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FOR THE RIGHT

FOR THE RIGHT

BY

KARL EMIL FRANZOS

GIVEN IN ENGLISH

By JULIE SUTTER

With a Preface

By GEORGE MACDONALD, LL.D.

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PREFACE.

Not having even been asked to do so, I write this preface from admiration of the book. The translation I have not yet seen, but knowing previous work by the same hand, have confidence in it.

How much the story is founded on fact I cannot tell; a substratum of fact there must be. To know that such a man once lived as is represented in it, might well wake a new feeling of both strength and obligation: here is one who, with absolutely no help from what is commonly meant by *education*, lived heroically. But be the tale as much a product of the imagination as the wildest romance, it remains a significant fact that the generation has produced a man capable of such an ideal.

For the more evident tendency of art has for some time been to an infinite degeneracy. The cry of "Art for art's sake," as a protest against the pursuit of art for the sake of money or fame, one can recognize in its half wisdom, knowing the right cry to be, "Art for truth's sake!" But when certain writers tell us that the true aim of the author of fiction is to give the people what they want, namely, a reflection, as in a mirror, of themselves--a mirror not such as will show them to themselves as they are, but as they seem to each other, some of us feel that we stand on the verge of an abyss of falsehood. The people--in whose favour they seem to live and move and have their being--desire, they say, no admixture of further object, nothing to indicate they ought not to be what they are, or show them what they ought to be: they acknowledge no relations with the ideal, only with that which is--themselves, namely, and what they think and do. Such writers do not understand that nothing does or can exist except the ideal; nor is their art-philosophy other than "procuress to the lords of hell." Whoever has an ideal and is making no struggle toward it, is sinking into the outer darkness. The ideal is the end, and must be the object of life. Attained, or but truly conceived, we must think of it as the indispensable.

It is, then, a great fact of the age that, such low ends being advocated, and men everywhere insisting on a miserable origin and miserable prospects for humanity, there should yet appear in it a man with artistic conception of a lofty ideal, and such artistic expression of the same as makes it to us not conceivable only, but humanly credible. For an ideal that is impossible is no ideal; it is a fancy, no imagination. Our author keeps his narrative entirely consistent with human nature--not, indeed, human nature as degraded, disjointed, and unworthy, neither human nature as ideally perfect, but human nature as reaching after the perfection of doing the duty that is plainly perceived. In none of its details is the story unlikely. We may doubt if such a man as Taras

ever lived; but alas for him who has no hope that such a man will ever be!

The reader must not suppose I would have everything the man did regarded as *right*. On the contrary, the man becomes bitterly aware of his errors--errors of knowledge, however, of judgment and of belief, be it understood--not of conduct as required by that belief, knowledge, and judgment. His head is at a loss rather than in fault; heart and will are pure. A good man may do the most mistaken things with such conviction of their rectitude as to be even bound to do them. How far he might be to blame for not knowing or judging better, God only could tell. If he could not have known better or judged better, he may have to bear some of the consequences of his mistakes, but he will not have to bear any blame; while his doing of what he believed to be right will result in his both being and knowing what is right. The rare thing is not the man who knows what is right, but the man who actually, with all the power in him, with his very being, sets himself to *do* that right thing, however unpleasant or painful, irksome or heartrending to him. Such a man, and such only, is a hero.

At the same time, the deepest instruction lies in the very mistakes of the man. The purity of his motive and object confessed, not merely were the means he took to reach his end beyond his administration, but the end itself was imperfect. There are multitudes who imagine they hate injustice when they but hate injury to themselves. They will boil with rage at that, but hear of wrong even to a friend with much equanimity. How many would not rather do a small wrong than endure a great one! Do such men love justice? No man is a lover of justice who would not rather endure the greatest wrong than commit the least. Here we have a man who, to revenge no wrong done to himself, but out of pure reverence for justice, feeling bound in his very being to do what in him lies for justice, gives up everything, wife even and children, and openly defying the emperor, betakes himself an outlaw to the hills, to serve that Justice whose ministers have forsaken her. He will do with what power he has, the thing so many fancy they would do if they had the power they have not--put down injustice with the strong hand. There is a place for this in the order of things; but were the judges of the earth absolutely righteous, the world would never thus be cleansed of injustice. The justest judge will do more for the coming of the kingdom of righteousness by being himself a true man, than by innumerable righteous judgments. The first and longest step a man can take toward redress of all wrong, is *to be righteous*, not in the avenging of wrong, but in the doing of the right thing, in the working of righteousness. He who could have put down evil with the strong hand had he so pleased, was he who less than any cared to do so. He saw that men might be kept from injustice and be not a whit the more just, or the more ready to do justice when the hand was withdrawn. What alone he thought worth his labour was that a man should love justice as he loved it, and be ready to die for it as he himself died. This man in his ignorance set out to do the thing his Master had declined to do; his end itself was inadequate.

Nor was the man himself adequate to the end. The very means he possessed he was unable to control; and wrong followed as terrible as unavoidable. Vengeance must be left with the Most High; for the administration of punishment, to be just, demands not merely an unselfishness perfect as God's, but an insight and knowledge equal to his. Besides all this, to administer justice a man must have power beyond his own, and must, therefore, largely depend on others, while yet he can with no certainty determine who are fit for his purpose and who are not. In brief, the justest man cannot but fail in executing justice. He may be pure, but his work will not.

One thing I must beg of the reader--not to come to a conclusion before he has come to the end; not to imagine that now or now he may condemn, but to wait until the drama is played out.

It was indeed a bold undertaking when our author chose for his hero a man who could not read or write, who had no special inclination, no personal aptitude for social or public affairs, and would present him attempting the noblest impossibility, from a divine sense of wrong done to others than himself, and duty owed by him to all men and to God--a duty become his because he alone was left to do it.

I have seldom, if ever, read a work of fiction that moved me with so much admiration.

The failures of some will be found eternities beyond the successes of others.

GEORGE MAC DONALD.

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FOR THE RIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

TO THE FRONT.

Let the reader's imagination carry him eastward. Let him suppose he were travelling at railway speed between Lemberg and Czernowitz, in a south-easterly direction, towards the sedgy shores of the river Pruth and the beech forests of the Bukowina, and the scenery to his left will appear changeless. His eye for miles will rest on a boundless plain, of which the seasons can influence the colouring only, but never a feature of the landscape. White and dazzling in the winter, it rises to something of a yellow brightness in the summer, wearing a neutral tint both in the autumn and spring. But on his right-hand each turn of the wheel will disclose a new picture to his eyes. He is fast approaching the towering heights of the Carpathians. Mere phantoms at first, they assume shape and substance like gathering clouds on the horizon, the mountain chain with deepening contours advancing through the violet and purple vapours of distance. And if the traveller now were able to fix his gaze a while on the monotonous plain, with its grey cottages, its poverty-stricken fields, and dreary heathlands, his would be a grand surprise in turning once more to the right. The heights have closed in--giants they, proud and solemn in fir-clad majesty. The wind, sweeping along the mountain-sides, is laden with the odours of pinewood; the air is filled with the roar of cataracts dashing through the gullies and foaming along the rocky channel by the side of the railway cutting; and athwart the narrow bands of azure, which seem the bluer for the deep-rent glens beneath, may be seen wheeling the bloodthirsty kite of the Carpathians. The very heart of the mountain chain, silent and beautiful, lies open to view. A moment only, and it will have vanished. The railroad, starting off in a sharp curve to the east, leaves nothing to the beholder but to the right and to the left the self-same monotonous plain. A sudden bend of the lawless Pruth had rendered it necessary for the line to cut the landscape at the very point where mountain and plain stand facing each other--abrupt and unblending--like hatred and love in the heart of man.

The spot in question--half-way between Colomea, the hill-crowned capital of the district, and Zablotow, a poor Jewish townlet of the plain--is within the parish boundary of Zulawce, a village not, however, visible from the railway, its cottages, a couple of miles beyond, covering an eastern slope of the magnificent mountain range. The thatched dwellings are as poor as anywhere in that part of Galicia, not even the church or the manor house commanding any attention. But all the more charming is the neighbourhood. Approaching the village from the Pruth, you reach its first outlying cottages without the effort of climbing, but by the time you have ascended to the farthest dwellings you have a splendid lowland landscape at your feet--spreading fields of gold, verdant woods and heath-covered tracts, skirted by the Pruth as with a broad silver ribbon, the glittering rivulet of the Czerniawa winding between. And your eye will carry you farther still, to the natural horizon, northward. But the eastern view is altogether different, and incomparably bewitching, the gloriously wooded hill-country of the Bukowina rising gradually, terrace upon terrace, from the deep-sunk valley of the Czeremosz. Indeed, this prospect, as seen from the village, is wondrously grand, a succession of gigantic steps, as it were, leading from earth toward heaven, the highest mountain-tops melting away in the ethereal blue. To the west and south the view is bounded by the "Welyki Lys," a gigantic mountain forest which separates Galicia from Hungary--dark and dreary, and unutterably monotonous. Nowhere in the lower Carpathians is there a spot to equal Zulawce for Nature's variety, looking upon the village as a centre.

But this is not all for which the place is noteworthy. Life there, on the whole, is regulated after the ways of the lowlands; but the people themselves approach the Huzul type--a peculiar race, inhabiting the mountains, and which, on account of the common language, is generally classed with the Ruthens, but being of a different origin and of different conditions of life is distinct from them, as in appearance so in habit and in character. The Huzul is a hybrid, uniting the Slavonic blood of the Ruthen with the Mongolian blood of the Uzen, his speech betraying the former while his name testifies to the latter; so also does the defiant dauntlessness of his bearing, hidden beneath an appearance of proud restraint, but apt to burst out suddenly, like a hot spring through the covering snow. The Ruthens of the lowlands, on the contrary, are purely Slavonic; industrious therefore, enduring and very patient, not easily roused, but once the fire is kindled it will go on burning with a steady glow. These virtues, however, have sad vices for a reverse--a bluntness which is both dull and coarse, and an abject humility, bending the neck of the conquered man even lower than need be. An unfair load of hardships may be pleaded in their excuse. The Ruthen for centuries bore the chains of serfdom, and these broken he continued the subject of some Polish nobleman, no law protecting his body, still less his goods, no mental culture reaching him whose soul received the barest crumbs of spiritual teaching. In this respect things, to be sure, went as ill with the Huzuls, but for the rest theirs was a life of liberty on the mountains, acknowledging no nobleman and no officer of the crown. Poorly enough they lived in the forest wilds, their sheep yielding milk and cheese, the barren soil a few oats for scarcely eatable bread, while meat was within reach of him only who would stake his own life in killing a bear. To this day there are glens where no money has ever been seen; for which reason it has never been thought worth while to levy taxes, the great lords remaining in the lowlands where the soil was fruitful and he who tilled it a slave. "Within those mountains there are but bears to be found and a wild people called Uzels," thus wrote a German explorer in the seventeenth century. He might have written it yesterday, for with the bear only does the Huzul share the sovereignty of the mountains, and his very freedom is no better than the liberty of the bear--yet liberty it is! Thus the difference between the Ruthens of the uplands and the Ruthens of the plain is immense, and scarcely to be bridged over--free huntsmen up yonder, yoke-bearing bondmen below.

"No falcon can lived caged, no Huzul in bondage," says the proverb. The village of Zulawce appeared to give the lie to this saying, but only at first sight. The people there tilled the soil; they went to church, paid tithes, and yielded forced labour; but for the rest they were Huzuls, and cousins-german to the bear-hunters of the Welyki Lys. They never forgot that they were *men*; they chose to govern themselves, and did not hesitate to meet injustice with a bullet or a blow of the axe. The lord of the manor, old Count Henryk Borecki, knew this well enough, and though he might groan he never attempted to treat the peasants of Zulawce as he would treat the churls on his lowland property. Not that he was a gracious lord, but he was prudent; and being a passionate huntsman himself, he loved to spend the season on that borderland of the great forest, which led to many a scuffle, but open rupture there was none while he lived.

When he had departed, matters grew worse. His son, Count George, never troubled the people with his presence, for he lived in Paris. He was a famous cavalier, devoting himself to the rising generation, so far as it was of the feminine gender, and given to dancing at Mabilie. His far-off estates he only bore in mind when his purse was low; for which reason, indeed, he thought of them as often and as anxiously as any pattern landlord, keeping up a lively correspondence with his stewards in Podolia--money they must send him, or dismissed his service they should be. These unfortunate "mandatars" had a hard time of it; but they did their best, fleecing the peasants to the utmost, and keeping their stewardships. Now, the mandatar of Zulawce also, Mr. Severin Gonta, for all that can be told to the contrary, might have wished to adopt this plan; but having lived for twenty years in the village, and knowing the people and their knock-down propensities, he preferred having recourse to the cutting of my lord's timber instead, sending the proceeds to Paris. Count George, however, in the pursuit of his noble passions, enlarged his friendships, admitting even usurers to the benefit of his private acquaintance.

Thus it came about that Mr. Severin one day received the youthful landlord's ultimatum: "Send

me another thousand florins a year, or go to the devil." Mr. Severin was soon resolved. He knew he had cut the timber till never a tree remained, and he preferred his bodily safety to the stewardship he held. So he quitted his post, being succeeded by the young Count's private secretary, a certain Mr. Wenceslas Hajek.

Mr. Wenceslas at the time--it was in the year of Grace 1835--was a young man of eight-and-twenty, with an experience far beyond his years. A Bohemian by birth, he soon rose to the dignity of an imperial detective, and in recognition of his peculiar talents was sent to Italy as a spy. He had acquired a knowledge of French, and was known to have committed a daring robbery upon a privy councillor of Milan, for which achievement he was not, like an ordinary mortal, sent to prison as a thief, but to Paris on a secret mission for Prince Metternich. He duly reported to his government; but his was a sympathetic temperament, and, pitying the refugees, he failed not to report to them as well. For a while he flourished, receiving pay from both sides; but being found out he was dismissed ignominiously. Thereupon he took a distaste for politics, establishing a private agency for nondescript transactions, the least doubtful of which were the arrangements he brought about between spendthrift nobles and their friends who lent upon usury. In this capacity he came to be introduced to Count George, who found him simply invaluable, appointing him his private secretary before long. Now, Mr. Wenceslas might thus have lived happily ever after, had his natural disposition not again played him the fool. He loved money, and took of his master's what he could. Count George was helpless, since the rascal knew his every secret; it was plain he could not dismiss him, but he promoted him to the stewardship of Zulawce. "I don't care how much of a blackguard he is, so long as he forwards my revenues," this distinguished nobleman thought within himself, continuing his pursuits in Paris.

It was in the month of May, 1835, that Wenceslas Hajek made his entry at Zulawce. He had scarcely an eye for the vernal splendour of the grand scenery which surrounded him; but he certainly felt impressed on seeing the peasantry on horseback ready to receive him into their village. It was with a queer look of surprise that he gazed upon those giant figures with their piercing eagle eyes. They were clothed in their best, wearing brown woollen riding-coats, dark red breeches, black sandals, and high felt hats with waving plumes, sitting their small spirited steeds as though they had grown together with them. Among mountaineers the Huzuls are the only equestrian people, and none of their Slavonic neighbours go armed, as they do, with the gun slung behind them, the pistol in the belt, and the battle-axe to hand. Mr. Wenceslas knew he trembled when these well-accounted peasants approached his vehicle. He had intended to treat them to his most gracious smile, and smile he did, but it cost him an effort ending in a grin.

Only one of the peasants bared his head--an old man, white-haired and of commanding stature, who lifted a proud face to the newcomer. He had pulled up by the carriage door, and his clear, undaunted eyes examined the features of the steward. That was Stephen Woronka, the village judge. "Newly-appointed mandatar," he said, "you are sent by our lord; therefore we greet you. You come from afar, and we are not known to you; therefore, I say, we men of Zulawce do our duty by the Count, expecting him to do the same by us. Neither more nor less! We greet you."

Mr. Hajek understood the import, for a Slavonic dialect had been the language of his childhood, and on the long journey through Galicia he had had opportunity to pick up some of the country's speech. But, more than the words, it was the spirit which impressed him, and he framed his answer accordingly. "I shall be just," he said; "neither more nor less! I greet you."

The old judge waved his hat, and "Urrahah!" cried the peasants, the shrill; crisp sound rising from two hundred throats. They discharged their pistols, and once more an exultant "Urrahah!" filled the air. It sounded like a war cry; but peacefully they turned their horses' heads, and, together with the travelling carriage, proceeded to the village inn.

There, on an open space beneath a mighty linden tree, the rest of the people stood waiting--old folk and lads, women and children--all wearing their Sunday best. When the carriage had stopped, and Mr. Hajek, still smiling, had alighted, he was met by the village priest, or pope, with a bow. The Reverend Martin Sustenkowicz was loyally inclined, and anxious to express his feelings in a proper speech, but somehow his intention often was beyond him; and in the present instance, attempting his salutation with unsteady feet, he bowed lower than he meant to, and speech there was none. Hajek took the will for the deed, and turned to an aged woman who offered bread and salt. He affably swallowed a mouthful, and thereupon ordered the innkeeper, Avrumko, in a stage whisper, to tap two casks of his schnaps.

He fully believed thereby to please the people, and was not a little surprised at the judge's deprecating gesture. "With your leave, new mandatar, we decline it," said the latter. "It may be all very well in the lowlands, but not with us. We men of Zulawce do not object to schnaps, but only when we have paid for it ourselves!"

There was something akin to scorn in the mandatar's face, though he smiled again, saying: "But my good people, I am here to represent Count George, your gracious lord. Is not he your little father? and you are the children who may well receive his bounty."

The old judge shook his head. "It may be so in the lowlands," he repeated, "but we are no children, with your leave, and the Count is nowise our father. We are peasants, and he is lord of the manor; we expect justice, and will do our duty, that is all!"

"But my good judge, Mr. Stephen----"

"Begging your pardon," interrupted the latter yet again. "This also is of the lowlands, where they 'Mister' one another. I am plain Stephen^[1] up here. And how should you know that I am good? We would rather not be beholden to you. We will drink the Count's health, paying for it ourselves."

He beckoned to the innkeeper; great cans full of the beverage were brought speedily, and the people sitting or standing about were nowise loth to fall to. Hajek felt posed, but once more he recovered himself, and went about among the villagers, smiling right and left. But the more he smiled, the darker he grew within. He really began to feel afraid of these proud, gaunt creatures, with their undaunted eyes. And he did *not* like the look of their arms. Why, every one of these 'subjects,' as the Galician peasant in those days was styled in official language, carried a small arsenal on his body.

"Why do you go about with pistols?" he inquired of the judge.

"We like it, and may require it," was the curt reply.

"Require it!" said the mandatar, with the smile of innocence. "Why, what for?"

"You may find that out for yourself some day," said old Stephen, and turned away.

Hajek shivered, but overcame the feeling, passing a benevolent look over the assembly. They were engaged with their schnaps now and heeded him not. One of them only--a tall, lean fellow with shaggy red hair--stared at him with an expression of unmitigated dislike.

The mandatar went up to him, inquiring mildly, "Who are you, my friend?"

"The devil may be your friend," retorted the man grimly. "I am Schymko Trudak--'Red Schymko;' but what is that to you?"

"Well, am I not one of yourselves now?" returned Hajek still anxious to conciliate. But he began to see it was no easy matter, and he cast a disconcerted look about him.

His eye alighted on a man who carried no arms, and otherwise appeared of a different stamp. Tall and powerful like the rest of them, his expression was gentle; he was fair-haired, and his eyes were blue. He wore a white fur coat with gay-coloured brodered facings, a black fur cap, and high boots--the holiday garb of the Podolian peasant. Hajek went up to him. The man took off his cap and bowed.

"What is your name?"

"Taras Barabola."

"Do you live in this village?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not in service, surely?"

"No!" and as modestly as though he were but a farm labourer, the young peasant added: "I own the largest farm but one of the place."

"But you are from the lowlands?"

"Yes; I came from Ridowa."

"Then what made you settle here?"

"I--I--loved--I mean, I married into the farm," he said with a blush.

"Do you approve of these people?"

The young man reddened again, but replied: "They are different from those we are used to in the plain, but not therefore bad."

"I wish they were more like you!" said the mandatar fervently, and passed on. He would, indeed, have liked them to be different; more humble, and not carrying arms for possible requirements--more like this Taras in short!

And presently, looking from the window of his comfortable room in the manor house, he examined with a queer smile the thickness of its walls. "A stout building," he muttered; "who knows what it may be good for? Still, this were but poor comfort if things came to the worst. As for playing the hero, I have never done it; but the son of my mother is no fool! I must act warily, I see; but I'll teach these blockheads what a 'subject' is, and I shall take care of myself!"

CHAPTER II.

THE STUFF HE WAS MADE OF.

The ensuing weeks passed quietly. The people gave their turns of work^[2] for the Count as they had always done, but the mandatar did not appear to take much notice. For days he would be absent in the district town, or in the villages round about, amusing himself with the officers of the Imperial service. The peasants hardly ever saw him, but they spoke of him the more frequently. On the day of his entry they had made up their minds that the new bailiff was a sneak, "but we shall be up to his tricks;" yet, somehow he rose in their estimation. True, there were those--the old judge to begin with--who continued in their distrust, but a more generous spirit prevailed with many as the days wore on. "Let us be just," they said; "he has done us no harm so far." And being laughed at by the less confident they would add: "Well, Taras thinks so too, so we cannot be far wrong!" This appeared to be a vantage ground of defence which the opponents knew not how to assail; old Stephen only would retort, angrily, "It is past understanding how this lamb of the lowlands should have got the better of every bear among us up here. But you will be the worse for it one of these days, you will see!"

The judge spoke truth; it was a marvellous influence which the young stranger had acquired in the village, and well-nigh incredible considering the people he had to deal with. But if a miracle it was, it had come about by means of the rarest of charms, by the spell emanating from a heart, the wondrous honesty of which was equalled only by its wondrous strength--a heart which had but grown in goodness and true courage because its lot had been cast amid sorrows which would have brought most men to ruin or despair.

Taras Barabola was born at Ridowa, a village near Barnow, the son of a poor servant girl whose lover had been carried off as a recruit and remained in the army, preferring the gay life of a soldier to hard labour at home. Amid the hot tears of affliction the deserted mother brought up her child, and not only trouble, but shame, stood by his cradle. For the Podolian peasant does not judge lightly of the erring one, and his sense of wrong can be such that Mercy herself would plead with him in vain. It was long before the unhappy girl found shelter for pity's sake, and little Taras, from his earliest days, had to suffer for no other reason but that his father was a scoundrel. It appeared to be meritorious with the people of Ridowa to scold and buffet the frightened child, as though that were indeed a means of proving their own respectability and combating the growth of sin. None but themselves would have been to blame if, by such treatment of the boy, they had reared a criminal in him, to be the disgrace and scourge of the village. But it was not so with Taras, because amid all his trouble a rare good fortune had been given him. The poor servant girl that bore him was possessed of a heroic spirit. And when the little boy followed his mother to church, she standing humbly in the porch, whilst he, childlike, would steal forward till the sexton flung him back as though his very breath defiled the sacred precincts; or when attempting to join other children in their play about the streets he was kicked away like a rabid dog, and nothing seemed left but to take his grief to the one heart beating for him in a cruel world;--that heart would grow strong in the suffering woman, lending her words so generous, so wise, that one could have believed in inspiration were not a mother's love in itself grand enough to be the fount of things noble and true. Many a one in her position would have bewailed her child--would have taught him to lay the blame upon others, sowing the seeds of cowardliness and revenge. But she--well, she did cry; no child ever was more bitterly wept over; but this is what she said: "Taras, grow up good! Do not hate them because of their unkindness, for it is deserved! Nay, my child, if you suffer, it is because your father and I have wronged them; they think ill of you for fear you should become what we were! Yet you are but a child, knowing neither good nor evil, and all they can say against you is that you are the child of your parents; that is why they ill-treat you! But one day you will show them what you are yourself, and they will then treat you accordingly, after your own deserts! And, therefore, oh, my child, do not repay them with evil: be good and do the right, and they will love you!"

Thus she wept, thus she entreated him, and, young as he was, her words were engraven on his brain and sunk deep into his soul. It was not in vain that, in order to save her child, she had staked the one thing left to her in life--the love of that child. Her own great love for him was her safeguard that his hatred for others, which she strove against, should not fall back upon her, who owned herself guilty, and for whom she said he suffered. Taras continued to love his mother; and when he inquired what it could have been whereby she had wronged all the righteous people, and she told him he was too young to understand, he was satisfied. But her words lived in his heart, laying the foundation of a marvellous development of character, teaching him, at an age when other children think but of eating and playing, that he must believe the world to be just, and that his own act must be the umpire of reward or punishment to follow. Thus he suffered ill-will without bitterness, but also, knowing he had not himself deserved it, without humiliation; and when, having reached his tenth year, he was chosen to be the gooseherd of the village--not, indeed, with the goodwill of all, but simply because no other serviceable lad had offered--he

burned with a desire to gain for himself commendation and approval. And he did gain it, because he worked for it bravely, but also because of a fearful experience which happened to him about a twelvemonth later, shaking his young soul to its inmost depth.

It was an autumnal morning; he had driven forth his geese with the grey dawn as usual. They fed on a lonely common; a cross stood there by the side of a pond, but not a cottage within hail, and the foot-path which traversed it was rarely used. The boy had his favourite seat on a stone by the water, at the foot of the cross; he was sitting there now contentedly eating some of the bread which his mother had given him, and whistling between whiles on a reed-pipe he had made for himself.

He was startled by a heavy footfall, and, turning, grew pale, for he that approached him was a spiteful, wicked old man, Waleri Kostarenko by name, one of the worst of those who delighted in bullying him. "You are but a cur!" he would call out when the lad passed his farm, and more than once he had set his dogs at him. And one day, finding him at play with his own grandchildren, he beat him so mercilessly that the little fellow could scarcely limp home for bruises. Nor was it any regard for morality he could plead in wretched excuse. Taras's mother had been a servant on his farm, and had been proof against his wiles, so he was the first to cry shame when trouble overtook her, and like a fiend he delighted in ill-using her child. Taras got out of his way whenever he could, and on the present occasion took to his sturdy little legs, as though pursued by the caitiff's dogs. It was not merely the loneliness of the place which made it advisable to seek refuge in flight, but the fact that the old man, as the boy had seen in spite of his terror, was in a worse condition than usual. There had been a merry-making the day before in a neighbouring village, and his unsteady feet showed plainly that the power of drink was upon him.

"Is it you, little toad?" he roared, "I'll catch you!" But the boy was too fleet for him, and he knew pursuit was vain. "Lord's sake," he cried, suddenly, "I have sprained my foot! Taras, for pity's sake, help me to yon stone!"

The boy turned and looked; the old man had sunk to his knee, a picture of suffering, and the boy did pity him, coming back accordingly. "What is it?" he said, "what can I do for you?" At which Waleri, bursting upon him, caught him exultingly. "Have I got you?" he shrieked, clutching his hair and treating him mercilessly.

"For heaven's sake," cried Taras, "spare me!" But pity there was none with the old wretch; beside himself with hatred, he held the boy with one arm, ill-using him with the other wherever his fist could fall. Taras struggled vainly for awhile, but with a wrench of despair he got free at last. He escaped. Waleri ran after him for a step or two. The geese were wild with terror, and one of the creatures had got between the man's feet; he fell heavily, knocking his head against the stone by the cross. The boy heard a piercing cry; he saw that his enemy was on the ground, but not till he had reached the further end of the common did he turn once more to look back. The old man lay motionless by the stone, the geese pressed about him, stretching their necks with a noisy cackle. He felt tolerably safe now from his enemy, for even if it were but another trick of his meanness he could scarcely overtake him at that distance; but as he stood and gazed a wild fear fell upon the boy, his heart beating violently.

"He is dead!" The thought flashed through him as a shock of lightning, and he felt dragged back to the scene helplessly. He retraced his steps towards the cross, and stood still within ten yards or so. A cry burst from him of pure horror--he saw the blood trickling over the upturned face. He pressed together his lips, and went close--slowly, tremblingly--quite close. The man was evidently unconscious, his face corpse-like and fearful to look at; there was a deep cut on the forehead, and the purple blood flowed copiously over the distorted face, trickling to the ground.

The boy stood still with labouring breath, as though spellbound. Horror and disgust, joy, scorn, revenge, and yet again compassion, went through him, the good rising uppermost in the great conflict that shook his soul. He thought of his mother, and bending down to the water he bathed the forehead of the unconscious man. The blood kept flowing. He tore off the sleeve of his shirt, and, making a bandage, pressed it upon the wound. Waleri groaned, but did not open his eyes. "He is dying!" thought Taras, but strove as best he could to stop the bleeding, crying for help at the same time with all his might.

A young peasant, the son-in-law of the village judge, riding by at some distance, heard his calling--the wind lengthening out the sound. He came dashing up, and what he saw might well fill him with surprise. "And you, Taras--you trying to save him!" he cried, when the boy had told his story simply and truthfully. It was more than he could understand. But he turned to the sufferer, sending Taras to the village for assistance. The boy returned with the judge himself, together with Waleri's son and some of his servants.

They took up the wounded man and carried him to his home, the judge looking at the boy repeatedly with unfeigned wonder. "Taras," he said at last, "I think if He whom they call the Christ were alive, He would just be proud of you, I do indeed! That is to say, we are told He *is* alive, and I daresay He will repay you for this!" At which the boy blushed crimson, remembering what a struggle it had cost him; he did not deserve any praise, he thought.

But from this hour the people thought well of him in the village; all were anxious to show their approval, and those that had spoken kindly of him before were quite proud of their discriminating

wisdom. Waleri recovered, continuing to hate him; but this utter ingratitude made others the more anxious to befriend him. The judge especially, henceforth, stood by the lad, giving him a place as under-servant on his own farm; and, he being looked upon as the chief authority of the village, his example told naturally. But of far more consequence than these things was the influence of that occurrence upon the inner growth of the boy. So far, he had simply believed his mother, that one must deserve kindness by being good; now he knew it by his own experience. "Yes," he said to himself, "justice is the foundation of things;" and more than ever he tried to fulfil his every duty to the utmost. But the golden opinions he gathered were his gain in a double sense; for there is no greater help toward well-doing than the knowledge that one is believed in, and all the clearer grew that fair creed within him which his mother had taught him concerning the world and its retribution. What at first had been only a sort of childish self-interest, grew to be the very backbone of his character: he could not but try and be good, just, and helpful. It could be said of him, without a shade of flattery, that no servant-lad ever had been so well behaved as he; and when his mother died, the fifteen-year-old youth had as many comforters and friends as there were people in the village. The stain on his birth even grew to be cause of praise. "Why, look you," the judge would say, "this boy is really no proper child at all; anyhow he is quite unfathered, and could be as rascally as he pleased, for there's none to cast it up to him. I might give him a box on the ear at times, but that could not make up for a father's thrashing. And, in the face of all this, this Taras is just the best boy in the village. He will be a great man one of these days, I tell you! My prophecies always come true--you will find out what stuff he is made of before you have done with him, and then please remember I said so."

And the time came when the young man gave evidence of the stuff within him, but that which brought it out was a sore trial to the brave-hearted youth. He was barely eighteen, and had come to be a ploughman on the judge's farm, when one day the Imperial constables brought an old soldier into the village, Hritzko Stankiewicz by name, a wretched creature with a worn-out body and a rotten soul. Begging and stealing, he had found his way from Italy to Galicia, where the police had picked him up, and now he was being delivered over to his own parish of Ridowa. It was Taras's father. The judge, in well-meant pity, was for concealing this from the young man, but the latter had heard the name often enough from his mother, and he went at once to the gaol where the vagabond had been located. The wretched man quaked when his son stood before him, and fearing he had come to take vengeance for his mother, the miserable coward took refuge in denial, insulting the woman he had ruined in her grave. Pale as death, and trembling, Taras went out from him, and for several days he went about the village mute and like one demented.

The following Sunday after church the men of the parish gathered beneath the linden tree in front of the village inn, after the usage of times immemorial, the day's question being what had best be done with the returned vagabond. "It seems plain," said the judge, "that we cannot keep the thieving beggar in our midst. Let us send him to Lemberg, paying for his maintenance. He won't like it; but it is a great deal more than he has deserved. It is the best device, I warrant." The men agreed. "It is," they cried, lifting their right hand in token of assent.

At this moment Taras stepped forth. His face was ghastly, as though he had risen from a sickbed. "Ye men," he cried, with choked voice, folding his hands, "pity me; listen to me!" But tears drowned what further he had to say, and he sank to his knees.

"Don't, don't!" they all cried, full of compassion, "you need not mind, we all know what a good fellow you are."

But Taras shook his head, and with a great effort stood upright among them. "I have to mind," he cried, "and in my mother's behalf I am here, speaking because she no longer can speak! He is my father though he denies it! Only him she trusted, because he was her affianced lover, and never another! If I were silent in this matter, it might be thought of her that after all she was a bad woman, and her son does not know his own father. Therefore, I say, listen to me: I do know! and as my mother's son I take it upon me to provide for my father. Do not put him into the workhouse, he cannot work. And if I take care of him, he will not be a burden to the village. For God's sake, then, have pity on me--and leave him here!"

There was a long pause of silence, and then the judge said, addressing the men: "We should be worse than hard-hearted if we refused him. But we will not be gainers thereby; the parish shall pay for Hritzko what it would cost us did we send him to Lemberg. It shall be as this good son desires; and God's blessing be upon him!"

For eight years after, the miserable wretch lived in the village. It was a time of continued suffering for Taras. Every joy of youth he renounced, striving day and night to meet the old man's exactions; and all the reward he ever had was hatred and scorn: but he never tired of his voluntary work of love. "My mother has borne more than that for me," he would say, when others praised him. "One could not have believed how good a fellow can be!" said the people of Ridowa, some adding in coarse, if real pity, "'Twere a kindness if some one killed the old beggar!" But the suggested "kindness" came about by his own doing--he drank himself to death. At the age of six-and-twenty Taras was free.

"Now you must get yourself into a snug farm by marriage," advised the judge. "You understand your business, you are a well-favoured fellow, and, concerning your character, my Lord Golochowski himself might say to you: 'Here is my daughter, Taras, and if you take her it will be an honour to the family!' There is that buxom Marinia, for instance, the sexton's girl; or

that pretty creature, Kasia----"

But Taras shook his head, and his blue eyes looked gloomy. "Life here has gone too hard with me," he said, "for me to seek happiness in this place! A thousand thanks for all your kindness; but go I must!" And they could not get him to change his mind; he looked about for a situation elsewhere.

Two places offered--the one with the peasant, Iwan Woronka, at Zulawce, the brother of Judge Stephen; the other with a parish priest on the frontier. Pay and work in both places was the same. He would be head-servant in both, and pretty independent; the latter for the same sad reason--that both the peasant and the priest were given to drink. Nor could he come to any decision in the matter by a personal inspection of the farms, for really there was no preference either way. So he resolved to submit his fate to that most innocent kind of guidance which, with those people, decides many a step in life. He would take the priest's offer if it rained on the following Sunday, and he would go to Iwan if it were fine. But the day of his fate poured such floods of sunshine about him that doubt there could be none, and he went to Zulawce.

It was no easy beginning for the stranger. The people laughed at him freely, his garb and his ways differing so entirely from their own; they even called him a coward because he carried no arms and spoke respectfully of Count Borecki as the lord of the manor. The fact was that Taras just continued to be the man he had always been, taking their sneers quietly, and the management of the farm entrusted to him was his only care. Iwan Woronka was old and enfeebled, his tottering steps carrying him a little way only, to the village inn, his constant resort. It was natural, therefore, that the farm had been doing badly. His only son had died, and Anusia, his daughter, had striven vainly to save the property from ruin. She blessed the day when the new head-servant took matters in hand, if no one else did; for not many weeks passed before the traces of his honest diligence grew apparent everywhere. "He understands his business," even Iwan must own, though over his tipple he kept muttering that the sneaking stranger was too much for him. But that Taras was neither a coward nor a sneak all the village soon had proof of, when on a bear hunt, with not a little danger to himself, he saved the old judge's life, killing a maddened brute by a splendid shot in close encounter. This and his evident ability in the fulfilment of his duties gained him most hearts before long. "You are a good fellow, Podolian," the people would say; and not a year had passed before they swore behind his back that there was no mistake about his being a real acquisition to the village.

Anusia said nothing. She was a handsome girl of the true Huzul type, tall, shapely, lissom, with dark, fiery eyes. High-spirited and passionate in all things, her partiality for the silent stranger made her shy and diffident. She went out of his way, addressing him only when business required. He saw it, could not understand, and felt sad. Now, strange to say--at least it took him by surprise--by reason of this very sadness he discovered that Anusia was pleasant to behold. It quite startled him, and it made him shy in his turn when he had to speak to her. But one day, riding about the farm, he without any palpable reason caught himself whispering her name. That was more startling still, and he felt inclined to box his own ears, calling himself a fool for his pains. "You idiot!" he said, "your master's daughter, and she hating you moreover!" And having mused awhile, he added philosophically--"Love is only a sort of feeling for folk that have nothing to do. Some drink by way of a pastime, and some fall in love." He really believed it; his life had been so sunless hitherto, that no flower for him could grow.

Well, love may be a sort of feeling, but Taras found that he could do nothing but just give in. Then it happened, one bright spring morning, that he was walking on a narrow footpath over the sprouting cornfields, Anusia coming along from the other end.

"How shall I turn aside?" they both thought; et neither quite liked to strike off through the budding grain.

"'Twere a pity to trample upon the growing blades," murmured he, and proceeded slowly.

"It is father's cornfield," whispered she, and her feet carried her toward him.

Presently they came to a standstill, face to face.

"Why don't you move out of my way?" she said, angrily.

He felt taken aback, and was silent.

"I have been looking over the fields--the wheat by the river might be better," continued the damsel.

"It might," owned he, "but it is not my fault."

"Is it mine?" cried she.

"No, the field was flooded."

"That is your excuse!" retorted the maiden. "I think the seed was bad. You are growing careless!"

"Oh!" said he, standing erect, "I can look for another place, if that is all." He quite trembled. "I believe I hate her," he said to himself.

"Yes, go! go!" she cried, her bosom heaving, and the hot tears starting to her eyes. Another moment, and they had caught one another, heart to heart and lip to lip. How it could happen so quickly they never knew. But the occurrence is not supposed to be unprecedented in the history of this planet.

It was a happy hour amid the sun-flooded fields. They both believed they had to make up for no end of past unkindness. But, being sensible, they soon took a matter-of-fact view.

"You will just have to marry me, now," said Anusia; "it is the one thing to be done. I will at once tell my father."

And so she did; but Iwan Woronka unfortunately did not consider her marrying his head-servant the one thing to be done. She was his only child and his heiress to boot, and he had long decided she should marry his nephew Harasim, Judge Stephen's son--a young man who might have been well enough but for his repellent countenance and his love for drink. But Iwan argued, "Good looks are no merit, and drinking no harm;" and therewith he turned Taras off his farm.

The poor fellow went his way without venturing to say good-bye to Anusia, or letting her know where he could be heard of. It cost him a hard battle with himself; but he knew the girl's passionate temper, and he wanted to act honestly by his master. But the victory was not thus easily got.

It was some two months later, a splendid summer night. The moon was weaving her mellow charm about the heathlands, lighting up the old tin-plated tower of the castle at Hankowce with a mysterious light, till it sparkled and shone like a silver column. It was the abode of Baron Alfred Zborowski, and Taras had found service there as coachman and groom. He did not sleep in the stables at this time of the year, but on the open heath, where the remains of a watchfire glowed like a heap of gold amid the silvery sheen. A number of horses were at large about him.

The night was pleasantly cool, but the poor fellow had a terrible burning at the heart as he lay wakeful by the glowing embers, thinking of her who was far away. There was a sound of hoofs suddenly breaking upon the night, and a figure on horseback appeared with long hair streaming on the wind. "Good heavens!" cried the young man trembling; "is it you, Anusia?"

"Taras!" was the answer, and no more.

She glided from her horse, and his arms were about her.

"Here I am, and here I shall stay," she said at last. "I have scarcely left the saddle since yesterday. It was Jacek, the fiddler, that told me where I should find you. I shall not return to my father--not without you. And if you will not go back with me you must just keep me here. I cannot live without you, and I will not--do you hear? I will not! I want to be happy!"

She talked madly--laughing, crying on his neck. And then she slid to the ground, clasping his knees. But he stood trembling. He felt as though he were surrounded by a flood of waters, the ground being taken from under his feet. His fingers closed convulsively, till the nails entered the quick--he shut his eyes and set his teeth. Thus he stood silent, but breathing heavily, and then a shiver went through him; he opened his eyes and lifted up the girl at his feet. "Anusia," he said, gently but firmly, "I love you more than I love myself! and therefore I say I shall take you back tomorrow as far as the Pruth, where we can see your father's house, and then I shall leave you. But till then"--he drew a deep breath, and continued with sinking voice, "till then you must stay with an old widow I know in this village. I will show you the way now; she will see to your wants."

The girl gazed at him helplessly, passing her hand across her forehead once, twice; and then she groaned, "It is beyond me--do you despise me?--turn me from you?"

"No!" he cried; "but I will not drag you down to misery and disgrace. If you stayed here, Anusia, you could only be a servant-girl in the village where I work. We should suffer--but that is nothing! Marry one another we cannot; not while your father lives, for the Church requires his consent. You could only be my--my----. Anusia, I dare not!"

Whereupon she drew herself tip proudly, looking him full in the face. "I am a girl of unblemished name," she said. "If I am satisfied to be near you----"

"You! you!" he gasped, "what do you know about it? You are an honest girl! But I--good God, my mother----. Go! go!" And there was a cry of despair; then he recovered himself "God help me, Anusia, it must be. The woman that will take care of you now lives next door to the church, the old sexton's widow, Anna Paulicz--this way!"

The girl probably but half understood him. As in a dream she moved toward her horse, seized the bridle, and turned back to Taras mechanically.

She stood before him. Her face was white as death; she opened her colourless lips once, twice, as though to speak, but sound there was none. At last, with an effort, a hoarse whisper broke

from her, "I hate you!"

"Anusia!" he cried, staggering. But answer there was none--the thundering footfall of a horse only dying away in the night.

Harvest had come and the harvest-home. The Jewish fiddlers played their merry tunes in the courtyard of the castle at Hankowce, and far into the evening continued the dancing and jumping and huzzaing of the reapers. The baron and his coachman were perhaps the only two of all the village who took no pleasure in the revelry--the one because he had to provide the schnaps and mead that were being consumed, the other because his heart was nowise attuned to it.

Dreary weeks had passed since that impassioned meeting on the heath, but the girl's parting words kept ringing in poor Taras's ear. "It is all at an end," he said, "and no use in worrying." But he kept worrying, and that she should hate him was an undying grief to his heart. It was little comfort that he could say to himself, "You have done well, Taras; it is better to be unhappy than to be a villain."

Comfort? nay, there was none! for what self-conscious approval could lessen the wild longings, the deep grief of his love? And so he went his way sadly, doing his duty and feeling more lonely than ever. He did not grudge others their merry-heartedness, but the noisy expression of it hurt him. For this reason he kept aloof on that day, busying himself about his horses, plaiting their manes with coloured ribands, but anxious to take no personal part in the feast. But the shouts of delight would reach him, clashing sorely with his sorrowing heart. Then the poor fellow shut the stables, and, going up to his favourite horse, a fine chestnut, he pressed his forehead against the creature's neck, sobbing like a forsaken child.

He was yet standing in this position when a well-known voice reached his ear--a man's voice, but it sent the blood to his face. Could he be dreaming? but no, there it was again, and a ponderous knocking against the door, which he had locked. He made haste to open--it was Stephen Woronka, the judge.

Taras was unable to speak, and the old man on his part could only nod. He looked mournful. "Come!" he said, after a brief pause that seemed filled with pain.

"Where to?" faltered Taras.

The judge appeared to consider explanation needless. "I have already spoken with your master; he allows you to go on the spot. Your things can come after you. My horses are ready to start."

"I cannot," murmured Taras, turning a step aside.

Old Stephen nodded, as though this were just the answer he expected. "But you must," he said, "we cannot let the girl die, Iwan and me. It is no light thing for us, to let her marry you, for you have just nothing--a poor stranger--and," he added, with a sigh, "my Harasim might be saved by a good wife. However, we have no choice now and neither have you!"

"Then she is ill?" shrieked Taras.

"Yes--very; come at once." And such was Stephen's hurry that he barely allowed Taras to take his leave of the baron. The judge drove, and so little he spared his horses, that the vehicle shot along the moon-lit roads like a thing demented.

"Let me take the reins," said Taras, after a while.

"No!" returned the judge sharply, adding more gently, as though in excuse: "Anxiety would kill me if I were at leisure."

"Then she is dying!" groaned the young man in despair.

"The Lord knows!" replied old Stephen huskily. "We can but do our duty in fetching you. Though she will not see you, she says, raving continually that she will kill you or kill herself if ever you come near her.... What is it that took place between you?" he cried, raising his voice suddenly and turning a menacing countenance upon Taras.

"That I must not tell," returned the latter firmly.

The judge gazed at him angrily, but nodded again, "I am a fool to ask you," he murmured. "You have either been a great villain to her, or--or--just very good.... Whatever it was, it is between you two, and you must settle it with her."

Nothing more was spoken that night. In the early morning, when the horses were having a most needful rest, they only exchanged some indifferent remarks. And starting once more, they hastened towards the purple hills, as fast as the panting creatures could carry them. But it was evening before they crossed the Pruth and approached the village. The air was sultry; clouds hung low in the heavens, hiding the moon.

The judge pulled up before they reached Iwan's farm. Taras dismounted. "I thank you!" he cried, seeking to grasp the old man's hand.

But Stephen withdrew it, shaking his head. "I cannot be wroth with you," he said, "but there are things that go hard with a man.... You don't owe me any thanks, however. I have now repaid you for that shot of yours which saved my life. We are quits."

"But I shall thank you while I live," cried Taras, walking away quickly in the direction of Iwan's farm. He stood by the door with bated breath; it was opened for him before he could put his hand on the latch, by Iwan Woronka.

"She--she is alive?" faltered Taras.

"Yes, but only that. Step in softly, she knows nothing of your coming."

He did step in softly, but his heart laboured wildly. The room was lit with a subdued light, and he could barely distinguish the figure of the stricken girl.

"Who is coming?" she cried, with trembling accents. "Who is it?" once more, with awe-burdened voice.

But answer she needed none. A terrible cry burst from her, and darting like a wraith from her couch she flew past him, vanishing in the night.

He followed her; but the hiding darkness without was such that he could scarcely keep in sight the white glimmer of her figure, although she was but a few yards ahead of him, on her way to the river. His hair stood on end when he knew the direction she took, and his every limb felt paralysed. It was but a few seconds, but she gained on him, and he saw he could not reach her in time.

"For God's sake, stop!" he cried, with the voice of horror; "you shall never see me again."

But it was too late. He saw the white figure sink, and rise again mid-stream. He was in after her, and reaching her, caught her by a tress of her floating hair. She struggled violently to free herself from his hand, and it could only have been the maddest despair that gave her the power. But he kept fast his hold--it was all he could do; and thus they were carried awhile, side by side, on the bosom of the icy mountain stream. Taras felt his grasp grow weaker in his two-fold struggle against the river and against the girl. A fearful picture flashed through his brain; he saw himself and his loved one two corpses washed ashore, old Stephen bending over them in sorrow. The pangs of death seemed upon him, but he held fast the tress of hair, and with his arm strove to keep himself and her afloat.

She yielded at last, her body floating as he pulled her; the power of life seemed to have left her, and with a mighty effort he brought her to land.

They were fearful days that followed. A burning fever ran its course in the girl's body, but the sickness of her soul seemed more devouring still. "I am dying--dying for shame!" she kept crying. "I love him--I hate him!" But as the fever spent itself, the struggle of her heart grew weaker. And at last she lay still, weary unto death, but saved, and her mind was clear. She wept blessed tears, and suffered him to touch her.

She suffered it, but did not return his caresses. "Taras!" she sobbed, "do you despise me?"

"Despise you? Good God!" he cried, covering her hand with kisses.

"Ah, yes--but you might--you ought!" she wept. "No only, because---," a burning blush overspread her pallor. "But do you know why I struggled so desperately when your hand was upon me in the river? I knew you would hold fast, and I wanted to drag you down with me in death. Can you forgive it?"

"Yes!" he cried, and his face shone.

"As sure as you wish your mother to be at peace in her grave?"

"Yes, Anusia!" he cried again.

"Then I may kiss you," she said, twining her arms about him.

That was their troth plight; and soon after they were married.

Thus the stranger had become the owner of the largest farm but one in the village. Yet no one grudged him his good fortune; even Harasim appeared to have submitted to his fate. And but rarely was there an attempt at making fun of his garb; he had acquired their mode of address, saying "thou" to young and old, but he could not be prevailed upon to adopt the Huzul's dress. But no one disliked him for it, the people had ample proof apart from this how faithfully he had adopted the interests of his new home, and even if they did not openly confess as much to themselves it was very evident he was benefiting them largely. Without in the least thrusting himself upon them, or pushing his views, this blue-eyed, quiet stranger in the course of a few

years had become the most influential man, even a reformer of the parish; in the first place because of his ever helpful goodness, in the second place because of the rare wisdom governing his every act.

But it was not without a struggle with himself that he came to feel at home in his adopted village; everything here seemed strange at first, and some things unheard of--their dress, their speech, their mode of life, their food, the way they reared the cattle and tilled their fields; nay, every domestic arrangement. A farmer should be able to move his limbs freely; but these men did their ploughing and threshing in tight-fitting breeches, in doublets that were the veriest straight-waistcoats; and the breeches, moreover, were scarlet--perhaps to delight the bulls they ploughed with. They wore their hair flowing, and their beards were long; and no man of them was ever seen without his array of arms. It quite frightened him to see them go tending the cattle with the gun on their backs, or discourse with a next-door neighbour axe in hand. "What on earth is this dangerous nonsense for, with a passionate, easily-roused people?" Taras would ask himself. And that such was their temper was shown by their very speech. In the lowlands people, as a rule, speak measuredly, in well-ordered sentences; but these men flung their notions at each other as though every statement must leave a bump or cut upon the other's head.

Nor was this all: their ways in some things appeared to him past conception. They seemed like grown children for carelessness, sending their sheep or cattle into the mountains miles away, with only a lad or two to mind them--was it in consideration of the prowling wolf and bear? These visitors, indeed, were not slow in carrying off what pleased them, whilst others of the scared cattle strayed into hopeless wilds or came to grief in some rocky solitude. Less startling than this manner of cattle-keeping was their agriculture; yet even this raised Taras's wonder. Their ploughs were peculiar, and their seasons of sowing, harvesting, threshing, all differed from his every experience.

A man of poorer quality would simply have shrugged his shoulders, saying it was no concern of his. But Taras began to consider and to compare, and it was quite a relief to his mind--nay, a joy to his heart--to discover that, though much with them was peculiar, his new neighbours must not just be looked down upon as fools. He understood that the people of Zulawce had a good reason for setting about their various field labours at other times than did the farmers of the plain. It was because their seasons differed. And he perceived that the Podolian plough, broad and shovel-like, was fit for the rich, soft earth of the lowlands, but not for the stony, upland soil of Zulawce. The people there, then, were right in substituting a strong, digging wedge of a ploughshare, being unreasonable only in this--that they would use this same plough for their low-lying fields by the Pruth, where the earth was rich and yielding. It was much the same with their manner of feeding. The Podolians have rye and beef; the Huzuls up in their mountain haunts must be satisfied with oats and sheep. Now the people of Zulawce just followed the Huzuls' example, although they reared cattle, and could grow both wheat and rye. And, again, their clothing was ill-adapted to their needs, and their carrying arms uncalled-for and foolish, but it was neither more nor less with them than simply preserving the habit of their upland neighbours. The Huzul must carry his gun, for his life is a constant warfare with bears or bandits. Now, at Zulawce things went more peaceably, but the belligerent habit remained. This mixture of the reasonable and unreasonable was most apparent in their ways with the cattle. It was natural that they should keep their live stock on the hills, utilising the land round about their village to its utmost agricultural possibilities; but it was stupidly careless to provide neither fold nor capable herdsmen. The Huzuls had no choice but to leave their flocks at large for want of hands, an excuse which could not be pleaded at Zulawce.

Now Taras was fully aware that these things could, and must, be mended, but he also knew it would be hopeless to attempt convincing his new neighbours of anything by the power of speech. On the contrary, advice, however excellent, which cast a slur on their habits would be the surest means of rousing both their anger and their opposition. So he strove to teach them by the force of example, letting his fields be a sort of model farm in their midst. And his strongest ally in this silent labour of love was their own self-interest waking a desire of emulating his gain. They watched him in the spring, they came to borrow his plough in the autumn, and by the next season they had provided themselves with a ploughshare like his. It was the same with other things. They began to perceive it might be an advantage to see to the safety of their grazing cattle, without much inquiring into their own reasons for adopting a plan they had neglected or despised so far. And Taras was the very last to remind them that they owed him any thanks, it being to this man the fairest of rewards that his silent endeavour should bear fruit.

But the recompense he coveted was not his in all things; he would find himself baffled, yet he renewed his quiet conflict unwearyingly, seeking to overcome that savage spirit of contention, that love of avenging themselves, prevailing with the men of Zulawce. If two had cause of quarrel it was a rare proof of moderation to allow the village judge a voice in the matter. And whatever the object of contest might be, a strip of land or a fowl, the stronger took possession. If the other succeeded in ousting him, or if the judge managed to arbitrate, it was well; if not, the stronger just kept his booty, and that, too, was considered well. As for appealing to law, it appeared out of the question; the far-off Emperor was welcome to his crown, but that any appointed authority in his name should dispense justice at Colomea they simply ignored. They would, indeed, have thought it an insult to have to do with any magistrate--their very thieves were too good for that; they would thrash the rascals and let them go. And as for their relations with their count, it was a natural state of warfare, if not with him personally, then with his steward or mandatar, old Gonta;

and shouts, of victory filled the air whenever they succeeded in wresting from him the smallest tittle of his claims. That any mandatar ever should attempt to worst them they had little fear, for did they not carry axe and gun? But this state of things seemed utterly horrible to Taras, whose course of life had taught him to look upon Justice as the lode-star and centre of all things. He could not understand these men, till he perceived that concerning their personal character also he must seek explanation in the fact that they clung to the peculiarities of the mountain tribe, be it in virtue or in vice.

The more he grew acquainted with the upland forest, and the more he saw of the Huzuls, the better he learned to judge of his neighbours in the village. Neither wealth, nor extreme poverty are known in those pine-covered haunts; envy, therefore, in these solitudes has no power to separate the hearts of men. Life goes hard with each and all alike--privation, the inclemency of the weather, the wild beast, being the common foes of all. The individual man makes a mark only in so far as he has power to overcome these foes; hence a feeling of equality and oneness, based upon the similarity of all. And whereas the people of the lowlands once a week only, on Sundays and in their churches, are taught to look upon men as equals in the sight of God, these highlanders know of no other church but their own wide forest, in which they bow the knee to no man, if ever they bow it to Him of whom they vaguely believe that He dwelleth above. It is natural, therefore, that they know of no difference of rank in men, using the simple "thou" to each and all alike. Now the men of Zulawce were not so circumstanced; some of them were masters, and some of them were serving-men; some knew poverty and some knew wealth; but the spirit of the tribe continued with them. A little envy, a little respect for riches, had found a footing with them; but, nevertheless, a strong feeling of equality survived, and they were too proud to cringe before any man; the rich peasant was addressed as familiarly as the beggar. Their speech was rough; but the feeling whence such roughness sprang was not in itself despicable. And it was the one point in which Taras yielded his habit to theirs, adopting their ways in this, at least, that he also said "thou" to everybody, and was satisfied that from the judge to the meanest of his own farm labourers all should say "thou" to him.

But it was not merely the pride of freedom, it was that inveterate habit of avenging themselves in matters of right and wrong which had come to them from the parent tribe. The Huzul is bound to fight for himself. A man who any moment may meet some desperate outlaw in the mountain wilds must be prepared to defend himself or perish. And not merely in such cases the Huzul must be his own protector. Supposing two men far up in the mountains, a hundred or more miles away from the nearest magistrate, fall a-quarrelling over a strip of pasture-ground, shall he who is wronged appeal to law? Granted he were willing to undertake the tedious journey, it might be a year or more before some law officer could put in an appearance up there for taking evidence on the spot. Justice from her appointed centres cannot easily reach such outlying regions. But supposing even a magistrate's verdict had been obtained, what power on earth can force the loser to abide by it? The Emperor's authority?--he barely knows his name, and the far-off majesty is little enough to him--or coercion? But who is to take a body of armed constables on impossible roads to the very heart of the mountain-range, merely to make sure that a slip of pasture-ground for the feeding of a score of sheep shall belong to Sfasko and not to Wasko! Why, even if it could be done what were the gain? Sfasko, indeed, might rejoice if the servants of the law had got there, for Wasko would have the keeping of them, and Wasko must give up the contested land. But no sooner than their backs were turned, Wasko, by right of the stronger, would pay him out for it, turning Sfasko's victory to defeat. Under such circumstances, then, and because no law can be enforced there, it is natural that the children of the forest should manage their own justice, each man for himself. But to Taras it appeared a deplorable state of things that the more civilised peasants of Zulawce should also require to fight for themselves. So he set about an all but forlorn hope of reforming their minds, striving earnestly, and making little impression save on his own suffering soul. Twice he succeeded in persuading the quarrellers to submit their suit to Judge Stephen's decision, and this only because the men in question had benefited by his generous kindness and did not like to lose it. In most cases he failed entirely; the people still anxious, perhaps, of retaining his goodwill, would listen to him with some show of patience, but took matters into their own hands nevertheless, calling him an innocent lamb of the lowlands for not knowing that a bear had his paws to use them.

But for all that, these contentious creatures had found out that the "innocent lamb" was nowise wanting in manliness. They liked to take his advice on general things, and elected him to the civil eldership as years went on, which greatly added to his influence; and with might and main he continued to strive for love of peace in the parish. Somehow or other, the men by degrees did not fly to arms quite so readily, perceiving that in most cases they did better to submit to Judge Stephen, abiding by his decision, or rather by that of Taras; for the judge, himself prone to wrath, would pass them over to the younger man in order to save his own temper.

"You have introduced this nonsense here," he would say; "it is meet, therefore, you should have the bother of it. 'Twere easier to settle if they had come to blows first."

But Taras was only too glad to be thus "bothered," sparing neither time, nor trouble, nor patience; and at such cost it was given him more and more to convince the contending parties of the justness of his judgments.

But so far he had succeeded only in little things. In matters of more importance he was unable to prevent the shedding of blood--as, for instance, when he that went by the name of Red

Schymko fell out with his brother Waleri concerning the right of pasturage on a certain field. That was considered a great matter; and not till Schymko had been maimed by a blow from Waleri's axe, in return for which he lodged a bullet in his brother's thigh, did they permit the judge and elders to have any voice in the matter. Judge Stephen and his coadjutors were most anxious to pass righteous judgment, examining matters carefully; but as their verdict could not otherwise than be in favour of the said Waleri, it resulted in Schymko's marching his armed labourers to the contested field by way of maintaining his claim. And the matter ended in Waleri's yielding, leaving Red Schymko in possession after all.

It was concerning this business that Taras very nearly lost his eldership by reason of a word of sensible advice. It was just before the yearly election, when Schymko, with his labourers, had taken possession of the field, that Taras said to him, "If you will not abide by the judge's verdict, you can but appeal to the magistrates of the district." "Go to law!" roared Schymko. "Go to law!" echoed the people, as though Taras had advised the direst folly ever heard of. But they took it seriously, and when, a few days later, it was a question of readmitting him to the eldership, the general opinion was to the effect that being honest and good was a recommendation certainly, but an elder had need to be no fool! He was chosen, nevertheless; but even his friend Simeon, to whose strenuous exertions his re-election was partly due, could only say, "You see, he *is* a lowlander--how should he know any better?"

Such experiences made Taras more careful, but they could not discourage him. He saw that even at best it would take the work of a lifetime to lay a foundation of better things with these people. They must be taught in the first place that the authority of their own judge should be unquestioned. He took great care never again to hint at the existence of law-courts, but to educate them up to the lesser point. He gained ground, though very slowly. He could work for it patiently, for had not good fortune smiled on him in all things besides, making his own life pleasant at last and happy beyond many! His homestead seemed a cradle of success, and the children his wife had borne him grew like olive branches round about his table. There was not a cloud in his heavens, and every good seed he had sown was like the grain on his own fields, bearing fruit, some thirty, some sixty fold; surely this one thing for which he laboured would yet come to be added to his golden sheaf!

Returning home in the evening he would rest by the side of his faithful wife, his little boy Wassilj upon his knee, and there was no greater joy to him at such times than to glance back to his own early years and to follow with the inward eye the growth of his life's happiness--a struggling thing at first, but a strong tree now with spreading branches, beneath which he and his might safely dwell. "It is no puny seedling," he would say, looking about him with happy pride, "but even like the strong pine that strikes root the deeper for having chanced upon the hard and rocky soil where no man's favour helped to rear it, and the sun of God's justice only yielded the light towards which it grew!" And his prayer in those days was something after this fashion: "Thou righteous One in the heavens who hast given me many things, if so be that Thou wilt let me keep them, I have just nothing left to ask for but this one thing: that I might teach these people, whom I have come to look upon as my brothers, that Thy will is very beautiful because it is just. There is this foolish old priest of ours always telling them of Thy grace and never a word of Thy justice--how should they understand their duties aright!" ... For himself in those days Taras had nothing to ask for.

Such was Taras Barabola at the time when Mr. Wenceslas Hajek made his entry at Zulawce--one of the happiest and most upright of men.

CHAPTER III.

THE RIGHT WRONGED.

It is often asserted that on meeting any one for the first time a voice within will warn us of the good or evil to be the outcome of such meeting. Now Taras had no such foreboding. The new mandatar had impressed him rather favourably; but apart from this, his sense of justice would oppose Judge Stephen's disparagement of the new bailiff. "Our Count," he would say, "has come into his possessions by inheritance, just as the Emperor has got his crown: and it is God who gave them power, for there must be rulers upon earth. It is hard that we should have to yield forced labour, but such is our lot, and it were wrong of us to hate the mandatar because he looks after his master's interest in claiming that portion of our work. He is but doing his duty; let us do ours." The peasants did not gainsay him, especially as Hajek on the coming round of the harvest expected neither more nor less of them than his predecessor, Gonta, had done. The judge had gone to him misgivingly, fully determined to fight his exactions; but there was no need, and to his own surprise matters were arranged in a moment.

Not till the autumn, six months after Hajek's arrival, did a cause of conflict present itself, when the tribute of the live stock fell due, the arrangement being that on the day of St. Mary the Virgin each peasant, according to his wealth, had to bring a foal, or a calf, or a goose. Now the former steward had never exacted this tax to the day, but was willing to receive it when the cattle had increased. The judge and the elders would go to him and state when each villager might hope to bring his due, and therewith the mandatar was satisfied. In accordance with this, old Stephen, with Taras, and Simeon Pomenko, his fellow elder, repaired to the manor house, the judge making his statement.

Mr. Hajek listened quietly and blandly, and then he said, "On St. Mary's day the tribute is due; if there were any arrears I should be constrained to levy them forcibly."

"Mandatar," cried Stephen, flushing, "have a care how you interfere with old usage!"

"It is an ill-usage."

"Ill-usage to go by the times of nature?"

"You should see that you are prepared."

"I see *you* are prepared to give good advice," retorted the judge with wrathful sarcasm; "perhaps you speak from experience! In your country the cows may calve at a mandatar's pleasure, they don't do so here!"

Hajek changed colour, but not his mind. "It behoves me to watch over the Count's interests," he said, slipping away to the safety of his inner chamber.

The men went home in a state of excitement, the ill news spreading rapidly through the village. Before long all the community had gathered beneath the linden, angry speeches flying while old Stephen delivered his report. "We must stand up for the time-honoured usage," he cried; "and as to any forcible interference, let him try it! We have guns, and bullets too, thank God!"

"Urrahah!" cried the men, brandishing their weapons. One only remained quiet, one of the elders--Taras. He allowed the commotion to subside, and then he begged for the word. "It comes hard upon us I own," he said, "for it finds us unprepared! The old usage was reasonable and fair, no doubt; but whatever of hardship any change may involve, we must consider which way the right inclines--the written right I mean, and I fear in this case it will speak for the Count."

"And who has settled that right," cried Stephen, hotly, "but the Emperor's law-makers. What do they understand about cattle!"

"Little enough, no doubt," owned Taras, "but these same law-makers have also made it a matter of writ that serfdom with us is abolished, and that we peasants have rights which the Count shall not touch. If we would enjoy the law's benefits, we must put up with its hardships."

"But where shall we get foals and calves all of a sudden?"

"Well, that we must see. I can provide some, and perhaps others of the larger farmers are willing to do the same. Or I will lend the money to any respectable man of ours that may need it if he can buy his foal or calf elsewhere. This can be managed. The chief point is the right, and that must be upheld for our own sakes, even where it goes against us."

He spoke quietly, firmly, and failed not to make an impression. The men began to weigh the question more soberly, Taras's offer of assistance going a long way with the less wealthy. There was none but Judge Stephen holding out in the end. "You are sheep, all of you," he cried, "following this great lamb, and you will be shorn, I tell you!" But since the majority outvoted him even the judge had to yield.

And thus the tribute was delivered on the very day, at a heavy tax to Taras's generosity; for while many could not have made it possible without his proffered help, there were others who improved the opportunity gratuitously, since he was so willing to step into the breach. It was simply his doing, then, that by St. Mary's Day not a man was in arrears.

Mr. Hajek was prepared to own this when Taras appeared with a foal on his own behalf. "That was good of you, Podolian; I see it is you who brought them to reason," said the mandatar, adding approvingly, "I liked the look of you on our first meeting. I am glad I was not mistaken!" Whereupon Taras bowed, but his answer was anything but a humble acknowledgment of praise. "The right must be upheld," he said, solemnly.

That was in September. About a month later Hajek sent for the judge and elders, receiving them with his blandest smile. "After All Souls', and throughout the winter, you owe me eight labourers a day for forest work, do you not?" he said. "Well, then, make your arrangements and let me have a list of the men I am to expect. On the morning after All Souls' I shall look for the first eight to make their appearance."

"The forest labour certainly is due," replied the judge, "that is to say, it was; but since all the

timber has been cut, the obligation dropped. Or are we expected to make new plantations now that winter is upon us?"

"Certainly not," said Hajek, "but if the men are due to me, I may employ them as I think fit. I have sold their labour to the forester of Prinkowce."

"That is unjust!" exclaimed Stephen. "We owe forest labour to our own count, and in his own forests only!"

Mr. Wenceslas pretended not to hear, picking up his papers and preparing to retire. "So I shall look for the men on the morning after All Souls'," he said and vanished.

"There will be bloodshed if you insist," cried Stephen after him, but the mandatar was gone.

The men went their way perturbed.

"Well, Judge," said Taras, as they walked along, "this is hard. We must try and advise the people justly, but to do so we must first examine the documents in your keeping--I dare say his reverence will help us."

"Podolian!" cried Stephen, angrily, "leave us alone with your suggestions! We want no documents to be looked into. It is a glaring wrong, and if proof be needed"--he snatched at his pistol--"here it is!"

Taras mused sadly. "Will you take any bloodshed upon your conscience?" he asked quietly.

"Will your conscience answer for the wrong?" retorted the judge.

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Taras. "But in the first place there is but one just means of redress if we suffer--the authority of the appointed magistrates; and in the second place we must make sure which way the right lies--we shall find out by examining the papers."

Stephen resisted to his utmost, but as Simeon also agreed with Taras he was obliged to yield; he fetched the deeds, and the men called upon their parish priest.

Now Father Martin was an amiable man, glad to leave things alone in life--his favourite schnaps always excepted, with which he meddled freely. And he was always ready to express his views, but his opinion was apt to be that of his latest interlocutor. For both these reasons he could after all throw no great light upon the matter, which was the more to be regretted as the question left room for doubt, the information contained in the documents amounting to this only: "The men of Zulawce owe forest labour to their count."

"There you see!" cried Stephen, triumphantly, "to their count. What could be plainer--and not to the forester of Prinkowce!"

"Of course not," assented his reverence, "how could the mandatar think of selling your labour? --ridiculous!"

"Owe forest labour to their count," said Taras, meditatively. "If there is no clause to limit the place, the Count *may* be within the law if he says: 'Having no forest at Zulawce of my own now, I sell the labour which is due to me.'"

"Of course," cried the pope, "he has lost his forest, poor man, shall he lose his profit besides?--ridiculous!"

"If he has no forest, he cannot expect us to work in it," objected Stephen, doggedly.

"Naturally not," affirmed his reverence; "even a child can see that! Where is the forest you are to work in?--ridiculous!"

"There is no lack of forest at Prinkowce," said Taras.

"No, no, plenty of it," declared the pope; "why, the place is covered with woods, partly beech, partly pine. And, after all, I suppose it may be pretty equal to you whether you do the work here or----"

"All honour to your reverence," broke in the judge, angrily; "but this is just nonsense; your judgment, I fear, is awry with your schnaps."

And the amiable man adopted even this opinion, owning humbly "it was Avrumko, that miserable Jew, with his tempting supply ..."

But the men went their way none the wiser for their shepherd's willingness to solve their difficulty. Simeon upon this attempted to reason with the judge, suggesting their applying to the magistrates for decision. It was not without a real struggle with himself that old Stephen at last gave in.

"To stand up for his right, and knock down the man who wrongs him, this is the true Huzul

way," he cried, passionately, "but if you will try the law, like a coward, see what you get by it."

But here Taras held out. "No man can appeal to the law," he said, "but he who is sure of his right. I am not! I cannot tell whether the right in this case is on our side or not. And, therefore--God forgive me if it is wrong, but I cannot otherwise--I shall propose to the people to yield the forest labour at Prinkowce."

"You shall not, brother!" cried Simeon, urgently. "You shall not! Remember that you are no longer a man of the lowlands. We men of Zulawce love not to bend our necks."

Taras flushed. "Your taunt is not altogether just," he said, gently, yet firmly. "True, we of Podolia are more peace-loving, even more humble than you. It is because we have borne the yoke. But the feeling of right and wrong is as strong with us as with most men, perhaps all the stronger for the wrong we have suffered. You determine between right and wrong with your reason only, we feel it with the heart. And the right is very sacred to us."

"Then why not stand up for it now?"

"I would if I saw it. But my understanding is at a loss, and the voice of my heart is silent. Therefore I cannot appeal to a decision by law, but must counsel a giving in."

And so he did on the following Sunday, when the community assembled beneath the linden. The men listened to him in silence, none dissenting nor assenting. After him Simeon arose to propound his views; but when the word "magistrate" had fallen from his lips their scornful shouting interrupted him. "No lawsuit for us!" cried the men of Zulawce. At this point the judge made up his mind to come forward with his opinion, battling down his resentment at having been defeated before. Some applauded, but most shook their heads. "Taras," they cried, "tell us yet again *why* you would have us give in." He repeated his reasons slowly and distinctly. Again there was silence. It appeared uncertain what decision the men would arrive at.

The judge prepared to put the question to the vote. "Men of Zulawce," he said, "it is your first duty to reject anything that must be to the disadvantage of the community. Whoever of you agrees with Taras, let him lift his hand." The majority did so. The judge did not believe his eyes. This result was indeed surprising; not only had these men voted against their own interest, but they denied the very character they bore. The fact was that Taras's opinion had come to be gospel truth to the village ever since his stepping so generously into the breach on St. Mary's Day.

The old judge positively shed tears of vexation when he had to pass the resolution arrived at, and at once declared his intention to retire from office. It was the men's united entreaty only that prevailed with him not to do so; but as for that rascally mandatar, he would not cross his threshold again, he swore.

For this reason it fell to Taras to arrange with Mr. Wenceslas, and give him a list of the men. Hajek made it an opportunity of patting Taras on the back, saying approvingly, "Once again you have shown yourself a capital subject." But this time Taras forbore bowing. He retreated a step, fixing the mandatar with a look, and said, slowly, "We are keeping our conscience clean; I hope you can say as much for yourself, sir."

Winter wore on, and the forest labour at Prinkowce was yielded quietly day after day; but the good understanding between old Stephen and Taras seemed at an end. Their relations had steadily improved in those eight years, since Taras had lived in the village as the husband of Anusia. The old man by degrees had conquered his offended pride and the disappointment of his dearest wishes. He had even learned to entertain as warm a regard for the stranger as did most of the villagers. But his friendship yielded to a renewed feeling of coldness after that public voting. He never spoke to him now except on matters of business, and then in the most cutting way he could command; it seemed hopeless to attempt a reconciliation. "Taras is a good man," he would say, "and I myself am answerable for his being among us. But he is wrong if he expects us, bears as we are, to be as lamb-like as he is--very wrong, for it is against our nature."

And the old man stuck to his opinion. Taras actually was not invited when, about the middle of December, the men of Zulawce, headed by their old judge, went hunting the bear in order to procure their Christmas dinners. "Either he or I," Stephen had said, and Taras was excluded. That hunting expedition is a regular high day and festival with the Huzuls, in spite of, or rather on account of the danger it involves. It generally spreads over three days, but on the present occasion the men returned on the second day, sad and silent. They brought two giant bears with them, it is true, but also a dying man. Judge Stephen, with his wonted impetuosity, had pushed ahead too recklessly, his gun had missed fire, and an infuriated brute had grappled with him. The bear was shot, but not till the brave old man had received his death wound in the bear's embrace, and it was a question whether he would reach the village alive. "Make haste," he was heard moaning, as they carried him home; "I must not die on the road; I have yet a duty to perform in the village."

They knew not what he meant, but understood when he begged them to stop before the house of Taras, who came rushing from his door, and sank to his knees, sobbing.

"Weep not," whispered the dying man; "but listen to me. You once saved my life, you are the

most upright man in the village, you have been the best of husbands to my brother's child, and yet I have been wroth with you. Not because you supplanted my hopes, I swear it; but because I have at heart the welfare of this village. In this sacred cause I now would speak to you. You will be made judge when I am gone--I cannot hinder it, or indeed I would! Not because I hate you, but for love of the village, and, ay, for your own sake, Taras! For it must end ill if the judge, the leader of all, is of another caste than the men he rules. It cannot be helped now. They will choose you, and you will accept. But let me tell you one thing--be sure that among men in this world it is exactly the same as with the beasts of the forest. The stronger will eat up the weaker, the evil one will destroy him that is good, the only question being that of strength. Whoever cannot fight for himself is lost.... But you--you *will* not understand--you cannot believe it! I must be satisfied with that which you can understand, and one thing you can promise. Hold fast by our rights; guard them against the oppressor, and suffer not that the necks of free men be bowed to the yoke. Give me your word that you will yield up peace rather than the right, if it must be fought for."

He lifted his hand with a great effort, and Taras clasped it in his own.

"It is well," said the dying man. "You will keep your word."

With a burst of wailing they earned the dead judge into his house. On his face rested an expression of great assurance, born of the good faith in which he had died. For never has promise been kept more truly than that which was pledged to him as the shadows fell.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING UP THE BATTLE.

Spring had returned upon the mountains. Some of the higher summits, it is true, still wore their crown of snow, glittering now in the sunshine of April; but the little village gardens of Zulawce were looking bright with early flowers, and on the slope toward Prinkowce the graveyard had burst into bloom where they had laid Judge Stephen to his rest. The spot was carefully tended, and marked with a well-wrought stone cross, as Taras had ordered, who was judge in his stead; for Harasim, Stephen's only son, had not troubled himself about it: drink was doing its work with him, and if his farm was kept in tolerable order it was due simply to the care of his cousins, Anusia and her husband. Taras had taken this burden also upon himself, though life pressed heavily on his shoulders; for it grew more evident to him, day after day, that it was no light thing to be judge of Zulawce while Wenceslas Hajek, as Count Borecki's land steward, had power in the village. Again and again the dying speech of Stephen rang in his ears.

As for the mandatar, he had rejoiced on learning that Taras had succeeded the old judge; this gentle Podolian, who had always been on the yielding side, seemed the very man for his plans. His fury naturally was all the greater on discovering his mistake. The 'capital subject' certainly never lost his temper or threatened violence, but every unfair demand he opposed with an inflexible "No," which was all the more effective for being given calmly, almost humbly, and fully substantiated with good reasons. On one occasion, however, his imperturbation was in imminent danger; Hajek had patted him on the shoulder, saying, with a knowing wink: "Well, my good fellow, suppose you allow me two labourers more; it shall not be your loss." Taras upon this gave the rascal a look which took the colour out of his face, and made him turn back a step, trembling.

From that hour there seemed enmity between the two, and the more the one strove to encroach, the more the other met him with refusal. But while Taras succeeded in maintaining a stern calm, the mandatar again and again was seen foaming with rage. It was so upon a certain occasion early in April, and for a trivial cause. Hajek was making a plantation, and wanted the villagers to allow him a quantity of young trees from their forest.

"We are not bound to yield that," said Taras, quietly.

The mandatar paced his floor, apparently beyond himself; but a discriminating observer might have doubted the sincerity of his rage.

"Don't force me to take high measures," he roared. "Why should you refuse me a few wretched saplings? I shall just take them, if you hold out."

"You will do no such thing," returned Taras, as quietly as before.

"Do you think I am afraid of your guns and axes?" Hajek's words rose to a shriek, as though he were half-suffocated with passion, but his eye was fixed on the peasant's face with a watchful glance.

"No," said the latter, "I am thinking that there are magistrates in the district. We shall never have recourse to violence, even if you should make the beginning."

"This is palaver."

"I mean what I say," said Taras, drawing himself up proudly. "While I am judge here, the men of Zulawce shall not take the law into their own hands on whatever provocation.... But why speak of such things? The trees you cannot have, so let me take my leave, sir."

"Go!" growled the mandatar, but a queer light transformed his features no sooner than Taras's back was turned. "That is useful to know," he said to himself with an approving smile. "This man is quite a jewel of a judge.... No, there is no need to be wroth with you, my good Taras! So, after all, my first impression of you was the right one!... Old Stephen could never have had a better successor!"

But Taras, the judge, went home with a heavy heart. He had no thanks for his battling, save in his own conscience; the men of Zulawce had scarcely a word of acknowledgment. On the contrary, they considered him far too yielding on many points; and, as they viewed matters, there was truth in their charge. Severin Gonta and the late Count, for the sake of peace, had not made good every claim to the very letter; but Hajek demanded every tittle that was his by right of institution, granting not an hour of respite, and foregoing not a peck of wheat; and Taras as a matter of duty never opposed him in this. It was quite correct, then, if the people said that the new judge insisted on their yielding all dues far more strictly than any of his predecessors ever had done. Indeed, it was only the love and respect he had won for himself in the village that kept under any real distrust or open accusation. For he was all alone in his work, no one helped him by explaining things to the people, not even that shepherd of his flock whose duty it fairly might have been. The reverend Martin sat on his glebe as on an isle of content, all because of that strange man, Avrumko, who kept supplying him so freely; and any sympathy he might have given was thus drowned.

But Taras continued bravely and hopefully, comforting his wife when her courage failed. "The right must conquer," he would tell her; "and for the rest, have we not an Emperor at Vienna, and God above?"

"But Vienna is far, and God in heaven seems further," said she, disheartened.

"Not so far," cried he, "but that both will hear us if we must call for redress. But things will not come to such a pass; even a mandatar will scarcely dare to subvert the right and do violence."

He was mistaken. Hajek dared both. It was about a month after that conversation concerning the trees. Taras in the early morning was in his yard, giving orders to his two servants, Sefko and Jemilian, concerning the sowing of the wheat, when he was startled by a dull report, which quivered through the air, a second and a third clap succeeding.

"Gunshots!" he gasped.

"Some one out hunting," said Sefko.

"No!" cried Jemilian; "it is near the river. Could it be 'Green Giorgi' with his band?" referring to a notorious outlaw of those days, a deserter, George Czumaka by name, who wore a green jerkin.

"No!" cried Taras, in his turn, and making for the road. "In broad daylight he would never dare.... What has happened?" he interrupted himself, changing colour. A young farm labourer, Wassilj Soklewicz, came dashing along wild with terror.

"Help! help!" he shrieked. His clothes were torn, and he looked white as death.

"What is it?" repeated Taras, seizing him by the arm.

"Help!" groaned the poor fellow. "They have just killed my brother Dimitri!"

"Where? Who?"

"The mandatar ... on the parish field!" said Wassilj; continuing brokenly: "We had gone there early this morning, my brother and I, together with the two sons of Dubko, to work on the field as you told us. We had taken our guns with us, intending to have a shot in the afternoon. We had just put the oxen to the ploughs when the mandatar arrived with a number of men, all armed. 'Get ye gone,' he cried; 'you are trespassing on the Count's property.'"

"'Begone yourselves!' returned my brother Dimitri, seizing hold of his gun, which he had laid down, we doing likewise. 'This field has been parish ground time out of mind; I shall shoot any one that says the contrary.'"

"The mandatar at this fell back, but urged on his men from behind, and they attacked us with guns and scythes. We sent our bullets amongst them, and the foremost of the party, Red Hritzko, turned a somersault and lay still on his face. One of us had hit him. But they also fired their guns, and my brother fell, shot through the heart!... They were too many for us, and they turned upon

as with their butt ends. But we got away!..."

The poor youth told his tale amid gasps and sobs, and before he had finished a crowd of villagers had gathered. From their houses, from their fields round about, the men came running, gathering about their judge. Most were fully armed, and all were wildly excited; for the parish field is sacred ground with every Slavonic community; he who dares touch it is not merely an offender against their property, but against their very affections; it is all but sacrilege in the eyes of these men.

Taras also felt his soul upheave, but he conquered his wrath, knowing the people. "If I lose self-possession," he said to himself, "blood will flow in streams to-day!" So he faced the men, who were for pressing on to the scene of the outrage. "Stop!" he cried, "we shall go in a body! Call the elders and the rest of the men."

The command was scarcely needed, for they were coming, every man of them, and the wives and the children. Wrathful cries filled the air, the women wailed, and children shrieked with an unknown fear. The mother of the young man who had been shot, a widow named Xenia, came rushing along; she had torn the kerchief from her head, and her grey hair fell in tangled masses round her grief-filled face. "Avenge my child!" she implored the judge, clasping his knees.

He lifted her, speaking to her gently; and turning to Simeon and his fellow-elder he ordered them to let the men fall in. "The heads of families only," he said; "let the women and young men stay here!"

"Stay here!" shrieked Xenia.

"Yes, why?" shouted the excited people. "Let every one follow who is able to lift a gun."

"My orders shall be obeyed," cried Taras, drawing himself up in their midst. "I pledge my head that I shall do my duty!" These words of his were like magic, the people yielded, and the procession formed.

But at this juncture Anusia pressed through the crowd, her youngest child on her left arm, her right hand brandishing a musket. "Take it!" she cried, offering it to her husband; "it is my father's gun and never yet missed fire!"

"Go home, wife," said Taras, "this is not woman's business, I go unarmed."

"Why? why?" yelled the people; but she caught him by the shoulder in wildest excitement. "Taras!" she screamed, "let me not regret that I was saved from the river! It is a man to whom I yielded, and not to a coward!"

"For heaven's sake, woman," cried Simeon, aghast, "you know not what you are saying!"

But she continued: "He who would have peace, since blood has been shed, disgraces his manhood. Will you allow yourself to be killed without striking a blow, lamb that you are?"

Taras stood proudly upright, but his face was livid, his eyes were sunk. His breast heaved with the tumult within, but not a word passed his lips. Thus silently he held out his hand, motioning the woman aside, and she obeyed, confounded.

"Men of Zulawce," he said at last, slowly and distinctly, but with a voice which, from its strange huskiness, no one would have recognised as his, "I speak not now of the dishonour my wife has put upon me; I shall do that by-and-by, in your presence likewise. But now I ask you, will you obey me as your judge, or will you not? Once again, I pledge my head that I shall do my duty!"

"We will," they cried unanimously.

"Then let us go." And the procession started, some sixty men, heads of families, following Taras, who led the way with the two elders, Simeon and Alexa Sembrow, his own successor.

The field in question, the common property of the community, was an irregular square, sloping towards the river, its upper boundary being a coppice which also belonged to the parish. A large black cross rose in the centre.

On stepping from the coppice, through which their road lay, the peasants could overlook the field at a glance. The mandatar with his men had established himself by the cross; he evidently had hired reinforcements, for they numbered some forty. At the lower end of the field, by the river, two of his labourers were seen ploughing with a yoke of oxen; another team stood ready for use by the cross. On the upper part, near the coppice, lay the body of the slain youth, evidently dragged thither by Hajek's men. But when the peasants beheld the corpse, and the armed band below, their fury knew no bounds; a thundering "Urrahah!" burst from them, and they pressed forward.

But Taras was before them, snatching at Simeon's pistol and turning it against his own forehead. "Stop!" he cried with a voice that could not but be listened to. "Another step, and I shall kill myself before your eyes."

They fell back, hesitating; but they obeyed.

The mandatar's men meanwhile prepared for fight, Mr. Wenceslas himself hiding behind them. He let his under-steward be spokesman in his stead, a huge fellow from Bochnia, Boleslaw Stipinski, by name.

"What do you want?" roared this giant; "are you for fighting or for peaceful speech?"

"We have come to defend our right," shouted Taras.

"Your wrong, you mean," retained Boleslaw. "But no matter, we stand on our master's soil, and shall yield it only with our lives. Mr. Hajek is prepared to affirm this to the judge and elders, if they will step forward."

Taras was ready to parley, being followed by Simeon and Alexa. They found the mandatar crouching on a stone, some of his men lifting their guns behind him.

"Tell them to put away their firelocks," said Taras, quietly; "you need not tremble like that; if it were for fight, we had been here sooner."

"Then you are peaceably inclined?" inquired Hajek.

"If you will own yourself in the wrong, offering some atonement for the crime committed."

"And if not?"

"Then we must refer the matter to the court of the district."

The mandatar recovered himself; he even smiled. "Perhaps that will not be necessary," he said. "You are a sensible law-abiding man, Taras, and I daresay you will understand my view of the case quickly enough. You know that in the days of the Emperor Joseph a survey of the property was taken. I have the papers, and therein it is plainly put down: 'The boundary of the parish field is marked by the coppice on the one side, by the black cross on the other; beyond the cross as far as the river the soil belongs to the Count.' So you see I am entitled to claim for my master that part of this field which beyond a doubt is his."

"No," cried Taras; "for when the survey was taken, and until fifteen years ago, the black cross stood close by the river, leaving a footpath for the Count who has always had the fishing in the Pruth. When the old cross was weatherworn the parish erected a new one in the centre of the field. That, sir, is the plain truth."

"May be," returned Hajek, smiling. "I suppose that would be a question for the magistrates to look into; in the meantime, I shall act upon the evidence of my own eyes. It was natural that I should request the men I found ploughing here to take themselves off. They fired their guns and killed one of my men; what could we do but fire ours? and I shall keep the two yoke of oxen to indemnify the Count for his loss. There, I have done."

"But we have not," said Taras, solemnly, baring his head. "I call the Almighty to witness that we are grievously wronged! And I protest that we could never own you in the right! It is in obedience to our Lord the Emperor, and in obedience to the law of God that we have refrained from violence. But both the Emperor and the Almighty will see us righted!"

"Well done!" said the mandatar, with a sneer. "This is a finer flourish than ever fell from the lips of Father Martin; the pope might fairly be jealous of you!"

Taras felt outraged; but he repressed the reproof that rose to his lips, and moved away in silence.

"Well!" cried the peasants when their leaders returned to them; "does he yield? or will you permit us now to offer him proof of our right after our own fashion?"

"No!" said Taras, "you shall follow me back to the village; we must convene a public meeting. But, first, we must carry the dead man into his mother's house, and you, Simeon, meanwhile, ask his reverence to join us with the Host."

"But what if I find him incapable?" objected the elder.

"No matter, it will not affect that which is holy."

Within an hour the community had assembled under the shade of the lime tree, outside the village inn. Father Martin, too, had arrived in full vestments, carrying the pix. It being yet early in the day, the elder was fortunate in finding him in his right mind.

But before Taras opened the meeting he had a domestic matter to settle. His wife lay at his feet, and her repentance was as passionate as her wrath had been.

"Trample upon me," she wept; "cast me from you, I have fully deserved it!"

But Taras lifted her up--kissed her. "I forgive it," he said, "but not again!"

And then he went to speak to the people: "There is not a shadow of a doubt as to our right," he said, "and therefore the district court will be on our side. Self-avenging yields tears and bloodshed only, and is likely to leave us in the wrong. I shall start this very day for Colomea to demand justice against the mandatar, and you shall swear to me now that you will keep the peace while I am gone."

Father Martin elevated the Host, and the men, kneeling, took the oath.

By noon Taras had set out on his way. He had taken his best horse and borrowed another on the road, but the distance being a good fifty miles he could not reach the town before noon the following day. A courier from the mandatar had forestalled him.

The district governor, therefore, Herr Ferdinand von Bauer, a comfortable elderly gentleman, was not exactly pleased to see the village judge, and would have none of his statements. "I know all about it already," he said, "there is no need to repeat it." But Taras insisted on substantiating his charge with full particulars, which appeared to differ from the account that had been rendered to the governor. Anyhow this comfortable gentleman began to shake his head, and to pace the floor of his office. At last he pulled up in front of the peasant, examining his face. "Is this the truth you are giving me?" he demanded gruffly.

Taras met his glance fully. "It is the truth," he said solemnly, "so help me God!"

"Humph! humph!" was all the answer vouchsafed, and the governor again fell to pacing the floor, till after a while he once more stood still in front of Taras. "Be hanged, both of you!" he said amiably. "I mean both lord of the manor and peasantry. Can't you ever keep the peace! A nice thing to have to arbitrate between you by way of resting one's old bones!" To be a district governor in Galicia, to his idea, plainly was not a bed of roses. "Go back to your people," he continued more gently, "I am unable to decide from a distance, but will send a commissioner to take evidence on the spot. Meanwhile, you can bury your dead, since we cannot bring them back to life, whatever we finally decide."

The judge returned quieted. The peace of the village had been kept, in spite of the towering rage of the peasants at having to stand by and let the mandatar till the field that was not his. The part beyond the cross, which Hajek left to the villagers, was ploughed and sown presently by Taras's men. "A man of the law will soon be here," he comforted himself and others, "and then we shall be righted."

A fortnight had elapsed when the expected official made his appearance; but this, unfortunately, did not mend matters. It was a certain district commissioner, Mr. Ladislas Kapronski, called the "snake" by his colleagues, which appellation fitted both his character and his gait, for in the presence of a superior this man never did anything but wriggle. He may have owed his advancement either to this peculiarity or to the number of his years, since preferment went by seniority, but never to his merits; for, whatever might be said of his cringing and deceitful nature, it was impossible to say aught for his capability, or even his desire of doing well. And having, moreover, a reputation for being frightened at the shadow of a hen, not to say at the sight of an infuriated peasantry, this commissioner plainly was the man for his mission!

And he did not belie his fame. The question of murder he disposed of in an off-hand way. "Both sides have had a man killed," he said, "let us suppose that they are quits. I may presume they killed each other, and since they are dead we cannot punish them; so that is settled." After a similar fashion he decided the question concerning the field. "I find the mandatar in possession for the Count," he said, "and he can prove his claim from the title-deeds. I must, therefore, give judgment in his favour."

"And if we had ejected him forcibly," cried Taras, bitterly; "if we had not refrained from righting ourselves by means of bloodshed, *we* should have found that possession is law?"

"Well, well," said Mr. Kapronski, trembling at this outburst, "I am sure it is very praiseworthy that you did not have recourse to violence. And I did not say that possession was law; indeed, it is not always. The field may really be yours; in that case, you must just file a suit and fight it out against the lord of the manor, leaving him in possession meanwhile."

The peasants demurred, but Taras urged silence. "Is that all you have come to tell us?" he inquired of the commissioner.

"Well, yes--certainly.... No, stop; there is something else. You shall see how anxious I am to judge fairly. The two yoke of oxen which the mandatar has seized shall be returned to you this very day. I have so ordered it, for justice shall be done. But be sure and leave the Count in possession; now do, or you will offend grievously."

He had jumped back into his vehicle, in a great hurry to be gone. He considered he had done his duty, and drove away, greatly relieved to see the last of these people with their battle-axes and guns.

Taras for some hours was disconsolate, but his faith in justice restored him. He called together

the people. "The right will right itself," he cried. "I trust in God and believe in the Emperor. We must go to law!"

But his influence seemed gone. "It is your fault," they exclaimed, "and you must bear the consequence! We men of Zulawce carry a cause with gun and axe, and not pen-and-inkwise. It is just your tardiness that lost us half the field, we will not lose the other half by a law-suit. Or, at least, if you will try the law, do so at your own expense."

"I am ready for that," said Taras. "A man standing up for the right must not stop short of victory, even though he should be ruined in the attempt."

Again he went to Colomea and called upon the district governor. But Herr von Bauer turned on his heel. "We have done our part," he said curtly; "if you are not satisfied there is an attorney in the place."

"I do not understand," replied Taras, modestly but firmly. "I want the law to see us righted and is it not you who, in the Emperor's stead, are here to dispense it?"

"You great baby!" snorted the governor. But good nature supervened; he came close to Taras, laying a hand upon his shoulder. "Let me make it plain to you," he said. "If you go and kill the mandatar, or if he kills you, it will be my business to come down upon you with the law, even if no complaint has been urged, for that is a crime. But if you and your peasants assert that a field is yours, which the steward of the manor has possession of we can only interfere if you bring an action, preferring your complaint through an attorney, for that is a matter in dispute. Now do you understand? if so, go and instruct your lawyer. Do you take it in?"

"No," said Taras; "the right surely must be upheld, whether life or property be touched; and to the men of Zulawce that field is as sacred as my life is to me. Is not justice in all things the world's foundation? and does not he who disregards it wrong the very law of life! Can it be the Emperor's will that such wrongdoing is not your business?"

"Dear! dear!" groaned the magistrate; "have I not always said, it's a precious business to be a district governor in Galicia? Why, you are just savages here--no notion of how the law works! But you don't seem a man to be angry with, so begone in peace."

Taras quitted the office, standing still outside. Disappointment and a sense of personal injury surged up within him with a pain so vivid, that he had to wrestle with it for fear he should burst into a shriek like some wounded animal.

But he recovered himself and went to seek the lawyer. He soon found him--Dr. Eugene Starkowski--a sharp-witted attorney, who at once caught the gist of the matter. He shook his head. "It was foolish," he said, "to move a landmark! But I will see what I can do for you."

"How soon can we expect a decision?"

"Some time in the autumn."

"Not before!" exclaimed Taras.

"No, and you will be lucky if more of your patience is not required. It will not be my fault, but you see the gentlemen of the court like to take it easy."

"Take it easy!" echoed Taras, as one in a dream, staring at the lawyer in helpless wonder. "Take it easy!" he repeated wildly. "Oh, sir, this is not right! Justice should flow like a well which all can reach, for it is hard to be athirst for it."

Starkowski looked at the peasant, first with a kind of professional interest only, but with human sympathy before long. He smiled--"I will really do my best for you," he said, and his voice was that of a man comforting a grieving child.

And he did his best, using his every influence to expedite the matter. In most lawsuits at that time in Galicia six months would slip away before even a writ was served upon the defendant, but Mr. Hajek, in the present case, received his within a week. To be sure, he was entitled to a three months' delay to get up his defence, and he availed himself of it to the day--for what purpose, the poor peasants presently had reason to suspect. On the very last day of the term allowed to him he sent in his reply, pleading in exculpation the reasons he had given to Taras, and demanding in his turn that a commission should be appointed for the examining of witnesses on the spot.

Taras's counsel was not a little surprised. To examine the peasants upon their oath was the one means within the reach of the law for arriving at the truth concerning the alleged removing of the cross which marked the boundary. It plainly was in the mandatar's interest to prevent this if possible, and to take his stand on the ocular evidence in his favour, as given in the title deeds. Strange that he should propose the very means of settling the contest which of all was most likely to go against him! Dr. Starkowski could not make it out. "He is a fool," he thought, "unless, after all, he is sure of his claim, or, indeed, has bribed his witnesses." And both conjectures appeared to him equally unlikely, the former because of the solemn soul-stirring manner with which Taras had invoked his help; the latter because of the good opinion Mr. Wenceslas enjoyed in the district

town. For his Parisian antecedents were not known there, and society had admitted him to its bosom as an amiable gentleman of irreproachable character.

But since both parties were ready to be put upon their oath, there was nothing else to be done. And the same genius of justice who in the spring had so capably decided that there was no one to be accused of murder, was despatched in the autumn to act for the civil law.

"Examine matters carefully, Mr. Kapronski," said the district governor; "take the depositions of every individual witness, impressing them with the sanctity of the oath. Go into the case thoroughly--there is no danger to yourself--and be sure not to hurry it over."

The commissioner, with an obsequious wriggle, departed on his mission. "The old fool," he said, when seated in his vehicle, "as though it did not depend on a man's sagacity much more than on his taking time! I'll see through the business in less than two hours, I will."

He was expected at Zulawce, and all the community had turned out to receive him--men, women, children, not to forget Father Martin, who, let it be said of him, for once had eschewed his favourite solace, and was perfectly sober. Mr. Hajek, too, had arrived, followed by the gigantic Boleslaw and a number of labourers on the estate. The commissioner drew up amongst them, and alighting beneath the village linden, called for a table from the inn.

"That is the first of my requirements," he said to the mandatar; "the second I have brought with me," pointing at a puffing clerk, who was seen descending from his seat by the coachman, with a huge parcel of red-taped foolscap and an inkstand large enough to bespeak the importance of the proceedings. "The third requisite," continued the commissioner, "a crucifix, no doubt these good people can provide."

They procured one from the nearest house. It was placed upon the table.

"To add to the solemnity," whispered the clerk, "two burning candles ..."

"No need," interrupted the commissioner. "I myself will be a light to their understanding." But his voice, as he turned to the people, quivered with anxiety. "I have come," he said, "to find out where the black cross, now in the centre of the so-called parish field, may have stood sixteen years ago. This is all the evidence I care for. So whoever of you has no testimony to offer on this head may take himself off--have the goodness to retire, I mean!"

A few labourers from the lowlands only obeyed this injunction, no one else moving. All eyes were fixed on him, such proceedings, indeed, not being an every-day spectacle.

"It is alleged," resumed Mr. Kapronski, "that the cross in question was removed from its former position fifteen years ago. Now, those only can affirm or deny this who were not children at the time. I will listen to no one, therefore, who has not passed his thirtieth year. I mean, all that are younger, I will ask them kindly to retire."

No one stirred. Kapronski looked about with an uncertain gaze. Happily, Taras came to the rescue.

"Have you not understood?" he cried, with far-reaching voice. "Whoever has not reached his thirtieth year is not wanted."

It sufficed. First the girls ran away, followed by the women and children, the young men leaving reluctantly. Some two hundred of the villagers were left, forming a dense crowd round the table.

"And now, listen," continued the commissioner. "Whoever has no clear personal recollection where the cross stood sixteen years ago, let him lift his right hand."

Only two hands were lifted--those of the leaders of the contending parties. "I came to the village eighteen months ago," said the mandatar. "And I ten years ago," said the judge.

"Never mind!" cried Kapronski, hastily. "Please stay; these men might---" he surveyed the stalwart assembly with evident embarrassment, and then added, "you have a right to watch the proceedings! Please, Mr. Mandatar, step to the right of the table; and you, Mr. Taras, to the left."

"Now then, listen!" he repeated, addressing himself once more to the people. "Whoever of you remembers for a certainty that sixteen years ago the black cross stood where it now stands, in the centre of the field, let him step to the right, taking his place beside Mr. Hajek. But whoever, on the contrary, is sure of recollecting that the cross sixteen years ago stood by the river and was removed thence to its present place a twelvemonth later, let him step to the left side, joining your judge."

The division took place amid ominous growls, which broke into exclamations of unbounded wrath and indignant imprecations when the opposing parties stood facing each other. "You curs!" cried the peasants, brandishing their axes. For not only was the mandatar supported by the labourers and farmers of the manorial estate, but, contrary to all expectation, some of the villagers had gone to his side--drunkards and others of low character. Now, whatever these might

be thought capable of, no one had given them credit for such open treason against the community--the very worst of crimes in the eyes of those people, to whom no bond is more sacred than that between man and man for the common weal. And what carried their disgust to its height was the fact that the son of their own old judge had joined the enemy. Harasim Woronka, too, had taken his place beside the mandatar, not won over by bribery like the rest of them, but by his own thirst for revenge: it seemed an opportunity for crushing the hated stranger. Harasim was fast going to ruin, and in his fuddled brain the thought kept burning: "If it were not for Taras I might be judge this day, besides being Anusia's husband and the richest man of the village." And whatever benefit he had received at the hands of the noble-hearted stranger had been like oil to the fire of his hatred. Too cowardly for an open act of revenge, he had lent a willing ear to the tempter coming to him in the guise of Boleslaw; but what little good was left in his degraded soul must have pleaded with his conscience even now, for he stood trembling visibly.

"You miserable woman of a man!" roared the insulted peasants; "you disgrace your father in his very grave!" Harasim grew white, his hands clutching the air like a drowning man, for not a more terrible reproach can be offered to a child of that race. Indeed, he would have owned his wickedness there and then by returning to the ranks of those to whom he belonged by kinship and destiny, had not Boleslaw interfered, seizing the wavering object with his huge hand and holding him tight.

"Murder!" roared the peasants, making an onslaught against the giant. It seemed as though the fury of bloodshed were let loose.

The three men by the table looked upon this scene with greatly differing sensations. The commissioner had grown ashy, being ready to swoon. Mr. Hajek, on the contrary, quivered with elation, but strove to hide his sense of victory beneath a mask of aggrieved consternation, saying to the representative of the law: "There, now, is it not almost impossible to maintain one's right with such people?" The virtuous creature would have felt doubly elated had one of the uplifted axes silenced Harasim for ever.

But that, to his disappointment, was prevented by the resolute and magnanimous courage of Taras, the judge. The treachery of Harasim had hurt him more than any of the others; but for a moment only did he yield to his feelings, duty coming to his rescue and making him strong. "Forbear!" he cried, with powerful voice. "Forbear," echoed the elders, and with them he faced the enraged peasants. They fell back, leaving a space between the two parties.

Kapronski kept shaking and quaking; his blanched lips opened and shut, but they framed not a sound. Luckily for him, an incident--partly ludicrous, but in truth most sad--at this juncture diverted attention from his own miserable self; for, when the parties once more stood facing each other, they perceived what had escaped their infuriated senses before, that one man had not joined either side, but was left standing in the middle--the village pope, Martin Sustenkowicz. Nor did the shepherd of Zulawce at this moment look like the happy peacemaker between his belligerent parishioners, being too plainly of a divided mind, and dolefully unsettled.

"Why, your reverence," cried the under-steward, "what are you about! Did you not swear to me yesterday that the mandatar was in the right?"

"Ah--hm--yes--yesterday!" stammered the pope, with a dazed look at the peasants, and taking an uncertain step to the other side.

"Stop! not this way, little father!" broke in Alexa, seizing him by his caftan; "did not you tell me this very morning: 'The field is yours most certainly, for with my own hands I consecrated the new cross fifteen years ago'?"

"Hm--ah--yes--consecrated!" groaned the poor man helplessly, a distracted figure in their midst. The mandatar took pity on him.

"Move this way," he said, with wicked sarcasm, "there is room behind the table right away from the contending parties. We have no candles to solemnise the scene, let the light of your countenance make up for it, illumining this crowd of witnesses."

The commissioner meanwhile had partly recovered, and had found his voice, though a husky one. "I must administer the oath," he said, "for you have given evidence by taking your position either on this side or on that. Let any one who cannot swear to his deposition show it by lifting his hand."

Not a finger moved.

Kapronski gasped. He was anxious to get over the business, but this state of things seemed to force from him some kind of exhortation. "My good people," he cried, "why, perjury is no joke! There's a Judge in heaven you know, and--hm--I mean--we punish any one convicted of swearing falsely. And--it seems plain--only one of the parties can take their oath honestly. So do consider, I entreat you! Now then--which of you cannot--hm--ought not, to swear?"

But his well-meant speech fell flat. The only witness whose hand seemed to make an upward movement, Harasim Woronka, let drop his arm when the overpowering Boleslaw whispered in his ear: "Wretched coward, shall Taras rejoice after all?"

The commissioner wiped his brow--this was more than he dared report to his superiors. "Unheard of case!" he groaned, turning to the mandatar. "Hadn't we better get the priest to speak to the people?"

"By all means," replied Mr. Hajek, with his most pious mien; "I have no doubt he will vastly influence the sleeping conscience."

But Taras shook his head. "Mr. Kapronski," he said, "it is a sad thing for people to be shepherded as we are. You see with your own eyes what manner of man he is. But we poor peasants have no voice in the matter, we can only strive to reverence the holy things, if we cannot reverence him who dispenses them. Therefore we try to avoid anything that must lower him in our eyes, for it is not well when the people are given cause of mockery. Nay, it is not well, God knows! Judge for yourself, sir, would it be fit to let him speak to the people at this solemn moment? For is not an oath an awful thing, terribly awful?"

Kapronski breathed, relieved. Were not the peasants the accusers in this matter? If they, then, were satisfied to have no further exhortation, he was not accountable for any consequences. He stepped forward. "I put you all upon your oath," he said, baring his head, and every one present followed his example. And having once again stated the matter to be sworn, the peasants, one after another, passed in front of the crucifix, giving their names and lifting three fingers of their right hand, saying: "I swear." But the mandatar's party after them, to a man, took the oath likewise. It was done quietly and quickly.

The commissioner pulled out his watch. "An hour and forty minutes," he said, triumphantly. His vehicle had stood by in readiness. He mounted at once, and quitted the village with all possible speed.

CHAPTER V.

THE WRONG VICTORIOUS.

Autumn, as a rule, is by far the most pleasant season in the Galician highlands. The winter there is long, dreary, and trying; the spring cool, and all too short; the summer exceedingly hot, and liable to thunderstorms almost daily. But in the autumn Nature wears a genial face in the uplands, with a delicious continuance of sunshine, when the airy dome is scarcely ruffled by the breeze, and wondrously clear; day succeeding day of this gentle splendour till late in November sometimes. Not so, however, in the year we are speaking of. In that season the birds had left early for their southern haunts, the earth looking bare and cheerless all of a sudden; the sun had hidden within heavy clouds, and the whirling snowflakes were at their chill play before September was well out. Brighter days once more supervened, but they were bitterly cold, ushering in a fresh fall of snow and a dismal twilight of the heavens, which seemed determined to last.

The people sat gloomily by their firesides, growing the more alarmed at this early show of winter as they listened to the tales of the old folk among them, who remembered a similar season in their youth--the winter of 1792--which was a terrible visitation in that country, beginning as early as the present one. In that year the cold grew so intense that men scarcely ventured outside their cottages, because every breath they drew went like daggers to their lungs, and their limbs were benumbed in the space of a few minutes, so that even in trying to get from one end of the village to the other some had been frozen to death. And the snow drifted in such masses that the dwellers in the glens were hopelessly shut up, some actually dying of starvation. Thus ran the terrible tale; but the old folk at Zulawce were like old people everywhere, and the dread experience of their youth grew in horror with the receding years. The spectres of fear roused by these memories kept glaring at men and women within the lowly cottages.

Distress and suffering seemed at hand; and the poor were the poorer for the loss of the common field, the produce of which would have yielded them a welcome share. But more than this, the harvest had failed in part, and the cold overtaking the land so early threatened to destroy the winter crop. Thus the future was as clouded as the present, and want might be looked for. Had such trouble befallen the men of the lowlands they would have borne it sadly and meekly, bowing their heads before the Lord of the seasons. But not so the defiant natures at Zulawce, questioning their fate indignantly, and looking about for one who might bear the brunt of their anger; for, with the strong, affliction is apt to blaze forth in wrath. Their scapegoat was easily found; for who else should be to blame for the loss of that field if not Taras, their long-suffering judge!

Grievous days had come to him, and he would not have known how to bear his burden, but for

the conviction upholding him that the decision of the court could not long be delayed now. This alone gave him the strength to continue his sorrowful duty day after day. The mandatar pitilessly went on grasping at every pound of flesh he might claim; the community either could or would not yield it. If Taras tried to reason with them to submit to the forest labour, which again had been sold, they retorted it was not their duty, and even he might know now what came of being too docile towards a rascally land-steward! Besides they had not the strength for it now, they said, half-starving as they were; and but for him the produce of that field by the river might now be safely stored in their granaries. And on his replying that, in that case, he must discontinue his office, they said scornfully their little father Stephen had been a judge for fair days as well as foul; it was a pity that he was gone, since his successor evidently was not like him in this. And Taras felt this taunt far more deeply than even the passionate appeals of his wife. He resolved to see the matter to its end; and, since there seemed no other means, he had the required forest labour done by his own men, or by others willing to work for his pay.

"We can afford it," he consoled his more prudent wife, "and if I thus step into the breach for the parish it is not as though I took it from the property which you have brought to me, since I have added to it honestly by my own diligence. And I shall have a right to expect indemnification when better days shall have come round. God surely will see to our being righted, and He will lessen the burden we now have to bear. Besides, a verdict must reach us before long, and there cannot be any doubt but that the court will see that the village has been wronged."

The verdict, however, was still delayed. Week after week passed amid suffering and dejection, and Christmas to the villagers brought nothing of its own good cheer. For the grim snowstorms continued, and if at intervals the skies would brighten, it was only to usher in still sharper frosts.

It was on the Epiphany of 1837 that the rigorous cold unexpectedly came to an end. Quite early on that day the people had been waked from their sleep by strange noises in the air, and rushing from their houses, were met by an unwonted warmth. It was the south wind so ardently longed for. It did not blow long enough to bring about any melting of the snow, folding its merciful wings all too soon; but the terrible cold nevertheless appeared to have received its death blow, the temperature not again sinking much below freezing point.

And in happy mood old and young that morning went to church; men even who had been sworn enemies for years would look at each other pleasantly at the welcome change. Taras also beheld brighter faces, and heard kinder words than had fallen on his ear since the sorrowful springtime. Indeed, so strong and general was the feeling of relief and of gratitude due to the Almighty, that even the pope was seized by the wave and carried to a shore of contrition he had not reached for many a year. Mass had been read, and the people were about to depart, quite accustomed to the fact that Father Martin, on account of his own sad failing, would excuse the sermon; but they were startled by his request to resume their seats, and he actually mounted his pulpit. Poor man, he could not give them much of a discourse, but such as it was it lent expression to their own feelings, and could not fail to touch their hearts.

The people, who were in a good frame of mind, after church gathered in groups outside. There was the weather to be talked about, and the sermon, and the lawsuit; concerning the latter, some of those even who bore Taras the deepest grudge were heard to say, "Who can tell but that it may end well after all."

And the most cheerful was Taras himself. He moved about from group to group, kindly words passing to and fro. "Let us trust God," he kept saying; "He has dispelled the fearful cold; at His touch the wrong, too, will vanish. My heart tells me so! The verdict cannot be delayed much longer, we may even hear of it before the day is out."

These words had scarcely fallen from his lips, when that happened which, however frequent in fiction, is rare enough in actual life--his expectation was realised there and then. Up the road from the river a sledge was seen advancing, driven by a peasant and carrying, it appeared, a large bundle of fur-rugs. No human occupant was visible when the vehicle stopped amid the staring peasantry, but the rug-bundle began to move, throwing off its outer covering, a bear-skin; a good-sized sheep-skin peeling off next, revealing as its kernel a funny little hunchbacked figure, an elderly townsman rather shabbily clad. He rose to his feet, inquiring, with a great deal of condescension: "My good people, is the judge of this village anywhere among you?"

The stalwart peasants laughed at the puny creature, and even Taras, moving up to the sledge, could not repress a smile. "And what do you want with him?"

The stranger pursed his mouth; his hand dived into his pocket and produced an alarming pair of spectacles, which he put upon his shrivelled nose, plainly desirous of adding dignity to that feature, and then he said slowly, almost solemnly, "A man like you should say 'your worship' to me! I am Mr. Michael Stupka, head clerk of Dr. Eugene Starkowski."

Taras shook from head to foot, and clutching the man, he stammered, "You have come to tell as the verdict! you have got a letter for me!"

And all the peasants pressed round them. "Ah!" they cried, "we have got the field back, no doubt!... Long live Taras, the judge; he was right after all.... But do read us your letter."

The terrified clerk all this time endeavoured to free himself from the iron grasp that held him as in a vice. "Stand off!" he groaned. "I have brought you the verdict--yes; but ..." He faltered.

Taras grew white. Hardly knowing what he did, he, with his strong arm, lifted the little man right out of the sledge, putting him down on the ground before him. "No," he said hoarsely, "it cannot be! The verdict surely is in our favour?"

"Why, dear me, can I help it?" wailed the dwarfish creature. "Are you savages here, or what! Ah, you are strangling me ... it is not *my* fault, I am only a clerk and of no consequence whatever ... I assure you! And Dr. Starkowski tried his best. Moreover, the matter need not rest here; don't you know that there is such a thing as an appeal?"

But Taras evidently did not take in this hint any more than he had understood the preceding words. One thought only had laid hold of him, and he reeled like a stricken man. "Lost!" he groaned hoarsely, the ominous syllable being taken up more shrilly by the peasants, who pressed closer still.

The clerk, meanwhile, had produced the documents of which he was the bearer, the one being a writ of the court, the other a letter of Dr. Starkowski's. "There!" he cried, thrusting them under Taras's nose.

Taras was striving to regain his composure. "We are usable to read writing," he said, gasping. "You must tell us what the lawyers have got to say. To whom have they adjudged the field?"

But Mr. Stupka did not feel it prudent to answer this question right out. He broke the official seal, putting on a look of the greatest importance. "With pleasure, good people," he said condescendingly, "with pleasure! I'll read it to you, and translate it presently into plain language. The legal style, you know ..."

But Taras interrupted him. "To *whom*?" he repeated, more emphatically.

"Well, I should say," stammered the luckless clerk, "I should say ... to the lord of the manor, so to speak."

"It is a lie," shrieked Taras; "it cannot be!" But the peasantry veering round, cried scornfully: "Did we not tell you that going to law is a folly? You have done it now!"

Utterly beside himself with the passion of his disappointment, the judge clenched his fists and set his teeth in the face of the mocking crowd, but the two elders laid their hands on him gently. "Do not give way," begged the faithful Simeon, "try and bear the blow; let us hear the verdict first, and then we will consider what next can be done."

The clerk spread out the document. "In the name of the Emperor!" he began, translating the somewhat lengthy preamble. The villagers loyally had pulled off their caps; Taras only thought not of baring his head. Simeon endeavoured to remind him, but the judge shook him off. The honest man looked at him doubtfully, and receded a step. The others did not notice it, too intent upon the verdict.

It was a long piece of legal rhetoric, substantiating every statement with a flourish of evidential reasoning, in the German language, which in those days was the medium for judicial transactions throughout that conglomerate of Babel-tongued countries going by the name of Austria. It was no easy undertaking to translate the strangely intricate periods of official verbosity into the simple vernacular of the listeners; but Mr. Stupka, being as clever as he was small, contrived to make himself understood. The verdict amounted to a dismissal of the case, because the plaintiffs could not bring forward sufficient proof to uphold their claim. The description of the field in the title deeds, it said, was in favour of the party in present possession, and if a number of witnesses upon their oath had given contrary evidence, their testimony was invalidated by counter-evidence upon oath likewise. It was not the court's business in civil cases to start an inquiry whether false witness possibly had been tendered; it was rather the duty of the court to decide which evidence weighed heavier in the scale, and the balance had inclined in favour of manorial rights. It seemed strange, also, that the village judge, as had been reported, should have opposed the exhortation of the witnesses by means of the pope....

Up to this point Taras had listened in silence and motionless, but now a shudder ran through his body, and he clenched his fists. "Ye adders," he panted; "ye deceitful adders!"

"Bear it," whispered Simeon, entreatingly, putting his arm round his reeling friend. But Taras scarcely needed the admonition as far as keeping silence was concerned, for his eyes closed; he seemed on the point of swooning.

And moreover, the clerk continued, it was a fact that among those who had given their oath in favour of the manorial claim had been several heads of families of the village, men, therefore, who tendered witness against their own interest. Such evidence could not easily be set aside. Considering all these points, therefore, the case was dismissed, the plaintiffs to bear the costs, as was meet and just.

"Just!" echoed the men in savage scorn, Taras alone keeping silence. His hand went to his

heart suddenly, he staggered and fell heavily, as a man struck by lightning.

For hours he lay in a swoon. They had carried him into his house; but neither the lamentations of his wife, nor their united endeavours to restore animation seemed to penetrate the dead darkness that had fallen on his soul. And when at last he opened his eyes his words appeared to them so utterly strange that they were more frightened still. "The very foundations are giving," he kept crying, "the holiest is being dragged low!" And he, in whose eyes no one ever had seen a tear, was seized with a paroxysm of weeping. He bemoaned his terrible fate, and between his sobs he called for his children, to take leave of them, he said. And he repeated this request so urgently that they could but humour him. It was a pitiful scene, and one after another the neighbours went away shudderingly, Simeon Pomenko only watching through the night by the sufferer's couch. But in the village the news spread that the judge, for sorrow, had gone out of his mind.

Not till the following morning did this piece of information come to the ears of the mandatar, Mr. Hajek having spent the night at Zablotow, playing at cards with the officers of the hussars. His under-steward, Boleslaw, impatiently lay in wait against his return, never doubting but that the news would fall on delighted ears, and he was not a little surprised at the mandatar's evident dismay. Nor was this put on; for the Count, still enlarging his acquaintances at Paris, had, through his friends the usurers, got introduced to their solicitors, and Hajek knew he must send him the wherewithal to stem the scandal of a prosecution, whatever he might wish to keep back for himself. So money, more than ever, was the need of the moment; and having succeeded in one villainous trick, he might hope to develop his talents for the further fleecing of the peasantry, and it was highly important, therefore, that the community should be represented by a judge who, at the risk of whatever loss to himself, was bent on keeping the people from offering violence.

"Gone out of his mind? Dear me, I *am* sorry," he said, honestly too. "But I daresay report has exaggerated the fact. He may have had a blow, but I do not believe he is the man to go mad. Go to his wife and tell her, with my compliments, that I shall be pleased to send for the best doctor at Colomea at my own expense."

The man hung back. "I am no coward," he said presently, "and I think I could face any dozen of the peasants, if you wished it. But as for this woman--sir, do you know she is a regular Huzul, quite a spitfire of a temper--and a man after all has only one pair of eyes to lose!"

The mandatar did not care what risk these optics might run; the man had to carry his message. He was relieved, however, on entering the judge's house. The two elders, Simeon and Alexa were with the sufferer, and he appeared to be listening to their words. The storm had not yet subsided which tore his soul, and threatened to change the very drift of his being. He who his life long had stood like a rock against the surges of trouble, who had won happiness and prosperity through steadfast endurance, was sobbing and wailing like a child, and his friends could not but tremble for his reason as they heard his pitiful plaints. "I have striven to pass my life in honour," he would moan, "and now it must end in shame! And what of my poor children, since I have no choice but to follow the dictate of my heart?"

He saw the under-steward enter cautiously, and his pale face grew crimson at the sight. Simeon rose hastily to send away the unwelcome visitor, but Taras interfered. "Glad to see you, friend Boleslaw!" he cried, cuttingly. "What good news has brought you hither?"

The giant delivered his errand, stammeringly.

"Send for a doctor--indeed--at his own expense!" repeated Taras. "Well, I did not require this proof to tell me that the mandatar is an honest man!" And therewith he closed his eyes, lying still like a sleeping babe.

Boleslaw paused. "Shall I---" he began presently, addressing the elders. But at the sound Taras opened his eyes. "Leave this house!" he cried, with a voice of thunder, and the powerful man quaked, making good his escape.

Taras watched his retreat, smiling strangely. "This message is something to be thankful for! You, my friends, could not help me, but this insult brings me back to myself. I shall fight against my ghastly destiny while yet I may!"

"What destiny?" said Simeon, soothingly. "Do look at it calmly. You have, in a just cause, done your utmost to see us righted; and you have failed honourably. What else could there be said?"

"What else?" reiterated Taras. "And since it is a just cause--but what use in talking!... I daresay you thought I had lost my reason, because I have cried and wailed like a woman--did you?" His friends endeavoured to look unconcerned. "But, I tell you," he continued, with trembling voice, "it will be well if you never have occasion to find out that, though reeling, my mind was terribly clear!... I will try to spare you the discovery. I want to see that clerk again."

"He has left," returned Simeon; "he thrust his papers into my hand when you had fainted, and turning his horses' heads he made the utmost speed to leave us. The poor creature was really quite frightened; never in his life again would he carry a verdict to savages, he said."

Taras could not help smiling. "Then I must ask the pope to read me that letter," he said.

"Leave the room, I shall be ready to join you in a few minutes."

"Do not exert yourself just yet," entreated Simeon.

But Taras looked up sternly. "Do not hinder me, man," he cried, "cannot you see that my very fate is at stake!"

The men left him misgivingly.

"What do you think of it?" said Alexa, as they stood waiting in the yard.

"God knows!" replied Simeon, troubled. "But I cannot forget how he refused to uncover when the verdict was being read."

The voice of Anusia was heard, who would not let her husband go from the house. "You will be fainting again!" she lamented. But Taras, though white as death, stepped forth, treading firmly.

The three men walked away to call on Father Martin; but on entering the manse his housekeeper, Praxenia, met them with a tearful face. She was an elderly spinster from the village who had presided over his domestic concerns since the popadja had departed this life, leaving the pope a widower.

"God o' mercy," she sobbed, looking at Taras, "it's a blessing that you, at least, have got back your wits. They said in the village that you had lost them. But you are all right, I see--would I could say as much for the poor little father. *He* is quite off his head, I assure you; regular mad if ever man was!"

"He will come round again, no doubt," said Taras. "I daresay he has had a glass too much."

"Ah, no," wept the good spinster; "that were nothing since we are used to it! He has not had a drop since yesterday, poor old man, who never could do without his tippie; it is that which frightens me! He is lying quite still now, staring blankly, and talking a heap of nonsense between whiles."

"Humph," grunted Simeon, "that certainly looks alarming. I have known him these twenty years, he never showed such symptoms."

"Didn't I say so--a very bad sign, surely! And all on account of that sermon, would you believe it? But let me tell you how it happened. I had gone to his room quite early yesterday morning--would I had bitten my tongue off first! though my going in was quite innocent-like. 'Little Father,' I said, 'there's a thaw setting in, and the parish is just beside itself with joy.' 'Beside itself? dear! dear!' he said, 'I must go and see,' and off he trotted. But very soon he came back again, his eyes positively shining. 'Naughty, naughty, little father,' I said, 'you have gone and been at Avrumko's--very naughty, so early in the day, and before reading mass!' But he insisted that he had not been near the inn, and that nothing but the common delight had so excited him. 'Ah! Praxenia,' he said, 'what a day to have seen--all the village is praising the Lord for His goodness. I must give them a sermon to-day, I must, indeed!' 'Little Father,' I said, severely, 'you had better not attempt it; you know it is beyond you now, and the people will only laugh at you; don't you remember how it was five years ago?' 'I do,' he said, ruefully, 'but I shall do better to-day.' There was no convincing him, he locked himself into his study, and through the door I could hear him at his sermon--pacing his floor I mean--vigorously, till the bells began ringing for service. I went to church, not a little anxious, you will believe me, and when he mounted his pulpit, as he had threatened, I said to myself: 'You'll stick fast, little father, and be sorry that you ever went up.' But not he--well you were there yourselves, and you know how beautifully he got through it, never once blowing his nose or scratching his ears--the beautifullest sermon ever spoken, though I say it, and moving all the parish to tears! I walked home proudly to look after his dinner, poor man, and said to myself he should have as many glasses now as he liked. But what was my surprise on going to his room presently, to find him weeping there, shedding the biggest tears. I ever saw. 'Ah, Praxenia,' he sobbed, 'to think of the Lord's goodness in giving me this day. I have not deserved it, miserable old tippler that I am!' What was I to answer? I got his dinner ready, putting his bottle beside it; and he sat down at my bidding, but never a morsel he touched, his eyes looking brighter and queerer than ever. 'Have a drop, little father.' I said, 'I'm afraid you are faint-like.' 'No,' he said, sharply, pushing the bottle from him. Then I knew that something was wrong. And all the rest of the day, till late in the evening, he kept walking about his room, muttering the beautifullest words--preparing his sermon, he said, when I asked him. Not till late at night could I get a spoonful of soup down his throat, making him take to his bed--no great battle, for although he is hardly more than sixty, he is just a child for weakness when the schnaps is out of him. 'Now you must go to sleep,' I said, sternly. But not he! He folded his hands, lying still, with his shining eyes, muttering at times. He is going to die, I tell you!"

The men were endeavouring to dissuade her from this mournful view, but were less certain of their own opinion when they stood by the bedside. The poor pope's appearance had changed alarmingly since yesterday. The face was worn and white, the wrinkles had deepened, and there was a strange light in his eyes.

But he knew Taras. "Ah--is it you?" he murmured.... "'And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.' ... The bells are ringing.... I must preach to the people.... What is it you

want?"

"I came to ask you to read a letter to me, but I am afraid you are not well, and it is rather a closely-written epistle."

"Epistle? yes," returned the pope, catching at the word. "The first of the Corinthians.... 'Though I speak with the tongues of angels, and have not charity.... believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.... Charity never faileth.' ..." And on he wandered.

The men saw it was hopeless, and left him. "It is strange," said Simeon; "our pope never spoke such edifying words while he had his wits about him. It does seem alarming."

But Taras's thoughts ran on a different track. He started. "I must go to Colomea," he said. "There could not be much in a mere letter, after all. I must see the lawyer myself as soon as possible."

He appeared so fully determined that his friends could but listen in silence, and even Anusia saw he must have his way, though she demurred. "It were far better to leave the thing alone," she said. "If you are bent on making a sacrifice for the parish, give them the field we bought two years ago, it will make up for their loss, and it were better than losing everything through the lawyers."

"You are the best of wives," he said, "but you do not understand. It is not merely about the field which is lost: but my fate, and yours, and the children's is at stake."

"What is this you are saying?" she cried, alarmed; but he had touched his horse, and the sledge was flying along the road towards the district town.

He entered the outer office of Starkowski's the following day, but no sooner had Mr. Stupka caught sight of him than he flew from his chair, disappearing in an inner chamber with the startled cry: "Heaven help us! a ghost ... the dead judge!"

But the attorney came forth undaunted. "I am pleased to see you," he said, shaking hands. "I felt pretty sure my clerk had been exaggerating in reporting you dead. I suppose it was the painful disappointment which stunned you?"

"More than this," said Taras, "it was the bitter consciousness that this verdict must change all the future current of my life, unless, indeed, it can be annulled. I have come to find out whether this is possible. Maybe your letter said something about it--I cannot read."

"No, the letter was only to tell you the costs," explained Dr. Starkowski, "one hundred and twelve florins. But there is no hurry whatever, you may pay me at your convenience. I had nothing further to tell you, for I never advise carrying a suit into a higher court unless there be some hope of a successful----"

"Sir," interrupted Taras, speaking slowly, and his voice was hollow, "think well before you tell me--you do not know how much there is at stake."

The man's manner, and still more his distorted face, staggered the lawyer. "Of course, I may be mistaken," he said; "but the examination of the witnesses, from which I hoped everything, has proved a bad business for us, and yet it appears the commissioner tried every conscientious means for arriving at----"

"Conscientious means!" cried Taras; but conquering his rising anger he described the scene which had taken place outside the village inn, Kapronski not so much as putting up his horses; and how the peasants had their own shrewd guesses how much had been paid by the mandatar to every rascal who had forsworn himself. "Sir, I hope you will help me in this trouble!" he said, in conclusion.

These simple words, breathing their own truth and sadness, went further with the lawyer than the most urgent entreaty. He had followed the legal profession for many a year, but the sense of the utter sacredness of his calling had perhaps never been so strong with him, nor his desire to see justice done more earnest, than at this present moment when that peasant had told him his tale. He promised to forward an appeal to the higher court at once. "There is yet another way we could try," he said; "you could inform against the perjurers. But if we failed in bringing the charge home to them, you would be in danger of imprisonment for libel yourself. I do not like to risk that, so we had better try the appeal."

"Do what seems best to you," said Taras. "I trust you implicitly. But what a world is this if a man can be put into prison for making known the truth! Is not truth the foundation of justice? Can the world continue, if falsehood and wrong carry the day?"

The lawyer no doubt could have given an answer to this question--a sad, painful answer--but somehow he felt he had better be silent. He contented himself with assuring this man, who seemed a very child in the ways of the world, that he would not fail in his most faithful endeavour, and set about the matter at once, moved by a feeling he scarcely could analyse. The appeal was on its way to the upper court at Lemberg before Taras and his servant had reached

their upland home.

They were nearing the Pruth in the evening of the following day when the sound of bells came floating towards them, and a red glow appeared through the dusk where the ground sloped away in the direction of Prinkowce. "Something on fire!" cried the man, pulling up the horses.

Taras peered through the twilight, and, bowing his head, he crossed himself piously. "Drive on," he said; "it is the torches at the cemetery. They are burying the pope."

And it was so. Father Martin had died that morning, and they were laying him to his rest already, as they are wont in the mountains. There was no great show of mourning, poor Praxenia's sorrow, perhaps, being the only honest sadness evoked. "Ah!" she kept sobbing, "if it were not for that sermon, he might be here to conduct his own funeral! It is the sermon he died of, and not old age, as the apothecary said." But the peasants had their own idea concerning the cause of his death. "It is the wretched schnaps Avrumko has introduced," they said. "If the rascal gave us unwatered stuff, we might live a hundred years, like our fathers before us."

Slight as the feeling of mourning was, it yet sufficed to turn the people's thoughts into a different channel, the loss of the pope thus acting as a palliative to the loss of the law-suit; and the question who should be Father Martin's successor was discussed with real interest. It was not mere curiosity which stirred them, for in the person of the pope a good deal of a parish's fate is bound up in those parts, and the congregation has no voice in the matter. They can but wait and see. But the men of Zulawce were soon relieved of any anxiety, and had every reason to be satisfied.

Not a month had passed when the desolate manse once more was inhabited, and it was a young pope who had come to pitch his pastoral tent in the upland parish, having till then been curate-in-charge of Borkowka, a village in the plain. Leo Woronczuk was his name, and it spoke well for him that his late parishioners accompanied him in procession as far as the wooden bridge over the Pruth, where Taras, at the head of the peasants, stood waiting to receive him. But what pleased his new flock more than anything was the fact that the stalwart young shepherd did not arrive singly, but with a blooming wife--the most good-natured of popadjas, to all appearance--and three round-cheeked, chubby little boys. For the Galician peasants are apt to be prejudiced against a pope who is either a bachelor or a widower, or, worse still, a monk of the Order of St. Basil, thinking it impossible for such a one to enter into the every-day joys and sorrows of his people, or to understand their more earthly needs.

Now, Father Leo had a heart for these things, and this not only because he himself was blessed with a wife and three jolly little boys! He was no brilliant star in the theological heavens, no paragon of superhuman virtues; he was a simple village priest--a man among men--with warm-hearted sympathies; and if his intellectual horizon did not extend immeasurably beyond that of his peasants, he at any rate had a clear-headed perception of all ordinary points and bearings within that sphere. It was not without diffidence that he accepted his new charge, influenced chiefly by the peremptory need of income, his late curacy having been sadly inadequate in this respect, considering the growing wants of his family; and, if the truth must be told, the bad reputation of that upland parish, which might have tempted a priestly soul of more enthusiastic ambition, only tended to discourage him; he, poor man, not feeling himself divinely commissioned to make up for the many years' failings of his predecessor. He would far rather have been called to shepherd a people of a less demoralised kind than appeared to be the case here, where a number of men, on the very face of things, were guilty of wilful perjury. But once having accepted the charge devolved upon him by his superiors, he had made up his mind, like a brave man, to do his duty as best he could, be it pleasant or otherwise.

And he made it his first aim to look into the apparent want of integrity among the people; to discover, if possible, who might be trusted and who not. He set about it quietly, without thrusting himself into people's confidence; nor did he think it necessary to frighten them into a higher state of morality by firing their imagination with grievous accounts of the punishment to come. His sermons were peculiarly simple, suitable in every way to the hearers' daily life--"a peasant almost could preach like that," said the people when he had dismissed them without once thumping the pulpit. But they discovered by degrees that, if his eloquence did not come down upon them thunderously, there was that in his words which might cling to them like good and sensible advice; while, on the other hand, he, not a little to his joy, could see that these people, after all, were not so black as they had been painted. Leaving the one vice out of the question, which in that country is as common as air and water--the wretched tendency to drunkenness--the worst these highlanders could be accused of was their defiant spirit so apt to break out into violence.

The pope soon found that they were not without a conscience, and that they had a true feeling of right and wrong, though it might be somewhat dulled by the unpruned egotistical instincts of human nature left to its own luxuriance. Not many weeks had passed before Father Leo was sure in his own mind which had been the perjured party on that fatal day in September, but he avoided individual accusation. Nor was it more than a moral certainty with him, as though he could take his oath that the black cross had not always stood in the centre of the contested field. But however strongly he felt in his honest mind that a vile wrong had been committed--robbing a poor, untaught, and easily misguided people not only of their property but, what was worse, of their good conscience--he yet repressed his wrath, and never by word or look showed the mandatar how entirely he abhorred him. Nor was this reserve the outcome of mere selfish

prudence, but rather of a wise perception that he could do more for the furthering of right and justice and the peace of his people in thus forcing the miscreant at the manor house to observe a show of good will.

Hajek, indeed, was deceived. He thought he had taken the measure of the new pope in believing him to be an honest but rather blockheaded parson, whom he treated accordingly with a certain amount of flattery, and even of deference. The mandatar would graciously yield a point whenever Father Leo, on behalf of the people, petitioned for a respite, or even for the lessening of an irksome tribute, assuring him that he was quite as anxious as himself to maintain the peace of the parish. The fact was, that while the suit yet hung in the balance, and a further examining of witnesses was a prospect to be dreaded, it was important that the village priest should think of him as an honourable man, not prone to harsh dealings, far less to open violence, or such a thing as an instigation to perjury.

Thus Taras by degrees found an unexpected ally in the pope, nay more, a true-hearted friend. The saddened man would not have looked for such happiness, and when the unsought gift had come to him he met it almost timorously. It was a good honest friendship which sprang up between these two equally honourable, yet entirely different natures; but a friendship which, for all its truth, left the last word unspoken, because neither of them, whatever their mutual sympathy, was able to enter into, the inmost depth of the other's being.

But the more the pope saw of the judge, the greater was his joy at having met such a man upon earth, a man so guileless and spotless, in whom selfishness was not, who seemed guided only by his own sense of justice and duty, and whose strength was the outcome of his great faith in the moral equity upholding this structure of a world. "A true, godly man," the pope would say to himself; but somehow the heretical thought would follow, "Why, this man does not even need the Christian's belief in a future life in order to be what he is." This feeling could not but breed certain doubts, but it did not lessen his hearty admiration of his friend's purity of nature, nor his longing to help him. He did what he could to ease the heavy burden of his dealings with the mandatar, coming forward as a mediator whenever it was possible; and he never lost an opportunity of proving to the villagers that their judge had acted righteously throughout. Taras was Father Leo's senior, but there was something of a parent's tenderness for his child in the pope's constant readiness to stand by his friend. Indeed, Taras would often appear to him in the light of a grown boy whom no evil thing had come nigh to corrupt.

"I could understand him," the pope would say, "if he were fourteen instead of nearly forty." And greater than his delight in the man was his surprise sometimes that he should understand so little of human nature and the way of the world. He took this for granted, but he was mistaken. Taras was not wanting in the power of seeing things as they are, but only in the capability of turning such perception to any use. He was one of those rare beings who must ever follow their own inward prompting, who cannot be bent in this or that direction by any outward compulsion; but who, for this very reason, are so easily broken and bowed to the dust. There is much sadness in life, though little of real tragedy; but what of it the world has known has ever had for its heroes such natures.

But neither did Taras fully understand his friend. He would have blessed the day which brought Father Leo to the village, even if the latter had remained a comparative stranger to him; for the late pope's unworthy conduct had touched him far more deeply than any one else in the village, because his instincts for everything good and holy were so much keener. He knew well enough that many a village pope was no better than Father Martin had been; but he had felt to the depth of his true soul that it was a terrible perversion of what ought to be, if a village judge out of reverence for the sanctity of the oath sees it laid upon him to oppose an exhortation of the people by their own priest. It was an unspeakable relief to him that things had changed in this respect, and that the man who had come to represent the spiritual interests in the parish was of good report and fit to be an example; his gratitude rising to boundless devotion on perceiving that in word and deed the honest pope was bent on sharing his burden--yet he could not always understand his friend.

The pope, to give an instance, might endeavour to correct some black sheep by saying: "You are not a bad man on the whole, it's just the drink which is ruining you; it were a great thing if you could overcome that failing!" At which Taras would think that this was an untruth, because the man was bad in other respects besides the drink; that the pope was quite aware of this, and how could it be right to depart from the full truth, even with a good object in view? Or, if Father Leo endeavoured to arbitrate between two quarrelling parishioners, he would tell them: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God!" endeavouring to bring about a compromise even if the one, whether erroneously or feloniously, had been coveting the other's property; but can it be right, thought Taras, to connive even in part at a wrongful intention for the love of peace? And if the pope was anxious to obtain some benefit for the people, he would not only listen patiently to the richest self-praise of the miserable mandatar, but might even enhance it by some word of his own; yet, shall a man fawn on an evildoer for the sake of mercy? These questions occupied the judge seriously, and one day, when they had been at the mandatar's together, he could not but unburden his heart to his friend.

The pope smiled, saying: "It is written, Be ye therefore wise as serpents."

"Yes," cried Taras, "and harmless as doves!"

"Certainly," returned the pope. "It would be wrong to meet any one with the serpent's wisdom in order to overreach him. I never do that, and to the best of my knowledge I strive to advance the good and to fight what is evil. But since I have to do with sinful men and not with angels, I must be content very often to fight with human weapons."

Taras shook his head. "How could deception ever be right in order to further a good cause?" he exclaimed.

"Nor is it," returned the pope. "But if I can keep back the wicked man from further wickedness by speaking civilly to him, and not contemptuously, I am not wronging nor deceiving him, but on the contrary doing well by him."

The judge walked on in silence, saying at last, gently but firmly, "I cannot see this; deception can never be right. I do not understand you."

At which the pope might look up at the towering figure by his side, saying tenderly within himself, "He is simple as a child!" But what shadows even then were overlying Taras's soul not even Leo could know, though a strange fear at times stole over him that this soul, so childlike and so pure, was undergoing a conflict with the powers of evil, and was being worsted. There were outward signs of such battling: Taras hardly ever now smiled; he would sit for hours in moody silence, with a stony look in his eyes, and his healthy countenance was being marred by the furrows of anxious care. Anusia, too, would come to the manse with her trouble, saying sorrowfully, "He hardly sleeps now, for day and night this worry is upon him, making an old man of him before his time."

"But what is it?" said the pope; "I am at a loss to know."

"Why, what should it be but this cursed lawsuit," sobbed the passionate woman, clenching her fists. "Would I could strangle the mandatar and all the tribe of lawyers along with him!"

The pope rebuked her, nor did her explanation satisfy him. "It cannot be the lawsuit that so weighs on him," he said; "for he speaks about it calmly, hoping for a favourable verdict from the court of appeal. I do not see what can thus oppress him, unless it be his troubled relations both with the mandatar and with the people, which are improving daily though, for I am doing my best to heal the breach," he added, with some complacency.

The honest man had not the faintest idea that, however successful he might be, he was only lessening his friend's outward burden, that which lay on his shoulders so to speak, and which he had strength enough to bear, whereas there was a burden crushing his heart and leaving him utterly helpless in his silent despair; for Taras kept his deep trouble hidden even from the eyes of the priest, his spiritual guide, feeling, perhaps, that the fundamental difference of their natures must keep them apart on the soul's deepest issues. "I should only sadden him," he said, "and make him angry; but I could never convince him, nor could he talk me out of it. No one could, for the matter of that, not the Almighty Himself, I fear; for if He can look on quietly when wrong is being done here below, I do not see that even He could do away with the consequences!"

Matters had come to an ill pass with Taras even then. He had grown calm outwardly, but the fearful thought which had overpowered him so utterly on his first learning that the court's decision had gone against the parish had not left him. If it was not added to in these months of weary waiting, while the verdict was being reconsidered, neither did it lessen. And as he went on with his duties day after day, waiting for an answer from the court of appeal, he was like some traveller traversing an endless desert beneath an angry sky. The air is heavy, and the thunderous clouds sink lower, he hastening onward through the friendless waste; onward, though the storm will break and the flashes of heaven are charged with death. No shelter for him anywhere; on, on, he hastens, though his doom await him--no hope, unless a strong wind from the healthy east be sent to drive the dark clouds asunder ... But how should he hope for such kindly blast while the hot air is heavy about him, and cloud draws cloud athwart the heavens? He can but bear up and continue, a weary traveller, utterly hopeless, and conscious of great trouble ahead!

CHAPTER VI.

APPEALING UNTO CÆSAR.

Autumn had come; again the season was cold and gloomy. Taras had waited patiently, but he had not the courage to face the long, dull twilight of winter if he must pass it nursing the one desperate thought. So he went to the pope and begged him to indite an inquiry to the lawyer.

Father Leo looked him in the face anxiously. The man appeared calm. "You are thinking too

much of the law-suit!" he said, nevertheless.

"Not more than need be," replied Taras. "I have long settled in my mind all concerning that question."

The pope wrote the desired letter. The reply came at the end of a week. He had done what he could, said the lawyer, to urge the case forward, praying especially for a re-examination of the witnesses; but he had received no answer so far.

Taras heaved a sigh when the pope had communicated this letter to him. "It will go hard with me in the winter," he said sadly.

But the pope could not know the full import of these words. "You have done your duty," he said, "and that will comfort you."

"There is no comfort in that," said Taras, "though it may help one to be strong. A man who has laid his hand on the plough of any duty must go on till the work is done."

The winter proved hard, indeed, for the waiting man, but the heavier the burden weighed on his soul the more anxious he seemed to hide it.

"He has ceased groaning as he used to do," Anusia said to her friend, the warm-hearted, fat little popadja; "and he seems to take pleasure in a pastime, rather unusual with him; he has become a hunter for hunting's sake."

Taras, in that winter, would be absent for weeks at a time, pursuing the bear. But his three companions, who were devotedly attached to him--Hritzko and Giorgi Pomenko, the two sons of his friend Simeon, and the young man, Wassilj Soklewicz, whose brother had been shot on the contested field--could tell little of the judge's cheer. "He is even more silent in the forest than at home," they said; "and if he takes any delight in the hunt it is only because he is such a good shot. He cares nothing for the happy freedom of life up yonder, nothing for the excitement of driving the bear; but his face will always light up when he has well-lodged his bullet."

The winter was not yet over, and Taras was again absent hunting, when one day--it was in March, 1838--the pope received a large letter from the district town. The lawyer had addressed the decision of the upper court to him, giving as his reason that he had understood from Father Leo's inquiry in the autumn, that he also sympathised with the judge, Barabola. "I pray you, reverend sir," wrote the lawyer, "to make known to him the enclosed verdict as best you can; for I am afraid the poor man will be crushed and not easily lift up his head again. The legal means are exhausted, the lawyer can do nothing more; let the pastor, then, come in and heal the wound."

The good pope was troubled, his apprehension nowise lessening on hearing how the first verdict had overpowered his friend. "Poor man," he said; "poor dear child! how will he take it?"

With not a little trepidation, therefore, he went to see Taras upon his return from the mountains, endeavouring to prepare him for the bad news by a rather lengthy and well-considered speech. Taras however, behaved otherwise than the pope had anticipated. He grew white, and the deep furrow between his brows appeared more threatening, but his voice was firm as he asked, "Then the upper court has upheld the first verdict?"

"Yes," said Father Leo, gently. "But you must not take it too much to heart, you have tried honestly."

"Let me know what they say," interrupted Taras, as calm as before, but it might have been noticed that he leant heavily on the table beside which he was standing.

The pope produced the writ, reading and explaining. The court dismissed the appeal, seeing no reason why the trial should be repeated, it being fully evident that the former examination had satisfied the demands of justice. The lower court's verdict, therefore, must be upheld.

Taras had listened to the end with the same rigid mien. "Thank you," he said, when Father Leo had done. "But now leave me alone. You too, Anusia; I must think it over."

"What use in farther troubling?" demurred the pope. "Dr. Starkowski says especially that the legal means are exhausted; which means that there is nothing further to be done. You must submit to the will of God."

"We will come back to that presently," said Taras, with a ghastly smile, which quite frightened the pope. "You shall not be cheated out of your sermon, but not now ... not now!" He repeated the words almost passionately.

Father Leo still hesitated; but Anusia interfered. She had been sitting in a corner, weeping; but now she rose. "Stay, pope," she entreated, taking hold of Taras's hand. "Husband," she cried, shrilly, "fly into whatever rage you like, thrash the rascal at the manor house till he cannot move a limb, if it will ease you; but do not hide your wrath within yourself. Do not look so stony; it kills me, husband. I am maddened with fear! I know why you would have us leave you--you are going to lay hands on yourself!"

"No!" cried Taras, solemnly. "God knows, I have no such thought." But again the smile played about his mouth. "Be at peace, wife," he added; "I have never stood in more grievous need of health and life than now. Leave me."

They saw they must obey, but they remained standing outside the closed door, listening anxiously. They hoped the terrible tension of his heart might be lessened now by the pouring forth of his sorrow, but they heard nothing save his measured step. It ceased at length, and all was still.

"Come!" said the poor wife, dragging the pope to a small window which gave them a peep into the room. They saw Taras, sitting still, resting his elbows on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. He sat motionless.

"We had better leave him to fight it out," said Father Leo, "his is a strong heart, and he will get over it."

But Anusia could not conquer her fears. "I must watch him," she moaned, the hot tears trickling down her face. "It is more than you think! Why, he is like a child at other times, never hiding the thoughts that move him; and now he cannot even speak to me or you!"

The pope endeavoured to comfort her, but it was ill trying when he was anxious enough himself. He left her presently to visit a sick parishioner who was waiting for him, returning in about an hour.

Anusia had not stirred from the little window. "He only moved once," she whispered, hoarsely, "and it was awful to behold. I watched him, hardly daring to breathe, and saw him rise slowly and lift the fingers of his right hand to heaven. His face was stony, never a muscle he moved, but his eyes could not hold back the tears, and they ran heavily down his death-like cheeks--ah, Father Leo, it must have been an awful oath he swore to himself--and now he sits rigid as before, staring hopelessly."

"That won't do," murmured the pope, opening the door rather noisily and entering. He was resolved not to leave the room again, even if Taras should dismiss him peremptorily. But there was no fear of that.

The judge rose, and met him quietly, almost serenely. "You are right, Father Leo," he said, "it is no use to keep on troubling! I have well-nigh worn out my brains, and am not a bit further than before!... There is just one thing though I want to know: you told me the lawyer had written that all the legal means were now exhausted--are you sure? are these his very words?"

"Yes; it is quite plain."

"But I am not certain. For I remember that our own judge, at Ridowa, when I was a boy, had a protracted law-suit with a cousin of his about some will that was questioned. The district court decided in his favour; but the cousin appealed, and the court at Lemberg was on his side. The judge thereupon took the case to a supreme court at Vienna, and there he obtained his right. So you see there must be judges at Vienna, who are over the court at Lemberg."

"Taras," cried Anusia, "surely you are not thinking of going to law at Vienna? Whoever could pay the costs?"

"Wife," he said solemnly, "if you knew what is at stake, you would ask me on your knees to plead the cause at Vienna if we were beggars ever after. However, I must first find out about it. Not that I doubt Dr. Starkowski, for he is honest, and will have written nothing but the truth; but I must have it from his own lips."

He was not able to set out for Colomea on the spot, having to arrange with the mandatar first concerning the spring labour due by the peasantry. And matters were not so easily settled as in the autumn, for Mr. Hajek was relieved of his fears as to a possible re-examination of witnesses, and showed his true colours. He would no longer heed Father Leo's suggestions, but set him aside as a meddling priest who had better not poke into mundane concerns. It was, therefore, not without much yielding to unfair demands that Taras could come to an understanding with the rapacious steward, after which he was free to depart on his journey, carrying with him in a leather belt all the ready money in his possession--the silver thalers and golden ducats he had inherited of old Iwan, or gained by his own industry.

On his entering the lawyer's office, the enlightened Stupka no longer took alarm; but all the more frightened was the kind-hearted attorney himself.

"Why, man!" he cried, aghast, "you look ten years older than when last I saw you. Is it the lawsuit which so worries you? You must not give way like that. Remember that you have a wife and children, and not only a parish, to live for."

"It was an evil year," said Taras; "but I have not come to make complaints to you, sir, but only to settle two points. Firstly, what is it I owe you?"

The lawyer brought down his ledger and named the sum--close upon two hundred and fifty

florins. "We have to bear the costs, you see," he said in excuse.

"Never mind," said Taras, undoing his belt and counting out the money. "Now for the second point. You have written to our Father Leo that nothing more can be done. But are there not higher judges at Vienna?"

"Not for this matter," returned Starkowski; "there certainly is a high court of justice at Vienna, but cases can only be taken thither when the district court and the provincial court of appeal have differed in their verdicts!"

"That is bad," said Taras. "But you spoke to me of another way last year--a prosecution for perjury."

"Yes, but I did not advise it, and would not advise it now," cried the lawyer, eagerly. "Can you not see that none of these witnesses will own to being perjured, and you will hardly succeed in bringing the crime home to them--for where is your evidence? And even if you had evidence, in the case of some who may have betrayed themselves by their own foolish talk, and could get them convicted, you will hardly escape going to prison with them. For those whom you failed to convict would be all the more spiteful, and would have you up for libel. And for what good in the end?--the field would remain Count Borecki's after all!"

"It is not that I am thinking of now," replied Taras. "I do not seek restitution, but simply the right." It was evident that he strove hard to speak calmly. But when he opened his mouth again the words fell stammeringly from his lips: "You tell me, then--there is--no help left--none?"

"None whatever," said the lawyer, "unless the Emperor----"

"The Emperor!" interrupted the peasant, almost with a shriek. And exultation broke from his eyes; he stood erect, transformed in every feature as by magic. So sudden was the change, from dire despair to uplifting hope, that he staggered and reeled as under a blow. "The Emperor!" he repeated, exultingly.

"Well, yes--but in fact--you see, the Emperor----" said the lawyer, taken aback.

But Taras paid no attention. "Oh, sir," he cried, and was not ashamed of the tears that flowed down his face, "what a fool I have been! People looking to me, and calling me their judge, and I never thinking of this! And how I racked my poor brain, and suffered, and strove with the awful future, and all for nothing! Why, of course, there is the Emperor; but I only thought of him while there was happiness; and when trouble came and the clouds hid the light of heaven, I forgot that the sun is behind them. I was even angry not to see it shining, and was wroth with the Emperor, because the men of the law, who are but his servants, could not help me! But I know better now. I know the Emperor will make it all right, let him but hear of it--why, it is his very duty, laid upon him by God himself! His servants may go wrong, but he will see the truth; they may judge ill, but he will be righteous, being above them all.... Ah, sir, forgive my being thus beside myself and weeping like a child! But if you knew what thoughts went through me but a moment ago, when you told me there was no farther help!... But, thank God, you have remembered the Emperor, while yet it was time--while yet it was time! For even a week hence, if I had gone away in my hopelessness, it might have been too late!"

"Too late!" repeated the lawyer, astonished. "What do you mean?"

"Ah! do not ask me, sir," cried Taras, brushing the tears from his face. "I would rather forget all about it; it was a nightmare, an evil dream. How foolish of me! The very darkest plans I could think of, but never of this simple help, as simple as prayer itself. For who are our helpers in this life but God and the Emperor? God paramount and hearing our cry, but not reaching down with His own arm from heaven in every instance, because He has appointed the crowned one in His stead, who is to judge men and rule them in His name. But the Emperor is not omniscient, like God. One must go to him and tell him one's trouble, which I shall do now. And for his understanding me the better, I will ask you, sir, to put it into writing, that he may have it all down on paper what I have to tell him."

Thus sobbed and talked the peasant, running on, positively beside himself, as though heaven had opened with a great vision of help; and, full of gratitude, he seized the lawyer's hand, bowing low to kiss it. But Starkowski drew back hastily, stepping to the window. He was startled, and almost dismayed. His mentioning the Emperor had been rather accidental, and he could never have dreamt of thus rousing the man. He felt morally certain that it would be quite useless to petition the Emperor, not that *he* doubted that the peasants really had been wronged in the suit. But how was the Emperor to see this, in the face of two verdicts? Every groat the judge would spend on that errand, every effort and particle of time, would be just thrown away. "It must not be," he said to himself. "I must get him to see it." But then the thought would rise whether it were not a wicked thing to destroy the poor man's hope--his last hope, to which he clung so pitifully. He remembered the words Taras had spoken a year ago, and these were strange hints which had fallen from his lips just now. Yet the lawyer had not an idea what awful resolve had ripened in the despairing soul of this man; he only perceived that he would leave no means untried, no violence even, to get back the field the parish had been robbed of--and this was bad enough to be prevented, if possible.

He believed he saw a way out of the difficulty. "Well, then, Taras," he said, "we will try the Emperor. I will draw up a memorial for you, and we can send it to Vienna. You, meanwhile, go quietly back to your people. There is no need to leave your family and your farm and your public duties on that account. The Emperor will see what it is all about from the document; there is no need to plead in person." At any rate, we shall thus gain time, the good man was hoping; he will calm down meanwhile, and will be able to bear his disappointment when it does come, perhaps a year hence.

But in laying this pretty plan, he had not considered the man he had to do with.

"No," replied Taras, with his own inflexible firmness. "I will gladly take your advice, but not on this point. My whole future is at stake, and the welfare of my wife and children. How could I trust to a happy chance? I shall go to Vienna myself, to see the Emperor and present the petition."

"Do stop to consider!" urged the lawyer. "And what chance is it you are talking of? I shall forward the memorial by post safely, and shall get it presented by a trustworthy man--a friend of mine----"

"Why, this is a whole string of chances," interrupted Taras. "The letter may be lost, or tampered with--one has heard of postbags being robbed. And your friend may fall ill, or die, before he can do what you request. But even if he were able to do it, and had the best of intentions, how should he speak for me, as I would myself? He would say a pleasant word, perhaps, thinking of you, his friend, or because he is in the presence of the Emperor; but he cannot possibly be anxious about *my* case. I must speak for myself!"

"But how should the Emperor understand you, not knowing a word of the Ruthenese?" inquired the lawyer, a little exasperated.

"Now, that can never be true!" cried Taras. "That is, I beg your pardon, some one must have told you a tale. It stands to reason that the Emperor can speak our language. Is he not the father of all his subjects, and are not we of them? And you would have me believe a father will not understand his children? No, no; that can never be! It is settled, then, that I shall go to Vienna, and I beg you to write out the petition for me; I will call for it this day week. I shall hardly get away before that, for I must set things in order before I leave."

There was no dissuading him. He returned to Zulawce, and neither his wife's entreaties nor the pope's remonstrance made the slightest impression on him. They both felt grateful on perceiving that a change had taken place in him; but both were equally set against his intention, though for different reasons. Anusia, for her part, did not doubt the likelihood of the Emperor's effective interference; but a journey to the far-off capital appeared to her as dangerous and venturesome as an expedition to the moon.

"Who can tell what might not happen on the road?" she said to the popadja, into whose sympathetic ear she poured her fears. "He may fall among thieves; or he may starve in some wilderness; or sorcerers may catch him with their wicked spells, and I shall never see him again. And even if he were likely to get through all these dangers, how is a man to find his way on *such* a journey and not be lost?"

Father Leo's apprehensions were not quite so desperate, although even he considered the journey a venture; but his chief fear was this--that it would be useless.

"The Emperor cannot possibly come back with you in person," he argued with his friend; "and how is he to know, without personal inspection, where the black cross stood these years ago? He can only inquire of the local authorities, our friends at Colomea; and how should they tell him anything different from what they have already decided? They must stick to the verdict to escape censure, if for no other reason."

But Taras had an answer to every objection. To his wife he said, "It is not the sorcerers you fear, but the sorceresses." And to Father Leo he said, "You know most things better than we do, no doubt; but even you have had no experience with emperors." It was plain he was bent on going.

The following Sunday he called a meeting of the men. "My own farm," he said, "I have entrusted to the care of my friend Simeon. He has offered to act as my representative also in parish affairs. But I cannot accept that; the parish must not be without a judge for so many weeks, perhaps months. I therefore resign my office, but I advise you to choose him in my place."

His friends opposed him, none more eagerly than Simeon himself. But Taras was not to be moved, and since his enemies failed not to second him, the resolution was carried, Simeon being chosen by a majority of votes. He accepted the office, declaring that he would hold it until his friend returned.

A few days later Taras again stood in Starkowski's chambers. The lawyer gave him the memorial to the Emperor, and a private letter addressed to a friend of his. "Go by this man's advice in everything," he said; "he is a man of high standing at Vienna, and will counsel you well, being himself of this country."

"Very well," said Taras; "I will do as you wish me; otherwise I should have gone straight to the Emperor's. No doubt every child at Vienna could show me his house."

"But you don't expect the children at Vienna to understand your Ruthenese!" cried the lawyer; adding, with a sigh, "God knows what will become of you!"

"I have no fear," said Taras, solemnly. "How should a man fail to gain his end who tries to do what is right?"

CHAPTER VII.

PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCES.

This had happened early in April. Taras had taken leave of his wife with the promise of letting her hear as often as possible, and he kept his word faithfully during the first stages of his absence. As early as the third week a letter arrived, dated from Lemberg, and written for Taras by a fellow-villager, a certain Constantino Turenko, who, as a soldier, had had the rare luck, in the estimation of the Zulawce folk, of rising to the dignity of a corporal. "Since my friend Taras is unable to send you a letter of his own contriving," this military genius wrote, "and since I am as clever at it as the colonel of the regiment himself, I send you word that he hopes you are well, as this leaves him at present. I have shown him all over the place; he never saw such a town in his life. You had better tell my people and Kasia, who used to be sweet on me, that they may expect me home in the summer on furlough. I shall bring my regimentals--won't they just be proud of me! Everybody says I am a fine soldier." Poor Anusia was thankful for even that much of news of her husband. In May another letter arrived from Cracow, indited by a musical hero of some church choir, also stating that Taras was well, but adding he was running short of money, and that he desired a remittance under his, the singer's, address. Father Leo, however, knew better than to carry out this injunction. It was the last news of the absent traveller which reached the village.

They waited, but the summer came and not a word of Taras. "It is a long day's journey to Vienna," the pope would say to Anusia, "and he might not easily come across a man there who understands the Ruthenese, and is not too grand to write a letter for him, so we must not be anxious."

But when even the harvest was over without bringing a sign of life, Father Leo himself grew uneasy, and was less confident in calming Anusia. And the poor thing, besides her waking fears, was harassed by nightly dreams of the most vivid apprehension, the least appalling of her visions being those in which she beheld her Taras captivated by some pretty Hungarian, but alive at least; but more often she would see him dragging along the weary roads utterly starving, and sometimes her dreams showed him dead in a ditch. With these tales of woe she came to the manse almost daily, and Father Leo did his best to console her. The pretty Hungarian he found it easiest to dispose of, assuring the distracted wife that Taras's way did not lead him through Hungary at all; and, as for the starving, he believed it unlikely, considering the two hundred florins the traveller had taken with him, but death certainly was a contingency against which no hapless mortal was proof. And when this latter vision mournfully overbore the previous ones, the poor woman lost all her youthful energy, fading away with her grief, and Father Leo, for very pity of her, wrote to Dr. Starkowski, imploring him to procure some news. The good-natured man readily promised to make inquiries at Vienna, but week after week passed and nothing was heard, nor did the lost one himself return.

It was autumn, the first frost was felt, and it was Saint Simon and Saint Jude's. Everywhere within sight of the stern mountains the people look upon this day as the herald of winter; the women see to their larders, and the men assemble to fix each household's share of firewood from the common forest. This being done, Simeon, the new judge, had gone to the manse to arrange with Father Leo concerning the pope's due. That was soon settled, but the two men continued in mournful conversation, and Father Leo scarcely had the heart to dissent from the judge's doleful remark that the miserable field had cost the village not only one of its stalwart youths, but another and more precious life as well, inasmuch as it seemed beyond a doubt that poor Taras had perished. Sympathy with his fate thus kept them talking, the dusk of evening descending with its own stillness, broken at times by the wailings of Anusia, who once again had come with her troubles to the kind-hearted popadja.

There was a knock at the outer door, and almost simultaneously they heard the poor wife's shriek--: "Taras!" They flew from the room.

It was a mystery how Anusia had recognised her husband without seeing him or hearing his

voice, or even his footfall; but it was himself. "Are you quite well?" he cried, as he caught her to his heart. "I have seen the children already!"

The friends fell back reverently to leave the husband and wife to each other; but then they also pressed round him to shake hands joyfully, and the popadja hastened to light her lamp. But when Taras entered the lighted apartment a heartrending shriek broke from Anusia, and the friends also stood horrified. Poor Taras looked sadly worn--old and grey, and life's hope, as it were, crashed out of him. His powerful frame was emaciated; the sunny hair showed colourless streaks; the furrow between the brows had grown deeper still, and the eyes looked hollow in the haggard face.

"You bring ill news, brother!" cried Simeon, aghast.

"Ill news!" repeated Taras. He endeavoured to smile, but failed sadly; and when the tears sprang to every eye about him, he, too, sat down and let his own trouble flow unhindered.

"My poor, dear darling!" sobbed Anusia, covering his head with her kisses and her tears--"come back to us a grey-haired man!"

But her grief helped Taras to recover himself, and now he did smile. He drew down his wife beside him, stroking her own brown hair gently. "Is not that like a woman," he said, striving to appear light-hearted, "to make a fuss because the man she wedded must turn grey in his time! The glory of youth is treacherous, my dear!... But tell me about yourselves now, and about the village."

"Tell us about *yourself*," they cried. "We have died with anxiety these months past. Where have you been all this time?"

"It was not possible to come back sooner," said he. "It is a long journey to Vienna, and I had to wait many a day before I could see him----"

"The Emperor! Did you actually speak to him?"

"Well--yes--after a fashion! They call it having an audience," said he, with a strangely gloomy smile. "And I would not come away without an answer...."

"Have you got it then? The Emperor's own answer?"

"No; but I know what it is going to be.... However, let us wait and see. I want to know how you have been getting on--and what about friend Hajek?"

"He is not over-anxious to show himself," said Simeon, making haste to add: "I am sure you will see that your farm meanwhile has done well. Your live stock is in the best condition, and the harvest was most plentiful. Your granaries are well filled, and I have eighty florins to give you for corn sold, and thirty for oats. But do tell us; did not the Emperor promise to see to the matter?"

"Promise!" said Taras bitterly, "to be sure he did!... But excuse me," he added, turning to the popadja, "I am quite faint with hunger. I was so anxious to reach home, that I put up nowhere today."

The little woman blushed, and ran to produce an enormous ham, with no end of excuses for her negligence; and, trotting to and fro, she set on the table whatever of hidden treasures her larder contained. But her hospitable intent was ill-requited; Taras swallowed a few mouthfuls, drank a glass of the pope's Moldavian, and then pushed from him the plate which the kind hostess had filled for him in her zeal.

"Why, you have not eaten enough for a sparrow," expostulated the popadja. "Do eat, judge--" correcting herself--"Taras!" But, again blushing, she added: "Why should I not call you 'judge,' for I daresay you will resume office pretty soon."

"No!" he said sharply. "I shall not, and never will"

"Of course you will," interrupted Simeon, eagerly. "You know I only accepted during your absence. I could never be to the village what you have been, and no one else could!"

"I shall *not*!" repeated Taras solemnly, lifting his right hand; "God knows I cannot!"

They looked at him surprised; there was something in his tone which startled his friends. But Anusia cried joyfully: "I am glad of it, husband. We will live for ourselves now, and be happy again. You must make haste to get back your own bright looks. You shall go hunting this winter as often as you like, it will do you good!"

"Yes," he said; "it will be well," adding, after a while, "and most necessary--most necessary!"

"How so?" inquired the pope; "there cannot be many bears this winter, considering how you hunted them down last season."

Taras had opened his lips, but closed them again sharply, as though he must keep in the word

that might have escaped him. And there was one of those sudden pauses of silence, burdened with unspoken thought.

The popadja broke it. "Now tell us all about the journey," she said. "I am sure we are all curious as to your adventures. Tell us about the Emperor--does he really live in a house made of gold?"

"I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you," replied Taras, with a smile. "His house is of brick and stone, and he himself a poor, sickly creature. And, indeed, I had no very wonderful adventures--I did not even fall in with a single sorceress, Anusia, but that may have been because I did not look for any, having eyes and ears for nothing beyond the one aim of my journey. I had no peace or rest anywhere, and would have liked to take post-horses, but could not afford it. So I looked out for coaches and waggons going that way, and took to my own feet when opportunity was wanting. It is slow travelling, either way, but I fell in with other travellers, who told me their troubles, as I told them mine. It is passing strange: the earth seems fair enough, but I have not met a single being who told me he was happy. Men seem to carry their burden everywhere, some more of it, some less, but there is none without sorrow; one finds that out if one goes a-travelling, folks talking to you as to a brother. And I must say, most of those I fell in with approved of my journey, one man only endeavouring to dissuade me. I had better go home again, he said. He was a Jewish wine trader from Czernowitz, who gave me a lift as far as Lemberg. He was most friendly, and would not hear of my paying him; he listened to my story, full of sympathy, but he thought going to Vienna was quite useless. 'There might be some hope,' he said, 'if these were the days of the good Emperor Joseph.' I, however, was not to be frightened from my purpose. 'It is not as though I wanted to petition for a favour,' I said; 'if I did I could understand that much depended on the kind of emperor we have. But I am not going to plead for anything save our right, and that he surely will grant, because it is his duty. A man must see his own duty, be he emperor or peasant.' He was silent after that, and we reached Lemberg."

"There, anyhow, you fell in with a happy individual," said the pope, interrupting him. "You met Constantino Turenko! I, at least, never knew a man to equal him in self-satisfaction."

Taras could not help laughing. "And yet he was not quite happy," he said, "since I found him sorely distressed for money. I had to lend him a florin. Is he here?"

"To be sure!" cried Anusia; "what a braggart he is! Why, he assured me how handsomely he stood treat for you at all the best inns of Lemberg. Of course I did not believe him, but the villagers somehow take his every word for gospel truth. He is quite a hero here, basking in his own glory. You should hear him--'I, a corporal of the Imperial army! Bassama!'"--she endeavoured to imitate the man. "He is a braggart!"

"Yes, his tongue wagged plentifully in my hearing also," said Taras, "especially after he had borrowed my florin! But I was glad, nevertheless, to come across him. It was the first large town I had seen, and I felt lost. You have no idea of such a town, and yet Lemberg is nothing compared to Vienna! He would have liked to detain me; but having rested a day, I proceeded towards Cracow. It was cheerless travelling now, for I could not understand the people any longer--at least not freely; the folk there have a queer way of talking, a kind of lispng it seemed to me, which does not come from the heart at all. I was silent and grew sad, feeling doubly pleased, therefore, in coming across a fellow-countryman, a 'diak'^[3] from somewhere near Czortkow, who had run away from his wife because she boxed his ears rather too freely. That is what he told me. He was a mite of a fellow, and informed me he would like to seek his fortune in Russia, if only he could get a little money; but I found presently he was telling me stories, and would do no more than frank him as far as Cracow. That city is not Austrian at all, the Poles there having a little free state of their own. It was a marvel to me how a number of men could live together owning no emperor as the head of all justice; but I have come to see now----" He interrupted himself, again pressing together his lips to keep in the word he would have spoken, and continuing after a pause:--"I was going to say, it is sad to be in a strange country; and hungering for a companion I could understand, I took the little story-teller with me as far as Cracow where I dismissed him."

"How clever of you to see through him," cried Anusia, proud of her husband's penetration. And she told him of the man's letter.

"The little rascal!" said Taras. "But, indeed, my two hundred florins were not such a fortune as you would have believed. Things grew enormously expensive, and there was other trouble besides. I was thankful at seeing again the black and yellow posts by the road--the Austrian colours. It was a poor enough country, on the Polish frontier; but if the people there were to work their hands as they work their talkative jaws, I have no doubt it might be better. I got to richer districts presently; but matters did not therefore improve. I was among the Moravians now, and to hear them speak sounded like a continuous quarrelling, till I perceived that their language still had some words like our own, especially such as bread, meat, and wine, things referring to eating, and the figures also--which was well. It was when I came among the Germans that my heart failed me. A fine people, no doubt, with villages more flourishing than our towns, and fields and farms to rejoice a man's soul; but what a language! Understanding was hopeless. I was driven to signs, moving my jaws when I was hungry and lapping with my tongue when I wanted to drink. But when I would have liked bread they brought me salad, and when I longed for a glass of water they offered me wine. However, I bore it all, anxious only to get along. Towards the end of my journey I fell in with a good-natured waggoner, who was carrying woollen cloths to Vienna,

and he gave me a seat. He was a most kindly old man, to judge from his pleasant face; and I think he took a fancy to me, for he kept smiling and nodding as he walked by the side of his horses, I nodding back to him from my seat between the bales. By and by he climbed up beside me; but then we thought it a poor business to be nodding only, and began to talk, he in his language and I in mine, exchanging some of our tobacco between whiles in token of mutual regard. I wished sorely I could understand what he was saying. It seems hard that God should have made men with different tongues, to add to their troubles, when their life on earth is sad enough without it!"

"Why, it is the Tower of Babel which brought it on, don't you know?" broke in the popadja, blushing violently at her presumption.

Taras continued: "I was taken along by this good man for two days--slow travelling, for the waggon was heavily loaded. On the third morning he resumed his smiling and nodding more vigorously than ever, pointing with his whip in front of him, and saying, 'Vienna, Vienna!' I understood, of course, and my heart leapt within me! but I could see nothing as yet except a thick grey haze in the distance, and behind it a ridge of clouds, with domes and peaks sharply defined. I thought it strange, for the air was clear and cool, there having been a thunder-storm in the night. But as we went on, hour after hour, and the cloudy picture continued unaltered, I perceived my error. It was not clouds, but a range of mountains on the horizon. And that haze, as I discovered by and by, was nothing but the dust and vapour for ever rising heavenward from a gigantic city, like the hot breath of a monstrous dragon."

The women gasped and crossed themselves.

"The waggoner hurried on his horses a bit, and kept repeating 'Vienna! Vienna!' getting me to understand by all sorts of dumb show that he had his wife and children there--happy man! I thought of you all, and my heart sank within me at the sight of the great city where no one would understand me. But I repressed these feelings and began to look about. We were crossing a splendid stone bridge, long and wide, beneath which the river was rolling its yellow waves--that was the Danube. Beyond the bridge rose the first houses. They were cheerful to look at, not larger than what we can see at Colomea, with pleasant gardens round about; but I knew we were in the suburbs only. 'I shall soon see the real town,' I thought, 'with the market place: and on it, I daresay, the Emperor's house.' But minutes passed, and an hour had gone, and we were still driving along an interminable street with little gardens on either side, one like the other, though getting fewer, I observed, as we proceeded, while the number of human beings and of vehicles increased steadily. It was a crowd as at Lemberg on market days, and there was a roar in the distance which rather puzzled me, growing louder and louder as we advanced. There were no more gardens now, and the houses were larger, some towering three, even four storeys high, with windows innumerable. I was utterly bewildered to think of all the human beings that must dwell there; and the street appeared endless, men and women jostling each other between the vehicles. And I saw that other streets opened out of this main thoroughfare, with horses and men and conveyances past counting. I clutched the bales between which I was sitting, utterly overpowered with the sight...."

"Ah," said Anusia, sympathetically.

"That street must be miles long; but we were through it at last, and there the city seemed at an end, and, not a little surprised, I saw large tracts of grass all around. At some distance I beheld a rampart, and behind it another city of houses, shining steeples, and a gigantic cupola. The crowd about us increased astonishingly, heaving in and out of the gates. It was a riddle to me, for had we not been driving through the city all along? I looked at my companion and he pointed ahead, saying 'Vienna!' 'Dear me,' I thought, 'then I have only come through a suburb as yet; what, then, will the town be like?' By that rampart they levy custom, and even victuals are taxed! I could not think what those green-coats were after in diving into my wallet, but they found only a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese, which they put back, laughing.

"I felt more and more bewildered, and do not know how to describe to you my sensation on entering that city; it was like venturing into a bee-hive. Yet this will scarcely give you an idea. Imagine how it would be if all the needles in the fir-wood up yonder were suddenly changed into human beings, whirling about madly like flakes in a snowstorm! Fancy if all the trees and shrubs were towering houses, closely packed, so that a ray of sunlight could scarcely get through! or how it would be if a thunder-storm were fixed for ever in the heavens above us, the booming commotion never ceasing, day and night!... But I am a fool for trying to show you by word of mouth what Vienna is like; how should you conceive it who have never been there! And I cannot tell you how utterly forlorn I felt. It must have been written on my face, for the honest waggoner took hold of my hand, asking me a question. From his kindly look I seemed to understand that he inquired whether I felt ill, so I shook my head and smiled. But evidently this was not the answer he wanted; he kept repeating his question, and pointed to the houses, and at last he rested his head on my shoulder, closing his eyes and drawing his breath slowly. Then I perceived that he wanted to find out where I intended to put up for the night. The thought had actually escaped me in my great bewilderment. Before I knew what Vienna was, I had believed the matter to be quite simple, intending to look for that Mr. Broza, Dr. Starkowski's friend, to whom I had an introduction, and no doubt he would take charge of me. But somehow I understood now that I could not well be carried all over the city in a great waggon full of bales; and as for setting out to seek the gentleman on foot by myself, I did not think that I should ever have the courage. So I shrugged my shoulders, making eyes of entreaty at my companion. He appeared to understand

that I was friendless, and, having recourse to a dumb show of working his jaws, he brought home the question to me whether I desired to be taken to an eating-house. I assented, and, turning from the main thoroughfare, he drove up some quieter streets, stopping at last before an unpretentious building, which had a signboard, and on it a tree with bright green leaves. He cracked his whip, and a man appeared--a servant by the look of him, to whom my good friend explained my need. The man grinned, and, turning to me, inquired in Polish whether I wished for a room. Now, as for the Poles, no one could love them or their language either, but I could have cried for joy on hearing the man, although he spoke but brokenly. He had been to Galicia as a soldier, being himself a Czech."

"A fellow-countryman of our respected mandatar!" cried Simeon.

"Yes; but with this difference, that Frantisek proved himself to be honest. And when I had explained to him who I was and why I had come to Vienna, he assisted me as much as he could, his first good office consisting in this, that he prevailed with his master to board and lodge me for a florin daily. Why, Anusia, there is no occasion to make such eyes, for it was cheap, considering I was in Vienna. And he offered to show me the way to Mr. Broza's the following morning. 'It is too late to-day,' he said, having looked at the letter, 'for the gentleman, I see, lives in the city, and that is a long way off.' 'In the city!' I cried, aghast; 'why, what is this?' 'This is Leopoldstadt, one of the suburbs,' he explained, calmly; and then I learned that the place with the interminable street we had passed before was Floridsdorf. Would you believe it, there are six such places forming the outer precincts of Vienna, and nine regular suburbs--that is fifteen cities enclosing a city! And their inhabitants are almost beyond counting--as many, they told me, as in all the Bukowina and Pokutia together."

"That, no doubt, was a story," interposed Simeon, who was not going to be taken in. But the pope confirmed the remarkable tale. "I have read it in books," he said.

"Well, I leave you to conjecture what the real town was like to which Frantisek took me the following morning. It is worse there at all times than on a market day at Colomea or the most crowded fair; and what seemed to me most horrible, men and beasts--I mean vehicles--go jostling one another in a gloomy twilight, for the streets are so narrow and the houses so high that you have need almost to lie flat on the ground, face upward, before you can see a bit of sky or the dear light of the sun; but no one could lie down, or stand still suddenly, without being run over. Even as it was, I was knocked hither and thither constantly, till Frantisek took me by the arm and helped me along as though I had been a child. Through numberless streets, and past St. Stephen's--a church about twenty times as large as our own--he brought me to a place called the Jew's Square; for what reason I could not make out, for not a single caftan or curl did I see. Mr. Victor Broza lived there in a stately house; but, dear me, the stairs I had to climb till I reached his flat! No beggar with us would thank you for rooms so toilsome of access! Mr. Broza's servant at first treated me superciliously; but when I had sent in my letter I was admitted at once. The man I had come to see was a fine-looking old gentleman, with silvery hair, and wearing gold spectacles. Very noble he looked, but he was not at all proud. And what a comfort to me to speak in my own tongue again without being stared at as a curiosity! But when he began, though all he said was kind and reasonable and well-meaning, my joy was gone. He warned me not to rest too great hopes on the Emperor. 'He is a good man, to be sure,' he said, 'and if your object were to obtain some money-help for your parish, either to build you a church or to alleviate some special distress, he no doubt would listen to you graciously. But he cannot enter into legal questions with his infirmity, poor man. His crown is a heavy burden to him as it is!' 'I do not understand that,' said I; 'if he can be gracious, how should he refuse to be just?' 'Well,' said Mr. Broza, 'matters of law are seen to by his lawyers. That is what they are for.' 'But if they pervert the right?' 'Then it is not his fault.' 'But, surely he will interfere!' 'The Emperor?' 'Yes; who else?' 'Indeed, who else? you may well ask!' he said. 'Your tale is a sad one, I grant, and if ever a case should be looked into I should say it is yours! Ah, if his uncle Joseph were reigning still, or even his father Francis ... the more you tell me, the more I fancy yours is a case for imperial interference; but----' He stopped embarrassed. 'Tell me,' I said; 'is he not able to do it?' I could hardly frame the words, and the blood ran cold at my heart. But Mr. Broza appeared to consider his answer, looking from the window, and saying presently: 'He is troubled with headaches; he is fond of working at his lathe, and he makes little boxes of cardboard.' I stared, open-mouthed, Mr. Broza adding: 'Why should he not, poor man; it is an innocent pastime, and helps him to get through his days....' After that I could not well disbelieve it."

"But he is the Emperor! how is it possible?" cried Simeon and the women.

Taras smiled bitterly. "How is it possible?" he repeated. "I also asked this question, and many another besides, till good Mr. Broza looked aghast at me, and spoke soothingly. 'I understand your feelings,' he said, passing his hand over my hair as though he were trying to calm an excited child. 'You are a fine fellow, Taras, but I daresay the world looks different to you at Zulawce from what it really is.' 'May be, much honoured sir,' I said; 'but I am sure of this, that human beings should act differently to one another than the wild beasts of the Welyki Lys, of which the stronger will always devour the weaker. Every man must see this, be he a poor peasant of Zulawce only, or the Emperor at Vienna.' 'He does see it, no doubt,' cried Mr. Broza, 'and he is always kind. But he can hardly know about every case of individual trouble, can he?' 'No, but that is the very reason why I want to tell him my own sorrow myself.' 'But he would not understand you, you only speak the Ruthenese!' That was a blow! I had refused to believe Dr. Starkowski, and here was Mr. Broza telling me the same thing! 'A father unable to understand his children,' I said; 'it does seem

strange; but I daresay he knows Polish?' 'I am sorry to say he does not; he was weakly from a child, and his studies had to be curtailed.' 'Then, does he understand Czechish?' 'Yes, that he knows.' 'That will do, then,' I said joyfully, 'I managed to get along with Frantisek, so I daresay I shall with the Emperor.' But that was not by any means the end of difficulties. 'I must warn you,' said Mr. Broza, 'he gives audience but rarely, the petitions mostly are received by one of his cousins or generals.' That was another blow, but I recovered it quickly, saying: 'Well, then, I shall just keep calling at his house till I *can* see him.' Mr. Broza at this broke into a smile. 'Do you think you can go to the Castle as you would to the house of your parish priest? There is a time set apart for audience once a week, though they are not very regular about it, and in order to be received at all you must first apply for admission in writing!' 'And I could come every week then, till I saw the Emperor in person?' 'Dear me, what obstinacy! What is the use of your spending your time and money here on such a chance? Give me your memorial, and I will take care to have it presented.' 'Sir,' I cried, 'I thank you; I see you mean well by me, but you cannot possibly know how much there is at stake. I must see the Emperor myself.' And this I maintained in spite of all his reasoning. But he, good man, took no offence; on the contrary, he promised to obtain admission for me at the very next audience. He wanted to know my address, but I did not even know it myself, so Frantisek had to be called to give the name of the inn. Mr. Broza wrote it in a little book, promising I should hear. But I wanted to have some idea how soon I might hope to see the Emperor. 'I cannot tell,' he said; 'it may be some days, it may be weeks hence.' I left him sadly...."

"Well, I should not have waited like that," cried Anusia, hotly; "surely the Emperor goes for an airing once a day like any other Christian! I should have waited outside his house till I caught sight of him, and, going up to him, I should have asked his leave politely to walk beside him a bit, and then I would have told him the whole story. That would have been my plan!"

"And a very stupid one," said Taras, smiling grimly, "though you are my wife. Nor should I blame you, since that same stupidity was mine till I knew better. My heart quaked at the long prospect of waiting, and I knew from sad experience that it was no use to look for much in answer to writing. I said to Frantisek, therefore, 'Do show me the house of the Emperor,' and he went out with me the following afternoon. Once more we went far into the town, past the great church, and through endless noisy streets, till at last we stood before a large building. 'This is it,' he said. 'Nonsense!' I cried; 'why there is not a bit of gold about it anywhere that I can see!' He, however, insisted it was the Emperor's house. When I saw he was in earnest, I looked at the place closely; it was large, but not otherwise imposing, and quite blackened with smoke. 'I'd go in for some house-painting, at any rate, if I were the Emperor; surely he can afford it,' I said to myself, adding aloud to Frantisek, 'Well, then, show me where the Emperor lives!' Whereupon he took me round a square surrounded with tall buildings, and through a gateway into another square, also overlooked by high houses, with sentries on duty at every corner. 'All this is the Emperor's,' he said; 'here he lives with his relations and a great many attendants.' Imagine my surprise. But then I said, 'I cannot but think that he sleeps in one room and feeds in another--so please point out to me where *he* lives.' Frantisek now appeared to understand, and took me to an open place, in the centre of which rose an equestrian statue in cast-iron; and he showed me a row of windows. 'Very well,' I said; 'now let us take our stand by that entrance door.' 'What for?' said he. 'To watch for the Emperor when he goes abroad.' 'You innocent!' he cried, laughing; 'don't you know that the Emperor never walks out? You may see his carriage, if you are lucky, bursting from the inner court, and dashing through the town as far as a copse on the banks of the river, returning thence at the same quick pace.' He had hardly done speaking when there was a deafening roar, quite startling me. It was the sentry calling out the guard frantically. 'Look! look!' cried Frantisek, 'they are presenting--it's the Emperor returning from his drive!' And while he yet spoke a closed carriage with six horses swept past us and disappeared in the inner court. But for all their fast driving I could see who sat inside--two officers, the elder of them in a plain grey coat, and the younger wearing a whole array of stars and ribands on his breast. 'That will be him!' I thought, but I heard Frantisek say: 'Poor Emperor, to think of his wrapping up in his cloak at this season like an old man in the depth of winter--they say he is always shivering with cold!'"

"I could not doubt that he knew, having lived at Vienna these five years, and I went home sadder still; for he who was wrapt in his cloak looked weary and worn."

"And was that really the Emperor?" inquired the popadja.

"It was; but it was long before I could see him close. For a whole week I waited for a message from Mr. Broza, but nothing reached me. Ah, friends, those were grievous days! I sat for hours in the dull little damp room they had assigned to me, staring at the wall. I had composed such a beautiful speech on my journey, and had learnt it by heart, to address the Emperor, but all that was useless now since he knew not the Ruthenese; so I put together a few words which might serve my purpose. But perhaps he could not even understand that much, and all would be useless and things must go as they would!... Frantisek, I saw, pitied me, for he would give me every spare moment of his time, hoping to cheer me; but how should he have succeeded? although he did his best, taking me all about the great city to divert my thoughts. It was but little pleasure to me, for the noise and bustle was dreadful, and the people stared because of my dress; there was quite a crowd sometimes following me, full of laughter and ill-disguised wonder, as though I were some monstrosity of a bullock. I soon grew tired of sight-seeing, and preferred my own little room, where at least I was unmolested."

"Did Mr. Broza forget his promise?" cried Simeon.

"By no means; he was doing his very best. He told me so when, at the end of a week, I ventured to call again, and I am sure he spoke the truth. 'Your name is down,' he said, 'you will be admitted to the next audience, but the day is not yet fixed. Next week, let us hope!' I continued waiting, growing more heavy-hearted day after day. And then I had even money cares to face! A hundred florins I had spent on my journey, and there was a florin a day of present expenses; how, then, should I return home if I must use up my little hoard waiting and waiting? I began to blame myself for not having followed your advice, and Dr. Starkowski's; and yet, God knows, I had not come to Vienna to please myself. I could not have acted differently. Was it not for the sake of all that is most sacred--my honour, and the good of my soul? Was it not----"

He stopped short, having caught a look from the pope's eye, searching his face intently.

"Well then," he continued, "I went on waiting ten weary days, when at last Mr. Broza sent his servant, announcing that the next audience stood fixed for the following Tuesday week; that was yet twelve days, but I breathed more freely, knowing the day now when the uncertainty must end. Thus humble a man becomes who is being taught by disappointment. I counted the days and hours, and on the Sunday previous to the longed-for audience I went to Mr. Broza, begging him to tell me how I was to behave. 'You mean in the Emperor's presence?' said he. 'Why, yes,' said I. 'But did I not tell you that although there be an audience you must not count on seeing the Emperor himself? The petitions, most likely, will be received in his name by one of the princes.' I had to sit down, for the room went round with me, and it was some time before I could answer. 'You did tell me, sir,' I said, when I was able to speak; 'but I fully trusted the Emperor would be receiving in person this once at any rate; why but for this should I have been kept waiting so long?' But Mr. Broza shrugged his shoulders. 'Let us hope so,' he said; 'but if you do not see him, be sure and hand your petition to the Archduke--he probably will hold the audience. Your conscience may be at ease, for you have done your duty to the utmost--better, I daresay, than any other village judge in Austria.' 'Thank you,' I said; 'but I can do no such thing. I shall give my petition into no hand but the Emperor's own. And if he does not appear this Tuesday, I must wait for another audience, and another, till I see him.' 'But, man, will you not listen to reason? Who is to procure you a standing admission? Such a thing was never heard of!' 'If it is really impossible,' I replied--'and of course I believe you, for you have acted honestly by me--if it is impossible, I shall know what to do.' 'And what may that be?' 'I shall throw myself into the way of his carriage when he drives out. If his coachman is able to pull up in time, I shall then present my petition; if the horses go over me, then it will have been my fate.' He looked at me aghast. 'And you would do that?' 'Certainly.' 'Well,' he said, 'there is no saying what one of you peasants is capable of in fighting for his right.' Presently he added, 'I shall have you conveyed to the Castle on Tuesday, and fetched away again. You must come to me directly after the audience, directly--do you hear?' I promised; but my mind was made up."

"Taras," cried Anusia, "how could you have such thoughts!"

His eyes burned darkly, and he shook the grief-streaked hair from off his forehead. "I may have had worse thoughts," he murmured; but the others hardly understood him. He paused, and went on quietly: "Well, then, the audience. I dressed for it quite early, as a bridegroom on his wedding day, putting on my top boots, and the long brown tunic with the leather belt, and over it my best sheepskin--all white, the one with the brodered facings, you know, Anusia. It was rather hot for fur, suggested Frantisek, who had made my boots shine like a mirror, anxious to do his part; but I knew what was due to the Emperor, and took my fur cap of lambskin as well. The people stared worse than ever when, thus arrayed, I walked from the house to the open carriage kind Mr. Broza had sent for me, and as I drove along folk everywhere stood open-mouthed. I did not much care, for I knew by this time that the Viennese, whatever they may be besides, are the most curious people under the sun. We reached the Castle, and stopped by the entrance opposite the iron statue. A lackey helped me to dismount, bowing to the ground. I knew that the rascal meant it for mockery, and took no notice. At the top of the stair two red-coated halberdiers pretended to start at the sight of me; but I showed my order for admittance, whereupon they directed me to a door opposite. I opened it, and came upon some more lackeys, who affected the same amazement. One of them tried to take from me my stick of carved oak; but I did not part with it. They laughed and pointed me to another door.

"I had reached the audience chamber at last: a long, spacious hall, all white and gold, and full of looking-glasses as tall as a man. I should never have believed such splendour possible--it was dazzling. Some fifty petitioners were assembled there already--old and young, men and women, soldiers and civilians, priests and laymen--some looking anxious and some hopeful. One thing we had in common--we all carried memorials in our hands; but for the rest of it every age was represented, every station of life, and, perhaps, every people of this great Austria. There was a poor tattered gipsy, and beside him a comfortable-looking lady in a silk dress; an old gentleman in threadbare garments, and a young handsome officer wearing the Emperor's uniform; a Jew in his black caftan, a sleek Catholic priest, and many others. They moved about whispering, and behind them stood motionless some of the red-coated halberdiers. I could not but groan at the sight of so many seeking redress. 'Alas!' I sighed, 'it would take the Emperor half-a-day to listen to them all; and of course he cannot do that, weak and sickly as he is,' Yet there was some comfort, too, in there being so many. Some of these people, no doubt, had come a long way, as I had, spending their money for the hope that brought them; and surely, I thought, they would not do it if the Emperor were not known to help readily. And it comforted my weary heart that rich and poor stood there side by side, all waiting for redress. 'We are all alike in the sight of God,' I

thought, 'and so we are in the Emperor's, who is His viceroy upon earth--how, then, should he not uphold the right?' This cheered me; I looked up boldly, gazing at the people as they gazed at me.

"We were directed to stand in a half-circle, a man in a green dress-coat assigning to each his place; and I perceived that there were degrees of dignity. I stood at the lower end, furthest from the entrance we were facing, together with two other peasants, by the look of them, also wearing their national costume. The one was rather stout, his dress consisting of light blue breeches, a tight-fitting jerkin, and a cloth cap with a plume; the other, tall and gaunt, wore baggy red trousers, and a long yellowish jacket, holding in his hands a felt hat with a high pointed crown. We had to wait a long time, and I did as the others did, endeavouring to draw my neighbours into conversation. They answered civilly, each in his own tongue, neither of us understanding the other. That was disappointing; but I thought I would at least find out their nationality, and that by the only means I could think of. You know that our soldiers, if they bring home nothing else, return to us with a sad habit of swearing, picking up the country's oaths wherever they go. 'Psie sobaczy!' I said; but there was no response. So my friends could not be of the Slavonic race. 'Kreuzelemt Donnerwetter!' they never moved; so they were not German. 'Bassama teremtete!' upon this my stout neighbour in the tight breeches gave a jump, jabbering away at me delightedly; that settled it, he was a Hungarian! But now for the other one in the yellow jacket. 'Merge le Dracul!' no response; he could not be a Roumanian then. I was nearly exhausted, but luckily remembered one more chance. 'Corpo di bacco!' I cried, at which he also flew at me, embracing me wildly--an Italian! But I wished I had been less curious; for they went on talking at me eagerly, to the great amusement of all the company, and I could only nod my head, keeping on with 'Corpo di bacco!' and 'Bassama teremtete!' But why tell you all this nonsense?--There was a hush of silence suddenly, for the great entrance door had opened."

Taras paused, evidently not in order to impress his hearers, but because he was himself overcome with the recollection of that moment.

"The Emperor!" cried Anusia, with a gasp.

He shook his head. "There appeared in the doorway," he continued quietly, but with a tremor in his voice, "a man in the uniform of a general, rather short and white-haired, and some officers of different regiments behind him. My heart all but stood still and sight failed me--I think I should have fallen but for the steadying arm of the Hungarian. It was *not* the Emperor; for although I had had but a passing glimpse of him, I knew his features from a portrait of his at the inn where I was lodging. That little white-haired general with the pouting under-lip--though he looked right pleasant otherwise--was a relation of his no doubt, being like him in feature; but it was not the Emperor! Ah, beloved! I cannot tell you what disappointment surged up within me, I could not put it in words if I tried for ever! I looked on, half stunned, watching him as he received the memorials. With most of the petitioners he could speak in their own tongue, and if there was one he was unable to understand, one or other of the officers acted as interpreter; but with no individual case was he occupied longer than about a minute, passing on with a gracious word. Some looked relieved, some rather woebegone, as they made their exit, a lackey directing them to a side door. I watched it all through a haze as it were, and perceived that at that rate my turn would be in about an hour's time, counting from his beginning at the other end of the half-circle. I tried to collect my thoughts, but think as I would nothing could alter the resolution with which I had come--to plead with the Emperor and not with his representative. And with a beating heart, but firm of purpose, I watched the prince's approach."

"Ye saints!" gasped the popadja, and Anusia crossed herself.

"At last he stood before me! I bowed low, he nodded and put out his hand for my petition. But I bowed lower still, saying: 'All powerful and gracious Mr. Prince! I know who you are, and that you are here for the Emperor; but to him only can I make my request.' He looked at me surprised, and turned for an interpreter. One of the officers, a captain, with ash-coloured facings, being of the Duke of Parma's regiment, which I knew was drawn from Podolia, stepped up, translating what I said. 'Peasant,' added the officer thereupon, turning to me with a kindly face, 'the Emperor is not to be seen, but it will be all right if you hand your petition to this gentleman, who is the Emperor's uncle, His Most Serene Highness the Archduke Ludwig.' Again I bowed, saying, 'Have the goodness to translate this to the prince. He who stands before you is Taras Barabola, peasant and landowner, lately judge of Zulawce, sometime a happy man, but now despairing. He may be nobody in the eyes of the great ones, but he is a human being in the sight of God, and therefore of His viceroy, the Emperor. He is here praying for his right, thirsting for it as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks. You, sir, are a fellow-countryman of ours, have pity on me and tell him this, word for word.' And the officer turned to the prince, interpreting my speech; whereupon the latter looked at me searchingly, putting a question. 'What is your trouble?' translated the officer. 'Robbery of the parish field,' I replied, adding, 'Tell him it is not merely a question of earthly justice, but that the future welfare of a soul is at stake. He is an old man I see, and will soon himself stand at the judgment bar of God; beg him, as he would desire the Almighty to be merciful to him, to obtain for me an audience with the Emperor.' 'My good man,' replied the captain, 'I am a Podolian myself and have grown up among peasants, being the son of a village priest, so you may believe that I wish you well; but I am not going to translate this speech of yours literally, or this is not the way to address a prince!' 'But you must!' I urged. 'It were taking an awful responsibility on your soul if you refused me; and see, the prince appears to expect it!' So he had to translate it, and never a feature changed in the Archduke's face, but his eyes were fixed on me piercingly. I did not quake--why should I?--but gazed at him fearlessly, my conscience

not reproaching me any way. Turning to the captain presently, he spoke a single word. 'Wait!' translated the officer. And the Archduke went on, taking the rest of the petitions and passing from the hall; whereupon the captain came up to me, saying, 'Follow me; the Archduke wishes to hear your story.'"

"What rare good fortune!" cried Father Leo.

"Yes; I suppose so," assented Taras. "We went along a corridor, and up and down some stairs, till we reached the Archduke's room. It was a simple apartment, full of books, and not in any way more princely than Mr. Broza's. He was sitting at a table covered with papers. We were ushered into his presence, I telling my tale and the captain translating. The Archduke's countenance remained as immovable as before; no matter what I was saying his eyes only showed his interest. He put a question or two: how we lived in the village, whether we reared cattle and such like. By and by he addressed a few words to the officer, who then led me away. 'Well?' I said, trembling with hope and fear, when the door had closed behind us. 'Your wish is granted,' replied he. 'Be by the iron statue yonder at four to-morrow afternoon, where I shall join you to act as your interpreter with the Emperor. "Why the man is of another planet," the Archduke said to me, "his confidence must not be shamed!" And he thinks the Emperor will like to see you, and that your Podolian garb will amuse him. He wishes you, therefore, to come in these same clothes to-morrow, and if you have anything in the way of weapons belonging to your dress to add it likewise.' 'For God's sake, captain,' I cried; 'I am coming to plead for the right, and not to show my clothes!' 'Yes, yes,' he said; 'but do as you are told,' adding kindly, 'you may thank your stars for this chance; and even if to-morrow's audience will avail you nothing, you may find it useful to have obtained the Archduke's interest.' 'I cannot understand that!' I cried. 'Well, and I could scarcely explain it to you,' said he, with a smile; 'but it *is* so.' And so said Mr. Broza, to whom I now went as I had promised; so also said the innkeeper, to whom, with the aid of Frantisek, I had to give a minute account. They all agreed that I was fortunate."

"Why, a child could understand that," interposed Simeon. "The Emperor, no doubt, values his old uncle's opinion."

"May be," said Taras, with a painful smile; "but they did not take it in that way, as I came to understand the following afternoon. You may imagine that I arrived by the iron statue a good while before the appointed time--it is a figure of the good Emperor Joseph. The officer walked up to me by the stroke of four, conducting me through the inner court to a splendid marble staircase, and through many passages to a door blazing with gold and guarded by some of the redcoated halberdiers. We passed a large ante-room, and entered a smaller one, where we were told to wait. The chamberlain in attendance, who looked vastly stupid, kept watching me with furtive sneers, but I did not care; my heart felt more solemnly uplifted than if I had been in a church. There was the sound of a little bell presently; the chamberlain glided in, and returning, he beckoned us to enter." Taras paused and drew a breath. "I think," he continued, slowly, "the look of that room, and of the two gentlemen in it, will be present with me to my dying hour: it was a large, splendid apartment, darkened with curtains, which left a half-light only, shutting out the sun; and at the table sat two officers--generals by their uniform. The one was that same old Ludwig, and in the other I recognised, when he rose, the Emperor! A feeble-bodied man of middle height, slightly stooping, with a good-natured face and blue eyes. He motioned me to come nearer, but I took a few steps only, and fell on my knees, holding up my petition. Oh! I did not kneel merely because it might be the custom, but urged by my own deepest need. For at that moment all the trouble I had battled with for months past surged up within me, and, do what I would, the tears rose from my heart...."

"And he?" cried Anusia.

"He came close to me, seemingly concerned at my emotion. Taking the petition I held out to him, he gave it to the Archduke, and then he addressed a few hasty words to me. 'He tells you to rise and dry your tears,' the captain whispered to me. But I remained on my knees, not to move his feelings, but simply because it was the natural position for mine. 'Thou Emperor,' I cried, 'have pity on me!' He plainly did not know what to say, and putting his hand into his pocket, drew forth a ducat, which he offered to me. 'I want no money; I want justice,' I cried. The Archduke stepped up now, whispering a few words to the Emperor, and then told the captain I was to rise, and that the Emperor would be sure to examine into my case carefully. I obeyed with an effort, but then I begged the captain to say that I would not hold myself assured till I had the Emperor's promise from his own lips. 'I cannot say that,' whispered the captain, alarmed; 'it would be most rude to the Archduke.' Whereupon I repeated the words myself, looking intently in the Emperor's face. Now the captain was obliged to translate, and thereupon the Emperor nodded to me, but burst out laughing at the same time, as though it were quite a joke. I am sure he did not mean to hurt me, for he looked kindness itself, and would not kill a fly if it annoyed him, but his laughter cut me to the heart; I keep hearing it still in my dreams.... No doubt the anguish of my soul was written in my face, but he took no notice. He walked round me, examining me curiously, and putting several questions--who had embroidered this fur of mine? whether I had many furs like that? and several pairs of these boots? did I polish them myself? and so forth. I answered his inquiries, but good God! they stunned my heart.... I think I would have given my life for his asking me a single question which did not refer to my clothes. But not he! And I daresay my fur and my boots would have interested him awhile yet, had not the Archduke again whispered some words to him. He left off questioning, and smiled at me once more with his good-natured smile, again offering me his ducat--not as a charity, as the captain had to tell me, but in memory of having

seen him. Thereupon, I took it--this is it, bearing his likeness."

He drew the coin from his belt. They all were anxious to see it, and agreed that the Emperor had a pleasant, good-natured face. "And now you were ready to start for home?" they said.

"Oh, no," said Taras, with a sigh; "for though my object was accomplished, my heart was no wise at ease. I wanted to wait for the Emperor's answer. My petition prayed for a re-examination of the witnesses, and thus much the Emperor might command on the spot, I thought. Mr. Broza tried to dissuade me--it might be months before I should hear, he said, and it would be a waste of time and money. But I clung to my desire, entreating him till he pitied my distress and promised to inquire at the Imperial Chancery whether the Emperor's decision had been received. It was a week after the private audience. The reply was hopeless--not even the petition itself had as yet been filed. 'I must look up that Uncle Ludwig,' I cried in my despair, and had some trouble in finding the captain who had acted as my interpreter--his name is Eugene Stanczuk, and his home is at Kossow, a few miles from Ridowa. I wanted him to take me once more to the Emperor's uncle. 'That is quite impossible,' he said, 'and moreover the Archduke has departed for his residence in Styria; he will not return here for months.' When I heard this I knew that further waiting was vain. I strapped my bundle--honest Frantisek brushing my boots for the last time sadly, and I went to Mr. Broza to thank him for all his kindness and--should he trust me--to borrow some money of him, for I had only ten florins left. 'That shall not trouble you,' he said, counting out a hundred florins to me without even a witness, as though I were his brother. 'Let us hope for a favourable answer in time,' he added, 'but if I have any claim on your gratitude, as you say, promise me one thing--do not let it break your heart if it turns out a denial!' Much as I owed him, this was more than I could promise; I had gone to Vienna with a hopeful mind, and was coming away now broken-hearted."

He ceased, the sadness gathering in his face.

"I do not see that!" cried Father Leo, "there is every room for hope since you have the Emperor's own promise!"

"Have *you* seen him?" said Taras, rising. "Have you been to Vienna? You have heard my tale, but you have not been there to see!... It is getting late--it must be near midnight. Kind thanks to you, friends. Come, wife, let us be gone!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DESPAIR.

The days followed one another, and winter was at hand; Taras, in silence, had taken up the old, changeless village life. He found plenty to do on his own farm in spite of the care bestowed upon it by Simeon during his absence; and, labouring with his men, the most diligent of them all, he could forget at times that one thought which kept burrowing in his brain. But for other reasons, too, it was well he was thoroughly occupied, for intercourse with the villagers could have comforted him little.

Ill-humour against him had risen to its height, since his journey to Vienna also had proved a fruitless errand. He had but two friends left besides the priest--his former colleagues, Simeon and Alexa. The others either openly hated him, or treated him with unkind pity as the fallen village king. As for his re-election to the judgeship, it was not so much as thought of. Simeon, true to his word, had resigned his vicarious honours at All Saints', rather expecting, however, the public confidence would turn to him; yet not even he was elected, but a certain Jewgeni Turenko.

The man thus chosen was a harmless individual, rather poor, who never could have aspired to such luck had the freaks of fortune not singled out his younger brother, Constantine, lifting him to the giddy height of a corporal in the Imperial army. It had never been dreamt of in the village, that any peasant lad of theirs could be more than a private, and now this hero of Zulawce had actually returned as a corporal, a live corporal, sporting the two white stars on his crimson collar. All the village felt itself honoured in this favoured soldier, entertaining the wildest hopes for his future. He has two years of service yet to come, they said; who knows but that he may be a sergeant before he has done? The young hero was ready enough to avail himself of the good opinions thus showered upon him. By his own account, he was one of the bravest of the brave, and as he could scarcely invent a great war as a background to his exploits, he devised some minor fancies, laying the scene in rebellious Lombardy--"Corpo di Bacco! where the heat of the weather is such that an ox in the fields is roasted alive in two hours." How could the good people of Zulawce have thought little of a man who, in such a temperature, had saved a province to the Emperor? And more especially, how should their womankind not have admired a soldier who, to

say nothing of his splendid moustache, had by his own showing been proof against the allurements of the very countesses in those parts--"devilishly handsome creatures, to be sure, but with the enemy's females I have nothing to do!" It was a fact, then, that within a few weeks, Constantine Turenko had the upper hand in the village; and as he could not be judge himself, being only on furlough, he managed that his brother Jewgeni should be elected, while two other friends of his, equally humble as regarded their wealth and wit, were chosen as elders. Thus aristocracy was laid low, the middle class rising.

Taras had not striven against it; he had voted for Simeon, but for the rest he let matters take their course. "The beggars will be the ruin of the village!" cried Anusia, in whom the pride of blood was strong. "It is atrocious that men like my Uncle Stephen, and you, and Simeon, should be succeeded by the rabble!"

But Taras took it quietly. "They are making their own bed," he said, "let them try it!"

"I wish you would not pretend such callousness," exclaimed Anusia, "there is no one who loves the village better than you do!"

"Perhaps not," said he, "but I cannot alter the state of things; besides, I have other cares now."

"Cares? What are they?" she cried. "Is not the farm as flourishing as ever?" To this he had no answer.

He did his work in those days with diligence and perseverance, as though he were not the richest peasant in the village, but a poor labourer merely, who had to gain his next day's bread. And whereas formerly he had always been guided by his own opinion, he would consult his wife's now, soliciting her advice. Anusia felt proud at this mark of confidence, till she discovered that he desired to hear her views in order to correct them. And as the question mostly referred to matters concerning which, capable as she was, she knew nothing, since, by the nature of them, they rather belonged to the husband's sphere, she lost patience at last. "What have I to do with assessments and taxes?" she exclaimed.

"You must get to know about them," he replied, gently.

"But why? Is it not enough that you should know?"

"Yes, now; but the time may come when you will have to do without me."

These words did not frighten her, appearing too ludicrous. A strong, healthy man, not forty years old--how should she take alarm? "You croaker!" she said, "we'll think about that fifty years hence."

"It is all as God may will," returned he solemnly; adding, "Do it to please me."

"Well, if it tends to your happiness, certainly," she said, good-naturedly, and did her best to understand what he explained to her concerning the taxes and imposts.

In the presence of his friend, the village priest, Taras never let fall such hints, meeting the good pope, on the contrary, with great reserve. But Father Leo took no umbrage, redoubling his affection for the saddened man, and doing all in his power to counteract the low spirits to which evidently he was a prey. He even proposed to teach him reading and writing. "It is useful anyhow," he said, "and you could amuse yourself with entertaining books."

But Taras declined. "It is no use to me now," he said, "and will be still less presently. Besides, that which would rejoice my heart is not written in your books. Nor have I the needful leisure; these are busy days on the farm, and after Epiphany I mean to go hunting. I shall be gone a good while I think."

"Do, by all means," said good Father Leo approvingly, "it will cheer you. And there is the general hunt before Christmas. You will not miss that."

"I shall not take part," replied Taras, quietly, "even if they ask me, which I do not expect."

"Not ask you!" said Father Leo. "You the best bear-hunter born!"

But events proved that Taras had judged right. Constantine objected to his presence, so the people did without him. That warrior had contracted a real hatred of Taras for various reasons, mostly foolish, but in part spiteful. To begin with, the dethroned judge was the natural leader of the more wealthy of the community, which was bad; he was an "enemy of the Emperor," and that was worse; worse still, the community had suffered loss "through him, and him alone;" the worst of all being that Constantine still owed a certain florin to "this bastard who had sneaked his way into the affections of an heiress."

Anusia felt it a personal insult, shedding passionate tears when the hunting party passed the farm; but Taras did not move a feature, continuing quietly to fill the sacks of corn that were to be sold. One thing, however, he did when the last sound of the noisy party had died away. He entered the common sitting-room, calling upon his eldest boy Wassilj. "My child," he said, "you are eight years old, and our little father Leo is instructing you well--do you know what an oath

is?"

"Yes," said the little boy.

"And you understand what is being a judge?"

"Yes, it is what you were!"

"Well then, lift up your right hand and swear to me that never in your life you will offer yourself for the judgeship, nor accept it if they ask you. Will you do that, and never forget?"

"I will, and will not forget it," cried the little boy, earnestly lifting up his childish hand.

And Taras kissed him and returned to his work.

But Father Leo, on learning of the new insult offered to his friend, expressed his hearty sympathy.

"There is no need to trouble about it," said Taras; "you see I am quiet."

"And so you have every right to be!" cried the pope, warmly. "Have you not always done your duty, ay, and a great deal more! If sorrow is your part now, you can accept it with a strong heart, as of God Himself. He has been gracious to you, bringing you to this village and blessing you abundantly; and if He now chastises you, it surely is for your good in the end. The ways of God sometimes are dark."

Taras shook his head. "I don't believe that," he said, curtly.

"Not believe in God?" cried the honest pope, aghast.

"I do believe in Him," said Taras, solemnly, "and I believe that He is all just, but that He brought me into this village, and that all this bitter grief has come upon me by His will, I do not believe. For if He guided every step and action of ours, if our fate were all His doing, no wrong could be done on earth. Nor does He, and we are not mere puppets in His hand!"

"Puppets! what an expression!" cried the pope, rather perplexed and therefore doubly vehement. "Nay, we are His children!"

Taras nodded. "His children, yes," he said; "if we may use an earthly simile to describe our relation to Him, that is the word. But what does it mean? we owe to our natural parents life and the training they give us; beyond this they cannot influence us; and so some of us are good, some are bad, some are happy, and some unhappy, whereas every one surely would be good and happy if the will of our parents could bring it about. And it seems to me we stand in a similar relation to Him above. He has made this world and the men that live therein, revealing to them His will: '*Be righteous!*' He does give us a training by the very fact that the circumstances of our birth and childhood are as He wills them. But what we make of it, and what steps we take in life, that plainly is our doing. I own that we cannot go to the right or to the left in unbiassed liberty, for we choose according to our nature, following our heart and mind, such as they have become."

"I do not seem to understand," owned the pope, hesitatingly; "but it would appear you believe in a blind sort of predestined fate, like any old crone of the village."

"No," cried Taras, sharply. "Let me try and explain. During the years of my happiness, when blessings were about me, full and rich, like the summer sun ripening the harvest, with no shadowing cloud overhead, I did believe the goodness of God had thus ordered my day, and in my heart I thanked him. But when darkness overtook me with sorrow unspeakable, I grew sore at heart and hopeless as the lonely wanderer in the storm-tossed wilderness, seeking for shelter in the driving snow, and not a star to guide him in the night; before him and behind no voice but that of howling wolves.... No, said I, *this* is not the will of God; it is fate! Let me go the way that is destined--happiness and blessings were to be, and the misery is to be, and the end is not mine to choose! Of what avail that I should strive thus wearily, seeking the path in darkness and battling to escape the wolves, since it is destined that either I be victorious, or fall their helpless prey? It was foolish, nay, maddening, while I thought so, but now I see differently: Nothing is predestined, our fate is here and here"--he pointed to his head and heart--"our virtues and vices are our guides in life, and besides this there is but one guidance to those that will listen to it, that all-encompassing will of God--'Thou child of man, act righteously!' That is it."

"This is not a faith I can hold," said the pope, "but I am glad, at least, that you do not believe either in a blind fate or in mere chance. For my part," he added, solemnly, "I shall always believe in the overruling of a Divine Providence that numbers the very hairs of our head."

"That faith has been taken from me," replied Taras. "His heaping sorrow upon sorrow on me could be compensated for in the world to come; but I see the right trampled under foot, and the wrong victorious, and this cannot be by the dispensation of God. No; it is just the outcome of the folly or the wickedness of man. As to chance, I certainly believe in it--who could live on this earth for well-nigh forty years and deny it, having eyes to see! There surely is such a thing as chance. Have you forgotten what I told you as to my coming hither, or do you think it was God's special

providence to let that Sunday morning be fine? Did He order His sun to shine, merely that a poor man, Taras Barabola, should become head servant of Iwan Woronka's at Zulawce, and not of that priest to whom I might have gone? Is it not sheer presumption to suggest as much? I say, there is a chance, but it does not make a plaything of us, we rather play with it, making it subservient to our destiny. The bright sunshine that Sunday morning certainly brought me hither; but do you think it made me the husband of Anusia, or brought about my becoming the people's judge? Do I owe to that sunshine the good that has come to me since, and the great load of evil? Surely not, that was all my own doing, and nothing else. Chance, then, is nothing; but what we make of it can be little or much."

He drew himself up, looking proudly at the pope. "And this," he cried, "must explain my every act hitherto, and my future actions. If I could believe that Providence has mapped out my fate, I would follow blindly. Could I believe in chance or destiny, I should abide quietly what further they will make of me. But I believe no such thing--I hold that every man must follow the voice within, ay, the voice of God speaking to him in the highest law: 'Be righteous! Do no wrong, and permit no wrong!' And these two commandments, equally sacred, I will obey while life is mine!"

He turned abruptly and went away.

Christmas had come. It is not a day of the children in the Carpathians; they have no presents given them, and the Christmas-tree is unknown; the one thing marking it out from other days being a certain dish of millet, poppy seed and honey, with mead as a beverage. In Taras's family, too, the day hitherto had thus been kept; but now he sent one of his men to Zablotow, ordering him to get various little presents for his own children and those of Father Leo. "It is a way they have at Vienna," he said to his wife; "it seems a pleasant custom. And I would wish that the children should remember this Christmas Day."

"Why so, what is there about it?"

"Well, for one thing, I have been away so long this year," said he hastily, turning to some occupation.

Christmas over, he had two large sledges laden with corn, taking them with his servant, Jemilian, to the New Year's market at Colomea, as was his habit.

But on the second of January the man returned alone. "The master has business with the lawyer," he said; "he will be home in three days." Anusia grew frightened, and ran to her friend, the popadja. "He is not going to come back," she wailed. "Now I understand his strange speeches, and why he insisted on making presents to the children that they should remember this Christmas. It was his way of taking leave of them!"

But the pope reproved her. "If you do not know your husband better than this," he said; "I, at least, know my friend. It grieves me, to be sure, that he should re-open matters with the lawyer. But he has sent you a truthful message, there is no doubt about that."

Nor was he mistaken. Taras returned even sooner, on the second day. "I guessed as much," said he, when Anusia clasped him, sobbing passionately; "you took alarm because I had business with the lawyer; so I made what haste I could and travelled through the night."

"But what is it?" she asked.

He drew a little packet from his belt, unfolding it carefully, and producing a large sheet of paper.

"The Emperor's decision!" she cried, exultingly; "there is an eagle upon it!"

At which he laughed bitterly. "No, my dear. That eagle merely shows the Government stamp for which I paid five florins. The decision, that is, the refusal of my petition, need not be looked for for months. What need of hurry is there concerning a mere peasant!" But suddenly growing serious, he said: "Listen, my wife! This paper affirms that I have made over all I possess to the children, but to be yours while you live. I have kept back nothing for myself, except some money and my guns."

"Wherefore?" she cried, trembling, "what can be the meaning of it?"

"Because--because--" he hesitated, the honest man could ill prevaricate--"because I might be fined heavily for the lawsuit...."

"It is an untruth!" she exclaimed. "You think of taking away your life!"

"No, indeed," he asserted with a solemn oath. But she could not take comfort, despatching little Wassilj with a message to the pope. Father Leo came at once, expressing unfeigned wonder on being shown the document.

"Why, it's a deed of gift, in due form and legally attested. But what for, my friend; what for?"

"You must not ask me."

The pope looked at him; his gloomy face wore an expression of unbendable resolve. And Father Leo, thereupon, was silent, knowing it would be useless to inquire. After awhile, however, he began again: "I will not press you, Taras; but tell me one thing: Did you inform Dr. Starkowski of your reasons?"

"No," replied Taras. "And that was why he refused to make out the deed. 'I require to know your intention,' he said. But fortunately there is another solicitor at Colomea now--a young man who did not trouble about my reasons."

"Fortunately?" echoed the pope, with marked emphasis.

"Yes, fortunately," returned Taras, equally pointedly. "I have fully considered it."

Again the pope was silent; and then he spoke of everyday subjects in order to inquire presently with all the indifference he could command. "And what are your plans for the present?"

"I have told you some time ago," said Taras. "To-morrow is Epiphany; after to-morrow I shall start for a several weeks' hunting."

"Not by yourself?"

"Oh, no. I shall have Wassilj Soklewicz with me, and my two men, Jemilian and Sefko--that is, if I may take them, Anusia," he added, with a smile, "for you are mistress now."

"Do not jest," she said. "I am well content you should take them. There is little to be done on the farm now, and they are faithful souls. But I hope you will let the two boys and Simeon go with you as well, they are just longing for it."

"No," said Taras, "that is impossible." Nor did he alter his mind when, the following day, Hritzko and Giorgi pleaded their own suit. "Have we in any way offended you?" they vehemently inquired.

"Certainly not," he assured them kindly. "You are fine fellows, both of you, but I cannot possibly take you. Your father is a true friend to me, and he is getting old. I--I must not let his sons risk their life."

"Risk! Why, what risk should there be? We did so enjoy it last year."

"All sorts of things may happen on a bear hunt; and, indeed, I will not take the responsibility, on account of your father. It is different with those others who will accompany me; they have no special family ties, either of them. It is really impossible, my good fellows, much as I would like to have you."

He took leave of them affectionately, as he did of their father, of Alexa, and of the pope's family. They all felt concerned at his going, but none of them could have given any reason. Anusia alone was brave-hearted. "You will recover your spirits," said the faithful wife, "and, therefore, I am pleased you should go. When shall I expect you back?"

"In six weeks at the latest."

And thus they parted. Anusia once again ruled the farm, and did so with a strong hand, equal to any man's for determination. The new judge, Jewgeni Turenko, before long found occasion to testify to her firmness.

The mandatar, for reasons known to himself, had been keeping at a distance lately; but whenever he was present at the village Jewgeni had no easy time of it. For Mr. Hajek continued in the path he had begun, and his claims were many, the new judge being nowise equal to his predecessor in distinguishing the just ones from the unjust. And being something of a coward besides, he made all sorts of concessions which clashed with his duty to the village. So, hoping to conciliate his own party, he sought to lay the burden on their opponents. And, since Anusia for the time being was unprotected, she seemed a fit person in his eyes to try the experiment upon. Consequently, he showed himself on her premises one day, informing her that she must tell off two extra hands for the forest labour about to fall due. "There is no such claim on me," she said, curtly, "it will be no use wasting any words about it." He ventured to remonstrate, showing his fist; but the judge of Zulawce had the worst of it--he retired rather hastily, bearing away on his face some visible tokens of her prowess.

The sixth week had not elapsed when old Jemilian presented himself before his mistress with a splendid bearskin, and delivered his message: Taras sent his love, and prayed for further leave of absence; he would return for Palm Sunday.

"Is he well?" inquired she.

"Yes, quite well."

"And of a cheerful heart?"

"Yes," averred the man. His eyes sought the ground, but Anusia did not notice that; she

trusted the honest servant, who for upwards of twenty years had lived on the farm. "Then I am quite satisfied," she said; "let him stay as long as it gives him pleasure. It is five weeks more, to be sure; but let him have it."

And thereupon Jemilian went over to the pope's. "My master has sent me," he said, "he is anxious to know whether the imperial decision has arrived, he gave directions to have it transmitted to you.

"Nothing has come," said Leo; "but how is your master?"

Jemilian repeated his statements, but Father Leo was not taken in, although he had trouble of his own, and sympathy with others might have been in abeyance--his youngest child was grievously ill of the small-pox. But he was a true friend of Taras's, and could turn away from his own grief. "Look me in the face," he said, sternly; "it is not meet to offer an untruth to the priest. Tell me what you are after up there."

"Well, we hunt," Jemilian replied, hesitatingly. But the pope was not thus turned off, and after a little more of prevarication the man was obliged to confess. "Ah, your reverence," he said, "such hunting as Taras's the Carpathians have never seen. The Almighty must have clouded his reason; He must, indeed! On first starting we all took it for granted he would lead us to the Red Hollow, the best hunting ground far and wide. But he took us on-on, far away into the mountains. He never notices the track of the bear, and if we call his attention to it he shrugs his shoulders. On-on, we go. He seems to have but one object--to get to know his way in the mountains. If we pass a dense forest he takes his axe, making his mark upon the trees. If we come across a herdsman he does not inquire what life the bears have led him, but is anxious to learn the character of the neighbourhood and its bearings. It is the same if we put up with any cottager. He makes friends with the people, giving them cartridges for their guns, and asking them for nothing but directions to find his way. On we go, westward chiefly, but exploring right and left--from mountain to mountain, from glen to glen. Denser grows the forest, more ragged the clefts; we seek a path through the rimy brushwood, our hands torn with the brambles... Ah, your reverence, I am a bear hunter of thirty years' standing; but what the Carpathians are I found out but lately."

"And have you asked him what is the object of all this?"

"Indeed I have--again and again, but to no purpose. How often have I said to him: 'What is the good of roaming through the wintry waste like this? Your servants would be well content if they could see you enjoyed it; but you push on, sad unto death--what is the good?' His reply being always the same: 'It must be, my men, and if you love me you will follow.' Love him?--of course we do. Your reverence knows as much as that yourself, that to know him is to be ready to go to the death for him... Well, we followed him like sheep their shepherd, chiefly westward, for the space of twenty days, when we reached a cottage, and the people there were Huzuls still, but of different ways from ours. 'We are of the Marmaros,' they said. We spent the night with them, and it was the same as everywhere. Let Taras but begin to speak with people, telling them of his life and inquiring into theirs, and his charm is upon them; they look up to him and are glad to serve him. Indeed, your reverence, he has a wonderful influence over men, if he chooses to use it; this has been very plain in our roamings. From that cottage he led us back again towards Pokutia. 'It was useful to have seen something of Hungary,' he said; 'but now we will turn our steps homeward again.' That was both sensible and pleasant, and for sheer satisfaction I forgot to ask him why it should have been useful to seek a weary way through brambles and riven rocks to have a look at the Marmaros. Nor could I feel satisfied long, for he soon turned from the rising sun, striking off northward, over mount and dale, as we had done before. Never a shot he fired, though we met the finest deer; he only kept noticing the country. At last we stopped far beyond Delatyn; he gave us a day's rest, and then in quick marches he brought us back to these parts, stopping near the Red Hollow. We arrived two days ago, putting up for the night in the dell of old Michalko, and yesterday we had some hunting at last. We were fortunate too, for not two hours passed before we sighted a splendid bear, and Taras killed him, rather carelessly, but the bullet hit clean between the eyes. It was the first time these six weeks that I saw him smile--he was pleased with his good shot. And when Lazarko and I had drawn the creature he sent me home with the skin."

"Lazarko," interrupted Father Leo, "who is he?"

Jemilian had tripped evidently. He grew red and stammered: "Oh!... some fellow.... who joined us...."

"Don't attempt what you have so little talent for," returned the pope; "your lies are transparent. Why do you depart from the truth?"

"I cannot help it," said the man, apologetically; "Taras has enjoined me so very sternly not to mention Lazarko, for fear of harming the poor youth...."

"Lazarko?" repeated the pope, rubbing his forehead, and exclaiming suddenly: "You don't mean Lazarko Rodakowicz, of Zolince, surely!"

"Yes I do," confessed Jemilian.

Father Leo was dismayed: "And this man our Taras suffers near him! Is he not aware that

Lazarko is a murderer? Why the fellow shot the mandatar of his village!"

"He did. But only because the mandatar dishonoured the girl he loved."

"That is true. I knew the parties, Zolince being but a couple of miles from my late cure. The mandatar was a wretch, the girl honest, and the youth had borne a good name. But to commit murder is an awful thing nevertheless, and Lazarko, so far from in any way expiating his guilt, made it worse by escaping into the mountains, where he joined the band of Green Giorgi, thus becoming a brigand--a 'hajdamak.' I trust Taras was not aware of that!"

"He was," said Jemilian, "for Lazarko came to us straight from the outlaws. And since the matter has escaped me, I may as well tell your reverence the plain facts of it, for you are Taras's friend. We knew well enough, on going beyond the Red Hollow into the heart of the mountains, that we must fall in with some 'hajdamaks'; for the Carpathians are their natural haunt, and not all the Whitecoats^[4] of the empire will be able to say a word against it. We had no fear; four of us, and carrying arms, we were a match for the devil if need be. Besides, it is well known that the hajdamaks hardly ever attack a peasant or a Jew; they are the sworn enemies of the Polish nobles only, and of the Whitecoats if driven to it. So we went ahead fearlessly, and our first encounter with one of their kind was not calculated to terrify us--a beardless milksop, half-starved and frozen. Our watch-fire brought him near, and he begged humbly for leave to stay. But Taras stepped up to him: 'Let us first see if you deserve it!' he said sternly. 'Is your mother alive?' 'She is dead.' 'Then answer me truly, as you would wish her to be at rest in her grave. I presume even a fellow like you will own the sanctity of that oath! Why did you take to the mountains?' 'Well, just because of my mother's death; my father married again, and the step-mother turned him against me. I, the heir to the farm, had to do the meanest labour, and was treated like a dog besides. So I ran away!' 'This is no reason for taking to the mountains! Why did you not try life in another village, eating your bread honestly, as the servant of some respectable peasant?' The fellow looked abashed. 'I had heard of the merry life up here,' he said at last. 'Away with you!' cried Taras, 'it is mere laziness and greed of enjoyment that made you a hajdamak! Away!' And his look was such that the fellow made the greatest haste to escape. A few days later we had a more serious encounter. We were deep in the heart of the mountains, not far from the Marmaros, resting one night in a forsaken cattlefold. Our fire was lit, when suddenly an armed band appeared, headed by a handsome young man, with a finely-twisted moustache, carrying the white bunda^[5] carelessly on his shoulders, with the green, silver-broidered jerkin beneath...."

"Green Giorgi himself," cried the pope, crossing himself involuntarily.

"Yes, himself! Your reverence will be aware of the stories concerning him--that he has power to show himself in different places simultaneously, and that he knows men and all about them, though he has never set eyes on them before. How that should be I cannot tell, but he certainly knew us. 'I make you welcome, Taras!' he said, condescendingly. 'I intend to start a-hunting tomorrow, and rejoice to fall in with the best bear-hunter of the country!' But Taras did not accept the proffered hand. 'If you know me so well, Giorgi,' he said, 'then you must be aware, also, that I never shrink from saying the truth. We are but four of us, and you about three times the number; we have but our guns, and you, I see, carry pistols besides. If you wish to attack us, we are lost. But nevertheless, I tell you, I shall neither hunt with you to-morrow, nor suffer your company a moment longer than I can help it this night. A man like you must poison the very air I breathe,' Giorgi grew white. 'Why?' he hissed, snatching at his girdle, where a pair of silver-mounted pistols were to be seen. 'I am not bound further to explain my opinion,' replied Taras; 'to be a hajdamak is a miserable trade, yet there are reasons which may force an honest man to take to it. You have no such excuse. You are a mere deserter from the ranks of the Whitecoats. And you carry on this sad trade after a cruel and shameful fashion besides. When the peasants of Roskow, last autumn, called upon you to help them against their hard-hearted lord of the manor, you were not satisfied with plundering this Polish tyrant's property, but you committed robbery in the village besides; you not merely killed the tyrant, who deserved it, but you killed the innkeeper, a poor Jew, whose only crime consisted in having saved up a little money, which roused your cupidity. I could lay many similar charges at your door, but I daresay this will suffice.' But, so far from sufficing, it was more than the ruffian could brook. He drew his pistol, foaming with rage. But we three--Sefko, Wassilj, and I--had cocked our guns at him, his own people standing by gloomily. He would have discharged his pistol, nevertheless, had not one of his party made a dash at him, whispering something we did not understand. He gave a scowling look at his followers and turned to go. 'You coward!' cried Taras, 'an honest man's bullet is too good for you!' At daybreak we learned the reason of his yielding, and, indeed, had guessed as much--he could not rely on his men. They had joined him, believing him to be an honest hajdamak, and not a murdering brigand...."

"No hajdamak can be honest!" interrupted Father Leo, sharply.

"Well, honest, as the saying is," continued Jemilian, a little abashed. "I was going on to say that at daybreak two of his men, Lazarko and Iwan, came to us, assuring us they had thus believed in him, and entreating Taras to take them under his protection, as they were tired of the wicked life. He listened to Lazarko but not to Iwan, although the latter swore by his mother's grave that he also had intended to be an honest hajdamak...."

"Honest! honest!" broke in the pope once more. "I wish you would not thus use the word."

"Well, honest, as people take it," rejoined Jemilian. "I meant to say that Iwan had become a hajdamak only because he had shot a tax-gatherer who was unlawfully going to distraint the goods of his mother, a poor widow."

"And that is an honest reason?"

"Taras admitted it as such. But he nevertheless refused the young man's request, because he had assisted Green Giorgi in a deed of cowardly violence. He gave this account of it himself, crestfallen enough: 'Some weeks ago,' he said, 'while scouring the lower Bukowina, we received information that a Jewish wine-merchant from Czernowitz was travelling by himself along the mountain road to Transylvania. On learning this, the captain disguised himself as a peasant, requesting me to do likewise. We lay in waiting by the roadside. The Jew arrived presently, driving his car, and Green Giorgi begged him to give us a lift. He good-naturedly agreed, although his vehicle was small, and, taking our places beside him, we drove on for about a couple of hours, engaging him in conversation. But on entering the dark, narrow valley of the Putna, the captain stunned him with a sudden blow, ordering me to fire, which I did, yet with so trembling a hand that the bullet merely grazed his arm. Thereupon Green Giorgi drew his pistol and despatched him.' Thus Iwan, amid sobs and groans; we listened horror-struck, but no one was more moved than Taras himself.

"'Was not the Jew a broad-built man, with a reddish beard, and blue, kindly eyes?' he inquired presently, with husky voice. 'Yes, yes,' groaned Iwan; 'ah, it is those eyes I cannot get rid of....' 'Villain!' cried Taras, 'I knew the man; he showed me a similar kindness. But even if I had never seen him I could have nothing to do with an assassin!' 'Have pity on me,' pleaded Iwan, 'I could not gainsay the captain, and it was but a Jew!' 'Away, villain!' repeated Taras furiously; 'is a Jew not a man? And you need obey no one for the committing of murder!' Iwan fell on his knees. 'If you reject me, I can but shoot myself,' he cried. 'There will be no harm done if you do,' said Taras, 'for it is what you have deserved!' We turned from him, going our way. And he did as he had threatened, the lads of old Michalko telling us only yesterday that they found him dead in the forest, the discharged pistol in his stiffened hand. We were sorry, but Taras never altered a look...."

The priest paced his room excitedly while this report was being given, and now he stood still. "These, then, are your hunting pleasures!" he cried, wringing his hands. "Is this the pastime by which Taras hopes to regain his spirits? And the worst of it is, it seems to delight him--he will return for Palm Sunday only! How do we know he will return then?"

"He will keep his word," said the man, confidently. "I was no less alarmed than you, and would not have come hither with his message had he not sworn faithfully to return by Palm Sunday."

Father Leo took comfort, asking presently: "And did he tell you what he means to do now?"

"Not in so many words, but I am pretty sure he will now take us through the Bukowina...."

Leo stared at the man, horror-struck, his whole figure trembling. His plump, honest face was livid with the thought that had come to him. He grew purple and white again, and big drops stood on his forehead. "Jemilian...." he groaned.

The man had watched him, his own appearance as it were reflecting the pope's emotion. But now he stretched forth his hands as though combating an unworthy suspicion. "No, no!" he cried, "do not--do not insult the pure-hearted man!"

The pope drew a deep breath, and fell again to pacing his room.

Some time passed in silence; the labouring man seemed lost in gloomy thought. When he looked up presently, Leo started as out of a dream. "Go," he said with trembling voice, "and God be with you! Tell him our conversation, and that I shall look for him by Palm Sunday without fail. If we were not in trouble ourselves, I would think nothing of the twenty miles' distance, but would go with you to urge his return even now."

"Do you know him so little?" said the man with a smile. "'Twere easier to make the Pruth flow backwards than to turn him from his purpose. But he will keep his promise." He drew a breath. "Doubt him not! And pray for him," added the faithful soul, "he sorely needs it."

Jemilian departed, and Father Leo returned to the bedside of his youngest child. The little boy lay in high fever, tossing the more wildly as his hands were tied up for fear of his scratching the painful pustules.

The apothecary who had seen him a couple of days ago had judged that the illness would run its course favourably, but that it had not yet reached its height. And it was so; twelve weary days had to pass before the danger was over. And even then the poor parents could not lift their heads, for when the little one recovered, both the elder boys sickened with the same terrible disease, and all their anxiety began afresh. No one could have blamed Father Leo if in this season of sorrow he had thought little of the absent friend, all the more as the daily visits of Anusia had ceased; she was obliged, for her own children's sake, to hold aloof. But on the contrary, he thought much and pitifully of the roving man and his strange hunting-time. It scarcely needed the sad news which reached him on the last Sunday in Lent to rouse his sympathy afresh.

For on that day a messenger from the district town brought over the long-expected imperial rescript. Leo knew what the contents would be, and yet he hesitated to break the seal. Those thoughts that had come to him as he listened to Jemilian's report--thoughts of a suspicion which he had striven to combat--surged up in him afresh. And he felt as if that red seal in his hands were dyed with the heart's blood of the most righteous man he had known. He almost felt forbidden to break it, and when he did so at last it was with a sigh. He was not mistaken; the writ contained not merely a denial, but also a reproof for having wantonly troubled the ear of His Majesty. Father Leo groaned. "Taras must never know that," he murmured. "I shall not give him the literal contents."

But not four-and-twenty hours had passed before all the villagers knew that the Emperor had written a letter to Taras, saying: "You good-for-nothing subject, if ever you trouble me again about your law suits, I shall have you shut up in prison!" It was the corporal who thus paraphrased the imperial decision, having it direct from Harasim Woronka, who was a common labourer now, thanks to his drink, working for the mandatar. It was Mr. Hajek's doing that this version was thus carried to the people; he had learned at Colomea that the decision had arrived, and had instructed his under-steward accordingly. Father Leo was greatly incensed, and saw he had no choice now but to inform Taras of the full contents, there being no mention of prison at any rate. And he made up his mind to get an insight into Taras's heart if possible, hoping the confessional in Passion Week would yield the opportunity.

Palm Sunday was at hand. Early spring had made its appearance, the snow was fast melting, the south wind blew, and the hearts of men were happy. Father Leo especially had reason to bless this early spring, the vivifying influence of which made itself felt in the sick-room, helping to conquer the dread disease. But the parents yet took turns in sitting up at night.

And thus the night before Palm Sunday found Father Leo awake in the dimly-lit chamber; the boys were asleep, he, with stockinged feet, walking up and down between them and the window. Again and again he stood still by their little beds, looking down wistfully at the pale faces of his children, on which the illness happily had left no ravages, and, turning back to the window, he would gaze out into the moonlit night. The village street was bright as day, but solemn in silence. The trees, just breaking into tiny buds, stretched forth their branches into the glimmering air, and there were quivering sounds as of the whispering winds of spring. From a copsewood near, the call of the screech owl was heard; it is counted a death omen in most places, but Father Leo scarcely noticed the dismal notes for the kindly light pouring down upon the world. And the pious man lifted a full heart to the Giver of all goodness, who had brought back his little ones from the arms of death. "If I could but tell them," he murmured, resuming his walk, and seeking words for the holy things that moved him. The good man was making his sermon for the morrow.

He was startled by a sound from the window, a finger tapping the pane gently. A dark figure stood without, and, looking close, he recognised Taras.

He hastened to open the sash a couple of inches. "Welcome! welcome!" he said warmly, "I am glad you have made good your promise."

"I returned an hour ago," replied Taras. "My wife and children are well; but you have seen trouble?"

At which the pope made haste to add that the Lord's goodness was being shown to him even now. "Come in," he concluded.

"It is late," said Taras; "I only wanted to have a look at you. Though, let me say, I know what you are keeping for me, happening to fall in with the two lads of Simeon by the Czeremosz yesterday, and they told me the imperial decision had arrived."

"But I daresay they have not told you correctly," said Father Leo, anxiously. "We will put off everything till to-morrow, but no false report in this respect shall grieve your heart; a minute longer than I can help. The rescript consists of a few lines only, and I have read them so often that I know them by heart. It is true that your petition is refused, because the verdicts of the local courts had plainly shown you in the wrong. And you are warned from again appealing to the Emperor needlessly; it is condoned this once, because of your evident zeal for the good of the parish. These are the very words: 'The subject Taras Barabola is herewith instructed to refrain from again troubling His Apostolic Majesty or the Imperial magistrates, and to submit to justice.' That is all, I assure you; never a word of prison. And it is bad enough as it is."

"Bad enough," repeated Taras slowly. "What were the last words?"

Father Leo looked at him, he could see his face plainly in the moonlight; it was quite calm. So he repeated the final clause.

"To submit to justice," said Taras after him, slowly. "Good-night."

The pope would have wished to detain him, but the clock had struck one some time ago, and it was the hour for giving the children their medicine. So he shook hands with him through the window and returned to the little patients, where the phial stood by the side of a night-light.

He was just taking up the bottle, when suddenly--fearfully--a cry rang through the stillness

without, half lost in the distance, but so terrible, so death-inspired that he shook violently, sending forth a cry in return. The children sat up in their beds sobbing, but he flew back to the window, trembling, and listened. Deep silence had settled without, and not again was it broken; yet he gazed out anxiously, prepared for the very worst.

But all seemed at peace; the little cottage gardens, and the street, and the fields beyond, lay swathed in moonlight, but deserted and still. Nowhere a trace of living soul, not a sound to be heard, save the whispering of the branches bending to the night air. Was it Taras? Did ever human breast send forth such a shriek of mortal agony? The priest could not tell, but he remembered the screech owl. "The bird of night may have flown past the house," he reflected, straining his ear to catch a repetition of the sound. But all was still; only the wind kept swaying the branches.

He crossed himself and returned to his children, endeavouring to calm them; and having given them their medicine, he strove to take up the thread of his sermon. But that was well-nigh impossible. Again and again he stood still, listening; but only the gentle voices of the night reached his ear, no sound of alarm--the screech owl was silent....

The small hours passed slowly, gloomily. With the dawn the popadja entered to take his place. "Little father," she said, "have I been dreaming, or did I hear it? A terrible cry broke upon my sleep, as of a man being strangled and crying for help...."

"I daresay you dreamt it," returned he, huskily, making haste to gain his study; there was early service at eight o'clock, and he really must collect his thoughts for his sermon.

But it was impossible, for while he was yet dressing he was suddenly seized with a burning desire to see his friend, and nothing was to be done but follow the inward compulsion. He snatched up his cloak and hurried from the house.

Entering Taras's farmyard, he found his two eldest boys in their Sunday garments, with bright plumes in their brand-new caps. They were making a desperate noise with toy trumpets. On seeing the pope they ran up to him and kissed his hand.

"Father returned last night," they cried, "and see what he brought us--a trumpet each and these beautiful caps."

"Is he at home?" inquired the priest.

"No. He is gone to see Jewgeni."

"The judge?"

"Yes--that judge," returned little Wassilj, with all the contempt he was capable of. "He has business with him. He would never go and see him for the pleasure of it."

"And where is your mother?"

"Getting ready for church."

"Well, tell your father to come to me in the vestry directly after service. Do you understand?"

Wassilj promised to deliver the message. "And I know what for," he added, with childish importance, "the Emperor's answer has arrived."

Full of disquietude the priest retraced his steps. "What business can he have with the judge?" he wondered.

Explanation was at hand. He came upon the judge at his own threshold.

"Glad to meet your reverence," said Jewgeni. "I have called for your advice. My brother is against it, but all the people are for it."

"For what?"

"It is Taras's proposal. He came to me this morning saying: 'I want you to call together the general meeting directly after service--not merely the heads of families, you know, but all the community. You are aware that the final decision has arrived from Vienna. I want to render an account to the people. Now whether you are my enemy or my friend is nothing. You are the judge, and I claim this as a matter of right,' I need not tell your reverence that his friend I certainly am not. For, firstly, he is against the Emperor; secondly, he is a bastard; thirdly, he is only a lowlander who has sneaked into our village; and, fourthly, that wife of his---"

The man involuntarily put his hand to his face. Father Leo understood the gesture, but his heart was too heavy for a smile.

"I know," he said quickly, "you are not exactly his friend, good man though he is. But what answer did you give him?"

"None at all," replied the judge, rather bashfully. "How could I without first consulting my brother Constantine, and he is against it. 'Do you want him to talk the people over?' he said. 'What have we to do with his petition to the Emperor? If he has lost his case it serves him right,' said Constantine."

"For shame!" cried the honest pope. "But what of the people? You said they are for hearing him. I hope they are."

"Well," returned Jewgeni, "my brother ought to know, being a corporal! But the elders and others of the men who heard of it think differently. 'He shall have the meeting,' they said; 'it is due to him in simple justice.' And what may be your reverence's opinion?"

"Call the meeting, by all means!" cried Father Leo, warmly. "Shall this man, who has sacrificed so much of his time, his money, his powers, for the good of the people, not be permitted to render his account, because he has stood up for your right, even beyond his duty? Of course you must hear him!"

"Very well, then," said the judge, meekly, kissing the priest's hand, "the meeting shall be called. The people can be informed after the service, but I will send a message to Taras at once. Yet I am not sure my brother, the corporal----" he scratched his head and went his way.

It was high time for Father Leo to repair to church for early mass. He hastened to his vestry, where the sacristan stood waiting to assist him with the vestments. And Father Leo began his duties.

The church was one of the United Greek community, in which mass was read according to the Roman Catholic rite, but in the language of the people, consequently the worshippers were able to follow intelligently. It was a good congregation, and they appeared to listen prayerfully whilst Father Leo with his choristers chanted the antiphony. But the good father himself had trouble in centering his thoughts on his sacred occupation. His eyes had scanned the people, and he knew that neither Taras nor Anusia were present. But Taras's companions had come--Jemilian, Sefko, and Wassilj Soklewicz, looking haggard and worn.

Mass over, the priest returned to his vestry to put off the heavy garments before mounting the pulpit. He was on the point of re-entering the church, when the outer door leading to his sanctum was torn open, little Wassilj bursting in, sobbing.

"What is it?" cried the priest, white with apprehension.

"Little father," sobbed the child, lifting his hands beseechingly, "mother entreats you to come to us at once--at once! It is a matter of life and death, she says."

"Good God--what is it?"

"Alas!" cried the boy, "I cannot tell you! I only know that mother is in despair."

"Is your father at home?"

"Yes! We were just starting for church, when a messenger from Jewgeni arrived, saying, 'The judge will comply with your desire, and the general meeting shall be called,' Thereupon father turned to mother, saying, 'Then we cannot go to church, for I owe it to you to tell you before telling the others.' And to us he said, 'Run into the yard, children.' But we remained in the hall ... and ... we never did it before!" sobbed the child.

"Did you listen?"

"Yes! We heard father's voice, he spoke lowly and we could not understand. But presently mother gave a sharp cry, as though she were suffering some fearful pain. I could not help bursting in, Fedko and Tereska after me. Mother was on her knees before father. 'Don't do it--oh!' she sobbed. 'But I *must!*' he said, 'not even pity for you and the children must prevent me!' And we began to cry, and mother said, 'Yes, children ... come and kneel to him! Perhaps he will listen to your tears, if he will not to mine!' Ah, little father, her face was streaming...."

"Go on; what else?"

"We knelt, we lifted up our hands, and we cried, 'Don't do it, father, for pity's sake!' But he shook his head, big tears running down his own face. And then mother sent me to fetch you. Do come, little father!" said the child, weeping.

Father Leo's chest heaved. "How can I?" he said, "the people are waiting for the sermon! It would be wrong to disappoint them."

"It would, your reverence," remarked the sacristan. But the child had got a hold of his gown, repeating anxiously, "Come; oh, do come!"

"It is the lesser wrong," said Father Leo, with a sudden resolve. "Run home, Wassilj, and say I am coming directly."

And hastily he entered the church. "I beg your leave, good people," he cried. "I cannot give you a sermon to-day. God will forgive me, there is a holier duty waiting," and he vanished into his vestry.

There was a loud murmur in the congregation, surprise being uppermost. And then there was a flocking forth from the building. But outside Jewgeni and his elders kept crying: "Go to the linden, all of you! We call the general meeting for the hearing of Taras."

The corporal stood by, smiling an evil smile. "Let us go and hear the joke!" he said, following the stream of the people.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PASSION OF JUSTICE.

The pope, meanwhile, made what haste he could to Taras's house; it was barely a ten minutes' walk, but it appeared to him fearfully long.

Having reached the farm, he rushed into the house--it was silent as a churchyard; after much looking and shouting he discovered only little Tereska near the hen-roost. The child had a tear-stained face, but seemed to have recovered her spirits, taking evident pleasure in chasing a hen. "Where is your father?" inquired Leo, anxiously.

"Gone!" said the child, and began to cry again.

"Gone?"--Father Leo crossed himself--"where to?"

"Don't know--he and mother----"

"To the meeting?"

"Don't know," repeated the little one, sobbing more violently. "Mother was crying, and father was crying!" But the hen appeared to make its escape, and the child was after it.

"They can only have gone to the meeting," said the pope to himself, retracing his steps speedily.

The inn with the linden in front of it was a little way beyond the church. The village seemed deserted; only a tottering old man in front of a cottage sat basking in the sun. "I wish you would send my grand-daughter back," he called out, querulously, "Taras will have plenty of listeners without her."

Father Leo, indeed, found the place crowded; the very oldest and youngest excepted, none of the village were missing. For the "general meeting" is an event, and duly appreciated. The faces of the people reflected its importance as they thronged in a circle about the linden, where a table had been placed by way of a platform for the speaker.

Taras was just mounting it when Father Leo arrived; a murmur of expectation ran through the people, of pity, too, with most, and of spite with some. But surely this latter sensation was smitten with shame at the sight of the unhappy man about to address them. His hair had become grey, his face was worn, and his eyes burned with a piteous fire deep in their sockets.

"Ye men of the village," he began, with trembling, yet far-sounding voice, "and all of you who are members of this parish, I thank you for coming here, and I thank the judge for having called this meeting. For although it is but a duty on your part, and on his, to hear me, yet a man who has lived to see what I have seen, is grateful even for that much!"

"Jewgeni will have told you why you are here: I want to render an account--yet not concerning the past, as he seems to think, but concerning that which is at hand. Listen, then, to what a man has to tell you who has been happy and has become unhappy, because justice is what he has loved and striven for most. Some of you love me, others hate me, and I daresay I have grown indifferent to many. But I pray you listen to me without love or hatred, as you would listen to a stranger whom death overtakes in your village, and who is anxious to unburden his soul before he goes hence. You would have no personal sympathy with such a one, but you would believe him because he is a dying man. Well then, believe me likewise, for I am a dying for your sakes!"

A shrill cry interrupted him, and a wave of excitement passed over the closely-pressed people. In vain the pope endeavoured to force his way; this wall of human beings stood firm as a rock. But on the other side of the linden, towards the inn, some of the men were seen moving. "They

are taking away his wife!" was whispered from mouth to mouth. "She has fainted!"

Taras had not stirred from his place. An agony of grief quivered in his features, but he stood motionless. They saw him lift his hand, the commotion subsided, and in silence they hung on his lips.

"Men and women," he resumed, "you have just witnessed that which is enough to move any heart! Give her your tenderest pity! She needs it doubly, not understanding that what I am about to do I *must* do. Love to me and to the children makes it impossible for her to follow my meaning. But you will see more clearly; you will perceive it is not wantonness and wickedness that forces me to separate from those that dwell in peace. The guilt of it will not fall on my head, and I need not fear the wrath of God. When the day of His reckoning comes I shall be able to answer. But I also shall have a question to ask of Him in that day, and I shall look for *His* answer. Let me hope it will not differ from what meanwhile I have said to myself in His name!

"Listen, then, to my confession. There is both good and bad to be said of me, in accordance with the truth. For a man should not be unjust to himself, any more than to others. And if in most cases it is but a false shame that would conceal one's vices or one's virtues, it were a crime in mine. My heart, therefore, of which I have not yet been able entirely to root out pity for myself, shall not influence my speaking. And what were the use of complaints? Am I not like a man whose fields have been wasted, whose dwelling has been destroyed by the flood from the mountains? Shall such a one sit down by his ruined home crying: 'Why should God have sent this to me? why should the flood find its way just to my house?' Why, indeed! Surely it was not mere accident that the pent-up waters should have broken through just in this direction; and if he is wise he will not sit still, but will ascend the torrent till he find the cause of his trouble. And I will not have you stand about me lamenting, but you shall follow me up the stream to see why the roaring waters have burst on my happiness, singling me out for destruction.

"You are acquainted with my past, as though I had grown up among you. You know I am a bastard, and that I had to suffer greatly on this account; but you also know that, thanks to my mother, the wrong I endured became a blessing. She had been brought to see that the heart is poisoned which ceases to believe in justice on earth; so she regarded not herself in order to teach me that faith. And when I had been able to overcome a terrible temptation, when I had gained for myself the goodwill of men, this faith of hers appeared to me also the very bulwark of life. Yes, my friends, I had learned to look upon this earth of ours as upon a well-ordered place where each man has his own share of labour, and is rewarded according to his work: for equity and justice seemed to be the foundation of things.

"He who has once admitted this belief into his heart and mind can never be really unhappy, even if misfortune should overtake him like a thunderstorm in summer. Trouble did come upon me. I bore it--first the illness and death of my mother, and then the return of my father. The first trial was the sorest, but my soul could rise from it with less effort than from the intercourse with the vagabond, just as the body will recover more easily from some painful gunshot wound than from a lingering fever. You all know how I strove to do what was right by my father, and you also praised me for it; but it was only a rendering of justice, the paying back of the debt I owed to my mother. He denied being my father, the memory of her that was gone was being sullied, and that made me willing for any sacrifice, ready to bear any burden without murmuring or sinking under the load. It made me serious, but not sad. For did I not suffer for the sake of justice, which grew all the dearer to my heart!

"The old man died. I did not rejoice; I felt like those men who all their life long carry salt in heavy loads from here to Hungary, bringing back packages of Hungarian tobacco instead. The poor slave wipes his forehead and is glad to have arrived at his destination with his burden of salt, but he is not therefore jubilant, for he knows that he will set out with his bundles of tobacco to-morrow, which are just as heavy, though otherwise different from the salt. Yes, my friends, young as I was, I had already learned the lesson that this life of ours is a mere changing of burdens, and I was content it should be so. For did not everything depend on how we carried our load! But mine hitherto had been heavy, and I longed for a change, longed for another burden elsewhere. I believed that at Ridowa I should never cease hearing the unkind and evil speeches of him for whom I had borne so much; the very air, I believed, must be full of them. You know that even the wild beasts can be driven forth from their haunts; destroy their home and they will repair it, but if you befoul it they go. So I looked for a place elsewhere, and chance brought me to Zulawce.

"Looking back on those days, how should I not be filled with the pity of it all? You know how I came to you--a man loving diligence and understanding his business, thoroughly capable of managing a farm, honest in all things, and trustworthy. Of the pleasures of life I knew nothing. I had never yielded to drink, had never conquered a man in fight, never kissed a girl for love. But I did not regret it, enjoying in those days what I believed to be the greatest satisfaction of all, a real content with myself. And why should I not? Was I not doing my duty? Was I not endeavouring to be just--yes, and had suffered for righteousness' sake! Added to this, I had complete power of self-control as far as that may be said of sinful man. I knew that this Taras, a self-made man, who from a despised bastard had risen to a position of respect among his fellows, would all his life long be noted for integrity, for helpfulness and justice; that he would never permit any wrong, nor ever intentionally repay evil with evil. Thus I believed myself strong and safe, come what might; for I could never be false to myself, and the world could not fail me, since, to the best of

my knowledge, it was so firmly grounded on justice."

He drew a deep breath, a sad smile hovering on his lips. "Bear with me, my friends; did I not warn you there were some good things to be said of me? But be very sure there is cause for blame as well, nay, I must bring an accusation against myself concerning the very days I speak of. My self-reliance was far stronger than could be justified by any virtue or success of mine. I not only believed myself to be a good man--which no doubt I was--but the very best man of my age and condition. This ugly delusion, like my virtues, was the natural outcome of my history, of my every experience. If a man has to climb a very steep mountain, he must believe in himself, considering himself stronger and more capable than perchance he is, else he would never set out on his journey, at any rate he would fail by the way. And how much more so if he is all alone! 'The thumb thinks more of itself than all the four fingers put together,' our much-lamented Father Martin used to say--one of the few sensible sayings he could boast of.

"You may wonder that I should accuse myself just of *this* vice! If I were to put the question to you to bring home to me any proud saying or act of conceit, I dare say none of you could do it. Have I, then, deceived you--shown myself different from what I am? Do I stand here a hypocrite, self-convicted? Nay, God knows it is not so, and this will not explain the apparent discrepance. It was no trouble to me to be gentle and good and kind to every one, first at Ridowa and then at Zulawce--helpful to all, and ready to serve them. I did but follow my own inmost nature, and to be different would have cost me trouble. Indeed, that pride of mine which possessed me was of a peculiar kind. I, at least, never knew a man who was lorded over by a similar taskmaster. The consciousness was ever present with me--'This Taras Barabola is a good man, and righteous and just. I am glad I am he!' But it were a mistake on your part to suppose that for this reason I was happy, wrapped up in my own esteem. No, indeed--that pride of mine, again and again, was the cause of shame to me, when I examined my deeds and those of others. 'No man is a church-door,' says the proverb with us. And I, too, was of flesh and blood; I, too, must fail and sin where I would not. Little sins mostly, at which another might have laughed without therefore being counted wicked or specially hardened. But to me, they were grievous beyond words. And no effort, no honest will of mine was a defence against them; for man is but human, and walking along the dusty road of this life he can scarcely keep his skirt entirely pure. The careless man will not be troubled by a little more or less of dust on his garment; but he who, so to speak, has a habit of frequently looking at himself in the glass, cannot but feel the smallest speck a burden. And thus, just because of my pride, my little sins have weighed on me far more than many a man can say of his grievous ill-doings, and to atone for them seemed almost impossible.

"But more than this, even the ill habits of others would be a burden to me in the same way. For instance, to exemplify it by the most frequent occurrence, it was a real pain to me to see any neighbour of mine yield to drink, carrying not only his earthly gains but his very manhood into the public house, there to lose them. Others would find it best to mind their own business, but that pride of mine left me no peace. 'What is the use of your being so good, Taras,' it would say, 'unless you strive to help and save? What is the use of your being so sensible, so sober and self-denying, except that you should be an example to these besotted fools?' I was just driven to do what I could to rescue the man; my pride would have torn me to pieces had I forborne; and if I failed in my endeavour, as in most cases I could not but fail, it made me sad at heart, and I believed myself bad and useless because of it. It was the same regarding the laziness or unfitness of any in their daily work. I would try to get hold of such men gently, teaching them without hurting their vanity. In these things I mostly succeeded, for a man will more readily take your advice concerning the ploughing of his field or the management of his cattle, than he will take it in matters of drink or ill-usage to some poor girl. Moreover, I could always fall back on myself--I mean, if some idle or besotted neighbour would let his farm go to ruin I could come to his assistance; for the diligent man is never short of time, and my own farm need not suffer because of my helping another. Indeed, I have often thus helped a neighbour, sometimes because compassion was strong in me, but more often it was just that same pride that made me do it."

"You should not say so!" broke in a voice, quivering with emotion. "You should not, indeed! How dare you call it pride--how dare you make a vice of what is the rarest of virtues?"

It was Father Leo. With a troubled heart, shaken to its depth with pity and with grief, he had listened to his friend. He alone had understood what Taras meant in saying he must "separate from those that dwell in peace," and he knew that the terrible forebodings which had come to him during the interview with Jemilian were about to be fulfilled. But how to prevent it--ah, how, indeed? Every fibre of his honest soul trembled with the apprehension of it; every faculty of his brain was bent on finding a means of averting the great sorrow at hand. "I am unable to hold back ruin," he murmured, pressing closer to the table, longing to be nearer his friend when the terrible word would be spoken. And standing there with a beating heart, the whole history of the strangest of men once more passed before his soul--all the shaping of so dread a fate--since first he beheld Taras, the leader of the community gathered by the Pruth to receive him on making his entry into the parish; all he had known of him since, until the interview by the window in the past night, until that cry of despair still ringing in his ears but far distant already, for God only could tell how much of the terrible history had been woven even since that cry....

"It is all as it must be," sighed he, bowing his head; "there is no help for it!" But his impassioned heart could not surrender without a struggle. If he could do nothing else for his friend, he at least would not allow that best of men to accuse himself unjustly before this crowd of listeners, of whom few indeed were fit to look upon so noble a soul thus laid bare to their gaze.

It was for this reason he had interrupted him at the risk of a sharp rebuke from the highly-wrought speaker.

But Taras was calm, smiling even as he made answer: "Nay, your reverence, I must distinctly contradict you--I know it was pride. But I will own to you that the only man to whom I ever opened my heart before this hour, speaking to him about this vice, shared your error. The man I mean was that honest compatriot of ours at Vienna, Mr. Broza, and he spoke words to me which I should not repeat if I were not a dying man. 'This is sheer blasphemy,' he said, 'do you not see whom you accuse of sin, if you call that kind of disposition pride? None other, let me say it reverently, than the Saviour Himself--Christ Jesus, the Lord! In this sense He also was proud--ay, a thousand times prouder than you--the very proudest man that ever lived.... But happily,' he added, 'happily we call it by another name--the beneficence of him who being a law to himself is filled with tenderest love to his neighbours.... I do not mean thereby to compare you with our Lord, Taras,' he concluded, 'but you are a rare man nevertheless--a Christ-like man.' Bear with me, men and women, for let me say it over again, it is a dying man that dares repeat such words to you. And surely I know my own heart better than another can know it. It was pride that moved me; it was sin.

"But having now laid bare my inmost heart to you, showing you the good and the bad within me, you may judge for yourselves how I must have felt when first I came among you. It was as though I had entered a strange world, it was all so different from the lowlands--different and, as I was ready to say, worse. But my pride did not permit me to look down upon you on that account, or to rejoice in finding you wanting; on the contrary, it urged me at all hazards to correct your ill habits. It was no easy matter for me to understand you, and find a reason for your doings; but I set about it and perceived where to make a beginning, and to what length I could go. My task grew plain. There was need to improve your agriculture, giving you for your low-lying fields the ploughshare of the plain. There was need to show you how to benefit your live stock by increasing the number of herdsmen and providing the cattle with shelter. There was need to accustom you to a garb more suitable to your labour, need to teach you the advantage of adding rye-bread and beef to your staple food. There was need, above all things, to break you from that wildest of your habits, so full of danger to yourselves, the constant wearing of arms...."

He stood erect, stretching forth his hand, as he scanned the people proudly. His eyes shone, and his voice increased in fervour.

"For twelve years I have lived in this village. As a poor serving man I came hither, and for years I bore the scorn of many. I have never boasted of what you owe me; no word or look of mine ever called your attention to what I have done for you. Nor would I do so now. What, indeed, were the gain of your thanks to a man in my position? But I will have you know the *truth* about me, and justly you shall judge me; it is therefore I ask you--Have I done these things, and were they for your good? Have I benefited you, and is it my doing--mine alone?"

His voice swelled like thunder: "Speak the truth, men of Zulawce--yes or no!"

There was a breathless silence, broken after a minute or two, as the forest silence is broken by a gust of wind when the branches whistle, the stems bend and creak, and every creature starts up affrighted, the many voices blending in one mighty sound; and thus to the pale, proud man but a single answer was given, bursting simultaneously from these hundreds of men.

"Yes, Taras, yes--it was all your doing!"

And then only the excited answers of individuals were heard.

"Yes, indeed," exclaimed an old man, "just eight years ago Taras built us the first cattle-fold, and the gain since has been double!"

"Long live Taras!" cried Simeon, half choking with sobs.

"Yes! yes!" broke in Wassilj, the butcher, "if we feed better, it is because he showed us how!"

"And it is all true concerning the plough--I ought to know!" chimed a voice like that of a little boy. It was Marko, the smith, a giant to look at, who owned this queer little voice.

"Long live Taras!" repeated Simeon; one after another joining in the cry--"Yes, Taras for ever!"

But the unhappy man stood trembling, his bosom heaved, and tears ran down his haggard face. He tried to speak, but the words would not rise to his lips, nor could he have made himself heard for the people's wild acclamation. At last he succeeded, and, holding out his folded hands to them, he cried with a voice so rent with agony that his listeners grew white with dread.

"Stop! stop! for pity's sake, stop! Let not your thanks overwhelm me, lest your reproaches presently be the harder to bear. For pure and honest as my intention was, you will come to see I have lived to be a curse to myself and my family; a curse, also, to you!..."

There was a deep silence when he had thus spoken, a solemn pause, and all the harsher sounded the spiteful voice of the corporal which broke it: "A curse? ah, you own it! but you took care it should fall lightly on yourself, you who fooled an heiress and sneaked into the judgeship!"

"Hold your tongue, you villain!" burst from a hundred voices; and when Simeon added, indignantly, "Be off, wretch that you are!" the echo went round, "Be off!" The worthy hero grew pale, continuing, however, to smile and to twist his moustache, that finest of moustaches in all Pokutia. But ere long his smile forsook him, for he beheld a little armed band that had pressed up to the speaker, endeavouring now, with cries of resentment, to make their way to him. There were six of them--Hritzko and Giorgi Pomenko, the sons of Simeon; Sefko and Jemilian, Taras's men; Wassilj Soklewicz, and with him a stranger--that same Lazarko Rodakowicz, whom Taras had admitted to his own followers, although he had come to him from Green Giorgi, the outlaw. They were in a towering rage, and evidently bent on punishing the corporal.

Constantino trembled visibly, offering not the slightest resistance when two of his comrades--like him, on furlough--took hold, one of his right arm and one of his left, to drag him away towards the inn. The people made room, but the words which fell from their lips were anything but complimentary. "You cur!" cried the men, "you heartless scoundrel, how dare you insult that man in his sorrow? ... Cannot you see that he has resolved upon an awful thing, even his own death? ... And besides this, are you not one of ourselves, you beggar? Do you not know that respect is due to the general meeting?"

The crestfallen warrior saw fit to hold his peace, making what haste he could towards the safety of the inn. Not till he had gained the threshold did he find courage to bethink himself of some witty remark, but it shrank back within his own soul on his entering the parlour; he stood still, abashed.

They had laid down the wife of Taras on one of the broad wooden benches of the deserted place. The heart-broken woman was a sight to move any man; some of the women were striving to comfort her, especially the good little popadja and a kindhearted Jewess, the innkeeper's wife. Poor Anusia had recovered from her swoon; she lay with wide-open eyes, moving her lips, and burying her hands wildly in the black masses of her hair, which hung about the death-like face. But her mind seemed wandering, she gazed absently; and no words--a moaning only fell from her lips, rising to a smothered cry at times, and dying away. The women who tended her felt their blood run cold with the pity of it--no impassioned speech, no flood of tears, could have moved them like that stifled cry, as of a wild creature in an agony of pain. Once only she found the power of words when the corporal had just entered the room--"Away, whitecoat!" she cried.

But the next moment she raised herself on the bench, clasping her hands and holding them out to him with piteous entreaty: "No--stop--hear me! Make him a prisoner--don't let him go--for the merciful Christ's sake, make him a prisoner!"

She sought to gain her feet, but the women held her back gently: "She is going out of her mind!" they whispered, awe-struck, making signs to the corporal to be gone. He was only too glad to obey, quaking with horror, and retreating to the open air. Silence had fallen without, and the crowd once more prepared to listen to the haggard, grief-maddened man, who had once been the gentlest and most peace-loving of them all, and whose wife could but entreat his meanest enemy now to hold him back from lawless deeds....

"To come to the point," Taras was saying, "the most painful part of it all--how did I come to be a curse to you, to myself, to all in this place? It is the consequence of an awful mistake; yet it was not my belief itself that was at fault, nor my trust in you, but my confidence in others!

"To this day it is my deepest, holiest conviction, and I will maintain it with my dying breath, that this world is founded on justice. To each of us, I hold, God has given a duty to perform, but we have our rights also, which others must not infringe. This indeed is the staff which the Almighty has given us to enable us to bear up under our load. For a burden each one has to carry. And for this reason no one shall dare to touch his neighbour's staff, or to add unrighteously to his load. For He that dwelleth above has ordered all things wisely, adjusting the burden of each man, and weighing it in the scales of His equity. The man who dares to interfere with this highest justice, sins against God's rule upon earth, and he shall not do so with impunity. But the Almighty does not visit every deed of wrong with His own arm; for He will not have us look upon justice, or atonement for its violation, as on something supernatural, but as on a thing essential to this life of ours, like the air we breathe. For this reason He has portioned out the earth into countries, calling a man to the rulership of each, to be judge in His stead, to protect the well-doer and to punish the evil-doer. This God-appointed man--it is the Emperor with us--has a great burden laid on him by the Almighty, but also a stronger staff to uphold him than any of ours, the Imperial power. Yet the most powerful man is but human, and even an emperor has but two eyes to see; and, like the poorest of his subjects, he can only be in one place at a time. So he, again, follows the divine example, portioning out his great empire into districts, appointing a man in each to be judge in his stead, and investing him for that purpose with some of his power--for since he is to bear part of the Emperor's burden, it is but fair he should have part of the Emperor's staff to strengthen him. These men are the magistrates; and in their turn they follow out the example of their master, the Emperor, and the higher example of Him above--they see that every parish is administered by its own judge, yielding to him part of their power to guard the right. In like manner every village judge behaves to the heads of families. I look upon it as a glorious ladder, replete with comfort, uniting earth with heaven, and bringing us poor sinful men nearer to Him who made us. I say it is glorious, because the proudest intellect could not add anything to its perfect goodness; and I say it is replete with comfort, because the very lowest step of this ladder is under the same law as the highest. For no matter whether I be a shepherd or a

king, he who wrongs me is committing equal sin, and it is the duty of those to whom God has entrusted the power to protect the shepherd as though he were a king. My duty is to do what is right, and not suffer any wrong silently, but to report it to those whom God has appointed to protect me. All further responsibility must rest with them!

"Such being to this day my holiest conviction, I am unable to swerve from my former opinion concerning you. You appeared to me like wild beasts, your love of avenging yourselves filled me with horror until I perceived whence it came; it was because you had not yet been taught to wean yourselves from the ways of your ancestors, who, descending from the mountains, settled here. They did well to look upon their firelocks as the best argument in maintaining their rights. For God will have the right respected, and the ladder I have spoken of is subservient to it; but where the influence of that ladder cannot make itself felt, as in the far-off mountain districts, the power of watching over his own right must return to the individual man. God Himself must have so willed it, otherwise He would not have peopled those outlying haunts. But you, who are within reach of the law, continued to act as though God had never made the provision I have spoken of! It filled me with horror unspeakable; and if your lesser shortcomings had power to rouse that pride of mine, how much more so this offence!...

"Many of you will remember my wedding-day, and how I was laughed at for being so serious; but I was not sad, only full of thought. I knew that I was about to enter upon an entirely new life, a life beset with the most difficult duties. For when I stood before the altar I not only married the girl I loved, but, if I may so express it, I married this village; and not only to her, but to you also, ay, and to Justice herself, I promised with a sacred oath to be faithful unto death. No words of mine could ever express what I felt on that day, how my thoughts from my own newly-granted happiness would roam away to a solemn future. For I knew that all my life in this place would be a falsehood if I did not strive with might and main to bring you to accept that will of God for yourselves also.... On my wedding-day! such a terrible taskmaster was that pride of mine!...

"I set about it. I soon perceived that I could do little unless I had power vested in me--unless I were elected to the eldership. But I scorned the idea of bringing about that end by despicable means. I could only leave it with God--whose kingdom I strove to uphold--to guide your minds. And when I had been chosen, I directed my every effort to the furthering of the glorious end I had in view.

"That same end was still my desire when the new mandatar arrived four years ago. You there and then turned against him; I spoke for him. Events have since shown that you were right in your antipathy, for he is a wicked man; but you were wrong nevertheless, hating him only because he was the mandatar. This dislike of yours came to be the test of my influence with you; for those of you whom I could convince that it was wrong to hate him because it was his business to claim the labour we owed to his master, could learn to understand also about that will of God. I did succeed with many of you, and the day was at hand that should prove it; for when the mandatar came down upon us as with his demand, expecting us to render the tribute of our live stock to the very day, you accepted my view of the question. It was the same in the more difficult matter concerning the forest labour. I shall never forget what I felt after those meetings. 'Thou God of Justice' my heart kept crying, 'these people are learning to accept Thy will!' Old Stephen turned from me--a real grief--but it could not lessen the holy joy I felt. Indeed, that same joy would have been mine if those meetings had cost me"--he said it slowly, and with marked emphasis--"the love of my wife, or the welfare of my children! The rupture between me and him was irretrievable; there could be no agreement between the village as it had been and the village as it should be according to my hopes, and, therefore, none between Stephen and me. Even his dying words, greatly as they touched me, offered abundant proof that his thoughts and mine concerning the most sacred things in life had ever been widely apart. I did not understand him when he said to me, 'It cannot but end ill when the judge is of another caste than the people he is called to rule.' ... I believed, on the contrary, that it would be an ill thing for Zulawce if the judge, like the rest of the people, were given to violence. Now if there had been among you a man of a like mind with myself, and better than I, I would have thought it wrong to seek the judgeship; but as it was, my very conscience laid it upon me to do so. I was chosen unanimously, as never a judge before me or since. I was glad for myself, and more glad for your sakes. There was little danger now, I thought, that you should ever fail in your duty to the Count, or try to right yourselves by force of arms. That the new mandatar was a miserable scoundrel I knew soon enough; it caused me vexation and disgust--the kind of disgust one feels in touching a toad--but I never for a moment considered it a cause of alarm. How should the righteous come to suffer in a country where justice prevails? So I never even threatened him; ay, more than this----"

He paused as though he had to brace himself up for pronouncing the words that must follow. But presently he added, "I have to say that which hitherto has been utterly unknown to you. Let your wrath be upon me, for it furnished the root whence all this trouble has sprung. Yet I could not have acted differently. It was myself who assured the rascal, on his hypocritical inquiry, that we should never meet violence with violence; and it was this assurance of mine that gave him the courage to wrong us, coward that he is!"

A cry of rage, not unmixed with surprise, burst from the assembled men, followed once more by a deep silence, when nothing was heard but their excited breathing; they were anxious to hear more, and he continued: "You have a right to be angry! But I also was right in thus speaking to him. And the proud confidence whence those words of mine had sprung did not forsake me when he dared violence. I was more deeply roused than any of you, because I loved the right more

deeply. But we had need to keep our hands pure, both for our own sakes and for the dear sake of justice, for the guilt of it all must be left with him entirely; therefore, I staked my very life to prevent your having recourse to violence on your side. I thanked God that I succeeded; and for the rest of it, it no longer was concern of ours, but of the imperial law court. I waited for the verdict as never before did human soul wait and hunger for the word of man! and when at last it was given--well, if you will take into account my life and the man I am, you will understand that no human tongue can describe the indignation which possessed me. I was utterly broken, yet not with impotent rage, nor yet with my just resentment against those miserable weaklings that should have righted us--but only with an utter pity for myself. For at the very moment when that hunchback creature of a clerk made known to us their decision, the conviction darted through me: 'Poor Taras! if right and justice are not to be trampled under foot, you will have to become a law-breaker in the sight of men!'--I, the happy husband and father, the good, peace-loving judge--a *law-breaker!* ... *That* was what smote me down, making me swoon like a woman, and for *this* reason I cried and moaned like a child when I returned to consciousness. Still, it was at that time only a thought, brooking no gainsaying it is true, but there was no resolve about it, still less any planning. My mind was overshadowed with the thunder-cloud that hung heavy on the inward horizon. I had not yet come to consider the ruin that lurked in its blackness, and as yet I gazed upon it with horror and dismay as upon a thing within the range of vision only, but outside the circle of my soul. And once again confidence lifted her head. What though the court of the district had failed to do right, there were other steps of the ladder beyond! I carried our complaint to the court of appeal at Lemberg, hoping and waiting yet again. But not with the strong hope of the former waiting! The mind yet clung to it, but my heart had lost its assurance. And the cloud remained. It spread more and more, forcing me to consider how it would break. And then, "--his voice sank to a hoarse whisper--"and then I felt an inward compulsion to go hunting in the mountains ... it was there I came to see how it would end....

"On returning--it was about this season last year--I found the superior court's verdict. The plea was declared to be groundless. I did not burst into a rage, I did not even lament; but I saw that the cloud must break. It was due, however, not only to me and mine, but even to humanity, once again to consult my legal adviser. He mentioned the Emperor; it was only by way of saying something, for the poor man, himself helpless in the matter, pitied my distress. But that remark lit up my night, comforting me greatly; it sent its radiance across the dreary wild in which the straying wanderer had vainly been seeking his home. The darkness, the terrors were forgotten, for the light of his own hearth had shone forth to guide him. I had forgotten that there was one on earth whom the matter concerned even more than myself, because God had laid it upon him as a great and holy duty; and I knew now it was my duty to go to that man--to appeal to the Emperor. I went to Vienna, upborne by a boundless hope! it gave me courage to face the strange country, to face every difficulty in my way to reach the ear of Majesty....

"But when I had seen him--it required no word of his--I knew that my hope was vain. Now, I will not have it said of me that I speak unjustly of any man; let me say, therefore, I do not look upon the Emperor of Austria as on one who loves wickedness or unrighteousness. He is a poor, sickly creature, fond of his lathe they say, and he seemed very anxious to know about my boots and breeches. That is all; for he is my enemy now, whom I shall have to oppose as long as there is breath in this body, and it behoves a man to speak more generously of his enemy than of his dearest friend....

"I returned home as a man who knows what is before him, and, recognising his duty, determines that the inevitable shall not find him unprepared. I acted accordingly with a sadness unspeakable, abiding the imperial decision. Not that I was foolish enough to hope it might turn out favourably; but what I meditated grew to be right only when the Emperor's refusal had reached me. It would have been sin before! But the time of waiting must not be lost.... Once again I retired into the mountains, endeavouring to make myself at home there more and more....

"Last night Father Leo transmitted to me the final decision. It is unfavourable. I have it much at heart that you should understand it is the denial in itself and nothing else in the writ that has ripened my intention. Some foolish clerk has clothed the refusal in unkind words, talking of prison unless I submitted. But I know better than to imagine that he did so by order of that harmless man, the Emperor, who is too good-natured to think of hurting a fly. It is not that which moves me. Nay, if he had penned it with his own hand I would not care a straw about it, any more than I should be influenced to the contrary if he were to write: 'My dear Taras, it grieves me sorely to deny your request; but I am anxious to reward your honest zeal by sending you the golden cross with which I decorate great heroes.' I should send back his cross, and would proceed with the duty which is before me."

As these words were falling from his lips his armed companions--Sefko and Jemilian, Wassilj Soklewicz and Lazarko Rodakowicz--had approached him more closely, standing quite near to him now. Their faces were white and quivering with emotion, most of all Jemilian's, who could not restrain his tears as he turned to his master, handing him his gun.

"Not yet," said Taras gently; but he took the weapon, leaning upon it as he continued, distinctly, slowly, and solemnly: "Now listen to me, ye men, and all that have come to hear me! Listen attentively, that you may be able to repeat my words to any that should ask you. A fearful wrong has been committed in this village--there has been robbery and perjury. I have used every means provided by the law to undo it. It has been of no avail. The perjured witnesses remain unpunished, and the wrongdoer enjoys the benefit of his robbery. Nay more--not only have I

vainly appealed to the constituted authorities, the guardians of our right, but I have done so to your hurt and mine. I have been a curse to the village, because I strove for justice. He who loves the right must suffer, and the evildoer flourishes!

"It is incredible, and how should one understand it? Is that fair faith of mine falsehood and deception? Is it not true that God has put an Emperor over the land, giving him much power, that he should see to the right? Is there no such ladder as I have spoken of binding earth to the high courts of heaven?

"Yes--yes, and yes again! It is so, it must be so everywhere where men would dwell in safety; but it is not so with us. In this unhappy place the arbitrariness, the unfitness, the carelessness of men has counteracted the holy will of God, making the wrong victorious!

"What, then, is the consequence for every right-seeking man? I have shown that wherever the divine institution is powerless, as for instance in distant mountain haunts, it is not incompatible with the will of God that every man should be the guardian of his own right. And how should it be otherwise in an unhappy place, where the wicked man's violence is left to trample down the right with impunity? In such a place also the power of protecting his life and goods must return to the individual man. If there is no Emperor to help me, I must help myself!

"Hear, then, these three things. Let them be repeated from mouth to mouth, that all men shall know them who dwell in this unhappy land in which justice is not to be found!

"Firstly! Since the Emperor is not doing his duty towards me, I am not bound by my duty towards him. And therefore I, Taras Barabola, declare before Almighty God and these human witnesses that I can no longer honour and obey this Emperor Ferdinand of Austria. His will in future is nothing to me, I disown and disregard it; and in all things in which hitherto I have acted according to his laws I shall henceforth be guided by my own conscience solely. Should he cause me to be summoned I shall pay no heed; should he despatch his soldiers to catch me, I shall defend myself. And since his magistrates abuse their power to the furtherance of wrong, and he takes no steps to prevent it, I shall strive to lessen that power as much as possible, waging war upon it wherever I can! I shall do this anywhere, everywhere, while I can lift a hand! Yes, I, Taras Barabola, in the name of Almighty God, herewith declare war against the Emperor of Austria!--War!--War!"

A shriek rose from the people, surprise, horror, approval and disgust blending together in a single cry, which died away as suddenly and completely as though it had been wrung from these hundreds of listeners--an involuntary outburst of their mute dismay.

"Secondly! Because justice is withheld from us, I shall take it by force. I shall oblige the mandatar to indemnify the village. Yet this will not be the extent of my duty, but only a beginning. If the name of Almighty God is not to be dishonoured in this country, there is need of a judge, of an avenger, before whom the evil-doer shall tremble and whom all good men can trust. And since there appears to be no one else for this holy office, I shall undertake it, looking upon it as a sacred duty while life shall last. I will be a protector to the oppressed in the Emperor's stead, since he is not. And because his power is with the wrong-doer, I shall require a strong arm to oppose it. I shall unfurl my banner up yonder in the mountains; let each and all come to me that will serve the right. The wild forest which hitherto has been the haunt of lawbreakers only, must now be a gathering-place for those that honour the law, but to whom justice is dearer. There I shall dwell, beyond the reach of any of their hirelings. I shall swoop down upon the dwellings of men whenever the high calling I have accepted requires me to do so, and I shall return thither having avenged the wrong."

"A hajdamak!" cried Simeon, despairingly. "Our Taras a hajdamak!"

"Taras a hajdamak!" echoed the people, some scornfully, some in utter dismay, according to the hatred or pity that rose uppermost.

"No!" cried Taras, a deep flush overspreading the pallor of his face. "God forgive you for insulting me at this time. A hajdamak is a brigand, but I shall be the leader of a band of avengers, and we shall fight against every evil-doer--against those scoundrels also who go by that name. Let me add, now, what in the third and last place I have to say. Within a week from this, by Easter Sunday, my banner will be unfurled up yonder. Whoever can come to me with pure hands, either to inform me of a wrong committed, or to join my band, will be able to learn my whereabouts from any honest herdsman or bear-hunter of the forest. But let him consider it well before he becomes a follower of mine. If he seek pleasure or lawlessness let him not come near me, for our living will be of the poorest, and I shall maintain the strictest discipline. If he hope for booty let him keep away; for no plundering will be allowed, and with my own hand shall shoot the man who, while following my banner, shall dare to touch any man's goods. Let none come to me who can testify to being happy, for he that follows me must know that there is no returning, that he has separated himself for ever from all men dwelling in peace; he must be ready to meet death any day, either in open combat, which is a death to be courted, or on the gallows, as though he were an evil-doer indeed. It would not be thus if men were different, if generosity and self-denial were not so rare in the world; for then my banner could be that of open insurrection, enlisting all good men against the common foe--the wrong to be put down. But this cannot be; I must be satisfied with the possible.

"And now I pray you to make this known, not forgetting to add that Taras Barabola will continue this war until he has gained the great end he strives for, until that glorious, divine institution is visibly established in this land. If I can but succeed, let happen to me what may, and though I should have to pay for it with my own life, I should meet even the felon's death a victor indeed."

He paused, his breast heaving, and then he added, with faltering voice:--

"And now ... fare ye well! Accept my best wishes, individually and as a community I am grateful to those who ever did me a kindness, and forgive those who have done me any wrong ... Be good to my unhappy wife, to my poor little children.... I leave them here--ah, forsaken indeed.... Pity them, don't pity me.... If you will but believe I am not wantonly becoming an outlaw that is all I look for.... It may be the last time you see me.... May your life be happier than mine.... Farewell!"

These broken words fell upon so deep a silence that they were heard plainly by all that crowd of listeners, although his voice had sunk to a whisper, quivering with tears. And none dared break the silence when he had finished, until, with a sudden leap from the table, and surrounded by his companions, he strove to make a way for himself towards the church.

Then only the sacred awe which held them spellbound was lifted from the souls of these men, yielding to a commotion unheard of, even among that savage people--in their 'general assembly' at least. Every man seemed ready to attack his neighbour; it was a tumult unspeakable, and some time passed before one voice succeeded in making itself heard above the rest. It was that of the corporal. "Stop him!" he roared. "He is a rebel, I will make him a prisoner in the Emperor's name. You must help me, all of you. Jewgeni, what is the good of your being judge?" He was not left alone this time, some dozen of old soldiers rallying round him.

But the rest of the men indignantly opposed him. "We are no policemen!" chirped the infant voice of the herculean smith. "No policemen!" echoed the people.... "Let him go in peace!... He has addressed the general meeting, and has a right to go free."

"In the name of the Emperor!" reiterated the corporal, white with rage, and, snatching a pistol from the belt of his nearest neighbour, he pointed it at the men, "Let me do my duty, or woe to your lives!"

"Woe to yourself!" cried Wassilj, the butcher, brandishing his axe in the would-be hero's face; and blood would certainly have flowed had not the judge interfered, an unwonted courage coming to him from the urgency of the situation.

"Do you know this sign?" he cried, thrusting his staff of office between them. "There is power vested in it; this is the general meeting, and I command you, desist!" And the combatants owned his authority, Wassilj dropping his axe and the corporal his pistol.

Taras, meanwhile, surrounded by his little band, attempted to break through the ranks; it was not so easy, for the people pressed round him, endeavouring to hold him, and discoursing wildly. But far harder to the parting man was the sorrowful entreaty of his friends. Alexa Sembrow, the late elder, had fallen on his knees before him, his white hair framing an agonised face. "Don't Taras, for God's sake, don't do it!" he kept repeating, while old Simeon bethought himself of another means, haply, to stop him. He was pressing to the inn to bring hither poor Anusia. Father Leo alone looked on with folded arms, his face quivering, his lips unable to move.

He was the only one for whom Taras yet had a word; turning to him with deep emotion, he said: "Forgive me, thou best of friends, forgive my silence, and my grieving thee now so sorely. Thou hast loved me truly, I know!"

That was too much for Leo; he lay weeping in the arms of his friend.

"Alas," he sobbed, "what a man is lost in you!"

"Not so!" replied Taras, disengaging himself gently. "He who obeys the dictates of his own true heart cannot be lost, happen what may--at least not in the eyes of the just ones...." He turned away, stopping once again: "Father Leo," he said, below his breath, so that the priest only could understand him, "Father Leo, will you promise me one thing?"

"Surely. What is it? About your wife?"

"Nay; I require no promise on her account, for I know your heart. It is about--myself--when one day--my last hour shall have come--may I send for you? Will you come to me--to any place?--no matter how terrible it be?"

"I shall come," faltered the pope.

"Do you pledge me your word ... to any place?"

"Wherever it be."

"Thank you for all your friendship--for this last proof most of all...."

He turned away hastily, whispering to Jemilian, "Are the horses ready?"

"Yes; behind the church, as you commanded. Young Halko has saddled them, and is waiting your orders."

"Then let us be gone."

But one more wrench before he could be free. The sons of Simeon, Hritzko, and Giorgi, had caught his knees.

"Take us with you," they cried; "we cannot--we will not let you go without us!"

"Get up!" he cried, sharply; and there was no gainsaying his voice, hoarse though it was with emotion. "Do you think I am villain enough to ruin the sons of my friend?" Adding, with a quivering smile: "You are quite incorrigible. What was the use of my resisting your importunity before? But love me always, and remember me when I am gone. You are dear to me. Good-bye!"

He walked away, and none stopped him. Having mounted, he was about to spur his horse, when once again his name was called with a shriek so heartrending that he shuddered and paused.

He knew who was calling him. His unhappy wife was standing outside the inn, looking after him with despairing eyes. She would have fallen to the ground had not old Simeon supported her trembling figure.

"Farewell!" faltered Taras; but the sound did not reach her, falling dead at his own feet as it were.

He could but wave his hand, and, spurring his horse mercilessly, the creature dashed away in a maddened gallop, his men following; and the little band vanished in the mysterious shadows of the fir-covered uplands.

CHAPTER X.

TO THE MOUNTAINS.

There is a strange legend concerning the origin of the Carpathians, which, now towering abruptly, now rising in gentler lines, form a mighty wall of separation between the rich lowlands where the Theiss flows and that vast plain, of heath-country diversified with fertile tracts, stretching away southward beyond the Pruth into Roumania. To those blue-green domes cling the gathering clouds, and sailing away thence they burst in storms of rain upon the Magyar or upon the Ruthen, as the capricious winds may list; and in those forest-haunts the rivers rise which come down from the heights, headlong at first and wondrously clear, but flowing wearily as they reach the plain. The dwellers round about differ in race and tongue; but they look to the mountains as to a common centre, where the weather is born, and whence the water is given for the lowlands; and common to all is that quaintest of legends, whether Slav, or Magyar, or Roumanian--a legend crudely imagined, but not without a meaning of its own, however fancifully expressed.

There was a good old time, the people will tell you, at the beginning of things, when the earth was a fair garden, a fertile plain, with pleasant groves here and there, and gentle hills. There were no mountains, no ravenous beasts, no thunder storms, no bursting waters, and the people were of one race and tongue. Men were happy in those far-off times--tilling the soil, and living on the fruits of this beautiful plain. And God would visit the garden He had made, and bless the children of men. But these foolish people were not content, and, uniting in their pride, they clamoured for golden harvests without previous toil; in punishment whereof the Lord God ceased to visit them, confounding their language so that they could no longer clamour in common, and permitting, moreover, a mighty barrier to be raised between them--the great Carpathians--to separate them into different tribes.

For the enemy of men was sent to raise the mountains, and to make them terrible withal. The heaving earth burst upward, and there were peaks and crags to frown at the discontented race. The evil one took seven days to shape the Carpathians, beginning on a Sunday, on which he heaped up the most towering parts, and finishing off with the lesser Carpathians on the seventh day when his power was nearly spent; that was Saturday, for which reason no doubt this part has always been a dwelling-place of Jews.

The mountain range of seven divisions, as is plainly to be seen, was of awful aspect, since the

evil had the making of them: not a tree or green thing would grow to clothe the riven rocks and the peaks he had raised to spread terror upon the once smiling plain. For the Lord God had been wroth with men.

But there was One in heaven, the good Saviour, who prayed His Father not to be angry for ever, but to let Him add beauty to the mountains which the evil one had made for the punishment of men.

He went, and at His touch the whole range was changed, not losing its dread gloominess, yet gaining a wondrous beauty over and above. For the Saviour with His pitiful hand covered the bare mountains with the grandest forests ever seen, surrounding the rocks with spreading verdure, and planting flowers at their feet. He made waters to spring in every glen, and cascades leap from the crags; and though wolves and bears went prowling, He created sheep and the dappled deer to browse in the sylvan haunts. And ever since, the people will tell you, the Carpathians have had a beauty of their own, but with terror combined.

It is hardly to be imagined how a man would feel who, by some magic, were to find himself suddenly transplanted into the heart of these mountains. For unmoved he could not be, were his perceptions never so blunted; a sensation of awe would steal upon him with something of wonder and dismay. Nay, such a feeling must come upon any wanderer ascending step by step from the lowlands, though the gradual rise would prepare him in a measure for the weird grandeur and stern beauty unrolling before his eyes.

To such a one the range at first would appear as a gigantic ridge of clouds heaped up on the horizon, but differing in hue according to the time of day; of a bluish black in the morning, they fade into shades of grey, transparently pale in the full daylight, till the sinking sun suffuses them with a crimson blush, and they continue shining through the long twilight like a wall of fire at the far end of the dusky plain. But the following morning those same shapes are black again, and all the darker if the air be clear--a wall of towering density jutting its pinnacles into the ethereal blue.

They seem approaching, but the vast plain is delusive; they are yet miles away. The landscape, however, has left monotony behind, growing more changeful at every turn. The moorland has disappeared, with its sedgy pools, instead of which there is an abundance of rivulets, growing more limpid and more headlong as you proceed; for you are ascending steadily, your horizon enlarging. Cornfields are few and far between, wheat making room for the more hardy oats; while all about you there are great tracts of brownish uplands, where juniper bushes are plentiful and the heather will burst into sheets of bloom. Villages are becoming scarce--mere hamlets, too poor for a manor house, too poor almost for a church, and with cottages of the humblest, the public-house alone retaining its undesirable dimensions. Orchards are no longer to be seen, but beech woods increase; the forest encloses you, and soon even the beech is crowded out by the fir. The sky, wherever it appears through the jagged branches, is of a deeper blue, for there are no misty vapours here as in the lowlands; but the air is filled with a strange, crisp perfume, the resinous exhalations of pine wood. Every sense thus is alive to the change of scenery, and if you are a lover of your lowland home, despite its dreariness, you will be overtaken by a haunting sensation of fear of the unknown world you have entered.

But emerging from the pine wood presently, and looking back from the height you have gained, the very plain behind you has assumed another aspect, a strange loveliness enwrapping it. The old homely expanse is aglow with an emerald hue--a giant meadow seemingly--streaked with the silver of its flowing waters; a shining greensward, the brighter for its cottages; and far yonder, where the blue of the heavens seems mingling with the green of the earth, your own dwelling perchance, a fair jewel in a radiant setting.

But the far-off wall, with its towering blackness? It has resolved itself magically. To your right and to your left, and above you, there are round-domed mountains and bolder peaks rising atop of one another to an immeasurable height. That path up the pine wood has brought you into the heart of the Carpathians, and their strange beauty, weird and wild and unspeakably mysterious, is upon you suddenly.

Yet monotony is even here; the world seems a sea of swaying pines, and the eye has nothing to rest it from the gloomy green save the sky, vast and blue. The heart grows lonely and wistful, but scarcely attuned to tender thoughts as amid the voices of the plain. The spell of the forest wilds is upon it, bracing it up to its own sterner kind. Resistless and tossing, each torrent dashes through its rocky glen, breaking into clouds of spray about the boulders, and mantling the young pines in a shower of shining drops. And from the forest deeps strange music is heard of groaning branches and whispering tree tops, now wild and solemn, now murmuring as in dreams, never ceasing, but going on for ever like the song of the sea. And as you listen you are caught in a trance, and drawn deeper still into the witching region. Nature here does not captivate by little gifts and graces; but, having looked at you once with eyes of kindling beauty, wild, weird, and awful, you worship at her feet.

It is a charm both chaste and powerful, and, having known it once, you seek to know more. But not many are admitted to that delight, which is still reserved for the few--even as in the days when Taras Barabola repaired up yonder to unfurl his banner. Yet occasionally some lover of the wilder aspects of nature will quit the shores of the Theiss or the Fruth to seek entrance into the

enchanted regions of that unknown world. The forest wilds of the Welyki Lys to this day are given over to bears, hajdamaks, and Huzuls, and the lowland folk aver that there is little to chose between either. But that is a libel.

Even a bear up yonder is as good-natured as a bear can be, not having made the closer acquaintance of man. A hunter by nature, he hates being hunted, and grows surly in consequence; nay, it must be owned that in the more inhabited parts he has quite lost his native *bonhomie*, growing cunning and spiteful, robbing more than his need, and killing for mere blood-thirstiness. Not so, however, up among the wilds. He is lord in possession there; behaving, accordingly, with a pride of his own, and not without generosity. Of course he will have his daily tribute, and fetches it too--now from this fold, now from that; but the shepherds and herdsmen quite understand this. There is no help against the lord of the soil, they say; but the bear, on the whole, is at least a convenient landlord, fetching himself what he wants, and not expecting you to carry it after him. Not fiercely as a robber, therefore, nor stealthily as a thief; but leisurely and with dignity, Master Bruin arrives at the pen, picks out his victim--the sheep, goat, or calf which takes his fancy--and walks away with it as quietly and unconcerned as he came. And he behaves most fairly, not oppressing one unfortunate subject more than another, but visiting in succession all the pens and folds within a certain radius of his lair; so that he may be looked for at pretty regular intervals. The herdsmen have an idea that he acts from a positive sense of justice; while others, less credulous, are of opinion that the bear of the Carpathians is a great walker, and thus naturally finds himself now in this quarter, now in that, turning to the nearest sheep-fold when it is time for his dinner. That the queer biped he meets occasionally might also serve him for a meal, he generously ignores. If he falls in with a herdsman, he gives a growl: "With your leave, brother, there is room for us both." He growls too, though more angrily, on meeting any stranger, but rarely thinks it worth while to attack him; and if he comes across any one asleep he will have a sniff at him, but without a thought of hurting.

While the wolf, that low, ugly creature, is hated and hunted down everywhere, a strange feeling of respect prevents any native of the upper mountains from killing a bear. "The poor little father has none too easy a life of it," they say, "and it is not well to murder an honest fellow." There is a tale preserved in the forest of an Englishman who once arrived there with the notion of bear-hunting. But although he had muskets of wrought silver, and held them out as presents to any who would help him, not many were found wicked enough to join in the chase. "Indeed," say the people, "all who went were frozen to death, the bad Englishman first and foremost. It served him right for wishing to hunt the poor little father." The very outlaw, the homeless hajdamak, shares this feeling; and hunting for the pleasure of it, whatever he falls in with in the lower forest regions, he acts peaceably in the upper haunts. "We go shares with the bear up here," he says, "and he behaves well to us."

The Huzul also, that hybrid of Slavonic and Mongolian blood, who lives up yonder as a herdsman, hunting the wolf and the deer, and tilling such bits of ground as he can, is not nearly so bad as he is believed to be by his betters in the lowlands. His one great vice is an ingrained want of morality, his own share, handed down from his fathers, of original sin.

His ancestors, drifting away from the great wave of migration, unused to a settled home and personal property, knew neither Christianity nor the wedded estate. Their descendant has accepted all these fetters of lawlessness, but he wears them lightly, according to his nature. He has submitted to a settled dwelling, having a hut of his own, but he will not live in it except when he cannot help himself. From the time the snow begins to melt, until it lies again mountains deep for seven months in the year, the Huzul moves about with his cattle from pasture to pasture, from glen to glen, as though driven, not only by outward necessity, but also by a mysterious inward need. While the world is green--winter to him being the black time--he is never long on the soil of his own property. He must return at times to till his field, to sow and reap his oats--the hardest and most unwelcome of labour; he *must* do it, else he would die for want of food, but he never thinks of adding to his wealth by means of agriculture. Every lamb rejoices his heart, and he is proud of his foals; but if he enlarges his oat-field, it is only because of the downright necessity of meeting his wants, and nothing beyond.

Neither is he greatly advanced in his notions of personal property. To be sure there are certain fields, and pastures, and flocks, belonging to certain settlements, these consisting of three or four, sometimes even of ten or twelve families of the same kindred, and united under one head who rules by birthright. This chief appoints the sowing of the fields and the management of the sheep, but not a grain of oats, nor solitary lambkin belongs to him any more than to another. It is all common property. Indeed, there are even pastures and flocks which are the joint property of several settlements, so that a single lamb may happen to belong to several hundred owners. Such property is managed, and the proceeds are allotted at the meeting of the married men, who, though of different settlements, are yet related to one another; for such common ownership always springs from the fact that their forefathers formed one family, which, growing too large, had divided for want of space. There is no personal property then, save wearing apparel and arms; everything else belongs to the family, which means to the clan. The student of political economy, it will be seen, could enrich his knowledge among the Huzuls!

They are no favourites with the clergy. They are Catholics to be sure, of the Greek Church, but a good deal of their ancestors' heathenism has survived, and their lowland neighbours say of them that a cat is as good a Christian as they when she crosses her paws. They take care to have their children christened in the name of some saint, and they know that there is a God Almighty

living up yonder with the Virgin Mary and their Son, and that there are lots of angels and devils, and of saints no end. This is the extent of their catechism, except, perhaps, that some few can repeat the Lord's Prayer after a fashion. There is no helpful pastor to feed these poor sheep, showing them the comfort they require as much as any. For they also are part of the groaning creation struggling with the sore riddle of existence, and their sense of helplessness is the greater because their lot is cast amid supremest hardships, leaving them too often the prey of the blind forces of nature. As much, then, as any of the striving children of men they are in need of the assurance that there is a Compassion more than human; but who is there to tell them the good news?

There are popes in the distant villages whose nominal parishioners they are. "Why do they not come to church, then?" Innocent question! The journey would take several days, even if they remembered they would be welcome. But since there is nothing to remind them of the far-off church and pope, how should they remember? And so Christianity to them has resolved itself into the legendary knowledge of the heavenly household, a poor, useless knowledge, although the Huzul does his best to grasp the idea of the Godhead, clothing it in his own image. The Almighty to his perception is a just Huzulean patriarch, something like Hilarion Rosenko dwelling by the "Black Water;" the Virgin Mary a kindly housewife; and Christ, the Saviour, a great, noble hunter, whom the spiteful hajdamaks killed for entering their domain. They don't quite understand why the popes should keep talking about this Saviour as though He were alive still; for if He is, why does He not show Himself among the mountains? But besides this "Christian" belief, they keep up the institution of those shining divinities worshipped by their ancestors of old--the sun, the moon, and the host of stars. These, happily, can be seen, and their blessings felt--the light and the warmth they shed upon the darksome wilds. But who shall save them from the powers of evil about them; from the stormy whirlwind rushing through the forests, uprooting the strongest trees and sweeping away the sheltering roof of their homestead? Who shall help them against the wicked sprites whose gambols produce snowdrifts, burying men and cattle? or who protect them from the evil witch stealing about in the gloaming with sickness in her train? For they are surrounded with uncanny beings of whom they know nothing save the ill-effects they feel, and they know but one means of pacifying them--as one pacifies an ill-natured neighbour, by occasional bribery.

These strangest of Christians and dwellers of the mountain wilds even manage to die without the pope's assistance. When some aged pilgrim lies at the point of death on the couch of bear and sheepskins they have spread for him, neither he nor his people give a thought to the ghostly shepherd of the nearest manse. What would be the use, indeed, if they did think of him, since it would take him at least nine days to come and return? so it is out of the question, and it is as well that neither the dying man nor his weeping relatives miss the spiritual comfort. One of them says the Lord's Prayer, adding some other mystic charm with which these poor people strive to pacify the divinities they believe in, the sufferer repeats the words with his dying breath and expires without anxiety on that score. When the corpse has stiffened, they bury it beneath some forest tree, cutting a great cross into the bole, not forgetting some mysterious signs to its right and left "for the other gods."

If, then, they manage even to die without the aid of a parish priest, it is scarcely to be wondered at if they do not need him to tie the nuptial knot. When any man and woman among them, generally of riper years, have agreed to spend their future days in common, this is a matter, they think, which concerns no one beyond themselves except the heads of their settlements, who never withhold their blessing unless the bridal pair should happen to be of different settlements at variance at the time about some bit of property or act of violence. If such is not the case the wedding is fixed upon forthwith, and word is sent over the mountains: "Come to the homestead of Marko, on such and such a day, when long-legged Sefko will take curly Magdusia to wife." And everybody is sure to come, bringing little gifts of kindness, and taking their fill of the schnaps which the heads of the settlements have procured in exchange for some sheep in honour of the guests. And when the last drop has been consumed, Sefko and Magdusia are looked upon as married, which does not always imply a change in the place of abode of either of them.

As for the pope's blessing, it is not disregarded on principle, since even the other gods are remembered; only there is no hurry. Sefko has no idea that Magdusia, in order to be his really, must be given to him by the pope, and so he takes his time about it, presenting himself for the blessing when opportunity offers, maybe the christening of their first offspring. If the pope be at all zealous he will, of course, lecture them on their want of morality, the pair listening submissively, but never understanding what should have roused the good man's ire, or displeased the Almighty, as he tells them. As for the infant, it is considered to belong to its mother's settlement, growing up to the same rights as any other youth.

For the rest, the Huzul shares in all the virtues and vices of uncivilised humanity: he is free from envy, candid, brave, and hospitable, but also coarse in his tastes and cruel. The Emperor's magistrates are nothing to him, he does not need their protection; and of his free-will he is not likely to pay any tax. Let his cousins of the lowlands do that, whom he pities and despises accordingly.

Of a similar kind are his feelings concerning the homeless hajdamaks; he, the native of the mountains, looking upon the outlaws much as the bear is supposed to look upon man; and, in consequence, actual enmity between them is rare. Not unless he were really starving with hunger

or cold would a hajdamak ever think of attacking even a single herdsman up yonder, a last remnant of generosity preventing him from wronging those on whose soil he dwells, and who, as he but too well knows, could take grievous revenge any moment. Not in the memory of men, therefore--which is the only source of authentic history within the mountains--has it ever happened that a band of outlaws dared an attack upon any settlement.

But if the Huzul has little to fear from the hajdamaks, he may yet get into trouble on account of them, that is, by means of the Whitecoats who are after those ruffians. The Huzul considers it incumbent on him to hate the soldiers; for are they not the servants of a power he refuses to recognise? But that power will lay hold of him if it can. There is no help for the Emperor--he must just put up with it--if the Huzul refuses to consider himself a taxpayer; some Imperial exciseman, however, may see his opportunity of paying the Huzuls a visit under cover of the military. "Hang the hajdamaks!" groans the Huzul, "but for them no confounded exciseman would have ventured up hither;" and, overpowered with the thought of his loss in lambs and sheep, he is sure to add: "Hang the Whitecoats! I wish the hajdamaks could teach them a lesson and make them keep clear of the mountains for ever." He is so wrathful, indeed, that he could scarcely tell which of the two he would like to see hanged first.

A strict neutrality, however, is the outcome. He would rather die than betray to the Whitecoats the hiding place of "Green Giorgi"; at the same time he has no idea of warning the outlaw of his enemy's approach, or of rendering him any assistance whatever. He just looks on; and nothing would please him better than that the belligerent parties, like the fighting lions of the fable, should devour each other bodily. And there are other considerations, besides, inviting him to neutrality. He knows that there are ruffians among the hajdamaks whom, even with his notions of honour and justice, he cannot possibly approve of; but they are a mixed lot, and there are others among them who have done nothing a Huzul would despise. And since it is not written in a man's face why he has become an outlaw, the Huzul behaves alike to them all, neither loving them nor hating them, but holding aloof strictly.

The Imperial authorities, then, cannot expect the Huzuls' help against the bandits, and need not fear their making common cause with them; but that is all, since no one ever lifts a finger to raise the poor dwellers of the mountains and teach them a higher standard of right and wrong. It were quite useless to expect any better; and if regiment upon regiment were let loose upon the Carpathians no lasting result could be looked for; for to give chase to any outlaw in the vast forests is as hopeless as to seek for a particular insect in a cornfield. The lawless trade will not die out till Civilisation takes up her abode in the mountain wilds, taming the dwellers therein; and, if unable to make better men of them, preparing the way at least for her nobler sister, even Justice herself, in whose fair sight men are equals, and oppression shall not stand.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that all hajdamaks are criminals and cut-throats; a distinction must be made. There is no exact rendering for the word itself in any of the western tongues, and, fortunately, the thing also lies beyond the experience of happier nations. The Bulgarians only have a similar word, denoting a similar existence, the "hajdamak" of the Carpathians and the "hajduk" of the Balkan being akin, both revealing in strangest blending some of the best and some of the very worst impulses of a suffering people. It is not easy, therefore, to judge fairly.

There are three distinct types among these outlaws, or "free men" as they call themselves. Firstly, there are those who have escaped from the arm of justice, having committed some crime, and who are not only guilty in the sight of the law, but of ill repute even among their kind. These men never unite in great numbers, their own wickedness rendering them distrustful of one another. Singly, or at most by twos and threes, they will pursue their villainous trade of waylaying travellers, or perpetrating what robbery they can. They avoid open fight, being best protected by their cunning.

Secondly, and far more numerous, are those who are criminals indeed in the eye of the law, but are looked upon by the people as martyrs to their cause. Some may have fought the tax-gatherers in bitter despair when they were about to be sold up; they may have been good and peaceful men, who thus suddenly took up the evil life. But, terrible as existence may be in the forest wilds, it is better than prison, and the unhappy man flies thither from the wrong he has committed almost in spite of himself. "He is gone after the sun," say his neighbours, glad to know him safe when the constables seek him--gone westward, that is, from lowland Podolia into the Carpathians. And others there are, martyrs to the sad relation between the Polish landlord and the Ruthen peasant; the landlord oppressing, till at some dark moment of wrath or drunkenness the peasant snatches up his gun or hatchet. There are deserters, too, from the Emperor's colours, sympathised with cordially; for what right should the Emperor have, argue these people, to levy the life-tax among them!

"Come join us, ye men, for life here is sweet!" are the words of a hajdamak song. But in truth it is an awful existence, although the miserable fellows do their best to make it bearable to one another. They will gather in bands of a score or more, plighting their troth, each sharing with the other the good things which are of the fewest and the ill things that abound. The Huzul will leave them alone, and the Whitecoats they need scarcely fear. But it is nowise easy to be an "honest hajdamak" when hunger and cold pursue them--for they have notions of honesty of their own, as old Jemilian suggested in his report to Father Leo. It is "honest" in an outlaw not to commit mere vulgar robbery, or take life save in self-defence or for revenge. He may rob a Polish landlord or

the men of the law, but he would be disgraced by robbing a peasant or a village pope. It is quite "honest" to stop a stage-coach, empty the postbags, and rob any Polish or Austrian passenger; but it would be disgraceful to inquire what money a pope might carry with him, travelling by the same coach. There was a time when no stage-coach in those parts could be safe from an attack of hajdamaks, unless accompanied by a strong escort of soldiers. "Great deeds," however, grew more and more impossible, and indeed they were never easy. It was always a miserable life in the dreary wilds, without shelter in the rigorous winter-time, and often without food. And it would entirely depend on what manner of man the 'hetman' (captain) was, as to how a band would bear up through such a season of distress; whether "dishonesty" would be had recourse to, when for the gaining of a mere livelihood they would sink to the level of the despised criminal, or whether their spirit would rise to some "great deed" of despair, even if it must bring them to close quarters with the Whitecoats. But this second alternative, as a rule, might only be looked for if the 'hetman' was a hajdamak by deliberate choice, driven to the life for an idea rather than as the outcome of some crime.

Men of this kind form the third class; they have always been rare, and the history of one adopting the awful trade of his own free will has ever made a stir. Mere love of pillage could never be an adequate reason; for a man of this description is aware that he can rob his neighbours with less trouble in the plain. No, there are nobler motives--a wild passionate manliness rising against oppression, or a yearning indignation and pitiful sympathy with the helpless despair of the people, will urge some few to "go after the sun." These few are the last representatives of the true hajdamak, who is fast becoming a legend of the past. The Ruthens, now the most peaceful and the most oppressed of Slavonic tribes, at one time were the boldest and most belligerent of the race, the terror of their neighbours, Poles, Russians, and Roumanians. But to-day one could only wonder why these people in song and story should always be designated as "falcon-faced," if indeed such a face were not met with among them occasionally even now--bold and clear-cut, full of energy and passion, with dark daring eyes. And as the type is found still, so are the old dauntless courage, and the ardent love of liberty. But he who preserves the true nature is lonely among his kind, and the misery about him will fill his soul with a bitter yearning for the times that are gone, the times surviving only in their songs--wild passionate outbursts, full of bravery and fortitude, sounding strangely enough on the lips of the humbled, labouring peasants. And such a one by his own inward necessity is driven forth from the plain; he takes to the mountains, and henceforth it is his one desire to make war upon the Polish oppressors, the murderers of his race. It is his one idea, his one resolve; and being a man of energy and power, he will naturally rise to the leadership of a band. He is an "honest hajdamak" at first, but does not always end so; for it is an evil trade, hurtful to body and soul. And whether they remain "honest," or fall away from the higher aspiration, they are sure to end ill--they and their followers.

Truly an evil trade, and few taking to it ever reach old age; the pitiless cold, or hunger and hardships of grimmest kind decimating the band, while the more hardy ones fall a prey to the wild beasts, if not brought to the gallows instead. And whatever their end may be, their people are anxious that their memory should be wiped out--anxious it should be forgotten that one of theirs took to the mountains. A hajdamak while he lives is held in some respect, inasmuch as he has gained the liberty sighed for by others--the dead man is nowhere.

But among the numbers living and dying thus sadly, there are three whose names are not forgotten, whose memory lives in song and tale, though dimmed with the haze of receding years; three who are famous, moreover, as being the only "hetmen" who moved the Huzuls to take part for or against them.

The first of these was one Alexander Dobosch, called the Black, or the Iron-framed, a Ruthen from the Bukowina who arose towards the end of the eighteenth century, and for several years was far more powerful throughout Pokutia than the Emperor. He had been a well-to-do peasant, and a boundless ambition only appears to have led him to his strange and fearful adventures. The Huzuls adored him, and he behaved like a king of the mountains, issuing manifestos to the "fellow at Vienna," making laws and levying taxes. But this was his ruin; the Huzuls were not going to condone in the iron-framed hajdamak what they had never approved of in the "fellow at Vienna." Their devotion gave way to wrath, but the man was so powerful that they dared not oppose him openly. He was poisoned by some of his followers at a drinking bout.

Of a different type was "Wild Wassilj," or, as song has it, the "great hajdamak," a Podolian peasant youth, lithe as a sapling pine, strong as a bear, and daring as a falcon. He had been in the personal service of a young noble, the brother-in-law of the lord of the manor, both of whom were the terror and detestation of every father and husband in the neighbourhood. But Wassilj suddenly set his face against the lawless life, growing strangely silent and anxious to be good; the fact was he loved an honest maiden of the village. But, unhappily, his master himself had set eyes upon the girl, and, finding her proof against his advances, he carried her off with the help of some menials. Wassilj thereupon waylaid and shot him, forming a band there and then, and becoming the scourge of the nobility for miles around, his thirst for revenge being unappeasable. It was found in those days how little it availed to send out soldiers with a hope of crushing the bandits in their mountains. The "great hajdamak" was not vanquished by anything the authorities could devise against him; but the innate spark of goodness in his wild and wayward heart overcame him in the end. For he was not a bad man by nature, and the remorse that would seize upon him was as poignant as it was true; but he quieted his conscience with the delusion that he

was doing these terrible things for the sake of the suffering people. One day, however, when he had overpowered some nobles in the castle of his native village, and had called upon the judge to assist him in bringing them to their just doom, the latter refused, saying he was an honest man, and could not join in the evil work of a cut-throat. That word struck Wassilj to the heart, and the same night, with a bullet from his own gun, he stilled that misguided heart for ever.

But the third one, whom the Huzuls assisted--he whom in song they called "the good judge" and "the great avenger"--was Taras Barabola.

CHAPTER XI.

OUTLAWED.

THE "good judge!" ... the "great avenger!" ...

It was not only after his death, not in commemorating song only, that Taras was first so designated. These appellations dated from the spring-time of 1839. When Palm Sunday had come and gone they were echoed from mouth to mouth, while the strange declaration of war that had been uttered beneath the linden of Zulawce was fresh in the minds of all. His mission was believed in, though as yet unaccredited by deed. As on the wings of a mighty wind the news sped from village to village, from district to district. Not a week passed before all the people had heard it--in Pokutia, in the Marmaros, in Podolia, and in the Bukowina; and gathering in groups after the morning service on Easter Sunday, it was the one topic with them everywhere: "To-day Taras will be unfurling his banner.... Could there be a surer proof of our misery? He, a Christ-like man, and yet driven to turn hajdamak!... But it is well for us--Taras has ever been a good judge, and he will prove a mighty avenger!"

This opinion had formed rapidly. A whole people stirred to its depth is almost always a righteous judge, a true prophet. Every man and woman understood that unheard-of things were passing. True, it was within the experience of most of them that some one or other had taken to the mountains; but such volunteers to the desperate trade had been young fellows without home ties, or men of a turbulent character breaking away from the restraints of the law. But how different with this peace-loving peasant, who had everything to make his home attractive, this man who once pointed a pistol at his own forehead to prevent violence from being met with violence! That phrase of Mr. Broza's which Taras himself had repeated reluctantly, and only because he was a "dying man," had taken hold of the people's imagination--*a Christ-like man*. And truly there was a breath of the Divine sweeping the senses of the oppressed peasantry as they strove to understand his motives. It could not be the love of revenge with him, for he had not been wronged personally; it could not be that he sought to defend his own property, for it had not been touched. He must be doing it, then, simply because "in this unhappy country justice was not to be found," and "because the people had sore need of one to avenge them." And if there is anything that will move the heart of man to its inmost depth, filling it with holy reverence, it is the unselfish deed done for love of a cause which is sacred to all and believed in by each.

With similar enthusiasm Taras was greeted in the mountains. The rude men who dwell there had been gained so thoroughly during his former sojourn, that one and all they welcomed the news of his returning to be among them for good. Was he not a victim of the oppression they hated? its sworn enemy, who henceforth would live to oppose it? Every glen on either side of the Black Water was alive with sympathy, and Taras had a staunch ally in every man far and wide in the forest.

In his own village, too, opinion had rallied round him entirely, though it would have been difficult to say whether this was due chiefly to the impression he had made upon his hearers on that Sunday, or to the selfish vanity of the people. The hearts of some had certainly been touched, and a natural pity for his forsaken wife roused others; while others, again, were merely glad that Taras had come to see the folly of trusting in the law, and it flattered their pride that from among themselves an avenger should rise who would make the country ring with his valour. A man of Zulawce in those days was welcome wherever he went, because he could tell of the hero of the hour. The people round about seemed to be insatiable of news concerning this Taras, and were ready to stand any amount of drink to him who could gratify them, for which reason the men of Zulawce, nothing loth, invented story upon story to glorify the pure-hearted man whose life they had embittered all along. Yes, the outlaw once more had risen to be the great favourite of his adopted village.

Yet there were few, even in his own village, who felt for him truly or mourned his loss, and the one man whose sorrow was most deeply sincere carefully avoided the very mention of his name. The good pope had not breathed a word concerning Taras since that saddest of partings beneath

the linden. His wife only guessed how he suffered, but even she was mistaken in believing that his heart ached for the loss of his friend alone. He was battling with another sorrow, a deeper trouble overshadowing his pious mind. And the moment came when the popadja understood it.

It was on the evening of Good Friday. Not till nine o'clock, and weary with the many services of the day, had the priest returned home, eating a mouthful of supper, and retiring to his study. Thither his wife followed him presently, establishing herself with her needlework in silence. He was pacing the room, murmuring to himself, as was his wont in preparing his sermon, and she refrained from speaking, but gave a furtive glance at him now and then. She had often thus watched him occupied in holy meditation, and the inward peace radiating from his countenance at such times would sink into her own heart with a loving content. Not so now, for an unspeakable grief was reflected in the face she gazed upon, and the bitterness seemed overflowing till she trembled and took courage to interrupt him.

"Husband," she said, with a beating heart, "are you now busy with the sermon for Easter Day?"

He started, looking before him gloomily. "I am utterly unfit!" he whispered hoarsely, as though speaking to himself ... "utterly unfit!" He groaned aloud, covering his face with his hands.

The good wife was by his side in a moment. "Leo," she sobbed, "what is it? ... Ah, yes, I know; but you must not thus give way to your grief. You could not prevent it!"

He shook his head, and then caught her hand like a drowning man. "No, wife," he groaned, "it is not merely grief for his loss! But since that man has gone to ruin, I seem a hypocrite whenever I turn to my prayers ..."

"Good God!" she cried, aghast.

"I seem such, indeed," he continued, hastily; "it is more than I can bear, and I cannot help it! Have I not been teaching and preaching the justice of God? And now to see this man gone to ruin--this man!"

"But, husband, dear," she cried, anxiously, "have you not often tried to make us see that the true recompense is in the life to come? Will you doubt it yourself now?"

"In the life to come; yes, yes," he repeated in the same husky voice; "it is the one thing to hold by.... But why should it all go wrong in this world? I mean, so terribly wrong? This man!... his wife gone out of her mind, his children orphaned, and he himself making straight for the gallows, just because, in a wicked, self-seeking world, he has within him the heart of a child that will trust his God and believe in justice ... oh, it is awful ... awful!"

She clung to him, but he freed himself from her embrace, and once more walked to and fro excitedly. The faithful wife could but retire to her corner, sharing his trouble apart.

Some minutes passed.

And presently he stood still before her, lifting her tearful face, and stroking her hair gently. "Fruzia," he said, with quivering voice, "I promise you to try and bear it. I shall battle it out; but it is a sore thing, and needs time.... Go to bed now and be comforted.... I shall battle it out."

The wife obeyed, but found little sleep, and her soul kept crying through the darkness of that night: "Oh, God, pity my husband--he, the priest, to lose faith in Thee!" Many a wiser prayer may rise to the ear of the Giver of all things; yet none, perhaps, ever was more touching.

When daylight returned she felt comforted, and drew courage from her husband's quiet face on his bidding her good-bye for early service. She, too, left the house, but not to go to church, for a duty no less sacred directed her steps to Anusia's house.

Poor Anusia, indeed! It was not without reason that her friends sorrowed for her, for she was doubly stricken. The last articulate sound that had crossed her lips had been her husband's name--that cry of despair wrung from her as he departed. Her grief since then had found vent in wild ravings only, night and day, day and night. Not a prayer, not a complaint had she uttered, and her eyes were tearless; but she would give a shriek and continue moaning with parched lips. Those that watched her believed her out of her mind, and no hope seemed left, save with Father Leo, who clung to it. "It will pass away," he said, well-nigh despairing himself; "hers is a more passionate nature than ours, and her grief is the wilder." Her ravings, indeed, appeared to lessen, the feverish agony grew calmer, and she began to take food; but to her friends the supervening apathy seemed worse than what had gone before. There she lay in a kind of living death, uttering not a sound, large-eyed and white-faced, wearing the expression of a helpless agony. But when her friends or the children attempted to rouse her, she waved them off, or cried huskily: "Leave me alone, I must think it over." And Father Leo would say: "No one can help her, she must battle through it; but the children must be seen to, having lost both father and mother." And he arranged with his wife that twice a day she should go over to the farm to see to the needs of the household; while outdoor matters found a willing helper in Hritzko Pomenko, the eldest of Simeon's lads. "If I work for Taras I shall perhaps bear it that he left me behind," said the honest youth.

That had been on the Thursday. Anusia appeared to take no notice that things were seen to by friends and neighbours, and she continued the whole of Good Friday in the same dull stupor. But when the popadja entered the sick-chamber early on the Saturday a happy change, evidently, had taken place. The bed was vacated, and a servant-girl came running in explaining: "The mistress is looking after the dairy, she is scolding poor Hritzko grievously because he brought over his father's new churn."

And, indeed, the startled popadja even now could hear the so-called scolding. "I know you meant kindly, Hritzko," Anusia was saying, in a voice both firm and clear; "but just take your things home with you, I can manage my own business." And the priest's lady herself presently received a similar greeting. "It is most kind of you"--Anusia made haste to address her friend as soon as she beheld her--"I am pleased to see you any time; but leave me now. And this kerchief must be yours, I think; I found my Tereska wearing it. But my children are no poor orphans, thank God, requiring friends to clothe them."

The good lady was only too willing to be reproved. "Say what you like," she cried, "I am happy to find you up again!"

"Yes," said Anusia, with perfect composure, "I know you all thought I had gone mad. But my mind was right enough; only, you see, I had to satisfy my own judgment that my husband had done well. I had always looked upon him as the most perfect man on earth, so that the need was great to find an answer to my questioning, and everything besides had to give way."

"Then you arrived at the conclusion that nothing else was left for him?" broke in Hritzko, vehemently.

"I have," she assented. "I saw it was his heart that laid it upon him to act as he has done, and he is a man that cannot go against the behest of his own heart. I know that, and it must be enough for me. As to whether he is otherwise in the right or not, I, a woman, am unable to decide. My mind says 'Yes,' but the heart keeps crying 'No.' I can but wait and see. If he is in the right the Almighty will own him and let him be a helper to many. But if he is on the path of wrong, God will turn from him, and his end will be the gallows. Be that as it may; he is lost to us, my children are fatherless, and henceforth I must be to them father and mother in one."

"And we all will help you!" cried the popadja, warmly.

"As far as I may need your help," returned Anusia, "I shall accept it gratefully." And therewith she resumed issuing orders to the servants about the place.

Father Leo did not learn the good news till about noon, when he returned from the parish, and, not waiting to eat his dinner, he hastened to the farm to see with his own eyes that Anusia indeed had recovered. He found her very quiet and self-possessed, and there was nothing to make him doubt the soundness of her mind, save the occupation he found her engaged upon. She had had the great barn cleared and the floor was being spread with straw. "What for?" he inquired, wonderingly.

"To sleep the soldiers," she replied, with a bitter smile.

"The soldiers! What soldiers?"

"I am surprised your reverence should require me to explain," she said. "Is it unknown to you that he who but lately was master here has declared war against his Emperor, and that the wife and children of that man are here unprotected? Will it not be the most natural thing to take possession of this farm in order to make it impossible for him to visit his family secretly? And, moreover, it might be supposed that his wife could be so questioned that from her his whereabouts could be learned; at any rate, it might be useful to make sure of her and her children as hostages, in case ..."

"No, no!" cried Leo, "this latter, most certainly not. The Emperor will never wage war upon women and children."

"Well, we shall see," she continued; "thus much is certain, that we shall have the Whitecoats quartered here before long; that coward of a mandatar will take care we shall, if no one else will. Did not Taras inform him plainly that with him the beginning should be made? I am only sorry for the village. It is hard that the neighbours should suffer, and it will turn them against us. It will be but natural if they do, and I cannot help it."

"They shall not, if I can prevent it," cried the pope, eagerly. "Now I know what to preach about to-morrow!"

"Well, I shall be grateful to you, whether you succeed or not, but one thing you must promise me"--she held out her hand, drawing herself up proudly. "You shall not ask them to pity me or my children. We do not need it, please God, while I have health and am able to keep house and home together."

He gave her his word, and kept it as far as his own compassion would let him. But his wife, in her own heart, was proudly happy, for never had she heard him preach with a fervour more

tender and soul-stirring; not noticing in her wifely gladness that this sermon of his differed somewhat from his usual discourses, inasmuch as he never mentioned either the wisdom or the justice of the Almighty, being taken up entirely with the one message to his hearers, the one exhortation of "loving our neighbour as ourselves!" And as he strove in his simple, yet impressive way to make it plain that an act of true love to one's neighbours, mistaken, even, though it might be, was none the less worthy of grateful acknowledgment, and that at all events it could never deserve the ill-will of those for whose sake it had been done, even though they might have to suffer in consequence--they all knew whom and what he meant, and felt moved accordingly. And emotion deepened when he spoke of the common sorrow making all men as brethren, since none was fully happy here below, and that there was no surer salvation from our own misery than being loving and good to other sufferers, especially to the weak and forsaken, the widows and orphans about us. And taking up an example to hand, he spoke of the sad lot of a poor woman, named Josephka, whose husband they had lately buried. "Do not let us imagine," he cried, "that we are doing more than our bounden duty if we remember her trouble, aiding her with our alms, which she hath need of sorely. Yet, poor as Josephka is, it is not she that is the most sorrow-stricken widow among us; there being a balm to her grief in the blessed thought that the husband she mourns has gained that rest to which we ourselves are journeying, that he has attained beyond the sorrow which remains with us still. There is another one among us, widowed, I say, and more grief-bowed than she, to whom this consolation is denied, and our most sacred duty is to her! Our alms then to Josephka, for she has need of them, but give ye your tenderest love, your most helpful sympathy, to that other most sorrowful widow in this village, whose children in their father's lifetime are as orphans in our midst!"

There was a great sobbing among the women, and a stirring among the men. One only in all that congregation sat unmoved, even shaking her head in disapproval--Anusia herself; and when the service was ended she quitted the building composedly. They all made room, and none dared address her, the popadja only joined her in silence and saw her home.

And when the men had gathered in groups without, the one topic was Taras, as, indeed, was the case all over the country that morning. Some had heard that already more than a hundred men had joined his banner; others had been told that his native parish of Ridowa had sent him word how, one and all, they were ready to rise in rebellion at his command; others again had certain information that the district governor at Colomea had fainted right away on hearing of Taras's now famous declaration of war ... all of which tidings were believed in as faithfully as though the pope himself had announced them as gospel truth from the pulpit. And not a soul present doubted but that Taras would swoop down on the arch-villain in their midst to judge him.

What difference of opinion there was concerned the time only when the avenger might be expected.

"I say he will come to-night," said Wassilj, the butcher; "for to-day he unfurls his banner, and he told us it would be his first deed."

But others opposed this opinion. "Taras is a God-fearing man," said the sexton, "I'll never believe he will thus spend the blessed Easter."

"Nor should I think he would act foolishly," added Red Schymko; "why the mandatar is safe away at Zablotow, hiding with the military. I know it for certain."

"You know it for a falsehood then," retorted Giorgi Pomenko, "the coward is hiding in the iron closet he has had built for himself at the manor house. I rather think, therefore, we shall hear of Taras this very night."

"So do I," chimed in Marko the smith, the giant with the infant voice; "what should he be waiting for? Has he not men enough with the hundred about him, being sure also of every honest, brave one among us?"

"Ho! ho!" rejoined Wassilj, the butcher, "am I not honest, or as brave as any? yet, would I lend a hand to the deed? I doubt if many will assist him!"

"Do you?" snarled the corporal. "Can it be a matter of doubt, indeed, when it is a question of aiding your own great hero?"

"Hold your wicked tongue," burst in the sons of Pomenko. "The time is gone when Taras could be insulted with impunity. Whoever would do so is a scoundrel--and a scoundrel is every one that will not stand by him against the mandatar!"

At which Jewgeni, the judge, grew alarmed. "Hear me," he cried.

"A scoundrel?" interrupted the butcher. "You had better hold your tongues, youngsters; this axe of mine has silenced many a bullock!"

"Hear me," pleaded Jewgeni "A hajdamak----" and there he stopped.

"Nay, hear *me*," broke in Red Schymko; "I know what is best to do. I make no promises either way, but shall just wait and see! If the mandatar offers resistance, to the shedding of blood even, I were a fool to risk life in opposing him. Is it my quarrel? Have I prevented the parish from

getting back the field by force? It was Taras's doing. Have I lost the law suit? No, but Taras has. Have I turned outlaw, calling myself an avenger, and having my praises sung by all the land? No, not I; but Taras. Then, I say, let him bear the brunt. But when the mandatar and his men are worsted, and there is a chance of repaying ourselves, let us not be such fools as to stand by and look on. As he robbed us, so let us rob him--that is what I think..."

"For shame!" cried Giorgi Pomenko; and Wassilj, the butcher, added: "Yes, for shame! Are you addressing a parcel of thieves?"

"Well, hear me then--a hajdamak--and I your judge----" But Jewgeni again stopped short, the butcher being bent on a further hearing.

"Listen to me, you men, and I will show you that I am no scoundrel," he cried, lifting up his powerful voice, "I am all for Taras, and whoever speaks ill of him shall answer for it to me. He is a grand hero, and far from being a hajdamak. He has undertaken the sacred duty of being an avenger, of righting the wrong. But in this great work we may not help him, because we have wife and child to consider. If he has risen above any such consideration it is in virtue of his own magnanimity. For my part, I am unable to equal it. Whoever joins Taras openly has to choose between going to prison or taking refuge in the mountains. I shall keep the peace, therefore, and so will every conscientious man here, for the sake of his family."

"Yes! yes!" cried the men, one after another, "Wassilj has said well, Taras has our best wishes. More is the pity that we cannot openly join him."

"Pity!" sneered the corporal; "but you may look on, at a safe distance!"

"Yes, indeed, and we will," was the unanimous retort. "It is you and Schymko that disgrace the village. No honest man will go to sleep to-night."

And therewith the consultation ended.

Not long after, Halko, the servant lad of Anusia's farm, rushed into his mistress's presence. "Is it true"--he cried, "it is being spoken of all over the village--that Taras, with a hundred men, will attack the manor to-night? The people mean to watch for it, but will not join him for fear of the law. Is it true?"

Anusia stood trembling violently, a burning glow and a death-like pallor succeeding one another rapidly in her face.

"How should I know?" she said presently, with a stony look. "I and my family belong to the village, and have nothing to do with the 'avenger.' And just because he has been the master of this house there is henceforth no communion between him and us! Let the others watch for him; we shall retire as usual. Let no one dare to disregard my orders!"

CHAPTER XII.

FLOURISHING LIKE A BAY-TREE.

"While the inhabitants of Zulawce thus excitedly waited for the events of the coming night, their busy imagination beguiling the slow hours with various visions of the hapless mandatar, beholding him either hanged, or shot, or burnt alive, this gentleman himself was similarly engaged. That is to say, he also was waiting excitedly for the night, endeavouring to shorten the agony of delay by picturing to himself the approaching crisis. But the images he had in view were of a vastly different nature. For he was nowise hiding in an iron closet at Zulawce, which, even if he had desired it, would have been impossible, for the simple reason that there was no such stronghold; but he was at that moment comfortably established in the snug little smoking-room of his chambers at Colomea--his refuge, both for his pleasures and, perchance now, in trouble. He had just returned from a dinner which the district governor at this season was in the habit of giving to the officials of the place; and between the blue circles ascending from his expensive cheroot he now beheld visions--imagining the impending scenes at an evening party to which the richest man of the neighbourhood, Herr Bogdan von Antoniewicz, an Armenian, had invited a small but select company. These scenes presumably would be of a pleasant nature, for Mr. Hajek kept smiling--nay, he even skipped about his room the while he puffed his fragrant cloudlets with a sort of irrepressible delight. But if he was expecting some happy event it appeared to be a critical one also, to judge from the nervous action with which he kept pulling out his watch, and there was even an occasional shadow of seriousness gliding over his finely-cut but dissipated features. But this was like a noonday cloud, only darkening for a moment the brilliant sky, and the mandatar returned to his smiles.

"Pshaw," he said, stopping before his looking-glass and twirling his moustache, "as if I had not made sure of her virtues myself!... three of them! And for the rest of it----" he paused, bowing profoundly to his image in the glass; "for the rest of it, Mr. Hajek, please to bear in mind your history and your present dilemma. Ha! ha!" He appeared immensely tickled with this pretence at honesty; it seemed quite a joke to ruminate over a bit of self-knowledge, and it kept him in the best of humour till the clock struck eight, when he rang for his valet, and, having completed his toilet, he drove to the villa of the Armenian.

It was early for an evening party of distinction, and Mr. Hajek, who had lived in Paris, and therefore was looked upon as an oracle of good style by all who pretended to be fashionable at Colomea, would under ordinary circumstances never have sinned so grievously against the laws he himself had established. But in the present case it was incumbent on him to be the first of the guests. For these were not ordinary circumstances, but, on the contrary, an event which as a rule comes but once in life; he was driving to the villa in order to celebrate his betrothal with the widowed Countess Wanda Koninski, the Armenian's only daughter. It was indeed an event! and the several actors in the little comedy had even drawn up a programme for the most suitable expression of their feelings.

It has been maintained by people of experience that it is not so much fiery love which ensures the happiest marriages--since the flame too often is sadly transient--but rather an even share of mutual understanding and a certain sympathetic perception of each other's aims in life. If it be so, the mandatar and the young widow might fairly be congratulated. And again, if it be true that a man's relations with his parents-in-law, in order to be satisfactory, must preclude the possibility of a delusion on either side concerning each other's moral worth, not a shadow of a doubt could be entertained but that the mandatar and the parents of his bride elect would yield a spectacle of the most charming friendship--quite hand in glove, in fact. For, excepting Mr. Hajek himself, Herr Bogdan von Antoniewicz certainly was the greatest rascal of the district.

This prosperous man did not like to be reminded of his earlier years, nor was he ever heard to refer to his ancestors, although they had been honest cattle-drovers in Moldavia. He himself had pursued this occupation in his youth: but possessing a kind of prudence which rendered his conscience easy and his money-bag close, he managed to make a little capital, establishing cattle trading on his own account.

Then it happened, as he would describe it, that a sore blow was experienced by the death of the best of uncles, a merchant at Constantinople, who had made him his heir. The chief facts were correct, and the deceased had left his money to his nephew, only it was not Bogdan who was that nephew, but a poor man of the name of Mikita, who was in Bogdan's service. The latter had received a ponderous document with seals and flourishes, announcing to him his uncle's bequest; and, being unable to read, he had taken it to his master. Bogdan read it--there was a legacy of ten thousand ducats--and he was seized with a feeling of vast sympathy with the humble man. He remembered that Mikita had nine ragged children, and that a shower of riches coming thus suddenly could be no blessing, since, no doubt, it would teach him to be thriftless. He said, therefore, to his labourer, "You're a lucky dog, to be sure, there's your uncle dead and left you ten ducats!" This, of course, was to try the man, to see if he were worthy of a great fortune; for what would become of his poor children, mused the philanthropic Bogdan, if he made away with his ten thousand ducats, leading a riotous life and turning his back upon work! Let him prove first how he will take the lesser luck. The poor man but ill stood the test. He had never known such wealth, and simply cried with delight, begging his master to lend him a ducat on the strength of his inheritance. Bogdan did so, hoping the man would not waste so great a sum, but put it out at interest discreetly. But Mikita, that spendthrift, knew no better investment than some new clothes for his little ones, also giving them a regular good meal for once. After awhile he presented himself again to his master, who, sadly grieving, handed him a second ducat; and so on till, after six months or so, the wretched father had actually spent the ten of them. And now the well-intentioned Bogdan went through a severe conflict with himself, ending with the renewed conviction that it were an unpardonable want of foresight to let those children be ruined. So having given to Mikita ten ill-spent ducats, he got him to put his mark to a receipt that the full amount of the legacy had been made over to him, and thereupon he went and presented himself as the required heir.

Thus Bogdan, acting for the best for his humble neighbour, had laid the foundation of his fortune. But it is well known that one's noblest actions are often cruelly misjudged, and this matter somehow leaking out, made it impossible for the tenderhearted cattle-trader to continue in the neighbourhood. He resolved to shake off from his feet the very dust of his old life, departing stealthily, and making his way into Austria, where, with his newly-acquired capital, he bought a large property, ostensibly bent on farming his land. The property, however, happened to be situated in the Bukowina, a very central position, where Austria, Russia, and Moldavia join. Now the import duties in those days were particularly heavy, and a man of resources living on the frontiers could not but direct his faculties to studying their results. Mr. Bogdan was too clever not to see that free commerce naturally must spring from an overdone system of protection, and, experimenting upon his theory, he ended in siding with free trade altogether. His property was delightfully situated for smuggling purposes, and he flattered himself he would best serve his generation by introducing large quantities of tobacco from Bessarabia into Austria, to the detriment of the Imperial monopoly, which was disgracefully selfish, he argued. He thrived for awhile, but the eyes of the customs authorities were upon him. He escaped conviction just in

time, selling his property advantageously and acquiring a larger one in Eastern Galicia.

He was now forty years of age, rich and prosperous, but alone in his glory. His heart, such as it was, longed for a distinguished passion, and his buttonhole gaped for a decoration. He would marry into the aristocracy, and become the founder of a noble house. As for marrying a person of title, that is almost easier in those parts than insisting on the contrary; but on what grounds he could become ennobled, even his fertile brain was at a loss to suggest. Fortune, however, had always smiled on him; and it so happened that the mysterious power which rules our hearts and destinies introduced to him a lady well qualified for becoming the stepping-stone of his aspirations. In the present instance that world-famed power elected to show itself in the person of a certain Jew, who made his living by acting as go-between in the matrimonial market. This herald appeared one day, proposing to Mr. Bogdan a union with a certain aristocratic spinster, Antonia von Kulczika. There was no doubt as to her good birth, but she was not *very* young, and not rich--possessed of influence, however, through having enjoyed the protection, hitherto, of one of the most powerful magnates of the land. Wicked tongues, of course, delighted in a tale, for which reason Aaron Moses, in stating the lady's virtues, kept his hand cautiously on the door-handle. To his agreeable surprise, however, Mr. Bogdan listened quietly, owing even to a sort of partiality for the lady he had never seen, and that nothing was required but certain easily-defined conditions in order to rouse his ardent love, which conditions being stated, Aaron Moses entered them in his notebook.

Within a month the Jew returned with a deed of gift, whereby the above-mentioned magnate, with brotherly generosity, settled on the lady the landed property of Rossow. Mr. Bogdan, on making sure of this, laid his hand upon his heart, confessing to the Jew his unmistakable devotion to the lady, to whom he was ready now to be introduced. But there was no talk of betrothal as yet. True love mostly is of the shyest, and Mr. Bogdan found no words for his feelings until Aaron Moses had brought him a letter wherein the magnate, under his own hand, had given his word of honour that he would procure a patent of nobility for Mr. Bogdan Antoniewicz within a year of his marriage with Miss Antonia von Kulczika. This settled, there was nothing left to hinder the flow of his feelings, and in due course the nuptials were solemnised.

They were a pattern pair; and if those only can be happy in married life whose mutual love is equalled by their mutual respect, their happiness was assured, for the love of this couple could not easily have been less than the esteem they bore one another. The happy husband in due time found himself Herr *von* Antoniewicz, his wife presenting him, moreover, with a fair-haired little girl. There appeared nothing to prevent their being received into society, for the lady was handsome, Bogdan rich and prosperous. The officers of the neighbouring garrison were the first to get over their qualms, the rest of society following suit. As years went on the lady, of course, could not be said to grow in grace or beauty; but Bogdan gained riches steadily, possessing three large estates now and plenty of money, which he continued to put to usury advantageously.

Such were the future parents-in-law of Mr. Hajek. Those who knew them could not but own that all three were worthy of each other, and the same might be said of the bridal couple itself. Bogdan von Antoniewicz had his daughter educated after the style most approved of by the Polish aristocracy. She had a Parisian governess, who taught her French and the piano, the rest of the 'branches' being confided to a refugee from Warsaw, in whose estimation there was no science equal to Polish patriotism, and in this he instructed her. Wanda should be a true Pole. It was not pleasant, therefore, when her parents one day made a sorrowful discovery, proving her Austrian predilections. She had a lover in the Imperial army, who, on being moved with his regiment, left it expedient for her father to find her a husband. It had better not be a rogue, if a fool was to be had, thought the latter; and a suitable youth was found in the person of one Count Agenor Koninski. Very suitable he was, being, in the first place, of the bluest aristocracy; moreover, in the second place, of such doubtful finances that Bogdan's offer was a godsend to him; and, thirdly, he was an easy-going fellow, whose wife might be what she pleased. "Koninski" might be correctly rendered by "horseman"--it was just the name for him. He spent his life with horses, and even came by his death through them, being thrown on a racecourse.

The widowed Wanda knew what she owed to her position; her sympathies were no longer with the Imperial army, but no Polish nobleman therefore cared for her hand. She and her belongings had thoroughly disgusted even that lenient body; and, at the time when Mr. Hajek was making friends at Colomea, the Armenian, in spite of his great wealth, was reduced to a select circle of visitors--respectable people refused his invitations. He and his wife had reached their threescore and ten, the Countess Wanda was thirty, and her boy eleven years old. It was high time to put an end to the scandal, and gain an able man who could manage the property. This state of things explains why Bogdan, in spite of the pride of his acquired nobility, as well as the widowed Countess herself, had turned their thoughts to the low-born mandatar, instructing their willing emissary, Mr. Thaddeus de Bazanski, accordingly--he being no other than that refugee who, in her youth, had educated Wanda in Polish patriotism, and who still awaited the day when Russia should suffer, glad meanwhile to act as the Armenian's hanger-on. He had to take his time in making overtures to the mandatar, who did not seem open to his hints; but he was able at last to inform the countess that Mr. Hajek had discovered he loved her; and it was agreed to celebrate the betrothal forthwith, even on Easter Sunday.

It had been no easy resolve on the part of the mandatar. To be sure, the widowed Countess possessed three first-rate charms, nay, virtues, in his eyes, being heiress to the broad lands of Rossow, Horkowka, and Drinkowce, and he himself was not a man given to prejudice. Still he had

managed somehow to acquire the position of a man of honour in the district, and was loth to part with this pleasant sensation, all the more valued, perhaps, for its novelty. But while he yet felt divided, the news reached him of Taras's declaration, and the cowardly wretch was seized with a perfect frenzy of fear. Indeed, the real match-maker, bringing together this pair of worthies, was not so much Thaddeus as Taras Barabola.

Mr. Hajek had not been in the village, and knew nothing of the great meeting. He had gone to a mess breakfast at Zablotow, Captain Mihaly, of the Palffy hussars, in garrison there, having invited him over. It was a merry gathering, comprising, besides the officers, several young nobles of the neighbourhood. But none so merry as Hajek himself; and he kept up his spirits when, breakfast over, he was invited to preside at the gaming table. He was winning largely, and was a very fountain of fun to the dissipated party. They went on gambling for the best part of the day.

But there was a strange interruption, the captain's man announcing, with a queer expression, that the under-steward, Boleslaw, had arrived, bearing an important message to the mandatar--a certain peasant named Barabola having that day declared war against the Emperor.

The news produced the greatest hilarity; the officers roared with laughter. But Wenceslas Hajek grew deadly pale, and, dropping the cards from his hands, he jumped from his seat shaking from head to foot. "Gentlemen," he gasped, "you would not laugh if you knew the man ... this is a matter of life and death ... excuse me, I must have particulars...."

He moved to the door, but the captain was before him. "No!" he cried, facetiously, "you shall not monopolise this declaration of war. *We* are His Majesty's officers, and ought to have our share--let the man enter!"

The under-steward appeared, his gigantic frame positively limp with dismay, as he reported the chief contents of Taras's speech. "You know what sort of man you have to deal with, sir," he said, in conclusion, turning to the mandatar. "This day week he means to make his beginning--make it upon you, sir! He has retired for the present in the direction of the Red Hollow. Four men are with him to-day; there will be fifty before the week is out."

The gentlemen ceased to be amused; somehow the giant's consternation had affected them. But when he had done, their laughter returned. "War!" they cried, "what fun! Double pay and promotion for all of us!" The captain adding: "But he has given us a week's grace, so let us finish our rubber. Mr. Hajek, I think you were meditating a trump ... but, good heavens, man!" he interrupted himself, evidently alarmed, "what is the matter? ... He is fainting!"

And, indeed, the mandatar's appearance was enough to startle his companions. He had sunk down on the nearest chair, the bloodless face distorted with terror; and as they gazed at him his head sank lower, till it rested on the table.

"Belshazzar!" cried a youthful lieutenant, "Mene, Tekel, Upharsin! Yes, yes, my dear Mr. Hajek, your conscience seems ill at ease concerning these peasants! Why, you are crying!"

The mandatar actually had begun to sob. "Ah!" he moaned, "I must be off to the town...." He attempted to rise, but fell back on his chair. "No ... I must go back to the manor first ... my papers.... Captain!" he shrieked, imploringly, "I entreat you, let your troop be mounted, and escort me to Zulawce--I mean, stay with me till you can bring me away again in safety. I'm a dead man, and the manor will be in ruins, if you refuse!"

"Nonsense!" cried the captain, in disgust. "I should not have believed it of you! This sudden news has made a coward of you! Don't you know that I am not at liberty to order my men about in that fashion?"

"Then you shall answer for the consequences!" screamed Hajek, wildly. "But I shall not go home by myself!" And again he sobbed, but recovered himself presently. "I must take refuge at Colomea. We are but three of us--the under-steward, myself, and the coachman, and those cut-throats are four or five! I trust you will, at least, set us up with arms, captain, and lend me some of your men to see us safely on our way."

"Certainly," replied Captain Mihaly, coldly. "I am quite able to grant you an escort."

And within an hour Mr. Hajek was on the road to Colomea, a hussar on either side of his vehicle, the under-steward besides having provided himself with a perfect arsenal of weapons. Nevertheless, the mandatar was dying with fright at every turn, crying aloud with terror as often as a sound rose in the distance or some horseman appeared in view. In vain Boleslaw tried to comfort him; all he could do was to remind him that Taras had said with, his own lips another week would lapse before he should make his beginning, "and you know he always is true to his word!"

The mandatar's answer to this was, perhaps, the finest praise ever awarded to Taras. "Ah!" he groaned, "you may not have heard it correctly"--for that Taras should ever deviate from his word, in great things or little, even he did not doubt; but just this made all the rest so fearful!...

The news had come to him quite unexpectedly, although he had been fully informed concerning Taras's doings, his prolonged visits to the mountains, his growing despair, and lastly

his cession of property. But he had misjudged these signs, believing in his own evil soul that Taras intended to make away with himself, and would probably do so upon the Emperor's refusal; indeed, he had even pitied the man, after a fashion, as a butcher may feel pity for a fine bullock whose carcase he intends to sell well. Now that he had learned Taras's intentions, he seemed suddenly to be aware what stuff the man was made of, and though but the barest outline of that memorable speech could have been reported to him, he had a clearer perception of its drift, no doubt, than most of those who had heard it with their own ears. "Yes, yes," he groaned, "the angel has become a fiend, and none so black as those that were all light before!"

At last the morning dawned. The mandatar ventured to dismiss his escort, and towards nine o'clock he reached the town, where he parted also from Boleslaw, sending him back to Zulawce.

"Do you believe the manor is endangered by my absence?"

"No," said the giant, "only by your presence, sir. What Taras wants is to punish *you* in life and limb; he does not care for your property, save as far as it may serve to indemnify the people for their supposed loss. But I should say he will not touch anything till he has got hold of yourself."

The mandatar shook. "I daresay you are right," he said. "Nevertheless, I want you to bring me, without delay, the black casket you will find in my bedroom cupboard--this is the key. I shall not leave this place for the present, and shall do my best to have the wretch hanged, else----"

"He will see you hanged," concluded Boleslaw. "I am afraid you are right, sir."

And with this parting benediction ringing in his ears, Mr. Hajek repaired at once to the district governor, to whom he represented the matter as a rebellion of gigantic dimensions, endangering the lives and property of thousands of helpless subjects, if a price were not set on Taras's head forthwith and half a dozen regiments despatched against him.

Herr von Bauer took refuge in his favourite growling. "Pleasant! most pleasant!" he muttered, and took to pacing his office like a caged lion. "Who on earth has to face such bothers but me? Defend your enemy, not to say your friend, from being a district governor in Galicia! I hoped we had done with these cut-throats since 'Wild Wassilj' had the good sense to shoot himself--now there is another of these rascals! But who would have believed it of Taras Barabola! I would have taken my oath that he was an honest man. To be sure, he understands nothing of justice--came to me once expecting *we* should prosecute for the recovery of that field. He positively believed it was our duty--to prosecute, you understand! A man who has such notions may as well turn hajdamak! They are just savages here--I have always said so ... not a notion of how the law works!... Well, I am much obliged for your news, sir, but it is not for us to proceed on it. Things must be done in order. Kindly send in your information in writing; it will cost you nothing. Good morning!"

"And may I ask how soon the matter will then be attended to?"

"In due course--first come, first served!"

"Sir! Why this is a most pressing case! I would propose, as a first step, to send for the hussars from Zablotow----"

"Hussars? Good gracious!" and the district governor grew as red as a turkey-cock. "Who do you take me for, sir? Am I a general to order about the military? I am governor of the district, sir--worse luck that I am!"

The mandatar was abashed, but made another attempt. "Sir," he said, rather pathetically, "my life is at stake, and what is more, the property of the Count, my master. I venture to ask how the matter will be dealt with!"

"In due course, to be sure! When your statement has been filed we shall despatch a commissary to Zulawce to report to us; and if it is as you tell me, we have quite a complicated charge of felony: the man has insulted the Emperor, not to say the Almighty Himself; he has libelled Government, and is guilty of seditious proceedings. It will be an interesting case, to be sure; he'll have ten years of penal servitude for that speech alone. And if he should lay hands on you, as he seems fully to intend, we will have him hanged! Will that satisfy you?"

But strange to say, the mandatar was not satisfied. "Sir," he stammered, "delay is most dangerous. Will that commissary be starting to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" gasped the governor. "Why not, rather, to-day? Perhaps we ought to ask your pardon for not having sent him as early as yesterday!... *To-morrow!* Are you in your senses, sir?" And he paced his office more violently than ever. It took him some time to get over, this unheard-of suggestion, and then he said: "A commissioner will be sent as soon as feasible; in about a month's time, I should say; things must be done in due course! And now I have the honour of making my bow to you."

The mandatar could but take his leave, standing still a moment outside. It was the very spot where his unhappy victim, and now his implacable enemy, had first felt the sore pain of disappointed hope and helpless wrath--these same sensations now having him for their prey. The

fear of death, which he had been able to hold at bay awhile with the vain expectation that the all-powerful State would hedge him round with safety, seized upon him afresh, tearing his cowardly heart to pieces. With tottering knees, and almost beside himself with rage and terror, he slunk away.

In one of the streets his eye was caught by a shop window exhibiting fire-arms. He entered and bought a double-barrelled pistol. "If I should have the misfortune of falling into his hands," he murmured, "I will at least save myself the worst of ignominy." But a voice in his heart gave him the lie directly. "Coward!" it said; "you would never dare it--never!"

Retribution for this man's crimes had begun before Taras lifted a finger against him, and his just terrors continued--nay, were added to hourly. The mandatar, even in his least cowardly moments, felt the situation to be most critical. While Taras lived, his returning to Zulawce was a movement in the direction of death; and there appeared to be every likelihood of Taras's continuing in life, while the authorities were bent on dealing with him "in due course," as the district governor had taken pains to point out. It seemed highly advisable, then, for Mr. Hajek to keep at a safe distance from Zulawce, and this was tantamount to his retiring from his stewardship, since the peasants, he knew, would never dream of rendering the slightest of their dues, be it tribute or labour, unless the mandatar were bodily present to make them. And if he got into arrears with the monthly payments to the Count, in Paris, this gentleman would not be long in dismissing him, without the least pity for his difficulties. It was preferable, then, to anticipate a dismissal. But how to make a living for the future? To be sure, he had improved the stewardship he was about to quit, putting by in that little black box of his a neat sum of several thousand florins in good Austrian securities, although he had never stinted himself of any personal luxury. Should he fall back upon these savings, leaving the country altogether and seeking a berth elsewhere? But in that case, not only this little capital would be endangered, but another and more precious one would also be lost, even the good name he had managed to acquire, and which he hoped to turn into a bait with which to land a fortune one of these days. Nor was this a mere illusion. Mr. Hajek was too sharp-witted to fool himself, and he really had come to enjoy a certain position at Colomea; for he was a man of the world and knew how to ingratiate himself with society, while even his worst enemy must admit he was an adept in the management of landed property. He knew, therefore, to what port he ought to run: he must look out for an heiress and become a landed proprietor himself. There were several eligible maidens, presumably willing to further his aims, with handsome sums in their pockets, if not Polish coronets on their brows. But all these hopes had vanished now; the successful mandatar might have proffered his suit in such quarters, but never the luckless culprit whose misdeeds had found him out. The one question for him was how to gain time, in order to make the best of his miserable fate.

Thus, by a strange coincidence of circumstances, the mere announcement of Taras's intentions had sufficed to ruin his enemy effectively; and the under-steward, returning on Tuesday with the precious black casket, found his master deeply dejected. Nor was his news calculated to rouse better hopes. "To tell the truth," said Boleslaw, "I brought away the worst impressions concerning the peasantry. Not an hour's further labour will they yield, and no tribute of any kind. Taras is a hero and a liberator in their eyes; and as for you, sir--I beg your pardon, but it is a fact--they are all delighted at the bare idea that he is going to hang you. I spoke with several of the villagers, and they all said the same thing."

"That will do," said the mandatar, faintly, and motioned him to go. Left alone, he sank into a chair, and involuntarily put his fingers round his throat. "There must be an end to this!" he cried. "I must shake off this business; I will have nothing more to do with these wretches."

And, going to his desk, he wrote a letter to the Count--it was his resignation. He folded the sheet, and put it into an envelope, which he sealed. But there he stopped, dipping his pen again and again without addressing the missive. "It might be premature after all," he murmured at last, throwing down the quill and snatching up his hat. "I ought not to act rashly, at least not before finding out the opinion of the town."

But if any one wished to know what the world thought at Colomea, he could not do better than repair to a certain wine-cellar, where the "daily news" of the place was almost sure to be present, gossiping away from early morning sometimes till the closing hour at midnight. This worthy was none other than Mr. Thaddeus de Bazanski, whose vicissitudes in life were a prolific source of entertainment to all the tipplers of the place. Mr. Thaddeus, by his own showing, was a man of consequence; but the jovial company listening to his tales somehow had agreed to call him Thaddy. Now Thaddy's history--of which he was most liberal--was of a curious kind, and never the same for two days running. On a Sunday he would have large possessions in Volhynia; and, being the last of an honourable name, he had fought the Russians gallantly, but was left for dead on the field of battle, after which he made his escape into Galicia. On Mondays he was the son of a Polish officer in French service, who had enjoyed the close friendship of Napoleon, and he had been a cadet at Vincennes; but, turning his back upon his brilliant prospects, he had entered the Polish army for love of his country--the rest being the same as on Sunday. On a Tuesday his name, de Bazanski, was merely an alias for prudence' sake, and he was really the scion of a princely house of Lithuania; but, having quarrelled with his family, who were of Russian tendencies, he had entered the Polish army--the rest the same as on Monday. On Wednesdays he had large possessions in the Ukraine, and in fact all the revolution of 1831 had been carried on with his money. Having been obliged to flee, he joined the Carbonari in Piedmont, and now lived

in Galicia in order to be at hand when the great day of revenge should have dawned. On Thursdays, when the cellars would be specially well filled after the weekly meeting of the local board, Thaddy's history had quite a romantic origin. He was a natural son of Alexander I. and a Polish countess, spending his youth at the Court of St. Petersburg, petted by all, until he did his duty as the son of his mother, standing up boldly before his half-brother Nicolas and demanding of him a grant of liberty for poor Poland. He was refused, and then--the same as on Wednesday. On Fridays, when the place was but indifferently visited, he was just a poor brave nobleman, who had spent the best years of his life for the good of his country, and was ready to do so again; while on the Saturday his tale had an anti-semitic tinge. His father, on those days, having been one of the richest landowners of Masovia, had been so foolish as to allow his Jewish tenants to drop into arrears with their rents, till the family was nearly beggared. It was then that Thaddeus showed the stuff he was made of, evicting "those rascally Jews," and making front against the Russians at the same time; and he was now at Colomea endeavouring to work up those sad arrears. To be sure, he never had any success to tell of, but that might be because of his constantly changing his lawyer, who, it was observed, was mentioned by a different name every Saturday. For the rest, if any visitor of the cellars ever had forgotten what day of the week it might be, he had but to listen for a moment to Thaddy's tale in order to recover the lost thread of his time.

These varying accounts were calculated to lend an air of distinction to the narrator, but there were some whose shrewdness believed his fame to be spurious, and one or two wicked tongues had even asserted that his features bore a suspicious likeness to a loquacious barber they had known at Warsaw. Thaddy denounced this as a libel, boldly; but it was not so easy to accuse people of calumny when they added that his appearance, somehow, was not of the aristocratic military type! That was true enough, for there was nothing of the heroic about his mean little figure, and those greenish eyes, half cunning, half cowardly, peering away over a coppery nose for any good luck in his way. Of course he always appeared in the national costume; but the 'kantouche' was peculiarly long and ill-fitting, not because of any eccentric taste of his, but simply because nature had endowed Mr. Bogdan with a figure so utterly different from Thaddy's. His 'confederatka,' however, was his own--one of the strangest head-gears ever worn by mortal man. It probably had been high, stiff, and square originally, but it had collapsed to utter flabbiness, and it could not now be said to be of any colour, having faded to a mixture of all. Thaddy kept assuring his listeners that he wore this article on great anniversaries for the most patriotic of reasons, since it had covered his head at the famous battle of Ostrolenka. It certainly looked ancient enough to have seen even the Napoleonic wars; and if it had many holes, that no doubt was a proof of the many bullets which had threatened the head of its gallant wearer. As for the anniversaries, there were those who pretended to observe that the famous confederatka was seen rather often, in fact quite habitually, on Thaddy's head--but then, the history of Poland is so rich in events, that the year of the piously inclined is one long anniversary naturally.

As for the present employment of this national martyr, it was twofold; he ostensibly waited for the better days of Poland, gaining his livelihood meanwhile by entertaining the customers at the cellars with his gossip, and holding himself in readiness for any business in which an agent might be wanted who was not over squeamish in his views.

When Mr. Hajek, on that Tuesday afternoon, entered the cellars he found Thaddy alone, in his usual corner, sadly occupied with counting the flies on the various pictures adorning the room. He looked up, a gleam of satisfaction shooting across his countenance, and held out his hand, which cordiality, however, the new comer appeared not to observe. "Ha!" he cried, "what a strange coincidence; here I was just thinking of you, actually! There is a curious likeness between this excellent young man's fate--meaning yourself--and mine, I was saying."

"Indeed!" replied the mandatar, coldly, taking a seat and ordering a bottle of wine. "Between you and me?"

"Yes, unmistakably," cried Mr. de Bazanski, coming nearer and taking his place opposite the mandatar. "A striking likeness in fact. It so occupied my mind that I quite forgot I was thirsty, and, indeed, for the matter of that, I am of too sociable a turn to have a glass by myself." This was true enough, for Thaddy never had any drink except in company. They knew better at the cellars than to give him anything that was not ordered and paid for by his friends.

Mr. Hajek smiled, requesting the waiter to bring a second glass. "A striking likeness, you were saying?"

"Most striking, sir, and unmistakable! Just look at me--what is it I have come to? I am an old officer, to be sure, who will give proof yet of the stuff he is made of. But what of this? I was thinking of my happy youth, and how from the battlements of our princely castle in Lithuania I, with a telescope, would scan our broad domain; forty-nine villages I could count, and they all were situated on our lands. Yes, ours was a princely family, and now, alas, I may not even confess to the name I was born to, I---"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted the mandatar; "besides, I was aware that this is Tuesday."

But Thaddy was not the man to be disconcerted. "Of course, this is Tuesday," he assented, smilingly. "I was going to add--who is to blame that I am a stranger now to my princely heritage, if not my wicked relatives? And who is it that, at the present moment, is a sore trouble to you, if

not this wicked peasantry of Zulawce? Is it not a strange and striking similarity?"

"Very striking," said Hajek. "Then you have heard about affairs at Zulawce?"

"Of course I have," cried Bazanski; "why the town is full of it." And the ex-officer waxed hot with excitement. "You would scarcely believe it," he cried, "but there are those, actually, who take this cut-throat's part against you--respectable people--nay, even Poles, I am ashamed to say!"

"Who, for instance?" inquired the mandatar, apparently unconcerned, but his heart was beating in spite of him.

"Well, there is that old demagogue, who ought to know better, being a lawyer--Dr. Starkowski, I mean--to begin with. This very morning we were sitting here, some twenty of us, and some one started the matter. My stars, you should have heard him! 'Gentlemen,' he said, quite solemnly, as though he were on his oath, 'I know this Taras; he is the most unselfish, the noblest man I have ever met, and filled with a passion for justice which would grace a king. And that this man, with the views he holds, had nothing left but to turn hajdamak, must make every honest man blush for our country. It is my opinion that this noble-hearted fellow has been morally murdered, and his murderer is the mandatar of Zulawce.' And the others, so far from contradicting him, clamoured for more. 'Tell us, Doctor, tell us all about it,' they cried. And he gave them a long rigmarole of a story about a field, and perjury, and what not; and when he had finished--'Humph,' said the others, 'why, if it is so, Mr. Hajek is just a blackguard.' 'He is,' affirmed the brazen-faced lawyer. Such is the world!"

"Such--is--- the world!" repeated Hajek, absently, and white as a ghost. It was plain there was nothing left for him now but to make his speedy escape. The laborious edifice of his wickedness was tottering, and threatening to bury him in its ruins. But whither should he turn? He gazed into his future helplessly....

"Such, indeed, is the world," repeated Bazanski, eagerly; "and there were those present who said--'Dear, dear, it is a mercy to learn that before it is too late!' Those, you understand, who hitherto would have considered you an eligible son-in-law--conceited fools!--as if you ever would have looked at any of their daughters--you, whose heart is adamant even to a countess."

Hajek turned to him with a start, his face flushing crimson. He had racked his brain for a way out of his plight, but had forgotten all about this possibility, in his very grasp if he chose! Three different estates in the lowlands, beyond the reach of Taras--what a splendid match to be sure! If he married the countess he need not give another thought to his master in Paris, nor to that wretch of an "avenger," nor yet to all the respectable folk at Colomea. And this grandest of chances had almost escaped him!

"Well," cried the wily Thaddeus, "I do like your pretending to be taken by surprise; as if you did not know how desperately the amiable Countess Wanda is in love with you." And he began to describe the secret passion of that lady with such glowing colours, that any writer of love sonnets might have envied him. "And there is her great fortune besides," he said, in conclusion; "but that is a mere accessory. First love, and then the practical advantages."

Mr. Hajek had recovered himself. "Don't talk rubbish," he said, sharply. "The countess is not likely to love me, being too--too experienced to make a fool of herself; and, besides, I am an utter stranger to her. If she intends to marry me it is simply because she is in want of a husband, and if I take her it will be because it happens to suit me. So it is a clear case of the practical advantage first and foremost; that settled, there may be love, for all I care. What about the property and the settlement? I daresay you have been instructed.... I don't want any flourishes; just let me know the facts."

Thaddeus de Bazanski was of an adaptable nature. "Just the facts! Yes, certainly," he said. "There are three estates, as you know--Horkowka, Drinkowce, and Rossow--quite unencumbered--will fetch in the market half a million florins any day; the personal property, besides, amounting to one hundred thousand florins in first-rate securities."

"Very well; and now for the conditions."

"The Rossow estate, on your marriage, will be settled on the countess, of course, but you will have equal rights to the revenues for your life; Horkowka, in reversion, on the countess alone; while Drinkowce and the floating capital will be settled on--on---" Bazanski stammered and blushed.

"On the lady's child by her first marriage--I understand," said Hajek quietly. "But now for my conditions! I am quite agreed concerning Rossow and Horkowka; but the boy has to be provided for out of the personal property solely, while Drinkowce must be settled on me absolutely. It shall be mine, whether there be any offspring of the marriage or not; and it is to remain mine even in the event of a dissolution."

"Humph! old Bogdan is no fool!"

"Quite sure of that; but neither am I! When shall I look for an answer?"

"To-morrow at noon. Shall we have another bottle now on the strength of the prospects?"

"No, not now; go and make sure of the prospects. Good evening to you."

Bazanski gazed after the retreating figure with positive awe. "Ugh!" he said at length, with a deep breath of admiration, "they were not far wrong this morning. What a villain! what an incomparable villain!" And, having thus unburdened his mind, he hastened away to the Villa Antoniewicz....

At noon punctually the following day he presented himself again to Mr. Hajek. "I have come to congratulate you!" he cried on the threshold.

"Well, has your patron accepted my conditions?"

"Entirely--excepting only Drinkowce. He is very sorry, but his little grandson----"

"Very well, that settles it. Excuse me, but I am busy, intending to start to-night."

"Start! whereto?"

"To--anywhere, so long as it is far enough from here."

"Then do not be in such a hurry! Let me have another word with the family."

"Very well. I will give you till to-morrow, but I cannot be detained beyond that."

Thaddy departed on his errand sadly, there was little hope of earning his pay. He was almost certain that Herr von Antoniewicz would prove unyielding; but it turned out differently. The Countess, in the first place, chose to pronounce in the intended bridegroom's favour. "He is good-looking; tolerably young, of good manners, and sufficiently a man of the world not to annoy me with any prejudice!" Her father arrived at a similar conclusion. "The fellow is of suitable stuff to manage the estates; whether Drinkowce be his or not, it will be his interest to pull along with us. I am old now, and cannot wait till as great a booby as your first husband may chance to turn up as a suitor for your hand. I would prefer an honest booby, of course; but a clever villain meanwhile must not be despised. He shall not do *me*. I'll take care of that!"

And the following morning, Thaddeus, with a beaming face, burst into the mandatar's presence. "Now I may congratulate you really," he cried. "Drinkowce is yours!"

"Very well," responded Hajek. "I am off on the spot to pay my respects to my future father-in-law, and to my bride-elect. One thing, though, before I leave, you will hold your tongue for the present. I might find it useful to be believed in as a man of honour by some of the folk here yet awhile!"

"What a delightful joke!" cried Thaddy, full of laughter, and brandishing the famous confederatka as he made his bow. But when the door had closed upon him, an expression of admiring awe once more settled on his features. "What a villain!" he murmured, "what an incomparable villain!"

Mr. Hajek's visit at the villa proved highly touching; that supreme moment especially, when, in his capacity of accepted lover, he imprinted a delicate kiss on the fair one's brow, a proceeding at which Herr and Frau von Antoniewicz tossed their handkerchiefs before their tearless eyes, whimpering affectedly, "Be happy, children; as happy as we ourselves have been!"

When the mandatar returned to his chambers he found on his table a note from the district governor. "Favour me with a call at my private residence at once," it said; "I have a communication of importance to make to you." Hajek was surprised, and slightly fluttered. The die was cast, his future secured, and if he stayed prudently at Colomea he had scarcely anything to fear from Taras. And yet he trembled. What if Taras had been caught, and he had sacrificed himself in vain--allowing a lady of the countess's antecedents to address him as her promised husband? Well, never mind, it was impossible to go back now, considering the manner of his courting. He had cast in his lot with these creatures and must abide by it.

With a sense of expectation he went his way to the governor's. Herr von Bauer received him politely. He was one of those officials, rather numerous at that time, who considered abruptness a sort of armour to be worn during office hours, but not required when off duty. The district governor was quite genial within the precincts of his own fireside, and all the more courteous now for remembering that he had put forth some special bristles along with that armour in his previous interview with the mandatar. "A pleasure to see you," he assured Mr. Hajek, shaking hands vigorously. "I have some important news which will please you," he said, winking mysteriously--"please you particularly."

"Has Taras been caught?" inquired the mandatar.

"Caught? Dear me, no! Why, who should have caught him? ... This is what I wanted to tell you: You know the court sat to-day. We had an unusual influx of landed proprietors and mandatars, and there was much talking concerning Taras; in fact he seems the one topic all over the country. They all agreed that his rising was most dangerous, because the peasantry everywhere are

devoted to him. There could be no doubt, they assured me, but that the manor house at Zulawce would be attacked on Sunday, and if he got hold of you, your life was not worth two straws--not two straws, they said!"

"Well," said the mandatar, with affected composure, "this may be important to know, but I fail to see why it should please me."

"No, no, of course, the pleasant part is coming--for yourself I mean, not for me. I hate having things done in an irregular way. But I suppose this is an exception." A groan escaped him. "Well, sir, I called a meeting of the board--a special meeting, and it was resolved to treat the case as a matter of unusual importance, attending to it, therefore, on the spot--an example of despatch quite unprecedented in my experience, I assure you. A commissioner will be sent to Zulawce as early as next Tuesday--we must, if possible, have an exact report of that speech--and a courier went off this very afternoon to inform the brigadier-general at Stanislaw of the state of affairs, submitting to him the necessity of ordering a company of infantry to Zulawce. This I am sure----"

"Is pleasant to know! so it is," interrupted the mandatar. "But might I suggest----"

"Yes, certainly; suggest away, sir," said the governor, waxing impatient. There had been a sound of teacups from the adjoining apartment.

"It appears to be a general conviction that the manor house at Zulawce is to be attacked on the night of Easter Sunday. In that case the military, in order to be of any use should arrive at the place on Sunday afternoon. But this is scarcely possible if it be infantry. This is Thursday. The courier, at the earliest, will reach Stanislaw at daybreak to-morrow. Now, supposing even the general attended to the matter at once, and made out his order to the soldiers by ten----"

"Or a quarter past," interrupted the governor, rushing into his office armour evidently. "What are you driving at, sir?"

"You will see presently," retorted the mandatar, nettled in his turn. "Supposing the general made out his order to the nearest regiment of infantry by ten o'clock, a detachment could not be off under four-and-twenty hours, for they are quartered at Czortkow, and it will be a two days' march for them to reach their destination--by Monday morning at the earliest, that is. So, you see, the village could only be protected against Sunday by means of the Palffy hussars, who are at Zablotow, close at hand."

"Sir," growled the governor, "are you fooling me? Am I the brigadier-general? I am governor of this district, and my business is to apply for military intervention if need be, but not to ask for cavalry or artillery when there are no means of stabling the horses. There are no large stables at Zulawce, so it must be infantry. They shall be there when they can; or do you expect us to introduce new regulations into the country just to suit *your* need? What do you mean by directing my attention to the distance, or to the length of time a detachment will be on the march? Am I supposed to know that? Am I in the general's coat to give his orders?"

"No--in your own smoking cap and slippers," replied the mandatar quietly, the words acting like magic. The old growler suddenly remembered that he was not in his office, but at home, where civility was due to a caller. And he put off his armour hastily.

"Well--a case of unusual importance, I was saying...." The poor old gentleman felt guilty, however, and was anxious to make reparation. "It is a trouble altogether--this Taras--but I was going to add, I have invited some of our people to dine with us on Sunday, and if you will do me the honour, we shall be charmed, sir."

He held out his hand to Mr. Hajek who put his fingers into it eagerly. An invitation to the district governor's annual dinner when all the elite of the place was assembled would have flattered him at any time; but to a man who had just become engaged to a lady of the Countess Wanda's reputation this was simply invaluable....

"So far he has not heard of it, evidently," the bridegroom elect said to himself as he descended the stairs. "I daresay it will be no secret by Sunday, and it will be as well for me to be seen then at the governor's dinner! However, I need not care now for anybody's opinion, any more than I need for Taras himself. It was foolish of me to excite myself at all about the military movements. What does it matter to me whether the Count's manor house be burnt or not, so long as myself and my cash-box are safe out of it?"

He was still pursuing this high-minded strain of thought, when, at the end of the street, he came into collision with a figure rushing round the corner in the opposite direction. But he saw at a glance that apologies were needless, for it was only Thaddy whom he had sent flying against the wall.

"Oh, to be sure," cried the latter, rubbing his shoulder, "what eagerness in a lover! Romeo going to visit Juliet, I'll be bound."

"Oh no, I am going home; but you, I daresay, are making for the cellars?"

"Alas! I am not in the vein. I was lost in meditation, remembering a certain conversation I once

had with my illustrious half-brother, Nicolas I., and how my life since----"

"Nicolas I.! You don't mean to say that this is Thursday? I really was forgetting.... But let me tell you, if you *do* go to the cellars and should not find any of your friends in the mood to treat you to a glass of Moldavian for your story about Nicolas, I'll not have you try your luck by publishing my engagement with the countess! If you breathe a word of it, I shall deduct fifty florins from your expected pay. Just bear that in mind. Good morning!"

The Czar's half-brother stood stock still, overtaken by an evident conflict. For Bogdan had just told him, "If by this time to-morrow the whole town is not aware of the engagement, I'll have you kicked downstairs when next you show your face here." A sore dilemma for the nobly-born Thaddy--to be kicked downstairs or forego fifty of his hard-earned florins! He would have submitted to the kicking willingly, so long as it left him at liberty to remount those stairs after the performance....

In a distracted state of mind, Thaddy entered the cellars, but the company there was in good humour, greeting him uproariously. "Good heavens," they cried, "are we to stand treat for hearing your romances about Nicolas--this is Thursday!" He could not, of course, submit to this taunt, and resolved, therefore, for once to keep to realities, giving them an account of the mandatar's latest achievement, the plain truth of it, with some exceedingly daring interpolations. But when he added: "This Mr. Hajek is a villain ingrained, sirs!" there was not one to dissent from the statement.

Towards noon the following day the mandatar set out to repeat his call at the villa, saying to himself as he crossed his threshold: "I shall know within ten minutes whether Thaddy has kept the matter close or not." And he did know before he had gone the length of the street! The secretary of the local board, Mr. Wroblewski, was the first acquaintance he met; but this gentleman appeared to have made a sudden discovery upon the roof of the town hall, which required his intetest gaze in that direction, whilst the chief postmaster, Nossek, another of his acquaintances coming along, was lost in a contemplation of the paving-stones, quite overlooking the mandatar in consequence. This was a cut to the heart; but Hajek recovered himself very soon, holding his head erect and stepping out courageously. "Once settled at Drinkowce," he consoled himself, "these things will show in a different light."

He was met in the Armenian's ante-chamber by the chosen bride herself; she walked slowly, not for sweet modesty's sake, but only because she was rather fat. That was a drawback to her charms; for the rest she had sparkling eyes and a rare wig of golden hair, slightly reddish though. She was in her ripest prime, like a cabbage-rose in September, when the perfume of spring has fled and the petals have expanded, the season of sweetness being gone.

He kissed her hands, she offered him her face. "Come," she whispered, "my parents await you, to settle the programme for Sunday."

They were soon agreed that since the engagement was certain not to remain a secret even till then, it behoved them to act a little drama of innocence before the eyes of their guests. "We shall not ask many people; just a select few," said Frau von Antoniewicz, Mr. Hajek agreeing to this fervently, well knowing that not a dozen visitors would be found forthcoming, if pressed ever so hard.

"And now the programme for the evening," resumed the lady--"a select few; we shall talk and have some music, but no dancing. When the clock strikes ten my daughter will take her place by the piano to give us an air of Cherubini's, after which you move up to her, complimenting her on her exquisite voice; and, giving her your arm, you will lead her into the smaller drawing-room, where the illumination will be appropriately subdued. I shall have some things up from the conservatory--palms and things, to represent a bower; a fauteuil will be placed conveniently, and a low stool beside it. Wanda will sink gracefully into the fauteuil; you will be at her feet on the stool--it will be quite a picture, and there will be a whispering among the company. This will be the moment when you must kneel, gazing at her adoringly; she will start up, endeavouring to escape.--It will be pretty if you can manage a blush, my dear; it is easy, you know, if you hold your breath.--I shall be crossing the room accidentally, and shall give a startled cry; whereupon you will take my daughter by the hand, leading her up to me, saying, 'Best of mothers, give us your blessing,' or some such suitable words. I shall be greatly touched, and shall say something appropriate. So will Bogdan. Then we shall have supper; a few toasts will have to be managed: long life to the lovers, and you must reply, lifting your glass to Bogdan and me."

"And then the curtain will fall," said Hajek, at which the wrinkled dame lifted her finger saucily. "My dear Mr. Hajek," she said, "the whole of life is but a comedy; who thinks differently is a fool. Then why should I not arrange this little scene before the closing act of my own life as merrily as I please, and you just be satisfied!"

"Certainly," he said; "but I will stipulate for a comfortable hassock to kneel upon."

They laughed and went to the dining-room....

Considering how he was being cut by every one in the streets, the mandatar would not have been in the least surprised to receive some excuse from the district governor cancelling the

invitation to his dinner. But no message came, for the simple reason that Herr von Bauer had quite forgotten he had asked the mandatar, and had not even told his wife. The governor, therefore, was disagreeably surprised when, at the appointed hour, Mr. Hajek presented himself among his guests, while the 'district governess'--as his wife, on account of her overbearing ways, was often called by her jocose acquaintances--flared up crimson with annoyance. It seemed to her as if the eyes of all present were filled with angry reproaches. The fact was, the mandatar had arrived at the very moment when the company was enjoying the newest bit of scandal, having learned by this time how he and the Countess Wanda, with the help of Thaddy, had discovered their secret flame. It was an awkward interruption; not the least so for Hajek himself. But he was the only one who showed any presence of mind. He made his bow to the company, some staring back at him utterly surprised, some completely disgusted; and having kissed the unwilling hand of the lady of the house, he seized the paralysed fingers of her lord, shaking hands with a fine pretence of unconcern. Herr von Bauer, of course, submitted, greeting him with a smile even--"a smile, upon my word," said the witty Wroblewski, "like that of a convict being tickled." The governor was endeavouring to do his duty. "Ah," he said, "I am surprised.... ahem, delighted to see you.... very.... ah!"

And then he recovered himself, perceiving that he owed it to his wife to take upon himself the onus of this man's presence, and that he could not expect any of his guests to entertain him. "Dearest Cornelia," he was heard to say, "I am sure it slipped my memory, but I invited Mr. Hajek--I asked him on Thursday--on *Thursday*, you know," he added, pointedly, "and I am afraid I am going to monopolise him on account of important business"--the mandatar keeping up his most amiable smile.

He drew him into a corner. "I have heard this morning from the brigadier-general by special messenger. A detachment of infantry has been despatched to Zulawce, and will arrive there on Monday as you calculated. But the general, besides this, has thought well to order the hussars to be there by this evening, just as you proposed. He thinks it is as well to be on the safe side."

"Very commendable prudence, no doubt, since Taras seems determined----"

"Determined? What is that to us! Who ever heard of cavalry being ordered to a place where they find no stabling! It is no joke to disregard established rules--none whatever! But I wash my hands of any consequences--I do, indeed!"

"And may I ask who will be sent on Tuesday, as you said, as your commissioner?"

"Kapronski. Well! what is that grimace for? We do things in proper order. He conducted the inquiry there on the former occasion, he may therefore be expected to be the man for it now. But--a happy thought!--I am sure you could give him a hint or two."

The governor rubbed his hands; it seemed a bright idea to set the two least welcome of his guests at each other, thus rendering them harmless for the rest of the company. And he gave a sign to Kapronski, who obeyed with alacrity; for if it was an honour to be invited to the governor's official dinner, it had, so far, not yielded him any pleasure. The company was apt to overlook him, and people would appear to labour under deafness when he addressed them. But being called upon to enter into conversation with Mr. Hajek was like being lifted on to a pedestal; for certainly this man stood lower now in the public estimation than even Kapronski himself. So he approached him accordingly, drawing up his fawning figure and assuming an expression of patronage ludicrous to behold.

"You have a favour to ask of me?" he began pompously.

The mandatar gave him a look of cutting sarcasm. "You are mistaken, sir!"

"I--I misunderstood--a request to make?" Kapronski could not stand being looked at boldly, and was slipping down from his pedestal rapidly.

"Nor yet a request, that I am aware," returned Hajek. "The governor asked my opinion, or any advice I could give, concerning the personal safety of the commissioner about to be despatched to Zulawce, and I am ready to advise you." The mandatar had some trouble in keeping serious, for Kapronski's features, besides recovering their wonted humility at a stroke as it were, presented a ludicrous picture of most doleful dismay.

"Personal safety," he stammered, "why, is there any danger?"

"A great deal," said Hajek, confidently.

Kapronski's face turned white, and red, and ashy grey. "I shall have an escort," he faltered; "but if Taras should attack us on the road, I am a dead man! There is no help----"

His voice positively failed him.

"None whatever," assented the mandatar. "Stop--yes, there is," he added, a sudden thought having flashed through him--indeed a capital thought, so simple and so clever withal that he was surprised it should not have presented itself before. "There is!" he said.

"Is there?" returned Kapronski, eagerly.

"Yes, indeed! a sure means of saving yourself and me, and all honest folks from this cut-throat. Let me remind you that his wife and children are still at his farm. It will be natural, then, to billet most of the soldiers upon her. But this is not enough! You must tell her that she will have to answer for it on the gallows if her husband hurts a hair of the mandatar's head--be sure and say the mandatar's! She is in communication with him, no doubt, and----"

"But this would be illegal!"

"Well, that is for you to judge. I only give you a hint or two, out of kindness. It is you who have to go to Zulawce, not I!"

"Ah!" groaned Kapronski, "if it should get known, it would cost me my place."

"Well, tell her without witnesses, then you can give her the lie, if need be. For the rest do as you please--I am safe enough here."

The conversation was interrupted! the governor inviting his guests to move to the dining-room. "I have thought," he said, addressing the pair, "it might be most agreeable for each of you if we put you together."

Kapronski bowed more humbly than ever, Hajek smiling blandly. He had made up his mind to let everybody feel mortified, but not himself--he was not going to be annoyed, not he! And he carried out his resolution; easier for him, no doubt, than for a man of higher mettle.

He drove home in the best of humours, and how he whiled away the rest of his time, attuning his mind for the events of the evening, we have had a glimpse of already. We need not describe the solemnities at the villa, touching as they were, for we know the programme, which was minutely followed. There were not many to witness the scene; but the old dame had set her heart on the play-acting, and the mandatar, to please her, fell in with her fancy. The manner of his kneeling to Wanda was quite classical, and supper was consumed amid charming hilarity, not forgetting some wonderful verses with which Thaddy astonished the company.

But when the guests had departed, a final and real surprise was in store for the happy bridegroom. He was cooling his brow at the open window, when suddenly he perceived his coachman, Jasko, in conversation with a horseman a little way up the road. He could see that the stranger wore the Huzul garb. The night was dark, and a faint gleam only from the lighted house fell on the road, but Hajek nevertheless recognised the horseman. "Good heavens!" he shrieked, "stop him! Seize him!"

Bogdan and the countess rushed up terrified; but the stranger also had heard the alarm, and spurring his horse, he dashed away and was lost to sight.

"My coachman! I entreat you send for my coachman!" cried Hajek, beside himself. Jasko was called in. "That was Wassilj Soklewicz you were talking with just now?" said the mandatar, quaking.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, wonderingly.

"Don't you know he is one of the outlaws--one of Taras's band?"

"Mercy on us!" cried the coachman, aghast. "He assured me he had taken service with the mandatar at Prinkowce, and I believed him, telling him all about ourselves on Tuesday and Thursday and this evening. I told him: 'We need not fear Taras now, for we are going to marry a rich lady, and shall live at Drinkowce. In the meantime, we are quite safe at Colomea.' At which he laughed, telling me there was no saying what might happen between now and the wedding; indeed soon----"

"Soon! soon!" groaned the mandatar, falling back on a chair. It chanced to be the fauteuil near the palms and things. The comedy was being changed into tragedy.

Bogdan recovered himself first. "I do not believe," he said, "that Taras is in the neighbourhood and likely to attack you in your chambers or on your way back to the town; but we will hold ourselves prepared for the worst. Stay here for the night. I'll have the gates closed, my men can be armed, and I will send for assistance to the main guardhouse."

And so he did, but the protection he was able to hold out to his worthy son-in-law proved of the poorest nevertheless. The officer on duty sent back orders not to trouble him with idle tales; and, concerning his own servants, Bogdan knew that they would throw down their arms at the first sight of danger.

"If Taras indeed were to come, I cannot protect you," he confessed to the mandatar. "We are not without neighbours, but none of them would stir to help us."

And with this agreeable assurance they kept watching through the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BANNER UNFURLED.

The excitement of the people of Zulawce rose steadily as the Easter sun was sinking to its rest. The cottages stood forsaken; the community had gathered beneath the linden. The men were fully armed and many a fierce threat was uttered against the "villain in the iron closet"; but the peasants seemed fully resolved to take no part whatever in the coming work of revenge. None of the inmates or dependents of the manor-house were present. The under-steward, Boleslaw, had ordered the gates to be closed, addressing his men in the courtyard. "Let us not act foolishly," he said. "There is no doubt but that Taras will come, since the report of the iron closet is so fully believed in; but he will not harm us, if we open the doors to him to let him see that there is no such thing as an iron closet in the place, and that the mandatar is not with us. Our only fear is that the peasantry may grow revengeful, and attack us when he is gone. Let us be ready to resist them, but we will not fight Taras."

Nor had any of Anusia's people joined the public gathering; her orders had been sufficient. She herself was sitting in the large family-room, holding little Tereska on her lap, while her boys pressed close to her with an indefinable fear. The children dared not speak, for the mother seemed sunk in that strange stupor which had kept her to the bed of sickness but lately.

Father Leo and the little popadja found her thus. A greeting was exchanged, but conversation would not flow. It was impossible to talk of indifferent matters, and they shrank from touching upon that which filled their hearts. So they sat silent, a red light streaming in through the windows; for the sun, like a glowing ball of fire, was sinking behind the fir-covered uplands.

"How red it looks," whispered little Wassilj, pointing to the parting glory.

"It forbodes blood," said Halko, under his breath.

"Blood," echoed the poor mother with staring eyes, pressing her children closer.

Father Leo could bear it no longer. He went near to her, taking her hand gently. "Anusia," he said, "do *you* believe---?"

"What do I know," she interrupted him, sharply. "Am I of the avenger's band? I am a widow, anxious to keep the peace for my children's sake."

Leo paced the room. "That is well," he said, presently. "I wish all the people were like you. They say they will not join him, but I fear their own wild disposition will be too much for them."

Anusia made no answer, and he sat down again in silence. Thus they continued, amid the sinking shadows, in the darkening room.

But suddenly they started, and the children gave a cry of alarm. There had been a tapping at the window which overlooked the garden. It was the window to the west catching the last glimmer of light; no one outside was visible, but as they gazed a hand was lifted cautiously from below, once more tapping the pane.

"It is father!" cried the children, and the pope rose.

"Hush, children," said Anusia, in a whisper, but so impressively that they forthwith obeyed. "Please keep quiet, Father Leo. It is not Taras, but his messenger ... sit still ... I am his wife and must answer when he calls."

Another tap, and Anusia glided from the room. They heard the outer door creak on its hinges, and knew she was in the garden.

The children fell to sobbing, but the popadja put her arms round them, beginning to say her prayers, good soul. Leo had risen, listening intently; but not a sound was heard till the firm footstep of the returning woman fell on their ear. She entered, carrying a lamp in her hand. They could see her face; the old look of icy calm had once more settled on it.

"Is it good news?" questioned Leo, eagerly.

"Yes--that is to say in some respects." She smiled bitterly. "Anyhow, pope, you will be able to do a good service to your parishioners."

"I am most willing--what is it?"

"Go and tell them to go home quietly, for their own sakes."

"I have told them, and tried my best already. Will you tell me what Taras----?"

"No," she said, fiercely; "I must have intercourse with him--I am his wife; but no one else shall, if I can prevent it. Try yet again, pope; for God's sake, do!"

Father Leo saw his wife home, and hastened to join his expectant parishioners. But the people insisted they must see Taras storm the castle; he was doing it as their own avenger; how should they forbear? The long hours of waiting, and the quantity of spirits which had been consumed, had but added to their excitement; exhortation availed not, and with a sigh the pope desisted.

It was between ten and eleven in the evening. Away in the district town the mandatar was about to undergo the graceful process of kneeling to the Countess Wanda. The night lay deep and still on mountain and plain.

A strange sound broke on the stillness, indistinct at first, but gaining in force. It was as though a mighty waterfall somewhere in the distance had suddenly begun to roar.

"Hark!" cried a hundred voices, "what is it?" "He is coming!" exclaimed the butcher. "No; listen!" said another.

The noise grew perceptibly, as though volumes of water were being added to that far-off cataract. The upland echoes awoke in response, and it was difficult to say whence the sound proceeded.

"A host of them coming from the mountains!" decided one, presently. "No, from the plains--listen!" cried another.

It was like a low rumble of thunder, in the direction of the river unmistakably. The very ground began to vibrate, and the dull noise ever and anon was broken by the quick, sharp sound of a trumpet.

"Horsemen!" a voice cried suddenly. "The hussars! Save yourselves." "No, stay," burst in another; "who should forbid our standing here quietly? Save yourselves!" and the cry was taken up repeatedly; "these hussars are worse than the devil!"

But the people seemed nailed to the spot, some pushing this way, some that; the enclosing darkness, the state of semi-drunkenness most were in, and a knowledge that a squadron of soldiers was bursting upon them, robbed them of all self-possession.

"Go to your homes," the pope kept crying, despairingly. He had caught hold of the torch which served to illumine the inn, and wildly urged the people. But it seemed too late. Already the first of the soldiers, four horsemen in advance of the troop, had reached the place, pulling up their steeds at the near sight of the heaving, howling mass of villagers. Two of the hussars lifted their pistols, firing into the air.

The shots hit no one, but took full effect on the excited minds, producing a wild panic in some, rousing rage and defiance in others. "Save yourselves," was heard again. "We are not going to be killed like sheep; take to your guns, men!" roared others, and bloodshed appeared unavoidable.

The imminent danger inspired Father Leo with an unwonted power. He forced a way through the people with his right arm, some falling back before the blazing torch in his left, and thus he got to the head of the crowd just as the body of soldiers galloped up the street, led by an officer, sword in hand. It was Captain Mihaly; and at the sight of the pale man in priestly dress, standing with a flaring torch between the approaching horse and the overtaken crowd, he called to his men to stop. The troop halted almost face to face with the people. "Surrender!" exclaimed the officer.

But Father Leo lifted his hands. "Sir captain," he cried in German, his voice rising above the turmoil behind him, "this is not the band of Taras, but only the people of this village; they will disperse at once."

"Then the bandit is not among you?"

"No!"

"But your people seem to be waiting for him--to assist him, I daresay."

"No; it is their curiosity only."

"I'll teach them better, then! Tell them I give them five minutes' grace, after which time my men will have leave to cut down any one about the streets at this late hour."

The pope repeated the orders in the people's own language; shrieks and curses were the answer. But, even though they might have been willing, most of the people could not at once free themselves from the struggling crowd, and some refused to stir, in sheer defiance if not for love of fight. The pope kept urging, but in vain. A few only escaped; the confusion was no wise diminished.

The captain's patience appeared exhausted. The word was given, the trumpet sounded, and, brandishing their sabres, the hussars charged the crowd, which fell back amid a deafening tumult of shrieks and groans and efforts of resistance. Father Leo was flung against the inn, his head striking the door-post so violently that he staggered bleeding and stunned with the blow. He was unable to see what happened, for the darkness seemed denser than before, but the sounds which fell on his ear filled him with dismay. He had suffered much of late, but trouble seemed culminating now.

He could not quite tell how long it lasted; the noise decreased, the hussars making their way towards the farms; presently there was silence, save for the groans of some who evidently had been hurt in the fray. His own head was bleeding and his limbs felt heavy, but he shook off the lethargy, and pushing open the door of the inn called for help.

There was no answer. Some few had taken refuge in the parlour, and the innkeeper's family were hiding in corners; the pope had to repeat his calling, and then only a lad appeared with a rushlight in his trembling hand.

The pope made his way into the house, conjuring the frightened people to lend him their assistance. A couple of torches were lighted and reluctant help was given. Matters outside were not quite so bad as Father Leo had anticipated. Five only were lying there, more or less severely wounded: four villagers and one of the hussars. The latter evidently was in the worst plight, a bullet, in an almost hand-to-hand encounter, had gone through his shoulder. Father Leo saw to him first, ordering him to be moved into the inn. An old man was attended to next, he had a sabre-cut on his forehead. The other three were women who had fallen beneath the hoofs of the horses, but were not badly hurt.

Leo set himself to bind up the wounds as well as he could, aided by Avrumko and Maxym Bobra, a soldier on furlough; and while they were thus occupied the troop of horsemen were heard returning. A trumpet sounded. "The signal for dismounting," whispered Maxym to the pope, and almost immediately the door of the inn parlour was flung open. The officer entered, followed by some half-dozen of his men.

"Bring out torches and some faggots!" he cried to the innkeeper, turning to give a look at the wounded.

The pope met him. "Captain," he said modestly, "it might be well to send a messenger to Zablotow, the doctor is badly needed."

"Got our own surgeon," was the gruff reply; and, having given orders for the military Esculapius to attend, the officer stood over the wounded soldier.

"Nice sort of 'curiosity' this on the part of your peaceful sheep," he said, presently. But Father Leo forbore answering, busying himself about the sufferers.

The surgeon entered, examined the wounds, and prepared to dress them. "The peasant will get over it," he said; "but this man of ours will hardly do so, a bullet having pierced his lung."

"Then the churls shall pay for it, by Jove!" returned the officer with rising passion; "and so shall you, sir pope--you have deceived me!"

Leo looked him in the face quietly. "I shall be ready to answer for anything to-morrow," he said; "I will now go along the village street--there may be other sufferers."

The captain somehow felt disarmed. "You are bleeding yourself, your reverence," he said more gently, almost abashed.

But Father Leo turned away in silence, leaving the inn with Maxym Bobra and one or two other men.

The village, which but lately had been the scene of so wild an uproar, lay still as death; a number of soldiers had settled round a watch fire outside the inn, a similar guard being stationed in front of the manor house. The lurid flames rising from these two spots were the only lights visible. The sentries patrolling the village with cocked pistols found no cause of alarm. Neither did good Father Leo, for no one seemed to require his aid except a woman lying terror-stricken at her own cottage door.

He went home, poor Fruzia receiving him with a cry of horror at the sight of his pale, blood-stained countenance. But she, whom lesser troubles would readily overpower, now recovered herself, courageously. "I will not murmur," the faithful wife was saying, with trembling lips, hastening to dress his wound, "you have but done your duty." Nor did she raise the slightest objection on his declaring he would sit up through the night. "I must indeed," he added, "I sadly fear we shall hear of farther trouble; some wounded or dying man may send for me."

And so it proved. In the small hours of the morning a messenger arrived begging him to take the sacrament to the smithy, since Marko had not many minutes to live. He made all possible speed, but death was before him; the towering giant who but a few hours before had spoken so manfully, would never lift his chirping voice again. He had been foremost among those who

opposed the soldiers, a sabre-cut had disabled him, and as he endeavoured to drag himself home after the fray a bullet caught him in the back, inflicting his death-wound. He reached the smithy, but only to die. Father Leo offered what consolation he could to the bereaved widow, who in tearless grief held fast the dead man's hand. "Peace!" she replied, gloomily: "there is but one comfort left; I shall know how to use his gun, and the hour of reckoning will come."

Such, indeed, was the frame of mind of most of the people when the good pope in the early morning went his round of the cottages. Few of the villagers had been wounded or hurt, but one and all were burning with resentment. And the strange quiet, blending with their wrath, appeared to him more alarming than the turbulent anger he was accustomed to. "We have suffered wrong," they said, "and we shall pay it back. We cannot do so without a leader, but we may trust Taras. If we waited for him in vain last night, it was no doubt because the mandatar evidently is not at the house--he would have shown his cowardly face under the protection of the military if he were hiding in the place! But no matter, Taras will now be coming for our sakes."

On the afternoon of Easter Monday a body of infantry relieved the hussars, the officer in command proving himself both judicious and kind. On learning from the pope how matters stood, he readily promised to spare the villagers as much as possible; and since the manor house, the protection of which was the main object, offered plenty of room, he would have the men quartered there--all but a few, at least, he added, whom, according to special instructions, he would have to billet on Taras's farm. "I am sorry," he said, "to make acquaintance of this man's family in so unpleasant a way, for it went to one's heart to hear him speak of them."

"Do you know Taras?" inquired Father Leo, wonderingly.

"Yes. I am Captain Stanczuk, and acted as interpreter when he was admitted to the Emperor's presence at Vienna."

The peasants looked on with a savage gloom as the "Whitecoats" made themselves at home in the village, their anger blazing forth when they learned that the officer actually was the son of a Podolian pope. Anusia received her uninvited guests after a similar fashion, treating the officer, first to a withering look, and then to her utmost contempt. The captain had come in person, hoping to smooth matters, but the woman seemed beyond conciliation.

Yet she trembled visibly when Father Leo whispered to her that her visitor was the same captain who had assisted Taras at Vienna, and a deep flush overspread her face.

"What is it?" inquired the pope, surprised. "He is not likely to harm you, seeing he was kind to Taras."

"Yes, yes," she groaned; "I am all the more sorry for him." But her lips closed, and the old stony expression settled on her face.

That same evening the two who on the previous day had opposed each other so strenuously concerning the attitude to be adopted by the village--Wassilj, the butcher, and Hritzko Pomenko--went from farm to farm, from cottage to cottage, evidently of one mind. "On account of the Whitecoats there can be no general meeting," they said; "but we ask you individually, Are you satisfied that tomorrow morning we should start for the mountains, to call hither Taras in the name of the community, for the avenging of this wrong? And do you pledge yourselves to help him?" Every one of the peasants assented, most of them readily, and some for very fear of the prevailing opinion. The horizon hung heavy with bursting clouds.

But the pope only heard of it when the two had started on the Tuesday, and the good man found himself in a painful plight. Should he inform the captain, causing more stringent measures to be adopted against the village, besides being the means of bringing two honest men to grievous punishment? Should he keep silence and let the mischief be done? He came to see that, of the two evils, this latter certainly was the worst, and therefore imparted to the officer what was brewing, but without mentioning names.

The captain smiled. "I know all about it," he said, "and more than you tell me. That corporal, Constantino Turenko, has been before you, embellishing his report, no doubt, with even more than the truth. But let me assure your reverence that my measures have been taken with the utmost circumspection; I hardly needed such information to be prepared for any exigency. I shall not have recourse to harsh treatment; and though that corporal has taken it upon himself so to advise me, I shall not prohibit the public funeral of the smith to-day."

But this mournful occasion brought no cause of disturbance. Nearly all the village attended, and Father Leo would fain have poured out his heart had the widow not begged him to forego the usual discourse. "My husband shall indeed have a funeral sermon by and by," she said, "not in words, but in gun-shots."

On the evening of this day, also, two men went the round of the village, Alexa Sembrow and Wilko Sembratowicz. "It has been announced," they said, "that to-morrow we have to expect a man of the law to take our deposition with regard to Taras's speech. Now Taras himself has desired us to make it known, but we consider the transactions of the general assembly are no lawyer's business, and we propose to refuse information. Do you agree?" which they all did, none having the slightest compunction on this point.

Whilst the inhabitants of Zulawce were thus preparing to circumvent the law after their own fashion, Mr. Ladislas Kapronski, the district commissioner, with his office-clerk behind him, was being driven towards the contumacious parish. He was seated in an open car, an armed constable on either side of him, but nowise at his ease; indeed, so harassed was his appearance, that the simple country folk by the roadside, unable to guess at his position by his looks, kept wondering what so respectable an individual could have done to be taken to prison for! A coward every inch of him, he certainly did not show to advantage with an escort of constables about him.

Nor did the rising sun of another day enhance his spirits; for was he not approaching that desperate village? his craven imagination conjuring up the most lively scenes of the regiment being murdered to a man by that awful Taras. He quite gasped with relief on beholding some of the soldiers patrolling by the Pruth, and their leader, a sergeant, assured him, somewhat surprised, that the regiment, so far, was alive and the people tolerably quiet.

This account seemed cheering, and he fell to determining his mode of action. He would try, in the first place, to bully Anusia; for if the mandatar's advice in this respect was illegal, it was nevertheless useful, and this was not a case to stickle for technical correctness, when positively one's life was in danger, the amiable man said to himself. He instructed his driver, therefore, to put him down near Taras's farm; and, to the astonishment of the constables, he went on his errand alone. The beating of his heart was known to himself only. "No doubt she is a termagant of a woman," he murmured, but face her he must.

He was fortunate in finding her alone in the common sitting-room. She gave a searching look at the man, who entered her presence with an uncertain step.

"I am the district commissioner," Kapronski stammered.

"I am aware of the fact," said Anusia. "What may be your pleasure?"

Her manner was not exactly calculated to rouse any latent courage; nevertheless he gathered himself up with an effort, saying hastily: "I am the bearer of a message from the Board of magistrates. Your husband is a miscreant. Unfortunately we cannot just lay our hands on him; but you and your children and this farm are within our reach. If Taras dares hurt a hair of my head--of my head, do you hear?--or anybody else's, your property will be confiscated, and you shall answer for him to the law. We know you have communication with him; so just send him word!"

The woman had listened quietly--almost with indifference. "Yes, yes," she muttered, when he had finished, "I understand you! All right," she added aloud, "your message shall be delivered."

"Soon?"

"At once."

With this comfortable assurance Kapronski made all possible speed to regain his car. "So far, so good," he said, rejoicing, "a reasonable woman after all! I wonder if I had better have the place watched to find out how Taras is being communicated with; it might be an easy mode of discovering his whereabouts, and a feather in my cap with the Board. But perhaps I had better not disturb the woman in sending so sensible a message!" And therewith he ordered his driver to take him to the judge's next.

But Jewgeni, unequal to the mental conflict of deciding whether his valiant brother or the will of the parish should prevail, had settled the question by beating his retreat to the public house at Zablotow. Constantine, however, was at home, and readily dictated to the commissioner's clerk a towering heap of invectives against all authority, whether in heaven or on earth, declaring such to be a faithful report of Taras's speech. But he was the only witness forthcoming; what further deposition Kapronski could procure was more amusing than valuable. Red Schymko, for instance, invited him politely to be seated, and then harangued him for an hour concerning Taras's personal appearance; but when desired to give his version of the speech in question, he protested with voluble regrets that his memory had failed him from the day he was born, and never a word could he remember. Most of the peasants, however, spurned the idea of thus humbugging the commissioner, flatly declaring they were no tell-tales.

The day passed, and although Kapronski had obtained nothing beyond the corporal's deposition, he decided, with the approach of evening, that he had better return now to those who had sent him. There was no time to be lost, if he meant to pass the most dangerous part of the way before nightfall.

The road from Zulawce to Zablotow runs at first along the Pruth, in a northerly direction, making a sudden bend eastward and traversing the plain. The commissioner's car had reached this bend, and daylight was fast vanishing, when one of the constables suddenly rose from his seat, giving a searching look across the river.

"What is it?" cried Kapronski, clutching the man's arm; he was short-sighted, and could not see for himself.

"Some dozen horsemen," replied the constable, "Huzuls by the look of them--just bursting from yonder cover and making for the ford."

The commissioner could now distinguish the dark figures approaching. "Let us return," he gasped.

"Impossible," declared the constables. "They will have crossed the river before we could out-flank them." Then to the driver: "Make what speed you can to Zablotow."

And the car shot on quick as lightning, passing the fields of Debeslawce. But the sound of hoofs was carried after them; the horsemen had crossed the ford and were coming on in a quick gallop. The distance between them was fast lessening, and voices could be distinguished. The commissioner had closed his eyes, well-nigh swooning.

"Stop!" cried the men in pursuit. "Stop, or we shall fire!"

"Drive on!" urged the constables. But the car stopped, the coachman dropping the reins. "I have not undertaken to be killed like a dog," he muttered. "Besides, there is no escaping this Taras!"

Another moment and the horsemen were on the spot, surrounding the commissioner's party with pointed pistols. A dark-complexioned fellow, lithe and graceful, with the look of an eagle, appeared to be the leader. "Hand over your muskets," he ordered the constables, and they obeyed.

"You may take yourselves off, then; it is not you we want, only this gentleman of the quill. Be so good as to descend, Mr. Commissioner."

"For pity's sake," whined Kapronski.

"We are not going to kill you," said the eagle-eyed leader, with a look of disdain. "Our orders are to take you to our captain, Taras, who wishes to speak to you. He would have come himself had it been worth his while. Have the goodness, then, to descend."

Seeing a pistol pointed at him, the commissioner could not but rise, yet his feet would not carry him, and he had to be lifted to the ground.

"Are you able to ride?" inquired the leader of the troop, beckoning at the same time to one of his men, who was holding a small, shaggy horse by the bridle. "Taras is sure to regret that he cannot place a carriage at your disposal, but this animal won't throw you."

The commissioner groaned.

"Lift him into the saddle," commanded the leader, "and strap him fast. Two of you take him between you."

It was done. The eagle-eyed chief nodded approvingly, and, turning to the constables and the clerk, he wished them good evening and a happy journey.

They drove on gladly enough, and, looking back presently, could see the mounted Huzuls disappearing in the shadows, the wretched commissioner in their midst.

CHAPTER XIV.

GATHERING STRENGTH.

The steep, narrow path which from Zulawce winds westward into the uplands, is not without danger to the pedestrian, but safe enough to the small, sure-footed mountain pony of the Huzuls. Here and there it takes you into one of those cool, dusky clefts which separate the terraced heights, leading for the most part straight across the mountains, so that each sudden rise is succeeded by an equally precipitous descent, and the traveller would hardly imagine he were nearing the very top of the chain, if every successive ridge he gained did not show him a wider and more glorious expanse of the plain left behind. For the view is open from every summit where the growing copse wood is swept away or kept low by the terrific eastern gales which burst upon these elevated regions from the broad level between the Dniester and the Don; tall bracken and giant trees closing in the path elsewhere, one particular spot excepted, where it winds between bare rocks of a brownish yellow and strangely shaped.

This is the Red Hollow, some half-day's journey from Zulawce. Traversing it, you would most likely follow the main path, westward still, to the Black Water and into the Marmaros beyond; indeed, few travellers, on reaching the centre of this rocky glen, where beneath a stunted fir a small red cross is to be seen, would strike off at right angles on what could scarcely be called a

path. It is the poorest of tracks, now ascending boldly, now descending abruptly amid boulders and crumbling stones; and the traveller who loves his life, having ventured so far, would do well to surrender himself to the safer instincts of his pony. It is a desperate attempt at best; but whoever has dared it will remember it with rapture. For having traversed a wilderness of nature's *débris*, you pass a rocky entrance overlooking a valley, the very home of beauty bright and still, wondrously fair, and its like hardly to be found even amid the glories of the Carpathians.

Lovely beech woods enclose a small lake of clearest blue; the sheltered slopes around are covered with wild flowers, in a profusion which is rare even in the lower valleys; and between bright leaves, in due season, the luscious, deep-coloured strawberries abound. Eastward the lake has an outlet, a tumbling brook making its way through a narrow cleft towards the Pruth, while all around from the slopes silvery rills come down, just ruffling the blue mirror which receives them. Above and beyond, this gem of mountain scenery is overhung with rugged peaks and solemn fir woods, looking down in proud protection upon this most favoured spot. The people round about have learned to call it again by its ancient name, "The Crystal Springs;" but in the days we write of it came to be known as "The Waters of Taras."

Here was his camp--hither he brought his men on that Palm Sunday of 1839.

The place was well chosen, secluded enough for safety, except in case of treason; a natural fastness, too, which could be held against almost any attack, and yet not far from the lowlands, for in following that outlet of the lake the sedgy banks of the Pruth might be reached in three hours. Moreover, the Red Hollow and its neighbourhood is the best-stocked hunting ground in these game-haunts; a fact not to be overlooked by a captain of outlaws, determined to make honest provision for his men.

For the matter of that, however, it seemed at first as though Taras, apart from this, need never be at a loss how to feed his men. The news of his arrival by the Crystal Springs had scarcely had time to spread before the dwellers in the glens round about arrived with a friendly greeting of bread, sheep's flesh, butter, and milk for the new neighbour. Taras knew what such hospitality cost these people, and he had money enough and to spare; but he could not refuse their gifts, well aware that they would look upon it as an insult to be resented. Nor was he pleased that their young men should offer to join him, bold and fearless as they were, huntsmen and shepherds of the mountain wilds, accustomed to any hardship, and seasoned to any storm. Their sympathy with the avenger was more the love of fighting than anything else; but they were honest, and Taras knew they would not forsake him in any plight, still less play him false in trouble. Nevertheless, to most of them he turned a deaf ear. He knew that these half-savage hordes were strangers to common obedience; he could never have trained them to the discipline he intended to uphold, and though he might perchance have taught them to respect property, he knew there was no trusting them with defenceless women anywhere.

Three of them, however, he admitted, because he believed himself certain of their inmost souls. These were a couple of huntsmen who had acted as his guides on his former visits, and the "Royal Eagle," Julko Rosenko, youngest son of Hilarion the Just, who dwelt by the Black Water. His handsome presence, rare strength and activity, together with a courage so dauntless and daring that it was conspicuous even among that reckless tribe, had gained him the proud name he bore. And of the Huzuls who offered themselves to Taras he was the only one actuated not solely by a spirit of defiant adventurousness, but by a deep longing to take vengeance for violence he had suffered. When a mere youth, he had, by order of a military captain, been dragged from a fair to the barracks at Wiznitz, and declared fit for service, against all show of right. His fine figure had thus brought him to grief. In vain he remonstrated, assuring his captors he was not even near the legal age for conscription; their answer was: "We have no wings, young eagle, to fetch you from your eyry when you may have reached the age. You had better submit; be reasonable, and you will enjoy the life." But the young man refused to be "reasonable;" no punishment, no bullying, could force him to take the military oath. For eight months he held out, when the visit of a higher officer brought sharp censure to the captain and liberation to the youth. He returned to the mountains thirsting for revenge; but Julko loved his father, Hilarion the Just, too dearly to grieve him by joining those who were looked upon as the refuse of the plains; he did not become a hajdamak, the repressed fury eating the deeper into his passionate heart. Now, at last, the longed-for hour of retribution seemed to have come: to join the avenger was no shame, but a glory.

At first then Taras's band consisted of seven in all--the three Huzuls, his own two men, and the youths, Lazarko and Wassilj, the latter of whom was almost always absent reconnoitring. Old Jemilian would shake his faithful head sadly, because the expected reinforcements were slow in appearing; and when Wassilj, after his first day's scouting, made a glowing description of the enthusiasm he had met with, the old man laughed grimly, saying: "I doubt not but they will find us worthy of song, even when we have come to the gallows." Taras was unmoved; his heart having gone through the heaving waters, seemed to have gained the shore of a mysterious calm. He was silent, solemn, and though a rare smile might come to his lips, it never reached his eyes; but that expression of brooding thought, of agonised conflict, had left him. When the news was brought that Anusia had gone out of her mind he shook his head. "I do not believe it," he said to Jemilian; "I know what one can bear and not go mad. I know it from my own experience, but now the worst is over. I have lost much, but I have recovered myself." And he would cheer his followers: "Never fear, we shall lack neither work, nor fit hands to do it." Whereupon he ordered the construction of a storehouse, a shelter for horses, and barracks to lodge thirty men.

Nor was his confidence mistaken; not a week passed before helpers poured in, one of the very first being a man whom neither Taras nor any one else in that country would have expected to volunteer for such service.

It was early in the morning, the rocky heights and the firs above them stood forth against a background of brilliant light; but the lake below and the meadows on the gentle slopes had just caught the first rosy glimmer of day. Taras had relieved the "Royal Eagle," who had done sentry duty through the night, and was sitting with his gun between his knees on the solitary rock against which the barracks were to be erected. He sat motionless, his eye commanding the fair valley from the rocky entrance on the one side to the shrubby cleft on the other, through which the lake found its outlet. The dewy stillness of early morning hung on bush and brae. But suddenly he bent forward, listening. There were steps approaching from the Red Hollow, distant yet, but falling heavily on the rocky soil, as of a traveller unused to such rough descent. The dark outline of a human figure grew visible presently amid the yellowish rocks, and Taras scanned the new comer.

"A Jew!" he exclaimed, with great surprise; "and he carries a firelock! what on earth can he want?"

Well might Taras wonder, for a Jew bearing arms had never crossed his vision. Men of that persuasion in the East have a horror of weapons of any kind, and any humble Israelite who may be met with occasionally in the mountain-wilds is but a pedlar, trudging with his bundle of stuffs from homestead to homestead with no ground of safety but the goodness of the God of Abraham or the knowledge of his own abject poverty. But the son of Jacob now coming hither carried his head high, and his back was bowed by no other burden than the musket, the barrel of which caught sparkles from the rising sun. He was young, tall, and broad-shouldered; and if his ample caftan gave sorry proof of the difficult path he had come by, there was no weariness in his movements. With undaunted step he approached the hetman.

"I greet you, Taras," he said. "I recognised you at first sight, although I daresay you have forgotten me; you used to be kind to me when I was a boy."

Taras gave a searching glance at the face before him, sharp-featured, gloomy, and furrowed as with terrible experience. "Nashko!" he cried, "is it you? Little Nashko, the son of the innkeeper at Ridowa?"

He held out both his hands, and the Jew caught them, his face trembling with delight. "I could hardly be sure of such a welcome," he said. "It is I indeed--your old friend Nashko, son of Berish!"

"But how is it?" cried Taras, making him sit beside him. "When I left my own village, twelve years ago, I cut you a reed-pipe to console you, and now---"

"Now," continued the Jew, with a dark smile, "it is a wonder I am not grey-haired, to judge from this face of mine. I am but four-and-twenty, Taras, but an old man through sorrow and despair."

"Things have gone ill with you? You have suffered wrong, and come to me to redress it?"

Nashko shook his head, yet added quickly, with a scrutinising look in Taras's face. "And if it were so, would you help me, though I am a Jew?"

"Can you doubt it?" exclaimed Taras, warmly. "Does the wrong-doer inquire into his victim's faith? How, then, should I? As they inflict wrong where they list, it is for me to right it wherever I find it. And I would help you, even if I hated the Jews. But I do not hate you, because, from a child upward, I have striven to be just. And whenever I heard people speak ill of them, I thought of you, Nashko, and of your father. Old Berish lived among us honestly and like one of ourselves. He drew a modest livelihood from his tavern, and tilled his fields with diligence. The people of Ridowa respected him, therefore, as they would any other good man among them. And were not you as merry-hearted and plucky a boy as any in the village? The only difference was that you wore no cross, but the Jewish fringe.^[6] And I always thought, it is not the difference of race; but the Jews behave to us just as we behave to them. Say on, then; what can I do for you?"

"Thank you, heartily," said the Jew, again seizing his hand. "But I have not come to beg for your help. It is too late for that, both as regards myself and my sister. And if there were a chance of revenge I would do the deed alone! I have come with another prayer, and the words you have just spoken give me courage to ask it. Let me join your band, Taras!"

"You!" cried the outlaw, starting from his seat in sheer amazement. "A Jew fighting for the right in the mountains. This has never been heard of since the beginning of days. To be sure, you have grown up like one of ourselves, as I have just been saying; still it is unheard-of. Poor fellow, what grievous wrong you must have suffered!"

"Grievous, indeed; but after all it is only what has happened to others before and will happen again," replied the Jew, his voice quivering with the deep trouble of his soul. "But while some can rise from their shame and forget it, others are undone for ever.... You will scarcely remember my sister Jutta?"

"O! yes," returned Taras, eagerly, "a dear little golden-haired thing--the prettiest child of the village."

"Well, she grew but the fairer as she grew in years. My father and I guarded her as the apple of our eye; my mother having died early, he and I brought her up, and she was the joy and pride of our life. Several respectable men had asked her in marriage, although we were poor, but my father would not give her to any of them; none seemed good enough for our sweet girl. He regretted it sorely in his dying hour, and could only take comfort in the sacred promise I made him, henceforth to watch over her with double care and let my own happiness in life be subordinate to hers. I kept my promise. Our farm brought in little, and the tavern still less, because the lord of the manor increased the rent from year to year; nevertheless, I remained at Ridowa, because my going forth to look for a living elsewhere would have obliged Jutta to seek service with strangers. For her sake also I remained unmarried, that she might remain mistress of the house and my only care. For both these reasons the Jews of Barnow were dissatisfied with me, for, in the judgment of my people, it is well-nigh a wrong to remain unwedded, and nearly as bad to live apart from one's fellows in the faith without forcible reason. But I had other trouble to think of than the displeasure of the Jews of Barnow! A young nephew of our Count, a certain Baron Kaminski, was visiting at the manor. He saw my sister, and fell in love with her--after the fashion, Taras, in which a young Polish noble will play at love with a poor Jewish maiden! He often came riding by, annoying her with his addresses whenever he knew I was out of the way. She kept it from me as long as she could, knowing my passionate temper, but the poor child at last could not help telling me. She had judged me aright--I was furious; and had I met the youngster in that hour, with these hands of mine I would have strangled him. But, growing calmer, I judged it best to appeal to our Count, begging him to interfere. He promised to speak to his nephew, and we seemed to be left at peace, the young baron never coming near the place, and even condescending to make some sort of apology on meeting me accidentally elsewhere."

"I know their tricks," said Taras, darkly; "it was his cunning to throw you off your guard."

"Yes," cried Nashko, drawing himself up and pacing to and fro wildly; "it was! I had business at the distillery one day, which kept me away over night. On returning, I found that the baron had been with his lackeys and creatures. I barely listened to the poor girl's piteous story, but snatched up my gun and forced my way into the manor-house. The wretch had left the place, thinking himself safer in Poland. My unhappy sister was seized with a burning fever, and, lest she should die without help, there being no doctor near us, I took her to Barnow. The people there had nursed their anger against us, and perhaps not without some reason, as they viewed matters; but pity was strong, and they stood by us in that time of sorrow. My sister was kindly taken care of, and when she had recovered I made over to her all I possessed, and went my way to seek the baron. I knew what awaited me if I did the deed my heart demanded, but go I must. Again I missed him; he had left for Paris. Thither I could not follow. I returned to Barnow, but my sister was gone ..." He covered his face, his bosom heaving.

"Gone after him?" cried Taras, wondering.

"What do you mean!" retorted poor Nashko, with a proud look of disdain. "Was she not an honest Jewish maiden? No; but the Sereth is a deep river and holds fast its prey. I never learned why she did it; whether for maidenly shame only, or because of any evil scorn, repressed while she was ill, but flung at her when she was about again--I cannot tell. But what is now left for me I know; and therefore your call to every wronged one has found an echo in my heart I shook off the lethargy of grief and despair, and I have come to ask you, judge and avenger as you claim to be, will you let me join your band?"

Taras went up to him, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "Nashko," he said, solemnly, "if I still hesitate, it is not because of your being a Jew. A man who has gone through what I have gone through would not deserve a ray of sunlight on his path if he could make any difference between his brethren. And who is my brother but he who has suffered wrong? My doubts, therefore, do not concern your faith, but yourself. Let me ask you, have you really lost all hope that your heart can ever grow still again and capable of being happy?"

"Certainly not," replied the Jew, firmly, and the fire of his eye spoke of terrible possibilities; "such hope, on the contrary, is ever present with me. My heart will grow calm again, and I shall be happy on the day when I shall cleave the head of him who ruined my sister.... Spare yourself any further trouble, Taras; the men of my race are wont to consider before they act. And I have considered. Will you accept me as one of yours?"

"Yes," said Taras, briefly, and called his men, who were not a little taken aback on beholding their new comrade, a scornful remark hovering on the lips of the "Royal Eagle," and shrinking back only at the captain's look of command.

Julko Rosenko, the first volunteer of the mountain wilds, and the Jew, the first one from the lowlands--or as, to this day, they are known in song, the "Royal Eagle" and "Black Nashko"--are the only two of Taras's band who strike the imagination either by their originality or by the motives inspiring their action. All the others, whom a lawless or revengeful disposition brought to his standard, may have been the victims of tyranny, indeed, but they were men of a lower type, and their history is but the outcome of the troublous confusion of oppressors and oppressed struggling for mastery.

Thus there was with him a peasant from the Bukowina, one Thodika Synkow, who to his fortieth year had lived quietly on his bit of land, till the harshness of a tax-gatherer selling the very pillow from under the head of his sick wife drove him to a deed of murder. There was an under-steward from near the frontier, Stas Barilko, who after years of faithful service had been cruelly flogged for having shot a hare without his master's leave. There was a certain Sophron Hlinkowski, the leader of a church choir, who in a dispute between the priest and the parish concerning tithes had sided with the people, and, when the angry pastor, with the approval of his superiors, suspended the church services, had yielded to the entreaty of the peasants, reading prayers when there was a funeral. That was his crime; the priest denounced him, and the unfortunate precentor was sent to prison, finding himself a beggar when his two years had expired. His only child had died, and his wife had gone off with another man. So he joined Taras to "lift his voice now after another fashion, and make the ears tingle of those who used him so cruelly," and Taras admitted him, as, indeed, he admitted any one whom honest resentment brought to his standard, and who, having nothing to lose, was possessed of the three requisites he looked for--obedience, courage, and frugality. For Taras held strictly by the words he had spoken beneath the linden: "Let none come to me who seeks for pleasure in life, and no happy man shall join me." Many offered themselves, setting aside this primary condition, but the hetman subjected every one to the most rigid examination; and any one hoping to find refuge with him from just punishment was rejected as mercilessly as were the mere ruffians looking for booty. Yet, in spite of such strict investigation, Taras's band on Easter morning consisted of thirty well-armed and resolute men.

But he had to give audience to a host of people besides, peaceful men coming to tell him of their troubles, or delegates pleading for a wronged community. Some of their complaints were worthless enough, but the greater number were well founded, strengthening him in his conviction that this "unhappy land in which justice is not to be found" was sorely in need of an "avenger." The wisdom he had gained at the cost of his life's happiness made him sufficiently cautious not to believe blindly any reports that might reach him, and the only promise any of his suppliants got out of him was to the effect that he would make inquiry, and "woe to you if you have lied to me, but woe to your oppressors if you speak the truth!" And if they grew urgent, protesting their honesty, and entreating for speedy redress, he would answer: "You may look for me soon, but the hour shall not be fixed; for how can I be sure there are no tell-tales among you, enabling the Whitecoats to meet me? And, moreover, I have undertaken, first of all, to settle accounts with the mandatar of Zulawce. Not that I long for his punishment before that of any other evil-doer in the land, but a man must be true to his word."

But, to judge from the intelligence brought to him by Wassilj, who on the Saturday had returned from a reconnoitring expedition to Colomea, it promised to be a desperate venture to get hold of the mandatar, and Taras shrank from the risk of leading his faithful men to the well-garrisoned district town merely to carry out to the letter an assurance given. If, however, his spirits failed him for a moment, his energy and confidence soon rose uppermost. Wassilj was ordered back to Colomea to procure farther information, whilst Sefko and the Royal Eagle were despatched to inquire into the complaints made by two parishes on the plain, and Jemilian was sent off to announce to Anusia, and through her to the village, the impending arrival of the Whitecoats.

"Master," said the faithful old servant, hesitatingly, "have you forgotten that the mistress----"

"Is gone out of her mind?" interrupted Taras. "She never did, and by this time is as collected as you or I, Jemilian. She was stunned for a moment, but she knows what is laid upon her, and will never flinch."

"Have you had farther news?" inquired the man, wondering.

"No, but I know my wife. My own heart tells me."

And Taras continued making his preparations. "I have promised to be ready by Easter Day; that much, at least, I will keep." He assigned to each man his place in the barracks, which, a light wooden structure, had been run up already; he gave orders concerning the daily rations and appointed the regulation of sentries. He also divided his band into two distinct companies, setting a sub-captain over each. The Royal Eagle should command the one, Black Nashko the other.

In naming the latter, Taras, with an imperious look, scanned the faces of his followers as they were drawn up before him. A flush of anger was plainly evident, and one of them, Stas Barilko, was about to speak. But that look of the hetman's silenced him, Taras repeating, "Our brother Nashko shall command these." Not a sound of dissent--and the sign for dispersing was given.

The Jew then came forward. "Taras," he exclaimed, "why did you not take me into your counsel? I fear this will be neither to your advantage, nor to mine. As for me it matters little, but you and your cause must not suffer. You should not have braved needlessly the prejudice in which they have grown up, and which is next to religion with them."

"Needlessly?" exclaimed Taras. "I have appointed you, because after due consideration I take you to be the most earnest and best qualified of my followers. These others--well they will soon see for themselves that you are worthy of my confidence; till then they will just obey."

"Yes, resentfully and under protest," urged the Jew, "and you should avoid that, unless the most sacred principle were at stake. Remember that your influence rests upon their free will alone."

"No!" cried Taras. "They could come to me or stay away of their own free will. But having come, they are what I am, instruments towards the gaining of a common and most holy end."

... The following morning--it was Easter Sunday--rose with all the wondrous fragrance of spring. Taras had caused a plain wooden cross to be erected, and the wild outlaws, bareheaded, gathered beneath the sacred sign. Nashko only held aloof.

And, taking his place beside the cross, Taras spoke to his men. "My brothers," he said, "we have neither priest nor altar to help us to keep this day. But God is to be found wherever the heart of man will turn to Him, and He will listen to the humble prayer we would offer up--a homeless flock, having left all that men count dear for the sake of His own holy justice."

He crossed himself and repeated the Lord's Prayer slowly and solemnly, the men saying it after him; and after that Sophron, of the church choir, stood up beside him, once more to do his duty in leading the ancient Easter Hymn; and all their voices joined in the fine old chorale:--

"Christ, the Lord, is risen to-day!"

Thus the homeless ones kept Easter in the mountains.

They were yet singing when Jemilian returned; and, service over, he informed his master he had found Anusia exactly as Taras had predicted. "She has even made ready for the soldiers," the man said. "The rest of the people seem utterly confident, firmly believing that this night you will storm the manor-house; and they are all preparing to witness it, for Anusia refused to give them your message."

"What!" cried Taras, staggering.

"Refused point-blank," repeated Jemilian. "This is her answer--I took care to remember it: 'Tell him,' she said, 'I shall be grateful for any news of my lord and master, but I entreat him to send me word about himself only, not concerning his plans or the movements of those against him; for I will not speak an untruth when the men of the law ask me, and I will keep a clean heart. That is my prayer, let him grant it or not, as he pleases; but one thing I will never do, however urgently he may demand it--I refuse to be the go-between, carrying his messages to the village. I shall not do so in the present instance, although his news is for the good of the people entirely, and I will not do it in any case whatever. I will not share his guilt, nor his punishment in the end--tell him so, he will understand. He has made our children fatherless, he shall not make them motherless as well.' This is her message!"

Taras grew white as death; but before he could answer another messenger arrived, a lad whom the Royal Eagle had despatched from Zablotow, his news being that the hussars were due at Zulawce by nightfall, to anticipate Taras's expected attempt on the manor.

The hetman looked anxious, Jemilian lending words to his fear. "There will be trouble," he said "if the soldiers come upon the excited villagers in the night."

"There will!" cried Taras, "they must be warned at any risk. You must go back directly, as fast as your horse will carry you. And if my wife still refuses, you must get Father Leo to tell them."

Jemilian promised his best, but Taras continued anxious, growing even more so with the setting sun, "All the misery of my life, so far, has struck me unawares," he said to his friend Nashko, "and I doubt whether a presaging voice is given to the heart of man; yet there is something within me making me sore afraid for my wife and children this night."

On waking in the morning from restless slumbers, he found Jemilian by his side. The old man looked wan, and his brow was clouded.

"They have been killed?" cried Taras, starting up.

"Not the mistress or the children," said Jemilian; "but blood has flowed." He was already on his way back when the tumult arose, and, returning cautiously, he learned what had happened, and that the smith had received his death-wound.

"Do not take it to heart so much, dear master," said the man, interrupting his report, for Taras was groaning pitifully. "The blood which has been shed lies neither at your door nor at your wife's. She did manage to have the people warned through Father Leo."

"At *my* door!" cried Taras, wildly. But, checking himself, he requested to be left alone. It was some time before he showed himself to his men, and then, with a silent nod only to their greeting, he departed into the lonely wood.

The rough men were at a loss to understand him. "Why, this is excellent news," they said. "Such butchery would rouse the most law-abiding people in the land!" The Jew alone guessed what moved the captain's heart, and took courage to go after him. He found him lying beneath a

fir-tree, with a gloomy face and evidently suffering.

"Taras!" he said, taking his hand, "I understand your grief; but the comfort remains that you did your best to avert this trouble."

But the captain shook his head. "A man must reap what he sows," he said.

"Do you repent of the step you have taken?"

"No!" he cried, vehemently. "Oh! how little you understand me! If I had not done so already, I would this day declare war against those that are in power. I have but done what I *must* do. But *what* that means--all the fearful scope of my undertaking--has only now grown plain to me.... And more," he added, hoarsely ... "there is another thing! I used to think at times that possibly I might come to an evil end through this work of mine. Now I know it; I see now that my end can not, must not, be a good one...."

"What has come to you, Taras?" cried the Jew, alarmed.

"I cannot explain it," said the captain, with a wistful look; "it is a voice within me, not of the mind, but of the heart. I know it now!"

The following morning the deputies of the village, Wassilj, the butcher, and Hritzko Pomenko, appeared before Taras, delivering their message.

"We are convinced that you will stand by us," they said, "and only wish to know what time you fix for the revenge."

He had listened quietly, but then made answer with a terrible sternness: "Hearken!" he said, "if you had asked me to help you in attacking the hussars, I would have refused, both for your sakes, since it would harm you in the end, and for the sake of justice itself; for these soldiers have only obeyed those they are bound to obey. I would have reasoned with you, advising you to keep quiet, and if nevertheless you had suffered wrong I would have made those responsible who ordered it. But now you actually ask me to lift the arm of murder against the Whitecoats, who have done you no injury. I have but one answer, therefore--'Get ye gone from the camp of the avenger!' How could I have anything to do with men capable of the thought even of assassination?"

"Taras!" exclaimed Wassilj, staggering as though he had received a blow; but young Hritzko stood rooted to the ground, his eyes wide open with amazement. Taras's men, on the contrary, looked sullenly before them in plain disapproval.

"Yes," continued Taras; "let me repeat it. What you are thinking of is not an act of sacred vengeance, but of revengeful murder. If I were not sure you would never dare an attack without me, God knows I would send word of your intention to the officer on the spot."

"Taras," now cried Hritzko, in his turn. "How is it? Have we not heard your solemn declaration of war against the Emperor, and now you will not rid us of his soldiers, the instruments of tyranny?"

"No," replied Taras, firmly, "I will not, because I am not an assassin, but a champion of justice."

"A champion afraid of shedding blood?" interposed the butcher, scornfully.

"A champion who will not shed innocent blood, unless it be the only way of making justice victorious," returned Taras, solemnly. "If the mandatar were at Zablotow under the protection of these soldiers, and I had a force sufficient to risk an attack, I would do so this very night. For he has sinned against the law of God, and must be brought to judgment; and since Right is the most sacred thing upon earth, it is better to shed blood than let this holy thing be dragged low. But except for such reason, I will never consent to endanger an innocent life, lest the deed rise against me and mine in the day of judgment."

"But, Taras," pleaded Hritzko, "this is all very well as regards ourselves or the soldiers, but what of yourself? Do you think they would have the slightest compunction in slaying you, wherever they find you?"

"We will take care of ourselves," said Taras, quietly.

"I trust you may," rejoined the butcher. "Come, Hritzko, let us be gone."

But the young man went up closer to Taras. "What answer would you have us take back to our people?" said he, clasping Taras's hand. "They are in the worst of moods, bitterly resenting the military interference, but they have full confidence in your coming. All their fury will be turned against you if we tell them how you judge of their purpose. Have you no other message, Taras, which we might take back to them?"

"No," replied the captain, sternly. "Thank you for your good intentions; but I have put off the fear of man, since I serve God. Tell them the plain truth."

This happened about noon on the Tuesday. Towards evening Taras assembled his men, some forty in number by this time, to hold his first council of war, laying before them the two most important points of his latest information. Wassilj Soklewicz had come back with the news of the mandatar's matrimonial intentions, and that he was in the habit of spending his evenings at the Armenian's villa. The Royal Eagle also had returned from Kossowince, reporting that the complaints of that parish against their avaricious and hard-hearted priest were but too well founded; he had suspended all church functions, and was distraining for tithes pitilessly.

"The measure of iniquity, both of the mandatar and of the priest, is full to overflowing," Taras said. "Let us, then, hesitate no longer to do the work, ridding the fair earth of these scoundrels. There is danger in both undertakings, for soldiers are quartered at the manse of Kossowince, and the villa which harbours the mandatar of an evening is near the well-garrisoned district town. But we will rest our courage in the Almighty, and do the deed. To-morrow, Wednesday, afternoon we start, reaching Kossowince by night, to bring the evil-doer there to his doom, and before the midnight of Thursday we must be ready for passing judgment on the mandatar. Will you follow me?"

"Urrahah!" was the wild answer of delight, and as the men gathered round their watch-fires the excitement of action was among them. Nashko only had retired by himself, musing sadly.

"Poor Taras!" he said, sighing. "These fellows understand his meaning no better than any brute cattle could follow a Sunday's sermon. They think him a misguided fool for trusting me, and they resented his refusal to the people of Zulawce. But for his resolve to fall to work he might have found himself obliged to begin his judgments upon his own followers in the first place. Their meanness is forced back now within their own hearts, but it will break out again sooner or later. He will hold his own against the men of the law, but who shall keep his soul undefiled from the breath of these lawless ones?"

With the earliest dawn the men began getting themselves ready for the intended raid, polishing their arms and grooming their horses, whilst Taras held farther counsel with Nashko and the Royal Eagle, giving to each his special orders. The morning passed in high excitement.

But suddenly--the sun was just nearing the zenith--the alarm was given from the direction of the Red Hollow, and all eyes turned thither; the figure of a horseman was seen coming at full speed down the steep declivity. "The fellow is mad," was the general outcry, "he will break his neck in a moment."

Taras also was straining his eyes, and grew white with apprehension, having recognised his young servant, Halko. "There is trouble at home!" he cried, rushing to meet the messenger.

But in spite of the headlong career to which the bold rider forced his helpless steed, he reached the rocky entrance of the valley safely, and then, just at the last reckless plunge, the poor animal rolled over, the young man, in a flying leap, coming to the ground. A cry of horror burst from the expectant band, but the horse only lay gasping; the youth jumping up from his fall like a wild-cat, hastened onward with quickening steps, stopping in front of Taras.

"The chestnut is done for," he panted, "but I have kept my promise, to reach you by noon. This is the mistress's message!" And he reported how the commissioner had threatened Anusia. All the band had assembled round him, listening eagerly. "The cowards!" they cried when he had done, "being afraid of us, they are going to wage war upon women!"

Taras alone seemed calm. "It is well," he said to the youth; "did you not say the commissioner intends to return in the evening? We will have a word with him, then. Julko, I will ask you to bring him hither, not harming him, but blindfolding his eyes.... You, Halko, go back to my wife, and tell her to be of good cheer."

The Royal Eagle forthwith led off his men in the direction of the Pruth, Taras quietly setting himself to inspect the preparations of the others, seeing to the needful ammunition, the necessary rations, and holding everything in readiness for the night's expedition. Watching him thus calmly engaged, one would scarcely have guessed that such a message had just reached him, and that he was expecting a meeting that must stir his troubled heart to its depth. At dusk all was in readiness, the men standing by their horses, listening impatiently for any sign of Julko's return. But the last glimmer of daylight faded, the stars shone forth, and night spread her mantle over the mountains; not a sound yet, save the murmuring whispers in the tall firs and, far off, the hooting of an owl.

"The bird of ill omen!" said the men, with bated breath; "who can tell what may have happened to Julko?"

But Taras heeded them not, lost in thought. The bird's dismal cry had wakened another voice within him; or, rather, it appeared like an echo of his own inner consciousness, which, rising from the depths of his being, quivered through him in awful agony. And then it seemed as though the bird kept crying: "You are about to shed the blood of man--you! you!"

Jemilian went up to him. "They keep us waiting here rather long!" he said anxiously. Taras shivered and stared at him. The man had to repeat his remark.

"Never mind," he now made answer, his voice rising as though to silence that other voice within; and he drew himself up. "Julko may have had to wait before catching him, and the way up the ravine is difficult even in daylight.... But is it that you are afraid of the dark, children that you are! Well, then, light a fire; it will serve at the same time to show off that coward of a commissioner when he does arrive."

The captain's words acted like magic, freeing the souls of these men as from a nightmare; and when, a few minutes later, a great pile of firwood sent up shoots of ruddy flame, spreading light and warmth, their spirits rose mightily. They formed a circle round the welcome fire, and one of their number produced a bagpipe, to the plaintive droning of which they fell to dancing that strangest of reels known throughout the Carpathians, and which, executed by these men and in such circumstances, once more assumed what was, no doubt, its original character--that of a war-dance.

Taras did not interfere, but looked for Nashko, who once more kept aloof with his own saddened thoughts.

"What is the time?" he inquired.

The Jew was the only one of all these men who possessed a watch, and only Taras and Sophron, besides himself, understood the art of telling the hour by such means.

"Eleven. Are you beginning to be anxious?"

"No! What should have happened? But hark! listen!"

"I hear nothing."

"But I do.... Hark!" and Taras turned to the merrymakers with an imperious "Silence!" They stood still like statues, and the bagpipe ceased wailing.

They could all hear it now--a peculiar, whirring sound, not unlike that of an arrow cutting the air. It came from afar, through the stillness of the night. "It is Julko signalling," the men cried, delightedly; and Taras, taking his own whistle, signalled back. A moment's silence, and again the sound reached them--longdrawn, and thrice repeated.

"You understand its meaning," said Taras to his men. "They have missed the track in the dark. Away with you, Stas and Jemilian; take torches and go to meet them, and keep signalling as you go." The two obeyed, while the rest of the men, at his word, took their places by their horses.

But the minutes passed, and nothing was heard save the signalling and counter-signalling in the wood, till at last the sounds seemed blending, and presently the sign was given that the seekers and the sought had met. Ere long their voices could be distinguished, together with the tramping of their steeds.

First of all the Royal Eagle burst upon the waiting band. "We were sadly detained," he reported to the captain; "two full hours we had to lie in ambush by the Pruth, and when the night overtook us we missed our way. But we have caught him all right."

"Not injuring him, I hope!"

"No--that is to say, he suffered no harm at our hands, but fear may have killed him, for all I know."

And, indeed, there was no saying whether it was a living man or a dead body that was being brought before the captain. Julko, not satisfied with lashing the commissioner to the saddle, had ordered a man to mount behind him that he might be supported and saved from striking his head against the low-hanging branches, blindfolded as he was. A cloak also had been thrown round his shivering shoulders. Thus the poor wretch clung helplessly to the neck of the horse that carried him, the men shouting with laughter on beholding his abject figure; but a look of Taras's silenced them.

"Has he fainted?" inquired he of the man whose brawny arm enfolded the commissioner.

"No, captain," was the answer, "it is just his pretence; only a few minutes ago he implored me to let him make his escape, promising me a hundred florins if he got away safely. I felt sorely tempted to pitch into him, but I remembered your injunctions." And the man looked so disappointed, that even Taras could not but smile. "Untie him," he said.

It was done. When the bandage was taken from his eyes Kapronski staggered and fell, his head striking the ground. That was no play-acting, for the scene thus suddenly presented to his vision might well have confounded a more courageous and less guilty man: first and foremost the towering figure of Taras, and behind him the band of outlaws armed to the teeth and leaning against their horses, all of them lit up by the lurid glare of their watchfire.

"Put him on his feet," exclaimed the captain, impatiently, two men endeavouring to do so, but they only got him to his knees. "For pity's sake," he whimpered, lifting his folded hands to Taras.

The latter came a step nearer. "Ah!" he cried scornfully, "is it you, friend Ladislas Kapronski? Get up, man; you need not shake like that."

The commissioner now managed to stand on his legs, but his head hung on his bosom, and his clasped hands continued in entreaty.

"I am not going to say a word concerning the matter at issue," began Taras, "you men of the law will just go on murdering justice--well, continue in your ways, but...."

At the mention of justice, Kapronski gasped, apparently recovering himself. "Yes," he said, with an obsequious bow, "I always told them at the Board it was no use arraigning *you*, who are as daring as you are just; and you have got the people to back you, honoured--much honoured, Mr. Taras."

"Be silent," cried the latter, "I am ashamed of you, for after all you are a man!... It is not on account of these matters, or concerning myself, that I wanted to see you, but because of your having threatened my wife."

"For pity's sake! I did but as I was told!"

"Indeed," said Taras, with so searching a look that the commissioner, unable to meet it, shook afresh. "Indeed! Then why are you trembling like that? Was it not rather an invention of your own cowardly brain?"

"No!" exclaimed Kapronski, "I swear by all the saints----"

"I will take your word for what it may be worth. I might well doubt you; you are fully capable of a lie--but the thing in itself is preposterous. That you, who call yourselves guardians of the law, should think even of such a glaring wrong! And how cowardly--how cowardly it is! You, with all the military at your command, are you not able to protect yourselves against me save by attacking my wife and children?"

"Oh, indeed," pleaded Kapronski, "did I not do my best to warn them? But my advice was not taken. I assure you----"

"No need of farther words; but listen to what I have to say, and take back my message to the Board.... No amount of threatening will prevent my carrying out the sacred duty I have undertaken. And if my wife and my poor children were indeed at your mercy, and I knew they would meet death at your hands for any act of mine, laid upon me by that duty, I would carry out such act unflinchingly. Do you take that in?"

"Ah!--yes--oh!"

"Well, then, listen again. I cannot hinder you from taking my wife and my children to prison, or even from taking their lives. But I tell you this: on the day you make good those threats, it will become my first and highest and most sacred duty to rid the land of the worst of evil-doers--of you, the so-called guardians of the law. Woe to any of you, then, who may fall into my hands! I shall have you hanged, every one, on these trees of ours...."

"Oh, no, not me--for pity's sake! I was always trying----"

"Well, hanging might be too good for you," said Taras, sternly. "I knew you were an abject coward, but this is worse even than the name you bear.... I regret to send you with an honest man's message. For there is yet another matter to speak about--and you shall tell them I have sworn to you a sacred oath that there is no deceit nor cunning in my request, but pity for the people alone. I earnestly pray the authorities to withdraw the soldiers from Zulawce. The hussars have done mischief enough already, and the infantry may do worse if they stay. There is no need of military occupation, for I give you my word that I shall not enter the village, not even if I knew the mandatar to be at the manor. I should bide my time to get hold of him elsewhere. Let me repeat it. I shall never set foot within the parish of Zulawce if my request be granted; and since the man lives not who could say that Taras ever broke his word, perhaps even you will believe me."

"Oh!--certainly--yes. I myself----"

"Stop your talking! This, then, is the message you shall bear; but I have a word for yourself also. See that you keep from lying in delivering my message, for the truth sooner or later will come to be known; and if ever I find that you altered one single word of what I have told you, I shall----"

"For pity's sake! I'll never alter a single letter!"

"Well, we shall see. I said I would not harm you in limb or life; but since you have shown yourself such a mean, craven coward, it is meet you should suffer punishment--that punishment which within these mountains is reserved for such meanness;" and, turning to his men, "Cut off his hair!" he said.

"Ah--pity!" groaned Kapronski, but it availed him not. He found himself held fast with a

merciless grip, while Sophron made short work of the commissioner's well-oiled locks, leaving his head like a field of stubble in the dreary autumn.

"Now tie him to his horse again," said Taras, "blindfolding him as before."

It was done.

"Light the torches! Mount, and let us be off! By the Pruth we will leave him to his own devices."

The signals sounded, the procession formed, vanishing in the deeper shadows of the cleft which leads to the river in the direction of Kossowince....

CHAPTER XV.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE.

Starting from the little wooden bridge which spans the Pruth near Zulawce, and following the river, about an hour's ride will bring you to the village of Kossowince. It is a well-favoured spot, the fertile wheat-fields of the plain spreading round about; yet the village is near enough to the rich green slopes of the rising uplands to obtain considerable returns from cattle-rearing as well. This flourishing place in our own days is known again as the "rich village," its much-envied inhabitants going by the name of the "wheat lords," but there have been times when the poorest cottager of the heath-country would not have exchanged his miserable cabin for the finest homestead at Kossowince. For rivers of tears and streams of blood have flowed here for religion's sake. In the days when Poland held sway, nearly all the inhabitants of the district had forsaken the Byzantine orthodox creed, turning Catholics, if not of their own free will, yet under the combined influence of Romish Jesuits and tyrannical waywodes; very few of the peasantry had courage enough to withstand such persuasion, but of these few were the people of Kossowince. Trusting in their numbers and wealth, the "wheat lords" clung to their ancient faith, although every decade brought them a bitter experience of persecution. The Austrian supremacy eventually put an end to these troubles, and in the days of the good Emperor Joseph the people of Kossowince might cross themselves from the right to the left, or from the left to the right, as they pleased. But when that monarch had been gathered to his fathers, this important difference once more appeared to trouble the ruling powers, most of all his Grace of Lemberg, and the villagers soon had proof that their heresy was being dealt with. Doubtfully they looked into the threatening future, and their horizon grew darker still when they learned that all of a sudden they had fallen under spiritual sway. The lady of the manor, a widowed countess, had seen fit to bequeath the "rich village" for purposes of Romish endowment, and their new mandatar proved to be a secular priest, a certain Victor von Sanecki, sent thither to collect the revenues. He was received with unbounded hatred; yet within the space of a few months he had known how to gain the confidence, even the goodwill, of the people. For this ghostly steward was thoroughly conversant with agriculture; he proved a good counsellor, and appeared not to take the slightest notice of the heretical tendency of the village. So tolerant was he, that when the elders one day uttered complaints against their pope, Miron Aganowicz, describing him as a worse drunkard than need be, he did his best to find excuses for his reverend brother, the result, of course, being that Miron, who so far had stood in some awe of spiritual censure, drank worse than ever, providing the means by various methods of extortion. But the parish was possessed of some spirit, and the sheep turned against the shepherd; whereupon the pope complained to the civil authorities and was victorious in the contest. The aggrieved peasantry carried their trouble to the ghostly mandatar, but he pointed out to them that the courtesy of his sacred calling did not permit him to interfere, making a similar statement to his brother Miron, who, on the strength of it, oppressed the people more than ever. Matters grew to such a pass that the parish petitioned for another pope, and, being refused, declared themselves willing to be rid of Miron at any price, assuring the authorities that they had come to see how foolishly prejudiced they had been in opposing the ruling faith, and that they were quite ready now to profess themselves Roman Catholics, provided that the reverend Sanecki, that excellent man, might be their priest and mandatar in one. This offer was accepted speedily, and on Easter Sunday, in the year of grace 1837, the Greek church of Kosso wince was solemnly dedicated to the Romish rite, Sanecki entering on his functions as the pastor of this converted people.

The event made a stir far and wide; it was evident that the benign wisdom of an amiable priest, within the space of two short years, had succeeded in overcoming the stubborn resistance which had braved the tyranny of centuries. Not many had the clear-headed judgment, or, indeed, sufficient acquaintance with Sanecki himself, to temper their surprise, seeing he was as unprincipled as he was clever. Victor von Sanecki was the scion of a decayed family of rank, a native of Posen. As a mere youth, iron-willed and indefatigable, sharp-witted and full of ambition,

he had striven hard to reclaim his hopelessly mortgaged inheritance. But no saving and no diligence of his could make up for the failings of his spendthrift ancestry. He gave it up, and, entering the Prussian civil service, turned Protestant for the sake of advancement; nor was he without prospect of gaining his end, and he might have risen to power had not his over-zealous chase after prosperity overstepped the lines of rectitude marked out in that country for a servant of the State. He was dismissed; upon which, repairing to Cracow, he resolved to read for holy orders. He was barely thirty when he thus entered the Church, and upon his consecration was appointed to the somewhat anomalous charge at Kossowince. His wondrous success there failed not to strike the Archbishop, who meditated work for him at Lemberg itself, but Sanecki submitted his earnest request "that he might be left to lead the converted flock in the way they should go"; for he believed that he could gather wealth while so engaged. His ambition sated, he was anxious now to satisfy that other craving of his debased soul, the love of riches.

And success appeared to attend his efforts; but the means he had recourse to were appalling. Not many weeks passed before the people of Kossowince discovered that the shepherd they had chosen was not nearly so gentle as they supposed, and before the year was out they had come to the conviction that a very fiend was addressing them from the pulpit and lording it over them at the manor. For it is a fact that the fate of every Galician village in those days was in the hands of two men--viz.: the mandatar and the parish priest. And here this power was vested in one and the same--Victor von Sanecki literally could do what he pleased. If a peasant refused an unjust tithe he as mandatar could send to prison; if he refused an oppressive tribute to the mandatar it was the priest that could inflict the lash of ecclesiastical punishment. The people naturally struggled hard against the injustice, appealing to the law; but it was no less in the nature of things that they found no redress, since before the civil authorities Sanecki claimed the privileges of the clergy, while to his spiritual superiors he pleaded his position as mandatar and steward of the revenues. Moreover, the stubborn character borne previously by the converted parish was remembered, and Sanecki was not slow to point out that having adopted the Catholic faith for outward reasons merely, they naturally were unwilling to meet the demands of the Church. So everything went against them, for the Romish creed was in the ascendant, and fines were imposed to teach them submission. A military detachment was quartered upon the refractory parish to enforce payment, and when the uttermost farthing had been wrested from them their goods were seized; not till a man had been brought to hopeless penury was he left alone by the priest. It seemed as though Sanecki could commit the vilest wrongs with impunity; but he cared to inflict punishment on those only who could offer money or money's worth to evade it, and his direst means of extortion, the refusal of Church burial, always fell on the wealthy.

Such was the man against whom Taras in the first instance lifted the avenger's arm. As it was close upon midnight when he with his followers started from the Crystal Springs, the Pruth was not reached till after two o'clock. And when the river had been forded, and the shivering Kapronski left to himself, the band in headlong gallop dashed onward through the plain. Kossowince was reached, and in spite of the surrounding darkness Taras perceived a horseman stationed at the entrance. He was appointed by the villagers to act as the avenger's guide.

Taras and his men drew up. "How many soldiers are there in the place?" he inquired; "and how are they quartered?"

"There is an officer with fifty men," reported the peasant; "Whitecoats from Lombardy with green facings. Thirty of them are at the parsonage, for the fiend himself lives at the manor, allowing the manse to be used as a barracks, for which we must pay him a rental of five hundred florins....."

"And where are the others?"

"Here and there about the cottages, one or two in each, all over the village. The officer and his man only are lodged at the manor. There are five or six retainers there besides, that is all. But have a care; the parsonage is not a hundred yards distant."

"Any sentries?"

"Yes, one--outside the manse. But these fellows feel the cold here; they are generally found cuddled up in their cloaks."

"And the villagers understand that they keep quiet?"

"Yes, much as they long to take part. But they see it is best so. It is different with me, who have nothing to lose. I am Jacek Borodenko, and the fiend has beggared me and mine entirely. What better can I do but join you for good?"

"We shall see," said Taras, and turned to his men. "The soldiery about the village need not troublous; it is the parsonage and the manse that require our attention. We will divide our force I shall want the Royal Eagle, Jemilian and Sefko, Wassilj and Sophron, Stas Barilko and Karol Wygoda, to come with me; we shall carry out the avenger's part at the manor. You others, all of you, shall follow Nashko. And to you," he added, turning to the Jew, "I leave it to deal with the sentry and make sure that no Whitecoat shall leave the manse. I rely on it that I shall not be hindered in my business while there is breath left in any of you!... But let every man here remember my injunction: he that sheds blood for the mere thirst of it shall meet with his deserts

in due time; but if any of you lay his hand on any property whatsoever, I shall shoot him on the spot.... Now let us be gone, keeping silence."

And cautiously they moved toward the scene of their ghastly labour. The night yet curtained the plain, but on the eastern horizon a faint streak betokened the approach of day.

By the church they separated. Taras and his seven men, led by Jacek, proceeded towards the manor, the others halting by the church, while some of their number slid from their horses and moved away stealthily to seize the sentry.

"Do you know the ins and outs of the house?" Taras inquired of the guide.

"Yes; as well as of my own pocket," replied the man. "I was in service there in the days of the late countess."

"Then I daresay you can show us some back door that will yield readily."

"Hardly," said the guide, "for the fiend is on his guard; he has iron-barred every door of the place. But Michalko, the groom, has a sweetheart in the village, and if we are lucky we may find the postern ajar."

Their very horses trod with noiseless footfall, carrying them to their destination unobserved. Jacek tried the latch, the door moved on its hinges, and the little band dismounted. Wassilj was left to guard the entrance, while the rest of the men followed their stern captain through a vaulted passage into the building. It was their first aim to make sure of the half-dozen retainers who slept in a large room in the basement. Jacek approached on tiptoe. "The key is in the lock," he whispered, and turned it forthwith. Nothing was heard from within but the snoring of the occupants.

"It is as well to be prudent," said Taras; "they are sure to wake up with the commotion, and, forcing the door, might give us trouble. This is your place, then, Sophron and Karol," and the two men took their position accordingly. "Now for the officer. Where shall we find him?"

"On the first floor," reported the guide; "not far from the fiend's lair." The man, in common with all the villagers, thus habitually designated their shepherd, as though Victor von Sanecki had never been known by any other name. They ascended the stairs. On reaching the landing the report of a firelock was heard, a second, and a third in quick succession; a din of voices rose in the distance; the garrison at the manse evidently was showing fight.

At this moment a door opened, the officer bursting upon the scene, his pistol in one hand and his sword in the other. But quick as lightning Taras had closed with him, disarming him, and with powerful grasp holding him helpless on the ground, his servant and a lackey or two speedily sharing the same fate at the hands of the others.

"There is no time to be lost," said Taras. One of the bedrooms was standing open, its window was iron-barred, and there was no other outlet. "Push them in!" The door was locked upon the overpowered men, Sefko being ordered to guard it while the others now made for the priest's chamber.

They found it secured, but Taras, with the weight of his gigantic frame, had no trouble in making the door yield, his men, with the butt-ends of their muskets finishing the operation. They entered a spacious apartment, modestly furnished; a lamp expired, not at the breath of any man, but in consequence of a sharp draught from an open window, as the invaders perceived by the light of their torches. The room was empty, the bed to all appearance recently forsaken, and the casement wide open.

Julko rushed to the window. "Look here!" he cried, pulling up a sheet that was tied to the sash; "the wretch has escaped us!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Jacek; "the moat is at its deepest below; he would have broken every limb in the attempt."

"But the room has no other exit."

"It has, though! I know there is a secret closet joined to this room by an invisible door. In the countess's time it used to be connected with the back-stairs as well; but the fiend, thinking it a good hiding-place for his ill-gotten gains, had that communication walled up. I have not a doubt but that he is within, caught in his own trap and no escaping."

"Then have you an idea where to look for the invisible door?"

"Yes, in this wall," he pointed to the side where the bed stood. The broad surface was covered with an antique hanging which, quaintly enough, appeared fastened to the wall at regular intervals with large metal buttons, forming a kind of pattern. "It is one of these buttons that opens the door," said Jacek, "if you press down the right one. I have seen it done once; but there are many, and I cannot tell which it is."

"That is a pity," said Taras. He stood listening to the confused voices of the fighting without.

"Well, if it is the only way, we must just find the button. Are you sure the other outlet is walled up?"

"Quite certain."

"Then let us try."

Several minutes passed while the men were thus endeavouring to discover the secret spring by which to move the hidden door, the din outside continuing unabated. Julko gave an exultant cry. He was kneeling on the bed, passing his fingers over the buttons in the centre when one of them yielding discovered a narrow chink in the wall. The door as yet did not open, but its outline was plainly marked; it was evidently made fast from within.

Taras snatched at Jemilian's axe, and, pushing aside the bed, he belaboured the wall with all his might. The door had begun to split, when a bolt was withdrawn inside, and before them stood the man they were seeking.

So sudden was his appearance that those without fell back a step. The "fiend" in person seemed utterly different from the name he bore--a well-grown, still youthful man, in the black robe of a priest, with a face both grave and handsome, and singularly dignified. The pallor of his countenance only showed his inward disturbance, his features wearing an expression of proudest self-confidence, and his eyes flashed imperiously.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

"I am Taras, the avenger," replied the latter, facing him. "Your time of reckoning has come! Your stronghold could not protect you; and neither the bold front of courage nor any cowardly whimpering will avail you now."

"Do I look like one given to whimpering?" said Sanecki, drawing himself up. "I am not a coward, though I endeavoured to hide from you. What else is there left for a peaceful priest when a horde of murderers enter his dwelling at night and he hears the tumult of bloodshed without? ... Your name and your purpose, Taras, are known to me, but I should scarcely have thought that you could think it needful to visit me. My conscience accuses me of nothing."

"Hold your lying tongue, you blackest of fiends," cried Jacek, beside himself, and he would have fallen upon the priest had not Taras held him back, continuing calmly: "Then you absolutely deny the charge of having committed the most inhuman wrongs against the villagers, robbing them of their property, and of the peace of their souls as well?"

"It is they who speak falsely in accusing me. I have taken from them what belongs to the Church and to me by right--not a whit beyond. In my case, Taras, you cannot be an avenger, but only a murderer, if your conscience will let you. But I think better of you, and I demand that you shall confront me with my accusers, with respectable, trustworthy men, not with a good-for-nothing like this Jacek, and I shall know how to answer them."

There appeared to be a lull in the fighting without--the firing had ceased, and the general tumult was hushed. But within the manor at that moment bloodshed was imminent. Jacek, quite unable to master his fury, had snatched a pistol from his belt, and was pointing it at the priest.

"Stop, Jacek," commanded Taras, wresting the weapon from him. "And you, priest, utter no slander!... Say on Jacek in what has this man offended against you and yours. Say it with the fewest words, and speak the truth."

The peasant strove to conquer his feelings. "My father," he began, speaking with difficulty, "was obliged last year to remain on the upland pasture late into the spring. It was an unavoidable necessity, for the live stock was all we possessed. When he returned, this fiend of a man fined him a hundred florins, because he had been absent from confession and from the sacrament at Easter. It was our ruin, and brought us to beggary."

A voice was heard through the open window. "Hetman! hetman!" was the cry.

Taras stepped to the casement.

"It is I, Milko, the hunter. The Jew sends you word that we have done our part. The Whitecoats have laid down their arms."

An exultant cry broke from the men, but Sanecki grew ashy. However, he recovered himself quickly. "It is a lie," he cried, reverting to the charge against him, "a false accusation. I call the Almighty to witness who is my only refuge in this hour of need, unless you deal righteous judgment!"

Again Jacek was making a plunge at him, and once more Taras interfered. "I am ready to prove to you that I judge righteously," he said. "So far everything is against you save your own statement; the character you bear, the complaints which have reached me, and this man's solemn oath are your accusers. But you shall not be judged without being fully convicted. You shall choose for yourself two inhabitants of this village to speak for you."

Sanecki considered a moment. "Well, then," he said, "let it be Hawrilo Bumbak and Iwon Serecki."

"Captain," broke in Jacek, "do not be outwitted by this scoundrel. He has named these men because they live at the furthest end of the parish. He hopes to gain time."

"Never mind, we are in no such hurry. You also shall name two men to be called as witnesses against him."

"Let it be those whom you know already," decided Jacek, without a moment's hesitation. "Harassim, the judge, and Stephen, one of the elders, since they carried our complaints to you."

"Very well," said Taras. "These four witnesses shall be called. Follow him, Julko, Stas, and Jemilian; mount your horses below, and get some of Nashko's men, if possible, in case of any hindrance from the soldiers about the village; I want those four witnesses with the least delay."

"And will you stay here by yourself?" inquired the Royal Eagle, doubtfully.

"Yes; he shall not escape me." And drawing his pistol he took his position in front of the priest.

The men went on their errand.

"Now listen," said Taras, when left alone with the culprit. "The slightest movement on your part, and I shall lodge this bullet in your brain. For the rest you may spend the time as you please. It might be as well to say your prayers, since I may not be able to allow you much time presently. I have little hope that you will see the rising sun yonder in his full-day glory."

Sanecki gazed in the direction pointed at with unsteady eyes. The window opened upon the vast plain, a ridge of cloud in the far east burning with a crimson glow. But somehow he appeared to draw strength from the sight, the growing light kindling his courage. "It is well I should offer up prayer," he said; "less for myself than for you, who are in danger of dipping your hands into innocent blood."

Taras made no answer, continuing motionless with uplifted pistol. The priest folded his hands, saying prayers with a loud voice. For the space of about ten minutes they were thus left alone, after which Stas returned with Stephen, the elder, and almost immediately after Jemilian with Harassim, the judge.

"Take your oath that you will speak the truth," said Taras; and the aged witnesses lifted their right hands, swearing.

"Speak, judge; what is your accusation against this man?"

"I went to him at All Saints'," said the old man, trembling with the memory of it, "to arrange with him for the rendering of the tithes we owe him. He demanded more than his due, I refused and left him; no unbecoming word had been spoken. But that same evening I was taken up by his orders and cast into a miserable dungeon, where I spent a week in complete darkness, and all the food he allowed me was mouldy bread and rank water. My sons implored him to release me, but he said in his capacity as mandatar he must punish me because I had offended the priest. For a fine of two hundred florins, however, he would release me. Now considering my age--I am more than seventy--and because I should have perished in the damp prison, they raised the money; he took it, charging me an extra twenty florins, to refund his expenses of keeping me for a week."

"And you, Stephen?"

"My wife lay dying at the Epiphany," said the elder. "I called upon the priest to prepare her for the great change, by administering the blessed sacrament. He refused until I should have atoned for a grave offence with the payment of a hundred florins. I could not find the sum, and my poor wife had to die unaneled, and was buried like a dog outside the churchyard ... my poor wife!" sobbed the old man, hiding his face in his hands, "my good, pious wife!"

"What was the offence he charged you with?"

"I had crossed myself inadvertently after the old style, and he happened to see it."

The hetman flushed purple with indignation. "Is this the truth, old man?"

"The truth indeed, the Almighty is my witness."

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" he now inquired of the priest.

"Only this, that they speak falsely," returned Sanecki, with choking voice.

"Falsely!" cried Stephen, horrified. "Man, think of the Judge above!"

"Yes," said Taras quietly, "it were well he did so. However, let us hear his own witnesses."

There was a pause of silence in the chamber, the twilight of which was slowly but steadily

yielding to the ruddy glow from the east, a broad stream of light flowing in through the window when Julko and Jacek returned with the other two witnesses, whom the priest had called for himself.

The men in question entered diffidently--they had not been told why they were wanted--looking aghast on learning that the priest had seen fit to appeal to them. "To us," they cried, "what could we say in his favour?"

Taras put them on their oath. "Now," he said, "what have you to affirm concerning this man?"

They were silent for a moment, but then Iwon burst out with--"Just this, that he *is* a fiend!"

"Yes, a very fiend," reiterated Hawrilo.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" Taras once more inquired of Sanecki.

"No, nothing," he made answer calmly. The self-command of this man was astounding. His face was corpse-like, but his lips, even at this extremity, had a smile, though it was an appalling, a ghastly smile. "I have miscalculated my chances," he said, half to himself--"miscalculated, it is a pity!"

Taras now addressed the men present. "It is my opinion that this man has forfeited his life. Is there any here to say I am wrong?"

Not a sound in the chamber--Death seemed counting the grains. But in the fair world without the beauty of morning had conquered the shadows, the larks meeting the sun with a jubilant song.

There was a clock in the room, the hands pointing to six minutes before five. "These minutes I will give you," said Taras, addressing the doomed priest, "that you may recommend your sinful soul to its Maker."

Even now the man quaked not, standing proud and erect. "Miscalculated!" he repeated. With a quick movement his hand dived into his ample garment, and withdrawing it as quickly, he carried a phial to his lips. The men caught his arm, but it was too late, they were in time only to support the dead man's frame.

"What a pity," cried Jacek; "I would have given anything to see him swing."

"For shame!" returned Taras, sternly. "He was an evil-doer, but he had the courage of a man! Lay him on his bed!... He has at least shown us that a man can die, if need be."

There was a solemn pause, after which he addressed the judge. "One thing yet before our work is complete. The village has suffered at the hands of this man. You shall take what money there is found here, to be divided justly among the people.... Stas and Jemilian, search the place."

"May we not offer you a part for yourself?" returned the judge; "it were but right and fair."

"No," said Taras, curtly.

"But you will let us give some of it to your men?"

"No, they are no paid assassins, but serving justice."

"But you must live!"

"I have enough for the present to provide for our needs, and when my own means fail, others, no doubt, will be forthcoming."

Stas and Jemilian at this moment returned from the adjoining apartment. "This appears to be money," said the former, placing a cash box upon the table.

"Force the lid," said Taras to the judge, "I would rather not touch it."

But the old man could not succeed with his trembling fingers, until Jacek came to his assistance. The box burst open with a jerk, revealing, however, only a moderate bundle of banknotes, beneath which lay a number of securities of considerable value. "The notes only are of use to us," said the judge, counting them. "Not much over a thousand florins," he stated presently; "the loss we have suffered is about twenty-fold."

Old Jemilian was standing aside, pale and trembling, and trying to come to a conclusion. Now he stepped up to his master, saying, with faltering voice, "I hoped to tell you some other time, but I see now you must know at once. There was more where we found the casket--a purse, I saw it plainly, which Stas put into his own pocket."

Taras grew deadly white, staggering as though he had received a blow. "Is--is it--true?" he said, stammering with the shock of it.

But Stas fell to the ground at his feet. "Forgive it--this once," he faltered. "The money tempted

me. Ah, mercy!"

Taras passed his hand across his brow. "Where is the purse?" he said, hollow-voiced.

The man, still kneeling, produced it.

"Take it, judge ... count it."

"Seventeen florins," reported the old man.

"Well, put it with the rest." He spoke hoarsely, a fearful agitation convulsing his frame. "Stas," he said, presently, with the same choking voice, "I grieve for you with all my heart. You have known much trouble, it is hard to see you end so ignominiously. But I cannot save you--say your prayers, Stas!"

"Ah, mercy!" groaned the unhappy man, the others joining: "Yes, hetman, forgive him this once!"

"I cannot--dare not," said Taras, breathing hard and wiping the dew from his forehead. "I would--ah, how gladly would I forgive him!--but this sacred cause!... Say your prayers, man."

"Mercy!" moaned Stas once more, and fell in a swoon. Taras stepped back, and, pointing his pistol, lodged a bullet in the motionless head. The man was dead on the spot. A cry of horror went round the room, and silence settled, the larks outside continuing their song of praise.

"He was unable to commend his soul to God, let us do so for him," said Taras, with the same husky voice. He crossed himself, and with quivering lips spoke a prayer for the dead, the others repeating it after him, awe-struck.

"Let us be gone now!"

They left the chamber of death, calling together their men, and mounted their horses. But the captain's face continued white and fearfully rigid.

"How shall we thank you!" said the judge.

"Not at all," returned Taras, sternly. "For if I had done it for your own sakes merely, I could but turn the pistol against myself now!" He spurred his horse, making for the manse, where Nashko and his men stood ready to mount.

"Three of us have fallen," reported the Jew, "and we killed fourteen of the soldiers. I used every precaution, but----"

"Have we any wounded?" interrupted the captain.

"No--that is, one man is slightly hurt; but able to mount horse."

"Let us start, then; the people here will see to our dead."

And away they went in a sharp gallop in the direction of Colomea. They followed the high-road at first, but, turning off at right angles, presently plunged into the pathless heath which they traversed at a furious pace, reaching the village Nazurna just as the thin-voiced church bell was tinkling out the hour of noon.

It is but a poor place, amid all the characteristics of heath-country; there are a few farms at great distances one from another, and not greatly thriving, for the soil is unproductive, forming part of the sterile table-land between the valleys of the Pruth and the Czerniawa. A couple of miles beyond the village there is a large moor called the Wallachian Bog, where, according to tradition, in the frontier wars between Poland and Roumania a regiment on the march was sucked down and suffocated in broad daylight. And nothing is more likely, for it is treacherous ground indeed, and even the experienced eye is at a loss to distinguish where the firm land ceases and marshy soil begins, since not only the latter, but the safe earth as well, is covered with sedge grass and willows far and wide. The waters nowhere rise to the surface, and tall trees growing on little islets complete the deception; a larger island covered with beech wood forms the centre of the moor, and is to be reached only by a narrow strip of solid soil which connects it with the firmer land.

Thither Taras led his band; he was acquainted with the bog and the island, with its overgrown and all but secret entrance, from the days when he had been in service at Hankowce, not far distant. It was an admirable place for his purpose, and not the most experienced military engineer could easily have secured a better position for a troop of horsemen in constant danger of being attacked by numerically superior forces, and in need of a safe resting-place to which they might retire after their raids, than this spot formed, not by the art of man, but by a freak of nature. The extreme loneliness of the neighbourhood lessened every chance of discovery; while even a body of men under hot pursuit could vanish thither as though disappearing by magic, and the narrow entrance at the worst could be held against almost any odds. It was natural then that the "avenger" should have taken his men to this place of refuge on many an occasion, so that to this day it goes by the popular name of "Taras's Retreat."

Cautiously, and not without trouble could the men in the first instance take the horses across the shrub-grown neck of land to the island, where they might rest and take food after that grim night and the hard ride since. Yet sleep came to very few of them, an unusual agitation counteracting even the inviting shade of the kindly beeches. A strange humour, something between the madness of utter recklessness and the dejection of inward disapproval, filled the minds of some. For there were those among them that had never shed blood, nor stood in danger of death themselves, and who seemed to understand all at once that the outlaw's business was desperate work; they grew thoughtful and somewhat penitent, endeavouring to conquer these sensations by breaking into noisy song, or by assuring each other that no doubt the coming night would be "jollier" still. But others, whose past experience had fortified them against the proceedings at Kossowince, felt regretful on a different score. It had not surprised them that Taras should have forbidden plunder under pain of death, for that was the way of every new hetman forming a band of hajdamaks; but that he should go to the length of refusing an offering of gratitude for service rendered, and that he should have found it necessary to shoot that poor devil of a Stas for the sake of a handful of florins, was beyond their comprehension. And thus they came to inquire what bound them to this man, who by sheer strength of will had forced them to acknowledge a wretched Jew as one fit to lead them; whose foolish notions had offended the people of Zulawce, and who actually appeared to expect his followers to risk their lives for his ideas, and for no earthly gain beyond the barest daily bread. But the power which Taras exercised even over these low natures was such that they hardly dared breathe these thoughts to themselves, far less to each other. They lay, gloomy and silent, in the tall sedge-grass, till one of them, suddenly jumping up, started a request for Karol Wygoda's bagpipe, at the squeaks and screams of which their darker thoughts receded. One apprehension, however, that might or might not yield to their merriment, was common to all--the near prospect of death. The band which had started so full of spirits from the Crystal Springs had already lost every tenth man of its numbers, and if the attack of a mere ill-defended country place required such sacrifice, what might not be the result of the coming night, when they would enter the well-garrisoned district town? It was for this reason that more than one among them, now joining madly in the dance, would turn aside suddenly with a strange tremor, to conquer which they would halloo the more wildly on resuming the measured pace.

Taras alone appeared unmoved. With the greatest composure he made his arrangements for the night, his bearing and his voice showing as little of emotion as if he had stood in his own farmyard giving orders for the cutting of the wheat. It quite distressed Nashko, for he felt certain that the carnage of the past night had left a fearful burden on the heart of his friend. He was anxious to lessen it, and when Taras beckoned to him to receive his instructions he did his utmost to show that neither the orders given nor their execution could be blamed for the sad results.

"Seventeen lives," he said, regretfully; "it is terrible, indeed! But I think I may say I did my very best to carry out your desire that bloodshed if possible should be avoided. It was the watchfulness of the sentry that frustrated our intention; the man gave the alarm at once, rousing the others, and since I could not leave them time to arm themselves fully, I was obliged to dash into action within the manse itself, in order to overpower them before they had a chance of benefiting by their numbers and superior equipment. It was the close encounter in rooms and passages--in all but darkness, moreover--which resulted in so many slain. There were no wounded, simply because in this desperate fray neither they nor we could have offered or accepted quarter. It was only when the torches were lit--and you may be sure this was done as quickly as possible--only when the soldiers could see that further resistance was madness, the sparing of life became possible; and you may believe me that from that moment not a single life--"

"All right," interrupted Taras, preparing to move away.

The Jew looked at him bewildered. "You are impatient of listening!" he said. "I thought your heart was breaking because of---"

"All right," repeated Taras, quietly. "You have done your duty. And for the rest--what does it matter? Ten lives more or less--what can it matter, since things are what they are?"

But the smile playing about his lips alarmed Nashko even more than the calm he understood not. "Taras," he cried, "this is not your own true feeling!"

"Do you think so?" returned the hetman coldly, the same terrible smile distorting the solemn and yet gentle beauty of his face. "I am not so sure."

He turned away abruptly to appoint the order of sentries until nightfall; when all was settled he expressed his desire to be left undisturbed. "I am going to have a few hours' sleep now," he said, and retiring to the other side of the island, he threw himself into the waving grass, where he lay motionless.

A good many eyes followed him enviously. "Humph!" said one of the men, "one would think he is as little used to butchering as ourselves, and he has set this business going, with his own hand even killing a man who could not defend himself; yet look at him, sleeping like an innocent babe, while conscience with us is a wakeful trouble!"

Only Nashko and old Jemilian knew how it was ...

Not till towards eight o'clock, when night was falling, did Taras once more mingle with his men. The command was given, and cautiously as before the horses were led through the tangled growth of the slip of land. On reaching the other side the procession formed. Their way would shortly bring them into more densely-peopled districts, and there was every likelihood that the news from Kossowince by this time had reached the district town, so that caution was doubly needful. Taras divided his men into three separate troops, himself heading the vanguard; to the Royal Eagle he entrusted the leadership of the second and strongest division, while Nashko should bring up the rear. They were to keep within earshot of each other. The signal was given, and the vanguard set off at a quick trot, followed in due order by Julko and the Jew.

They rode on well through the dark and silent night, due west at first over the desolate heath, till they reached the track between Nazurna and Kornicz, which they took. The heavens were veiled with low-hanging clouds; the air was heavy and sultry; the darkness appeared to grow deeper, and the path at length could hardly be distinguished. Taras kept whistling distrustfully at short intervals; the counter-signals from the two other leaders at first were given in return almost immediately and in due order, but one of the whistlers behind appeared to fall back, and presently his signal showed him in a wrong direction altogether.

Much as delay was undesirable, Taras had to stop, and even to turn back. He soon came upon the main body, but not without trouble could the straying rear guard be brought up. Nashko had missed the path on the heath, following a northerly track, and when the captain's signals sounded more and more faintly, he believed the divisions in front to have quickened their pace, and ordered his men to spur on their horses, thus, of course, falling away all the further.

Upon this Taras resolved to keep his forces together, as the least dangerous plan in the circumstances. Recovering their direction, they passed several homesteads, and presently heard the roaring of the Wilchowec, which carries the waters of the Dobrowa Forest in a succession of cataracts to the Pruth. There a new mishap awaited them. They had missed the only bridge spanning the turbulent stream, and were at a loss to decide whether they ought to seek it above or below them.

"Let some of us ride up the river and some down, and those that find the bridge can signal for the others," proposed Julko.

"No," said Taras, "that were losing time. The Wilchowec must be fordable somewhere. I saw a light burning in the cottage we just passed. I will go for a guide."

And, followed by two or three of his men, he galloped back and halted in front of a lighted window. In a low-ceiled room a peasant was seen sitting beside his wife, showing her delightedly a handful of silver coin. It was an elderly man, white-haired, and with a rubicund countenance. "Hail, old fellow!" cried Taras, tapping at the window.

The peasant started, extinguishing the torchlight inside the room, while the woman screamed, and then all was still.

"There is no cause for alarm!" cried Taras, "we beg a kindness of you, that is all."

"What, so late at night," said the peasant within. "Have the goodness to let us sleep in peace."

"You have not been asleep yet," Taras called back, growing impatient. "You were counting your earnings. There is no fear of our robbing you; indeed, I will add to your gains if you show us the place where the river can be forded."

"Why should you want to ford it, when there is a bridge not more than a mile distant, down stream? You cannot miss it, since the hussars there are keeping a good watch fire."

"The hussars!" cried Taras, startled.

"Yes, the hussars," repeated the peasant. "You don't seem to like it. And I must say it would not be advisable for highwaymen to try to cross the bridge to-night."

"Listen," said Taras, who had recovered himself. "I am not a highwayman, and I take you to be an honest peasant. So I will ask you to guide us. I want you--I am Taras, the avenger."

"Taras!" exclaimed the man, with a tone of the greatest surprise. "Taras!" he repeated, leaning out from his window as far as he could. "Is it you, indeed? Ah! it is too much almost to believe. What happiness--what honour!... Light the torch, wife, quickly, that I may see his face!... But no, you want me to come"--and he drew back his head; "I am coming--coming at once."

"No, stay. Tell me first--are you sure there is a body of hussars by the bridge?"

"Yes, certainly; some thirty of them. Are you in ignorance of their resolves against you at Colomea? I know all about it, having been to market to-day. And there is no need to hide it now, I made fifteen florins--out of my sheep, that is. And I have not told you my name--I am Stenko Worobka."

"Yes, yes, Stenko; tell me quickly."

"Ah, yes; I am an old fool! It is just this: with the early morning to-day the car returned, and the two constables safe enough, but no commissioner. The town was aghast; that is, the people said it was no great loss if Taras had a fancy for keeping Mr. Kapronski; but it seemed certain that if he meant to carry out his threats at all he would come first to Colomea to strangle the mandatar. And so they dispatched a courier to Zablotow to call the hussars that brought such trouble to your own village, and I saw them arrive before night. But the magistrates did not approve that you and the soldiers should fight it out beneath their own eyes--dear me, that I should be able to tell you all this; what happiness! what rare good luck! What was I going to say?--yes, they resolved to catch you on the road, and so they ordered the hussars and such Whitecoats as were quartered in the city to station themselves in a half-circle between the town and the mountains, making sure thus to cut off your approach. The soldiers are all at their posts by this time; a body of hussars, as I told you, keeping the bridge yonder."

"And where are the rest of them?"

"Well, some guard the road towards Horodenka, others keeping a look-out in the direction of Cieniawa; others again are by St. Mary's Cross. They think not a mouse could thus pass their vigilance, for they keep patrolling diligently."

"Well, we have not met a soul so far."

"I daresay--ha! ha! what a joke!--don't you see, this is just the one loophole in their net. They make sure that so long as they hold the bridge no one could cross this boisterous river."

"Is it fordable?"

"Yes, to be sure--not very comfortably, but we can manage it--close by here.... So you are really bent on going to Colomea? There is no reason why you should not do so; why, they did not--ha! ha! how delightful!--they did not keep back a dozen soldiers."

Taras was revolving the situation in his mind. "We will do it," he said, after some cogitation; "it is a venture for life and death, but we will risk it. But there is not a moment to be lost."

The peasant was ready to guide them, and mounting behind one of the men, they dashed back to the others. Taras reported to them what he had just learned, "Let us venture," he said. "Yes, yes, let us try it," cried Julko and Nashko, in high spirits, all the others assenting.

Under the peasant's guidance they forthwith set about fording the river; the current was wild and strong, the deep darkness of the night adding to the danger; but they crossed in safety. "We have managed it, thanks to you," said Taras to the peasant; "and here is your florin."

But Stenko refused, quite hurt at the offer. "Do you think I should take pay," he cried; "are you not our own avenger? Nay, I am more than rewarded, and you must let me come with you, for this night is darker than the inside of a cow--you would scarcely reach the town; besides, you will want to ford the river again as you return."

"But you have a wife and your property to think of. I must warn you," said Taras, "it would go ill with you if they caught you thus aiding us."

"They won't then," decided the peasant, confidently. "And don't you know that a man cannot escape his destiny? If it is my fate to come by an evil end I shall have to face it whether I guide you or not."

After which philosophical remark two of Taras's men had to be satisfied with being mounted one behind the other, leaving a horse free for the peasant who rode beside Taras at the head of the band. At a sharp pace they traversed the fields and meadows of Korolowka, and presently found themselves on the high road leading to the district town. The country appeared desolate; but close by the town they met some peasants who so late in the night had set out to return from their week's marketing. Not that important business had detained them to this hour, but the public-house had, as might be judged by their unsteady gait. Yet the vapours of drink were at once dispelled when they found themselves suddenly surrounded and questioned by an armed band on horseback; and though trembling with fright they were able to confirm the news that all the garrison of the place as well as the hussars had been sent to waylay the Avenger, and only a handful of soldiers now were within, at the main guard-house, for the sake of sentry duty in the prisons.

They left the high road, Wassilj Soklewicz now acting as guide, for he alone knew the villa where they hoped to find Hajek. It lay on the road towards St. Mary's Cross, a German colony; it was a spacious building, but low, situated in its own grounds, which were guarded in front by a strong iron railing. Orchards stretched away at the back of it, and meadows on both sides. The nearest habitation was a quarter of a mile distant, the town fully a mile. Just as they came in sight of the place, a clear sound cut the air, the clock in the little belfry was announcing the first hour after midnight. And close upon it--already they could see the lighted windows of the house--a sharp whistle was given, followed by another....

The men started. "An ambush!" they cried. "Fall back!"

"No; forward," ordered Taras, spurring his horse. "The wretch has set spies to be warned of our approach.... He is here! There, look!..."

He was pointing towards the house, the lighted windows of which one after another were darkening rapidly. The gate, just as they reached it, closed with a bang, and retreating footsteps were heard.

"Try your axes!" cried Taras; and some of the men, jumping from their horses, belaboured the gate with powerful blows. The strong bars were bending, and some already giving way.

But suddenly the door of the villa opened, and between two torchbearers an aged man came forth, bareheaded, and carrying a key--it was Herr von Antoniewicz.

"My good people," he began, "why are you ruining my gate like this? Was there no better way of asking for admittance? There is no reason why you should not come in, if you tell me who you are and what brings you hither at this late hour."

"You know that well enough!" cried Taras; "the wretch is in hiding here."

"Yes," said the old man, continuing slowly and distinctly, "I am afraid we know that he cannot escape you, and I am ready to let you in, on your word of honour that you will harm no one else, and that you will not kill him here, but take him away with you. You see I am anxious to spare my daughter's feelings, who was going to be his wife."

"He seems to have found a worthy father-in-law, anyhow," said Taras, scornfully. "However, you have my word; now open on the spot."

The Armenian did so unhesitatingly. Julko and Nashko with the main body taking up their position by the gate, while Taras and some dozen of the men entered the grounds. About half of them were ordered to watch the exits of the house, the others following their captain inside.

"Where is the mandatar?" inquired Taras of Antoniewicz.

"Somewhere about the sitting-rooms," replied that worthy man, as quietly as though he were directing a casual visitor to his guest. "At least I left him there. He fell in a dead faint when I explained to him that I had no intention, nor indeed the power, to save him from your hands. I daresay he has recovered by this time, and is hiding in some corner."

Taras traversed the ante-hall, where Frau von Antoniewicz and the Countess Wanda awaited him kneeling. They were in floods of tears, trembling with emotion as they caught hold of his feet to stop his progress. "Mercy!" they moaned. "For pity's sake forgive him!" Taras endeavoured to free himself from their grasp, but they clung to him, and he was too much of a man to use force with women.

"Let me go," he said; "it is quite useless to waste a word about him."

But they clung all the faster, "What, shall I have to see it with my own eyes?" cried the amiable Wanda with dishevelled locks and rolling her eyes--a very picture of despair.

"You need not--you are free to leave the house. I have nothing to do with women."

"Alas!" whined the mother, "how should we, helpless women, venture to face all your men?"

"They won't harm you. Moreover, your husband is welcome to go with you. Of course you will keep in the grounds for the present."

He sent an order to this effect to the men keeping the front door, and thereupon, with Jemilian, Sefko, Wassilj, and one or two others of his most trustworthy followers, he set himself to search the rooms. Their torches flared brightly, but the spacious apartments appeared untenanted. They looked into every chimney, beneath every couch, and behind the hangings with rising impatience, making such careful examination that not a kitten could have escaped, far less a man. But not a creature did they find. They had reached the last room on this floor--the dining room.

It was locked. "Ah!" said Taras, with a sigh of relief. The door soon yielded. The table showed the remains of dessert, empty champagne bottles and glasses half filled. There appeared to have been five covers.

"Who may have been the fifth at this feast?" said Jemilian, wondering.

"Caught him!" cried Wassilj at this moment from the further corner of the room. "Here he is!" And sure enough something like a man it seemed, but in the strangest hiding place. The large fuel basket had been turned upside down, and emptied of its contents of firewood, and some one had squeezed himself in as best he might. But success was not equal to the effort, a pair of coattails showing treacherously; on Wassilj giving the basket a kick it capsized, but the man inside stuck fast, yelling, however, vociferously.

"That is not Hajek's voice!" cried Taras, Wassilj and Sefko dragging its owner from the basket.

And, indeed, it was not the mandatar, but only the fifth at the late banquet, the ere-while champion of Poland's honour--Mr. Thaddeus de Bazanski. But how little he that was half-brother of Nicolas I. at this moment showed worthy of his august descent! His head and shoulders covered with wood chips, his garments torn, his knees trembling, and his face so white with terror that the nose itself had only the faintest flush left of its usual redness. Thus he stood before them, clutching the immortal confederatka to his bosom, and so overpowered with fear that he could only shiver and quake in speechless agony.

"Who on earth are you?" inquired Taras, peremptorily.

"I ... oh!... a visitor ... mercy! I could not help it!"

"Where is the mandatar?"

"He got away--made his escape while old Bogdan kept you talking ..." Taras stamped furiously. "Ah, mercy, I will tell you everything!" faltered the whilom conqueror of Ostrolenka, sinking to his knees. "They did not think there was much fear of your coming, on account of the soldiers, but Mr. Hajek insisted on setting spies, that he might be warned of any possible danger. We were still at table--and a fine banquet it was--when suddenly the signal was given; there was barely time left to lock the outer gate and drag the mandatar from the house. He could not stand on his own legs for fear of meeting you; but since there was a chance of his getting away safely through the orchards, and gaining the town, old Bogdan and his womenfolk undertook to lead you off the scent. They expected me to take a part also, but I stoutly refused. 'How should I deceive this Taras, this noble avenger,' I said; 'I shall do no such thing; for Taras is a brave man, an honourable man, a generous----'"

Which eulogy was not even heard by Taras. "Follow me!" he called out to his men, bursting from the house. "I want to have a word with that pack of deceivers; where are they?"

"Made their escape, hetman," reported the men at the door.

"Their escape? I will hold every one of you answerable!"

The two men in charge of the grounds now came up. "Hetman," they said; "we can hardly be blamed. These three deceitful serpents would have got round an archangel, not to say the devil himself. We had asked them to keep near the house, and there they stood awhile, when the old woman suddenly gave a cry with all the antics of swooning; upon which the young one implored us to assist in carrying her mother into the arbour yonder. And then she fell a-shrieking, 'Water! water! for pity's sake, get some water!' Well, as they were women after all, and the old man, who kept wringing his hands, assured us she would die unless we complied, what else could we do? We went for water, and returning quickly enough, we found they had gone--disappeared in the darkness. We searched the orchard, but they have escaped us, much to our disgust."

Taras looked gloomy.

"I may come back to that presently," he said, sternly; "the next thing to be done is this--the house which has given shelter to the mandatar, and whose owners have deceived me so shamefully, shall disappear from the earth.... Set fire to it, in the basement, beneath the roof, everywhere--let it flare up quickly ... but "--and he drew his pistol--"if any of you value his life, let him beware of plundering!"

The men gave a wild halloo, brandishing their torches, and burst into the house.

"And what is to be done with this man?" said Wassilj, dragging the Polish champion behind him.

"Who are you, then?" now asked Taras. "What is your name?"

"Thaddeus Bazanski, and--and----"

"I can tell you all about him," interrupted Wassilj; "one of the mandatar's men has just told me. He is a miserable wretch, living on his betters, and making money in all sorts of mean ways. It is he that brought about the engagement between the mandatar and that fair, fat creature of a countess!"

"I don't deny it," cried the would-be nobleman, eagerly. "But I am sure, if you knew all about her, and what bliss awaits your enemy in wedlock, you would say 'Thank you' to me!"

Taras could not repress a smile, the man spoke with such utter assurance; but his brow clouded again as Wassilj continued: "He is a Polish nobleman by his own showing. True, he is nothing but a beggar now; but he keeps telling his listeners how *he* got money out of his peasants before he lost his vast possessions."

"Indeed?" said Taras, frowningly.

"Ah, no," whined Thaddy; "I never owned any possessions. How, indeed, should I have come by any land?"

"Well, captain, these are his tales whenever he can get a man to drink with."

"That much is true," said the imperial offspring, with woe-begone countenance. "A man must live--I mean, one gets thirsty and is bound to drink. And no one will stand me a glass unless I give him a fine story in return. They don't mind the lying, so I go on inventing. But I am not noble at all--never was, or fought any battles either. My father was a poor cobbler, and I--I----"

"Well, out with it!"

"I am nothing particular, at present. How I manage to live, most honoured avenger, I have just confessed to you--this young man in that has spoken the truth. In my younger days I was a--a--well, something of an artist."

"Indeed! what sort of an artist?"

Thaddy smiled bashfully, and since the word was not forthcoming, he took refuge in signs, passing his hands over his jaws and under his chin, at which he blushed and smiled afresh.

"What, a cut-throat?"

"Oh, dear, no; only a barber!" cried Thaddy. "As sure as I hope for better days, you may believe me--just nothing but a barber! And I think I could give you proof of my craft still. Might I perhaps have the honour----"

"No, thank you," said Taras, and turning to Wassilj, he added, "Let him off!"

The hero of Ostrolenka bowed to the ground in gratitude, and still clasping the famous confederatka, he vanished into the night as quickly as his legs would carry him.

The men returned. "We have done it, hetman," they reported. "We have set fire to all the rooms not facing the town, so that it may not be perceived there too soon."

The signal to mount was given; and the band was ready to start. "We will yet gain our end," cried Taras. "We will seek the wretch in his own dwelling within the town."

But he had scarcely done speaking, when the tocsin broke upon the night with its own lugubrious notes of warning. Taras looked at the villa, smoke was rising, but no flame as yet. "This is not the alarm of fire," he exclaimed, "but rather in warning of our coming! They must have received information. Well, never mind! The townsfolk will not harm us, and the few soldiers we shall get the better of. I suppose we must make straight for the main guard-house, and I should not wonder if we found our man there--he will not feel safe in his own dwelling. Are you ready?"

"Urrahah!" responded the men, and away they went.

The rest of it happened more quickly than it can be told.

The band made for the town at full gallop, every moment swelling the tumult ahead of them. All the bells of the place by this time had joined with the tocsin, filling the air with dismal, deafening sound. The citizens had all awaked. "Fire!" cried some; "The avenger--save yourselves!" shouted others.

Meanwhile the night was lit up suddenly behind the riders, volumes of lurid flames rising to the heavens. The villa in a moment stood lapt in fire.

The band of horsemen was nearing the marketplace, the streets were heaving. Everywhere the people burst from their dwellings, some barely clad; and from hundreds of horror-struck voices the news rang through the air, "The avenger is upon us!" Some returned to their houses, endeavouring to barricade the doors, others in senseless terror rushed to the market-place.

"Urrahah!" was the war-cry resounding ever and anon through all the wild commotion. Like a mountain stream the cavalcade dashed onward, over the heads and limbs of any in their way. They reached the market-place. The main guardhouse was full of light, torches everywhere. In front of it the handful of soldiers drawn up with their corporal, muskets levelled.

Taras and his men burst upon the scene. The people, shrieking, ran hither and thither. The corporal gave the word, "Fire!" Milko fell from his horse, shot to the heart, and Nashko reeled in his saddle. Another moment and the soldiers were disarmed and cut down to a man.

Some of the band were left to guard the door, the others, following Taras, rushed into the building to seek the mandatar. The first-floor was utterly deserted, but at the top of the stairs two venerable figures awaited them, the burgomaster and the senior priest, falling on their knees. "Have mercy!" they pleaded, "the mandatar is not in the place."

"Where is he, then?"

"We cannot tell. If we knew, we would give him up to you, that other lives might be spared. He fainted in the fields, and maybe is lying there still. The groom who was to accompany him ran on

alone to warn us of your coming."

"Can you swear it is so?"

They affirmed it on their oath.

"Then all the night's work has been for nothing!" cried Taras. "To seek him in the open fields would be useless, and the hussars may be back at any moment."

The signal was given, the outlaws mounted and dashed away with the same amazing rapidity with which they had come.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AVENGER TO THE RESCUE.

The terrible night was over, the garrison had returned; but an agony of fear was uppermost in the district town. What Taras had dared seemed well-nigh incredible, and greater than the horror of what was past was the direful apprehension of what the future might bring. He might return any night; nay, in broad daylight even.

Thoughts like these also occupied the magistrates, who held a special meeting the following morning at the District Board office. The captain of the hussars, and one or two other officers had been invited to attend, but they had no comfort to offer; it seemed nothing short of a miracle that the raid should have succeeded, and more incomprehensible still that the band should have made good its retreat. As to its numbers, opinions differed greatly. The commotion raised by their flying entrance into the town, and the rapidity with which they had overpowered the soldiers, tended naturally to an over-estimation of their strength. There was one witness, however, who swore that Taras had fully a thousand men under his command. "A thousand, I tell you, for a certainty, on the honour of a nobleman!" It was Thaddeus de Bazanski who averred this. For having got over his fright, the experience he had undergone appeared to him rather lucky than otherwise. And well it might, considering the bottles of fine Moldavian the tale would be worth, not to mention the halo of importance it cast around him!

"A thousand men, I say, at the very least," he reiterated. "You will believe an old officer, who for years has ridden at the head of a regiment, and allow his fitness for estimating numbers. But concerning this avenger, if I may judge by my own experience, I should say a manly denunciation would suffice to cow him. If you show pluck, he knocks under--he did so, at least, with me. 'Where is the mandatar?' he stormed, as we met. 'Taras,' said I, undaunted, 'I am a guest under this roof, and a nobleman born. I am not going to turn informer!' I said this quietly, with all the sang-froid I am in the habit of preserving in a desperate situation, and, for the matter of that, I have known worse dangers in my time. As for him--well he bit his lip, and, turning on his heel, said to his men, 'Comrades, it is no use to think of intimidating an officer of such standing----'"

But the Board never learned what further the frightened Taras had to say concerning that officer, for a loud tumult was rising in the market-place, coming nearer and nearer. The magistrates jumped from their seats, crowding the windows, and an unlooked-for spectacle met their eyes below. In the centre of a moving crowd there appeared an open car, and upon it the lost Kapronski. He seemed unhurt, and even in good spirits, for he kept smiling to the right and to the left in acknowledgment of the people's salutation; but he waved his hands only, never touching his travelling cap, which was pulled low over his ears.

The excitement of the Board was such that it passed unnoticed when the commissioner did not even bare his head on entering their presence. They grew aware of it only when, having bowed low, he began with somewhat uncertain accents: "I venture to crave permission of the worshipful Board to keep my head covered. I am anxious to save your feelings, for I--I got wounded--a bad cut."

"Wounded!" cried the old town surgeon, who served on the Board, and unable to restrain his professional eagerness, he caught at the cap. But the sight of Kapronski, minus his head-gear, was so tragi-comical that, with all their anxieties, the magistrates could not but smile.

"What on earth is the meaning of this," cried the district governor.

"It is the punishment which, among the Huzuls, is reserved for cowards," Mr. Wroblewski, the secretary of the Board, hastened to explain.

Kapronski rewarded him with a vicious glance. "The secretary speaks the truth," said he,

putting on a bold front; "but it is not more than is reserved for himself and all this worshipful Board if you have the misfortune of falling into Taras's hands. He has inflicted this infamy on me for no other reason but that I did my duty in carrying out your orders."

The smiles had vanished. "Tell us all about it," cried the magistrates, eagerly.

The commissioner bowed, and began with a minute description of how he was carried to the Crystal Springs, and of what he saw there.

"How many men should you say he has with him?" interrupted the captain of the hussars, who naturally considered this the most important point.

"Well, I should say about a thousand," replied the commissioner, unblushingly.

"Then this seems to be a fact," murmured the captain, with evident concern; "that looks bad!"

"I have not a doubt," Kapronski continued, "that his one reason for waylaying me was his desire to make an example, just to show what awaited any servant of the law who dared lift a finger against him. In fact, he was going to hang me, and said so plainly. But, fortunately, I had prepared an answer. 'So you may,' I said, 'if you dare, for I am one against your thousand. But know that if you touch me your wife and your children will rue it.'"

"Why, that was illegal," broke in the district governor. "I wonder what paragraph of the penal code warrants this!"

Kapronski bowed deeply. He had expected this objection, and, indeed, had shaped his story so far with the one intention of bringing his dastardly falsehood, which had caused him plenty of trouble already, in the best possible guise to the knowledge of his superiors. "Illegal," he replied, humbly, "no doubt; but I venture to think I was justified by the extremity of the situation." A murmur, not altogether of disapproval, went round the Board, and even the district governor could only shake his old head, grumbling to himself as the commissioner continued.

"The words I had spoken produced an immediate effect. Taras looked concerned. 'Stuff!' he said, pretending to be careless; 'it is no use trying to frighten me with that sort of thing; *your* hands are bound by the law,' However, he gave up the idea of hanging me, saying he would use me as his messenger instead. Two things he charged me to bring to your knowledge, most worshipful governor of this district; firstly, that he expects you on the spot to withdraw the soldiers from the parishes of Zablotow and Zulawce, and to forbear instituting against him any action whatsoever. And he wishes you to understand that you are not to dream of stopping his intentions by military interference."

"Well, I never!" cried the governor.

"What impudence!" echoed the Board.

"Secondly, that within four-and-twenty hours you are to deliver up the mandatar to his men at that particular spot where the Pruth is fordable between Zulawce and Debeslawce. He will let you know who else is to be given up to him."

The Board sat mute with indignant consternation. "And suppose I don't?" gasped the governor.

"In that case," returned Kapronski, with his deepest bow, "in that case--I can hardly frame my lips to the rest of his message, but he said: 'Tell him, if he does not comply, I shall set fire to the district town and give it up to my men to plunder; and the magistrates, nay, every servant of the law, shall be hanged on these trees of ours--the governor first and foremost. I look upon them as a set of infamous cowards, and to show them how we deal with such, I'll visit on your head the ignominy which I consider is theirs.' And having treated me as you see, he had me put down by the river that I might find my way back as best I could."

A series of groans went round the room, Captain Mihaly recovering himself first. "Well, gentlemen, it's no use to hang our heads," he cried. "Orders for reinforcements must be despatched at once."

"Certainly," assented the burgomaster, "it is best to declare war against this man on the spot. But," he added cautiously, "I suppose the town itself is sufficiently protected by the garrison; you, captain, I daresay, will guarantee its safety?"

"We shall fight to the last man if need be," replied the gallant soldier; "but I can guarantee nothing beyond. If this bandit has really a thousand cut-throats to do his bidding, my squadron and the handful of infantry stationed here cannot make any stand against him."

The old man fell back in his chair white as death. "Then," he groaned, "the mandatar must leave this town at once, even if we must get rid of him by force; and it might be well to let it be known as widely as possible, perhaps send a messenger to Taras."

But the brave governor by this time had recovered himself. Rising, he put forth his hand, as if to silence the burgomaster. "This shall not be while I live," he said earnestly. "It is indeed a terrible matter we have to face, but let us face it like men; let us rather die than act meanly--let

no act of ours cast a slur upon the dignity of legal justice! This Mr. Wenceslas Hajek has done nothing, so far as I am aware, to justify us in refusing him protection; let him stay here as long as he pleases. If he will leave us of his own accord, all the better; but if he chooses to stay, beware of annoying him."

"Well, and will you undertake the fearful responsibility of it all?" cried the burgomaster, excitedly.

"I will," said the governor, solemnly; "I will be answerable both to the Emperor and to God."

"But I daresay it would need only a hint to Hajek," interposed the captain. "I know what stuff the man is made of. If he is told that all of us are in danger of our lives here, he'll be ready to leave us with post-horses even."

"Well, and where is he to be found, if that is the case?" inquired the governor, open to this reasoning.

"I can tell you," cried Dr. Starkowski, "in no less a place than the town gaol. On my way hither I was told so by the chief constable. Hajek, it appears, came to him at daybreak this morning, imploring him to have him shut up, since prison was the only place of safety. He is quite beside himself with terror, I hear--an object to behold."

"Well, the mandatar may consider his movements by and by," said the governor. "Our chief care for the present is the question of reinforcements, as the captain has pointed out. And considering the urgency of the case, I will forthwith despatch letters to the nearest military stations at Stanislaw and Czernowitz. And I will also have matters reported to the Provincial governor--I mean I will not do so by writing only, but will despatch one of the commissioners to Lemberg, to add every information by word of mouth."

At which Kapronski gave a jerk, craning his neck eagerly.

"Wait till you are asked!" cried the irritated governor. "On consideration I have hardly any choice but to send you! It will be as well to get rid of that cropped head of yours for a while--the people here are frightened enough already, without keeping before their eyes such a lively reminder of Taras's visit as you present. Besides, I daresay you will prove an interesting sight to the gentlemen at Lemberg. I shall expect you to be ready within half-an-hour."

Kapronski bowed as deeply as before, hardly knowing how to hide his satisfaction. He had succeeded in making his own confession of the falsehood he had been guilty of; and had not only, as he believed, revenged himself on Taras, but on his colleagues as well. He had paid them out, he thought, for the slights with which they were apt to treat him, and it delighted him to see them all afraid for their lives. Moreover, his falsified report resulted in one thing his cowardly soul approved of--the prospect of military reinforcement--for he could not have foreseen his being sent away from the menaced city. But since the governor's decision now promised to place him personally out of danger, a really malicious thought presented itself to his dastardly mind--he remembered what Taras actually *did* say. "Your worship," he began, and his voice quivered with the consciousness of his meanness. "I venture to submit ... my own impression ... fully alive to the importance of the case...."

"Well, and what have you to say?"

"Only just this. Would it not be well to anticipate any trouble this bandit is likely to give; to make it impossible, and, perchance, even force him to sue for peace? I know how easily he is cowed...."

"It would seem so," cried the burgomaster; "at least, he has thus been described to us already."

"Yes, and by whom?" growled the governor, with a contemptuous glance at the victor of Ostrolenka, who, after having given his evidence, had retired to the wall, where he still stood, grinning and smirking. "What is it you were going to say, Mr. Commissioner?"

"Only this, your worship. I have stated how I was able to save my life from the hands of this man. Now, supposing this most honourable Board could see its way, in consideration of the imminent danger wherewith the town is threatened, to issue an order for the arrest of the wife and children...."

"We might, indeed, be driven to it," said the burgomaster, half under his breath.

"What!" roared the governor, white and trembling with passion. "Oh, the shameful disgrace, that an official of this district dares make such a proposal! Coward, that you are!"

Kapronski felt the withering contempt, and shrunk back. "I meant it for the best," he stammered, "and I am sure I will not breathe a word of it at Lemberg if it is disapproved of."

"You are likely to be sent now!" muttered the governor, pacing the room furiously. "Is this the man to be sent in the present emergency, when so much----" The rest was lost in an angry

mumbling. The man's whole nature seemed in an uproar. At last he subsided, and, standing still before the frightened Kapronski, he said, "You shall go; but I shall take care that the letter you carry be sufficiently explicit. You may come for it in an hour."

The commissioner heaved a breath of relief, and turned to go, but not without experiencing another shock, for the governor called after him, "Stop a moment; if the mandatar chooses to leave you might as well travel together. I shall allow you a couple of constables."

Kapronski stood rooted to the ground, his eyes starting with terror. If he had been offered old Death itself as a travelling companion he could not have trembled more at the prospect. "And what if we are attacked?--Taras----" he groaned.

"In that case you would be lost either way;" with which comfort the wretched man had to be satisfied. The governor now addressed himself to Starkowski, begging him to visit Hajek in his voluntary confinement. "I know I can trust you with this delicate business," he said; "you will represent matters correctly to him, without exercising any pressure."

The lawyer agreed readily, and went on his errand at once. But the abject creature lying on a couch in a private apartment in the city gaol did not strike him as likely to come to any resolve. He was positively delirious with fear, and the warder had not a little trouble to keep him quiet.

So after all Mr. Kapronski started on his journey without the mandatar; not, however, without a numerous retinue. For no sooner had it become known that Captain Mihaly had not considered it possible to guarantee the safety of the town, than every citizen that had a chance of horses prepared for flight. And those who could not get away themselves were anxious to send, at least, wife and child and the best of their movables out of the town, which seemed doomed. The streets for some hours presented a picture of distress and unspeakable confusion, since the poor folk were hard driven for time if they wished to set out with the commissioner and his escort. At noon the sorrowful procession was ready to start, in the very centre of them all the commissioner on his car; but instead of two constables there were twenty of the hussars, which escort the governor had been prevailed upon to grant upon the sore entreaties of the fugitives.

But this was the only concession he made to the craven fear that had possessed the populace. Herr von Bauer proved in those days that, with all his comical weaknesses, he was a man indeed. He called together the citizens, suggesting that they should organise themselves into a body of special constables for the safety of the town. But that chicken-hearted population met his well-meant proposal with positive indignation. "We are not going to be brought to ruin," they cried. "We shall endeavour to conciliate Taras if he returns; maybe he will be satisfied with the heads of those who have offended him." Nay, worse than this. "We are not going to be butchered for the sake of a blackguard land-steward; if you do not rid the town of his presence we shall do it ourselves, and so thoroughly, we warrant, as will please even Taras." The district governor was by himself, facing the seething crowd; but his reply was as plucky and curt as possible. "You idiots! you cowards!" he cried; "I can't make men of you, of course, nor force you to defend yourselves; but be sure of this, I'll have every man of you shot that lifts a finger against the mandatar." In the consternation which followed he walked away quietly. But the very next hour showed that he was likely to be as good as his word, when, amid the beating of drums and the pealing of bells, martial law was proclaimed in the city and district of Colomea. The citizens were informed that they must keep within doors, that every gathering of mobs would be treated as open rebellion, and any attempt upon life or property punished with the gallows. The worst was thus staved off, and disorder within was not likely to join hands with any horrors from without.

At the same time couriers were despatched in all directions, not merely to the neighbouring military stations, but even to some of the larger villages of the plain, where the peasantry, eight years before, when the great Polish insurrection threatened to spread into Galicia, had volunteered their services for the safety of the town. And at sundown Herr von Bauer, worn out with the day's anxiety, had at least the comfort of knowing that he had done what was possible for the averting of trouble; if the night passed peaceably the town was saved.

And there was no disturbance, but the morning brought one batch of ill-news after another. The messengers came flocking back from the plain stating that the peasantry everywhere repudiated the idea of yielding assistance. "We are not going to turn against our own flesh and blood," they had said, "and we advise the men of the law to make their peace with Taras, for he is just." And more, it seemed as if the peasants round about, not satisfied with keeping neutral, were ready to side openly with the avenger. Every hour swelled the reports coming in from the mandarats, landlords, and parish priests of the district, all concurring that the peasantry were at the highest pitch of excitement; that the success which had accompanied Taras's first deed of vengeance had roused the spirit of opposition everywhere, and that the worst might happen unless Government carried matters with a high hand. But the most appalling news was this, coming in about noon, that in the past night the avenger had dealt justice elsewhere; that he had appeared about midnight in the village of Zadubrowce, setting free a number of peasants who were kept in gaol because of arrears of forced labour; that he had called upon the mandatar of the place to answer for his doings in the presence of all the people; and that after a careful trial he had decided to let him off a disgraced man with his head shorn, warning him at the same time that he would forfeit his life if he continued oppressing the people. But strangely enough--so ran the report--he gave the peasantry a similar warning, in case they should attempt any plundering of the manor. But if this latter piece of information contained any comfort, there was the fact to

be set against it that the village in question was far out in the plain, bordering upon the Bukowina. It was beyond anything to be conceived that these outlaws had dared the distance, there was not a shadow of an explanation how they got thither, and no one knew whither they had vanished. It seemed but poor consolation that by the evening a troop of dragoons arrived from Stanislaw, especially as their captain brought the information along with him that further reinforcements must not be expected under a week. About midnight, however, the infantry returned from Zulawce, Captain Stanczuk having led back his men on his own responsibility, in consequence of what appeared to him certain information of a meditated attack upon the district town. Now this officer was a man whose judgment might be trusted, it being known that, having grown up among them, he understood the peasantry; and when he also reported an ominous excitement about the country, giving it as his opinion that the danger was not to be trifled with, it was resolved to keep together what forces so far were available--about five hundred men in all--for the protection of the town itself, and to deal with the disturbed state of the country only when further reinforcements could be obtained.

April merged into May, but there was no further attack upon the town, although nightly expected, and the remainder of the garrison at Kossowince arrived safely at Colomea; but there was a constant feeling of the proximity of Taras's band, and the reports pouring in proved that this man, for good or for evil, swayed the minds of the peasantry throughout that part of the province. For, incredible as it seemed, it had to be accepted as a fact that Taras, whatever might be thought of his 'judgments,' exercised his influence in a marked degree for actual good. The governor, with a grim smile, had entered that account of events at Zadubrowce along with the "charges against Taras and followers"; but almost every day since had brought fresh proof that Taras really had forbidden the peasantry under pain of death to have recourse to plunder, or even to seek their rights for themselves, and, more remarkable still, that he insisted on their yielding every just tribute. And this information did not proceed from any of his adherents, but from the mandatars, the landlords, and the parish priests, who hated this "avenger" as their natural enemy, and would have been only too glad to see him taken up as a malefactor. For if the influence of this strangest of bandits for good could not be denied, neither was there any gainsaying that he exercised it in a terrible degree for ill almost daily. That steward of Kossowince had found some companions in his grief, who with the loss of their hair had been "disgraced" and obliged to make amends to the people they had wronged; while two landlords of the plain, not far from Horodenko, had fared worse: Taras had ordered them to be shot, and their dwellings levelled with the ground. But the man whom these accounts might well have dismayed first and foremost knew nothing about them. Wenceslas Hajek, lying in a raging fever, was mercifully saved from the shock of such news. Taras's "judgments," indeed, were appalling, and within three weeks no less than ten distinct cases were registered against him. And they resembled each other closely. He arrived suddenly with his band, cut off every retreat, took up the accused, tried him, and if he denied the charges, called witnesses, had him convicted, and the sentence was carried out on the spot. It was a remarkable fact that he carried out his judgments with the bullet only, none of his victims coming by their death by means of the rope; another feature was that any money that was found he invariably made over to the community for whose sake the deed was done. In short the cases were so like each other, and followed one another so rapidly, that the district governor quite got into a routine of filing charges against Taras.

Not till the end of May was the pressure on the minds of the citizens somewhat relieved. A battalion of infantry had been sent from Stanislaw, a regiment of dragoons from the Bukowina, and a regiment of hussars besides. With these troops there arrived also a lieutenant-general to take the entire command, and he forthwith called a council of war, to which, besides the military chiefs, were admitted the district governor, the burgomaster, and Dr. Starkowski as legal adviser.

Now while this council was sitting round the green baize table of the district court, a special messenger arrived with a letter from Hankowce, addressed to the Governor. "From Hankowce," exclaimed Herr von Bauer dismayed, "alas, poor Zborowski!... but no, he can't be killed," he corrected himself, "for it is his own handwriting!"

He tore open the missive, read it, and, pushing the letter from him, he burst from his seat with a crimson countenance, striking both his fists on the table.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "this is beyond anything ever heard of; enough to madden the Chief Justice himself. There, read for yourselves, and tell me if it is not simply maddening!"

The gentlemen made haste to comply, and what they read in that letter certainly was startling. The lord of the manor of Hankowce, Baron Alfred Zborowski, one of the most respected noblemen of the district, had written to his friend, the governor, with all the haste of one reporting a most unusual occurrence, for Starkowski had some trouble in making out the shaky handwriting. The letter ran as follows:

"We have just been saved as by a miracle from almost certain death. You know that I have never been a hard landlord; my peasants are kindly treated, and there has never been a point of contention between us till within these last weeks. But after the rising of Taras my people appeared entirely changed. They no longer touched their caps to me refused the labour they owed me, and there was a good deal of seditious speaking and of getting drunk at the public-

house. I did what I could to prevent worse things, yielding one point and another, but to no purpose. They grew only the more refractory, and it ended in their sending a deputation to me, a lot of young fellows armed with scythes and firelocks, demanding a loan of fifty florins. I refused it. They returned in the evening, about double the number, all more or less in drink, and not merely young men, but a great many of the older ones as well. There seemed nothing left but to yield, for how could I oppose them with a handful of retainers, and I dared not risk the safety of my wife and children. So I paid them the money. They went off brawling, spending it in drink forthwith. The day before yesterday they returned, some of my most trusted peasants among them, grievously drunk. 'We want one hundred florins of the money you have stolen from us, you robber, you tyrant,' cried their spokesman, a certain labourer of the name of Juzef Supan, 'pay it at once, or we shall call Taras.' 'Well, call him,' I said. 'I know him, and he knows me, for he was in my service twelve years ago; he knows I am no unjust man.' But they had only abuse in return, concluding, 'We don't even want Taras, we can help ourselves. Either you give us a hundred florins here on the spot or we'll make you rue it!' What could I do? I paid the money and off they went.

"My poor wife and I were left to consider the horrors of the situation. There was little doubt of how it would end--they would return with increased demands, or, more probably, would fall to plunder. Life itself was in jeopardy, and no help to be had. Even flight was impossible; for how could we risk it when rebellion is up everywhere? We could only look at one another in mute despair. Some hours passed, when suddenly my wife started from the couch on which she had buried her tearful face, looking at me with luminous eyes, as though she had had an inspiration. 'Husband!' she cried, 'you call Taras!' I stared at her, aghast, believing her demented with the agony of our fears. 'My dear,' I said, 'you know not what you are saying! My referring to him so confidently in the presence of these rebels was like a drowning man's snatching at a straw--nay, not even that! True, I have not been a hard landlord--the Almighty is my witness--but how should Taras care? Don't you know that he is no better than a cut-throat now; up in arms against the noble and wealthy of the land? If I called him we were lost, if we are not so already!' 'No, we should be saved,' cried she, warmly. 'Why, you know yourself we never had a more honest fellow in our service. I well remember his driving me once over to Colomea. I was struck with a peculiar sadness in his face; and on my inquiring what ailed him, he, in the most simple, straightforward fashion, told me it was about a girl. Now, it was just a tale of troubled love, nothing at all particular, but a man who could thus sorrow about a girl, and speak as he did, has a heart, I say, to pity us and our children.' I thought she was imagining a good deal; but, as she clung to her fancy, I no longer tried to contradict her, but set my face to the doing of a desperate duty. I did not send for Taras--for where, indeed, could I have looked for him?--but I gave orders to barricade the doors; and, arming my men, I placed wife and child in the strong room of the tower, prepared for the worst, and resolved to meet it.

"The day passed quietly, but with the approach of night we heard them coming--a mob of several hundred--the very women among them. They roared for admittance. 'We'll have it all back what you have robbed us of!' they cried, and forthwith prepared to force an entrance. The strong portal was groaning beneath the blows of their axes--it must yield, and we are lost! At this terrible moment a thunderous noise filled the air, the echoing hoof-treads of a body of horse bursting upon us. 'The hussars!' cried my steward; but no, for the mob was shrieking, 'Urrahah, the avenger!' When I heard that I knew the hour of death had come. There was an ominous silence, when a mighty voice fell upon my anxious ear: 'You are lying, you wretches, I know the man!' and presently, 'Up, comrades, make sure of this murderous lot; let none escape!' It was Taras himself. My men gave a cry of hope, but I felt stunned. There was a knocking at the gate presently, and a voice saying, 'Open, sir; I have come to save you!' My men let him in.

"Taras, indeed, stood before me, but I should not have known him again, so old, so worn he looked. 'My poor master,' he said, taking my hand, 'what must you have suffered, and the dear lady and the children! But fear nothing now, come with me and we will settle matters.' I followed him speechless. 'Nay, stop,' he said, with the sweetest smile, 'had we not better send word to the lady first, she will be anxious, and I would not have her be troubled a minute longer than I can help!' I called one of my men, sending him to her with a message, but then--I am not ashamed of owning it, I have not shed a tear these thirty years, but there was no fighting against it now.... 'Poor master,' he said, 'be comforted.' He spoke to me gently, as to a child, and drew me along with him to face the peasantry. A strange sight indeed--they stood like a flock of sheep when a storm is bursting, pressing against each other for very fear, and surrounded by a number of Taras's men armed to the teeth, every third man carrying a blazing torch besides. By the outer gate I perceived a further number, motionless on their horses, and drawn up like a body of cavalry, their leader a man in peasant garb with marked Jewish features. 'Now,' cried Taras, looking sternly at the mob, 'here is the man you have accused to me; let me hear, then, what he has been guilty of to justify your murderous attack. But I will have the truth--and woe to the man that dares a falsehood!' Upon which most of them fell on their knees, crying for mercy; a few only remained stubbornly on their feet, and there was but one who had the courage to make answer--it was Juzef Supan who said: 'We did not think that you, the people's avenger, would take the part of a Polish noble--a landlord--is not that enough in your eyes? He did, however, oppress us, like all of them!' 'You are not much of a witness,' said Taras, 'I happen to remember you. Your heart is a swamp, and your words like its poisonous exhalations. Is there any one here who can come forward with proof of the baron's oppression?' Juzef scowled, but the peasants cried: 'Forgive us, he led us on, saying, This is the time when poor folk can enjoy themselves for once, and the rich men must pay! And so we----' ... 'Turned rogues and all but assassins,' interrupted Taras, and his

eye shot fire; 'do you think these are the people that have any claim on me? You have deserved death every one of you for thus dragging low the sacred cause I have espoused; for making the holy right an excuse for the doing of meanest wrong. Yes, you have forfeited your lives; but, believing that you have been misled, and that you are willing to repent, I will grant you forgiveness, unless the baron himself would have you punished.' 'Surely, I forgive them heartily,' I cried. 'In that case,' he continued, 'I have but three things to see to. Firstly, you shall begin tomorrow with rendering whatever labour you owe to the baron; and you will behave reverently, as he deserves at your hands. If any of you, after this, dares offer him any slight, or withholds any just tribute, be it but a sheaf of wheat or an hour of your time, I shall have him shot, as sure as there is a God above us.' 'We will render our every due,' they cried. 'Secondly'--and he turned to me--'do they owe any arrears?' 'No,' 'But they have refused labour--for how long?' 'About three weeks.' 'That is eighteen working days. And how much in money did they force you to give them?' 'One hundred and fifty florins; but I acquit them of it.' 'Ah, but that is not justice,' he exclaimed, with a look that brooked no contradiction; and, addressing himself again to the peasantry, he called upon their judge to step forth. But that good man was not of the rioters; only one of the elders, Grigori Borsak, had joined the mob, and shamefacedly he presented himself. 'The eighteen days' labour,' said Taras, 'shall be doubled, and are due to the baron whenever he chooses to call on you within six weeks from this day. But as for the money, or at least its value, I'll see it paid back this very hour. You must raise it on the spot; some of my men will go with you about the village, and you had better not keep us waiting. And now for the third matter.' His voice swelled like thunder, and at a sign from him Juzef was dragged forth. 'Ah! forgive him!' I cried; but he shook his head. Another sign--two shots--and Juzef fell a corpse at our feet. The peasantry, horror-struck, rushed back to the village. 'Well, then, this is settled,' said Taras, turning to me. 'I have but to wait now to see them make amends for what they robbed you of.' But I stood mute, the awfulness and the generosity of this man seemed overpowering. He, too, was silent awhile, and then he said softly, almost humbly, 'I would like to see the lady and the dear children, but I dare hardly ask it.' 'Certainly,' I cried; 'forgive my neglect. Besides, she will want to thank you. It was she who insisted that you would save us if I would but send for you.' 'No! did she, indeed?' he exclaimed, blushing for very pleasure; yet he followed me bashfully, almost reluctantly.

"But my wife was coming to meet us, bathed in tears and holding our youngest child in her arms. She flung herself on her knees before him, but he, with a gesture of dismay, lifted her gently, and, bowing reverently, kissed the hem of her garment. 'Dear lady,' he said, 'I am told that you still think kindly of your former servant; and be sure he has never forgotten either the baron or yourself. I heard of your plight two days ago, but could not come sooner--not till I saw judgment done upon the mandatar at Rossow,' 'Bawinski!' she cried, dismayed, 'ah, his poor wife!' 'I could not help it, his life was forfeited!' 'Terrible man,' she sobbed, 'how long shall this shedding of blood continue?' It must continue while wrong remains unpunished,' said he, solemnly, 'and I have the power of righting it.' I thought it best to change the subject, inquiring after his wife and children; and my wife, recovering herself, invited him to our sitting-room. He followed her shyly and with the utmost respect, nor could he be prevailed upon to take a seat, but, hat in hand, remained standing, listening deferentially to all I told him about ourselves and the things that had occurred since his leaving. In fact, he was just the old servant happening to pay a visit to his former master, unconsciously falling back into the ways of service with the humble interest of grateful attachment. But no sooner was he told that the elder had returned with some money and a few heads of cattle, than he was the captain of his band again, self-confident and imperious. I endeavoured once more to have the people excused from making amends, but he would not hear of it, turning upon me almost fiercely: 'It is right, sir, to accept it!' and there seemed nothing else to be done. He took his leave with evident emotion, and burst away with his band, like a whirlwind, as he had come. I have written this in the early glimmer of morning, hardly myself as yet, but I longed to tell you; nay, conscience urged me not to delay my report. I am ready to swear to this statement if required, remaining, meanwhile,

"Ever yours,

"ZBOROWSKI."

The lawyer had read the letter aloud, but with a voice growing husky and tremulous, and having finished he sat down silent. Nor could any one else find speech, except the governor, who once again struck his fists on the table, exclaiming with a quaint petulance--

"Perhaps you will tell me now, sirs, what I am to think of this? I say it is maddening, it is distracting, if even the law cannot decide whether a man is a wicked scoundrel or a noble-hearted, valorous defender of his kind. Now without this Taras, my good friend Zborowski were a corpse by this time, every manor in the district, but for him, were in rains, and rebellion stalking the land! It is so, indeed. I have little chance of upholding martial law though I proclaimed it, but every word of his is regarded like an edict of the crown. But what do I say?--why, without him we had never seen this confusion, and the wretch has men shot like sparrows! Do *you* understand him? then do help me to see straight!"

"He is a remarkable outlaw, that much I perceive," said the general, drily.

"It does not seem so baffling after all," broke in the burgomaster, "it is just this, methinks--an

honest law-abiding man, as he was originally, has been wronged in a lawsuit--wronged, he thinks--and it has driven him to seek for himself the right which he fancies is denied him. He wants to destroy the man who has thus ill-used him, and he thinks he must punish the unjust judges; that is, he seeks to kill Hajek, and to--to--I beg your pardon, but the unjust judges in his opinion are evidently the magistrates of this district. All his enemies, then, are enjoying the shelter of this town, and this is why I always urged making special provision for its safety."

"Supposing it is so, then why does he hold his 'judgments' all over the country?" returned the general.

"By way of practice, I should say," rejoined the burgomaster. "So far he has not seen his way to attack us, because of the reinforcements, which I am thankful to say are sufficiently large now; yet he must do something to keep together his band. Besides, such men require diversion!"

"Diversion!" broke in the governor, wrathfully, flourishing the baron's letter in the burgomaster's face. "Do you dare maintain that such a man kills his neighbours by way of a pastime?"

"Gently--gently, sirs," interrupted the general, amused at the governor's fury; and turning to Starkowski, he said: "Now you have had some opportunity of knowing this man, doctor; are you also of opinion that this town is in danger of an attack?"

"Yes, certainly, so long as Hajek is within its gates. But Colomea is in exactly the same position to him as any manor, any place whatever sheltering an evil-doer. Taras's doings do not proceed from any personal sense of injury; in short, they are not dictated by revenge. There have been such instances in the history of the law, but his motive, so far as I know, is unprecedented. Hajek has not robbed him of anything, not wronged him in any way; the very lawsuit, which he carried on with a pertinacity quite unexampled, was never any fighting for *his* right, but for the right of others--in fact, for *the* right pure and simple, for the 'holiest thing on earth,' as he once designated it to me. He failed in fighting for it with peaceful means, so he continues his battle by force of arms. He does not hate the mandatar--or, rather, he hates him as he would hate any wrong-doer; his fighting is a fight for the right--for the right, as such, against wrong. Therefore I say he would not now be satisfied if you delivered up the mandatar into his hands--you have heard what answer he made to the baroness! And, therefore, what I should counsel is this: Protect this city by all means, but do what you can to withdraw the district from his power."

Captain Stanczuk fully concurred in this view, and a resolution was passed to commence active operations against Taras immediately. The town should be held, as hitherto, by its own garrison, while the rest of the troops, as flying columns, should scour the country, the hussars acting as scouts between them.

The mode of action settled, and everything arranged, the council was breaking up, when the governor requested a further hearing. "Sirs," he said, producing a writ, to which a large seal was appended, "I am extremely sorry to have to detain you with this--one moment, I pray you. It is not for me to question any of the Provincial Governor's orders--but--humph! it is a pity sometimes--- However, I can but make it known to you that, by this writ, I am instructed, firstly, to place a price of five hundred florins upon Taras's head. Now, leaving all other considerations out of the question, I should say this measure is utterly useless, and will only enrage the peasantry. And I am instructed, secondly--but no!..." Herr von Bauer was heaving with passion, and his face was purple.

"Well, secondly?" inquired the general.

"I think, perhaps, on the whole, I had better keep this point to myself--for the present, at least, till I hear what the Provincial Governor may think of my urgent appeal to reconsider the matter. And I'll just see," he added, with rising anger, "if there is any coward to be found, any mean----" The rest was lost in his own furious growl. However, he recovered sufficiently to say, "I wish you good evening, gentlemen! I have the honour to wish you a very good evening. As for me, if I had never known it before, I know it now, that it is desperately pleasant work in one's old age to reach the dignity of a district governor in Galicia...."

CHAPTER XVII.

SIGNS OF FAILURE.

About the very time when the authorities at Colomea were holding their war council, a remarkable occurrence took place at Zulawce. It was Ascension Day, and a general meeting had been called.

The men of Zulawce were in a difficulty of their own; for, while all the rest of the parishes within the disturbed district were at least free to side either with the Government or with the avenger, as seemed best to suit their temper or their interests, the people of Zulawce could do neither. They considered they had done with Taras; for had he not insulted them beyond forgiveness by refusing to rid them of the soldiers? But no less implacable was their resentment against the authorities who had inflicted the soldiers upon them; and even after the company had withdrawn its hateful presence, they continued in a high state of ill-humour and uncertainty of mind, which rendered them unfit for any united action. It was this very want of decision, however, which proved helpful to Father Leo in his strenuous efforts to prevent any deed of violence; for though there were few among them that would not have loved to see the manor plundered or set on fire, now that it was left at their mercy, none quite dared to assume the responsibility of taking the lead in such an act. Still, this, or any similar outrage, might any day be looked for; and since the helpless Jewgeni did nothing for the maintenance of order, Father Leo, assisted by some of the more steady-going of his parishioners, succeeded in bringing together a sort of committee, which was to take in hand the settlement of affairs in the distracted village. The six men, however, upon whom this office devolved did not at first seem more likely to arrive at a united opinion with whom to cast in their sympathy than the parish at large had been; but they managed by degrees to sink differences in a sort of compromise of a peculiar kind, and quite unprecedented even in the history of that remarkable people. The resolution arrived at ran as follows:--

"This is to give notice that since Taras has left us in the lurch, and the men of the law have wronged us, we repudiate them both now and evermore! It is their fault if we men of Zulawce, in this time of trouble, have come to the conclusion that we had better in future be our own administrators, recognising no one in authority over us, save the judge of our own choosing. We intend henceforth to pay neither tax nor tribute to any outsider, and we shall render forced labour to no man; but we will live justly and peaceably, wronging none either in life or property. We insist on taking back the field which belongs to us; but we will guard the manor as carefully as though it were left to the parish in trust by one of ourselves absent for a time." So then the committee of affairs at Zulawce, after this fashion, and quite ignorant of its classical prototypes, had arrived at the idea of the republic, proposing Simeon Pomenko as the fittest man to preside as "free judge" over the parish interests.

The announcement was received enthusiastically, and on the day in question all the community once more had gathered beneath the lindens, where the new order of things was to be promulgated. The place was as crowded as on the Palm Sunday when Taras had made his memorable speech. Two only were absent--Father Leo, who of course could not officially acknowledge this change of government, although he would not deny that for the present it seemed the likeliest arrangement for arriving at anything like order in the parish; and she whom he had termed the most unhappy widow of the place, poor Anusia, who since that service on Easter Sunday had left the house only when her presence was absolutely necessary about the farm. She continued an object of interest, and was talked about daily; but, with natural tact, the villagers forebore troubling her with calls, and passed her in silence when they met on the rare occasions of her being about the fields; for even the roughest of them felt that her sorrow, and the silent dignity with which she bore it, commanded their reverence. And it redounds not a little to the honour of that wild community, that even on the day when their fury ran highest, when Wassilj and Hritzko had returned with Taras's answer, none had thought of casting it up to the widow, or of offering her any insult whatever.

The bearing of the assembly was grave and even solemn. "Men and brothers," said Simeon, "it would be a disgrace if we could not rule ourselves and re-establish order in this village of ours! The country is full of uproar and sedition; let peace and honest labour have their place here--so be it!" On account of the intended independence of the community, and because of the pressure of the times, there would naturally be an increase of parish business; and it was resolved therefore that three elders henceforth would be required, and they were nominated. Alexa Sembrow was to act as "home minister,"--the common field and the fair distribution of its produce should be his especial care; while Wassilj, the butcher, should see to the external safety of the place; Wilko Sembratowicz, the third of the number, serving as treasurer.

This arranged, the assembly fell into a procession, and with bared heads proceeded to the field of strife, amid the ringing of bells and the solemn strains of the *Te Deum*. The "free judge" and his elders led the march, and with their own hands, while the singing continued, they pulled the black cross from its present place, replanting it where it had stood formerly, at three feet distance from the river. This done, the four white-haired men fell on their knees, and, spreading forth their arms, thrice kissed the recovered soil, all the people doing likewise, amid sobs and tears.

After which Simeon stepped forth, saying: "I require every one here to witness, as I also ask Him above, that we have only taken back that which belongs to us by right, and which was taken from us by a wicked fraud.... We pray Thee, Thou Ruler above, to prevent such fraud in the future, and we will fight to the death rather than permit it again. This is our solemn oath!"

"Our solemn oath!" repeated the men in chorus, lifting their right hands. And with faces beaming with satisfaction the people returned to the village.

Nor was their confidence at all lowered for some little time. The word of the free judge

seemed being fulfilled, peace and diligence continuing here, while bloodshed and misery spread over the land. Neither was the village interfered with for changing its constitution, the authorities and the troops having more than enough on their hands already. No illusion had prevailed at that war council at Colomea concerning the difficulty of dealing with the bandits; but the utter failure of all operations hitherto exceeded even the worst anticipations. In fact, the chance had never yet offered for having even a brush with the enemy; and although the flying columns continued to scour the land, never a hajdamak did they set eyes upon. They somehow always arrived just too late, or they sought for them on the banks of the Dniester while they did their work by the Pruth; or strove to protect the east of the province, where the avenger had just been heard of, while Taras quietly, but surely, carried out his judgments in the west. It seemed altogether useless that the number of soldiers out against him was doubled, and even trebled, by the arrival of further troops; and nothing seemed to come of spending large sums of money upon private spies, when the mandatars and others grew shy of giving their information, lest they should suffer for it sooner or later. Taras, with all the machinery of Government against him, continued his awful work, utterly undisturbed, all through May and June; nor did the presence of soldiers throughout the troubled districts hinder him in the least from extending his raids far and wide, and making his power felt in every direction. And, in spite of the almost appalling penetration he showed in singling out his victims, never mistaking the innocent for the guilty--in spite of his repeated injunctions to the peasantry to forbear from acts of violence themselves, and to render every just tribute conscientiously--the terror at the jurisdiction he had established, as it were, in the face of the law, and which one would scarcely have conceived possible within the boundaries of a powerful, well-ordered State, grew and spread till nothing short of a panic filled the length and breadth of the land. The authorities had to listen to the wildest reproaches of the excited people, although they strained every nerve in the execution of their duty. But with all their honest efforts they could not even suggest an explanation of the means by which this strange bandit was holding his ground against them. With their erroneous notions concerning his numbers, their absolute ignorance of his hiding-places--of which the bog-island near Nazurna was the most important--and not in the least aware to what extent the peasantry aided and abetted him as his willing informers, the speed and temerity of his movements could not but be a mystery. He seemed everywhere and nowhere, and did his work with impunity. By the middle of July four thousand soldiers were out against him, and yet it appeared hopeless to look for an ending of this reign of terror.

Now the men of Zulawce watched this state of affairs rather with satisfaction than otherwise. For the more useless military intervention appeared, the greater was their confidence in being able to maintain their self-constituted liberty unmolested. But all of a sudden the day dawned that should teach them it was not so easy to break away from the leading-strings of sovereignty.

It was a dull, grey morning in July; rain was pouring in endless streams. The sodden roads were deserted, and so were the fields. The two fellows whom Wassilj, the butcher, had placed by the toll-booth near the river, did stay at their post, it is true, for the place was dry and comfortable enough, but instead of keeping a careful look-out, they had retired to their pallets and were snoring blissfully. These somnolent youths started suddenly, rubbing their eyes, for heavy footfalls on the wooden bridge had broken on their slumbers; they stared, wondering if they could be dreaming; but no, it was flat reality--they even recognised the face of the officer who was leading hither his men, Captain Stanczuk. They rushed from the booth, fired off their muskets by way of giving the alarm, and, racing towards the village, they kept shouting at the top of their voices. The soldiers had to slacken their pace on account of the fearful state of the roads, so that the youths reached the village a good while before them.

And when Captain Stanczuk brought up his men in sight of the inn, he found the road barricaded by some overturned waggons, while bundles of faggots were being heaped up hastily, and some fifty men stood with muskets levelled, ready to defend the place. Now Stanczuk had special orders to avoid bloodshed, if possible; but his kindly prudence hardly required such instruction. He stopped the advance of his men within a hundred yards of the villagers, and, riding on by himself fearlessly, requested to parley with the judge.

"My father is not here yet," replied Hritzko. "But there will be no parleying, save by means of bullets."

"Well," replied the captain, quietly, "if you set so little store by your lives, I cannot help it. But not being such a foolhardy idiot myself I think I will just wait for your father's pleasure." And turning his horse, he rode back to his men.

He had to wait a considerable while, but not in vain. The number of men holding the barricade had, indeed, increased till almost every man of the village was present, and nearly all were in a belligerent mood; but behind them their wives were lamenting, preparing the way for the pope's and the judge's influence. It would be no more than good sense, these urged, to hear first what the officer might have to say; and after some altercation it was agreed that Simeon, with his son and the three elders, should accompany Father Leo to the soldiers.

The captain rode forth to meet them. "Good day to your reverence, and good day to you all!" he said, smiling pleasantly. "I have been waiting patiently for an explanation of this nonsense! Don't you think you are rather foolish, considering the times?"

The half-bantering tone of his address somewhat disconcerted them, but after a pause the

judge returned: "Then what are you here for, captain? If you have any idea of calling us to order after your fashion, we'll just defend ourselves. And as for the field we have taken back----"

"Your fields are no business of mine," said the officer, as blandly as before, "and you may continue King of Zulawce yet awhile, my good friend. My present orders concern no one but Anusia Barabola and her children. I have to arrest them, and take them to Colomea."

"That shall never be!" cried Hritzko furiously, and even Father Leo flushed crimson with indignation.

"It would be nothing short of a dastardly wrong, captain!" he exclaimed. "I pledge my life that the poor woman has no share whatever in her husband's doings."

The honest officer winced. "Your reverence is aware," he said, lowering his voice, "that the soldier's duty is to obey his orders, and not to question them."

"And the poor children, are they to be held accountable for their father?"

"I have to obey my instructions," repeated Stanczuk; "and if your reverence will use your influence and prevent any interference with my duty, you will but act in accordance with the sacred office you bear."

The pope was silent; but even if he had shared the officer's views and fallen in with his suggestion as to his influence, he would have had little chance of exercising it. For the peasants had decided for themselves, old Simeon stepping forth, saying as he crossed himself: "Sir captain, while there is a man alive here to defend her, you shall not lay hands on this unhappy woman and her children. We are fully aware that we endanger our own wives and children in opposing you, but we cannot help it. Why, we should deserve to be struck dead on the spot if we suffered such wickedness against the widow and her orphans. There, you may do your duty--we shall do ours!"

He turned to go, but the captain touched his arm, almost pleadingly. "Have you really considered," he cried, "what misery your refusal may bring on this village? There is bloodshed enough in these days; do not add to it, I pray you. Go and consult the people--I will wait."

But Simeon shook his head and turned away without another word, followed by the rest of them, Father Leo included. When they had reached the barricade and informed the people of the demand made upon them, there was but one voice of indignant refusal. Anusia's servant, Halko, rushed off towards the farm, but all the rest of the men stood like a wall, crying: "You have spoken well, judge, we will never permit it!" And the women ceased wailing, but Father Leo, with speechless agony, folded his hands, looking on.

Hritzko took the command, and the peasants, besides holding several of the cottages near, stationed themselves all about the raised ground on which the church stood, where they found ample cover. They knelt with muskets levelled, prepared to fire.

"Let them approach within thirty paces," cried Hritzko, "and, at a sign from my whistle, receive them with a volley. Be ready!"

The captain waited for twenty minutes, and then, sorely against his will, drew his sword, and heading his men, gave the word to advance. The drums beat, the men started at the double, with bayonets fixed.

The peasants, in accordance with the orders received, allowed them to approach without firing. The soldiers had reached Wilko's cottage, when Hritzko lifted the whistle to his mouth. But before he could give the sign, a hand was laid on his arm, pressing it down with a good deal of force. "You shall not fire!" a loud voice was heard to say peremptorily; "I will not have it!"

The young man started amazed. Before him, tall and commanding, stood the wife of Taras, with little Tereska on her arm; an old woman-servant followed with the little boys, sobbing piteously. The children, too, were crying. But Anusia, though pale, was calm as death; she stood erect, and her face bore that expression of stony composure which, ever since that terrible Palm Sunday, appeared to have taken the place of her naturally passionate disposition. "I will not have a shot fired," she said; "I shall go with the soldiers."

"Anusia!" exclaimed Simeon, "will you deliver up yourself and your poor children to certain death?"

"We are all in God's hand," she said. "For my sake no wife shall be made a widow, no child fatherless." ... And, turning to the servant, she added, "Come!"

But Captain Stanczuk had understood the strange scene, and ordered his men to halt. The peasants, too, were standing motionless with surprise. Anusia deliberately went up to the officer. "Here I am," she said, "and here are my children."

But the gallant soldier, on looking into the tearless, grief-bound face of that poor peasant woman, was filled with a sensation of awe the like of which he had never known before. He felt as

though he must bend the knee as to a queen or empress. "Come," he said, reverently, "we brought a carriage for you."

She nodded, and forthwith would have moved towards the vehicle, which followed in the rear; but the villagers had recovered themselves, and were pressing round her. The officer nowise interfered, for he could see in their faces that they intended no further enmity. They surrounded her, deeply moved, some even sobbing when she lifted her children into the carriage as it drew up, and others kissed her garment, crying, "Farewell, Anusia! we shall never forget it!" Father Leo breaking out passionately, "You are a brave woman; no saint ever did a greater thing for her people--it shall not be forgotten, indeed.... And your farm shall be cared for, we shall be proud to do it!"

"Thank you," she said, gently, and could no longer forbid her tears, the big drops running down her face: but soon the rigid calm returned. "I am quite ready," she said to the officer.

The drums beat, and the procession started, down to the river and across the bridge, towards the distant town.

At dusk the following day they arrived at Colomea, and that same evening Anusia was ushered into the presence of the governor.

That honest, stout-hearted gentleman had looked forward to this hour as to the bitterest trial of his life, and had indeed resisted it as long as he could; but his remonstrances with the governor of the province had been fruitless, though seconded by every magistrate of the district; and even their united request to be dismissed rather than forced to obey in this matter availed not. The Lemberg authorities had returned word that no doubt the question of their dismissal might be considered in due time, but for the present they must keep to their posts, obeying their superiors. And thus the high-minded old governor had been obliged with his own hand to draw up the order for an arrest, which in his eyes was the worst act of violence yet committed; but having done this, he insisted on conducting the inquiry himself, lest the wrong he could not help should be carried out harshly. Mr. Wenceslas Hajek by this time had recovered his sprits sufficiently to quit his voluntary retreat in the city gaol for his own chambers, and the apartment he had occupied--not really a cell, but a private room of the chief warder's--had been made ready for Anusia, the governor himself superintending the arrangements and giving various directions for her comfort. This done, he returned to his office, awaiting her coming with a beating heart.

She entered, but he scarcely found courage to look up, busying himself with a sheet of paper to hide his emotion.

"Are you cognisant of your husband's crimes, or aiding him in any way?"

"No, sir."

"I am forced, nevertheless, to keep you in custody; but I will have you well treated. I shall daily inquire after your own and your children's well-being."

He waved his hand, and Anusia was taken back to her place of confinement. The old man remained by himself, pacing his office for the best part of an hour, deeply agitated; now gesticulating with his hands, now talking wildly. Having calmed down a little, he returned to his desk to make his report to the Provincial Governor, adorning it with all the flourishes approved of by the profession of the period; but he took care that his dutiful letter should end with these words: "Never again may a representative of the law within this realm of Austria feel himself thus lowered in the eyes of the accused brought to his bar, and may his excellency, the Governor-Provincial, not find cause to lament the consequences of this measure!"

But even before his note of warning could reach the ears it was meant for, the thunderbolt of vengeance had fallen--fearfully, terribly indeed! On the second night after Anusia's arrival at the city gaol the district governor was roused from sleep--a certain clerk, Joseph Dorn by name, had arrived with news that brooked no delay.

The poor governor positively shook with apprehension; for that clerk had been ordered to accompany one of the stipendiary magistrates, who in the morning had set out to the village of Jablonow, where a certain matter had to be settled by local evidence. The gentleman's name was Hohenau, he being a worthy German from the Rhine, advanced in years, and universally respected for his integrity. Now, although, after the attack upon Kapronski, Taras had not again laid hands on any officer of the law, the governor decided, nevertheless, that Hohenau, whom he loved as a friend, should not undertake the journey, short as it was, without a special escort of forty dragoons. He was expected to return late at night; what if the clerk had come back without him!... The governor tried to battle with this thought as with an apparition. "Nonsense!" he said; "what should have happened?" and he stepped boldly into his ante-room. But one look into the man's face showed him that his fears were only too well founded. That clerk, who had served half his life as a sergeant of the constabulary, till pensioned off to his present post, and who was not likely to grow faint at the sight of a shadow, was leaning against the wall, white as death, and trembling in every limb.

"He has been killed?" gasped the governor.

"He has!" groaned the clerk.

Herr von Bauer, too, grew faint, catching at a chair-back for support. At that moment he experienced that most painful of all bodily sensations, which, though common enough as a figure of speech, is rare in actual fact, and not likely to be forgotten by the luckless mortal that ever underwent it! The poor old governor felt his scalp contract with an icy coldness, every single root of hair pricking into it like a red-hot needle--*his hair standing on end!*

For a while these two men continued facing each other, terror-struck and unable to speak, till the governor's lady came rushing in to inquire into the reason of this late disturbance. Her coming was opportune, for the governor was obliged to rouse himself to bid her retire; and turning to the clerk, he said, "Tell me."

At which the latter drew himself up straight and saluted his superior. And then followed his tale: "There was much to be done at Jablonow," he said, "and it was eight o'clock before we could set out on the journey back. Both in front and behind us the dragoons were trotting, quite carelessly, and Herr von Hohenau was even merry-hearted, conversing pleasantly to pass the time. And he fell talking about Taras, saying--'Do you know, Dorn, I should rather like to see him; one would like to have a talk with the man--he is quite a colleague of ours, a criminal judge if ever there was one; and I will even maintain he is possessed of all the true instincts of the profession, knowing how to discriminate between a rascal and an honest man--between right and wrong. I am sure of it!' 'Begging your pardon, sir,' I replied, 'but he is just a black-dyed villain, and God Almighty keep us from falling in with him.' 'Well,' owned he, 'I don't say I am anxious to meet him, say, on this journey, although I should not give him credit for any desire of harming us. You misjudge the fellow, Dorn; I have carefully followed his so-called judgments, and I will say this for him, he is a man still and no fiend.' The word was scarcely out of his mouth--we had just arrived by the little bridge leading over the Krasnik--when all of a sudden the reeds on both sides of the brook seemed alive with highwaymen. I am an old soldier, sir, and it is a dead mystery to me how it could happen so quickly, but in less than three minutes all our men were clean overpowered. I should think the bandits were at least five to one of ourselves, but I will say this for them, they did behave decently, and whoever was willing to accept quarter, was merely disarmed and pinioned; they killed only those who stubbornly resisted. Herr von Hohenau remarked it also, and whispered to me: 'Never fear, Dorn, he won't harm us,' And for a while it seemed so. For the bandits who had surrounded the vehicle, levelling their pistols at our faces, now drew off, and one of their number--a Jew, by the face of him--said almost politely: 'Please to get out, sirs, and speak to the avenger.' We stepped to the ground, they closed in a circle, and Taras himself stood before us. Now I had often seen him--why, it is barely two years since--when he used to call here on account of that law-suit of his, a fair-haired, strong-built, ruddy man, with a glow of health about him; but I certainly should not have known him again, hollow-cheeked, worn, and grey as he is now, with deep furrows about his face, and almost trembling as he looked at us. He kept silent rather long, I thought, and there seemed more pity than wrath in his eyes, and he spoke gently when he began, turning to me first. 'It is not you I require, you are but a clerk of theirs, and are bound to write whatever they tell you. You had better go your way at once--that is, if this man here has not some last message he would like to entrust to you.' I shook from head to foot at this announcement, and the gentleman, too, grew white, catching hold of my arm as if to steady himself; yet he was able to say--'I am Carl von Hohenau, a magistrate; every man in this neighbourhood knows me, and can tell you that no crime lies at my door. What is it you accuse me of, Taras?' 'Unheard-of violence and cowardly wrong,' he said. 'My wife and my children are detained in your gaol.' At which Herr von Hohenau drew himself up, saying solemnly: 'Taras, you will believe my word of honour, that they have not been arrested at our instigation, but against our every protest. The governor has been forced to yield to the authorities at Lemberg, our superiors,' At which Taras scanned his face attentively, saying, after a pause: 'I am unwilling to believe you are speaking falsely; but I have had information on solemn oath. Was it not by your orders that Kapronski, on the Wednesday after Easter, threatened my wife with arrest?' 'No--certainly not! Did he? Oh--the rascal! Why, he came back assuring us that only by means of his taking it upon himself thus to threaten you had you been prevailed upon to spare his life,' 'He lied,' said Taras. 'I charged him to tell you that I should consider your lives forfeited if you countenanced such wrong--did he tell you that?' 'No, on the contrary, he advised it as the only expedient; and the Provincial Governor, in issuing his orders to us, has acted on his suggestions without a doubt.' The poor gentleman was not a little excited, but had sufficient power over himself to state plainly that repeated efforts were made by the magistrates of this district to reason with the authorities at Lemberg, and that they obeyed orders in the end under protest only, because there was no help for it. Taras listened quietly, and then, bending his head, he stood motionless, like one lost in thought, a shudder ever and anon quivering through his limbs.... And I believed there was ground for hope; but, alas, I was mistaken. Pulling himself up suddenly, he said: 'I will accept your account, every word as you have told it. But how is it that you yielded in the end, knowing that which was demanded of you was an act of violence?' 'We were driven to it,' 'I do not understand that,' said Taras, slowly; 'a soldier has no will of his own, and must obey his superiors, or he will be shot; but I never heard it is so with the Emperor's magistrates!' 'It is not; and yet we should have been punished--ignominiously dismissed in all probability, which is no light thing for a man to face. Some of us have wives and children,' 'So it is just this: you preferred your position, and perhaps daily bread for yourselves and your families, to the integrity of your conscience! And you are judges, who have sworn an oath before the Almighty, to further the right!' The terrible man said this in the same quiet tone and very slowly, but his passion now broke forth: 'No,' he cried, 'judges who are capable of that, who have yielded

to the wrong, have forfeited their lives! Prepare yourself for death.... I cannot spare you!' But I fell on my knees. 'Taras!' I cried, 'for mercy's sake, forbear killing this man!' Herr von Hohenau, however, ordered me to rise, preserving his composure like a hero to the end. 'I have nearly reached my three score and ten,' he said, 'and have striven after righteousness all my days, to the best of my knowledge. I am ready to give up my account to Him who is Judge over all, and my days at best are numbered. And I leave neither wife nor child behind me. It is, therefore, not the fear of death, man, which prompts me to say that you must not kill me, unless you would burden your conscience with a deed of common murder, in the blind fury of revenge. So far as your deeds are known to me, this would be the first act of yours that must be called criminal and nothing else,' The bandits growled, but Taras, beckoning them to be quiet, stood motionless, with bowed head, and lost in thought, as before. Those were terrible moments, I cannot tell how long it lasted, but it seemed an eternity. At last one of Taras's men--that Jew--went up to him, addressing him gently. I could not understand his words, but saw from the expression of his face that he was pleading for mercy. That it was so grew evident from Taras's answer, who, lifting up his hand, said hoarsely, and trembling as though it went hard with him: 'God help me and him, and if I am judging wrongfully I may suffer for it on the gallows, but there is no help for it--he must die! He and his fellow magistrates have set aside their sacred oath for the sake of earthly advantage, and in the fear of man; theirs is the power to protect the holiest of causes, to see the Right carried out, and they have misused the power entrusted to them. That is a fearful evil; and where shall wrong end if it begins with them? Hitherto I have tried to believe that it was their mistake, or at worst their carelessness, at times, which rendered them liable to judge falsely; and though combating the wrong I have so far not declared war against the men of the law themselves. But now I have proof that these judges, these guardians of the Right, have actually been able, against their own better knowledge, to concur in a wrongful deed! I can no longer, then, be satisfied with merely stopping the course of this or that muddy stream, as it were, but am bound to close up the spring-head itself. I grieve, indeed, that I must make the beginning with this old man, who I daresay is one of the best of them, but there is no help for it--may God be merciful to him and to me!' Herr von Hohenau was going to speak yet again, but Taras cut him short, saying: 'It is useless, you must see I cannot help you!' and when I clasped his feet, he freed himself, and fell back behind some of his men. But Herr von Hohenau stood erect, saying with a loud voice, 'Get up, Dorn, it is not meet for honest men to kneel to such a one! Get me a piece of paper and a pencil!' He wrote a few lines, commended himself to the Almighty, and--and----

The old clerk was shaken with sobs, his eyes were tearless, but the lips quivered, and his breast heaved convulsively.

"They--shot--him?"

The man nodded, and, fumbling in his pocket with trembling hand, produced a scrap of paper. But the governor saw nothing; he, too, was leaning against the wall now, unable to stand. His eyes were closed, but two large drops hung quivering at his lashes, and fell over the furrowed face. "Peace, peace be with thee!" he murmured, "thou best of friends!"

There was a long silence, but the clerk at last ventured to break it: "This bit of writing," he said, falteringly. The governor took it and read:--

"Farewell, my Ferdinand, we have been friends this many a year; do not grieve for me, but have a care for yourself and the others. Let Kapronski meet with his deserts if you can! What money I leave behind me I want your eldest boy to have; just take it, with my love. I do not die willingly, but with an easy mind.--Yours in death,

"CARL VON HOHENAU."

Herr von Bauer folded the letter, placing it in his note-book. "Where is the body, Dorn?" he inquired, presently.

"Lying by the bridge; and so are the shackled dragoons. The monster himself cried after me, 'You had better send for them,' He had ordered some of his men to take me within sight of the town, where they left me."

Before daybreak even, the brave old governor, together with the general and a sufficient body of men, had started for the scene of death. It was an unspeakably sad journey through the mellow summer night. About half-way they came upon the greater number of the dragoons. None of these had been hurt, they had only been overpowered and bound with ropes. One of them had succeeded in slipping his fetters, and had thus been enabled to set the others free. They confirmed the statement that the band appeared to have no other object than to compass the magistrate's death, vanishing almost directly after he had fallen, pierced by their bullets.

They reached the bridge in the grey of the morning, and found only a few wounded soldiers and the corpse. And the men, bending over it, were filled with a holy awe on beholding the expression of a restful, even proud calm, that had settled on the dead man's face; never had the majesty of death spoken louder than here. And even the old general felt an unwonted pricking

about his eyelids when the governor knelt by the dead body of his friend. He insisted on lifting it himself, barely allowing Dorn to lend him a helping hand.

When the mournful procession had returned to the town, the district governor lost no time in calling at the prison, in order to see Anusia. But only a single question he asked of her--"Did Kapronski offer you any threats?"--"Yes," she replied, unhesitatingly, repeating his words.

The governor nodded, as though it were just the information he had expected; and not wasting another word he went his way to the district-board office. As he entered the building the secretary came rushing down to meet him--a messenger had just arrived from Lemberg with a writ from the Provincial Governor, and was to wait for an answer. "Let him wait," said the district governor, bitterly. "I daresay they have come to see the propriety of our remonstrances and rescind their orders."

The contents of the writ, indeed, somewhat verified these surmises, stating that, having referred the matter to Vienna, instructions had been received to take no measures against the family of Taras; to which the Provincial Governor nevertheless added, as his own opinion, that, had the arrest been effected already, he should not deem it advisable to countermand it, lest the dangerous bandit should draw strength from their yielding. But more than this, the Viennese Government requested that every authentic information concerning Taras, beginning with the records of his law-suit in behalf of the community of Zulawce, should be forwarded without delay. And the attention of the Provincial authorities was directed to the advisability of endeavouring to reclaim, the rebel by peaceful means, since both his character and his history, so far as known in Vienna, appeared to warrant this as the best solution of the difficulty. Not that his submission should be bargained for under promise of absolute immunity, or any other inexpedient concession, but rather by rectifying certain unfortunate mistakes, which no doubt might be done without lowering the dignity of the law or that of its guardians. With regard to this, however, the opinion of the local authorities was invited. In the meantime, and until further notice, all action against Taras should be strictly on the defensive, certain contingencies excepted.

This official communication was accompanied by a private note of the Provincial Governor's, which said: "I have certain information that His Imperial Highness, the Archduke Ludwig, is at the bottom of these instructions. Send me your records at once, and it is to be hoped everything is in plain order. For you know that if the Archduke once inquires into a cause, he will have it thoroughly sifted. It is a positive riddle to me how this wretched cut-throat, Taras, should have come to rouse interest in such high quarters. Concerning the 'peaceful means,' however, about which we are to give our opinion, I desire nowise to influence your own ideas, but it seems to me we should be handed down to posterity as fools if we recommended them. The commissioner, Kapronski, whom I have every reason to believe a thoroughly honest and trustworthy man, quite shares my view, deprecating the proposal in the strongest terms, and I should say he is not without experience of his own. He assures me, and I daresay he is right, that any leniency shown to Taras would rouse his insolent opposition to the fullest. I wish to suggest this view to you, but of course you should judge for yourself."

Having read this, the district governor at once issued notices for a meeting of the Board, submitting to the magistrates not only the official document, but the private communication as well. "His excellency, the Provincial Governor, and myself, are not in the habit of having secrets with each other," he said, grimly. The Board, after a short debate, was unanimous in its opinion that peaceful means were not likely to avail in the present extremity, and the following despatch was drawn up: "We fully agree that Taras, terrible as his crimes are, cannot be designated as a bandit and cut-throat in the ordinary sense; it might seem a natural hope, therefore, to lead him back to paths of rectitude by appealing to his sense of honour and justice. Nor do we fear that such an attempt would increase his temerity. But we feel bound to deprecate such a plan, not only because of its utter uselessness as regards the man himself, but even more on account of the hurtful effect it would certainly produce on the people, who would see in it a confession of weakness. As for Taras himself, it is evident that he is acting under the pressure of a belief stronger than his will, imagining that the duty has devolved on him to exterminate every 'wrong' he obtains cognisance of, to punish every deed of injustice, nay, the very omission of doing right. And this idea has so eaten itself into his heart, that no concession to any lawful, or for the matter of that even to unlawful demands, or any other 'peaceful means' will dissuade him from it. He will continue his 'judgments' till they are rendered impossible by force." The Board, however, strongly recommended the setting at liberty of his innocent family; "not for fear of his revenge, but as a matter of conscience, and in the fear of the Judge above." And in conclusion, having reported the murder of their colleague, Hohenau, and Anusia's declaration, they requested that the commissioner Kapronski should be sent back without delay, that he might be brought to the bar of his immediate superiors. With which reply, and a bulky bundle of papers, the messenger returned to Lemberg.

Upon this the Provincial Government wrapped itself in silence save on one point; they had been loth, these authorities stated, to set full value on the commissioner's complaints concerning the ill-will of his colleagues, much as they trusted his veracity on all other heads. But now the Board of Colomea had given tangible proof of its unworthy animosity, actually suggesting proceedings against a respectable servant of the law upon no evidence whatever, save the declaration of a bandit and his imprisoned wife. This appeared unjustifiable spite, and the Provincial Government not only must refuse to give up the innocent commissioner, but felt obliged to censure the magistracy sharply. In answer to which the whole Board of Colomea once

more, and in stronger terms, submitted their request for dismissal, but neither on this matter nor concerning Taras did anything farther reach them. There was a dead silence for several weeks.

Thus the district governor's position had come to be no bed of roses, when suddenly it seemed as though having reached the worst, matters would mend. It had been observed that Taras's 'judgments' grew fewer, and during the first fortnight in August not a single act of his was heard of at Colomea. It was as though the 'avenger' and his band had suddenly disappeared from the earth. This silence was as mysterious as his terrible doings had been. It could not be any fear of punishment which bound his hands; for if the General now kept his forces together in stockades between Kossowince and Zulawce, this centre of defence, however formidable, could not prevent the bandits from carrying on their work wherever they pleased, any more than the flying columns had been able to stop it. And since no other explanation offered, the Board lent a willing ear to the report which arose, dimly at first, though it soon gained ground, that by far the larger number of the hajdamaks had fallen out with their leader, and that it was inward dissension which had stopped the activity of the band.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE APPROACHING DOOM.

The valley of the "black Czeremosz"!... When the great Emperor Joseph, a hundred years ago, put forth his hand to lay hold of the lonely tracts overlooked by the Carpathians, he sent thither a brave old colonel, George Wetzler by name, a man reared on the sunny banks of the Neckar, to take possession of the district in the monarch's name, and to make suggestions for the improvement of the newly-acquired territory. No easy matter! but the old colonel was a Swabian born--stout of heart and tenacious of purpose--and, moreover, he was honest. So his efforts prospered, and some of the good institutions of his planting are growing still. Never at a loss to make the best of things, he was the very man for his work; but after inspecting this valley the old colonel's patience appears to have been fairly exhausted, as may be gathered from his report to Vienna--a witness of his disappointment to this day. "This valley of the black 'Tshermosh'," he bluntly declared, "must be Old Nick's own presence chamber, and what human creatures are to be found here, are a pack of senseless knaves. There is nothing to be got out of them, nor into them, and this wretched valley will always belong to him of the cloven foot, and never to the Emperor's Majesty."

In one point this judgment proved true, for the people or Zabie and Reza to this day own the supremacy of the State only in a loose and distant sort of way; but in other respects the plain-spoken colonel's picture certainly is overdrawn. It cannot be said that the inhabitants of the valley in question are either more senseless or more knavish than the rest of the Huzuls, though they may be even more shy of the world, more rude of habit--creatures of the forest, both hardy and daring, as men will become whose life is a constant warfare with the sterner forces of nature. But "Old Nick's presence chamber" itself, in sooth, is one of the most glorious, if wildest regions of this mountain chain, "raised by the devil and beautified by the Christ." It would seem as if this valley, which forces its way eastward in a zigzag line between the towering peaks in the southern-most part of Galicia, had indeed been something like an apple of contention for evil or for good. But if it was the devil who made the frowning mountains and strewed the valley with weird-shaped rocks, the imagination may fitly dwell on the redeeming fancy that the gracious Christ has clothed the heights with those splendid firwoods, and called forth flowers and shrubs about the boulders, sweeter and fairer than one would look for at such a height; and if it was the great adversary who made of the Czeremosz a roaring and dangerous torrent, it must have been the Friend of man who formed its banks, so rich and lovely, to hold in the turbulent stream. It fact the traveller, once acquainted with the fanciful legend, will remember it at every turn; and the higher he climbs, up towards the giant-keeper of the Hungarian frontier, the towering Black Mountain (the Czernahora), the more it will appear to him as though a contest between opposing forces had verily taken place; the upper valley certainly is one of the wildest and fairest spots on earth. It narrows perceptibly to the west, ending in a circular hollow, in the centre of which there is a small deep lake, whose waters appear black, partly on account of the dark-coloured strata of rock which form the sides of the basin, and partly because of its lying within the far-stretching shadow of that great frontier peak. At noon only is the silent mirror of the Black Water smiled upon by a passing sunbeam.

On the shore of this lake there is one of the largest settlements within the mountains--cottages, sheepfolds, barns in great number, and closed in with a thorn-hedge; it is the home of Clan Rosenko, numbering about three hundred souls, dwelling here and ruled over by no man save their own patriarch, feared for their valour and duly respected as the wealthiest tribe of the Carpathians. The patriarch of this settlement, in peace or war, is lord paramount within a territory as large as any English county, and wields an influence the strength of which rests in its

tradition rather than upon any personal qualities. But never had the clan possessed greater power than when ruled over by the friend and ally of the avenger, the venerable Hilarion, surnamed the Just. There was not a man of Pokutia or the Bukowina who did not bow to him, and none so great nor yet so humble but he would obey his warning and accept his will.

In this man's close proximity Taras had arrived early in August, 1839, encamping with his much-lessened band on an open space within the Dembronia forest, about a mile from the Black Water. Not for fear of the military operations had he withdrawn from the plain and broken up his camp by the Crystal Springs; still less had he done so of his free choice, but yielding to necessity, and hoping thereby to avert worse things. For the report which had reached Colomea was only too well founded. Taras no longer had absolute power over the minds of his men, whose dissatisfaction had grown to bitterness and resentment, breaking out into open rebellion at last. Just that had happened which Nashko, with the clear discernment of his race, had foreseen and foretold, the catastrophe occurring in the last days of July.

"There are too many of them," Taras had said, sorrowfully, to the Jew. "I cannot now, as I used to, impress every individual man with the sacredness of the cause he is serving." But he was mistaken; the band never numbered more than about two hundred, and Taras knew each and all personally; the men, in their turn, being fully aware of his ideas concerning the work they were engaged in. Nor could explanation be sought in the suggestion that even his rigorous care could not suffice for keeping the band pure, and that some ill-disposed fellows, no doubt, were leavening the rest. No; the true reason was this, which Nashko and Jemilian failed not to point out to their beloved leader, saying, "You could never hope for anything better, unless the Almighty had lent you his own avenging angels for the work. These men are but human, and unwilling to stake their lives day after day for no advantage they can see; they look for some reward, some personal gain, for the constant danger they run. You think that the sacred cause of justice should be as dear to them as it is to you; perhaps it should, but for a fact it is not. And if you expect of these men to understand your way of thinking, you should, in your turn, try to enter into their views, less elevated though they be."

But, in truth, neither party could comprehend the other; and with a great number of the men the good-will even was wanting. Their wonderful success, and the fame attending it, had intoxicated them at first; but the novelty wore off, and they began to resent their hetman's folly which forbade plundering and expected them to do the work merely for the benefit of others. It was unheard-of severity, and most unjust, they considered. Among the Huzuls, too, a spirit of discontent was abroad. These wild, lawless men had joined the avenger because they hated the authorities, together with the Polish landlords and the thriving inhabitants of the plains, feeling attracted, moreover, by the prospect of plenty of fighting. It was not reward or booty they craved; but, unused to obedience or self-restraint of any kind, they writhed under the consciousness of being mere instruments of another man's will. They wished to have a voice in the matter before being ordered to this or that work, and did not see by what right they should be interfered with if at any time they preferred to please themselves after their own fashion. But there was yet another and an equally-numerous set of discontented ones, whose spokesman was the whilom choir leader, Sophron Hlinkowski--men of honest and respectable antecedents, who had gathered to Taras's standard either for pure love of his cause, or had been driven to it by cruel oppression.

But the scenes of bloodshed almost daily enacted, and in which they must take their part, filled them with horror and disgust. They trembled at the thought of what punishment they incurred at the hands, even, of earthly law, and they feared the judgment of God. Hitherto, though with a sore conscience, they had obeyed every behest of their leader, whom at first they so fondly adored; but their helpless regret, ending in despair, looked upon Taras now in the light of a cut-throat who forced them on to every fresh deed of iniquity. That his own soul suffered and bled more than theirs they never suspected; for the iron-willed man, worn and wan though he looked, never once quailed before his terrible purpose. They had come to look upon him as the destroyer, not only of their earthly, but even of their eternal hopes, and they were the first of his followers to unburden their minds.

The band had been on a raid as far as the river Sereth, and was returning in forced rides under cover of the night, taking their rest during the day in their various hiding-places, and once more was encamped now by the Crystal Springs.

But before the first day was out Taras reassembled his men, announcing that they must be ready to start at sundown for Ispas, and thence to the southern Bukowina, because several Roumanian communities had sent him their grievous complaints.

The information was received with a growl of disapproval, and a voice was heard, "What, already, before we are half rested?" Another following it up with a plain "We refuse!" While yet another added, "We sha'n't move a step, unless we see what we shall gain by it!" But these cries were half smothered in the swelling surf of a general discontent.

Taras's friends pressed round him--those few in number who in life or death would be true to him--Nashko, the faithful Jemilian and his fellow-servant Sefko, the youths Wassilj and Lazarko, and several others. They had caught up their muskets in real alarm, prepared to stand by him to the end; and to judge from the increasing uproar, violence indeed seemed imminent. The mutinous band pressed closer and closer to the captain.

But he stood motionless, with eyes bent on the ground, and his face wore the expression of stern, unflinching resolve, which had grown habitual with him. "Speak to them," whispered Jemilian, hoarsely. "Speak, or you are lost!" But he shook his head. Presently, however, he drew himself up, fixing a penetrating glance upon the foremost of the heaving crowd, and such was the power of his eye that they fell back cowed and confounded.

He lifted his hand. "Silence!" he cried, continuing, with a voice not over loud, but wonderfully impressive, "If you have aught to say, or to ask of me, here I am! But I will not brook disorder! Who is to be spokesman for the rest? Let him step forth."

There was but a low murmuring now, like rumbling thunder, ceasing gradually as the men fell to debating more quietly among themselves. The Huzuls gathered round the Royal Eagle, urging him evidently to inform the hetman of their wishes. Others again, the worst of the lot, pressed round a herculean fellow of the name of Iwon Pistak, who had been in the service of one of the victims of Taras's judgments, and had joined the band but recently. A third body in the background was seen clustering round Sophron, the former choir-leader; and while the others kept muttering with wrathful or threatening faces, these latter seemed to cling together for mutual support, requiring no words in their trouble.

An expression of disappointment, deep and bitter, passed over Taras's features. He had refused to believe what Nashko and Jemilian had told him concerning the splitting up of the band into factions--he could see it now distinctly for himself. Alas! how far matters must have gone already, how often the men must have consulted among themselves, and how fully their minds must have been made up, if at this moment of excitement the division could take place thus easily and naturally.

"Who is to be spokesman?" he repeated, expecting Iwon Pistak to step forth with an insolent demand. But he was mistaken--this man of might shrugged his shoulders, refusing the honour. Taras could hear him say with a loud whisper, "You see, he is sure to shoot down the first that dares tell him. Of course he will then be shot in his turn; still I decline to be that first one!"

Taras was on the point of yielding to his indignation, when his attention was diverted from that miserable wretch; for suddenly there stood before him, pale and trembling, one of those from whom he scarcely would have expected the spirit of resistance--it was the late choir-leader, Sophron.

"You may kill us, hetman," he cried passionately, "but we shall not again follow you: we will never again lift hand at your bidding. We cannot bear it any longer, to spill the blood of men who are unable to resist us. We fear the judgment of God!"

Taras was not utterly unprepared for this terrible accusation, Jemilian, more than once, having reported to him remarks he had overheard among the men. Sophron's words, at the same time, struck to his heart; and he who had not quailed when all the band seemed ready to turn upon him now leant on his musket, for he trembled, and his voice quivered as he made answer, "God is with those who love justice! This is, and has been, my stand-by; I require none other, and it ought to hold good for you."

"Then how do you know that that which is just in your sight is just also in the sight of God?" cried Sophron ... "Tell me," he continued excitedly, taking hold of the hetman's hand, "speak, Taras, and prove it, that God has shown you His will better and plainer than to others. Prove it, and show us that you have a right to judge men in His name--that the power you claim is given you by Him above!"

An ugly peal of laughter burst from Iwon and his party, but the Royal Eagle indignantly ordered them to hold their peace. Taras looked fixedly before him.

"Tell us!" Sophron repeated.

"What I have to say, you have known from the beginning," Taras made answer at length, but his voice was hollow. "I claim no power beyond that which every honest man is called to in this unhappy land, where right is not otherwise to be found."

"This is nonsense!" cried Sophron wildly, "I have suffered greater wrong than you. I have lost all, my property, my wife, my child, I have myself been imprisoned, and with no earthly show of justice. Yes, I have been wronged, cruelly, and so have you--I will admit it--and many another, no doubt! But for all that, can you prove that there is nothing left for honest men but to turn murderers themselves? What would become of mankind, I ask you--what of this country, if every man who has suffered innocently felt called upon to do as you have done?... Taras, you have misled us--you are grievously mistaken. And as for us, our latter ruin is likely to be worse than our former! Say, what answer shall we make to the Judge above, when He inquires of us, saying: 'What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground!'"

"Listen to him! that comes of having been a choir leader!" cried Iwon, with a sneer. But again the Huzul chief silenced him peremptorily.

"What is it you want?" said Taras, hoarsely.

"We want to leave you!" cried Sophron. "Let us go--we cannot bear it any longer.... We will try to live honestly and peacefully again; we will go away from this country which we have defiled with so much blood-shedding--far, far away. We will try to expiate the great wrong we have committed. And if our deep sorrow avails not, if the Almighty cannot again turn His face upon us, and we must fall into the hands of earthly judges, be it so, we have deserved it."

"You are at liberty to go," said Taras.

And wild excitement filled the air. The men of Sophron's party seemed beside themselves with the sudden prospect of quitting their present mode of life. "Would that we had spoken sooner!" they, kept crying.

"Any one is at liberty," repeated Taras; "let all those whose conscience forbids them to continue with me, lift up their right hand." Some forty men gave the required token; and, as Taras could see at a glance, he was losing the most trustworthy of his followers--not counting his own few personal adherents.

He heaved a sigh. "Step aside to yonder fir-tree," he said, "I will settle with you presently; you shall have your share of the common property. But I must arrange with these others first," He drew himself up proudly, and his eyes shot fire. "Now for you, Iwon Pistak!" he cried.

The giant hung back, but his fellows pushed him forward. "Why should I bear the brunt of it," he muttered; but gathering courage, he continued: "Well, you know our meaning, hetman, and I daresay you find it natural; for after all, why should we go and help those fellows in the Bukowina, utter strangers to us? and don't you think we owe something to ourselves? Supposing now, we did your bidding, we might find the manor garrisoned and soldiers in the cottages, some of their bullets might hit, and we lose life or limb--that is looking at the worst side. But at best--well, we kill the landlord or his steward, men who never have done us any harm, we help these wretched Bukowinians to get their money back, and then we return on our steps poor as church mice, even as we went. Is that fair, we ask? You call yourself an avenger, and we grant you are just, but in justice to ourselves you ought to allow us something for our pains, now, oughtn't you? Where would be the harm if you allowed us to go shares with the peasants in any money found, for after all it is our doing if they get any at all! And moreover, Taras, we do think it is ridiculous to expect of us fighting-men to live like a parcel of monks! We want to enjoy life, we----"

"That will do," interrupted Taras, "and what if I deny your requests?"

"In that case, Taras," declared the giant, with a foolish grin, "you couldn't be offended if we gave you the slip; we might carry on a warfare against rich wrong-doers on our own account, mightn't we?"

"That will do!" and Taras turned to the fellows of this man. "Whoever of you is of his way of thinking, let him signify it by lifting up his right hand." In a moment some fifty hands went up in the air. Taras would not have believed it possible, but he looked neither surprised nor mortified. "Very well," he said, "take your place by this rock, you shall have your due."

He stepped up to Julko. "And what about you?" he said, "do you also want to leave me?"

"It is not for me alone to decide," replied the Royal Eagle, gloomily, "else we should have left weeks ago. It is neither your fault nor ours! But the Huzuls have ever been free--we are not a submissive race. Of course we should always obey the hetman of our choosing, but I also must say that men who are willing to be hajdamaks do not expect to live like monks. We should, indeed, have given up long ago but for my father, who would not hear of it. This was his message when I sent him word of our desire: 'It is not I who commanded you to join Taras's banner; but neither did I forbid it, for I lay down no law unless I see absolute need of it; moreover, I consider Taras to be an honest man, who knows what he is about, and I approve of his warfare. If you think differently, the question is whether he has ever expected anything of you beyond that which you knew he would expect when you joined him. If this is the case you may break with him; but if not, you must stay!' This is my father's opinion, Taras!"

"And what is yours? Do you think, as he puts it, you ought to leave me?"

"No; else we should not be here still. But I say this, that we did not much consider what might be your real meaning when we came to you, or perhaps we misunderstood you entirely. So what we propose now is this: Take us back to the Black Water and we will submit the case to my father in person. He shall hear you and hear us, and we will leave him time to think it over; if after that he still will have us continue as your followers, we shall do so, whatever our own feelings may be."

"And if I do not agree to this proposal?"

"Then we leave you this very day," said the Royal Eagle, curtly. "I will answer for it to my father."

"In that case," said Taras, after a pause, "I must accept your proposal; you will see for yourself, Julko, that I have no other choice. If I had began this work for any advantage of my own, or merely to satisfy private revenge, I should have no need to appeal to you for your services any

longer. For in that case I should turn the pistol against my own head at once, if I had not done so long ago!... But I have undertaken to fight for a holy cause, and I must not, I dare not, give it up till all means have failed me. I could not continue the work with the handful of faithful followers I have left; I must hope, therefore, that your father will be on my side. But at the present moment I have something else to ask of you, and you will do it, for it is a duty, Julko--the duty of an honest man!"

The Royal Eagle bent closer. "I guess your meaning," he said, under his breath; "it concerns Iwon and his fellows. You want to pass sentence on them."

"No, not that; for, evil as their intentions are, they have as yet committed no crime to be atoned for with their lives. But I must not permit these men to use their weapons, which have served a holy cause, for murder and robbery in the future. I will disarm them. Will you help me?"

"Of course we will!"

Thereupon Taras went over to Sophron and his party, asking their assistance also, which was readily granted.

But Iwon and his fellows little guessed what was in store for them. Standing or lying about, they talked noisily of the merry life they now hoped to lead, when suddenly to the right and to the left ranks were forming against them. They flew to arms, but it was too late; they saw themselves surrounded, and a circle of muskets levelled at their heads.

Taras fearlessly went up to them. "Lay down your arms," he commanded.

"Not before I have made a last use of mine," cried Iwon, enraged, and, snatching up his pistol, he discharged it at Taras.

The bullet missed its mark, striking a tree close beside the captain; but another bullet proved true to its aim. Lazarko, quick as lightning, had fired back at the assailant of his beloved master. The giant's hand went up to his head, he staggered, and fell heavily to the ground.

The sudden death of their ringleader so terrified the mutinous men that they obeyed helplessly, laying down their arms and entreating Taras to forgive them this once, and they would do his bidding for ever.

But he shook his head. "I know you now," he said, sternly, "men of your sort are no fit champions of a holy cause. Go your ways, and seek a better occupation than you intended. Green Giorgi and the rest of the hajdamaks have disappeared, for they are afraid of me; should you make common cause with them they might venture forth from their hiding-places and once more be the pest of the land. Take warning, then, for I shall hold you answerable. If any crimes are committed I shall know that you are the scoundrels whom I shall have to deal with next. And be very certain I shall find you, if need be."

"We will seek an honest livelihood, indeed we will!" they asserted, trembling.

"So much the better," he returned, coldly. "I charge you to do as you promise, lest I should have to make good my word."

Thereupon Jemilian, by his orders, gave to every man who was ready to go food for three days and his fair share of the common purse, the disarmed number starting first, abashed and silent. And then the word was given for a general departure.

"Say a kind word to us before leaving," said Sophron, with honest entreaty, and all the rest of that party pressed round the captain, begging him to forgive them. "We are sorry, but we must do it," they pleaded.

"I know," said Taras: "I bear you no grudge; but you also shall believe that it is laid upon me to act as I have done. Farewell, and God grant that we may not meet again!"

"Oh!" cried Sophron, "then you do bear us ill-will?"

"No," said Taras, and his voice was low with inward emotion; "indeed I wish you well, and that is why I said, God grant that we may not meet again on the road--that road which is marked out for me. Fare ye well!"

He spurred his horse, and, followed by his own friends and the Huzuls, he led the way towards the Red Hollow. The night fell, and the stars looked down upon the deserted camp by the Crystal Springs. Taras never returned to it.

They reached the Black Water, after four days of desperate riding through the pathless forest wilds. Their coming was entirely unexpected; but all the greater was the delight of the tribe at the return of the clansmen. Taras, too, was received with a hearty welcome. Those savage natures are not prone to show affection; but having made friends, they are fast and true. They had received the unhappy man with real sympathy on his first seeking their alliance. His dauntless courage struck a kindred chord, not to mention an undercurrent of *naïve* gratitude in their minds, as though they were indeed beholden to him for being such a thorn in the flesh of

the powers they hated. And when the aged Hilarion had clasped hands with Taras, in token of mutual friendship, the wild shouts of "Urrahah" that filled the air, if an expression of savage delight, promised faithful adherence as well....

This being the case, the returning champions were loth to disclose the real reason of their arrival, and with tacit consent deferred matters to the following morning, when Julko and Taras together sought the presence of Hilarion, informing him of the state of affairs calmly and without bitterness.

The aged man listened quietly, the proud head uplifted, and with thoughtful, unperturbed brow. At times only his hand, passing with a quick movement over the silvery expanse of his mighty beard, betrayed his deep interest in the recital. "It is the old story," he said at last, after a long pause of silence, when they had finished. "I have watched the course of this world for eighty years, and it is ever the same. It is the wicked only who know how to traffic with the hearts of men, and to do so for their own advantage; but the good man is unsuspecting, judging others by his own honest nature, and it is sure to bring him to grief. It is nothing new, Taras, and I am only surprised that you have no worse tale to tell; for you are good and honest to the core, and trustful as a child, in spite of the rivers of blood you have set flowing; and you are as a stranger on the face of this earth, despite the fearful experience of your life."

"I do not understand you, my father," said Taras, with modest deference.

"Nor would it avail you if I tried to explain my meaning," replied the old man, smiling sadly. "You would never understand it, and still less could you alter your nature.... As for your rupture, I cannot take sides with either of you; for you are both in the right, each acting after his nature. This is not a case to be influenced by any man's opinion."

"Then you do think that our ways henceforth lie apart?" said Julko; "I and every one of our men thought so."

"It would be the simplest solution, and perhaps the most prudent," said Hilarion, slowly, "but I do not say it would be the best and most noble ... Let me tell you, Taras, when I first heard of the work you had set yourself to do, and of the way in which you did it, striving to carry out justice without fail or wrong, as far as mortal man is able, I said within myself, 'Thanks be to those up yonder, whatever their names may be--and if the popes are right in maintaining there is but One, well, then, thanks be to Him that I have lived to see this day; for truly it is a shame what oppression the inhabitants of the plain have to suffer, what wrongs untold, and no champion, no avenger, has ever stood up for them. But now such a one is given them, in token, as it were, that they are men still, and not mere cattle born for the yoke.' These were my thoughts, Taras, and I think so still. But I also knew that your work could not continue. Not that you had anything to fear from the Whitecoats, for a man who has the mountain-haunts of the Welyki Lys to fall back upon, and as many helpers as there are sufferers in the land, need fear no soldiers. No, the only danger threatening you would come from your own people, for you judged others by yourself, taking for granted their willingness to share the burden to which you have bowed your own shoulders. It could not end well, and to tell the truth it was a relief to me to see you arrive yesterday, for the news would never have taken me by surprise that you had fallen a victim to your mutinous band. Or if they dared not shoot you they might have delivered you up to the magistrates, gaining thereby their own safety and filthy reward besides. Yes, these were my fears; and it was chiefly with the hope of protecting you that I insisted on our men remaining true to your banner!"

"It may be so," said Taras, gloomily. "A week ago I would have taken my oath in contradicting you, but now I have not a word to say. But the question is, What is now to be done?"

"What, indeed?" repeated the old man. "I have thought about it a great deal, and especially this last night. I could not sleep for anxiety concerning you, for I love you as though you were a son of mine ... If prudence alone could guide you, I should invite you to remain with us and live in peace henceforth as a shepherd and huntsman in the mountains. I doubt not but that your wife and children would be released on your word of honour, and you could live happily. But it is useless talking, for you will listen--you can listen--only to that inward voice which prompts you to continue this work! So the question remains how to make it possible. If you raise your standard anywhere within these mountains your name and fame will attract numbers of men, there is no doubt about that; and they will be neither better nor worse than those with whom you have lately parted. How, then, will you anticipate such danger as you have just escaped?--do you think you might permit them some enjoyment of life and a share in the booty?"

"Never!" cried Taras, passionately. The aged Huzul nodded. "I knew it," he said. "It would be wronging your inmost nature, and I could scarcely advise you to attempt it. For in that case the devil, not you, would be ruling the band before a month were out. Nothing remains, therefore, but to govern your men in the future as you did in the past. A band will gather round you, but what will be the end? You must be prepared for worse things than these late experiences; you may end any day as I have hinted. Or do you think I am mistaken?"

"No! But there is no other way."

"There is," rejoined the old man; "I have thought it over, and it seems to me the one plan to be

adopted. You must not collect another band; at the same time you must carry on your work, which I deem both sacred and necessary. Do it in this way: Encamp with your faithful adherents in our vicinity, and wait and see what complaints reach you here. If any wrong requires you to redress it, I shall order this son of mine and as many of our men as you may ask for, to place themselves at your disposal. From the moment of their going forth with you, and until they return, your word shall be their law, but at other times they shall be free to live within the mountains as they are wont. That will suit all parties: you will not be short of men when you require them for any work that may be before you; the sufferers in the lowlands will not be crying in vain for their avenger, and my own people need not forego the pleasure of having a hand in punishing the Polish nobles, the Whitecoats, and all those that would lord it over us by means of the law, whom they hate cordially. This is what I offer to you: straightforward and honest alliance; will you accept it?"

"I am grateful to you," said Taras, "but it concerns a matter far dearer to me than life. I pray you, therefore, let me consider it, and hear my answer to-morrow."

Taras gathered his friends about him, and informed them of the proposal. Opinions differed.

"This will be no lasting alliance, dear master," said Jemilian, anxiously. "We know the Huzuls! We grant that they are honest and brave, and if for the rest of it they are dissolute rascals, that is no business of ours; but we also know that they have a devilish temper of their own, and are ready to pick quarrels out of nothing."

"Well, if we know that, they cannot take us unawares," suggested Nashko. "We shall have to treat them accordingly, and if the alliance does come to grief sooner or later, we shall be no worse off than we are now. It seems to me there is no reason why we should not accept the offer as matters now stand."

Taras himself inclined to this opinion, and the result was that on the following day the alliance between him and Hilarion was solemnly ratified in accordance with the ancient usage of the tribe, a usage found to this day among Mongolian races. They filled two goblets with mare's milk, and each of the two about to pledge his friendship mixed a drop of his blood with the cup he was holding; thereupon they exchanged the vessels, and turning their faces sunward, they rested their left hands upon their heads, while drinking each of the other's life blood.

About a week passed quietly. Taras repeatedly went to commune with Hilarion, and the old man in his turn visited him in his little camp in the Dembronia Forest. But their people had no intercourse with each other. No news arrived from the lowlands, and no prayer for redress. The peasants believed the band to have dispersed, and the avenger to be either dead or somehow silenced.

But there was a poor mother far away in a village of the Bukowina who refused to believe that the man was dead, or no longer to be found, of whom alone she could hope that he would be the saviour of her unhappy child. Her neighbours laughed at her for setting out to seek him in the mountains; but she went and found him after a five days' anxious search. And the story she had to tell was so heartrending, that both Taras and Hilarion decided on the spot that her prayer must be granted, although the undertaking was fraught with more than usual danger, and even the bravest of the brave might well shrink back.

The victim in this case was a Ruthen maiden of rarest beauty, Tatiana Bodenko by name, who, in the district gaol of Czernowitz, was awaiting the Emperor's decision concerning the sentence of death which had been passed on her, following upon the verdict found by the local jury in fulfilment of their duty. That fair-haired, gentle creature, with the eyes of a fawn, had indeed committed murder; but it was one of those pitiful cases which the law must condemn, while the heart's sympathy will plead for the culprit.

Tatiana, who had only just reached her eighteenth year, was the eldest daughter of a poor gamekeeper, and had grown up amid all the hardships of poverty. The mother often was ailing, and the father absent on duty, so that at an early age the responsibility of rearing the younger children upon the humblest of means devolved on her. It was indeed a wonder that the flower of her beauty unfolded in spite of such nipping cares; but she fought hunger bravely and kept out the cold. There is a saying among her people that if God sees reason to punish a mother He gives beauty to the daughter, and that lightning loves to descend on the tallest trees. Poor Tatiana also had to learn that a girl's beauty may be her ruin. She was modest and sweet as a violet, but she could not help being seen; and all eyes that beheld her seemed spell-bound. But silent worship not being a virtue much known in those parts, she had much ado in keeping at a distance her rude admirers, and would often sigh at the thought that, with all her other burdens, she should have the special trouble of such beauty as well. But the day also was given her when she found that it was not altogether amiss to be lovely; she had made the acquaintance of a young peasant at a neighbouring village, and came to be grateful for her sweet face, since thereby she had gained his love. The young man was honest and fairly well off, her parents gave their blessing gladly, and that saying need never have come true as far as Tatiana was concerned had not an evil hour brought Mr. Eugene de Kotinski, the owner of the forest, to her father's cottage.

He was not a fast man of the worst type, and his morals hitherto had escaped the world's censure, but no sooner had he seen the girl than he was seized with a frenzied passion for her.

Day after day he returned, like a moth to the candle, trying to win her with the most dazzling promises, and these failing, with cruel threats. Her prayers and tears availed not, and she withdrew into the silence of contempt. Suddenly his visits ceased; he had left the neighbourhood, hoping to master his folly. But the promptings of his nature, perhaps of his heart even, were too strong for such honest intentions; he returned to ask the keeper for the hand of his daughter. It was an unheard-of resolve for a man of his standing, making the gossips gape with wonder for miles around; but still more startling was the further news that Tatiana had rejected her noble suitor. She did not care to be his wife, and neither her mother's entreaty nor her father's abuse could move her; she remained true to her humble lover. But passion fed on rebuff, and the maddened nobleman now sought to gain his end by a baseness which many another of his kind, no doubt, would have had recourse to much sooner. He exerted his influence, and the young peasant was levied as a recruit and carried off into a distant province. But this villainous trick brought him not a step further, the girl repulsing him more firmly still, whereupon he played his last card, discharging the keeper and evicting him and his family from their humble cottage, though it was in the depth of winter and the poor wife sick and suffering.

But if Tatiana was the cause of all this trouble, she also was the unconscious means of help. A forest ranger in the neighbourhood, pitying the poor girl, took her father into his service, appointing him even to a better post than the one he had quitted. This man was a German of the name of Huber, of known respectability, and a widower beyond the heyday of life. But he succumbed nevertheless, offering the girl his honest love, and was more fortunate than the nobleman had been. Tatiana agreed to wean her heart from the young peasant, separated from her by cruel interference, and to secure a home and bread for her family by marrying the kind-hearted ranger. Her father's sudden illness only strengthened her resolve; he could die in peace, for the widow and orphans would thus be cared for. The wedding was postponed for the usual time of mourning, and this delay left room for evil slander. The ranger was informed that his wife that was to be had allowed herself to be visited secretly by Kotinski's valet. Of such baseness had that man's revenge been capable! And he must have paid his servant handsomely, for the wretch added oath upon oath when Huber interrogated him concerning the truth of the report. Calumny carried the day. He broke with the girl, and once more Tatiana, with her mother and the little ones, were homeless. Again pity held out a helping hand, a well-to-do widow in their own village receiving them into her house. But even here they were not safe from Kotinski's low-minded vengeance. That charitable widow was fined for giving shelter to a girl of bad character. When Tatiana heard this she took hold of the one possession they had left, her father's musket, and waylaying Kotinski as he rode about his property, she killed him by a shot through the heart; and going to the nearest magistrate she gave herself up on the spot.

The case against her was so plain that sentence could be passed almost immediately; according to the law, she had forfeited her young life and must atone for her deed on the gallows. When asked whether she had anything to say for herself, she made answer quietly: "You will not deny, sirs, that he deserved to die; and since my father is dead, and my eldest brother but nine years old, I had to do it myself." But in spite of this open confession, the jury unanimously agreed that the verdict should be accompanied by a strong recommendation to mercy. She was told of it, but all she said was: "Mere life is nothing to me. I suppose the Emperor would not let me go back to work for my mother and the children; so I do not care whether I die now, or some years hence in prison." And her whole bearing showed that she spoke as she felt. She returned to her cell, awaiting the imperial decision without a shade of disquietude. She considered she had done her duty--an evil duty, to be sure--and must take the consequences. Her fortitude was not the outcome of heroism, but simply that submissive yielding to the inevitable which is so strong a characteristic of Slavonic races; but in a case like this, and surrounded with the halo of so tragic a fate, it reflects the lustre of the higher virtue.

But while the girl thus awaited her fate calmly, Taras was coming to avert it. The hill country between the rivers Czeremosz, Pruth, and Sereth was almost bare of troops, and he knew the neighbourhood sufficiently; nevertheless this enterprise was the most daring of his ventures. There was the General with his concentrated forces not far to the left of him, and he was moving towards a city of some ten thousand inhabitants--not to mention its garrison, the strength of which he had not been able to learn. True, he had sent on Nashko and the Royal Eagle to procure information and to reconnoitre the situation of the prison; but these spies of his could scarcely rejoin him before he, at the head of his band, would have arrived in the vicinity of the town; and the least suspicion of their approach would bring almost certain failure, for the General could effectively cut off their retreat. No precaution, therefore, was omitted to avert discovery. They carried food for themselves and provender for their horses, in order to obviate intercourse with the peasantry. They rode by night only, and in small detachments, taking their rest and hiding in lonely places from the early dawn till late in the evening. They avoided villages--and solitary homesteads even--choosing the rocky woodland paths as much as possible, where the horses' hoofs left no traces behind them. Still, a hundred horsemen could not traverse the country as quietly as mice; and, apart from all this, everything depended on whether the attack could be carried out successfully within the space of an hour: if there were anything like a fight, the band was lost. Most of Taras's feats hitherto had been ventures for life or death; but the chances of utter failure never seemed more certain than this time. The Huzuls hardly realised it, or if they did, their great temerity despised the danger; but all the deeper was Taras's sense of responsibility.

With the first streak of dawn on the fourth day they reached that uninhabited forest region,

rent with numberless ravines, between the village of Dracinetz and the Swabian settlement of Rosch, which forms the western suburb of Czernowitz. In the midst of this wild waste rises broadly and grandly the Cecina mountain, the brow of which, in times gone by, bore the ramparts and bastions of a considerable stronghold. In one of the hollows on the western slope, between rocks and brushwood, the band was halting; to this spot the spies had been ordered to return. They arrived in the course of the day, but their news was even less hopeful than Taras had anticipated. The prison itself was favourably situated in the outskirts of the city, but within a stone's throw of barracks containing some five hundred soldiers.

But Taras nevertheless resolved to venture, and the attack was not only successful, but was achieved without the loss even of a single life. The enterprise, which bordered on the impossible, was carried victoriously through by a series of happy chances.

A storm had broken at sunset, the rain descending in torrents for hours through the night. Under cover of this tempest the band succeeded in gaining the level between the gaol and the Catholic cemetery, without letting the sentry in the barracks close by, or any one else, become aware of their arrival. Taras dismounted with about half his men, cautiously advancing to the entrance of the prison. The sentinel, most fortunately, had retired from the pelting rain, and was comfortably asleep, well wrapped up in his overcoat. He was gagged and pinioned before he had half opened his drowsy eyes.

And now Taras rang the bell, but there was no sound in response--the wind only howled and the rain splashed wildly. After the bell had been rung a second time, approaching footsteps were heard and keys rattled, a sleepy voice growling, "What is it at this time of night?" "Government inspection!" returned Taras, peremptorily. At which the gates flew open, revealing an old turnkey with a lantern in his hand. He staggered back horrified.

"Lead the way to Tatiana Bodenko," said Taras, lifting his pistol. "You are a dead man if you raise the alarm; but you have nothing to fear if you show me to her cell. I am the avenger, and you may trust my word."

The man grew livid, but did as he was told, tremblingly unlocking the cell of the condemned maiden. Taras took hold of the lantern and entered, leaving the warder to his men. Tatiana was fast asleep, her rest being as peaceful as though she had sought it in her father's cottage, the sweet earnings of toil. A gleam of light fell on her face, and a tall man, grey-haired and wan, was bending over her. She woke with a start, and gave a little scream, but he laid his hand on her mouth, saying, "Rise; I am the avenger. I have come to take you back to your mother; it is she who has sent me. Be quick!"

He turned away, and she rose as in a dream; but her limbs shook and she was scarcely able to put on her clothes. Taras knew that not a moment was to be lost; divesting himself of his "bunda," he wrapped it about her and lifting the quivering figure in his strong arms, he carried her away through the night and the rain, followed by his men, to where the others were waiting. He placed her upon a horse, tying her fast in the saddle and joining the bridle to that of his own steed. And the band dashed away quick as lightning through the storm-tossed night.

But success was scarcely yet complete. Unless the authorities at Czernowitz had utterly lost their heads they would send a courier to inform the General of what had happened; and if the latter moved forward to the banks of the Czeremosz, quite at his leisure, he could cut off the band's retreat to the mountains. Taras was fully aware of this and resolved to make a dash for it straight across country, taxing his men and horses to their utmost. And it was well he did so, for on the evening of the second day he fell in with the vanguard of the approaching troops, a handful of hussars. But these, not strong enough to venture upon an attack, turned tail after having exchanged some shots with the bandits. Only one of their bullets hit, wounding one of Taras's truest helpers, and his own inmost heart as well; his oldest, most faithful companion, Jemilian, fell bleeding by his side. They lifted him up, taking him away with them back to the mountains. The old man's iron nature fought for life, but Taras knew that the sore parting was at hand....

Words utterly fail to describe the excitement which filled the land when that night's exploit became known. The consternation was all the greater because men had clung to the belief that Taras's day was over and no further attack need be feared. It had been asserted he had laid hands on himself in despair; others declaring his band had mutinied and that he had fled for his life to Hungary. But here he was, bold as ever, daring unheard-of things, and heading a swarm of outlaws which the terrified hussars who had fallen in with them estimated at five hundred at least.

Helplessly the authorities met at the Board, couriers flying from Czernowitz to Colomea, and thence to Lemberg, and away to Vienna. The poor district governor, who had begun to breathe more freely, hung his head again in utter dismay. "Would to God," he cried bitterly, "our superiors at Lemberg had turned their venom against this Taras, instead of spluttering it over us. But as for those at Vienna----" he heaved a sigh and sat mute. The poor old man was so deeply troubled that even his favourite resort of growling began to fail him.

But "those at Vienna," meanwhile, did not quite deserve his disgust. Before a week was over he could once more call the Board to inform them that a special writ had arrived from the

Provincial Governor, and his eyes shone with a curious moisture. "Gentlemen," he said, "after all it was not in vain that we stood up for what is fair and right. Our superiors at Lemberg have just informed me that by express orders from Vienna Anusia Barabola and her children are to be set at liberty at once, and that, considering the very special circumstances of the case, she is to be indemnified for any loss she may have suffered through having been detained here. This is fine, I say! But, on the other hand," he added, with a queer smile, "we seem to be told that, in part at least, our views are open to amendment. Listen to this," and he read as follows:--"It appears to be thought highly desirable at Vienna that an effort should be made to bring Taras to his senses by personal remonstrance, it being left to the district authorities to name fit persons for this office. These, in company with the outlaw's wife if possible, are to repair to Taras's camp, and to inform him that the Imperial Government, having learned that he, formerly a well-behaved and even exemplary subject, had been driven to his desperate crimes by an alleged wrong done to his parish in the matter of a law-suit against the lord of the manor concerning a field of theirs--that Government, as in duty bound to rectify any miscarriage of justice, had ordered a careful revision of the judicial records referring to that suit; and although there seemed nothing irregular in the judgment of the local court, yet nevertheless it appeared that certain pleas might be urged in Taras's favour, for which reason it was deemed well to annul that judgment by an act of imperial prerogative, and to order the case to be tried over again; that the district governor was instructed to repeat the process of collecting evidence, and especially to inquire into the possibility of perjury in the former trial--these matters to be taken in hand with all possible speed; and Taras to be given to understand that the case was to be re-tried for the sake of justice itself, and not with the mere idea of pacifying him. At the same time he shall be informed of this decision, in the hope that it may enable him to see his way all the more plainly to turn from his present evil life, and by an unconditional surrender to make amends to the law he has so grievously wronged. And though it would not be just to hold out positive impunity to him and his accomplices, he is to be assured that his and their lives shall in that case be spared. The district governor is herewith requested to take note of these instructions, and to act accordingly."

Herr von Bauer looked up from his paper, and, allowing the excitement of the Board to subside, he added presently, "And now, gentlemen, who is to be sent--to Taras, I mean; for I shall myself repair to Zulawce to re-examine the witnesses."

"If I might be allowed to suggest," said Wroblewski, the secretary, looking wicked, "surely we could find no better delegates than our friend Kapronski, who sooner or later will have to show his face here, and the amiable hero of all this business himself, Mr. Wenceslas Hajek, who, I am told, intends this very week to enter the blessed estate of matrimony."

"None of your chaff," broke in the governor, "we are not gathered here for joking; moreover, I want to be off to inform the poor woman of her liberty. I'll see her myself! So, to come to business, suppose we appoint Dr. Starkowski, who not only knows Taras, but always had a good word for him. And I should say he could not have a better companion than the parish-priest of Zulawce, Father Leo Woronczuk. Let these two go and come to an understanding with Taras."

The Board unanimously agreed to this proposal, and the governor was soon free to repair to the city gaol, his heart brimming with the good news for Anusia.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR THE RIGHT--IN THE WRONG.

It was a lovely morning, fair and still, with the glow of autumn upon the mountains. More golden seemed the light and bluer the heavens than summer had known them. Though but early as yet in September, the high peaks of the Czernahora were white with the first sparkling snow; but the air was mellow in the valley, and there being no foliage which by its turning colour might have told of the waning year, but only firs and pines of sombre green, there was nothing to remind one of nature's gentle decay, save the peculiar clearness of the atmosphere, and at times a whirring sound high overhead--the first flights of birds going South. A deep silence lay brooding over the wild splendour of the valley; not a sign of life anywhere. The Czeremosz even, ever restless and rushing as described in song, had grown calm with the hot days of summer, and was flowing quite steadily along.

A strange shrill call suddenly rent the air. Any one who had never heard it would naturally have looked up to see whether a hawk or falcon might be discerned in the shining blue; but the sound was followed by others, falling on the ear more gently, now at intervals, now in succession, a monotonous mournful melody, rising and sinking, and ebbing away through the stilly landscape. And even the unaccustomed listener would have found out by this time that it was some shepherd's pipe sending its voice through the valley. But ere long, the sorrowful strain was

broken into by that same shrill call, only it now came from a different direction, another pipe silencing the first one, as it were, and carrying on its dolorous song; which again in its turn was taken up by another, more distant, starting with that peculiar note, and continuing the strain. Thus the plaintive melody went sobbing along from pasture to pasture, and those that heard it crossed themselves, murmuring a prayer, and then hastened to their homestead to put on suitable attire, that they might assist in burying the dead. For such is the way within the mountains: if a man dies in any of the valleys the event is made known by a blast of the horn--the death-horn they call it--and its voice is hollow and dismal, as befits the first outburst of mourning; and later on the subdued dirge of the shepherd's pipe invites the neighbours to render the last kindly tribute to him who is gone.

It was from the largest settlement that the call had come, and the far-off listeners had been seized with apprehension, lest the death-horn should announce the passing away of the patriarch of the valley, Hilarion the Just; but by the time the pipes were heard it was known that it was for the burial of a stranger only, who in a sheltering homestead of Clan Rosenko had breathed his last. Old Jemilian was gone.

For more than a week he had lain wrestling with death, fighting his last battle bravely, with manly courage and resignation. Hilarion, not merely the ruler and guide of his people, but their adviser in sickness as well, had vainly endeavoured to succour the sinking life with healing herbs, and to tend the wound with practised skill. In vain, too, had been the almost passionate care of the maiden Tatiana, who watched by the sick man day and night. The poor girl, feeling shy at first, and disconsolate among strangers, had been glad of the opportunity of showing her gratitude to the hetman by soothing the sick-bed of his servant and friend.

Jemilian himself was almost impatient of so much solicitude. "I know that I am going to die," he kept repeating; "and it is well. One duty only I have yet to perform, and the good God will give me the needful strength before I go."

What this one thing might be which yet bound him to life he was in no hurry to disclose, not even to Taras, whose devotion and loving care for the wounded man were only equalled by Tatiana's. Once only, when the hetman had to leave him for a couple of days at the call of duty, the well-kept secret seemed about to be told. For Taras had learned that Green Giorgi, reinforced by several of his own late followers, had dared to resume his predatory life, and he at once resolved to bring those scoundrels to justice, Jemilian himself urging him not to delay. And when the fearless band was mounted, and Taras once more returned to the sick-bed to take leave of his friend, the wounded man suddenly grew restless, looking doubtfully at the girl. Tatiana understood, and left the two by themselves. "Dear master," said Jemilian; "you may be absent for several days, and I may be gone when you return; yet I must not die without telling you one thing!"

"I shall find you alive, and, please God, getting better," said Taras, cheeringly. "But if it is any comfort to you----"

The old man shook his head. "No," he said, falteringly; "I think I will wait till death tightens its hold; for if, after all, I should recover by some miracle it were terrible ... terrible ... to have told you! No! go your way, dear master, and God bless you.... I will wait!"

And as Taras rode along at the head of his followers he kept thinking of these strange words; but explanation there seemed none, and his attention presently was otherwise engaged. The enterprise was successful as usual, if not fully, for Green Giorgi himself was not among the hajdamaks he waylaid and caught, and Taras had to be satisfied with punishing his accomplices. The two most guilty he ordered to be shot, while the rest were disarmed and shorn of their hair.

Returning to the settlement, he found his faithful old servant alive still, but his last hour evidently at hand. But not yet did he refer to his secret, and Taras cared not to inquire. Not till the last sands were running through did the old man open his lips. It was near midnight; he had been lying still with closed lids, but, suddenly endeavouring to raise himself, he gazed anxiously at the pale, beautiful girl who sat by his side. "Tatiana," he whispered; "for God's sake, where is my master? Call him--I am going!"

She hastened away, and in another minute Taras was by the side of the dying man, taking hold of his hand tenderly. And Jemilian having satisfied himself that they were alone, began with laboured breath:--

"I have to make a confession to you, and to ask a promise. Hear me--a dying man cannot use many words. Do you know what, after all, will be your end?"

Taras kept silence, a stony look stealing over his face.

"The gallows!" whispered the old man, and shuddered. "It is an evil death, Taras--a horror to yourself and a lasting disgrace for your children! And therefore I have been resolved fully and firmly to save you from such a death, my poor, dear, dear master! I have sworn to myself, if ever we should fall into their hands, and there were no hope of escape, to shoot you myself with these hands of mine."

"Jemilian!"

"Do not hate me; for never man loved you more truly than I did when binding myself with that oath. You know what it would have cost me to do the deed! But you are the noblest soul, the best and most lovable man that ever lived, and such a one shall not be tortured to death on the gallows...."

Taras, quite unable to speak, had fallen on his knees by the side of the bed, and was hiding his face in the rough bearskin which covered the limbs of the dying man.

Jemilian continued: "The Almighty is calling me hence, and I am not able to show you that love! But I cannot die in peace without endeavouring to save you from so horrible a death, for your own sake and for the sake of your little ones whom I have helped you to rear. Promise me, therefore, Taras--I entreat you promise me--that you will do yourself what I had intended."

"I cannot," groaned the unhappy man.

"Why not? Poor, dear master! Ah! I know how you dread the gallows!--not the dying, but the rope! The mere thought of it fills you with horror and loathing unspeakable. I know it, for who knows you better than I do? For this and no other reason you have granted the bullet to even the blackest rascal we ever brought to his doom. And to yourself you refuse it--why should you?"

"Because it were cowardly and a sin against God!"

"Nay, surely the Almighty will judge your soul with the same justice and mercy whether you appear before His judgment-seat a month sooner or later. I cannot doubt that!... And cowardly? I do not understand you...."

"Yes, cowardly!" cried Taras, passionately, and rising to his feet. "It is my appointed lot to be a guardian of the Right, and to strive to carry out the will of God concerning it, as far as may be possible to mortal man. I must not, I dare not renounce that sacred duty. If ever I fall into their hands I shall hope and endeavour to make good my escape, and continue fulfilling the duty which is laid upon me. Yes! in the very sight of the gallows I shall cling to the hope that the Judge above will set me free, though it be by a miracle, to carry on His work."

The dying man was silent; he fell back on his bed and closed his eyes. Taras bent over him. And once again those faithful eyes opened on him fully, and the old servant whispered, scarcely audibly: "Farewell, dear master, and may God in His mercy be with you in death." A deep breath, and Jemilian was gone.

They laid him out in the morning after their way in the mountains, with a crucifix at his head, but with a jug of water at his right hand, bread and salt at his left, and the skin of a newly-killed kid at his feet, "for the other gods." And after that they buried him beneath a mighty fir-tree in the Dembronia Forest. No priest prayed over the dead, the aged Hilarion only whispered his ancient spells handed down from generation to generation, believed in by all, and understood by none. They filled up the grave, discharging their muskets over it, and finally cut a cross into the bark of the tree, not forgetting some mysterious signs by the side of it "for the other gods."

Then they returned to the settlement to partake of the funeral meal. But as they entered the enclosure Taras perceived a youth standing by the hedge, at the sight of whom he gave a stifled cry.

It was young Halko, the farm-servant, who, with glistening eyes, now burst upon his master and kissed his hand. "Thanks be to God," he cried, struggling with tears, "we shall all be happy again! The mistress and the children have been set free! They are waiting to see you at the hamlet of Magura, at the lower end of the valley."

"My horse!" cried Taras, turning to his men. "And why have they not come all the way?"

"Because of the two gentlemen. It was they who refused to come further, lest you might think they wished to discover your encampment--our little Father Leo, I mean, and that old lawyer of Colomea who was your counsel in the suit."

"And what have they come for?"

"To bring you good news, master--really. The men of Zulawce are to have their field back, and the wrong is to be righted."

Taras grew white and then crimson, and again the glow yielded to a deadly pallor. But he asked no farther question, and, mounting his horse, he raced down the valley at a pace which left Halko far behind him.

The meeting between husband and wife was deeply affecting. Taras flew towards her without giving a glance at the men, and Anusia, with a wild cry, buried her face on his shoulder. And they stood clasping each other speechless, only their tears kept flowing. At length Taras freed himself from her arms, and turned to his children, little Tereska beginning to cry with fear when that strange-looking grey-haired man caught her up, kissing her wildly; the little girl did not recognise her father, nor did the younger boy. Wassilj only clung to him sobbing, "Oh, father dear, you look so ill--so ill!"

Taras made no answer, he took the boy on his knee, fondling him and closing his mouth with kisses when he would have spoken. It was as though he feared human words might destroy the blessedness of this meeting. And almost anxiously he avoided the eye of either the pope or the lawyer; still less could he have offered them greeting. He kept lifting, now this child to his knee, now that, pressing them to his heart closely; and drawing his wife down beside him, he passed his hand tenderly over her grief-worn face. "Do not speak," he whispered, and she nodded, hiding her head in his bosom, to weep her sorrows away.

Father Leo and Dr. Starkowski had withdrawn modestly, watching that most touching scene from a distance only. "There is every hope of his yielding," whispered the lawyer. "God grant that it be so," returned the priest, less confident, evidently.

Half-an-hour might have passed, when Taras roused himself, once more clasping his wife and kissing the children with a passionate fervour, as though separation once more were at hand. And now he went up to the men, expressing his pleasure at seeing them, but his voice trembled as with apprehension, "What is it you have to tell me?" he inquired.

"We are sent hither by order of the Government," said Starkowski, producing a written document and explaining its contents. It was a paper drawn up by the district governor, instructing the present bearers, and containing, in full, the resolutions come to in Vienna. "Tomorrow," concluded the lawyer, "the governor himself will repair to Zulawce to re-examine the witnesses in person. And, since he is fully determined to get at the bottom of the matter, there is no doubt but that the contested field will be adjudged to the parish, and that the perjured witnesses, together with the scoundrel who led them on, will meet with their fullest deserts. And this is resolved upon, as you understand from this communication, for the sake of justice itself, and quite irrespective of what decision you may arrive at concerning yourself. But we ask you, whether there be any just reason left why you should refuse submission to the Emperor, the guardian of justice in this realm."

Taras drew one deep breath after another, but answer there was none.

"Husband!" cried Anusia, wildly, "tell them you are satisfied."

"Do not press him," interposed Father Leo. "Let us consider the matter calmly.... Taras," he continued, "I do not want to urge upon you the claims of ordinary wisdom, which might well prevail with you, in order to preserve your life, not only from ignominious death, but for your children's sake and their future welfare; for I know that no such consideration has influenced your actions hitherto and that you follow the voice of your conscience only; but this I will ask of you--does your conscience permit you to continue striving in your own might, and with fearful means, to bring about a result which will be attained peaceably by the faithful endeavour of those who are called to this duty?"

"This is the very point," said Taras, slowly. "I do not know that these endeavours are faithful! Look back on all this sad experience. Grievous crimes have been perpetrated at Zulawce--robbery and perjury. I appealed to the law, considering no personal sacrifice too great to obtain relief; but every effort proved vain. The robber was left to enjoy the benefit of his deed, and the perjurers could mock honest men! Three years nearly have passed since this happened, and the matter was not likely ever to be taken up again. Now you tell me that the men of the law have suddenly remembered their duty. Why so? What is the reason that, all of a sudden, they feel called upon to try the case over again?--why are they willing to do so? Because these months past they have stood in terror of me, and I have left them no peace!... I ask you, doctor, as an honest man--would the case ever have come to be tried over again if I had followed your advice, and lived down my disappointment as a peaceable subject on my farm?"

"Yes, possibly," returned the lawyer. "I mean it is just as likely that some other chance had made it advisable----"

"That will do!" interrupted Taras. "By your own showing, then, it was a mere matter of chance, and you were brought to seek for the right in the present instance only because of my forcing you on to it through dire warfare. But for this, I repeat, you would not have lifted a finger to right the wrong! This is an evil state of things, and must not continue, for it opposes the beautiful will of God. The case does but lend force, then, to my belief that a judge and avenger is grievously needed in this country. This, however, is not the only, not even the chief, thing I must strive to rectify. I found greater wrongs left unpunished elsewhere; and, knowing that the men of Zulawce would not miss their opportunity of getting back their field for themselves, there was no need for me to see to it. I soon perceived there were other evil-doers in the land, not greater scoundrels, perhaps, than Hajek, but with greater scope for wrong; and therefore I judged well to punish and remove them first, and to bring him to his doom when I can do so without too great an effort or loss of life. But to come to those other cases, or to take one only as an example--who, I ask you, would ever have thought of ridding the people of Kossowince from that vilest of oppressors if I had not done it? And how, then, can I be sure that such things shall not happen again--not once, but in scores of cases? Can you pledge yourselves that such wrongs shall never again be possible? Will you yourselves be the surety that in future no man shall be oppressed in this country, or his cry for redress die away unheard?"

"This is more than we can promise," said the lawyer; "but----"

"It needs no further word! I maintain that a judge and avenger was required in this country, and will still be required; and therefore----"

"Taras!" cried Anusia, with a shriek of despair, and clutching his arm, "forbear! Speak not lightly; it concerns our deepest welfare--it is a question of life or death!"

Once more the pope interfered. "Hear me, Taras," he said, speaking with a forced calm; "I do not condemn your answer so far, for it is no more than must be expected from your nature and your way of thinking, such as I have known them these years. And as a tree could not change the colour of its leaves at any man's bidding, you also could not have spoken differently, for your words are the outcome of your very being. But I should have to condemn you if you were to disregard that which I will point out to you now, and which no doubt has escaped you hitherto. Listen to me! You are grievously mistaken if you imagine that the law in itself is to blame, or that the Emperor wishes his judges to close an eye when poor peasants are ill-used by rich and powerful oppressors. The law is all right, and those that are appointed to dispense it are required to take a solemn oath that in all cases they will be just and impartial. And again, you are mistaken if you think that our magistrates sometimes pass an unjust verdict wilfully." Taras broke in with a passionate exclamation, but the pope stopped him. "I know what you are going to say," he cried; "you want to remind me that your wife and your children were arrested. I shall come to that presently. Let me urge upon you that, taking all in all, the intentions of the magistrates are good, and the laws are good. Just call to mind your experience as a whole, and tell me, speaking honestly, as before the face of Almighty God, Is it the just or the unjust verdicts which are the exception?"

"I have considered this point often," said Taras, quietly; "it is true that I have heard of far more just than unjust sentences. But what of it, what *can* it prove?"

"Just this," rejoined Father Leo, warmly, "that an occasional miscarriage of justice is not to be explained by imputing it to the ill-will of magistrates. What else, then, is to blame? you inquire. I remind you that for one thing there is that unfortunate survival of feudal times, whereby the lord of the manor is vested with judicial authority over the peasantry on his lands; this is fully acknowledged to be an evil, not only by you and me, but by Government as well. But it cannot be done away with all of a sudden, nor by violent means, for the landlords exercise their jurisdiction in virtue of Imperial grants acquired by purchase in times long gone by. It is this deplorable state of things which is to blame chiefly, if oppression and injustice go more easily unpunished in this country than elsewhere. But do not imagine, Taras, that we are the only people who ever suffer wrong; nay, that beautiful ladder which has appeared to you in happy vision is not anywhere on earth so firmly planted, so utterly to be relied on, as you dreamed. For the guardianship of Justice in this world is not given to God's angels, but to poor sinful men like you and me. God alone is all-knowing, all-wise, and all-just, and it is man's inheritance to judge of things not as they are, but rather as they appear. I do not deny that there may be unjust judges here and there; yet it is not this fact which is to blame for the continuance of wrong upon earth, but the imperfection of human nature. For everything human falls short of its highest aim, and perfect justice is with God alone; if, therefore, you are bent on continuing your warfare, it will not be against the Emperor and his magistrates, nor against the wrong upon earth, but against human nature and human failings."

Taras had bent his eyes on the ground thoughtfully; but after a pause of silence he shook his head. "I have followed you," he said, "and I grant the truth of your points. But of one thing, the most important of all, you cannot convince me. I will never believe that a man endowed with good sense, provided he is honest, could pass an unjust sentence as it were against himself. And therefore I must continue in my sacred undertaking, for it is nothing to the point *why* any wrong goes unpunished--whether the human weakness, or stupidity, or the ill-will of the magistrates be at fault. It is enough for me that the wrong is there and requires to be rooted out."

"This is sheer infatuation!" cried Father Leo. "And have you ever considered which is the greater wrong, either as regards your fellows or the will of God--whether some peasant is taxed with more labour than he owes, or whether you fill all the land with horror and bloodshed? Nay, has not a harvest of wrong sprung from your very work? Have we not heard of villages rising against their lords, refusing their just claims, and threatening their lives? Have you forgotten what happened at Hankowce? and what at Zulawce? Does not the blood of many a soldier--nay, of your own men--cry for vengeance unto God?"

"I am not afraid to be answerable for this," responded Taras, "for the Right is more to be valued than any man's life. Both my conscience and my reason tell me that, for the world itself is founded on justice."

"The world founded on justice!" reiterated the pope, hotly. "And how do you know, then, that your judgment is always just? Are not you a man like others, and liable to err?"

"I follow conscience, and rely on the grace of God, which will be with him who seeks what is right. You know my deeds; do you accuse me of any injustice?"

"What of that poor man Hohenau!"

"He was one of those magistrates who used the power entrusted to them for a deed of

violence, for fear of earthly punishment."

"Taras," cried the pope, with a vain attempt to speak calmly, "there is no excuse for you, or rather your only excuse is this, that you did not know the true state of things----"

"I knew all about it," rejoined Taras. "I was aware that the Board of Colomea had prayed to be dismissed the service rather than be obliged to do this deed. But what of it? You will tell me that their request was refused by their superiors, and that their oath required them to stay at their post and obey the higher authority. But I tell you no oath binds a man to iniquity--and therefore the judgment I carried out was a just one!"

Starkowski interposed: "It is quite useless to reason with you on these points, or to expect you to retract anything of the past. But tell me, what of the future? Do you really consider yourself infallible? Do you imagine that you alone will never be in danger of passing sentence unjustly? This is awful presumption!"

"No," said Taras, solemnly; "it is an assurance resting on the grace of God. He sees and probes my heart. He knows that I have undertaken this warfare for His sake alone, and He will not let me fall so grievously. But even apart from this, I do think that an honest, right-minded, and judicious man will always be able to distinguish right from wrong."

"Then you really believe that an unjust sentence on your part is utterly impossible? Well, let this pass; but supposing the hour ever came that would convince you that you also, in striving after justice, had done wrong--what then?"

"It were the most fearful hour of my life," said Taras, hoarsely; "and I do not speak lightly!... I have never considered what in that case I should have to do, but it is quite plain. If God ever suffers me to commit the wrong, then I shall acknowledge that He never was with me, that the blessed ladder joining earth to heaven is a dream, and I shall no longer call myself an avenger, but an evildoer who has deserved every punishment he has ever inflicted on others. If ever such terrible conviction does come to me, be very sure I shall give myself up to you on the spot. Till then, I have nothing to do with you. Take back this message to those that sent you."

Deep silence followed.

"Is this your final decision?" These words fell on the stillness with stifled sobs. It was Anusia--white as death, bending forward, hollow-eyed and shaking in every limb--who now faced her husband.

The two men were dismayed, and even Taras staggered. "Anusia," he began, "you know----"

"Nothing else; just this one answer!" She looked straight into his eyes, and continued with that same ghastly voice: "But let me tell you first what is at stake.... Hitherto I have clung to this one conviction, that all your deeds were done in obedience to the dictates of your conscience; and because I have known you as a man more noble and more just than your neighbours, I would not permit myself to doubt for one moment that you continued noble and acted justly even where I could not see it. I took it upon myself to be both father and mother to our children, to rule the farm in your absence--the loss to my heart I could not make good. But in my sorest hours I strove to encourage myself. 'Hold up thy head proudly,' a voice within me kept crying, 'for thou art wife to one who is not like common men! Thou hast loved him for it, and prided thyself on it, bear thou the deep sorrow which comes because of it. He never was like other men; he cannot be now. He has set his great heart on winning back that field for his people, for it is theirs by right, and since he was foiled when he sought to gain his end by lawful means he is now trying what force will do. Since justice is on his side, he will succeed in the end, and will come back to you, and happiness once more will return.' This was my one hope through it all, and I believed in its fulfilment and fed upon the longed-for blessing. When the governor came to tell me what message had been received from Vienna, ah! then indeed, my heart beat with the rapture of its gratitude! I learned at the same time, however, that they could not let you go unpunished, and that you might very likely have to atone for your deeds with a long imprisonment; but even this my love and pride were ready to bear. 'He will not be a whit less great and noble,' I said to myself, 'and prison cannot degrade him! And far better to know him in prison, and making up for these months, than to think of him continuing this fearful life.' For, Taras, no human tongue can tell what it means to be the avenger's wife! God knows, and I do!... And will you now crown it all--will you heap up a burden of grief and shame beneath which I and the children must break down entirely?"

"Anusia!"

"Be silent, and listen! I have borne the utmost; now let me speak. I say this, that unless you return, now that the wrong is about to be made good, and the field given back to its rightful owners, you will cease to be believed in as noble and good, not only by me, but by all upright and sensible men; you will no longer be a champion of the oppressed and an avenger for conscience' sake, but a mere common assassin, a bloodthirsty----"

"Anusia, wife, for God's sake----"

"Do not call me wife! I will not acknowledge an assassin as my husband, nor let the children call him father. Now tell me--are you willing to follow these gentlemen or not?"

"I cannot!"

"Then go your ways ... but in your dying hour you shall call me in vain ... I will not----"

She could not finish the terrible sentence, breaking down, not in unconsciousness, but overpowered with the boundless passion of her resentment....

The unhappy man hid his face in his hands, and then slowly, with a faltering step, but not again lifting his eye to her he was leaving, he returned to his horse, and, mounting it with evident effort, he rode swiftly away towards the Black Water, nor once looked behind him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BANNER SOILED.

The following day the district governor arrived at Zulawce. He had been careful to let the villagers have full assurance beforehand that he was coming with truly peaceful intentions, but he considered it prudent, nevertheless, to provide himself with a considerable escort of hussars, since besides sifting the evidence concerning the field, there was that republic to be overthrown, and a new mandatar to be introduced. For Count George Borecki had succeeded at last in finding a man who expressed himself willing to unravel the complication left by Wenceslas Hajek, this man of enterprise fortunately being an old acquaintance of the villagers, Mr. Severin Gonta; and there was some hope of his succeeding, for he was thoroughly acquainted with local affairs and enjoyed the good will of the peasantry besides. But Herr von Bauer was not so certain that hostility was entirely out of the question, and apart from the consciousness of doing his duty in a matter of justice; he very gladly relied on the sharp sabres of his body-guard as well.

But his apprehensions happily proved unfounded. On his reaching the wooden bridge leading over the Pruth, the whole parish, to be sure, was there awaiting him, but peacefully inclined, thanks to Simeon Pomenki, who had addressed the republicans on the previous evening to this effect: "There now, you see, we get all we ever could ask for--the field which is ours, our own old mandatar, who is no fiend, and exemption from punishment for what is passed. If we are not satisfied with this, but insist on carrying on the conflict, we had better apply for admission into the madhouse at once. But I am no fool, and prefer the chances offered me of continuing on my farm." This harangue did not miss its aim, and Simeon was able to receive the district governor in the name of the community respectfully.

Herr von Bauer was ready to be conciliated, and replied with his customary bluntness: "It is a satisfaction to see you, rascals though you are; but you are poor wretches after all, and have had to suffer for the life you have led us, so we'll forget all about it and be friends again. As for you, old Simeon, I'll not even inquire into your private feelings as King of Zulawce. You'll hand me over that crown now, and if ever you men here are going to play the fools again, send us word first, and we'll say be hanged to all the parish. So that is settled; and in the meantime we shall expect better things of you."

After which impressive statement old Gonta addressed the peasantry on behalf of the Count, and if he was less outspoken, his kindness was quite as apparent, winning over the villagers entirely when he assured them in conclusion that he was prepared himself to plead their rights concerning that field, and that he felt sure of Count George's readiness to withdraw any claims that might have been urged in his name, without waiting to see what decision the authorities might form.

In these circumstances it was easy for the district governor to arrive at the truth concerning the field, though he experienced some difficulty in eliciting a confession from the perjured witnesses. The experienced magistrate perceived well enough--and was ready to make allowance for it--that these persons would think it hard to be excluded from the general pardon; but he went through with his duty bravely, assuring them that, although the instigators could expect little mercy, those who had been led on by them might hope to be treated leniently, if a point of the law could possibly be stretched in their favour. And he succeeded at last in making out several cases in which the mandatar, either personally or by means of his under-steward, Boleslaw, had corrupted the witnesses and led them on to perjury. He had the true charity not to inquire more closely than was absolutely necessary, and allowed the crest-fallen sinners to return to their homes, the judge going bail on their behalf.

His object accomplished, he returned to Zablotow, where Dr. Starkowski and Father Leo were to await him with the results of their mission. He was fully prepared to hear of their failure, and not surprised, therefore, at their tale.

"We shall have to proceed now against the misguided man," he said, quietly. "Let him do his worst. We can breathe more freely now than we could before, for our own conscience is at ease! To be sure, all we can do for the present is to protect the lowlands against him as best we can; an expedition to the Black Water, in the hope of catching him, would be sheer madness, for the whole of the Carpathians would rise in an uproar. I know those Huzuls! But he will be brought to book somehow. It is well he believes that God is with those who seek what is right--he will find it so sooner or later!"

September verged upon October, and though almost daily expected, no farther violence transpired, the reason being that no complaints had reached Taras which appeared to him worthy of redress. But before the month was out he received information which roused him to action. A certain nobleman, Baron Stephen Zukowski, of Borsowka, in the district of Czortkow, was accused to him by Karol Wygoda, the piper, who had continued with Taras, and in whom the latter rested full confidence. "Your work is but half done, hetman," the man exclaimed, "while that fiend is allowed to suck the very blood from the people of Borsowka!" and he enumerated a whole string of iniquities to be brought home to that nobleman.

Taras was indignant. "We will put an end to his doings!" he cried. "But how do you come to know of them?"

"I knew the wretch long ago; for though my own home is miles away from that village, I was in service there in my younger days, and could see for myself--indeed, his unblushing crimes were done in the light of day. Not a head of cattle was safe from his cupidity, and not a girl from his wickedness--but these are old tales, it is well nigh twenty years ago, and I believed the old sinner had gone to his account long since. But he is alive still, and carrying on his evil doings, as I learned yesterday, quite accidentally. You had given me leave, as you know, to join the merrymaking at Zabie and pick up a few coppers with my bagpipe. I met an old fiddler there who had just come from Borsowka. Ah, hetman, the iniquity done in that place keeps crying to heaven--it is worse than any we ever heard of elsewhere! 'Why don't the injured people call upon Taras to help them?' I inquired of the fiddler. 'Indeed,' he said, 'it is strange they do not think of it, but the horrors of their existence are enough to kill even hope in their hearts.' So the fiddler said, and I can well believe it; at the same time, I agree it is well to be careful. And I propose that you should send me to Borsowka to make inquiry. I know some folk there whom I can trust, and they will tell me the truth no doubt. I feel I must do this for conscience' sake, and out of compassion for those villagers among whom I lived."

"This is good of you," said Taras. "Go, and the Almighty speed you. It is a solace to my soul that some few honest men will cleave to me, knowing the sacredness of our common duty."

These words rose from the depth of his heart! and indeed, he needed some comfort--something to cling to--lest he should break down and fail. He had informed his men on returning from the hamlet of Magura what answer he had given to the messengers of the Board; but what a wrench it had been to his dearest affections, and the sore cost of his final parting from wife and child, they never learned from his lips.

As compared with this deepest sorrow, no other trouble befalling the unhappy man might be thought to affect him, yet his burden seemed to be added to daily; and in spite of the honest desire to avoid all contention, in spite of the real friendship Hilarion entertained for him, there were constant bickerings between his own followers and the clansmen. It was Nashko especially, who, on account of his faith, appeared to be a convenient butt for the mockery of the Huzuls. Now Taras could not allow this to continue, if only for this reason: the Jew had acquitted himself splendidly, fully justifying the confidence reported in him, and would, in any future enterprise, naturally have to retain his position of a leader; so the Huzuls must be taught to respect him, and Taras begged Hilarion to explain to his people that a man should not be derided for worshipping the Almighty in one way and not in another.

The patriarch fixed his eyes on the ground, keeping a long silence, as was his wont before answering, and when he began to speak he appeared to have forgotten the matter in hand. "Taras," he said, "have you ever ridden an ox?" and receiving a rather surprised "No" in return, he said, with a half smile, "Well, neither have I, and I don't know that any one else ever did. But why not? Might there not be found an animal among the species, well-grown and nimble enough to serve as a mount? In fact, I should say it is quite possible. At the same time, neither you nor I ever thought of trying it. And why? simply because, for a fact, God who made the ox, did not intend it for a steed, and because every man who used an ox for such a purpose against its nature would look a fine fool on its back. You will allow that?"

"I daresay, but I don't admit the simile; a Jew is as good a man as you or I."

"Certainly," said Hilarion. "The ox and the horse are equally useful, only in different ways; and a Jew is as good a man as ourselves, but differently endowed. Say what you like, but a Jew is ill-fitted for the bearing of arms, or to lead men in warfare; they are considered to be cowardly and servile, and no doubt are so."

"Nashko is a brave man, and has acquitted himself like a hero."

"I am sure he has," rejoined the old man, "but I maintain we do not ride an ox, even though we

should know of one exceptionally well fitted to carry us. And we do not do so for the one reason that oxen as a rule are not considered to be first-rate steeds. And if a man insists on making the experiment, though it should turn out to his own satisfaction, he must not quarrel with his neighbours for laughing at him, nor scold his horses if they toss their heads at the queer creature he is stabling along with them. No, Taras," he added more seriously, "it is never satisfactory to fight established opinion, and you seem determined to run that head of yours right through the thickest walls; and not content with overthrowing injustice wherever you see it, you would actually have the world make friends with the Jews. Taras, have you considered that sometimes it is not the walls which go to pieces, but---"

"The head may dash out its brains against them, I know that," said Taras, quietly, "and it does not deter me for one moment. I entreat you to lay it upon your people not to sin against the laws of hospitality with regard to Nashko. He who offends him offends me."

"I am sorry for that," replied Hilarion, "but I cannot help it. He who receives hospitality must consider the ways of his hosts."

So the conversation served not to heal the jar, as Taras had hoped, but rather widened it, and the Huzuls annoyed Nashko even more than before. Taras was grievously disappointed, and resolved to avoid further altercation, but something happened which forced him against his will to appeal a second time to the patriarch's sense of justice. It concerned Tatiana.

The poor maiden once more had reason to bewail her bewitching beauty. Hilarion had offered her the shelter of his house, and she had gratefully accepted it, endeavouring to repay her benefactors by faithful service. She could not have lived many days among the tribe to whom her strange fate had brought her without perceiving that their moral sense was of the bluntest; but she endeavoured to keep out of harm's way by attending to her work, and to nothing else. The impudent youths, moreover, soon discovered that the youngest son of the house, the Royal Eagle, was not inclined to have her molested; and, indeed, he interfered with any intended liberty of theirs so effectually, that they dared not offer it, for even the boldest of them could ill stand his ground against that young hero. The girl was glad of his protection, her natural light-heartedness returning, till one day, when gone a-milking to a distant pasture, she grew aware, to her intense dismay, that Julko had defended her for no very lofty motive. She broke away from her ungenerous admirer, and like a hunted deer fled to Taras's camp, falling on her knees before him with the bitter cry: "If you cannot save me from shame, it had been better for me to die on the gallows!"

Taras endeavoured to calm her, and was going to set out immediately for Hilarion's dwelling. But Nashko laid hold of his arm, excitedly. The Jew, who had kept his composure so admirably through all the petty insults offered to himself, was shaking with rage, and his eyes flashed fire.

"Do not humble yourself in vain!" he cried. "You are going to ask these men for manly generosity--*these* men, Taras! Why, they will never even understand your meaning; and if they did they are too savage, too low, to grant it!"

"You smart at the recollection of their insults," said Taras; "but this is unjust."

"I do not!" cried the Jew, passionately.

"What is it, then, that moves you like this?"

Nashko grew white, and again the crimson glow flushed his clear-cut face. "Go," he murmured, "and judge for yourself."

Taras went, and was hardly able to believe his ears, for Hilarion's reply was of the shortest and driest. "There is no help for it," he said.

"What?" cried Taras, utterly amazed. "Do you mean to say that we have saved the girl from her ignominious fate only to hand her over as a plaything to that son of yours? For shame!"

"Moderate your feelings," returned the aged man, quietly. "If the Royal Eagle has cast his eye on a maiden, and would have her, she has every reason to be proud of it."

"In honourable wedlock, then?"

"Oh dear, no! he is promised in marriage to the only granddaughter of my cousin Stanko, on the other side of the Czernahora, and she will be his wife as soon as she attains her sixteenth year. Stanko and myself arranged this more than ten years ago, for she is his heiress and must marry into the family."

"Then I was right in concluding that he desires the girl for his pleasure merely?"

"Yes, certainly; and why should he not? she is fair enough to behold. Why on earth do you look as if he meant to eat her? You cannot expect him to consider her more unattainable than any of our own girls. I give you leave to ask any Huzul maiden you please whether she would not feel honoured by his attentions."

"That is nothing to me," cried Taras. "Tatiana considers it shame, and I call it vilest disgrace! I entreat you to hold her safe from your son."

"I cannot interfere; I said so before," said the old man; "and there would be little use endeavouring. If the maiden indeed is so coy as you tell me, I can only advise her to leave the settlement."

Furiously indignant, Taras went back to the camp. Karol Wygoda had returned in his absence, bringing with him two peasants from Borsowka. But Taras waved them aside; he was going to consult with Nashko first, who rushed out to meet him anxiously.

"You were right," said Taras, grinding his teeth, "and I know not where we can hope to protect her."

"But I do," cried the Jew, eagerly. "She dare not leave the mountains, because prison still awaits her in the lowlands; but we must place her where Julko's power is not acknowledged. I have thought it might be best to take her to Zabie; I have acquaintances there, an old Jewish innkeeper and his wife, who I doubt not will give her shelter. They have no children of their own, and I know they can be trusted. I mentioned the girl's sad history there the other day, and the good wife shed tears, assuring me she would love to show kindness to one in such trouble."

"But if Julko should follow me thither?" interposed the girl, anxiously.

"Even if he should, he will not dare to use violence," said the Jew. "But I do not think him capable of that. He is not a scoundrel, but only a lawless youth whose nature at times is too strong for him, and who never learned to keep it under. Moreover, it is true Huzul fashion--out of sight, out of mind. You will be safe there, I think."

"Let us hope so," said Taras, deciding for this plan; "for, indeed, we have no other choice. Make ready, poor girl, to ride with us!"

And turning to Karol now, he required his report.

"Captain, it is just fearful!" asserted this man, "If that priest at Kossowince was a fiend, this baron is one double-dyed." And therewith he proceeded to give instances of his atrocious cruelty and oppression.

"Have the people appealed to the law?" inquired Taras.

"Indeed, they have; but he is not only the greatest scoundrel, but the vilest liar under the sun. He has given the lie to every accusation, and the magistrates have believed the nobleman rather than the poor, ignorant peasants. Ah! captain, you should have seen their grateful tears when I told them I was one of your men, and that you had sent me. They are waiting and hoping for you now, as for their only saviour; but hear their own messengers."

And his companions came nearer--a poorly-clad elderly man of dignified bearing, who introduced himself as Harassim Perko, the judge of Borsowka, and a younger peasant wearing a fine sheepskin. He called himself Wassilj Bertulak, and his voice was husky, as with suppressed tears, in giving his tale of woe; indeed, he could hardly speak.

"Our people have sent me because the monster's most recent crime has laid low the pride of my life. Ah! my poor daughter!" and he turned away, overcome with sobs. But all the more minute was the judge's account, and it did not require his final entreaty to confirm Taras's resolve that he must start on the spot for Borsowka.

The assistance of the Huzuls was not needed in the present instance, for although Taras's men numbered less than a score now, they would suffice for overpowering the baron, who, with a few old servants, lived in the quiet manor house of Borsowka. Taras therefore returned to Hilarion only to take his leave.

"The Almighty speed you," said Hilarion. "Let us part friends. You are a welcome guest here whenever you please to return, and the flower of the clan is ever at your service. I have partaken of your blood and you of mine; this is a tie which can never be severed. Remember it always."

"I shall remember it," said Taras, bending over the old man's hand.

He mounted with his men, and the little troop followed the Czeremosz till they reached Zabie. There he handed over Tatiana to the old Jewish couple, requiring their solemn assurance that they would watch over her as though she were a child of their own, and after the fashion of their race they gave the promise with many oaths. This settled, the band dashed away towards the plain, the two men of Borsowka in their midst.

Early on the fourth day, riding under cover of the night only, they reached the chalky cliffs on the left bank of the Dniester. There they rested for the last time, being within a few miles of the quiet manor house they were about to enter. Late in the afternoon a pale faced girl, looking troubled and shy, appeared in the glen where they halted. Wassilj Bertulak going to meet her, greeted her with a father's affection, and taking her by the hand brought her to Taras. "My poor

girl," he said, "she has come to see the scoundrel meet with his reward."

"Oh! no! no!" cried the girl, alarmed.

"Yes, yes, it is necessary," urged the father, "for he might deny it all."

Taras looked compassionately at the troubled girl. "Stay with us," he said, tenderly. "Poor child! I daresay it is a sore effort to you to tell of your grievous sorrow in the presence of so many strange men. But let the thought comfort you that you do it in order to save others from similar harm."

And then he made his disposition for the night. The manor house was in a lonely place, inhabited only by the baron, his old body-servant, Stephen, and Peter, the coachman; the steward and the rest of the men sleeping in the farm-buildings near the village. Resistance, therefore, need not be expected, and Taras satisfied himself with appointing Nashko and the greater part of his men to guard the grounds, whilst he, with the others, would bring the accused nobleman to his doom.

About eleven they started, reaching the modest building soon after midnight. The outer door was not even locked. "No doubt that coachman has attractions in the village," whispered the judge, who was of Taras's party. But when they entered the basement, in order to make sure of Stephen, that conjecture proved to be erroneous. They found but one man, the coachman, who started aghast and prayed for his life pitifully. "I am no assassin," said Taras, and inquired about Stephen. "His dying sister sent for him this morning," stammered the terrified Peter; "and the baron gave him leave to go."

Taras thereupon ordered Sefko to guard the man; he, with the others, mounting the stairs. The baron seemed to have been roused, for a door opened, a streak of light appearing, a voice weak with age calling out, "Peter, what is the matter?"

"We have come to tell you," the strong voice of Taras made answer. "I am the avenger."

There was a cry in response, and a sound as of breaking glass; sudden darkness enveloped the scene, for the lamp had fallen from the trembling hands. But power to attempt an escape seemed wanting. And when Taras, torch in hand, reached the upper landing, he found the aged nobleman leaning against his open bedroom door, simply petrified with dismay.

Lazarko, at a sign of the captain's, pushed him back into the room. It was a spacious chamber, but poorly furnished, and serving evidently as a library besides, for the walls all round were covered with bookshelves, and a large table in the middle was littered with volumes and papers. The whole aspect of the room seemed to deny that it was inhabited by a man of low pursuits. And so did the baron's own appearance. Taras looked at him surprised, for the man he had come to judge was bowed with age, and of a venerable countenance. But for a moment only he hesitated, his inflexible sternness returning. He knew that appearances were deceptive: did not that monster at Kossowince gaze at him like an angel of light?

"I have come to judge you," said Taras, austere. "You have wronged your peasants with unheard-of oppression."

"I?" groaned the poor old man, sinking into a chair. "By the blessed Lord and His saints, some one must have lied to you!"

"Do not call upon the holy names!" returned Taras, with lowering brow. "I am prepared to hear you deny the charge, but witnesses are at hand. Is it true, or not, that you have acted like a tyrant by your people, robbing and wronging them fearfully?"

"I call God to witness that this is false!" cried Zukowski, solemnly, lifting his hand. "Ask the judge, he will tell you; his name his Harassim Perko, and his is the first house this side of the village. He can be here within an hour if you send for him."

"He is nearer than you suppose," said Taras, turning to the door; and the elder of his two guides entered. "Here he is," continued Taras, "do you call upon him as a witness?"

"This is not the judge of Borsowka," exclaimed the baron, and rose to his feet. "Why this is Dimitri Buliga, an old good-for-nothing whom no one respects here, and he left the village some time ago."

These words were spoken with such a show of simple truth and honest indignation that Taras looked at the peasant doubtfully. But the man never winced; answering the charge with a smile almost. "I must say, Baron, this beats all we ever knew of you as a liar! It is natural that you should seek for a loop-hole, but I suppose I know that I am I! This is preposterous ... After this it will seem useless, hetman, to ask this wretch another question. Let that man of yours speak for my identity whom you sent to us, he knows me--that is one comfort."

And Karol Wygoda cried out: "Yes, hetman, certainly, I have known him these twenty years; his name his Harassim Perko, and he is the judge of this village."

"It is false," groaned the baron, and, stepping closer, he looked into Wygoda's face. "You also seem known to me ... Yes, I remember--your Christian, name is Karol, and you were in my service as a farm labourer years ago. I remember you because you are the only man I ever had to hand over to the law."

Karol listened with an unperturbed air, looking at the baron with an amused sort of wonder, as one might examine a natural curiosity; and, turning to the hetman, he said: "There now, this is as fine a proof as we could expect of this man's capacity of wronging a poor fellow. I daresay he may remember having seen me since I lived in the village; but I never set foot on his property, and still less did I give him any chance of handing me over to the law, as he says."

"Have you no fear of God, man?" broke in the baron. "I---"

"Stop," said Taras; "answer me one more question. Do you think that your own servants are likely to betray you, or tell a lie in order to have you killed?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed the baron, eagerly. "Honest old Stephen, I fear, cannot have returned, but my coachman sleeps in the house, and he can tell you that this man is not Harassim, the judge."

"Have him in," ordered Taras, and the coachman appeared; his hands had been tied on his back, he was pale as death, and shook from head to foot.

"You have nothing to fear," said Taras; "we only want you to tell the truth; but woe to you if you prevaricate. Who is this man?"

"Harassim Perko, the judge," stammered the fellow.

"Peter!" cried the baron, "you have lost your senses. Why, you know the judge as well as I do."

"This is sufficient," said Taras. "Be silent now, till I require you to speak. Say, judge, has this man taken unlawful possession of part of the common field?"

"He has," replied the man, adding a minute statement.

"What have you to say to this, Baron?" inquired Taras, of the nobleman, when the accuser had finished.

"It is false," reiterated Zukowski--"a whole web of falsehood. I have told you that this man is not the judge, but that good-for-nothing Dimitri. If you, indeed, are bent on justice, Taras, I pray you send to the village for the real judge. Do not soil your hands with innocent blood."

"It is you that are bent on lying," said Taras, scornfully. "Other scoundrels have endeavoured to deceive me, and to stay me in the performance of my sacred duty; but a man of such brazen face I have never yet set eyes upon. It is a pity that you seem willing to die as you have lived.... But we have yet other witnesses--bring them in."

The peasant Wassilj entered, followed by the reluctant girl; her father had almost to drag her in.

"Do you know these two?" said Taras.

"The man is a stranger to me," replied the baron, unhesitatingly; "I have never set eyes on him. But that girl was in my house this morning, with a message from my poor Stephen's dying sister, entreating him to come.... Taras!" he added, excitedly; "now I see all this wretched plot. They have made up this tale of the dying sister to decoy my good old Stephen away, who would rather have died than betray me, and I suppose they have bribed my coachman. They are deceiving you, so that you should order me to be murdered!"

"This is cleverly put together," said Taras, coldly, "it is lamentable, indeed, that, gifted as you seem to be, you did not make better use of your life; it might have saved you from this hour. Answer me, Marina, as in the presence of God Almighty. Is it true that you were in this house this morning for the first time in your life?"

"No!" she faltered.

"But you were here three weeks ago when this wretch wronged you?"

"Yes!"

"How dare you!" cried the baron, with flashing eyes. "Oh, God! how should I--look at my grey hairs, man!"

"Silence!" returned Taras. "What have you to say, Peter--does this girl speak the truth?"

"She does--old Stephen told me."

"The Lord have mercy on me!" groaned the doomed man. "Taras, have pity on my age. I have

but little money in the house, but what there is, take it all--only spare me!"

"I am not a robber, but an instrument of God's justice," replied Taras, solemnly. "It is very evident that you have deserved death amply. If you would recommend your soul to the Judge above, I will give you ten minutes."

"Spare me, for mercy's sake! Call any of the peasants, there is not a man in the village but would stand by me."

"We have had sufficient witness. Say your prayers."

"Assassin!" cried the aged baron, and with the strength of despair he flew at Taras. But a bullet from Lazarko's pistol laid him dead at their feet.

The girl shrieked and fainted, her father carrying her from the room. The others remained till they had found the cash-box. It contained, as the baron had said, but a moderate sum.

Taras avoided touching the money. "Take it," he said to the judge, "and divide it justly among those that have suffered most."

Before the day broke the manor house of Borsowka lay wrapped in silence as before, and utterly lonely, for Peter the coachman had gone off with the two villagers, Taras and his little band speeding back to the mountains.

The following day, after a sharp ride, they reached the low-lying, water-intersected waste between Kotzman and Zastawna, where they resolved to halt till the evening. The place being within easy distance of Karol Wygoda's home, the latter begged to be allowed to look up his relations. "I have no objection," said Taras, "only be careful not to fall in with any traitors. I shall expect you back by sundown."

Karol promised and went.

But he did not return. Taras, growing anxious, kept waiting for him, gazing into the deepening night, but not a sound broke on the stillness.

"We had better start without him," said Nashko, at last. "Either he has been caught, and in that case it were folly for us to tarry; or else he has made up his mind to remain with his own people, in which case we cannot force him to come back to us."

"I cannot believe that," said Taras; "for he has ever proved himself a trustworthy man; he would certainly have told me if he had any idea of leaving us. And I cannot bear to think that the faithful soul has come to grief. Some accident may have detained him; indeed, I feel sure he will return. Let us wait till midnight, at least."

But midnight came and no Karol. With a troubled heart Taras at last gave orders to mount.

On the third day, which they spent under the shelter of the forest by the Czeremosz, Taras consulted his men, whether they had better return to the camp in the Dembronia Forest, trusting to the Huzuls for further assistance in any considerable enterprise, or move northward to the Welyki Lys and gather a new band to their banner. But they would not decide. "We follow you whichever way you lead us," they said.

"Well, then," said Taras; "I am for taking you back to the Dembronia Forest. The Huzuls, certainly, are troublesome confederates, but we must not consult our feelings, we must do what seems best for the cause we serve. While Hilarion is inclined to back us we are strong, whereas without him we might not always be able to fight great wrongs effectively."

It was late in the evening of this day that they rode into Zabie. The village lay hushed in sleep, the cottages standing dark and silent, the inn excepted, whence a pale light gleamed, though the place was closed for the night. Taras rode up to one of the uncurtained windows, and peered in. The large bar-room was empty, save for a bowed figure sitting by the hearth, motionless.

"It is Froim, the innkeeper," cried Nashko, who was looking in at another window. "For God's sake--I trust nothing has happened!" And, trembling violently, he tapped at the pane.

The old Jew started, turning to the table as if to extinguish the flickering lamp. But recognising Nashko's voice, he came to the window instead, opening it, and saying with a hoarse whisper: "I suppose you would like to have a last look at her!"

"Tatiana!" cried Taras. "Man, say, what is it?"

"We could not have her laid out here," continued the innkeeper, slowly and shaking with emotion. "Poor lamb! we would have loved to show her that last honour, but we are Jews. She is in the little chapel of the cemetery, and to-morrow they are going to bury her."

"She is dead!" cried Nashko, with anguished voice.

"Did you not know? I thought you might have returned so speedily for this sad reason," cried

Froim. "We got her out of the water yesterday--the good pope here, and myself, and some of the villagers; but it was hard work, for the Czeremosz is a cruel river, holding fast its prey."

"Tell us," cried Taras, "who has dared to take her life?"

"It was her own brave doing," cried the old Jew. "She would rather die than be dishonoured. Ah! how fair and sweet she was, and how good; and to come by such an end!" The honest innkeeper struggled with his tears, continuing, amid sobs, "We have known her these few days only, my wife and I, but we grieve for her as for a child of our own."

"But how did it happen?" cried Taras, vehemently.

"Cannot you see?" returned the old Jew. "Two days ago, toward midnight, that Huzul came----"

"The Royal Eagle?"

"Yes; but Vulture were a truer name! He came with a hundred of his men--or two hundred for aught I can tell--and, knocking at this very window, insisted that I should let him in. 'What do you want?' said I. 'Open the door,' says he, 'or I shall force it open.' 'I am a poor old Jew,' I replied, 'and there are but three women in the house besides me--my wife, and her servant, and Tatiana. Of course we cannot resist you, but I ask you whether it is fit for a son of Hilarion, whom they call the Just, to turn house-breaker, and worse!' 'Open,' he retorted, 'or you shall rue it.' 'So please the God of Abraham,' said I, 'but I shall never let you in with my own hand, for I have sworn to keep the girl safe, and God Almighty will punish him who breaks his oath. I am afraid of you, of course I am, for I am but a poor old Jew, but much more do I fear God, and I will not let you in.' So he kicked open the door and carried off the girl. On to his own horse he lifted her, holding her in the saddle before him, and was off to the Black Water. But she was a jewel of a maid, and her honour was dearer to her than life. She slipped from the horse as they rode by the river and leapt into the roaring water. They tried to save her, but in vain. I heard of it early in the morning, and went to seek for the body with some of our men, the good pope himself coming with us. And, as I said, they'll bury her to-morrow morning. Go to the chapel if you like to have a last look at her."

The piteous tale had been interrupted with many an indignant exclamation from the men, Nashko and Taras only listening speechless, nor could they find words at once.

"Come to the chapel!" said Taras, after a sorrowful pause.

In deep silence and slowly the band rode through the village, reaching the cemetery at the other end. There they dismounted, casting the bridles over the railings, and one after another they entered the chapel, baring their heads.

It was a modest place, damp and bare, lit up with a couple of torches. And there, at the foot of a large, crude crucifix, stood the open coffin in which they had laid the body. No one was watching by the dead, those to whom the pope had delegated that pious duty no doubt preferring to spend the blustering night in more congenial quarters.

With bowed heads and murmuring a prayer the outlaws stood by the humble coffin and gazed at the marble features, lovely even in death. The fair face, but for its pallor, seemed bound in sleep only, and the green wreath, the crown of virginity, rested lovingly on the maiden's brow. The hearts of these rough men were stirred to their depths, but one only was unable to keep silence, and with a smothered cry the maiden's name burst from his lips. He broke down utterly.

That was Nashko. Taras went up to him gently and led him out into the night, making him sit down on the steps of the chapel. And bending over him, he passed his hand tenderly over his face.

"I know ..." he murmured, "I have seen it for some time ... and if I cannot avenge her, you will do it!..."

CHAPTER XXI.

"VENGEANCE IS MINE."

It was a sad, humble funeral. The blasts of October moaned in the valley, and the rain hissed and wept. For which reason the villagers preferred to remain indoors when the little bell called them early in the morning to attend the body to its resting-place, the charitable among them murmuring a prayer for the dead. "She needs it," they said, "having laid hands on herself!" For which reason, also, the judge and the elders had insisted that she must be buried by the outer

wall of the cemetery, although the honest pope had tried his utmost to show them that the girl deserved their pity, even their admiration, rather than their contempt. But the villagers clung to their opinion, and all the priest could do was to take care that she should be buried with full church honours. If no one else were willing he, at least, would consign her to her grave reverently. He appeared at the mortuary chapel soon after eight o'clock, followed by some half-dozen mourners, and started back dismayed on beholding a band of armed and wild-looking men, evidently waiting for the funeral. But he proceeded with his sacred duty bravely, and felt touched not a little on perceiving how fervently these ill-famed outlaws joined in the prayer he offered up by the grave.

Having ended, Taras came forward, begging him to read three masses for the maiden they had buried. He promised, but refused the money the captain was offering him.

"You may take it without fear," said Taras, smiling sadly, "it is honestly acquired--we rob no man."

The priest gave a searching glance in the face before him, which looked old and anguished with the burden of sorrow this man had borne. "I believe you," he said, "but permit me to do a good work for this poor girl without taking reward."

Taras made no answer, but bowing low, he kissed the priest's hand reverently. The good man, seeing him so deeply moved, took courage to whisper a word urged by his deepest heart. "You poor, misguided man," he said, gently, "how long will you go on like this?"

"As long as there is need for it," said Taras, in a tone equally low, but none the less firm and decided. "I have been kept from wrong so far, but I see much of it about me."

The pope could but shake his head mournfully, and went his way. Taras and his men remaining yet a while in the cemetery to say their prayers by the newly-made grave. Nashko only stood aside, gazing at them fixedly, and his eyes glowed with a terrible fire.

But a pitiful scene awaited these men on leaving the graveyard--the old innkeeper and his wife standing without, weeping and sobbing; forbidden by the strictness of their faith to pass within an enclosure at the entrance of which there was a crucifix, they had abstained from coming nearer, but from a distance had endeavoured to do honour to the dead after their own fashion.

Taras went up to the old Jew. "You have done what you could," he said, "and we thank you."

"What is the use of making words," cried Froïm, passionately. "I know I have done what I could, but I could not save her! I'm a poor old Jew, but you are a strong, hale Christian, and if I were you I'd make the rascal rue it dearly."

"This is the very thing I am going to do," returned Taras, quietly. "I shall go straight to the Black Water to accuse him to his father. And if Hilarion will not bring him to due punishment, I shall do so."

And the band mounted, turning their horses' heads westwards, towards the towering peaks of the Czernahora. They stopped for the night at the hamlet of Magura, reaching the settlement early the following day.

The patriarch appeared to have expected them, for his eldest son made haste to invite Taras into his sire's presence, Hilarion receiving him with the same dignified complacency with which he had parted from him the week before. "You have come to call for justice against that young son of mine; but I have anticipated it, and punished him as he deserves."

"And what is his punishment?" inquired Taras.

"I have sent him to a distant pasture, where he will have to stay till I give him leave to return, and I shall take good care not to do so before the spring. This will furnish him with leisure to consider his folly."

"Folly!" exclaimed Taras, bitterly.

"Yes, folly!" repeated the patriarch, pointedly. "Was she the only pretty girl to be had? He ought to have seen that Tatiana had no taste for him, but his vanity blinded him; it was sheer folly."

"But I call it a crime," cried Taras, hotly; "a mean, dastardly crime!"

The old man nodded. "I expected to hear you say this," he said calmly; "but you are wronging the youth. You must bear in mind that he is a Huzul. And, besides, how should he have foreseen that the girl would drown herself? I suppose that even in the lowlands suicide for such a reason is rarely heard of; but up here, I swear to you, such desperation in a girl is utterly unknown. If you will bear this in mind, you cannot accuse him of anything worse than folly."

"It was a dastardly crime," repeated Taras. "A man acting thus by a poor defenceless girl dishonours himself, and ought to be dealt with accordingly."

"Do you expect me to understand that I should order my son to have his hair cut off as a sign that he is no longer fit for the society of the brave and honourable of his kind?"

"I do," replied Taras, fiercely; "I even demand it. And if you refuse, I must carry out the punishment myself."

There was a long pause of silence. Taras stood erect, fully expecting to meet with the old man's indignant denial. But Hilarion preserved an unperturbed calm, closing his eyes as one in deep thought. Now and then he would nod his head like one arriving at a conclusion, and presently he touched a small gong by his side. His eldest son entered. "Call hither the clansmen, young and old, as many of them as are about the settlement, and request the followers of this man also to enter my house. Let all hear my decision."

The spacious room presently began to fill, the Huzuls thronging in first, Taras's men following. And when silence had settled the aged patriarch again nodded to himself, and thereupon he rose from his seat, holding in his hand an intertwining twig of willow--for Taras had interrupted some quiet occupation of his--and with solemn voice he began:

"Listen to me, ye men of my people, for I, Hilarion, called the Just, to whom you look for guidance, have cause to speak to you. Mark it well, and tell others if need be ... You all were present when this man of the lowlands, Taras, whom they call the avenger, first came to me; and you know how I received him. You witnessed our solemn covenant; how we swore friendship to one another, not only for to-day or to-morrow, but partaking of each other's blood as a sign that it shall never be broken while the red life-stream pulses through our veins. I have kept this sacred vow; but he just now has wronged it grievously, casting insult, nay, shame, on me by insisting that a member of my own house shall be punished, not because I say so, but because he wills it, and threatening that he himself will carry out such punishment if I fail to do so. It is my own flesh and blood, even my youngest son Julko, whom he will have dishonoured."

A cry of indignation burst from the Huzuls, and they turned upon Taras.

"Silence!" commanded the old man. "I have called you to hear what I have to say, and for nothing else.... But what I say is this: a man who can thus insult me no longer can be my friend and brother." He held up the twig in his hand. "He and I have been as this branch of willow, closely intertwined; but henceforth we are severed, and there is nought to heal the disruption!" He broke the twig, casting the parts from him, one to his right and one to his left.

"Urrahah!" shouted the Huzuls; but again the patriarch enforced silence, and, turning to Taras, he said:

"You are no longer my friend, but a man who has offered me deadly insult; yet the sacred law of our fathers lays it upon me never to forget that we partook of one another's blood! I therefore may not, and will not, have recourse to active enmity beyond what you yourself will force me to by further affront. It were sufficient affront, however, if a man who has acted as you have done should continue to insult me by his presence! For which reason I banish you from this settlement, and from these mountains, to the extent of my authority. You will leave the settlement at once, withdrawing from my reach within these mountains in three days. And let me warn you that none of you shall ever see the lowlands again if, after this, you dare brave the presence of my people. It is not on my son's account that I thus threaten you, for I shall take care to inform him of your intentions, putting him on his guard, and the Huzul lives not who fears his enemy when once he knows him! It is not in order to protect him, therefore, that I have said this, but simply because you have so deserved it. And now be gone!"

"I go," replied Taras; "but I call God and all here present to witness that you are disgracing yourself and me. I will not avenge it, for I also will remember the friendship we had sworn. But as for your son Julko, I shall know how to find him and visit his wrong on him, like any other evildoer."

The fury of the Huzuls knew no bounds, and Taras would have been lost had the aged Hilarion himself not stepped between him and the indignant clansmen, enabling him and his followers to leave the house and mount their horses, the wild cries of their hitherto confederates pursuing them as they rode away.

It was a sad departure, and with heavy hearts the little band returned through the dreary landscape to the hamlet of Magura. What should they do now, and whither turn their steps? Dark and gloomy lay the future before them, but none of the men uttered a word of complaint.

Having reached the hamlet and seen to their horses' needs, Taras gathered his men about him.

"I would not for a moment delude you with fair speeches," he said; "you know for yourselves how matters stand. Just answer me one question: Will you stay with me, or go your way? I could not upbraid any one whose courage failed him to continue this life of ours. It has been full of hardships hitherto; it will be almost unendurable now that the Huzuls also are against us."

"Tell us about yourself, hetman," said Wassilj Soklewicz; "what are you going to do?"

"I must continue to the end," replied Taras; "it is not for me to fail in my duty, even if you all forsake me. I shall endeavour to win other followers."

"Is it thus?" cried the faithful youth; "then we will share your fate!" All the rest of them crying in chorus, "We will not forsake you!"

"I dare not dissuade you," said Taras, "it is not I, but the cause which claims your fealty!... Now the next question is, where shall we encamp ourselves? In the lowlands the military are on the look-out for us, and here we are in danger of the Huzuls. I propose we retire to our island fortress in the Wallachian bog. By the Crystal Springs, or indeed anywhere within the mountains the Huzuls would rout us out; I know them better even than you can know them. They were true to us while they were friends, they will be intense in their hatred now they are our enemies. But we are safe from them on that island, where we have the advantage, moreover, of being in the very midst of the country we would rid from oppression, and in a hiding-place we could hold against almost any odds. I do not deceive myself concerning the danger even there, but I know no better place."

They resolved, then, to venture into the lowlands the following morning, after which these homeless outcasts lay down by their horses, sleeping as calmly as though they had found rest by their own firesides knowing nothing of the dread burdens of life.

Two only were awake--Nashko, keeping watch outside the hamlet, and Taras, tossing on the bundle of straw that formed his couch. Sleep was far from the unhappy man, much as he longed for it; indeed it had but rarely come to him since that terrible hour, that last meeting in this very place, separating him for ever from wife and child. Alas! and what nameless agony tortured him in those hours that seemed an eternity to the sore heart within! It was then he heard those voices that would not be silenced, of regret not only concerning the lost happiness of his life, but of a far more terrible regret--of awful accusation, much as he fought against it when daylight and activity returned. The night winds moaned, sounding to him like the blending curses of a hundred voices, the never-silent reproaches of all those whom he had brought to their doom. And when he succeeded for a moment in turning his back upon the irredeemable past, fixing his relentless gaze on the life before him, the life he would have to tread, what was it but a glaring reality, a fearful outcome of the shadows behind?

He was glad of the first streak of daylight stealing into the barn, and, rising from his troubled rest, he went out into the cold grey morning, seeking the Jew, who walked to and fro at his post looking pale and wan like a belated ghost. He nodded sadly on beholding his friend.

"We shall not be able to mount for a couple of hours yet," said Taras. "Turn in now, and have a rest."

"I could not sleep," replied Nashko, "but I am stiff with the cold, and could scarcely ride without first stretching my limbs on the straw." And, handing him his gun, he went away.

Taras walked up and down, slowly at first, till the nipping cold forced him to a quicker pace. It was as dismal a morning of late autumn as could well be imagined. Cutting gusts of east wind kept hissing through the narrow valley, rattling in the gloomy fir-wood, and having their own cold play with the whirling snow-flakes. The sun must have risen by that time, but it was nowhere to be seen; a pale, cheerless light only, descending from the snow-capped mountains, showed the muddy road and its windings, with a look of hopelessness about it. Not a living creature anywhere, not a sound of animated being beyond the croaking of a solitary raven on a fir-tree near.

The unhappy man cast a listless glance at the dismal prophet. The raven is looked upon as a bird of ill-omen, but what of trouble yet untasted could its call forebode? Death? Nay, for would he not have welcomed it gladly! And yet, though he seemed to know the very sum of human suffering laid upon him by a terrible fate, even by his own awful will, there was an agony approaching him that very morning, the direst possibility of grief for his heart and soul, and that cheerless day was to be the saddest of all his sad life....

An hour might have passed, but daylight seemed as far off as ever, and the wind continued its play with the whirling snow-flakes, so that Taras did not perceive the approach of a horseman, who was fighting his way hither from Zabie, till he pulled up close by the hamlet. It was a puny, elderly figure, ill-at-ease evidently on his miserable horse, and shivering with the cold; for though his garment was bedizened abundantly with gaudy ribands and glittering tinsel, there was not a scrap of fur to yield comfort, his queer head-gear, a tricoloured fool's cap, being fully in keeping with his tawdry appearance. On his back, by a leathern strap, he carried--not a gun to betoken the mountaineer--but a wooden case, from which protruded the neck of a violin. Taras examined this strange horseman with not a little wonder, concluding presently that it was some sort of a mountebank seen about the village fairs in the lowlands, where they pick up a scanty living, now playing the fiddle, now performing some jugglery. But what gain might this artist be seeking in the wintry mountains?

"What a mercy," cried the horseman, "to fall in with a living creature at last! How long shall I have to struggle on, tell me, before reaching the Dembronia Forest?"

"What on earth do you want there?" asked Taras, surprised. "You would find only wolves to make merry at your bidding, if that is it--why, the forest is utterly uninhabited!"

"Then I am better informed than you," retorted the fiddler; "the avenger and his band are in the forest, if no one else is."

"Do you want him?"

"To be sure, and badly! The poor wretch of a girl, I believe, would claw my eyes out if I did not fetch him as I promised."

"What girl? But you may save yourself farther trouble--I am the avenger."

"You!" cried the man, crossing himself quickly. But coming a little closer, he peered with a half-fearful curiosity into the hetman's sorrowful face. "You might be he, certainly," he muttered; "you look exactly as they told me, and poor Kasia said I could not possibly mistake the terrible gloom on your face. I suppose I had better believe you, and you must come with me, else that wretched girl will die of her remorse."

"What girl? what is it? Where am I wanted? Do speak plainly!"

"At the inn at Zabie. She'd have come to you instead of asking you to come to her--I mean Kasia, my sister's daughter--she says it is killing her, and she must not die without telling you."

"Telling me what? Has she any complaints to make against any wrong-doer?"

"No; she has done that once too often already, and is grievously sorry for it now. It is not you, though, who are to blame--nor in fact, is she, poor thing--but her sweetheart, Jacek, that good-for-nothing rascal; if you can pay him out for it, 'twere well if you did. For it was a damned lie, all that story at Borsowka----"

"At Borsowka?" exclaimed Taras, staggering. "At Borsowka!" he repeated hoarsely. And clutching the fiddler with his strong hand, he dragged him from the saddle and shook him till the poor creature gasped for breath. "Speak the truth!... Is it that Marinia who sent you?"

"You are strangling me! Help!" groaned the fiddler. "It is not my fault ... help!... murder!"

At this moment Nashko, who had heard the cry, came out, followed by the others.

"What is it?" they inquired, and the Jew, taking in the situation, endeavoured to free the agonised messenger from the captain's powerful grasp.

"Aren't you rather hard on him?" he whispered to his friend. "What has he come for?"

But Taras, letting go his hold, stared about him like one demented, and a shriek burst from him--"A horse! for God's sake, a horse!" His men moved not, utterly confounded. But he broke away, dragging a horse from the barn, the first he could lay hold on, and mounting it without saddle or bridle dashed away in the direction of Zabie as fast as the frightened animal could carry him.

Two hours later he stopped by the inn. The horse was done for. He cared not, but rushed up to old Froim, who came to meet him. "Where is she?" he cried, wildly.

"Who? the sick woman?" inquired the innkeeper. "We made up a bed for her in the little lean-to."

Another minute and Taras stood by the couch. The girl had greatly changed since that terrible night. She looked as though she had passed through an illness, and her eyes were deep in their sockets. "Ah," she moaned, "you have come, and I may tell you. It has left me no peace day or night. I ran away from Jacek to look for my uncle Gregori, that he might try and find you, for he was always...."

"Be quick about it," interrupted Taras. "I want to know the truth!"

"Ah! do not look at me with those eyes," cried the unhappy girl, hiding her face in her hands, and indeed the man bending over her was fearful to behold. "I want to tell you ... I wish I had never done it, but they made me!"

"Be quick about it!" repeated Taras, hoarsely. "You are not Marinia Bertulak, and no peasant girl from Borsowka. Your name is Kasia, and you keep company with jugglers?"

"Yes, yes! I am Kasia Wywolow."

"And you lied to me in that night, all of you?"

"Yes, we did; the old baron only spoke the truth. The man who pretended to be my father was Jacek, with whom I have been going about to fairs; and the other one was a farm labourer, Dimitri Buliga, and not the village judge...."

"And why did you deceive me?"

"It was all Karol's doing. We, Jacek and I, fell in with him at the merry-making here at Zabie, and he talked us over; after which he went to Borsowka, where he bribed the coachman and prevailed on Dimitri to play the judge. He said he knew exactly how to set about it to make you believe the story ... he had an old grudge against the poor baron, who years ago brought him to punishment for theft. He stole away from you as soon as the deed was done, dividing the spoils with Jacek and Dimitri, who waited for him at Kotzman. But I suffered agony with remorse, and it brought me here."

"That will do," said Taras, faintly; "thank you." And he staggered from the room. The old innkeeper came upon him presently where he lay in a merciful swoon.

It was late in the afternoon when his men came after him, and with them the fiddler Gregori. They had not been able to gather the full truth from the bewildered messenger, but they had understood sufficiently to know that Karol Wygoda had deceived them shamefully, and it had filled their honest hearts with indignant grief. But pity for their unhappy leader was uppermost, for they felt rather than knew how fearfully the discovery must affect him; and since he had left no orders, they waited hour after hour, with growing anxiety, thinking he might return; and as he did not, they now came to seek him.

"Yes, he is here," said old Froim, sorrowfully, in answer to Nashko's inquiry, "and I think he is seriously ill. I do not know what that young woman may have told him," he added under his breath, "but it must have been something very awful; for he fainted right out, and when I had managed to bring him to again, he just said: 'I must go my way to the gallows now,' and never another word has crossed his lips. I have tried to rouse him, but he is like a stone, staring blankly; it could not be worse if he had buried wife and child. I have spoken to him, I have implored him, but not a sign is to be got from him. Will you try it?--he may yield to your words."

Nashko told his companions what the old Jew had said, and they all agreed. "Try and rouse him," they said, "tell him that to us he is as noble and just as before. How should he, how should we, in God's eyes, be guilty of this blackguard Karol's wickedness!"

Nashko took heart and entered the little room, where Froim had prepared a couch for the stricken hetman, but he was unable to deliver the men's message. For no sooner had he closed the door than Taras turned to him, saying huskily, but firmly: "Please leave me to myself till to-morrow morning; I must think it over; not for my own sake, for I know what I have to do, but for yours--I would like to counsel each of you for the best I can hardly collect my thoughts as yet, it is as though I had been struck with lightning. Let me come to myself first. I daresay Froim will find a night's lodging for you; and to-morrow--yes, to-morrow morning when the day has risen, I will see you." Taras seemed fully determined, and Nashko could but yield.

The following day early, when the men had gathered in the great empty bar-room, Taras came among them. They had not seen him for a space of four-and-twenty hours, but the havoc wrought in his appearance seemed the work of years. He was fearfully altered, looking like an old man now, overcome with life's distress.

"Dear friends," he said, speaking very calmly and kindly, "I pray you listen to me, but do not try to turn me from my firm resolve. I release you one and all from the fealty you have sworn to me. I am your leader no longer. Please God, this will be the last time that you will see me; I have prayed to Him earnestly to let my life and the yielding up of its every hope be sufficient atonement. Yes, I have pleaded with Him in mercy to let your ways be far from mine; for the path I have to tread will now take me to Colomea, to prison, and thence to the final doom."

A cry of horror interrupted him. "For God's sake," they cried, "what is it that has come to you?"

"Not thus, if you love me," he said, gently, warding them off. "I have followed the voice of my own heart so far, let me follow it still. That voice has deceived me hitherto, leading me to misery and crime; it is speaking well this day for the first time! Yet, be very sure, I was not wrong in saying that the plain will of God required Right and Justice to be upheld in this world; not wrong in accusing those of their shortcomings whose sacred duty it is to see that justice rules here below, but who do not carry out this duty to its fullest, holiest meaning. My mistake was this, that I fancied this unfulfilled duty could by the will of God devolve upon me or any other individual man. To be sure I who sacrificed all earthly happiness at the shrine of justice, who became a murderer in blind love of the right, and now go to the gallows--I most not be unjust, not even against myself, and therefore I say it was a natural mistake. For what more natural than to argue: Since they will not guard the right whose bounden duty it is, I will do so, who am strong at heart and pure of purpose! But, nevertheless, it was a grievous mistake. I see it now. I still believe in that grand, holy ladder of His making which is intended to join earth to heaven; but plainly it is not His will, even if some of its steps at times be rotten, that any single man should take upon himself to make up in his own poor strength for any failings in that glorious institution for working out the divine will. It were proud, sinful presumption in any man, and I have done evil in His sight, not merely in disregarding what mischief must accrue if others followed my example, but chiefly on account of the awful delusion that *I* was above erring, and that *my* judgments must needs be just! And how did I come to imagine this? Because I chose to believe that the Almighty

must keep me from foiling--me, His servant, the righteous, justice-loving Taras. It was just my pride! The magistrates, the courts, might err, but I never! And yet how great is the danger if the carrying out of justice be vested in any individual man!--the work I have undertaken could not but end like this! I believed I was doing right, and I have been utterly confounded. The Baron of Borsowka was a righteous man, and I, who presumed to judge him, have been his murderer."

"But that was not your fault; you were deceived by Karol!" they cried.

"I was," replied Taras; "yet the guilt rests with me for not examining into the charge more carefully. Why did I refuse his urgent request to send for witnesses to the village? I am his murderer. I, and no one else; and since I have judged falsely in his case, how can I be sure that I have not done so in others? But, be that as it may, I am an assassin, and it behoves me to expiate my crime, submitting to those whom God has called to judge any evildoer in the land. I am going to Colomea to give myself up."

Vainly they strove to turn him from his resolve. He kept repeating: "I follow the voice within, and it has begun to speak truth." With heavy hearts they perceived it was utterly useless to plead with him, and listened to his last farewell. He enjoined them to separate at once and to begin a new life each for himself in different parts of the country. He had a word of sympathy, of advice for each. "Forty florins are still in my possession," he added, producing the sum; "it is all I have left of the money contributed by honest peasants towards my work. Take it and divide it fairly. Let it be the same with the proceeds of your arms and horses."

And he took leave of them, of each man separately, the Jew being last. "Nashko," he said, "I have yet a request to make of you. You love me, I know, and I am about to die. Will you grant it?"

"Surely," said the Jew, with tear-stifled voice.

"I know your intentions with regard to Julko," said Taras, "and I know the reason.... But I ask you to forbear, and to leave these mountains without bringing him to his due."

"The thought of revenge was sweet," said the Jew, "but I will do your desire."

"Whither will you betake yourself?" asked Taras. "I was able to advise them all, but I know not what to say to you; besides, your judgment is better than mine."

"I shall go away--far, far away," said Nashko. "I have heard that in following the sun through many lands you reach the wide sea at last, and crossing the sea you reach a country where a man is a man, and no one inquires into his creed. I shall try for that country, and if so be that I get there----"

"God speed you!" said Taras, deeply moved, "for your heart is honest and you have been true to me. So have you all: the Almighty watch over your lives!"

He left the room and, seeking his horse, he sped away from his friends towards the lowlands, vanishing from their gaze.

CHAPTER XXII.

PAYING THE PENALTY.

A few days later the district governor and Dr. Starkowski were having a quiet talk in the dusk of the evening. They were sitting in Herr von Bauer's private office, and the latter had just confided to the lawyer that it was officially settled now--and the requisite document a visible fact--that the contested field on the Pruth was formally adjudged as belonging, not to the lord of the manor, but to the parish of Zulawce.

"I am simply thankful it *is* settled!" the governor was saying, rubbing his honest old hands. "I always suspected foul play, but since I had proof of it, the former judgment has weighed on me like a nightmare. It is more of a relief than I can tell you!"

"And yet that judgment was legally correct," said the lawyer, somewhat sadly; "the case had been investigated, and witnesses on both sides were examined, the evidence appearing unquestionable!"

"Is this intended for a covert reproach?"

"Certainly not," returned Starkowski; "and yet I cannot think of this tragic affair without a sad reflection on the short-sightedness of all human justice."

"You are right there," said the governor, sighing in his turn. "My only comfort is, that we, the authorities of this district, have done our human best; even that coward Kapronski, cannot be accused of wilful injustice. The peasants had been so foolish as to move the landmark, and the mandatar, rascal that he is, saw his opportunity for taking possession. It was quite correct that our commissioner should have told the peasants that their only remedy was the law; and the suit began. Both parties were ready to swear, and, indeed, there was no other means for eliciting the truth, except by putting them on their oath. I admit that Kapronski set about it somewhat summarily and offhandedly, but I doubt whether, in all conscientiousness I could have arrived at a better result myself. If witnesses are open to bribery, perjuring themselves, how should the most careful of judges get at the truth? There was oath against oath, a considerable number of the peasantry yielding evidence in favour of the manor against their own interests, and the lord of the manor, moreover, was in possession--how then, I ask, should even the court's judgment have been different? There is some comfort in this, I assure you; at the same time it is better comfort that the wrongful judgment with its sad consequences has been reversed--as far as possible at least."

"As far as possible," repeated the lawyer, thoughtfully. "Poor Taras----"

"Don't talk to me about that man," interrupted the governor, waxing hot; "or would you have me tax the short-sightedness of human justice with his history also?"

"Certainly, I should say."

"Certainly not, you mean! What, have you forgotten poor Hohenau? And what of his latest murder at Borsowka?"

"There I am staggered, I own," said the lawyer.

"Of course you are, because you insist on judging the man by the rules of your ethics," cried the governor, as though the deeper bearings of the soul were utterly beneath the legal mind; "but I, who am no psychologist, but a wretched district governor in this province of Galicia--worse luck!--I who have had plenty of opportunity of getting acquainted with any number of hajdamaks, I tell you he is no better than the rest of them! It is all very well to start the business with a fine pretence, a pretty cloak to cover one's rags; he has discarded it now, you see, and shows himself as he is--a mere wretched assassin. Let us change the subject; I have something more pleasant yet to tell you. What should you say to those poor wretches at Zulawce, in mortal terror of their lives on account of their perjury?--of course, they must bear the consequences!--they are going to be duly sentenced, and then----" the kind-hearted man could not go on for smiles.

"They are going to have a free pardon," added Starkowski; "are you sure?"

"I have got it in my desk, which is more, and I am highly delighted for once that the law should be circumvented. Of course, the line will be drawn between the instigators of these precious plans and those who were merely led on. There is Mr. Wenceslas Hajek, for instance, whom we shall have the honour of lodging in safe quarters within this city for a couple of years--I'd give him five, Willingly--and no expense to himself. Come in!"

There had been a knock at the door repeatedly, but the gentlemen had not heard it in the warmth of their discussion till it struck the governor at the tail end of his information. "Come in!"

The door opened showing a tall visitor, who stood still.

"A peasant by the look of him," said the governor, peering into the dusk. "This is beyond office hours, my friend; come again to-morrow."

There was a pause of silence, and then the man by the door came a step forward, saying, with trembling voice, "Excuse me, sirs, for disturbing you, but I would rather not go away again----"

"Taras!" exclaimed the lawyer, and the governor, bursting from his seat, stood still a moment, paralysed with the discovery; but then he flew to the window, flinging open the sash, and sent one terrified cry after another into the street below.

Taras never moved. "Do not be frightened," he said, sadly. "Look here, I am quite unarmed, and have come with peaceful intentions."

But the sentry outside and some of the clerks yet at work had heard the alarm; assistance already was pressing in at the door.

"Bind him!" cried the governor. And, nothing loth, the men clutched the prisoner.

But Starkowski interfered. "Stop!" he said. "You are five against one, and you see he offers no resistance." He walked up to Taras and looked him in the face. "You have not come with any evil intention?"

"No, sir."

Starkowski seemed quite satisfied; turning to the governor, "Leave your men in the room," he said, "but there is no need to bind him, I'll go bail."

But the poor governor was not so easily quieted, and his voice positively shook when he addressed the man of whom all the district had stood in mortal fear these months past. "Step closer," he said, "we are ready to hear you."

And Taras came nearer, looking pale and wan, a stricken figure, resting his worn frame against the table. "I have come to give myself up," he said, "and I pray to be dealt with according to my deserts."

"And where are your people?"

"I have disbanded them; there is no fear of their committing further violence."

"*Where* are they?"

"They have gone different ways; but I have not come to betray them, and shall not do so. Concerning myself I will answer any question, and that must suffice. But before interrogating me, please have a clerk here to write it all down, for I should like those at Vienna to have the truth in my own words. I would especially wish the Emperor to know it, and his kind uncle, Ludwig."

The governor was going to retort sharply, but he restrained himself; the man after all had not desired anything improper. But the shock had been too great to enable him to open proceedings on the spot. "You will be interrogated to-morrow morning," he said, "and, whatever your misdeeds, it shall be set over against them that you have given yourself up of your own free will. I will not have you put in irons, and no one shall dare to insult you; but I shall have you well guarded."

"Do whatever the law requires," replied Taras. "But there is no fear of my escaping again, even if never a door were locked upon me. It is my conscience which brought me hither, and it will keep me here. Indeed, if any one attempted to set me free against my will, I should oppose him as an enemy."

The governor had nothing more to say, beyond ordering the prisoner's removal to the city gaol. But Taras looked at him. "There is yet one thing," and his voice quivered; "may I speak to this gentleman--it is something I have deeply at heart."

The governor nodded assent, and Starkowski went up to the prisoner. "Ah, sir," said Taras, "I pray you not to believe that after all I turned a robber and murderer! I daresay you heard that I have had Zukowski killed, the poor old baron at Borsowka. I have; but I have been grievously deceived by evil men, on whose honesty I relied. I was fully persuaded I had judged righteously in this case also. I appeal to you--you know that I never yet told a lie--will you believe me?"

"I will--I do," said the lawyer, holding out his hand.

But Taras did not take it, there was a strange agitation in his face, he shook, and before the lawyer could prevent it, he had fallen on his knees, covering Starkowski's hand with kisses and tears. "Ah, sir," he sobbed, "this is the most merciful word you have spoken in your life!"

He rose and followed his keepers.

An hour later special messengers were speeding in all directions to announce to the magistrates and military authorities that the great trouble was at an end, that the avenger was in safe keeping of his own free will. At Colomea itself the news was flying from house to house, being received everywhere with exultant satisfaction. Two men only, whose interest in Taras's fate, because a personal one, was of the liveliest, were rather aghast at the news, calling their mortal enemy a fool for his pains, because he had put his head into the noose.

One of these worthies was Mr. Ladislas Kapronski, who had been obliged after all to return from Lemberg, not of his own choice, but because of the importunity of his immediate superiors, which left but two ways open to him, either to accept their pressing invitation or to quit the service. So he had arrived, hoping to escape with a sharp reproof; but the very first meeting of the Board showed he was not likely to be dealt with in a spirit of leniency, the district governor being especially vicious in the virtuous Kapronski's opinion. Nevertheless, he clung to his hope, giving the lie unblushingly to all accusations, since the one witness to be dreaded, even Taras, could not so easily be confronted with him; and who else should know whether he had perverted his message or not? So he carried his head high, and his collapse was sad to behold when, at a late hour that evening, the news reached him, "Taras is in safe keeping!" He jumped from his seat as though an adder had stung him; but, alas! there was no use in his rushing abroad to inquire whether it could really be true, since the strange rudeness--or, perhaps, deafness only--of his closer acquaintances had appeared of late to affect most people at Colomea, and now Kapronski in addressing any honest citizen could never be sure of a hearing! So he did not go forth from his chamber, but fell to chewing the bitter cud of retribution, listening intently for what terrible affirmation might come flying in to him through his open windows from the excited streets. The news plainly was a fact!

But if his cogitations were misery, what then must be said of that other one who deprecated Taras's act of surrender, Mr. Wenceslas Hajek, the ex-mandatar of Zulawce? This gentleman quite lately, at the invitation of two constables, had exchanged his princely residence at the

castle of Drinkowce for the more modest abode of a prison cell, and this quite in spite of--or, in fact, rather because of--his sudden desire for a change of air in distant parts. It had transpired that he was quietly on to Paris. He had been admitted to bail, when proceedings were commenced against him on account of the discovered perjury, and the constables caught him in the very act of strapping his travelling bag. He was naturally annoyed at being thus overreached; but the virtuous Wanda, who had not intended to accompany him on his travels, most heroically witnessed his discomfiture, watching his being carried off with truly stoical calmness--she might even have been a Spartan matron! "Good riddance," she said quietly, "if they would but keep you in prison; it's the one place for you!" Whereupon he, gathering together the shreds of masculine courage, retorted: "Hell itself would be delightful if I had a chance of going thither without you!" from which amiable passage of arms the reader may infer that this marriage, founded on a love just about equalled by the mutual respect of the contracting couple, had turned out as happily as might have been foreseen, the actual result being that Herr Bogdan von Antoniewicz even now was taking measures to bring his daughter's case into the divorce court. But Mr. Hajek, who, it will be remembered, had prepared against such a contingency, felt no sorrows on this head; and indeed a husband blessed with a wife of the Countess Wanda's description might be tolerably certain that any inquiry into her character would bring to light ample mitigation of any blots in his. But if his domestic concerns sat easy on him, all the greater was his anxiety concerning that other trial, since there was no saying where a close inquiry might not land him, especially as his under-steward, Boleslaw Stipinski, had been so very foolish as to allow himself to be caught. Still, while Boleslaw had a tongue left wherewith to deny all charges as unblushingly as Hajek himself, the mandatar need not give himself up for lost--not while the only man who could witness to most of his crimes was far away, and not likely to be got hold of. What, then, must have been the feelings of the brazen-faced prisoner that evening when a call from the echoing corridor resounded in his cell, and he understood the words: "Look sharp, boys, they are bringing the avenger!" It was the chief warder calling upon his fellow gaolers. There was a running to and fro and a confusion of voices, followed presently by the usual silence of the place. And when the death-like stillness had again settled down the wretched man tried to persuade himself that he had been dreaming; but the early morning dispelled this delusion, his inquiry eliciting a gruff reply from the warder going his rounds. "Taras? Yes, he is on this very floor, more's the pity you cannot communicate with him," said the surly attendant, never perceiving the irony of his speech.

Early in the forenoon the new prisoner was brought to his preliminary examination, Herr von Bauer conducting it in person; and in accordance with his stated intention Taras yielded the fullest information concerning himself and his late doings, but refused persistently whatever might tend to incriminate his followers. He readily mentioned those who had led him into the murder at Borsowka; but not a fact, not a name besides, was to be got out of him. Nor could he be brought to give the slightest clue towards inculcating such of the peasants as had assisted his work by their contributions for the maintenance of his men. "They have aided and abetted a criminal course," he said; "but they did it with the best of intentions for the love of their suffering neighbours, and believing it to be the will of God."

"It might be better for you to give their names," said the governor, not unkindly, "for if you do not, how is it to be proved that you are speaking the truth? These contributions might be a myth, and you be taken for a common bandit after all, who committed murder for the sake of gain. Are you prepared to face this?"

"If the Almighty will thus punish me, I shall bear it," said he, sadly. "He knows I have spoken the truth."

The trial concluded with those questions laid as a duty upon the judge, even with the worst of criminals, ever since the great Empress left her womanly influence upon the Austrian law. "Do you desire spiritual assistance?" inquired the governor.

"Not now," said Taras; "I need no one to come between me and the Almighty. When death is at hand I will thankfully receive the holy sacrament, and I would ask you then to send for the parish priest of Zulawce, Father Leo, who on Palm Sunday gave me his promise to come to me whenever I should need him. He will do so."

"And have you any message to be transmitted to your wife?"

The extreme pallor of his face yielded to a flush which rose to the very roots of his hair. "No," he said faintly. "My wife was right in saying I had forfeited my claims on her and the children. It were sheer goodness and mercy on her part to remember me now. But since it is so, I must not ask for it; I can only wait."

But waiting for the prompting of her love seemed vain. Throughout the dreary tune of the legal proceedings, which lasted nearly four months, neither the pope nor Anusia visited the prisoner. The only human being who during all this sad time requested permission for occasional intercourse with the accused was Dr. Starkowski, who could not visit him in his capacity as legal defender till after the protracted inquiry, but prayed to be admitted as a friend. And he was allowed to see the prisoner occasionally in the presence of the chief warder, finding the unhappy man, for whom he had a truehearted sympathy, strangely quiet. "I have nothing to complain of," Taras would say; "I could not have expected anything else. And, calling to mind the terrible hour when that girl in her agony of remorse confessed to me how I had been deceived, this present time seems happiness in comparison. I am bearing the just punishment for my deeds even on this

side of the grave--it is all I must ask for at the hand of man."

"All?" repeated the lawyer, with a peculiar stress on the word, and it seemed to him a very duty of Christian charity to offer to the unhappy man his willingness to plead with Anusia. "It will be no trouble," he added, rather awkwardly; "I have business at Zulawce, and might as well go and see her."

"I pray you not to do so," said Taras, earnestly. "It would be a bitter trial to her to have to speak about me to a stranger, and I have brought on her so much suffering already that it is not for me to add to it."

Starkowski nevertheless endeavoured to mediate, but in vain. Father Leo himself dissuaded him from his well-meant purpose. "Believe me, sir," said the honest priest, sadly, "there is nothing to be done. If human pleading availed anything, my entreaty would have done so! But no prayer and no exhortation will bend the iron purpose of that woman. This is the reason why I have refrained hitherto from going to Colomea: I have not the heart to meet him with no better news than this."

"Well, perhaps a stranger may be more successful," said Starkowski, and went over to Taras's farm. But he was met in the yard by Halko, with a message from his mistress. She did not desire to see him, the young man said wistfully, unless he were sent on business of the trial.

Towards the close of January, 1840, the inquiry was concluded; but, after all, not much more had come to light than had been known with more or less of exactness before. And if, on the one hand, it was beyond a doubt that Taras was guilty of the death of a great number of men, having brought loss and suffering to others, so also it proved a matter of certainty that in every case he had granted to the victim a kind of judicial inquiry, punishing them upon conviction. Also there was a considerable amount of actual evidence in his favour, Baron Zborowski, of Hankowce, especially doing his utmost in his behalf. On the whole a fairly just estimate of the man's activity during those seven months of the reign of terror in the land had been arrived at, but not a clue had been obtained concerning his fellows and helpers, who appeared simply to have vanished. One of his late followers only was caught--Karol Wygoda, whose whereabouts Taras himself had suggested. This wretch denied the charge persistently, until confronted with his former hetman, a look of whose eye sufficed to crush the man, whereupon he made a full confession, including the crime he had instigated at Borsowka.

But not only in this case was it apparent that Taras had in no wise lost his strange power over men; none of the perjured witnesses of Zulawce could hold out against him at the bar. But the most flagrant proof of the awe he still inspired, perhaps, was this, that Mr. Hajek, on the mere announcement of the governor's "I shall confront you with Taras to-morrow," fainted outright, and upon recovering his senses declared himself ready to confess on the spot. No doubt he acted from the consciousness that conviction was unavoidable, and that it would be useless to harass his feelings by so painful an interview.

Kapronski, on the contrary, felt that all his future career depended on the ordeal of a meeting with Taras, and, fortifying his flunkey spirit with this consideration, he tried hard to strike terror into the soul of the convicted bandit; but he collapsed woefully, and blow upon blow the righteous wrath of Taras came down upon his head. It was a strange sight these two--the one covered with the blood of his fellows, the other legally guilty at worst of a breach of discipline--but no one could doubt for a moment which of them was the nobler and better man.

On the last day of the inquiry the governor put the question to Taras who should be his advocate.

"Ah!" said Taras, "am I permitted to choose? I would have Dr. Starkowski in that case, for he will do his best for me."

"Certainly," replied the governor, continuing with some surprise; "have not you assured me again and again you had done with life? Yet you seem to rest confidence in the success of your advocate."

"Oh," returned Taras, "I never doubted the justice of my having to die; that is settled, and I would not have him or any one else endeavour to get me off. But there is another important matter in which I sorely need counsel."

What this might be Starkowski learned on his first professional visit to the prisoner. "They will not believe me," said Taras sadly; "they doubt the truth of my having maintained the band honestly, partly out of my own means, partly with the freewill contributions of well-meaning folks. And yet I cannot name any of those who helped me, for fear of their having to suffer for it. Is there no help, but that the suspicion must rest on me and mine, that I committed murder for vulgar gain's sake?"

The lawyer endeavoured to comfort him, saying he hoped to dispel this charge, proving it at variance with the character of his client, which was plainly apparent in the evidence. "But let us speak of something else now," he added, "which is more important--your own fate."

"Why, that is settled," replied Taras, quietly; "I have shed blood and must atone for it with my

own. Please do not try to overthrow that!"

"Now, listen to me," said the lawyer, "there is such a thing as common sense. You have given yourself up of your own free will to satisfy justice; this is enough for your conscience, and it would be simply wicked in you to clamour to be hanged. Try to judge calmly in this respect. Looking at facts, of course I cannot doubt that the jury will find you guilty, because the law must have its course, but I have hopes that the Emperor may pardon you. There are strong reasons for a recommendation to mercy. Moreover, it is plain that the old Archduke Ludwig is interested in you, and he will not fail to plead in your favour."

"Will you listen to me now?" said Taras, quietly, when his counsel had finished. "I can have no other wish in this matter than to see that carried out which I have been striving for all my life--that is justice; and a sentence of death alone would be just! I can not prevent the Emperor pardoning me if he is so minded, but I will not have you petition him in my name. There is one favour only I would ask, if it comes to the dying ..." he paused, a shudder running through his frame.

"I know," said the lawyer, deeply affected, "you would like to be shot and not hung. Father Leo told me; old Jemilian come to him once secretly for confession ... Take comfort, I think I can promise you that much, if indeed it must come to the worst."

Towards the end of February, Taras was sentenced to death--"to be hung by the neck"--there could not have been any other verdict. But he was informed at the same time that the parishes of Ridowa and Zulawce, as well as Baron Zborowski, had petitioned the Emperor for mercy.

That same day Starkowski addressed a letter to Father Leo, acquainting him also with the sentence, and imploring him once again to try his influence with Anusia. The pope was deeply grieved. "Alas," he said to his wife, "even this news will not move the woman, and what else could I tell her? Have I not striven with her to the utmost?"

"You must try yet again," said the good little popadja; "it is the most sacred duty in all this life of yours."

"I am sure of that," he said, sorrowfully; "and my heart bleeds at the thought that once more I must plead in vain for her poor husband! I am truly sorry for Anusia herself, and shall never cease befriending her, but this hard-heartedness, this horrible power of vindictiveness in a woman fills me with loathing."

With a heavy heart he set out on his mission, finding Anusia in her sitting-room, her eldest boy, Wassilj, at her feet, reading to her with a clear voice from some book of spiritual comfort. On beholding her visitor, she gave a nod and ordered the little boy to leave them alone, but the child hesitated, obeying her repeated command reluctantly. She rose and went up to the pope with the icy quiet which had grown habitual with her; but her face was fearfully worn, and she looked quite an old woman now. There was scarcely a tremor in her voice. "I know what you have come for," she said "He has been sentenced to death."

"Yes," he replied. "But if ever----"

"Stop!" she interrupted; "would you have me and the children be present at----"

"Anusia!" he cried; "it is awful--fearful; do you know that your life-long repentance will never atone for this cruelty of heart?"

"Is that what you think?" she said, hoarsely; "and do you know how I loved him? do you know the depth of my suffering? God knows----"

"Do not call on Him," cried the pope, passionately; "He is holy and pitiful, and has nothing in common with the hardness of men."

"Priest," she said, confronting him wildly; "how dare you come between Him and me? His understanding me is the one hope which keeps me from madness----" and a cry burst from her; she fell at his feet, clinging to his knees, moaning: "Ah, turn not away from me! Try and consider the agony of my heart!"

He lifted her gently, making her sit down on a chair. "I do consider it," he said; "and I have borne this sorrow with you throughout. But do not think you can lessen it by being unforgiving and hard.... Come with me and see him," he added, folding his hands with his heart's entreaty; "it is his dying wish, will you not grant it? I will not plead his right to look for his wife and children."

"No, certainly," she interrupted him, and he shuddered at the cold denial glistening in her eyes; "he gave up his rights when he left us with no better excuse than his mad longing to obtain justice for any stranger. He could not have complained of me if I had told him as early as Palm Sunday, 'I cannot prevent your going, but you cease to be my husband,' I did not say that, I did not upbraid him, but I knelt to him and wept at his feet. He saw the agony of my soul, and went his way. I did not cease loving him, I only strove to save the children from his ruin. He would not have hesitated to make me the recipient of his plans, the go-between transmitting his messages to the village. He only thought of his work, never of what might come to us! And when we were

taken to prison for his sake, he only said, 'And though they kill them I must go on with this cause!' Can a husband, a father, nay, a human being act thus? And when we were set free, and you and I went to see him, to entreat him to forego this life of bloodshed and murder lest his wife and children should have to bear the last fearful disgrace, did he listen to us? 'I cannot help it, I must go on,' he said. And neither can I help it now," she added, with a bitter moan; "he has brought me to it, and must bear the consequences!"

"And do you think this will help you to bear it?" said the pope. "Can it in any way lessen your sorrow?"

"No!" she cried; "but it is just! just! I am treating him as he treated me!"

"And is it justice you look for from your Saviour?" said he; "is it your deserts you will plead when you hope for His mercy in that day?" He paused solemnly, but once again he strove with her entreatingly, pleading for love and for pity. She moved not, and he could not see her face, for she had covered it with her hands; but when a sob burst from her ice-bound heart, and the tears welled through her fingers, hope rose within him, and, continuing to speak to her gently, he lifted his soul to God that the words might be given him which could touch her and carry light into the darkness of her fearful despair.

Neither of them heard the door open, both starting when suddenly the voice of little Wassilj was heard sobbing amid his tears. "Let me help you, Father Leo," faltered the child, "mother will listen to us, surely. And if she will not go with you, take me, please, for I love father dearly!"

At these words an agonised cry burst from the woman's heart; she caught up the boy and covered him with tears and kisses, crying: "I will go--I will go!"

Two days later Starkowski, with a flush on his face, entered the convict's cell. "Taras," he cried, "I am glad to tell you--your wife----"

"Is she coming?" faltered Taras. "O God, is it possible?"

He had risen, but staggered back to his chair--it was too much for him. Starkowski left him quietly; in his stead Anusia had entered the cell.

And husband and wife once more stood clasped to each other's heart.

The governor allowed Anusia to spend many hours with the prisoner. They spoke of the past, of the children's future, of the village, and everything they had in common--one subject only they both avoided, the ghastly event which soon would separate them for this life. Taras took leave of her and the children every evening as tenderly as though it were the eve of his final doom, but he never referred to it, and Anusia in her secret heart took it as a sign that after all he hoped for a pardon.

On the 15th of May, 1840, the decision arrived from Vienna. The Emperor had confirmed the sentence; a pardon could not be granted because "the notoriety of the case required the law to have its course." But it was left with the district governor to make all further arrangements and decide the mode of execution.

It so happened that Father Leo was with the governor early in the day when the decree arrived; he had come to beg for an interview with the convict, and Dr. Starkowski having been sent for, the three entered the cell together. Taras knew at once what they had come for, his face grew white, but he could stand erect, requiring no support, while the sentence was being imparted to him.

"You will be shot to-morrow morning," said the district governor. "Father Leo will go with you. Your execution shall not be a spectacle for the curious, for which reason I have fixed an early hour, and chosen a place at some distance--a quiet glen on the way to Zablotow, where a deserter was shot some time ago. None but myself and another magistrate will be present, and the fact will be kept secret to-day. Would you desire your wife to accompany you?"

"No," said Taras, "and I pray you not to tell her anything. We have settled everything, and I shall take leave of her and the children this evening just in the usual way, as though we were to meet again to-morrow. I think this will be the best course for her."

And he carried out this pious deception with a wondrous strength of purpose, passing the day in quiet intercourse with her and their children. When she had left in the evening, utterly unconscious of the final parting, he was removed to another cell, lit up and provided with altar and crucifix, to spend his last night in the customary way. Father Leo took his confession, Taras's voice being low and earnest, but he was very calm; and having received absolution and the sacrament at the hands of his friend, he passed the rest of the night in silent prayer.

At daybreak the following morning, when the town yet lay buried in sleep, three carriages drove away in the direction of Zablotow, the governor and a brother magistrate occupying the first, the condemned man, Father Leo, and a couple of soldiers the second, some more soldiers in the third bringing up the rear.

It was a perfect morning of spring. Taras drew deep breaths of the fragrant air, and his eye rested on the blossoming fruit-trees by the way. "God is kind to me," he said, turning to the pope, "letting His sun rise brightly on my dying hour."

"Yes, God is good," said the pope, "He is always kinder than men ..." The poor priest spoke his inmost feeling, but he regretted it almost immediately--was it for him to drop bitterness into the heart of the dying man?

But Taras only shook his head. "It is your grief for me which makes you unjust, Father Leo," he said, quietly. "I have thought deeply these last days, and I see there is much to be thankful for! I may be at rest, too, concerning my poor wife; and as for my children, I am certain you and Anusia will bring them up rightly, and they will live to be good."

"I will not fail in my duty by them; I shall look upon it as a holy vow," said the pope solemnly. And he kept it faithfully. The children of Taras are alive to this day, honoured and loved by their neighbours, richly blessed, too, in outward circumstances; and Wassilj Barabola would long ago have been made judge of his village had he not declined the distinction, remembering the promise he gave to his father.

"And even as regards myself!" said Taras. "All my life long I have endeavoured to farther the Right and promote justice, and if I have done grievous wrong myself, yet I have not failed entirely. But for this strife of mine, oppression would be more rampant than it is now; my own parish would not have received back the field of which we were defrauded, and the wicked mandatar would not have been replaced by a man who means well by the peasants. So you see, dear friend, the grace of God has been with me after all! I have not lived in vain; as for my evil deeds, I now pay the penalty, as is right and meet. Why should I complain!"

"Oh, Taras!" cried Leo, "what a heart was yours, and to come to such an end!"

"Nay," said Taras, "I am poor and sinful, and my pride was great; yet I always longed for the Right, and to see it done was my heart's desire. The Judge of men, I trust, will be merciful to me."

"Amen!" said Leo, with stifled voice, and he began to say the prayers, Taras repeating the words after him fervently. They reached the glen. The sentence was read, and the priest resumed prayers.

Taras stood up. The soldiers fired, and he was struck to the heart. He lay still in death, and his face bore an expression of deep content.

They buried him where he fell. There is no cross to show his grave, but the place to this day is known to the people as "the Glen of Taras."

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1](#): These mountaineers, like the Tirolese, know but one pronoun in addressing high or low, the "Thou" being used throughout the story in the original; but their straightforward simplicity may be sufficiently apparent, though substituting the English "You."

[Footnote 2](#): Forced labour, a reminiscence of villanage, surviving in Slavonic countries.

[Footnote 3](#): One of a church choir.

[Footnote 4](#): Soldiers.

[Footnote 5](#): The fur mantle.

[Footnote 6](#): Orthodox Jews wear on their chest a short garment with fringes according to the rabbinical tradition; *vide* Numbers xv. 38.

THE END.

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