all his valour a discreet person, was not forthcoming, was indeed not to be found anywhere, much to Paul's vexation.

Paul and the Archbishop therefore rode quietly out together, accompanied by no more than half a dozen men-at-arms, and they had not been riding a quarter of an hour before they caught sight of a party of horsemen coming towards them through the grey dawn. There seemed to be some three or four score of them, and they might be some of the expected troops arriving; it was impossible to tell in the dim half-light, and Paul and his companion drew behind some rising ground to make sure. They had not long to wait before they saw that these were no friends, however, but an advance body of Mongols cautiously and quietly moving forward. To engage them was out of the question, and the two at once agreed to turn back without attracting attention, if possible. But they had no sooner left their shelter than a perfect hurricane of wild cries showed that they had been observed.

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Fortunately for them, their horses were fresh and in good condition, while those of the Mongols were sorry jades at the best, and worn out besides. The Hungarians, therefore, reached the city in safety, though hotly pursued, and they at once presented themselves before the King, who had risen very early that morning, and was already at work in his cabinet.

"Why, Ugrin, how is this?" said Béla, rising to meet the Archbishop, "armed from head to foot so early? and you, too, Héderváry? Where do you come from? I see you are dusty!"

"Your Majesty," began Ugrin, one of the most daring of men, in spite of his office, "Héderváry and I have been riding in the neighbourhood, and we chanced upon the Tartars!"

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"Did you see many?"

"The advance guard, with a whole division behind."

"We have only our horses to thank for it that we are here now," added Héderváry.

"Have not I forbidden all provoking of encounters until we have all our troops assembled?" said the King.

"And there was no provocation—on our part," replied Ugrin, in anything but an amiable tone; "but if we don't get information for ourselves as to the enemy's movements——"

The King cut him short. "I know all about them!" said he, "more than you gentlemen do."

Ugrin and Héderváry shrugged their shoulders, and both put the King's coolness down to irresolution, or even fear.

"I know," said the King, "that they have not only approached our towns, but that at this moment they are before Vác, if they have not stormed it."

"Before Vác!" exclaimed Ugrin, "and your Majesty is still waiting! waiting now! when one bold stroke might annihilate them before the Khan himself comes up."

"Batu is close at hand," said the King, "and if we don't wish to risk all, we must be prudent, and act only on the defensive until the rest of the troops arrive."

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"Ah!" cried Ugrin, forgetting for a moment the respect due to the King, "I suppose your Majesty means to wait until Vác is in flames! By Heaven! I won't wait—not if I perish for it!"

As he spoke, Ugrin turned on his heel and abruptly left the room. Possibly the rattle of his armour and the clank of his sword prevented the King's hearing clearly his last words; but he called to him in a tone of command, and ordered him not to leave the city.

"Make haste and stop him, Paul," said Béla, as the door closed behind the Archbishop, and Héderváry hurried to obey; but his own horse had been taken to the stables with a Mongol arrow in its back, while Ugrin's was on the spot, being walked up and down in front of the palace. The Archbishop had the start of him therefore, for he had rushed down the steps, mounted, and dashed off like a whirlwind, before Héderváry could catch him up.

"Let him go!" said the King, "let him go!" he repeated, walking up and down the room. He had left his private cabinet now for a larger room, in which, notwithstanding the early hour, many of the nobles were already assembled; for the news of Ugrin's and Héderváry's encounter had spread like wildfire, and all were impatient to be doing something.

"We must double the guards and keep the troops ready; but no one is to venture out of the city," said the King, and his words fell like scalding water upon the ears of those who heard them. [Pg 137]

For it was always the Hungarian way to face danger at once, without stopping to realise fully its gravity, or to give courage and energy time to evaporate.

"My orders do not please you, I know, gentlemen," the King said, with dignity, "but when danger is near, blood should be cool. If we waste our strength in small engagements, the enemy's numbers, the one advantage he has over us, will make our efforts entirely useless. No! let him exhaust his strength, while we are gathering ours, and as soon as we have a respectable army, myself will lead it in person!"

No one was satisfied; but Héderváry the Palatine was alone in venturing to say a word, and he spoke firmly though respectfully.

He had had more actual experience of the Mongols than anyone else, and submitted that, though their strength lay chiefly in their numbers, yet that this was not the whole of it, for they were exceedingly cunning, and he believed their object just now was to cut off the reinforcements before they could reach the place of rendezvous. If so, then an attack quickly delivered would be of the greatest service.

"Besides," he concluded, "I suspect that the Archbishop of Kalócsa has led his 'banderium' out against them, and we can't leave him unsupported."

"The brave bishop will soon settle the filthy wretches!" cried a young Forgács who was standing near. [Pg 138]

With a reproving look at the young man, the King turned to the Palatine and said gravely, "I expressly forbade the Archbishop to leave Pest, and I cannot therefore believe that he has done so! If he has—well, he must reap as he has sown! I am not going to risk all for the madness of one. But you are right, Palatine, there is no more cunning people on the face of this earth! Isn't it more likely that they want to deceive us and entice us away from our defences, by sending forward these comparatively small bodies of men?"

The Palatine shook his head, urging that a great part of the country was already laid waste, that fear was paralysing everyone, and that it was no time to wait when danger was actually in their midst and threatening the very capital.

And so the discussion went on, a few holding with the King, but the more part with the Palatine.

But the King had heard the same arguments so often before that they had ceased to make any impression upon him. His resolution was taken to await the arrival of Duke Friedrich of Austria, whom he knew to be on the way, and whom he confidently believed to be at the head of a considerable body of troops, from whom Béla expected great things. They would at least set his own army a good example in the matter of discipline, and this was much needed; and that army, too, was growing day by day, surely if slowly, though the greater part was ill-armed. [Pg 139]

The discussion ended with the King's reiterated orders that no one should go outside the city, and the nobles went their several ways, giving free vent to their disapproval and impatience, and helping thus to spread mistrust of the King's judgment. For all that, most of them were confident of victory as soon as the army should be put in motion, and some went so far as to expect no less than the immediate annihilation of the Mongol bands in the vicinity, at the hands of Ugrin.

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Crowds filled the streets, and reports of all sorts were flying about the city.

The Archbishop had met the enemy and defeated him!

Some watchman on one of the towers had seen the Archbishop cut down a Mongol leader, and great part of the Mongols were lying dead on the ground!

More important still, he had felled Batu Khan himself with one blow of his battle-axe!

So it went on all day till late in the evening, when suddenly the news spread that the Archbishop was coming back, but—with only three or four of his men with him! And while the people in the streets were talking together with bated breath, a man rushed into their midst, covered with [Pg 140]

blood and dust.

"What has happened? Where are you from?" they asked, not at first recognising the furrier, a man belonging to Pest, and well known there.

"Water!" whispered the new-comer, bowing his head on his breast. "Water! I don't know how I got here! Water, quick!"

Several of the crowd hurried off for water, and when he had quenched his thirst, some of them began to wash the blood from his face and to bind up his wounds.

"Ah! they are no matter!" he gasped, "one may get such cuts as these any day in a tavern brawl, but—I'm—done for!"

By the help of a wooden flask of wine the man presently revived enough to satisfy the curiosity of the bystanders, though he still looked terrified.

"I have come straight from Vác—my horse fell down under me. I was pursued by Tartars—a score of arrows hit the poor beast—three went through my cap and tore the skin off my head!"

"But what is going on in Vác? they have beaten off the Tartars, eh?"

"There *is* no Vác!" said the man, with an involuntary shudder through all his limbs.

All were too dumfounded to utter even an exclamation. They had believed that their troops had but to show themselves, and the Mongols would be scattered. [Pg 141]

"The walls of Vác stand staring up to heaven, as black as soot," the man went on. "The people defended themselves to the last, ay, to the last, for hardly a hundred out of them all have escaped!"

"But the church—there are moats to it, and new walls——" began one of the bystanders.

"There *were*!" said the furrier, "there were! there is nothing left now! The clergy, and the old men, with the women and children, took refuge there, and all the valuables were taken there; even the women fought—but it was no good!"

"Did the Tartars take it?" inquired several at once, beneath their breath.

"They stormed it, took it, plundered it, murdered every soul and then set fire to it; it may be burning still! Their horrible yells! they are ringing in my ears now!" and the furrier shuddered again.

But at that moment the attention of the crowd was diverted from him by a commotion going on at a little distance, and they pressed forward to see what it meant, but soon came back, making all the haste they could to get out of the way of some heavy cavalry, armed from head to foot, and preceded by six trumpeters, who were advancing down the street.

"The Austrians!" said some of the more knowing, as Duke Friedrich and his brilliant train passed on straight to the King's palace, where his arrival was so unexpected that no one was in readiness to receive him. [Pg 142]

Events and rumours had followed one another so quickly that day, that the whole population was in a state of excitement; but there was more to come, and the Duke was hardly out of sight, when a Magyar horseman galloped up, the foam dropping from his horse, which was covered with blood. Its rider seemed to be so beside himself with terror as not to know what he was doing, and as the crowd flocked round him, he shouted, "Treachery! the King has left us in the lurch! Ugrin and his troops—overwhelmed by the Tartars!"

With that he galloped on till he reached the bank of the Danube, where his horse fell under him, and when they hastened to the rider's assistance, they found only a dead body.

In spite of the King's commands, Ugrin had led his troops out, and had daringly attacked the bands of Mongols who had approached Pest to reconnoitre. Many of them he had cut down with his own hand, and the rest he had put to flight and was pursuing, when, just as he came up with them, the Mongols reached a morass. This did not stop them, however, with their small, light horses. On they went at breakneck speed, and he followed, without guessing that he was already on the edge of the marshy ground until the treacherous green surface gave way beneath the heavy Hungarian horses, which floundered, lost their footing, and sank helplessly up to their knees, up to their ears, unable to extricate themselves. [Pg 143]

And then the Mongols turned upon them, as was their wont, and poured a perfect storm of arrows upon the defenceless troopers. Ugrin and four others managed to dismount and cast away their heavy armour; and, with only their battle-axes in their hands, they succeeded at last by superhuman efforts in wading through the marsh, and so reached Pest, pursued by the Mongols, and leaving corpses to mark their track all the way, almost to the gate.

The people were aghast at the intelligence, and they set to work to blame the King!

He was blamed by Ugrin in the first place—Ugrin, who had nothing but his own madness to thank for the disaster! He was blamed by the mob, who were ready to see treachery everywhere; and above all, he was blamed by Duke Friedrich, surnamed the "Streitbare," for his valour!

The King bore all, and worked on. All night he was on horseback, seeing to the fortifications, urging the workmen to redoubled vigour.

And while he was thus engaged, what was going on in the army?

It is hardly credible, but is nevertheless a fact, that blind self-confidence, whether real or feigned, held possession of the camp. The troops and their leaders spent the night for the most part in revelry, while the sentries on the walls mocked at such of the Mongols as came near enough and let fly their arrows at them.

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Early in the morning Duke Friedrich was on horseback, after a previous argument with the King, in which he had made light of the invasion, and called it mere child's play, easily dealt with, and then he led the small body of men he had brought with him out of the city. A small body it was, to Béla's bitter disappointment. He had expected something like an army, and the Duke had brought about as many men in his train as he would have done if he had come to a hunting party!

Such as they were, he led them forth on this eventful morning to have a brush with the Mongols, whose advance guard retired, according to custom, as soon as they caught sight of the well-armed, well-mounted, well-trained band. The Duke was cautious. He meant to do something, if only to show Pest how easy it was; and when he presently returned with a couple of horses and one prisoner, he had his reward in the acclamations with which the populace received him. The success of the valorous Duke was belauded on all sides, and some compared the daring warrior with the prudent King, not to the advantage of the latter.

The prisoner was taken before the King, and, as ill-luck would have it, he proved to be a Kun; worse still, he said among other things, that there were many Kunok in Batu's camp.

They had been forced to join him; but the news spread through the town, exciting the people more than ever, and it was openly asserted by many that the Kunok were in league with the Mongols, and that Kuthen was a traitor, who had managed to ingratiate himself with King Béla only that he might prepare the way for the enemy.

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## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **"I WASH MY HANDS!"**

The Diet, summoned a few weeks before, was still holding its meetings in the open air, with no better shelter than that afforded by a large open tent. Akos Szirmay would be going thither presently, but it was still early, and he was now on his way to his uncle's old mansion near the Danube.

Though Kuthen was rather prisoner now than guest, he was still visited by some of the Hungarian lords, and Bishop Wáncsa was often there with messages from the King, saying how greatly he deplored the necessity for still keeping him prisoner, and explaining that it was from no want of confidence on his part, but rather for the ensurance of Kuthen's own safety, adding that he was hoping and waiting for the time when he might come in person and restore the King and his family to liberty.

Kuthen had loved and honoured Béla from the first, and though in this matter he thought him weak, no one would have been able to persuade him that Béla would consent to anything which would imperil his guest.

Akos had been a daily visitor at the house all along, and he made no secret, either there or at his father's, of his attachment to Kuthen's younger daughter, whose sweet face and winning ways had attracted him from the first.

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Stephen Szirmay did not like his son's choice, which was not to be wondered at. Kuthen, it was true, possessed much treasure, and Marána was his favourite child. But Jolánta's marriage had taught him that wealth did not make happiness. Her marriage had had his eager, delighted approval, as he was obliged to admit to himself; and as his judgment had been at fault in the one case, he would not interfere in the other. It would be wiser to remain neutral, lest ill-timed opposition should make his son more determined.

Kuthen was up very early this morning; for news had reached him that many of the Kunok who had remained behind in Moldavia were hastening to Hungary, and being aware also that those already in the country were now on their way to Pest, he was hourly expecting a summons from the King for himself and his sons, and then they would fight, they would fight! and for ever silence the jealous suspicions of their enemies.

Kuthen knew all that was going on about him, for he was well served by his faithful followers, who were more devoted to him than ever since he had been a sort of state prisoner; he knew that the Diet was sitting that day, and that his best friends, the King and Duke Kálmán, would for their own sakes do all they could to bring to an end the present disgraceful state of affairs, which was only likely to increase the slanders and suspicions of which he was the victim.

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Kuthen knew also of the Duke of Austria's arrival, of his encounter with the Mongols, and of the prisoner, said to be a Kun, whom he had so unfortunately captured. Kun or not, the populace believed, and were encouraged by the Duke to believe, that he was one. During the last few hours the Duke had done his utmost to foment the growing irritation against the King and his people.

Kuthen knew all, and though he hoped in King Béla, he neglected no precautions to ensure the safety of his family, if the worst should come to the worst. There were already more than a hundred Kunok in the castle, chiefs and simple armed men, who had found means to join him, by degrees, without attracting notice, all of whom were most resolute and most trustworthy. Watch was kept day and night without intermission, and of one thing Kuthen might be entirely confident, that if danger should come, it would not take him by surprise, and that, if the mob should rise against them—as he knew was not impossible—though they might perish, they would at least not perish like cowards.

When Akos arrived on this particular morning, he was closeted alone with the King for a time, and could not deny that things looked threatening, or that the populace and most of the nobles were in a state of irritation, thanks in great measure to the Duke of Austria and his unlucky prisoner. All that he could do was to urge the need of prudence and vigilance.

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But before the young noble took his leave, something seemed to strike Kuthen. Whether a new idea flashed into his mind, whether he had a premonition of any kind, or whether he was merely filled with vague forebodings, not unnatural under the circumstances, it is impossible to say, but as Akos was about to make his farewells, Kuthen laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder, and drew him into the adjoining room. There he took his daughter Marána by the hand, and leading her up to Akos, he said solemnly, "Children, man's life and future are in the hands of God! We are living in serious times. See, Akos, I give you my beloved daughter! Happen what may, you will answer to me for this, one of my children."

"You have given me a treasure, you have made me rich indeed! God bless you for it; and, father, have no fears on her account, for we will live and die together," said Akos, with much emotion, his hand in that of his bride.

The Queen's eyes filled with tears as she looked at the handsome young pair, and drawing close to Akos, she whispered in his ear, "Mind, whatever happens to the rest of us, my Marána must be saved."

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Just then in came the two young Princes, who were always pleased to see Akos, and were delighted, though not surprised, to hear of their sister's betrothal.

"Oh, but brother Akos," they exclaimed together, as if they thought that the new relationship must at once make a difference, "we should so like to go with you to the Diet, but we are captives, and we have not wings like the eagles."

"And, my dear brothers, even if you had," returned Akos, "I should advise you not to leave your dear father for a moment just now."

"Oh, but why? why?" they both asked.

"Because I think that this is a critical time," he answered. "Let us only get through the next day or two quietly, and I quite believe that you will all be able to go in and out as you please."

"You are right, Akos," interposed the King. "Time may bring us good. Let us wait and be watchful! And don't forget that I have given this dear child into your care. Trust the rest of us to God, in whose hands is our fate; we shall defend ourselves, if need be, but you think only of her. Do you promise me?"

"I swear I will," said Akos, with uplifted hand.

Then he embraced his bride, who accompanied him to the covered entrance, then followed him with her eyes all along the drawbridge, and after that watched him from a window until he was quite out of sight.

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Kuthen had already doubled the guards about his dwelling, and had taken other precautions and measures of defence; but the walls were high, and all had been done so quietly that it had not attracted the attention of the sentries posted on the other side of the drawbridge. When Akos was gone, he and his sons armed themselves as if for battle.

Sheaves of arrows were brought out and placed in readiness, the guards were armed, and the Kun chiefs, who took it in turn to be on duty near the King, made all needful preparation for an obstinate defence.

Akos had not been gone more than an hour or two, when little groups and knots of people began to gather round Kuthen's house. There were three or four here, and three or four there, and presently they might be counted by the score. Later on a large crowd had collected. They were talking quietly to one another, and seemed so far to be quite peaceable, however.

The Kun royal family took no alarm, for they knew the Pest populace and its insatiable curiosity well by this time, and they fancied that there was perhaps some idea abroad that Kuthen and his sons would be going to the Diet; or perhaps Marána's betrothal was known.

Another hour passed and the people began to shout and howl. Two persons were declaiming to them; but within the walls it was impossible to distinguish what they were saying. The crowd pressed nearer and nearer to the drawbridge, so near indeed, that the guards on duty there had the greatest difficulty in keeping them back, and a sudden rush of those in the rear sent two or three of the foremost splashing into the moat, to the huge diversion of the rest.

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Presently, however, the mob appeared to be seized by a new idea, for they all set off running in one direction; and in a few moments, only a few small knots of people remained.

But these few lay down on the patches of grass round about, as if they meant to stay indefinitely, and the Kun chiefs, who had been keeping close watch behind the loop-holed walls, noticed that they were all armed, some with knotty sticks and wooden clubs bristling with nails, and a few here and there with bows and quivers. It looked as if they meant mischief, and the Kunok were all on the alert for what might happen.

Akos meantime had been for the last hour or two at the Diet. From where he was he had a full view of the Danube, and after a time he noticed a large crowd of people crossing the river by the ferry-boats and making straight for the place where the Diet was being held. Both banks of the Danube were thronged, and soon the crowd became a vast, compact mass; but the first intimation of anything unusual that many of the members had, was the finding the table at which they sat suddenly surrounded by their own gaily caparisoned horses, which the crowd had found blocking their way, and had driven before them into the tent.

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It was a terrible moment! No one could imagine what had happened, and some of the more nervous thought that the Tartars, whom they had taken so lightly before, had actually stormed the town. All started to their feet, seized the horses by their bridles, and drew their swords.

And now the howls of the furious mob were plainly to be heard.

"Kuthen! the Kunok! the traitors! Death to the Kunok!"

It was impossible to misunderstand what the mob were bent upon.

This was no peaceable, if clamorous deputation like the former one! these were no faithful subjects rallying round the King in a moment of danger, and seeking his counsel and help!

No! the flood had burst its bounds, carrying all before it, and had come not to petition, but to claim, and to threaten.

The King motioned for silence. He was the calmest and most collected of all present, and such was the magic influence of his presence, such the respect felt for him, that even now, in spite of all the excitement, for a moment the clamour seemed to cease.

Just then one of the nobles, a young man in brilliant armour, with flashing eyes, seized the bridle of the horse nearest him, flung himself on its back, dashed away, and looking neither behind nor before him, forced his way recklessly through the mob. All who noticed him supposed that he had received some command from the King, but the confusion was so great that his departure was unobserved, except by those whose legs were endangered by his horse's hoofs.

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"The Kun King is a prisoner," said Béla in a trumpet-like voice, which commanded attention at least for the moment. "No one in my dominions will be condemned unheard. I forbid all violence, and I shall hold the leaders of this insurgent multitude responsible."

So far the King was allowed to speak without interruption, or at least without having his voice drowned. But after this, if he spoke, he could not make himself heard. For no sooner did the magnates and others assembled understand what all the uproar was about, than the King's words lost their effect.

Members from the counties where the Kunok were settled, recalled the many irregularities of which the latter had been guilty on their first arrival, envied them their rich pastures, and joined the mob in crying for vengeance upon them, and in shrieking "Treachery!"

There were but few on the King's side, save the two Archbishops, the two Szirmays, one Foyács, and Héderváry the Palatine.

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The mob surged into the tent, howling and threatening.

"If the King won't consent, let us settle it ourselves! The country stands first! The King himself will thank us when his eyes are opened! Let's go! what are we waiting for? There are enough of us!"

Duke Friedrich, who, as being the most powerful and most distinguished guest present, was sitting next the King, turned to him and said in a half whisper: "Your Majesty, this is a case in which you must give in! Nothing is more dangerous than for the people to think they can act against the King's will and go unpunished. No one will defend Kuthen, and who knows what has been going on yonder, or even whether Kuthen is still alive?"

The King maintained a determined silence, but his eyes flashed, and his hand grasped the hilt of his sword.

The tumult increased, and some even of those who believed in the Kunok's innocence, were so alarmed by the rage of the insurgents that they hurried up to the King and implored him to yield.

The pressure around him waxed greater and greater.

Duke Kálmán, who was standing not far off, cried out, "Your Majesty won't give in! The honour of the nation is at stake!"

But the noise and confusion were so great that the King could not hear a word his brother said. The Duke shouted for his horse, but it was all in vain, for he could not move. [Pg 156]

King Béla, pressed on all sides by those who were beseeching, imploring, urging, forgot himself for a moment. He put his hands over his eyes, then stretching them out, he said, "Lavabo manus meas! (I will wash my hands). You will answer to God for this wickedness. I have done what I could do!"

"The King has consented!" roared those nearest him.

The mob began to sway about, the horses neighed, the people all poured forth, roaring, "Eljen a király! Long live the King! Death to the false traitors! Forward! To Kuthen! to Kuthen!"

No sooner was he free than Duke Kálmán mounted the first horse he could seize, while the mob rushed off like a whirlwind in the direction of the house by the Danube.

When the King looked round none were left but some of the magnates.

"A horse!" he shouted furiously; and he galloped away after the mob, accompanied by the Austrian Duke and the rest.

If Béla had mounted his horse before he addressed the mob, if he had faced the insurgents as a king, and had at once punished the ringleaders, the country might have been spared great part of the disasters which were now on the very threshold. But once again the King was weak at a critical moment. There is much to be said in his excuse and defence; but weakness, however brilliantly defended, remains weakness still. [Pg 157]

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A few moments after the mob had burst into the King's tent, Akos was again at the drawbridge which led to Kuthen's dwelling.

"What do you want, sir?" asked the captain of the guard hotly, as he sprang forward to meet him. "No one is admitted."

"Since when?" asked Akos haughtily.

"The King sent orders an hour ago."

"Maybe! but I have come straight from the Diet by the King's command, and I am to take Kuthen and all his family before him and the States at once, while you can remain here to guard the place till our return."

The captain turned back submissively, and blew the horn which hung at his side. Possibly the drawbridge which formed the outer gate of the castle would not even now have been lowered, but that Kuthen had recognised Akos, and that they were so well armed as to be quite a match for the guard, and for those of the mob who had remained behind.

The drawbridge was lowered therefore, but raised again the moment Akos had passed. He rode across the covered space between the drawbridge and the inner gate, and there he had to wait again a few moments while the bolts and bars were withdrawn. He leapt from his horse as soon as he was within, and Kuthen and his sons hurried from the entrance-hall to meet him, doubting whether he brought good news or bad. [Pg 158]

"Quick!" said Akos, "to horse! your Majesty, to horse! all of you," and without waiting Kuthen's answer, he shouted, "Horses! bring the horses! and mount, all who can!"

The Princes flew at once to the stables, and bridled the horses—which were always kept ready saddled—while Kuthen asked in some surprise, "What has happened? Where are we to go?" for he had not been able to read anything in young Szirmay's face, whether of good or of evil.

"Where?" said Akos bitterly, "where we can be farthest from the mob—the mob has risen and may be here any moment."

In those times, sudden dangers, sudden alarms, sudden flights were things of every-day occurrence, and Kuthen and his followers had long been accustomed not to know in the morning where they should lay their heads at night. No people were quicker or more resolute in case of extremity than the Kunok, who were one family, one army, one colony, and moved like a machine.

The Queen and Princesses, as well as the chiefs, had all come together in the hall, but now the former and many of the servants rushed back into the house, from which they again emerged in a few moments, all cool and collected, all ready to start, and with their most valued possessions packed in bundles. [Pg 159]

The riding horses were bridled, some of the pack-horses loaded, and all had been done so quickly and quietly, that the guard without had heard no more than the sort of hum made by a swarm of bees before they take flight.



Meantime Akos had rapidly explained matters to Kuthen, pointing out to him that King Béla and his brother and others were standing up for him, but that there was a rising of the populace, and that the mob might arrive before the King, when, even if they were successfully beaten back, there would certainly be bloodshed, which would only exasperate the people more than ever, and make it impossible for the King, good as he was, to ensure the safety of his guests. Whereas, if they could succeed in avoiding the first paroxysms of fury, King Béla would be the first to rejoice at their escape.

Akos spoke confidently, and his words carried conviction.

Kuthen, his family, and the chiefs were already mounted, while those of the guard who were on foot formed themselves into a close, wedge-shaped mass, and were all ready to set out.

"Lower the drawbridge!" cried Kuthen. The chains rattled, and the gate, which had been closed behind Akos, was reopened. He and Kuthen headed the procession which issued forth.

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At that moment a long, yellow cloud of dust made its appearance in the distance, coming towards them. A horseman was galloping in front of it, and he was closely followed by two more, shouting aloud what no one in the castle understood, but something which made the captain of the guard without give orders for the bolts of the drawbridge to be pulled back; and the bridge, left without its supports, dropped with a great splash into the moat.

The Kunok were cut off!

With the sangfroid and fearlessness learnt in the course of his adventurous life, Kuthen at once ordered the drawbridge to be raised; the inner gate was closed again and barred with all speed.

Akos was as pale as death, for he saw in a moment that he had come too late, and that all was lost; but he was resolved to share the fate of the man, whom for Marána's sake he looked upon as his father.

As for Kuthen, he was suddenly the wild chief again. His face was aflame, his eyes flashed fire, he was eager for the fray, and his one thought was to defend himself proudly. He ordered the guards to their places, the horses having been already led back to their stables; and then, turning to his family, he said coolly and calmly, "We will defend ourselves until the King comes, and then his commands shall be obeyed, whatever they are."

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The women at once retired to their own quarters, without uttering word or groan. There were no tears, no sobs, no sign of terror on their countenances. They looked angry and defiant.

When the women had withdrawn, the Princes went to their posts, and Kuthen, turning to Akos, said, "Remember your oath."

Akos raised his hands to heaven without a word.

His own position was a more dangerous one than it might seem at first sight. His manifest intention of shielding Kuthen from their vengeance would bring down upon him the hatred of his own countrymen; while on the other hand the furious glances of the Kunok confined in the castle, and their ill-concealed hostility, showed him clearly that his life was now in danger from within as well as from without.

The mob which had rushed away from the Diet had pressed on with the speed of the whirlwind, its numbers growing as it went. A few minutes only had passed since the cloud heralding its approach had been seen, and already the crowd was swarming round the banks of the moat, making an indescribable uproar and uttering the wildest, fiercest shouts.

Within, all was silent as the grave. But the mob outside were not idle for a moment. They were athirst for vengeance, and from the moment of their arrival they had been busy trying to make a passage across the moat by throwing in earth, straw, pieces of wood, even furniture, brought on all sides from the neighbouring houses, and, in fact, all and everything that came to hand.

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All at once there was a cry raised of "The King! The King is coming!"

It was not the King, however, but Duke Kálmán, with his servants and some of the nobles in his train.

That part of the moat faced by the gate was by this time almost full, and some of the more daring spirits were trying to clamber up to the drawbridge, when suddenly the scene changed. The wild figures of the Kunok appeared as if by magic upon the walls, the thrilling war-cry was raised, and a cloud of well-aimed arrows hailed down upon the assailants.

Kuthen and his sons, who confidently expected King Béla, had done their utmost to restrain their people, but in vain, for when they saw the moat filled and their enemies preparing to rush the gate, they became infuriated and uncontrollable.

In the first moment of surprise all fell back, knocking over those behind them; but some few began to retaliate and shoot up at the garrison. Not to much purpose, however, for neither arrows nor spears hit the intended marks, while the long arrows shot from the powerful bows of the Kunok never failed.

It was during this fierce overture of the contest that Duke Kálmán rode up.

"Stand aside!" he shouted, "stop fighting! The King is coming, he will see justice done——"

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The words were not out of his mouth when two arrows flew forth from loopholes in the walls. One struck the Duke's horse, and the second felled to the earth a young nobleman riding close beside him.

"They have shot the Duke!" was shouted on all sides; for so dense was the cloud of arrows that it was impossible to see at first which of the two had fallen.

The Duke himself, however, was standing coolly defiant amidst the whistling storm.

But the shouts were the signals for a general rush, and from that moment no one, not even the King, could have restrained the people.

The moat was filled, the drawbridge wrecked, the inner gate, in spite of its bars, wrenched from its hinges and thrown down upon the dead bodies of the Kun guards.

The mob rushed in and stormed the castle, and an awful scene of bloodshed followed. Kuthen, his sons, and the Kun chiefs fought desperately; and side by side with them fought Akos, so completely disguised as a Kun as to be quite unrecognisable. He was too downright to have thought of a disguise for himself, but had acquiesced in it at Kuthen's entreaty.

The first of the mob who rushed into the courtyard fell victims to their own rashness, and many more were despatched by the arrows poured from the walls.

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But suddenly the younger of the two Princes fighting beside their father, fell to the ground with a short cry.

"My son!" exclaimed Kuthen, turning to Akos, "Go! now's the time! keep your word! I—I'm dying!"

With that, Kuthen, who had been mortally wounded by a couple of pikes, rushed upon his foes, felled several of them by the mere strength of his arm, and then himself sank down. Akos rushed from the entrance-hall into the house.

"You are our King now!" roared the Kunok, pressing round the remaining Prince, and covering him with their shields, as he fought like a young lion.

All at once there were loud outcries and yells. The Kunok outside the house, finding themselves unable to defend the castle against the swarms which poured into the courtyard, had rushed in, closing the doors and barring the windows.

All in vain! The young Prince, just proclaimed King amid a shower of arrows, retreated from one room to another, some of his defenders falling around him at every moment. By the time the last door was burst open, less than a dozen of his guard remained, all wounded, all fighting a life-and-death battle with desperation.

A few moments more and every Kun in the place had ceased to breathe.

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Where were the women? What had become of Akos and his bride?

Presently the mob outside received with howls of joy the heads of Kuthen and his family, flung to them from the windows, and at once hoisted them on pikes in token of victory. If the head of Akos was among them no one noticed it, for he had stained his face.

Maddened by their success, the rabble now made with one consent for "King Béla's palace," foremost and most active among them being the Austrian Duke's men-at-arms.

They poured into it like a deluge, and the air was filled with shouts of "Eljen a király! Long live the King! The traitors are dead!"

When they had shouted long enough, they set fire to Master Peter's old mansion, as if it had been the property of King Kuthen, and in less than a quarter of an hour sparks and burning embers were flying from it into the air, while the gaping multitudes ran round and round the dwelling, in all the bloodthirsty delight of satisfied revenge.

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A day or two later, the Kun army, which had promptly obeyed orders—more promptly indeed than most even of the more energetic Hungarians—reached the gate of Pest, well mounted and well armed. There first they learnt what had befallen their King and his family.

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They came to a halt.

The chiefs took counsel together as to what was to be done, and they were not slow in coming to a decision. For the news had spread into the country that all the Kunok in Pest had been put to death for treachery, and the country, following the example of the city, had also begun to take matters into their own hands by making in some places regular attacks upon the Kun women, children, and old men. The Kunok had not understood the reason of this before.

Now they knew! and with one consent they turned back, gathering all their own people together as they went, and turning against the Hungarians the arms which at Béla's appeal they had been so quick to take up in their defence.

Duke Friedrich stayed no longer, but, content with his little victory over the Mongol chief, content with having helped to capture Kuthen's castle and to murder its inhabitants, he made off home, giving a promise which he did not keep, that he would send an army to Béla's assistance. He had done mischief enough, and left an evil legacy behind him.

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## **CHAPTER X. LIBOR CLIMBS THE CUCUMBER-TREE.**

Duke Friedrich had left him in the lurch; the Kunok were on their way to Bulgaria, wasting and burning as they went; and now King Béla saw the mistake he had made in not exerting his utmost power to defend Kuthen.

The banderia (troops) expected from both sides of the Tisza (Theiss) did not arrive, eagerly as they were expected. The Bishop of Csanád, and nobles from Arád, and other places, had indeed been hastening to Pest with their followers, but on the way they had encountered the outraged and enraged Kunok. Knowing nothing of what had been taking place in the capital, they were unprepared for hostilities, and when the Kunok fell upon them, some were cut off from the rest of the force, and some were cut down.

All things seemed to be in a conspiracy against the King and the country, and one blow followed another.

It was not until the Kunok had crossed into Bulgaria, leaving a trail of desolation behind them that the Bishop of Nagyvárad (Grosswardein) could venture to lead his banderium towards Pest; and the banderium of the county of Bihar was in the same case. Now, however, they were hurrying forward, when the Mongols, who knew of their coming, put themselves in their way. The Bishop attacked what appeared to be but a small force of them; the Mongols retreated, fighting. The Hungarians, who did not as yet understand their enemy's tactics, pursued. Suddenly the Mongols turned and fell upon them, and but few escaped to tell the story of the disaster.

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By this time some 60,000 or 70,000 men were assembled in Pest, against the 300,000 or more under the command of Batu Khan; but of those who had put in an appearance, few were likely to be very serviceable as commanders.

The nation had to a great extent lost the military qualities which had distinguished it before, and which distinguished it again afterwards. The masses were no longer called upon for service, and the nobles, not being bound to serve beyond the frontier, had become unused to war. There was plenty of blind self-confidence, little knowledge or experience.

The King was no general; and although Duke Kálmán and Bishop Ugrin were distinguished for their personal valour and courage, neither they nor any of the other leaders had an idea of what war on a large scale really was.

However, such as it was, the army was there, and it was not likely to receive any large accessions; it believed itself invincible, which might count for something in its favour; and the general distress and misery were so great that at last the King yielded his own wish to remain on the defensive, and led his army out into the plain. Batu Khan at once began to retreat, and to call in his scattered forces, which were busy marauding in various directions. He drew off northwards, his numbers swelling as he went, and the Hungarians followed, exulting in the conviction that the Mongols were being driven before them, and meant to avoid a battle! It did not for a moment strike them that they were following Batu's lead, and that he was drawing them to the very place which he had chosen to suit himself.

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When they were not many miles from Tokay the Mongols crossed the Sajó by a bridge which they fortified, and they then took up a position which extended from this point to the right bank of the Tisza (Theiss), having in front of them the vast plain of Mohi, bounded on the east by the hills of Tokay, on the west by woods, which at that time were dense forests, while behind them to the north they had more plains and hills and, beyond these again, a snow-capped peak which shone like a diamond in a field of azure.

Master Peter's old country-house lay about a hundred miles to the north-west of Mohi, almost under the shadow of the loftiest part of the Carpathians. A hundred miles was no distance for such swift riders as the Mongols, but thus far the county of Saros had escaped them, they having entered Hungary by passes which lay not only east and west, but also south of it.

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Batu Khan's forces occupied the horse-shoe formed by the junction of the three great rivers, Sajó, Hernád, and Tisza.

The Hungarians encamped on the great plain opposite. But though they had so vast a space at their disposal, their tents were pitched close together, and their horses—a large number, as nearly all were mounted men—stood tethered side by side in rows. Freedom of motion within the camp was impossible; and to make matters even worse, the whole was enclosed within an ill-constructed rampart of wooden waggons, which quite prevented freedom of egress.

A thousand mounted men were on guard at night outside the camp, but scouting and outposts were apparently unthought of.

A few days had passed in merry-making and self-congratulation on the easy victory before them, when one morning King Béla appeared mounted on a magnificent charger, to make his customary inspection of the camp. He wore a complete suit of German armour, a white, gold-embroidered cloak over his shoulders, and an aigrette in his helmet.

Many of the Knights Templar had joined the army, and some of them, in their white, red-crossed mantles, were now standing about him. Close behind him was his brother Kálmán, in armour of steel, inlaid with gold; and near at hand was the fiery Archbishop Ugrin, the most splendid-looking man in the army, so say the chroniclers, his gold chain and cross being the only mark which distinguished him from the laymen.

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The Bishop was a devoted patriot, and though he had not forgiven the King for "leaving him in the lurch," he was sincerely attached to him. He was the leading spirit of the campaign.

It was Ugrin who had urged the King to take the field without further delay; Ugrin, who, with much valour and enthusiasm, but with little military experience, had advised Duke Kálmán where to pitch the camp; and again it was Ugrin, who, convinced that the Mongols were in retreat, had pressed the King to give hurried chase, whereby the army had been fatigued to no purpose, and had finally been brought precisely to the spot where Batu wished to see it. The Bishop, however, happy in his ignorance, was under the delusion that it was he who had forced the Khan into his present position.

Just now the King was giving patient hearing to the opinions, frequently conflicting, of those about him. Black care was at his heart, but he looked serene, even cheerful, as usual, as he asked his brother in an undertone whether he had managed to reduce his men to anything like order.

The Duke, for all reply, shrugged his shoulders and looked decidedly grave.

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"Ah!" said the King, stifling something like a sigh, "just as I expected!"

Then he heard what the leader of the Knights Templar had to say, and then he turned to Ugrin, well knowing that the Bishop's one idea was to attack, and of course beat, the enemy, and that he had no room in his head for any other.

"You don't think Batu Khan will attack?"

"Attack! not he!" said the Bishop, scornfully. "They are all paralysed with fear, or they would never have pitched their tents between three rivers. They have three fronts, and they have put those wretches the Kunok and Russians foremost! Here have we been face to face for days and nothing has come of it! And yet," continued the Archbishop eagerly, "nothing would be easier than to annihilate the whole army. All we have to do is to deliver one attack across the Sajó, while we send another large force to the left through the woods at night, and across the Hernád, and we shall have the Mongols caught in their own net!"

The Archbishop may have been right, but whether he were so or not, the King saw one insuperable objection to what he proposed. The movement depended for its success upon its being executed in absolute silence; and there was no power on earth capable of making any part of the Hungarian squadrons move forward without shouts, cries, and tumult! Unless Heaven should strike them dumb they would noise enough to betray themselves for miles around, as soon as they caught the sound of the word "battle."

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Still, the King was obliged to admit that there did not seem to be anything to be gained by waiting.

He was just about to start on his tour of inspection, when there was a sudden sound of great commotion within the camp. Men were rushing to and fro, tumbling over one another in their eagerness, and the air was rent with their shouts. But sudden hubbubs, all about nothing, and tumults which were merely the outcome of exuberant spirits, were so frequent that Béla and the more staid officers expected the mountain to bring forth no more than the customary mouse on the present occasion.

"A prisoner, apparently," observed the Duke, as an officer emerged from the crowd. Spies and fugitives were frequently crossing the river and stealing into the camp, where there were already Russians, Kunok, Tartars, and men of many tongues.

This man had been caught just as, having crept between the waggons, he was starting off at a run down the main thoroughfare, and making straight for the King's tent.

"Keep back!" cried the officer, "Keep back! and hold your tongues, while I take him to the Duke and let him tell his story!"

But he might as well have addressed the winds and waves.

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There was a storm of "Eljens," mingled with cries in various tongues unintelligible to the rest. They threatened, they swore, they yelled; and in this disorderly fashion approached the group of which the King was the centre.

"Not to me! There is the King!" said the Duke, as the rather bewildered officer pushed his prisoner up to the Commander-in-Chief.

"Well, what news do you bring? Who are you? Where are you from?" the King asked good-humouredly, but with an involuntary smile of contempt.

"I am a Magyar, your Majesty," said the man in a doleful voice. "The Tartars carried me off just outside Pest."

"Why!" exclaimed Paul Héderváry suddenly, as he stood facing the fugitive, "why, if it isn't Mr. Libor's groom, Matykó!"

Libor, as we have said, was not to be found on the morning of Paul's expedition with Bishop Ugrin; and not having seen or heard of him since, Paul had been growing daily more anxious on his account. He missed him, too, at every turn, for Libor had made himself indispensable to his comfort.

Stephen Szirmay and Master Peter, who were as usual in close attendance upon the King, looked with curiosity at the unfortunate lad, who, as they now saw, had lost both ears.

"What have you done with your master?" inquired Master Stephen, forgetting the King for a moment in his eagerness.

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"The Tartars are going to attack the Hungarian camp this very night!" blurted out the fugitive, with a loud snort; after which, and having relieved his news-bag of this weighty portion of its contents, he seemed to feel easier.

"Do you know it for a fact?" asked the King gravely. "Take care what you are saying, for your head will have to answer for it."

"It is the pure truth, your Majesty. I heard the whole thing, and when I knew everything I took my life in my hand and crept through the bushes, swam across the Sajó, and then stole hither by the edge of the ditches! Well, your Majesty will see for yourself by to-night whether I have been telling lies or no."

"What more do you know? Are the Mongols in great force? Have they many prisoners?" the King asked, by way of getting at the lad's budget of news and forming some idea of its value.

"They are as thick together as a swarm of locusts, sir; and as for the prisoners, they are like the chaff of a threshing floor. There are gentlefolk there too. My old master is one of them—blast him with hot thunderbolts!"

"And who is your master?"

"My faithful governor—Libor!" exclaimed Paul Héderváry, stepping forward and answering for the groom in a tone of great displeasure.

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"And have they treated the rest as they have treated you?" asked the Duke, pointing to the lad's bleeding ears.

"The Tartar women cut off the ears and noses of every pretty woman and girl, and the best looking of all they kill! They have killed most of the gentlemen too, and thrown them into the Hernád."

"And your master?" asked Paul quickly.

"My master? No master of mine! he's better fit to be master to the devil," said the prisoner, quite forgetting the King in his rage.

"What—whom are you talking about?" asked Paul, indignantly.

"I'm talking about Mr. Governor Libor, and I say that he has turned Tartar!"

"Turned Tartar!" exclaimed several in amazement.

"It's fact," said the lad. "He has cast off his 'menti' and 'suba,' and doffed his great plume, and now he is going about like a reverend friar, with a cowl large enough to hold myself."

"Turned priest then, has he?" asked Master Peter.

"Priest to the devil, if he has any of that sort down below," said Matykó. "Priest, not a bit of it! He has turned Knéz! that's what he has done! The Tartars wear all sorts of church vestments, even the Khans do, blight them!"

"Knéz! what sort of creature is that, Matykó?" asked Ugrin.

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"A sort of governor, something like an 'Ispán' (*i.e.*, Count, or head-man of a county)—I don't know, but he has some sort of office, and our poor gentlemen prisoners must doff their hats to the wretch!"

"Well, nephew!" said Master Peter, with a laugh, for this was water to his own mill, "so you have chosen a pretty sort of fellow indeed to entrust your castle to!"

The King meantime had turned away to speak to the Knight Commander of the Templars, and Paul was able to go on questioning Matykó. He was beside himself with astonishment.

"How long has he been in such favour with the Tartars?" he asked.

"Ah, sir! who can say?" answered the lad, hotly. "He was Knéz before they took me! I found him among them, and hardly knew him. It was he who had my ears cut off, the brute! and only just saved my nose!"

"Well, that is something anyhow," said Master Peter.

"And then," continued Matykó, "I heard that Mr. Governor had been having dealings with the Tartars, like those rascally Kunok, and what's more, if it is true—and true it must be, for Tartars don't give anything for nothing—they say he has shown them the way to two or three castles, where they have got a lot of plunder!"

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"Shown them! the scoundrel!" exclaimed Peter and Héderváry together.

"It's so," said Matykó emphatically. "He did ought to have his own long ears and snout cut off, he ought!"

Young Héderváry did not perhaps believe all that had been said about his favourite, but still his anger waxed hot within him.

He had to leave Matykó now, however, and follow the King, who rode through the whole camp, and finally gave orders to the Duke to anticipate the Tartars by advancing at once to the Sajó with a considerable force.

"Ugrin!" cried the Duke, well pleased with the command, "you will come with me! Quick! Mount your men, and we will be on the way to the Sajó in half an hour and stop the Tartars from crossing."

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By the time the Duke and Ugrin reached the river, they found that a number of Mongols had already got across. These, after some hard fighting they successfully beat back, and that with considerable loss; and as the survivors disappeared into the woods on the opposite side of the river, the Duke and Ugrin led their victorious troops back to the camp, where they were received with acclamations and triumph. They had lost hardly any of their men and were highly elated by their victory.

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The night following this success was one of the quietest in the camp. The rapid and easy victory they had won had redoubled everyone's hopes that, upon the advance of the entire army the Mongols would perish utterly and completely, as if they had never been.

Most of the men in camp lay down, with the exception of the King, the sentries, and some of the generals.

The King allowed himself but a very short rest; for, from his many conversations with the unfortunate King Kuthen, he was well aware of the overwhelming numbers and strength of the Mongols, and he was determined that the enemy should never find him anything but prepared and on the alert.

Kálmán and Bishop Ugrin also approved these prudent measures; but the army as a whole was so worn out by long watches and merry-making that rest it must have.

It was a dark night, and the wind blew the tents about; the camp fires had been purposely extinguished, though it was spring-time and chilly.

Twice in the course of the night the King left his tent, made the round of the camp, and satisfied himself as to the strength of the wooden bulwarks. The Duke, the Commander of the Templars, Héderváry the Palatine, and his son Paul, as well as Ugrin, all lay in the King's tent, on carpets, dozing, but not sleeping, while the King merely put off his armour, and stretched himself on the camp bedstead for an hour or two.

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All was still save for the wind, and in the intervals between the gusts nothing was to be heard but some terrific snores, and the stamping of the horses.

Now and again those who were fully awake thought they heard shouts of merriment, showing that there were still some not too tired to be amusing themselves; then the wind roared again, and all other sounds were lost.

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## **CHAPTER XI.**

### **"NEXT TIME WE MEET!"**

Since her father's departure, Dora had held the reins of government, and held them, too, with a firmer hand than Master Peter had done.

In a couple of weeks she had made the sleepy governor, if not active, at least less dilatory; the men-at-arms had been well drilled by himself and Talabor, and the serving men and women had

been bewitched into some degree of orderliness.

News of her father she neither had nor expected. Probably she would hear nothing until he came or sent for her. She knew nothing positively as to what was taking place outside, though the servants from time to time picked up fragments of news in the villages, so contradictory as to convey little real information. But the air, even in this out-of-the-way region, was full of rumour and presentiment, which affected different characters in different ways, but had the general result of making all more careful than usual.

Without being in the least alarmed, Talabor was one who showed himself particularly circumspect at this time; and, as if he had some sort of instinct that trouble might be at hand, he gradually got into the way of helping the seneschal in all that he had to do. And his assistance, though uncalled for, was most welcome to the poor man, who felt a good deal burthened, now that he had to bestir himself to greater speed than was his wont.

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Some of the servants liked Talabor for his unassuming ways, resolution, and courage, while the rest sought to curry favour with him because the young clerk was evidently in the master's good graces, and they believed him to be a power in consequence.

By degrees, and without even noticing it, Talabor quite took the governor's place. The servants, being accustomed to receive their orders from him, and to go to him in all difficulties, finding moreover that Talabor was always ready with an answer and never at a loss what to do, while the old seneschal forgot more than he remembered, soon almost overlooked the latter and put him on one side.

Even Dora, who was perhaps more distant with Talabor now than she had ever been before, came at last to giving her orders to him, instead of to the governor. And the governor, finding himself thus in the shade, would now and then suddenly awake and become jealous for the preservation of his authority, and at such times would seize the reins with ludicrous haste, while Talabor would as quickly take up again the part of a subordinate.

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Such was the state of affairs when the governor and Talabor were sitting together one evening in a tolerably large room occupied by the former.

On the table before them were a good sized pewter pot and drinking cups to match. The two had been talking for some time. The governor was looking as if he had been annoyed about something, and Talabor could not be said to look cheerful either, in fact, he had rarely been seen to smile since Master Peter's departure. He missed him greatly, for latterly, as long as he was at home, Peter had often had the young man with him in the evenings, when the candles were lighted, or when a blazing fire supplied the place of tallow and wax, these latter being still considered luxuries.

Master Peter possessed a few books which he greatly valued—a copy of his favourite Ovid, and a Bible, for which he had given a village and a half, besides one or two others. He made Talabor read to him from all in turn; and often by way of variety, he had long conversations with him, and told him stories of his hunting adventures.

Talabor was a good listener, and he not only enjoyed but learnt a good deal from the narratives of his younger days, in which Master Peter delighted. Dora, too, was more often present than not, and sometimes joined in the conversation, which made it more interesting still, and then Talabor felt as if he were almost one of the family. Of course, there could be nothing of this sort now. Dora gave her orders, sometimes made suggestions, but he never saw her except in the presence of others and on matters of business. He had quite satisfied himself, however, that there had never been anything between her and Libor, and that was a satisfaction. She had not deceived her father, she had never either sent or received a single letter unknown to him, and in fact she was just as upright and honourable as he had always thought her.

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As to why Libor had spread the reports which Talabor had traced to him, and why he had enlisted Borka's aid, unless it were to magnify his own importance, that, of course, he could not guess; but he had so frightened the maid that he was satisfied not only that she had told him the truth so far as she knew it, but that for the future she would keep it to herself, on pain of being denounced as a traitor to her master, of whom she stood in great awe.

"This won't do!" cried the governor, as he brought his hand down on the table with a mighty bang. "This won't do, I say! Here are the woods swarming with wolves, and one good hunt would drive the whole pack off, and yet you, Talabor, would have us look idly on while the brutes are carrying off the master's sheep and lambs regularly day after day."

"Not idly, sir, I did not say idly; but they have the shepherd and his boys to look after them, and they are good shots, especially the shepherd, and then he has four dogs, each as big as a buffalo," Talabor rejoined, rather absently.

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"Buffalo!"

"Calf, I mean, of course; but it would certainly not be wise to take the garrison out hunting just now."

"And why not? You are afraid of the Tartars, I suppose, like the rest!"

"No, sir! but if they do come, I should prefer their being afraid of us! Besides, there is no good in

denying it—the wind never blows without cause, and there has been more than one report that the Tartars have actually invaded us."

"Always the Tartars! How in the world should they find their way through such woods as these unless you or I led them here?"

"If once the filthy creatures flood the country, it seems to me from all that ever I have heard, that not a corner will be safe from them. They'll go even where they have no intention of going, just because of their numbers, because those behind will press them forward in any and every direction."

"Well, it's true, certainly, that the last time I was with the master in Pest, I heard they had done I don't know what not in Russia and Wallachia. People said that wherever they forced their way they were like—excuse me—like bugs, and not to be so easily got rid of, even with boiling water! And they are foul, disgusting folk, too! they poison the very air; and they eat up everything, to the very hog-wash!"

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"So, Governor, you agree with me then! It's the man who keeps his eyes open who controls the market! Who knows whether we mayn't have a struggle with them ourselves to-day or to-morrow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the governor. "Our walls are strong, and, if only there are not very many of them——"

"Eh, sir, but numbers will make no difference! We are so enclosed here that the closer they are packed the more of them our arrows will hit."

"True! true!" said the governor, with more animation now that there was a question of fighting, "but they shoot too, blast them!"

"Let them!" said Talabor confidently, "we are behind our walls, and can see every man of them without being seen ourselves."

"Clerk!" cried the governor, quite annoyed, "I declare you talk as if the Tartars were at the very gate!"

"Heaven forbid! but——"

At that instant the door flew open, and the gate-keeper, one of the most vigilant fellows of the castle, rushed in.

"Get on with you, you ass!" shouted the governor, "what's the news? What do you mean by leaving the gate and bolting in here as if the wolves were at your heels?"

The governor might perhaps have gone on scolding, but the gate-keeper interrupted him.

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"Talabor—Mr. Governor, I mean, there are some suspicious-looking men on the edge of the wood, if my eyes don't deceive me."

"On the edge of the wood? But it is rather dark to see so far," said Talabor, standing up as he spoke.

"If it were not so dark, I could tell better who the rascals are; but so much I can say, there they are, and a good lot of them."

"Very well," said Talabor, making a sign to the governor, "you are a faithful fellow to have noticed them; but we mustn't make any fuss, or our young mistress may be frightened."

"I am not usually given to fearing danger, Mr. Talabor," said Dora, entering the room at that moment, and speaking with cool dignity. "I have just been to the top of the look out myself, and what this honest fellow says is perfectly true. There are some men just inside the wood, and they do look suspicious, because they keep creeping about among the underwood, and only now and then putting their heads out."

While his mistress spoke, the gate-keeper had stood there motionless.

"Come, go back to the gate," said Dora, turning to him, "and make haste! you heard what Mr. Talabor said; let him know at once if you notice any movement among these people."

"And, Governor," she continued, "you had better place the guard and all the men who can shoot at the loopholes, quietly, you know, not as if we were expecting to be attacked; and then, the stones for the walls——"

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"Pardon me, mistress," interposed Talabor, "I had stones, and everything else we might need, carried up a week ago."

"I know it, Mr. Talabor, I was not doubting it," Dora said in an unruffled tone, "but for all that, it will be as well to have more stones, I think. I believe myself that they are just brigands, not Tartars, but even so, if they attack us at night, and in large numbers, all will depend upon the reception they get, so it seems to me."

Talabor said no more, but in his own mind he was fully persuaded that the suspicious-looking folk were the Mongols, and that they were concocting some plan for getting into the castle without



attacking it.

"Your orders shall be obeyed, my young mistress," answered the governor.

"Talabor," Dora went on, as if to make up for her previous coldness, "I trust to you to do everything necessary for our defence."

A few moments later Talabor was in the spacious courtyard, collecting the men who formed the watch or guard, while the old governor hurried with some difficulty up the stairs which led to the porter's room, over the gate.

All preparations were complete within a quarter of an hour.

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Dora wrapped herself in a cloak and stationed herself in a wide balcony facing the woods.

She had been very desirous of following her father and sharing all his perils and dangers; but it must be confessed that at this moment she was filled with fear; so, too, she probably would have been if at her father's side in battle, but she would have suppressed her fear then as she was doing now, and would have shown herself as brave and resolute as any.

The doubtful-looking figures had vanished now from the wood, and, aided by the moon which just then shone out through the clouds, Talabor's sharp eyes detected three horsemen coming towards the gate. They were riding confidently, though the path was steep and narrow, with a wall of rock on one side and a sheer precipice on the other. They seemed to know the way.

"Talabor!" cried Dora, as she caught sight of him standing on the wall just opposite her, between the low but massive battlements.

"Directly!" answered Talabor, and with a whisper to Jakó the dog-keeper, who was beside him, he hurried down and came and stood below the balcony, while Dora bent over it, saying in a pleased tone, "Do you see, there are guests arriving? I think they must be friends, or at least acquaintances, by the way they ride."

"Yes, I do, mistress!" answered Talabor. "They have the appearance of visitors certainly, but they have come from those other questionable-looking folk, so we will be careful. Trust me, I have my wits about me."

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"There are three," said Dora, after a short pause, and as if the answer did not quite satisfy her. "How can we tell whether they have any evil intentions or not?"

"We shall see; but I must go back to my place."

"Go to the gate tower."

"I am going!" said Talabor, and without waiting for further orders, he ran back, first to his former post on the wall, where he spoke to the wild-looking dog-keeper and the two armed men who had joined him, and then to the tower flanking the gate, from a slit-like opening in which he could see the moat, and the space opposite formed by a clearing in the wood.

The gate-keeper had not noticed the approach of the "guests," as Dora called them, for the window was too narrow to give any view of the breakneck path, along which the riders were advancing, now hidden in the hollows, now reappearing among the juniper bushes and wild roses. They were within a short distance of the moat now, and were making straight for the gate.

"Quick!" said Talabor to the porter, "go and fetch the governor! I'll take your place meantime; and tell him to be on his guard, but not to raise any alarm. It would be as well if he could get our young mistress to leave that open balcony, for some impudent arrow, if not a spear, might find its way there."

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The gate-keeper stared for a moment, and then went off without a word.

The governor, finding day after day pass in peace, had cast care to the winds for his own part, and had fallen into the way of constantly testing the contents of Master Peter's well-filled cellar, in the privacy of his own room. He was rather a dainty than greedy drinker, and the wine, being pure, never affected his head, though it did not make him more inclined to exert himself. Just now, however, he was carrying out Dora's orders, as he sat on a projection of the wall with his feet dangling down into the court. He would have had his pipe in his mouth, not a doubt of it, if tobacco had been known in those days.

While the gate-keeper was gone the three horsemen arrived.

"Hi! porter!" cried the foremost, whose figure, though not his features, was plainly discernible. He was mounted on a dark, undersized horse, and was enveloped in a sort of cloak of primitive shape, much like the coarse garment worn by swine-herds. His head was covered by a small round helmet, like a half melon.

"Here I am, what do you want?" answered Talabor.

"I come by order of Master Peter Szirmay," answered the man. "The Tartars have broken into the country, and his Honour has sent a garrison, as he does not consider the present one sufficient."

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"You are Libor the clerk!" said Talabor, at once recognising the forward governor by his peculiar voice, which reminded him irresistibly of a cock's crow.

"And who may you be?"

"Talabor, if his Honour the governor still remembers my poor name."

"Ah! all right, Clerk! just let them be quick with the drawbridge, for it is going to rain, and I have no fancy for getting wet."

"No fear, Mr. Libor. It is not blowing up for rain yet! But in these perilous times, caution is the order of the day, and so, Mr. Libor, your Honour will perhaps explain how it happens that Mr. Paul Héderváry's gallant governor has been sent to our assistance by our master. That we are in much need of help I don't deny."

"Why such a heap of questions? Mr. Héderváry and some twenty or more Szirmays are in the King's camp, and Master Peter has sent me with Mr. Héderváry's consent, as being a man to be trusted."

"A man to be trusted? And since when have you been a man to be trusted, Governor? Since when have people come to trust a scamp? You take care that I don't tell Master Peter something about you!"

"Mr. Talabor!" cried Libor haughtily, "have the drawbridge lowered at once! I have orders to garrison the castle. And pray where is the governor? and since when have such pettifoggers as you been allowed to meddle in Master Peter's affairs?"

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"Here is the governor," said old Moses at this moment. Curiosity, and just a little spice of uneasiness had brought him quickly to the tower, and he had heard Libor's last angry words.

Talabor at once gave up his place to him, but neither he nor the porter left the room.

"Oh, Mr. Governor," said Libor in a tone of flattery, "I am glad indeed to be able to speak to the real governor at last, instead of to that wind-bag of a fellow. I know Mr. Moses *deák*, and how long he has been in Master Peter's confidence as his right hand."

Then, slightly raising his voice, he went on: "The promised garrison has arrived. It is here close at hand by Master Peter's orders, and is only waiting for the drawbridge to place itself under Mr. Moses' command."

Before making any answer to this, the governor turned to Talabor with a look of inquiry, which seemed to say, "It is all quite correct. Master Peter himself has sent Governor Libor here, and there is no reason why we should not admit the reinforcements."

"Mr. Governor," whispered Talabor, with his hand on his sword, "say you will let Mr. Libor himself in and that you will settle matters with him over a cup of wine."

"Good," said the governor, who liked this suggestion very well. Then he shouted down through the opening, "Mr. Libor, before I admit the garrison, I should be pleased to see you in the castle by yourself! I am sure you must be tired after your long journey, and it will do you good to wet your whistle with a cup or two of wine; and then, as soon as we have had a look at things all round, I will receive your good fellows with open arms."

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"Who is in command of this guard?" inquired Talabor, coming to the window again.

"Myself! until I hand my men over to the governor. But I don't answer you again, Clerk Talabor! What need is there of anyone else while good Mr. Moses is alive? But I can't come and feast inside while my men are left hungry and thirsty without. I will summon them at once! and even then they can come only single file up this abominable road where one risks one's life at every step."

"Indeed so, Mr. Libor? Well, if you have all your wits about you, we have not quite taken leave of ours. You would like to come in with your troop, but we should like first to have the pleasure of being made personally acquainted with your two wooden figures there! I understand you, sir! but you should have come when times were better. These are evil days! Who knows whether Master Peter is even alive, and whether Mr. Héderváry's governor has not come to take possession and turn this time of confusion to his own advantage?"

So spoke Talabor, and Governor Moses was a little shaken out of his confidence. Indeed, the whole affair seemed strange. Surely, thought he, if Master Peter had wished to strengthen the garrison he would have found someone to send besides the clerk, Libor; for he, of course, knew nothing of the latter's recent military advancement; and then again, Talabor was so prudent that during the past weeks the governor had come to look on him as a sort of oracle.

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"Then you won't admit the guard?" said Libor wrathfully.

"We have not said that," answered Moses; "but if you have come on an honest errand, come in first by yourself; show me a line of writing, or some other token, and we shall know at once what we are about."

"Writing? token? Isn't the living word more than any writing? And isn't it token enough that I, the Héderváry's governor, am here myself?"

"The garrison are not coming into the castle!" cried Talabor. "There are enough of us here, and we don't want any more mouths to feed! But if you yourself wish to come in, you may, and then

we shall soon see how things are."

"Mr. Governor!" shouted Libor in a fury, "I hold you responsible for anything that may happen! who knows whether some stray band of Tartars may not find their way up here to-day or to-morrow, and who is going to stand against them?"

"We! I!" said Talabor. "Make your choice, if you please! Come in alone, or—nobody will be let in, and we will take the responsibility." [Pg 196]

So saying Talabor went forward, and looking down through the loophole, exclaimed, "Why, Mr. Libor, who are those behind you?"

"Tótok (Slovacks), they don't understand Hungarian," answered Libor; and in a louder voice he added, "Let the drawbridge down at once, I will come in alone."

"Talabor!" said Dora, coming hastily into the room, "I see a whole number of men coming up the road. What does it mean?"

"It means treachery, mistress! Mr. Héderváry's governor, Libor, *deák*, is here asking for admittance, and I suspect mischief. I believe the rascal means to take the castle," said Talabor.

"No one must be admitted," answered Dora.

As Dora spoke, Governor Moses turned round. The old man was not yet clear in his own mind what they ought to do.

If the reinforcements had really come from Master Peter, why then there was no reason why they should not be admitted; and, left to himself, he would certainly have let both Libor and all his followers in without delay. But Talabor had "driven a nail into his head" which caused him to hesitate, and Dora's commands were peremptory.

"Excuse me, Mr. Governor," said Dora, "and allow me to come to the window."

"Mr. Libor," she went on, in a voice which trembled a little, "please to withdraw yourself and your men, and go back wherever you have come from. If we are attacked we will defend ourselves, and you must all be wanted elsewhere, if it is true, as I hear, that the Tartars have invaded the country." [Pg 197]

"Dearest young lady! Your father will be greatly vexed by this obstinacy."

"That's enough, Libor!" said Talabor, with a sign to Dora, who drew back. "We shall let no one into the castle, not even Master Peter's own brother, unless he can show us Master Peter's ring, for those were his private instructions to me."

"Why didn't you say so before?" muttered Moses to himself; and then, as if annoyed that his master should have thought it necessary to give private instructions to any but himself, in the event of such an unforeseen emergency as the present, he called down to Libor, "It is quite true! I asked you for a token myself just now, for I have had my instructions too."

"I'll show it as soon as we are in the castle," returned Libor.

"Treachery!" said Talabor, addressing Dora. "The castle is strong, and it will be difficult to attack it. We will answer for that! Don't have any anxiety about anything, dear young lady; but hasten back to your own rooms and don't risk your precious life, for I expect the dance will begin directly."

Talabor's manly self-possession had reassured her, and she looked at him with animation equal to his own; then, not wishing to wound the feelings of the governor, she shook him by the hand for the first time in her life, saying, "Moses, *deák*! if they should really attack us, I trust entirely to you and Mr. Talabor. And, now, everyone to his post! I am not a Szirmay for nothing! and I know how to behave, if the home of my ancestors is attacked!" [Pg 198]

And having hurriedly uttered these words, Dora withdrew.

"Very well then, as you please!" shouted Libor furiously. "Hungarian dogs! you shall get what you have earned!"

With that he turned his horse's head, and not long after the whole body of mounted men had reached the open space fronting the gate.

"Hungarian dogs!" thundered the governor, "then the rascally whelp can actually slander his own race!"

A few moments more, and not only the horsemen who wore the Hungarian costume, but also a hundred or so of filthy, monkey-faced Mongols on foot, were all assembled before the castle, these latter having climbed the rocks as if they had been so many wild cats. It was easy to see at once that they were not Hungarians.

"Yes! Hungarian dogs, that's what you are!" shouted Libor, "and I am a Knéz of his Highness, the Grand Khan Oktai, and I shall spit every man of you!"

So saying, he hurried away, and was lost in the throng.

## CHAPTER XII. DEFENDING THE CASTLE.

A few moments later the small garrison of brave men were all on the walls, and so placed behind the breastwork as to be almost invisible from below.

All stood motionless; not an arrow was discharged, not a stone hurled. The castle was to all appearance dead.

All at once there was a terrific roar from the enemy, which awoke countless echoes among the rocks. But it was no battle-cry of the Tartars or Mongols, for they rush to the fray in silence, without uttering a sound. This was like the wild yell of all sorts of people, a mixture of howls and cries, almost more like those of wild animals than of human beings.

Dora, who at that moment had stepped out into the balcony, shuddered at the sound. The howls and screams of fury were positive torture to her ears, and thrilled her through and through.

"O God!" she said within herself, "I am afraid! and I must not be afraid!" and as she spoke, her maids all came rushing into the balcony, wringing their hands above their heads, uttering loud lamentations, which were half strangled by sobs.

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"The Tartars! the Tartars!" they cried, hardly able to get the words out. "It's all over with us! What shall we do! What shall we do!"

"Go about your own business, every one of you!" said Dora sternly, "fighting is the men's work, yours is to be at the washing-tub, and the fireside. Don't let me hear another sound, and don't come here again till I call you!"

Her speech had the desired effect; the women were all silent, as if they had been taken by the throat and had had their wails suddenly choked; and away they went in haste, either to do as they were told, or to hide themselves in the lowest depths of the cellar. At all events they vanished.

They had no sooner all tumbled out of the balcony than Talabor stepped in, and just as he did so, an arrow, the first from outside, flew in and struck his cap.

"Come in! come inside! for Heaven's sake!" cried Talabor, seizing Dora by the hand.

"Mr. Talabor! What do you mean?" she began indignantly, both startled and angered by his audacity. Then, catching sight of the arrow in his cap, she went on in a frightened voice, "Are you wounded, Talabor?"

The young man did not let go his hold until he had drawn Dora into the adjoining hall, where she was quite reassured as to the arrow, which he then drew from his cap, without a word, and fitted to the long bow he had in his hand. Then he stepped back into the balcony, and sent the arrow flying with the remark, "There's one who won't swallow any more Magyar bread at all events!"

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The next instant a cloud of arrows poured into the balcony, but already Talabor was down in the court and rushing to the walls, whence Master Peter's famous dog-keeper and some of the garrison had already discharged their arrows with deadly effect.

Dora had quite recovered herself.

As for Libor, he had vanished as completely as if he had never been there.

"If I could only clap eyes on that scoundrel!" cried Talabor furiously. "Ah! there! that's he! with his head buried in a cowl! cowardly dog!"

He fitted an arrow and drew his bow, but hit only a Tartar.

"Missed!" he muttered, with vexation, "and it's the last! Here, Jakó," he said, turning to the dog-keeper, "just go and fetch me the great Székely bow from the dining hall! you know, the one which takes three of us to string it."

While Jakó was gone, Talabor observed that one body of Tartars was stealing along under the trees close beside the moat, towards the south side of the castle, and that Libor had dismounted, and was creeping along with them.

"What can those rascals mean to do?" whispered the governor.

"I know!" said Talabor, "the traitor! I know well enough what he's after! but he's out! The wretch! he thinks he shall find the wall on that side in the same tumble-down state in which it was the last time he was here!"

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"True!" returned the governor, "they are making straight for it."

"You there at the bastion, quick! follow me," he went on, hurrying along the parapet to where the Mongols seemed to intend a mighty assault.

The dog-keeper, who had come back with the bow, climbed the wall by the narrow steps, and he, too, followed Talabor.

Libor was creeping along on foot among his men, wearing a coat of mail, and so managing as to be out of range of the arrows of the defenders. Libor thoroughly understood how to avail himself of shelter, and here, close to the wood, had no difficulty in finding it.

To his great chagrin, however, he found that he had miscalculated. The wall had been so well repaired that if anything it was even stronger here than elsewhere.

Talabor and his party had no sooner made their appearance than they were observed, in spite of the gathering twilight, and were the targets for a cloud of arrows. They withdrew behind the breastwork, and after some difficulty succeeded in stringing the great Székely bow. Whereupon, Talabor chose the longest arrow from Jakó's quiver, fitted it to the string, straightened himself, and, as he did so, he caught sight of Libor. Libor also recognised his worst enemy at the self-same moment, and turning suddenly away made for the wood.

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But Talabor's arrow flew faster than he, and with so sure an aim that it hit him in the back, below his iron corselet, and there stuck.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Jakó, himself a passionate bowman, and one of the few who could manage the Székely bow, "ha! ha! ha! that's right! if not in front, then behind! all's one to us!"

But Talabor was not satisfied with his shot, for Libor kept his feet, at least as long as he was within sight.

The Mongols were meantime showing how determined they could be when the hope of valuable booty was dangled before their eyes. Their numbers had been mysteriously increased tenfold, and from all sides they were bringing stones, branches from the trees, whole trees, in a word, all and everything upon which they could lay hands. The attack on the south side of the castle was abandoned, though not before some score or so of the enemy had been laid low by the arrows of Talabor and his men, and the Mongols all now turned their attention to the moat, and to that part of it immediately fronting the drawbridge. Arrows poured down upon them incessantly, and there was seldom one which missed its mark. But in spite of this, the work proceeded at such a rate as threatened to be successful in no long time, for as one fell another took his place, and the wood seemed to be swarming.

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Talabor had had no experience of the Mongols, and was not aware that their chief strength lay in their enormous numbers. He did not so much as dream how many of them there might be. However, Master Peter had made no bad choice in the garrison he had left behind him, and they did not for a moment lose courage. They shot down arrow after arrow, not one of which was left without its response by the bowmen stationed behind those at work on the moat; but while many of the besiegers were stretched upon the ground, not more than three or four of the besieged were wounded, and of them not one so seriously as to be incapable of further fighting.

Dora had been coming out into the courtyard from time to time, ever since the siege had begun in earnest. Talabor and the governor were too busy probably to notice her, and though not altogether safe, she found herself comparatively out of danger, so long as she kept under the wall, as the arrows described a curve in falling. She could handle a bow at least as well as many of the women of her time; but though she had a strong sense of her responsibilities as the "mistress of the castle" in her father's absence, she was content to leave the fighting to the men, and to do no more than speak an encouraging word to them from time to time and keep everything in readiness for attending to their wounds.

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As she stood there, in the shelter of the wall, she suddenly heard the governor's voice uttering maledictions and imprecations, and the next moment he came blundering down the stone steps from the parapet.

"Oh! Moses, *deák!* what is the matter?" cried Dora, rushing towards him.

The governor could be a very careful man when occasion required, and if he descended now with something of a roll, he trod gingerly all the same; and he had besides the advantage of such well-covered bones, that they were in little danger.

"The matter?" he cried, as he reached the grass in safety, "the matter, young mistress, is that they have shot me—through the arm, hang them! just as my spear had caught one of them behind the ear too!"

"Here," cried Dora to the man nearest her, "Vid, fetch me some water and rag, quick! we must stop the bleeding. Borka has them all ready!"

Vid, who was on the wall, had seen the governor totter and almost lose his balance as he stumbled down the steps, and was hurrying after him when Dora called.

But Mr. Moses no sooner found himself safely at the bottom, and sound in all his limbs except just where he was hit, than he at once regained his wonted composure.

"Off with you, Vid," said he, "but fetch a good handful of cobwebs; that will stop the bleeding in a trice."

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Meantime Dora herself ran into the house and soon came back with Borka her maid, bringing water, heaps of old rag, and all that could possibly be wanted. The girl's knees were shaking under her with terror as she slipped along, close after her mistress.

Dora herself bound up the injured arm, Moses offering no opposition, as they were in a fairly safe place, and when the operation was over, he even kissed the hands of this "fairest of surgeons," as he called her. Then he rose to his feet, gave himself a shake and roared, "Hand me my spears! I shall hardly be able to draw another bow to-day!"

No sooner was the governor standing up once more than Borka made a hasty dash for the house.

"Keep along by the wall, Borka!" Dora called after her. But the girl was so consumed with fear that she neither heard nor saw. Just as she was hurrying up the steps of the principal entrance, instead of going round to the back, where the danger was nil, she fell down, head foremost, and as she did so, a long Tartar arrow caught her in the back.

Dora flew after her, and just as she had reached the steps Talabor was beside her, with his shield held over her head. Two or three arrows rattled down upon it, even in the few moments that they stood there.

"Get up at once!" said Talabor, sternly. But the girl did not move, and Moses began to tremble. [Pg 207]

Borka was dead! killed, not by the arrow, as they found later on, but by her own terror.

"Oh, poor girl!" cried Dora, her eyes filling with tears.

"She has got her deserts!" said Talabor, in a hard tone. "There is one traitor less in the castle! and I believe she was the only one."

And without giving time for question or answer, he hurried Dora indoors, and rushed back to his post on the wall, followed at a more leisurely pace by Moses with his four spears.

While all this was going on, the Mongols had succeeded more or less in filling up the moat, and though up to their knees in water, and impeded by the logs, branches, stones, and other material with which they had filled it, some had already crossed, and were beginning to climb the wall, by means of long poles, when Talabor gave the signal, and a volley of huge stones and pieces of rock came suddenly crashing down upon them. These were swiftly followed by a flight of arrows, and the two together worked such terrible havoc among the assailants that the survivors beat a hasty retreat.

They seemed to be entirely disheartened by this last repulse, and convinced that nothing would be gained by continuing their present tactics; for, to the great surprise of Moses and Talabor, they did not return. When next the moon shone out it was seen that a large number of men were lying dead both in and about the moat. All, whether whole or wounded, who could do so, had drawn off into the depths of the wood, the more severely wounded borne on the shoulders of the rest. [Pg 208]

Libor was not again seen by anyone.

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The usual guard was doubled, and Talabor was going to pass the night on the battlements, with the great dog-wood bow beside him and his quiver full of fresh arrows.

The wounded, only four of whom were seriously injured, had been bandaged, and it now appeared that, of the entire garrison there were but two or three who had not at least a scratch to show.

Talabor had been hit he did not know how many times, but he had escaped without any serious wound, though he had lost a good deal of blood. Before going to his post on the wall, he paid a visit to the porter's room to have his hurts seen to, and when at last the porter's wife let him go, he was so bound up and bandaged as to be not unlike an Egyptian mummy.

By the time Moses came in to see Dora, she was utterly worn out.

"Where is Talabor?" she asked.

"On the castle wall," said the governor. [Pg 209]

"Not wounded, is he?"

"I don't think so," was the answer. "At least, he said nothing about it."

"We must all watch to-night, Mr. Moses; I am afraid they may come back and bring more with them."

"My dear young lady," said Moses, "whether they do or not, this castle is no place for you now. It is only the mercy of God which has preserved you this time."

"But I must not stir from here until I hear from my father! Besides, where can I go? If the Tartars have discovered such an out-of-the-way place as this, the country must be swarming with them!"

"It was easy enough for them to find their way here," growled Moses, with sundry not too respectful expletives. "It was that good-for-nothing clerk, Libor, who brought them down on us."

"That's true indeed; but now that they have found us out, others may come. So, Mr. Moses, we must have our eyes open, and as soon as we can, we must have the moat cleared, and make the castle more secure if possible."

Moses said "good-night," though he well knew that Dora would not go to rest, and then he, too, went to the porter's room.

It was a most unusual thing for the Mongols to abandon any attack, but just as Talabor had begun to pelt the assailants with the heavy missiles already mentioned, one of the chiefs sent with Libor (possibly to act as spy upon him), hastily quitted the post of danger and hurried after the governor-clerk, whom he found in the wood, trying as best he might to bind up the wound from which he had now drawn the arrow. The wound, though deep enough, was not serious. [Pg 210]

"Why, Knéz! sitting here under the trees, are you?" cried the Mongol roughly, in his own uncouth tongue. "Sitting here, when those Magyar dogs have done for more than a hundred of our men!"

"Directly, Bajdár!" said Libor sharply, "you see I have been shot in the head and can't move!"

"Directly? and can't move? shot in the head? Perhaps you don't keep your head where we Mongols keep ours! but what will the Khan say, if we take back only five or six out of 300 men?"

"Five or six?" repeated Libor in alarm; "are so many lost?"

"Well, and if it's not so many! and if you, who ought to be first in the fight have managed to save your own skin! quite enough have fallen for all that, and we shall all perish if this mad business goes on any longer. Take care, Knéz! Look after yourself! for Batu Khan is not used to being played with by new men such as you!"

Libor staggered to his feet, and though badly frightened by his ill-success, as well as by what Bajdár had said, his natural cunning did not altogether desert him. [Pg 211]

"Be off, Bajdár! and don't blame me! Of course, I meant it for the best! The castle is crammed with gold and silver, and there are some good horses, as well as a pretty girl or two. Who could have supposed the rascals would defend themselves in such a fashion! Be off, I tell you, Bajdár, and stop this senseless fighting, and we'll draw off into the woods."

"What! with empty hands?"

"Who is to help it? But we won't go quite empty-handed either."

The Mongol glanced up from under his cap as Libor said this, and his small eyes glittered like fire-flies in the darkness.

"Master Peter has a large sheep-fold in a valley not far from here, and the few men who guard it are nothing to reckon with; if we drive off the sheep, there will be a good feast for a thousand or two of hungry fellows in the camp."

"What's that?" said the Tartar hotly. "Why, we shall eat those up ourselves! All the cattle have been driven off out of our way, and we are as hungry as wolves!"

"Only go, Bajdár, and call the men off, and then I'll tell you something which will make up for our ill-luck here."

Bajdár shook his head. He was in no good humour, but he had gained his object, and he went off, cursing and threatening, to stop the assault. [Pg 212]

As for the amends which Libor promised, we can say only so much as this, that they were ample. He believed the country to be wholly at the Mongols' mercy, he was well acquainted with the neighbourhood, and he led his men, who had now dwindled to thirty or so, to the most defenceless places, where they found cattle enough to satisfy them.

So great was the prevailing terror, that many had fled from their homes leaving everything behind them, or had been so harassed by perpetual alarms that they had at last concealed their property in such senseless ways that it was found without difficulty.

However it may have been in this case, it was a fact that when Knéz Libor returned from his campaign, he received high praise from Batu Khan, who cared nothing at all that the force had melted away till little more than a fourth part was left to return to the Sajó. Batu had further uses for Libor.

When the Mongols had at last made off, and Moses and Talabor found that the shepherds had been killed, and the sheep, either eaten on the spot, carried off, or scattered in the woods, they first cautiously searched the neighbourhood, and then proceeded with no little labour, to bury the dead.

This done, Talabor made it his business to ride out every day, and was sometimes absent for hours, scouring the country while those at home were busy with the governor, strengthening the defences of the castle. [Pg 213]

One morning, some days after the attack, Talabor asked to speak to Dora. It had been a trying time for all in the castle, but Dora had gone back to her usual habits, and was looking after her household affairs as strictly and regularly as if nothing had happened. In one thing she was somewhat changed: her confidence in and dependence upon Talabor had much increased.

"Well, Talabor, is there any good news?" she asked gently.

"May I speak plainly, dear young mistress?" he asked, by way of answer.

"I never wish you to speak otherwise, Clerk Talabor."

"Then I will tell you at once, that you must not stay here any longer, mistress. The place is too unsafe now that the Mongols know it."

"Must not? and where could I go?"

"We have to do with dangerous enemies, and they are enraged, and will be certain to revenge themselves as soon as they can," he urged.

Dora sighed. "I know, Talabor, but I am not going to move till I hear from my father."

"Dear lady," said Talabor again, after a pause. "Dear mistress—perhaps you may have noticed that I have been out riding every day. I have scoured the whole neighbourhood for miles round, and I have learnt a good deal more than the mere rumours which are all that reach us here."

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"And you have dared to keep it to yourself?"

"Yes, dear mistress, I have dared! I did not wish to trouble you for nothing, and one hears many things. If I have done wrong, God knows, I could not do anything else until I was sure."

"Talabor!" said Dora, quite disarmed, "and why do you speak now?"

"Because the time has come when I must either tell you the worst, or let you risk your precious life."

Dora shuddered but did not speak, and Talabor went on to tell her, what we already know, of the invasion, and of the successes already gained by Batu Khan. There were naturally many gaps in his narrative, and much that was already sorrowful fact, he knew only as rumour and surmise. But still, with all deficiencies it was abundantly evident that her present home was no longer safe, and that the very next week, day, even hour, she might be exposed to fresh and graver peril.

And still, what was she to do?

"Is that all?" she asked presently, "you have not heard anything of my father?"

"I have heard that he is alive at least," responded Talabor cheerfully, "though twice I heard the contrary——"

"And you kept it from me?"

"Why should I tell you what I did not believe myself, and what those who told me were not at all sure of? It was only a report, and now I know for certain that Master Peter is alive."

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"Certain? how?"

"Truly," and he told how the news had reached him, adding, "so now we know where to find him, when we have the opportunity."

"Ah! that settles it then, Talabor. The proper place for a good daughter is with her father. I'll go to him!"

But while Dora was thus making up her mind to ride to the camp, events had taken place which, when they came to her ears, made her hesitate again as to what she ought to do.

Meantime, until they could decide, Talabor went on strengthening the walls in every way he could think of, and rendering the steep approach more difficult.

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## **CHAPTER XIII. CAMP FIRES.**

Dschingiz Khan had died in 1227, and by the year 1234 his son and successor, Oktai, had completed the subjugation of Northern China. Two years later he sent his nephew Batu westwards at the head of 500,000 men, and in less than six years the latter had overrun nearly one quarter of the circumference of the earth.

The boundless steppes of Asia, and the lands lying between the River Ural and the Dnieper, with all their various peoples, were speedily brought under his sway. In the autumn of 1237 the Mongolian catapults had reduced Riazan to a heap of ruins; Moscow perished in the flames; and with the capture of Kieff, then the handsomest and best fortified city of Northern Europe, all Russia sank under the yoke of the Mongols, who ruled her for centuries. Kieff had fallen towards the end of 1240, and Batu had then divided his forces, sending 50,000 men to Poland, where they burnt Cracow and Breslau, and then proceeded to Silesia, where, on April 9th, they defeated an army of Germans, Poles, and Bohemians near Liegnitz; they then devastated Moravia, and entering Hungary on the north-west, presently rejoined Batu, who himself had made a straight

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line from Kieff for Hungary, entering it, as already said, by the pass of Verecz, on the north-east.

The third division of Mongols had gone south, skirting the eastern Carpathians and entering Transylvania at two different points.

One portion of this division had rejoined Batu at the river Sajó, in time for the pitched battle now imminent.

When first the Hungarian camp was pitched Batu had surveyed it from an eminence with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"There are a good many of them!" he exclaimed, "but they can't get away! They have penned themselves up as if they were so many sheep in a fold!"

With the return of Duke Kálmán after his victory at the bridge, all danger was believed to be over for the night, and save for a few merry-makers, the exultant army slept profoundly. There were few watchers but the King, the Duke, the Archbishop, and the few others gathered in the royal tent.

On the other side of the Sajó a different and wilder scene was being enacted.

The night was dark, but the Mongol camp was brilliantly illuminated by the blaze of a bonfire so huge, that its light shone far and wide.

It was never the Khan's way to extinguish his camp fires; quite the contrary. He wished his enemy to see them, and to suppose that his army was stationary.

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Thanks to his innumerable spies, he was well aware of all that had taken place early in the night, and had not been in the least surprised by the recent sortie. It was, in fact, just what he had wished to provoke, by way of diverting the attention of the Hungarians from that which was taking place farther up the river.

If a few hundred scape-goats had perished, what matter? there were plenty more to take their place. And they were not even Mongols, but slaves, Russians, Kuns, etc., who had been forced into his service.

While these wretches, with the trembling Libor perforce among them, were bearing the brunt of the Hungarian onset, and being thoroughly beaten, Batu had sent a large force across the Sajó farther up and this, under cover of the darkness, was now stealthily drawing nearer and nearer to the Hungarian camp. It moved forward in absolute silence, and without attracting any notice.

Batu and several of his chief leaders were just now standing on a low hill, all mounted, armed, and ready for battle. Below was the Mongol host, mounted also and armed with bows, spears, and short, curved swords. A wild, terrible-looking host they were, short of stature, broad in the chest, flat in the face; with small, far-apart eyes, and flat noses. They were clad in ox-hide so thick as to be proof against most weapons, and consisting of small pieces, like scales, sewn together. So they are described by Thomas, Archdeacon of Spalatro, who had but too good opportunity of seeing what they were like. He adds that their helmets were either of leather or iron, and that their black and white flags were surmounted by a bunch of wool; that their horses, ridden bare-backed and unshod, were small but sturdy, well inured to fatigue and fasting, and as nimble and sure-footed in climbing rocks as the chamois. Scanty food and short rest sufficed these hardy animals even after three days of fatigue.

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Their masters were not accustomed to much in the way of creature-comforts for themselves. They carried nothing in the way of stores or supplies, which gave them great advantage in the matter of speed; they ate no bread, and lived on flesh, blood, and mare's milk. Wherever they went, they dragged along with them a large number of armed captives, especially Kuns, whom they forced into battle, and killed whenever they did not fight as desperately as they desired. They did not themselves care to rush into danger, but were quite content to let their captives do the worst of the fighting while they reaped the victory. In spite of their enormous numbers they made no noise whether they were in camp, on the march, or on the field of battle.

Thus far Archdeacon Thomas.

When to this description we add the fact that they had had continuous practice in warfare for years past, that a career of well-nigh unbroken victory had given them perfect self-confidence, while it spread such terror among those whom they attacked as paralysed the courage even of the stoutest hearts, it is not difficult to understand how it was that everything fell before them, and they were able to found an empire vaster than any which had before, or has since, existed.

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But to return to the Khan and his train of chiefs, among whom was to be seen Libor the Knéz—not the Libor of old days, but a much less comfortable-looking individual. Mongol fare did not seem to have agreed with him too well, for he looked worn and wasted, and his every movement betrayed his nervousness. Yet he was at the Khan's side, perfectly safe, and surely a hundred-fold more fortunate than the miserable captives whom the Mongols held so cheap that they cared not a jot whether they lived or died.

Libor was a Mongol now; he wore a round helmet of leather, carried a scimitar, rode one of the tough little Mongol horses, and was in high favour with his terrible master.

Batu was an undersized man, and the reverse of stout. His eyes, set far apart and slant-wise,

were small, but they burnt like live coals, and were as restless as those of a lynx. His low forehead, flat nose, fearfully large mouth, and projecting ears, made him altogether strikingly like the figures, in gold on a black ground, to be seen on antique Chinese furniture.

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He was marked out from those about him, however, by his dignified bearing, and by the pure white of his leathern garments.

It is true that his dignity was of the lion-like order, animal, that is to say, rather than human; but it was very pronounced. And there was a sort of rude splendour and glitter in his costume, too; for the white leather, the fur of which was turned inwards, was covered all over with strange designs, looking like so many dragons or other imaginary monsters.

He was mounted on a slim, dapple-brown horse, of purest breed, and all his arms, even his bow, were profusely decorated with precious stones.

Of all the ape-faced circle, there is no denying that he was the best looking ape of them all, even if we include Libor, who was dainty enough in appearance, though fear just now was making him not indeed like an ape, but like a large hare, with quivering nostrils!

The camp was far from deserted, in spite of the large force detached, for there could not have been altogether fewer than 300,000 Mongols on the Sajó, and in addition, there were nearly half as many more of the miserable beings who had been first conquered and then forced to join the great host. Round about the hill where stood the Khan were multitudes of felt or leather tents, and thousands of temporary mud-huts, for the trees afforded but little shelter as yet, it being now about the middle of April. Tents and huts were full of armed men, also of women, who wore the scantiest of clothing, and of children, who wore no clothing at all.

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Besides these, there were many women captives, who lay about in groups under the trees, with ears and noses cut off, the picture of exhaustion and misery, and so brutalised by slavery and suffering that they looked more like a herd of mutilated animals than human beings.

Any good-looking women captured by the Mongols were given up to their own women, who fell upon them like furies, tortured without mercy, and then murdered all but those wanted as slaves.

The camp extended far into the depths of the wood, where the chiefs kept order such as it was, with their whips.

As Batu reached the top of the hill, his harsh voice was to be heard giving some peremptory order, at which those about him bent their heads low in respectful submission, and a dozen women, his wives, appeared upon the scene, muffled up in white woollen garments, and mounted upon beautiful horses, which were smothered in fringes, straps, etc., of leather. They were followed by an armed guard, and preceded, oriental fashion, by a band of singers chanting a melancholy dirge.

They had come to take their leave of the Khan, who was sending them to his home, and on reaching the foot of the hill they were helped to dismount. Whereupon they threw back their snow-white veils, which were of wool like their other wraps, and Batu Khan looked at them in dead silence. There was no trace either of pain, or pleasure, or of any other emotion, unless it were vanity and ambition, upon his wild features.

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The women burst into a furious fit of weeping; but it was evidently the result of great effort, not of any irrepressible distress. Men are much like overgrown children, and have always liked to deceive themselves and be deceived; and this weeping and lamentation were the proper thing, the conventional way of saying "farewell!"

And yet, if they but looked on themselves, the sight was surely enough to move anyone to tears; for these women were all strikingly beautiful, and their beauty was enhanced by an expression—and this not forced—of profound sorrow and dejection.

Who they were, and whence they came—whether they were Russian girls from the Volga and Don, Caucasians from the Caspian, fair Slavonians, or white-faced Wallachians, who could say? But all were beautiful, all had an air of distinction about them, and all looked overwhelmed with woe unutterable.

They gathered round the Khan, and his horse pricked its ears and whinnied as if it would take part in the proceedings; for, though Batu's horses were all his friends and tent-mates, far more beloved than his people, this one was an especial favourite, its sire, so the story went, having lived to the age of a hundred.

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When he had had enough of the ceremonial weeping, Batu raised his hand, as who should say, "That will do! You have done your duty, now you can go!"

And instantly the sobs were checked, and smiles were forced to take their place, while the poor goods and chattels raised their hands towards their master, but whether as a mere token of farewell, whether in blessing, or perchance in secret cursing, who could tell!

Another signal and away they hurried down the hill; and a few moments after the white figures had disappeared out of the glare and were lost to sight in the recesses of the wood.

The women gone, Batu put spurs to his horse and raced down the slope, his chiefs following as best they might. With the light flashing blood-red about him, with his spear quivering uplifted

above his head, himself and his horse absolutely one, he dashed on with the rush of a whirlwind, and wherever he went he seemed to say, "Look and admire!" And indeed, the Khan looked his best, when he was thus exhibiting his horsemanship, and in spite of his ape-like features, might almost have passed for some gallant, if wild cavalier.

He and his train galloped away into the darkness, followed by a select body of mounted men; and as soon as they were out of sight, the remaining squadrons were drawn up in regular order. Tents were taken down, and they and their belongings were packed on horses or in waggons, and in a short time, though the bonfire still blazed, it cast its light upon a deserted camp.

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Followed by a herd of women, the entire force moved in dead silence towards the Sajó, where Batu had his first line of battle.

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Day was beginning to break when the Hungarian camp was roused by startling cries, and those who rushed from the King's tent to learn the meaning of them were met by terror-stricken shouts of "The Tartars! The Tartars are upon us!" "They are yonder, close at hand!" "The guard at the bridge has been overpowered, massacred, put to flight," etc.

Looking out between the wooden walls, Master Peter descried at the distance of about a quarter of an hour's march, a dark mass of something which appeared to be in the form of a crescent, but of a size too vast to be measured by the eye. It was like a wall of stone, as solid, as silent, and as motionless; and for a moment he was in doubt as to what it might be, until the neighing of a horse, and the briefer, rarer sound of a signal-horn brought the truth home to him.

The Mongols had come up in the night; the camp was surrounded on three sides; and nothing but the most desperate determination could save them! So much was evident even to his inexperienced eyes, and the silence of these savage folk, who could howl like the very wolves at other times, had something so weird and terrible about it that Master Peter was not the only brave man to feel his heart quake and his blood run cold.

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The victory of the Duke and Ugrin but a few hours before had been delusive indeed, for they had hardly returned in triumph to the camp when Batu sent down to the bridge seven of the gigantic engines of war which played so large a part in the Mongol invasion.

Suddenly, without the least warning, the detachment left on guard found itself assailed by a fierce and heavy storm of stones and pieces of rock; and what added to their terror was the fact that they could not see their enemy, and that there were no stones or rocks anywhere near the river. Seized by superstitious panic, those who escaped being crushed or wounded fled back to the camp, where instantly all was uproar and confusion.

Master Peter rushed back to the King as fast as he could for the turmoil, the narrow ways, and the tent-ropes; and indignation filled his soul at some of the sights he saw: luxurious young nobles, for instance, making their leisurely toilets, combing and arranging their hair, having their armour put on with the greatest care, and finally drawing on new gloves! What he heard during his hurried passage was not much more reassuring. There was plenty of courage and confidence expressed; plenty of contempt for the despicable foe; plenty of assurance that Mongol spears and arrows would prove ineffectual against iron armour; but also there was among some contempt, openly expressed, for their own leaders, though they looked upon the victory as already won.

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"It will be a hard day's work!" muttered Peter Szirmay to himself, while his thoughts flew to Dora in her lonely castle. He had little doubt that the Hungarians must conquer in the end, in spite of the huge odds against them, but still—! and even if they did, he himself might fall! What would become of her?

"God and the Holy Virgin protect her!"

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## CHAPTER XIV. A FATAL DAY.

Peter Szirmay and Paul Héderváry were arming the King with all speed, while his charger, magnificently caparisoned, was brought round, neighing with excitement.

Béla had never appeared more cool and collected than on that eventful morning. As already remarked, he was without military experience, and though his expectations were not extravagant, and he did not make the mistake of underrating the enemy, he had much confidence in the valour of his army.

"We must get the troops outside, without an instant's delay!" shouted Bishop Ugrin, galloping up his face aglow with pleasurable excitement, for he was never happier than when astride his war-horse and amid the blare of trumpets.

"Sequere!" (follow) cried the King, who usually spoke Latin to the ecclesiastical dignitaries.

They rode through the camp, finding the ways everywhere crowded with men, whom some of the officers were trying to reduce to order, while others, still busy attiring themselves, were of opinion that they would be in plenty of time if they made their appearance when the whole army was mounted.

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The Templars were first on horseback.

Their white mantles, with the large red cross upon them, were blowing about in the keen wind, and displaying the steel breastplates beneath, their martial appearance being enhanced by their heavy helmets, which covered the whole head and face, with the exception of narrow slits through which they breathed and saw. As the King rode up to them, the wind blew out the folds of their white banner, and showed its double-armed cross of blood-red.

All this time the Mongols had been drawing nearer and nearer, like an advancing wall, so close were their ranks. And now like a storm of hail the arrows began to fall upon the half-asleep, half-tipsy, and wholly bewildered men in camp. Most were mounted now, but the confusion was indescribable. There were grooms with led horses looking for their masters, masters looking for chargers and servants, and generals looking for their banderia.

There was shouting, running to and fro, and such confusion and hurly-burly that the King had great difficulty in making his orders understood.

He galloped from one squadron to another, amid a cloud of falling arrows and spears, doing all that in him lay to organise the troops. Men were falling on all sides around him, more than one arrow had struck his own armour; the battle had begun, and blood was flowing in streams before the army had been able so much as to get out of camp.

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At last a dash was made down the narrow ways between the tents and the hastily uncoupled waggons; and then with the rage, not the courage, of despair, every leader wanted to rush upon the enemy straight away without waiting for orders, or heeding any but his own followers.

"Stop!" cried Béla, hurrying up to them with the Palatine, and a few men who were hardly able to force their way after him. "Stop! Wait for the word of command!"

But no one even saw, no one heard him.

Leaders and men had most of them lost their heads, and the few disorderly squadrons which succeeded in reaching the Mongols were immediately surrounded and overwhelmed.

The great black crescent was growing more and more dense and solid; there was no way of eluding it, no hope of escape.

Bishop Ugrin was well-nigh beside himself; and he poured forth now blessings, now execrations, as the distracted troops rushed aimlessly hither and thither, between the tents and their ropes, and down the narrow passages.

They were completely entangled as in a net; to form them up in order was an impossibility; and a deadly cloud of spears and arrows was continuously poured upon them by the Mongols.

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To add to the general horror and terror, the waggons took fire, and soon the tents nearest them were in flames. The tumult and confusion waxed greater and greater.

Batu's main object was to capture the King, and already Béla had had at least one narrow escape, which he owed to the devotion of one of his guard; but now both he and they were all wounded.

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Fighting had been going on since early morning; it was now noon, when the Duke made a last bold effort to retrieve the day.

"I'll break through the enemy's lines with the right wing," he shouted in stentorian tones. "Will your Majesty give the left wing orders to do the same, and then yourself lead the centre!"

The heroic Duke spoke of left and right wing, and centre; but alas! where was any one of them?

Without waiting for the King's answer he galloped off again, succeeded in infusing some of his own spirit into his men, and, joined by Ugrin and his followers, and the remaining Templars, he made a dashing attack upon the Mongols, who were drawn up in such close order that individuals had no room to turn.

Numbers of them fell before the furious onslaught of the Hungarians, and great was the devastation wrought in their ranks, when suddenly, like a whirlwind, up came Batu Khan himself with a fresh cloud of savage warriors, and arrows and spears flew thicker and faster than ever.

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The Archbishop was smitten on the head by a spear, just as he had cut down a Mongol, and he fell, as a ship's mast falls struck by lightning.

Next fell the leader of the Templars, fighting helmetless by his side. The riderless horses dashed neighing into the ranks of the enemy, among whom they quickly found new masters.

Kálmán had seen the bravest fall around him, but he was still pressing forward, still fighting, when he also received a severe wound. Just then the sun went down.

His sword-arm was useless, and his brave warriors, placing him in their midst, made their way back to the camp. But the camp was deserted now by all but the dead and the dying. The troops whom they had left there had forced their way out at last, but it was to fly, not to fight.

The Mongols had made no attempt to stop them; on the contrary, they had opened their ranks to let them pass through, and the faster and thicker they came, the more room they gave them.

That the fugitives would not escape in the long run well they knew, and their object just now was the King.

The flower of the Hungarian nobility, several bishops, and high dignitaries, both of Church and State, had fallen in the battle, or fell afterwards in the flight. Most of them took the way to Pest, which was strewn for two days' journey with the dead and dying, with arms and accoutrements. [Pg 233]

Many were slain by the Mongols who pursued and attacked them when they were too weak to defend themselves; and many others perished in the attempt to cross rivers and swamps.

Seeing that all was lost, Béla himself thought it time to fly, and while the Mongols were plundering the camp, he succeeded in reaching the open, and made for the mountains, recognised by few in the on-coming darkness.

Immediately surrounding him were Paul Héderváry, in spite of his five wounds, Peter and Stephen Szirmay, Akos, Detrö, Adam the Pole, the two Forgács, and several others—a devoted band, while behind came a long train of the bravest warriors, the last to think of flying, who followed in any order or none.

Few, as we have said, had recognised the King, but there were some who had, and these pressed hard after him.

"My horse is done for!" cried the King, as his famous charger began to tremble beneath him. "Let us stand and die fighting like men!"

"No! for Heaven's sake, no!" cried Adam the Pole, leaping from his horse as he spoke. "Mine is sound! take him! I hear the howl of the Mongols." [Pg 234]

One had indeed actually overtaken them, but, though on foot, Adam felled him to the ground, leapt upon the Mongol's horse, and galloped on after the King.

The handful of brave, true men guarded Béla as the very apple of their eye. Not one thought of himself; their one anxiety was for the King.

For an hour they galloped on, always pursued by the Mongols. The foam was dropping from the horses; the moon had risen and was shining brightly down upon them, when the irregular force which had followed them was overtaken, and engaged in a fierce battle with the relentless and unwearied enemy.

Just at that moment down sank the horse which Adam had given to the King; but one of the two Forgács, András (Andrew), who was known in the army as Ivánka (Little John, *i.e.*, John Baptist) gave up his. The King was so worn out by this time that two of the nobles had to lift him upon the horse; Ivánka himself followed on foot. A younger brother of his, whose name has not come down to us, lost his life at the hands of the Mongols, who were again approaching perilously near the fugitives.

Ivánka was threatened by the like danger, when Paul Héderváry and a few of the others who were on in front chanced to see his peril, and turning back, routed the Mongols. Ivánka mounted his brother's horse, which had remained standing quietly by its master's body, and rode after the little band. [Pg 235]

Daybreak was once more at hand, and they were far, far away from the field of blood, when again the King's horse failed him, and the Mongols were hardly so much as a hundred paces behind.

They had recognised the King, and one of Batu Khan's sub-officers had promised a large reward to anyone who could get Béla into his hands, alive or dead.

Then a young hero, Rugács by name, who had already distinguished himself in battle, offered the King his charger, and it was thanks to this good horse of Transylvanian breed that the King finally escaped his pursuers. For, tough though they were, even the Mongolian horses were beginning to fail, while nothing apparently could tire out the Transylvanian.

As they helped him to mount, Béla noticed that there was blood on the arm of the faithful Rugács, and asked kindly whether it gave him much pain.

"Ay, indeed, sir!" was the answer, "but there is worse pain than this!"

"Ah! your name shall be Fáj from to-day," said the King. "Remind us of it if we live to see better times."

And accordingly, there is to this day a family which bears the honourable name of Fáj or Fáy, the meaning of which is: "It pains."

At last the fugitives reached the forest, the Mongols were left behind, and the King then happily gained a castle in the mountains, where for a while he remained. [Pg 236]

But when he looked upon his devoted followers, how many were missing! how many had laid down their lives to save his!

Among the dozen or more who had fallen by the way was Jolánta's father, Stephen Szirmay; his brother Peter, though he had not come off scathless, had escaped without any mortal wound.

Having no army, the King was for the present helpless, and as soon as he could do so, he made his way to Pressburg, where he sent for the Queen and his children to join him, they having taken refuge in Haimburg, on the other side of the Austrian frontier.

But instead of the Queen, appeared Duke Friedrich, who persuaded the King that it would be much wiser for him too to come to Austria, and had no sooner got him in his clutches than he made a prisoner of him, and refused to let him go until he had refunded the large sum of money with which Friedrich had purchased peace from him four or five years previously.

Béla gave up all the valuables which he and the Queen had with them, but as the Duke was still not satisfied, he had to pawn three Hungarian counties in order to regain his liberty.

Once more free, he sent the Queen to Dalmatia for safety, and despatched ambassadors to Pope and Emperor, and the King of France, praying for their help against the terrible foe who threatened all Europe with destruction. But the Emperor was fighting Rome, and the Pope was bent upon reducing him to obedience. Poland was fighting the Mongols on her own account; Bohemia was in momentary danger of being herself attacked; and the shameless Duke Friedrich availed himself of Hungary's defenceless condition to invade and plunder the counties nearest him, and even to rob such fugitives as had fled to Austria for refuge from the Mongols.

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Béla meantime had borrowed a little money where he could, and had gone south to await the answers to his appeal, and to raise what troops he could for a campaign. But he waited in vain. No help came! and without an army or the means of raising one, he was helpless.

His brother Kálmán had reached Pest, and after urging the terrified inhabitants to abandon the city, cross the Danube, and hide wherever they could, he continued his journey to Slavonia (then Dalmatia and Croatia), his dukedom, where he soon after died of his wounds.

Before the people of Pest could remove their goods to a place of safety, they were hemmed in by the Mongols. Thousands from the surrounding country had taken refuge here with their families and treasures, and the numbers had been further increased by the arrival of fugitives from the army. They resolved to defend themselves to the last man; but they little knew the enemy with whom they had to deal. Three days' battering with catapults was enough to make breaches in the walls; the Mongols stormed and burnt the town, and murdered all who fell into their hands.

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The Mongols flooded all the land east of the Danube, but for the present the broad river formed a barrier which they could not easily pass, and they were further deterred from making the attempt by the idea, unfortunately erroneous, that if they crossed it they would find all the armies of Europe massed upon the other side waiting to receive and beat them back.

But if they were checked to the west, there was nothing to prevent their chasing the King, who was lingering near the Drave. Here they were in no fear of the armies of Europe, and they crossed the Danube by means of bladders and boats.

Béla fled to Spalatro, but feeling unsafe even there, retired with his family to the island of Issa. Furious at finding that his prey had escaped him, the Mongol leader, Kajdán, revenged himself upon his prisoners, whom he set up in rows and cut down; then he hurried on to the sea coast, and appeared before Spalatro early in May. Foiled again, he hurried to Issa, which was connected with the mainland by a bridge; and here he had the mortification of seeing the King and his followers take ship for the island of Bua under his very eyes.

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Pursuit, without a fleet, was hopeless, and Kajdán had to content himself with ravaging Dalmatia, Croatia, and Bosnia.

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## **CHAPTER XV. DORA'S RESOLVE.**

For days, weeks, months, Talabor had been expecting Libor and his Mongols to return and renew their attack upon the castle, whose defences he had strengthened in every way possible to him.

But spring had given way to summer, and summer to autumn, and still they had not come. When a winter of unusual severity set in, he felt the position safer, for the steep paths were blocked with snow or slippery with ice.

Rumours of the fatal battle had not been long in reaching the castle, and fugitives had been seen by one or another of the villagers, whose accounts, though they differed in many respects, all agreed in this, that the country was in the hands of the Mongols, and that the King had fled for his life—whether he had saved it was doubtful. One reported the death of both the Szirmays,

another declared that Master Peter had escaped with the King.

The general uncertainty began to tell upon the inhabitants of the castle.

Gradually, one by one, the men of the garrison disappeared. If a man were sent out hunting, or to gather what news he could in the neighbourhood, he not seldom vanished. Whether he had deserted, or whether he had been captured, who could say? In either case he might bring the Mongols down upon them. [Pg 241]

At last, when the number of fighting men was so diminished that it would have been out of the question for them to offer any serious resistance, disquieting events began to occur among the house-servants. One day two of them were nowhere to be found! One was a turnkey of Master Peter's, the other a maid-servant, a simple, country girl, whom no one would have supposed capable of counting up to three!

These two had evidently not gone empty-handed, moreover, a few silver plates and other light articles having vanished at the same time! Neither of them had been sent out to reconnoitre; neither, least of all the peasant girl, could have gone a-hunting. They had deserted, and they had stolen anything they could lay hands on!

After this discovery Dora became every day more uneasy, feeling that the danger from within might be as great as that from without.

Talabor kept his eye with redoubled vigilance upon those who were left, but confidence was destroyed in all but one or two.

Early one morning it was found that the whole of the plate had disappeared from the great dining hall. Every chest was empty, and no one of the servants knew where the contents were. Talabor had spent an entire night in carrying them away to a hiding place shown him by Master Peter, a sort of well-like cavity in a cellar, of which he kept the key always about him. He had been busy for days digging out the earth and rubbish, without letting anyone, even the faithful Moses, know what he was about; for, like many another sorrowful Magyar in those days, the old man had of late been trying to drown his grief in wine, and Talabor feared that his tongue might betray what his fidelity would have kept secret. [Pg 242]

All being ready, he carried down the silver from the chests in which it had been locked, and finally removed from the shelves in the dining hall even what had been in daily use. This done, he filled the pit with earth again, and left no traces to indicate the hiding place of Master Peter's treasure.

Libor, of course, was well aware of its existence, and Talabor sometimes wondered whether he were intending to keep the knowledge of it to himself, to be made use of later on, when the winter was over, and the castle more easily reached. Be this as it might, neither he nor the Mongols appeared again; and only once had Talabor encountered any in his rides. So far as he could see and learn, the neighbourhood seemed to be free of them; and still anxiety rather increased than diminished, as day followed day without bringing any news to be relied on.

Early one morning Dora sent for Talabor, who went expecting merely some fresh suggestion or order; but he had no sooner entered the room than she met him, and without any sort of preliminary, exclaimed, in a somewhat agitated voice, "Talabor! you are loyal to us, and to me, I know you are! aren't you? You would do anything for me? I am sure you would!" [Pg 243]

Talabor fell upon one knee, and with glowing countenance raised his hand to heaven, by way of answer. His heart swelled within him, and just then he felt strong enough for anything.

"Good Talabor, I believe you," said Dora; "but get up and listen to what I want to say. I am only a woman, and perhaps I give myself credit for more courage than I really have; but one thing I know, I have a strong will, and I have made up my mind. I mean to go and find the King and my father!"

"What!" exclaimed Talabor, almost petrified by the mere idea of so daring a step. "Master Peter—we don't even know whether——"

"He is alive!" interrupted Dora very decidedly.

"But the King! whether it is true or not, who can say? But so far as I can gather he seems to be in Dalmatia, and the Tartars are pursuing him. The country may still be full of them, for anything I know; and you mean to run such a frightful risk as this would be? Dear mistress——"

"I do mean, Talabor!" said Dora, "I do mean; for it seems to me that I may have worse to face if I stay here; and what is more, I can't do any good by staying. I can't in the least help those who would, I know, lay down their lives for me. Did not you yourself say, months ago, that this place was not safe?" [Pg 244]

"True, but then things were not as they are now, and I was thinking of some safer refuge, not of a perilous winter journey. We will defend ourselves to the last, and now that we are free of traitors, we shall be stronger than before."

"To the last, you say? Then the last person would be myself, and I should be left to die by torture or to become the slave of some Mongol scoundrel! No, Talabor! if I could protect those who have been faithful and devoted to me, if I could even protect those who have deceived me, robbed me

and deserted me so disgracefully, I would stay, but my presence here does no one any good."

"And," Dora continued, after a moment's pause, "the fact is we are living over a volcano, for who can answer for it that none of those who have stayed behind are traitors, and what of those who are gone? Why then, should you wish to stay?"

Dora had taken to "theeing and thouing" Talabor, ever since the time of danger and anxiety which they had passed through together. It showed him that she had confidence in him; but he, of course, continued to address her in the third person.

"Because," replied the young man in a firm voice, "I can put down any mischief that may raise its head here; and because, dear lady, if there is any danger of your being attacked here in the castle, the dangers outside in the open are a thousand times more serious." [Pg 245]

"You are mistaken in one thing, Talabor. It may all be, perhaps it is, as you say, but something tells me to go! I can't explain it, but it is as if I were continually hearing a voice within saying, 'Go, go;' but if I made a mistake in expecting you to follow me blindly——"

"Oh, dear lady, how could you be mistaken in trusting the most devoted of your servants! Let it be as you say! Command me, and I will neither gainsay, nor delay to do what you wish."

"You really mean it?"

"I do! before Heaven I do."

"Well now, Talabor, can you deny that there is a sort of nightmare oppression about this place? The garrison has dwindled to three, and there are but four servants. We can't reckon upon Mr. Moses, for he grows harder to stir every day."

It was all so perfectly true that Talabor could say nothing; but they talked on for a time, and then Dora began to think and consult with him as to the first steps to be taken. She wished to discharge all her duties as mistress of the castle to the end, as far as was possible; and the first question was, what was to become of Moses and the rest of the household? This settled, they thought it time to take the old governor into their confidence. [Pg 246]

Mr. Moses had long been of opinion that the castle was no safe place to stay in, and he readily undertook to conduct the remaining members of the garrison and household to a place of greater safety.

In the depths of the neighbouring forest lived an old charcoal-burner, who supplied the castle blacksmith with charcoal, and had managed to steal up with it now and then all through these perilous times. The hut, or rather cave, in which the poor man and his family lived, was far away from any road, it was closed in by rocks, and was altogether so difficult, if not impossible, for any stranger to discover, that Moses and Talabor thought it the safest place of any to be found. But Dora begged them both to keep their own counsel until the time for action should come; and as to when that time should be, no one knew but herself.

Latterly, as troubles had multiplied, it had become a sort of fixed idea with her that she must go and find her father at all costs, or at least make sure whether he were still alive or dead, and in the latter event she had resolved to take refuge in a convent.

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Two or three days after the consultation mentioned above, Dora sent for her two devoted followers.

It was quite early in the morning, but she was already dressed for going out—for a journey it seemed, though, in spite of the bitter cold, she wore none of her rich furs. Except that she was cleaner and neater, there was nothing to distinguish her from the poorest peasant-girl tramping from one village to another, or perhaps going on a distant pilgrimage. [Pg 247]

In the narrow belt, which she wore in the ancient Magyar fashion, round her waist, she had hidden a few pieces of gold; on her feet she had thick, heavy boots, and over her shoulders hung a rough cloak of antiquated cut, which might be put over her head like a hood if necessary.

Somehow Talabor had never admired her so much before as he did now. Moses stared at her wide-eyed, for of late he had seen her always in black.

The old huntsman looked as if he were wondering what new madness this might mean, and one can hardly be surprised at him. But he was always respectful to Dora, and next to the old castle, and the woods, and Master Peter, he loved her better than anything else in the world! Talabor came next to her in his affections, but a good way behind.

"Mr. Moses," began Dora gravely, addressing him first as she always did, because he was governor, in name at least, if not in fact, "I think the time has come for us to follow your advice; we have not men enough to defend the castle, and if it is true that the whole country is laid waste, it is very likely that one of the horrible Tartars who came before will take it into his head to come again. Besides, the thieves who have deserted us know how few we are, and how much plate there is in the chests; and what is to hinder their coming back? Well, at any rate, I have made up my mind to leave the castle, but I mean to be the last. I shall not go until I know that every one is as safe as he can be." [Pg 248]



"I don't stir a step without you, mistress," exclaimed Moses.

"I am Dora Szirmay, Master Peter's daughter, and my faithful governor will obey my orders!" returned Dora, in tones so decided that it was plain she had not forgotten how to command.

Mr. Moses was silenced, and Dora went on, still in the same grave way, "I know that you are faithful, that no one is truer to my father and me than yourself, and so I can give you my orders with trust and confidence. You, Mr. Moses, and everyone that is left in the castle, except Talabor and Gábor, will go to-day as soon as it is dusk, to old Gődri, the charcoal-burner. You can take Jakó's pony with you in case anyone should be tired, and be sure you take all the arms you can carry. The food, too, you must take all that, though I am afraid there is not much left, for we have all been hungry for some time past, if we have not been actually famished. When that is gone, there are the woods; and no hunter ever died of starvation."

"But yourself, my dear young mistress?" asked Moses.

"I stay here in the meantime with Talabor and Gábor. You know all I wish done besides, good Mr. Moses," said Dora gently, with a smile, rather sad than cheerful. [Pg 249]

"I need not tell you all to be prudent," she continued. "That we must every one of us be. Take all the care you can of yourselves!"

"And what about the horses?"

"They must be turned out. They will find masters: we need not be troubled about them; and if they don't, they can roam where they will, and there will be grass under the snow, down in the valleys. Jakó might take Fecske (Swallow), if he thinks he could feed her; it would be a pity for her to fall into the hands of the Tartars."

"Fecske" was Dora's own favourite horse.

"You understand me, don't you, Mr. Moses?"

"Yes, young mistress; but—" he added uneasily, "what of the castle and everything?"

"Well, Mr. Moses, you were the first to call attention to the unsafe state of the castle, weren't you? So what more can we do? We can't defend it, we can't live in it, we can't carry it with us! Now you will start to-day, all of you, except Talabor, Gábor, and myself; and you must trust everything else to us!"

Moses would dearly have liked to raise a multitude of further objections, but he could not, perhaps did not dare. Just as he was about to leave the room, Dora stopped him, saying, "One thing more, Governor; when all is ready, let them all come to this room." [Pg 250]

Mr. Moses departed, and turning to Talabor, Dora asked him what he thought of her arrangements. She spoke more brightly now, and Talabor answered calmly and respectfully, "I will obey you, mistress! But, I should like to make one little remark—it is not anything concerning myself—"

"No preamble, Talabor!" said Dora, who looked more cheerful every moment. "Make any remarks you wish, and I will hear you out, because I know you don't speak from fear."

"Well, lady, wouldn't it be better to keep Jakó with you, instead of Gábor? Gábor is a good, trusty fellow and active, but he is not equal to Jakó."

"I am not going to keep more than one with me, and that is yourself, Talabor! For safety's sake I must travel on foot, like a pilgrim, and with as few followers as possible. Why I am keeping Gábor is that I want to send him to seek my father by one route, while we take another. Jakó is the only one of the others who is capable of thinking and acting for them. If I take him they have no one. Don't you think, now, that I am right?"

Talabor assented, and no more was said, but when he realised that he was to be Dora's sole guardian and travelling companion, he felt as if he had the strength of a young lion.

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That same evening, Moses the governor, and all the rest, with the above-mentioned exceptions, quitted the castle; and by dawn of the following day, Master Peter's ancient dwelling-house was like a silent sepulchre. All the doors and windows were open, but the drawbridge was up, and the moat full of water. [Pg 251]

The most valuable articles of furniture of a size to be moved, Talabor had helped Gábor to carry down to a vault opening out of the cellar, in the course of the night, and together they had walled them up.

As to what had become of Dora and the two men, no one knew but Moses. Some thought that she was still there, and others that she had "left the country," as they said in those days, though how she could have crossed the moat, except by the drawbridge, and how, if she had done so, the drawbridge could have been pulled up again, was a mystery which none could fathom.

Not even Talabor had ever known of the subterranean passage, which Master Peter had shown to his daughter and to no one else; and even now Dora did not disclose its whereabouts. Blindfold, her companions were led through it, she herself guiding Talabor, and he Gábor; and when she

allowed them to take the bandages off their eyes, they were out of sight of the castle, and could see not the slightest sign of any secret entrance. They were in a diminutive valley, with rocks and cliffs all about them; and here Dora gave Gábor, the horseman, a small purse, which, had she but known it, was likely to be of small assistance in a wilderness where no one had anything to sell, but where there were plenty of people ready to take any money they could get hold of.

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Dora told the man to travel only by night, to avoid all the high roads, and to make for Dalmatia, where he had been once before in charge of a horse which Master Peter was sending to a friend. He remembered the way well enough, which was one reason why Dora had chosen him for this dangerous and almost impossible mission.

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## **CHAPTER XVI. THROUGH THE SNOW.**

Hungary was a very garden for fertility; her crops of every kind were abundant, her flocks and herds were enormous; and while the grain-pits and barns were full, and while there were sheep and oxen to steal, the Mongols lived well. But at last the country was stripped, provisions began to grow scarce, and the year's crops were still in the fields. Whether or no the Mongols themselves ever condescended to eat anything but flesh, the mixed multitudes with them were no doubt glad of whatever they could get, and Batu foresaw that if the harvest were not gathered, and if something were not done to keep such of the population as yet remained in their homes, and bring back the fugitives, there must needs be a famine.

Among his prisoners he had many monks and priests whom he had spared, from a sort of superstitious awe, and these he now called together, and tried to tempt with brilliant promises, to devise some plan for luring the people back to the deserted farms and homesteads. Many and many a brave man rejected his offers at the risk, and with the loss, of his life; but there were some who were ready to do what the Khan wanted, if only they could hit upon any scheme. All their proclamations issued in the Khan's name failed to inspire confidence, however. The people did not return; those hitherto left in peace fled at the approach of the Mongols, the general need increased day by day, and the captives were put to death by hundreds to save food.

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The massacres were looked upon as a pleasant diversion and entertainment in which the Mongol boys ought to have their share; to them, therefore, were handed over the Hungarian children; and those who showed most skill in shooting them down were praised and rewarded by their elders.

Yet how to feed half a million men in a country which had been thoroughly pillaged was still a problem.

And then, all over the country there appeared copies of a proclamation written in the King's name, and sealed with the King's seal.

There was no Mongol ring about this, as there had been about similar previous proclamations, and it was given in the King's name, it was signed with the King's own seal! Of that there could be no question.

The news spread rapidly, further flight was stopped, and in a few days the people dutifully began to venture forth from their hiding places, and that in such numbers that a great part of the country was re-populated. Moreover, the Mongols, though still in possession, actually welcomed them as friends, which showed that the King knew what he was about! They were allowed, moreover, to choose magistrates for themselves from among the Mongol chiefs, to the number of a hundred, who met once a week to administer strict and impartial justice.

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Magyar, Kun, Mongol, Tartar, Russian, and the rest all lived as amicably together as if they were one family. Farming operations were resumed, markets were held, and peace of a sort seemed to have returned to the land.

At last harvest and vintage were over. Corn and fruit of all descriptions had been garnered, and there was wine in the cellars. And then? Why, then, late in the autumn, the too confiding people were massacred wholesale; and those of them who managed to escape fled back to their hiding-places.

Then followed winter, such a winter as had not often been matched in severity. The Danube, frozen hard, offered an easy passage; there was no European army to oppose them, for the heads of Christendom were fighting among themselves, and the Mongols crossed over to do on the right bank of the river what they had already done on the left.

Always rather savage than courageous, the Mongols obliged their prisoners to storm the towns, looked on laughing as they fell; cut them down themselves from behind if they were not sufficiently energetic, and drove them forward with threats and blows. When the besieged were thoroughly exhausted, and the trenches filled with corpses, then, and not till then, the Mongols made the final assault, or enticed the inhabitants to surrender, and then, with utter disregard of

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the fair promises they had made, put them to death with inhuman tortures. The Mongols were exceeding "slim," as people have learnt to say in these days. One example of their savagery will suffice.

The most important place on the right side of the Danube was the cathedral city of Gran, which had been strongly fortified with trenches, walls, and wooden towers by its wealthy inhabitants, many of whom were foreigners, money changers, and merchants. As the city was thought to be impregnable, a large number of persons of all ranks had flocked into it.

Batu made his prisoners dig trenches all round, and behind these he set up thirty war-machines, which speedily battered down the fortifications. Next the town-trenches were filled up, while stones, spears, and arrows fell continuously upon the inhabitants, who, seeing it impossible to save the wooden suburbs, set fire to them, burnt their costly wares, buried their gold, silver, and precious stones, and withdrew into the inner town. Infuriated by the destruction of so much valuable property, the Mongols stormed the city and cruelly tortured to death those who did not fall in battle. Not above fifteen persons, it is said, escaped.

Three hundred noble ladies entreated in their anguish that they might be taken before Batu, for whose slaves they offered themselves, if he would spare their lives. They were merely stripped of the valuables they wore, and then all beheaded without mercy.

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For weeks Dora and Talabor had journeyed on, avoiding all the main roads, travelling by the roughest, most secluded ways, and seldom falling in with any human beings, or even seeing a living creature save the wild animals, which had increased and become daring to an extraordinary degree.

Wolves scampered about in packs of a hundred or more, and over and over again Talabor had been obliged to light a fire to keep them off. He had done it with trembling, except when they were in the depths of the woods, lest what scared the wolves should attract the Mongols.

Bears, too, had come down from the mountains, and had taken up their quarters in the deserted castles and homesteads, and many a wanderer turning into them for a night's shelter found himself confronted by one of these shaggy monsters.

Traces of the Mongols were to be seen on all sides: dead bodies of human beings and animals, smouldering towns, villages, and forests; here and there, perched upon some rocky height, would be a defiant castle, whose garrison, if they had not deserted it, were dead or dying of hunger; in some parts, look which way they might, there was a dead body dangling from every tree; poisonous exhalations defiled the air; and over woods, meadows, fields, ruined villages, lay a heavy pall of smoke.

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Such was the condition to which the Mongols had reduced the once smiling land. Truly it might be said, in the words of the prophet: "A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness."

But, though they saw their works plainly enough, the wanderers saw hardly anything of the Mongols themselves, which surprised them. Once or twice they had narrow escapes, and had to take sudden refuge from small parties, travelling two or three together; but they encountered nothing like a body of men, and those whom Talabor did chance to see appeared to be too intent on covering the ground to look much about them.

From one or two wanderers like themselves he presently learnt that the Mongols were everywhere on the move, and were all going in the same direction, southwards. But what it meant no one could guess. They were moving with their usual extraordinary rapidity, and but few stragglers on foot were believed to be left behind.

But it might be only some fresh treachery, some trap, and the people dared not leave the caves, caverns, thick woods, where they had hidden themselves, and lived, or existed, in a way hardly credible, on roots, herbs, grass, the bark of trees, some of them even eking out their scanty provisions by a diet of small pebbles!

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Needless to say that many died of hunger, while the remainder were reduced to skeletons, shadows, ghosts of their former selves.

From some of these bands of refugees Talabor heard fragmentary accounts of the horrors that had been enacted, and the events that had followed after the battle of Mohi.

Dora had felt more and more confidence in her travelling companion as day had followed day during their terrible journey. He had spared no pains in his efforts to lighten the privations and difficulties of the way; he had thought for her, cared for her, in a hundred ways; and yet with it all, he was just as deferential as if they had been in the castle at home.

Miserable were the best resting places he could find for her for the night, either in the depths of the forest or in some cavern or deep cleft of the rocks. Sometimes he was able to make her a little hut of dry branches, roofed over with snow; and when he could do so without risk of discovery, he would light a fire and cook any game that he had been able to shoot in the course of the day.

But whatever the shelter he found or contrived for her, he himself always kept watch outside, and

got what little sleep he could when the night was past.

They had almost lost count of time, and they hardly knew where they were, when, late one night, Dora came to a standstill. [Pg 260]

The moon was shining, the cold intense, and the snow, which crackled beneath their feet, lay thick and glittering all around them. It was the sort of night that sends fear into the hearts of all who are compelled to be abroad, and yet are anxious to escape the notice of their fellow men, for it was as light almost as by day, and the travellers showed up like a couple of black spots against the white background.

Talabor, muffled in his cloak, was leading Dora by the hand; she had her large hood drawn over her head, and the two looked as very a pair of tramps as one could meet with anywhere.

The cold cut through them like a knife, though the night was still—too still, for there was not wind enough to cover up the track they had left behind them. It would be easy to trace them, for the snow was powdery, and in many places they had sunk in it up to their knees.

"I must stop, I am tired out! and I am so deadly sleepy," said Dora, in a broken voice, "I feel numb all over, as if I were paralysed."

She looked ghastly pale, worn, thin, a mere shadow of what she had been; and she had been travelling all day, dragging herself along with the greatest difficulty.

"Dear lady," said Talabor gently, supporting her trembling figure as well as he could, "do you see that dark patch under the trees yonder?" [Pg 261]

"I can't see so far, Talabor," she stammered.

"I see it plainly," he went on, "and it is a building of some sort, a dwelling-house, I think. If you could just manage to get so far, we should be better sheltered than we are here."

"Let us try," said Dora, summoning all her remaining strength.

"Lean on me," Talabor urged in a tone of encouragement; "we shall be there in a quarter of an hour; but if you can't walk, you must let me carry you as I have done before, it is such a little way."

"You are very good, Talabor," said the girl gratefully, and off they set again.

The building which Talabor had noticed stood on rising ground, on one side of the valley, and, the snow not being quite so deep on the slope, they were able to get on a little faster. Neither spoke, for what was there to talk about? The cold was benumbing, and both were suffering.

Presently Dora felt her knees give way under her, and everything seemed to turn black before her eyes.

"Talabor!" she whispered, holding his arm with both hands, "I—I am dying—you go on yourself and leave me!"

"Leave you!" exclaimed Talabor; and before Dora could say another word, he had thrown back his cloak and picked her up in his arms. She was almost fainting, and overpowered by the deadly sleep induced by the cold. [Pg 262]

Light as his burthen was, it was a struggle for Talabor to make his way through the snow, for he, too, had lost much of his accustomed strength during the past weeks of hardship and anxiety. Still, he managed to go straight on without stumbling or faltering. All about them, for some distance and in every direction, there were strange prints in the snow, and these he scanned carefully until he had quite assured himself that they were not made by human feet.

"No Tartars have been here lately, at all events!" he said, by way of cheering his companion, as they drew near the gloomy, deserted building, which was not a ruin, but one of the many dwellings plundered by the Mongols, and for some reason abandoned without being completely destroyed.

It was a small, dark place, and its only defences were its outer walls. There was no moat; and it had probably belonged to some noble family of little wealth or importance, who had either fled or been murdered. The gate was lying on the ground, and the snow in the courtyard was almost waist-deep. Talabor needed all his strength to wade through it and to carry Dora up the stone steps, which he could only guess at, and had to clear with his foot as he went on.

In the tolerably large room which he first entered all the furniture was half consumed by fire, and the door burnt off its hinges; the moonlight, which streamed through the open windows, showed bare, blackened walls, and a scene of general desolation. [Pg 263]

Spreading his cloak on the bench, which owed its escape from destruction to the fact that it was covered with plaster, he laid Dora down upon it, gathered up some of the broken furniture already half reduced to charcoal, and soon had a small fire burning. The smoke from it filled the whole room, but still the warmth revived his companion, who had known what it was to spend even worse nights than this one promised to be; for, when Talabor presently took a piece of burning wood from the fire, that he might explore the building, he found an old sack full of straw.

The room in which he discovered it opened out of the larger one, and was not quite so desolate looking, for the fire did not seem to have penetrated so far, and, moreover, it had a large fireplace still containing the remains of charcoal and bones.

Talabor lighted another fire here, drew the sack into one corner, and hurried back to Dora, who was now dozing a little, with the light from the crackling fire shining on her face. How deadly pale, how wasted it was!

Talabor stood looking at her for a moment, wondering whether after all he should be able to save a life which every day was making more precious to him.

He piled more wood on the fire, and tried to rub a little warmth into his own numb hands. It was the most bitter night of all their wanderings, and the cold pierced his very bones. Tired out as he was, heavy with drowsiness, he kept going from one fire to the other, as he wanted to take Dora into the smaller room when she awoke, for it was not only a degree warmer, but also free from smoke, and had a door which would shut.

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She opened her eyes about midnight, and seemed to be all the better for her two hours' sleep. Talabor had kept her so carefully covered, and had replenished the fire so diligently that her healthy young blood had begun to flow again, and, not for the first time, he had saved her from the more serious consequences of her exposure and fatigue.

"Talabor!" she said, raising herself a little, "I have been asleep! thank you so much! Now you must rest; you must, indeed, for if your strength fails, it will be all over with us both."

"Oh, I am accustomed to sleeping with one eye open, as the Tartars do when they are on horseback. It does just as well for me; but you, dear lady, must rest for at least a few hours longer, and after that I will have a real sleep too."

"A few hours!"

"Yes, here in the next room, where I have found a royal bed of straw, and there is a good fire and no smoke."

By this time the smaller room really had some warmth in it, in spite of the empty window frames; and the sack of straw was a most luxurious couch in Dora's eyes.

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"What a splendid bed, Talabor!" said she, gratefully; "but before I lie down, one question—it sounds a very earthly one, though you have been an angel to me but—have we anything to eat? I am shamefully hungry!"

"To be sure we have!" said Talabor, opening his knapsack, and producing a piece of venison baked on the bare coals. "All we want is salt and bread, and something to drink, but there is plenty of snow!"

"Let us be thankful for what God gives us! Our good home-made bread! what a long time it is since we tasted it!"

"We shall again in time!" said Talabor confidently, as he handed Dora the one knife and the cold meat.

"Talabor," said Dora presently, "I am afraid we have come far out of our way."

"I am afraid so too," he answered, "but I don't think we could help it. There has been little to guide us but burnt villages and ruined church-towers. And then, when we have come upon recent traces of the Tartars, we have had to take any way we could, and sometimes to turn back and hide in the forest for safety. How far south we have come I can hardly guess, but we are too much to the east, I fancy."

"You have saved me at all events, over and over again: from wild beasts by night, from horrible men by day, from fire, smoke, everything! I shall tell my father what a good, faithful Talabor you have been! And now I am really not very sleepy, and I should so like to see you rest—you know you are my only protector now in all the wide world, and you must take care of yourself for me!"

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"You must have just a little more rest yourself first, dear mistress, and then I will have a sleep."

"You promise faithfully? Then shake hands upon it, for you have deceived me before now, you bad fellow!"

But when next Dora opened her eyes, the moon had set; it was quite dark; the fire had gone out, and the cold was more biting than ever.

"Talabor!" she cried, alarmed and bewildered, for she could not see a step before her.

"I'm here!" he exclaimed, starting up from the bare floor, on which he had been lying near the hearth, and rubbing his eyes as he did so.

"I have been asleep," he said, greatly displeased with himself. "I was overpowered somehow, and our fire is out! Never mind, we will soon have another!" and he set to work again with flint and steel. But when the fire was once more blazing, and both were a little thawed, Talabor would not hear of any more sleep.

"I *have* slept!" he said, still indignant with himself. "For the first time in my life I have slept at my

post, slept on duty—I deserve the stocks!"

"And you are not sleepy still?"

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"No!" and then he suddenly jumped up from the floor, on which he had but just thrown himself.

"What is it?" asked Dora nervously, and she, too, started up.

"Nothing! nothing—I think," he answered, taking up his bow and quiver as he spoke.

"I hear some noise, I'm sure I do," said Dora, listening intently. "What can it be? Quick! we must put out the fire!"

At that moment, just in front of the house, and, as it seemed to both, close by, there was a long-drawn howl.

"It's wolves, not Tartars," said Talabor, much relieved.

"Oh! then make haste and fasten the door!"

"They won't come in here," said Talabor, as he put the door to. It had been left uninjured by the fire, but its locks and bolts were all too rusty to be of the smallest use. There was a heavy little oak table which had survived the rest of the furniture, however, and this Talabor pushed up against it, saying, "The fire is our best protection against such visitors as these; but dawn is not far off now, and perhaps it would be better not to wait for it before we move on. I should not care to have them taking up their quarters in the yard."

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Dora, in alarm, "surely you are not going to provoke them?"

"No! and if I should annoy one of them, he will not be able to do much harm after it!"

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"I forbid you to do anything rash! You are not to risk your life, Talabor. You are to sit still here, if you don't want to make me angry."

Dora's vehemence was charming, but Talabor never did anything without reflection; and he was not going to have her life imperilled by any ill-timed submission on his own part.

"You may be quite easy," he said, "I am not going to stir from here, and they are not going to come in either!"

The wolves meantime had been drawing nearer and nearer, to judge by their howls. Perhaps they had scented the smoke, and expected to find the dead bodies of men or cattle, as they commonly did in every burning village in those days.

Talabor was standing at the window, bow in hand, when he presently drew back with a hasty movement.

"Quick!" he said in an undertone. "We must put out the fire!"

Dora rushed to it and began scattering and beating it out with a piece of wood.

"What is it?" she whispered; and Talabor whispered back, "I saw someone that I don't like the look of!" Then, holding up his forefinger, he added, "Perhaps there are only one or two; don't be afraid."

These few words, intended to be re-assuring, did not do much to allay Dora's fears, and she went up to Talabor, who was back at the window again, now that the fire was put out. Trembling, she stood beside him, while her cold hand fumbled in her pouch for the dagger which she carried with her.

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It cannot be denied that at that moment, in spite of all her high spirit, Dora was terrified.

Thanks to the snow and the stars, Talabor could see clearly enough what was going on outside; and this is what he saw: two muffled figures hurrying towards the house, by the very same path which he himself had trodden only a short time before; tracking him by his deep footprints in all probability.

But a few moments after he had told Dora to put out the fire, one of the two figures, an unmistakable Tartar, was overtaken by the wolves, and there began one of those desperate conflicts between man and beast, which more often than not ended in the defeat of the former, firearms not being as yet in existence.

"Here! Help! Father!" shouted the one attacked. He had beaten down one wolf, with a sort of club, and was trying his utmost to defend himself against two others. At this appeal, made, by-the-bye, in the purest Magyar, the man in front hurried back to the help of his son.

"Surely he spoke Magyar!" whispered Dora.

"There are only two of them, at all events," was Talabor's answer, that fact being much the more reassuring of the two in his eyes, for he had heard, during their wanderings, that there were more "Tartar-Magyars" in the world than Libor the clerk.

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He fitted an arrow to his bow, as he spoke, and added, in an undertone, "They are coming, and the wolves after them! but there are only two, nothing to be afraid of; trust me to manage them!"

In fact the two men were already floundering in the courtyard, and close at their heels rushed the whole pack, disappearing now and again in the deep snow, then lifting up their shaggy heads out of it, while they kept up an incessant chorus of howls.

Tartar-Magyars might be enemies, but wolves certainly were, thought Talabor, as he let fly his arrow and stretched the foremost wolf upon the ground, just as it was in the act of seizing one of the Tartars.

Apparently the fugitives had not heard the twang of the bow-string, for as soon as they caught sight of the open door, they hurried towards it with the one idea of escaping their pursuers, so it seemed.

But when Talabor again took aim, and a second wolf tumbled over, one of the men looked up, saw the arrow sticking in the wolf's back, and cried out, as if thunderstruck, "Tartars! per amorem Dei patris!" (Tartars! for the love of God!) And having so said, he stopped short, irresolute, as not knowing which of the two dangers threatening him it were better to grapple with.

Talabor heard the exclamation, and, whether or no he understood more than the first word, at least he knew that it was uttered in Latin. The fugitives must surely be ecclesiastics, who had adopted the Tartar dress merely for safety's sake.

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"Hungari, non Tartari—We are Hungarians, not Tartars!" he replied in the same language, leaning from the window as he shouted the words. Whereupon that one of the "Tartars" who had spoken before called out again, as if in answer, "Amici! Friends," and turned upon the wolves, two of which had been so daring as to follow him and his companion even up the steps. The nearer of the two he attacked with his short club; but his comrade, who had been hurrying after him, slipped and fell down, and the other wolf at once rushed upon him and began tearing away at his cowl.

Talabor meanwhile, being completely reassured by the word "Amici," turned to Dora saying, "Glory to God, we are saved! They are good men, monks, as much wanderers as ourselves!"

He pulled the table away from the door, snatched a brand from the still smouldering fire, waved it to and fro till it burst into flame, and then rushed out with it through the hall into the entry, where the learned one of the two supposed Tartars was hammering away at the head of the huge wolf which had got hold of his friend, whose rough outer garment it was worrying in a most determined manner. The rest of the pack, about twenty, seemed not at all concerned at the loss of their four companions lying outstretched in the snow, for they were drawing nearer and nearer to the entry, and were lifting up their heads as if desirous of joining in the fray going on within, while they howled up and down the scale with all their might.

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But the moment Talabor appeared with his flaming torch they were cowed, turned tail, and tumbled, rather than ran, down the steps in a panic. Head over heels they rushed towards the gate, some of the hindmost getting their tails singed as they fled.

Meantime the two strangers seeing the enemy thus put to flight, took courage, and thought apparently to complete the rout, for they rushed off after the retreating wolves and were for pursuing them even beyond the gate, when they were checked by a shout from Talabor, who called to them to stop.

They stood still, up to their waists in snow, and looked at him, wondering and half doubting who and what he might be.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Magyars! infelices captivi—Unfortunate captives," answered the learned one.

"We are Magyars!" said the other in Hungarian.

"If you are Magyars, follow me," said Talabor, and the strangers obeyed.

It was dark no longer, but still it was difficult to judge of the men by their looks, for they wore the rough Tartar hoods over their heads, and the one who had been mauled by the wolf had his hanging about his face in lappets and ribbons.

Talabor could see just so much as this, that neither was very young, that both were wasted to the last degree, and that they were as begrimed as if they had been hung up to dry in the smoke for some weeks.

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"Come along, come along!" he said, for he was anxious to get back to Dora, and to make up the fire again. Should he take them into, the warmer inner room, or keep them in the other until he knew more about them? He was still undecided what to do when a sudden exclamation from one of the wanderers, followed by the fervent words, "Glory be to Jesus!" startled him.

More startled still was he to hear from Dora the response, "For ever and ever!" and to see her clinging to the begrimed "Tartar."

"Father Roger! Father Roger!" she exclaimed tremulously, and for the moment could say no more.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### A STAMPEDE.

As soon as he was sufficiently warmed to be able in some degree to control his trembling lips, Father Roger explained that he had been captured by the Mongols, from whom he had but recently escaped; that his life had been spared, at first on account of his clerical costume, and afterwards because he had been taken into the service of a Tartar-Magyar, who had saved both himself and his servant.

But when Dora would have questioned him further, and inquired who the Tartar-Magyar was, he shook his head, saying gently, "Another time, dear child, another time—perhaps. But it is a nightmare I would willingly forget, except that I may give praise to God, who has preserved us through so many grievous perils."

It was evidently such a painful subject that she could not press him further; and she began to speak of their own plans.

"Dalmatia!" said the Canon, shaking his head, "Dalmatia! but we are in Transylvania! and who knows for certain where his Majesty may be? I have heard rumours, but that is all, and they are ancient by this time. It would be wiser to try and find some safe retreat here, where there are more hiding-places than in the great plains."

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He spoke dreamily; but he had noticed Dora's hollow cheeks, and had marked how greatly she was altered from the bright, beautiful girl whom he had last seen less than a year ago. Her strength would never hold out for so long a journey, even if it were otherwise desirable, which he did not himself think it; for he was able to throw some light upon the mysterious movement among the Mongols, and told his hearers that Oktai the Great Khan had died suddenly in Asia; and that Batu Khan, the famous conqueror, was far too important a person in his own eyes to be ignored when it came to the choice of a successor. He must make his voice heard, his influence felt; and the tidings had no sooner reached him than he despatched orders to all his scattered forces, appointing a place of rendezvous, and bidding them rejoin him at once.

This done, off he hurried, in his usual headlong way; and, with his captives, his many waggons laden with booty, and his yellow hosts, he had rushed like a tornado through Transylvania into Moldavia, plundering, burning, ravaging, according to custom, as he went.

That was the last Father Roger knew of him; for, finding that the farther they went the worse became the treatment of the captives, until at last the only food thrown to them was offal and the bones the Mongols had done with, he had felt convinced that a massacre of the old and feeble was impending.

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"Then the Tartar-Magyar is not gone with them to Asia, and he could not protect you any longer?" asked Dora.

"He could not protect us any longer," echoed Father Roger. "We, my faithful servant here and I, watched our opportunity and made our escape one night into the forest."

And here we may mention that they had fled none too soon, as the massacre of those not worth keeping as slaves actually took place, as Father Roger had foreseen, and that within a very short time after his flight.

The more Talabor thought of it, the more he felt that Father Roger was probably right as to Dalmatia, and Dora finally acquiesced in giving up her cherished plan. It was a comfort to be with Father Roger, broken down though he was; and for the rest, if she could not join her father, what did it matter where she went? She left it to him and Talabor to decide, without troubling her head as to their reasons, or even so much as asking what they had agreed; but the disappointment was grievous.

The little party therefore journeyed on together, slowly and painfully, often hungering, often nearly frozen, until at last they reached the town now known as Carlsburg. But here again they found only ruins and streets filled with dead bodies, and they toiled on again till they came to the smaller town of Frata, where there were actually a good number of people, recently emerged from their hiding-places, and all busily engaged in strengthening and fortifying the walls to the best of their power.

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They had but little news to give, for all were in doubt and uncertainty both as to the King and the Mongols. The latter they did not in the least trust; and though Frata had hitherto escaped, no one felt any security that it might not be besieged any day, almost any hour.

"Better the caves and woods than that," said Father Roger with a shudder. But if there were no safety for them in Frata itself, Talabor heard there of what seemed at least a likely refuge for Dora, and that with a member of her own family, a certain Orsolya Szirmay, who was said to have taken refuge among the mountains, and to have many of the Transylvanian nobility with her, and would certainly receive them.

"Only a little further!" said Talabor, as he had said before; but this time it was "only a few miles," not a quarter of an hour's walk; and when one can walk but slowly, when one's strength is ebbing fast, and one's feet are swollen and painful from the many weary miles they have trodden, when



one is chilled to the bone, weak from long want of proper food, and in constant terror of savage beasts and still more savage men, the prospect of more rough travelling, though only for "a few miles," is enough to make the bravest heart sink.

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Before we see how it fared with the four travellers, we must glance at what had been taking place in Transylvania, whose warlike inhabitants had been far less apathetic and incredulous than those of Hungary, and at the first note of alarm had raised troops for the Palatine. Héderváry had been despatched, as already mentioned, to close all the passes on the east, and this done, and his presence being required elsewhere, he had departed, leaving merely a few squadrons behind as a guard. He and they both considered it impossible for the Mongols to force a passage on this side, so well had they blocked the roads.

Like most of the fighting men of those days, the Hungarian army received very little in the way of regular pay, and nothing in the way of rations. It lived upon what it could get! and what would have been theft and robbery at any other time, was considered quite lawful when the men were under arms.

The troops lived well at first. To annex a few sheep, calves, oxen, and to shoot deer, wild boar, or buffalo was part of the daily routine, for the forests abounded in game. They were at no loss for wine either, as some of the nobles supplied them from their cellars.

On the whole, therefore, the men were well entertained; and, little suspecting the serious campaign in store, looked forward to a brush with the Mongols as involving little more danger than their favourite hunting expeditions.

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And then, one morning they noticed a peculiar sound in the distance. In one way it was familiar enough, for it reminded them of a hunt, but a hunt on such a scale as none of them had ever witnessed yet. For it was as if all the game in the dense, almost impassable forests on the frontier were being driven towards them by thousands of beaters, driven slowly and gradually, but always nearer and nearer.

They wondered among themselves who the huntsmen could be, and thought that the great lords had perhaps called out the peasantry by way of beguiling the time, and that, as the roads were closed against the Mongols, they were coming through the woods.

But there was no shouting, which was remarkable, and they could hear no human voices, nothing but the hollow sound as of repeated blows and banging, which came to them from time to time, when the wind was in a particular quarter, like the mutter of distant storms.

Two days later, this weird and ghastly noise could be heard till dark. No one could imagine what was going on.

But the detachments whose especial duty it was to watch the frontier appeared to be under a spell, for they passed their time in the usual light-hearted way, and went out shooting and hunting in large parties. They had never known the forest so full of game of all sorts before—wild buffalo, bears, wolves, deer, fawns—as it had been since "the woods had begun to talk," as they expressed it.

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By the third day the distant sounds had altered their character, and were no longer like the ordinary noise made by sportsmen and their beaters, but more puzzling still.

Then came orders to the various detachments from the Palatine, that a few bodies of men were to be posted here and there, rather as spies than guards, while the rest hastened with all speed to join the main army in Hungary proper.

Héderváry did not so much as hint that the "Tartars were coming"; but he was well aware of the fact, for he had good spies, and that even among the Russians who had coalesced with the Mongols.

Early on the morning of their departure some of the men thought they saw scattered clouds of smoke rising over the forests to the east, but they were a "happy-go-lucky" set, as so many were in those days, and they troubled their heads very little as to what it might mean.

Someone suggested that, as the blacksmiths were all unusually hard at work on horseshoes, of which an enormous number were wanted, no doubt the charcoal burners were especially busy too; and there were many of them in the woods and forests; in all probability, the smoke proceeded from their fires. And with this supposed explanation all were content.

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But suddenly, to the now accustomed sound of beating and knocking, which was still drawing nearer and nearer, there was added another of a different character.

Hitherto, the woods had "talked," and echo had answered them; now the forest "roared." The wind had been light at early morning; now it was piping and whistling, swaying the trees to and fro, making the tall stems tremble, and knock their long bare arms one against the other.

One of the Palatine's small detachments of about 150 men was stationed in the mountainous district of Marmaros, with a lofty and precipitous wall of rock bounding one side of the camp. The men were just preparing for a start, when a huge buffalo made its sudden appearance on the edge of the cliff far above their heads. It had come so far with a rush, but the sight of the great

depth below had stopped it short, and it stood with its feet rooted to the ground for a moment—only for a moment, however. It raised its head, and seemed to sniff the air, and then, with one short, faltering bellow, it leapt and fell into their midst, upsetting one horse, and wounding a couple of men.

This was the first; but after the first came a second, after the second, a third!

Helter-skelter the troops retired from the dangerous spot, and from a safe distance they counted five buffalo, one after the other, which dashed to the edge of the cliff, as if in terror from their pursuers, and took the fatal leap. Only one was able to rise again, and that one just gave one look round, dug its forefeet into the ground, and then rushed on straight ahead as if there were a pack of hounds at its heels.

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Shortly after, while the troops were riding down the narrow valley at the foot of the mountains, they could hear the howl of wolves coming nearer and nearer, and a pack so large that no one could even guess their number, was seen to be scampering down the dale; some were clattering down the cliffs, which were more sloping here, while the rest tore wildly forward, passing close beside, and even in among the horses, many of which were maddened with terror, and bolted with their riders.

An hour or so later, when the little troop had succeeded in quieting the horses, and had advanced some way on its journey amid many perils and dangers, the cause of all this excitement among the wild animals was suddenly revealed. The forest was on fire! It was crackling in the flames, burning like a furnace beneath a canopy of black smoke.

The Mongols had fired it on this side, while in another direction they had opened a way forty fathoms wide, through woods over hill and dale, through walls of rock, and across streams and ditches. They were making ready their way before them, and were advancing along it upon the unready country.

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Wherever they were reached by the fire, the trees crashed down one upon another; ravens, crows, jackdaws, and all the winged creatures of the woods, were flying to and fro above the trees, in dense, dark clouds, and with loud cries and cawing; bears came along muttering, flying before the fire and smoke, climbing trees from which they did not dare descend again, and with which they perished together.

As already mentioned, Batu Khan's army was preceded by pioneers with axes and hatchets, who drove their road straight forward, through or over obstacles of all kinds. Nothing stopped them, and often their own dead bodies helped to fill up the ditches and trenches; for what was the value of their lives to the Mongols? Absolutely nothing! since they were taken for the most part from the people whom they had conquered.

As soon as the awful news of their advance spread through the country, the people fled without another thought of defending their homes or resisting the enemy, or of anything else but saving their lives and what little property they could carry with them in their wild stampede.

In a few days Transylvania was ablaze from end to end. Towns, villages, farms, castles, country seats, strongholds, even the ancient walls of Alba Julia, all were surrounded by the flames, and were crashing and cracking into ruins.

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The invaders, stupid in their destructiveness, spared nothing whatever; and their leaders and commanders, themselves as stupid as the brute-like herd over whom they were placed, occasioned loss to the Khan which was past all reckoning, for his object was plunder, and they in their rage for ruin, destroyed what the Khan might even have called treasure, as well as what might have provided food for hundreds of thousands of the army. What did the Khan Oktai, or Batu, or his thousands of leaders care! The latter were Little Tartars, Russian Tartars, German Tartars, and what not, to whom the conqueror had given the rank and title of Knéz, whom he favoured, promoted, and enriched, until his humour changed, or he had no further use for them, and then—why then he squeezed them, made them disgorge their wealth, and strung them up to the nearest tree. They were but miserable foreigners after all!

Transylvania was in the clutches of the enemy, who had entered her in two large divisions, north and south. But, thanks to the nature of the country, and the many hiding-places it afforded, she did not suffer quite so severely as her neighbour.

Orsolya Szirmay, of whom the travellers had heard at Frata, had married one Bankó, a man of large property and influence, who owned vast estates both in Hungary and Transylvania; but Orsolya did not see much of her own relatives after her marriage, for her husband was a man of awkward temper, and they rarely paid her a visit; so that when, four or five years before the Mongol invasion, Bankó died, she went to live on the Transylvanian property, which was in a most neglected condition, and required her presence. Bankó had lived to be ninety-three, and his widow was now an old lady with snow-white hair, but with all her faculties and energies about her, and eyes as bright, hair as lustrous, as those of a young girl.

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She had made her home in a gloomy castle among the mountains, but at the first rumour of the coming invasion, she left it for Frata, where she had an old house, or rather barn, which had been divided up into rooms, and was neither better nor worse than many another dwelling-house in those days.

During her short stay here, the old lady was constantly riding about the country accompanied by

her elderly man-servant, and a young girl, who had but lately joined her, and was introduced as "a relation from Hungary."

One morning early all three disappeared without notice to anyone, and it was only later that it was rumoured that "Aunt Orsolya," as she was called throughout the country, had taken refuge in a large cavern among the mountains to the north of Frata.

It afforded plenty of space, it was difficult of approach, and it had but one, and that a very narrow entrance; the streams which now flow through it not having then forced a passage. [Pg 286]

How Aunt Orsolya had contrived to stock it with food and other necessaries we are not told, but she had done it; neither did she lack society in this lonely abode after the first week or two, for she was joined in some mysterious way by between seventy and eighty persons belonging to the most distinguished families in the land.

She, of course, was the head, the queen of this strange establishment, for those who fled hither to save their lives, and, as far as they could, their most precious valuables, found the old lady already installed.

She received them, she was their hostess; and besides all this, she was a born ruler, one to whom others submitted, unconsciously as it were, and who compelled respect and deference.

Orsolya, then, had taken the part of house-mistress from the beginning, and no doubt enjoyed receiving more and more guests, and enjoyed also the consciousness that they all looked up to her, and were all ready to submit themselves to her wishes—we might say commands.

The old lady herself appointed to each one his place, in one or other of the many roomy caves which opened out of the great cavern, and she managed to find something for everyone to do.

In a short time the cavern was as clean as hands could make it. The driest parts were reserved for sleeping places; and one cave was set apart as a chapel, where service was regularly held by the clergy, of whom there were several among the refugees. [Pg 287]

When the neighbourhood was quiet, the men went out hunting, and—stealing! Stealing! there is no polite word for it. They stole sheep, cattle, provisions anything they needed for housekeeping. Those who came in empty-handed Orsolya scolded in plain language; and the men who swept and cleaned at her bidding, and the women who boiled and baked, gradually became as much accustomed to the old lady's resolute way of keeping house and order as if they had served under her all their lives.

It was some time in March that Aunt Orsolya had retreated to the cavern, and there she and her companions had remained all through the spring, summer, and autumn, often alarmed, but never actually molested, hearing rumours in plenty, but knowing little beyond the fact that the whole country was in the hands of the Mongols, and that the King was a fugitive.

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## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

### **AUNT ORSOLYA'S CAVERN.**

Three fires were burning in different parts of the cavern, and round each was encamped quite a little army of women and children.

Of the men, some were lying outstretched on wild-beast skins, others were pacing up and down the great vaulted hall, and yet others were busy skinning the game shot during the day. Quite respectable butchers they were, these grandees, who had been used no long time ago to appear before the world with the most splendid of panther-skins slung elegantly over their shoulders.

Some of the women were filling their wooden vessels at the springs which trickled out from under the wall of rock; and as they watched the water sparkling in the fire-light they chattered to one another in the most animated way, or told fairy tales and repeated poetry for the general entertainment.

In her own quarters, in the centre of the cavern, close under the wall, Orsolya was seated in a chair of rough pine branches, beneath a canopy of mats, which protected her from the continual droppings of the rock. [Pg 289]

Her face was covered with a perfect network of lines and wrinkles, but her dark eyes shone like live coals. Her beautiful silver hair was nearly hidden beneath a kerchief which had seen better days, and her dress, a plain, old-fashioned national costume, was neat and clean in spite of its age. She had a large spinning-wheel before her, and on a low stool by her side, sat a young girl, also employed with a spindle.

It was evident that this latter, a pale, slim creature with black eyes, was no Magyar. Her features were of a foreign cast, her hands were small and delicate, and the charm and grace of her every movement were suggestive rather of nature than of courts.

But the beautiful face looked troubled, as if its owner were haunted by the memory of some overwhelming calamity.

Evidently this young relation of hers was the light of the old lady's eyes, for her features lost their stern, rather masculine expression, and her whole face softened whenever she looked at her.

Some of the men interrupted their walk from time to time to loiter near the fires, or talk to the sportsmen as they came in, or drew near to Orsolya, as subjects approach a sovereign; and Orsolya talked composedly with each one, too well accustomed to deference and homage even to notice them.

"Dear child," said the old lady, as soon as they were left to themselves again, "how many spindles does this make? I'll tell you what, if you spin enough we will put the yarn on a loom and weave it into shirting." [Pg 290]

The girl raised her beautiful eyes to the old lady's face, saying in good Magyar, though with a somewhat peculiar accent, "I think Mr. Bokor might set up the loom now, dear mother; I have such a number ready."

"I only hope we shall be able to make it do, my child," said Orsolya, leaning towards the girl, and stroking the raven hair which floated over her shoulders. "Good man!" she went on, smiling, "not but that he can be as obstinate as anyone now and then! and he has made the shuttle the size of a boat!"

The girl laughed a little as she answered, "We will help him, good mother," and she drew the old lady's hand to her lips, and kissed it as if she could not let it go.

"Yes," she went on slowly, "necessity is a great teacher; it teaches one all things, except how to forget!"

"Oh, my dear, and who would wish it to teach one that! There are some things which we cannot, and ought not to forget, and it is best so, yes, best, even when the past has been a sad one."

She stroked and caressed the girl in silence for a few moments, and then went on, "But you know, dear child, that life on this sad earth is not everything. God is good, oh, so good! Why did He create all that we see? Only because He is good. He, the Almighty, what need had He of any created thing? It is true that life brings us much pain and anguish at times, but then this is but the beginning of our real life. There is another, beyond the blue sky, beyond the stars, which you can no more realise now than a blind man can realise a view, or a deaf man beautiful music. We shall find there all that we have loved and lost here. God does not bring people together and make them love and care for one another only that death may separate them at last." [Pg 291]

"No, don't forget anything, dearest child," Orsolya went on, with infinite love in her tone, as the girl laid her head in her old friend's lap. "Keep all whom you have loved, and honoured, and lost, warm in your heart."

"They are always there, dear mother, always before me! I see their dear, dear faces every moment!—oh! why must I outlive them?"

"That you may make others happy, dear child; perhaps, even that you may be a comfort and joy to me in my old age."

Mária threw her arms round the old lady and embraced her warmly.

"Dear, dear mother! how good you are to me! Don't think me ungrateful for what the good God has given me in place of those whom I have lost. Yes, I wish to live, and I will live, if God wills, to thank you for your love, and to love you for a long time. But if you see me sad sometimes, don't forget, good mother, how much I have lost! and—I am afraid, I am afraid! I have only one left to lose besides you, dear mother, and if—if—I don't know how I could go on living then——" [Pg 292]

Just then two or three men appeared in the passage leading up from the mouth of the cave, and Mária went back to her stool.

Night had fallen, the men had been engaged in making all safe as usual by barricading the entrance with large pieces of rock, but they had suddenly left their work and were hurrying up to the cavern.

"Someone is coming, Mária! or—but no, we won't think any evil, God is here with us!"

"Mistress Aunt!" said the first of the men, bowing low, "we have brought you a visitor, a great man, Canon Roger, who has but lately escaped from the Mongols, and there are three others, strangers, with him. Leonard here found them all nearly exhausted and not knowing which way to turn."

"Well done, nephew! I'm glad you found them," said Orsolya, "theeing and thouing" him, as she did everyone belonging to her little community. "Roger—Roger," she went on, "I seem to remember the name—why, of course, Italian, isn't he? and lived with my nephew Stephen at one time?"

"Bring them in! bring them in!" she cried eagerly; and in a few moments Father Roger and his companions appeared before the "lady of the castle."

"Glory be to Jesus!" said, or rather stammered, the Canon; and "For ever and ever!" responded Orsolya, who had risen to receive him; and for a moment her voice failed her, so shocked was she at the change in the fine, vigorous-looking man whom she remembered.

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Attenuated to the last degree, bent almost double, he looked as if he were in the last stage of exhaustion. His clothes were one mass of rags and tatters, which hung about him in ribbons; his face, sunken and the colour of parchment, had lost its expression of energy and manliness, and wore for the moment a look of bewilderment, which was almost vacancy. He was the wreck of what he had once been.

His servant, the one whom he mentions in his "Lamentable Song," Orsolya took to be quite an old man. Withered and worn like his master, he was, if possible, even more dilapidated, thanks to his encounter with the wolves.

"You have come a long way and suffered much, Father," said Orsolya gently, when she had welcomed Dora and Talabor, and regained her composure.

"Much lady, much—I—I—"

"Ah, well, never mind! so long as you are here at last, Father Roger, never mind! It is a long, long time since we met last! Do you remember? My husband was alive then, and we were staying in Pressburg with my nephew, Stephen Szirmay, and with the Hédervárys."

"I remember well, dear lady; ah! how little we any of us dreamt of the days that were coming!"

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He spoke falteringly, in a faint voice; and as he sat bowed together on the low seat, Orsolya noticed that he trembled in every limb.

The rumour of his arrival had quickly spread, and the inhabitants of the cavern all came flocking round, eager to see and hear. In their bright-coloured, though more or less worn garments, with the fire-light playing upon them, and a whole troop of eager children among them, they were a most picturesque company. But Orsolya allowed no time for questions.

"Come," said she, rising from her chair, "that will do for the present! Father Roger is worn out! Will you ladies go and get St. Anna's house ready, and make up good beds; and you, kinsmen," she went on, turning to the men, "will you see about clothes and clean linen? I am afraid we have nothing but old rags, but at least they are not quite so worn as those our friends are wearing, and they are a trifle cleaner! I shall put the good Canon especially in your charge, Márton; you will look after him and see that he wants for nothing."

"Thank you, lady," stammered Roger, almost overwhelmed by the warmth of his reception. "Blessings be upon your honoured head, and upon all who dwell beneath this roof."

All present bowed their heads almost involuntarily, whereupon Roger summoned all his remaining strength, and reaching forth his withered hands, pronounced the benediction over them; after which the children made a rush forward to seize and kiss his hands.

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"No, I won't hear anything now, Father Roger," said the old lady after a pause, for her new guests belonged to the family now, she considered, and were to be "thee'd and thou'd" and managed like the rest. "You must not say another word; you must eat and drink and get thoroughly rested, and then, to-morrow perhaps, or in a day or two, when you have said prayers in the chapel (we have one!) and the day's work is done, we will all sit round the fire, and you shall tell us all you know and all you have seen."

Aunt Orsolya's subjects were well drilled, and though they were burning with eagerness and anxiety, those who had begun to besiege the other wanderers with inquiries at once refrained.

Preceded by a couple of torch-bearers, Father Roger was led carefully away to one of the side caves, all of which had their names; Dora was taken in charge by some of the ladies; Talabor and the Canon's servant were equally well looked after, and that night they all once more ate the "home-made bread," which they had so long been without. That it was made with a considerable admixture of tree-bark mattered little, perhaps they hardly noticed the fact. It was simply delicious!

And the beds! As Dora sank down on hers, it seemed to her that she had never known real comfort before.

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At last the excitement of the evening had subsided; the Queen's subjects had all reassembled about the fires, speculating much as to what the new-comers would have to tell them; and presently Aunt Orsolya began her nightly rounds, visiting all in turn, and stopping to have a little kindly chat with each group.

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## **CHAPTER XIX.**

### **FATHER ROGER'S STORY.**

A day or two passed, and the good Father Roger began to recover a little of his strength, if not much of his cheerfulness. He was naturally a robust man, and he was, besides, inured to hardship and suffering; there was nothing actually amiss with him but extreme fatigue and want of food, so that after a few quiet nights and days he began to feel more like himself, and able to give some account of all that had happened since Aunt Orsolya and the rest had betaken themselves to the cavern.

The men, of course, had some of them been going out more or less all the time, hunting, or—as we have said, stealing, but the accounts they had brought back had been not only imperfect, but often so contradictory that it was hard for the refugees to form any clear idea of what had really been going on, and, naturally enough, they were intensely eager to hear.

No one was more eager than Aunt Orsolya, and it cost her no small effort to repress her curiosity, or rather anxiety; but she did it, and not only forbore to question Roger herself, but strictly forbade everyone else to do so also. [Pg 298]

But as soon as she saw that the Canon was able to walk about a little, that his appetite was good, and that he was gradually regaining his usual calm, she reminded him of his promise; and one evening they all gathered round him in the firelight to hear the story which he afterwards wrote in Latin verse, and to which he gave the title of "Carmen miserabile," or "Lamentable Song."

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Roger began his narration by telling of the battle of Mohi and the King's escape to Thuróc; and Orsolya heard with pride how Stephen, Peter, and Akos Szirmay had shared his flight, how Stephen had fallen by the way, and how Master Peter had survived all the perils and dangers by which they were beset, and how Akos, too, had not only survived the Kun massacre, but was safe and sound when last the Canon had heard of him, and had distinguished himself by many an act of bravery and devotion; and the old lady's eyes grew very bright as she listened, and she put out her hand to stroke that of the pale, slim girl who sat beside her, eagerly drinking in every word. Father Roger's information came from the captives brought in at different times, and stopped short, so far as the King and his followers were concerned, at the time when they had taken refuge in the island of Bua, and Kajdán had found himself baffled in his pursuit. To indemnify himself for the loss of his prey, he had plundered Dalmatia, Croatia, and Bosnia, had vainly stormed Ragusa, and had set fire to Cattaro. The last Father Roger knew of him was that he had turned east and was expected to join Batu in Moldavia, by way of Albania, Servia, and Bulgaria. [Pg 299]

The name of Kajdán was not unknown to the refugees, for it was he who had led the Mongol horde which had poured into Transylvania from the north-east; it was he, or rather probably only his vanguard, who had been defeated by the men of Radna; it was he who had suddenly attacked them in force on March 31st, when they were gaily celebrating their victory; it was he who had consented to leave their town and mines uninjured on the condition that Ariskald, their Count, should act as his guide. It was he, as Father Roger knew too well, who had crossed into Hungary and joined Batu in reducing it to a desert; for his own cathedral city, Grosswardein (Nagyvárad) was one of the many places which Kajdán had captured.

"And about yourself, Father Roger?" asked Orsolya. "Tell us about yourself, where you were taken, and how you escaped with your life."

"I had fled from Nagyvárad before Kajdán reached it, and was a fugitive, hiding in the woods, living on roots and herbs and wild fruits until the autumn, and then—I was deceived as others were!"

Father Roger went on to explain that Batu, by way of keeping those of the inhabitants who had not yet fled, and of luring back some who had, in order that the harvest might be secured, had issued a proclamation in the King's name. [Pg 300]

"But how?" interrupted Orsolya. "You were deceived! Can he write our tongue? Besides, the King's proclamations have the King's seal."

"And so had this! They—they got hold of it."

"And knew what it was?" persisted Aunt Orsolya incredulously.

Reluctantly Father Roger had to admit that they had been enlightened by a Hungarian.

"A Magyar!" burst from his audience in various tones of horror and indignation.

"There were not many like him, I am sure there were not many—perhaps we don't know everything. He saved my life; I don't like to think too ill of him—it was a time of awful trial—ah! if you had seen how some were tortured! It was enough to try the courage of the stoutest heart, and he was not naturally a brave man. And yet I could not have believed it of him! I can't believe it! There must have been some mistake, surely!"

"You had known him before, the traitor!" cried Aunt Orsolya.

"Yes," said Father Roger sadly, "I had known him. He had joined the Mongols before the battle of Mohi, partly because he was poor, or rather because he was afraid of being poor, and partly because he was frightened. He had been useful to the Mongols on many occasions; and he had grown rich and prosperous among them. No one of the chiefs outdid him in splendour, in the number of his servants, or of his beautiful horses. He, too, had been made a chief, a Knéz, as they [Pg 301]

called it. Well, Nicholas the Chancellor was among the many who fell at Mohi, and a Mongol, who was plundering the dead, found upon him the King's seal. This chanced to come to—to this man's ears, and he thought it might be useful; it was easy for him to get possession of it, for it was not valuable, being only of steel. He gave the Mongol a stolen sheep in exchange, and the man thought himself well paid. I don't suppose he had any thought then of putting his prize to any ill use; but he was one of those who never missed an opportunity, and generally managed to secure for himself the lion's share of any booty. However it was, he had the seal, and now——"

Father Roger paused, perhaps from weariness; perhaps because it was never his way to speak evil of any if it could be avoided.

"Don't let us judge him," he went on. "The poor wretch had seen enough to terrify a bolder man than he. He went to the Khan and advised him what to do, and Batu gave him a valuable Tartar sword, and a splendid horse in return."

Father Roger explained that among the prisoners there were many monks and others able to write, and that some of these were "compelled" by Batu to draw up and make copies of a proclamation in the King's name. Every copy was sealed with the King's seal, and they were distributed broadcast over the country. He had seen more than one copy himself, and more than once he had been called upon to read it to those who were unable to read for themselves.

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This was how the proclamation ran: "Fear not the savage fury of the dogs! and do not dare to fly from your homes. We were somewhat over hasty indeed in abandoning the camp and our tents, but by the mercy of God we hope to renew the war valiantly before long, and to regain all that we have lost. Pray diligently therefore to the all-merciful God that He may grant us the heads of our enemies."

There was nothing of the Mongol about this, and any lingering doubts were, dispelled by the sight of the King's seal. The result was what the Mongols hoped for. In places which had not yet been harried and ravaged the population remained, while many refugees returned to their farms.

"But the traitor!" interrupted Orsolya, "what of him? Where is he? If there is such a thing as justice——"

"He was made one of the hundred chief magistrates," said Father Roger quietly, "and one day when he was in Nagyvárad, after my return, he recognised me and offered to take me into his service. He could protect me better, he said."

"But his name! Who is he? One ought to know who are traitors! Where had you known him before?" persisted Orsolya.

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"At Master Stephen Szirmay's! He was one of his pages. His name was Libor."

Dora and Talabor both uttered an exclamation.

"He lived with my nephew Stephen! and he could turn traitor!" cried Aunt Orsolya in horror.

"Yes, dear lady, he was not the only Magyar to do so! But there were not many, no! indeed there were not many."

"And why couldn't they have died, every one of them!" cried Orsolya, impetuously.

"Ah! who knows?" said Father Roger gently. "Who knows? But he did not think matters would go as far as they did; no, I am sure he did not!"

It was not in Father Roger's nature to think the worst of any, still less of one to whom he owed his life, and he knew nothing of the attack on Master Peter's house or of the despicable part which Libor had played with regard to Dora, or he would have spoken less leniently.

Libor had "climbed the cucumber-tree" to some purpose; and this last service rendered to the Khan had won for him the praise of Batu and all the chiefs, who called him one of themselves. He had reached the pinnacle of greatness, his fortune was made.

The Hungarian prisoners came to him for his advice and assistance, and Libor always received them with the kindly condescension of a great man, and was always ready with fair words and empty assurances to allay their fears.

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Late in the autumn, and without any previous intimation to anyone, came an order to Libor and all the other chief magistrates that they were to assemble on a certain day at various appointed spots, each at the head of the entire population for which he was responsible. They were to come with their old and with their young, and they were to be provided with presents for the Khan.

It was a gloomy day, and the storm-clouds were chasing one another across the sky, as if they, too, were going to hold a rendezvous somewhere, to consult perhaps how many thunderbolts would be required to reduce the country to a heap of ruins.

Batu Khan's tent was pitched in the centre of a vast plain, and round it were gathered a large number of Mongols, some mounted, some on foot. In the background, making a terrific noise, were a swarm of filthy Mongol children, who were lying about under a group of tall trees.

The mud huts and numberless tents of the Mongol camp formed an extended semicircle at some little distance, and within this were drawn up a number of Mongol horsemen, quite unconcerned

apparently at the blackness of the sky and the distant muttering of the thunder.

Batu Khan was seated on a camp-stool brilliantly attired as if for some great ceremony. Around him stood more than thirty chiefs, armed from head to foot, and among them was Libor, who had surpassed himself in the magnificence of the apparel which he had assumed in honour of the day's festivity.

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He stood on the Khan's right hand, and more than once had the honour of being addressed by that personage; behind him, as behind the other chiefs, stood a swarm of servants, their ears—if they were still lucky enough to possess such appendages—ever attentive to catch the commands of their masters. Father Roger had been present in Libor's retinue on this occasion, a slave among slaves.

Presently the wild Mongolian "band" struck up. Its members were a motley crew, stationed before the Khan's tent, and their songs were of the most ear-splitting variety, accompanied too by the dull roll of drums and the screeching of pipes and horns, the whole performance being such as to baffle description, and to be compared only with the choicest of cats' concerts.

The "music" seemed to be intended as a welcome to a white-flagged procession which now appeared in the distance, advancing towards the Khan, every member heavily laden. It consisted in fact of the whole population of some two hundred villages and hamlets, from the district of which Libor was chief magistrate.

Meanwhile, Father Roger had brought round Libor's horse, magnificently caparisoned, and at the first burst of music, the Knéz mounted and galloped off, followed, in obedience to his haughty signal, by a couple of armed Mongols, the Mongol chiefs meanwhile looking on with envious eyes. They were not too well pleased with the Tartar-Magyar's rise to favour.

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Libor galloped across the plain to meet the new-comers, who bowed down before him as if he had been a god, and then rising again at his command, followed him to the camp, where he drew them up in a long line; after which he hurried back to the Khan, dismounted, and announced that his people had brought him such gifts as they could, and only awaited his orders.

The Khan's wide mouth grew wider still as he smiled from ear to ear, and showed two perfect rows of sharp-pointed teeth; but the smile was like that of an ogre, and such as might have made some people rather uneasy, though not, of course, anyone who was such a favourite and in such an exalted position as Libor.

"That's well," said the Khan; and then, turning from him, he muttered something to the other chiefs which escaped Libor's ears or comprehension, though he had done his best to acquire the miserable language spoken by his master.

The next moment a large detachment of Mongols had stepped forth from behind the tents, and moving forward swiftly, but in perfect silence, had advanced towards the rear of the Hungarians. Others at the same time came from behind the Khan's tent, and in a few seconds the white flags were hemmed in before and behind.

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Libor, who had looked upon the whole ceremony as merely one of the usual devices for squeezing the unfortunate people, was plainly startled, nay terrified, by this sudden movement, and his astonishment and discomfiture did not escape the sharp eyes of Batu.

"These proceedings are not quite to your taste, eh, Knéz?" said he, with a tigerish grin.

And the wretched Libor, bowing almost to the earth, made hurried answer, "How could I possibly take amiss anything that his Highness the Khan, my lord and master, may choose to do?"

"I thought as much, my faithful Knéz! Make haste then, and see that all that these folk have brought is taken from them, and then—have them all cut down together!"

Libor turned pale as death, but he knew his master; he knew that the slightest remonstrance, the slightest demur even, would be at the risk of his life. He bowed more deeply than before, and staggered away to give the signal for the plunder and massacre of his own people.

The wind had suddenly risen to a hurricane, and was filling the air with dust; the thunder pealed; but above the howling of the one and the roaring of the other, there rose one long, long cry, and then all was still.

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Libor returned, trembling, shaking, to the Khan, the gracious Khan, whose favourite he was, who had honoured him to such an extent as to provoke the jealousy of the Mongol chiefs; who had enriched him, and had distinguished him above all the rest. He had faithfully obeyed the Khan's orders, though, with a bleeding heart; and now, holding as he did the first place among those who formed Batu's retinue, he was secure as to his own miserable life, for who would dare to lift hand against him?

The Khan received him on his return with the same enigmatical smile, which seemed just now to be stereotyped on his lips.

When the dust-storm was past, a terrible spectacle presented itself. Thousands of corpses lay upon the ground; and among the men, who were quite worn out by their murderous work, were to be seen Mongol women and children, seated upon the bodies of their victims, their hands stained with blood.



"A few thousand bread eaters the less!" exclaimed Batu, in high good humour, "and if my orders are as well carried out in other parts of the country as they have been by you, Libor, my faithful Knéz, there won't be many left to share the rich harvest and vintage with us."

Libor said nothing, for his lips were twitching and quivering convulsively.

"By the way, Libor," the Khan went on pleasantly, "it has just struck me, what present have you yourself brought, my faithful servant?"

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"All that I possess belongs to your Highness, mighty Khan," said Libor, trembling.

"Excellent man!" replied Batu, and turning to one of the chiefs standing by, he addressed him in particular, saying gently, "See now, and take example by this excellent man, who has made me a present of all that he has!"

The chief to whom these words were spoken cast a furious glance at the favourite.

"All you possess is mine, eh, Libor?" Batu went on, "all, even your life, isn't it?"

Libor bowed.

"Oh, how faithful he is!" exclaimed the Khan, addressing the same chief as before, and speaking in the same good-natured tone. "I know the loyalty of this trusty Knéz of ours is a thorn in your eyes! and I know that there are some of you daring enough even to have doubts of his splendid fidelity and obedience! Wretches, take example by Libor the Knéz!"

So saying, the Khan rose from his seat, and cried in a loud, shrill voice, "Take this devoted servant and hang him on the tree yonder opposite my tent!"

If a thunder-bolt had fallen at his feet Libor could not have been more terror-stricken. He threw himself on his face before the Khan, but his voice was strangled in his throat, and he could not utter a word; all that he was able to do was to wring his hands, and raise them imploringly towards his awful master.

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And the Khan—burst into a loud fit of laughter!

Another moment and Libor the favourite, the envied—whom the other chiefs were ready enough to speed upon his way—Libor was hanging to a lofty willow-tree and tossing to and fro in the stormy wind.

Batu Khan presented one of Libor's horses—a lame one—to Bajdár; and the rest of the ex-favourite's very considerable property he kept for himself.

(Bajdár, it may be remembered, though, of course, neither Father Roger nor Talabor were aware of the fact, had been of the party which had attacked Master Peter's house, and we may readily guess how he had earned this handsome reward.)

Orsolya gave a sigh of satisfaction as Father Roger finished his story.

"There is one traitor less in the world," said she, "and he might think himself lucky that he was only hanged! It was an easy death compared with many!"

And she said the same thing, yet more emphatically, when she heard from Dora and Talabor of their experiences at the hands of the Magyar-Tartar-Knéz.

Gentle Father Roger sighed too, but without any satisfaction, as he thought of the youth, with whom he had lived under the same roof, and to whom, as he was fond of insisting, he and his servant owed their lives.

But when he heard all that Talabor could tell him, he was as indignant as even Orsolya could have wished; for he understood Master Peter, and saw at once what had puzzled so many, the reason why he had left Dora at home instead of sending her to the Queen, out of harm's way.

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## **CHAPTER XX. LIKE THE PHOENIX.**

It seemed too good to be true! But it was a fact that the Mongols were really gone—gone as they had come, like one of the plagues of Egypt, for there "remained not one" in all Hungary.

As soon as King Béla knew that the unexpected had come to pass, and that the land was clear of the enemy, he hastened home. But what a home he found! It had been one of the fairest and richest in Europe; and now he rode for whole days without seeing so much as a single human being, and his followers had to do battle with the wild beasts, which had multiplied to an alarming degree. Go which way he would, he found the land uncultivated and overgrown with thorns and weeds; and when he did come across an inhabited district, the men he encountered were not men, but spectres. The many unburied corpses, together with the sometimes altogether

indescribable kinds of food upon which the people had had to subsist, had produced pestilence of divers kinds, which carried off many of those who had escaped the Mongols. [Pg 313]

It was only a year or so since the first irruption of the Mongols, but the land was a chaos.

How the King laboured with might and main to restore the "years which the locust had eaten," and how he succeeded are matters which belong to history.

Very gradually and cautiously the people ventured forth from the dens in which they had concealed themselves. At first they came only one or two at a time, to reconnoitre; but when they were convinced that the enemy had utterly withdrawn himself, the joyful news was quickly conveyed to those who were still in hiding, and they flocked back to the ruined towns and villages, which began at once to rise from their ashes.

One by one the bells pealed forth again from the church-towers, and many, many a cross was put up in the graveyards to the memory of those who returned no more; not only of those known to be dead, but of those who had simply disappeared, no one could say how, but whose bodies were never found, and who might therefore have been carried away to a living death as slaves. Few indeed of the captives were ever seen again. Many a hamlet and small village of the plains had been wiped out as completely as if it had never existed, and some of these were never rebuilt, though their names live in the neighbourhood to the present day.

Many a young man who had been but a "poor relation" before the flood, now found himself the heir to large estates and great wealth. [Pg 314]

Once more the plough was to be seen at work among the furrows, drawn now by an ox, now by a horse, and not infrequently by the farmer himself, the old owner or the new. Where there had been ten inhabitants there was now one; but that one seemed to have inherited all the energy, vigour, and hopefulness of the other nine, so fiercely he worked.

Buried treasures were dug up again, though often not by those who had buried them; many remained undiscovered for centuries; many have not been found to this day.

The wolves still roamed the plains as if the world belonged to them; they would even enter the scantily populated villages and carry off infants from the cradle, and from the very arms of their mothers. Clouds of ravens and crows still hovered over the countless bodies of those who had fallen victims to the Mongols or to starvation, exposure, disease. Both birds and beasts disputed the possession of the land with its returning inhabitants.

Of the forty members of the Szirmay family there now remained but four male representatives: Master Peter, his nephew Akos, and two others whose names have not come down to us; and all four of these were now wealthy landed proprietors.

Dora had been unable to communicate with her father; Gabriel had never reached him; and when at length Master Peter was able to re-visit his faraway castle, he did so not knowing whether his daughter were alive or dead. He found the whole place in ruins; for Dora had been only too right in her conjectures. The Mongols had paid it another visit not long after her departure; and, finding the house deserted and empty, had vented their rage upon it in such a way that nothing remained to receive their owner but the bare walls. [Pg 315]

Among the ruins, however, he discovered old Moses, Jakó, and a servant or two, all in a famishing condition. From them he learnt how Dora had left the house only just in time to escape the second attack; but as to what had befallen her since, they could, of course, tell him nothing. She had intended to join him in Dalmatia, and she had never arrived there. So much only was certain, and when he thought of the perils she must have encountered, and the awful sights he had himself seen by the way, his heart sank within him. And, worst of all, there was nothing to be done, nothing! but to wait, wait, wait, in a state of constant anxiety as to what he might any day hear.

But supposing that she should have been preserved through all, and were only waiting till she heard news of him, or perhaps until she were able to travel! She would certainly hear in time, wherever she might be, of the King's return—she would go to him for news of her father—she would hear that he was alive, and she would come back to the old home to find him; so there he must stay! [Pg 316]

Master Peter was sufficiently practical to reflect that if his daughter appeared one day without warning, he would want a roof to shelter her, and to work he set making preparations accordingly, though with a heavy heart.

Yet the work did him good. It cheered him to see the labourers repairing the walls and roofing in what had been her own room, for sometimes it beguiled him into thinking that Dora must certainly be coming, would be there perhaps before the place was ready for her, and then he would urge the workmen to greater speed.

He was watching and superintending as usual one day, growing more and more down-hearted as he reckoned the many weeks, the months which had slipped past since he had left Dalmatia, when the clatter of horse-hoofs roused him. Most people were finding enough to do at home just now, and Master Peter was never more ready to welcome anyone—anyone who might bring him the tidings he longed for, and yet dreaded, or at least tell him news of some sort which would divert his thoughts for the time.

He hurried forward to meet the visitor as he clattered into the courtyard, and—did his eyes deceive him? or was it indeed his old page who was bowing before him?

Talabor the page! Talabor! Any old face was welcome, but—suddenly he remembered! Talabor had left the castle with Dora, he had come back without her!

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Master Peter could do nothing but look at the young man, for his lips refused to utter a word; and he put up his hand with an imploring gesture, as one who would ward off an expected blow.

What was it Talabor was saying? That she was alive, safe, well! Dora was alive and well! Then—where was she? and why was she not with him?

It was a minute or two before he could take it in; for, his tongue once loosed, he poured forth his questions so fast that Talabor had no chance of replying to them. But, when at last he did understand that Dora was with "Aunt Orsolya," that she had wanted to set out with Talabor as soon as ever the roads were considered safe, that in fact she had begged and prayed her hostess to let her go, but that the old lady would not hear of her doing so, and had insisted on sending Talabor first—why then, with a good-humoured "Just like Aunt Orsolya!" Master Peter hastily decided that Talabor must set out with him again that very day, and take him to her.

Horse tired? what did that matter? Thank Heaven, he had a horse or two still in the stable! and catching sight of Moses, he shouted the good news and his orders together.

Talabor had hidden the furniture, the plate? Very well, very well! so much the better, but they could wait! Later on no doubt he would be properly grateful, but what would he have cared for a gold mine just now? He had no thought for anything but how to reach Dora at the earliest possible moment, bring her home, and never let her out of his sight again whatever might betide.

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Orsolya had remained in the cavern until all apprehension of the return of the Mongols was over; and then she had betaken herself to the "barn" in Frata, with quite a regiment of poor, homeless folk, whom she supported as best she could. There Master Peter found her and Dora; and there, too, he met his nephew Akos, and heard from him how he had escaped with Mária from the Kun massacre, and heard from Dora how she had become quite attached to his bride, and no longer wondered at her cousin's choice.

There is little more to say. But two or three months later, when Master Peter and his daughter had not only been restored to one another, but were once more at home, when the castle had been rebuilt, the hidden treasures found uninjured and brought back to the light of day, when Dora had recovered the effects of her terrible journey and was beginning sometimes to feel as if its horrors were a dream—she received an offer of marriage from the haughty Paul Héderváry, who had lost his wife in Dalmatia, and was now willing enough to conform to ancient usage and bestow himself upon her cousin, "his first love," as he was pleased to call her, the only child of the now wealthy Master Peter, and the heiress of his large estates.

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It was very magnanimous of him, he felt, and he expected Dora and her father to see the matter in the same light, and to show their appreciation of the honour he was doing them. Great therefore was his astonishment, when he received, not the willing assent he expected, but "a basket," or in other words a refusal, courteously worded, but unmistakably decided.

He was even more than astonished, he was annoyed, mortified, for "secrets" of this kind were sure to leak out, even though the parties concerned held their tongues. There would certainly be some kind friend to spread abroad the news, that Paul Héderváry had been refused!

Little as he cared for Paul, Master Peter was gratified by the proposal, if only because it would set Dora right in the eyes of the world. Possibly he would have been pleased to see her the great man's wife, in spite of all that had come and gone, but if so, he cared for her too much to press his views, and when Dora herself asked his consent to her marriage with Talabor, he was not the man to say her nay! How could he, when but for Talabor he would have had no daughter, whether to give or to keep? And now he would give and keep too, for she could and must always live with him, and this reflection consoled him for any regret he might have felt at not having a more notable son-in-law, with a family-castle and estates of his own.

A few words as to Akos, or rather his wife, Aunt Orsolya's ward, Mária, who had shared her retreat in the cave. Who she was, was never exactly known to the world in general. In Hungary she was always said to be a Transylvanian relation of the Szirmays, while in Transylvania she passed for a Hungarian member of the same family. But how she came to be placed in Aunt Orsolya's charge was a secret never divulged. One thing struck people as strange, and it was this: Akos had been well known as a friend of the Kunok, so that, if the Kun King had confided to him the place where he had hidden his treasure, that was nothing remarkable; nor was anyone astonished to hear that Akos had unearthed it and delivered it up to the King, or that the latter had made it over to the Queen. But why should the Queen have given everything to Mária, when her own stock of jewellery must surely have needed replenishing?

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More surprised still would people have been, had they seen the Queen kiss the girl's still pale cheek, and heard her say, as she wished her all happiness, "Dear child, would that instead of giving you these, I could restore to you those who are gone! But we have all lost so many, we have all so many, many graves to weep over!"

Yet another circumstance attracted attention, though the fact that Akos had championed the cause of the Kunok was supposed to account for it. Many of these had returned to Hungary by

On the first anniversary of Mária's marriage a deputation from these Kunok came to her and Akos. To him they presented a hundred arrows and one of their famous long-bows of dog-wood, beautifully ornamented with gold; and to her they gave a coronet of no small value.

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After awhile some few of the Tartar-Magyars returned from the places where they had hidden themselves, and were re-Magyarised; but never, to the day of their death, were they reinstated in the good graces of their neighbours. The King, however, was more merciful than the populace. There were so few Magyars left that he was disposed to cherish lovingly the scanty remnants, and not only showed lasting gratitude to those who had shared with him the time of adversity, and rewarded all who had distinguished themselves by acts of courage or self-devotion, but he even became blind and deaf when any were denounced as turncoats.

Among the many who received the King's thanks for their loyalty, Talabor was not overlooked. How he had repulsed the Mongol attack upon Master Peter's castle, how loyal and devoted he had been to the Szirmay family, and especially how he had saved Father Roger from the wolves, was all known to the King, who gave him a considerable property, the renewal of his patent of nobility, and the surname of Védvár, *i.e.*, castle-defender.

Father Roger became in time Archbishop of Spalatro, and in his "Lamentable Song" he left to future generations a full account of the time of terror and misery through which the nation had passed.

Hungary had learnt something from her trouble, and the next time the Mongols thought of invading her they were promptly driven back.

As for the treacherous Duke of Austria, he lived to see his neighbour more firmly established on the throne than any of his predecessors had been, and just five years after all the mischief he had done during the Mongol invasion, he lost his life in battle with the Hungarians, or rather with the vanguard of the army, which, by a singular nemesis, consisted mainly of Kunok; and the three counties which had been so unjustly obtained by him were again united to the fatherland.

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter III, a quotation mark was added before "but—we might find or invent someone".

In Chapter IV, a period was added after "the King was always glad to welcome useful immigrants".

In Chapter VII, a period was added after "in exterminating the common enemy", and "Versecz" was changed to "Verecz". (Thanks to the National Széchényi Library in Hungary for their assistance in determining the correct spelling.)

In Chapter IX, "perhaps Marána's betrothal was known" was changed to "perhaps Marána's betrothal was known", and "having helped to capture Kuthven's castle" was changed to "having helped to capture Kuthen's castle".

In Chapter XI, "Borká's aid" was changed to "Borka's aid", and "Jankó the dog-keeper" was changed to "Jakó the dog-keeper".

In Chapter XII, a quotation mark was deleted after "Must not?"

In Chapter XIII, "all danger was believed to be over the night" was changed to "all danger was believed to be over for the night".

In Chapter XVI, "in such numbers that great part of the country was re-populated" was changed to "in such numbers that a great part of the country was re-populated", and "and few but stragglers" was changed to "and but few stragglers".

In Chapter XIX, a quotation mark was deleted before "If a thunder-bolt".

In Chapter XX, "whieh carried off many of those" was changed to "which carried off many of those", "After awhile some few of the Tartar-Maygars returned" was changed to "After awhile some few of the Tartar-Magyars returned", and the footer "Jarrold & Sons, Limited, the Empire Press, Norwich," at the bottom of the last page was changed to "Jarrold & Sons, Limited, the Empire Press, Norwich."

The advertisement for Jarrold & Sons' Six Shilling Novels was moved from the

front of the book to the back.

In the list of New and Forthcoming Books, "Lady Jermingham" was changed to "Lady Jerningham", and "Baron Nicolas Jòsika" was changed to "Baron Nicolas Jósika".

Any remaining inconsistencies in spelling and hyphenation were present in the original text.

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