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Translator: R. Nisbet Bain

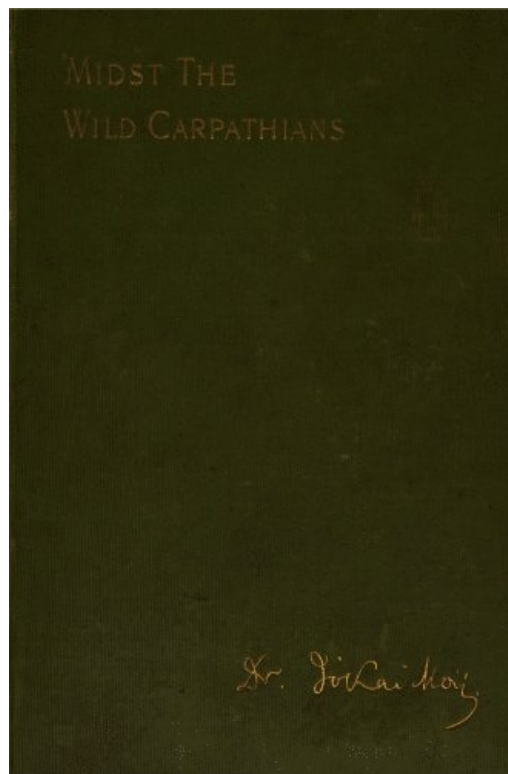
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'MIDST THE WILD CARPATHIANS

("AZ ÉRDÉLY ARÁNY KÓRA")

BY
MAURUS JÓKAI

TRANSLATED BY
R. NISBET BAIN

FROM
THE FIRST HUNGARIAN EDITION

Authorised Version

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1894

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INTRODUCTION.

[Pg v]

Hungarians regard *Az Érdély arány kora* as, on the whole, the best of Jokai's great historical romances, and, to judge from the numerous existing versions of it, foreigners are of the same opinion as Hungarians. Few of Jokai's other tales have been translated so often, and the book is as great a favourite in Poland as it is in Germany. And certainly it fully deserves its great reputation, for it displays to the best advantage the author's three characteristic qualities—his powers of description, especially of nature, his dramatic intensity, and his peculiar humour.

The scene of the story is laid among the virgin forests and inaccessible mountains of seventeenth-century Transylvania, where a proud and valiant feudal nobility still maintained a precarious independence long after the parent state of Hungary had become a Turkish province. We are transported into a semi-heroic, semi-barbarous borderland between the Past and the Present, where Mediævalism has found a last retreat, and the civilizations of the East and West contend or coalesce. Bizarre, gorgeous, and picturesque forms flit before us—rude feudal magnates and refined Machiavellian intriguers; superb Turkish pashas and ferocious Moorish bandits; noble, high-minded ladies and tigrish odalisks; saturnine Hungarian heydukes, superstitious Wallachian peasants, savage Szeklers, and scarcely human Tartars. The plot too is in keeping with the vivid colouring and magnificent scenery of the story. The whole history of Transylvania, indeed, reads like a chapter from the *Arabian Nights*, but there are no more dramatic episodes in that history than those on which this novel is based—the sudden elevation of a country squire (Michael Apafi) to the throne of Transylvania against his will by order of the Padishah, and the dark conspiracy whereby Denis Banfi, the last of the great Transylvanian magnates, was so foully done to death.

[Pg vi]

In none of Jokai's other novels, moreover, is the individuality of the characters so distinct and consistent. The gluttonous Kemeny, who sacrificed a kingdom for a dinner; the well-meaning, easy-going Apafi, who would have made a model squire, but was irretrievably ruined by a princely diadem; his consort, the wise and generous Anna, always at hand to stop her husband from committing follies, or to save him from their consequences; the crafty Teleki, the Richelieu of Transylvania, with wide views and lofty aims, but sticking at nothing to compass his ends; his rival Banfi, rough, masterful, recklessly selfish, yet a patriot at heart, with a vein of true nobility running through his coarser nature; his tender and sensitive wife, clinging desperately to a brutal husband, who learnt her worth too late; the time-serving Csaky, as mean a rascal as ever truckled to the great or trampled on the fallen; Ali Pasha and Corsar Beg, excellent types of the official and the unofficial Turkish freebooter respectively; Kucsuk Pasha, the chivalrous Mussulman with a conscience above his creed; the renegade spy Zülfikar, groping in slippery places after illicit gains, and always falling on his feet with cat-like agility; and, last of all, that marvellous creation, Azrael, the demoniacal Turkish odalisk, blasting all who fall within the influence of her irresistible glamour, a Circe as sinuously beautiful and as utterly soulless as her own pet panther—all these personages of a, happily, by-gone age are depicted as vividly as if the author had known each one of them personally.

[Pg vii]

Finally, the book contains some of Jokai's happiest descriptions, and in this department it is generally admitted that the master, at his best, is unsurpassable. The description of the burning coal-mine in *Fekete Gyemantok*, of the Neva floods in *A szabadság a hó alatt*, of the plague in *Szomorú napok*, or of the Danube in all its varying moods in *Az arány ember*, stand alone in modern fiction; yet can any of these vivid tableaux compare with the wonderful account of Corsar Beg's aerial fairy palace, poised on the top of the savage Carpathians, or with the glowing picture of the gorgeous harem of Azrael, or with the fantastic scenery of the Devil's Garden, with its ice-built corridors, snow bridges, boiling streams, fathomless lakes, and rushing avalanches?

R. N. B.

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.

BY COMMAND OF THE PADISHAH.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	A HUNT IN THE YEAR 1666	1
II.	THE HOUSE AT EBESFALVA	18
III.	A PRINCE IN HIS OWN DESPITE	27
IV.	A BANQUET WITH THE PRINCE OF TRANSYLVANIA	37
V.	BODOLA	45
VI.	THE BATTLE OF NAGY SZÖLLÖS	57
VII.	THE PRINCESS	70
VIII.	THE PERI	85
IX.	THE PRINCE AND HIS MINISTER	105

BOOK II.

THE DEVIL'S GARDEN.

I. THE PATROL	125
II. SANGE MOARTE	135
III. AN HUNGARIAN MAGNATE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY	155
IV. THE MIDNIGHT BATTLE	173
V. THE BANQUET TRIBUNAL	189
VI. THE DIET OF KAROLY-FEHERVÁR	197
VII. THE JUS LIGATUM	210
VIII. DEATH FOR A KISS	218
IX. CONSORT AND CONCUBINE	228
X. THE SENTENCE	257

BOOK I.

BY COMMAND OF THE PADISHAH.

'MIDST THE WILD CARPATHIANS.

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I.

A HUNT IN THE YEAR 1666.

Before us lies the valley of the Drave, one of those endless wildernesses where even the wild beast loses its way. Forests everywhere, maples and aspens a thousand years old, with their roots under water; magnificent morasses the surface of which is covered, not with reeds and water-lilies, but with gigantic trees, from the dependent branches of which the vivifying waters force fresh roots. Here the swan builds her nest; here too dwell the royal heron, the blind crow, the golden plover, and other man-shunning animals which are rarely if ever seen in more habitable regions.

Here and there on little mounds, left bare during the long summer drought by the receding waters, sprout strange and gorgeous flowers, such perhaps as the earth has not brought forth since the Flood overwhelmed her. In this slimy soil every blade of grass shoots up like gigantic broom; the funnel-shaped convolvuluses and the evergreen ground-ivy put forth tendrils as stout and as strong as vine branches, which, stretching from tree to tree, twine round their stems and hang flowery garlands about the dark, sombre maples, just as if some hamadryad had crowned the grove dedicated to her.

But it is only when evening descends that this realm of waters begins to show signs of life. Whole swarms of water-fowl then mount into the air, whose rueful, monotonous croaking is only broken by the melancholy piping of the bittern and the whistle of the green turtle. The swan, too, raises her voice and sings that melodious lay which now, they tell us, is only to be heard in fairy-land,—

[Pg 2]

Now and again, indeed, sportsmen of the bolder sort presume to penetrate far into this pathless labyrinth of bush and brake; but they are forced to wind their way among the trees in canoes which may at any moment be upset by the twisted tangle of roots stretching far and wide beneath the water, and it is just in these very places that the swamp is many fathoms deep; for although the dark green lake-grass and the yellow marsh-flowers, with the little black-and-red efts and newts darting about among them, seem close enough to be reached by an outstretched hand, they are nevertheless all under water deep enough to go over the head of the tallest man.

In other places it is the dense thicket which bars the canoe's way. Fallen trees, the spoil of many centuries, but untouched by the hand of man, lie rotting there in gigantic heaps. The submerged trunks have been turned to stone by the water, and the roots of the lake-grass, the filaments of the flax-plant, and the tendrils of the clematis have grown together over them, forming a strong, tough barrier just above the water which rocks and sways without giving way beneath one's feet. The knotty clout-like film of the lake, stretching far and wide, seems, to the careless eye, a continuation of this barrier, but the treacherous surface no longer bears—one step further, and Death is there. This unknown, unexplored region has however but few visitors.

Southwards, the wilderness is bounded by the river Drave. The trees which line its steep banks dip over into its waves. Not unfrequently the fierce stream sweeps them into its bed and away, to the great peril of all who sail or row upon its waters.

Northwards, the forest extends as far as Csakatorny, and where the morass ends oaks and beeches of all sorts flourish. In no other part of Hungary will you meet with trees so erect and so lofty. The wide waste abounds with all sorts of game. The wild boars, which wallow in the swampy ground there, are the largest and fiercest of their kind. The red deer too is no stranger there, and huge, powerful, and courageous you will find him; nay, at that time, even gigantic elks

showed themselves occasionally, and made nocturnal incursions into the neighbouring millet-fields of Totovecz; but at the first attempt to lay hands upon them, they would throw themselves into the innermost swamps, whither it was impossible to follow them....

[Pg 3]

On one of the brightest days of the year in which our story begins, a numerous hunting-party was bustling about an old-fashioned hunting-box which then stood on the borders of the forest.

The first rays of the sun had scarcely pierced through the thick foliage, when the grooms and kennel-keepers led out the hunters by their bridles and the hounds in leashes, which sprang yelping up to the shoulders of their keepers in joyful anticipation of the coming sport. The huge store-wagons, each drawn by from six to ten oxen, have already gone on before to fixed rallying-places, whither all the quarry is to be carried. The villagers for miles round have been enlisted as beaters, and stand together in picturesque groups armed with axes, pitch-forks, and occasional muskets. A few smaller groups have been posted at regular intervals along the wood, with canoes made from the trunks of trees. Their duty is to scare the game back from the swamp, should it turn thither for refuge. Every man, every beast shows signs of that precipitancy, that ardour, that restlessness by which the true huntsman is always distinguishable; only a few of the older hands find time to sit by the fire and roast slices of bacon with perfect equanimity.

At last comes the signal for departure, the blast of a horn from the porch of the hunting-box; the retinue spring shouting upon their snorting horses; the unruly, barking pack drag the kennel-men hither and thither; the huntsmen wind up their heavy shooting muskets, and every one stands in eager expectation of their lord and his noble guests.

They have not long to wait. A cavalcade, with a few attendant pages, descends the hill. Foremost rides a tall, muscular man—the lord of the manor—the rest, as if involuntarily, linger some little way behind him. His broad shoulders and superbly-arched chest indicate herculean strength; his sun-burnt features are wonderfully well preserved, not a wrinkle is to be seen on them; his short clipped beard and his shaggy moustache, which is twisted sharply upwards, give his face a martial expression, and his very pronounced aquiline nose and coal-black, bushy eyebrows lend him a haughty, dictatorial air; while the dreamy cut of his lips, his mild, oval, blue eyes and high, smooth forehead throw a poetic shimmer over his peculiarly chivalrous countenance. A round, unembroidered hat, surmounted by an eagle's plume, covers his closely-cropped hair; his upper garment is a simple green, shaggy jacket, which he wears open, thus allowing you a glance at his under-garment, a white buckskin dolman,^[1] trimmed with silver braid. By his side hangs a broad scimitar in an ivory sheath, and the mother-of-pearl handle of a crooked Turkish dagger peeps forth from a scarlet girdle richly set with precious stones.

[Pg 4]

[1] *Dolman*. An Hungarian pelisse. A more magnificent kind, worn only on state occasions, is called the *attila*.

The pair which ride immediately behind him consists of a young cavalier and a young Amazon. The cavalier can scarcely have counted more than two-and-twenty summers, the lady seems even younger. A better-assorted couple you could find nowhere.

The youth has smiling, gentle, pallid features; rich chestnut-brown locks fall over his shoulders; a slight moustache just shades his upper lip; an eternal smile, nonchalance, not to say levity, are mirrored in his bright blue eyes; but for his brawny arms and his stalwart frame, the iron muscles of which protrude at the slightest movement through his tight-fitting dolman, you might take him for a child. His head is covered by a kalpag^[2] of marten skin with a heron's plume in it; his dress is of heavy twisted silk stuff; down from his shoulders hangs a splendid tiger's skin, the claws meeting together round his neck in a gorgeous sapphire agraffe. He rides a pitch-black Turkish stallion, whose shabrack, richly embroidered with golden butterflies, is plainly the work of a gentle lady's hand.

[2] *Kalpag* or *Calpak*. A tall, skin cap of Tartar origin, part of the Hungarian national costume.

The Amazon, over whom the youth bends from time to time (doubtless to whisper some sweet compliment in her ear), is his very antithesis, and perhaps for that very reason tallies so well with him.

Hers is an earnest, dauntless, energetic countenance; her eyes are brighter than garnets; she loves to pout a little and arch her bushy but delicate eyebrows, which lend a proud expression to her features, and when she raises her flashing eyes and her coral-red lips expand into a peculiar enthusiastic smile, a heroine stands before you whose head, heart, and arm are as strong as any man's. Her jasper-black, braided locks, which fall half-way down her shoulders, are surmounted by an ermine kalpag, from the top of which waves a gorgeous plume of bird-of-paradise feathers. A light, lilac robe, meet for an Amazon, clings tightly to her slim waist, and sweeps down in ample, majestic folds over the flanks of her rose-white Arab. This robe is unbuttoned in front, so as to leave free her heaving bosom, which is covered right up to the neck with lace frills. Her short sleeves, richly trimmed with batiste, are fastened by intertwining gold cords. Over her left foot, which rests upon the stirrup, the long robe is thrown carelessly back, presenting us with a glimpse of her white satin, padded petticoat, and one of her little feet in its red morocco shoe. Her snow-white arms are half protected by silk embroidered buckskin gloves, which do not quite conceal the velvety skin, and the play of the well-developed muscles. Both form and face rather demand our homage than our love. A smile rarely rests on those features; the glance of her large, dark, sea-deep eyes rests from time to time upon the youth who is bending over her, and then

[Pg 5]

there beams from them such witchery, such tenderness—yet all the while her face is without a smile. A loftier, nobler longing is then visible on her face, a longing deeper than love, higher than the desire of fame—perhaps it is that self-consciousness of great souls who foresee that their names will be an eternal remembrance.

Behind the loving pair, ride side by side two cavaliers who, to judge from their dress, belong to the higher nobility. One of them is a man of about thirty, with a long, glistening black beard; he sits upon a full-blood Barbary charger, with a white star upon its forehead; the other is a sallow man advanced in years, whose long, light moustache is already touched with grey; an astrachan cap covers his high, bald, wrinkled forehead; his beard is carefully clipped, and his dress almost ostentatiously simple. No lace adorns his jacket, no fringe of any sort sets off the caparison of his good steed; his neckerchief, which peeps out of his dolman, might almost be considered shabby.

This man does not appear to stand very high in the estimation of his companion, and marks of annoyance at the neglect he suffers are plainly visible on his shrewd, not to say crafty, features. The reader would do well to study this man's face, for we shall often meet with him. Cold, withered features, thin fair hair and beard speckled with grey; a pointed, double chin; disdainful, contracted lips; keen and lively, red-rimmed, sea-green eyes; projecting eyebrows; a lofty, bald, shining forehead which, beneath the play of his emotions, becomes furrowed with wrinkles in all directions. This face we must not forget; the others—the herculean horseman, the laughing youth, the stately Amazon—will only flit across our path and disappear; but he will accompany us all through our story, pulling down and building up wherever he appears, and holding in his hands the destinies of great men and great nations.

[Pg 6]

The bald-pate drew nearer to the cavalier trotting by his side, who was balancing his spear in one hand as if to test it, and said to him in a low tone, as if continuing a conversation already begun—

"So you will not interfere in the matter?"

"Pray don't trouble me with politics now," replied the other, with a gesture of angry impatience. "You cannot live a day without planning or plotting; but pray spare me for to-day! I want to hunt now, and you know how passionately I love the chase."

With these words he gave his horse the spur, galloped forward, and caught up the herculean horseman.

The other bit his lips angrily at this roughish flout, but immediately turned with a smile towards the youthful cavalier ambling in front of him.

"A splendid morning, my lord! Would that our horizon were only as serene in every direction!"

"It is indeed," returned the youth, without exactly knowing what he was saying, whilst his heroine bent over him with a darkening face, and whispered—

"I don't know how it is, but I am always suspicious of that man. He is continually asking questions, but never answers any himself."

At this moment the stately cavalier reached the hunting-party, returned their boisterous greetings, and halted close to them.

"David!" cried he to an old grey-bearded huntsman, who at once stepped forth, cap in hand.

"Put on your cap! Have the beaters taken their places?"

"Every one is in his place, my lord! I have also sent canoes into the swamp to scare back the game."

"Bravo, David! you know your business. And now set off with the dogs and the huntsmen, and strike into the path which we usually take. Our little company will be sufficient for my purpose. We mean to cut our way straight through the forest."

[Pg 7]

A murmur of surprise and incredulity began to spread among the huntsmen.

"Your pardon, gracious sir!" returned the old huntsman, who now took off his cap a second time, "but I know that way, and it is no good way for a god-fearing man. The impenetrable thicket, the bottomless waters, the sticky slime present a thousand dangers, and then there is the wide Devil's-dyke which goes right across the forest: no horse or horseman has ever leaped that dyke."

"We at any rate, my worthy old fellow, will go for it; we have done worse bits than that ere now. He who follows me will not come to grief; don't you know that I am Fortune's favourite?"

The old huntsman donned his plumed cap, and set out on his way with the others.

But now the bald-pate rode up to the hero's side.

"My lord!" remarked he calmly, but not without a touch of sarcasm, "I hold it a great blunder for a man to jeopardize his life for nothing, especially when he may turn it to good account. I know indeed that say and do are one with your lordship; but pray be so good as to cast a glance around, and you will perceive that we are not all men here; one of that sex is among us whom it were cruelty to expose to certain peril for the mere love of adventure."

During this speech, the hero gazed fixedly, not at the speaker but at the Amazon, and the fiery pride on his cheeks flamed up still higher when he saw how contemptuously the stately girl

measured her unsolicited advocate from head to foot, and with what haughty self-confidence she chose a dart, adorned with ostrich feathers, from a bundle carried by a page, and then like a defiant matador planted the shaft firmly upon her saddle-bow.

"Look at her, now!" cried the hero. "Is that the girl you are so fearful about? I tell you, sir, she is my niece!"

The hero's exalted words rang far and wide through the forest like a peal of bells. There was, at that time, no voice in Hungary like his; so thunderous, so deep, and yet so melodious and penetrating.

The Amazon permitted the cavalier who had called her his niece to embrace her slim waist; she even allowed him to kiss her rosy red cheeks: in those days an Hungarian girl used to blush even when the kiss came from a kinsman's lips.

[Pg 8]

"Not in vain does my blood flow in her veins! Ha, ha! For valour I'll match her with the best of men. Have no fear for her! The time is coming when she will face greater perils than any of to-day, and still hold her own."^[3]

[3] The Amazon was Helen Zrinyi. She married first the young cavalier with whom we now meet her, Francis Rakoczy, and subsequently the famous Emerich Tököly, whose acquaintance we shall make presently. Her spirited defence of the fortress of Mohacz, 1689, against the Emperor is well known.

After these prophetic words, the rider pressed his spurs into his horse's sides; the wounded beast plunged and reared, but the pressure of a knee as hard as steel quickly brought it to reason.

"Follow me!" cried he, and the picturesque little group dashed after him into the depths of the forest.

Let us anticipate them. Let us go whither the stag rests at noonday in the shady groves, whither the heron bathes and the turtle basks in the sun.

What habitations are these which rise up before us, built upon piles, in groups of five and six, between the waters and the wilderness, little huts carved out of the stumps of trees with round, clay-plastered, red-thatched roofs? Who has built that dam there, so that the water may never fall too far below the thresholds of those tiny houses? Here dwell the diligent beavers whom Nature herself has taught the art of building. This is their colony. 'Tis they who have gnawed through the thick trees with their teeth; they who have brought those logs hither; they who have thrown up a bank to make a dam, and watch over its safety all the year round. Look there! One of them has just glided out of the lowest storey of his dwelling, which is under the water. With what mild and gentle eyes he looks around him! He has never yet seen man!

Let us go on further. In the shadow of an old hollow tree rests a family of stags. A buck and a doe with her two little fawns.

The buck has come forward into the sunlight; his stately form seems to give him pleasure; he licks his smooth, shiny coat again and again; softly scratches his back with his branching antlers, and struts about with a proud, self-confident air, daintily raising his slender legs from time to time: the undulating movements of his slim and supple form show off to the best advantage the play of his elastic muscles.

[Pg 9]

The doe lies lazily in the rank grass. From time to time she raises her beautiful head, and looks with her large black eyes so feelingly, so lovingly at her companion or at her sportive little ones, and if she perceives they have strayed too far, she utters an uneasy, plaintive sort of whine, whereupon the little creatures come bounding back to her helter-skelter, frisking and gambolling about their dam; they cannot keep still for a moment, all their limbs quiver and shake, and all their movements are so graceful, so lively, and so lovely.

Suddenly the buck stands motionless and utters a low cry. He scents danger and raises his nose on high; his distended nostrils sniff the air in every direction; he scratches up the ground uneasily with his feet; runs round and round in a narrow circle with lowered head, and shakes his antlers threateningly. Once more he stands perfectly still. His protruding eyes betoken the terror which instinctively seizes him. All at once he rushes towards his companion; with an indescribable sort of gentle whine they rub noses together; they too have their language in which they can understand each other. The two fawns instantly fly in terror to their mother's side; their tender little limbs are trembling all over. Then the buck disappears into the forest, but so warily that the sound of his footsteps is scarcely audible. The doe however remains in her place, licking her terrified young (which return these maternal caresses with their little red tongues), and hastily raising her head and pricking up her ears at the slightest sound.

Suddenly she springs up. She has heard something which no human ear could have distinguished. In the far, far distance the forest rings with a peculiar sound. That sound is familiar to huntsmen. The hounds are now on the track. The beating-up has begun. The doe throws uneasy glances around her, but ends by quickly lying down in her place again. She knows that her companion will return, and that she must wait for him.

The chase draws nearer and nearer. Presently the buck comes noiselessly back, and turns with a peculiar kind of squeak towards his mate, who immediately springs up and scuds away with her young ones obliquely across the line of the beaters. The buck remains behind a little while longer,

and tears up the ground with his antlers, either from fury, or on purpose to efface all traces of his mate's lair. Then he stretches out his neck and begins to yelp loudly, imitating the barking of the hounds, so as to put them on a wrong track, a stratagem which, as old hunters will tell you, is often practised by the more cunning sort of stags. Then, throwing back his antlers, he disappears in the direction taken by his mate.

[Pg 10]

Nearer and nearer come the beaters. The crackling of the down-trodden brushwood and the shouts of the armed men mingle with the barking of the dogs. The forest suddenly teems with life. Startled by the cries of the pursuers, scores and scores of hares and foxes dart away among the trees in every direction. Sometimes a panting fox makes for an open hole, but bounds back terrified before the fiery eyes of the badger which inhabits it. Here and there a grey-streaked wolf skulks along among the scampering hares, standing still, from time to time, with his tail between his legs, to look round for some place of refuge, and then, as the pursuing voices come nearer, running off again with a dismal howl.

And yet no one pursues these animals; the huntsmen are after a greater, a nobler prey, a stag with mighty antlers. The beaters draw nearer and nearer; the dogs are already on the track; the blast of a horn indicates that they are hard upon the stag.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" resounds from afar. The beaters, advancing from different directions, halt and fall into their places, completely barring the way. The din of the hunt approaches rapidly.

Shortly afterwards, a peculiar rustling noise is heard. The hunted stags, with their young ones, break through the thicket and disappear. A broad chasm lies between them and the beaters. Quick as lightning, both the noble beasts bound over the fallen tree-stumps which lie in the way, and reach the chasm. The pursuit is both before and behind, but the danger is greatest from behind, for there the herculean hero, the bold Amazon, and the ardent Transylvanian huntsman head the chase. The buck leaps across the broad chasm without the slightest effort, raising both feet at the same time and throwing back his head; the doe also prepares for the leap, but her young ones shrink back in terror from the dizzy abyss. At this the poor doe collapses altogether; her knees give way beneath her, and bowing her head she remains beside her young. A dart, hurled by the Transylvanian huntsman, pierces the animal's side. The wounded beast utters a piteous cry, resembling the moan of a human being, but much more horrible. Even her slayer, moved by sudden compassion, forbears to touch her till she has ceased to suffer.

[Pg 11]

The two kids remain standing mournfully beside their dead dam, and allow themselves to be taken alive.

Meanwhile, the flying buck, shaking his heavy antlers with frenzied rage, rushes with bloodshot eyes upon the beaters who bar his way. The beaters, well knowing what this generally mild and timid beast is capable of in his valiant despair, throw themselves with one accord to the ground so as to allow him a free passage. A few of the dogs, indeed, go at him; but the now furious animal gores them with his antlers, hurls them bleeding to the ground, and then dashes off towards the swamps.

"After him!" roars the hero, in a voice of thunder, and he urges his horse towards the chasm over which the stag has just flown.

"Help, Jesu!" cry the terrified beaters on the opposite side; but the next moment their terror is changed to boisterous joy; the horse with his bold rider has come safely across.

Of the whole of his suite only two dared to imitate him, the stately Amazon and the gentle stripling. Both horses flew over the abyss at the same moment; the lady's long velvet robe flapped the air like a banner during the leap, and she threw a proud look behind her as if to inquire whether any man was bold enough to follow her.

Their suite thought it just as well not to risk their necks over such a piece of foolhardiness. Only the young Transylvanian made a dash at the chasm, although, as his horse had already injured one of its hind legs in the forest, he might have been quite sure that it was unequal to such an effort. Fortunately for him, just before the leap his saddle-girth burst and he was pitched across the chasm, just managing to scramble up the bank on the other side. His good steed, less fortunate, was only able to reach the opposite margin with its front feet; and after a wild and hopeless struggle, fell crashing back into the abyss below.

The three riders alone pursued the flying stag, which, now that he had got clear away, drew his pursuers after him into the marsh-lands. The hero was close upon his heels; the Amazon and her cavalier trotted a little on one side, for the forest was very dense here, and prevented them from going forward abreast. At last the stag forced his way into the thick reed-grown fens and took to the water, with the hero still in hot pursuit. The youthful riders were also on the point of plunging among the reeds, when two hideous, black monsters, fiercely snorting, suddenly confronted them. They had fallen foul of a brood of wild swine. The loathsome beasts had been lying, deaf to everything around them, in their bed of trampled reeds and slush, and only became aware of the presence of strangers when the youth's horse, in bounding over them, trampled to death a couple of the numerous litter that lay crouching by the side of the sow. The rest of the speckled little pigs scattered squeaking among the reeds, while the two old ones, savagely grunting, advanced to the attack. The sow fell at once upon the slayer of her little ones; but the boar remained, for a moment, on his haunches; his bristles stood erect; he pricked up his ears, gnashed his tusks together, then, wildly rolling his little bloodshot eyes, rushed at the Amazon with a dull roar.

[Pg 12]

The youth flung his javelin at the sow from afar with a steady hand. The dart whirred through the air and then stuck fast, upright and quivering, in the horny skull of the impetuous beast, the point piercing to the very brain. The sow, not unlike a huge unicorn, ran forward a little distance; but its eyes had lost their sight, and it staggered past the rider only to fall down dead without a sound, a little distance off.

The lady calmly awaited the furious boar. She held her dart with a reversed grasp, point downwards, and drew tight her horse's reins. The noble steed stood perfectly motionless, but he pointed his ears, threw a sidelong glance at the boar, and at the very instant when the rabid beast had passed beneath the horse's belly, and was about to rip it asunder with a powerful upward heave of his gleaming tusks, the well-trained charger suddenly reared and sprang over his assailant; at the same instant the Amazon deftly stooped and hurled her dart deep between the shoulder-blades of the wild boar.

The mortally-wounded beast sank bellowing down into the long grass. Once more he would have rushed upon the girl, but the youth sprang, quick as light, from his horse, and gave him the *coup de grâce* with his dagger.

At that moment the blast of a horn was heard in the distance. The hero had brought down the stag. The other horsemen, who now overtook the leaders of the chase (but only after making a wide circuit), welcomed the hero of the day with loud cries of "Eljen!"^[4]

[Pg 13]

[4] *Eljen!* = Long live!

The herculean horseman was mud-stained from head to foot, nor did the others look much better; only the Amazon's robe was spotless and untraced. Even at such times a girl knows how to take care of her clothes!

When the hero beheld the wild beast slain by his niece, which, as it lay stretched out stark and stiff before him, looked even larger than life-size, he was at first deeply affected, as if he now, for the first time, fully recognized the greatness of the peril to which his darling had been exposed, and he exclaimed, not without alarm—"My Nelly!" but immediately afterwards he stretched out his hand towards her with a smile, and gazed round triumphantly upon the bystanders.

"Did I not say she had my blood in her veins?"

Every one hastened to pay an appropriate compliment to the radiant heroine, who appeared to experience, on this occasion, something of that peculiar satisfaction which only belongs to the lucky huntsman.

The hero again looked proudly around till his eye fell upon the young Transylvanian, who was now sitting on a fresh horse. Him he at once accosted, and pointing to the dead boar asked—

"Nicolas, my son! prithee tell me, does Transylvania produce such boars as that?"

Now, not to mention that the Transylvanian was already somewhat sore on account of his recent mishap, it was not to be expected that he, a Transylvanian born and bred, would for a single moment permit the assumption that any natural product of Hungary was superior to the like product of Transylvania to pass unchallenged, so he answered defiantly—

"Most certainly, and even finer ones."

Nothing at that moment could have more mightily offended the questioner than this curt answer. What! to tell an enthusiastic huntsman that he will find elsewhere game even finer than what he has just been lauding to the skies; game, too, which the darling of his heart has just slain! It was simply outrageous.

"Very well, my son, very well," growled the hero; "we shall see, we shall see!"

With obvious marks of annoyance on his face, he turned away from his contradictor, and ordered that the quarry should be conveyed at once to the hunting-box. Not another word did he exchange with any one but his Nelly; but her he literally overwhelmed with compliments and caresses.

[Pg 14]

It was already late in the afternoon when the hunters sat them down to a simple but tasty repast spread upon a huge and level grass-plot in the midst of the wood. Wine and merry jests soon set everything right again; they talked of everything at the same time, of war and the chase, of beautiful dames, of poetry (a fashionable subject then amongst the higher classes), and of the intrigues of courts; but even after all this blithe discourse the hero could not quite forget his grievance, and again he inquired impatiently—

"So there really is excellent sport in Transylvania?"

The young Transylvanian began to feel this perpetual harping on the same string a little tiresome. He had never meant to be taken so literally. The bald-pate, remarking the growing tension, sought to change the conversation, and raising his beaker proposed the following toast—

"God keep the Turks in a good humour."

But the hero angrily overturned his glass.

"God grant no such thing!" cried he savagely. "I'm not going to pray for the goggle-eyed dogs now, after fighting against them all my days. The man who is always trying to change masters is a fool."

"Yet the Turk is a very gracious master to us," put in the young Transylvanian, with an ambiguous smile.

"Ha, ha! didn't I say so? With you, even Turks are bigger and finer than they are with us. Of course! of course! In Transylvania everything flourishes better than in Hungary: the boars are bigger, the Turks are daintier, than they are in this part of the country."

At this moment David, the old huntsman, approached the hero and whispered something in his ear. The hero's features brightened as if by magic, and springing from his seat he cried—"Give me my gun!" then, holding his long, silver-mounted musket in his hand, he turned towards his guests with a radiant countenance. "All of you stay here. There is a colossal boar close at hand. You shall see him, my son," added he, tapping Nicolas on the shoulder. "Twice already have I vainly pursued the fellow; this time I mean to catch him. He is, I assure you, a descendant in the flesh of the Calydonian boar"—and with that, carried away by his enthusiasm, he hastened towards that part of the wood which the old huntsman had pointed out to him. David he presently ordered back: nobody was to accompany him.

[Pg 15]

"I know not how it is," whispered Helen to the youth at her side, "but I have a foreboding that my uncle is in danger. How I wish you were by his side!"

The youth said nothing in reply, but he instantly stood up and seized his gun.

"Pray don't go after him," remarked the Transylvanian, when he saw the young man about to hasten off. "You will only enrage him. He wants to do the whole business himself, and a man who has exterminated hordes of Tartars can easily dispose of a single brute beast."

And so they kept the youth back from going. The men went on drinking, and the lady remained in a brown study, glancing uneasily, from time to time, at the skirts of the wood.

Suddenly a shot resounded through the forest.

Every one put down his glass and glanced at his neighbour with a beating heart.

A few moments passed and then they heard the roar of a wild beast; but it was not the well-known roar of a mortally-wounded boar—no, it was a peculiar, gurgling, half-stifled sound that told of a fierce struggle.

"What is that?" was the question which rose to every one's lips. "Surely he would call out if he were in danger!" Then came a second shot. Every one instantly sprang to his feet. "What was that?" they cried. "Oh! let us go! let us go!" exclaimed the girl, trembling in every limb, and the whole company hastened in the direction of the shot.

Our hero had scarcely advanced four or five hundred paces into the thicket when, at the foot of a mighty oak, he came upon the wild beast he sought. It was a gigantic boar, with span-long, glistening black bristles on its back and forehead; the tough hide lay, like plated armour, in thick folds about its huge neck; its feet were long and sinewy. Lazily grunting, it was making for itself a bed beneath the bushes in which its shapeless body was stretched out at full length, and it had found a place for its enormous head by rooting out with its tusks bushes as thick as a man's arm.

On hearing approaching footsteps, the monster irritably raised its head, opened wide its jaws, and cast a sidelong glance at its assailant.

[Pg 16]

Our hero knelt upon one knee so as to take better aim, and fired at the wild beast just as it suddenly raised its head, so that the bullet pierced its neck instead of its skull, wounding it seriously but not mortally.

The wounded boar instantly sprang from its lair, and gnashing its crooked tusks together so that sparks flew from them, rushed upon its foe. It would not have been difficult to have avoided such a furious attack by a skilful side-spring; but our hero was not the man to get out of any opponent's way; so he threw his gun aside, tore his dagger from its sheath, faced the savage beast, and dealt at its head a blow sufficient to have cleaved it to the chine; but the tremendous blow fell short upon one of the monster's tusks, and the dagger, coming into contact with the stone-like bone, broke off short at the hilt.

Half stunned by the shock, the boar only succeeded in grazing the hero's leg, whereupon the latter seized the beast by both ears and a desperate struggle began. Weaponless as he was, he grappled with the monster, which, grunting and roaring, twisted its head about in every direction; but the hero's iron grasp held fast the broad ears of the monster with invincible force, and when the boar tried to overturn its assailant by suddenly going down on its haunches, the hero, with a swift and tremendous blow of his clenched fist, hurled it backwards, falling himself indeed at the same time, but uppermost, and quickly recovering his balance pressed down with his whole weight upon the boar (which valiantly but vainly continued struggling against superior strength), and triumphantly bestrided its huge paunch.

The boar now appeared to be completely beaten; its glassily glaring eyes were protruding, the

blood streamed from its jaws and nostrils; it had ceased to bellow, but a rattling sound came from its throat; its legs writhed convulsively, its snout hung flabbily down; it was plain that it could not hold out much longer.

The hero had now only to call to his companions, who were close at hand, but that would have been too humiliating; or to wait till the boar bled to death, but that would have been too tiresome. Suddenly he recollected that he had a Turkish knife in his girdle, and, meaning to put a speedy end to the long tussle, he pressed down the boar's head with his knee and felt for his knife with one hand.

[Pg 17]

At that moment the report of a gun^[5] resounded somewhere in the wood. The down-trodden boar suddenly seemed to feel that the pressure of his opponent's hands and knees was slackening, and rallying all his remaining strength, threw off his assailant and dealt him one last blow with his tusks, and that blow was fatal, for it ripped open the man's throat.

[5] Some pretend that this shot was fired by a secret assassin sent from Vienna. Many doubt whether a shot was fired at all.

His kinsmen and friends, hastening to the spot, found the hero in the throes of death by the side of the dead boar. They rushed up with loud lamentations, and bound up his throat with their kerchiefs.

"It is nothing, my children; it is nothing!" he gasped, and expired.

"Alas! poor warrior!" sighed those who stood around him.

"Alas! my country!" sobbed Helen, raising her tearful eyes to heaven.

The gala-day had become a day of mourning; the hunt a funeral.

The guests sorrowfully followed the body of their best friend to Csakatorny. Only the bald-head took the opposite direction.

"Didn't I say that life was meant for other and better things?" murmured he. "Well, well! the world is large, and men are many. I'll go a kingdom further on."

Thus died Nicolas Zrinyi^[6] the younger, his country's greatest poet and bravest son.

[6] It is not without reason that Jókai alludes to Zrinyi as "the hero." He was one of the greatest warriors of his day (1618-1666), and his victories over the Turks were many and brilliant. As a poet he stands high, even judged by a modern standard. His chief works are his great epic, *Szigeti veszedelem*, and his religious poems, *Keresztre*, "On the Cross!"

Thus died the man whom Fortune always respected, the darling, the bulwark, the ornament of his fatherland.

In vain will you now seek for his hunting-box or his castle. All has perished—the name, the family, nay, the very remembrance of the hero.

The general and the statesman are forgotten; only one part of him still survives, only one part of him will live eternally—the poet.

[Pg 18]

CHAPTER II. THE HOUSE AT EBESFALVA.

And now we too will go "a kingdom further on."

Let us go one kingdom forward and four years backward. We are in Transylvania; the year is 1662.

A simple country-house stands before us, at the lower end of Ebesfalva, being almost the last house in the place. Evidently the architect of this edifice had rather an eye to usefulness than beauty, for each part of it has a style of its own, and differs from every other part in shape, size, and quality. On both sides stand stables, cow-houses, wagon-sheds, fowl-houses, and high-gabled, straw-thatched sheepfolds. In the rear lies an orchard, from which the pointed roof of a beehive peeps forth, and in the middle of the courtyard stands the whitewashed dwelling-house, surrounded by shady nut trees, beneath which stands a round table improvised from a millstone. A stone wall separates the courtyard from a thrashing-floor, in which we see incipient haycocks piled up into hillocks, and enormous stacks of corn, on the topmost point of the tallest of which an adventurous peacock shrieks exultantly. It is evening; the herds are returning home; the oxen

are being unyoked from the huge, maize-laden wagons; the herds, jingling their bells, come back from the pastures; the swine jostle one another in the narrow gateway and rush grunting to their troughs; the cocks and hens are squabbling in the large nut tree, where they have taken up their quarters for the night; far away sounds the vesper bell, and further still the song of the village beauty, on her way to the spring; the hands see to their cattle: one carries a freshly-mown bundle of millet-grass across the farmyard, another bends beneath the weight of a huge pitcher, filled with overflowing with yellowish, fragrant, foaming milk, fresh from the udder. Through the kitchen window is to be seen the merry sparkle of a roaring fire, over which a girl with round, red cheeks holds a large pan; the fragrant odour of the savoury mess spreads far and wide. And now the meal is served on large, green platters; the family take their places round the millstone table, and eat with a good appetite, the white watch-dogs looking up respectfully all the while at the hasty gobblers. Then the dishes are cleared away, and the maize is shot out of the wagons beneath the projecting eaves. The peasant girls come trooping in from the neighbouring villages to help to husk the pods, and sit them down upon the odorous heaps. Some merry wag or other scoops out a ripe pumpkin, carves eyes and a mouth in it, sticks a burning light inside, and hangs it up by way of a lantern, and the girls shriek and pretend to be terribly frightened. Then the more handy lads, sitting on over-turned bread-baskets, plait long wreaths out of the maize-husks; and while the tranquil toil proceeds, merry songs are sung and fairy tales are told of golden-haired princesses and persecuted orphans. Now and again the fun requires a kiss or two to keep it going, and loud screams proclaim the daring deed to all the world. The little children cry out for joy if they chance to find an occasional scarlet or mottled maize knob among so many yellow ones. And there they sit and tell tales, and sing and laugh at the merest nothings till all the maize is husked, and then they wish one another good-night, and, chatting and bawling, linger over a long, last good-bye; and then they go singing aloud along their homeward way, partly from fun and partly from pure light-heartedness.

[Pg 19]

Then every one enters his house, shuts the door behind him, and puts out the fire; the sheep-dogs hold long dialogues in the village streets; the crescent moon rises; the night watchman begins to cry the hours in long-drawn rhythm; the others sleep and do not hear his golden saws. Only in one window of the manor-house a light is shining. There some one still is up.

The watchers are a grey-haired, venerable dame and a much younger serving-maid. The old lady is reading from a worn-out psalter, every line of which she already knows by heart; the serving-maid, as if not content with a long day's work, has sat herself down to her distaff, and draws long threads out of the silky flax which she heckled yesterday and carded to-day.

"Go to bed, Clara," said the old woman kindly, "it is enough if I remain up. Besides, you have to rise early to-morrow morning."

[Pg 20]

"I could not sleep till our mistress has returned," replied the girl, continuing her work. "Even when all the men are in, I always feel so frightened till she has come home, but when once she is here, I feel as safe as if we were behind the walls of a fortress."

"Quite right, my child; she is, indeed, worth many men. Shame upon it that the cares and anxieties which it behoves a man to bear should rest upon her shoulders! She has to look after the whole of this vast household, and, as if that were not enough, she must needs farm the estates of her sisters, the ladies Banfi and Teleki. How many lawsuits must she not carry on with this neighbour and with that! But they've met their match in her, I'll warrant. She appears in person before the judges and pleads so shrewdly, that our best advocates might take lessons from her. And then, too, when my Lord Banfi came capering hither with his killing ways, some little time ago, fancying that our gracious lady was one of your straw-widows, how she sent him away with a flea in his ear! The worthy gentleman did not know whether he stood on his head or his heels, and yet he is one of the chief men in the land! And afterwards, too, when, out of revenge, he saddled us with that freebooter of a captain and his lanzknechts, don't you recollect how our lady had them all flogged out of the village, and how the rascals took to their heels when they saw our gracious mistress herself march out against them, blunderbuss in hand?"

"Would that they had not scampered off quite so quickly," interrupted the girl, with a burst of enthusiasm. "I'd have laid the poker about their ears, I warrant you."

"Hark'e, Clara! when a woman has been forced to keep house alone for so long a time, and to defend herself and family by the might of her own arms, she comes at last to feel herself a man all over. That is why our mistress looks as stern as if she had never been a girl."

"But tell me, Aunt Magdalene," returned the girl, drawing her chair nearer, "shall we never see master again?"

"Alas! God only knows," replied the old dame, sighing. "How can I tell when the poor fellow will be released from his captivity? I always had a presentiment that it would come to this, and I said so, but no one heeded me. It happened in this wise. In the days when our Prince George^[7] of blessed memory, not content with his own land, must needs set out to conquer Poland at the head of the Hungarian chivalry, our good master, Sir Michael, went with him. Oh, how I tried—and our lady too—to keep him back. They were a newly-wedded couple then, and the good gentleman himself had little heart for war—he always preferred to sit at home among his books, his water-mills, and his fruit trees—but honour called him and he went. I begged him to at least take my son Andy with him. God gave me that thought, for otherwise we should never have heard again of our gracious master, for when his Highness, our Sovereign Prince George, beheld the bestial hordes of Tartars marching out against him, he himself galloped off home, leaving his nobility

[Pg 21]

captives in the hands of the heathen, who dragged them off in fetters to Tartary. My son Andy, who was of no use to them, for he was badly wounded in the thigh, and therefore could not work, they sent home; he brought the tidings that Sir Michael was sickening in sad confinement, and the Tartars, perceiving how high he stood in the esteem of his fellow-prisoners, took him for their prince, and set upon his head such a frightfully high ransom, that all his property turned into gold could not have paid it off. Nevertheless our noble lady rejoiced exceedingly when she heard that her husband was still alive, and ran hither and thither and left no stone unturned to raise the money. But neither her kind friends nor her dear relations would lend her anything—no, not on the best security, for no one willingly lends on land in time of war. So she sold her treasures, her bridal dower which her mother had given her; all the beautiful silver plate, jewelled bracelets, and embossed gold and pearl ornaments which her ancestors had handed down to her; her large satin-trimmed, fur-embroidered mantle and her filagreed *mente*^[8]; her rings, agraffes, and hairpins; her carbuncle bracelets and orient pearls; her diamond ear-rings—in short, everything which could be turned into money. Yet even all that came to not one-half of what the Tartar demanded, so what does she do but farm the estates of her sisters, plough up the fallow-lands, and cut down the forests to make way for corn-fields. To find time for more work, she turned night into day. No sort of husbandry whereby money could be made escaped her attention. At one time she laid down clay-pits and dug out quarries, the products of which found customers in the neighbourhood. At another time she bred prize oxen and sold them to the Armenian herdsmen. She visited all the markets in person; carried her wine as far as Poland, her corn to Hermannstadt, her honey, wax, and preserved fruits to Kronstadt—nay, in order to obtain a fair price for her wools, she crossed the border and took them as far as Debreczin. And how frugally she fared all the time! It is true she never stinted her servants in anything, but she seemed to weigh every morsel that went into her own mouth. At harvest time she would have nothing cooked for herself at home for weeks together, so that she might remain in the fields all day. A piece of bread which would have been too little for a child was all she ate, and her drink was a bowl of spring water; yet, believe me, Clara, we never once saw her in a bad humour, and never did a single bitter tear fall upon the dry bread which her loyalty to her husband constrained her to live upon."

[Pg 22]

[7] George Rakoczy I., Prince of Transylvania, 1630-1648.

[8] *Mente*. A fur pelisse.

"And why was all this?"

"I'll tell you, my child. The money which she thus scraped together by toil and frugality, year by year, is regularly sent by Andy to Tartary, in part payment of Sir Michael's ransom. At such times our dear lady grudges herself every morsel she puts into her mouth."

The old nurse wiped the tears from her eyes.

"And what then was the amount of the ransom?"

"That's more than I can tell you, my daughter. Andy always brings back the parchment on which the Tartar marks down the amount received and the amount still due. Our noble lady keeps it herself. I, of course, never ask any questions about it."

The girl was silent and appeared to be reflecting; doubly quick the spindle flew round in her hands, and her heart beat faster too.

"My son Andy is there now," said the old dame, weary of the long silence. "I expect him back every hour now; from him we shall hear something certain."

At that moment the gate outside creaked on its hinges, a little gig rolled boisterously into the courtyard, and a joyful barking and yelping told that an old acquaintance had arrived.

"Our mistress has come," cried the two servants, rising from their seats, and at the same moment the door opened and Anna Bornemissa, Michael Apafi's wife, stepped in.

[Pg 23]

A stately woman of almost masculine stature; the outline of her slim but vigorous and muscular figure is plainly visible through her simple grey linen dress. She cannot be more than thirty-six, but her face is of those on which time leaves no trace until extreme old age. Her features are deeply tanned by the sun, but the velvet down of well-preserved youth and the natural ruddiness of perfect health lend a peculiar loveliness to that extraordinary countenance. Her look surprises, dominates, subdues; the charm which lies concealed there appears not so much in the features as in the expression—her face is the mirror of a noble soul. Not as if there was anything hard, rough, stiff, or masculine in the features themselves: on the contrary. Her brow is finely arched, delicately smooth, unobscured as yet by a single wrinkle, and yet so full of majesty; her eyelashes are most exquisitely pencilled; the shape of the eyes is enchanting, those large, not exactly wild-black, but rather deep, bright, nut-brown eyes, half hidden by their long eyelashes, and in those eyes there is so much fire, so much sparkle, and yet so much coldness. The delicate nose, the oval face, every feature is so femininely regular. Even the mouth when closed is so sweet, so tender, the other features seem to use violence towards it to prevent its smile from spreading further, and yet when it opens, how haughty, how commanding it becomes.

"What, still up?" cried she to her servants.

The voice is pleasantly sonorous, although affliction has somewhat deadened its lower notes.

"We thought it best to stay up, in case your ladyship might be kept waiting outside," replied the old woman, tripping round her mistress and taking the heavy mantle from her shoulders.

"Has not Andy yet returned?" asked Lady Apafi, in a low, melancholy voice.

"Not yet; but I expect him every moment."

Lady Apafi sighed deeply. How much of stifled grief, vanishing hope, and patient renunciation was concealed in that sigh! The recollection of the manifold sufferings of her wretched life rose up before that heroic woman's soul. She called to mind her brave struggle with fate, with her fellow-men, and with her own heart; her love, grafted on pain, had brought forth not gladness but ungratified longing. Another toilsome year of her life had passed away. With the self-sacrificing industry of a bee, she had hoarded up, morsel by morsel, her little store, and who could tell how many years would be requisite to complete it? And till then nothing but toil, patience, and unrequited love.

[Pg 24]

Lady Apafi, not without an effort, resumed her habitual coldness, wished her servants good-night, and was already on her way to her chamber, when Clara rushed forward and kissed her mistress's hand. The lady looked at her with astonishment. She felt that a burning tear had fallen on her hand, which the girl held fast and pressed to her lips.

"What ails you?" asked Dame Apafi, much surprised.

"Nothing," replied the girl, sobbing; "it is only that I feel so sorry for your ladyship. I have long had an idea in my head, but have never yet dared to express it. We have often talked about our master's captivity and his grievous ransom. We village girls have all of us got necklaces of gold and silver coins which are no good to us. So we have agreed among ourselves to club together all this money now lying idle and give it to your ladyship towards our master's ransom. It may not be much, but still is something."

Lady Apafi, her eyes glistening with involuntary tears, pressed hard the peasant girl's trembling hand.

"I thank thee, my girl," she said, deeply touched. "I prize thy offer more highly than if my sister Banfi had placed ten thousand gold chains at my disposal. But God will also be my helper. In Him is my trust."

At that moment the trampling of horses was heard in the courtyard and the dogs fell to barking.

"Who can that be? Robbers, perhaps!" stammered the old nurse, and neither of the two servants durst approach the door.

Then Dame Apafi took the light from the table, stepped to the door, opened it, and looked out into the courtyard.

"Who's there?" she cried, loudly and clearly.

"We!—I mean to say I," returned a hesitating voice, which all three immediately recognized as Andy's.

"Oh, 'tis you? Come hither quickly!" said Lady Apafi joyfully, pushing Andy into the room, who was plainly very much confused, for he kept on twirling about his hat in his hands, and looked sheepishly at the floor.

"Well, did you see him and speak to him? Is he well?" asked Lady Apafi impetuously.

"Yes, he is quite well," replied the man, glad to have found his voice again; "he respectfully kisses your ladyship's hand. He also bade me say that God is good!"

[Pg 25]

"But what do you keep looking sideways for? At whom are the dogs barking?"

"At the black horse perhaps; it is a long time since they saw him."

"And you gave the purse to the Mirza?"

Instead of answering this question, Andy began to fumble about in the pocket of his sheepskin jacket, and as this pocket was very high up, narrow and deep, his features expressed the most exquisite torture till he had fished up the parchment, and he trembled all over as he handed it to his mistress.

"Is there still much in arrear? What says the Mirza?" asked Lady Apafi, with a very shaky voice.

"There is not much more. One might even say there is very little," replied Andy, with downcast eyes, fumbling in his confusion with the rim of his hat.

"But how much, how much then?" they all cried together.

Andy got very red.

"Well—well, there is nothing at all!"

He said this in a broken voice, and with that he burst into a loud and long roar of laughter, and immediately after wept as if his heart would break.

The mind of Dame Apafi instantly grasped the whole truth.

"Speak, man!" cried she passionately, seizing the fellow by the shoulder; "you have brought my husband back with you?"

Andy waved his fist behind him and nodded his head; he laughed and wept at the same time; but, to save his life, he could not have uttered a word.

Dame Apafi, with a sob and a cry of boundless joy, rushed to the door which already stood ajar. Some one had been waiting there and listening all the time; it was Michael Apafi, her long expected, often bewailed consort.

"Michael! my beloved husband!" cried the woman, trembling with emotion; and half swooning, half beside herself, she fell upon her husband's neck, murmuring unintelligible words of love, joy, and tenderness.

Apafi pressed her to his breast. She embraced him convulsively; no other sound was to be heard but a deep sobbing.

"Thou art mine!" she stammered, after a long pause, when the tempest of her emotion had somewhat subsided and she was more herself.

[Pg 26]

"I am thine," cried Apafi; "and I swear that nothing in the world shall ever tear me from thee again!"

"O God, what bliss!" cried Anna, raising her streaming eyes to heaven. "What joy thou hast brought back to me!" she stammered once more, leaning on her husband and hiding her face in his bosom.

"And if the whole world were mine," continued Apafi, "even then I should not be rich enough to requite thy devotion. I take God to witness, that if I could call a kingdom my own I would give it thee, and think it but a beggarly recompense."

The joyful, loving pair, happy beyond all expression, were then left alone with their joy and happiness. Late into the night burned the taper in their window. How much, how endlessly much they had to say to one another!

[Pg 27]

CHAPTER III. A PRINCE IN HIS OWN DESPITE.

A year had elapsed since Michael Apafi's return home. There was a great hubbub in the house at Ebesfalva. One team of horses had scarcely had time to rest, when off went another at full gallop along the high-road; the servants themselves were sent hither and thither; some great trouble had evidently visited the house, but for all that, not a glum or sorrowful face was to be seen.

To those who could question discreetly, it was presently whispered that the wife of Michael Apafi expected every moment to be delivered of a child.

Good Sir Michael never quitted the chamber of his suffering consort. The gossips said that the sight of her husband was a great consolation to the invalid lady, and that he never ceased whispering sweet, caressing words into her ear.

Suddenly a wild tumult filled the courtyard, and, to the great terror of the servants assembled there, four-and-twenty mounted Albanians, armed with swords and lances, and headed by a big-headed Turkish Aga, dashed up to the door.

"Is your master at home?" cried the Aga dictatorially to Andy, who stood rooted to the spot with fright. "For if he is," continued he, without waiting for an answer, "tell him to come here. I have something to say to him."—Andy still could not find his voice.—"If, however," proceeded the Turk emphatically, "if he won't come, I'll go and fetch him."

And with these words he sprang from his horse, and was crossing the threshold, when Andrew plucked up sufficient courage to stammer—"But, most gracious sir ..." The Turk turned savagely upon him.

"It were better, my son, if you did not chatter so much!" said he, and forthwith he plunged into the vestibule.

[Pg 28]

At that very moment Apafi, startled by the clatter of the sabres, came out of his wife's chamber. He was not a little alarmed when he found himself face to face with this unexpected guest.

"Are you Michael Apafi?" asked the Turk wrathfully.

"The same, at your service, gracious sir," returned Apafi meekly.

"Good! My master, his Highness, the famous Ali Pasha, commands you to instantly get into your

carriage, and come to my lord's camp at Kis-Selyk without a single attendant."

"This is a pretty go," murmured Apafi to himself. "Pardon me, worthy Aga," added he aloud; "just now it is quite impossible for me to comply with your wish. My wife lies in the pangs of child-birth; the issues of life and death depend on the next five minutes. I cannot leave her now."

"Send for a doctor if your wife is ill; and recollect that to bring down the wrath of the illustrious Pasha on your head is not the proper way to cure *her*."

"Grant me but one day, and then I don't care if I lose my head."

"You won't lose your head if you obey instantly; but otherwise I'll not answer for the consequences. Come! don't be a fool."

Anna heard in her chamber the dialogue that was going on outside, and anxiously called her consort. Apafi quitted the Aga and hastened to his wife.

"What is it?" asked the sufferer, much disturbed. How pale she was at that moment!

"Nothing, nothing, my darling! Some one has sent for me, but I don't mean to go."

But Lady Apafi had perceived the points of the Turkish lances through the rifts of the window-curtains, and she cried despairingly—

"Michael, they want to carry you off!" Then she clasped her husband convulsively to her heart. "I won't let you go, Michael! I won't lose you again. You shall not be dragged off into captivity. Rather let them kill me."

"Calm yourself, dear child," said Apafi soothingly. "I really don't know what they want me for. I have certainly done nothing to offend these good people. I suppose it is an attempt to levy blackmail. I'll satisfy them."

"Alas! I have an evil foreboding. My heart fails me. Some calamity threatens you," stammered the sick woman; then, bursting into a violent fit of sobbing, she threw herself on her husband's bosom. "Michael, I shall never see you again." [Pg 29]

Meanwhile, the Aga outside began to feel bored, so he fell to hammering at the door, and cried—

"Apafi! hi! Apafi! come out! I may not enter your wife's chamber, for that would be an abomination to a servant of Allah; but if you don't come out at once I'll burn your house down."

"I'd better go, perhaps," said Apafi, trying to soothe his wife with kisses. "My refusal would only make matters worse for us. They are sure to let me go. I shall be back in the twinkling of an eye."

"I shall never see you again," gasped Anna. She was near to swooning.

Apafi took advantage of this momentary fainting fit, plucked up his courage, left his wife, and joined the Aga with streaming eyes.

"Well, sir, let us be off," said the Turk. "But surely you won't go without your sword, just as if you were some poor peasant," continued he fiercely. "Go back, I say; gird on your sword, and tell your wife that she need fear nothing."

Apafi returned to his room, and as he took down his large silver-embossed sword (it was hanging up on the wall right over the bed) he said cheerily to his wife—

"Look, now! there can scarcely be anything unpleasant in store for me, or they would not have bidden me buckle on my sword. Trust in God!"

"I do, I do trust in Him," she replied, convulsively kissing her husband's hand and pressing it to her heaving bosom. Then she broke forth again into bitter lamentations. "Apafi, if I die, do not forget me."

"Alas!" cried Apafi; then bitterly cursing his fate, he tore himself out of his consort's arms, and wishing all Turks, born and to be born, at the bottom of the sea, rushed violently out of the room.

Then he threw himself into his carriage, and looked neither up nor down, but wrestled all the way with the one thought that if his wife were now to die, he would not be able to receive her parting words; and this thought conjured up before him a whole series of images each more lugubrious than the other.

He and his escort had scarcely left Ebesfalva a mile behind them when the Turks caught sight of a horseman dashing after them at full tilt, obviously bent on overtaking them, and they called Apafi's attention to the fact. At first he absolutely refused to listen to them; but when they told him that the horseman came from the direction of Ebesfalva, he made the carriage stop and awaited the messenger. [Pg 30]

It was Andy who came galloping up, with waving handkerchief and loosely hanging reins.

"Well, Andrew! what has happened?" cried Apafi with a beating heart to his servant while he was still a long way off.

"Good news, sir!" cried Andy: "our most gracious lady has just now given birth to a son, and she herself, thank God! is quite out of danger."

"Blessed be the name of the Lord!" cried Apafi, with a lightened heart; and as he dismissed the messenger, the idea which was at the bottom of all his griefs vanished from his brain, and with it all his griefs also. He thought of his new-born son, and in the light of that thought he began to regard his Turkish escort with other eyes: they now seemed to him as good, honourable, civilized a set of people as it was possible to find on the face of the earth.

It was late at night when they reached Ali Pasha's camp. The sentinels slept like badgers; you might have carried off the whole camp bodily so far as they were concerned. Apafi had to wait in front of the Pasha's tent till the latter had huddled on his clothes. The curtains of the tent were then drawn aside, and he was invited to enter. Ali Pasha was sitting with folded arms on a carpet spread out in the back part of the tent; behind him stood two gorgeously-dressed Moors with drawn scimitars. The outlines of a couple of figures were distinctly visible through the tapestry wall which separated the back part of the tent from the audience chamber—no doubt the Pasha's wives, on the alert to pick up something of what was going on.

"Art thou that same Michael Apafi who was for some years the prisoner of the Tartar Mirza?" asked the Pasha, after the usual greetings.

"The same, most gracious Pasha, to whom also the Khan compassionately remitted the remainder of the ransom money."

"Think no more of that. The Mirza remitted the remainder of the ransom money because my master, the Sublime Sultan, commanded him so to do, and the illustrious Padishah will do yet more for thee."

[Pg 31]

"Wonderingly I listen, and gratefully; not knowing how I have deserved such grace," returned Apafi.

"The Sublime Sultan has heard how honestly, discreetly, and manfully thou hast borne thy doleful captivity, and how thou didst win the hearts of thy fellow-captives, insomuch that they all looked up to thee, though among slaves there is no distinction of rank. For which cause therefore, and also having regard to the fact that the present Prince of Transylvania, John Kemeny, would fain rebel against the Sublime Porte, the illustrious Padishah, I say, has for these reasons resolved to raise thee without delay to the throne of Transylvania and keep thee there."

"Me! You are pleased to jest with your servant, most gracious sir!" stuttered Apafi.

His eyes were blinded by excess of light.

"Nay, thou hast not the slightest cause to be amazed thereat. The Padishah has but to nod, and pashas and princes become slaves, beggars, or corpses. He nods again, and beggars and slaves rise up into their places. Thou art highly favoured, for thou hast found grace before him. Use it discreetly then, but beware of abusing it!"

"But, most gracious sir, does it occur to you how I'm to become a prince?"

"Leave that to me. I'll make thee one."

"But Transylvania has got another prince, John Kemeny."

"Leave that to me also. I'll dispose of him."

Apafi shrugged his shoulders. He felt that he had never been in such a mess in all his life.

"My wife was quite right in her presentiment that a great misfortune was about to befall me," thought he to himself.

The Pasha began again.

"Summon therefore a Diet at once, so that the installation may take place as speedily as possible."

"I summon a Diet! I should like to know who would appear to my summons. Why, sir, I am the least amongst the gentry of the land; people will laugh in my face, and say that I am mad."

"In that case they will soon see that it is they who are mad."

"But how am I to send out the writs? for, excepting the land of the Szeklers,^[9] Kemeny^[10] holds every place."

[Pg 32]

[9] *Szeklers* (Siculi). The Szeklers were originally a military colony placed, at the beginning of the twelfth century, in the waste lands of Transylvania, which they engaged to defend against the incursions of the pagan Pechenegs, on being exempted from every other obligation.

[10] John Kemeny, Prince of Transylvania, 1661-1662.

"Then summon the Szeklers. They, at any rate, will come."

"But I don't even know *their* chief-men, for I am not a born Szekler. The only persons I know amongst them are Stephen Kun, John Daczo, and Stephen Nalaczi."

"Then summon hither Stephen Kun, John Daczo, and Stephen Nalaczi, if you consider them fit and proper persons."

Apafi began to scratch his head.

"But supposing they do appear, where shall we hold our Diet? There is no place for us. At Klausenburg the governor, my brother-in-law, Denis Banfi, is my sworn enemy, while at Hermannstadt lies John Kemeny in person."

"We can assemble here in Kis-Selyk."

Harassed as he was, Apafi could not help laughing aloud.

"Why, here there is not a house large enough to hold thirty men," cried he energetically.

"What! is there not the church?" interrupted the Pasha. "If that house be sufficiently fine for the honour of God, I suppose it will do to honour men in!"

Apafi saw no further escape.

"Can you write?" asked the Pasha.

"Yes, I can do that," replied Apafi, sighing deeply.

"Very well, for I cannot. So sit down and issue the writs for a Diet."

A slave then brought in a writing-table, a scroll of parchment, and an inkhorn. Apafi sat down like a lamb about to be slaughtered, and began with a caligraphic flourish so large that the Turk sprang up in affright, and asked what it meant.

"It is a W," answered Apafi.

"You won't leave any room for the remaining letters."

"That is only the initial letter, the others will be much smaller."

"Read aloud then what you are writing."

Apafi wrote with a trembling hand and read: "Whereas—"

The Pasha furiously tore away the parchment and roared at him.

"Plague take all your whereases and inasmuch-ases! Why all this beating about the bush? Write the usual formula—'We, Michael Apafi, Prince of Transylvania, command you, wretched slaves, by these presents, to appear incontinently before us at Kis-Selyk, under pain of death.'" [Pg 33]

Apafi was brought almost to his wits' ends before he could make the Pasha comprehend that it was not usual to correspond in this style with free Hungarian noblemen. At last the Pasha allowed him to write his letter in his own way, but took care that its purport should be emphatic and dictatorial. As soon as Apafi had written the letters, Ali Pasha put a Ciaus on horseback, and sent him off at full speed to all those to whom the writ was addressed.

"And now," said Apafi to himself, sighing deeply as he wiped his pen, "and now I should like to see the man who could tell me what will come of it all!"

"Till the Diet assembles," said the Pasha, "you will remain here as my guest."

"Cannot I go home then to my wife and child?" asked Apafi, with a beating heart.

"To give us the slip, eh? A likely tale. That is always the way with you Hungarian nobles. Those we won't have at any price are always dangling about our necks, and begging and praying for the princely diadem; and those we would place on the throne take to their heels as if we were going to impale them." And with that the Pasha assigned Apafi a tent and dismissed him, at the same time giving secret but strict orders to the guard of honour stationed at the door of the new Prince, not to lose sight of him for an instant.

"I'm nicely in for it now," sighed Apafi with the resignation of despair.

His solitary hope now was, that the deputies whom he had summoned would ignore his informal mandate by failing to appear.

A few days afterwards, as Apafi still lay on his camp bedstead in the early morning, Stephen Kun, John Daczo, and Stephen Nalaczi, with all the other noble Szeklers to whom the circular had been sent, suddenly walked into his tent.

"In Heaven's name!" cried Apafi, starting up, "why have you come hither?"

"Your Highness ordered us to come hither," replied Nalaczi.

"True; but you would have shown far greater wisdom if you had kept away. What are you going to do?"

"Solemnly install your Highness, and, if need be, defend you also in the good old Szekler fashion," replied Stephen Kun. [Pg 34]

"You are too few for that, my brothers," objected Apafi.

"Pray be so good as to cast a glance outside the tent!" replied Nalaczi, drawing aside the curtain and pointing to a band of Szeklers armed with sabres and lances, who had remained outside the tent. "We have marched out *cum gentibus*, to prove to your Highness that if we have accepted you as our Prince, we have not done so simply by way of a jest."

Apafi shrugged his shoulders and began to draw on his boots; but he was so dazed all the while, that almost an hour elapsed before he was half dressed. He put on every article of clothing the wrong way, and had to take it off again. Thus, for example, he had slipped into his mantle before he even thought of his vest.

Several hundred gentlemen had met together in Selyk at his bidding, a thing he had never expected, still less desired.

When Ali Pasha came out of his tent, he went towards the deputies, took Apafi by the hand in the presence of them all, threw over his shoulders a broad, new green velvet mente,^[11] put an ermine embroidered cap on his head, and explained to the assembled crowd that henceforth they were to regard him as their legitimate Prince; whereupon the Szeklers roared out deafening "Eljens," raised Apafi on their shoulders, and hoisted him on to a dais covered with velvet which Ali Pasha had expressly provided for the occasion.

[11] *Mente*. See Note 2, p. 21.

"And now," said the Pasha, "go to church, administer the oaths to the Prince according to ancient custom, and yourselves take the oath of allegiance. I have ordered the bells to be rung myself, and you had better have a mass sung in the usual way."

"Your pardon, but I am a Calvinist," protested Apafi.

"So much the better. The ceremony will be over all the quicker, and will cost less trouble. There is the Rev. Francis Magyari, he will preach the sermon."

After that Apafi let them do whatever they liked with him, merely twirling his long moustaches hither and thither, and shrugging his shoulders whenever they asked him questions.

Nalaczi and the other Szeklers thought good to treat him in church with all the respect due to a sovereign prince, and the Rev. Francis Magyari improvised a powerful sermon, in which he prophesied, in a voice of thunder, that the God of Israel who had called David from the sheepfolds to a throne, and exalted him over all his adversaries, would now also graciously maintain the cause of His elect even though his enemies were as numerous as the grass of the field or the sand on the sea-shore.

[Pg 35]

This modest little house of prayer could never have thought that it would have been the scene of a Diet and a coronation; and as for Apafi, not even in his wildest dreams had it ever occurred to him that such things might befall him.

He had eyes and ears neither for the coronation nor for the sermon, but kept on thinking of his wife and child. What would become of them, poor creatures; where would they be able to hide their heads when John Kemeny had put him in prison, confiscated his estates, and driven them out of house and home? It next occurred to him that, somewhere in Szeklerland, he had a brother, Stephen Apafi, with whom he had always been on the most friendly terms, who would certainly take them under his roof if he saw them destitute. These thoughts made him so forgetful of everything around him, that when at the close of the sermon all present arose and intoned the *Te Deum*, he too got up, oblivious of the fact that all this ceremony was being held in his special honour.

Then some one behind him placed two hands on his shoulders, pressed him down into his seat again, and a well-known voice growled into his ear—

"Keep your seat."

Apafi looked in the direction of the voice, and fell back in his chair completely overcome. His brother Stephen was actually standing behind him.

"You here too?" said Apafi, deeply distressed.

"I was a little late," returned Stephen, "but quite early enough after all, and I'll venture to remain here till you tell me to go."

"So you have also resolved to plunge into destruction?"

"Brother," said Stephen, "we are in the hands of God; but something has been put into our own hands also which may have a say in the matter," and he touched the hilt of his sword. "Kemeny has lost the affection of the greater part of the country; why I need not now tell you. Your cause is righteous, nor do you lack the means of success."

"But if it should turn out otherwise, what would become of my wife? Have you not seen her?"

"I came straight from her—that is why I came so late."

[Pg 36]

"What! You have spoken to her? What did she say about my evil case? Was she not much troubled?"

"Not in the least. On the contrary, she was very glad of it, and said that Transylvania could not

have got a better prince; that you deserved this honour far more than any of the magnates who practise nothing but tyranny and extortion, and that she much regretted her illness prevented her from assisting you with her sympathy and counsel."

"Well, I should have liked it better if the election had fallen upon her," said Apafi, half in jest and half in anger.

"Take heed to yourself," answered Stephen archly; "the lady is already so much used to ruling the roost, that we shall live to see her put the Prince's diadem on her own head, unless you plant it right firmly on your temples. Nay, brother, don't look so serious; I was but in jest!"

But does not the proverb say that there is many a true word spoken in jest?

[Pg 37]

CHAPTER IV. A BANQUET WITH THE PRINCE OF TRANSYLVANIA.

Meanwhile, his Highness, Prince John Kemeny, was faring sumptuously at Hermannstadt. This gentleman's darling vice was gluttony—even if the whole machinery of state were to fall to pieces in consequence, he would not have risen from table, and amongst all his counsellors his cook always stood highest.

And now, too, we find him at dinner. He has converted the Town-hall to his own use, and it is thronged by his suite. In the courtyard we see spurred and iron-clad cuirassiers flirting with the Saxon serving-maids; German musketeers, professedly on guard, who have left their muskets standing against the doorposts, in order to cultivate friendly relations with the scullions removing the dishes. With brimming glasses raised on high, they jocosely warble Hungarian airs picked up on the spur of the moment, improvising at the same time an absurdly artless sort of dance, in which one leg performs aimless aerial gyrations. On the other hand, the heydukes of the Hungarian bodyguard, dressed in yellow dolmans with green facings, sit morosely in twos and threes against the wall, not even condescending to look at the bumpers of wine thrust, from time to time, into their hands; but gravely tossing it down at a single gulp into its proper place, returning the empty pocal to the friendly butler, who has as much as he can do to keep his feet; keeps on offering the noble fluid to Tom, Dick, and Harry; and finding it easier to go backwards than forwards, is constantly backing against the head cook as he passes to and fro, bearing now a sugared almond tart adorned with flowers on a silver salver, and representing the tower of Babel, now a large porcelain bowl exhaling the spicy fragrance of hot punch, or a peacock on a large wooden platter, roasted whole, with his gorgeous head-dress and splendid tail still upon him.

[Pg 38]

The head cook is scarcely able to force his way through the gaping mob of petitioners assembled here, who must wait till the Prince has dined, and are regaled in the meantime with wine, roast meats, and pastry, getting in short everything but what they came for—justice.

Within the dining-room itself the gentlemen and ladies are by this time in a merry mood. The meal has already lasted a pretty long time, and is likely to last a good while longer.

French gastronomic science seemed to have reserved all her masterpieces for Kemeny's banquet. Nature's three kingdoms have been laid under contribution to tickle the human palate. Every extravagant and extraordinary delicacy invented by Epicureanism, from the days of Lucullus to the days of Gallic gourmandism, is here in abundance. Here is to be seen every sort of foreign and domestic wine, in artistically-carved and gorgeously-coloured Venetian flasks, placed in huge silver refrigerators; game, large and small, of the rarest kind, on silver dishes; transparent, rose-coloured, quivering jellies with names unpronounceable by Hungarian lips; Indian fruits preserved in cane sugar; *ragoûts* of cocks' combs; enigmatical-looking snails, fit rather for the eye than for the palate; gigantic lobsters and the rarer kinds of marine fish fantastically disposed; meats which men who have already eaten to surfeit can only make believe that they enjoy by a supreme effort of the imagination; dishes which a true man would only eat by way of penance; immense pasties made entirely of pikes' livers; large baskets of rosy swans' eggs, which the guests may boil for amusement in little silver egg-boilers placed over spirit-lamps in front of them, and other wonderful dishes innumerable, the purpose of which is not immediately obvious to ordinary children of men, and everything in such profusion as would have more than sufficed for six times the number of guests present. Then too there were there all sorts of spiced drinks to suit every one's taste, from punch-royal to Polish brandy. Nothing was forgotten.

Behind every guest stands a little page, who whisks away his well-filled plate from him the instant he turns his head, and places before him a clean one instead. Behind the Prince's chair stands the son of Count Ladislaus Csaky, who is right proud that a son of his should have the privilege of filling and refilling the Prince's pocal.

[Pg 39]

And the Prince's pocal has to be filled pretty often. Transylvanian banquets generally ended with a wager on the part of the gentlemen to drink one another under the table. At such banquets John Kemeny has no equal. Now too he invites the bolder spirits to take up the usual challenge.

The greater part of the guests, however, decline the invitation. Only three persons respond to the Prince's challenge. The first is Wenzinger, the leader of the German mercenaries, a big, raw-boned man, with a closely-shaven head, bright blue eyes, somewhat stooping neck, and scarcely visible grey eyebrows. The second is Paul Beldi, Captain-General of the Szeklers, a grave, handsome, amiable-looking man with a very high forehead. The wine he has taken gives a sparkle to his gentle eyes, and his taciturn lips are parted in a half-smile—drink produces no other effect upon him. He wears a simple yellow camelot dolman, with a scarlet, silver-embossed girdle round the waist; his white shirt-collar extends far over his dark-blue kerchief. His smoothly-combed hair is parted down the middle, brushed behind his ears, and falls in long locks over his shoulders. The man with delicate white hands who sits opposite to him, Denis Banfi, Lord-Lieutenant of Klausenburg, is the third competitor. He is a middle-aged, broad-shouldered, haughty-looking man, with an air of savage truculence on his aristocratic face. His thick black beard has never yet been touched by a razor. His dark, chestnut brown locks lie in spiral rolls upon his forehead, and flow down over both shoulders in rich crisp curls. His round face is red by nature, but wine has now made it redder than ever. His sparkling eyes glance defiantly around. When he addresses any one he strokes his double chin, screws his neck on one side, and speaks in a sharp, irritating tone, at the same time throwing back his haughty head provocatively, and assuming an expression of endless condescension. His dress consists of a purple dolman with large enamelled buttons, and over that a short, heavy, white silk tabard trimmed with swan's-down, the sleeves of which are slit up to the elbows and garnished with rubies. His golden knightly belt is thrown over his shoulder with lordly negligence.

At the head of the table sits John Kemeny himself, with the consorts of Beldi and Banfi one on each side of him. Kemeny, despite his frequent intercourse and close relations with the West, still prefers to adopt the oriental costume. He is characterized by short clipped hair, a long beard, a grave, dignified face, and a curt, monosyllabic style of speech. The ruling expression of his face is an unmistakable, fatalistic indifference to everything about him, an indifference which was ere long to overwhelm him in so terrible a catastrophe. [Pg 40]

One of the ladies by his side, Banfi's wife, is a delicate, nervous, gentle being, scarcely twenty years old. Ever since her sixteenth year she has stood beneath the influence of her violent, imperious husband, and is now almost as timid as a child. She scarcely ever dares to raise her eyes, and then only to look at her lord, whom she loves idolatrously. Her neck and shoulders are covered by a heavy, watered silk dress, fastened by a row of diamond buttons. Round her neck twines a gold chain, between each of the large broad links of which sparkles an emerald. A silk coif set with pearls adorns her head, reaching half-way down over her forehead, and jealously hiding the blonde locks of the lovely lady.

On the other side, between her husband and the Prince, sits Beldi's wife, still a dazzling beauty. Her complexion ordinarily has the tint of the white rose, but is now all aglow with the fire of the banquet: her flushed cheeks seem literally to burn. Her coquettish black eyes roam hither and thither. A seductive magic lurks in her eyebrows, and when she lowers her long eyelashes over her burning eyes, how ravishing she is! Her black locks are held together, not by a coif, but by strings of pearls artistically intertwined and fastened behind to a little diamond diadem, from which a long gold filigree veil descends to the ground. Her dress consists of a tight-fitting, cherry-coloured kirtle of Hungarian velvet, wide open in front and fastened over her embroidered cambric smock by strings of pearls. Her snow-white shoulders peep half out of the short, puffed sleeves, which are fastened in the middle by huge opal clasps, leaving bare her exquisitely-shaped arms. She wears bracelets of large oriental pearls, and a pale pink rose is stuck nonchalantly in her bosom.

The guests sitting at the far end of the table are plainly scandalized by the coquettish ways of the siren, who, although she has a marriageable daughter, still presumes to appear publicly in an open kirtle; but the Prince, the impetuous Banfi, and even her own dove-like husband, who worships his wife, appear to be all the more delighted with her in consequence.

The drinking wager had already somewhat exhilarated the worthy gentlemen, so that they began to mingle their songs with the music which had been playing in the gallery ever since the banquet began, when the captain of the guard, Gabriel Haller, suddenly rushed into the room with a very serious face, and hastening to the Prince, whispered a couple of words in his ear. Kemeny looked first at him and then at the glass he held in his hand, emptied it with the utmost composure, and then burst into a loud peal of laughter. [Pg 41]

"Pray tell your tidings to the company, that they may know what is going on," cried he to Haller, in a loud voice.

Haller hesitated.

"Come! Out with it. You could not, if you tried, invent anything half so entertaining. Stop playing up there, will you! This is something like a joke."

The company urged Haller to lose no time in passing the joke on.

"There is not much to tell," said Haller, shrugging his shoulders. "It is only that Ali Pasha has proclaimed Michael Apafi Prince of Transylvania."

"Ha! ha! ha!" resounded on all sides. The Prince, with comic affectation, turned first to one and then to the other.

"Who is the individual? Does any one know him? Has anybody ever heard of him?"

Lady Banfi turned pale and clung tightly to her husband's arm, who leaned his elbow on the table and replied with sublime indifference—

"The poor devil is, I believe, a very distant connection of mine. He has married some relation or other of my wife's. He was for a long time a slave among the Tartars, and the Turks (being wroth with us just now) have no doubt only released him on condition that he allows himself to be made Prince. He must be clean out of his senses."

At this all the gentlemen laughed still more loudly than before.

"Well, we'll go and inaugurate him," said Kemeny sarcastically, throwing back his head.

"That has already been done, your Highness," put in Haller.

"Where? By whom?" asked the good-humoured Prince, with arched eyebrows.

"At Kis-Selyk, by the Diet!"

Kemeny intimated by a wave of his hand and a contraction of his eyebrows that this explanation was not quite clear to him.

[Pg 42]

"Who then were present? Where were the Estates? All the men of any importance in the land are here with us."

"There were Stephen Apafi, Nalaczi, Kun, Daczo, and some two hundred Szeklers."

"Well, we'll go and count them as soon as we have disposed of our other affairs," said the Prince contemptuously. "Pray give Master Haller a chair!"

"But they are not awaiting us there. They are marching against us. By this time they must be at Segesvar."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Kemeny. "I suppose, then, Master Michael Apafi thinks to drive us out of the country with his couple of hundred Szeklers."

But now Wenzinger rose from his chair, and remarked with soldierly precision—

"Does your Highness wish me to concentrate the army? We have eight thousand armed men, and, if it please your Highness, we will disperse this mob of nondescripts so effectually that not a couple of them shall remain together."

"Keep your seat!" commanded Kemeny, who treated the whole affair with the most sovereign contempt. "Sit down again and drink! Let them come a little nearer! Why should we inconvenience ourselves by going out against them? We can then take the whole lot together bag and baggage. I much regret, my lord Denis Banfi, that this fellow is a kinsman of yours; but, out of regard for you, I will take care that he is not broken on the wheel—I will simply have him *stuffed!*"

Kemeny's witticism was received with uproarious laughter.

"Give Master Haller a glass. And you up there! go on playing where you left off."

And once more the music resounded. The gipsy band now played a *csárdás*.^[12] The gentlemen clinked glasses and sang in unison. The guards outside joined in the song. The glasses flew against the wall. Every one was ready to dash his glass into a thousand pieces except Gabriel Haller, who, being the last comer and therefore tolerably sober, was ashamed to destroy the expensive Venetian crystals so recklessly.

[Pg 43]

[12] *Csárdás* [pr. *chárdásh*]. The national dance of Hungary. It is danced in 3/4 time by single couples, who improvise the figures. It commences with a very slow and stately movement, gradually quickening into a furious gallop.

"Come! down with it! Let the splinters fly!" roared the Prince at him, and to please his Highness Haller dutifully but gingerly rapped his glass against the table till it broke off clean at the neck, quite decently and respectably, whereupon he bowed low to his Highness with obsequious humility.

Dame Banfi sighed at the thought of her kinswoman; but Banfi, to show how very little he cared about the matter, leaped from his chair, and with the wild music of the *csárdás* ringing in his ears, invited the lovely Lady Beldi to a dance.

The merry siren did not require twice bidding. Banfi passed his arm around her slender waist, pressed her tightly to his breast, and whirled away with her. The fiery beauty hung with elfin airiness on her partner's arm.

Then all the other gentlemen present, carried away by Banfi's example, also leaped from their seats and whirled away with their fair neighbours, till the whole company resolved itself into a maze of fantastically revolving figures, every one dancing, applauding, and huzzahing to his heart's content.

Banfi was an impetuous, hot-blooded man who loved pretty women in general and at all times. Now, moreover, he was heated with wine, and thus it came about that as his lovely partner was

dangling on his arm and her glowing cheeks came very near to his, he suddenly so far forgot himself as to press the bewitching dame to his breast and imprint a burning kiss upon her lips.

Lady Beldi shrieked aloud, and instantly repulsed the self-forgetful Lothario. Banfi, much confused, cast a glance around him; but apparently every one was so taken up with his own amusement, that neither the shriek nor the kiss had been observed.

Nevertheless, Lady Beldi, very much offended, left off dancing, and when Banfi began stammering some sort of an apology, she sharply told him to be off and leave her.

Banfi will one day have to pay very dearly for that kiss!

Nobody had observed it, however, save him whom it most concerned—the husband. Beldi's eyes had seen it. Oh! you must not imagine that an uxorious husband is never jealous. Even though he makes as though he hears and sees nothing, he sees and hears and observes all the same. He had seen Banfi kiss his wife, although he feigned not to perceive his consort's confusion as, excited and indignant, she went in search of him. He took her by the hand and led her out of the room. When they got outside, he bade her go to her lodgings and dress for a journey.

[Pg 44]

"Whither are we going?" asked the agitated lady.

"Home to Bodola!"

Of all the guests, Denis Banfi was the only one who saw them quit the room.

[Pg 45]

CHAPTER V. BODOLA.

In one of the innermost recesses of the county of Felső-Feher, when you have left behind you the Boza Pass, or avoided it by taking one of the narrow footpaths which wind along the mountain side, you will come in sight of the Tatrang valley.

On every side of you are hills wrapped in lilac-coloured mists, and behind the hills the heaven-aspiring peak of Kapri, glistening with early-fallen snow. From the mist-shrouded valley below emerge four or five villages, with their white houses sending up bluish smoke-wreaths among the green orchards. The little Tatrang stream winds, silvery blue, in and out among the quiet villages, forming cascades in its downward progress, which in the dim distance look like fleecy mists. The clouds sink so deeply down into the valleys that their golden, veil-like shapes hide first this and then that object from the eyes of the observer on the hill-tops. There you can see Hosszufalva, with its far-stretching street. There, again, the tiny church of Zajzonfalva, whose pointed, tin-covered roof gleams far and wide in the rays of the sun. Tatrang lies on the banks of the stream, just where a large wooden bridge has been thrown across it. Far, very far off, black and misty, are to be seen the walls of Kronstadt and the blue outlines of the still unscathed citadel. In the valley just below you is the straggling village of Bodola. The houses lie low, but the church stands on rising ground, and opposite the village you notice a sort of small fortress with broad towers, black bastions, and projecting battlements. The western bastion is built on a steep rock, whence there is a fall of three hundred feet on to the roofs of the houses below.

It is only in the distance, however, that the castle looks so gloomy. On approaching nearer, you perceive that what had seemed, from afar, to be a dark green belt of bushes, is really a wreath of flower-gardens thrown round the ramparts. The large Gothic windows are adorned with handsome sculptures and stained glass. A well-kept, serpentine path winds up the steep rock, and there is a mossy stone seat at every bend. Where the rock is most precipitous a breastwork has been thrown up. The pointed turrets of the castle are all painted red, and adorned with fantastic weathercocks.

[Pg 46]

The path leading through the Boza Pass to Kronstadt is not more than an hour's journey from this little castle, and along this path, at the very time when Prince John Kemeny was still regaling himself at Hermannstadt, we see a long line of cavalry wending their way into the valley below—two thousand Turkish horsemen, or thereabouts, distinguishable from afar by the scarlet tips of their turbans and their snow-white kaftans. Among them are some hundreds of Wallachian irregulars in brown gabardines and long black *csalmaks*.^[13]

[13] *Csalmak* [pr. *chalmak*]. A low, skin turban.

The way is so narrow here that the horsemen can only proceed along in couples, so that while the rearguard is still painfully making its way through the narrow defile between converging rocks, the vanguard has already reached Tatrang.

The Turkish general is a middling-sized, sunburnt man, with eyes as bold and bellicose as an eagle's. A large scar runs right across his forehead. His beard curls in little locks around his chin.

His moustache is twisted fiercely upwards on both sides, making one suspect an excessively fiery temper in its possessor, a suspicion confirmed by his hard and curt mode of speech, the haughty carriage of his head, and the impatient movements of his body.

He halts his little army outside the village, to give the rearmost time to come up. Last of all roll a few wagons and a large pumpkin-shaped coach. This is all the heavy baggage which the Turks carry with them. The rearguard is led by a child whose round, cherub face contrasts strangely with his glittering scimitar and his grave, commanding look. He cannot be more than twelve. Inside the coach, the curtains of which are thrown back on both sides so as to freely admit the evening air, we perceive a young lady of about five-and-twenty years of age, dressed half in Turkish, half in Christian costume, for she wears the wide silken hose and the short blue open kaftan of the Turkish ladies, but has taken off her turban, and her face, contrary to Turkish custom, is without a veil. She gazes with the utmost composure out of the carriage window, bestowing her attention now upon the landscape and now upon the passing peasants.

[Pg 47]

The Turkish commander is marshalling his forces in the village below. They seem used to the strictest discipline. Every one looks steadily at his leader without moving a muscle. At the head of the left wing stands the little boy; a tall, muscular man leads the right. The Wallachs are drawn up in the rear.

"My brave fellows,"—the Pasha addresses his troops in a hard, sharp voice—"you will pitch your tents here! Every one will remain in his place hard by his saddled horse, without laying aside arms or armour. Ferhad Aga^[14] with twelve men will go into the village and respectfully ask the magistrate to send hither forty hundredweights of bread, just as much flesh, and double as much hay and oats, at the average price of four asper^[15] per pound, neither more nor less."

[14] *Aga*. An honorary title among the Turks, here equivalent to lieutenant.

[15] *Asper*. A small silver coin worth about fifteen to twenty kreutzers.

Then the Pasha turned towards the Wallachs—

"You, dogs! don't suppose that we have come hither to plunder! Stir not from this spot, for if I find out that so much as a goose has been stolen from the village, I'll hang up your leaders and decimate the rest of you!"

He then selected four horsemen.

"You will follow me," said he; "the rest remain here. This very night we resume our march. During my absence Feriz Beg commands."

The little boy bowed.

"If Feriz Beg receives orders from me to quit you, you will obey Ferhad Aga till I return."

With that the Pasha struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and galloped with his escort towards Bodola.

Then the boy whom the Pasha had called Feriz Beg rode forward with soldierly assurance, and in a deep, sonorous voice gave the order to dismount. His hard-mouthed Arab plunged, kicked, and reared, but the little commander, heedless of the capers of his steed, delivered his further orders with perfect self-possession.

Meanwhile the Pasha pursued his way towards Bodola Castle.

Paul Beldi had arrived there only the day before with his wife, having quitted Kemeny's Court without a word of explanation, and was standing in the porch at the moment when the Turkish horsemen trotted into the courtyard. In those days the relations of Transylvania with the Turks were so peculiar, that visits of this kind might be made at any time without any previous announcement.

[Pg 48]

The Pasha no sooner beheld Beldi, than he sprang from his horse, ran up the steps to him, and brusquely presented himself—"I am Kucsuk Pasha. Being in the way, I came to have a word with thee if thou canst listen."

"Command me," replied Beldi, pointing to the reception-room, and motioning to his guest to enter first.

It was a square-built room, the walls of which were painted with oriental landscapes, the spaces between the windows being filled by large cut-glass mirrors in steel frames. The marble floor was covered with large variegated carpets. Round about the walls hung ancestral pictures, with clusters here and there of ancient weapons of strange shape and construction. In the middle of the room stood a large green marble table with fantastically twisted legs. Huge arm-chairs with morocco coverings and ponderous carvings were dispersed about the room. Facing the entrance was a door leading to a balcony, commanding a panorama of the snow-capped mountains. The evening twilight cast red and lilac patches through the painted windows on the faces of those who are now entering.

"How can I serve you?" inquired Beldi of the Pasha.

"Thou art well aware," replied Kucsuk, "that great discord now prevails in this country on account of the throne."

"It does not concern me. I have made up my mind to remain neutral."

"I have not come hither to beg for thy advice or assistance in that matter; the sword will decide it. What brings me to thee is a purely family affair which concerns me deeply."

Beldi, much surprised, made his guest sit down beside him.

"Speak," said he.

"Thou mayest perhaps have heard, that once upon a time a daughter of the Kallay family fell in love with a young Turkish horseman, naturally without the consent of her kinsfolk?"

"Yes, I've heard of it. People say that the young Turk was equally victorious in love and in war."

"Possibly. His victories in war, however, have disqualified him from being the Knight of Love. Thou seest that my face is furrowed with scars; know that I am the man who wedded that woman!"

[Pg 49]

Beldi began to regard the Pasha with curiosity and astonishment.

"I have continued to love that woman devotedly," pursued the Pasha. "That may appear strange to thee in the mouth of a Turk, but so it is. I have had neither wife nor concubine beside her. She has borne me a son, of whom I am proud. My affairs just now are in such a critical condition that I must, with God's help, work wonders, or perish on the battle-field. Thou knowest that the religion of Mahommed highly commends such a death. I have therefore no anxiety on that score. It is the thought of my wife which disturbs me. If she should lose me and my son, she would be in great straits. She would be persecuted in Turkey because she remained a Christian; she would be persecuted in Transylvania because she married a Mussulman. There my kinsfolk, here her own, are her enemies. I come to thee therefore with a petition. I have heard tell of thee as an honourable man, and of thy wife as a worthy woman. Receive my consort into thy family circle. She will not be a burden to thee, for I leave her everything I possess. All she wants is thy protection. If thou dost promise me that, thou canst count upon my eternal friendship and gratitude, and mayst command my fortune, my sword, and my life in case I survive."

Beldi pressed the hand of the Pasha.

"Bring your wife hither. I and my family will welcome her as a kinswoman."

"I may bring her then?"

"We shall be delighted to see her," returned Beldi; and he commanded his retainers to escort the Pasha's suite back to Tatrang with torches, and fetch from thence his carriage.

Kucsuk sent word by them that Feriz Beg was to come too.

Meanwhile Beldi introduced Kucsuk to his wife, and he was not a little delighted to find that she recollected the Pasha's wife as one of her girlish friends, whom she looked forward to see again with sincere joy and some curiosity.

After the lapse of some hours the carriage rumbled noisily into the well-paved courtyard. Feriz Beg escorted it on horseback.

Lady Beldi hastened down the steps to meet the Pasha's wife as she stepped out of the coach, and received her with a cry of joy—"What! Catharine! Do you still know me?"

[Pg 50]

The lady immediately recognized her youthful playfellow, and the two friends rushed into each other's arms, kissed again and again, and said of course the sweetest things to each other—"Why, darling, you are more handsome than ever!"—"And you, dear! What a stately woman you have grown!" etc., etc., etc.

"Look, this is my son," said Catharine, pointing to Feriz Beg, who, after dismounting, had hastened with childlike tenderness to help his mother out of her coach.

"Oh, what a little darling!" cried Lady Beldi, quite enchanted, and covering the rosy-cheeked child with kisses.

If only she had known that this child was a child no longer, but a general!

"And I've got children too!" continued Lady Beldi, with maternal emulation. "You shall see them! Does your son speak Hungarian?"

"Hungarian!" cried Catharine, almost offended; "what! the child of an Hungarian mother, and not speak Hungarian! How can you ask such a question?"

"So much the better," said Lady Beldi, "the children will become friends all the more quickly. From henceforth you belong to the family. Our husbands have settled all that already, and we shall be so delighted!"

The amiable and sprightly housewife then embraced her friend once more, took Feriz Beg by the hand, and led them both into the family circle, chatting merrily all the time, and asking and answering a thousand questions.

A cheerful fire was sparkling in the chimney of the ladies' cabinet. Large flowered-silk curtains darkened the walls. On a little ivory table ticked a gorgeous clock, ablaze with rubies and

chrysoprases. Sofas covered in cornflower-blue velvet offered you a luxurious repose. On a round table in the centre of the room, from which an embroidered Persian tapestry fell in rich folds to the ground, stood a heavy candelabrum of massive silver, representing a siren holding on high a taper in each of her outstretched hands.

In front of the fine white marble chimney-piece were Dame Beldi's children. The elder, Sophia, a tall, slight, bashful-looking beauty of some fourteen summers, was bustling about the fire. She still wore her hair as children do, thrown back in two long, large plaits which reached almost to her heels. This girl was afterwards Paul Wesselenyi's consort.

[Pg 51]

The second child, a little girl of about four, was kneeling at the feet of her elder sister, and throwing dried flowers into the fire. She went by the name of *Aranka*, which in Hungarian means "little goldy," for she carried her name on her locks, which flowed over her round little shoulders in light golden waves. Her vivacious features, sparkling eyes, and tiny hands are never still, and now too she is mischievously teasing and thwarting her elder sister, laughing aloud with artless glee whenever Sophia, naturally without succeeding in the least, tries to be very angry.

On hearing footsteps and voices at the door, both children spring up hastily. The elder one, perceiving strangers, tries to smooth the creases out of her dress, while Aranka rushes uproariously to her mother, embraces her knees, and looks up at her with her plump little smiling face.

"These are my children," said Lady Beldi with inward satisfaction.

Catharine embraced the elder girl, who shyly presented her forehead to be kissed.

"And here's your cousin, little Feriz. You must kiss him too!" said Lady Beldi, pushing together the bashful children, who scarcely dared to press the tips of their lips together. Sophia immediately afterwards blushed right up to the ears, and rushed out of the room. Nothing would induce her to show herself again that evening.

"Oh, you shamefaced mimosa!" cried Lady Beldi, laughing loudly. "Why, Aranka is braver than you. Eh, my little girl? You're not afraid to kiss Cousin Feriz, are you?"

The little thing looked up at the boy and drew back, clinging fast all the time to her mother's skirts, but never once removing her large, dark-blue eyes from Feriz, who knelt down, took the little girl in his arms, and gave her a hearty kiss on her round, rosy cheeks.

Having gone safely through this ordeal, Aranka was quite at home with her new acquaintance. She bade the Turkish cousin sit him down on a stool by the fire, and, laying her head on his lap, began asking him questions about everything he wore, from the hilt of his scimitar to the plume in his turban—absolutely nothing escaped her curiosity.

"Let the children play!" cried Lady Beldi merrily, as with high good-humour she led her friend out upon the balcony, from whence they could survey the whole Tatrang valley now floating in the bright moonlight.

[Pg 52]

Here the two women—while the men were engaged with serious matters, and the children were playing—here the two women entered into one of those long confidential chats which young ladies find so charming when they are by themselves, especially when they have as much to ask and answer as these two had.

Kucsuk Pasha's wife was a middling-sized, powerfully-built woman. Her well-rounded bosom and broad shoulders were shown off by her tight-fitting kaftan, which was fastened round the waist by a girdle of gold thread, and reached somewhat lower down than is usual with the dresses of Turkish ladies, just permitting a glance at her wide, flowing, red silk pantaloons and her dainty little yellow slippers. Her face, if a trifle too stern and hard, was yet most lovely; her full and florid complexion betokened a somewhat choleric temperament; her thick, coal-black eyebrows had almost grown together, and her gaze was burning in its intensity.

Lady Beldi made her sit down by her side, took her familiarly by the hand, and playfully asked—

"Your husband then has no other wife but you?"

Catharine laughed, and replied with just a shade of impatience—

"I suppose, now, you fancy that an Hungarian woman has only to wed a Turk to instantly become his slave? You have no idea how dearly my husband loves me."

"I am sure of it, Catharine. But recollect that my question related to what has long been customary among you."

"Among us! My dear, I am not a Turkish woman!"

"What then?"

"A Christian, just as you are. We were married by a Calvinist minister, the Rev. Martin Biro, now an exile in Constantinople, and for whom my husband, out of gratitude, has built a church where the Hungarians and Transylvanians who dwell there may attend divine service."

"Really! Then your husband does not persecute the Christians?"

"Certainly not. He believes that every religion is good, as leading to heaven, but that his own

faith is the best, as opening the gate of the very highest heaven. Moreover, my husband has a very good heart, and is much more enlightened than most of his fellows."

[Pg 53]

"But why have you not tried to convert him to the Christian religion?"

"Why should I? Because our poets regularly conclude their love-romances in which a Turk falls in love with a Christian girl, by bringing him to baptism and dressing him in a mente instead of a kaftan? Here, however, you have one of those romances of real life, in which a woman follows her spouse and sacrifices everything for him."

"No doubt you are right, Catharine; but you must let me get used to the idea that a Christian, let alone an Hungarian, girl may wed a Turk."

"And listen, dear Lady Beldi: surely God would have imputed less merit to me, if I had converted my husband to our faith, instead of leaving him in the faith wherein he was born? As a Christian renegade he would have occupied but a humble place in our little church; while as one of the most influential of the Pashas, he has made the fate of all the Christians in Turkey so tolerable, that the Christian subjects of other states flock over to us as to a land of promise. Often, when he has received his share of the spoils of battle, he has handed me a long list with the names of those of my enslaved countrymen whom he has ransomed at a great price. He has expended immense treasures in this way. And believe me, love, the perusal of such a list gives me more pleasure than the sight of the most beautiful oriental pearls which my husband might easily have purchased with the amount, and it has raised him higher in my estimation than if he had learnt the whole Psalter by heart. And he is not the man to break the word he has once given, whether it be to God or to his fellow-man. If he were capable of abjuring his religion, I could believe no longer in his love, for then he would cease to be him whom I have always known; he would cease to be the man who, when once he has said a thing, always abides by it, never goes back from, and is to be moved neither by the terrors of death nor the tears of a woman."

Lady Beldi embraced her friend, and kissed her glowing cheeks.

"You are right, my good Catharine! 'Tis our prejudices that prevent us from rising higher than everyday thoughts. It is true. Love also has her faith, her religion. But how about your country? Have you never thought of that?"

Catharine rose with proud self-satisfaction from her seat, and pressed her friend's hand.

[Pg 54]

"Let this convince you that I indeed love my country. I am about to sacrifice for it the lives of my husband and my son, whom perhaps I now behold for the last time."

Lady Beldi's face plainly showed that she did not quite grasp the meaning of these words, and Catharine was about to explain them to her, when a servant announced that the gentlemen had long been awaiting them in the dining-room.

Lady Beldi thereupon gave her arm to her friend and led her into the dining-room. The children had already become such close friends that Aranka allowed Feriz Beg to carry her in to dinner, playing all the time with childish coquetry with the diamond clasp of his agraffe.

The lady of the house assigned to every one his place. Catharine took the upper end of the table. On her right sat the Pasha, on her left the hostess. The host took his place at the lower end of the table. Feriz and Aranka sat side by side. Opposite Feriz was an empty place, the shy Sophia's, whom nothing could induce to come to dinner.

Catharine seeing that a large wine-jug was placed in front of her husband, quickly seized it in order to exchange it for a cut-glass caraffe full of pure, sparkling spring water. Lady Beldi remarked the action, and glanced mischievously at her embarrassed friend.

"He never drinks wine," said Catharine apologetically. "It is not good for him. He is of a somewhat excitable nature."

Kucsuk smiled and lifted Catharine's hand to his lips.

"Why gloss over the truth? Why not say straight out that I do not drink wine because the Koran forbids it, because I am a Mussulman?"

Beldi shook his head at his wife and pointed at the children in order to give another turn to the conversation.

"It looks as if your son were already quite at home with us, Kucsuk. You shall see, when you come back, what a Magyar we have made of him."

Kucsuk and Feriz exchanged a proud and rapid glance, and then both of them looked at Beldi.

The child's features had suddenly and completely changed; at that moment he looked wondrously like his father. There was the same hard, stony glance, the same defiant bearing, the same haughty elevation of the brows.

"So thou dost imagine, Beldi," said Kucsuk severely, "that I only brought my son hither to leave him with thee?"

[Pg 55]

"But surely you do not mean to take that child with you to battle?"

"Child dost thou call him! He is already the commander of four hundred mounted Spahis; has

already been in three engagements; has had two horses shot under him, and is to command the left wing of my forces in the impending battle."

The Beldis looked with amazement at the child, who, with all eyes fixed upon him, assumed his most manly air.

"But I hope that you will at least keep him by your side in the heat of the fight?" said Lady Beldi, much disturbed.

"Not at all. I lead the centre. He too will give a good account of himself. When I was his age I already wore the Nishan^[16] order on my breast, and I hope that this time he will not return home without having at least deserved it."

[16] *Nishan Order*. A Turkish order of merit for valour, instituted by Selim III. It consisted of a gold medallion bearing the Sultan's effigy.

"But if it comes to a *mêlée*, and he is in danger?" continued Lady Beldi, with increasing apprehension.

"Then he will fight as a brave soldier should," returned Kucsuk, stroking his moustache, which immediately twisted upwards of its own accord.

"Ah, no; he is far too tender to sustain a conflict with grown men!" cried Dame Beldi compassionately.

"Feriz," cried Kucsuk to his son, "just take down that sabre from the wall, and show our friends that thou canst wield it like a man."

The boy sprang up, and, proudly confident in his own strength, chose from the weapons that hung on the wall not a sabre but a huge club—seized it by the extreme end of the handle, and swung it with outstretched arms in every direction with an ease and a dexterity which would have done honour to any man. His feat was rewarded by enthusiastic applause.

"Deuce take it!" cried the astonished Beldi; "that is what I call a good graft, a Magyar scion on a Turkish stock. You did not carry off his mother for nothing. Come, Kucsuk—give me that lad!"

"Be it so! But give me thy daughter."

"Which? Make your choice."

"She who sits next to him. When she has grown up they will make a good pair, and then we shall both have a son and a daughter." [Pg 56]

Beldi laughed heartily, and both the women exchanged a smile. Kucsuk looked with an air of satisfaction at his son, who took his aigrette from his turban, tore off the diamond buckle which had pleased Aranka so much, and handed it to the little girl with lavish gallantry. The child timidly stretched out her tiny hand towards the costly gift, the material as well as the moral worth of which she was far from suspecting, but which nothing in the world would now have made her relinquish.

The parents suddenly became silent. Their faces still wore a smile, but there was a melancholy earnestness in their eyes.

[Pg 57]

CHAPTER VI. THE BATTLE OF NAGY SZÖLLÖS.

Meanwhile Michael Apafi, comforted by Ali Pasha's assurance that help was nigh at hand, had thrown himself into Segesvar, and there awaited the turn of Fortune's wheel. John Kemeny came out against him with a vast host. He had with him an imposing array of German and Hungarian troops, but what his army really wanted was an enterprising general.

Michael Apafi had very little to oppose to such a host—a few hundred stubborn, undisciplinable Szekler spearmen, a handful of Saxon burghers, and a bodyguard of blue Janissaries, altogether only about a tenth part of Kemeny's army.

Acting therefore on the advice of his brother Stephen, the Prince resolved to remain strictly on the defensive at Segesvar till auxiliaries should reach him from his Turkish protector. This resolution pleased the Saxon burghers immensely, for they were well able to defend themselves behind the walls of their own city, but never felt quite at ease in the open field. Upon the Szeklers, however, Apafi's resolution produced just the contrary effect.

It was Nalaczi's mission to keep the Szeklers in a martial humour, and one evening he took them all into the tavern, and filled them with such ardour that at break of day they marched clamorously beneath the windows of the Prince, and swore by hook and by crook that they must have one of the city gates opened for them at once, so that they might fall upon Kemeny there

and then and fight him to the death.

The Prince and his counsellors went down among them in great alarm, and tried in every way to make it clear to them that Kemeny's suite alone was more numerous than all the Szeklers put together; that at least one-half of his army was armed with muskets, whereas with them scarcely any one except the Saxon burghers knew even how to use fire-arms; and that if they rushed out at one door, the enemy would rush in at the other, and then there would be neither outside nor inside—and much more to the same effect.

[Pg 58]

But whoever fancies he can drive out of a Szekler's head what he has once got into it is mightily mistaken.

"Either you must let us march against the foe or home we go!" cried they. "We don't mean to lie here for the next ten years like the Trojans, for there's work to be done at home. Apportion, therefore, so many of the enemy to each one of us; let every man go out and slay his lot, and then in God's name dismiss us. We won't submit to be blockaded and rationed on dog and rat-flesh."

"My good fellows, if you don't like stopping here, go home by all means," was Apafi's ultimatum; "but to fight a battle in my circumstances were mere madness."

The Szeklers did not waste another word; but they seized their wallets, shouldered their lances, and marched out of Segesvar as if they never had had anything to do with it.

From that moment the Szeklers became Apafi's enemies to his dying day.

Next day Kemeny's host stood beneath the walls of the town where Apafi now barely had armed men sufficient to guard the gates.

The siege operations were entrusted to Wenzinger as having had most experience in warfare. This great general, true to the principles of the school in which he had been brought up, first of all carefully surveyed every inch of his ground; then he cautiously occupied every position which by any possibility might become important, and took care also that the besieging host should be covered at all points—in short, he so spun out his preparations by his systematic way of going to work, that by the time he had really begun to think about the siege, tidings reached him that the Turkish auxiliaries were advancing by forced marches. Thereupon (still faithful to his system) he re-concentrated his scattered forces, and prepared to march against the Turks, the Hungarian gentry being ready to a man to follow him. But John Kemeny was against a general advance, holding that if the Turkish contingent was strong enough to put his forces to flight, he would have Segesvar in his rear, and thus would be caught between two fires. He therefore preferred to await his opponent's attack, and retiring in consequence from the town, pitched his camp at Nagy Szöllös, whence he looked calmly on while Kucsuk Pasha's horsemen, amid the bray of clarions, made their entry into Segesvar.

[Pg 59]

Apafi had eaten and drunk nothing for three days from sheer anxiety at the straits into which he had fallen, through no fault of his own, when word was brought him of the arrival of the auxiliaries. It was late in the evening when Kucsuk Pasha, after a fatiguing march along unfrequented mountain paths, entered the town. Apafi rode out to meet him, and saluted the Turks as his guardian angels. But great indeed was his astonishment, after mustering the troops twice or thrice, to find that at the very highest estimate they were only a fifth part of the forces opposed to him.

"What does your Excellency mean to do with this little band?" he uneasily asked the Pasha.

"God alone knows, who reads the destiny of man in heaven above," returned Kucsuk with laconic fatalism; and that was all that the Prince could get out of him. That night the Turks pitched their tents in the market-place, immediately opposite the dwelling of the Prince.

Apafi, after so many sleepless nights, could at last enjoy repose. It did his heart good to hear beneath his windows the snorting of the war-horses and the sabre-clattering of the sentries, and he gradually dozed off in the midst of the comforting hubbub, reflecting, that with such an army he could at least defend himself for some time, and that meanwhile a great many things might happen. Long before daybreak, however, he was awakened by the hammering of planks, the usual signal to the Turkish cavalry to feed their horses. "They feed their horses very early in the morning," thought the Prince, and he turned over on to the other side and again fell asleep. While still half-dreaming he fancied he heard the songs of the dervishes, songs apt to make even the wakeful feel drowsy. Then a loud and sudden flourish of trumpets once more aroused his Highness from his slumbers. "Egad! What are they about in the middle of the night?" cried he peevishly; got up, looked out of the window, and saw that the Turks were all sitting motionless on their horses in the dark. Then came a second flourish, and the whole squadron started off, the clattering of the horses' hoofs on the paving-stones and the watch-words of the sentinels resounding far and wide through the silent night. "This Pasha is a very restless man," thought Apafi. "Even at night, and after so many fatigues, he grudges his men their proper repose." And with that he again turned in, and fell into a yet sweeter sleep, from which he only awoke on the following morning.

[Pg 60]

The sun stood high in the heavens when Apafi rang for his steward and factotum, John Cserey.

The first question he put to him was, "What is the Pasha about?"

"He quitted the town last night, and sent back a messenger, who has been waiting outside there

ever since dawn to deliver his message."

"Let him come in at once," cried Apafi, and he began hastily to dress.

Stephen Apafi, Nalaczi, and Daczo entered the Prince's apartments at the same time as Kucsuk's messenger. They too had been waiting for the last two hours for the Prince to awake, and were very curious to hear the Pasha's message.

"Speak quickly!" cried Apafi to the Turk, who bowed to the ground, folded his arms across his breast, and said—

"Illustrious Prince! my master, Kucsuk Pasha, speaks these words to thee through the mouth of thy servant: Remain quietly in Segesvar and be of good cheer. Let the troops that are with thee mount guard upon the walls. Meantime my master, Kucsuk Pasha, is marching against John Kemeny, and will fight him wherever he meets him, yea! though he lose his host to a man, yet will he fight with him to the death."

The Prince was so confounded by these tidings that he had not a word to say for himself. Kucsuk's forces were scarcely a fifth part of Kemeny's, and, moreover, they were still exhausted by their forced marches. To expect a victory under such circumstances was to look for miracles.

"Let us make up our minds for the worst and trust in God," said Stephen Apafi; and, under the circumstances, this was perhaps the most sensible thing that could have been said.

So Michael Apafi let things take their own course. If any one had a mind to guard the walls he was free to do so. So the commanders left the soldiers to their own devices, and the soldiers did nothing at all. The fate of the realm lay in God's hands in the fullest sense of the word, for man had withdrawn his hand from it altogether. One thing, however, the Prince did. He sent old Cserey up to the top of the church tower that he might keep a good look-out, and come and tell his master the moment he saw troops approaching.

[Pg 61]

John Kemeny had established himself at Nagy Szöllös, which is a few hours' journey from Segesvar. He had fixed his head-quarters at the parsonage there, and to this day the little room is pointed out in which he slept for the last time, as well as the round hillock in the garden, where stood at that time a pretty little wooden summer-house in which the Prince began the dinner which he never finished.

The Hungarian gentlemen had a long debate with Wenzinger and the Prince about the plan of campaign. Some were for taking the town by storm, others preferred starving it out by a blockade.

Wenzinger shook his head.

"Allow me, gentlemen, to express my opinion also," said the experienced German. "I am an old soldier. I have knocked about in all manner of campaigns; I know the value of numbers in war, but also the value of position, and well understand how to weigh the one against the other. I have learnt by experience that one hundred men under favourable conditions are often more than a match for a thousand. I also know how enthusiasm or indifference can multiply or diminish numbers. I can also calculate the relative importance of the various kinds of arms; nor is the military value of patriotism an unknown quantity to me. Now we have ten thousand men, and there are not more than three thousand opposed to us. But we must not lose sight of the fact, that the greater part of our Hungarian forces consists of cavalry, and to storm walls with cavalry is clearly impossible. Scarcely less impossible is it to persuade the mounted Hungarians to fight on foot. I would further remark, that although the Hungarian is a veritable hero when he stands face to face with a foreign foe, nevertheless, whenever I have seen him called upon to fight against his own countrymen (and often enough have I had that opportunity) he becomes as slothful and indifferent as if he were only awaiting the first pretext for taking to his heels. Then, again, we possess a troop of Servians, whom I consider very good shots, and if we only had them safely behind the walls of that town we might buckle to it against a ten-fold superiority; but outside fortifications these people are scarcely worth anything: they are strong enough to defend, but not strong enough to storm a bastion. We ought therefore to demolish the walls as soon as possible: but then, again, we have no cannon, and would have to send as far as Temesvar for our field-artillery, and while they were on their way to us along the vile roads—and of course it is a further question whether the commandant there would send them at all at our bidding—Ali Pasha would have time to return with fresh troops, and we should lose all our labour. I consider, therefore, that we ought not to remain here any longer. We are incapable of conquering that fortress either by assault or blockade. We cannot, on the other hand, suppose that the enemy would be insane enough to be lured into the open field. The most prudent thing, therefore, that we can do under such circumstances, is to set out for Hungary without delay, collect reinforcements and artillery, and then endeavour to force the enemy to an engagement."

[Pg 62]

Kemeny, little accustomed to listen to such lengthy discourses, could scarcely wait till Wenzinger paused, and, as if the whole plan of campaign deserved not the slightest thought, he now interrupted him with frivolous impatience.

"Mr. General, leave all that till the afternoon. After dinner we shall see everything in quite another light."

"No, not after dinner," blustered the German. "No time is to be lost. We are in the midst of war, where every hour is precious; not at a Diet, where matters may be debated for years together."

At this sally the Hungarian gentlemen laughed heartily, seized Wenzinger by the arm, and dragged him off to the banquet, joking all the way. "There will be lots of time after dinner!" cried they.

"Well, well," said Wenzinger, half in jest and half in anger; "it is a fine thing, no doubt, to have soldiers who will do everything but obey your orders!"

Not another word did he speak at table, but he drank all the more.

In the midst of these table-joys, John Uzdi, the commander of the skirmishers, stepped into the Prince's pavilion with a terrified countenance, and scarce able to speak for excitement.

"Your Highness! I see great clouds of dust approaching from the direction of Segesvar!"

The Prince turned his head towards the messenger, and said with comic phlegm—

[Pg 63]

"If it gives you any satisfaction to stare at your clouds of dust, pray go on looking at them as long as you please!"

But Wenzinger sprang from his seat.

"I should like to have a look at them myself," cried he, hastily ordering his heavy charger to be saddled; "possibly the enemy has come out to entice us nearer."

The others did not trouble themselves about the matter, but continued to make merry.

In a few minutes, however, back came Wenzinger, unable to conceal the secret joy which a professional soldier always feels when his plan is about to succeed.

"Victory, gentlemen!" cried he. "The enemy is marching against us in force. If it is not merely a diversion, and he really means business, the day is ours."

Some of the gentlemen at once rose from their seats and began buckling on their swords. The Prince, however, remained sitting.

"Are they still a good way off?" he indolently inquired of Wenzinger.

"Scarcely half-an-hour's march!" exclaimed the latter with sparkling eyes.

"Then let them come a little nearer still, and in the meantime sit down by our side."

"I'll be damned if I do!" cried the general angrily. "As it is, I have scarcely time enough to marshal my forces."

"But why marshal them at all? Let them advance upon the enemy *en masse*, that he may be terrified out of his life at the bare sight of them."

"Yes, but I don't want to scare them away, I want rather to surround them. I shall confront them with one-half the host, the rest I shall distribute as follows: one division shall creep through the maize-fields and cut off the enemy's retreat to the town; another shall attack him in flank from above the mill-dam; a third shall remain behind in reserve. Your Highness will join the reserve with your Court."

"What!" cried Kemeny, deeply offended, "I in the reserve! The proper place for an Hungarian Prince is always the fore-front of the battle!"

"That was all very well formerly; but in a general engagement, such precious personages require constant looking after, lest any accident befall them, and are only in the commander's way, and seriously interfere with his tactics. If, however, your Highness expressly desires it, I will surrender my bâton to you at once, and take my place in the ranks. Here there is only room for one generalissimo!"

[Pg 64]

"Keep your place and take what measures you please, but pray let me choose my own position. That need not interfere with you in the least."

And Kemeny, with a few other gentlemen, remained at table.

Wenzinger had scarcely made the necessary preparations when word was brought to the Prince that the army was in battle array. Then Kemeny stood up with imperturbable *sangfroid* and buckled on his sword, but refused to wear armour.

"Why should I?" cried he. "Do you suppose that the heart beats more courageously behind a coat of mail?"

So they brought him his most stately charger, whose restive head two stalwart grooms could only hold with difficulty. The coal-black, fiery-eyed steed plunged and reared; its nostrils snorted steam; white frothy flakes fell from its mouth all over its breast; its long waving tail reached almost to the ground.

Kemeny swung himself into the saddle, drew his sword, and galloped to the front. Every one was amazed at his skilful horsemanship; he seemed to have been grafted on to his stallion, so perfectly did all his movements correspond with its gambols. On reaching the front, the stately

charger fell into a mincing pace, sharply striking the ground behind it with its prancing hoofs, and nodding its head as if saluting the host, which broke with one accord into a loud shout of "Eljen!" At the same instant the Prince's horse stumbled and plunged violently forward on both knees at once. The silver bit in its mouth snapped in two, and it was only his extraordinary skill and dexterity which saved the Prince from flying headlong.

His suite came hastening to his side.

"That is a bad omen, your Highness!" stammered Alexius Bethlen. "Your Highness should mount another horse."

"'Tis not a bad omen," replied Kemeny, "for my horse has not thrown me."

"Nevertheless, your Highness, it would be well to change your mount. That horse is frightened, and will do nothing but rear."

"I mean to keep my seat, if only to show that omens have neither meaning nor terror for me," said Kemeny defiantly; and he ordered the broken bit to be replaced by another. At the same instant Kucsuk Pasha's trumpets sounded a charge.

[Pg 65]

The Turkish cavalry formed a half-moon with the horns turned outwards. Kucsuk himself rode in the centre.

The Pasha on this occasion wore an unusually splendid costume. His kaftan was of rich-flowered silk wrought with gold; beneath the kaftan peeped forth a dolman of cloth of gold; a costly oriental shawl encircled his loins; his scimitar, buckled on behind, sparkled with gems; a ger-falcon's plume, fastened by a diamond agraffe, waved from his turban. His charger, a fiery barb with slender head, long, twisted mane, and black flying tail, threw back its head proudly and shook its richly-fringed saddle-cloth. A sort of gold netting surrounded its whole body, from the fringes of which depended numbers of large, jingling, golden half-moons.

As soon as Kucsuk Pasha perceived Kemeny's troops, he dismounted, threw himself with his face to the ground, thrice kissed the earth, thrice raised himself on his knees, uplifted his face devoutly to heaven, and called upon the name of Allah. Then he remounted his horse; sent for his son; tore one of the falcon feathers out of his turban, and sticking it in the youthful hero's, said—"Go now to the left wing of the host, and fight as becomes a man of valour! For 'tis better that thou shouldst fall by the hand of the enemy, and lie dead before me, than that thou shouldst fly, and this my sword" (here he smote the scimitar by his side with his fist) "should slay thee!"

Feriz Beg reverentially bowed his head, kissed the hem of his father's kaftan, and proudly galloped to the post assigned to him, feeling that every eye was fixed upon the falcon's feather which his father had fastened to his turban.

The Pasha now rode along the ranks and addressed these words to his cavalry—

"My brave fellows! the enemy is before you! I say not whether they be many or few—you can see for yourselves. They are indeed many times more numerous than we; but trust in Allah, and fight valiantly! It is more honourable to die here sword in hand than to fly like cowards. We are in the midst of Transylvania. He who flies will fall by the sword of the pursuer ere he reaches the frontier, and he who escapes the pursuer will fall by the bowstring of the Padishah. We have no other choice but victory or death!"

Then he turned to the Wallachs. Then he addressed with harsh and wrathful words.

[Pg 66]

"You dogs, you! I know right well that you are ready to bolt at the first shot; but know that I have ordered the troops behind you to instantly cut every one of you down who so much as looks backward." Then the Pasha, placing himself at the head of his host, waved his naked sword for the trumpets to blow, and glancing once more along the lines, saw the Moorish troops who stood behind him, with melon-shaped, copper-plated helmets, making ready to fire their long muskets.

"What are you doing?" growled the Pasha. "Away with your muskets! The enemy has more of them than we. We shall only need our swords. Let every one charge boldly upon the foe, ducking his head down over his saddle-bow the moment I give the signal, and then gallop forward without hesitation!"

The host did as it was commanded. The Moors slung their funnel-shaped muskets over their shoulders, drew their broad scimitars, and trotted forward in the footsteps of the Pasha.

Kemeny's troops, like a wall of steel confronted them, the musketeers in the first line, the lanzknechts behind. In the centre stood Wenzinger, on the right wing John Kemeny. The flanking troops were creeping stealthily on behind the mill-dam and among the maize-fields in order to take the foe in the rear.

When the Turkish army had come within gunshot distance of Kemeny's forces, Kucsuk Pasha suddenly turned round and glanced fiercely back, right and left, upon his soldiers, who immediately ducked their heads over their horses' necks, tightly grasped their swords, used their spurs freely, and dashed like a whirlwind upon their opponents.

"Allah! Allah! il-Allah!" thrice sounded from the lips of the charging Turks, and simultaneously John Kemeny's musketeers gave the attacking horsemen a point-blank enfilade, which for a

moment enveloped their ranks in smoke. But in those days musketry fire did little harm; it was far more noisy than dangerous. So now too only a couple of Turks or so glided out of their saddles, dragging their horses down with them; the rest galloped forward with a howl of fury.

Wenzinger, perceiving that his arquebusiers had no time to load again, immediately ordered his lanzknechts to advance. Now if these troops could only have kept back the Turkish cavalry till the arquebusiers had managed to reload, or till the flanking squadrons had come up and fallen upon the enemy, Kemeny would no doubt have won the battle. But the ranks of the lanzknechts collapsed at the very first onset, and after (to do them justice) a really desperate resistance, were mostly cut to pieces, whereupon the helpless musketeers took to their heels *en masse*, and threw their whole army into great confusion.

[Pg 67]

Wenzinger now tried to restore order by commanding the whole line to fall back, and had his command been properly obeyed, the engagement might perhaps have had a different issue. But the cavalry, which the Prince led in person, obeying his proud counter-orders to remain where they were, were left fighting single-handed against the divisions opposed to them, when the rest of the army had already changed its position.

The Pasha immediately left off pursuing the panic-stricken musketeers and fell with all his might upon Kemeny, who, attacked simultaneously in front and in flank, altogether lost his head; and as there was neither time nor space for an orderly retreat, wildly cut his way through the first opening which presented itself, not perceiving in his confusion that he was riding down his own retreating infantry, for the cavalry, galloping frantically into the newly-formed ranks, trod their own people under-foot, frustrated the last hope of forming a reserve, and threw the whole army into hopeless disorder. The infantry threw down their arms and fled in all directions before their own and the enemy's cavalry, which followed, helter-skelter, on each other's heels, trampling to death all who came in their way. Neither the skill of the general nor the self-sacrifice of a handful of heroes was able to restore the battle. The wild flight of one part of the army had demoralized the other. The battle was irretrievably lost.

Amidst the general rout the Prince also found himself a fugitive. As he had stood in the fore-front of the battle during the fight, he naturally found himself now among the hindmost in the flight, and could scarcely escape from his pursuers for the press in front. The Turks were everywhere on the heels of the fugitives, and mercilessly cut down all whom they could reach. A Turkish youth was following the Prince like his shadow, and as the boy's steed had very much less to carry, speedily came up with him. The falcon feather in his turban enables us to recognize Feriz Beg, Kucsuk Pasha's son.

[Pg 68]

The face of the youthful hero glowed with excitement, but the face of the Prince was dark with rage and shame. He frequently looked behind him and gnashed his teeth. "To fly perforce before a child! Shame, oh, shame!" Again and again he tried to stop, but his frenzied steed tore him along with it.

Meanwhile the youngster had come near enough to reach him with his scimitar. At first the Prince disdained to defend himself against his puny foe; but the latter, becoming more and more audacious in his attacks, he at last drew his sword and parried his blows.

"Avaunt, you little bastard!" cried Kemeny, foaming with rage, "for if I do turn round, I'll deal you a blow that will knock all your baby teeth down your throat."

But now a bound of his horse brought Feriz alongside of the Prince, and regarding Kemeny with flashing eyes, he aimed a blow at his neck with his supple Damascus blade; while Kemeny, with a lowering countenance, seized his sword with both hands, and dealt a tremendous backward blow with all his might which was meant to cut his presumptuous young assailant in two. It was as though a young eagle had brought a flying panther to bay, and forced him to a life-and-death struggle. At the moment when both swords sped hissing through the air, Kemeny's horse again stumbled and fell forward with a broken foot, causing Kemeny's blow to fall wide, and strike not Feriz but Feriz' horse's head, which it clove in twain, while Feriz' blow flashed down upon the Prince's forehead.

The Prince as he sank from his horse looked darkly up into the face of his youthful opponent. The blood flowed in streams from his frowning forehead. Once more he gave his horse the spur, but the maimed beast only reared on its hind legs, fell over with its sinking rider, and both were instantly trampled under-foot by the enemy's cavalry.

In the wild rout no one noticed the spot where the Prince had fallen. It was only after many days that his torn and tattered mantle and his broken sword were offered for sale in the market-place of Segesvar by Turkish hucksters, purchased by Michael Apafi, now sole Prince of Transylvania, and subsequently preserved in his museum at Fogaros. Apafi also ordered search to be made on the battle-field for the corpse of the fallen Prince in order to give it decent and honourable burial, but no one could recognize his body among the naked and mutilated slain.

[Pg 69]

The battle won, Kucsuk by a flourish of trumpets recalled his squadrons from pursuing the beaten foe. The Turkish horsemen came galloping back at once, quite contrary to the usual practice of Turkish armies, which are generally as much demoralized after a victory as the vanquished themselves. Kucsuk had inured them to the strictest discipline.

Back they came, black with smoke and red with blood, but the bloodiest of all was Feriz Beg. His mantle was riddled with bullets, and the horse he rode was the third that he had mounted since the action began, two had already been killed under him.

Kucsuk, without a word, embraced his son, kissed him on the forehead, fastened his own Nishan Order on his breast, and exchanged swords with him, then the highest conceivable distinction.

Ferhad Aga, the leader of the right wing, was brought dead, on a litter of lances, before the general. His body bore wounds of every shape and size; he was literally covered with gunshot wounds, sabre-cuts, and lance-thrusts.

Kucsuk sprang from his horse, bent weeping over the corpse, covered it with kisses, and swore by Allah that he would not have given this man's life for the whole of Transylvania.

Nor would he enter the town till Ferhad had been buried. The dervishes immediately surrounded the dead man, washed him, wrapped him in fragrant linen, and the Pasha himself sought out for him a sunny spot in the midst of a little grove. There they buried him with his face turned towards the east, and with a pennant fluttering on a lance's head over his grassy grave. And for three days sentinels watched over him, to prevent the accursed Jins from mutilating the corpse of the dead hero.

[Pg 70]

CHAPTER VII. THE PRINCESS.

After the fatal day of Nagy Szöllös, the faithful followers of John Kemeny fled to Hungary, and transferred their allegiance to Simon Kemeny, the son of the fallen Prince. But a sinking cause has few friends, and while the younger Kemeny's party rapidly diminished, Apafi's as rapidly increased. His victory had assured his position, and won for him all the great men of the land—the governors of the towns, the magnates, the commandants of the fortresses—in short, it was a race who should do him homage first, all the Estates of the Realm recognized him as Prince.

Only a few fortresses, where Kemeny had placed German garrisons, still held out, Klausenburg among the number.

Kucsuk Pasha, whose army meanwhile had been reinforced, brought Apafi beneath the walls of that city, and pitched his tent at Hidelve over against the old town, then a mere heap of straw huts, and there the new Prince held his first reception.

The morning had scarcely dawned when Apafi's tent was besieged by a host of visitors, petitioners, and liegemen. The Prince, enchanted at the delightful novelty of a position which enabled him to gratify everybody's desires, could not find it in his heart to say no to anybody. Nalaczi and Daczo were there before he had finished putting on his boots, and introduced a whole mob of persons anxious to pay their respects, who were waiting with smiling faces at the tent door. Apafi made haste with his toilet in order that none should be kept waiting. He was anxious to oblige every one.

Amongst the first who elbowed their way in was Count Ladislaus Csaky. He came to offer his son as a page to the Prince, the self-same son who had filled and refilled John Kemeny's glass a few weeks before. Apafi could scarcely find words to express his gratitude for such an offer.

[Pg 71]

Next came Master Gabriel Haller, who seemed as if he would really never leave off bowing and scraping, and addressed an eloquent oration to Apafi, every tenth word of which was a title of honour. Apafi could scarcely conceal his childish joy at being called your Highness, and invited Master Gabriel Haller to dinner straight off.

A daïs was then placed in the back part of the tent, which the modest Prince absolutely refused to mount, till his brother Stephen used gentle violence, and even then he insisted on rising to receive every suitor, and accompanied him to the door at the end of each audience.

Petitioners, homagers, and visitors of every description kept coming and going one by one.

By Apafi's side stood Nalaczi, Daczo, Stephen Apafi, and John Cserey, whom his Highness urged repeatedly to be seated.

After receiving the oaths of allegiance, on which occasion the commandants of the fortresses placed the keys of their strongholds in the Prince's hands, it was the turn of the petitioners to be introduced.

First came Master Martin Pok, the jailer of Fogaros, with the humble petition that he might be appointed the governor of that fortress, inasmuch as the former governor had fled to Simon Kemeny.

Apafi promised to bear him in mind.

Next came Master John Szasy, the chief magistrate of Hermannstadt, complaining, with tears in his eyes, that his fellow-citizens were persecuting him, and throwing himself on the Prince's protection.

Apafi at once took him under his wing.

Then followed Master Moses Zagoni, who begged the Prince to let him off a certain balance in his accounts which had been outstanding from Kemeny's time.

Him too Apafi sent away comforted.

Last of all came a thick-set, sturdy Szekler, in a short sheep-skin jacket, who called himself the representative of Olahfalva; did homage to Apafi in the name of his district, and preferred two very peculiar petitions, to wit: that from henceforth Olahfalva should be declared to be only *two* miles from Klausenburg (the real distance between the two places is, as we all know, more than twenty); and secondly, that it should be legally enacted that he who had no horse should go on foot.

[Pg 72]

The Prince laughingly complied with both of these extraordinarily ludicrous requests, which put him into such a good humour that an itinerant scholar, Clement by name, a crooked-nosed, long-legged individual, wrapped from head to foot in a fox-skin mantle, made bold to approach Apafi, and present him on his knees with a huge parchment roll which he had been holding in his hand for some time, and which the Prince, not without extraneous help, now took and unfolded. Inside it he read the whole genealogical record of the Apafis, painted on a green-leaved family-tree, whereby his family was brought into connection with the illustrious Bethlen and Bathory families; traced back to King Samuel Aba, from him again to Huba, one of the seven original leaders of the Magyars, and thence ascending still further, first to Attila's youngest son Csaka, and from him in the female line to the daughter of the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, but in the male line to Nimrod, the first recorded earthly king.

This fulsome piece of flattery seemed to somewhat annoy Apafi; but as he could not quite make up his mind to kick the impertinent poet out of the tent, he resolved to be quit of him with a handful of ducats, and placed the genealogical tree behind him by way of a prop.

Nevertheless the Prince's good-humour was not in the least disturbed. He seemed to feel it his bounden duty to treat every one who approached him with peculiar graciousness and condescension, and after listening patiently to the last of his many petitioners, he turned to Messrs. Nalaczi and Daczo, who stood by his side, and said—

"Is there absolutely nothing I can do for you? How shall I requite the fidelity with which you have stood by me from the very first?"

Nalaczi and Daczo had long been racking their brains as to what *they* should ask of the Prince. Their chief anxiety was lest they should ask too little.

"I leave the reward of my poor services to the benevolence of your Highness," said Nalaczi: but he thought within himself that the Szeklers needed another Captain-General in the place of Beldi.

"The little I have been fortunate enough to do for your Highness is, in my opinion, not even worth mentioning," declared Daczo; but it did occur to him at the same time that the post of Governor of Klausenburg, vacant by the flight of Banfi, was just the very thing for him.

[Pg 73]

Apafi looked at them benignly, and no doubt would have created both these worthy but not particularly capable gentlemen privy-counsellors at the very least, when, unfortunately for them, a hubbub outside here interrupted the conversation, and the body-guards, drawing aside the curtains of the tent, admitted Kucsuk Pasha.

The Prince sprang from his seat at once, and would have gone to meet him, had not Stephen Apafi pulled him by the mantle and whispered in his ear—

"Keep up your dignity in the presence of the Turk. He is only a subaltern Pasha, while you are the sovereign Prince of Transylvania."

Despite this admonition Apafi did not feel quite at his ease till Kucsuk had beckoned to him to be seated, and although the Turk remained standing in the presence of the Prince, there was this difference between them, that whereas Apafi's face expressed nothing but affability and condescension, Kucsuk's was all haughtiness and dignity.

"How can I show my gratitude for the labours and perils you have undergone on my behalf?" asked Apafi with genuine enthusiasm.

"Not to me but to my imperial master are thy thanks due," replied Kucsuk dryly. "I did but do his will when I set thee on the throne of Transylvania. With God's help I have scattered thy enemies, only a fortress here and there still holds out. I shall have done my whole duty when I have captured them; the rest lies with thee. To-morrow I shall besiege Klausenburg, and, cost what it may, I shall not rest till the town is taken. When that has fallen the others will follow of their own accord."

"Should I not also call out the provincial banderia^[17]?" inquired Apafi.

[17] *Banderia*. The mounted gentry of the county.

"I need them not," replied Kucsuk; "let them remain at home and look after their own affairs. My own troops will do everything."

Apafi was about to thank the Pasha for his magnanimity, when suddenly he became aware that every one was looking towards one of the side-entrances of the tent, through which some one had just entered without being announced.

The Prince also looked round in the same direction, and what he then saw before him made him forget instantly Transylvania, Kucsuk Pasha, Klausenburg, and everything else, for before him stood his beautiful and majestic consort, Anna Bornemissa. [Pg 74]

It was indeed a queenly apparition.

That commanding countenance, which seemed to exact homage, how affably yet how proudly it could glance around! In her dress there was no trace of pomp; but was there any need of gems where such speaking eyes flashed and sparkled? Did that royal form require velvet or ermine to lend it majesty?

It was the first time that Apafi had seen her since his departure. She had risen from her child-bed twice as lovely as before. Renewed happiness and comfort had invested her features with a sort of transparent brightness. Her eyes, dimmed no longer by tears of sorrow, flashed with a purer radiance than before. Her lips, which had long known nought but joy, smiled still more sweetly. Her figure had gained in fullness and roundness without losing in symmetry, and the confident, self-conscious dignity visible in all her features and all her movements well became her majestic form.

Apafi, forgetting all dignity and decorum when he saw his consort, sprang from his seat, rushed towards her, seized her hand, drew the enchanting lady to his breast, just as he used to do when he was a simple squire, and kissed her mouth and cheeks so heartily that the assembled Estates of the Realm had auricular demonstration of the fact.

Anna nestled closely to her husband's breast, and her lips tenderly returned his salutations; but her large, earnest eyes seemed to be scrutinizing over her husband's shoulder the faces of all who were present, and her gaze rested for an instant on each one of them.

These connubial caresses seemed likely to have no end so far as Apafi was concerned—his wife was worth more to him than all Transylvania with the appurtenances thereof—till Anna disengaged herself from his arms with a smile, and said merrily—

"You lavish the outpourings of your heart on me alone, but there is some one else here who claims his share too;" and with that she beckoned to Dame Sarah, who had followed her mistress into the tent with a beaming countenance, and now unwrapped before Apafi's eyes a pretty sleeping babe, whom the good nurse had been dangling about in a piece of silken tapestry. [Pg 75]

Beside himself for joy, Apafi took the child in his arms and kissed its little round cherub face again and again. The child awaking, allowed itself to be kissed and hugged without uttering a cry, and snatched with its plump little be-ribboned arms at papa's beard, which naturally gave papa indescribable delight.

The gentlemen standing around considered it their bounden duty to congratulate the Prince on his parental felicity, who, drunk with joy, exhibited his son to them and said—

"Look how serious he is. He doesn't even cry. What a perfect little man it is!"

Meanwhile Anna beckoned to Stephen Apafi, and whispered to him—

"I am sure the gentlemen will not take it ill if the Prince's family concerns and joys withdraw him for a few moments from public affairs."

"Your Highness has taken the words out of my mouth," replied Stephen. "I was just about to say the same thing to the gentlemen myself;" and turning towards the courtiers, he begged them to leave the Prince for a few moments in the bosom of his family, and meanwhile withdraw into the antechamber.

The gentlemen considered the request only natural, and at once retired, obsequiously giving precedence as they went to Kucsuk Pasha.

No sooner did Anna find herself alone with her consort, than she took the child from his arms, gave it back to Sarah, and sent them both away. Apafi now approached her with fresh demonstrations of tenderness, but she took him by the hand, gazed earnestly into his eyes, and said—

"It is to the Prince of Transylvania that I have come!"

Apafi was somewhat chilled by her steady look; but she, perceiving it, nestled closely up to him again, and said kindly—

"I was beginning to suspect that the Prince might have more need of me than the husband." Then she added with a smile full of irresistible grace—"I hope you will not misconstrue my good intentions."

Apafi embraced his wife, and made her sit down by his side. The chair of state was large enough

to accommodate them both. It is true that the pretty wife had to sit half upon her husband's knee, but that certainly did not inconvenience either of them. [Pg 76]

"You are right," said Apafi; "it is well that you are here. When I don't see you I always feel that I lack something. At any rate you deserve to be nearest to my heart, and I'll venture to set your judgment against the judgment of any of the gentlemen surrounding me."

"Who are all these gentlemen?" asked Anna.

"You must know them all by name. The lanky man is Ladislaus Csaky, who offers me his son as a page."

"He loses no time about it! A very little while ago the lad was John Kemeny's page."

Apafi began to look glum.

"The man with the large moustaches is Gabriel Haller."

Anna smote her hands together in amazement.

"What! he here too?"

"What have you to find fault with in him?"

"I'll tell you. He has always been the spy of your enemies. He brought Kemeny the first tidings of your installation, and of Kucsuk Pasha's arrival at Segesvar."

Apafi's features grew still darker.

"And I have invited the gentleman to dinner!" he murmured between his teeth.

"And why are Messrs. Nalaczi and Daczo so familiar with you? Do they want anything?"

"They are my faithful followers, who have stood by my side from the very first."

"But pray don't on that account make them the highest personages in the land. Simple, ignorant men in responsible positions are far more dangerous to a state than open but enlightened foes. Reward them by all means, but only in proportion to their abilities."

"I'll do so," replied the harassed Prince; and during the remainder of the interview he tried hard to uphold his conjugal supremacy, but Anna would not let the subject drop.

"And Master John Szasy, what does he do here? for I saw him too."

"The poor fellow is persecuted," returned Apafi, who began to find the joke a little tiresome.

"Evil rumours are abroad about that man. People say of him—and they say it pretty loudly—that he has young Saxon girls abducted for him, and after sacrificing them to his brutal lusts, removes them out of the way by poison. The parents of the girls have indicted this man, and he fancies he will escape exposure by fawning upon you." [Pg 77]

Apafi sprang wrathfully from his seat.

"If that be so, I will show Master Szasy the door; he shall find no shelter beneath my mantle."

"And what brought that honest, tattered Szekler hither?" asked Anna, who had evidently made up her mind to know everything. "I like not his crafty face at all. The Szekler is always most dangerous when he puts on the garb of simplicity."

The Prince was suddenly seized with a paroxysm of mirth, he could scarcely speak for laughing.

"That was the representative of Olahfalva," said he.

At the mention of this place even Anna could not forbear from smiling.

"The good folks of Olahfalva," continued Apafi, still laughing, "who carry people to church in sheets and beat watches to death!"

"I fear me the poor people are very much maligned. They are called simple, but methinks their ways are altogether crooked and crafty."

"But is it not true then that they carry ladders horizontally through the woods?"

"Yes; but why? You shall hear. Their Captain-General had forbidden them to waste the woods, but at the same time sent them out to pull down crows' nests; so to get at the nests they carried the ladders horizontally through the woods to have an excuse for hewing down every tree that stood in their way."

"Well explained! But at least you will not deny that in hilly districts they never plough to the end of their fields for fear that if they go right to the margin the earth will tilt over with them."

"They do that because the margin is of a rocky consistency which no ploughshare will penetrate."

"Then what do you say of their custom of choosing to represent them at the Diet those amongst them upon whom their obsolete, short skin-jackets sit the best? I'll swear I saw the self-same jacket now worn by the Olahfalva deputy at the Diet of Klausenburg twelve years ago, only then it

was on some one else's shoulders."

"The good folks think," returned the Princess, "that a deputy to the Diet need say little or nothing, but that the coat in which he has to sit for hours ought to be as comfortable as possible." [Pg 78]

"You seem to know the reason of everything. But, come now! explain, if you can, the signification of the promises which this Szekler has got out of me. He petitioned for two things: first, that the distance between Olahfalva and Klausenburg should henceforth be declared to be only two miles."

"Oh! *sancta simplicitas!*" cried Anna. "They have a charter which permits them to offer their timber for sale at any place within two miles of their district; they are consequently anxious to have the Klausenburg market thrown open to them."

"I really believe you are right," returned Apafi, in a tone of conviction. "I now begin to suspect their second petition, although it seems to me to have no special connection with their community. They desire it to be legally enacted that he who has no horse shall henceforth be obliged to go on foot."

"I have it!" cried Anna, after a moment's reflection. "Olahfalva has recently been made a post station, and the couriers passing through the place have therefore the right to demand fresh horses there. Now the good people begin to find this new obligation onerous, and therefore want a law passed to compel the couriers to make their pilgrimages through Olahfalva on foot."

Apafi stamped angrily on the ground.

"The impudent rascal! To presume to jest with me in such a way! Well, you shall see how I'll make them grin on the other side of their faces. But is it not about time to re-admit the gentlemen?"

"One word more, Apafi," said Anna gently, placing her velvety arms on her husband's shoulder. "I observed Kucsuk Pasha among your liegemen; I presume he came to take his leave?"

Apafi threw back his head much perplexed.

"Not at all! Don't you know that we are here to capture Klausenburg? It is Kucsuk's business to take it."

"Michael!" cried the Princess, in a tone of tearful supplication. "Do you mean to say that you will suffer a Turkish garrison in Klausenburg? Do you forget that the Osmanlis are always loth to relinquish any Hungarian stronghold that they once get possession of? Do you not recollect that Klausenburg is the capital of your realm, and those who dwell within its walls are your own people, your own compatriots, your own co-religionists? And you would expose them to the horrors of an assault? The Turks may be your allies, but after all they are heathens and aliens, whom you should not allow to play havoc with your people. Did not your heart sink within you when you saw the walls of Klausenburg? Could you behold those towers, those houses, without reflecting that there are the homes of your fellow-countrymen and the churches of your God, into which the besiegers would hurl their firebrands? Could you look at those ramparts without perceiving crowds of mothers holding their babes in their arms, and declaring to you that your own people—an innocent, loyal, honest people—dwell therein? And you would hold your triumphal entry into the capital of your country over the mutilated bodies of these women and children?" [Pg 79]

Apafi rose from his seat. His forehead was bathed with sweat. Involuntary remorse was legible on his troubled countenance.

"No, Anna; I don't wish it. How can you think me so heartless? What! I, who could never endure the tears of a single woman, should remain deaf to the lamentations of a whole nation? But what am I to do? I meant to have called out the banderia to invest the town, and so compel the garrison to surrender; but how shall I set about it with Kucsuk Pasha in the way? He is determined to storm the town, I know not how to prevent him."

"Be easy on that score. The commanders of the Turkish troops in Transylvania have received firmans^[18] ordering them to instantly rejoin the army of the Grand Vizier at Érsekújvár. Kucsuk too has doubtless received such a firman."

[18] *Firman*. A decree issued by the Sultan and proclaimed by the Grand Vizier.

"I was not aware of it. That is why he wants to press on the assault, I suppose?"

"A similar mandate is already on its way to you from the Divan,^[19] and by pretending that this mandate has already reached you, it will be easy to induce the Pasha in a friendly way to raise the siege of Klausenburg."

[19] *Divan*. The Sultan's council.

"I will try, Anna; I will try!" cried Apafi, walking up and down the tent. "I owe it to my people, and I would rather turn my back upon these walls than force my way through them with fire and sword."

"But you must not turn your back upon them," replied the discreet lady; "there are ways and means of getting possession of the fortress without having recourse to fire and sword." [Pg 80]

Apafi stood still and looked inquiringly at his wife. She drew him closer to her and whispered in his ear—

"Before coming to Klausenburg, I secretly instructed the well-disposed within the town to try and bring the garrison over to our side. This morning our spies have brought us word that the infantry is ready, at the first sound of the trumpet from without, to open the gates and go over to us with bag and baggage. The cavalry by itself will be unable to offer any resistance."

"My dear!" cried Apafi in astonishment, "you are really a born princess."

Anna took her husband softly by the arm, led him to the daïs, and made him sit down.

"The sceptre is no plaything, Apafi," said she earnestly. "Never forget that posterity will sit in judgment on princes. A ruler's every act and word may mean the ruin or the salvation of thousands. Think of that in all you do and say. And now, God be with you. Be firm!"

Anna, with an exalted look, kissed the Prince on the forehead. At that very moment her eye fell on the parchment roll of the itinerant scholar.

"What plan of campaign is this?" cried she, taking up the parchment.

Apafi would have snatched it from her, but it was too late; Anna had already unrolled it, and after casting a rapid glance over the lickspittling pedigree, looked with an expression of overwhelming reproach at the discomfited Prince, who stood before her with downcast eyes.

"Did *you* get any one to compose it?" she softly asked.

"Certainly not," replied Apafi energetically; "a shameless poet brought it to me."

"Then throw it into the fire," replied his wife, much relieved.

"That is just what I was going to do. I can then get rid of him with a few ducats."

"A few strokes with a whip would be much more appropriate," exclaimed Anna wrathfully; but soon her features grew mild again, and steadfastly regarding her husband she said to him kindly—"Be strong! Be a prince! Protect the loyal! Forgive the repentant! Despise flatterers!"

With that she curtsied low, kissed her husband's hand, and had vanished from the tent before he could return the salute.

[Pg 81]

Apafi immediately called Cserey and commanded him to re-admit the gentlemen, who were still waiting in the ante-chamber.

On the countenances of the courtiers could be read, as plainly as if it were written there, the persuasion that they might now ask for and expect from the Prince anything they liked, on the presumption that the blissful antecedent domestic scene had left him in a state of mental flabbiness which could say no to nobody. Stephen Apafi was alone sufficiently sober-minded to perceive the change which had come over his brother's face in the meantime. Apafi's features now wore an expression of dignity, firmness, and energy worthy of a prince.

"My loyal friends," he cried, in a hard, firm voice, without waiting for any one to address him. "As concerning the petitions preferred to us, we would dismiss you with fit and proper answers. We accept your homage with all due appreciation, and trust you will ever persevere in your loyalty. You, Ladislaus Csaky, we permit to return home. We will no longer deprive you of your family joys. As for your son, we will have him educated abroad at our own cost, till he be suitable for our service."

Count Ladislaus Csaky, with a very wry face indeed, expressed his gratitude for the Prince's gracious permission to return home, although he would willingly have remained at Court all his life with the whole of his family.

Gabriel Haller the Prince passed over altogether, as if he absolutely did not see him, but he turned pointedly towards Nalaczi and Daczo, who made desperate efforts to appear meek and humble.

"Having regard to the zeal and affection which our faithful Stephen Nalaczi has always testified for our person, we appoint him herewith first gentleman-in-waiting at our Court. And you, John Daczo, we appoint commander of Csikszerda."

Both gentlemen made the grimace usual in suitors who have expected much and got little. Nalaczi smiled, but within he was all wormwood and gall. Daczo tried to look contented, but he coloured up to the ears. They were scarcely able to thank the Prince for his goodness.

Meanwhile Master Pok, in order not to be left altogether out of sight, had elbowed his way to the front, completely covering honest Cserey, who modestly made way for him.

[Pg 82]

Apafi beckoned to him, however.

"Why do you keep so much in the background?" said he.

Master Pok, under the impression that the hint was meant for him, drew still nearer.

"'Tis Master Cserey whom we address," continued the Prince, "or do you think that we are unable to distinguish our faithful from our feigning followers? Your fidelity and prudence, Master

Cserey, are well known to us, wherefore we appoint you forthwith governor of our fortress of Fogaros."

In his consternation Master Pok looked up at the ceiling as if he expected it to fall on his head.

"Master Martin Pok, on the other hand," pursued the Prince, "we confirm in his former post. He will continue to be jailer at the same fortress."

Master Martin Pok sobbed aloud. Cserey was about to raise objections, but the Prince beckoned him to be silent.

Next came Master John Szasy's turn.

"You are accused of grievous crimes, from which we have neither the will nor the power to absolve you. You will therefore be conveyed to Hermannstadt with a strong escort, there to clear yourself as best you can."

John Szasy, with a stupefied air, looked first to the right and then to the left. He could not understand it at all.

"You, Master Moses Zagoni, we command to present your accounts for examination to our officers of the Exchequer thereunto appointed."

To hide his own confusion, Zagoni thought he could not do better than whisper consolation to Szasy.

The deputy of Olahfalva had now to take his turn. It was indeed high time that something amusing should happen, for while the Prince had thus been distributing rewards and punishments, the smile had gradually vanished from every face; nothing short of the discomfiture of the quaint and crafty boor could now restore the general hilarity.

"What I promised you," said the Prince, scarcely able to repress his inward merriment, "is yours. If it give you any satisfaction, you may henceforth regard Olahfalva as only two miles distant from Klausenburg instead of twenty; let him also who has no horse go on foot as you desire. But we grant this with the express reservation that you are not to take any timber to the market of Klausenburg, and that you always give the couriers the necessary relays of horses."

[Pg 83]

The Szekler grinned, shook his head, and then looked very hard at the Prince, as if to find out how Apafi could possibly have got to the bottom of his artifice.

The wondering, puzzled face of the Olahfalvian was too much for Apafi's gravity, and he burst into a loud guffaw, in which everybody present joined him. The Szekler, whose face had hitherto worn a bewildered smile, suddenly became quite serious, threw back his head defiantly, cast a furious look around, half stripped off his short jacket, and exclaimed—

"Harkye, gentlemen! If the Prince chooses to make merry with me, I suffer it; but I'll trouble you all not to laugh so at my expense."

The Prince beckoned to them to be silent, and diverted their attention by calling forward the itinerant scholar Clement, who shambled up on his long, lean legs, as if he were every moment about to fall on his knees.

"We have commanded our treasurer," said the Prince, "to pay to you out of our privy purse three *marias*^[20] for the work which you have handed to us."

[20] *Maria*. An old Hungarian coin worth about thirty-five kreutzers.

"Your Highness was pleased to observe—" stammered the confounded poet.

"You heard very well. I said three *marias*. That is about the value of the writing materials which you have wasted upon this pedigree. Another time employ your leisure more profitably."

The Prince then signified that the audience was at an end.

The gentlemen quitted the tent with many a deep obeisance. Kucsuk Pasha alone remained behind.

During the whole of this scene the Pasha had been shaking his head, as if he had not expected all this from Apafi. He could not help remarking too that Apafi now needed no one to remind him how to preserve his princely dignity in the presence of others. Apafi wore an affable air; but it was the affability of princely condescension.

"We have learnt with regret," he began, turning towards the Pasha, "that we must shortly lose you, whose valour we so much admire, whose friendship we so much esteem."

The Pasha looked up with astonishment.

"What means your Highness?"

"In consequence of a firman commanding the Transylvanian generals to assemble in the camp of the Grand Vizier. We shall, alas! only see you in our circle for a very short time."

[Pg 84]

Kucsuk angrily bit his lips.

"How could he have learnt that already?" he muttered.

"We would willingly retain you, for your person is most dear to us; but we know that the commands of the Padishah require instant submission. Moreover, lest your devotion to us should draw down upon you the displeasure of the Sublime Porte, we have taken such measures as will bring the fortress of Klausenburg to capitulate without having resort to an assault, thus releasing you from the troublesome obligation of keeping your army here any longer. As to the confirmation of our princely dignity, we will take care to settle all that with the Grand Vizier, presumably at Érsekújvár, whither we also are summoned."

During this speech, Kucsuk had regarded the Prince fixedly and with folded arms. Even when Apafi had finished speaking, he remained standing in the same position without uttering a word.

Apafi calmly continued—

"In order however to express our personal gratitude, however feebly, for your services, we would have you accept from us this little gift more as a token of our respect than as a reward." And with that the Prince took from his neck a gold chain set with large brilliants, and hung it round the Pasha's neck.

Kucsuk still remained immovable. He searchingly scrutinized the Prince, and wrinkled his brows. Then, all at once, he began to smile, and shaking his head said slyly—

"It is well, Apafi, it is all excellently well. But I see that thou art wont to commit thy understanding to the custody of thy wife. *Salem aleikum!* Peace be with thee!"

And off went the Pasha, shaking his head all the way.

But Apafi, with a lightened heart, hastened back to his wife.

Master Gabriel Haller waited a very long time at the door of the tent, till one of the bodyguards came out to inform him that the Prince would dine that day in his family circle.

Then he too shook his head and departed.

A couple of days later, with drums beating and banners waving, Prince Michael Apafi made his triumphal entry into Klausenburg.

[Pg 85]

CHAPTER VIII. THE PERI.

Once more we are in Hungary, among the Homolka Mountains, in one of those parts of the land which no one has ever thought of colonizing. For fifty miles round there is not a village to be seen; not a single passable road traverses the whole mountain range. The very footpaths break abruptly off amongst the rocky labyrinths, terminating either in a leaf-covered waterfall, or at the forsaken hut of a charcoal-burner, the carbonized, sooty environment of which suffers nothing green to grow.

The very skirts of this wilderness are uninhabited. One can wander for hours among the oaks and beeches, towering up one above the other, without hearing any other sound but one's own footsteps; not a blade of grass, not a flower, not a shrub can thrive anywhere here. Beneath the uncleared trees rustle the fallen yellow leaves, peeping up from the midst of which we perceive the speckled caps of oddly-shaped fungi clinging in clusters to the mossy tree stems.

Only where the stream dashes down from the mountains, forcing its way through the valley, does the greensward appear. There, among the luxuriant grasses, lie the fearless stags; wild bees build their basket-shaped nests in the hollow trees on the margin of the stream, and sweep buzzing round the Alpine flowers which dance on the surface of the water.

That stream is the Rima.

In the dim, dismal distance still higher mountains appear, from which the stream plunges down in a snow-white torrent. The morning mists exaggerate the magic remoteness of the scene, and when at last you have reached the extremest point of that remoteness, it is only to see before you a still more awful expanse, still more desolate mountain ranges, forming as it were an immense and uninterrupted ladder up to heaven.

[Pg 86]

The Rima burrows in every direction among these primeval mountains. She alone is bold enough to force her way through this wild rocky labyrinth. Sometimes she plunges down from the granite terraces with a far-resounding din, dissolving into a white, cloudy spray, in which the sunbeams paint an eternal rainbow, which spans the velvet-green margins of the abyss like a fairy bridge. A moss-clad rock projects from the midst of the waterfall, dividing it into two, and from the moss-

clad rock wild roses look over into the dizzying, tumbling rapids below. Far away down, the vagrant stream is hemmed in between basalt rocks; the twofold echo changes its monotonous, muffled roar into melancholy music; its transparent, crystal waters appear black from the colour of their stony bed, wherein rosy trout and sprightly water-snakes, like silver ribbons, disport themselves; then, escaping from its brief constraint, it dashes onwards from crag to crag, angrily scouring a huge mass of rock which once, in flood-time, it swept into its bed from a distance of many miles, and which, after the next thaw or rainfall, it will hurl a thousand fathoms deeper into the rock-environed valley.

Higher and higher we mount. The oaks and beeches fall behind us; the pines and firs begin. The horizon opens out ever wider and wider. The transparent mists which have hitherto veiled the heights are left behind in the depths. The little green patches of valley are scarcely visible through the opal atmosphere, and the hilly woodlands have dwindled into dark specks; only their outlines, gold and lilac in the rays of the rising sun, are still distinguishable.

And before us the mountains still rise higher and higher. One feels tempted to scale these fresh giants also, in order to find out whether there is really any end to them. Now too even the Rima has forsaken us. Deep down below, we perceive a round, dark-blue lakelet, enclosed on all sides by steep rocks, on the mirror-like surface of which white swans are bathing beneath the shadows of the pines dependent over the water's edge. In the midst of this lakelet, the source of the Rima tosses and tumbles, casting its bubbling crystal fathoms high, and keeping the lakelet in perpetual ebullition, as if some spirit were trying to raise up the whole lake with his head.

And yet another mountain range starts up before our eyes, covered with thick fir-woods, though nothing else will grow on the steep ridge, which is covered along its whole length by masses of rock piled one on the top of the other. Nowhere does a single green speck meet the eye.

[Pg 87]

Having scaled these heights also, we naturally fancy that at last we have reached the highest point, when suddenly, high above the dark fir forests, a white giant emerges, and before the eyes of the wearied mountaineer rise the lofty distant peaks of the Silver Alps, representing the unattainable with their towering, snowy pyramids.

Here we pause.

All along the mountain ridge, standing out the more distinctly for the great distance, meanders a footpath, disappearing among the pine forests at one point and re-emerging at another, thereby showing that some one must dwell here in the wilderness, a circumstance the more startling as, up to this point, the region has seemed altogether uninhabited, while beyond it shimmer the still more inhospitable snowy mountains.

From the top of this peak one sees hundreds and hundreds of mountains and valleys exactly resembling one another. The eye grows weary of regarding them, and so long as the sun's rays strike obliquely over the region, suffusing it with a golden mist, one can barely distinguish the separate parts of the oppressively sublime panorama.

Gradually, however, our attention is attracted towards a deep, rocky gorge, surrounded by greyish-blue mountains, which seem likely at any moment to topple over. In the midst of this gorge an enormous and completely isolated rocky pillar stands upright, looking for all the world as if it had just fallen from the skies. A careless glance might easily pass over this rocky mass without seeing anything remarkable about it; but a more attentive observer would discover a narrow wooden bridge planted on fir-wood piles, and apparently connecting the rocky block with the surrounding mountain summits. And gradually we perceive that it was not Nature's hand which made this rocky scaffolding so high. Those monochromatic rocks, piled one atop the other, forming a wall all round, and seeming to prolong the mountain range, are the work of human hands. It is a massive rocky bastion, almost as high as the hill which forms its base, and as the walls are everywhere carried right out to the verge of the steep, naked mountain side, they look as if they have grown out of it, and as if the creeping plants which cling to the rocky walls are only there to bind them more closely together.

[Pg 88]

In the year 1664, the eye which looked down from this point upon the bare bastions could have perceived within them a dwelling fresh from fairy-land. Corsar Beg, the terror of the district, dwelt in this stronghold, and at his command, hedges of roses bloomed on the bastions, groves of orange and pomegranate trees sprang up around the courtyard, and everywhere could be seen those gorgeous structures which oriental magnificence builds for transient pleasure. Spacious rotundas with sky-blue, enamelled cupolas, sparkling in the sun; variegated turrets rising from the bastions; balconies adorned with arabesques and covered with porcelain vases; slim, snow-white minarets encircled by fragrant creepers; trellised kiosks with their gilded columns; everything constructed of the most delicate materials, as if it were meant to be a toy castle; nothing but gilded wood and painted glass, enamelled tiles and variegated tapestry. Bright banners and pennants flutter down from the copper roofs, and golden half-moons sparkle on every gable-ridge. All the kiosks, rotundas, and minarets are bright with banners and half-moons. 'Tis a fairy palace ready to take flight.

But the bastions which encircle this frail fairy palace are impregnable. On every side nothing but inaccessible rocks, where, if once he reach them, the pursued can defend himself against odds a hundredfold. The Comparadschis stand, day and night, with burning matches behind the cannons which Corsar Beg has had cast for himself within the fortress, for there is no road for ordnance in the whole region. Two of the cannons are pointed at the bridge, to blow it into the air in case of

an assault.

From this stronghold Corsar Beg sallies forth, pillaging the land and massacring the defenceless people; and if he lights upon any pursuing host, he instantly turns tail with his Spahis and Bedouins; and whilst he flies to his stronghold along mountain paths, on mules laden with booty, his Timariots, who cover his retreat, throw barricades up on the narrow roads, and stone to death all who venture to follow them into the dark gorges. Sometimes, however, he permits the pursuers to come right up to the fortress walls, and while they are popping away at the rocky bastions with the little half-pound mortars which they have dragged up thither after incalculable exertions, and think that now they will starve him out at last, he plays a practical joke upon them by somehow or other (perhaps through subterranean ways), making a sortie from his stronghold, and robbing and burning behind the backs of the besiegers. Every attempt to capture, surprise, or blockade him has been in vain. The inhabitants of the surrounding villages have begun to migrate into more distant regions for fear of their terrible neighbour.

[Pg 89]

After the battle of St. Gothard, in which the Turkish general lost the fight and twelve thousand men against the Imperial and Hungarian forces, a twenty years' armistice was concluded between the Porte, the Emperor, and the Prince of Transylvania, which left the Turks in possession of all the fortresses which they had built or captured in Hungary. The lords of these fortresses now continued the war on their own account, and pillaged and destroyed whenever and wherever they had a chance. The Sultan was too far off to interfere in each individual case. All he could do was to authorize the complainants to capture the peace-breakers if they could, and deal with them as they chose.

In the twilight hour of a sultry summer evening, when the heat, compressed among the rocks during the day, made the atmosphere so heavy and stifling that sound only travelled with difficulty, we see two shapes hastening towards the same point from different directions. One is a man in Hungarian costume, with a low forehead and sharp, squinting eyes, whose oblique gaze seems expressly made to disconcert whomsoever he looks upon. The other is an old Turkish woman, with a warty chin covered with sprouting bristles. The sleeves of her long striped kaftan hang slovenly down, and her dirty turban gives you the impression that she has slept in it for weeks together.

The trysting-place which the two shapes are cautiously making for is a cavern covered with bushes. Both shapes glide, at the same time, into the cavern, from the dark depths of which they can see the fortress without being seen themselves. The old woman, with a hideous smile, whispers something in the man's ear.

"Are you quite sure?" inquired the squinter, with a searching look.

"So certain that I make bold to claim one-half of the promised reward in advance."

"That I can quite understand," replied the man with an insulting smile; "but I will make bold not to pay it. I prefer sticking to my principle of paying as I go along, sentence by sentence."

[Pg 90]

"Ask then!" murmured the hag greedily.

"When does the Beg return? I lay five ducats on that question."

"The answer to it costs ten. That is my lowest price."

"There's your money then! Now speak!"

The woman counted the gold pieces, put them in her bosom, and replied—

"The Beg comes home this evening."

"Where is the subterranean way by which he arrives?"

"The answer to that costs one hundred ducats."

"There you are! Don't count them, but answer me!"

The woman took the money, pointed to the yawning chasm behind them, and said—

"We are on the very spot."

The man looked around him with some surprise, then, jingling the purse from which he had been doling out the ducats in the old woman's ear, he said—

"All in this purse is yours if our plan succeeds, but if you betray us, this dagger will surely reach you. I'd hunt you down even if you took refuge in hell itself!"

The hag grinned.

"No threats, please! I know something which will not only make you hand over that purse of gold to me instantly, but will also fill you with such insane joy that you'll be ready to cover me with kisses. I have about me a letter which, if once your master reads, he would cover me with gold from head to foot."

"Who wrote it?"

"That is a very dear question. If you paid for the answer down, I'm afraid you would not have enough money left to carry you home."

"I want to know who wrote that letter. I'm not going to buy a pig in a poke."

"Then farewell! If you want to know anything more, you must pay for it." And she prepared to go.

"Stop! Give me that letter, or I'll kill you."

"No, you won't! One shriek from me and you are lost."

"Where's the letter?"

"You surely don't think me fool enough to tell you! I don't carry it on my person, so you need not look for it!"

The man angrily threw the purse towards her, whereupon she tripped to the entrance of the cavern, fetched from thence her crutch and unscrewed its handle, and drew forth from the hollow of the stick a crumpled silken roll, which the man unravelled and began to read, and as he read his face began to tremble for joy, disbelief, and surprise.

[Pg 91]

"If all this really happens, what you have now received is a mere earnest of what you will receive hereafter."

"Didn't I tell you so?" returned the beldame complacently. "Didn't I say that you'd gladly pay me in advance at least one-half of the sum stipulated?"

"Now, take heed that nothing is observed!"

"Pst! Go round by the stream, the usual path is to-day infested by marauding parties."

With these words the two shapes glided hastily out of the cavern, and vanished in different directions among the thickets of the wood.

And now begone, thou inhospitable outer world! thou oppressive mountain panorama! thou desolate horizon!

Appear, ye fairy realms! ye earthly counterfeits of the paradise of dreams! Permit us one glance into the sanctuary of mysterious joys, of stifled kisses, of glowing sighs, where Love and Love's satellites alone do dwell and live!

We see before us a gorgeous circular saloon. Its spacious walls are made of mirrors, the perpetual reflection of which lends a peculiar lustre to every object, nowhere suffering a shadow to fall. The sky-blue cupola of the domed ceiling is supported by slender, dark-red porphyry columns, half concealed by clusters of exotic flowers, which, heaped profusely together in rose-coloured porcelain vases, scatter the gold-dust of their velvet blossoms on the floor. The floor itself is covered with silk carpets—only here and there does the mosaic pavement shimmer forth. In the midst of the room, in a basin of rose-coloured marble, bubbles a crystal-clear fountain, from the centre of which springs a jet glistening with all the hues of the rainbow, and falling back in showers of liquid pearls. The water of this fountain is introduced into the fortress through a secret passage by hidden pipes. All along the walls extend rows of velvet divans with cylindrical, flowered cashmere cushions; and on every side of us are fairies, laughing young girls dancing on the carpets, romping on the divans, and splashing one another with the water of the fountain. One odalisk swings a cymbal above her head, and dances with audacious leaps and bounds among the rest, who, winding their hands together, weave a magic circle around her. Three Nubian eunuchs accompany the dancers, singing love-lorn lays to the music of their simple pipes.

[Pg 92]

The veils of these fairy forms flutter left and right, revealing faces whose youthful charms no eye of man has ever gazed upon. The patter of their tiny feet is scarcely audible on the soft carpets. They seem to fly. Their light muslin robes ill conceal their youthful forms, and their tresses, escaping from their turbans, writhe down their snow-white shoulders like tame serpents.

A black slave is playing with the little gold fish that dart about in the basin of the fountain, and laughs aloud whenever any of the nimble little animals wriggle out of her hands. Her white, embroidered robe is held together by a golden girdle, and as she sits there on the rosy marble, the hemispheres of her ebony-black bosom and her plump round arms glisten in the sunbeams. The glow of youth shines through her dark features, and her coral lips, radiant with mirth and joy, allow us a glimpse at rows of the purest pearly teeth, as, with childish glee, she laughs at her own simple sport.

At the end of this oval saloon, raised a few feet above the floor, stands a purple ottoman. The rosy-coloured damask curtains, which form a baldachin over it, are tied to the branches of enormous jasmine trees by heavy golden tassels. Oriental butterflies, with ultramarine wings, flutter round about the silvery jasmine blossoms; and at the head of the ottoman, on a perch in a golden cage, two little inseparable paroquets, with emerald wings and carmine heads, nestle close together and kiss each other perpetually.

Stretched out to her full length upon the ottoman lies Corsar Beg's favourite odalisk^[21] Azrael. Beneath her snow-white elbows, left bare by the loose-falling, laced sleeves of her ample kaftan, lies a living panther, like a bright speckled cushion, licking his glossy skin, and playing like a

young kitten with his mistress's jasper-black locks which descend upon his head.

[21] *Odalisk*, from Turkish *Odalyk* = chamber-maid. Applied particularly to the chief concubines of the Sultan.

The young lady has well chosen her companion. She too is as slender and as supple as he; her limbs are just as flexible as his; her slight figure has the same undulating motion, and in her languid eyes burns just the same savage, half-quenched fire which we see in the eyes of the half-tamed beast of prey. She lies supine on the ottoman. The amber mouthpiece of her fragrant narghily droops from her listless hand. Close by, on a little ivory table, spiced sherbet exhales from a golden bowl. There too, on Japanese dishes, lie heaps of luscious fruit—golden, warty melons; pine-apples; the red fruit of the palm; fragrant clusters of grapes—and, dripping down upon a little silver platter, snow-white comb-honey, gathered by the bees in the days of the acacia's bloom.

[Pg 93]

Azrael bestows not a glance on the luscious fruits. When, from time to time, she raises her languid eyes, half hidden by their long silken lashes, one is almost thunderstruck: such burning glances are only to be found beneath southern skies, whose summer is as glowing, as languishing, as parching as the eyes of this girl. An eternal desire burns in those eyes, unspeakable, unappeasable, which enjoyment feeds without satisfying. If you gave her a world she would instantly demand another. Even when every sense is sated with bliss and rapture, her heart remains empty, and yearns after the unattainable. Those who love her, she hates; those who hate her, she loves. Die for her, and she will mock you; kill her, and she will adore you.

Her oval face is as pale as though the burning rays of her eyes had burnt up all its roses; but when she closes her eyes, and her bosom heaves convulsively beneath the fire of her secret thoughts, the bright crimson blood suffuses her cheeks once more.

And how her lips tremble! She is in a brown study. She speaks to no one. Dancing and singing, the girls of the harem circle round her. A little negro boy kneels before her with a silver mirror. Half-naked female slaves shower down rose-leaves upon her, and fan her with peacock's feathers. Azrael sees them and hears them not. She looks into the mirror, and speaks to herself, as if she would read her own thoughts from her own features; her lips tremble, smile, and pout defiance; her eye entices, languishes, weeps, or flashes rejection; at one moment she transports you into the seventh heaven of delight, at the next she dashes you to the earth. And now some cruel thought, some demoniacal idea has got hold of her. She retracts her upper lip, exposing her tightly-clenched teeth; her contracted eyebrows draw a trembling furrow across her snow-white forehead; the pupils of her eye disappear, leaving only the upturned whites visible; the beauty lines round the corners of her mouth grow crooked, and give the expression of a Fury to the beautiful countenance; her curling tresses, like writhing snakes, twist down on both sides of her. Her tremulous fingers, involuntarily and spasmodically, clutch at the smooth neck of the panther, and the tortured beast roars aloud for pain.

[Pg 94]

The favourite shrinks back from her own countenance. She thrusts aside the little negro, mirror and all; wraps her starry veil around her; turns upon her side with her tiny scarlet-slippered feet beneath her; presses her supple body against the panther's neck, and leaning upon her elbows, glances around with such a savage, menacing look, that every one on whom it falls, not even excepting the wild beast, shrinks back with fear.

But she cannot keep still a moment. A tormenting weariness compels her every moment to shift her position. Now she reclines on her divan, and raising her arms aloft, throws back her head and neck; all her limbs writhe like the folds of a serpent; in her eyes sparkle the tears of smothered desires.

None dare ask her, "What ailest thee?" Azrael is so capricious. Perhaps the questioner might please her, and she would command her to straightway leap down before her eyes from the highest pinnacle of the Corsar's castle into the abyss below. It is therefore neither wise nor safe to try to please Azrael.

But lo! a gold-trellised door opens, and Azrael's tearful eyes sparkle with joy when she perceives who it is that enters. It is the old woman with the warty chin, whom we have already met at the cavern's mouth. A ghastly, hideous duenna! Turkish women age prematurely. Ten years ago Babaye was Corsar Beg's favourite mistress, now she is Azrael's favourite slave.

The hag sits down at Azrael's feet. She alone has the privilege of sitting down before Azrael.

"Are we weary then?" said the beldame to the beautiful odalisk, with a confidential leer, displaying a row of jagged fangs black from sugar-sucking and betel-chewing. "We find no joy in anything, eh? What! have not the Bayaderes^[22] danced amidst a circle of burning tapers? Or has that also lost its charm? Are the Persian silks already shabby and threadbare? Is there no longer any flavour in the honeycomb or any perfume in the pine-apple? Have the pearls of Ceylon lost their lustre? Do the songs of the Italian eunuchs vex and weary? And has the mirror nothing beautiful to show? Wherefore is the Sun of suns so moody and so impatient? Why should a cloud obscure the heaven of Damanshour? Shall I delight her of the alabaster forehead with a tale? Shall I tell the story of the captive lion which Medzsun, the immortal poet, has written?"

[Pg 95]

[22] *Bayaderes*. Indian singing and dancing girls. A Portuguese word.

Azrael cast down her languid eyelids by way of assent.

"Once upon a time they captured a lion in the palm forests of Bilidulgherid. A rich and powerful Dey bought the beast for a thousand gold pieces. The Dey was a mighty man. At his command they built for the lion a cage of gold so large that palm-trees could stand upright therein. The ceiling of the cage was inlaid with lapis-lazuli. They brought to it, from the distant mountains, a spring of living water, and the floor was decked with purple carpets. But the lion was sad and silent. All day it lay there sullen and morose. Only when the sun had set would it arise with an angry roar, shake the door of its cage, and terrify the silence of the night. The Dey asked the lion, 'What dost thou lack, my beautiful beast? Thy house is of gold. Thou dost eat with me out of the same dish, and thy drink is the crystal spring! What more dost thou desire? Wouldst thou bathe in ambergris? Or dost thou desire for supper the hearts of my favourite odalisks?' The lion roared and made answer, 'My cage, though it be of gold, is still a cage; these palm-trees are not the groves of Nubia, and this basin is not the springs of the desert of Berzendar. I want neither thy perfumes nor thy spices, nor the throbbing hearts of thy slaves. Give me back the free air of the desert, there will I speedily find again my good-humour!'"

Babaye was silent. The odalisk, with a tremulous sigh, bowed down her head upon her aching bosom, and beckoned to the duenna to tell her yet another tale.

"Wouldst thou hear the story of the fairy and the mortal maiden? Once upon a time the fairy of the rainbow perceived a lovely maiden, enticed her away with sweet words, and took her over the bridge of the seven colours into the third heaven. There, everything was more beautiful than it is on earth—the flower a languid diamond; the sigh of the zephyr a melodious song; the pillars of the palaces nought but crystal and gems. There every sense experienced a threefold greater bliss than here below. The fairy treated the maiden like the apple of her eye—fairies know the secret of loving tenderly—and yet the girl was sad. She grew weary in heaven, and whenever the fairy went away to suck up water for the sky from the ocean, she saw how the girl bent over the rainbow-bridge, and looked longingly down upon the cloudy earth. 'What lackest thou?' she asked the maiden. 'Wherefore dost thou look down so upon the earth? Speak! What dost thou want? Command me, and I'll fetch it for thee!'—'Stars are falling down from heaven,' replied the girl, 'and they fall upon the earth. Give me of them, and I will make a pearly coronet for my hair!' And the fairy went and brought the stars. Again the maiden looked down sadly upon the earth. Again the fairy asked her, 'What dost thou lack? Is there aught on earth that thy soul desirest?' The maiden answered, 'There below dance slim damsels, and look up smilingly at me! Wherefore are they happier than I? Would that I had their heads to play at ball with!' And the fairy brought the heads of the damsels for the maiden to play at ball with."

[Pg 96]

Azrael looked at the hag with contracted eyebrows, half raised herself upon her elbows, and sought in her golden girdle for the malachite handle of her little dagger.

"Once more the maiden looked down upon the earth," resumed Babaye, smiling. "'Is aught else to be found there that is worth a wish?' asked the fairy in despair. 'Below there, youthful heroes are walking to and fro,' returned the maiden, 'and they are all so sweet and so lovely. Thou art a fairy, 'tis true, but thou art alone in heaven. Thou canst not give me fresh love. Let me go back again to earth.'"

Azrael sprang from the ottoman with glowing cheeks, and seized the beldame by the shoulder. Her bosom heaved tumultuously; a threatening scarlet flamed upon her burning face. All the muscles of her snow-white arms seemed to quiver.

Babaye looked up at her with a grin.

"Come into thy bathing-chamber," said she to the agitated odalisk. "The agate basin exhales the perfumes of spikenard and ambergris. Whilst thou art there alone, I will entertain thee. I know still more beautiful tales which shall rejoice thy heart."

Azrael, all tremulous, drew her veil around her neck, and with nervous irritability beckoned to the girls to be gone. They escaped through the side-door in terrified haste; nor were they fearful without good cause, for as soon as Azrael had withdrawn, the deserted panther, freed from the thrall of his mistress, stretched himself to his full length, lolled out his red tongue as far as it would go, protruded his sharp claws, lowered his head with a menacing growl, sprang at a single bound into the middle of the room, careered twice or thrice round the walls, savagely howling and snuffing at every door behind which he scented the vanished slaves, scratched at the threshold with bloodthirsty rage, and whined peevishly because he could not get at them. Then he crouched down by the water-basin, rested his fore-paws thereon, lapped up the crystal-clear stream with his long red tongue, then, rolling himself into a ball on the soft carpet, seized his long speckled tail between his hind legs and played with it like a cat. Then he stood up again, looked around with cunning, malignant eyes, and perceiving a large white cockatoo in a bronze cage, wriggled towards it on his belly, and watched it for a long time with lowered head and restless tail. Suddenly, with one bound, he sprang upon it, and seized the bar of the cage with his claws. The terrified cockatoo, loudly screeching, struck at his assailant with his crooked bill; and the panther, who could neither overthrow the cage nor destroy it, for it was nailed fast to the ground, leaped over it again and again, roaring furiously, and then cowered down before it, lashing the ground on both sides of him with his tail, and gaping from time to time at the terrified bird with his wide bloodthirsty jaws, whilst the cockatoo screeched, whistled, fluttered about the cage, and hacked away at his inaccessible perch.

[Pg 97]

Along the hollow, labyrinthine way which meanders into the Corsar's castle, the trampling of a troop of horsemen is faintly audible. The clash of arms resounds from the depths of the wood long before we can discern who are approaching. Now they have climbed to the mountain summit where the road runs along the rocky ridge. It is Corsar Beg himself with his robber band. The booty-laden mules lead the way. The treasures of pillaged churches gleam forth from the leathern sacks piled one on the top of the other. In the centre rides the Beg himself, with his motley body-guard recruited from every kind of Turkish cavalry—silk-clad Spahis with long lances, bare-armed Baskirs with bows and arrows, Bedouins in snow-white mantles with long, brass-tipped muskets. The Beg is a man in the prime of life. His brown, almost black countenance makes his slight beard and moustaches nearly invisible. His lips and eyes are large and swollen. His projecting cheek-bones and broad chin give him a truculent, ferocious air, with which his massive shoulders and enormous muscular development well agree. His clothing is tastelessly overladen with gems. A string of pearls goes round his turban. Large gold rings hang glistening down from his ears. His dolman is embroidered with a flower-pattern of precious stones, and everything about his horse, from its hoofs to its snaffle, is of pure gold. His round shield is made of burnished silver, and the head of his morning-star consists of a single cornelian.

[Pg 98]

His troop follows him in silence. Many of the horsemen carry behind them half-swooning Christian girls on whom they do not bestow a glance. The garments of all these freebooters are stained with blood; some of them have not even taken the trouble to wipe away the blood-stains from their faces.

The mules, whipped by the fellahs, trot noiselessly towards the fortress; the host ambles after them along the narrow path. The Timariot infantry straggle behind, and quarrel among themselves about the booty which they carry on their shoulders. No one pursues them.

The large oval room is empty. The women of the harem have withdrawn into their own apartments. Azrael is alone.

On quitting her perfumed bath, she has a hammock slung over the fountain, reclines therein, rocks herself luxuriously to and fro, and lets her glowing, snow-white limbs be splashed by the water-jet. She folds her arms across her bosom, and, with a self-complacent smile, watches the diamond jet break against her lithe body as the swaying hammock cuts across it with its charming burden.

The red curtains are let down to keep out the rays of sunset, but a rose-coloured light pervades the room, suffusing every object with a soft and magic hue. The odalisk appears like a rosy water-nymph swinging on a bright lotus-leaf over a fountain of liquid rubies.

The atmosphere of the room is impregnated with a bewitching, love-inspiring perfume. Not a sound is to be heard save the pattering of the water-drops as they fall back into the basin.

All at once the familiar winding of a horn is heard outside. The prancing and neighing of horses in the courtyard scares away the silence. Above the din rises the word of command of a well-known voice. Azrael smiles, and rocks herself still more swiftly in her hammock. A fatal enticement lurks in her eyes as she looks towards the golden-trellised door, and throws back her head.

[Pg 99]

A minute later, and we hear hasty steps approaching. Impelled by love, Corsar Beg is hastening towards his earthly paradise. The turning of a key is audible in the golden door. Azrael laughs aloud, and rocks herself still more swiftly in her bright-winged hammock.

The shadows of night have descended. Every living thing sleeps soundly. Love alone is wakeful.

"Oh, I fear me! I fear me!" whispers Azrael, clinging still more closely to the breast of the wild Moorish horseman.

"Why dost thou tremble? I am here," and he embraces her slim waist.

"Hamaliel hath brought me evil dreams," returns the odalisk. "I dreamt that the Giaours stormed thy castle in the night-time and murdered thee. I would have hurled myself down from the battlements, but I could not because I was a captive. A Christian held me in his arms! Mashallah! it was frightful!"

"Fear not!" said the Corsar. "The Koran says that only birds can fly, and none can get into this castle without wings. But even if we were surprised thou hast no cause to fear falling into the hands of the Infidel, or being defiled by the touch of the Giaour, for under the ottoman on which we now lie a lunt is laid which goes right down into the powder-chamber. If all were lost, thou hast but to touch that lunt with this night-lamp, and the whole castle with us and our foes would fly into the air."

"Oh, what a consoling thought!" sighs Azrael, softly pressing her lips to the Corsar's cheeks, and seeming to slumber once more.

The night-lamp flickers feebly on its tripod, multiplying its own shadow. The watchers snore before the doors.

Suddenly Azrael springs screaming from her couch, dragging the Beg along with her.

"La illah, il allah! Dost thou not hear the noise of the Jins?" she cries, trembling in every limb.

The Beg stares around him in terror. A tempest is raging outside. The weathercocks creak and rattle. The wind tears the tiles from the summits of the minarets, and hurls them on to the cupolas of the kiosk. The lightning flashes, and the thunder teaches the rocks to tremble.

[Pg 100]

"Dost thou hear how they howl, those invisible beings, and rattle at the barred and bolted windows with a mighty hand?"

"By the shadow of Allah! I hear them right well," murmurs the trembling freebooter, with wildly staring eyes.

"Mercy! mercy! Avaunt, ye evil spirits!" cries Azrael, sinking down upon the floor with dishevelled tresses, and stretching wide her naked arms. "Ye shall be whipped with sunbeams and the darkness shall swallow you! Go hence to the Giaours and torture them! May ye break your wings on the horns of our half-moons, as ye whirl past them in your hosts!—Ha, how their eyes flash! Shadow of Allah, conceal us, lest they look upon us with their fiery eyes!"

The big, strong man, all trembling, lies on his face beside Azrael, and hides himself beneath her mantle and her long flowing tresses. His superstitious terror has stolen every feeling of manliness from his breast; he quakes like a child.

"Dost hear! dost hear how they murmur! Repeat rapidly and aloud the prayer of Naama, and stop thy ears that thou mayst not hear what they say!"

At that moment a terrible gust broke one of the panes of glass, and the free invading air began to move the heavy curtains to and fro, and make the lamp flicker.

"Ha! Dost thou see him?" cried Azrael. "Pst! Look not thither! Open not thine eyes! Hide thy face! Duck down by me! Cover thee with my mantle! It is Asasiel, the Angel of Death! Dost thou not feel his cold sigh upon thy cheek? Pst! Be covered! Perchance he will not see thee!"

Corsar Beg clung convulsively to Azrael's garment, and covered his face with his hands.

"What wouldst thou?" cried Azrael, as if addressing an invisible spirit. "Black shadow, with blue sparkling eyes of fire, for whom dost thou come? There is none here but I. Corsar Beg has not come home! Come later! Come an hour hence! Avaunt, avaunt, black being! May Allah crush thy head in the dust! Come an hour hence, and be for ever accursed!"

Corsar dared not open his eyes. Azrael bent half over him, to shield him from the eyes of the Angel of Death.

[Pg 101]

"Avaunt! avaunt!"

At that moment the lightning struck one of the bastions, and shook the mountain to its very base. The crackling roar of the thunder, like an infernal trumpet-blast, went clanging up to heaven.

"Ah!" cried Azrael, and she sank down upon the Corsar, encircled his body with her arms, and so remained till the rumbling of the thunder had died away, and a gentle shower began to patter down upon the copper roof. Then the tempest gradually passed away, sighing and moaning around the windows, and finally dying away among the distant forests.

Azrael softly raised her head and looked around.

"He is gone," she whispered, in a scarcely audible tone. "He said he would return in an hour. Corsar, thou hast yet another hour to live."

"An hour!" repeated Corsar faintly. "Alas! Azrael, where canst thou conceal me?"

"It cannot be. Asasiel is inexorable. Another hour, and he will take thee away."

"Bargain with him. If he must have the dead, I will behead a hundred of my slaves. Promise him blood, treasure, prayers, and burning villages. All, all he shall have, only let him give me back my life!"

"Too late. In my dreams I saw thy sword break in twain. Thy days are numbered. Nay, thou hast but one chance left, but one way of thwarting the Angel of Blood: if only one among the dead will change names with thee, so that Asasiel may carry him off instead of thee."

"Oh yes! oh yes!" stammered the strong man, beside himself for fear. "Oh, seek me out some such dead man who will change names with me. Thou dost know the incantations. Go! call up one from the grave! Promise him anything, everything, whoever he may be—a fella, a rajah, it matters not. I'll give him my name and take his. Go!"

"Nay, but thou must go also. Gird on thy kaftan quickly. Leave thy weapons here. Spirits fear not sharp steel. We will descend into the churchyard beneath the fortress walls; kindle ambergris and borax on a tripod; hurl the magic wand into the nearest grave, and so compel the dwellers therein to appear before thee. When the spirit appears he will stand motionless, but thou must advance towards him, and cry thrice in a loud voice—'Die for me!' whereupon the spirit will vanish, and Asasiel will cease from troubling thee."

[Pg 102]

"But thou too wilt be close at hand?" stammered the Corsar, grasping tightly the arm of the odalisk, as if he feared that Death would instantly seize him if he let her go.

"Yes, I will be by thy side. But hasten. An hour is but a brief respite."

Corsar quickly threw his upper garment around him, and recited in broken sentences the beginning of a prayer, the end of which he could not recollect.

"Wake none of the watch," said Azrael cautiously. "The power of the spell might be broken if we met any living soul who should say a prayer contrary to ours. We will saddle the horses ourselves and descend by secret paths. Speak not a word by the way, nor cast a glance behind thee."

The Beg was ready. He was just putting on his fur-lined kaftan, for his limbs felt frozen, when the odalisk called to the panther, which was reposing on the carpet.

"Oglan,^[23] thou shalt go with us and keep watch, and if we fall in with a wild beast, thou shalt defend us."

[23] *Oglan*, the Turkish for boy.

As if he understood the words of his mistress, the panther rose up on his hind legs and placed his fore-paws on her arm, while the trembling man clung to her on the other side.

The Turkish cemetery beneath the walls of the fortress is planted with cypress trees. The turbaned graves, with their coffin-like slabs, peer forth, ghastly white, from among the dark weeping-willows. The sound of the approaching footsteps startles away a grey wolf from among the tombs, the sole inhabitant of that desolation. Since the last shower the clouds have dispersed, and here and there the dark-blue sky looks through with its diamond stars. Raindrops trickle down from the leaves of the trees.

From time to time the rumbling of the storm is still heard faintly in the distance. Sheet-lightning flickers above the mountain crests, painting everything white for an instant. The lightning, like the night, can only give one colour to this region—the one paints it white, the other black.

The nightly shapes reach the churchyard by the secret path and dismount among the graves. Azrael places the reins of both horses in Oglan's jaws, and the shrewd beast remains sitting there on his haunches, holding both the snorting horses as firmly as if they were fastened to a stake. [Pg 103]

The Moorish horseman and the odalisk ascend a high funereal mound, the tombstone of which is barely visible through the dependent branches of a weeping willow.

"Something more than a slave must rest beneath that stone," whispered Azrael to the quaking horseman; and placing her magic tripod on the tomb, she ignited with a phosphorous pellet the powdered ambergris and borax, which flickered up and cast a whitish glare all around the grave.

There was a slight rustle in the distance. The Corsar's horse neighed uneasily.

"What was that?" asked the Corsar.

"The Jins," replied Azrael; "look not behind thee."

With that she raised her magic staff, and pronounced in unintelligible words the exorcism over the grave.

"Thou restless spirit, appear at my bidding. Wherever thou art, beneath the dark tree of Hell, or in the garden of the Houris; whether thou dost pine in chains of fire or dost recline on beds of roses, obey my voice, fly through the air, dissipate the darkness, and appear before me in the mortal shape thou didst wear on earth. Appear!"

With these words she struck with her staff upon the stone slab, and immediately a lofty shape in a white winding-sheet rose up from behind the tomb.

"Now advance three steps forward and speak to it," cried Azrael to the confounded Moor.

With tottering footsteps Corsar Beg approached the shape, and cried with a hoarse, trembling voice—

"My name is Corsar Beg. Who then art thou, accursed spirit?"

"I am Balassa," replied the shape with a sonorous voice; and casting aside the white winding-sheet, a powerfully-built, fair-complexioned man appeared with a drawn sword in his hand.

"Corsar Beg, you are my prisoner," cried he to the Turk, who stood there in his bewilderment as if turned to stone.

The next moment the Beg put his hand to his side, and not finding his sword there, rushed back with a howl of fury to his horse, threw himself like lightning into the saddle, and struck his sharp spurs into the flanks of his steed. But Oglan held the reins firmly between his teeth, and when the horse tried to start off, the panther planted his front paws firmly into the ground, and forced it back again.

"To hell with thee, accursed monster!" roared the Beg, foaming with rage, and striking at the panther with his fist; but the beast tugged the halter first to the right and then to left, and

stopped the horse in its flight; terrified it with his leaps and bounds, and forced it to go round and round.

"Speak to this monster, Azrael!" cried the Beg. He turned round to look for his favourite, and he beheld her nestling lovingly in Balassa's bosom, with her snow-white arms encircling the young Hungarian's neck. At the same instant the woods all around teemed with life; the ambushed Hungarian soldiers rushed forth and tore the Beg from his horse, who, even when forced to the ground, tried to defend himself with stones.

"Be accursed!" gasped the vanquished freebooter.

The attacking squadrons marched before his very eyes through the secret passage into the fortress, and an hour later he could see, by the light of his burning palace, his favourite Azrael mounting up behind Balassa, and disdaining to bestow so much as a glance at the discomfited Beg.

[Pg 105]

CHAPTER IX. THE PRINCE AND HIS MINISTER.

Several years have elapsed since Apafi became a Prince. We have reached that period when the unexpected death of Nicolas Zrinyi dissolved the faction of the malcontent Hungarians, compelling most of them to emigrate into Transylvania, which land, owing to the ceaseless antagonism of the German Emperor and the Turkish Sultan, was allowed to enjoy an independent government. It paid indeed a tribute to the Sublime Porte; but it adopted what measures it chose in its own Diet, and if the Tartars occasionally reduced a few villages to ashes, that was only another proof that they no longer regarded the land as their own property. All the strongholds were in the hands of the Prince. He could keep as many soldiers as his purse would pay for, wage war with whomsoever he could cope, and hoodwink the Turks whenever it pleased him so to do. The Turk had nothing to find fault with, either in the constitution of the land, its peculiar privileges, its patriarchal aristocracy, its Latin language, and its Hungarian dolman; or, again, in its manifold religions and its three distinct^[24] and self-governing nationalities. All these things did not trouble him in the least. At most he pitied the poor gentlemen who made such a muddle of affairs of state; but he never made the slightest attempt to initiate them into his own much simpler political system.

[24] *Viz.* the Saxons, the Szeklers, and the Magyars. The Wallachs simply cultivated the soil.

Meanwhile, great changes had taken place at Ebesfalva. The dwelling of the Prince no longer consisted of a simple manor-house. On a neighbouring hill he had had a castle built with lofty, square towers, from the corners of which rose still loftier turrets. The entrance was guarded by two proudly rampant stone lions. On the façade, in bold relief, was carved the inscription: *Fata viam inveniunt*. A vestibule, connecting one wing of the castle with the other, and surrounded by a richly-gilded and ornamented trellis-work, runs along the front of the castle on huge, classically-carved stone pillars. The windows are all in the Perpendicular style, with old-fashioned ornaments, and you reach the inner courtyard by a subterranean corridor.

[Pg 106]

In this courtyard, instead of ploughs and wagons, our eye falls upon arquebuses and culverins. Instead of peasants, we see body-guards, in yellow dolmans and scarlet hose, swaggering before the doors. To reach the Prince's cabinet, one must traverse long corridors and re-echoing saloons, in which pages, footmen, and gentlemen of the bedchamber announce the newcomer from door to door, and when one has finally reached the reception-chamber, it is only to see, after all, not the Prince, but the Prince's chief councillor, Master Michael Teleki, the same bald-headed man whom we first met at Csakatorny, at that memorable hunt where Nicolas Zrinyi met his death. At that time the worthy gentleman was only one of Prince George Rakoczy's disgraced ex-captains; but since then a kind Providence has taken him by the hand, and he is now Captain-General of Kövar, and the Prince's omnipotent prime minister. His mother was the Princess's sister, and his aunt, whom he always calls sister (women seldom take offence at such mistakes), introduced him to her consort. Once near the Prince, Teleki needed no one's good word. His comprehensive intellect, vast knowledge, and statesmanlike dexterity made him indispensable to the Prince, who loved to bury himself among his books and his antiquities, and felt aggrieved when anything tore him away from his family circle or his favourite studies.

To-day, too, his reception-room is crammed to suffocation by gentlemen who seek an audience of his Highness. They are the fugitive Hungarians, of whom the Prince seems to stand in peculiar horror. These restless, bellicose, dark-browed people are an abomination to the easy-going, contemplative Prince. So he shuts himself up in his study, and the only person admitted to his presence is the learned and reverend John Passai, Professor at Nagy-Enyed, beloved by the Prince on account of his profound scholarship.

[Pg 107]

Apafi's private room is more like the study of a scholar than the cabinet of a ruler. All around stands filled with books in gilded bindings hide the walls, and in every corner lie heaps of plans and charts. In the very circumscribed intervening spaces stand consoles with clocks upon them, which the Prince always winds up himself; and the chairs and sofas are so overladen with books for immediate use, that whenever the Prince has a confidential visitor, he hardly knows where to bestow him. Nay, sometimes the stone floor itself is so bestrewn with outspread maps, dusty MSS., and open folios, that Teleki, when he enters, has to walk as circumspectly as one who picks his way circuitously through mud and mire.

The two gentlemen are at the present moment standing before the table, which is covered with all sorts of ancient coins. Apafi wears a short grey coat with loose sleeves, which is fastened round his loins by a silken cord. His headgear consists of a round skin cap. Passai is buttoned up in a dark-green, fur-lined mente, which reaches from his chin to his heels. His thick white hair is shoved back and held together by a large circular comb. His face, despite the wrinkles which cover it, is fresh and ruddy, and his teeth are as perfect as those of a youth.

Apafi is attentively regarding a gold piece, which he poises between his fingers and holds against the light. Passai stands hat in hand before the Prince like a log, with his wrinkled countenance fixed intently on his Highness.

Apafi petulantly turns and twists the coin in all directions.

"These are not Roman letters," he angrily murmurs; "neither are they Greek nor Cyrillic, and least of all Hunnish symbols. Where was it found?" he asked, turning to Passai.

"In Vasarhely, as the Wallachs were removing the ruins of the old temple."

"Deuce take them! They might have been better employed."

"It was a very ancient ruin, what they call a Roman temple."

"But it cannot have been a Roman temple, for this is not a Roman coin."

"That's my opinion too; but the Wallachs have a way of regarding all the ruins in Transylvania as Roman monuments." [Pg 108]

"But why did they take it to pieces?"

"The villagers wanted to make lime of the statues."

"The impious wretches!" cried Apafi indignantly, "to turn such precious masterpieces of art into lime. And you have not striven to save at least a part of it from destruction?"

"I bought the lid of a sarcophagus adorned with sculptures, and a sphinx in a perfect state of preservation; but the Wallach who was charged with their removal was too lazy to have them lifted up as they stood, so he broke up the statues into five or six pieces, so that he might have less trouble in loading his cart."

"That man deserves to be impaled. I will issue a decree that no one shall henceforth lay a hand upon such antiquities."

"I am afraid your Highness will arrive too late, for when the people found that I was paying for these stones, the belief spread among them that I was seeking for diamonds and carbuncles therein, so they smashed the whole mass into such tiny morsels that they could now be offered for sale as sand."

"Have you spoken to that nobleman of Deva about the mosaic?"

"He won't part with it at any price. He said that none of his ancestors had ever carried their property to market. If only he would remove it from the place where he found it, it would be something. But he won't even do that, and now the cow-house stands over it, and the oxen make their beds on the prostrate figures of Venus and Cupid."

"I should very much like to confiscate that man's property, and so come into possession of that priceless curiosity," cried Apafi, with a scholar's zeal, and again he busied himself with the investigation of the enigmatical letters.

At that moment Teleki entered the room with a busy, important look, and drawing from his silken pocket a MS. roll, placed it open in Apafi's hand. The Prince made as though he were reading the document attentively, and wrinkled his brows. Suddenly he looked up and exclaimed joyfully—

"They are Dacian letters!"

"What!" cried Teleki, opening his eyes wide in his astonishment. He was at a loss to explain how the Prince could have found Dacian letters in the Latin MS. which he had just put into his hands. [Pg 109]

"Yes; there can be no doubt about it," continued the Prince. "I recollect reading somewhere—in Dion Cassius, I think—that the Romans, after the fall of Decebalus,^[25] had commemorative medallions struck off with Dacian inscriptions, and the figure of a decapitated man on the reverse. Don't you see the emblem?"

[25] *Decebalus*. King of Dacia during the reigns of Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan.

"But your Highness," interrupted Teleki impatiently, "the memorial which I have handed to you —"

And now for the first time Apafi perceived that a parchment was in his hand awaiting perusal. He returned it sulkily to Teleki.

"I have already told you that I can speak to no one to-day. In a month the session of the Diet will begin, and then the Hungarian gentlemen can ventilate their affairs to their hearts' content."

"I cry your Highness' pardon!" replied Teleki caustically; "this document is not from the Hungarian lords, but from his Excellency the Tartar Khan."

"And what does he want?" cried Apafi, throwing a glance upon the parchment, but when he perceived how long it was he laid it aside. "I will be brief with him. Who brought the letter?"

"An emir."

Apafi immediately threw his attila over his shoulders, girded on his sword, and stepped into the reception-room.

"Good-day! good-day!" he cried hastily to those assembled there. He wished to cut short their long ceremonious greetings, and looked about among them with inquiring eyes.

"Where is the emir?"

The Tartar envoy at once stepped forward. He was a truculent, swarthy fellow, with small sparkling eyes. A heron's plume as long as the shaft of a lance waved from his large turban. He wore a red, richly-fringed jacket, and the gold inlaid hilt of his scimitar peeped forth from his broad girdle. Defiantly he placed himself in front of the Prince and stuck out his chest.

"*Salem alek!* What do you want?" asked Apafi curtly.

The emir measured the Prince from head to foot twice or thrice with his piercing eyes, threw back his head, and said—

[Pg 110]

"My master, the gracious Kuban Khan, bids me say to thee, O Prince of the Giaours, that thou art a perjured, false, and faithless man. Thou didst swear by thy honour that we should be good neighbours, and how hast thou kept thy word? It chanced last year that we traversed the Saxon^[26] land, and visited those towns whose names no true believer can pronounce, to collect the usual yearly tribute. They were ever good payers, but some among them chancing to lag behind with their contributions were, by the order of the most gracious Khan, instantly reduced to ashes that they might learn to behave better another time. And perchance thou dost fancy that they amended their evil ways? Not at all. For when we visited them again this year, we found the charred and naked walls as we had left them the year before: the unbelieving dogs had traitorously fled away. Wherefore my gracious master, the mighty Kuban Khan, bids me ask thee what manner of prince thou art that dost suffer these unbelieving dogs to so forsake their towns and make fools of us. When we came at other times, the hay was housed, the corn thrashed, the cattle stalled—and this time we find nought but weeds, and therein hares and other unclean beasts which ye unbelievers delight to eat, and none of the towns built up again, so that we could take no vengeance. Look to it, then, if thou wouldst not draw down upon thy head the wrath of the mighty Khan, look to it that thou commandest this runaway people to return to its towns that we may reckon with them; and in the meantime bid the remaining Saxon towns, which have faithlessly envired their houses with impregnable walls, that they open their gates to us, otherwise we will visit thee in Klausenburg itself with fire and sword, and will not leave thee one stone upon another."

[26] *Saxons.* Geza II. (1141-1161) planted in Transylvania a German colony to clear the forests and till the lands. These so-called Saxons have survived to the present day, and reside chiefly at Hermannstadt.

Apafi, during the course of this speech, had frequently laid his hand on his sword, but he evidently thought better of it, for it was with the utmost tranquillity that he thus replied—

"Go back! Greet thy master, and say that we will give him satisfaction."

With that he turned his back upon the envoy, and would have returned to his cabinet had not Teleki barred the way.

"That is not enough, your Highness. Once for all we must make it impossible for any dog-headed Tartar to speak such brave words before the throne of the Prince of Transylvania."

[Pg 111]

"Speak to him then yourself!"

Teleki thereupon, with an earnest, dignified mien, stepped up to the emir, stared him out of countenance, and said with a firm voice—

"Thy master is doubtless the ruler of Tartary, but is not my master the Prince of Transylvania? And is not the sublime Sultan the protector of us both? Know then that the sublime Sultan did not make thy master Khan of Tartary that he might dwell in Transylvania, nor has he set my master on the throne of Transylvania to endure the insolence of thy master! Go back then to thine own land, and come not hither again to wonder why a town which is burnt down one year is not built up again the next. We will take good care that all such places are rebuilt, but we will also see

that the bastions are high enough to keep thee out, and shouldst thou desire to visit us at Klausenburg next year, we will also take care that thou shalt not have thy journey for nothing, and will provide guns in abundance to salute thee at a respectful distance."

All this Teleki said to the emir with a perfectly serious countenance.

The emir snorted with fury. His eyes grew bloodshot. His hand played with the hilt of his scimitar, and he stammered with pallid lips—

"If any of my master's servants spoke thus in his presence, he would immediately have his head struck off."

But Apafi tapped Teleki on the shoulder, and murmured as he stroked his beard—

"It is well, Master Michael Teleki! You have spoken like a man."

The emir turned furiously upon his heel, and, shaking the dust from his feet, left the room.

This scene put Apafi in a good humour, especially with Teleki. The minister could read this change of mood in his master's face, and hastened to make use of it. Taking one of the many suitors by the hand, he presented him to Apafi with these words—

"My future son-in-law, your Highness."

Apafi would probably have escaped from a presentation made in any other way; but made in this form he could not possibly avoid it. He was compelled to cast a glance upon the young man.

[Pg 112]

The person so presented was a tall, handsome stripling with blooming red cheeks and no trace, as yet, of a beard. In his femininely beautiful features, it was pride alone which revealed the man.

The youth pleased Apafi.

"What is your son-in-law's name?" he asked Teleki.

With a peculiar smile Teleki said—

"Emerich, Stephen Tököly's son."

On hearing this name, Apafi suddenly became very grave, and said to the young man—

"Your father was a good friend to me"—and yet he did not extend his hand to the son.

"I know it," replied the youth, "and for that reason I have come to your Highness."

"But your late father—God rest him!—was an unruly spirit. It is well that you have not followed in his footsteps. He was never happy unless he was fighting. The thunder of artillery was a vital necessity to him, and the last hours of his life were spent at a siege. Well for you that you do not imitate him! You seem to me a very steady, quiet sort of young man."

"Oh! such praise as that I'm sure I don't deserve," replied Tököly proudly; "I also was at the siege you speak of, and defended the fortress till my father died."

Apafi did not like to be interrupted in this way, but, meaning to show his sympathy, he added, after a pause—

"And how then did you manage to escape, my son?"

Emerich blushed deeply and would not answer; but Teleki, by way of correcting his young kinsman's intemperate zeal, answered apologetically—

"The fact is, he was then very young, so they disguised him in woman's clothes, and he was thus able to elude the vigilance of the besiegers."

Apafi immediately recovered his good-humour. He playfully stroked the youth's blood-red cheeks, and signified to Teleki that he might now introduce the other gentlemen also.

They were all fugitives from Hungary, and the Prince did his best to appear gracious towards them; but, in the meantime, one of the court ushers entered and announced with a loud voice—

[Pg 113]

"His Excellency Monsieur l'Abbé Reverend, the French Envoy, desires an audience."

This announcement again filled Apafi with embarrassment. He drew Teleki aside and whispered in his ear—

"I will not, I cannot receive him. Go out and speak to him yourself, and explain how matters stand." And with that he hastily quitted the reception-room, delighted at having this time shifted the difficulty on to Teleki's shoulders; but he remained listening at the door to find out whether there would be any violent explosion behind his back.

And an explosion there certainly was, though not of a particularly terrifying character.

The Prince heard Teleki burst into a jovial peal of laughter, whereupon all the gentlemen present with one accord followed his example, just as if they were taking part in some intensely amusing diversion.

"It must indeed be a very peculiar phenomenon which extorts such extravagant merriment from

these sour-faced gentry," thought Apafi, and he half opened the door—he could not quite open it, because learned Master Passai, ordinarily a miracle of gravity, had so given himself up to mirth that he was forced to lean back against the Prince's cabinet.

"Let me come in, Master Passai!" cried the inquisitive Prince, and succeeding shortly afterwards in opening the door, the cause of the general mirth was immediately obvious to him.

The Abbé Reverend stood in the centre of the room in full Hungarian costume. A more comical figure was scarcely conceivable.

The worthy gentleman, who rejoiced in the possession of a really redoubtable corporation, standing there, clean shaven and benignly smiling, presented an amiably ludicrous figure, of which only an Hungarian, or one who knows what a severe criterion of the human figure the tight-fitting Magyar costume really is, can form any idea. Add to this that the worthy Frenchman, in his stiff hose and spurred jack-boots, moved about as gingerly as if he feared every moment to fall on his nose. He had also forgotten to buckle on his girdle, which lent a peculiar quaintness to his general get-up, and his long bag-wig, in which he looked like a lion, was surmounted by a tiny round cap from which waved a gigantic heron plume.

Apafi did not see why he too should not smile when the others laughed.

Monsieur Reverend, with that facility peculiar to Frenchmen of coupling gaiety with solemnity, tripped at once up to the Prince and said—

[Pg 114]

"Your Highness's persistent refusal to receive me made me assume that perchance I did not present myself becomingly attired, and my present good-fortune demonstrates the correctness of my assumption, for the moment I present myself in Magyar costume I am lucky enough to behold you."

"Parbleu, Monsieur!" returned Apafi, repressing his merriment with difficulty, "I am always glad to see you on condition that politics are banished from our discourse. But you have not fastened on your scarf, and without the scarf a person in the Magyar dress looks for all the world like a Frenchman who has forgotten to put on his breeches."

With these words the Prince produced a scarf adorned with gems, and tied it with his own hands round the respectable waist of Monsieur Reverend.

"And what's this? Who taught you to stuff your pocket-handkerchief into your trousers pocket? Only heydukes do that. What the deuce! A nobleman always keeps his pocket-handkerchief in his kalpag. So! Hem! What a beautiful pocket-handkerchief you've got!"

"Splendid, is it not?"

"Indeed it is! A garland pattern in silk thread, with gold and silver embroideries at the corners. Only Paris can produce the like of this."

"And yet it was manufactured in Transylvania."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes; and what is more, in this very place, in Ebesfalva."

Apafi looked at Monsieur Reverend with amazement.

"And I not to know the artistic hands which work such beautiful things!"

"But your Highness does know them. The name of the fair artist will be found embroidered in gorgeous Gothic letters on the hem of the handkerchief."

Apafi carefully examined all the corners of the handkerchief one after the other. Each had a different device embroidered on it—here a wreath of oak-leaves, there a trophy, in the third a Turkish scimitar, an Hungarian sabre, and a French sword bound together by a ribbon. At last he came to the fourth corner, where, beneath a princely coronet, was embroidered the word *Apafiné*.^[27]

[27] *Apafiné* = Lady Apafi. The "né" is a feminine suffix.

The Prince read the name aloud. All who stood around looked at Apafi's face with fearful suspense, as if they expected an explosion of wrath. To every one's surprise, however, the Prince only smiled, stuck the pocket-handkerchief into Monsieur Reverend's kalpag, cocked it rakishly on the ambassador's head, and said to him with peculiar *bonhomie*—

[Pg 115]

"So you have succeeded in seducing my wife, eh?"

Reverend laughed awkwardly at what was a rather ambiguous jest so far as he was concerned.

"Me, however, you shall not seduce," added Apafi, smiling.

Reverend bowed deeply; then, throwing back his head, he observed archly—

"That will be brought about also, I hope, though by mightier than I."

At that moment the door opened and a servant announced—"Her Highness, Dame Anna of Bornemissa, his Highness's consort, desires an audience of the Prince."

Apafi looked at Teleki.

"This is all your doing."

Teleki calmly replied—"It is, your Highness."

"You have besieged us in form?"

"I do not deny it, your Highness."

"It was you who brought the ambassador to the Princess?"

"Such is indeed the case, your Highness."

"And it was you who then advised him to present himself in this masquerade in order to lure me hither more easily?"

"I did it all, your Highness."

"Then you have done a very foolish thing, Master Michael Teleki."

"That remains to be seen, your Highness," replied the minister proudly, conscious of his own intellectual superiority.

Meanwhile Dame Apafi had entered the room; her princely robes well became her princely aspect. All the gentlemen present hastened forward to do her homage. But Apafi also advanced quickly towards her, put his arm through hers, and with marked tenderness endeavoured to lead her into his cabinet.

"No; let us remain here," cried the Princess; "there will be plenty of time later on to look at your Dutch clocks. Far more serious matters claim our attention first. These gentlemen from Hungary desire an audience."

Apafi exploded at once.

"I know beforehand what they want, and I have declared once for all that I will hear no more of the matter." [Pg 116]

"But you will surely listen to me. I too am an Hungarian woman, and in the name of my fatherland I implore the Prince of Transylvania for help. None shall say that I rule the Prince in secret. Look now, I advance openly before his throne, and I beg of him protection for Hungary, whose sons are called strangers in Transylvania, though I, her daughter, am the Princess."

From Apafi's looks it was clear that he would much rather have listened to the Hungarian gentlemen than to his own consort. But he was caught in a trap. She stood before him as a petitioner. There was no escape.

Teleki bade the pages in waiting at the door admit no one else. Apafi, with a gesture of impatience, sat down in an arm-chair, and resigned himself to listen to his consort; but Anna had scarcely commenced to speak, when the rattling of a coach was heard in the courtyard, and shortly afterwards heavy footsteps resounded in the corridors, and a stern, dictatorial voice, with which every one appeared to be familiar, asked if the Prince was in. The pages said No, and tried to stop the intruder, but exclaiming, "Out of my way, you brats!" he burst open the door and forced his way into the room. It was none other than Denis Banfi.

He had just descended from his carriage. His cheeks were much redder than usual, and his eyes sparkled. He went straight towards the Prince and cried, without the slightest preamble—

"Do not listen to these gentlemen, your Highness! Do not listen to a single word."

The Prince smiled and greeted Banfi.

"God preserve you, my cousin," said he.

"Pardon me, your Highness, if in my great haste I neglected to salute you; but when I heard that the Hungarian gentlemen were here in audience, I was quite beside myself with rage. What do you want?" continued he, turning towards the Hungarians; "not satisfied, I suppose, with ruining your own country with your unruliness, you must needs come hither to disturb us likewise?"

"You speak of us," remarked Teleki, with quiet sarcasm, "as if we belonged to some outlandish Tartar stock, and as if we had been cast hither from heaven only knows what sort of savage, distant land."

"On the contrary, I know you only too well, ye Hungarian lords. I speak of you as men whose turbulence has, time out of mind, been ruinous to Transylvania. The people of Hungary are idiots one and all." [Pg 117]

"I beg you not to lose sight of the fact that I too am one of them," said the Princess.

"I know it; and it is with anything but satisfaction that I see the will of your Highness predominant here."

Dame Apafi, with an expression of wounded dignity, turned towards her brother-in-law.

"Whatever you may say, I will not cease to be your good kinswoman and well-wisher," and with

these words she quitted the room.

"You might at least have addressed the Prince more becomingly," remarked Teleki, sharply.

"Have I then spoken one word to the Prince?" asked Banfi, shrugging his shoulders. "How can I even reach his Highness when you are always standing in the way? I am and always will be the enemy of those who have no right whatever to stand on the steps of the throne, and you are one of them, Master Michael Teleki. Oh, don't imagine that the reasons which make you so enthusiastic in the Hungarian cause are hidden from me. You are not content with being the first in Transylvania after the Prince; you would fain become Palatine of Hungary^[28] as well. Ha! ha! how you all befool one another. The French promise aid to the Hungarians; the Hungarians promise Teleki the dignity of Palatine; Teleki promises Apafi a kingly crown, and ye lie, the whole lot of you; ye deceive and are deceived."

[28] *Palatine* (Hungarian: "*Nador*"). The Palatine was the highest dignitary in Hungary after the King. The dignity was instituted soon after the year 1000, but since 1848 has been found incompatible with modern parliamentary government.

"Sir," replied Teleki, bitterly, "is that the way to speak to guests, to exiled, unhappy fellow-countrymen?"

"Don't teach me how to be generous," retorted Banfi, proudly. "At my house the poor and the persecuted have ever found an asylum, and if these fugitive gentlemen wish us to share house and home with them, I'm ready to do so. Here's my hand upon it. But just as I should be out of my senses to burn my own house down, so now too I protest against the conflagration of my country; and if you do not cease from troubling a peaceful land, I'll leave no stone unturned till I have driven you all out."

"We ought not to be surprised at this tone, my friends," said Teleki, with bitter scorn, turning towards the Hungarians. "His Excellency here has been so very recently amnestied by the Prince, that he imagines he is still at war with us."

[Pg 118]

Apafi, who had been sitting on burning coals, now interposed.

"Cease this bickering. We dismiss you all. You see that sundry of our councillors are against the matter, and without their consent I can do nothing."

"Then," cried Teleki, with solemn emphasis, "we appeal to the Diet."

"I too will be there," said Banfi.

The Prince, very much offended, withdrew to his cabinet. The Hungarian nobles, much excited, went out by the other door. Teleki remained behind. Banfi, adjusting his marten-skin cap, haughtily measured his opponent from head to foot, and exclaimed ironically as he went out—"I leave my reputation behind me!" Teleki returned his gaze with the most nonchalant sangfroid.

When every one had disappeared, Teleki whispered some words to a page, who went out and returned in a few moments with a florid, curly-headed young man. Methinks we have seen this youth somewhere or other before, though only for an instant which we cannot call to mind. A beggar's sack hangs down over his ragged clothing, his hand holds a knobby stick.

"So you permit me at last to approach the Prince?" said he, in a somewhat dictatorial tone.

"Sit down here by the door," replied the minister; "the Prince goes to dinner shortly, and will pass by this way. You can then speak to him."

The young man with the beggar's sack sat for a long time at the Prince's door, till Apafi came out of his room on his way to dinner. The beggar with the knapsack planted himself right in his Highness's way.

"Who are you?" asked the Prince, much surprised.

"I am that renowned warrior, Emerich Balassa, who once was one of the chief men of Hungary, and now stands before your Highness with the beggar's staff."

"You were involved, I understand, in that conspiracy against us?" said Apafi, disagreeably flurried.

"That I was not, your Highness. If you would deign to listen to my tale, then——"

"Speak!"

[Pg 119]

"There was once in Hungary a famous Turkish freebooter, named Corsar Beg, who for a long time ravaged the mountain regions. The banded might of six counties was insufficient to besiege him in his fortress. This man I captured by subtlety. By promises and flatteries I won over his favourite slave, who enticed him out of his stronghold by night and alone. I, duly advertised thereof, fell upon him with horsemen ambushed in the woods, and took captive both him and his slave, who is the most beautiful and the most abandoned of her sex in the whole world."

"I have heard of you, Master Balassa. It was a daring deed."

"Listen further, your Highness. No sooner had the news of my capture spread abroad, than the Palatine of Hungary, very emphatically, insisted upon my handing over the prisoners to him. The

Turks had already offered me a ransom of sixteen thousand ducats for the pair, but I would not part with the girl at any price. I therefore sent word to the Palatine that if he wanted a Beg of his own he must catch one, for I had not captured mine on his account."

Apafi laughed heartily. "That was one for him!"

"Thereupon the Palatine waxed wroth, and by the Emperor's command sent out troops against me to rob me of my captives. Now just at this very time, your Highness's brother-in-law, Denis Banfi, had taken refuge in my castle, and to him I entrusted the slave, of whom I was madly enamoured. He was to fly with her to my castle of Ecsed, and as I saw that the Palatine was bent upon securing Corsar Beg for himself in order to cut off his head at Buda as a warning to all malefactors, I gave the Turk poison, which he, to escape the scaffold, thankfully accepted. When, therefore, the troops of the Palatine arrived at my house, all that they found there was the cold corpse, which the Turks afterwards purchased from me for a thousand ducats."

"The Palatine was naturally very angry, I suppose?" remarked Apafi.

"'Twas I who had cause to be angry, for all through him I lost fifteen thousand ducats, and yet he succeeded in obtaining an order for my apprehension from the Emperor. I scented the danger in time, and got together my valuables in order to fly into Transylvania, and remain there till the affair had blown over. First of all, then, I hastened to my castle at Ecsed, whither, as I have said, I had sent Banfi on beforehand with the Turkish slave. While still on the way, I learnt that Banfi had been restored by your Highness's amnesty to his former position. I rejoiced greatly thereat, supposing that I now had in him a powerful protector. Nevertheless, on reaching Ecsed, I found no sign or trace of the girl. My castellan there informed me that Banfi had carried her off with him, and left a letter behind for me, which contained the following words—'Learn from this, my friend, that there are three things you should never entrust to another—your horse, your watch, and your mistress!'"

[Pg 120]

"What!" cried Apafi; "is this really true?"

"Pray let your Highness look at his own writing," and he drew the letter in question out of his leather knapsack. "He is said to have concealed the girl somewhere in his forests at Banfi-Hunyad."

Apafi turned scarlet with rage.

"'Tis monstrous!" cried he. "This fellow possesses a virtuous and lovely wife of his own—my consort's own sister—and yet he can so far forget his duty as a husband! I'll not put up with it!"

"Pardon me, your Highness; I have nothing more to do with Banfi now. My complaint is against one Kapi, who had the usufruct of my Transylvanian property. Not wishing, then, to have anything more to do with Banfi, I took up my quarters with Kapi at Aranyosi Castle. Your Highness, the pomp which that man displays exceeds anything that I have ever seen, and I have seen many princely and palatinal courts in my day. His wife never uses her feet at all. Even if she wants to get to the door, she is carried thither in a gilded sedan-chair, and she never wears a dress more than once!"

"But what have I to do with the frippery of Dame Kapi?"

"I'm coming to that. Her love of display costs money, and has compelled her husband to resort to fraudulent practices. And besides, such extravagance concerns your Highness also, as tending to emphasize the contrast already apparent between the frugal simplicity of your Highness's court and the dazzling pomp of these petty kings—a contrast which has already made a pretty deep impression upon our foreign visitors. Thus, quite recently, the Bavarian minister, who had come from a banquet at Ebesfalva to Aranyosi, remarked in a flattering tone to Dame Kapi, in my hearing, that she was the real Princess of Transylvania."

"He said that, did he?" cried the Prince, becoming much interested. "Go on with your narrative. So he said that Kapi's wife was the real Princess, eh?"

[Pg 121]

"Yet strip from off her her costly pearls and diamonds, and you will see that in regard to beauty and majesty she is not fit to lace the shoes of her Highness the Princess Apafi."

"Go on! go on!"

"Well, one fine day this same Kapi came to me, and told me that your Highness had been commanded by the Palatine to arrest and deliver me over to him."

"I receive a command! I know absolutely nothing about it."

"Unfortunately I believed his words, and imagining myself caught between two fires, I made over my Transylvanian property to Kapi to save it from confiscation, he at the same time delivering to me an undertaking to re-transfer the estates as soon as possible. Meanwhile I resolved to fly to Poland, and stay there till the storm blew over. Kapi gave me two guides, who were to conduct me through the mountain-passes to the frontier; but at the same time he secretly informed the frontier sentinels that I was a spy sent by the Emperor to explore Transylvania, and was now desirous of returning unobserved. So the rogues waylaid me, robbed me of all my money and papers, and dragged me to Fehervar, where my innocence came to light, but my money and papers were of course hopelessly lost. And now this Kapi actually maintains that I sold him all my property, and I've nothing in the world but this leather knapsack round my neck, with which I

must now beg my way about."

"Be of good cheer. I will give you the most exemplary satisfaction," returned the enraged Prince.

"It is a matter which also concerns your Highness's own dignity," replied Balassa. "These great lords behave in as high-handed a fashion as if they had absolutely no superior."

"Be easy. I will very soon show them who is the real Prince of Transylvania."

Apafi, full of indignation, then left the audience-chamber.

A storm was gathering over the heads of two great men who stood in Teleki's way.

BOOK II. THE DEVIL'S GARDEN.

CHAPTER I. THE PATROL.

[Pg 125]

Clement the Clerk stuck his pen behind his ear and recited to himself the elegant verses which he had just composed, two hundred strophes in all, almost every line of which ended in *fuera*, with a sporadic *fuisse* in between.

Michael Apafi used regularly to repent whenever he had offended any one, and he therefore could not rest till he had compensated the itinerant scholar Clement for the snub he had administered to him, and this he did by making the unsophisticated poet his—Patrol-officer.

In those days many agreeable duties were connected with this office—duties which Clement simply left alone, devoting himself instead to the composition of epics and chronicles, which he manufactured in great abundance.

At that moment he was casting his eyes over a great epic, in which he recorded how his Highness, Prince Michael Apafi, had gone out against Érsekújvár to besiege it; how with splendid valour he had arrived there; how, on beholding the foe, he had drawn his sword; how, after mature deliberation, he had turned back again; and how, finally, he and all his heroes had returned home again safe and sound.

Poetic distraction had so completely absorbed the faculties of Clement the Clerk, that a week had already elapsed since his servant had made off with his master's spurred jack-boots, without the latter, in his capacity of Patrol-officer, thinking of pursuing the runaway; but in fact he was confined within a vicious circle, inasmuch as every time he thought of inquiring for his boots, it occurred to him that his servant had stolen them; and every time he thought of going out and inquiring for his servant, it occurred to him that he had no boots. What could he do then under such circumstances but sit down again, and write poems in absolutely endless quantities?

[Pg 126]

His room had not been swept out for weeks, naturally therefore there was no lack of dust and cobwebs; but, by way of contrast, the deal floor all around the solitary table was mottled with ink-blots. The table itself had only two legs, the place of the others being supplied by layers of bricks.

The poet scribbles, erases, and nibbles at his pen; on the window-sill lies a piece of bread and some cheese; it occurs to the poet that it has been put there for him to eat; but first he must use up the ink still remaining in his pen, and in doing so another idea occurs to him, and after that a third, and then a fourth; meanwhile mice come skipping out of a hole beneath the window-sill, frisk about the bread and cheese, nibble away at it till not a morsel remains, and then skip back into their holes again. The poet having wearied out his Pegasus, starts up, looks for his bread and cheese, and perceiving that only the crumbs remain on the window-sill, concludes that he has already eaten his fill, so sits him down again and goes on writing.

While he is thus plaguing himself for the benefit of posterity, somebody begins scratching at the door, and after groping about the door-hinge in search of the door-latch, finds it at last, and shakes it to and fro as if he does not know what to do with it. This disturbance disagreeably awakens Clement the Clerk out of his poetic reveries, who, after vainly exclaiming in a loud and angry voice that the door is not bolted, finds himself at last obliged to rise from his seat and open the door himself, lest the importunate visitor should break off the latch or lift the door bodily from its hinges.

Before him, with a sealed letter in his hand, stands a gaping Wallach peasant, who appears extraordinarily terrified to see the door open, though that was the very thing he had been aiming at all along.

"Well, what is it?" snapped Clement the Clerk, horribly angry. "Why don't you speak?"

The Wallach raised his round eyebrows, which looked, for all the world, like a charcoal smear extending from his nostrils to his temples, and which also served him as a kind of propeller for shoving backwards and forwards the lamb's-wool cap that he wore half over his face, looked at

the poet with wide-open eyes, and asked him—

"Are you he whom they pay to tell lies?"

The Wallach meant no offence by this terminology. It was only his roundabout way of describing Clement the Clerk's sphere of activity.

[Pg 127]

The poet was almost choking with rage.

"And whose ox are you?" he exclaimed furiously.

"The ox of his Excellency who sent this letter," he answered with perfect simplicity.

"What is your master's name?" cried Clement, angrily snatching the letter out of the Wallach's hand.

"They call him Excellency."

Clement tore open the letter and read as follows—"I want a word or two with you; follow the bearer whithersoever he leads you."

Clement was wroth enough already, but the reflection that he was summoned away on important business, and had no boots to go in, was the last straw. He was quite beside himself.

"Go," cried he to the Wallach, "and tell your master, whoever he may be, that he is as near to me as I am to him; if he wants to speak to me, let him take the trouble to come hither. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Dumni Macska" (Mister Pussy), returned the Wallach, involuntarily using in his fright the nickname secretly given by the Roumanian peasants to the Patrol-officer when he is making his rounds; and with that he slouched out of the room.

Meanwhile Clement, with a great muscular effort, had climbed on to his high-backed chair again, and placed two huge folios upright on the floor in front of him, so that his coming visitor might not see that he was bare-footed.

In a short time strident, energetic footsteps were audible outside, and Clement the Clerk, peeping out of the window, perceived to his no small confusion that his visitor was none other than his Excellency, Count Ladislaus Csaky, accompanied by two gold-laced heydukes.

"Clement," thought the clerk to himself, "now's the time to assert your dignity! No doubt his lordship is a great man and a high; but, on the other hand, he is in the Prince's bad books, while you, my boy, are in high favour at court, and a public officer to boot." So he hid his feet behind his books, stuck his pen between his lips, and when Csaky came in did not so much as offer him a seat.

Csaky seemed much put out by this reception.

"You have a very high opinion of your official dignity," said he to Clement.

[Pg 128]

"I am what I am thanks to the favour of the Prince," returned Clement haughtily, crossing his arms with an air of importance.

"I too have come hither by the Prince's command. His Highness has just entrusted me with a very delicate errand, in which I need your help; but the affair must be managed with the utmost secrecy, and that was why I wanted you to come out to me."

At this explanation Clement the Clerk forgot his dignity altogether.

"I beg you a thousand pardons," stammered he in great confusion, and with meekly-bowed head. "I did not know—pray be seated!" As however there was no other chair in the room but that on which he sat, he sprang down from it to give place to the Count, thereby revealing the fact that his feet were minus their legitimate coverings, at which Csaky laughed till his jaws ached.

"Why, deuce take it, Mr. Officer, is it from a feeling of excessive reverence that you take off your boots like the Turks do?"

"I beg your pardon! I have not taken them off; but my servant ran away with them while I slept, and that was the sole reason why I was forced to send your lordship that churlish message, which I hope your lordship has long since forgotten."

At this Csaky's mirth became downright uproarious.

"Well, if that is all, we will soon find a remedy," said he to Clement; and calling the heydukes, bade them fetch at once his own parade boots out of his carriage.

Clement instantly began to raise objections: he could not think of it; the honour was too great. But when his eyes fell upon the boots, they took his fancy immediately, for they were made of the finest green morocco, sewn with gold thread, trimmed on both sides with galloon, and provided with enamelled spurs.

"Quick! on with them!" cried Csaky to the Patrol-officer; "for you must set out upon your journey without delay."

So Clement the Clerk seized one of the boots by the tags, and after bestowing a smile upon it,

proceeded to pull it on. But this of itself was no light labour, for Csaky wore very small, tight-fitting, gentlemanlike boots, whereas Clement the Clerk was a very large-footed animal; so that it was not till after three desperate struggles had completely exhausted him that he managed to get one foot half-way down the leg of the first boot, and all the time he made such grimaces that Ladislaus Csaky had to put his head out of the window to hide his merriment. When he got as far as the heel, he stuck fast again, so that he had to seize the straps with both hands and stamp his way down, hopping round the room all the while, with his body forming a complete curve, and groaning aloud at every forward shove; so that by the time he had wriggled into one boot, the eyes of the poor poet were almost starting from their sockets, and the sweat trickled from his cheeks.

Similar difficulties awaited the good Patrol-officer with the second foot; but after working with six-horse power to force his foot into a receptacle never intended for it, he was at last able, with the ruddiness of satisfaction on his cheeks, to take a smiling survey of his gorgeous, tight-fitting boots, which harmonized so delightfully with the other dusty, greasy, ink-bespattered constituent parts of his dress.

"Now, mark what I say!" said Csaky, sitting down with a lordly air on the solitary chair, whilst the clerk, standing before him, raised first one and then the other leg aloft, at the same time uttering a peculiar hissing sound, and turning a livid green and blue in his agony, for the boots had now begun to play havoc with his corns. "When did you last go your rounds?"

"I really don't know."

"But you ought to know. Why don't you make a note of it? The Prince wishes you to go your rounds at once, and you must look particularly sharp after all the places between Toroczko, Banfi-Hunyad, and Bonczhida. Besides the usual questions, you must ask the people whether they have seen any foreign wild beast in the surrounding woods."

"Foreign wild beast?" mechanically repeated the wretched Patrol-officer.

"And if at any place they tell you they have seen such beast, you must go personally into the districts indicated, and search till you come upon its track."

"I cry your Excellency's pardon! but what manner of beast may it be?" asked the student timidly.

"Come, come! don't be afraid! It is neither a seven-headed dragon nor yet a minotaur, but only a young panther." [Pg 130]

"A panther!" stammered the terrified Clement.

"You are not expected to catch it," said Csaky cheerily. "You have only to discover its hiding-place and let me know."

"And if this wild beast—whose existence indeed in Transylvania I very much doubt—should stray into the territory of Denis Banfi," asked Clement, "what am I to do then?"

"You must go after it."

"I cry your Excellency's pardon, but his property is a *liber baronatus*, where my jurisdiction ceases."

"Don't be so stupid, Clement," said Csaky. "I never said you were to repair thither *vi et armis*: the whole expedition must remain a secret. You have only to follow the wild beast's track. We have it, on the best authority, that the beast is somewhere in the neighbourhood, and we trust to your dexterity to spot it. The rest will be done by more enterprising people than yourself."

Clement regarded the mission as altogether odd and risky, but he dared not raise any objection, so he simply bowed low and sighed deeply.

"Above all things we must have dexterity, expedition, and secrecy. Keep that constantly in mind."

"I will go at once," cried Clement desperately; "but first I must borrow me a horse from some one or other, for I should not like to utterly ruin these beautiful boots by walking in them."

"That too would be a little too slow for our purpose. But don't bother your head about a horse. One of my heydukes will give you his, which you must mount at once. Remember however to give him oats occasionally, as I don't want him to come back all skin and bone."

Clement the Clerk, quite confounded by so much graciousness, hastily shouldered his shabby knapsack, fastened his rusty sword to his side, and after placing in his knapsack a roll of parchment, a goose-quill, and a wooden ink-horn, declared himself ready to depart.

"You have a very light equipment," remarked Csaky.

"*Integer vitae, scelerisque purus, non eget Mauri jaculis neque arcu,*" returned the philosopher with a classical flourish, and when the reins had been placed in his hands, he prepared to mount. But the aristocratic charger, as soon as he perceived that the clerk had one foot in the stirrups, began to plunge, buck, and run round and round, thereby compelling the aspiring poet to hop along with him on one foot, till the laughing heydukes seized the horse by the bridle, and helped the unpractised horseman into the saddle. As however he had very long legs, and the wicked heydukes had lashed the stirrups up very high, he was obliged to squat upon the horse as if it had [Pg 131]

been a camel.

Ladislaus Csaky bawled after him once more not to forget what he had told him, whereupon the poet, quite unintentionally, gave his horse the spur, and dashed madly off at full tilt over stock and stone. Mantle, sabre, and knapsack flew about the ears of the unfortunate horseman, who held on to his saddle with both hands in mortal agony, to the intense delight of the whole population of Toroczko, who were sitting in groups outside their houses on their *beard-driers*, as the benches used to be called in those days.

First of all the Patrol-officer took the road to Abrudbánya. Formerly, while he still had a servant, Clement used to leave all the pioneering to him; but now he was forced to find his way from village to village himself, with the occasional assistance of the country magistrates.

He had just quitted the narrow mountain path, and was ambling slowly over a dilapidated bridge, which spanned a brawling stream, when he perceived in the thicket a group of dirty-looking men crouching over a large fire. At first he took them for gipsies, but, approaching nearer, was horrified to discover that they were Tartars, who had dismounted from their horses, and were sitting round an ox which they had roasted whole.

To turn back was scarcely advisable; but the road he was following went straight past the diners. Clement was in a fix; but he determined at last to put a bold face on the matter, so he trotted by the gaping group with affected nonchalance, pretending to be intent all the while on calculating the exact number of acorns on the wayside oaks, and merely raised his hat to the Tartars with a brief "*Salem aleikum!*" when he came close up to them, as if he only then perceived them for the first time, passing quickly on without looking once behind him.

So far all was well, but at that very moment two of the Tartars sprang up from the fire and called to the rider to stop. Clement, perceiving that they were both unarmed, argued therefrom that they had no murderous designs upon him, and therefore halted and awaited them. [Pg 132]

No sooner had the two dog-headed figures come up to him, one on each side, than they caught hold of his legs and displayed no less an intention than to rob him of his beautiful boots.

"Would you? ye sons of Belial!" cried Clement, beside himself with rage, and grasping the hilt of his sword he tried to pull it from its leather sheath, in order to cut off the ears of his assailants forthwith. But the good blade, which had not quitted its sheath for ten years, had grown so rusty that Clement, despite all his endeavours, could not pluck it forth, and in the meantime the two Tartars pulled the wriggling rider hither and thither by the legs, naturally without succeeding in loosening the tight-fitting boots in the least. The Tartars reviled Clement, and Clement reviled the Tartars: their language was perfectly horrible.

The noise brought the Aga to the spot—an ourang-outang-like object whose mahogany features were framed by a white beard—and he asked in a hoarse whisper what was the matter.

Clement the Clerk at once drew his credentials from the pocket of his mente, and shook it in the Aga's face—he was too wrathful to speak—while the Tartars, pointing with frantic gestures at the boots, jabbered something to the Aga.

"Who art thou, O bow-legged unbeliever!" asked the Aga, "that thou dost presume to wear on thy lowest extremities, on thy mud-wading feet, forsooth! the sacred colour of the Prophet, that radiant green which the faithful may only behold on the arches of their mosques and on the turban of the Padishah? Thou shalt be burned alive, thou godless Giaour!"

"I am the Patrol-officer of his Highness Prince Michael Apafi!" declaimed the ex-student, with terrified pathos. "My person is sacred and inviolable. I am he who provides the host of the sublime Sultan with meat and drink; I proclaim and collect the taxes, so let me go, for I am a very important personage."

This mode of defence pleased the Tartars. The Aga exchanged glances with his subalterns, as much as to say—"This is the very man we want!" and addressed him again in a more friendly tone.

"Dost thou indeed collect the taxes? Look now! my master, Ali Pasha of Grosswardein, has sent me hither to notify to the people a fresh imposition. Allah hath clearly brought us together. Thou wilt act discreetly then by proclaiming the new tax at once. It is no more than thy duty." [Pg 133]

"I'll do so gladly," replied Clement, who made as if he were going.

"Stay, my son," said the Aga, beckoning to him. "Thou dost not even know yet the amount of the new tax. 'Tis a mere trifle, and only imposed by way of showing that we are the masters here. 'Tis only a farthing per head. That's not much, I'm sure."

"Nothing at all!" assented Clement, eager to be off.

"Not so fast! not so fast!" remonstrated the Aga. "I shall not be best pleased if thou dost disobey my orders; but as I know that thou dost not regard it as perjury to break promises made to us, I'll tell off one of my brave fellows here to accompany thee from village to village, and take care that thou dost duly proclaim the new tax whithersoever thou goest."

"It is well, gracious sir," said Clement meekly, with the mental reservation of ridding himself of

the brave fellow at the very next village.

"Mount your horse, Zülfikar," cried the Aga to one of his servants.

The person addressed was an evil-looking fellow with a malignant squint. Although just as dirty as the others, it was clear from his physiognomy that he was not made of the same stuff, and if we condescended to bestow any thought at all upon such low people, it might even occur to us that we had seen him somewhere else before.

"As for thee," said the Aga to Clement, who was anxious to be off at any price, "take off thy boots as soon as thou gettest home, and if ever I meet thee with them on again, thou shalt receive from me five hundred strokes on the soles of thy feet, which thou wilt have cause to recollect even on thy wedding-day."

Clement the Clerk said "Yes" to everything, rejoiced that he had got off at last, and trotted off towards Abrudbánya. His Tartar escort rode faithfully by his side.

From time to time the Patrol-officer cast a sidelong glance at his companion, only quickly to avert his eyes again, for as the Tartar squinted horribly, Clement could never exactly make out which way he was looking. Clement was thinking all the while how easily he would give the Tartar the slip, smiled to himself at the thought, winked with both eyes, and nodded his head with a self-satisfied air.

[Pg 134]

"Mr. Patrol-officer, don't fancy you will circumvent me as you go your rounds!" exclaimed the Tartar suddenly, in the purest Hungarian, as if he could read Clement's thought from his face.

Clement was so aghast that he almost fell from his horse. How the deuce could the fellow snap up his very thoughts, and speak Hungarian despite his Tartardom?

"Don't bother your head about me any more," continued the Turk calmly. "I am an Hungarian renegade who was once in the service of Emerich Balassa. I had a hand in the capture and poisoning of Corsar Beg, and when the Hungarians began to persecute me on that account, I turned Turk. If the Prophet befriend me, I may yet rise to be Kapudan Pasha. Pray don't imagine you can bamboozle a wily old fox like me."

Clement, completely disconcerted, could only scratch his head, proceeded with his escort from village to village, and after accomplishing his regular official business, proclaimed the fresh imposition of a farthing per head, which the people everywhere received most favourably, in many cases even paying it down at once to his Tartar comrade.

But no one knew anything about the panther. Indeed, but for the respect inspired by his gallooned green boots, the Patrol-officer would have been laughed out of countenance.

Only one little Wallachian village up in the mountains, called Marisel, was yet to be visited, and beyond that place began the domains of Baron Banfi, where the jurisdiction of the Patrol-officer terminated.

Thither also the renegade followed him.

[Pg 135]

CHAPTER II. SANGE MOARTE. [29]

[29] *Sange moarte*. Dead blood (Roumanian).

The Patrol-officer and his companion had already been travelling for half the day across the Batrina moor on their way to Marisel. Clement kept on asking every living soul he met where the village was, and always received the same answer—"Further on!"

From time to time they met a Wallachian peasant reviling the team of sluggish oxen spanned to his huge wagon, and vainly endeavouring to make them quicken their pace; then there were ponds to be waded, where half-naked gipsy bands, in picturesque rags, were washing gold-dust out of the sand, and stared at the Tartar as if he were a wild beast; here and there, in the mossy hollow of a wayside tree, stood an icon, the pale, weather-worn gilding of which being all that remained of its once gorgeous colouring; in the worm-eaten niche stood the *pomana*, [30] a pitcher of pure spring water which the traditional piety of the young Wallachian maidens had placed there for the refreshment of thirsty travellers.

[30] *Pomana*, or *pomena*. An alms, a voluntary free succour. The etymology is obscure. Some opine that it is a corruption of *per* and *manus*.

The road now went up hill and down dale; for the greater part of the way they had to lead their horses. All around stood the ever-changing wilderness; lofty, perpendicular beeches, terebinthine oaks, with an occasional dark-green pine. At last they reached a point where the road divided. One branch of it ran right down into the valley, the other wound obliquely up to the summit of a

bald bleak hill, from which a projecting rock hung down so precipitately that it seemed ready to fall every moment.

"Well, whither shall we turn now?" asked Clement, hesitating. "I have never come so far as this before."

[Pg 136]

"Let us follow the road," returned Zülfikar; "none but a fool would risk his neck up that steep cliff."

Clement looked about him in great perplexity, and suddenly perceived a man sitting on the rock which so precipitately overhung the path. It was a young Wallach with a pale face and long, flowing curls; his sheep-skin jacket was open at the breast, his cap lay beside him on the ground. There he sat in a reverie, on the very edge of the lofty rock, with his feet dangling in empty space, his stony countenance resting on his hands, and his eyes staring glassily into the remote distance.

"Hi! you up there! *ungye méra ista via?*"^[31] cried Clement, in a jargon which was half Latin and half Wallachian.

[31] *Ungye méra ista via?* "Whither goes this road?" The first two words are Roumanian.

The Wallach did not appear to hear the question; he remained in just the same position, blankly staring and immovable.

"He is either deaf or dead," said Zülfikar, after they had both bawled themselves hoarse at him in vain. "The best thing we can do is to follow the beaten track," and off they set at a trot. The Wallach did not so much as look after them.

Evening was drawing nigh, and the road to Marisel seemed absolutely endless. It went out of one valley into another, without passing a single human habitation, and the huge boulders and fierce mountain torrents, which they came upon at frequent intervals, made it almost impassable. At last they perceived, somewhere in the wood, a fire burning, and a monotonous chant struck upon their ears. On approaching nearer, they saw an immense pyre, made of the trunks of trees, burning in a forest glade, and shaded by oaks, the foliage of which was singed red by the long tongues of flame which flickered up to their very summits.

Not far from the pyre, a band of Wallachs were dancing with savage gesticulations, striking the ground at the same time with their massive clubs. Their twirling feet seemed to be writing mystic characters in the soil, and all the while they brandished their arms and howled forth metrical curses as if they were exorcising some evil spirit.

Around the men twined a wreath of young girls, holding one another by the hand, and twirling in a contrary direction. These young and charming forms, with their black, plaited tresses interwoven with pearls and ribbons; their flowered petticoats, cambric smocks, and broad, striped aprons; their tinkling gold spangles, or strings of silver coins about their round necks and their tiny, high-heeled shoes, formed a pleasant contrast to the wild, ferocious figures of the men, with their high sheepskin hats perched upon their shaggy, unkempt hair, their sunburnt, naked necks, greasy *köduröns*,^[32] broad brass buckles, and large ox-hide sandals.

[Pg 137]

[32] *Ködurön*. A rough, fur jacket.

Both dance and song were peculiar. The girls, all hand in hand, flew round the men, singing a plaintive, dreamy sort of dirge, while the men stamped fiercely on the ground and uttered an intermittent wail. The fire blazing beside them cast a red glare, intermingled with dark flitting shadows, on the wild group. Some distance behind, on the stump of a tree, sat an old bagpiper with his pipes under his arm. The tortured goatskin's monotonous discord blended with the savage harmony of the song.

When the pyre had nearly burnt itself out, the dancers suddenly dispersed, dragged forward a female effigy stuffed with straw and clothed in rags, placed it on two poles, and with loud cries of "Marcze Zäre! Marcze Zäre!"^[33] held it over the fire; then, exclaiming in chorus—"Burn to ashes, accursed Wednesday-evening witch!" they threw it into the glowing embers. The girls then danced round the fire with cries of joy till the witch was burned, when the men, with a wild yell, rushed among the embers and trod them out.

[33] *Marcze Zäre* = Wednesday witch, hags possessing peculiar power on Wednesday evenings, according to the Wallachs.

"Who are ye, and what are you doing here?" cried Clement the Clerk to the Wallachs, who hitherto had not taken the slightest notice of him.

"We are they of Marisel who have burned Marcze Zäre," answered the peasants unanimously, with the grave faces of men who had just done something uncommonly wise.

"Well, be quick about it, and then come back to the village, for I am here by command of the Prince, my master, to put the usual questions to you."

"And I," put in Zülfikar, "am here by command of the mighty Ali Pasha of Grosswardein to levy a new tax."

The Wallachs watched the Patrol-officer till he was quite out of sight without uttering a word; but

[Pg 138]

they shook their fists after him and exclaimed—"May Marcze Zăre take him!"

Then, with the bagpiper in front, they formed into a long procession and marched, loudly singing, down towards the distant village.

It was a long, straggling, Wallachian hamlet at which the patrollers now arrived—one house exactly like another; low clay huts with lofty roofs and projecting eaves, surrounded by quick-set hedges, the doors so low that one had to stoop in order to enter. Every house consisted of a single room, in which the whole family, parents and children, goats and poultry, lived together. At the entrance of the village stood a gigantic triumphal arch made of marble blocks; over the principal portal was the torso of a Minerva; on the façade were battle-pieces in high relief, and beneath them this Latin inscription in large Roman letters—"This town has been built by the unconquerable Trajan as a memorial of his triumph!" And behind the arch a heap of wretched clay huts!

On the capitol of a fallen Corinthian column, in front of the village dead-house, sits the *prefika*, the oldest old woman in the place, lamenting with meretricious tears over the dead young maiden who lies within. On the side of a grass-grown hill close at hand one sees a round stone building, raised once upon a time, no doubt, in memory of some Roman hero; but the Wallachian population has turned it into a church, covered it with a pointed roof, and daubed the interior with hideous paintings.

The Patrol-officer called the people together into the church, which was the only public building in the place. The crowd stood around him, the old men leaning on their crutches. The blood-red rays of sunset pierced through the round window-panes, giving a peculiar appearance to the interior of the venerable edifice, whose walls were daubed all over with figures of grotesque saints, whom the monstrous fancy of the rustic artist had provided with scarlet mantles and spurred jack-boots. Amongst so many pictures of the marvellous, that well-known allegory which represents Death as a skeleton, dragging off with him a king, a beggar, and a priest, was not lacking, and scattered among the icons were a few bandy-legged fiends derisively stretching out their tongues at poor damned sinners whom they clutched tightly by the hair.

Behind the iconostasis the priest and the Patrol-officer took their stand, surrounded by gilded icons and consecrated candles. When Clement had read his credentials to the people, he called to the village elder, a tall man with large projecting teeth, to come in front of the altar-rail, and addressed the following questions to him—

[Pg 139]

"Are there amongst you any sorcerers and magicians who can summon the devil to their aid?"

The crowd received this question with an awful whisper, and after a long pause the magistrate replied—

"There was one last year, your worship, a godless villain with blotches on his neck and body, which were patches stitched on to him by the devil, for even when we singed them with red-hot irons he did not feel it. We sent him to the Sanhedrim at Fehervár, where, failing to stand the water test, he was burnt alive."

"Are there among you any hags or vampires which injure other people's children, make knots in men's bowels, ride through the air, colour milk red, hatch serpents' eggs, or seek for grasses which can make them invisible, and open barred and bolted doors?"

This question called forth a hundred different answers. Every one tried to communicate his own personal experiences to the interrogator; the younger women in particular pressed upon the Patrol-officer with furious importunity.

"One at a time, please," cried Clement, with great dignity. "Let the magistrate say what he knows."

"Yes, there used to be an old witch here, worshipful sir," said the village elder obsequiously. "We called her Dainitsa.^[34] She had long molested mankind, for her eyes were red. She could, when she chose, bring down such storms upon the village that the wind would take off the roofs of the houses. Once she brought a hailstorm upon us, and God's thunderbolt smote the village in three places. Thereupon the women here grew furious, seized her, and threw her into the pond. But even there the witch railed upon them and said—"Take heed! You will live to beg of me the water which you now give me to drink!" Then the women fished up her dead body from the bottom of the pond, thrust a dart through her heart, buried her in the valley, and rolled a large stone over her grave. But the very next year the witch's curse came upon us. Throughout the summer not a drop of rain fell in our district. Everything was withered up, and our cattle carried off by the murrain. Dainitsa had drunk up all the rain and dew. So we went to her grave, bored a large hole therein, and filled the grave with water till it ran over, shouting at the same time—"Drink thy fill, accursed hag! but lap not up all our rain and dew!" And so at last the great drought came to an end."

[Pg 140]

[34] *Dainitsa*. She who sings in a low voice, *i. e.* she who mutters spells. From Roumanian *daina*, which is derived from the Hungarian *danolni*, to sing.

The priest gravely vouched for the accuracy of this narrative, and Clement made a note of it in his parchment roll.

Now came the third question.

"Are there any among you who dare to smoke tobacco, either by cutting up the leaves into small fragments and putting them in his pipe, or by roasting them on the fire and inhaling the ascending steam?"

"There are none, sir!" returned the elder. "We do not know that dish."

"And do not try to, for whoever is caught in the act will, in accordance with the law of the land, have the stem of his pipe thrust through his nose, and be led in that guise all round the market-place."

The fourth question was this—

"Do any of the peasants wear cloth coats, marten-skin kalpags, or morocco shoes?"

"Pshaw!" cried the village elder. "Why, our poverty is such that we never look beyond sheep-skin jackets and leather sandals. What do we want with coloured cloth and morocco shoes?"

"Nor must you, for the Estates of the Realm have forbidden the peasantry to wear the clothes of the gentry."

Now came the fifth question.

"Which of you not only acted contrary to the decree of the Diet, that the peasants should extirpate the sparrows, but even mocked the officers charged to collect sparrows' heads?"

The magistrate humbly approached the Patrol-officer.

"Believe me, worshipful sir; by reason of the great drought and the bad season, the sparrows have all departed from our district. Tell his Highness that we have been unable to lay our hands upon a single one all through the summer."

"That's a lie!" cried Clement the Clerk fiercely.

"I speak the truth," persisted the magistrate, seizing Clement by the hand, and dexterously insinuating two silver marias into his clenched fist.

[Pg 141]

"Well, it is not impossible," said the Patrol-officer, somewhat mollified.

Last of all came the question—

"Has any among you seen foreign beasts of prey, or other strange animals, straying about in these regions?"

"Of a truth, sir, we have seen lots of them."

"And what sort of beasts were they?" asked Clement, with joyful curiosity.

"Well, dog-headed Tartars!"

"You fool, I don't mean that sort of beast. I want to know whether any one, in strolling through these woods, has come upon a four-footed beast of prey, a creature with a spotted skin? You know very well you have left no hole or corner unexplored, for even now you are hunting after the hidden treasures of Decebalus."

The magistrate shook his head incredulously, glanced at the crowd, and said, with a shrug of his shoulders—

"We have seen no such wondrous beast; but haply Sange Moarte has seen it, for he in his mad moods roams incessantly through woods and hollows."

"And where then is this Sange Moarte? You must call him hither."

"Alas! sir, he is difficult to catch; he seldom comes to the village. But perhaps his mother is here."

"Here she is! here she is!" cried several peasants at once, pushing forward an old woman with sunken cheeks, whose head was wrapped round in a white cloth.

"What mad name is this you have given to your son?" cried the Patrol-officer; "whoever heard of calling a man 'Dead blood!'"

"'Twas not I, sir, who gave him this name," said the old Wallachian woman with a broken voice.

"The villagers call him so because he is never seen to laugh or speak to any one, or answer when he is spoken to. He did not even weep for his father when he died; nor has he ever visited the girls in the spinning-rooms, but wanders about incessantly in the woods."

"All right, all right, old lady; but that has nothing to do with me."

"I know it, sir, I know that it does not concern you; but I must tell you that the pretty Floriza, the belle of the village, was in love with my son. There was not a lovelier maiden in all Wallachia. Such black eyes, such locks reaching down to her feet, such rosy cheeks, such a slim waist were not to be found anywhere else. And then she was so diligent, and she loved my son so dearly! In her chest she had sixteen embroidered chemises which she herself had woven and spun, and round her neck she wore a string of two hundred silver and twenty gold pieces. Sange Moarte

[Pg 142]

never so much as looked at the girl. Vainly did Floriza make him posies, he would not put them in his hat; vainly did she give him kerchiefs, he would not wear them in his breast. Whenever he passed by, the girl would sing such beautiful songs as she sat by the hearth; but Sange Moarte for all that did not linger at her threshold, and yet she loved him so dearly. Often she said to him, when they met together in the lane—"Thou dost never come to see me; perchance thou wouldst not even look at me if I were dead?" Sange Moarte replied—"Then indeed I would look at thee."—"Then I will soon die," said the maiden sorrowfully. "And then will I also visit thee," said Sange Moarte, and went his way. Does all this weary you, good sir? I shall soon have done. Pretty Floriza lies dead. Her heart broke for grief. There she lies on her bier; the funereal *armindenu*^[35] stands in front of the house. When Sange Moarte sees it he will know that Floriza is dead, and will come forth from the woods to look upon his dead sweetheart, as he promised her, for he always keeps his word. Then you can speak with him."

[35] *Armindenu*. A green branch placed in front of houses on the 1st of May and at funerals. Compare Latin *Alimentale*.

"Very well, old lady," said Clement, who had suddenly become serious, and was almost angry to find something very like poetry among rude peasants, who had certainly never read Horace's *Ars Poetica*. "You must watch for the lad's return, and let me know."

"'Twere better you went yourself, sir," said the old woman, "for I scarcely think he will answer a single question put to him by any one else."

"Be it so! Lead me thither!" cried the Patrol-officer; and the whole assembly proceeded towards the mortuary, which stood at the extreme end of the village.

This end of Marisel is so far distant from the church, that night had fallen before the crowd had reached it.

The moon came from behind the mountains. Round about the house stood pine trees, through the sombre foliage of which the evening star shimmered faintly. In the distance sounded the melancholy notes of some pastoral flute. In front of the little white house the hired mourner was sobbing loudly. The wind agitated the crape-hung branches of the *armindenu*. Inside the house lay the corpse of the beautiful young maiden awaiting her truant lover. The moonbeams fell upon her pale countenance.

[Pg 143]

The mob surrounded the mortuary, crept stealthily on tip-toe into the courtyard, peeped through the window, and whispered—

"Look! There he is! there he is!"

The Patrol-officer, the priest, the magistrate, and Sange Moarte's mother entered the room.

Right across the threshold lay the girl's father dead drunk; he got so tipsy yesterday from sheer sorrow that he will need all to-day and all to-morrow to sleep it off. In the middle of the room stood the pine-wood coffin, bedaubed with glaring roses fresh from the brush of a rural artist; within it lay the girl (she was only sixteen), her beautiful forehead encircled by a funereal wreath. A wax taper had been placed in one of her hands, in the other she held a small coin. At the head of the coffin burned two handsome wax candles stuck into a jar containing gingerbreads; at the foot of the coffin, in a gaudily-painted, high-backed chair, staring blankly at the girl's face, sat Sange Moarte.

The pious superstition of the priest and the magistrate would not let them cross the threshold; but Clement stepped up to the lad, and immediately recognized in him the man on the rock who would not tell him the way.

"Hi, young man! So you are he who has the bad habit of never replying to people when they address you, eh?"

The person thus addressed justified the question by not answering it.

"Now hearken and answer my question. I am the Patrol-officer. D'ye hear?"

Sange Moarte remained speechless, with his eyes fixed all the time on Floriza. He was as motionless as the corpse itself, and scarcely seemed to breathe. His good old mother tenderly took him by the hand and called him by his proper name.

"Jova, my son! answer the gentleman. Look at me, I am your mother."

[Pg 144]

"In the name of my master, the Prince, I command you to answer me!" cried the Patrol-officer, raising his voice.

The Wallach still remained silent.

"I ask you if, in the course of your sylvan ramblings, you have seen any sort of foreign wild beast, to wit a yellow, speckled monster, which the learned call a panther?"

Sange Moarte gave a start, as if suddenly aroused out of a deep sleep. His glassy eyes flashed and sparkled as he looked at his interrogator, a feverish scarlet flushed his cheeks, and he stammered tremulously—

"I have seen it, seen it, seen it."

And with that he covered his eyes, so as not to look upon the dead body.

"Where have you seen it?" asked the Patrol-officer.

"Far, far away," whispered the Wallach; then he became dumb once more and buried his forehead in his hands.

"Name the place. Where is it?"

The Wallach looked timidly around. A cold shudder ran through him, and with fearful, rolling eyes he whispered to the Patrol-officer—

"In the Gradina Dracului."^[36]

^[36] *Gradina Dracului*. Garden of the Devil (Roumanian).

The priest and the magistrate immediately crossed themselves thrice, and the latter gazed devoutly on a mural St. Peter, as if to invoke his help on this occasion.

"You seem to me a plucky lad, to venture to approach the Devil's Garden," said the Patrol-officer. "Will you guide me thither?"

The Wallach nodded, with a joyful look.

"In the name of St. Michael and all the Archangels I implore you, sir, not to go," interrupted the priest. "Of all who have visited the Devil's Garden, not one has ever been known to come back. A truly devout person would turn his back upon it. It is only this man's sinfulness that has led him thither."

Clement scratched his head.

"I don't go there for the pleasure of the thing," said he. "Not that I fear the name of the place, but because I object to scaling mountains. In my official capacity, however, I have no choice."

"Then at least stick a consecrated willow-twigg in your cap," urged the anxious pastor, "or take with you a picture of St. Michael, that the devil may not come near you."

[Pg 145]

"Thank you, my brothers; but it would be much more to the point if you provided me with a pair of sandals, for I cannot go clambering over the mountains in these spurred boots. I regret too that your amulets are thrown away upon me, for I am a Unitarian."

The priest crossed himself once more, and said with a sigh—

"I fancied you were orthodox, because you were so zealous about the hags and witches."

"I only did that officially. Send my Turk hither."

As he went out the priest murmured to himself—

"Birds of a feather! A nice pair of heretics!"

"Comrade Zulfikar," cried Clement to the Turk, as he tied on his sandals, "you can find the rest of your way by yourself, for I must take a side spring into the mountains."

"If you spring, I will spring too," replied the distrustful renegade. "Whithersoever you go, thither will I go also."

"My dear fellow, there is nothing to be pocketed on the road that I am about to take, except perhaps the devil, for man has never set his foot there."

"What do I care! My orders are to go along with you till I return to the point from whence I started."

"So much the better, then; I shall have the pleasure of your company. But pray help me to draw my sword, so that I may be able to defend myself in case of need."

"So you carry a sword which requires two men to draw it! Well, let's look at it," and with that the two men planted their legs one against the other, grasped the sword with both hands, and tugged away at it for a long time, till at last it flew out of its sheath so suddenly that Clement the Clerk nearly fell sprawling.

Clement then called for a jar of honey, rubbed the rusty blade all over with the viscid stuff, and stuck it back into its sheath.

"And now let us be off, young man," said he to the Wallach, who hastily took his cap and a small axe from the ground, and went out without once looking behind him.

His mother seized him by the hand—

"Wilt thou not first kiss thy dead sweetheart?"

Sange Moarte did not even turn his head round, but drew his hand out of his mother's and went with the two strange men towards the darkening woods.

All that night the adventurers were traversing a deep dell. Gigantic perpendicular rocks rose up on each side of them, only above their heads shimmered a narrow streak of starry sky.

[Pg 146]

Towards morning they found themselves among the Carpathian Alps.

It was a dazzling spectacle. In the distance diamond-peaked crystal mountains covered with white snow-fields, striped here and there by dark-green lines of pine forest. Close beside them is a basalt rock, consisting of angular columns as large as towers, standing side by side like the pipes of a gigantic organ, with their summits crowned by wreaths of round trees. A white, semi-transparent cloud floats across this rock, hiding all but its summit and its base. From time to time a lightning-flash darts from this cloud, and the reverberated echoes of the thunder-peals resound like long-drawn-out chords from this majestic organ of Nature's own workmanship.

Over yonder, a mountain chasm suddenly comes into view, where two rocky fragments, whose rugged surfaces seem to exactly correspond, stand face to face. Through this rocky chasm, many hundred feet below, rushes a stray branch of the icy Szamos, disappearing among the thick oak woods which cover its banks.

In one place the rocks form a flight of steps, steps never fashioned for the foot of man, for each of them is as high as a tower; in another place the rocky boulders are piled one on the top of the other, in such a way that if the undermost block were disturbed, the whole of the enormous mass would fall into a differently-shaped group.

Everything indicates that here the dominion of the world and of man ends. Not a single human habitation is visible from the dizzy heights; even vegetation is rare and scanty; on every side bald rocks and gaping chasms, among which the mountain torrents toss and tumble; only the wild goat is there to be seen leaping from crag to crag.

"Which is the way now?" asked Clement of his guide, casting an anxious glance at his surroundings, in which the possibility of hopelessly losing oneself was more than probable.

"Trust only to me," said Sange Moarte, and he guided them through the uninhabited wilderness with the unerring precision of instinct. In places where it seemed impossible to go a step further, he always found a path. He recollected every root or shrub which could serve as a support to clamberers down the mountain side; every fallen tree which spanned the abyss, every narrow ledge which could only be passed by bending forward over the precipice and holding fast behind to the fissures of the rock, was familiar to him; in short he seemed quite at home in this interminable labyrinth.

[Pg 147]

"We are near," he cried suddenly, after clambering up a steep rocky wall and surveying the horizon; then he held out his hands to his companions and drew them up after him.

A new spectacle then presented itself.

The opposite slope of the rocky ridge which they had just ascended was perfectly smooth and shiny, and encompassed the whole region in a semi-circle, forming a sort of basin, at the very bottom of which—and it was six hundred feet deep—lay a little mountain lake, the dark-green waters of which perpetually boiled and bubbled, though not a breath of air was stirring: perhaps it felt the ebb and flow of ocean. The opposite side of the rocky basin was formed by a gigantic chain of mountains, fringed only at its base by fir trees, and at the point where the two mountain systems met, a small stream in a deep bed trickled into the little mountain lake. The masses of ice which had fallen into the valley formed a crystal vault over this stream.

"Whither are we going?" asked Clement, aghast.

"To the source of that brook," returned Sange Moarte. "It has dug its way through the ice, and by following its course we shall come to the place we seek."

"But how are we to get there? This rocky slope is as smooth as a mirror; if a man begins sliding down it there is no stopping till he plumps into the lake."

"You have only to take care. We must lie on our backs and glide down sideways. Here and there you will find a tuft of Alpine roses to cling on to. But you've nothing to fear if you slide down barefoot. Do as I do."

A hair-bristling pastime truly!

Taking off their sandals they held on by their hands and feet to the smooth, shelving, stony wall, at the foot of which lay the darkly-gleaming, fathomless lake.

They had already slid half-way down the incline, when from the mountain opposite arose a muffled, mysterious roar. They felt the cliff on which they lay quaking beneath them.

"Ha! stay where you are," cried Sange Moarte, looking back at them. "An avalanche from the mountain opposite is approaching."

[Pg 148]

And at the very next moment they could see a white ball descending from the immeasurably distant heights, plunging with mad haste down the mountain slope, tearing away with it whole masses of rock and uprooted pines, swelling every moment into a more tremendous bulk, and dashing down the decline in leaps of two hundred feet at a time into the valley below.

"Heaven defend us!" cried the terrified Clement, clutching his guide with one hand and holding

on to the rock with the other. "It is coming this way, and will overwhelm us all."

"Keep still," cried Sange Moarte, seeing them inclined to clamber up again and thus expose themselves to the danger of a fall. "The avalanche will take the direction of that block of rock standing in its way, and will there either stop or disperse."

And indeed they could see that the snow-slip, now grown colossal, was making for a projecting point of rock which was dwarf-like in comparison. Every other sound was lost in the thunder of the avalanche.

And now the huge snow-ball bounded upon the obstructive rock, and fell prone across it with a terrific thud, which shook the whole mountain to its very base.

For a moment the whole region was enveloped in a cloud of steam-like snow-spray, and after the final crash the thunder of the avalanche ceased. But immediately afterwards it began again with a frightful crackling; the weight of the snowy mass had uprooted the obstructing rock, and whirling down with it in dizzy rotations, plunged perpendicularly into the lake below.

The agitated lake, lashed out of its basin on both sides, rose in an enormous wave, three hundred feet high, up to the very spot where the bold climbers were clinging to the naked rock, and after poising in the air for a second, like a huge transparent green column, broke and fell back into the lake, which very slowly subsided.

"Now we will go on our way," said Sange Moarte. "The rock is moist now, and the descent will be all the easier."

After the lapse of half-an-hour, the wanderers found themselves at the mouth of a stream.

A wondrous corridor lay open before them. The brook sprang from a hot spring, which, after racing down the deep valleys, buried itself beneath icebergs and snowdrifts. But the hot water had bored a passage through the ice, constantly melting the frozen mass around it with its warm stream, so that only the thick outermost layer remained, which, constantly renewed by the cold air without, and as constantly dissolved by the hot stream within, grew into a sort of transparent crystal arcade with huge dependent glittering stalactites above the stream.

[Pg 149]

Through this channel Sange Moarte now led his companions.

Clement could not but call to mind the fabulous fairy palace where spellbound mortals only see the light of day through transparent waters.

Wading thus in the bed of the stream, they reached a point where the bright arcade began to grow dark. Its transparent roof grew thicker and thicker, passing gradually into an ever deeper blue, till at last it became quite black, and the murmuring of the stream was the wanderers' only guide. As they advanced, with their hose tucked up to their knees, into the ever-darkening darkness, they felt the water getting hotter and hotter, till at last they heard a hissing sound and saw once more the daylight streaming through the rocky chasm, through which the brook rushed down into its subterraneous cave.

Here, with the help of some dangling shrubs, they scaled the hillside to avoid the onslaught of the boiling spring, and after a brief exertion found themselves on the other side of the mountain, in a deep, well-like valley.

This is the *Gradina Dracului*.

It is a perfectly round dell, shut in on every side by a wall of perpendicular cliffs more than six hundred feet high. Whoever wishes to look down from above, must approach the edge of the rock lying on his stomach, and even then must have a good head not to be seized by vertigo. At the bottom of this dell the flowers have an amaranthine bloom. When the snow is falling thickly all around, and the ice is sparkling everywhere else, here in the depths of the hardest winter may then be seen those dark-green flowers with broad, indented petals, and those little round-leaved trees the like of which are to be met with nowhere else in this district. Just at this time too the leather-leaved *Nymphaea* opens its light-yellow calices here; the grass, both summer and winter, is of the brightest green; and the wild laurel climbs high up into the crevices of the rocks, and casts its red berries down into the valley, when Nature all around is cold and dead.

Throughout the winter this dell is clothed with the rarest flowers. Therefore the Wallach calls it "the Devil's Garden," and fears to approach it.

[Pg 150]

But the whole wonder has quite a natural cause.

In the depth of the dell a hot mineral spring bubbles up in a cave, never coming to light, but soaking all the circumambient soil through and through, and it is because these warm waters possess a flora of their own that these unknown shrubs and flowers are for ever blooming in the neighbourhood of the vivifying element. The whole thing is a splendid open-air orangery in the midst of snowstorms and icebergs.

Sange Moarte beckoned to his comrades to follow him. A feverish impatience possessed him, and when he had advanced a few steps into the cavern, he pointed with trembling hand at a dark recess, in which an iron door was visible.

"What is it?" cried Clement, clutching his sabre. "Does anybody dwell here?"

"Yes," rejoined Sange Moarte (his blood at that moment seemed to be on fire, and the veins of his temples stood out like cords). "There, in that water-basin, she is wont to bathe. There have I watched her, from day to day, without ever daring to approach her," stammered he, in a whisper that was scarcely audible, but full of the most passionate ardour.

"Who?" asked the Patrol-officer, much amazed.

"Oh! the fairy," stammered the Wallach, with trembling lips, and he buried his glowing head in his hands.

"What's all this about?" said Clement, turning to Zülfikar. "'Tis not a fairy that I'm after but a panther!"

"Pst! a key is turning in the lock," cried Zülfikar. "Away back into the dark cave!"

The two men had to drag Sange Moarte away from the iron gate, which a moment afterwards opened noiselessly, and a girlish form stepped forth leading a panther by a golden chain.

Sange Moarte was right in calling her a fairy.

Before them stood a dazzlingly beautiful woman in oriental *déshabillé*. Her locks were enveloped in a red fez, the long gold tassels of which fell across her white turban over her pale face; her ivory-smooth shoulders gleamed forth from the sleeves of her short, ermine-embroidered kaftan; her eyes sparkled in the dark; every movement of her lithe body was serpentine, fascinating, maddening.

The three men held their breath. The girl passed by without observing them.

"Ah, that is she," whispered Zülfikar in amazement, when she had gone.

[Pg 151]

"Who? Do you know her?" asked Clement.

"It is Azrael, Corsar Beg's former favourite."

"What a place for her to be in!"

"Pst! she'll hear us."

Meanwhile the girl had reached the basin where the subterranean waters poured their mingled flood, sat down on a stone bench, and commenced to unwind her turban. Her jasper-black hair fell down over her shoulders.

Sange Moarte's hot panting resounded through the darkness.

The panther lay quietly at his mistress's feet, his shrewd head resting on his front paws.

Azrael now removed her bright Persian shawl from her slim waist, and next prepared to slip off her light kaftan, taking a couple of steps towards a projecting rocky buttress which hid her from the eyes of the watchers.

Sange Moarte was about to rush after her. It was all the two men could do to hold him back.

"Are you mad?" growled Zülfikar in his ear. "Would you betray us with your infernal curiosity?"

"The poor devil is in love with the girl!" whispered Clement.

At that moment there came the sound of a splash, as of some one leaping into the water and playing with its waves.

Sange Moarte frantically tore himself loose from his companions' arms, and with a furious yell rushed towards the basin.

At this yell Azrael, in all the maddening witchery of her charms, sprang out of her watery mirror, looked at the presumptuous wretch with flashing eyes, and cried savagely—

"Oglan! Seize him!"

The panther had hitherto remained motionless; but the moment his mistress called him to battle, he sprang up with a roar, seized the young Wallach, and threw him with a single jerk to the ground.

Sange Moarte did not think of defending himself against the savage beast, but stretched out his hands imploringly towards the odalisk; drank in her loveliness with thirsty looks; writhed closer to her, and, weeping and groaning, fell down at her feet, while Azrael stared wildly at him, threw her mantle hastily around her, and watched her darling panther tear to pieces the youth who had never loved any one in his life in order that he might love her to the death.

[Pg 152]

"I'll go and help him!" cried Clement, mad with horror, and drawing his sword.

"Softly! Don't be a fool! Besides, we have something better to do. The iron gate remains open; let us creep in while the lady is otherwise engaged, and find out what there is here; that will interest our masters very much, especially mine."

With that the two men crept through the iron door, groped their way along the narrow passage which seemed to have been cut out of the naked rock, and discovered at the end of it, by the light

of a lamp hanging from the roof, several small doors to the right and left. They opened one door after the other, but only found empty rooms with no further outlets. At length a glimpse of the outer world reached them through one of the windows. They hastened forward in that direction, and coming upon a second iron door passed through it, and found themselves in a large courtyard surrounded by high walls, one of which they scaled, and beheld from the top of it the valley of the cold Szamos stretching far and wide before their eyes. Soon after they discovered a footpath which led them from the wall to the woodlands below, and off they set running, and never drew breath till they had safely reached the bottom. It was only then that the two men ventured to stop and look each other in the face. Clement fancied he still heard the wildly musical voice of the fair demoniac, the roaring of the panther, and the death-shrieks of the young Wallach.

"We may as well go on now," remarked Zülfikar, "for to return the way we came without a guide is impossible, and we are bound to come out somewhere."

And, indeed, they soon came upon two wood-cutters, who were fastening their raft to the river's bank.

"What is that castle yonder?" asked Clement.

The men stared at him.

"Where? What castle?"

Clement looked behind to show it to them, and behold! nowhere was anything to be seen with the remotest resemblance to a castle, nothing but rocks, each the counterpart of the other. The Wallachs laughed aloud.

"It were better not to mention it to them," said Zülfikar. "They look as if they do not know what is going on under their very noses. But we'll mark the place. Nothing but rocks are visible from the outside, the brushwood conceals the very opening through which we got into the open air." [Pg 153]

So the wanderers inquired their way; returned to Marisel, where they naturally did not stop to be questioned about Sange Moarte, but mounted their steeds and rode off.

Zülfikar wanted Clement to go on with him to Banfi-Hunyad. The Patrol-officer, however, declined to trespass on Denis Banfi's domains, so the Turk went on alone to levy the new tax, though Clement prophesied that he would receive more kicks than halfpence.

Clement duly informed Ladislaus Csaky of what he had seen, and received one hundred ducats for his discovery, to say nothing of the green top-boots.

Zülfikar fared much more strangely.

On arriving at Grosswardein, he gave the tribute-money to Ali Pasha, informing him at the same time of all that he had found out about Azrael.

This girl, when only thirteen years old, had been carried off from Ali Pasha's harem by Corsar Beg. Ali, her original possessor, had promised a reward of two hundred ducats to whomsoever should discover the whereabouts of his favourite.

Zülfikar on quitting the Pasha had in his hand a purse of two hundred ducats. This came to the ears of the Aga, Zülfikar's superior officer, who straightway picked a quarrel with the renegade, and condemned him to one hundred strokes of the bastinado, unless he preferred redeeming each stroke with a ducat.

"I won't do that," returned Zülfikar, "but I'll hand over to you the gift which Denis Banfi sent to Ali Pasha when I told him he was to pay the new tax. Give it to the Pasha, and I'll wager he'll so reward you that you'll remember it all your life."

The Aga greedily caught at the offer, took charge of the carefully-sealed casket which Zülfikar himself ought to have handed to the Pasha, and presented it to his Excellency with the following respectful salutation—

"Behold, most gracious Pasha, I bring you that princely gift which Lord Denis Banfi has sent you in lieu of taxes."

Ali Pasha seized the casket, cut through the silken cords, broke the seal, and took off the cover, when lo! a horrible, shrivelled pig's tail fell out of it on to his kaftan—the direst, most abominable outrage which can befall a Mussulman! [Pg 154]

Ali Pasha in his fury sprang almost up to the ceiling, and throwing his turban to the ground, immediately ordered that the Aga, who stood rooted to the spot with horror, should be impaled outside the camp.

But Zülfikar went gaily on his way with the two hundred ducats in his pocket.

CHAPTER III.

AN HUNGARIAN MAGNATE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

There was a great commotion at Bonczhida Castle. The lord of the manor, Denis Banfi, was expected home from Ebesfalva. The castle gates (on the midmost panel of which blazed a huge family coat-of-arms between the claws of two golden lions rampant) were overshadowed by green branches and bravely-coloured banners; in the street, the school-children, in gala costume, were drawn up in a long line headed by their teachers; further back, with bright Sunday faces, stood the vassals; and, marshalled in front of the hillock which marked the bounds, the mounted gentry of the County of Klausenburg, some eight hundred horsemen or so, all of them stalwart, sturdy forms, armed with morning stars and good broad-swords, had come out to meet their leader, the Marshal of the Nobility.

On the bastions are to be seen Banfi's own soldiers, consisting of about six hundred mail-clad heroes, with long Turkish muskets and Scythian helmets. On the walls facing the Szamos six mortars are placed. A few yards further off a coal fire is burning, at which the cannoneers are heating the ends of their long iron staves so as to use them as linstocks.

At every gate, at every buttressed window, stand a couple of pages in crimson dolmans and tightly-fitting, cornflower-blue hose, richly garnished with silver-embroidered lace.

At the window of the highest donjon sits the castellan, ready to proclaim the arrival of his liege lord by the blast of a horn. Over his head the wind is wrestling with a gigantic purple banner, the huge dependent gold tassels of which it can only raise with difficulty.

Out of all the windows, inquisitive domestics and expectant knights and dames peep forth, or rather, out of all the windows but three, which are altogether bare of festal groups, for there nothing is to be seen but fragrant jasmines and quivering mimosas in snow-white porcelain vases, behind which one can dimly distinguish a pale and delicate form leaning dreamily on the embroidered window-cushions. This is Denis Banfi's wife.

[Pg 156]

It might have been ten o'clock in the morning when the castellan, perceiving clouds of dust on the highway, announced the approach of his Excellency with a blast of his horn, whereupon the roar of the mortars scared every one into his proper place; the priests and teachers reviewed their pupils, the officers marshalled their troops, and the trumpeters on the ramparts played the latest marches.

Shortly afterwards the Lord-Lieutenant arrived, escorted by the banderia of half-a-dozen counties. Before and behind him trotted squadrons of horsemen, whose arms and caparisons gleamed with all the colours of the rainbow. There were to be seen horses of every race and every hue—Arabian stallions, Transylvanian full-bloods, little Wallachian ponies, slim English racers, and light-footed Barbary steeds. There were horses with flesh-coloured manes, jewelled bits, variegated reins, and embroidered schabracks. There were all the weapons with which the art of war was then familiar—the slender Damascus blade, the toothed morning-star, the curved *csakany*,^[37] the serpentine crease, and those long, gorgeously-fashioned fire-arms which could seldom be discharged more than once; here and there, too, was visible a specimen of those three-edged, six feet long Turkish scimitars, which were just then coming into vogue.

[37] *Csakany*. An ancient weapon, half hook, half battle-axe, of Tartar origin.

Each squadron brought its banner, on which the arms of the respective counties were gaily embroidered, and sturdy standard-bearers bore them aloft on their saddle-bows. In front of the martial bands rode their captain, George Veer, a muscular man of about forty, with a grey-speckled beard, stiffly waxed moustaches, and sun-burnt face. A stately heron's plume, fastened by an opal agraffe, waved from his marten-embroidered kalpag; his gorgeous bearskin was held together in front by a gold chain as broad as a man's hand, set with gems. Chrysolites as large as filberts gleamed, instead of eyes, in the bear's head looking over his shoulder; his body was encased in a coat of silver mail, sewn with gold stars, through which his dark-blue dolman was visible. His crooked scimitar with its golden hilt well became the hand which held it, and from his saddle-bows peeped forth the menacing muzzles of a pair of pistols, the mechanism of which was about as simple as the mechanism of a modern steam-engine.

[Pg 157]

The Lord-Lieutenant himself sat in an open carriage, drawn by five black horses, with rose-coloured, gilded harness; both panels of the carriage door bore the Banfi crest, gorgeously painted on a gold ground; behind stood two hussars with silver-embroidered mantles and white heron plumes.

With haughty dignity Denis Banfi sits back on the velvet cushions of his coach; all the pomp and splendour which surrounds him suits him well. His glossy locks leave bare his high forehead, which, together with his fine, frank eyes, bespeaks infinite good-nature, while the bold curve of the bushy eyebrows and the peculiar cut of the thin lips indicate a violent temper. The whole face seems to be constantly under the influence of these hostile emotions. At one moment it is mild, smiling, rosy; at another savage, grim, and suffused by a dark purple flush. The traces of noble enthusiasm and of unbridled fury are impressed upon his face side by side just as they are in his heart.

The martial squadrons present arms; the school-children chant hymns; the vassals wave their hats; the music resounds from the battlements; the clergymen deliver addresses; and all the guests flutter their kerchiefs and their kalpags at him from the windows, and Banfi receives all these demonstrations of respect with his usual majestic dignity and condescension, with the air of a man who feels that all this sort of thing belongs to him of right. Meanwhile his eyes glance up at those three windows concealed behind the fragrant jasmines and the quivering mimosas, and his face grows graver and sadder when he perceives no one behind them.

From the window of another room there looks down a very tall old man in a long clerical surtout with small buttons. Since losing his teeth his chin has moved closer to his nose, which makes his nose look a long way from his eyes. He seems to be taking no part whatever in the general rejoicings. By his side leans a lady in mourning, wearing a black velvet *haube*; rage and contempt are unmistakably visible in her countenance. Near these two stands Master Stephen Nalaczi with folded arms, surveying the whole procession with a droll, sarcastic smile.

[Pg 158]

"Just look, your Reverence," says the lady in widow's weeds to the grey-headed clergyman. "Did ever prince lord it with the pomp and splendour of this simple Baron? I have been at coronations, installations, inaugurations, triumphal ovations, but never, never have I seen anything like the homage paid to this private man. If they rendered it to a prince it might pass, but who, forsooth, is this Denis Banfi? Why, a simple nobleman—just such a one as we are, except that he is full of arrogance and pretence. All this princely splendour does not belong to him *de jure*. Oh! well do I know the meaning of the word *jus*; for I have all my life been before the courts against greater lords than he."

"How my reverend colleagues press forward to kiss his hand," murmured Martin Kuncz (for that was the clergyman's name). "Ei! ei! Look now, at my learned colleague Gabriel Csekalusi, how radiantly he hastens forward to assist his Excellency out of his carriage!—and he is right, for Denis Banfi is the visible providence of the Calvinists. But for poor, vagabond Unitarian ministers like me, the place behind the door is good enough."

"But just look! just look! how the worthy *armalists*^[38] raise him on high and carry him on their shoulders to the door. 'Tis well they do not set him on a litter like a sovereign prince—as if, forsooth, feeding them at his table made him their lord and master!"

[38] *Armalists*. Noblemen who could show *literae armales* in support of their nobility.

"Nay, but, Madame Saint Pauli, pray let the good people do him homage if they like," interrupted Nalaczi with a sneer. "Wait a bit. The greeting I have in reserve for him will add salt to the soup! It will bring my lord to his senses, I warrant you!"

Meanwhile Banfi is mounting the steps, and the crowd, pouring after him, forces its way in at the same time, and carries the Baron on its shoulders right up to the dais at the end of the room. The clergymen squeeze their way through the surging mob into their proper places, not without being mercilessly mauled on the way; while George Veer, with respect-inspiring elbows, carves a road for himself through the mob up to the very seat of the Lord-Lieutenant. The room is already crammed full with as many of the gentry as it will hold, the remainder block the corridors. The vassals remain, perforce, in the courtyard, and hear nothing of what is going on but the hubbub which reaches them through the windows, and seems to delight them amazingly.

[Pg 159]

"My noble friends," said Banfi, when there was at last something like silence, and his eye had taken in every one present, "it was not without good cause that I invited you to come to my house *armed*. You know right well from the past history of our poor fatherland, how much our nation has suffered because our Princes, either discontented with what they already had, or unable to guard it, have perpetually called in foreign troops. The historians have only recorded what has redounded to the glory of our Princes—victories, battles, conquests; but they have forgotten to mention that in the year 1617, in consequence of the horrors of war, not a single child was born in the whole of Transylvania, for famine and flight killed them all in their mothers' wombs. But we know it, for we have suffered with and for the people. Now, thank heaven! we are masters in our own homes. By the Peace of Saint Gothard, the Turkish Sultan and the German Emperor have covenanted not to march their troops through Transylvania, and by thus holding each other in check, have vouchsafed us a little breathing-space, inasmuch as we are no longer bound to take up arms for either of them, but can set about healing our country's ancient wounds. A golden age is dawning upon us. The whole world is fighting and bleeding, we alone possess peace; in our land alone is the Magyar independent and his own master. True, ours is not a very large realm, but at any rate 'tis our own. We may be a very little people, but we recognize no greater anywhere. Now there are persons who would destroy this golden age. There are persons who do not care what an imprudently begun war may cost the country, provided their ambition, provided their greed is gratified thereby; and if he whom they attack chances to win, *they* do not perish with their country, but simply turn their coats, go over to the victors, and share the spoil with them."

"That is a slander!" cried some one from the background. Banfi at once recognized Nalaczi's voice.

The murmuring crowd turned towards the corner whence the interruption had proceeded.

"Let him alone, my friends," cried Banfi; "some satellite of Master Michael Teleki's, I suppose. Let him, too, have the benefit of freedom of speech! I, however, who am well acquainted with the upright sentiments of the Estates of the Realm, can tell you positively, that this thoughtless step

[Pg 160]

can never be taken in a constitutional way, and if they attempt by secret intrigues or sudden violence to bring about what cannot be done by fair means, then too they will find me at my post. I wish to defend the realm *and* the Prince, but if it must be so, I will defend the realm against the Prince himself. Now listen to what the caballers have devised, so as to ensnare us once more in those meshes from which we have hardly withdrawn our heads. Despite the peace, Turks at one time, Tartars at another, cross our frontier, blackmail the people, burn the towns, in short, force their friendship upon us in every imaginable way. Eight days ago they ravaged Segesvar, and before that they made incursions into the Csika district. That, however, is not *my* business. It concerns the Governors of the Saxon land and the Captains of the Szeklers. It is true that the mouth of his Excellency, Ali Pasha, has long been watering for my domains, only he has not quite made up his mind how to pick a quarrel with me. A few days ago, however, his roving bands captured the Prince's Patrol-officer, and proclaimed through his mouth to the whole district a fresh tax of a farthing per head. The poor peasantry rejoiced at getting off so cheaply, and hastened to pay the tax without first asking me whether it was lawfully levied. The artful Turk gained a double end thereby: in the first place, he got the people to recognize the tax, and in the second place, he found out exactly how many taxable persons resided in the district, and immediately afterwards levied upon them the fearful blackmail of two Hungarian florins per head!"

The multitude howled with rage.

"I immediately forbade all further payments. This tax does not indeed fall upon our shoulders, for we are nobles; but it is just because we are the peasants' masters that we are bound to save them from being fleeced, and defend them at all hazards. The only answer I sent to his Turkish Excellency was a pig's tail, and if he comes to levy the tax in person, I swear by the living God, I'll give him a buffet he won't forget as long as he lives."

"We will cut him to pieces!" roared the mob, striking their scabbards, and waving their morning-stars in the air.

"And now, my faithful friends, return to your tents. My seneschals will provide for your entertainment. If we must fight, I'll tell you when."

[Pg 161]

The excited nobility then withdrew with rattling weapons and boisterous approbation; only a few petitioners remained behind.

The Klausenburg professors invited their patron to the public examinations. Banfi promised to come, and distribute rewards to the best scholars.

As they retired Banfi beckoned to the remaining suppliants to approach one by one. The first he turned to was Master Martin Kuncz, the Bishop of the Klausenburg Unitarians.

"How can I serve your Reverence?"

"I have a complaint to make, gracious sir," returned Kuncz, with a bow and a scrape. "The Klausenburg town-council has forcibly removed the market booths belonging to the Unitarian Church. I beg you to help us to regain possession."

"I am very sorry I cannot help your Reverence," returned Banfi, whistling through his teeth and buttoning up his coat. "That is a constitutional affair, and concerns the Prince. The land indeed is mine, but the cause belongs to his Highness's Courts."

"The Prince gave me exactly the same answer, only reversed—'The cause indeed belongs to my Courts, but the land is Banfi's, go to him.'"

Banfi laughed good-humouredly, but Kuncz did not seem to regard the matter as particularly entertaining.

"Then, although my right is as clear as noon-day, I can turn nowhither?"

Banfi shrugged his shoulders and stroked his beard.

"Because your Reverence has right on your side, it by no means follows that you will get justice."

"Then his case is exactly the same as mine," interrupted some one, and Banfi, looking round, beheld Dame Saint Pauli making towards him.

The magnate pretended he did not see the widow, and nonchalantly adjusted the gold and diamond chain of his mente; but the widow thrust herself right under his nose, and thus began—

"Vainly do you condescend to ignore me, my lord. I am here though uninvited."

Banfi looked at her without saying a word, half amused and half annoyed.

"Or perhaps your lordship has forgotten my name?" continued the lady sharply, smiting her breast and exclaiming—"I am the noble, high-born—"

[Pg 162]

"And worshipful," added Banfi, laughing.

"Dowager Lady George Saint Pauli," continued the lady imperturbably, "every scion of whose family is as noble and illustrious as the Prince himself. I too have never forgotten what name I bear, but have proudly confessed it before princes and generals—yea, even before greater men than your Excellency."

"Well, well, your ladyship. All that I know by heart, for I have heard it from your own lips twenty times before. Come, tell me quickly what you want."

"Quickly, forsooth! Perchance your Excellency imagines that it is possible to tell in a few words why the suit between us has lasted four years already, and why the suit between the town of Klausenburg and my family has been pending for three-and-sixty years?"

"To cut matters short, I will tell you the whole story myself," interrupted Banfi; "your ladyship can make your comment afterwards. Your ladyship possesses a ruinous den in the midst of the Klausenburg market-place——"

"I beg your pardon—a manor-house just as good as your lordship's own castle."

"This shanty has for a long time disfigured the market-place. In vain has the town-council negotiated with and sued your family in order to have the house pulled down."

"And we have not surrendered it. Quite right. A genuine nobleman never sells property which he has purchased with his blood. It belongs to me, and within my four walls neither Prince nor Diet has the right to command. No, nor you either, my Lord-General."

"My good lady, I never asked you to give me this venerable ruin for nothing. I offered you ten thousand florins for it. For that sum I could have bought up the whole gipsy quarter, though there is no such dilapidated house there as yours."

"Keep your money, sir. I'll not give up my house. My seven-and-seventieth ancestor bought it two centuries ago, and therefore I'll not barter it away. In it I was born; in it died my father and my mother. If it offends your Excellency's eye to look down upon my beggarly house from your splendid mansion, pray look the other way; but at least do not grudge me the poor pleasure of spending the remainder of my days in the room where my poor husband breathed his last sigh; and let me tell you, sir, that I wouldn't take a palace in exchange for it."

[Pg 163]

The widow's sobs at the recollection of her deceased husband here enabled Banfi to put a word in, and he replied with passionate vehemence—

"What I have said shall be done. The masons are already on their way to pull down the house. The ten thousand florins you can have on application to the town-council."

"I don't want them. Throw them to your dogs," cried the woman furiously. "Am I a peasant that you turn me thus out of my property? Whoever dares to step across my threshold shall be driven out with a broomstick like a cur. I have appealed to the Prince and to the Estates, and there you have the sealed mandate in which the Diet forbids all and sundry to invade my property. I'll nail it upon the gate,—'tis engrossed in a good, legible hand,—and then I'll see who dares to break into my house."

"And I tell you that to-morrow your house will be razed to the ground, even if it be surrounded by armalists, and then the Diet may build you a new one if it is so disposed."

And with that Banfi turned away in high dudgeon, and almost ran into Nalaczi.

The two men greeted each other with constrained politeness; and while Dame Saint Pauli went off cursing, Nalaczi, after drawing a long breath, began in the sweetest of tones—

"His Highness the Prince desires to bring a very unpleasant matter to the notice of your Excellency."

"I am all attention."

"The Turk has thrice this year extorted gifts from us under various pretexts."

"You ought not to give them to him."

"If we don't he will force upon us as Prince the refugee Nicholas Zolyomi, now under the protection of the Porte."

"Let him come! We will kick him out again."

"Bravely spoken! But the Prince, weary of so much discord, and somewhat fearful besides, has resolved to amnesty Zolyomi and allow him to return."

"In God's name let him do so then!"

"Right, quite right! But your lordship knows very well that Zolyomi's estates are now in your lordship's possession; the Prince therefore finds himself compelled to request your lordship to surrender these estates to the returning Zolyomi, if it would not greatly inconvenience your lordship."

[Pg 164]

Nalaczi had been a little too curt in the delivery of his message, although he had done his best to sugar it with respectful epithets.

"What!" cried Banfi, stepping back, "do you really suppose that I will give up these estates? The Diet gave them to me with the onerous condition of equipping at my own cost twelve regiments for the defence of the country. That onerous condition I have faithfully fulfilled, and now you fancy that I shall surrender the estates merely because there is to be one fool the more in the

land? Preposterous!"

"But if the Prince wishes it!"

"I'll not give them up whoever wishes it."

"And that is the answer I'm to take back?"

"You'll please take back these two words," said Banfi, emphasizing each syllable—"I won't!"

"Your most obedient servant," said Nalaczi, and with an ironical obeisance he turned upon his heel.

"Servus," replied Banfi contemptuously, as if he were throwing a bone to a dog; and then he looked out into the corridor, and seeing some of his vassals waiting there, hat in hand, roughly asked them what they wanted.

When the good people saw that their liege lord was in a villainous humour, they held back, but the steward pushed them in.

"We ought to have brought the tithes," began the oldest peasant, with a whining voice and downcast eyes, "but it was impossible."

"Why?"

"Because we have nothing, my lord. There has been no rain; the crops are a failure; we have not even seed enough to sow our fields. In the village the people are living on chance roots and fungus, and when these are all gone, God only knows what will become of us."

"Look now," cried Banfi, "another visitation of God, and yet we must needs have a war to boot! Steward, open at once the demesne granaries, and distribute seed to the vassals, that they may sow their fields. See too that the poor people have enough corn to feed them through the winter."

The poor peasants would have kissed Banfi's hands, but he would not suffer it. A tear stood in his eye.

"For what am I your lord if not to lighten your burdens when you are in need? My stewards will carry out my orders. If my own storehouses fall short, you shall have corn for ready money from Moldavia."

[Pg 165]

And with that he retired into the adjoining chamber.

Banfi's wife with a beating heart heard his familiar footsteps drawing nearer.

There she sits behind the fragrant jasmines and the quivering mimosas, herself as pale as the jasmine flowers and as tremulous as the mimosas.

Around her is nothing but pomp and splendour. On the walls hang cut Venetian mirrors in gold frames, portraits of kings and princes, the handsomest among which is John Kemeny's, painted while he still held with the Turk and wore close-cropped hair and a long beard in the Turkish fashion, so much affected by the magnates of those days.

On one side of the room is a wardrobe with countless drawers, a masterpiece of art, inlaid with tortoise-shell, lapis lazuli, and mother-of-pearl. In the centre of the room stands a variegated table surmounted by silver candelabra of exquisite workmanship. Within glass almeries the family treasures are piled up in gorgeous heaps: pocal encrusted with gems; gold-enamelled stags, whose heads can be screwed off and on; large silver filigree flower-baskets, each scarcely heavier than a crown-piece, filled with posies of precious stones of every hue, artistically disposed in dazzling groups, with here and there a butterfly poising above them with delicate wings of transparent gold.

Heavy red silk curtains fall down from the lofty windows to the floor, and the window-sills are covered with the most gorgeous of the flowers then in vogue, among which the shining, velvety, amaranthine cock's-comb, the lirioidendron with its dependent, tulip-like calices, and the mesembryanthemum, with its leaves like dewy pearls, are the most conspicuous.

Of all these flowers only the trembling mimosa and the pale jasmine harmonized with the lady of the house, whose face contrasted so sadly with the gorgeous abode. The tiny, delicate figure seemed almost lost in the lofty arched room. She could not even have moved one of the massive morocco arm-chairs, nor have raised one of the huge heavy candlesticks, nor have pulled aside one of the heavy atlas curtains. Everything around her seemed to remind her of her feebleness. Every sound made her nervous, and when the well-known footsteps reached her threshold, all the blood rushed to her face. She was about to leap up when the door opened, and immediately she was as pale again as ever, and incapable of rising from her seat.

[Pg 166]

Banfi hastened, with expansive joy, towards his trembling wife, who could not for the moment find words to welcome him, seized both her delicate hands, and looked kindly into her dreamy eyes.

"So pretty and yet so sad!"

The lady tried to smile.

"And how sad that smile is too," remarked Banfi, gently embracing the sylph-like lady.

Lady Banfi laid her head on her husband's bosom, threw her arms round his neck, drew down his face to hers, and kissed it.

"That kiss too, how sad it is!"

She turned away to conceal her tears.

"What is it?" asked Banfi, stroking his wife's forehead. "What is the matter? Why are you so pale? What do you want?"

"What do I want?" returned Lady Banfi, turning her streaming eyes up to her husband and sighing deeply. Then she dried her eyes, placed her arm in his, and as if to give another turn to the conversation, led him to her flowers.

"Look at that passion-flower, how withered it is, and yet it is planted in a porcelain vase, and I water it every day with distilled water. But once I forgot to draw up the blinds, and now look how the poor thing has faded. It wants nothing—but sunshine."

"It seems," said Banfi, in a low voice, "as if we were to address each other in the language of flowers."

"What do I want?" repeated Lady Banfi, and leaning on her husband's neck, she burst forth sobbing. "I want my sunshine—your love."

Banfi at that moment looked very uncomfortable. He sat down on his wife's chair, took her gently upon his knee, and asked her in a kind tone, but not without a touch of temper too—

"Am I less able to show you my love now than heretofore?"

"Oh, no!—not less! But I see you so seldom. You have been away these six weeks, and you would not let me come to you."

"What, my lady! Have you suddenly become ambitious? Would you shine at the court of the Prince? Believe me, your court is much more splendid than his, and not nearly so dangerous."

[Pg 167]

"Oh, you know right well that I neither seek splendour nor fear danger. When our only shelter was a rude simple hut, nay, sometimes only a tent, half buried in the snow, then you made me lay my head upon your breast, covered me with your mantle, and I was so happy, oh, so happy. Oftentimes the din of battle, the thunder of the cannon, scared sleep from our eyes, and yet I was so happy. You mounted your horse, I sank down in prayer; and when you came back blood- and dust-stained, but unhurt, how happy I was then!"

"Heaven grant that you may always be so. But there is a happiness which stands higher than domestic happiness; there are matters where the mere sight of you would be to me a hindrance and an obstacle."

"Oh, I know what they are—sweet adventures, lovely women, eh?" returned Lady Banfi, with an arch voice but perhaps a bleeding heart.

"You are mistaken," cried Banfi, springing hastily from his chair. "I was alluding to the commonweal," and he began to pace angrily up and down the room.

When a husband takes umbrage at such jests, it is a sure sign that he feels himself hit.

At last Banfi unknitted his bushy brows and stood stock still before his trembling wife, who, ever since her husband entered the room, had been the prey of the most conflicting emotions; joy and grief, fear and rage, love and jealousy, still struggled for the mastery in her agitated breast.

"Margaret," he began, in an unsteady voice, "Margaret, you are jealous, and jealousy is the first step towards hatred."

"Then hate me rather than forget me!" cried the lady with a sudden outburst, which she instantly regretted.

"But what do you want me to do? Have you a single reason for suspecting me? Perhaps you want me to render you an exact account of how many miles I've travelled, how many people I've spoken to, like that blockhead Gida Bertai, for instance, who takes a diary with him every time he leaves the house, and reports to his better-half every half-hour? To hear you speak, one would fancy that I keep you under lock and key, like Abraham Thoroczkaï keeps his wife, who, whenever he goes from home, puts a padlock on his wife's chamber, and on his return exacts an oath from all his neighbours that no one has spoken to her in the meantime."

[Pg 168]

Lady Banfi laughed, but it was a laugh which ended in a sigh.

"You evade the question with a jest. I certainly do not accuse you. I do not watch you, and if you were to deceive me I should be none the wiser. But look! there is that in a woman's heart (a sort of sixth sense) which smarts she knows not why, and whereby she can tell instinctively whether her beloved's love is on the wax or wane. I know not, nor wish to know, whence you come and whither you go; but this I do know—you stay away a long time, and do not make much haste in

coming back. Banfi, I suffer—I suffer more than you can think."

"Madame!" cried Banfi, turning upon his wife with a flushed face, "in this country divorce suits do not last very long!"

Lady Banfi fell back into her chair, pressed her hands to her heart, and gasped for breath. She uttered one sharp, plaintive cry, but no other sound came from her parted lips. It was as though some one had suddenly severed the strings of a harp with a sword.

Half fainting, the wife looked up at her husband, as if to make sure whether after all it was not a mere jest, though certainly a very ghastly one.

"You are unhappy," continued Banfi, "and I cannot help you. You are so romantic, and I'm not given that way at all. Perhaps my heart wounds yours, and I'm sorry for it; but your heart certainly wounds mine, and I won't stand it. I recognize no tyrant over me, not even in love, and I'll not endure persecution—no, not even the persecution of a woman's tears. Let us rend our hearts asunder. Better do it now while they will still bleed from the rupture than wait till they drop away of their own accord. Let us rather part while we still love one another, than wait till we have learned to hate."

During the whole of this cruel speech the lady panted convulsively for breath, as if a heavy nightmare were pressing upon her bosom and depriving her of speech, till at last her emotion found an escape, and she uttered a piercing scream.

"Banfi! you are killing me!"

Banfi himself seemed aghast at this cry, and turning round in the very act of quitting the room, cast a glance at his wife.

He did not perceive that at that moment the door opened and some one entered; he only saw that his wife's agonized countenance was suddenly distorted by an unspeakably painful smile. A forced smile on those convulsed features was something too terrible. Banfi thought at first that his wife had gone mad. [Pg 169]

The next instant Dame Banfi rose impetuously from her chair, and exclaiming, "Anna! my darling Anna!" rushed towards the door.

It was then that Banfi turned round, and saw before him Anna Bornemissa, the consort of Michael Apafi. That lady's sharp eyes instantly detected the agitation of the consorts, though they both did their best to hide it, and not without success. But she made as though she saw nothing, and drawing Margaret to her breast, kindly held out her hand to Banfi.

"I heard your voices outside," said she, "so I came in without waiting to be announced."

"Ah, yes ... we were ... laughing," said Dame Banfi, covertly wiping her eyes with the corner of her pocket-handkerchief.

"And to what circumstances do we owe this extraordinary piece of good fortune?" asked Banfi, concealing his embarrassment behind an exaggerated courtesy.

"As you did not bring my sister to see me," returned the Princess, with a reproachful smile, "I thought I would just visit my poor exiled Hungarian kinswoman myself."

Banfi felt the sting of these last words, and murmured as he stroked his beard—

"Here my fair sister-in-law may do with me what she will. She may make me the butt of her sparkling wit; she may overwhelm me with her playful sallies. In the Hall of the Diet, before the throne of the Prince, we stand, face to face, as foes; but here you may command me, here I am only your most devoted servant, who delights to do homage to your charms, and is beside himself for joy to have you as his guest."

With these words Banfi embraced the majestic lady with easy familiarity; then, turning to his wife, added, not without a touch of malice—

"I hope you will not be jealous of Anna?"

The Princess hastened to reply instead of Margaret.

"Methinks you fear me too much to make love to me."

"I might perhaps if you were my wife. Yet we were near being wedded once. There was a time when I wanted to make you my bride." [Pg 170]

"But it went no further than wishing," returned the Princess, laughing.

"We soon learned to know each other," continued Banfi. "There would have been no room in one house for two such heads as ours, which find one realm too small to hold them both. We both of us love to rule. We should have been hard put to it if one had been obliged to obey the other. Things fell out for the best. We have found our corresponding halves—you Apafi; I Margaret—and we are both contented."

With these words Banfi tenderly kissed his wife's hand and departed, leaving the sisters alone. Anna, with noble gravity, placed her hand on the shoulder of her sister, who looked up to her

with a soft smile like an innocent child regarding its guardian angel.

"You have been weeping," began the Princess; "'tis in vain that you try to put a good face on it."

"I have not been weeping!" returned Margaret, keeping her countenance with wonderful self-control.

"Well, well; I'm glad you conceal it. That shows you love him; and if ever there was a time when your husband needed your love, your watchfulness, and your protection, it is now."

"Your words alarm me! You have something extraordinary to tell me!"

"My coming here at all must have been enough to have alarmed you. You may well suppose that I would not come to your castle for nothing. We have both equal cause to fear a certain person, and if we do not quickly come to an understanding, one of us may lose what she prizes most in the world."

"Speak! oh, speak!" cried Dame Banfi, trembling, and making her sister sit down beside her on the sofa.

"Our husbands have hated each other from the first. They were always of different opinions, belonged to opposite parties, and early became accustomed to regard each other as foes. Woe betide us if this hatred should turn to open strife, and we should see our loved ones compass each other's ruin."

"Oh, I can positively assure you that Banfi nourishes no hostile feeling against your husband."

"I do not apprehend Apafi's fall, but your husband's. The throne upon which he was placed by force has quite changed Apafi's character. I perceive, to my consternation, that he has begun to grow jealous of his authority. Why, even at Érsekújvár, when he first became Prince, he expressed his anxiety to the Grand Vizier that Gabriel Haller was plotting for the diadem, whereupon the Grand Vizier had poor Haller beheaded there and then without my husband's knowledge; but Apafi still recollects the message your husband sent him on that occasion, namely, that ere long he would tear from his shoulders the green velvet mantle, the symbol of the princely dignity." [Pg 171]

"Oh, my God! what must I not fear?"

"Nothing, so long as I do not lose my husband's favour. While you are securely sleeping, I am watchfully guarding against his passionate outbursts, and hitherto God has given me strength to fight against the monsters who would make of his reign a bloody memorial. But there is a certain condition of mind to which my husband is liable when my influence over him loses all its talismanic power; when, revolting against his own nature, his gentleness turns to ravening savagery; when his eyes, usually so ready to weep at the death of his lowliest vassal, seem to thirst for blood; when he throws off his habitual circumspectness and becomes wildly reckless. And this condition—I blush to confess it—is drunkenness. I do not bring it against him as an accusation. He whom we love has no fault in our eyes."

"Except one thing—his infidelity to us," interrupted Margaret.

"That too, yes, that too must be forgiven when it becomes a question of saving his life," replied the Princess.

"Oh, Anna!" cried Margaret, "you make me suspect mysteries which you will not reveal to me."

"What you ought to know you shall know. A little while ago your husband, with haughty presumption, opposed himself to a mighty faction which has kings for its confederates and kings for its antagonists; he might just as well have opposed Destiny herself. He is too proud to calculate the dangers which he thus draws down upon his head; or does he really think that they who sharpen their swords against a reigning monarch would suffer for an instant one of their own subjects to raise his head against them? And Banfi has threatened, mocked, insulted them, and entangled the meshes of their well and widely laid plans—nay, more, he has encountered and browbeaten them in the very presence of the Prince."

Dame Banfi folded her arms in timid resignation. [Pg 172]

"I see the storm which is gathering over Banfi's head. In his drunken fits, Apafi has let fall hints which have filled my soul with terror, and I don't wish Apafi's to be the hand to strike down Banfi for the sake of others. They will try to catch him at every turn, but we two will watch over him. I will endeavour to keep back the stroke, yet should it fall, 'tis for you to ward it off. We must both possess the entire love and confidence of our consorts, so as to be able to intervene energetically and decisively should they come to blows. For would it not be frightful if one fell by the other's hand, and one of us were the cause of the other's misery?"

Margaret timidly pressed Anna's hand.

"What am I to do? Oh, my God! what can I do? How can I intervene? I have no power."

"Your power lies in your love, watchfulness, and self-sacrifice," returned Dame Apafi with an exalted look, striving to inspire her weaker sister with something of her own strength.

At that moment the fate of two men was in the hands of two angels, and the fate of those two

CHAPTER IV. THE MIDNIGHT BATTLE.

As Denis Banfi, after quitting his wife's chamber, was descending the spiral staircase which led to the hall, he saw a young horseman come galloping at full speed into the courtyard.

The horseman was covered with blood and foam. As he sprang from his horse the beast collapsed altogether; but the rider rushed pell-mell towards Banfi, who, recognizing in him one of his captains, Gabriel Benkö, went to meet him, and asked him what was the matter.

"Sir," began the gasping knight, catching his breath, "Ali Pasha is attacking Banfi-Hunyad."

"Is that all?" said Banfi gruffly, not displeased that Fate had given his irritated temper something to rend and tear. "Send Veer hither!" he cried to his retainers; "and you, when you have got your breath, just tell me how the matter went."

"I must be brief, my lord. I come from the thick of the fight. Yesterday a troop of Kurdish freebooters appeared before Banfi-Hunyad. Your lordship's captain, Gregory Söter, anticipating that they had come to levy blackmail, went out against them with the castle bands, engaged in combat with them, drove them from beneath the walls after a sharp contest, and, following up his advantage, sounded a charge and pursued the fugitives in the direction of Zenlelke. We were still pursuing the Kurds, who fled headlong, when suddenly we saw ourselves attacked in flank; and in a trice the whole plain was swarming with Turkish horsemen, who overran us like ants. I cannot exactly tell their numbers, but I saw three horse-tail standards with my own eyes, which proves that the Pasha himself was with the expedition. Söter had no time to make good his retreat to Banfi-Hunyad."

[Pg 174]

"The devil!" cried Banfi.

"Every one of us had to do with two or three of them. Söter himself seized a morning-star with one hand and a broadsword with the other, and cried to me—I was by his side—'My son, leave the battle-field, cut your way through! Fly to Bonczhida and tell the news!' I heard no more. The surging masses parted us; so I threw my shield over my shoulders, bowed my head deep down over my saddle-bow, gave my nag the spur, and galloped out of the fight. About one hundred horsemen pursued me, the darts fell like a hailstorm on my shield; but my good horse, well aware of the danger, redoubled his speed, and so the pursuers lost trace of me."

"Did you come direct to Bonczhida?"

"No; I made a side-spring to Banfi-Hunyad, to warn the people there of their danger, so that they might have time to escape to the mountains."

"You did wisely. Then the people have escaped?"

"By no means. It was in front of Dame Vizaknai's house that I told the news to the people. Their faces turned pale, when all at once the lady of the house appeared with a drawn sword in her hand, and as if possessed by the spirits of a hundred warriors, stood among the people with sparkling eyes and thus addressed them—

"Are ye men? If so, seize your weapons, go out upon the ramparts, and show the world that you can defend the place where your children were born and your fathers lie buried. But if ye are cowards, then fly whither you will; but the women will remain behind here with me, to show the savage foe that none is too weak to fight for hearth and home."

Banfi, with a hoarse voice, called to his armourers to bring him breastplate, spear, and helmet, and beckoned to the panting messenger to go on with his story.

"At these words the people uttered a loud and furious cry. The women, like so many Bacchantes, ran in search of weapons, and mounted the ramparts by the side of their husbands, whom the determination of their wives had turned into veritable heroes. Every one seized the first thing that came to hand—scythes, spades, flails. Meanwhile, Dame Vizaknai was everywhere at once, marshalling and haranguing the combatants, barricading the church, breaking down the bridge, so that when I left the town, it was already in a fair state of defence. Thereupon I swam the Körös, to avoid making a long circuit, and came hither through the woods and by-ways."

[Pg 175]

During the latter part of this narrative Banfi seemed to be nearly beside himself. He waited now for neither armour nor helmet, but roared for his horse; and as he sprang into the saddle, cried to Veer, who was hastening up—

"After me to Banfi-Hunyad! March day and night. The infantry must go round by the Gyalyui Alps. The cavalry will follow me to Klausenburg. Light beacons in the mountains as you approach, that

I may attack the foe simultaneously with the vanguard."

"Would it not perhaps be better if your Excellency remained behind with the main army?" said George Veer, with an anxious face.

"Do what I bid you, sir!" was Banfi's reply; and giving his horse the spur, he dashed off, followed by about half-a-dozen of his suite.

"What ails him then, that he will neither wait for us, nor inform his wife and the Princess of what has happened?"

"He was aghast when I told him that Dame Vizaknai was defending Banfi-Hunyad," said Benkő apologetically. "She is an old flame of his whom he has long forgotten; but his youthful affection seemed to revive him when he heard of her heroic audacity."

George Veer, satisfied with this explanation, ordered his squadrons to take horse forthwith; and after previously informing Lady Banfi that he was off on a petty raid, departed for Klausenburg, leaving the command of the infantry to Captain Michael Angel, who did not break up till evening, the road along the Snow Mountains being much the shorter way.

Just as they were about to start, a tattered young Szekler, with pale cheeks but strong arms, stepped forth. His companions had pushed him into the front ranks.

"Come, sing us a battle-song!" they cried.

It was the rude, popular poet, Ambrose Gelenze.

Drawing from the pocket of his tunic his Bible, on the inside of the parchment covers of which he used to jot down his improvised war-songs, he placed himself in front of the host, and began to sing the following simple lay, the whole of the Transylvanian gentry repeating it word for word as they marched after him— [Pg 176]

"Now dawns serene the morning sheen,
The wonted hour hath come;
Sounds bold and free the merry march,
Nor bush nor brake is dumb!
Then up! to horse! and scale the height,
Bold Magyar! Szekler steeled in fight!
And sturdy Saxon hind!
A laggard he who doth not hie
When straight before the road doth lie;
And where there is no road to go, then climb, nor look behind!"

This song, sung by thousands and thousands of warriors, gradually died away in the distance.

George Veer, on reaching Klausenburg, no longer found Banfi there. The Lord-Lieutenant with two hundred horsemen had departed an hour before.

Veer, after allowing his men a brief halt, followed Banfi all night long without being able to overtake him; the Baron had always the start of him, though sometimes only a few minutes.

It was already late in the night when Banfi with his two hundred horsemen reached the point where the Körös intersects the woody dale; just where a bridge crosses the stream the Turk had pitched his camp. Watchful Bedouins lay stretched on their bellies there, with their long muskets in their hands. It was impossible to surprise them.

In the direction of Banfi-Hunyad a red glow illuminated the sky, alternately waxing and waning.

Leaving his horsemen in ambush on the opposite shore, Banfi with four companions descended to the stream to seek for a ford. The Körös is there so rapid that it can unhorse the firmest rider. Fortunately it had fallen so much in consequence of the summer drought, that Banfi soon found a place where the water flowed more calmly, and waded successfully through it with his escort. One of them he sent back to fetch the rest, but he himself with the other three remained on the opposite bank looking steadily in the direction of the fire.

Meanwhile a patrol of Bedouin horsemen, who were keeping watch on the bank, perceived the three riders and their leader, and challenged them.

Banfi would have fallen back, but three of the Bedouins charged upon him forthwith, while the three others with couched lances fell upon his comrades. [Pg 177]

"Bend your heads down over the necks of your horses, and seize their lances with your left hands!" cried Banfi to his companions; and with that they all four drew their swords, went at full tilt against the foe, and collided beneath the dark shadows without another word.

Banfi was in the centre. The lances of the three Bedouins whizzed through the air simultaneously, and Banfi's comrades fell on both sides of him, transfixed, from their horses, while he with his left hand skilfully disarmed one of the spearmen, at the same time dealing him a blow with his right hand which cleft his skull. He then turned single-handed upon his two nearest assailants, and cut down one with his lance and the other with his sword.

But now the three remaining horsemen fell furiously upon him.

"Come on then!" shouted Banfi, gnashing his teeth; and with that terrible humour peculiar to certain warriors in the hour of danger, he added—"I'll teach you how to wield the spear, my boys!" and setting his back against a clump of trees, he stuck his sword into its sheath, seized his spear with both hands, and not three minutes had elapsed before all three Bedouins had fallen from their horses to the ground.

Then he looked around to see if any more were coming, and was delighted to observe that the Turks at the bridge had heard nothing of the tussle, while his two hundred horsemen had come down to the river-side and were noiselessly crossing to the opposite bank.

Some of the fallen Bedouins were still moaning and groaning.

"Smash their skulls in, that they may not betray us with their cries!"

"Ought we not to await Veer's troops?" asked one of the captains.

"We cannot. We haven't time!" replied Banfi, with his eyes fixed upon the ruddy horizon, and the little band proceeded covertly through field and forest.

Soon a distant hubbub struck upon their ears, and when they had climbed to the top of a little hill, Banfi-Hunyad emerged before their eyes.

Banfi gave a sigh of relief. It was not the town that was burning, but the haystacks. The roofs of the houses had been taken off beforehand by the inhabitants themselves to prevent the enemy from setting them on fire. Even the church and castle were roofless, and the Turkish host could be seen swarming round them by the light of the conflagration, whilst from the battlements a fiery rain of sulphur and pitch, occasionally intermingled with heavy beams, poured down upon the besiegers, and drove them back from the walls.

[Pg 178]

Ali Pasha had not waited for his artillery,—it had stuck fast in the wretched roads,—imagining that he could easily storm a place defended only by women and peasants. But it is notorious that despair makes every one a soldier, and that even scythes and axes are good weapons in resolute hands.

At this spectacle Banfi's features grew flaming red. He fancied he saw a white female form on the pinnacle of the tower, immediately gave his horse the spur, and rushed forward like a whirlwind, crying to his horsemen—

"Don't count the enemy now; we shall have time enough for that afterwards, when we have cut them all down!" and in a quarter of an hour the little band had reached the camp before the town.

There every one was slumbering. Whilst one half of the host was storming the town the other found time to repose. Even the heads of the sentries hung drowsily down. There they lay, close to their horses, and only awoke out of their dreams when Banfi was already charging through their ranks.

The Baron, who seemed bent upon relieving the besieged single-handed, cut down everything that came in his way; while the Turks, scared out of their slumbers, blindly snatched up sword and spear, and began massacring each other, despite all the efforts of the Tsahusz's to restore order.

Meanwhile Banfi was madly forcing his way through the Turkish host surrounding the church. The foremost rows fled back aghast at this unexpected onslaught; but a brigade of Ali Pasha's picked Mamelukes rode forward and arrested the flight.

A gigantic Moor stood at the head of this troop. His horse too was an extraordinarily big beast, a stallion sixteen hands high. The protuberant, swelling muscles of the dusky giant's naked arms shone like steel in the hellish glare of the burning haystacks, his broad mouth was bleeding from the blow of a stone, and the whites of his eyes gleamed ghost-like out of his dark countenance.

"Halt, Giaour!" roared the Moor, with a voice which rose above the din of battle, and he went straight for Banfi. In his enormous fist sparkled a sabre as broad as a man's hand; it appeared too heavy even for him.

[Pg 179]

Two hussars riding in front of Banfi fell right and left before two blows from the monster, one without his head, the other cleft to the shoulder. Throwing back his arm for a third stroke, the Moor rose in his stirrups, and exclaimed with a voice of thunder—

"I am Kariassar, the invincible! Thank thy God that thou diest by my hand!" and with that he swept his sword backwards, and dealt a tremendous blow at Banfi's head.

The Baron, with the utmost sangfroid, brought his sword in front of his face, and at the very moment when Kariassar let fly at him, made with lightning-like swiftness a dextrous lunge at the Moor's fist—it was what fencers call *an inner cut*—striking off Kariassar's four fingers, so that the heavy scimitar fell clashing out of the fingerless hand.

The black's face grew pale from rage and pain. With a frightful howl he instantly threw himself on Banfi, and disregarding fresh wounds on his face and shoulders, seized Banfi's right hand with his left, and must have dragged him from his horse by sheer brute force if the Baron had not had

an uncommonly firm seat.

It seemed as if the Moor were capable of crushing him with only one hand. But Banfi was a good rider, and now he pressed his horse tightly with his knee, whereupon the noble beast reared and plunged; and while the giant was struggling with his master, and tearing at his lacerated arm with a lion's strength, the war-horse turned suddenly on the Moor, struck him a blow on the thigh with its front hoof, bit his brawny breast with foaming mouth, and shook the bitten part between its teeth.

Kariassar yelled aloud, and suddenly relinquishing the Baron, grasped his poniard with his left hand, and writhing with pain, drew it from its sheath; but at the self-same moment Banfi dealt a rapid stroke at the giant's neck. The huge head rolled suddenly to the ground, and while the blood shot up in a threefold jet from the severed neck, the headless figure remained for an instant swaying on its horse, and spasmodically waving its poniard—a fearful spectacle to friend and foe.

At the sight of their leader's fall the terrified Mamelukes scattered in all directions, trampling one another down in their panic-flight. At the same time the defenders of the church threw down their barricades and made a sortie, Dame Vizaknai at their head with a drawn sword, and close behind her the priests as standard-bearers with the church's banners. The great besieging host, thus caught between two fires, was cut in two, leaving a free space on one side for the scythes of the peasants, and on the other for the csakanys of the hussars.

[Pg 180]

The csakany, by the way, is a mighty weapon in the hands of those who know how to use it. Its strokes are almost unavoidable. Its long, pointed beak smites down with such force as to crush shield and helmet to pieces, and a sword is no defence against it.

Step by step the besieged and the relief party drew nearer to each other, driving before them the Janissaries, who contested every inch of ground, and even when lying on the ground half-dead, aimed with their daggers at the feet of the horses which trampled them down.

Dame Vizaknai sprang towards Denis Banfi and seized his horse by the bridle.

"The danger is great, my lord! The Turk is twenty to one. Come behind the churchyard wall."

"I'll not budge a single step," replied Banfi coolly; "but that is no reason why you should not save yourself behind your barricades."

"Not another step do I budge either," rejoined Dame Vizaknai.

"I can defend myself!" cried Banfi vehemently.

"And I too!" replied the lady proudly.

The next instant fresh squadrons came streaming up from every quarter, as if they had fallen from the clouds or sprung from the earth—infantry and cavalry with long muskets, bows and arrows, and ribboned darts.

"Ali! Ali! Allah akbar!"

The Hungarian forces ranged themselves in battle array, with their backs to the churchyard wall, and awaited the attack. From the end of the street a glittering array of horsemen was seen approaching; it consisted of a picked corps of Spahis^[39] on stately Arabs, whose emerald-set saddles sparkled in the firelight. In their midst rode Ali on a slender, snow-white Barbary steed, in his hand flashed a diamond-hilted scimitar; on his head he wore a turbaned helmet; his long black beard fell down over his silver breastplate. On coming within gunshot of Banfi's host, he halted and marshalled his squadrons.

[Pg 181]

[39] *Spahis*. Light Turkish cavalry.

Hitherto Banfi had not touched his pistols, the wonderfully-carved ivory handles of which peeped forth from his holsters. But now he drew them forth and handed them to Dame Vizaknai.

"Take them!" said he; "you must have wherewith to defend yourself."

Meanwhile Ali Pasha had sent forward a herald, who, drawing near to the Hungarians, delivered the following message to them—

"My master, Ali Pasha, informs you, O ye unbelieving Giaours, that every loophole of escape is closed. Wherefore then strive against him further? Lay down your weapons and throw yourselves upon his mercy."

Scarcely had the herald finished speaking when two shots resounded, and he fell dead from his horse. Dame Vizaknai had fired both pistols at him by way of reply. Then Ali Pasha beckoned furiously to the squadrons surrounding him, and from all sides there rained darts, bullets, and arrows on the little band of Hungarians. The same moment Dame Vizaknai climbed on to Banfi's stirrups, and supporting herself on his shoulders with one hand, cried—

"Fear nought, my friends!"

A crackling report and a hissing shower of darts followed. Dame Vizaknai covered Banfi with her body, and after the fiery tempest had roared past, the Baron felt her hold upon his arm relaxing. An arrow had struck her just above the heart.

"That arrow was meant for you," said Dame Vizaknai, with a faint voice, and she sank dead to the ground.

"Poor lady!" cried Banfi, with a look of compassion. "She always loved me, and would never show it."

And then blood flowed instead of tears.

The Turkish host surrounded the Hungarians on every side, but were unable to break through their ranks. Banfi was already fighting with his eighth Spahi, who like the seven others was at last overcome by the Baron's extraordinary dexterity. Ali Pasha was beside himself with rage.

"Why can't you cut down that grizzly dog?" roared he furiously, and galloped himself against Banfi, driving his flying followers out of his way with the flat part of his sword-blade. "'Tis I, Ali Pasha, who now stands before thee, vile hog!" bellowed he, gnashing his teeth, "thou son of a dog, thou."

[Pg 182]

"Keep your titles for yourself," cried Banfi, and riding up to the Pasha he dealt him a tremendous blow on the helmet with his sword, so that sword and helmet were both smashed to pieces, and the champions reeled back half stunned. Ali quickly snatched from his armour-bearers a round shield, while Banfi was hastily provided with a steel csakany, and again they rushed upon each other.

The csakany fell with fearful force upon the shield, and knocked a hole through it, while Ali lunged forward with his scimitar, and this time only a very dexterous twist of the head saved Banfi's life.

"I'll play ball with thy head!" cried Ali contemptuously.

"And I'll make a broom of thy beard!" retorted Banfi.

"I'll have thy coat-of-arms nailed up over my stables!"

"And thy skin, stuffed with sawdust, shall serve me as a scarecrow!"

"Thou rebellious slave!"

"Thou barber's apprentice turned general."

Every abusive epithet was accompanied by a fresh and furious blow.

"Thou dishonourable girl-snatcher," cried the Pasha, with foaming mouth. "Thou dost filch Turkish maidens for thy unclean embraces; therefore will I carry off thy wife and make her the lowest slave in my harem."

To Banfi the world seemed all at once to be turning round and round. His soul had received three wounds, which quite divested him of humanity.

"Thou accursed devil," he roared, gnashing his teeth, seized his csakany by the middle with both hands, sprang closer to Ali, and whirled his weapon with lightning-like rapidity over his head, so that it flew round and round in his hands like the sail of a windmill, crashing down now with its axe-head, now with its bullet-shaped nether end on his antagonist's shield, and attacking and defending himself at the same time. Ali Pasha, confused at this altogether novel mode of attack, would have retired; but the two war-horses, furiously biting each other about the head and neck, were now taking part in the contest of their masters, and could not be parted.

The Spahis, seeing their leader waver, threw themselves between the combatants and drove from Banfi's side his escort of hussars. The Baron now perceiving that all his people had fled to the churchyard, directed one last swift stroke at Ali's shield, which, to judge from Ali's agonized howl, penetrated it at the very spot where fitted on to the arm. Banfi had no time for a third encounter, as he was now completely surrounded.

[Pg 183]

At that moment a well-known flourish of trumpets resounded in the rear of the combatants, and a fresh and general battle-cry mingled with the din—

"God and St. Michael."

George Veer had arrived with the banderia.

"God and St. Michael!" thundered the leader of the nobility, conspicuous among them all in his silver coat of mail with the bearskin thrown over his shoulders; and with his toothed battle-axe he hewed his way through the ranks of the astonished Turks.

The attack was skilfully conducted; the mounted nobility pressed on from all sides, simultaneously bringing the Turkish host everywhere into confusion, so that one wing could not assist the other, and the outermost ranks were always borne down by superior numbers.

Ali Pasha had received a bad wound in the arm from Banfi's last blow, which had daunted his courage, so he stuck his spurs into his horse's sides and gave the signal for retreat.

The Turkish host was driven head and heels out of the town, and its leaders endeavoured to retreat among the Gyalyui Alps, hoping to rally it again in the narrow defiles.

Outside the town the battle, fast becoming a rout, still raged furiously. The Hungarians scattered

about the burning hayricks, and were so intermingled in the darkness of the night with their opponents that they could only distinguish one another by their battle-cries.

The harassed Turkish host, which in the darkness and confusion at one time took refuge among the enemy, and at another cut down their own comrades, tried to imitate the battle-cry of the Hungarians, but this only made the mischief greater; for as they could not pronounce the words "Angel Michael," but always cried "Anchal Michel," they exposed themselves more completely to the Hungarians.

The Turkish army was now completely beaten; more than a thousand of its dead lay in the streets and around the church, and only the mountain passes, into which it was not prudent for the Hungarians to follow them, saved them from utter annihilation.

[Pg 184]

George Veer therefore sounded the recall, whilst Banfi, with restless rage, rushed hither and thither after the flying foe. All in vain; every way was barred by the trunks of trees which the Turks had hewn down in hot haste.

"We must let them escape!" cried Veer, thrusting his sabre into its sheath.

"Say not so! say not so!" cried Banfi excitedly, and riding up to the top of a hillock, he seemed to be observing something in the distance. Suddenly he exclaimed with a joyful voice—"Look yonder. The fire-signals have just been lit!"

And indeed on the crests of the Gyalyui Mountains the fire-signals could be seen flashing up one by one in a long line.

"Those are our people!" cried Banfi, with fresh enthusiasm. "The Turk is caught in the trap. Forward!" And remmarshalling his squadrons, he galloped towards the barricaded forest paths, heedless of the warnings of the more circumspect Veer.

Meanwhile Ali Pasha, abandoning his tents, camels, and booty-laden wagons to the enemy, sent Dzem Haman, the Albanian commander, on before, to level the roads over the snowy mountains.

As now Dzem Haman was advancing through the darkness and superintending the labours of his Albanian pioneers, he heard voices in the steep rock above his head, and a company of armed men suddenly emerged from the mountain passes before his eyes.

The troops on both sides challenged each other simultaneously.

"Who are ye? What are you doing?"

"We are carrying stones," answered Dzem Haman. "And you?"

"We too are carrying stones," was the answer from above.

"We are Dzem Haman's men, who are removing the stones from the path of Ali Pasha—and ye, are you not Csaky's men?"

"We are collecting stones for the head of Ali Pasha, and are Michael Angel's people," resounded from above, and at the same time a terrible rain of stones rolled down upon the heads of the Albanians, by way of confirming the statement.

[Pg 185]

"Michel Anchal is here also!" roared the terrified Albanians, falling back aghast, and creating a panic among those behind them by declaring that they were surrounded.

At these tidings, the Turkish host, harassed from before and behind, resolved itself into a disorderly mass, on which, at break of day, the Hungarian infantry began rolling enormous masses of stone and rock.

Ali Pasha attempted first on one side and then on another to break through the enemy's lines, but was everywhere driven back with fearful loss by the missiles hurled down from above. The boldest warriors, who had fought man to man in a hundred battles, fled back pale and trembling before the thundering masses of rock, which so completely smashed everything that came in their way that horse and rider were undistinguishable.

Ali Pasha tore his beard in impotent rage on perceiving that he and all his host were at the mercy of an army even now much weaker than his own.

"There is neither help nor refuge, save with the Most High God!" cried he, breaking his sword in twain in his despair; and drawing out his pistols, he pointed them at his own heart.

At that moment a hand snatched his weapons from him, and Ali Pasha saw Zülfikar before him.

"What wouldst thou do, madman?" cried he. "Thou wouldst not have me fall into the hands of the unbelievers?"

"I would deliver you and your host out of their hands," said Zülfikar.

"By the shadow of Allah, thou dost speak brave words, and if thou couldst but do as thou sayst, I would make thee the foremost of my captains."

"I desire no such honour. Promise me a thousand ducats, and send me as a messenger to Banfi."

"So that thou mayst betray my position to him, eh! thou cur?"

"I've no need to do that. He can see it for himself from yon hill-top. You are as good as dead and buried already, so that you have no choice but to trust to me. You may hold out for a couple of days perhaps; but then you and your bravest heroes must perish with hunger just like me. We are all in the same evil case, there is nothing to choose between any of us."

"And what wouldst thou do, wretched slave?"

"Induce Banfi to withdraw his troops from the road leading to Kalota, and thus leave us a loophole of escape."

[Pg 186]

"And dost thou think that possible?"

"It may, or it may not be so. Where death is certain, a man cares not what he risks. If I can speak to Banfi this evening, you may be able to escape the same night. If I succeed, well. If not, we shall be no worse off than we are now."

"The fellow speaks boldly. Do as thou dost desire. I'll trust thee. Allah alone reads the secrets of the heart. Go!"

Zülfikar laid down his arms, and went all alone down to the narrow pass leading to Kalota. When he came to the Hungarian outposts, his eyes fell upon rows of dead Turks who had been hung up on the trees along the wayside. This sight did not appear to disturb the renegade in the least. He stepped boldly among the Magyars, and as they seized him, said quickly to them in the purest Hungarian—

"Bring me to Denis Banfi. I am his spy!"

"You lie!" cried they. "Sling him up."

"I can prove it," continued Zülfikar, with a loud voice, and taking a neatly-folded parchment out of his turban, he handed it to the captain.

The letter contained these words—

"I, Gregory Söter, hereby declare to all the commanders of the Hungarian troops that Zülfikar, the bearer of this letter, is my faithful war-spy. Let him pass free everywhere."

The captain gave back the letter, not without grumbling, and bade two of his soldiers lead Zülfikar to Banfi, but they were to cut him down at once if the general did not acknowledge him. However, at the first glance Banfi recognized in him Pongracz, Balassa's former servant, and motioned to his men to leave them alone together.

"So you have turned Turk?" said Banfi.

"This is no time for questions, my lord. 'Tis for me to speak, and to the point. I'll be brief, if you'll let me. Emerich Balassa expelled me from his house when he learnt that I had helped you to abduct Azrael."

"Good!" said Banfi, contracting his brows. "The girl has flown from me too—whither, I know not."

"Yes, my lord, you do; and the worst of it is, others know it also. Close to the Gradina Dracului there is a habitation among the rocks, and there she dwells."

"Silence!" cried Banfi, aghast. "How know you that?"

"Balassa has lodged a complaint with the Prince about the abduction of the girl. The matter is not such a trifle as you imagine. Azrael is the Sultan's daughter, who, after being betrothed to Ali Pasha, was carried off by Corsar Beg, whom Balassa's poison alone saved from the silken cord, while Balassa himself has become a homeless vagabond because of her. She has been the ruin of all who ever possessed her. It is your turn now. The Prince having promised the disgraced Ladislaus Csaky everything he likes to ask, if only he can ferret out the girl's hiding-place, Csaky slyly commissioned the Patrol-officer to make inquiries among the people whether a panther had been seen anywhere in the woods, for he well knew that it is the habit of this wild beast to roam about in search of prey. Its track led them to the rocky retreat, the girl has been seen, and everything discovered."

[Pg 187]

"Devils and hell!" cried Banfi, turning pale.

"Listen further. Csaky communicated his plan to Ali Pasha, and it was agreed between them that while the Pasha attacked Banfi-Hunyad, Csaky with two thousand Wallachs was to scour the mountains under the pretext of a hunt, and storm the Devil's Garden."

"What infernal villainy!" cried Banfi, striking his sword with his fist.

"It is just possible, my lord, that you might still arrive in time," added the renegade insidiously, "if you do not stay here too long."

"We'll be off at once," cried Banfi, pale with rage. "I'll teach these lickspitlers to invade the domains of a free nobleman at the very moment when he himself is fighting against the enemies of his country. A few hundred men will be sufficient to keep Ali Pasha in check from this side. With the rest I wager I'll be able to pull Master Ladislaus Csaky out by the ears if I catch him

trespassing."

And immediately Banfi commanded his men to set out for Marisel as swiftly and as silently as possible, and bade the little band he left behind him light many large fires in the wood, so as to make the enemy believe that the whole host was bivouacking there, while he himself hastened towards the imperilled hiding-place. To Zülfikar he paid five hundred gold pieces for his timely warning.

The same night Ali Pasha fell with his whole host upon the two or three hundred Hungarians whom Banfi had left behind him; scattered them after a brief resistance, and hastened back to Grosswardein, swallowing as best he could the indignity of a great defeat, for he left behind him two thousand dead, and the whole of his baggage.

[Pg 188]

From him too Zülfikar received the covenanted one thousand gold pieces, thus doing a service to the Turks and to the Hungarians at the same time, and making both of them pay him for his pains.

[Pg 189]

CHAPTER V. THE BANQUET TRIBUNAL.

The blast of hunting-horns resounded from the Batrina Mountains, the hubbub of the chase came nearer and nearer; a group of well-dressed, well-mounted gentlemen led the way, and at their head rode Count Ladislaus Csaky.

"After him! after him!" resounded on all sides, and the pack were already in full cry, when the cavalcade, emerging from the thicket into an open glade, suddenly encountered another party coming from the opposite direction, in whose leader they all recognized Denis Banfi. Csaky with considerable confusion called the beaters back.

Banfi rode up to the group with an ironical smile.

"Welcome, gentlemen, to my domains. Delighted, I'm sure, at my great good fortune. Probably you have lost your way; but, if not, you are my guests, and consequently doubly welcome. But, pray, why do you stare at me so wildly? You really remind me of the Hindoo proverb, which says, He who beats the woods for a stag, oftentimes falls in with a lion."

"We regard your Excellency neither as a stag nor yet as a lion," returned Csaky, blushing up to the ears in his confusion. "The fact is, we fancied ourselves on lawful ground."

"Of course! of course!" returned Banfi, with an offensive smile. "You are on my property, and that is certainly lawful ground. I don't know how to express my gratitude for such an honour. No doubt you are tired too. I therefore invite you all to Bonczhida, just to take a little pot-luck with me."

"We are much obliged," returned Csaky angrily, "but we are unable just now to accept your invitation."

"Nay, nay; you'll not put me off. It is not my practice to let those who have come to me as guests depart hungry and thirsty. I cannot regard you as poachers, I suppose? And if you are not poachers, you must be guests."

[Pg 190]

"A third case is also possible."

"I know of none."

"Your Excellency shall learn from me that there is, though."

"Quite right. But there will be time for that at table. So turn your horses' heads towards Bonczhida, gentlemen."

"I've already said that we can't accept your invitation."

"What! Are you so ill acquainted with my hospitality as not to know that, if necessary, I will carry you off by force? Ha, ha! You must take away with you a reminiscence of Bonczhida. As you know now what my wild animals are like, you must make the acquaintance of my domestic animals also. In any case, I mean to take you by force."

"A truce to jesting, Banfi. This is not the place for it."

"Methinks 'tis you that jest. I am perfectly serious when I say that I will take you with me even against your will."

"We should like to see you do it."

"Then see it you shall," and with that Banfi blew on his horn, and instantly armed squadrons

poured forth from every corner of the wood. Count Csaky and his merry men were completely surrounded.

"Ha! this is treachery!" cried Csaky wildly.

"Oh dear, no! 'Tis only a little carnival jest," replied Banfi, laughing. "This time 'tis the quarry which captures the huntsmen. Forward, comrades! Take these gentlemen's horses by the bridles, and follow me with them to Bonczhida. If any one stands upon ceremony, tie his legs to the stirrups."

"I protest against this compulsion," cried Csaky furiously. "I take you all to witness that I enter my protest against this act of violence."

"I for my part call every one to witness," repeated Banfi, laughing, "that I've invited these gentlemen to a banquet in the most friendly manner in the world."

"I protest! 'Tis violence."

"Nonsense! 'Tis a merry jest. 'Tis Hungarian hospitality!"

Some of the gentlemen laughed, others swore. As however Banfi had numbers on his side, the Csakyites sulkily and wrathfully submitted at last to their jocose tyrant, and allowed themselves to be conducted to Bonczhida, though Csaky stopped every one he met on the road, and took them to witness that Banfi was doing him violence, while Banfi laughingly endeavoured to make it plain to the good people that the worthy gentleman was a trifle fuddled, and that they were playing a harmless little practical joke upon him.

[Pg 191]

"You will live to bitterly rue this!" cried Csaky, gnashing his teeth, and half beside himself with rage.

As they were passing through a village, one of Csaky's company, a young nobleman, whom his friends called Szantho, broke away from the crowd and vanished before he could be overtaken.

"Let him go to the devil!" cried Banfi gaily. "We will manage to be merry without him, eh! my lord Ladislaus Csaky?"

Gradually Csaky recovered his sangfroid, and his wrath seemed to abate; indeed, by the time they reached Bonczhida he wore a radiantly smiling countenance, for he was well aware that it would be indecent as well as ridiculous to pull wry faces before ladies. He therefore allowed himself to be presented to Dames Apafi and Banfi as a chance guest picked up on the way, without the least show of ill-humour.

Banfi crowned his insult by assigning to Csaky the place of honour at the head of the table, next his wife, and sitting opposite to him treated him with the most marked attention, through which there ran, however, a vein of the most trenchant irony. And Csaky was not even able to resent it! What must his feelings have been!

As the banquet was drawing to a close and the general mirth increased proportionately, Csaky grew more and more furious. He was sitting all the time on burning coals, and had to smile and simper as if he liked it. At last Banfi invented a fresh torture for him, by raising his pocal and drinking his guest's health. Csaky was obliged to clink glasses, drain his own to the very dregs, and endure to see Banfi laughing at him in his sleeve all the time. Every drop he drank was so much poison to him with that mocking laugh ringing in his ears.

And all this refined torture was so delicately veiled, that it escaped the attention of the ladies altogether.

Just as the mirth was most uproarious, the folding-doors suddenly flew wide open, and, without any previous announcement, Prince Michael Apafi, to whom the fugitive Szantho had brought the news of Csaky's capture, entered the room.

Both ladies, with a cry of joyful surprise, hastened towards the unexpected guest; but the gentlemen, perceiving from the Prince's face that a storm was brewing, suddenly became very grave.

[Pg 192]

Banfi alone preserved his usual grand seignorial gaiety, which could even express anger with a smiling countenance. He sprang quickly from his seat, and hastened joyfully towards the Prince.

"By Heaven, a lucky coincidence! Your Highness comes to us at the very instant that we are draining our glasses in your Highness's honour. This is what I call an unlooked-for and most timely arrival."

Apafi received this salutation with a slight nod, and leading the ladies back to their places, sat down himself on Banfi's chair. Several of the guests hastened to offer Banfi their seats, but the Prince beckoned him to approach.

"Your Excellency will remain standing. We would submit you to a little friendly cross-examination."

"If we are to be the judges in this case," interrupted the learned Master Csekalusi, taking up his glass, "allow me to inform you that the necessary preliminaries^[40] have already been observed."

[40] A banquet was the usual prelude to judicial as to all other public proceedings in

"I will be the judge," said Apafi; "although I do not quite know who is the master at Bonczhida, myself or Denis Banfi."

"The law of the land is the master of us both, your Highness," returned Banfi.

"Well answered! You would remind us that an Hungarian nobleman permits no one to sit in judgment upon him in his own house. But this affair is after all only a little carnival jest. At least you have been pleased to call it so, and we will follow your example."

The most anxious suspense was legible in the faces of all present: they did not know whether the jest would end seriously or the reverse.

"Your Excellency," continued Apafi, "has seized our envoy, Lord Ladislaus Csaky, and brought him to your house by force."

"Ah!" cried Banfi, with affected astonishment, "I see it all now. Why then did not the Count tell me at once that you had sent him to hunt in my preserves? And besides, if your Highness had taken a fancy to some of my game, why did you not let me know it? I would have shot more excellent bucks for your Highness than any that my Lord Csaky could catch."

[Pg 193]

"This has nothing to do with bucks, my lord baron. You know very well the ins and outs of the whole business. Don't force me to speak out plumply before these ladies."

At these words Lady Banfi would have risen, but the Princess prevented her.

"You must remain here," she whispered in her ear.

"So far, I don't understand a single word," said Banfi, in an injured tone.

"No? Then we'll recall to your mind a couple of circumstances. The peasants have caught sight of a panther in your woods."

"It is possible," returned Banfi, laughing—for a Hungarian gentleman may jest with his guests but never be rude to them, however much they offend him—"it is possible that this panther is a descendant of those which came into the land with Árpád,^[41] and may therefore be called ancestral panthers."

[41] Árpád, the primeval ancestor of the Hungarian princes, who first led the Magyars into the plains of Hungary. He died in 907. With Hungarians, to come in with Árpád is like our coming over with the Conqueror.

"It is no matter for jesting, my lord. That panther has torn a young Wallach to pieces in the sight of several persons, wherefore I sent out Lord Ladislaus Csaky to hunt down the beast and kill it. And Csaky had seen the monster and was hard upon it when you met him in the forest and stopped him."

"Lord Ladislaus Csaky no doubt mistook his own tiger-skin for a panther."

"No gibes, please. The lair of the monster is discovered. Do you understand me now?"

"I understand your Highness. But 'twas a pity to put my lord Csaky to so much inconvenience for such a trifle. So 'twas he then who discovered the pleasure-house which I built over a hot spring among the rocks? Well, I don't think even such a discovery as that will earn for him the title of a Columbus."

"You persist in sneering then? Will nothing make you bow your haughty head? Suppose now I knew the secret of that mysterious cave, what then?"

Banfi began to change colour, and he answered in a low, husky voice, like a man who finds it very difficult not to speak the truth. [Pg 194]

"'Tis a very simple matter, sir. It was I who discovered Börvolgy; but as soon as the rumour of the hot spring spread abroad, the public tried to take possession of it. Now, I had also discovered a rich mineral vein beneath the Gradina Dracului, and to prevent it from being appropriated, I had a little private pleasure-house built there among the rocks for the exclusive use of my wife."

By these last words Banfi wished to make the Prince understand that he ought to spare his wife, but they produced exactly the contrary effect.

"Oh, you vile hypocrite!" cried the Prince, starting up and striking the table with his clenched fist. "You would use your wife as a cloak, well knowing all the time that you keep there a Turkish girl on whose account the Sultan is about to ravage the land with fire and sword!"

Lady Banfi uttered a piercing shriek. Her sister whispered in her ear—

"Be strong! Now is the time to show what you are made of."

Banfi furiously bit his lips, but controlled himself with a mighty effort, and answered calmly—

"That is not true, sir! That I deny!"

"What! Not true! There are people who have seen her."

"Who?"

"Clement, the Patrol-officer."

"Clement the poet? Ah! We all know that lying is the masterpiece of poets."

"Very well, my lord baron. As you deny everything, I will try to get to the bottom of the matter myself. I will therefore go in person to the place in question, and if I find confirmation of that whereof you are accused, let me tell you that a threefold punishment awaits you: first, for the rape of the Turkish girl; next, for the violence done to a princely messenger; and thirdly, for adultery. Each one of these deeds is sufficient in itself to hurl you down from your presumptuous height. My lord Csaky, lead us to this place; and you, my lord Denis Banfi, will in the meantime remain here."

Banfi stood there with a bloodless face, and his feet rooted to the ground.

Meanwhile his wife had risen from her seat, and rallying all her strength with a supreme effort, stepped in front of the Prince and said—

[Pg 195]

"Sir, pardon my husband! He knows nothing of this thing—the fault is mine—the woman whom you seek turned to me for protection in her hour of need—and—I concealed her in that place—without my husband's knowledge."

Every word she spoke seemed to cost the pale, fragile lady superhuman exertion. Banfi turned very red and cast down his eyes before her. The Princess looked triumphantly at her sister and pressed her hand.

"Well done!" she whispered. "That was indeed noble and heroic!"

Apafi saw through the magnanimous fraud; but he was determined that Banfi should not escape him that way, so, turning wrathfully upon him, he exclaimed—

"And you permit your wife to commit such indiscretions, which might so easily ruin your family, nay, the realm itself? She must be punished for it, and I therefore request you to reprimand her on the spot!"

Lady Banfi, full of resignation, sank down upon her knees before her guests, and bowed her head like a criminal awaiting punishment.

"It is not my practice to correct my wife in public," murmured Banfi, with an unsteady voice.

"Then I'll do so myself," cried Apafi; and approaching the lady he said—"You deserve, madame, to be sent to jail!"

"That I would not allow, sir!" muttered Banfi between his teeth.

He was now as pale as a corpse. All his blood, all his fire, seemed concentrated in his eyes. All his muscles quivered with shame and rage.

"Gentlemen!" interrupted a sweet, sonorous voice. How soothingly it sounded amidst the rough contention of angry men. It was the voice of the Princess, who stepped between the lady and her accuser. "In former times," she cried reproachfully, "noblemen were ever wont to respect noble ladies."

"So you are again at hand to defend those whom I attack?" cried the Prince petulantly.

"I am again at hand to prevent your Highness from committing an act of injustice. I have always the *right* to defend my sister—but it becomes my *duty* to do so when she is insulted!"

With these words the Princess embraced Margaret, who no sooner felt herself in the embrace of a stronger than herself, than she lost all her artificial strength, and sank senseless into her sister's arms.

[Pg 196]

Banfi would have hastened to his wife's assistance, but Dame Apafi waved him back.

"Go!" cried she; "I'll take care of her!"

"Then you mean to remain here?" said the Prince to his consort, in a voice trembling between wrath and compassion.

"My sister has need of me—and you, I see, can do without me."

Apafi, ever since his wife had begun to speak, had plainly lowered his crest, and fearing lest she might rout him altogether, he hastily quitted the battle-field with a half triumph. He could not fail to be very much discontented with the result of his investigation. He felt that he had wounded Banfi in a sore place, but he also felt that the wound was not mortal. The great nobleman had been affronted rather than humbled. So much the worse for him! What will not bend must be broken.

[Pg 197]

CHAPTER VI.

THE DIET OF KAROLY-FEHERVÁR.

It is the fate of many a town, as of many a nation, to rise from the dead.

One people perishes there. The walls fall to pieces. The name of the town passes into oblivion. And again there comes another people, which builds upon the ruins, gives the place a new name; and while the old stones, cast one upon another, seem to bewail the past, the city, radiant with new palaces, rejoices in its youth like a flattered beauty.

The hill on which Transylvania's only fortress stands was once covered with massive buildings by Diurban's race. Who now remembers so much as its name? The Roman legions subjected the nation, threw down the shapeless walls, and instead of the altar dedicated to the Blood-God, and stained with human sacrifices, there arose a temple of Vesta; the wooden palace of the Dacian duke vanished, and the marble halls of the proprætor took its place, with their Corinthian columns, their white mosaic floor, their artistically carved divinities. The place was then called *Colonia Apulensis*.

Again the town grew old, fell down, and died.

A new and mightier race came into it; the former inhabitants were buried beneath the ruins of their palaces and temples, and instead of the proprætor's palace, the gilded and enamelled dwelling of Duke Gyula,^[42] with its skittle-shaped roof, towered up like an enchanted castle from the Thousand and One Nights, and on the ruins of the temple of Vesta the pagan forefathers of the Magyars built altars under the open sky, where they worshipped the sun, the stars, and a naked sword. Then the town was called Gyula-Fehervár.^[43]

[Pg 198]

[42] *Gyula* = Julius. The heathen Prince of Transylvania at the end of the tenth century.

[43] *Gyula-Fehervár*. White Julius' town.

A century passed, and Stephen, saint and king, cast down the altars of the fire-worshippers, and built a vast church on the spot where so many false gods had been adored. The sun-worshippers disappeared, and the Christian world called the church after the name of the Archangel Michael.

What sort of church was it?—Nobody can now tell! Two centuries later the Tartars came, levelled town and church with the ground, and put the population to the sword. On their departure they gave to the town the scornful nickname *Nigra-Julia*.^[44]

[44] *Nigra Julia*. Black Julia.

Our nation's greatest man, John Hunniady, rebuilt it. Traces of his huge Gothic arches may still be found there. In the crypt, built at the same time, all the Princes of Transylvania were buried in richly-carved sarcophagi. Here *rested* Hunniady himself and his headless son Ladislaus.^[45] They *rested* here, but only for a time. Robber-hordes came and scattered the sacred relics, and devastated the church, and the succeeding princes who patched it up again during the Turkish dominion, added to the Gothic groundwork the peculiarities of Arab architecture, serpentine columns, and Moorish arabesques.

[45] *Ladislaus Hunniady*. The eldest son of the great hero, treacherously beheaded in 1456.

And last of all came the renovations and restorations of modern times—four-cornered towers, with little low windows and shapeless portals. The arabesques were all white-washed, and where here and there the mortar falls from the walls, you may catch a glimpse of the stones with which the church was originally built, relics of every age which has visited the place and vanished tracklessly. Here sculptured fragments of the old Mythra cultus; there mutilated Vestals. Below, the top of an ancient altar with the broken symbol of a sun upon it; above, florid and fantastic arabesques.

And again the town lost its name.

They call it now Karoly-Fehervár.^[46]

[46] *Karoly-Fehervár*. White Charles' town. German: Karlsburg.

At the time in which our story is laid, this town was the place where the Princes of Transylvania used to be consecrated and the Diets to be held. Where the episcopal palace now stands stood then the Prince's residence, restored by John Sigismund,^[47] with marble inlaid chambers, and walls covered with battle-pieces in fresco. The great hall where the Diet met was separated from the surrounding chambers by a balustrade of tinted marble. Round about the walls hung the busts of princes and woywodes interspersed with trophies. In front stood the throne covered with purple, and round about it a triumphal baldachin made of banners, shields, and morning-stars.

[Pg 199]

[47] John Sigismund Zapolya (1540-1571), with whom the line of the Transylvanian princes began.

The rest of the town was scarcely in keeping with the pomp of the Prince's residence, for in 1618

the Diet had been obliged to command the inhabitants to cease dwelling in tents, and build up their ruinous houses again.

The Estates of the Realm have already assembled. Every one is in his place. Only the seat of the Prince is still vacant.

There they sit in order of precedence—the Transylvanian patricians, the heads of the Hungarian nobility, the most eminent in wit, wealth, and valour—the Bethlens, the Csakys, the Lazars, the Kemenys, the Mikeses, the Banfis!—those mediæval clans whose will is the nation's, whose deeds form its history, whose ancestors, grandfathers and fathers, have either perished on the battlefield in defence of their princes, or on the scaffold for defying them. And their descendants loyally follow their examples. A new prince comes to the throne, and they take up again the swords which have fallen from their fathers' hands—to wield it for or against him, as Fate may decree.

The Szekler deputies with their homely garb and sullen, dogged faces, and the Saxon burghers with their simple, round, red countenances, and their primeval German costume, form a striking contrast to the dashing and resplendent Hungarian magnates.

The mob assembled in the galleries and behind the barrier presents a most motley picture. Many amongst it can be seen pointing out the celebrities to their neighbours, or shaking their fists at the deputies they dislike.

At last a flourish of trumpets announces that the Prince has arrived. The pages throw open the doors. The crowd shouts "Eljen!" His Highness appears surrounded by his court.

[Pg 200]

Denis Banfi, as Marshal of the Diet, leads the way, with the national standard in his right hand. Beside him is Paul Beldi of Uzoni, who, as Captain-General of the Szeklers, bears the mace. Behind them comes the Prime Minister, Master Michael Teleki, bringing with him in a silken case the Imperial *athname*: all three gentlemen are in gorgeous robes of state. In the midst walks the Prince himself, in a magnificent green velvet kaftan and an ermine embroidered hat: he holds the sceptre in his hand. Around and behind him throng the foreign ambassadors, foremost among whom stand the Sultan's envoy in a robe sparkling with diamonds; Forval, the Minister of Louis XIV., a sleek, courtly man, with silken ribbons in his dolman, gold lace on his hat, and a richly-embossed sword-scabard; his colleague, the Abbé Reverend, with a smiling countenance, his lilac surplice fastened by a purple sash; and Sobieski's minister, wearing a *bekesch* with divided sleeves, which so closely resembles the Magyar costume.

All these dignitaries now take their places. The ambassadors remain behind the Prince's throne; and while the long and tedious protocols of the last Diet are being read, many of them engage in conversation with the lords behind the barrier.

Among these latter we perceive Nicholas Bethlen, the young Transylvanian whose acquaintance we made a long time ago in Zrinyi's hunting suite. He is now a vivacious and sensible young man, having spent his youth in travelling through all the civilized countries of Europe, cultivating the acquaintance of their most famous men, and even of their princes, and appropriating the progressive ideas of the age, without losing anything of his national peculiarities. The French themselves tell us that it was he who first acquainted them with the hussar's uniform, and that the dolman he wore at Versailles served Louis XIV. as a pattern for equipping his first Hussar regiments.

When Bethlen caught sight of Forval, whom he had learnt to know in Paris, he hastened to his side and greeted him heartily.

"You'll lose the thread of the discussion," said Forval, hearing that something was being read, but not knowing what.

"So far, they can get on without me. The bills now before the house merely regulate how many dishes should be set before servants; or discuss the best method of compelling poor people to grow rich enough to pay more taxes. When the real business of the day begins you will find me also in my place."

[Pg 201]

"Then tell me in the meantime who are the capable men here, and who are not. You know everything about Transylvania." Forval had only just arrived there.

"Such a classification is by no means an easy one," returned Bethlen. "Formerly, when I was a party man myself, and had seen no country but my own, I was quite convinced that all the members of my own party were honest men, and all its opponents scoundrels without exception; but now that I have severed party ties, and seen a little of the world, I begin to perceive that a man may be a good patriot, an honest man, a valiant warrior, or the reverse, whether he belongs to the Right or the Left. Everything depends on the point of view you take. However, as you desire it, I will give you my own views of the state of parties, you can then draw your own conclusions. That proud man on the right of the Prince is Denis Banfi; the one on the left is Paul Beldi. They are the two most eminent men in the land, and both are determined opponents of the war it is proposed to commence; in all else they are adversaries, but on this one point they are inseparable. Banfi seems to be in league with the Emperor, Beldi with the Turk. In their opinion Transylvania is strong enough to drive back every invader of her territories, but not strong enough to play the invader herself. Now cast a glance at that baldish man on the left of the Prince. That is Michael Teleki. 'Tis the genius of that man which alone keeps the other two in

check. He is a near relative of the Princess, and would renew here the war which has been the ruin of the national party in Hungary. The trial of strength between those three men will be an interesting spectacle."

"And if the peace party should prevail?"

"Then the nation will have declared for peace."

"And the Prince cannot go against it?"

"Here, my friend, we are not at the Court of Versailles, where a Prince may venture to say, '*L'état —c'est moi!*' Each of those three men has as much authority here as the Prince, and their authority is one with his. But let him only try to act against the will of the nation, and he will soon become aware that he stands alone. So, again, those great nobles would remain isolated if they undertook anything in opposition to the Diet."

[Pg 202]

"Be candid now. Do you think the war party will prevail?"

"Scarcely this time. I do not yet see the man who can bring a war about. Amongst the whole Hungarian party there is no one fit to become the ideal of a martial nation. Zrinyi has perished. Rakoczi has deserted it. Teleki knows how to overthrow but not how to create parties. Besides, he is no warrior, and it is a warrior that they want. He represents cold reason, and here there is need of a soul of fire. He has no *mission* to fight for Hungary, but only a political interest. One of the Hungarian magnates, that moustacheless youth yonder, Emerich Tököli, has lately sued for his daughter's hand in order to engage the father in his interests. Mark my words. That young man has a career before him. His one idea is power—and Fortune is fickle, and her instruments are many."

This cold consultation was somewhat distasteful to Forval. Meanwhile the tiresome recitation of the protocols had come to an end, and Bethlen took his seat.

The Prince very sulkily informed the Estates that the reason he had summoned them would now be explained to them by Master Michael Teleki; then, wrapping himself in his kaftan, he leaned negligently back in the depths of his huge arm-chair.

Teleki stood up, waited until the applause of the crowd had subsided, then, casting a calm look upon Banfi, thus began—

"Worshipful and valiant Orders and Estates! The recent events in Hungary are well known to you all, and if you did not know them, you need only cast a glance around you, and the sad, despairing faces with which your assembly has been augmented would tell their own tale. These are our unfortunate Hungarian brethren, once the flower of the nation, now its withered leaves, which the storm has scattered far and wide. You have not denied your kinsmen in their adversity; you have shared hearth and home with them; you have mingled your tears with theirs. But oh! they have not turned to us for the bread of charity, or for womanly lamentations. Thou, Bocskai, [48] thou, Bethlen, [49] whose images now look down upon us from these walls with dumb reproaches; whose victorious, dust-stained banners wave around the throne, why can you not rise up again in our midst to seize those banners, and thunder in the ears of an irresolute generation —The banished beg of you a country, the houseless a home?"

[Pg 203]

[48] Stephan Bocskai, Prince of Transylvania, 1605-1606. A great statesman and warrior.

[49] Gabriel Bethlen, the wisest of all the Transylvanian princes. He reigned 1601-1629.

Here Teleki paused as if awaiting applause, but every one remained perfectly silent; mere rhetoric did not affect that Assembly in the least. Teleki saw his mistake, and instantly changed his tactics.

"You reply to my words by silence. Am I to take it that *qui tacet, negat*? I'll never believe that your hearts are too cold to be fired. You only hesitate because you would count up your forces. But let me tell you that we shall not take the field alone. The sight of our despoiled churches and our enslaved clergy has called all the Protestant princes of Europe to arms. Even the Belgian King, whom our fate concerns least of all, has rescued our brethren in the faith from the Neapolitan galleys; nor has the sword of Gustavus Adolphus grown rusty in its sheath. Nay, more, even the most Catholic of princes, even the followers of Mahommed, are ready to assist our cause. Behold the King of France, at this moment the mightiest ruler in Europe, raising troops for us, not only in his own land, but in Poland also; and, if necessary, the Sultan certainly will not scruple to break a peace that was forced upon him; or he will, at the very least, place his frontier troops at our disposal. And when all around us we hear the din of battle, when every one grasps the sword, shall we alone leave ours in its scabbard, we who owe so much to our brethren and to ourselves? What happened to them yesterday may happen to us to-morrow, and what country will then offer us a refuge? Therefore, my fellow-patriots, hearken to the prayers of the banished as if you stood in their places; for I tell you, that a time may come when you will be as they are now; and as you treat them now, so will Destiny treat you then!"

Teleki had done. He fixed his eyes on Denis Banfi as if he knew beforehand that he would be the first to reply to him.

Banfi arose. It was plain that he was making a great effort to keep within bounds and speak dispassionately.

"My noble colleagues!" he began, in an unusually calm voice. "Compassion towards unfortunate kinsmen and hatred of ancient foes are sentiments which become a man; but in politics there is no room for sentiment. In this place we are neither kinsmen, nor friends, nor yet foes; we are simply and solely patriots, whose first duty it is to coolly calculate, for, to say nothing of the joy or grief resulting from it, the fate of a whole land depends upon the issue of our deliberations. Now the question before us is really this: Are we to stake the existence of Transylvania for the sake of Hungary? Are we to shed our blood for the sake of raising her from the dead? Listen not to your hearts, they can only feel—'tis the head that thinks. Just now there is peace in Transylvania. The people are beginning to be happy; the towns are rising from their ashes; the mourning weeds are gradually being laid aside, and ears of corn are ripening on fields of blood. At present the Magyar is his own master in Transylvania. No stranger, no adversary, no protector exacts tribute from him. None may interfere in our deliberations. The neighbouring powers are obliged to protect us, and we are not obliged to do them homage for it. Reflect well upon all this ere you stake everything on one cast of the die! Would you again see all Transylvania turned into a huge battle-field, and your vassals transformed into an army, perhaps not even a victorious army? And even if our hosts were sufficient, who is there to lead them? None of us has inherited the genius of a Bethlen or of a Bocskai; neither I, nor Master Teleki. And then again, whom can we trust besides ourselves? The capricious Louis XIV. perhaps? His policy can be changed every moment by a pair of bright eyes. If we depended only on him, a petty Versailles intrigue might leave us in the lurch when we most required assistance."

[Pg 204]

Here Forval coughed to conceal his annoyance.

"As for Sobieski," continued Banfi, "depend upon it he will not attack his present ally the Emperor for our sweet sakes; nor will the Sultan break his oath as lightly as Master Michael Teleki seems to imagine. What then remains for us to do? Call the nomadic Tartars into Hungary, I suppose! The poor Hungarian population would certainly express their gratitude for such assistance as that! Your ideal Hungarian, Nicolas Zrinyi, used to tell a tale which deserves to be handed down to our latest posterity. The devil was carrying a Szekler away on his back. The Szekler's neighbour met and thus accosted him: 'Whither away, gossip?' 'I am being carried to hell,' said he. 'Eh! but that is a very bad job,' returned the other. 'Yes, but it might be much worse,' replied the rogue. 'Just fancy if he were to sit on my back, dig his spurs into me, and compel me to carry him instead!'—Let every one apply this fable as he thinks best. For my part, I cannot quite decide which I fear the most, the enmity of the Emperor or the amity of the Sultan. For, tell me, what will be the end of this war? If we conquer with the aid of the Sultan, Transylvania will become a Turkish Pachalic; if we are conquered, we shall sink into an Austrian province, while now we are a free and independent State by the grace of God! In any case Hungary's fate is bound to improve, and that fate touches my heart quite as much as theirs who fancy they can heal the sick man with the sword. But nothing is to be won in that way. How much blood has not already been shed without the slightest result? Let us try some other way. Surely the Magyar has sense enough to subdue by his intellectual superiority those whom he cannot overcome by force of arms? Subdue your conquerors, I say. You who are second to none in sense, energy, wealth, and the beauty of manliness, why do you not take the highest posts which belong to you of right? If you were to sit where the Pázmáns^[50] and the Esterhazys^[51] have sat, there would be no room left for a Lobkovich.^[52] If instead of fighting petty, fruitless battles now and then, you were to use your intellects and your influence, you might make your land happy without costing her a drop of blood. It rests with you to restore once more the age of Louis the Great,^[53] that foreign prince who became enamoured of his adopted people, turned Magyar, and made the nation as great and as powerful as the nation made him. The Estates of Transylvania will undertake to mediate between Hungary and the Emperor, and so get you back your privileges and your possessions. I will be the first to stretch out a helping hand, and assuredly Master Michael Teleki will be the second. If, however, you do not accept this offer, then, I say, beware of what you do. As to the prophecy—Our turn to-day, yours to-morrow! I'll only say, Fear nothing for Transylvania. I'll be bold to say, that whoever invades her by force of arms, will always find a host of equal strength ready to meet him; but let me tell you, that that same host will never be so foolhardy as to invade a foreign land."

[Pg 205]

[50] Cardinal Peter Pázmán (1570-1637), a famous Hungarian patriot and statesman.

[51] The celebrated Nicholas Esterhazy of Galanta, Palatine of Hungary.

[52] Lobkovich (Eusebius Vincent), Leopold I.'s prime minister (1670-73), who attempted to make the Emperor absolute in Hungary.

[53] Louis the Great, King of Hungary, 1342-1381.

"Then Hungary is to you a foreign land?" cried a mocking voice from the crowd.

[Pg 206]

This interruption was too much for Banfi's composure. He turned furiously towards the quarter whence the question came, and meeting the cold, contemptuous looks of the Hungarians assembled there, he quite forgot himself; everything around him seemed to be in a whirl, and dashing his kalpag to the ground, he cried—

"Right, right—indeed! A foreign land—nay more, a stepmother you have always been to us. We have always had to suffer for your sins. We have won victories, and you have frittered away the fruits of our victories. Your discords have thrice brought Hungary low, and thrice have we raised her from the dust. We have given you heroes; you have given us traitors!"

These last words Banfi was obliged to roar out at the top of his voice to make himself heard above the ever-increasing din. The uproar was general. Every one tried to shout down his neighbour. The Hungarian gentlemen sprang from their seats and reviled Banfi. The graver members of the peace party shook their heads when they saw how Banfi's indiscretion had let loose the passions of the Assembly.

Beldi now arose. All lovers of order cried at once—"Let us hear Beldi!"

Then a young man suddenly leaped over the barrier, and placing his hand on Teleki's arm-chair, planted himself in front of Banfi with a flushed and defiant face. It was Emerich Tököli.

"I too have got a word to say," cried he, in a voice audible above the tumult. "I also have the right to say a word or two within this barrier. If you will deny your mother, Hungary, and draw boundaries between her and you, it is time for me to speak. I am just as good a territorial noble here in Transylvania as that proud and petty demigod, whose father before him was just such another reviler of his mother country!"

Beldi was making his way towards Tököli to stop him from speaking, when some one from behind seized his hand, and turning round, he was astonished to see his own son-in-law, Paul Wesselenyi, who begged him to step outside for a moment.

Beldi retired into the lobby, while Tököli's voice thundered through the hall above the never-ending din.

A veiled lady awaited Beldi in the lobby, whom, when she had unveiled her face, he had some difficulty in recognizing as his daughter Sophia, so much had grief and care changed and broken her. Her beautiful eyes were red with weeping.

[Pg 207]

"We are homeless fugitives," sobbed Sophia, sinking on her father's breast. "They have taken from us our Hungarian possessions; my husband has been driven from his castle, and a price set on his head."

Beldi became very serious. This unexpected ill-tidings pricked him to the heart. Within, Tököli's thundering voice was raising a perfect tempest of indignation, but Beldi no longer made haste back to quell it.

"Remain with me," said he, with a troubled countenance; "here you can dwell in peace till things improve."

"Too late!" said Wesselenyi. "I have already enlisted under the flag of the French General, Count Boham, as a common soldier."

"You a common soldier! You, the descendant of the Palatine Wesselenyi! And what in the meantime is to become of my daughter?"

"She will remain behind with you—till Hungary has been won back again!" and with these words he placed his wife in Beldi's arms, kissed her on the forehead, and departed with dry eyes.

Within raged the tumult. Beldi heard his daughter sobbing, and a bitter feeling began to fill his breast, a feeling not unlike a nascent desire of vengeance. He felt almost pleased that war was being demanded within there; and he, the leader of the peace party, was also just about to draw his sword, rush into the Diet, and exclaim—"War! war! and retribution!" when the pages led into the lobby an old man as pale as death, who, recognizing Beldi, staggered up to him and addressed him in a trembling voice—

"My lord, are you not the Captain-General of the Szeklers, Paul Beldi of Uzoni?"

"Yes. What do you want with me?"

"I am the last inhabitant of Benfalva!" stammered the dying man. "War, famine, and pestilence have carried off all the others. I alone remain, and feeling that I too am on the point of death, I have brought you the official seal of the place and the church bell. Give them to the Diet. Preserve them in the archives, and write over them—"These are the bell and the seal of what was once Benfalva, the inhabitants of which utterly perished."

[Pg 208]

Beldi's nerveless arm dropped the hilt of his sword, and he tore himself from his daughter's embrace.

"Go to your mother at Bodola, and learn to bear your fate with a stout heart!"

Then he took the seal and the bell from the dying man, and hastened back to the hall of the Diet, where Tököli had just finished his speech, which had produced a terrible effect on the Assembly. The French ministers were shaking hands with him.

Beldi stepped up to the president's table, and placed upon it the seal which had just been handed to him.

Every one looked at him, and seeing that he was about to speak, became silent.

"Look!" cried he, with a voice broken by emotion. "A desolated town sends its official seal to the Diet by its last inhabitant. There are already enough of such towns in Transylvania, and in time there may be more. War and famine have wasted the fairest portions of our land. You should not forget, gentlemen, to place this seal among your other—trophies!"

At these last words Beldi's voice sank almost to a whisper, yet so deep was the silence, that he was heard distinctly in every part of the hall. A thrill of horror passed through every one present.

"Outside that door I hear some one weeping," continued Beldi, with quivering lips. "It is my own dear daughter, the wife of Paul Wesselenyi, who, driven from her fatherland, on her knees implored me, as I loved her, to let the *lex talionis* assert its rights. But I say, let my child weep, let her perish, may I also perish with my whole family if need be, but let not the curse of war fall on Transylvania! May no one in Transylvania have cause to weep because I suffer. No! I would declare against war though every one here present were for it.... Gentlemen!... this seal ... and the other relic too ... forget not to preserve them among your trophies!"

Beldi sat down. Long after his words had ceased to sound, a death-like silence continued to prevail.

Teleki, ascribing this silence to indignation against Beldi, very confidently arose, and bade the Estates give their votes. But for once he had wrongly felt the pulse of public opinion, for the majority of the Diet, deeply touched by the foregoing scene, voted for peace. So great was still the influence of Banfi and Beldi in the land.

[Pg 209]

Teleki looked with some confusion at his future son-in-law, who clenched his fists, and murmured bitterly with tears in his eyes—

"Flectere si nequeo Superos, Acheronta movebo!"

As the Assembly broke up, Forval and Nicholas Bethlen again met together.

"So our hope that Transylvania will take up arms has been dashed," observed the crestfallen Frenchman.

"On the contrary, our hope only now begins," returned Bethlen, tapping his friend on the shoulder. "Did you hear that young man Tököli speak?"

"Yes; he spoke very prettily."

"Prettily or not, it strikes me that he is just the man you seek."

"A King of Hungary, eh?"^[54]

[54] Tököli (Emerich), the most extraordinary Hungarian of his day, famous for his marvellous courage and beauty, his adventures and vicissitudes. In 1682 the Turks proclaimed him Prince of Hungary, and for the next five years he disputed possession of that country with the Emperor. After being twice thrown in prison by the Sultan, he was released and proclaimed Prince of Transylvania, but, after many successes, was finally obliged to fly to Turkey. He was excluded by name from the general amnesty at the Peace of Lovicz, 1697, between the Turks and the Emperor; but the Sultan made him Count of Widdin and one of his chief counsellors. He died in 1705 at Nicomedia in Bithynia. He married Helen Zrinyi, who accompanied him everywhere with heroic fidelity.

"Either that or an outlaw. Fate will decide."

[Pg 210]

CHAPTER VII. THE *JUS LIGATUM*.^[55]

[55] *Jus ligatum*. The right of conspiring secretly against an offender unreachable by the ordinary law.

'Tis a good old custom which requires that every ceremony should end with a feast, and so the boisterous Diet was succeeded by a still more boisterous banquet, whereat Michael Apafi also presided; and here he was in his proper place, for the chronicles tell us that a skin of wine at a sitting was a mere nothing to his Highness.

Wine inflames hate as well as love. When ladies are at table, we must look to our hearts; but when only men sit down together, our heads are often in danger.

After dinner, according to Transylvanian custom, the guests stood up to drink. Conversation flows more easily thus, and the Prince, going the round of his guests, presented to them an overflowing beaker with his own hand, challenging them one by one to drain it—"Come, a toast—my health, the welfare of the realm, and whatever else you like!"

The gentlemen were in high good-humour, and kept falling out with each other and making it up again from sheer lightness of heart. Only one man was quite sober—Michael Teleki, who never drank at all.

Beware of the man who keeps sober while every one else is in his cups.

Teleki went about among the wrangling roysterers, and lingered for a long time round Banfi's chair. When the magnate caught sight of him, creeping about like a cat, he turned sharply round upon him.

"Why, how sad you look!" he cried, with a mocking laugh; "just like a man whose coveted palatinate falls into the dust before his eyes."

[Pg 211]

That was all Teleki wanted.

With a smile, beneath which there lurked a deadly sting, he replied—

"That is no merit of yours. If Paul Beldi had not been present, you would have been left all alone with your vote. But I must confess that we all bow before such a distinguished man as Paul Beldi. The whole nation cries Amen! to whatever he says."

Teleki then bowed low, with a semblance of deep respect, well aware that he had sent a venomous shaft into the proud magnate's heart, for nothing wounded Banfi so much as to see some one honoured above himself, especially some one who really deserved it.

Teleki next turned to Beldi, drew him into a window-niche, and thus began in his suavest manner—

"I had always held your Excellency for a very magnanimous man, but to-day I learnt to recognize you as doubly such, though it was to my own detriment. The Diet only knows that in voting for peace you sacrificed your fatherly affection; but I know that at the same time you sacrificed your hatred of Banfi."

"I?—I have never hated Banfi."

"I know why you conceal your hatred. You fancy that no one knows your secret reasons for it. My friend, we men know well that a sword-thrust may be forgiven, but a *kiss* never."

Beldi started. He knew not what reply to make to this man, who, after planting the sting of jealousy in his heart, quitted him with a smiling countenance, leaving the wound to rankle.

At that moment Banfi appeared behind Beldi's back with his haughtiest air. He was burning to make Beldi feel his haughtiness, and was thinking how he could best pick a quarrel with him.

Beldi at first did not perceive him, and when the Prince, chancing to stray into that part of the room, holding a costly pocal set with turquoises, which he affably extended, saying familiarly—"Drink, my cousin!" Beldi, fancying that the invitation was meant for him, and never suspecting that any one was behind him, took the cup out of the Prince's hand, and drained it to his Highness's health, at the very moment when Banfi also held out his hand towards it.

Banfi, purple with rage, turned furiously upon Beldi, and said in his most insulting tone—

[Pg 212]

"Not so fast, Szekler. You might, I think, have a little more respect for the Marshal of the Diet, and not snatch away the cup from beneath my very nose. Let me tell you, sir, that if you persist in such courses, you and I shall fall out!"

Beldi was anything but a quarrelsome man. Had he been in another frame of mind, he would simply have apologized for his mistake. But now he too was in a pugnacious mood, so, calmly measuring Banfi from head to foot, he replied with suppressed rage—

"Yes, Denis, I am a Szekler, as you say, and a tough one too; and if it came to a bout between us, and I fell uppermost, I'd give you such a squeeze that you'd never raise your head again in this world."

"Come, come! What's all this nonsense about?" cried the Prince, intervening. "I'm surprised at you, gentlemen! *Inter pocula non sunt seria tractanda.*" And, with that, Apafi compelled the two magnates to shake hands with each other, and then passed on, thinking that the whole affair was a mere drunken brawl, and that he had put it right.

But it did not escape Teleki that, immediately after this scene, both the magnates quitted the room, and he learnt soon afterwards that they had suddenly left Fehervár, thus leaving the field clear for him.

Teleki and his satellites remained alone with the half-besotted Prince.

"Drink, gentlemen! drink! be merry!" cried Apafi. "Don't drop off one by one! Who last went out there?"

"Beldi!" cried several voices.

"Ah, I understand! The poor fellow has not seen his wife for a long time. Let him go. And who else has gone?"

"Banfi!"

"What? Banfi too? What's the meaning of that?"

"He has gone to lord it at home?" sneered Szekely, one of Teleki's creatures.

"He can't endure to be anywhere where there is a greater than he," put in Nalaczi.

"I certainly shall not resign the princely diadem to please his Excellency!" cried Apafi.

"That is not necessary!" insinuated Teleki. "He knows how to rule in Transylvania without an *athname*. When he commands the country must obey, and what the country commands he contemptuously rejects."

[Pg 213]

"I should like to see him do it!" murmured Apafi angrily.

"But is it not so? We want war, he doesn't, and we must give way. We want peace, and he is immediately up and waging war against our allies on his own account. The throne is ours, the realm is his!"

"Don't say that, Master Michael Teleki!"

"I appeal to you, Nalaczi! What answer did he give in the Zolyomi affair?"

"He said that if the country wished him to surrender the Gyulai property to Zolyomi, it must give him in exchange the domain of Szamos-Ujvar."

"What!" cried the Prince, "the property which the Estates gave to me for my maintenance! My princely domains! The man must be mad!"

"So he said, adding that he would not surrender the property even if Zolyomi saddled us with the Turks in consequence."

"Well, now we've had enough of him. Not a word more about it, gentlemen."

"The insult to the Turks your Highness might overlook," persisted Teleki, "but we really cannot look through our fingers any longer at the way in which he treats the gentry. The latest victim of his tyranny is Lady Saint Pauli. The poor widow's ancestral dwelling was an eyesore to the great lord, because it spoiled the prospect from his palace windows; so he had the house appraised at his own valuation, and turned the poor lady out of doors. The magistrate gave her a letter of indemnity, but my Lord-Marshal tore the letter to pieces, and pulled down the poor widow's sole possession, her ancestral dwelling-place. The Diet, he said, might build it up again if it felt so disposed. Such an act, sir, in ordinary times has been known to cost the doer thereof his head!"

Apafi was silent, but his bloodshot eyes began to glow savagely.

"But that is not all," continued Teleki; "outrages on individuals are of small account when the security of the whole realm is at stake. This great lord can speak very prettily about the blessings of peace, let us see now how he labours to uphold it. He takes the sword out of our hands and closes our mouths, while he himself collects an army and goads the Turk against us, well knowing that we have no money wherewith to buy the gifts necessary to counteract his vagaries. Now, three letters have reached us simultaneously—one from the Pasha of Grosswardein, another from the Pasha of Buda, and a third from the Sultan himself—demanding instant satisfaction, or an indemnity of three hundred purses of gold, for the defeat which the Pasha of Grosswardein has suffered at Banfi's hands. As, however, we cannot expect Banfi to pay the indemnity, will it please your Highness to consider from whence such a large sum of money is to be procured?"

[Pg 214]

"From nowhither!" cried Apafi furiously, smashing his glass to pieces on the table. "I'll show the world that I'm able to exact satisfaction from whomsoever I will, let him be even as mighty again as Denis Banfi."

"Then I wish your Highness would tell us how, for we know that Banfi will not appear to our summons, and we cannot compel him, for he has shown himself stronger than the whole realm. If we attempted to use force he would call out the banderia and the garrison troops, and then it might fare with us as it fared with Ladislaus Csaky—he would arrest the officers sent to arrest him, and expose us to universal derision."

"As our first counsellor, it is your province to give us good counsel in such cases," cried Apafi wrathfully.

"I only know of one remedy capable of curing the realm thoroughly of this disease."

"Then prescribe it. In what does your remedy consist?"

"In the *jus ligatum*."

Apafi, despite his semi-besotted state, instinctively shrunk back from such an expedient, and throwing himself into his arm-chair, looked blankly at Teleki.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself," he murmured in broken sentences, as tipsy people usually do, "to propose a secret conspiracy against a free nobleman? To privily conspire against him is contrary to the law of the land."

"It is not my fault if the expedient is shameful," returned Teleki calmly and steadfastly; "but it is shameful that the law should not possess sufficient power to bring a rebel to book, and that one of our own subjects should be able to openly defy justice and laugh at the decrees of the Prince. If in such a state of things the *jus ligatum* is our only means of defence, the shame falls not upon me but upon the Prince."

Apafi rose angrily from his seat and paced to and fro. The lords remained perfectly silent.

[Pg 215]

At last the Prince stopped short in front of Teleki, and, leaning on the back of his arm-chair, asked him—

"And how then do you propose to bring about this league?"

Nalaczi and Szekely exchanged a smile. It was plain that the idea had caught the Prince's fancy. Teleki beckoned to Szekely to fetch him writing materials and a strip of parchment.

"We will quickly draw up the necessary articles of impeachment; your Highness will subscribe them, and we'll secretly persuade the great men of the land to consent to Banfi's arrest and join the league before any legal steps have been taken."

At these words many of the gentlemen present began to bite their moustaches and move uneasily in their chairs.

Teleki observed the movement, and added emphatically—

"I perceive that no one here has the courage to put down his name first on the list. Nevertheless I have already found a man, who in dignity and power is every whit Banfi's equal, and when once he has subscribed the list, the other signatures will follow as a matter of course."

"And who may that be?" asked Apafi.

"Paul Beldi!"

The Prince shook his head.

"He won't do it. He is much too honourable a man for that."

Wine-inspired as this sentence was, it completely ruffled Teleki's equanimity. Turning vehemently upon the Prince he cried—

"Then you mean to imply that *we* are acting dishonourably?"

"I meant to say that Beldi is never very willing to pick a quarrel with anybody. He is a peace-abiding man."

"But I know his sore point, and if you but touch it with the tip of your finger, he'll answer with his clenched fist, and the lamb will become a lion. I'll get him to——"

At that moment the door opened, and, to every one's astonishment, the Princess entered the room.

Nevertheless, her appearance at this time was no freak of chance. You could see by her agitation that she was well aware of what was going on. The lords were confused, and Apafi, despite his tipsy wrath, became so frightened when he beheld the pale face of his consort that he whispered to Teleki—

[Pg 216]

"For heaven's sake put that document out of sight."

Only Teleki kept his countenance, and instead of hiding the parchment, ostentatiously spread it out before him.

"What are you doing?" asked the Princess. She was very pale, and her bosom heaved tempestuously.

"We are holding a council," replied Teleki grimly.

"A council?" repeated Anna, approaching nearer and nearer to the table.

"Yes; and we venture to ask your Highness by what right you intrude here, while we are deliberating over the most momentous affairs of state?" continued Teleki in a hard, dry tone.

"Deliberating over the most momentous affairs of state, eh?" repeated the lady, measuring Teleki with a searching look. Then with a loud, vibrating voice she exclaimed—"What mean these wine-cups then? You are holding a council of state when the head of the state is drunk, that you may sow discord and confusion."

Teleki sprang from his seat and turned towards the Prince—

"May it please your Highness to dismiss us. We perceive that a domestic scene is about to begin."

"Anna!" cried Apafi, scarlet with shame and wine, "leave the room this instant. We command it—and for a week to come do not presume to appear in our presence."

"Be it so, Apafi. I have nothing more to say to you, for you are not yourself; but to you, Mr. Chief-Counsellor, to you who are always sober, I have a word to say. I raised you from the dust; I helped you into the place where now you stand; you requite me by thrusting yourself between me and the Prince's heart, for I find you in my way every time I approach my husband. You have taken the sceptre out of the Prince's hand, and have substituted for it the headsman's sword; but let me tell you that if I cannot reach the Prince's heart, I can, at least, step in the way of the sword, and as often as it descends, you will find me between the stroke and the victim!—And ye! Nalaczi and Szekely, ennobled lackeys as you are, who cannot explain to yourselves how you became great lords, reflect that the wheel of Fortune debases as often as it exalts, and that as you treat others to-day so may others treat you to-morrow. And I say to you all, ye noble

cavaliers, who seek your courage in your cups, bethink you and tremble at the thought, that not wine but innocent blood is foaming in the beakers that you hold in your hands! Shame, shame upon you all! who give wine to the Prince in order to ask blood of him. And now your Highness may add a couple of weeks to my term of banishment."

[Pg 217]

With these words, the Princess rapidly left the room. The lords were dumb, and dared not look at each other. But Teleki got up, closed the door, dipped his pen in the inkhorn, and said—

"And now we will go on where we left off."

[Pg 218]

CHAPTER VIII. DEATH FOR A KISS.

Paul Beldi went straight from Fehervár to Bodola: all the way he was tortured by the thought which Teleki's words had revived.

In itself, a kiss is a very harmless thing. But what if another knows of it or has perceived it? Then indeed it becomes the pole of our suspicion, round which the mind weaves a whole pandemonium of doubts and guesses. We begin to think what might have led up to it, and what it may lead to. And in this case another did know of it. The husband had reasoned with himself: a kiss of which nobody knows anything makes no rent in a wife's virtue—and behold! it is in every one's mouth already. And perhaps they don't stop there. Perhaps while he, fond fool! imagined his honour in safe keeping, the world with a loud Ha, ha! has long been dragging it through the mire, and his ear is the very last to catch the insulting laugh. And that his mortal foe, too, should be at the bottom of it!

Night had fallen. The horses were tired out. Beldi had nowhere given them rest, nowhere changed them for fresh ones. He wanted to get home as quickly as possible. He wanted to meet face to face the woman who had so disgraced him, heaven only knew how much! But why be content to see a woman weep or die, when there was a man on whom vengeance could be taken? A man who had ever been his foe, from the time when they had been pages together at Prince Gabriel Bethlen's court, and had now fastened on the most sensitive spot in his heart and ruthlessly torn it.

"Turn back," he cried to the coachman, "and go in the direction of Klausenburg."

The old servant shook his head; turned into a side-path, and so completely lost himself in the darkness of the night, that he was forced to confess to his master that he really did not know where he was.

[Pg 219]

Beldi's rage and impatience knew no bounds. Looking about him, he perceived a small light burning at no great distance, and sulkily bade his coachman drive in that direction.

It was into the courtyard of a lonely country-house that they rolled at last, and Beldi recognized in the master of the house, who appeared at the barking of the large watch-dogs, old Adam Gyergyai, one of his dearest friends, who, when he saw Beldi, rushed into his arms, and was beside himself with joy.

"God be with you!" said the good old man, covering his guest with kisses. "I will not ask what piece of good fortune has brought you to me."

"To tell the truth, I've lost my way. I was on the road to Klausenburg. I must get there to-night; but I'll rest my horses here for an hour or two if you'll let me."

"What pressing business is this you have on hand?"

"I must deliver a message," replied Beldi evasively.

"If that be all, why so much hurry? Write it down, and one of my mounted servants shall immediately take it to its destination while you remain here."

"You are right," said Beldi, after some reflection; "it will be better to send a letter," and with that he asked for writing materials, sat down, and wrote to Banfi.

The mere act of writing generally clears and calms the mind, so that it was in a fairly moderate tone that Beldi challenged Banfi to meet him at Szamos-Ujvar on an affair of honour. Beldi then sealed the letter and gave it to Gyergyai, requesting him to forward it at once.

"So you are writing to Banfi, my brother?" said the old man, looking at the address of the letter. "Why, you only parted from him a little time ago! What is all this between you?"

"Do you recollect the time, my father," said Beldi, "when you saw Banfi and me fight together in the lists at the tournament held by Prince George Rakoczy?"

"Quite well! On that occasion you had both vanquished every other competitor, but could do

nothing against each other."

"You then said that you would very much like to see which of the two would beat the other if we set to it in earnest."

[Pg 220]

"Yes; I well remember it."

"Well, now you *shall* see!"

Gyergyai looked Beldi in the face.

"My brother, I know not what this letter contains, but I can guess your thoughts from your face. My father used to say that a letter written in wrath should never be sent off the same day, but should be put under one's pillow and slept upon. The advice is not bad; follow it, and send off the letter to-morrow morning, for, to be candid with you, I won't send it to-night."

Beldi followed the old man's advice. He put the letter under his pillow, lay down, went to sleep, and dreamt that he was in the bosom of his family, saw his wife and children, and was very happy. It was only the rolling of his carriage into the courtyard next morning which woke him out of his slumbers. The first thing that occurred to him was his letter to Banfi. He broke the seal, read the letter through again, and was much ashamed that he had ever written such a letter.

"Where was your common-sense, Beldi?" he asked himself, tore the letter to pieces, and threw it into the fire. "How the world would have laughed at me!" thought he. "An old fool, to take it into his head all at once to be jealous of the mother of his children!—and for the sake of a kiss too given in drunkenness and rejected with indignation. What a weapon I should have put into Banfi's hands, had I led him to suppose that I was jealous of my wife on his account."

"Let us go to Bodola," said he very gently to his coachman, and with that he took leave of his host.

"But how about that pressing letter of yours?" asked Gyergyai anxiously.

"I have already sent it—up the chimney," replied Beldi, smiling, and set out on his journey with feelings very different from those with which he had started.

So you see a man can be drunk without wine!

While still some distance from Bodola, he could see all the members of his family looking out for him on the castle terrace, and no sooner did they perceive his carriage, than they hastened down to greet him. He met them all in the park, wife and children; they threw themselves on his neck with cries of joy, and he kissed them all, one after another, over and over again; but his warmest embraces were for his darling wife, who smiled up at him with a radiant face, which he could not feast his eyes upon enough. It seemed to him as if her eyes were brighter, her features more enchanting, her lips sweeter than ever they had been.

[Pg 221]

"What a fool a man is, to be sure," thought Beldi, "who, when his wife is out of sight, is capable of supposing everything bad of her, and when she stands before his eyes cannot make too much of her."

In the abandonment of his joy he did not at first perceive that there was a strange face in the family circle—a handsome, stately young Turk, with frank and noble features, not unlike an Hungarian.

"You do not even notice me, or perhaps you forget me," said the youth, stepping in front of Beldi.

Beldi looked at him. The youth's features were familiar to him, and yet he could not recall his name till his youngest daughter, Aranka, who was dangling on her father's arm, remarked archly—

"What! Not recognize Feriz Beg, papa! Why, I knew him at the first glance."

Beldi at once held out his hand and heartily greeted the youth, whose manly features however wore a grave and serious look.

"My father sends me to you on an urgent errand," said he, "and had you not come, I must have gone to seek you, for my message admits of no delay."

Beldi was struck by the youth's earnest tone, and on reaching the castle immediately took him aside into a private room, and there the young Beg handed him a parchment roll tied round with silken cord, and sealed with a yellow seal. Beldi broke the seal and read as follows—

"The blessing and protection of heaven rest upon you and your family!—Transylvania is in great danger. The Sultan is enraged at the war which Denis Banfi wages with the Pasha of Grosswardein. They say that this great noble is in league with the Emperor. See to it that the land chastises Banfi, the power to do so is still your own. But if the Prince cannot, or will not punish him, the Sultan has sworn to drive the pair of them out of the realm, and convert Transylvania into a Turkish Pachalic. The Pashas of Grosswardein and Temesvar, the Lord-Marchers, and the Tartar Khan have been ordered to hold themselves in readiness to invade Transylvania from all sides at a moment's notice. Put a bit therefore in the mouth of this great lord, for death hangs over your heads on the film of a spider's web.

[Pg 222]

"Your friend and brother,
"KUCSUK PASHA."

Beldi's face grew dark as he read this letter. So it was all in vain that he had driven Banfi's name out of his head. This letter conjured up that odious form once more before his eyes.

He folded up the parchment and gave the grave youth a brief answer to take back with him—

"Let your father know that we will take the necessary steps to avert the threatened evil, and thank him heartily for his warning."

Feriz Beg immediately quitted Bodola Castle. Beldi remained alone in his room, pacing to and fro in a brown study, and racking his brains to find a way out of the danger. He could find none. It was not to be expected that Banfi's pride would yield to the Pasha, especially after a brilliant victory and in a just cause; and yet the welfare of the land required the sacrifice of the just cause.

Brooding thus, he did not notice that somebody was tapping at his door, who after thrice knocking and receiving no answer, opened it, and as Beldi suddenly came to himself and looked around him with a start, he perceived Michael Teleki standing before him. So amazed was Beldi by this apparition, that for the moment the power of speech forsook him.

"You appear surprised," said Teleki, observing his amazement. "You are astonished that I should travel such a long way to see you, after parting from you only twenty-four hours ago. But great events have taken place in the meantime. Transylvania is threatened by a danger which must be averted as quickly as possible."

"I know it," replied Beldi, and putting his hand over the signature, he let Teleki read Kucsuk's letter.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed the minister. "You know more than I did. But what I want to say on this matter is a secret which the very walls around us may not hear."

"I understand," replied Beldi, and immediately commanded his heydukes to admit no one into the vestibules; placed guards in front of the windows, and drew the curtains down to the ground. There now only remained a little tapestried door, at the back of the room, which led through a narrow corridor to his wife's bed-chamber, an arrangement very common, at that time, in the mansions of Hungarian magnates. By way of additional precaution Beldi closed this door also. [Pg 223]

"Does your Excellency feel secure enough now?" asked Beldi.

"One thing more. Give me your word of honour that if what I am about to disclose does not meet with your approbation, you will at least keep it secret."

"I promise," returned Beldi, impatiently awaiting the *dénouement* of all this mystery.

Teleki thereupon drew forth a long strip of parchment, unfolded it, and held it before Beldi's eyes, without however letting it out of his hands.

It was the league against Banfi, signed and sealed by the Prince.

The more Beldi read of this document, the blacker grew his looks, till at last, turning his face away, he pushed the document aside with an expression of deep disgust.

"Sir," said he, "'tis a dirty piece of work!"

Teleki was prepared for some such answer, and summoned to his aid all the sophistry of which he was so perfect a master.

"Beldi!" cried he, "we must, for once, put aside all narrow-minded sentiment. Here it is a question of the end and not of the means. The means may seem bad, but we really have no other. Whenever a subject becomes so powerful in a state that the arm of the law is no longer able to bring him to justice, then I say he has only himself to blame if the state is compelled to conspire against him. He whom the axe of the executioner cannot reach, must fall beneath the dagger of the bravo. Denis Banfi, by despising the Prince's commands and waging war on his own account, has placed himself outside the law. In such a case, where the ordinary tribunals become inoperative, we must of course have resort to secret tribunals. If any one injures me, and the law can give me no remedy, I make use of my own weapons, and shoot him down wherever I meet him. If the country is injured by any one whom it cannot punish, it must fall back upon the *jus ligatum*, and lay hands upon him whenever and wherever it can. The commonweal requires, the common danger compels such a step." [Pg 224]

"We are in the hands of God!" replied Beldi. "If 'tis His will to destroy the fatherland, we can only bow the head and die in defence of our freedom with a good conscience. But never ought we to lift our hands against the liberties we have inherited from our forefathers. Rather let us endure the wrongs which spring from those liberties, than lay the axe to the root of them ourselves! Rather let war and strife burst over the land, than conspire against the laws! That may cost the nation its blood; but this will destroy its very soul. I disapprove of this league, and, sir, I mean to oppose it!"

At these words Michael Teleki rose from his seat, sank down upon his knees before Beldi, raised his hands to heaven, and cried—

"I swear by the living God, that as I hope for my own and my family's protection and happiness here and for salvation hereafter, that what I now do, I do as your loyal friend, well knowing that all Banfi's efforts aim at the ruin of your house, and I solemnly adjure you, as you love your life and the lives of your wife and children, to avert the impending danger by signing the league. I have now done all in my power to save you and my country, and that too at my own risk and peril. I have no other object. Before God I lie not!"

Beldi turned with calm dignity towards the minister, and said, in a tone of immovable conviction

"*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus!*"

A few moments after Teleki's arrival at Bodola, a mounted heyduke had galloped into the courtyard; it was Andrew, Dame Apafi's faithful old servant, who handed to Dame Beldi a letter from the Princess, adding that the message was doubly urgent, as he already perceived in the courtyard Teleki's coachman, whom he ought to have forestalled.

Dame Beldi hastily opened the letter and read as follows—

"DEAR SISTER—

"Michael Teleki has set out for Bodola to see your husband. His aim is to secretly ruin Banfi by the hand of Beldi. The magnates have conspired together to break the law. Fortunately, every one of them has a wife, and in the hearts of our women the better feelings of human nature are not yet extinguished. I have charged each one of them to preserve their husbands from Teleki's wiles; but 'tis to you that I chiefly look for help. Beldi is the most eminent of them all. If he joins the league, the rest will follow his example; but he is also the most honourable of men and the best of husbands. I count upon your firmness. Move heaven and earth!

"Your loving sister,
"ANNA BORNEMISSA."

[Pg 225]

On reading this letter, Dame Beldi almost swooned.

Teleki had already been closeted with her husband for more than half-an-hour, and the servants had brought word that every one had been ordered away, even from the passages leading to the room. In an instant she divined everything. Terror seized her. Perhaps it was already too late! But what could she do? Suddenly, the secret corridor occurred to her, which led from her bedroom to her husband's. Urged by fear, she rapidly traversed the corridor, reached the tapestried door, stood still before it with a beating heart, and listened. She could only hear Teleki, and he was speaking in an unusually excited voice, which rose almost to a scream. She looked through the keyhole, and beheld the minister on his knees before her husband with uplifted hands, endeavouring to move him by solemn oaths.

Such a sight made Dame Beldi perfectly frantic. What must it be that could make a man so proud and so exalted kneel down before Beldi? What is he swearing so vehemently? Suddenly Banfi's name struck on her ear; she turned pale with horror, and at the same instant she heard Beldi say the words—"*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus!*" Ignorant as she was of the Latin language, she at once jumped to the conclusion that her husband had yielded, and in her desperation pressed hard upon the door-latch, and finding it immovable, shook the door furiously, exclaiming wildly at the same time—

"My husband! My beloved lord! Lord of my soul! Give no heed to Teleki's words, for he would ruin you."

Both the men started at this passionate cry, and Beldi rose from his seat, went to the door, opened it, and cried angrily to his wife—

"Go to your work, woman! You have no business here."

Then Dame Beldi lost her presence of mind altogether. Fear did not allow her to reflect. The idea that her husband was consenting to Teleki's schemes rendered her incapable of grasping the situation; and she forgot that the most complaisant of husbands, rather than see his uxoriousness paraded before the world, will do violence to his better nature. So Dame Beldi rushed wildly into the room, sank down at her husband's feet, convulsively clasped his knees, and cried in a voice of passionate remonstrance—

[Pg 226]

"Sweet lord of my heart! I adjure you not to believe in that man. Don't be led away. He would bring down innocent blood upon your head. You are too just and merciful to become a headsman."

"Get up, woman! You are mad!"

"Oh! I know what I'm saying. I saw him kneel to you. He who believes in God, kneels not to man. He would ruin Denis Banfi through you. Woe betide us if you help him! For if Banfi be the first, you will assuredly be the second."

When Teleki saw his secret design thus exposed, he grew wroth.

"If my wife were to treat me so," cried he passionately, "I would tear her eyes out. If any one came to me with a saving word of friendship on his tongue, I would thank him for it, and not allow my wife to lead me by the nose."

Beldi turned furiously upon his wife and ordered her out.

"I'll remain here even if you kill me, for 'tis a matter of life or death. When the peace of my family is at stake, I think 'tis time for me to speak. I beg, I implore you to hear me. I'll not allow you to sacrifice Banfi."

Beldi was already so ashamed of this onslaught on his marital authority that he was nearly beside himself; but when his wife began to plead for Banfi, he started back as if an adder had bitten him.

This did not escape Teleki, and with malicious innuendo he exclaimed—

"It seems to me that wives forget *some things* much sooner than their husbands."

Quick as lightning the dart pierced through Beldi's soul. The recollection of that kiss came back to him. Pale and speechless, he seized his wife's arm; her loud sobs only inflamed his jealousy, and dragging her to the tapestried door, he pushed her out and closed it behind her. There she remained, lying on the threshold, loudly cursing the Prince's minister, and hammering at the closed door with her fists.

[Pg 227]

Beldi, pale as death, sat down at the table, gnashed his teeth, and whispered huskily—

"Where's the document?"

Teleki spread out the parchment roll before him on the table.

Beldi took up his pen without a word, and wrote his name in a bold hand beneath that of Michael Apafi.

A triumphant smile played around Teleki's lips.

No sooner was the deed done than something in Beldi's breast began to accuse him. Resting his hand on the document, he turned with a very grave face towards Teleki.

"I expressly stipulate," he murmured, in a hollow voice, "that if Banfi be arrested, right and justice shall be done to him, according to the law of the land."

"Quite so! Of course!" returned the Prince's counsellor, making a snatch at the document.

Still Beldi would not let it go.

"Sir," said he, "promise me that you will not secretly assassinate Banfi; but that when once he is arrested you will proceed against him before the proper Court of Justice, and in the usual, legitimate way. If you don't guarantee me that, I'll tear this parchment to pieces and throw it into the fire, together with my own and the Prince's signatures."

"I promise it to you on my word of honour," replied the minister, inwardly smiling at the man who was so weak so long as he stood upright, and made such a brave show of firmness when he had already fallen.

That same day Teleki hastened with the subscribed league to Ladislaus Csaky, and from him to Haller, and from him to the Bethlens. As soon as they saw Beldi's name, they signed the document without more ado, for all of them hated Banfi.

In every case the wives intervened. Terrible scenes took place. Nowhere did Teleki escape scot-free. But the league was successfully carried through, and that was, after all, the main thing.

And thus it was that Transylvania dug her own grave.

[Pg 228]

CHAPTER IX. CONSORT AND CONCUBINE.

Ever since that painful scene at Bonczhida, Lady Banfi had not met her husband. Fate so willed it that Banfi was constantly away from home; scarcely had he come back from the Diet of Fehervár when he was called away to Somlyo, where his troops stood face to face with the Turks. During the few hours however that he remained at home, his wife had locked herself up from him; not even the domestics caught a glimpse of her face. She did not quit her chamber, and received no one.

One day both the spouses were invited to Roppad by a distant kinsman, one Gabriel Vitez, who knew nothing of their estrangement, to act as sponsors to his new-born son. To decline the invitation was impossible, and thus it came about that on the day in question, Lady Banfi coming from Bonczhida and her husband from Somlyo met together, to their mutual confusion, at the

festive mansion of the Vitezes.

At the first meeting they instinctively shrank back from each other. They had both indeed longed for such a meeting, but pride had kept them apart, and thus while their affection rejoiced at, their pride revolted against this chance encounter. Of course they let nothing of all this appear openly. In the presence of their friends they had so to conduct themselves that nobody might suspect that this meeting was anything but an everyday occurrence.

At the end of the banquet, which lasted far into the night, Master Gabriel Vitez took care that all his guests should be lodged with the utmost convenience. Husbands and wives and all the young girls had separate quarters, and the young men were accommodated in the hunting saloon. For Banfi and his spouse the garden pavilion had been reserved, which, being at some distance from the noisy courtyard, promised to be the quietest resting-place of all. The host, with the most distinguished courtesy, accompanied them thither himself.

[Pg 229]

It was now a long time since they had slept together under the same roof.

Before so many acquaintances they could not declare their estrangement, and had been compelled to accept the nice quarters provided for them by their amiable host, who insisted, despite their protests, in showing them the way; jested pleasantly with them for a time, and only left them to themselves after wishing them good-night some scores of times.

The pavilion consisted of two small adjoining rooms, such cosy little cribs, with quite an air of home about them. In one of them a merry fire was crackling and flickering on the hearth. In the corner a tall solemn clock was softly ticking. The brocade curtains of the large tester-bed were half drawn back, revealing behind them a comfortable, snow-white, downy expanse, on which lay, side by side, *two* little pillows adorned with red ribbons.

In the other room, which was half lighted by the reflection of the fire, a couch was visible provided with a bear-skin covering and a single stag-skin bolster. In all probability no one had ever thought that it would be occupied.

Banfi looked sadly at his wife. Now that he was no longer free to approach her, he saw what a heaven he had possessed in that noble and lovely being. She stood before him with downcast eyes, so sorrowful and yet so mild.

In her heart, too, many traitorous thoughts pleaded for her husband; wounded pride, that unbending judge, was already beginning to waver. In a noble breast it is not hate but grief that takes the place of love.

Banfi drew nearer to his wife, seized her hand, and pressed it in his own. He felt that her hand trembled, but he also felt that it did not return his pressure.

He went still further. He tenderly pressed her to him, and kissed her forehead, cheeks, and lips. She suffered his caresses but did not return them. But if only she had looked up into her husband's eyes, she would have seen them glistening with two tears as sincere as ever repentant sinner shed.

Banfi, with a deep sigh, sat down in an armchair, still holding Margaret's hand in his own; it needed but a single tender word from his wife, and he would have flung himself at her feet and wept like a remorseful child. Instead of that, Dame Banfi, with self-denying affectation, said to her husband—

[Pg 230]

"Do you wish to remain in this room, and shall I go into the other?"

The icy tone of these words cut Banfi to the heart. His broad breast heaved a deep sigh, his eyes looked sorrowfully at Margaret's joyless face—to him a closed paradise. He rose gravely from his seat, pressed his wife's hand to his lips, whispered her a scarcely audible good-night, and tottered into the adjoining room, closing the door behind him.

Dame Banfi set about disrobing, but on casting a glance at the lonely couch, a painful feeling overcame her. She threw herself sobbing on the pillows, and then, finding no rest for her soul there, she stood up again, drew a chair in front of the fire, sat down, and burying her face in her hands indulged in brooding, melancholy, dreamy thoughts.

And can there be any greater grief than when the heart fights against its own conviction; when a woman can no longer conceal from herself that the ideal of her love, him whom, after God, she loves the most, is after all only a common, ordinary mortal?—that he whom she has loved so nobly deserves nothing but her contempt? And yet she cannot but love him! She feels she ought to hate him, yet she cannot bear the thought of being without him. She would fain die for him, and the opportunity of dying will not come.

A single unlocked door separates her from him. They are only a few steps apart. How small the distance, and yet how great! She can hear him sighing. He too cannot sleep while he is so near to her whom he has so deeply wounded. What bliss it would be to traverse those few steps, to nestle side by side, to gratify each other's longings! But reconciliation is impossible; her heart yearns after it and recoils from it, loves and loathes at the same moment.

Oh! why can we not forget the Past? Why is it impossible to prevent Grief from grieving?

The lady fell a-thinking, a-dreaming.

It seemed to her as if she were talking to her husband in a vision—

"You said yourself that we ought to part while we still loved each other, while our hearts would bleed at the rupture. Then why don't you do it? Why do you sigh when you look at me? Why do you kiss me? Those sighs, those kisses are torture to me; they wound my heart. Let us part! It was your own wish."

[Pg 231]

The fire had burnt very low in the grate; over the ruddy embers a pale, ever-dwindling flame was feebly flickering to and fro, like the last thought of an extinguished passion. All around the room was growing darker and darker; the light of the expiring embers barely lit up the form of the sorrowing lady who sat there, with her head buried in her hands, like a marble statue mourning over a tomb.

Suddenly, amid the silence of the night and of her own thoughts, it seemed to her as if whispering voices and stealthy footsteps were approaching the doors of the pavilion.

Lady Banfi really did hear these sounds; but she was like one but half-awakened from his first sleep, who hears but heeds not, who knows what is going on about him without regarding it.

The whispering was now audible close beneath the windows, and now and then it seemed to her as if the smothered clash of arms was mingling with it. In her dreamy state the lady fancied she had got up and bolted the door; but this was a delusion, the door remained ajar.

Then some one pressed the latch, and the creaking sound made Lady Banfi dream that her husband had come to her, and was speaking to her in a tearful, supplicating voice. She felt the terrors of nightmare strong upon her as she came within the magnetic influence of that shape. "Let us part, Banfi!" she would have said, but the words died away on her lips. Then the dream-shape whispered to her—"I am not Banfi, but the headsman!" and seized her hand.

At this cold touch Lady Banfi uttered a shriek and started up.

Two men stood before her with drawn swords. The lady looked into their faces with a shudder. Both were well known to her. One was Caspar Kornis, chief captain of the Maros district, the other John Daczo, chief captain of Csik, who now stood before her with menacing looks, and the points of their naked swords at her breast.

"Not a sound, my lady!" said Daczo grimly. "Where's Banfi?"

The lady, thus scared out of her first sleep, was scarcely able to distinguish the objects around her: terror made her dumb.

Suddenly she observed through the open door that the passage was filled with armed men, whereupon her presence of mind seemed instantly and completely to return. She grasped at once the tremendous significance of the moment, and when Daczo, gnashing his teeth, again asked her where Banfi was, she bounded from her chair, ran to the door which separated her husband's chamber from her own, turned the key quickly round, and screamed with all her might—

[Pg 232]

"Banfi! Save yourself! They seek your life!"

Daczo ran forward to stop her mouth and snatch the key from her; but with singular presence of mind Lady Banfi had, in the meantime, thrown the key into the heart of the red-hot embers, and cried again—

"Fly, Banfi! Your enemies are here!"

Daczo tried to pick the key out of the fire, and burnt his fingers very badly in the attempt, whereupon, still more furious, he rushed upon the lady sword in hand to cut her down, but Kornis held him back.

"Softly, sir! We have no orders to kill the woman, nor would it be worthy of us; let us try rather to burst open the door as quickly as possible," and with that they both pressed their shoulders against the door, Daczo cursing and swearing, and calling upon all the devils in hell to help him, while Lady Banfi on her knees prayed God to allow her husband to escape.

Banfi had gone to sleep at the same time as his wife. He too had had a tormenting dream. He fancied he was in prison, and the moment he heard Margaret's shriek, he sprang in terror from his couch, tore open the window of the pavilion, and without thinking what he was doing, leaped into the garden at a single bound. He looked hurriedly about him. The house was surrounded by armed Szeklers, and the rear of the garden was bounded by a broad ditch filled with greenish rain-water. Amongst the masses of infantry stood here and there a group of grooms, holding by the bridles the chargers from which their masters had just dismounted.

Banfi had very little time for reflection, nor did he need much. Under cover of the darkness, he rushed swiftly upon the nearest groom, gave him a buffet which brought the blood in streams from his nose and mouth, sprang upon one of the vacant horses, and struck the spurs into its flanks.

The cry of the groom, who had fallen beneath the horse but still held on fast by the bridle, brought up to the spot a crowd of yelling Szeklers. It immediately occurred to Banfi to put his hands into his saddle-pouches, where pistols were sure to be found, and the moment he felt the

[Pg 233]

handles, he as quick as light sent two shots among the crowd which was pressing upon him from all sides, and taking advantage of the consequent hubbub and confusion, spurred his horse fiercely, till it reared and plunged and flew away with him through the garden. The groom still stuck to it like a leech, and allowed himself to be dragged along the ground, till at last his head came into collision with the stump of a tree and he fell back unconscious. Banfi thereupon galloped towards the ditch, and leaped it at a single bold bound; his pursuers, not daring to follow him that way, were obliged to make a long détour to reach the gates, thus giving Banfi a start of several hundred paces. His steed too, scared by the noise of the pursuit, had become half frantic, and Banfi gave him his head, and away they went over stock and stone, up hill and down dale, without aim or purpose.

"Oh, accursed woman!" roared Daczo, threatening Lady Banfi with his fists, when he learnt that Banfi had made his escape. "'Tis all through you that Banfi has slipped through our fingers."

"Oh, Almighty God! I thank Thee!" stammered Margaret, with hands upraised to heaven.

The Szeklers, enraged at having let the husband escape, swung their weapons and rushed upon the wife to murder her.

"Let her die! Her blood be upon her own head!" they roared, with bestial rage.

"Kill me! Death will be welcome to me!" cried Margaret, kneeling down before them. "To die for him was my only wish. God be with me!"

"Be off with you!" cried Kornis, suddenly intervening, beating down the weapons of the Szeklers with his sword, and covering the kneeling lady with his body. "Shame on you! Would you kill a woman? Ye are worse than the Pagan Tartars. If you've let Banfi escape, run after him."

"We'll kill her! We'll kill her!" bellowed the Szeklers, and again they attempted to tear Kornis away from the lady.

"Eh! you damned beasts! Who commands here, I should like to know? Am I not your captain?"

"No!" bluntly replied a stiff-necked, bull-headed Szekler, twitching his bulky shoulders to and fro. [Pg 234]
"Our captain is Nicholas Bethlen, and he is not here."

"Then go and find him. But let me tell you that whoever does not instantly quit this room shall be beaten into a pulp."

Still the Szeklers persisted in remaining, and there is no knowing what they might not have done, had not one of the hindermost suddenly exclaimed—

"Let us go to Bonczhida!"

Thereupon all the others fell a-shouting—"To Bonczhida! to Bonczhida!" and they withdrew, cursing horribly, and in the most chaotic confusion.

But Captain Kornis quietly put Lady Banfi into a carriage, and sent her to Bethlen Castle, which then belonged to Paul Beldi, hoping that Banfi would behave with a little more discretion when he heard that his wife was a prisoner.

Meanwhile, the Szekler rabble sent out against Banfi by order of the Prince had arrived at Bonczhida, and on showing the castellan the Prince's mandate, the gates were opened to them without the slightest contradiction. Daczo only left a portion of his band there, whom he strictly charged to arrest Banfi the moment he appeared, then with the rest he went on to Örményes, where Banfi had another castle, to seek him there.

The Szeklers left behind at Bonczhida no sooner perceived themselves captainless, than they proceeded to make themselves perfectly at home in the occupied castle. At first indeed they only jostled each other in the hall and vestibules, but presently they began to insist that the private apartments should also be thrown open to them.

The castellan hesitated. He declared that there was no necessity for such a step, and begged the noble gentlemen to keep within their legal rights, whereupon the before-mentioned broad-shouldered, bull-headed rogue stepped forth, twirled his blonde moustache, which consisted of about nine hairs, and thrusting his pock-marked face close under the castellan's nose, exclaimed—

"What do you mean by that? You are a conspirator! You have robber-bands concealed in those rooms. Open the doors instantly, or we'll burn the house down!"

The castellan was very wroth, but he was also very frightened, so he threw open the rooms in order that the Szeklers might see with their own eyes that nobody was concealed there. [Pg 235]

The Szeklers thereupon, with astonishing conscientiousness, thoroughly explored every hole and corner, even looking into places where no one would ever have thought of hiding anything. They looked under and inside all the beds. They pulled out all the cupboards. They took the grates out bodily to see what was behind them. They pitched all the books out of the book-cases, and, after ransacking every room, came at last to Lady Banfi's bed-chamber.

"Look! look! There sits Banfi!" cried the bull-headed ringleader, recoiling at first before a lifelike portrait of the Baron, but immediately afterwards rushing forward and gouging out one of its eyes with his spear. "And that pretty lady yonder is his wife, I suppose?" asked he, pointing to another portrait by the side of the first. "Ai, ai, ai! We were like to have killed her a little while ago, not knowing that she was so pretty. Let us be off, comrades! This room we must leave untouched, for it belongs to that pretty lady," and with that he drove his comrades out, and wrote with a piece of charcoal on the white enamelled door, in letters each an ell long—"THIS IS THE PRETTY LADY'S CHAMBER."

"Why do you do that?" asked the castellan in some surprise.

"To prevent any fuddled blockhead from thrusting his nose in there, in case we all get drunk."

"But where will you all get the drink from, pray?" asked the castellan, more and more amazed.

"Nay, gossip! we must certainly have a peep at the cellars also, to see if anybody is lurking there."

"There you cannot go, and so I tell you once for all, unless you have brought petards with you under your coats of mail."

"What! Just say that again! I should like to hear it once more. Do you know, gossip, to whom you are speaking? My name is Firi Firtos, and if you speak a single word more, I'll chuck you over the house, so that you will fall to the ground in half-a-dozen pieces."

"Why bandy words with him?" cried a voice from the crowd. "Let us pitch the fellow out of the window."

The Szeklers did not wait to be told twice, but instantly raised the castellan into the air and threw him, despite his frantic struggles, out of the window. Luckily he fell on his feet, and took to his heels, to the great indignation of Firi Firtos, who seized all the cactus and hortensia plants that stood in the windows, and hurled them after him, pots and all, after which the whole mob rushed bellowing down to the cellars. Finding it impossible to open the large iron doors, they dragged forward huge casks, filled them with big stones, and sent them flying down the cellar steps, till at last the iron doors fell in with a tremendous crash.

[Pg 236]

The vast cellar was fitted with huge butts and barrels of every size and shape, and the Szeklers forthwith fell upon them and knocked the tops off with their morning-stars to see what was inside them. The costly wine poured out into the cellar. The Szeklers drank as only Szeklers can drink, and what they could not drink was simply wasted.

When they had all drunk as much as they could hold, the mob stormed up-stairs again, and while another batch took their place below, they forced their way into the state-rooms, rolled about on the costly divans and oriental carpets, hustled one another against the furniture and mirrors, and indulged in many other like pleasantries. Firi Firtos climbed on to a round ebony table in order to paint a moustache on the portrait of a mediæval lady with a piece of charcoal, but some one else jerked the table from under him, and the merry wag fell crashing down into a glass chest containing the family treasures. Mad with rage, he immediately began pitching about everything which came to hand: gorgeous gold pocals, silver plates, enamelled snuff-boxes, flew one after another at the heads of the Szeklers, who, entering into the joke, flung them all back at him with great spirit.

This was the signal for a general devastation. The mania for destruction is contagious. It needs but one to begin it, and the mob, as if rejoicing at the sight, is never so ready as when there is something to be pulled, torn, or smashed to bits. In an instant every piece of furniture was broken up and every bit of tapestry torn down. Splendid costumes, costly, fur-trimmed pelisses, gala-mantles—everything was torn to pieces. They ripped open the feather-beds, scattered the eider-down out of the windows, and bellowed to those who stood below—"It is snowing! it is snowing!" whereupon all the others came rushing up to tear and pull to pieces what still remained whole.

They pulled up the fragrant jasmynes by the roots to make posies of them, and cut up into neckties the delicate tapestries which Lady Banfi had worked with her own hands. Stealing gave the Szeklers no pleasure, it was destruction for its own sake that they found so delightful. Thus they threw to the ground a rare and costly clock which needed winding only once a year, broke it up, distributed the wheels and chains as buckles for their shoes, and melted the silver keys into bullets, which they fired off into the air.

[Pg 237]

Here too it was edifying to see how Firi Firtos tried to get at the bottom of everything. He took down an antique urn and stuck it on his head upside down by way of a helmet. A clock chain he wound round his loins as a girdle, and he danced about hugging in his arms a huge statue of Gutenberg, declaring that it would make an excellent scarecrow for the Somlyo vineyards.

The fragments of the broken furniture they piled up on the hearth, and made a great fire of the priceless ebony, mahogany, and palisander woods. The conflagration of a whole village would not have been half so costly.

Over this fire they hung, on a silver chain, a Corinthian amphora of exquisite workmanship by way of a kettle, filled it with finely-chopped mutton, and sent Firi Firtos out for beans, salt, and onions. He brought them instead green coffee beans, white powdered sugar, and the most costly

tulip, amaryllis, and hyacinth bulbs, all of which they threw pell-mell into the kettle, with the natural consequence that the mess, when finished, was very nearly the death of them all, and the end of it was that they pitched Firi Firtos neck and crop into the courtyard.

The Szekler, mad with rage and unable to obtain any other satisfaction, rushed down to the cellars to drink himself dead drunk, but there all the hogsheads had already been staved in, and he waded in wine up to his middle. Looking about him, he perceived a door leading to a second cellar, broke it open with his axe, and was overjoyed to see by the light of the torch he held in his hand, a whole row of fresh casks. He immediately rushed upon the first of them, and knocking the top in, held the torch over it to see what was flowing out. It was *gunpowder*! Luckily for him he was drunk, otherwise he would certainly have sent the castle and everything it contained the shortest way to heaven. "That's not good to drink!" thought he, and broke open the second cask; in that too there was powder, and in the third also, and he swore a terrible oath that if the fourth held the same thing he would hurl the torch into it holus bolus. In the fourth cask, however, there was honey, and shake it as much as he would, he could get nothing else out of it. At last he came upon a six-gallon cask, and, smelling the bung, inhaled a strong odour of spirits, which made him madder than ever, and seizing it by the spigot he raised it bodily from the ground and swallowed long draughts of the strong corn brandy, till over he fell backwards, cask and all. There he wallowed about in the streaming honey; struggled laboriously to his feet again, stumbled a few steps further on, fell down into the gunpowder; rolled backwards and forwards in it for some time, and finally, all candied as he was, scrambled into the courtyard, and there the honey-and-powder-bedaubed form fell prone into the heaps of eider-down which covered the ground, and sprawled helplessly about till he was covered with plumage from the crown of his head to the soles of his jack-boots, and in this plight the grotesquely hideous creature crawled up stairs on all fours in amongst his carousing companions. The man no longer resembled any known beast of the Old or New Worlds. He was black and white all over: white where he was not black, and black where he was not white. Perhaps he had some distant resemblance to a polar bear with a hide of feathers instead of hair, but his roaring was like the roaring of a hippopotamus. It is therefore not surprising that when the Szeklers beheld this strange monster crawling towards them on all fours and bellowing loudly, they should take to their heels in terror, scatter to all points of the compass, and leave the flesh-filled kettle in the lurch. Most of them took the shortest but most dangerous way out of the window, exclaiming—"That is Banfi's devil! Here comes Banfi's devil!"

[Pg 238]

The Szekler, perceiving the success of his involuntary masquerade, sent after the fugitives a still more ghastly howl, took the amphora down from the chain, sat down with it in the middle of the parquetted floor, thrust both hands into it at once like a demon of the woods, and gobbled and roared alternately.

And these savage scenes took place in the very same chamber where, only a few days before, the delicate form of Dame Banfi had appeared among her jasmynes and mimosas like a melancholy shade from fairyland which only listens with its soul and speaks with its eyes.

Meanwhile Denis Banfi, after breaking through the ambush laid for him at Koppad, began, as the noise of the pursuit gradually died away, to look about him in the star-bright night, and picked his way so carefully through woods and over stubble-fields that, at dawn of day, he saw before him the towers of Klausenburg.

[Pg 239]

Once rid of the terrors of pursuit, anger and revenge began to rage within him. He thought at first that this night attack was simply an audacious conspiracy of his private enemies concocted without the knowledge of the Prince, on the principle that an accomplished act is more easily justifiable than an act that has still to be accomplished. But the attempt had not succeeded, and the escaped lion had both the will and the power to turn upon his pursuers and teach them respect for the laws.

In the plain before the town Banfi's troops were just going through their morning exercises when their leader came galloping up to them, pale, agitated, unarmed, and without either hat or mantle. His captains hastened towards him, aghast and curious.

"I've just escaped from a murderous assault," said Banfi, with a hoarse voice and a heaving breast; "my enemies have treacherously fallen upon me. I have escaped them, but my wife is in their hands. I recognized the voices of Daczo and Kornis among my pursuers."

"Yes, and Daczo's name is embroidered on this saddle-cloth," said Michael Angel.

Banfi appeared much disturbed. His face was dark and troubled, as if neither the future nor the past was quite clear to him.

"I don't understand it at all," said he to his captains. "If the attack was by the Prince's command, I ought to have been served beforehand with a writ, a citation, or, at the very least, a notice of judgment. If however it be only an act of private vengeance, my band is more than sufficient to reach these honest Szeklers. In any case, you will remain under arms before the town while I go up to my castle. In a few hours I shall know whither we have to turn."

Thereupon Banfi rode into the town, accompanied by Michael Angel. As he turned the corner of his palace, he was obliged to pass over the ground where the house of Dame Saint Pauli had formerly stood. All that remained of it now was a large stone, and Banfi, chancing to look in that direction, saw the mistress of the vanished house sitting on that single stone, and evidently

"Good-morning, your Excellency! Good-morning!"

Banfi haughtily rode on without a word. At the palace gate the castellan of Bonczhida awaited him, who, after escaping from the violence of the Szeklers, had discreetly kept his evil tidings secret, and now told his lord, in a hurried whisper, that his castle had been turned upside down, and the Szeklers were making merry there to their hearts' content.

Banfi answered not a syllable, but he sent for his armour and his charger, and calmly got ready to depart.

"Your lordship would do well to hasten," said the castellan; "by this time the Szeklers must have penetrated into the state apartments."

"It is well," replied Banfi, walking up and down the room with folded arms.

"No, my lord; it is not well. They have smashed to pieces everything in the rooms, torn the carpets to shreds, divided among them the curiosities, flooded the cellars with wine, and even made away with the horses."

"It does not matter," replied the magnate hoarsely. What cared he at that moment for his costliest treasures, his wine, his horses?

"They have done still worse, my lord. They forced their way into her ladyship's bedroom, set up the bust of her ladyship as a target, and mutilated it horribly amidst peals of laughter."

"What! My wife's bust?" cried Banfi, putting his hand to his sword. "My wife's bust did you say?" repeated he with sparkling eyes. "Ha!" he roared, and tearing his sword from its sheath, raised his face to heaven with an expression which no one had ever seen there before. It was like the face of a furious tiger chained down by force, with bloodshot eyes, thick starting veins in the forehead, and lips thirsting after blood. "God be gracious and merciful to them!" cried he, with a terrible voice, threw himself upon his horse, and hastened to his host.

"My friends!" cried he, ere yet he had had time to marshal their ranks. "A marauding swarm of hornets has fallen upon my castle and plundered it. They have smashed everything in my rooms, emptied my stables, stolen or destroyed my family treasures. All that troubles me little. Let the half-starved wretches eat and drink their fill! Let them keep what they have got! Let them rob, burn, and ravage if they will, poor devils! I am still the master of many mansions, and can pay off this beggarly Szekler crew out of one pocket. But they have defaced the image of my wife!—my wife I say! Therefore will I take vengeance upon them, a fearful vengeance. Follow me! The trees of the orchards of Bonczhida have not borne fruit for a long time. We will now hang fruit upon them ourselves!"

[Pg 241]

The enthusiastic shouts of the squadrons proved that the host was ready to follow Banfi whithersoever he might choose to lead it. The captains marshalled their divisions, and the second flourish of trumpets had already sounded, when a company of twelve horsemen suddenly appeared in front of Banfi's host. In the foremost of this company they recognized the Prince's herald, a broad-shouldered man of gigantic stature, who boldly rode up to Banfi and his staff, and raising his escutcheoned bâton, cried—"Halt!"

"Use your eyes! We *are* halting!" retorted Michael Angel.

"In the name of his Highness, the Prince, I cite you, Denis Banfi, to appear within three days before the Privy Council at Karoly-Fehervár, there to defend yourself as best you may against the charges brought against you. Till then your consort remains in our hands as a hostage for your good behaviour."

"We *are* coming," retorted Michael Angel; "don't you see that we are already about to start? We only wanted to know whither, and now we know it."

"Silence, captain!" cried Banfi; "one must not jest with the Prince's ambassador."

The herald next turned to the captains.

"This citation does not concern you. I have a very different message to deliver to you in the Prince's name."

"You had better keep your message to yourself, or I'll speak a word in your ears which will make them tingle," jeered one of the captains, aiming at the herald with his pistol.

"Down with your weapons," exclaimed Banfi; "let him proclaim the Prince's mandate. Give him room that he may speak freely."

The herald rose in his stirrups, and looking along the ranks cried aloud—

"The Prince forbids you from henceforth to obey Banfi! Whoever takes up weapons for him is a traitor!"

"You're a traitor yourself," roared Michael Angel, and the next moment the crowd fell furiously upon the herald, with loud cries of "Kill him! kill him!" A hundred blades flashed simultaneously over his head.

[Pg 242]

"Hold!" cried Banfi in a voice of thunder, covering the herald with his body; "this man's person is sacred and inviolable. To your places! Sheathe your swords! I—your leader—command it!"

"Eljen! eljen!" roared the brigades, and at the word of command they fell back into their places and stood there like an iron wall.

"You will not be very angry with me," said Banfi to the herald, who had suddenly turned deadly pale, "you will not be very angry with me, I hope, for making them obey me this once? Go back to the Prince and tell him that in three days I will appear before him."

"And tell him that we will be there too," cried the captains in chorus.

The herald and his suite withdrew. Banfi moodily bent his head.

The third flourish of trumpets had already sounded, and the banners were all unfurled; but Banfi still continued staring blankly, darkly, dumbly before him.

"Draw your sword, my lord!" cried Angel; "place yourself at our head, and let us start. First to Bonczhida and then to Fehervár."

"What do you say?" said Banfi, with a start. "What is it?"

"I say that if the law of the sword is to try you, the sword must also be your defence."

"And such a process is generally called *civil war*!"

"We have not kindled it."

"Nor will we fan it. 'Tis no longer, I see, a struggle against my personal enemies, but against the Prince, and he is the head of the land."

"And are not you its right arm? If they choose to light up the flames of civil war, we will not allow it to be quenched in your blood."

"And why should my blood flow at all? Have I committed any capital offence? Can I even be charged with such a thing?"

"You are powerful, and that is a sufficient reason for killing you."

"I care not. I'll go, and what is more, alone. My wife is in their hands. They have the power to make me feel their wrath in the most painful way, and if there were no other reason for appearing, it is my knightly duty to release her."

[Pg 243]

"You can save both her and yourself much more efficaciously by force of arms."

"I have nothing to fear. I have done nothing for which I need blush in the sight of justice, and if they plot privily against me, are not you here? Summon hither my Somlyo troops as well, and only intervene if they practise foul play."

"Oh, my lord! that army is good for nothing which is abandoned by its leader. To-day it would go through fire and water for you, and is even ready to proclaim you Prince; but to-morrow, when it hears that you have appeared before the court, it will disperse and deny you."

"They need know nothing of my resolution. I'll immediately take coach and go to Fehervár. Tell the troops I've gone to Somlyo to collect my other forces, and keep them under arms till you hear from me."

With that Banfi rode off to Klausenburg, and Michael Angel irritably stuck his sword into its sheath and told the troops that they might rest if they felt tired.

An hour later Banfi was rolling in a carriage-and-four towards Torda, on his way to Fehervár; a mounted servant led a spare horse after him by the bridle.

The further he withdrew from the seat of his power, the more anxious he became. His soul wavered. He began to see phantoms at every step. Only his pride prevented him from turning back again.

Everything now wore a different aspect. He could read in the looks and salutations of all whom he met what they thought of him. A smile was a sign of compassion; a mere nod, a token of ill-will. He stopped to speak to every one, even to very slight acquaintances, even to those whom he had hitherto looked down upon or had never regarded at all. He even condescended to question them. In the hour of misfortune it is wonderful how a man recollects all his acquaintances. At such a time he who once haughtily rejected the hand of friendship is ready to meet his very enemy half-way.

Suddenly he perceived an open carriage coming towards him from Torda, and in it sat a man wrapped up in a grey cloak, in whom, as he passed, Banfi recognized Martin Kuncz, the Unitarian bishop; he called to him to stop for a moment. The bishop, not hearing him for the clatter of the wheels, simply doffed his hat and drove on. Banfi thought he did it on purpose, and took it for a very bad omen. He who ordinarily treated all danger so lightly, now recoiled before the veriest bugbears. He stopped his carriage, and taking horse bade his coachman drive on to Torda and await him there. In the meantime he galloped after the bishop's carriage, whereupon the bishop,

[Pg 244]

catching sight of him, stopped and awaited the magnate, who cried to him from a distance—

"So you will not answer when I speak to you, eh?"

"I am at your lordship's command. I did not know that you wished to speak to me."

"You know my situation, I suppose? What do you think of it? What ought I to do?"

"In such a case, my lord, it is as difficult to give advice as to take it."

"I have resolved to appear to the citation."

"Really, my lord?"

"I have nothing to fear. I feel that my cause is just."

"No doubt; but it does not follow that you will get justice because your cause is just. In this world anything is possible."

Banfi understood the allusion. He had formerly said the very same words to the bishop, and now he had not even sufficient strength of mind to leave him and go on his way defiantly; on the contrary, he dallied with him for some time longer.

"The Prince indeed is my enemy; but the Princess has always defended me, and I have every confidence in her Highness."

"Yes; but unfortunately the Prince has quarrelled with his consort. They say that he even forbids her to enter his apartments."

This answer seemed to quite confound Banfi; but he had still one hope left.

"I don't believe they'd dare to do me mischief, for they know that at Klausenburg and Somlyo I have armies in battle array which can call them to account at any moment."

"Oh, my lord, it is difficult to direct an army from the walls of a prison, and you know very well that a live dog is stronger than a dead lion."

These words seemed to produce a great change in Banfi. For a time he moodily rode by Kuncz's carriage; then, after a long pause, he replied in a very low voice—"You are right," gave his horse the spur, and rode back to Klausenburg with the firm resolve of not allowing himself to be enticed from his stronghold.

[Pg 245]

On reaching the spot where scarcely six hours before he had restrained the enthusiastic ardour of his troops, he was much surprised to find a band of gipsies apparently searching for something on the ground.

"What are you doing here?" cried he, as he came up to them.

At this question their leader came forward, and recognizing Banfi, humbly doffed his cap.

"Verily, your Excellency, the gipsies have come hither to collect the cartridges which the brave and noble gentlemen have scattered about here."

"But where then are the gentlemen?"

"Gone, your Excellency."

"But why, and whither?"

"The moment they heard your lordship had quitted Klausenburg—whew!—they dispersed in all directions."

"And Michael Angel?"

"He was the first to depart."

Banfi felt sick and dizzy. The tears rushed to his eyes. To be so abandoned by every one, by Fate, by his fellow-men, and even by his own self-confidence! What now remained of all his former might? Whither should he turn? What should he devise? Every way was closed against him. Neither with the sword of justice nor with the sword of battle could he fight. There was no hope and no refuge.

His horse carried him whither it would. The magnate sat upon it with a darkened face, staring blankly at the clouds or on the ground. The earth, the sky, and his own heart—everything within him and around him was dark and desolate. Hitherto his soul had been so full of pride that there was no room for anything else, and now all his pride was gone, and had left a hideous blank behind it. On, on he went; but it was his horse that chose the road. Vast forests lay before him, and he thought—What lies beyond those forests? Lofty hills. And what beyond the hills? Still higher hills. And what then? The snowy peaks. And nowhere was there any refuge or shelter for him! So at the very first stroke every one had fallen away from him, and he who only the day before had ruled over the half of Transylvania, and held fortresses at his disposal, cannot even find a hut to shelter him from the night. Or shall he give himself up to the derision of his enemies, and not even have the poor satisfaction of meeting death with front erect and a smiling countenance? Shall he perish ignobly like a hunted beast? He fell a-thinking. If die he must, he would at least die like a man. But how?

[Pg 246]

Gradually a thought began to dawn in his benighted soul, and with that thought the colour returned to his cheeks. Slowly he raised his head, and this secret thought ripening into a quick resolution, it was as though a voice within him cried—"Yes! Thither! thither!" His eyes began to sparkle, he turned his horse's head towards the forest, and disappeared beneath the thick foliage.

The tempest is raging. The storm snaps the trees. The rain patters down, and the swollen torrents roar. From time to time fitful lightning flashes illumine the whole region, and snowy mountain peaks grow dark and the black sky gleams white—and again the sky darkens and the snowy peaks shine forth.

The scanty patches of brushwood clinging to the bald rocks are rudely torn and shaken by the hurricane, and the distant pine forests roar like the last trump. Every beast crouches trembling in its den and listens to the storm.

Lofty, inaccessibly steep rocks shut out the horizon, and far, far down in the vale below, like a toiling ant, we see a horseman struggling through the pathless wilderness.

God be merciful to him in such a night in such a place!

It is the Devil's Garden!

A gorgeous oriental chamber opens out before us. Round about the walls gleam hundreds of torches; but the ceiling is so lofty that it is invisible, the light of the torches never reaches it. Two rows of columns support the gigantic architrave, slender columns with capitals in the shape of beasts' heads, as we are wont to see them in ancient Persian temples. Splendid curtains fill up the interstices of the columns. Moorish arabesques adorn the walls; the arched portals are ablaze with gold and malachite. In the centre of the room a lofty red velvet couch rests on four gold griffins with amethyst eyes. In front of the couch is a little ivory table, supported by intertwining silver snakes, and beside the table a golden censer exhales light-blue fragrant clouds of ambergris and aloes. On the couch reclines a sylph-like girl with languishing and yet ardent eyes. A string of pearls, dependent from her neck, draws her light tunic up to her bosom. Her slender form is girdled round the hips by a gorgeous oriental shawl. Her black locks are held together by a golden fillet, which encircles her brows, and the huge diamond clasp of this fillet flashes its myriad blinding rays amidst her dark tresses, like a rainbow condensed into a star gleaming through darkest night.

[Pg 247]

The girl is alone. Everything around her is motionless. We seem to be in an enchanted fairy palace. Nowhere a sound, a movement.

Who would ever have thought of finding such a magic chamber in the bowels of the earth, six hundred feet within the solid rock, on the surface of which the storm is worrying the hardy shrubs and trees?

It is the crypt of the Devil's Garden, and the woman, sylph or demon, who inhabits it is Azrael.

How can this woman live here so lonely, so far from everything human?

And yet, why not? She is a whole world, a hell, to herself. Within the resounding walls of the populous harem she felt herself lonely, and she peoples this vast vault with the creations of her own wild fancy. Here she shapes the future, forms endless plans, dreams of battles, of intoxicating love, of more than earthly might, of new realms of which she is the Queen, the Sun surrounded by her starry train.

Suddenly a light trampling is heard overhead, as if some one were riding over the vaulted roof. Azrael arises and listens. The sound of footsteps is audible in the corridors, and presently three familiar, measured knocks are heard at the doors.

"'Tis he!" she whispers; springs from her couch, hastens to the door, draws back the heavy bolts, tears the door violently open, and falls into the arms of him who enters.

"At last! at last!" she murmurs, twining her arms round the man's neck and pressing her cheeks to his lips.

The man is Denis Banfi.

Sad, speechless, broken as he never was before, he does not even greet the girl as he enters. He seems to freeze, all his limbs are trembling. He has left his tiger-skin outside, but the drenching rain has soaked him through and through.

"Thou art wet to the skin," says the girl. "Quick! warm thyself. Thou hast come from afar. Thou dost need repose," and dragging Banfi to her couch, she took off his dolman, covered him with her own costly ermine mantle, placed under his feet soft velvet cushions, which she first warmed over the steaming censer, and pressing the man's frozen hands to her throbbing bosom, warmed them there.

[Pg 248]

Yet Banfi remained dumb. Misfortune seemed to be written on his forehead. A far less practised eye, a far less penetrating genius than Azrael's, could have seen at a glance that he was no

longer the haughty magnate he had been, but a fallen viceroy, whose fall was all the greater because he had stood so high; who had come to her, not because he had forsaken every one, but because every one had forsaken him; whom not pleasure but despair had brought to this place.

"I have been waiting for thee!" cried the girl, burying her head in Banfi's bosom, while he played involuntarily with her rich tresses. "To me thy absence is an eternity, thy presence but a fleeting moment."

Not for all the world would Azrael have let Banfi perceive that she had observed the change in him. She pushed a little round stool in front of the couch, took up her mandolin, and began to sing with a voice of thrilling sweetness one of those improvisations which the ardent imagination of the East brings spontaneously to the lips, striking the while with her fingers wild, fantastic chords.

"If thou hast joy, share it with thy beloved, and thou wilt have so much the more. If thou hast grief, share it with thy beloved, and thou wilt have so much the less."

Banfi looked at the odalisk with beetling brows.

But Azrael struck fresh chords and began another song—

"False is the world and all that is therein! Every day the sun forsakes the sky. Every day the sea forsakes her shores. Every year the swallow forsakes her nest. But the maiden who loves never forsakes her beloved."

Still Banfi remained silent. There he sat with staring, bloodshot eyes, his head resting on his elbows, like a poor, mortally-wounded lion.

And again the odalisk sang—

"If choice were thine, which wouldst thou choose—love with hell, or heaven without love?"

Banfi stretched out his arms towards Azrael, and as the odalisk, casting away her mandolin, bent down to kiss his hand, he drew her to his breast, and the odalisk, softly stroking Banfi's forehead, said—

[Pg 249]

"What mean these wrinkles on thy noble brow, which I have never seen there before? Vainly do I charm them away with my kisses; they come back again and again. Wait!—I'll cover them with this diadem. So!—how well a kingly crown becomes thy brow!"

Banfi uttered an inarticulate cry, tore the diadem from his head, and hurled it far away, while with the other hand he roughly repulsed the girl. Every line of his face proclaimed his agony of mind. The odalisk looked into his face and could read there everything which had happened.

This passionate outburst, however, aroused Banfi from out of his dull despondency. He sprang from the couch, resumed with an effort his usual proud, devil-may-care look, and raising the girl into the air cried, with bitter, scornful mirth—

"Bring me wine! To-day I'll make merry! Over our heads the storm is howling—let it howl! We'll laugh at it, eh! my pretty wench? To-day is ours! On this one day we'll heap together everything which can bring bliss and mad delight, so as to leave nothing for the morrow. Wine and kisses and music—and hell-fire!"

The girl skipped away like a chamois, and came back like a Hebe with a large silver salver covered with gold goblets.

"No, not the golden pocal!" cried Banfi. "They won't break when we dash them against the wall. Serve the wine in Venetian crystals."

The odalisk obediently brought forth the gorgeously-coloured and gilded Venetian glasses, then so much in vogue, and pushed a broad, short-legged table close to the couch.

"Come, embrace me!" cried Banfi, drawing the girl to his bosom, and gazing into her abysmal black eyes.

"My love is an endless sea," whispered the girl, her hands resting on Banfi's shoulder.

"My desire is as hell itself, which drinks to the very dregs!" cried Banfi, embracing the odalisk and pressing a burning kiss on her lips, as if he would have drunk in her very soul.

With that he seized the first glass that came to hand; the wine sparkled in the torch-light. Azrael's kisses had not yet softened his heart. With bitter scorn he raised the glass, and cried—

"I drink to my friends."

He drained it to the last drop, and hurled it contemptuously against the wall, so that it was shattered to pieces. Immediately afterwards he seized a second glass—

[Pg 250]

"I drink to my enemies."

With a wild peal of laughter he hurled the second glass into the air. In its flight it almost reached the ceiling, but it fell back again on the couch and did not break.

"See, it mocks me and will not break!" exclaimed Banfi, with sparkling eyes.

Azrael sprang up, seized the glass, and crushed it beneath her foot.

In Banfi's heart the flames of three passions began to mingle—wrath, intoxication, and frantic love.

He raised the third glass to his lips, and while the girl held his body fast embraced, Banfi exclaimed, with flushed face and strident voice—

"I drink to Transylvania."

He drained the glass, but when he took it from his lips, the smile had frozen on his face, and instead of dashing the glass against the wall, he placed it gently on the table. A cold shudder ran through him at his own words—"I drink to Transylvania."

He did not remove his hand from the glass, and would shyly have put it aside in a safe place, when the crystal, without any visible cause, suddenly burst in pieces, filling the magnate's hand with a million fragments.

The diamond ring on his finger had scratched the glass, which, as all badly-cooled crystals are wont to do, shivered instantly at the contact, scattering its sparkling fragments in every direction like a Bologna flask.

Banfi shrank shuddering back at this phenomenon and hid his face in Azrael's bosom, as if he had seen a portentous enchantment.

The girl, however, impetuously seized her glass and cried exultantly—

"I drink to our love."

Her voice broke the spell of Banfi's sobering horror and plunged him into frenzied joy. He caught the slim, supple body of the odalisk in his arms, and pressed her to him with the strength of a boa-constrictor: she was almost stifled in his embrace.

"I know not what you have given me to drink," stammered Banfi, "but I have lost my head. I am beside myself for love."

"Then take heed that thou dost not faint. Long hast thou let me languish, and I swore that when next thou camest, to murder thee in thy sleep, so that thou mightest never forsake me more." [Pg 251]

"Oh, do it, do it," whispered he, and drawing his dagger from his girdle and stretching himself at full length upon the couch, he laid bare his breast with one hand and gave the girl the dagger with the other.

Azrael, with demoniacal ferocity, grasped the dagger by its beryl handle, and threw herself like an armed Fury upon Banfi, who looked at her with a frenzied smile as the sharp edge of the dagger grazed his breast. Then the weapon fell from the hand of the odalisk, and the madly-distended eyes and lips resumed their languishing smile.

"Kill me rather than forsake me," stammered the girl, embracing Banfi.

"We'll die together, eh?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Jest not, Azrael. I am ready to do what I say."

"And I am ready to die," replied the girl. "Come, I'll show thee something,"—and with that, drawing aside the carpet, she lifted up a trap-door, beneath which was visible through the gloom a deeper, lower room, supported by short, stout, arched columns, close beside which a number of large barrels had been placed.

"Yes," said Banfi, "I know. In that cellar I have hidden the gunpowder which I saved after John Kemeny's fall."

"Look at this long nitrous linstock," said Azrael, drawing up the end of a thick cotton coil out of the cellar; "the barrels are connected with it, and many a time when thou hast been with me have I had the end of this lunt under the cushions of my couch, and held in my couch the torch which was to have kindled it whilst thou wert sleeping with thy head upon my breast, and I lay and listened calmly for the explosion which was to send us both to heaven or to hell."

"And you were afraid to do it?"

"Not for myself. But I reflected that thou wert not thine own but thy country's."

"I belong to no one now."

"Thy mind was so full of lofty plans. Destiny chose thee to be a Prince among men, a hero among the kings of the earth whose name should fill the pages of history."

"All that is over now," cried Banfi, with drunken self-forgetfulness. "I am nobody and nothing. The vault beneath this floor is all that belongs to me. In the world without I am a fugitive and a vagabond." [Pg 252]

"Ha!" hissed Azrael. "Then thy enemies have triumphed over thee?"

"My curse be upon their heads! I had compassion upon them, so I have perished."

"Is Csaky also among thy persecutors?"

"Yes; he is my most pitiless pursuer."

"And have all thy faithful friends deserted thee?"

"The fallen has no faithful friends."

"Thou mightst hire mercenaries and begin the struggle anew. Thou art rich enough."

"My wealth has gone."

"Thou mightst beg for help from foreign lands."

"That would be treason against my country. I have fallen and know what awaits me. I must die. But my enemies shall not triumph at my death as at a festival, or laugh aloud to see me go pale and downcast to my doom. I will die alone."

"By Allah, thou shalt not die alone! Come, let us fill our glasses. Accursed be the world! we'll speak of it no more. Come, stifle thy soul in the delirium of joy, and when thy drooping head sinks down upon my breast, I will light the end of this lunt. Thou shalt dream of bliss, of paradise, of kisses ravished and returned; the twofold throbbing of our hearts shall beat the minutes; here below, the stillness of death; there above, the howling of the tempest and of thy foes; and then an earthquaking thunder, rending and scattering the rocks, shall proclaim to heaven and hell that none shall ever find Denis Banfi here on earth again!"

"Azrael, thou art a devil, and I love thee!" cried Banfi, and he clasped the girl in his arms as if she had been a little child.

An hour has passed, and the room has grown dark. The torches are expiring. In the huge vaulted chamber no other light is visible but the red vapour streaming from the orifices of the censer, which gleams like a many-eyed monster, and the burning end of the linstock, lit by Banfi in the midst of his mad orgy, crawling slowly along the room like a fiery serpent.

Naught is to be heard in the deep silence but the sighs of two lovers, and the throbbing of two hearts.

Banfi slept long.

[Pg 253]

Suddenly he awoke. Pitch-black darkness surrounded him. It was some time before his reeling brain could realize where he was, or why he was there. He felt an icy wind streaming through the room, but it was only after a long interval that he grasped the fact that a door was open somewhere, and that the cold night air was rushing in from outside.

Gradually the scenes of the by-gone night and the vows of death came back to his mind, and he felt that he still lived. "The girl has certainly repented of her wish to die," thought he, and he began to grope about for her. The couch was empty.

"Azrael! Azrael!" he cried repeatedly; but there was no answer.

At last he tottered to his feet, and snatching some embers from the hearth, lit a torch. The solitary, feeble light did not penetrate far, but as far as it extended Azrael was nowhere to be seen.

The first thing he perceived was the linstock cut in two by a pair of shears.

"Coward soul!" he growled, and, pierced through and through by the air, would have put on his mantle, when a roll of parchment fell at his feet, and picking it up he recognized Azrael's handwriting, and read as follows—

"My lord, you read not hearts aright. We give our love for our own sakes, but we do not give ourselves for love's sake. You have frittered away your power, and, deserted by all the world, think to find me faithful who loved your power and that only: I am his who has inherited that power. He who is in the ascendant I adore, but I hate and despise the fallen. Corsar Beg's fate should have warned you that one day you too might fare like him ..."

Banfi could not read it to the end. His face grew dark with shame. "To sink so low as this! This wretched slavish soul even while embracing me was devising treachery! And I to wish to spend my last moments in the arms of such a monster——" At that moment he *loathed* himself.

"Cowardice and infamy! A man who has lived as I have lived, to desire such a death! He who has always been wont to meet his foes face to face, to hide himself from them in his last moments!— to hide himself in the arms of a slave! Shame upon him!"

"This lesson has done me good. It was meet that I who could forget a wife who sacrificed herself to deliver me out of the hands of my enemies, should fall into the power of a harlot who would have betrayed me to them. Yet even now it is not too late. My life is forfeit, but at least I can save my honour. None shall be able to boast that he has betrayed me. My enemies shall never say that I hid myself from them and they found me out. I'll appear before them boldly, as I ought to have

[Pg 254]

done at first."

Full of this resolution, Banfi went straightway into the secret courtyard, where he had left his horse. He was surprised to find it no longer there. The odalisk had taken it away with her.

He smiled disdainfully.

"What matters it, so long as she has not stolen me also."

He returned into the rocky chamber, rekindled the lunt, came out, and closing the iron door behind him made his way along the banks of the cold Szamos.

Towards midday he sat down on the bank to rest, and he had scarcely been there a quarter of an hour, when he heard the trampling of horses, and looking up—the bushes completely concealed him—beheld Ladislaus Csaky and Azrael on horseback, side by side, at the head of an armed band. The girl seemed to be pointing out something to Csaky on the rocks above, and the worthy gentleman was beside himself for joy.

Banfi smiled scornfully.

"Poor Tartars!"

As soon as the band had passed by, Banfi continued his journey. He had not gone far when he came upon a poor peasant cleaving wood.

"Dost know whither that armed band has gone?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. They have gone to capture Denis Banfi, on whose head a great price has been set."

"How much?"

"If a noble capture him he will receive an estate, if a peasant, two hundred ducats."

"Little enough, but enough for you, I dare say. I am Denis Banfi."

The peasant took off his cap.

"Does my lord wish to be led anywhither?"

"Lead me to the place where they will pay you two hundred ducats."

A quarter of an hour afterwards a tremendous explosion resounded through the mountains, which shook the earth for half-a-mile around. The enchanted garden of the Gradina Dracului had collapsed into an inaccessible chaos.

[Pg 255]

Csaky had fortunately lingered on the road, or he and his company would have perished utterly.

On returning, he found Banfi already under arrest, and was thus deprived of the glory of having captured his foe with his own hand. He immediately hastened to accost him, and, with exquisite malice, brought with him the odalisk, who looked at Banfi as if she had never seen him before.

Banfi, however, since his voluntary surrender, had quite resumed his former sangfroid, and looking contemptuously over his shoulder at Csaky, said—

"So your Excellency means in future to wear my cast-off clothes, eh?"

At this bitter jest Azrael hissed like a snake upon whose tail one has suddenly trodden, whilst Csaky blushed up to his ears and tried hard to smile.

"Does your Excellency desire any favour from me?" asked Csaky presently, with insulting commiseration.

"None from *your* Excellency. I came here of my own free will, and have been arrested I know not why. My wife, therefore, can now be set free."

"So at last we begin to whine for our wife, eh?"

"On the contrary. So far from wishing to meet her, I desire that as soon as I am put in prison she should be let go."

"It shall be as you desire, my lord!" replied Csaky, with ironical benevolence.

Banfi requited him with a look of the most withering contempt, and turning to the jailers entered into conversation with them: the magnates he no longer regarded.

When Teleki heard of the capture of Banfi, he ordered him to be sent at once to Bethlen Castle, to make the world believe that the anti-Banfi faction was headed, not by him, but by Beldi, to whom the castle belonged.

On his way thither, the captive magnate learnt that his consort had already been released, and thus relieved of his one remaining anxiety, cared little for the rest.

On reaching Bethlen Castle he was received by the Rev. Stephen Pataky, Rector of Klausenburg,

to whom he cried jocosely—

"So they've appointed you my father confessor, eh?"

Pataky wept bitterly, but Banfi only smiled.

The jailer conducted Banfi up the steps with every demonstration of respect.

Banfi turned round to him.

"I hope you will let Reverend Master Pataky remain with me all the time?" said he.

Pataky was understood to say through his sobs—

"Truly your Excellency will find far better company awaiting you than any my poor self can offer."

Banfi, not knowing what to say to this, only shrugged his shoulders and hastened towards the door of his prison, but remained standing on the threshold transfixed with astonishment. In the room was a lady in deep mourning, who turned very pale on perceiving him, and clung to the table unable to utter a word.

Banfi felt all his blood rush to his heart. The next moment he darted impetuously forward and cried—

"My wife! Margaret!"

The lady threw herself upon her husband's breast and sobbed aloud.

"What! have they not released you?" inquired Banfi anxiously.

"I would not be released," answered Margaret. "How *could* I forsake you in your prison?"

The tears came to Banfi's eyes. Speechless he sank to the ground, and covered her hands with glowing kisses.

"While we were what the world calls happy we might avoid each other," said Margaret, with a choking voice, "but misfortune has brought us together again," and she bowed her head to kiss her husband's forehead.

Banfi fell senseless at her feet. It was more than even his strong soul could bear.

CHAPTER X. THE SENTENCE.

The Diet, hastily summoned to Fehervár, strongly disapproved of the secret proceedings against Banfi. Paul Beldi was the first to declare that even if Banfi could be arrested by means of a league, a Diet was the only tribunal which could try him, and insisted that he should have every opportunity of defending himself.

The Prince came to the Diet with red eyes, an aching head, and a very irritable temper—the usual witnesses of a drunken debauch.

Teleki, finding the Diet beyond his control, got Apafi to dissolve it, by persuading him that if Banfi were brought before it he would escape altogether, and even turn the two-edged sword of justice against the Prince himself.

In the Privy Council itself, Kozma Horvath's opposition to the extra-judicial prosecution was all in vain. The league drew up thirty-seven articles of accusation against Banfi, and the magnate was impeached.

Most of these articles were so utterly frivolous as to need no reply. Banfi's real offence was his pretension to the throne, and this they dared not bring forward at all.

Banfi manfully replied on every count. In vain. Defend himself as he might, his adversaries knew only too well how much they had offended him: they could not afford to let him live.

The matter came to the vote.

Banfi was condemned to death.

On the day when this took place, no one could get at the Prince except the members of the league, who were constantly going in and out of Apafi's apartments with hasty steps and eager faces.

Towards evening they succeeded in bringing the besotted Prince to sign the sentence. It was no longer possible to recognize in the spectre-haunted drunkard the mild and gentle Prince, who had had a tear for the sorrows of the meanest of his servants.

Saddled horses and long rows of carriages had been standing before the castle gates since midday. Suddenly Ladislaus Csaky came very hastily out of the castle with a document hidden in the folds of his pelisse, and calling for his horse, mounted, nodded significantly to the other gentlemen who had followed him out, and galloped away. The other gentlemen thereupon leapt into their carriages, or on to their horses, with as much expedition as if some one was pursuing them, and exchanging hurried whispers, decamped so swiftly that in a few moments the Prince was left entirely alone.

Teleki was the last who quitted him. The Prince accompanied the minister to the very end of the ante-chamber. Black care was written in his face. He would hardly let Teleki go.

Teleki coldly withdrew his hand from the Prince's grasp.

"You have no need to brood over it, sir. It is not a question of the life of a man, but of the welfare of a state. If my own neck had stood in the way, I would have said, Hew it off! I say the same when it is another's."

With that he took his leave.

Apafi could not remain in his room. He was obliged to go out into the fresh open air. Inside something seemed to choke him, the air was so oppressive—or was it his own conscience? He went into the garden. The cool night air soothed his throbbing head; the sight of the starry heaven did good to his darkened soul. Leaning over the balcony, he looked amazedly out into the quiet night, as if he expected a star larger than all the rest to fall from heaven, or some one miles and miles away to call him by name.

Suddenly a scream fell on his ear.

He looked around with a shudder, and terror made him speechless—before him stood his consort, whom his counsellors had kept away from him for weeks.

The moment the last magnate had departed, her own faithful servants told her that the Prince had signed the death-warrant, and the terrified woman, breaking through the castle guards, rushed after Apafi, found him in the garden, seized him roughly, and shrieking rather than speaking in her agitation, exclaimed—

[Pg 259]

"Oh, accursed, accursed wretch! Thou hast shed innocent blood!"

Apafi tried to avoid his wife. He feared her.

"What do you want with me?" he asked in a hollow voice. "What do you mean?"

"You have signed Banfi's death-warrant."

"I!" cried Apafi feebly, trying to catch hold of his wife's hand.

"Away with that hand, monster! It is stained with my kinsman's blood."

"Then you don't consent to it?" stammered the abject creature. "Neither did I, but the magnates constrained me."

The Princess smote her hands together, and looked at her consort despairingly.

"You have brought blood on our family! You have brought a curse on the land and on me! Oh, why did I not let you perish in the hands of the Tartars? Where you are concerned virtue itself becomes a sin."

Apafi was crushed. Alone with his wife, he was something less than a man.

"I did not wish to kill him," he blurted out, "nor do I now; and if you wish it, I'll reprieve him. Here, take my signet-ring. Send a horseman after Csaky to Bethlen Castle. Reprieve your cousin and leave me in peace."

"What ho, there! Who is without?" shrieked the Princess.

The domestic servants came pouring in, headed by the pantler.

"Take four of the Prince's swiftest horses with you," cried Anna, as she wrote out the pardon with her own hand and made her husband sign and seal it. "Take this letter and hasten to Bethlen Castle. If one of the horses falls under you, take the others. Stop not an instant on the road! A man's life is in your hands!"

The grooms led forward the swift horses; the pantler swung himself into the saddle, and, leading the other three horses by the bridles, galloped away.

The Princess impatiently followed him with her eyes till he was out of sight, and then went up to her room again; but unable to rest there long, she came down once more, sent for her faithful old servant Andrew, and giving him an old piece of green velvet,^[56] set him on horseback and sent him after the pantler.

[Pg 260]

[56] Green velvet was the symbol of the princely dignity in Transylvania.

"If the Prince's reprieve arrives too late, this will be a cere-cloth wherein to wrap the murdered man."

The same hour, perhaps at the self-same moment, Paul Beldi called his chief groom, bade him mount his swiftest horse, ride to Bethlen Castle, and inform the castellan there that he would cut his head off if the slightest harm happened to Banfi at Bethlen. He too dared not face his wife at that moment.

The same hour, perhaps at the self-same moment, Michael Teleki pressed the hand of his future son-in-law Tököli, and whispered in his ear, "We are a step nearer." And beneath the pressure of the youth's iron hand, the engagement ring which knitted him to Teleki's daughter snapped in two, and Teleki took it as an omen^[57] that, one day, the hand of this youth would be stronger than his own.

[57] The omen was justified when, nearly thirty years later, Tököli defeated and slew Teleki at the battle of Zernyes, 1691.

That night all Transylvania was greatly disturbed. Farkas Bethlen could not sleep in his bed all night. Stephen Apor was so unwell that he had to send for his confessor, and Kornis lost himself so completely on his way home that he was forced to sleep in his carriage.

And what was going on in heaven? Towards midnight a storm arose, the like of which the oldest men could not call to mind. The lightning set forests and castles on fire; the falling clouds drove the rivers out of their beds. The alarm bells resounded everywhere. God sat in judgment over the land that night. The whole population was sleepless.

Only the reconciled consorts slept calmly.

With one arm under her husband's head and the other embracing him, the pale and fragile lady fell asleep. At times she wept in her dreams, and her tears fell on the pillow. She was dreaming of her happy bridal days, and of that sweet moment when she had laid her first and only child in her husband's arms, and she pressed him more closely to her, while he lay sleeping there so calmly, at enmity with the world, but reconciled to himself and to the better-half of his soul. Happiness, which had fled him in his palace, sought him out in his dungeon.

[Pg 261]

The night lamp cast its pale rays on the sleeping forms.

Through that terrible night, four horsemen, scarcely a thousand paces apart, are galloping at full speed towards Bethlen Castle. During the lightning flashes they sometimes catch a glimpse of each other, and then each of them digs his spurs more deeply into his horse's sides.

The first horseman reaches the castle gate and winds the signal horn. The drawbridge sinks groaning down; the horseman springs into the courtyard and places a letter in the hands of the flurried castellan. It is Paul Beldi's messenger.

The horseman who next arrives at the castle orders the gates to be opened in the name of the Prince. He hands the castellan a second letter. It is Ladislaus Csaky.

The castellan grows pale as he reads this letter.

"My lord," says he, "I have just received a message from Paul Beldi, threatening us with death in case any harm befalls the prisoner."

"You have your choice," answered Csaky. "If you obey me, Beldi may perhaps cut off your head to-morrow; but if you don't obey me, I'll cut off your head myself this instant."

The trembling castellan bowed submission.

"Up with the drawbridge!" commanded Csaky. "None must enter this castle without my permission. Whoever acts against my orders is a dead man!"

The spouses lay tranquilly sleeping in each other's arms. A minute later the door creaked on its hinges, and the Rev. Stephen Pataky, tearful and terrified, entered the dungeon. His heart died within him when he saw the consorts sleeping so calmly side by side.

He stepped up to Banfi to rouse him. As he touched his hand, Banfi awoke, and perceiving Pataky, who could not speak for emotion, tried to disengage his head from his wife's encircling arm without awakening her. At that very moment Lady Banfi opened her eyes. Pataky, wishing to conceal the fatal message from her, addressed Banfi in the Latin tongue—

"*Surge Domine! sententia lethalis adest!*"^[58]

[58] Arise, sir, the death-warrant has come!

Lady Banfi, terrified by these mysterious words, the meaning of which Pataky's face so ill concealed, asked in mortal fear what was the matter.

[Pg 262]

"Nothing, my darling! nothing!" said Banfi, embracing her with a tender smile. "A pressing message which I must attend to at once. I'll be back again soon! Lie down and sleep gently!"

With these words he persuaded his wife to fall back upon her pillow, kissed her repeatedly with great tenderness, and soothed her caressingly between each kiss—"My soul! my delight! my love! my heaven!"

The wife little suspected that this was the parting kiss of a man about to meet his doom; Banfi looked at her so smilingly, feigning a joyful countenance as he stood on the threshold of death.

Then the castle horn again sounded. The Princess's first messenger had arrived, and demanded admittance in her Highness's name.

Csaky rushed hastily up-stairs, and just as Banfi, after half reassuring his consort, was about to quit her, suddenly burst open the door, and cried—

"Why so long a leave-taking? Get ready! The sentence stays for execution!"

Lady Banfi with a piercing scream rose from her couch, and stretching out both her arms towards Banfi, gazed speechlessly at him for a moment, then, clutching at her heart, fell back dead upon her pillow with wide-open eyes.

Banfi looked at his enemy with the bitterness of death, his streaming eyes hurled more curses at him than any lip could have uttered.

"Base, cowardly wretch!" he moaned, "was it then part of your mandate to murder my wife also?"

Csaky turned his head away, and said in a hoarse voice—

"Hasten! the time is short!"

"Short for me, but it shall be long for you! For a time is coming when you will curse the day of your birth, and will not be able to die as calmly as I do!—Leave me!—I would fain pray; but I cannot call upon my God while you are nigh!"

Csaky, overcome despite himself, quitted the room.

Banfi laid his hand on his forehead and prayed.

Outside the heavens were thundering.

"O God! who dost thunder on high, take my blood as a sacrifice for my sins, but let not a drop of it fall on the heads of those who shed it! Suffer not my native land to pay the price of my blood! Guard this poor land from every ill! Visit not this people in Thy anger, but be their refuge and their sure defence in the evil day! Forgive my enemies my death, as I forgive them!"

[Pg 263]

The thunder roared terribly. God was wroth that day. He would not hearken to such a prayer.

"Is your Excellency ready?" inquired Csaky impatiently, whilst the Princess's messengers hammered furiously at the gates, and demanded instant admission.

Banfi stepped up to his lifeless consort and kissed her cold, pale face for the last time; then, turning calmly to Csaky, he said—

"Yes; I am ready now!"

A quarter of an hour later Csaky admitted the messengers.

"What do you bring?" he asked the pantler.

"The Prince's pardon for the prisoner."

"You are too late!—And you?"

"A cere-cloth for the corpse!"

"You have brought it very opportunely."

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[59] The subsequent fortunes of Apafi, Csaky, Teleki, Tököli, Azrael, and Feriz are related in Jokai's second historical novel, *Törökvilág Magyarországban* (*The Turks in Hungary*), which is a sequel to the present story, and ends with the collapse of the Turkish power in Hungary.

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Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

In Part I, Chapter I, "that Jokäi alludes to" was changed to "that Jókai alludes to".

In Chapter II, "the hinds see to their cattle" was changed to "the hands see to their cattle".

In Chapter III, "write his letter in own way" was changed to "write his letter in his own way".

In Chapter VII, a quotation mark was added after "on some one else's shoulders."

In Chapter VIII, "Arzael laughs aloud" was changed to "Azrael laughs aloud".

In Part II, Chapter II, "Behind the iconastastis" was changed to "Behind the iconastasis".

In Chapter III, "horses with flesh-cloured manes" was changed to "horses with flesh-coloured manes".

In Chapter VII, "the security of the whole realm are at stake" was changed to "the security of the whole realm is at stake".

In Chapter IX, "called away to Sombyo" was changed to "called away to Somlyo", and "her husband from Sombyo" was changed to "her husband from Somlyo".

In the advertisements, numerous minor punctuation and spelling errors were corrected, "Freiherr von Loudon" was changed to "Freiherr von Loudon", and "BELUCHISTAN" was changed to "BALUCHISTAN".

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