

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Iermola, by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Iermola

Author: Józef Ignacy Kraszewski

Release date: October 4, 2011 [EBook #37622]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Charles Bowen, from page scans provided by Google Books

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IERMOLA ***

Transcriber's Notes:

1. Page scan source:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=ilpGAAAAYAAJ&dq>

2. Alternate spelling of author's name: Józef Ignacy Kraszewski

IERMOLA

IERMOLA

BY

JOSEPH IGNATIUS KRASZEWSKI

Author Of "The Jew"

Translated

By MRS. M. CAREY

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD, AND COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Copyright, 1891,
By DODD, MEAD, AND Co.
All rights reserved.

CONTENTS.

- I. [The Land and the People.](#)
- II. [The Background of the Picture.](#)
- III. [What there was at the Foot of the Oaks.](#)
- IV. [First Cares and First Happiness.](#)
- V. [Set a Cheat to catch a Cheat.](#)
- VI. [When One Loves.](#)
- VII. [A New Life.](#)
- VIII. [Happy Days.](#)
- IX. [A Visit to the Door.](#)
- X. [What a Strong Will can Accomplish.](#)
- XI. [A Pottery at Popielnia.](#)
- XII. [Paternal Happiness.](#)
- XIII. [The Gray Mare.](#)
- XIV. [Improvement and Deception](#)
- XV. [The Other Father.](#)
- XVI. [Alone!](#)
- XVII. [In Bondage.](#)

- XVIII. [The Last Journey.](#)
XIX. [The Drama in the Forest.](#)

I E R M O L A.

I.

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE.

Amor omnia vincit.

The events which are here related took place in Wolhynian Poland, in that little corner of the earth, happily overlooked, where up to the present time neither great highways nor roads frequented by carriages are to be seen,—a land remote, almost lost, where the antique modesty, simplicity, innocence, and poverty of past ages are still preserved. I do not mean by this to say that all human vices with burdens of sins upon their backs are always to be seen following in the footsteps of civilization along the great highways; but unfortunately there is always, between one social condition just ended and another which is beginning, a period of transition during which the old life is extinguished, and the new does not yet exist; and the result is indecision and sad confusion. That hour, which has already chimed for other nations and other provinces, has not yet sounded for this little nook of our land. Here people live, particularly in the *dwors*^[1] of the lesser nobles, according to the traditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which have left upon the people the impress of their thought, their faith, and their manners.

It is true that in those yellow-painted *dwors* belonging to the richer nobles certain reforms have been adopted and a few new customs are in use; but the mass of the lesser nobility are astonished and scandalized at these innovations. Can it be otherwise in this honest little corner of the earth, where the newspapers arrive in bundles once a month; where the sending and receiving of letters is managed only by means of the Jews who come to pass the Sabbath in the neighbouring town; where the whole business of the country, with the exception of some traffic in building timber, of which we shall speak farther on, is the breeding of livestock and the manufacture and sale of shoes made of bark? Some persons perhaps will find it difficult to believe that there still exists a spot on earth so remote and so behind the rest of the world; but it is really true that in the district of Zarzecze, in the environs of the marshes of Pinsk, not very long ago, there were still homes of nobles, whose occupants sometimes inquired of travellers for news of the health of King Stanislaus-Augustus, and were still in complete ignorance of all events which had taken place since the days of Kosciusko.

Soldiers are never seen there; officials are unknown. Even those of the inhabitants who go to Pinsk to pay taxes never ask the names of those to whom they pay them, and wrapping their receipts carefully in their handkerchiefs, never dare to examine them closely, fearing lest this might cost them dear.

The portion of country which will be the scene of our narrative was, however, neither so remote nor so wild. The almanac of Berdyczew regularly found its way there in the latter days of December, bringing a far-off reflection of foreign civilization and a collection of the facts most necessary to the inhabitants,—such as the name of the dominant planet for the current year, the date of the feast of Easter, the hour of the rising and setting of the sun, and the receipt for the destruction of insects which had been brought over from England. The post-office was only ten miles away, and the richer nobles sent a messenger for their newspapers every month or six weeks; some of them even received letters by this means still so little used.

The majority of the inhabitants preferred, in fact, to confide their commissions to the hands of a messenger on foot, even when he had to go as far as fifty miles, for the Polesian messenger is superior to all others. None walk so rapidly; none are so discreet, so faithful; none ask so few

tormenting questions; and none so surely and so cleverly escape all sorts of dangers. At first sight one would take this peasant porter for a beggar or vagabond, with his torn and threadbare old gray coat, and his wallet containing a few crusts of bread and a change of shoes; but closer examination would reveal that in the folds of his girdle or in the lining of his cap, wrapped in an old ragged handkerchief or a scrap of paper, he carried titles, documents, and papers representing hundreds of millions of francs, or interests of the greatest importance. When God created the Polesian He made him a messenger: he always finds the shortest road by instinct; he never loses his way; and he goes through the most difficult places with marvellous ease. Consequently a tradition concerning messengers is current among the gentry; they hold that the promptest and surest post never can replace them. And therefore each village possesses a certain number of these hireling footmen, who tramp over the space of a hundred miles like apostles, and who, provided the recompense were sufficient, would not hesitate to carry a letter to Calcutta.

The portion of country of which we are speaking, whose geographical position it is not necessary more exactly to determine, is not so remote from Pinsk as Zarzecze, nor so near as Western Wolhynia; but it touches both of these regions, and thus occupies an intermediate position.

It is a long strip of land still in great part covered with forests of pine and oak. In the midst of it are to be found fields recently and with great difficulty reclaimed, and miserable villages all smoked and blackened by the resinous vapours from the forests.

The river Horyn flows through these forests, thus rendering them of great commercial value, for the principal revenue of the country is derived from the sale of timber transported to Dantzick in rafts. Thanks to their simple habits, almost all the inhabitants become rich in their old age. In fact, the Polesian, in spite of his wretched and poverty-stricken appearance, in spite of the inconveniences of the *plica*,^[2] with which they are frequently afflicted, would not change his condition for that of his cousin, the Wolhynian, who is apparently much more robust and prosperous.

In this country the peasant does not depend for support entirely upon the cultivation of the soil; there are varied means of subsistence which prevent his entertaining too great a dread of the unproductive seasons which are so terribly felt in other parts of the world. The forests and the river, to which the nobles grant him access, are for him an inexhaustible source of certain revenue and small industries. Those forests particularly from which the proprietors draw no profit after the trees suitable for sale have been cut down, furnish the principal wealth of the peasants,—bark from the oak and linden trees, barrel-hoops, bark slippers, osiers and rushes for the manufacture of baskets, blocks of beech and box wood for making domestic utensils, resinous torches, laths, and shavings. The dwellers in the *dwors* do not take the trouble to pick up all these refuse objects; but the peasants gather them and gain both profit and pleasure. Then, too, dried mushrooms, strawberries, mulberries, pears and wild apples, the berries of the guelder-rose and hawthorn furnish the peasant so many small harvests which yield him a modest and certain profit.

The working-men frequent the river shore. The young men of the villages are employed as raftsmen to float the timber down the river; they stretch nets and weirs, and hunt with the sparrow-hawk and boar-spear,—in a word, no one dies of hunger, and although famine sometimes threatens the poor people of the villages (and where does not this stern benefactress show her face?), if only they can hold out till harvest-time, they are sure to be able to live along together quite comfortably during another year. There are, it is true, bad days,—dark days, as the people call them. Sometimes they are obliged to make bread of bark, hay, and buckwheat. But the world would not be the world if one always enjoyed in it the peace and happiness of heaven.

The nobles who dwell in the *dwors* lead a patriarchal life, toward the maintenance of which the commercial relations with foreign countries contribute so little that these might without much inconvenience be altogether done away with. Everything is found, everything is manufactured in the villages; the people buy only sugar and coffee, a few bottles of Franconia wine, which is here called French wine, a few pounds of tea, a little pepper, and that is all. In many instances honey, which costs nothing, is substituted for sugar and chicory for coffee; camomile or balm and lime tree flowers, infinitely more healthy, for tea, and horse-radish for pepper. Meat necessary for household purposes is frequently butchered at home; at other times the Jews bring it for sale at six and seven cents a pound, and tongues and tripes for even less. The poultry-yard furnishes fowls and eggs; candles are moulded in the old fashion; cloth is woven after an antique method, admirable for its simplicity; linen also is equally well spun and woven in the villages; and there are no trades necessary to daily life which are not practised in the somewhat larger towns. Everywhere one will find farriers, wheelwrights, carpenters, coopers, and masons, usually very industrious, although it must be said not very skilful. And besides, in urgent or difficult cases, when one is in a hurry, for instance, and a workman is not just at hand, there is always some Polesian who remembers having seen the thing made somewhere, and who will undertake the needed job. He does it as well as he can, and usually after several attempts becomes a tolerable workman.

I do not mean to say that trades and the arts are in a flourishing condition in Polesia; in a country so simple, but little that is artistic is required. When the shoemaker brings you a pair of boots, at first sight they will certainly not seem to be made for a human foot, they look so

awkward, hard, large, rounded, and apparently moulded on a block of iron. But try them, wear them for two years in water and mud, and not a crack will be seen in the leather, not a peg will have come out, they are so solid, strong, and conscientiously made. No one asks, it is true, if his feet are more or less comfortable; has he not something for which to thank God if a good piece of ox-hide covers them and a thick sole protects them? And as for corns and bunions, he considers them the natural consequence of years and hard work, and not the effect of ill-made shoes.

It is in this way that everything is done there,--strongly, solidly, roughly. If the epidermis suffers in consequence, so much the worse for a skin which has been made tender by too much care, and for the eye which has become too delicate and exacting from the effects of luxury and studied refinement, I will only observe further that in this fortunate country each mechanic, who is oftener an amateur, and who has very few rivals professionally, thinks himself an artist, a being of superior nature, uncomprehended and unappreciated by his fellow-citizens. The frequent communications which he has with the *dwors*, the efforts he makes to possess himself of the secrets of his trade, the consciousness of being a necessary man,--a sort of axle in the social mechanism which surrounds him,--contributes to arouse in him feelings which, even if absurd, are manifested in other spheres and under other skies than those of our Polesia.

In this country vast green forests form the frame and horizon of each landscape. As we pass along we come to an occasional clearing; there a pond glitters, or a slow, deep river runs; there damp marshes stagnate eternally, and meadows grow green, half buried under rushes. Farther on rise the roofs of huts blackened by the everlasting smoke. The Horyn, like a rich silver girdle, surrounds this sleeping country with its sparkling waters, which enrich and fertilize it; almost all the small towns of this region are grouped along the river shore.

In other countries the name of town is not given to such miserable, straggling villages; but in Polesia any assemblage of houses among which may be found an inn, a Catholic chapel, a *cerkiew* (Russian church), a market-place, and above all two or three Jews, is called a town.

The number of Israelites dwelling in a small town constitutes its wealth; the more of them, the richer it is considered. In each of these little capitals one encounters a Boruch, a Zelman, an Abram, or a Majorko, who trades in everything; who furnishes to each person whatever he desires, from a coat of lamb-skin to a gold watch; who buys wheat and grists of corn, keeps an inn, sells rum, tobacco, pipes, and sugar, and is acquainted with the whole history and condition of all the gentlemen in the neighbourhood, numbers of whose notes and receipts he has in his portfolio. The great storehouse situated on the market-place supplies the general needs of the poor villagers, who find there pots, girdles, bonnets, iron, salt, tar, etc.; besides, there are two or three little shops containing stuffs and haberdashery and a few groceries, and that is all. The entire little town is nourished, clothed, and subsists by means of the activity of the Jews who are its soul. The cultivation of the soil, it is true, which is carried on by the inhabitants of the towns, according to the ancient Slavic custom, also furnishes other supplies.

A few poor gentlemen, one or two functionaries poorer still, the curate, the Russian priest, and the employees of the *dwor* compose almost all the population. During the week the town seems deserted; only the Jewish children run about the streets playing at quoits and skittles. The chickens, goats, and cows wander peaceably through the market-place. But on Sunday it is almost impossible to pass on the square, there are so many riding horses, so many wagons laden with wood and fodder, and so brisk is the trade going on in all sorts of produce. And when once a year the day of the town holiday comes, then there are all sorts of noises, and a crowd, and a fair. Then the pedlers arrive with their little wagons, and display their bundles of merchandise upon the square. The Jew hatter hangs from long poles planted along the wall the bonnets and hats of his own manufacture; the Gypsy horse-doctor appears; hand-organs abound; and the crowd increases every moment. All the land-holders of the neighbouring parishes also come with their wives; the stewards and managers, the poor gentry who own only one field, the villagers who wish to get rid of any surplus commodity or useless provision, such as leather, wool, cloth, or linen,--all are there.

It is a pleasure to see, and a delight to hear, the noise and commotion with which business is carried on. On the square every few moments some of the men conclude a bargain and go off to the inn to confirm the agreement by emptying a pint mug; the old women venders of onions, garlic, tobacco, girdles, and red ribbons pick up as many big coppers as they want. The day after the fair, and even for many succeeding days, unless a good rain storm washes out the numberless traces, one would divine at first glance what had taken place. Possibly the pools of the blood of slaughtered goats and sheep which are drying and blackening on the ground might even suggest that some dark crime had been enacted.

But with the exception of this one day of bustle and gayety, the whole country reposes during the entire year in that state of sweet torpor and melancholy silence which is the normal condition of its daily life. Man always absorbs, more or less voluntarily, the external influences to which he is exposed. We are, in the scale of universal order, like the caterpillar who clothes himself with a green robe while living on the leaves of a tree, and with gorgeous attire when his food is the heart of its purple fruit.

In a country fast asleep, like Polesia, where the murmur of the venerable trees lulls the thin grass and the rushes on the marshes, where peace and torpor is inhaled with the heavy air,--damp, and filled with resinous vapours,--the inhabitants, with their growth, feel the blood flow

more and more slowly in their veins; thoughts arise more and more slowly in their minds, and man, thus quieted and softened, desires only repose, trembles at the idea of a sterner and more active destiny, and clings like a mushroom to the soft, damp earth.

The peasants at about forty years of age have long beards like old men; the nobles at that age cease to wear coats, wrap themselves in dressing-gowns, allow their mustaches to grow at will, and to the end of their lives, if they have wives and children, never again go out of their houses. As for the old bachelors of the same age, they begin then to consider that the sole result of marriage is inconvenience and useless subjection.

There is but little visiting, although generally there is much cordiality between the landholders; but in summer it is too warm, in winter it is too cold; in the autumn the mud and wind are disagreeable, and in the spring there are the gnats. If ever one of them determines to overcome his laziness, it is only on the occasion of a feast at the house of an esteemed neighbour or in case of inevitable necessity. As, however, it is not possible to live without some news, and some intellectual intercourse, the Jew who owns the inn of the town undertakes to retail the one and furnish the other. He comes at the slightest call, or naturally in virtue of his ordinary occupations; he stops at the door and begins at once to give an account of what he has heard during the week, either in his excursions through the neighbourhood or from the peasants who come to the mill or to the blacksmith's shop. Generally the amount of his information consists in being able to tell who has sown, who has harvested, who has sold, who has gone on a journey, how much money the one has received and why the other has departed. But this scanty supply of news feeds the curiosity of the noble for a time, amuses him or wearies him, makes him gloomy, irritates him, and sometimes even suffices to drag him out of his house.

Let us not therefore seek in this country any modern innovations, any enterprise or invention of the day; they would be greeted here only by incredulity, distrust, and dislike. Everything is done in an old-fashioned way; and if one should seek for the living tradition, perfect and entire, of the life of past times, he will find it nowhere in such perfection as here. The noble has the same respect for old customs as the peasant; and if outwardly he laughs at them, in the bottom of his heart he renders them homage, because with his blood and his milk, with his eyes and his ears, he has absorbed them from his infancy.

Thus it happens that in places where once rose a castle, and where now a new *dwor* stands in its place, the site of the new edifice retains the old name, and the peasants who haul wood for the proprietor still say that they are taking it to the castle. The spot once occupied by an ancient *cerkiew* is perhaps now a potato field, but the gardens of the proprietor are none the less called the monastery. At the cross-roads in the forest, where the foot-paths meet, a grave dug ages ago has disappeared under the grass so that no trace of it remains; the wooden cross has fallen and rotted in the sod, and may be traced in the thick green grass which alone marks the spot where the soil has been enriched by the decayed body. Still, not a peasant passes that way without throwing, according to Pagan custom, a stone or a broken branch upon the spot. Everything that has lived in this country lives there still. The legend of the founding of a colony whose limits were traced by a pair of black bulls whose privilege it was to preserve the future city from infection and diseases common to cattle; the story of the prince who drowned himself in a pond; the narrative of the Tartar invasion; the sad fate of the two brothers in love with the same young girl, on whose account they killed each other in single combat, and who afterward, in despair, hung herself on their tomb,—all these survive.

The same songs have been sung for a thousand years; the same customs continue to prevail; and all are faithful to them as to an engagement sacredly entered into with their ancestors.

II.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE PICTURE

Let us now imagine ourselves transported to the banks of the Horyn.

On the shore, close to the water's edge, there was a pretty little *skarborwka*^[3] painted a light yellow. Some planks, piled one upon another and closely pressed together, extended so far out into the water that one could not only walk with dry feet up to the little cabin, but almost out into the middle of the river. Every preparation had apparently been made for a voyage; nothing seemed wanting but the signal for departure; the men alone had not arrived. But at this very moment boatmen were being collected, more provisions supplied, and so day by day the hour for setting sail was deferred.

The country along the shores, though sterile and bare, was not devoid of a certain sweetly

melancholy attraction. Beyond the broad spreading sheet of water, a little back to the right of the ploughed fields, might be seen a large Polesian village with its gray chimneys and the great clumps of trees which in summer crown it with verdure, its ancient Russian church surrounded by embattled walls and surmounted by a clock-tower, and its cemetery situated in the midst of a pine wood through which gleamed here and there the silver bark of a few birch-trees. On the other side of the river a dark forest stretched like a great wall as far as the eye could reach; upon the plain invaded by the waters, the long rows of damp osiers marked the place where the ponds and marshes usually ended. The village, which stretched in length for a great distance, must have been founded ages ago, and once was of considerable size, as one might see by the height and number of the trees which surrounded it.

The eye which seeks among the huts of the village for the roofs and walls of the *dwor*, which ought to be its crowning ornament, would expect to find it on the top of the hill overlooking the river; but on closer examination it would discover, in the midst of an abandoned orchard and brush-wood scattered over with rubbish and old tree-trunks, only the blackened ruins of an old wooden building which gives to the spot a sad and savage aspect. Three fourths of the dwelling-house had tumbled down; one of the chimneys opened to view its dark depths; and not far off, the farmhouse, very old and miserable looking, but still inhabited, sent up a little gray smoke from its roof. It was easy to see that for a long time the proprietor had not lived there; even the wooden cross which once stood at the courtyard gate had fallen and rotted on the ground. The broken-down hedges gave foot-passengers and flocks access to the orchard, while near at hand, the great gate, by an ironical stroke of fate, was still standing as though to defend the entrance.

The broad road which formerly extended between the *dwor* and the village was now deserted and overgrown with grass. One could scarcely even distinguish the narrow foot-paths trodden by the cattle which the villagers took there to pasture.

The same neglect was noticeable in those houses in the village depending for repairs entirely upon the proprietor; but in spite of this apparently poverty-stricken condition, the rafting, the work in the forest, and the various small trades of the inhabitants were productive of employment and competence.

At the moment when this story begins, not a single person remained on the rafts which were ready to depart; twilight was coming on; the breeze from the water became brisker and more chilling. On the trunk of a fallen tree, near the river shore, was seated an old man, already bent with age, holding between his lips a small wooden pipe; near him came and went a little boy, who from his dress and exterior seemed to belong to a position between that of peasant and servant in a gentleman's family. It would have been difficult to determine precisely the exact age of the old man. Are there not faces which, having reached a certain age, change so entirely and so rapidly that the years which pass afterward seem to leave no trace upon them?

He was small in stature, a little bent, his head almost bald and slightly gray, his beard and mustaches short, though allowed to grow at will. His cheeks were wrinkled as an apple withered by the winter's cold, but retaining some fresh and healthy color. His eyes still had much vivacity and some brilliancy; and his features were remarkable for their regularity even under the yellow and furrowed skin which covered them. His face, at once quiet and slightly sad, wore an expression of peace and tranquillity of mind which is rarely met with in the countenances of the poor; one would say on seeing him that he had peaceably settled all his affairs in this world and that henceforth he would await quietly the reward which he might receive in a better one. It would be equally difficult to form any positive idea of his condition or position from his dress. According to all appearance, he was not a simple peasant, although he wore the costume of one. The threadbare coat which covered him was shorter than the *sukmane* of the Polesian, and it was gathered about his waist by a leather belt with a metal clasp; he wore besides dark cloth pantaloons, an old neck-handkerchief, and on his head an old brimmed cap considerably faded and worn.

But even in this dress, so simple and so worn, there was something which showed that the old man had still a certain care for his appearance: the coarse shirt which showed below his cravat was very white; the *sukmane* spotless and whole; the shoes of linden bark which covered his feet were tied carefully with narrow strips of linen.

The youth who was standing beside him and who was neither peasant nor servant, but who looked like a boatman's apprentice newly enlisted, had the features of the Polesian race, small, very bright brown eyes, long brown hair falling over his neck, a face almost square, a rather large mouth, a well-shaped turned-up nose, and a low but intelligent brow.

His entire countenance was expressive of cheerful good-humour heightened by the natural gayety of youth and utter carelessness of the future.

"There are three brothers of us at home," he was saying to the old man. "My lord has allowed me to hire myself as a boatman on the rafts; and I assure you I like such a life much better than the one I spend at home, doing all sorts of drudgery and melting behind the stove."

The old man shook his head gently.

"I see very well," he replied, "that you will no longer listen to my advice since you have got the

desire to go on a voyage into your head. When youth wishes for anything, nothing but want can dissuade him from it. Go, then, and may God guide you, but this shall not prevent my telling you--

The young man burst into a merry laugh.

"Let me first tell you what I think," said he, "and then I will listen to what you have to say. First, it is not a bad thing for a young man like me to see something more of the world than may be viewed from his window; secondly, I shall certainly be much more comfortable here with this Jew, who, though he cannot tell why, is always afraid, than with our lord and master, the steward; and last, but by no means least, I shall pick up during the voyage enough money to pay the taxes."

"All that is very true," replied the other, "and there are other things you may gain besides; but an old man looks at it in a different light. During these voyages, or rather, these wanderings, one becomes weaned from one's old home and unaccustomed to regular work, one gets into the habit of roaming about; and there is nothing so sad as to become dissatisfied with one's birthplace. When, after that, one returns to one's old home, everything seems strange and distasteful: the bread tastes bitter; the soup is poor; the neighbours are wearisome, and the daily work is a burden. At first one goes to the inn to talk with the Jew for some sort of distraction; then one grows accustomed to drinking brandy, and ruin surely follows. If I had a son, I never would allow him to go wandering about the world in company with a Jew. Let him whom God has appointed to live peacefully in his cottage take care never to stray away from its threshold."

The young boatman became thoughtful. "But," he replied, after a moment's pause, "do you believe that one so easily forgets all that has been about him from infancy, all his former life? No, no; surely not, my father. Can it be any harm to go and see the world so as to have something to talk about to one's children when old age comes? Would you not be constantly sighing for home and the good friends left behind, rather than forgetting them and laughing at them? Would not home food taste better after you had eaten the bread of strangers?"

"That is perhaps all true, if one continues honest and discreet,--if one lives in the fear of God; and then the voyages on the rafts might be of some service," answered the old man. "But it is so easy to grow dissipated, to get in the habit of seeing and desiring new things, and then grow weary and lounge about with arms folded. On the raft there are so many occasions for drinking: the unbelieving Jew does not spare the brandy at every mill, at every lock; and the men, from continually tasting it, soon go to the devil. What matters it to the Jew merchant what becomes of the souls of his boatmen, provided his wood arrives safely in Germany, and the thalers flow into his purse? As for me, I am an old man now, as you see, yet never in all my life have I had any desire to see what is going on far away in the rest of the world. I never have gone far from the threshold of the house in which I was born, and I have now only one prayer to offer to my God, and that is that I may be allowed to lie here in peace when I die."

"Bless me! And are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly, perfectly! And I ought to be, because I am no longer fit for the world, and I ought to be content to have in my old age all that is necessary to life,--a little corner and a bowl of soup. But I have had many sad moments too, and I am persuaded that it is much easier to endure poverty, weariness, and misfortune when one is among one's own people."

"Is this, then, your native land?" said the young man.

"Yes, here I was born, here I have dragged out my pitiful existence, and here I shall end it in peace," replied the old man, a little sadly. "It is not for the mushrooms to grow big like the oaks."

"It must be a strange story."

"What?"

"Your own, to be sure."

"Mine? Have I a history? Poverty was born, and poverty is dead."

"Ah, please! We have nothing to do this evening; I dare not go to the inn. I beg you, good father, do tell me something of your life. It is so lonely there all by myself on the raft; in this way we can while away an hour or two, and I shall have learned something from you."

The old man smiled sweetly.

"But what can I tell you? There has been nothing unusual in my life; there are a great many lives like mine in this world. I have lived all alone, without friends, without brothers. Not even one being calls me cousin; not a living soul bears my name. Moreover, my child, you know that what gives an old man most pleasure is to talk about the days of his youth; therefore, if you are wise you will not call the wolf from the forest, for you never will be able to get rid of him again."

"Never mind; only talk to me, talk to me! I shall always be glad to listen."

"Well," began the old man, "I remember that when I was a very little boy I used to run about here in this very spot, on the shores of the Horyn, with other little villagers of my age. Ah, it mattered not then whether my head was bare or my shirt torn; no other days that I can recall seem so joyous and so sweetly happy as those."

"And your parents?"

"I do not remember them. I was six years old when they died of a terrible fever; and as they had come from Wolhynia, I had no relatives here, and was entirely alone. I see as through a mist the village watchman leading me away, as we came out of the cemetery to a neighbouring hut, where an old woman who called herself my foster-mother gave me a large plate of soup which I devoured greedily. I had eaten nothing for two days except a crust of dry bread which I had concealed in the bosom of my shirt. The next day I was sent into the fields to mind the geese; after that I was made to take care of the pigs; and finally, when it was found that I was not awkward, and that I knew how to take care of cattle, I was appointed to take the village cows to the meadow. Oh, how sweet a herdsman's life is! It is true that we had to go off with the cows at daybreak through the long grass all wet with dew; but to make up for it, we had a good nap in the middle of the day under the trees, when the cattle were at a safe distance from the wheat, and when our happy band of shepherds were frolicking in the furrows or in the great clearings. Cattle are not much trouble: they are quiet and intelligent; when once they are accustomed to their pastures, they will not go out of them even though beaten with a stick. If they are driven away once or twice from the oat or wheat fields, they never will go back there again; the boy has only to look at them and call to them from time to time, and then amuse himself as he pleases."

"But what pleasure can he have when he has no companions?"

"I told you that we went out in companies. And when we lighted a fire on a little rising ground among the rushes, or in the forest against the trunk of an old fallen tree; when we roasted potatoes, fried some mushrooms and morels, or a little bacon which we had brought with us,—what a feast we had, and what a good time! Then we would sing till the woods resounded; and our hearts beat fast for joy, the far-away echo of our song seemed so beautiful to us. So when it happened that the proprietor of the village, our old lord (God rest his soul!), chanced to meet me one day as he was hunting, took a fancy to me and ordered that I should be taken to the *dwor* where I should serve as a cossack, God only knows how sad this made me, and how I longed to be able to refuse to go."

"Ah! So you have been in service at the *dwor*?"

"All my life, my child, all my life."

"And you have not been able to lay by anything for your old age?"

"Wait a moment, my child. Surely I do not complain, though labour has not been so profitable to me as to many others. But if I had more than I have, what good would it do me? I should not eat with a better appetite; I should not sleep more peacefully. Listen now, and you will learn what I gained by such service. They carried me by force to the *dwor*. I was washed, combed, dressed, whether I would or not. I was obliged to stay where I was put, although my heart was ready to break. But after three or four days I began to acquire a fondness for work."

"In fact, my work was not too hard; occupation was given me in the office until I should become sufficiently polished up to wait in the dining-room. The lord at that time was not an old man; he was tall and very handsome, had a fine mind and the best heart in the world. After hearing him speak only a few words, one could not help feeling that he was a man to be loved and respected; his appearance, his gestures, and his voice all bespoke the lord and master. If he were dressed in a cassock and a *sukmane*, one would recognize at once, though one should meet him in the dark, that God had created him to command others. But his commands were neither rough nor offensive to any one; he never spoke an angry word to his servants. When he was angry, he always kept silence, and his servants had the terrible punishment of seeing him refuse to speak to them and turn his face away from them. The home was like the master; not only the old cossack whose business it was to instruct me, but the other servants at the *dwor* were quiet, affable, and kind, and I soon grew accustomed to them."

"It is true they put upon me a good deal of their drudgery; but only my legs suffered from the errands they sent me on, and I cannot recall ever being injured or maltreated. The old cossack often said in a low voice, 'He is a poor little boy, an orphan, and it would be too bad to hurt him.' Thus little by little I forgot the open-air life; and a few weeks after, meeting on the dam old Hindra, the shepherd, and my old companions, I contented myself with smiling at them from a distance and showing them my wide pantaloons with red bands, and I did not feel the least desire to rejoin them in the woods. My task was not at all severe. The lord wished to have me take care of his apartment, and it was for this duty that I was first trained. As for his own wants, he gave but little trouble to any one; usually he waited on himself, and showed the kindness of a father to those whose business it was to serve him. His old cossack was like a brother to him, and often scolded him for one thing or another."

"Upon my word, he must have been a good lord."

"Yes, he was, God bless him!" answered the old man, wiping his eyes, which were full of tears; "there are no more like him in this world. He was brother and father and everything to me. He lived over there, do you see, in the place where that great gray chimney still stands; but in his time things were not as they are now. In his household there was neatness and order in every little corner as well as in the great courtyard; not a useless straw could be found lying about, and now there is nothing but brush-wood, briars, and rubbish."

Here the old man heaved a deep sigh and then resumed.

"He rarely quitted the estate, and seldom received visitors. However, now and then a guest did arrive; and although the house was ordinarily as quiet as a cloister, it was not dull,—for all of us, and especially the master, took part in cultivating the fields and garden, we went hunting, and we never had a moment of idleness or weariness. The lord loved the horses, the dogs, the trees, and the chase. Sometimes he delighted in fishing; and thus the days passed so pleasantly that we scarcely knew how the years rolled by. The master never married, and he seemed to have no relatives. It was said that he came from a distance, and had bought this estate; but though he was a new-comer, the country people were as much attached to him as if they had served his ancestors for generations, and he was beloved as a father throughout the neighbourhood.

"It was indeed an easy matter to become attached to him, he was so good, so frank, so cordial and honest; he had such pity for human sorrow that the most wretched being who came to his house was sure to receive help and go away comforted. I loved him at first sight; and before a year had passed, I took the place of the old cossack, who was beginning to grow infirm. He wished to give up work, for thanks to his master's goodness he owned a thatched cottage with a field, and had an annuity; so after having taught me all about his business, he asked permission to retire and rest. But how strong is the effect of habit! He thought he should be happy doing nothing in his own house, but at the end of three weeks he began to be so tired of it that he came every day to the *dwor*; there, leaning against the garden hedge, he smoked his pipe with us, or sat on the porch from morning till night. If it happened that for a single day he did not see his master, it had the same effect upon him as going without his food, his heart hungered so.

"As for me, no one could have forced me to leave my master, even though I should have been beaten, for he was indeed such a lord as is not often found in this world. I will give you an instance of his goodness, though it is only a little thing: whenever anything better than usual was served for him, whether good fruit from the gardens or a dish well prepared, he never failed to leave a bit of it for his servants. Gradually, as I came to know him well, I loved him more and more; and like all the others who surrounded him, I would have given my life for him. I saw more of him than any of the other servants did; together we went to the chase, of which he was passionately fond, we fished, we rowed on the river, we worked in the garden. We often rose in high spirits at daybreak; and old Bekas, my lord's spaniel, as if divining what we were going to do, would jump and bark and wag his tail. Then we would throw our game-bags over our shoulders, and away we would go to the marshes through the mud and the brush-wood, frequently spending the whole day without any other refreshment than a little brandy and bread and cheese.

"I was at first astonished that so good a man should live so alone; but after I knew him better I saw plainly that although he did his best to be calm and happy, and smiling toward others, there was something which he concealed which had embittered his life. Sometimes, even in his most joyous moments, he would stop suddenly, sigh, and turn pale; tears like large pearls would flow down his cheeks; but as soon as he became conscious of them, he would put his gun on his shoulder and go off to the woods or go to work in the garden or occupy himself in some way so that no one should see that he had been weeping.

"In the service of such a master I was so happy that I forgot to think of myself. I was beginning to be advanced in age; he himself undertook to make a marriage settlement for me, and to establish me in the village, but how could I bear to leave him? Besides, at the *dwor* we had become so accustomed to doing without women that we almost forgot there were any in the world. We learned by experience that it was very possible to get on without them; and the old cossack was of the opinion that they were good for nothing but to make a fuss, and cause disorder and waste in the household. Nevertheless, he married after a while.

"Our master never spoke to any woman; he never even cast a glance upon those who came in his way; and as for us servants, it never even occurred to us to marry. Our master grew old, and so did we. Some of us died; others grew gray-headed, and I sooner than any of them, for I was scarcely thirty years old when my head, God only knows why, began to turn white. Our life at the *dwor* underwent no change; the master continued erect and vigorous, and went hunting constantly, but he showed less enthusiasm for it, and preferred to work in the garden, for his legs began to refuse to obey him. Probably they had grown stiff, in consequence of his having tramped so much through the water and the snows of winter, for he walked a great deal and very rapidly.

"When he felt himself growing feeble and infirm, he became sadder. As it was thenceforth difficult for him to engage in any sort of labour, he buried himself in his books and sighed frequently, muttering mournfully to himself; and at night he prayed aloud, calling upon the name of God in a plaintive, tender voice which brought the tears to my eyes. We tried to amuse him, now in one way, now in another, but this became a more difficult task every day. I raised some birds for him, and this appeared to distract him; but he grew more feeble constantly, and began

to be indifferent to everything.

"As soon as he took to his bed, some fine people, until then unknown to us, arrived. First came a lady, who, it was said, was our lord's sister-in-law; then came her husband, who, it appeared, was our lord's brother; and after that a horde of cousins, nephews, and other relatives, who formerly had not known him, and who now seemed to spring up from the ground.

"But all these people were so different from him that one never would have supposed that they belonged to the same family. They were polished and elegant in their manners, cordial in their greeting, and spoke in gentle voices; but we learned from their servants that all this was put on, for in their own homes they conducted themselves quite differently. I do not know what good reason our master found for sending them away, but they all suddenly departed in great anger; and after that we were left alone, thank God!

"We continued to lead a more and more gloomy existence. Thirty odd years had passed, and I had scarcely perceived the lapse of them; the last of these I spent constantly near the bedside of my good lord. There were moments when he still amused himself, sometimes with me, sometimes with old Bekas or some of his tame birds; at other times a book would please him; then he read night and day, and seemed more tranquil. It was easy to perceive that for him the end was near; but we loved him so much that we thought only of him, and never asked ourselves what would become of us afterward. We dared not think of the moment when he should be taken from us. I was almost forty when my good master died. I had passed my whole life near him; I was as devoted to him as if I had been his dog; consequently when we had laid him in his coffin, I felt as if it was a great misfortune to survive him, I was so sad and lonely and out of heart.

"I sat down at his feet and wept a long time. The lawyers came and wrote papers and sealed them; one of his cousins took charge of the funeral. I know nothing of what happened after that, for I was like one stunned. The next day I entered his room, swept it, and arranged it as if he still lived, and then sat there, bewildered, waiting for I knew not what. At times all seemed a terrible dream. But soon the sister-in-law, the brother, the cousins, and other relatives arrived, and turned everything upside down, searching everywhere for the will. They went through the house from top to bottom; and as they found no will, the brother and sister-in-law took possession of everything, sending the rest of the family abruptly away.

"They then undertook to manage everything after their own liking, to sell, to rent, collect money, and rule the village people. For my part, I begged them only to allow me to remain in service at the *dwor*; but what did they care for the *dwor*, when they did not wish to live there? They ordered me to go and live in a hut in the village; but there was not a vacant one, and our deceased master had made no arrangement for me. There seemed therefore nothing left for me but to take old Hindra's place as shepherd. But when they became convinced that I had given up faithfully to them all that my deceased master had confided to my care, they had sufficient consideration for me to allow me to end my days here. As I have told you, there was no vacant cottage, and I had no relatives. Do you see that old ruined inn down there near the clump of trees behind the cemetery? It was there that they gave me a small lodging and a bit of garden ground, which rented for three roubles a year. I have now lived there over twenty years, giving thanks to God. Each day I go to the old *dwor*; I recall the days of the past, I weep, and then I return to my hole--"

"And you live all alone?"

"Just as you see me. It is my fate doubtless to die alone also, without ever having had any one to live near me. Since the death of my good master, I never have been able to become attached to any man, and no man has ever seemed to care for me. I do not complain, for no one in the village seeks to do me any injury; they would, on the contrary, rather help me, but I am alone, always alone."

"At your age, that is very sad--"

"Oh, yes, it is sad," sighed the old man, "that is very true; but what is there to do? When one is gray-headed and walks with a stick, it is too late to marry. Besides, no woman would have me, except perhaps some one I would not have myself. God gave me neither relatives, friends, nor brethren. What can I do? I must die alone, as I have lived."

"And do you never murmur?"

"What good would that do?" answered the old man, quietly. "Should I lessen my grief or alter my fate by offending the Lord God? And moreover, cannot man become accustomed to anything, even to such a life as mine? That is, if one lives long enough."

So saying, he sighed, shook out his pipe, and taking up his stick, prepared to depart.

"Good-evening, my child," said he; "are you going to spend the night here?"

"The Jew asked me to sleep in the cabin; for there are some bags of flour and barrels of bacon on board, and he is afraid they may be stolen."

"Even the thought of theft should be unknown to us," answered the old man; "but God guards

what the master takes care of. I must go, my son; good-evening."

"Good-evening, old father, good-evening."

III.

WHAT THERE WAS AT THE FOOT OF THE OAKS

Thus they parted,--these men whom chance had brought together, whom an hour's conversation had made friends, and who were perhaps never to meet again during their lives. It is strange, but where manners and social conditions are primitive, friendship and sympathy between men are easy, and they are unhesitatingly fraternal; and on the other hand, when men become civilized and polished, they carefully and politely avoid personal relations and fear and shun each other.

But among the lower classes it is quite the reverse; and I cannot say that things are any the worse for it. An hour is sufficient to bring two strangers together, and make them feel almost like brothers; a hearty speech or a sympathetic look excites ready confidence and prompt exchange of feeling; friendship is quickly formed, and grows as vigorously and ardently as hatred. Here at least, men are men.

Good Iermola, as the old man was called, then returned to his own house, his head still full of his old memories, while the young boatman, whistling a tune and thinking of the poor and friendless old man, spread down the bundle of straw upon which he was to stretch himself in front of the cabin door, content to go to rest; for as soon as the sun is set, the peasant, no matter what the hour may be, is always ready to sleep if only he is allowed to do so.

Meantime, Iermola walked slowly toward his lodging, which was but a short distance away. Between the village and the river, on a sandy bit of ground strewn with the trunks of old pines and oaks broken down from old age, mutilated also in many places by the hand of lazy villagers who were not willing to take the trouble to go to the forest for their fire-wood, stood an old building curiously constructed, which served as a shelter for our old servant. It was neither a thatched cottage nor a *dwor*, but simply a ruin,--an old deserted inn which once had covered a far larger space, and which had been knocked down and demolished by some unknown accident. Its roof had disappeared; its bare beams and rafters crossed one another here and there; and fragments of the straw thatching were still hanging suspended above the corners of the old walls. One of these corners, although strangely bent and filled with long cracks, still remained standing and entire; here might be seen a window half chinked up with mud, with a few panes of glass still left at the top, a door which had been freshly patched and nailed together, and walls which once had been painted white, but which now wore a coat of doubtful gray.

The rest of the building was all one mass of ugly ruins,--beams and rotten planks, blackened woodwork, pieces of rubbish all buried together, covered with mud and overrun with briars and high grass.

By what miracle was the fragment of roof still held in place over the room which it sheltered? How had this remnant of the building been preserved? These were questions difficult to answer.

Quite near the old building, a paling of half-rotten laths surrounded a small garden, shaded at one end by a clump of pines and large oaks.

Above the roof rose the old chimney, black, bare, and cracked, which, however, still served to warm the sole inhabitant of this poor lodging. The mouldiness of the beams, which were rotting on the ground, extended to the walls, which remained standing; the work of destruction might here be seen in all stages from beginning to completion, and one might quite certainly foretell the time when these miserable ruins would be only a vast mass of wood, mud, and useless rubbish. Gazing upon this wretched dwelling, it seemed cruel to think that a man should be obliged to find shelter there. Yet Iermola, accustomed to his pile of trash, approached this den without repugnance; he opened the door and entered his chamber. Then, as it was very dark inside, he hastened to kindle the fire and make a blaze of pine wood which he kept ready for this purpose in the little hearth of his stove.

Gradually every corner of the room was lighted up, and might be seen distinctly by the blaze of the dry wood. It was a small chamber situated in an angle of the building, where the roof and walls were still left, and which must formerly have been used as a bedchamber and office for the innkeeper.

The doorway opening into the large dining-hall of the inn, now entirely destroyed and

uninhabitable, had a few planks nailed across it which were chinked with a mixture of chopped straw and mud. The large old stove, having been patched and mended every year, had lost its rectangular form and become externally utterly irregular, bulged out, rounded, dented, and altogether shapeless; and the metal plates which formerly closed it were now replaced by some tiles. Inside the fireplace, now stopped up, a few planks served as cupboard shelves, and the end of the mantel-piece as table and sideboard.

It may be easily imagined that the furniture was not elegant. It was partly of village manufacture, and had been roughly made with axe and saw; the rest was composed of a few respectable old pieces brought from the *dwor*. When the new owners sent Iermola away empty-handed, after thirty years of service, he was granted, as sole recompense for a long life of labour and devotion, permission to take with him a few old, broken, and useless pieces of furniture which otherwise would have been thrown on the rubbish pile. The poor but worthy and industrious old man had succeeded in transforming these into almost comfortable furnishings. The ingenious Iermola knew how to make the most of the least thing; and so his one apartment was soon quite decked out with souvenirs of his youth and happy days. He slept on an old sofa with broken and twisted feet, which was of fine wood, and had once been painted white and gilded. At his head stood a little round table supporting a chess-board which had been made and inlaid by the hand of some old master; two or three old chairs, upon whose seats some boards, nailed on, took the place of the velvet cushions, were evidently of Dantzick manufacture, but it was only by the aid of numberless nails and strings that the different pieces succeeded in holding together. Near them was a large wooden chest painted green, whose rough appearance clearly indicated that it had been made in the village. A bench, rough-hewn with an axe, was near the door; another table of unplanned plank served to hold all his collection of jugs and plates of common pottery. In contrast, on the mantel-piece stood a small pitcher of fine Sèvres china, without a handle; egg-cups and mustard-pots with delicate bright flowers shone there, a tea-pot of Saxon china with dainty feet, one of which had been broken off fifty years before, a cup of Wedgwood, and a butter-dish of Russian manufacture in the shape of a paschal lamb. The general appearance of the good man's chamber was poor and neat, but sad, because it was filled with mementos of former comfort striving to conceal present poverty. The drapery which covered the wall near his bed was a fragment of Turkey carpet, torn and patched, but still in strong contrast with the coarse bed-coverings. Broken glasses, porcelain, and bits of china glittered beside pots of clay, mahogany, and pine. On the wall, not far from a rude picture of Our Lady of Poczai, was hung a fine engraving by Raphael Morghen, horribly mouldy and old, with part of one corner torn off; it was "The Last Supper," after the painting by Leonardo da Vinci. Farther on was an old picture of the twelve apostles, by Hoffmann, of Prague, and a small painting on wood of the German school, much injured, and representing the birth of our Saviour.

The only real adornment of the room, therefore, was the exquisite neatness and order which reigned in it. There was no litter to be seen in any part of it, not the smallest crumb or the least speck of dust; each thing was in its place, and although in this poor apartment all sorts of things were mingled,—provisions, food, cooking utensils, the poor man's wardrobe, and all his simple stores,—there was neither inconvenience nor confusion. Cupboards were made on the walls, shelves set up in the corners of the room, the large chests rolled under the table; the hiding-place behind the stove—the fireplace, over which a piece of cloth was hung—served to shut up and conceal all disorderly objects. Even the chips and bits of wood used to kindle the fire were piled up neatly in their own proper corner. It is true that Iermola had very near at hand, in the ruins of the inn, a sort of cellar surrounded by walls, where he stored his more cumbrous provisions; but he could not leave many things in a place which had no fastening, for poverty, scorning the laws of proprietorship, often dares to share with poverty.

On entering, the old man contented himself with lighting in the stove his pieces of resinous wood, for candles or oil were luxuries which he did not allow himself; then he looked around to see if all was in good order in his dwelling. After that he took one of his pots and proceeded to warm his supper, which the cossack's widow usually prepared for him in the village, or which he sometimes cooked himself on his return to his lodging; and then he seated himself on a stool in the corner of the fireplace, and began to say his prayers.

The wind sighed fitfully in the branches of the pines and the oaks close by his little garden; a deep silence reigned all about him; and Iermola, sad and motionless, was beginning to dream as he prayed, when in the midst of this profound stillness the cry of a baby was suddenly heard, at first feeble and indistinct, then loud and shrill.

It was like the cry of a new-born baby; and it seemed very near, as though it came from the other side of the garden, out of the clump of pines and oaks.

"What can it be?" said the old man, interrupting his prayers, and rising from his bench. "It is now so late. Can it be possible that any silly woman can have crossed the river with her baby to come and ask for medicine?"

He paused and listened, but the trembling, feeble wailing did not seem to come nearer nor to recede; evidently the child remained in the same place. It was impossible to believe that any woman working in the fields could have left her cradle there; the chilliness of the evening, the lateness of the hour, the solitude of the secluded place, would not permit such a thought. And still the wailing cry continued.

"Ah! it is doubtless an owl," thought the old man, as he seated himself once more. "It is perched on one of the trees at the end of the garden, singing. But one could swear that it was a baby. How perfectly they can imitate the human voice!"

He continued to listen; the wailing became more and more distinct and pitiful.

"No, truly, it cannot be an owl; I must go and see. Perhaps some accident has happened. But what can it be?"

So saying, Iermola rose quickly, put on his cap, seized his stick, and rushed to the door, forgetting his pipe, which usually he never left behind him. When he reached the threshold, he became convinced that there was no longer any doubt that the cry he heard was not that of an owl, but the wail of an infant. This frightened the good man, who, following the sound of the voice, set out to see whence it came. He went at once to the garden, and thought he saw something white lying at the foot of one of the nearest oak-trees. The old man's eyes had not deceived him; on the thickly interwoven roots, padded and made velvety with mosses, a little baby, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lay crying.

A baby! A baby here! all alone! deserted and cast off by its parents! The good man could scarcely conceive such an idea. He trembled with fright, surprise, sorrow, and pity; and darting forward, scarcely knowing what he did, he tenderly lifted the poor little creature, who, feeling perhaps that some one was near, immediately ceased to cry and be frightened.

Then, bewildered and forgetting his stick, the old man fled back to his chamber, carrying the baby, trembling, crying, and repeating over and over to himself, "A baby! A baby! How could this have happened?"

Suddenly it occurred to him that doubtless the little one had only been left alone for a moment; that the mother would be very anxious if she should not find it again on the spot where she had just left it.

He then began to shout as loudly as he could, repeating all the calls known to the Polesian tongue, which brought back to him his shepherd days; but no one answered.

"At any rate it is impossible to leave this poor baby out on so cold a night," said he, with emotion; "I shall take it to my room. Any one will immediately suppose that it is I who have picked it up."

He opened the door of his lodging. The fire had gone out in the stove; it was pitch dark. He deposited his living bundle on the bed, and again lighted his chips and twigs, of which this time he was lavish.

But when the light again glimmered through the room, and the old man returned to the side of the baby, who moaned constantly, his fright and astonishment knew no bounds. The little creature evidently did not belong to the peasant class; the clothing in which it was wrapped sufficed to show that. And in vain did Iermola imagine a thousand reasons, admit a thousand suppositions; he could not comprehend how a mother or a father could have been able to decide thus to abandon the innocent little creature, the very sight of whom caused him to shed tears of tenderness and emotion. In fact, from the moment when the baby's first cry had reached his ears and his heart, a strange feeling had taken possession of this old man hitherto so tranquil. He felt moved, frightened, but at the same time awakened and enlivened; it seemed as though he had grown twenty years younger in a few moments. He therefore examined with curiosity this little unknown being whom Providence, perhaps in pity for his terrible isolation, had sent him as a consolation at the very moment when he was sadly longing for some one tie which might still bind him to life.

The child, swaddled with care, was nevertheless clothed externally in such a manner as at first sight to conceal his origin. The heartless mother and unfeeling father, touched by some small feeling of solicitude, had covered the baby's long clothes entirely with a large piece of coarse white percale, leaving exposed only a part of the little suffering, weeping face.

Iermola gazed at the baby with his own sad eyes, and took its little hands in his.

It was some time before he remembered that there was something else to do; that a baby who cried so was perhaps hungry; that an unlooked-for burden had been sent him from heaven; that it would be difficult for him to take care of it, even with every exertion that he could make. Then came flashing like lightning before his mind the images of a cradle, a nurse, smiles, maternal cares, at the same time also his own poverty, which would not allow him to pay any one to take care of the little one.

Suddenly he said to himself that hiring hands were not fit to touch this gift of God,—this frail new-born being whom Providence had doubtless intrusted to him that he might be its nurse and father. Then he trembled, as it occurred to him that some one might take this baby from him; and at this thought he felt ready to faint with terror, although he had not yet been able to make up his mind what he should do with it.

"No," he cried aloud, "I will not give it up to any one; it is my child,—the child whom God has

sent me. I will never desert the little orphan."

But he must hasten; the baby cried and moaned continually. Iermola again took it in his arms. What should he do? How should he begin? Whose advice should he ask?

As he was thus carrying the baby up and down the room, his arms filled and his mind bewildered by this strange adventure, a heavy little package escaped from the long clothes and dropped on the floor. Iermola in still greater astonishment picked it up and found about fifty pieces of gold wrapped in a scrap of paper. His surprise was so great that he almost let fall his precious burden.

"So they are rich people, who have abandoned their child, at the same time paying some one to take care of it."

And the old man, simply and deeply overcome, paused a moment, endeavouring to comprehend the baseness of this world of which he knew so little. Perhaps in that one moment he intuitively divined all the misery and woe of human existence.

"My God!" he cried, "there are perhaps men who would rob this little orphan of this gold! No, no! no one shall know anything about it. I will keep the money and give it to him some day when he is grown up; and I, by the fruits of my own labour, will bring him up."

He hastened to throw the gold-pieces into an old casket which was under his bed, and in which he usually kept the few coppers he happened to have; then having wrapped himself in his cloak, he determined to go to the village to ask advice of some of his neighbours.

Then covering up his precious burden warmly, the old man, troubled and surprised, yet happy, started for the nearest cottage.

IV.

FIRST CARES AND FIRST HAPPINESS

In this thatched cottage lived the widow of the old cossack Harasym, with her only and dearly loved daughter, who, having sought for a husband for several years, had not been able to find one, though she was young, beautiful, and consequently well worthy of attention.

The cottage which the late landlord had granted to Harasym was situated at the extremity of the village, not far from the river shore, so that the old servant of the *dwor* could say, in the words of the national proverb, "My cottage is all alone in the world; it has neither neighbour nor master,"--for from its window could be seen only the woods, the waters, and the barren plain upon which rose the ruin inhabited by Iermola. But cordial and friendly communication was kept up between the two huts, on account of the former relations which had existed between the two servants. The cossack's widow never refused Iermola her support and her counsel; he took his meals at her house, and went there for consolation in his hours of sadness, or distracted his mind by a few moments of friendly conversation or hearty interchange of feeling. But the widow's house was far more comfortable than poor Iermola's lodging. The cottage was well supplied; the good woman was active, orderly, and somewhat avaricious; she never had suffered either care or hunger, even just after seedtime or during the dark days, and she always had laid by a little money or a measure of wheat for those who were in want.

The cottage, already old-looking, was blackened and wretched outwardly, although the old cossack had built it himself with his master's assistance, and consequently neither care nor expense had been spared. The exterior, therefore, was similar to that of others which a little way off extended in a long line; but the planks of which the walls were built were thicker, more solid, and better arranged, and the interior more convenient, since there was a good stove and a first-rate fireplace, which furnished plenty of light and did not smoke.

There was one small lot belonging to this hut, which was left to grow up in grass for hay, and another larger one, which was usually sowed down in rye or planted in vegetables, and which on the farther side joined the commons. The cossack's widow owned four cows from whose milk she made butter and cheese, which she sold to the neighbouring *dwors* and to the peasants; in addition she had a team of two oxen for ploughing, which she often rented to her neighbours, or sent now and then without pay to cultivate the field of the poor,--also ten sheep, three small calves, and even a horse which she had bought to use in the harrow, but which had proved useless, as it was spavined. Besides herself and her daughter, there dwelt in the cottage old Chwedor, her servant, whose hair had grown gray in the service of others, and who was also a little deaf, and a great toper. Then there was a little orphan about ten years old, who drove the

cattle to pasture, and a young servant. It was, in fact, a complete and flourishing household, skilfully managed by the widow. The comfort in which she lived and her honest reputation rendered more striking the indifference with which the young men of the village regarded her daughter, Horpyna, who had now reached her twentieth year, and was justly considered the greatest beauty in the village.

She had a tall, erect figure, which she inherited from her father, a charming bright and healthy complexion, beautiful hair, and fine black eyebrows. When she dressed herself on Sunday in her ribbon head-dress, her jacket of gray-blue cloth, and yellow Wolhynian boots with high heels, she might have been taken for a great lady in disguise. The young men of the village gazed at her from a distance, sighed, twirled their caps in their hands, and scratched their heads; but none of them dared approach her, for Horpyna was as proud as if she had been the daughter of a great lord. Besides, it had been whispered about for two years that one of the gentlemen of the lesser nobility who had served in the capacity of agent in a great land-scheme was suing for her hand, and made frequent visits to her and her mother. It was this which frightened and discouraged the village suitors, who took pleasure in laughing secretly at Horpyna's vanity, her fine-lady airs, and her liking for the nobility.

But the old mother, apparently expecting no good to come of such a rash project, used every effort in her power to marry off her daughter. She went with her to all the fairs and jubilees; she invited the fathers of families and the young men to suppers and wakes. Every one went gladly to her house, were entertained, ate and drank heartily, but nothing came of it all, and Horpyna still had not seen the arrival of her bottle and napkin.^[4]

It happened that Iermola encountered no one on his way to the widow's cottage; and he reached it all out of breath, holding in his arms the baby, who still continued to cry. But the light which glimmered from the window told him that the thrifty housewife was at home. He therefore hastened with his burden straight into his old friend's chamber.

The widow was seated on a bench near the table, leaning her head upon her hands, and seemed in deep thought; Horpyna was standing beside the fireplace. They were both gloomy and silent; but when they saw Iermola with his burden, they rose at once, somewhat confused, and uttered a cry of astonishment.

"What have you got, old man? What is it?" cried the mother, who was the first to speak.

"See what it is," answered the old man, as he laid upon her lap the baby, upon which his eyes were fixed. "Look at it; see, it is a baby which God has given me."

"A baby! to you? How is this?"

"It is a marvel, a miracle; I can scarcely believe it myself. I had just come from the river shore, where I had been to help the raftsmen bind up the wood; I had lighted my fire and sat down to say my prayers, when I heard all at once something moaning under the oaks. Now it sounded like the voice of an owl, and then like the wail of an infant. At first I was sure it was an owl, because those hateful birds have nests in the old trunks, and I went on with my prayers; but suddenly the voice rose in louder weeping. Then I could not tell what it was, and I began to be anxious. I ran out hurriedly and looked around; and what do you think I found? This baby. And now what shall I do with it? What shall I do?"

The two women, shaking their heads in their extreme astonishment, had listened to Iermola in profound silence.

"Some one must have brought it there," said the widow, at last; "but who could it have been?"

"And who could have been willing to desert such a pretty baby?" answered the old man, indignantly. "How could such a thing be possible?"

"Oh, oh! There are many people capable of such a thing," replied the widow, shaking her head sententiously. "This is not the only instance which might be related of human depravity. Did you never hear of the unnatural mother who had the atrocity to give her sweet little baby to be devoured by swine?"

Old Iermola, not being able to comprehend what he heard, kept silence, opening wide his eyes and shaking his head. Meanwhile the two women had been kneeling on the floor that they might see the baby better.

"How fine and white his long-clothes are!"

"And how delicate it is!"

"It must be the child of some lord, for no one in the village would have dared to do such a thing."

"And was it really brought and placed near your hut?"

"Yes, yes! but advise me; tell me what I ought to do with it."

"Do what you like best," answered the widow. "You can take it to the steward, who will have it sent to the chief of police; and then it will be taken to the hospital."

"Take it--and send it--to the hospital!" cried the old man, in a voice choking with tears. "Ah, do you call that good advice? Would any one there pity it; would any one take care of it? How could I be sure they would not leave it to die?"

"Well, but what are you going to do with it," replied the old woman, shrugging her shoulders.

"Ah, I do not know; advise me, neighbour."

"Well, what do you think of doing?"

"How can I tell what to think?" answered the old man. "My head is going round like a crank. I would not for anything in the world abandon a child whom God had intrusted to me; and when I think of rearing it myself, I fear I am not capable of doing it. But I feel almost sure I could; why should I not?"

"But you would have to put it out to be nursed; you could give it to Jurck's wife."

"No, no! not for anything in the world!" cried the old man. "Jurck's wife is too wicked; she treats her own poor child badly; and besides, she would ask God knows how much for taking care of it, and I always have a hard time making both ends meet. Could you give it a little milk? See how it is crying; perhaps it would drink it. I will buy some milk from you every day."

At this the cossack's widow burst into a loud laugh.

"Well, well! So you are the one who is to rock its cradle, amuse it, and make its broth? But if you do, you must remember that you will not be able to do anything else. A little baby is a constant occupation and care. I remember very well what I suffered with my little Vymoszek, who only lived one year, and with my Horpyna too. I had not a moment day or night without anxiety."

"But I do not need much sleep, and I have not much to do," replied the bewildered old man, who felt himself drawn more and more to the poor little foundling. "Three or four hours' sleep is quite sufficient for me; and a little baby sleeps almost all the time, provided his stomach is not empty. I should find plenty of time to rest myself, take care of my garden, and roast my potatoes."

"But what would you give it to eat?"

"Why, milk, to be sure."

"Suppose it should not be able to drink, it is so young and so weak."

At this Iermola heaved a deep sigh. "It may not be able to drink at first," he said; "but it will learn after a while. But what shall we do for it now?"

Then the cossack's widow took the baby in her arms so as to examine it closely. Her daughter ran to get some new milk, and the neighbours, attracted by curiosity and by the few words which had fallen from Horpyna as she passed, began to assemble, first by twos and threes, and then in large numbers.

Since the village had been in existence, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant nothing like this had ever occurred, so there was no end to their observations, exclamations, and conjectures.

The oldest inhabitant gave his advice; the counsellors counselled; the young and the old gave their ideas on the subject,--women and men and even the servants. But no one could suggest any very acceptable plan; each repeated the same opinions, each differing a little from his neighbour in particulars, but in the end coming to the same conclusions, and all recommending the wife of Jurck to Iermola as nurse.

There were numberless conjectures, wild suppositions, jokes, and accusations with regard to the wicked parties. But no one had the slightest suspicion who the authors of the scandalous act could be.

No one had seen any strange person about nightfall either in the village or its vicinity; the roads and foot-paths had been deserted; at the ford, at the mill, at the inn, no stranger had appeared. After discussing the matter a long time, the villagers gradually dispersed, spreading the strange story as they went along; at last no one remained but old Chwedko, the illustrious proprietor of a gray mare, who stood leaning on his stick, and after a few moments of thoughtful silence addressed his friend Iermola as follows:--

"There comes to my mind at this moment something which happened twenty years ago. A farmer of Malyczki, who was a friend of mine, had the misfortune to become a widower; his wife left him a poor little orphan who had scarcely drawn a breath.

"The poor man, who was blind in one eye, lame, and poor, had nothing to pay a nurse. He went in vain from cottage to cottage trying to find a woman compassionate enough to be willing to nurse his child; and he had no cow even to furnish him milk. Do you know what he did? He

bought a goat with the last half-rouble which remained after the funeral expenses had been paid; and that goat nursed and reared for him the little daughter, who afterward became the loveliest girl in the village."

At these words Iermola trembled and rose.

"Somebody find me a goat!" he cried aloud. "Where is there a goat? I will buy one at once."

"The Jew innkeeper has one."

"Then I shall go and buy it."

He had already started for the door when Chwedko and the cossack's widow stopped him.

"Take care what you do, good man," said his old companion. "The Jew will fleece you if he knows that you really need the goat very much."

"Ah, well, let him ask what he will, provided I get the animal."

"He will take your last shirt from you, old fool," said the cossack's widow, in her turn. "You know Szmula; he is a regular thief, the most miserable rascal that ever lived, even among the Jews of his class. Do not be in too great a hurry, for God's sake! Use a little deception at least, and say that you want the goat to raise a little flock, or else he will make you pay more than you would have to give for a cow."

"I will go with you," said Chwedko, "see if I don't; between us we shall be a match for the Jew."

"But what shall we do with the baby?"

"Never mind about it; I will keep it here. No harm shall happen to it."

"I pray you, good mother," said Iermola, trembling, "take special care of it."

"Ha, ha! he undertakes to give me lessons, do you see? Just as if it was the first baby I ever had in my arms. I shall rock it, and feed it with some milk, and perhaps I shall let it suck the end of my finger. Do not be at all anxious."

"I shall be back again in a moment," continued Iermola; "do take care that nothing happens to the baby."

The old woman burst into peals of laughter as she listened to him, he looked so anxious. Just as he was about to cross the threshold, he remembered that he had not smoked for some time; he drew from his bosom his old wooden pipe, which was his constant companion, went up to the tinder, lighted it, and then started off with Chwedko through the darkness in the direction of the new inn situated in the centre of the village.

V.

SET A CHEAT TO CATCH A CHEAT

In a small town where, by reason of its trade in wood and its rafting, the number and the means of the transient inhabitants is considerable; where the boatmen, the merchants, and their employees constantly come and go,—it would not be possible for a Jew, without money and without credit, to keep the principal hotel. Consequently the illustrious Szmula, who owned the inn of Popielnia, whence he reigned over the village and its vicinity, was not a mere innkeeper going from time to time a distance of three miles to purchase a little barrel of brandy. He was a Jew who had grown rich upon the profit of his trade in wood, timber, tar, and ashes,—in fact, all the products of the Polesian forests, including dried mushrooms and conserved berries.

His inn also, particularly in the springtime, brought him gain which was not to be despised; and Mr. Szmula, justly valuing the rotundity of his girth and the dignity of his position, began to set himself up for a great lord. The new inn, from which he lorded it, was different in appearance from the old-fashioned inns whose architecture had been perpetuated according to Slavic custom because they were intended to be used for public assemblies and councils. It was without the traditional vestibule, projecting and supported by pillars, for the practical Israelite cared but little to entertain the poor and infrequent travellers who usually passed through that secluded region; but there was a stable and coach-house sheltering the great carriage which was used in going to the fairs, and the house had externally very much the appearance of a gentleman's *dwor*. On one side was a large apartment, which was in fact the dining-hall of the inn, where heavy

benches were placed all about the wall, with an enormous table in front of them. In one corner there was a sort of staging which was shut up during the night by means of several window shutters, and where during the day brandy was retailed from the counter. In the other part of the house, which was furnished with some elegance, lived Szmula Popielauski and his family; and there was a pretty unoccupied room kept for the merchants of his religion who might stop in the neighbourhood.

The front room in this portion of the house made some pretence to the name of drawing-room, for it contained a wooden sofa polished and varnished, and covered with a sort of damask studded with gold stars, two chairs with arrows of black wood on their backs, a mirror suspended on the wall, the framed portraits of two illustrious Israelites,--the rabbis of Hamburg and Wilna,--a cupboard filled with china cups, cut glass, and bottles of rum, and a somewhat rickety table supported by a lyre and covered with a bright cloth.

The floor of this room had once been painted white, but the colour having been rubbed off in many places, it was now variegated; the stove was closed by a small iron door with a brass knob; and Szmula, having done all this *proprio sumptu et cura*, to satisfy his taste for elegance, congratulated himself upon the effect. In the second room the Jewish dirt began to assert itself, but did not exclude attempts and pretensions to elegance. Above the bed was placed a fringed canopy with curtains covered with enormous flowers. Near this might be seen a cupboard of black wood, full of books and papers, and a small rickety bureau; also a pile of potatoes, one or two buckets of kindling-wood, some cakes of dough drying on a plate, a large earthen pan full of dish-water, and a white turkey, walking composedly about surrounded by her brood.

Szmula was no longer in his early youth. He was about fifty years old, and was married a second time, his late spouse having left him only one son, who kept a shop of his own in the next town. Not being satisfied with this only scion, Szmula had taken to wife a young Jewess, very poor but extremely beautiful, who had borne him three children during the three years of their marriage. His gray hairs were honoured by this blessing from the Lord. At first sight, this grave descendant of Israel was very pleasing, with his long beard and hair, his regular features, his serious and winning expression. One had a desire to study him closely, and to believe in his honesty. Nevertheless, his beauty and the sweet expression of his eyes were, as is so often the case, deceptive.

In fact, there could be no more insatiable vampire, no more greedy blood-sucker, than the worthy Szmula of the village of Popielnia. The constantly increasing profits earned by his deceit and tact did not render him above turning to account the smallest opportunities. Besides his bills of a thousand roubles and his coupons of government bonds, he deposited without shame in his chests the big copper money bathed with the sweat of the wretched peasants; and puffed up by his position and his wealth, he treated the poor villagers as though they were mere beasts of burden, and fleeced them without mercy.

The result was that when the villagers had any business to transact, they preferred to do so secretly with the poorer Jews who lived in the little town; and this aroused the deepest resentment in Szmula. He could not forgive them for being unwilling to allow him to cheat them. He considered their conduct a daring revolt; and as an old tradition, founded upon some unknown basis, gave him the right to claim one pint of flour when a peasant took his corn to the mill, he thought therefore he had the right to fly into a rage and make a terrible fuss when a peasant took his cow to the market or sold a bag of corn without his royal permission. Gifted with indefatigable energy, Szmula neglected nothing, for all gain was acceptable to him, and he always had time for everything. His presence of mind and dexterity never forsook him.

Such was the all-powerful autocrat to whom the simple-hearted Iermola was about to apply in the hope of buying his white goat. Fortunately, he had with him old Chwedko, who was infinitely better acquainted than he with all the subtleties of human rascality; who, experienced, cunning, and prudent, spared neither time nor words nor pains when the question was to economize or to earn a little money. As they went along, therefore, Chwedko gave all sorts of advice to Iermola, but the latter heard little of it, so absorbed was he with his own plans for obtaining the goat.

Unfortunately this old animal was the pet of Sara, Szmula's second wife, and also of her eldest son, who often amused himself by pulling the goat's beard, although she had more than once mercilessly trampled upon him. The goat in question was not worth more than twelve florins; but Iermola was quite willing to give twenty rather than not get it, and even Chwedko thought this a not unreasonable price considering the circumstances. But how were they to approach the subject and make this proposition to Szmula? If the Jew for a moment suspected how exceedingly necessary the animal was to poor Iermola, he would take advantage of the situation and fleece him unmercifully.

The question therefore was, if possible, to deceive the Jew, so that he should not have the opportunity to rob the unfortunate Iermola.

When the two men were within a short distance of the inn, Chwedko, who had reflected for some time, made a sign to Iermola to stop.

"Stay here a moment, near this cottage," said he, pointing to the spot. "Wait here a moment for me; I will go and feel the Jew's pulse. Do not fear; I will find some good way to arrange the

matter. If we go and ask him for his goat outright, he will make us pay as much for it as the price of a cow. We must manage to have him offer it to us; leave it all to me."

"But what are you going to do?"

"You shall see; you shall see," answered good old Chwedko, deeply interested in Iermola's project. "Only be careful to do just what I tell you."

Then Iermola, making a great effort to be quiet, seated himself on the ground beside the wall of the hut, for he was in great need of rest for mind and body. He leaned his head on his hand and fell into deep thought. For the first time in his life he was obliged to think of the future.

As for Chwedko, he went straight to the great dining hall of the inn, but Szmula was not there,--no one was there, only the goat. Partly opening the door of the chamber, carefully wiping his feet, and humbly asking permission to enter, he stepped inside with a low bow and holding his cap under his arm. He took special care not to step off the door-mat, for the Jew flew into a rage if any one soiled the floor of his chamber. Having established himself firmly in his position, Chwedko dropped his hand down to his knees and made another low bow to the dreaded Szmula.

In order to be favourably received by the innkeeper, it was really necessary to go through with all these formalities, as the far-seeing Chwedko well knew,--first to wipe one's feet, then stop at the threshold, and above all, not to call the worthy man Mr. Innkeeper, but instead, Mr. Merchant, for our Szmula maintained that if he kept an inn it was for his own entertainment, and that it was for his pleasure alone that he lived in the country.

"Well, what do you want, Chwedko?" asked the Jew, without rising from his easy-chair, where he was bending his head, with his long nose over a book, yet ready without hesitation to interrupt his devotions whenever his interests required it, for he knew very well that God is more patient than man.

"Mr. Merchant--I want to tell you--there is an occasion."

Thus the lower classes speak of every unexpected event which may serve as a pretext for feasting or drinking.

"An occasion! What is it? A baptism? A betrothal? A wedding or a funeral? Is any one dead, any accident? I'll venture you have come to ask for some brandy on credit."

"No, indeed, sir; but I chanced to hear something, and I wanted to tell my lord the merchant about it. It is perhaps an opportunity to make something."

"Let me hear; what is there to be made?" said Szmula, rising, thrusting his hands into his girdle, and approaching Chwedko.

"Your Honour" (this title was specially flattering to the Jew's vanity),--"your Honour knows Iermola, the old man who lives in the old ruined inn."

"Certainly I know him; but he is only a poor devil, a beggar."

"That is true, but it does not prevent his having gained a few roubles."

"Well, what? He wants to drink them up?"

"No, no! he does not drink brandy, but he has taken it into his head to buy a cow, paying half the amount down and asking credit for the balance."

"A cow! and what will he do with it?"

"He was going to the town to look for one; but I stopped him because I thought of a plan for him."

"To the town! always to the town!" repeated the Jew, shrugging his shoulders. "The fools! That is their first thought. But tell me, Chwedko, what is your plan?"

"I have tried to make him think that it is not a good idea for him to have a cow and be in debt; that it would be better for him to buy a goat with his money. He would have milk immediately, and in a little while a flock. Perhaps you would sell him your white goat?" Just here the Jew fixed his piercing eye on Chwedko's face, but he fortunately was not disturbed thereby. It was scarcely possible, in fact, to suspect any design in so simple a proposition. The innkeeper, however, tried to sound the intentions of the good man by a sudden question.

"Is Iermola here at the inn?"

"No; since noon he has been down there with the neighbours. But if you wish, I can go and bring him here, though usually he does not like to come to the inn. But perhaps you do not wish to sell your old white goat? I merely thought of this for your interest; why should you let all the money of the people go out of the village? However, if the idea does not suit you, say nothing about it, and let him go on to the town."

"Wait a moment, wait," said the Jew, after a pause, seeing Chwedko with his hand on the knob of the door. "Why should he go to the town?"

Here he called Sara, who came in with a discontented countenance; they exchanged a few words in their own language, Szmula speaking in a low voice and his wife looking very cross. Chwedko tried to divine the intentions of the couple from their voices and their gestures, but in vain; the Jewess went out at last, and Szmula, turning to him and slapping him on the shoulder, said,--

"You are a good man when you want brandy on credit. I have told Sara to let you have a rouble's worth; do you hear? Bring Iermola here in the great hall. The goat is there; he can buy it. It is a good goat; he will like it. It is an excellent goat. How much money has he?"

"I do not know really," answered Chwedko. "He must have, I think, about fifteen florins; and the cossack's widow will probably lend him something more."

The Jew nodded his head silently, and having thus taken leave of the peasant, who hastened to rejoin his companion, he put on a warmer overcoat, for he took great care of his precious health; then he walked slowly into the great hall under pretext of going to look over some accounts with his servant, Marysia, who on the Sabbath as well as all other days served at the bar of the inn, besides which she took care of the children, milked the cow, in fact, rendered herself generally useful to the household.

The great hall, dark, dirty, and mean-looking, without any floor, dimly lighted by a torch of resinous wood which was smoking in one corner, was occupied at this moment only by Marysia (who was so very fat and short that the peasants compared her to one of the big-bellied barrels in which bacon is put up in brine), the white goat, who wandered around looking in all the corners for something to eat, and a Polesian peasant, who, after having taken a small glass of brandy and an onion, had stretched himself beside the wall with his money-bag and his shoes under his head, and was sleeping like a rock, and snoring like a chariot in need of greasing.

Szmula walked up and down for some time, looking first at the goat and then at Marysia, who was quite astonished at his sudden entrance. He yawned, sighed, and turned his thumbs over each other; then all at once hearing the sound of a footstep in the vestibule, he went to the window and began chalking figures on the shutter, keeping his eyes fixed on his calculations, and pretending to be very busy.

Just at that moment Chwedko appeared, followed by old Iermola, who was trembling like a leaf and blushing also at the thought of the farce he was obliged to play in order to get the white goat. His first glance fell upon the tall figure of the Jew; and this glance would doubtless have been sufficient to betray him if Szmula had seen it. But fortunately the Jew at that moment was entirely taken up with his own rôle; he seemed utterly absorbed in important business, and was standing with his back to the two friends.

"Good-evening, my lord merchant," began Chwedko.

"Good-evening," answered Szmula, half turning round, and muttering a few words through his beard.

"Well, what shall we do? Shall we take a drink of brandy?" continued Chwedko.

"For my part, I rarely drink; but to keep you company--Pour out something for us to drink, Marysia."

"You are going to the fair," resumed the first speaker; "you must strengthen yourself for the journey."

"Ah! so you are going to the fair, are you?" interrupted Szmula. "Perhaps you have something to sell. I shall be glad to buy it from you."

"No, I am going for another purpose."

"And what is it?" said the Jew. "This is the way all of you peasants do,--as soon as you have any business to transact, you run to the town. Are you thinking of buying anything?"

"See here, my lord merchant," answered Chwedko, interrupting, "my neighbour wants a cow; he is lonely, and for company's sake is willing to take on himself one more bother."

"But why get a cow?" asked the Jew, in a scornful tone.

"Well, it would give me some pleasure, and perhaps some profit."

"Pshaw, pshaw!" cried Szmula, waving his hand, "one can see plainly that you never have owned a cow, and that you do not know what it is to take care of one. First, you must pay the little herdsman, and God only knows how much the herdsman asks; besides, the cattle always come home hungry. Then you will be obliged to buy hay,--and hay costs as much now as pepper; and tailings,--and tailings are now ten coppers a bag; and buckwheat,--and I do not sell that for less than forty coppers a bag; that is what every one pays me. Besides, she must have grass and

potatoes; and if you do not give her some of all these things, the animal will get poor. Then there are so many diseases and so much time when the creature gives no milk. Think of it! not a drop of milk for six months in the year!"

"Yes; but one has the calf and a little milk."

"And who, pray, will take care of the animal for you?" interrupted the Jew, shrugging his shoulders.

"What did I tell you?" here put in Chwedko. "For a poor man like you a cow is only a bother and nothing else."

"But she would give me nevertheless a calf and a few drops of milk."

"Yes, about milk; talk about that," answered the officious go-between. "As for milk, I can assure you there is nothing so good as a goat. Observe, a goat costs very little and lives upon anything it can find,--branches, leaves, or stubble. Besides, a goat needs no care; and when once you have tasted goat-milk, you can be sure you have had something to drink, it is so sweet and nourishing."

"Really, to tell you the truth," said the innkeeper, in his turn, "I can assure you there is nothing like a goat. If any people know how to manage, it is our race, I believe; and you see that we almost invariably have goats. But men have opportunities to observe, yet do not comprehend; a goat is a treasure."

"Well, when I have thought the matter over, perhaps I shall buy a goat," said Iermola.

"And you will do well," cried Chwedko,--"you will do well, I repeat. Now suppose Mr. Szmula were to sell you his white goat?"

"What is it you are saying?" said the Jew, quickly, as though he had heard by chance. "I would not sell my white goat for any price; do you hear? It is the only pet of my wife and children, and moreover it is an invaluable animal; it is worth more than a cow."

"I am sorry," answered Iermola, looking attentively at the white goat, which was strolling around, "for the town is not here; my old legs will scarcely carry me so far, and, dear me, I might have decided to buy your goat."

"True, it is only a goat, but such a goat!" answered the Jew. "Have you ever seen one like it? She has so much instinct, so much sense, upon my word, one might almost talk to her; and as for her milk, it is all cream. You might go twenty miles and not find her equal. It is not a goat; it is a treasure, a rare possession."

"But it is old," observed old Iermola, respectfully.

"Old, old! Well, what does that matter? The older a goat grows, the more it is worth. Besides, how could it be old? It has hardly begun to live; it will live twenty years yet," cried Szmula, becoming more and more excited.

"How much did it cost you?" asked Iermola.

"Oh, it has cost me-- I cannot tell you how much. First, when it was just born, I paid two roubles for it. For you see this is no ordinary goat; it is of a fine breed,--a very rare breed. I would not take six roubles for it; she eats almost nothing, and she is always fat, and every year she bears two kids."

After this speech there was a moment of silence. Iermola turned pale and became agitated, not knowing what to say. He gazed at the goat, which continued to walk around, stamping on the ground with her hoof, and poking her head into every corner where she perceived the faintest odour of food. She occupied herself in picking up scattered leaves, bits of bark, and cabbage stalks; and in justice to her, it must be said that she minded her own business and disturbed no one.

"She would suit you exactly," said Chwedko, resuming his rôle of courtier. "She never would run away, because she is already accustomed to the village. She knows where to go to graze; she is old, gentle, and used to being milked."

"And she is not an ordinary goat," repeated the Jew, in a sententious tone; "she is of a rare breed,--a good breed."

"But where should I find so much money?" sighed Iermola.

"Come, see here," answered Szmula, coming nearer and speaking earnestly, "you are an honest man; I will have every consideration for you. In the town people might cheat you; I will give you a good bargain, and let you have the goat for three roubles. Now that is the best I can do; make up your mind."

Chwedko, who had not expected such reasonable terms, hastened to conclude the bargain,

quite satisfied to find Szmula in such an accommodating mood.

"Come, hold out your hand, neighbour, and thank my lord merchant; you have made an excellent bargain. Pay for the animal and take her; I hope you will be quite satisfied with her."

"Well, what shall we do?" sighed the old serving-man. "I will take it at that price, since my lord merchant will not take less. Please give me a bit of cord so I can lead the goat home."

Accordingly, the purchase was quickly made and satisfactorily beyond all expectations. Iermola drew from a knot in the corner of his handkerchief three roubles, which he gave to Szmula. The Jew examined them, threw them on the ground, as was his custom, and then, dropped them into his pocket.

"You will return the string to-morrow?" said he, as he slowly retired to his chamber.

"How about the treat?" said Chwedko, timidly.

"That is Iermola's right," answered Szmula, "but since he did none of the bargaining, you shall not pay for your little glass of brandy; I will treat myself."

Then Marysia threw to the two friends a piece of cord with a buckle at the end which was used to carry the fagots of kindling-wood. And Chwedko, having shut the door, began to chase the goat, who, suspecting some foul play, fled from the least approach of her two pursuers. The Jew had already gone away to his own apartment.

"Well, upon my word, you have shown your sense," cried the servant when she saw that her worthy master had disappeared. "What a shame to give twenty florins for a miserable old beast! you might have bought three young ones at the fair for that price."

The two old men kept silence; and having tied the string to the animal's horns, they led their conquest away.

Iermola was trembling with pleasure; the tears filled his eyes; and he embraced his neighbour.

"You have done me a great service; may God reward you!" he murmured.

"For the present, I shall not think of showing myself at Szmula's house," sighed Chwedko, who recognized the full extent of the danger to which he had exposed himself. "As soon as he hears about the baby, the rascal will suspect some trick, and never will forgive me. He would have fleeced you famously had he known that the goat was such a necessity."

Talking thus in low tones, they reached the widow's hut, forcing the goat to obedience by various means, more or less gentle, for she had not the slightest desire to go away from the inn.

Meantime the storm began to mutter behind them, for Sara, greatly enraged, had just rejoined her husband, and was relating to him the story of the baby left at old Iermola's house, which news she had just learned from Marysia, the bar-maid.

Szmula, who was not wanting in sagacity, understood at once why his goat had suddenly become so necessary; he pulled his beard and bit his finger-nails.

"Just wait a while, you rascal, you scoundrel of a Chwedko," muttered he, shaking his head. "If I live only a little while longer, I will pay you for it."

VI.

WHEN ONE LOVES

In the life of a good and loving man,—one who, like Iermola, had led an isolated existence and had preserved in full force all the strength of his affections,—an event such as that which had just happened produces a sudden and entire change. The old man became young again. He felt the ties which bound him to the world renewed and strengthened; he had henceforth an aim in life, a hope, a bond, an affection, a new desire for work, the delights and anticipations of an unknown feeling. The poor orphan, cast off by his parents, became the crowning treasure of his old age.

A sort of excitement, such as he had not felt for years, took hold of his entire being, and made him at once stronger and more tender. He was disturbed; he wondered; he feared; he hoped; and he was anxious concerning the morrow. Tears sprang to his eyes. He felt that he had changed; he had become another man. He had forgotten the past, and he was dreaming of the future. He felt

himself blest, very happy, never suspecting the weary moments, the cares and toil he was preparing for the remainder of his existence. Like the bird in whose nest the cuckoo lays her eggs, he was astonished, frightened, content. For the first time he found, to his surprise, that he dreaded death; that he felt the need and the desire to live. Chwedko no longer recognized him, he was so utterly changed; the old man, usually so silent and indifferent, now spoke with warmth and vivacity, so entirely did he resume the attraction, the gestures, and thoughts of a young man.

He found it impossible to remain patiently any longer beside Chwedko, for their stubborn companion never ceased for a moment to make every effort in its power to get away from them and return to the alehouse. He therefore confided the goat to the care of Chwedko, and hastened on in advance.

He rushed into his old friend's hut and ran at once to the wooden bench where the new-born baby was lying asleep, quieted and satisfied by the good milk it had drunk. Beside it stood Horpyna, the little shepherd, and the servant, who were watching in silence this unexpected guest. Iermola made his way through the little group, and seated himself on the floor so as to see the baby better.

"I think he is asleep," he whispered in the old widow's ear.

"Ah! to be sure, the poor innocent one," replied the old woman, nodding her head.

"And did he drink the milk?"

"Oh, certainly he did, and stopped crying immediately. But about the goat?"

"We have bought it; Chwedko is leading it hither."

Good old Iermola gazed with rapture upon his precious baby. "How beautiful he is!" he cried after a moment. "It must be the child of some nobleman."

"He is a fine hearty boy," interrupted the widow; "but all children look alike when they are small. It is only later on, my good old man, that it is possible to distinguish those who have sprouted up under the hedge like a bunch of nettles from those who have grown up in the sunshine in the open fields. But at least this one is as lively as a fish; so much the better for you,-- you will have less trouble."

Iermola laughed, but at the same moment his eyes filled with tears.

"Mother," he replied, "never in all my life have I seen so beautiful a baby."

"You have lost your senses, Iermola," cried the cossack's widow, bursting into a loud laugh and shrugging her shoulders. "Are you really thinking of bringing up the child yourself all alone?"

"And why not?" replied the astonished old man. "Do you suppose I would turn him over to strangers?"

"But you will not be able to do it. It seems an easy thing to you; but what will you do all alone, no woman near you at your age? Remember it must be fed, bathed, put to bed, amused, and looked after; this will be too great a task for you, all by yourself."

"Let me alone," answered Iermola, waving his hand. "It is not the saints who boil the pots,^[5] I will prove it to you. You shall tell me what to do; and as true as there is a God in heaven, I never will be separated from this baby."

"Has the old man gone crazy?" cried the widow, shrugging her shoulders. "He thinks it is as easy to bring up a child as it is to raise a little dog; and how much worry and fatigue he will have during two long years!"

"The longer the better. Don't say anything to me, mother, don't say anything; I will not listen to you, I will bring him up; I shall do it well, you will see."

Every one laughed at old Iermola's enthusiasm. He was unable to jest on the subject, and for a moment he even began to be doubtful of himself, to hesitate.

"Good mother," said he, in a low voice, a little sadly, "help me, teach me, advise me; you will find that I shall know how to show my gratitude. When harvest-time comes, or when it is time to work your garden, you will find that all that sort of work will cost you nothing."

"Make yourself easy," answered the widow; "you know that I am not stingy with my good advice. I will help you and this orphan; but tell me this one thing, do you really believe that in your old age, and knowing nothing about nursing or bringing up children, you will be able to undertake to be its mother?"

At these words Iermola bowed his head and made no reply. Judging the feelings of others by those of his own heart, he feared that under this pretext some one would come and take his baby from him.

Then he rose, cautiously approached the bench, raised the coverings, took the baby gently in his arms, and started toward the threshold. At that moment the door opened, and Chwedko appeared, accompanied by the goat. The white head and horns of the animal appeared in the dark space of the half-open door, touched by the light of the flickering candle, and began to move. Horpyna, at sight of it, was startled, and screamed.

"Well, well!" cried the widow, "here is a nurse."

"Let us go back to the house," whispered Iermola. "Good-evening, mother; come to see me tomorrow, if you will be so good."

"I will, if only for the sake of curiosity," answered the old woman.

Then the good man, constantly fearing lest they should take his baby from him, hastened to leave the house. His heart felt lighter when he found himself in the street. Chwedko followed behind him, leading the goat, and both went on in silence toward the old ruined inn.

Iermola, however, was communing with himself all along the way.

"Why should I not be able to do it?" said he to himself. "I understand,--I understand; the old woman wanted to keep him herself, the beautiful little angel. But I will not give him to her. No, indeed; she shall not have the care of him. Once more I repeat, 'It is not the saints who make the pots boil.' I will bring up the child! I shall have a son!" he cried, with joyous pride. "My good Chwedko, take care of the goat; I will give you a florin, for you helped me very kindly. May God have in store for you a more abundant reward!"

The two, walking cautiously along, at last reached the door of the old house. Iermola laid the baby, who was still fast asleep, upon his own bed, and then undertook to light a fire; as for Chwedko, he even put off going to see after his gray mare, the only possession he had in the world. Seeing this, the old man gave a florin to his friend, embraced him, and sent him off, remaining alone in the room with the goat and the baby.

He did not think of going to sleep; he felt no need of sleep, he had so much to do, so many preparations to make. At first he seated himself near the stove, not knowing what to do first, his eyes fixed on the baby as one gazes on a rainbow after a storm. The old goat wandered restlessly about the room, butting against the door with her horns, and mousing around in the corners, picking up whatever she could find to eat.

The noise at last woke the baby; and Iermola sprang forward to hush it, when it occurred to him that the best plan would be to tie the Jewess (that was the name Chwedko had given to Iermola's new possession). Accordingly he threw her a little straw, and she became quiet, resigning herself to her fate. The baby slept on sweetly and soundly. Iermola had now no bed for himself, but he did not care for it; he sat down upon the piece of a tree-trunk, cut flat off at both ends, which served him as a stool whenever he wished to sit near the stove.

His bed was well filled; and he had so many things to think about and so many things to do before to-morrow morning!

He had already been warned that he would have to announce the discovery of the baby to the steward Hudny, who represented the estate, and tell him that he, Iermola, would undertake the charge of the poor little one. In addition to this disagreeable duty, which he would have given anything to escape, he had to make a cradle for the baby and to attend to a number of other small matters. Then the creature might waken and cry; he must soothe it lest it should shed tears. However, he felt that he could do all this, for strength did not fail him now,--that strength which comes from the heart.

The whole of this bright, short spring night was passed by him full of anxiety and care; the first gray light of morning which shone through the window found him still disturbed and embarrassed, but feeling no need of sleep or rest. Finally he thought he would like to go and cut some feet for the cradle from the old logs which were in his other room; but he feared to leave the child, and besides, the goat might disturb him. The creaking of the door even might waken the little creature; and what if, when he was busy at work, he should not hear him cry!

But the sense of these difficulties and apparent impossibilities overwhelmed him only momentarily; at other times he told himself that it would be easy to surmount it all, and he strengthened himself by hope, forgetful of hunger, fatigue, and want of sleep. The sun was just about to rise when he undertook the task of milking the goat, so that he might have some milk ready when his dear little one wakened; but the old Jewess was not in a kindly and accommodating humour. She was stubborn as a goat; that describes her temper. Moreover, she was accustomed to obey only her old master and mistress, and absolutely refused to submit to the will of her new owner. At first Iermola treated her with great gentleness. He patted her, spoke to her, and endeavoured to convince her of the necessity there was for her to be docile; but all was of no avail, and he was finally compelled to resort to violent measures. Then the goat boldly raised the standard of revolt; she broke her rope and rushed toward the door of the chamber, butting it with her horns. The baby, at this noise, woke; the old man tore his hair.

Fortunately, at this moment the cossack's widow arrived, the curiosity which had consumed

her since she wakened having led her to Iermola's hut. Seeing him in such a state of bewilderment, she burst into a loud laugh, but she also set to work and succeeded in milking the goat with the most surprising ease. It might have been because the Jewess was accustomed to allow herself to be milked by women, or perhaps seeing herself alone against two, she doubted the expediency of opposition; but she voluntarily submitted to the widow. As for Iermola, he was already rocking the baby.

"Well," asked the old woman, "how did you pass the night?"

"I did not go to bed," answered Iermola; "but the baby slept sweetly. Only that miserable goat--"

"Oh, you will not have much trouble with her; she will become accustomed to you in a day or two if you feed her well. And so the little one slept?"

"Like a little angel! I am sure that there is not a baby in the world who sleeps better than he. You should see how intelligent he is! I believe he almost knows me, neighbour."

The orphan's adopted father was greatly astonished when the widow burst into a hearty laugh on hearing him say this. After that he kept silent, quite abashed.

"I really do not know why God did not give you a wife and children," said she, a moment later; "or rather, why He did not make you a woman."

She stopped suddenly; just outside the door a loud voice was heard, saying, "Ha, Iermola! old idiot, come here; you know very well that I expect you." It was the voice and the signal of the steward Hudny, who, having been already informed of the event of the evening before, desired by visiting the hut to see with his own eyes what had happened, so that he could relate the whole affair to his wife. The old man trembled at the approach of this stern master, whom he feared exceedingly, and whom he usually carefully avoided; but leaving the baby in the hands of his old friend, he hastened out of the hut.

The steward was mounted on a fat little horse, with a well-kept and glossy coat; he wore a gray cloak lined with lambskin, long boots, carried a whip in his hand, and had a cap pulled over his ears. One could see at a glance that he had not left his home fasting; and it was easy to perceive that he had fortified himself against the fog with the usual quantity of brandy. He was one of those stewards of the new regime, who had taken the place of the loyal and faithful servants of the old. To the defects of his predecessors, which he had preserved intact, he had taken care to add others peculiar to himself, and which were the penalty he paid to the advance of the times. The worthy Mr. Hudny, as former managers had done, treated the peasants as clowns and clodhoppers. He beat them, oppressed them, and rendered them miserable; moreover, he outrageously robbed and abused those who called him by the old title of manager, enjoining it upon his subordinates to address him as my lord the steward, and announcing to all who would listen to him that he should soon rent a large estate.

He and his wife lived like bugs in a rug, on this fine old deserted domain; they seized upon everything they could possibly take, and sought by every means in their power to escape from a position which was distasteful to them. Neither of them had any heart; but they possessed a revolting pride and an absolute want of principle, such as is manifested only in the ranks of a half-disorganized and deeply corrupted society. Two small bright eyes, a little crossed, which sparkled above a round red face, partly concealed by two enormous eyebrows, on account of their uncertain and conflicting expression, at once threatening and cowardly, gave at the first glance some idea of the character of the man. The rest of his rough and irregular features were partly concealed by his abundant beard and by the enormous whiskers which met under his chin.

Iermola bowed till his hands touched the ground.

"What are the orders of my lord the steward?" he asked.

"What is the news at your house? I hear some talk of a cast-off baby."

"Ah, yes, most illustrious master," answered the old man, adding the word "illustrious" if possible to secure a favourable hearing for his story. "Yesterday evening I heard a moaning sound under the oaks. I thought at first it was an owl; but, no, indeed, it was a baby, please your lordship."

"A boy?"

"Yes, a fine boy."

"And you found nothing else at the same time,--nothing but the baby, eh?" said the steward, fixing upon the old man his piercing, avaricious glance,--a glance which was almost terrifying. "No explanation whatever? No papers, no medal? For everything of that sort, you understand, must be turned over to the police; and the baby must be taken to the hospital."

At these words Iermola began to tremble and wring his hands. "No, my lord," he cried, "there was no sign of an explanation; the baby was wrapped only in a piece of coarse white cambric. I

swear to this, my lord; but I do not wish--I will not give this little one to anybody, for God Himself gave him to me."

"Oh, oh! there must be something at the bottom of all this," replied the steward, laughing his wicked laugh. "A child is left at your door, and you wish to keep it? But an inquest may be held, some difficulties may arise, and some expenses be incurred. It is best that you should take the brat to the court or to the chief of the police, so that they can decide the matter; and as for the piece of cambric, send it at once to my wife, do you hear?"

So saying, the steward dismounted and gave his horse to the good man. Then he entered the hut, and Iermola's heart began to beat very fast. The poor old man dreaded for his child the presence and the gaze of this man, particularly as he could not go and protect the baby, for he could not leave the horse. He would have liked exceedingly to be present at the interview, but that was impossible; he listened intently, however, so as to hear as much as he could of the conversation which took place between the steward and the cossack's widow. This mental strain and anxiety agitated him to such a degree that when Hudny came out of the lowly mansion, Iermola was wiping away great drops of sweat as large as tears, which were running down his cheeks.

Fortunately the cossack's widow, for whom the steward entertained a sort of respect, had resolved to purchase peace at a moneyed price, and had taken care to buy her supply of butter from the Hudny dairy, and in some way or other succeeded in persuading him; and the result was that he did not persecute Iermola further on the subject of the baby, nor did he again order him to deliver it over to the police.

"Fie, fie, old fool!" said he, as he remounted his horse. "Upon my word, it seems absurd for you to take upon yourself such a useless burden. However, I will undertake to make the report to the court; but if you take my advice, you will get rid of the new-comer as soon as possible. What necessity is there that you should have another mouth to feed; and why should a child be brought to you? Ah, it must be a droll story," he added, laughing again his coarse, wicked laugh.

Iermola, in his terror, kissed his knee and hand and elbow, and begged that he would leave the baby with him with an expression so paternal and tender that any one but the steward would have been deeply touched.

But thus Iermola escaped a disagreeable errand; he was not obliged to go to the *dwor*, which would have been bad for him for two reasons: first, because the sight of the dear old house awoke in him painful memories; and secondly, because the steward and his wife, gentle and fair-spoken to their superiors, were harsh, scornful, and unkind to the common people. Thus he also had his whole day to himself, and could do all that was needful for the baby.

At that moment the sun rose, glad, bright, and radiant, like a messenger of hope and faith. Motion and labour began; a thousand noises awoke along the river shore. As the news, the wonderful news, had spread like lightning, all whose business led them along that road went into Iermola's house to see the baby and hear how it had all happened. The cossack's widow, more eloquent than her neighbour, undertook to tell the story, which she constantly clothed in new colours, repeating the smallest details with indefatigable delight. Meanwhile the old man occupied himself in making the cradle, for which, fortunately, he found a rush mat, perfectly woven and sufficiently light.

This mat, swung between the two feet which he had constructed as well as he could, then filled with hay, and covered with the softest and whitest cloth that Iermola could find among his rags, was ready about midday. It would have been, indeed, much easier to suspend a basket by a rope to one of the beams of the ceiling, as was the custom of the peasants, and rock it with his foot. But Iermola was afraid of everything where the baby was concerned,--the rope, the hook, the basket, the beam; and he preferred to undertake a tiresome and difficult task himself rather than to expose the innocent creature to any danger.

The widow rallied him upon his anxieties and fears, but she could not convince him. Then when the cradle was finished, he found it necessary to rearrange the chamber,--that room in which nothing had been moved for so many years. Now it must be arranged differently altogether,--so that the light should not fall upon the baby's eyes; so that he should not feel the draught from the door or the heat from the stove. And after that, he had to build a little shelter in one corner for the goat, with the help of an old door and a broken-down ladder. The obstinate animal did not become at all more docile. She ate whatever was thrown to her, but she would allow no one to come near her; and it was necessary for the present to keep her tied.

When his various preparations were ended, Iermola came and seated himself beside the widow, and listened attentively to all the precepts she laid down to him on the subject of caring for the baby. By dint of strict attention and numberless and exact questionings, he succeeded in learning precisely what he should give him to eat, how many times and in how much water he should bathe him, how he should amuse him, quiet him, and put him to sleep.

The profound and inexpressible affection he felt for the innocent new-comer was only equalled by the intensity of his hatred for the horned and rebellious goat, who persisted in her disobedience, and would not endeavour to appreciate the good fortune which was in store for

her. All the while that Iermola was listening to the widow, he cast upon the Jewess a menacing glance, unable to boast sufficiently of the baby's lovable qualities or sufficiently to deplore the goat's unworthiness, her stupidity, and the detestable habits she had acquired while frequenting the inn.

It was in such important occupations that the first day of poor old Iermola's paternity was passed.

VII.

A NEW LIFE

The fortunes of man are often very strange. He frequently passes through long, barren, unemployed years, awaiting the one moment which brings into relief and into activity all his faculties and all his powers; it seems as though he had slept an age in order to awaken for one hour. A new situation arouses in him unknown sentiments, enlightens his mind, opens his heart, and changes the indolent dreamer into a worker, an indefatigable athlete.

Thus it happened to Iermola, whom the mere presence of this unknown child had regenerated and revived, and who, to the great astonishment of the widow, the people of the village, and all who had formerly known him, not only acquitted himself without difficulty of the care necessary to be bestowed upon his nursling, but became quite another man. He always had been considered one of the most good-for-nothing and insignificant beings in the world, silent, humble, timid, and ignorant. People had become accustomed to see him every day at the same hour in the vicinity of the ruined inn, and to hear the same words of greeting repeated by him every day. With his bowed head and stooping shoulders, and his eyes fixed on the ground, and leaning on a cane, he might be constantly seen, now on his way to the river shore, and now going toward the *dwor*; he gathered grasses, kindling-wood, and fagots, and cultivated in his garden a little tobacco and a few vegetables. On fine summer evenings he repeated his chaplet sitting on his door-sill, and sometimes, when his complete isolation did not weigh too heavily upon him, he allowed several months to pass without appearing in the village. He never went to the inn, never showed himself at weddings, funerals, or baptisms; and when he went to them because he was invited, he stayed only a very short time, and was in a hurry to return to his den, where he squatted down and secluded himself as though there was some sad mystery attached to his life.

Moreover, he visited at none of the houses in the village with the exception of the widow's hut, whither he was drawn by memories of old friendship and also the need of assistance, for there he had his linen washed and mended, and took some of his meals. Some said that he was sulky and cross; but those who knew him best rarely spoke of him otherwise than in terms of kindest friendship. And indeed under his cold, rough exterior was concealed a rare heart, a heart of gold, one of those hearts to be met with among the poor and simple more often than one believes.

Nowadays a goodly number of thinkers interested in such matters, and who judge quite erroneously, have succeeded in discovering in the peasant far more bad qualities than good ones. But considering the influences to which the lower classes are subjected, the examples they have before them, their surroundings, the poverty which enervates them, and the want of moral education which brutalizes them, one can only be astonished at the treasures of honesty which God puts into their hearts.

Under such a condition as theirs, the greatest faults are pardonable; for which of our reformers proposes to inculcate either moral or religious principles? Therefore the virtues they possess really seem miraculous. In order to know the lower classes, it is necessary to observe them closely, and to study them, and not allow ourselves to be led astray by the prejudices and false ideas which we may have imbibed from the speeches of interested persons and from books. Virtue, with them, is the more to be respected, because it is indigenous, like pure native gold. As for us, we are inoculated with it; it is preached to us, taught us from our infancy. It is very easy for us to be honest. Our own interest, our self-love, the aid which circumstances give us, the advantageous emulation with which the social struggle inspires us, our conception of duty,—all help to clear the way for us; and in spite of this, all are not virtuous, or at least as virtuous as they ought to be. It is not at all astonishing, therefore, considering all that we have on our side, and all that makes against the lower classes, that good, equitable, and strict judges have discerned more worth and virtue in the lower than in the higher classes, and have invited the fortunate ones of this world to follow the example which by a sort of miracle is presented by those who enjoy fewer comforts.

We, who are in constant and active communication with our country people, do not hesitate to recognize that they are better by nature and by instinct than the people in other classes of

society, than the people of other European races, especially the Western races. Let us examine, compare, and number their vices; and we shall be astonished to find still so much morality among a populace so miserable and entirely abandoned, who must have received the strength to be virtuous simply from the air which surrounds them, from the blood which flows in their veins. It is easy for us to understand and excuse their faults if we will only be just.

Iermola was precisely one of those men, gifted with a marvellous instinct of virtue and feelings naturally affectionate and just, whose nobleness servitude had not been able to stifle, possessing a heart which coarse and imperfect civilization had not been able to make cold, and earnest moral strength which old age had not withered or destroyed. I can find no other word than "instinct" to express that rare and powerful faculty; and I would willingly admit, if I were writing a treatise on psychology, that by the side of the coarse, egotistical, material instinct exists a second one, noble, generous, sublime, different in every respect from the other, which elevates often to the highest plane of virtue the weakest and simplest natures. Those who possess it usually act contrary to their most evident interests; they listen only to their hearts, which never breathe the voice of violence and passion, but rather that of pure love, which longs for perfection, and action, which reveals the need of devotion and tenderness.

The old man of whom we are speaking never had deplored the miseries of his useless and suffering life. He never had cursed his past; he neither scorned nor complained of men. He found a sufficiency in himself, suffered, was silent, and did not succumb, because he accepted everything with a humble and thankful spirit. No one ever saw him spare himself; he was always ready to help others, though he could do but little for himself. Every one knew him in the village; and strangers, as well as old friends, knew to whom to apply when they needed help or sympathy,—for poor old Iermola had nothing else to give. To watch and care for a sick person, to harvest a widow's field of barley, to take care of a houseful of children when the mother of the family was away, to collect herbs and recipes for curing wounds and diseases, were the things that Iermola knew how to do best, and that he did with most pleasure. People made use of him the more willingly because he would not accept any pay, and because he never drank brandy.

Among the lower classes it is customary in such cases to recognize by some gift or other even the smallest service rendered; the good villagers would be offended if these slight marks of their gratitude should not be accepted. They therefore slipped into Iermola's hands a few presents which he took, lest he should wound his friends; some eggs, a little butter, a small loaf of bread, seemed to him more than sufficient return for his services.

He bore no grudge against those of his old friends whom he had obliged, who in times of sickness and need had come to him for help, and afterward deserted and forgotten him. He never complained of their indifference, never called their neglect ingratitude or coldness of heart; he knew the villagers had but little time at their disposal in which to pay debts of affection or gratitude; that generally it was not the will which was wanting, but the possibility; and their indifference was often feigned and very frequently forced. It is necessary to know thoroughly their life of labour and weariness, to feel the effect of fatigue and its consequent lassitude, in order to comprehend it and not be surprised by it. And if with regard to matters of the heart Iermola was superior to his neighbours, in other respects he was still a child of the village, retaining its tastes, habits, inclinations, and prejudices.

The day following that upon which the event we have related took place, nothing was talked of all over Popielnia but the baby found under the oaks by old Iermola, and the goat bought from Szmula,—for Chwedko boasted as much of this good bargain as he usually did of his famous mare.

There were a thousand conjectures concerning the inexplicable appearance of the new-born baby,—an event the like of which was unheard of and unknown in the village; this miserable act was laid to the door, not of the peasants very naturally, for they would not have been able to commit such a deed, since they had no such habits, but rather to some unknown father and mother belonging to the nobility. Suspicions fell first upon one and then another neighbouring lord; but nothing confirmed them, and they contradicted each other. Effort was made to recall exactly everything which had taken place on the two previous days; unfortunately, the tracks of the person who had brought the baby and placed it in the garden had been entirely effaced. One of the villagers had indeed seen, about nightfall, a carriage driving rapidly away in the direction of Malyczki; but this proved to have been only the *briczka* of the young secretary, who had been to pay a visit to Horpyna and her mother. Another remembered having seen, from a distance on the river shore, a man on horseback, holding under his arm a bundle wrapped in a white cloth; but he learned that it was the manager Hudny, who was taking a ride, and who, on account of the cold, had wrapped a towel round his neck. Marysia, the servant at the inn, also recalled the unknown Polesian who the previous evening had snored so loudly on one of the benches at the inn, and had disappeared when the cocks began to crow; but could he have slept so quietly if he had been the one who undertook to abandon to fate such an innocent creature?

At the inn, in the fields, in the woods, on the river shore, everywhere, in fact, nothing was talked of but the foundling baby; but no person knew any more about the matter than another. All were, however, astonished at Iermola's determination and laughed at the old man, shrugging their shoulders. Meanwhile, in the good man's hut the cossack's widow was preparing a bath for the little one. As she was unwrapping it from the piece of coarse percale which was to be sent to the steward's wife, she examined the child more closely, and began to share the convictions of his adoptive father. The baby was surely the offspring of some noble family, he was so delicate, so

fresh-looking, so charming. There was no mark on his clothing, but around his neck was a silk cord from which hung a small medal of gilded brass which Iermola supposed to be gold, and put carefully away. Because of this the two old people began to wonder if the baby had been baptized; and the widow told her neighbour that when there was any doubt on the subject, it was always prudent to have the infant sprinkled with the waters of holy baptism. That very evening the baby took the name of Irydion, which was that of the saint the church invokes on the day it was found.

In the dialect of the lower class, this name assumes a Slavic sound, and is transformed into Radion or Radiwon; the little one was therefore called Radionek, as a sort of pet name. Iermola wept with joy as he took him in his arms and covered him with caresses, saying over and over a hundred times that at last he had a son, and that this son would make him so happy.

Our good man got a little tipsy for the first time in his life, on the occasion of the baptism. He treated Chwedko and the widow to bountiful drinks, embraced them both, pressed their hands, and showered affectionate words upon them. As for the unfortunate goat, who regarded all these joyful demonstrations with angry eyes, he shook his fist at her threateningly.

"Listen, wretched Jewess," said he to her, as he stood before her with flaming eyes and uplifted hand. "Listen, vile descendant of a horned and bearded race: if you are not gentle and obedient, if you are not willing to be an honest and affectionate nurse for this dear little baby, I will immediately find another to take your place. But as for you, I will cut you in two with a wood-saw, as truly as there is a God in heaven."

To these menacing words the goat replied by stamping her feet, shaking and throwing her head up proudly, and all the people present burst into peals of laughter; but it was observed that from that time forth she conducted herself with much more gentleness and docility, as though Iermola's violent harangue had finally triumphed over her indomitable obstinacy.

VIII.

HAPPY DAYS

Such was the beginning of this self-imposed paternity; in spite of the difficulties at the outset, the good man was so successful that at the expiration of three months he had become perfectly acquainted with all the duties and requirements of his new occupation. The village people never tired of seeing the old man with the baby in his arms, walking with him in the fields or on the river shore; they would immediately surround the pair so strangely but so entirely united, and overwhelm Iermola with questions and the baby with caresses.

What may not love, will, and patience overcome? The old goat, which had shown such obstinacy of character in the first days after her separation from Szmula at last grew so attached to her new master that she followed the old man and the baby everywhere. At first she ran away several times and went back to the inn. Szmula had even given secret orders to have her killed, intending to put her four quarters into the pot, but Iermola, divining his intentions even at that distance, gave the baby for a few moments to the widow, and found the goat concealed behind a pile of straw in the pig-sty; whereupon he, by his cries and threats, frightened Szmula so terribly that the Jew never again had any desire to face such an adversary. As a finishing stroke to his misfortunes, Szmula was obliged to bestow gratuitous drinks upon the village men who had been attracted to the inn by Iermola's cries and uproar, and whom he naturally wished to get rid of as soon as possible.

Finally, the goat, well cared for and well fed, began to understand that she could henceforth expect no good from Szmula. She therefore regarded him with supreme indifference; and serving her new owner with fidelity, she would not even turn her head when she happened to pass by the inn. Consequently she became a great favourite with Iermola, the thing he loved best in the world, except the well-beloved baby, of course; and as the child jabbered to her constantly, and she was always with him, she became not only his nourisher, but almost his nurse. The baby knew well her black fierce eyes and her long beard, which he pulled with his little fingers; the Jewess would come at his slightest call and stand over his cradle with wonderful intelligence and precaution. She became, in fact, one of the family; and Iermola, rendering her full justice, was utterly astonished that he had not been able at first to recognize her excellent qualities.

But the satisfaction which the old goat gave him--and he would not now have given her up at any price--was nothing in comparison with the infinite and ever-increasing joy the baby was to him, as he grew and developed day by day. Little Radionek had a peculiarly gentle disposition and uncommon strength and health, as is usually the case with poor little orphans.

It seems as though God in His providence bestows earlier and more abundantly upon those who have no mother the faculties and forces necessary to existence. But however lovely and well-developed Radionek may have been, Iermola doubtless saw in him many more virtues and charms than he really possessed. The widow rallied him on the subject, but this did no good, and only irritated him; he called her wicked, jealous, and blind, and would go away, low-spirited, carrying his treasure with him. The old woman, however, was also sincerely attached to the child, who certainly owed much to her. Indeed, without her counsels and assistance, the adoptive father would have found it very difficult to acquit himself in his new, strange, and hard position. All his neighbours were good to him, and helped him in time of need, for the baby became the pet, the darling, and the wonder of the village.

After several months of watchfulness and continual care, Iermola at last found time to ask himself what he would do in the future, and even spoke frequently of the projects he had formed for himself and the baby. Ah, he had so many dreams, and built so many castles in the air! First of all, he did not wish the child to be a simple villager; he desired for him a better condition and more brilliant and noble career. But the choice of a career seemed very difficult to him; for his dear Radionek everything seemed too humble and too pitiful. What he would have liked best would have been to buy an estate and see him some day manage it as he chose; but poor as they were, it was foolish even to think of that. He was of course obliged to think of something else. During his long seasons of thought Iermola reviewed a number of trades and different occupations; but he always found some fault with them. The shoemaker from sitting so constantly must have bent limbs and stooping shoulders; the miller was obliged to stand all day; the blacksmith was exposed to being burned by his hot fire; the mason was tired with carrying tiles and climbing ladders and suffering from the cold and the wind and the heat. Iermola did not wish to expose his dear child to any of these dangers and troubles.

He always firmly intended to have his dear Radionek learn to read and write, but it was necessary to wait a few years before doing that; and the chorister in the church, the only man in the village who had dived into the mysteries of the alphabet, and who would have been able to take charge of his pupil's education, was already very old. If he should die, would his successor be as accommodating or as learned as he? This was a sadly perplexing subject for the old man. He conceived the idea of settling the matter by asking the chorister to teach him, so that when the time came he would be able to teach the child to read and write without any one's assistance. With this intention he bought a primer from a Jew pedler; and soon every day the old man might be seen with the baby in his arms and the goat following him, going along the one street of the village on his way to the farther end of it, where he took his daily lesson from old Andrej Prosforowicz. It was beautiful to see the old man perspiring and growing red in the face, studying and working over the pages of his primer, holding the baby with one hand, and with the other the iron needle which he used to point to his letters. One consoling idea sustained him through all this hard task. At least, in this way the old chorister, who was not very patient, would not be made to torment Radionek, whom he would doubtless have caused to pass some unhappy half-hours. Iermola knew very well that when he should undertake the task of paternal education, he would succeed by means of gentleness and perseverance in imparting all he knew to his child, without either trouble or contention.

But truly it is no easy matter to undertake to learn the alphabet when one is almost sixty years old; to sit quietly with fixed attention for long hours; to keep eyes still which have been accustomed to wander freely; to take an interest in those black, irregular, and excessively small characters. It is an enormous undertaking, a real torment, which can be endured only by remarkable perseverance, will, and strength of affection. Iermola, indeed, groaned and was weary more than once; but he did not abandon the task which he had so bravely begun, and at last the time came when he could read. Fortunately, his sight was still good, which helped him very much in his work; and he found less difficulty, after all, than the chorister had feared. The old instructor received as his pay a half-roll of linen containing fifty yards, and very wide, which had been kept a long time, with a shiny silver rouble in addition.

As for the care bestowed upon the baby, the old man acquitted himself as if he had been a foster-father all his life. The cradle was placed beside his bed; the goat slept in a corner near by. At the slightest sound from the baby, the father was on his feet to see what the innocent creature needed. He slept but little; but he never had needed a great deal of sleep. During the day he took the little one in his arms and wandered with him along the shore, in the woods, in the fields, under the oaks; and when he grew weary he sat down on the door-sill. This sight, which at first had appeared so strange and ridiculous to the villagers, at last seemed pleasant and interesting. They smiled at the orphan, and admired the perseverance and tenderness of the foster-father; and on Sundays, a few old companions came out to the ruined inn to see the baby and talk with their old neighbour.

Iermola was charmed when he found himself surrounded by this little circle of friends, in whose presence he could show off the attractions of his darling pet; and by his earnest praise and repeated recitals he at last succeeded in persuading his neighbours that the pretty boy he had found promised to be really an extraordinary child. What was indeed very strange in all this was that in spite of his various cares and constant fatigue Iermola grew visibly younger. His figure was more erect than before, his step lighter, his countenance more smiling, fresh, and fair; work, want of sleep, and fatigue did not overcome him so much as hope soothed and strengthened him. It might really be said that from the moment when he had found a hope and an aim he had begun

a new existence, a sweeter life. Nevertheless, his existence, as may well be imagined, was not a succession of joys and ever-renewed delights; the presence of the child, while sensibly increasing his wants and expenses, forced upon him a formidable undertaking, a constant labour, for henceforth he must supply not only the bread for to-day, but that for the morrow also.

The poor usually require very little to satisfy their daily wants. Iermola was particularly temperate and sober; he could easily do without this or that thing when necessary, and he had never, up to the moment when, by God's providence, the new-comer had appeared in his cabin, suffered from hunger. He had indeed no certain income; but he never begged, and he managed, by doing his best, to pay very regularly a rent of twenty florins a year for his little garden and poor cottage. It is very hard for us, who have been accustomed to a better style of living, to understand how the poor can sustain themselves, and be content upon so little. Old Iermola had saved up during his long years of service only a few pieces of cloth, which he had laid by, one at a time, together with about twenty roubles and some worthless rags. He could have obtained for these enough to pay his rent in advance and buy his daily food; but if he had not added to this little sum by his daily earnings, it would soon have been exhausted. Iermola, it is true, spent very little upon himself, for he got his meals at first one place and then another in the village; the cossack's widow fed him oftenest, and was not willing to receive anything from him in return. Moreover, he was always content with a little bread and bacon and some potatoes; he took great care of his old clothes, which fortunately had not yet given out. But there was that dreadful rent, which had to be paid from the profits of his garden, which formed the sole income of the good man.

This square bit of ground, surrounded by a paling of laths and situated close to the old house, was almost as large as an ordinary peasant's garden; besides this, there was, a few rods from the inn, about an acre of good land on which oaks and pines grew. There Iermola sowed some tobacco in the spots he thought most fertile; farther on he planted potatoes, cabbages at the end of his garden, beets, peas, and other vegetables in the rest of the enclosure. Sometimes his little crop turned out well, and then, besides getting from his garden all that he needed for his own subsistence, he sold enough to bring him the twenty florins necessary to pay his rent. At other times the vegetables were a failure; and the poor man was obliged to resort to other means of procuring the sum.

Under such circumstances, the woods and the river were a great resource for the peasants; and as the inhabitants of Popielnia were not forbidden access to them, they all found there some means of existence. So long as Iermola had lived alone, he had engaged in fishing; for this purpose he stretched nets and set weirs. In fishing at night with a lance he was at times not unsuccessful, and he sold the fruit of his labour at the neighbouring *dwor* or in the town. In addition to this, he gathered and dried mushrooms, which were a still more profitable commodity, as the price of them had for some time been going up. But after he had little Radionek almost constantly in his arms, these two employments became impossible. He could not leave the child alone, and spend the night fishing or pass the day in the woods.

And meantime the expenses increased; the small supply of money had been used at first to buy the goat and several trifles the baby was obliged to have. It was necessary for the poor man to do something new. Formerly he had worked gratis in the fields of his friends and the poor; now his time became dear and precious to him. He resolved to work for hire. Soon he might be seen, like those women who at times when work is pressing join the reapers in the fields, starting out every day with the goat, the baby, three stakes, a basket, and a tent. He put the baby in the basket between two furrows under the shade of the piece of coarse linen, stretched on top of the stakes; the old goat watched the little one, and he meantime cut down, gathered, and bound the wheat. In this way he earned his food and about twenty coppers a day in addition; for it is rare that a labourer is paid more than that in Polesia. He had to work three days, and work hard too, in order to earn two florins, which elsewhere is given for sixty sheaves. He had to cut sixty sheaves of thin, scattering wheat, and stoop over them, sweating and breathless, then carry them; and they make them heavy in Polesia, although in order to form them, one has to gather the straws one by one.

Often, returning to his deserted home from the distant harvest field, carrying the basket and the baby, the old man felt overcome with the weight of his years and the heat of the day, worn out and sleepy and almost sad; but one single glance at little Radionek, who was always smiling, sufficed to restore his strength, and the night's sleep refreshed him and prepared him for the next day's work. In fact, Iermola never had worked so hard or been so fatigued before; the villagers regarded with respect his perseverance, his earnestness, and his faithful devotion. Not daring to touch the gold found in the baby's clothes, because he considered it the orphan's property, he undertook to supply everything himself; and this became more and more difficult, for he scarcely had time to work his garden. He bravely devoted all his mornings and evenings to this work; the rest of the day he occupied himself in working in the fields.

But the heart can conceive and work out miracles as soon as it is warmed and animated by a ray of affection. It is a unique and sovereign talisman. Without it everything is full of thorns, everything is difficult; with it all obstacles melt away, and dangers disappear.

At the end of a few months of brave and constant effort, field labour began to be unsatisfactory to Iermola. The baby grew, and the earnings were very small; besides, the chorister had charged a rouble for his lessons, and God knows how much time the study-hours

occupied each day. The poor man became at times very sad; then his one resource was to seek his old friend, the widow, to whose house he was in the habit of going for consolation and advice. He was always welcomed cordially and joyously there. The widow was perhaps a little sour and cross occasionally; but she was always really good and affectionate. When at his old friend's house, Iermola was never troublesome, never inconvenienced any one; on the contrary, he often made himself very useful,—for however weary or anxious he might be, if the widow asked him to her table, or even to warm himself by her fire, he felt obliged to cut up her wood, or go to the well for water, in fact, to take the place of old Chwedor, who usually took himself off to the inn for the evening, and could scarcely be moved from there, even if one drove him with a stick.

The widow had a great deal of trouble with the drunken Chwedor, but it was a difficult matter to find servants in the village who were willing to live on a farm, the strong, hearty men greatly preferring to take their axes and go to work in the woods; she was compelled, therefore, to put up with this good-for-nothing creature, who, if he had not had the assistance of the young orphan servant, would scarcely have accomplished the feeding and caring for the cows. Chwedor was truly a singular being; he seemed to be two men in one. In the morning, before he had taken anything to drink, he was industrious, obedient, diligent, and silent,—he even sometimes did things of his own accord which his mistress had not commanded; but when he returned from the fields, although he had solemnly sworn never to drink again, he would scarcely have driven the cattle into the courtyard before he would suddenly disappear, and installing himself at the big table in the hall of the inn, would drink, swear, scream, and give himself up to the most noisy and ridiculous behaviour. With his cap pulled down over his ears, and his hands on his hips, he would grow excited, scream, swear, abuse the innkeeper, sing, dance, stick up his mustache, and strut about as though he were neither more nor less than a *waiwode*.

On his return to the cottage he went regularly to bid his mistress good-night, and after that went to bed, still singing and swearing, then fell asleep and snored; and when he awoke in the morning, he was as pleasant and obedient as the previous evening he had been brutal and blustering. After having shirked the widow's service, using most abusive language to her, the evening before, he would be eager next morning to reinstate himself in her good graces by all sorts of kind attentions and ingenious devices. She herself had several times discharged him; but as it was almost impossible to procure another servant, and as Chwedor was thoroughly well acquainted with the duties of a farm, the noises and rows of the evening were invariably followed by reconciliation and peace in the morning.

But in consequence of Chwedor, Iermola was particularly welcome at the widow's cottage whenever he came in the evening, first, because he helped a little, and then because she found in him a willing listener to whom she could relate all her gossip and make all her complaints. Horpyna also loved the old serving-man, especially for the sake of the baby, who always smiled for her so sweetly.

One day as Iermola was returning late from the fields, having spent the whole day without being able to gather his task of sheaves from the scattering and ill-grown barley, his heart sad and anxious, and very weary from stooping so long, he turned in the direction of the widow's cottage. As soon as Horpyna saw him, she took the little boy in her arms and began to jump about the room with him; and the old man sat down by the fire and gazed at the flames dreamily. The sun had given him the headache; fatigue had stiffened and bent his back; the weight of the reaping-hook had bruised his wrinkled hands, although he had carefully wrapped the handle with a piece of coarse cloth.

This temporary weakness, by which he was for the moment overcome, frightened him on the child's account and not on his own; he began to sigh heavily, and his old friend, as she busied herself with her cooking, understood very well that he was in need of counsel and comfort.

"Now, you see, good man," said she to him, "I told you how it would be; when you took the baby, I knew you would not be able to raise it. But perhaps you are over-anxious and have been unfortunate today, for you sigh so sadly."

"Yes, yes, it is true,—all true, neighbour. I realize now that I am no longer twenty years old; for when I return from the fields, I am good for nothing but to lie down in my grave, I am so sick and weary. But what is to be done? I must work or die of hunger. And Hudny would drive me out of my poor den if I did not give him his twenty florins at Michaelmas; and I must eat and take care of the baby. Think of it, I can earn only twenty coppers a day, and I have a broken back."

"But I tell you now, as I have often told you before, that you must find some other means of earning your bread. You have spent your whole life seated by a table in an office, with little work to do, and suddenly you take a notion to handle the reaping-hook and the scythe just as those do who have been accustomed to it all their lives. Why do you not try to find some other sort of work?"

"Because, really I do not know how to do anything else."

"But you did not know how to read a while ago, and now you tell me you have learned. Can't you learn how to do something else?"

"Do you think I could?"

"Indeed?" answered the old woman, in that interrogative formula which often in the language of peasants takes the place of affirmation.

"What?"

"How do I know? Any sort of trade. You do not want for sense; you have seen and observed a great many things; you would learn much faster than any number of young giddy-heads."

"I should not like the shoemaker's trade, though I sometimes mend shoes," replied Iermola, shaking his head with a thoughtful air. "There are plenty of tailors who come from Kolkiow with their measuring sticks on their shoulders; and no one would be willing to trust a piece of cloth to me, lest I should spoil it. As for cloak merchants, there are already three."

"Yes, and there is not even one honest weaver, who would not steal a third of your package of warp," cried the widow. "The old man who steals least will keep you three months waiting for your roll of cloth; and if you pay any of them in advance, they will sell it to the Jews. I can truly say no one here really understands weaving, though it is a trade which pays well. Now, couldn't you undertake to learn it?"

"But how about the weaving-room and the loom? How could I put it in my house? The room is small; the goat occupies one half of it, and the baby the other; all my furniture is already piled up one piece on top of another. It is impossible to think of such a thing. If you want to give me helping counsel, think of something else."

"Bless me! I should have been very glad if you would have learned the weaver's trade, as I should then have been able to find some use for my thread, which is rotting here, and I do not know what to do with it."

At this Iermola laughed, but he also sighed.

"Ah! you are advising yourself, then, and not me. Think of something else, neighbour."

"Can't you think of anything?" cried Horpyna. "I know of something. Haven't you told me that at the *dwor*, when you had nothing else to do, you used to amuse yourself by playing on the violin?"

"Yes, that is so; I used to play sometimes all the evening."

"Very well; why not be a musician?"

"Pshaw, for shame!" cried Iermola, spitting on the ground. "It is not right, Horpyna, for you to give me such advice. Suppose I should take to drinking from playing at weddings and balls? And then how could I take the baby with me to all the inns?"

"Ah! that is very true. I have advised you as my mother did. But why couldn't you leave the baby with us?"

Iermola smiled and shook his head.

Just at that moment the two large pots which the widow had on the fire knocked together; one of them, which was probably already cracked, burst wide open and broke in pieces. The boiling water dashed all over the fireplace, on the coals, and spilled upon the floor, and would have gone upon the widow's feet if she had not jumped aside.

There was a moment of confusion. Horpyna gave the baby to the old man and ran to her mother's assistance; the widow began to cry; the servant screamed with fright; the half-cooked potatoes rolled upon the floor; the dog, which was asleep upon the door-sill, was startled, and began to bark loudly.

Some minutes passed before order was restored. Fortunately, no harm was done, except to the pot, for the boiling water was all over the floor. The young girls set to work to pick up their supper; and the widow, having cursed the decrees of fate, seated herself on the bench to collect her wits.

But when they came to put the potatoes again on the fire, and went to the loft for another pot, it was found that there was not another there so large as the one which had just been broken; and they were obliged to use in its stead two small ones which were like small pennies in comparison.

"There never was such a pot as that," cried the widow, recommencing her mournful wail. "I remember perfectly the day I bought it. It was at the fair at Janowka. It was as white as milk, and so strong and solid. One might have cracked nuts on it. We came back home at night, that drunken Chwedor and I. As we were passing by Małyczki, he let the wagon run into a rut; Chwedor and I and everything that was in the wagon were thrown into a ditch. There were five pots and a sifter. 'Confound you and your brandy!' said I; and I began to grope about for the utensils.

"The sifter was ruined,--the wagon-wheel had broken it in half; two of the smaller pots were

broken all to pieces; but my big white pot had rolled two fathoms away down the road. I ran after it; it was perfectly whole, and had not even the slightest crack. I could scarcely believe my eyes. I have used it for two years, and I never shall find another like it. Ah, that is what we need,--some good potters. To get another set, I must wait till a pedler takes pity on us and comes this way. But as the roads are bad and the merchandise easily broken, they come seldom; and they cheat us--oh, the way they cheat us is a caution! Now there is Procope, the potter at Malyczki; he makes such indifferent, ugly black pots. They are really good for nothing but to hold ashes. He is compelled to go away to sell them because we know them so well; no one here would buy them. Suppose you learn to be a potter; what do you think of that? It is an honest and quiet trade, and it is not hard work."

"Do you think I could?" said Iermola, shaking his head. "But who would teach me? And the clay? Is it good about here? And how could I build an oven? Besides, even supposing I could do all that, I should need a wagon and horse to carry my wares about; and suppose I should happen to upset them?"

"Well, really, what is the matter with you to-day, old man?" cried the widow. "Everything seems disagreeable and difficult to you. I repeat to you your own proverb, 'It is not the saints who make the pots boil.'" At this, all present burst into a laugh; Iermola alone remained silent and thoughtful.

Thus passed this memorable evening, which was to bear so many fruits; for although Iermola did not then make up his mind clearly, he nevertheless, on returning to his home, began to think seriously what there was for him to do, and gradually he recovered hope and courage. "Since I have succeeded in learning to read," said he to himself at last,--"which is much the most difficult thing in the world,--I ought to be able also to learn a trade. I am old, it is true; but do arms and thought and will belong to youth alone? We shall see."

IX.

A VISIT TO THE DWOR

Next day the old man intrusted Radionek to the care of his friend Horpyna, and under some pretext or other started for Malyczki. A thousand projects were whirling in his head.

The village was of medium size, surrounded by deep marshes and immense forests, built upon barren soil composed principally of sand and peat-moss.

Nevertheless, the village was wealthy, for it was inhabited almost entirely by industrious mechanics. The peasants of this town were obliged to buy bread every year; the soil was like that of the district of Opoëzynsk, and perhaps even worse, and returned for one bushel of wheat sowed only sixty sheaves, which would scarcely yield a bushel of grain, making a gain of only the straw. They were therefore compelled to resort to other means of subsistence. They made charcoal; they sold bark; they dealt in staves, made tubs and casks, and turned out various other small household utensils; they constructed carriages and ploughs, or were carpenters, weavers, or clothiers; they even wove caps and red belts; and there was one potter among them. But this last trade was not very profitable, although the man made his living,--for his wares were considered of indifferent quality.

As a general thing, potters rarely set up a business in a place where no one has previously worked at the trade; in most cases the ovens have descended from father to son for a considerable length of time. Formerly, in the ancient times, when the potter's art was more necessary, because it was called on to furnish the sacred urns used at the sacrifices, the qualities of the different clays were better understood, and also the degrees of heat in the kiln; the situations for manufactories were better chosen, and a better standard of work prevailed among the men of the trade.

At the present time it is rare that any one attempts to build a kiln on a spot where no one has ever built before. Potteries are carried on just where they have been for ages, and the same clay is used which furnished the funeral urns of our ancestors.

The last descendant of the potters of Malyczki had sunk pretty low in his profession as artist and also in the social scale; he drank, lounged about most of the time, and cared very little about the quality of his clay, and still less about the quality or the beauty of his wares. His pots gave forth no sound to the touch; they were black, ugly, and so easily broken that the people in the village never bought them except when in extreme need. But during his expeditions to places at a distance he managed to get rid of them; and in his neighbourhood he passed for a rich man, for he put on proud airs and indulged himself in everything.

He ate bacon, drank brandy, wore a robe of lambskin with a collar of gray astrachan, a woollen cloak with a hood, and a big cap of black lambskin as high as that of any gentleman. He had never had a son, and only one daughter, recently married to the richest peasant in the village, to whom he had given such a handsome dowry that his neighbours could scarcely believe their eyes or their ears,--horses, cattle, three chests of clothing, and a cap full of silver roubles.

Iermola knew all about these matters, for formerly, when he was in the service of his good master, there was frequent intercourse between the *dwor* of Popielnia and the *dwor* of Malyczki, and also between the two villages. Consequently, from the first the idea suggested by the widow had taken possession of his mind. He did not wish to reveal his designs at first lest he should be laughed at; and under pretext of some business common to village people, he set out for the *dwor* of Malyczki.

For many years there had lived in this *dwor* a weak and decrepit old man, once a chief of squadron in the national cavalry, and an old friend of Iermola's good lord, whose name was Felicien Druzyna. He had once been rich, but had lived to see all his fortune melt away during the civil wars; and he had for a long time wandered about the world, travelling sometimes in the north and sometimes in the west. Finally he returned to Polesia, to live on the estate which was all that remained of his possessions. For several years his infirmities had so increased that he was now confined to his bed, and prayed for death, which seemed to refuse to put an end to his sufferings.

Even the exterior of the house in which he lived in Malyczki showed that it had formerly been the seat of considerable wealth. It was old-fashioned, large, and gloomy, surrounded by an old garden, trellised in the French fashion of the time of Louis the Great; and there were large ponds, a chapel and a small bastion,--monuments left behind by the ancestors of the chief of squadron.

But all these ancient beauties were falling to ruin; the revenue of one poor village was not sufficient to maintain so much splendor. The monotonous life of the old man brought out all his peculiarities. It may have been that he had naturally an ill temper; it may have been that the sorrows of his long life or the sufferings of his long illness had rendered him extremely irritable; but in his old age he had become unusually violent and passionate.

His only son, who was about thirty years old, and a young relative of his wife, who assisted in taking care of him, could not leave him for a moment, and were condemned to a continual punishment by the constant whims and endless persecutions of this despotic old man. But in spite of his physical weakness, the chief of squadron retained such remarkable activity and vigour of mind that he still exercised the entire control of his affairs. He treated his son as a child of twelve years old, his ward as a servant, and held his servants in the harshest manner to the strictest performance of their duty. The keys of all the granaries, the cellars, and cupboards were brought to him every day after the distribution of necessary provisions, and were carefully placed by him under his pillow. When he ordered corporal punishment to be administered to his servants, he never prescribed less than fifty lashes; the oldest received a hundred in compliment to their age. Every one in the house trembled before him, and obeyed his slightest breath; and each one was obliged to be ready to account for the smallest trifle whenever he took it into his head to inquire about it.

Thus the blind old man, irritated by the gloom of his life, and by its inaction, which was even more difficult for him to bear, endeavoured to distract his mind by ruling his house and family as strictly as possible and torturing every one by whom he was surrounded. Every one who came near him was compelled to serve him; no one had the right to live for himself. A skilfully organized system of constant watching produced continual quarrels and anxieties, which had become the chronic condition of this unfortunate household, where neither confidence, joy, nor liberty existed.

Even the old man's son, Jan Druzyna, who was kept constantly beside the sick bed, was losing all joy, hope, and love of life.

Nevertheless the old chief of squadron, so ill-natured and so harsh in his manners toward his own family, was to strangers particularly affable, kindly, and good-natured. He adopted one line of conduct for outsiders and quite another for the bosom of his family. He gave hearty welcome to the guests who sometimes visited him, was obliging to his neighbours, and compassionate to the poor. He spoke kindly to every one, smiled, often joked, and even rendered small services; consequently those who did not know him, and only saw him at such times, could scarcely believe the tales which were told of the old soldier's cross and tyrannical conduct. It is certain that the sufferings of disease, the long weary hours of blindness, the misery of sleepless nights, had all contributed to sour his disposition; but his heart had remained kind and sympathetic, though he had resolved to disguise the fact from others by such constant and unusual severity of manner. Moreover, the exaggerated ideas which he had conceived of military discipline, and of holding a firm hand upon the reins of domestic administration, had confirmed him in the practice of this fussy and incessant despotism.

The young heir of the little domain and poor Marie, the far-off cousin, both nailed to the side of his bed or his easy-chair, passed days filled with bitter repinings. Their mutual attachment was their only comfort. The old man had in some way or other discovered the affection they bore each

other,--these two young creatures so cruelly tried; he had even by persuasion and cunning induced them to confess it to him, but having done so, he at once forbade them under the severest penalties, even under penalty of his curse, ever to think of marrying. He, however, continued to keep them about him in the solitude of his home, not seeing the necessity of separating them, for he thought his word was all-powerful, and that no one would have the audacity to resist his commands. The young people consequently were forced to keep strict guard over themselves, and went on with their wearisome task with sorrow and tears, carefully concealing in the old man's presence their firm and constant affection.

Some one was obliged to watch beside the old chief of squadron night and day, for he would have some one always by him, and generally preferred his son Jan or his ward Marie; and he rarely quitted his bed except to stretch his swollen limbs on the cushions of his big easy-chair, which was rolled around his chamber. He slept badly and with frequent interruptions. Usually he dozed until about ten o'clock, woke up about midnight, and slept again at daylight after he had taken his coffee; then until dinner-time he attended to his business, calling his son, his ward, and his servants by turns to his bedside. He would shut his eyes again for a moment after the midday meal, then rouse up again to worry, command, and torment his servants and entire family all the rest of the day till evening. The old officer took much less precaution in regard to his health than he ought to have done, considering his numerous infirmities; he drank brandy several times a day, ate tremendously, and paid no attention to the advice of the doctor, who constantly recommended temperance.

Beside his easy-chair or bed were discussed the most important affairs with regard to improving the lands and the most minute details of the household economy. He consulted, contradicted, judged, and finally condemned. The old man divined everything, and remembered so perfectly everything that was said to him that nothing could be kept concealed from him, although he was blind and helpless.

In former times, when he had good health, he was one of the best friends and most frequent visitors of the lord of Popielnia. Iermola at that time had seen him in private; and since then the old officer, out of respect for the memory of his friend, had sometimes assisted him. To his *dwor*, therefore, Iermola now directed his steps, relying upon the old officer's excellent judgment and the kindly interest which he had always manifested for him.

All the inhabitants of the *dwor* rejoiced at the unexpected visit, hoping it would have the effect of amusing the old officer, and so gain some respite for his slaves, or at least it would cheer him for the time, and force him to assume the affable and lively manner which he always had in reserve, not for his own family, but for his guests.

In fact, when Druzyna was informed that Iermola wished to see him, he began at once to abuse everybody, ordering them to bring him in immediately, and also to bring some brandy and a good breakfast,--in a word, he found means to scold and torment half his household in a sudden overflow of friendly welcome for his guest. Then hearing a timid little cough coming from the doorway, he greeted the new-comer in a pleasant and good-humoured voice,--

"How do you do, old man? What is the news from Popielnia?"

"Nothing, most gracious lord,--nothing but hunger and poverty."

"And you,--what have you been doing? Has anything new happened at your house?"

"Indeed, certainly," replied the old man, sighing; "something very new. Has my lord heard nothing about it?"

"Why how in the devil could I know anything?" cried the old officer. "You see how I am, shut up here with ghosts like Lazarus; and as for these people here, they take special pains not to tell me anything which could interest or distract me,--they prefer to be silent or else sigh and complain. But what has happened?"

"Oh, the strangest thing that I believe has ever been heard of within a hundred miles of us."

"But what is it? Do not weary me, my brother."

"Well, it is this; the good God has sent me a child."

"What, the devil! have you been fool enough to get married?"

"No, no, gracious lord."

"Well, how then!" repeated the chief of squadron, contracting the gray brows upon his wrinkled forehead.

"My lord does not comprehend at all?"

"No; the devil! I do not comprehend at all; I am waiting for you to explain yourself more clearly."

"Some time ago--it was in the month of April--some one came and left a baby near my cabin."

"How? What? When?" exclaimed the chief of squadron, moving about anxiously.

"It was in the month of April."

"Come, go on; tell me quickly how it all happened."

Iermola then related every detail of the story concerning the baby, the goat, all his hopes and anxieties; the difficulties he had encountered in earning enough money, in learning to read, and the necessity which was now upon him to undertake some trade. The old officer listened attentively; and what was still more strange, his son Jan, who had started toward the door as the old man entered, glad of an opportunity to get some fresh air, was so interested in what Iermola was telling that he stood motionless in the doorway to hear the end.

"Truly, this is a strange thing!" cried the chief of squadron when the story was finished. "Unnatural parents abandon their child on the threshold of a poor cabin, and the Lord sends the orphan a father a hundred times better than the one Nature had bestowed. But my old friend, the blessing from Heaven comes to you rather late, it seems to me. Since the world began, no one ever heard of a man of your age taking it into his head to learn a trade and undertaking such rash business projects. How old are you?"

Iermola knew perfectly well that he had lived sixty good long years, but he dared not confess it, lest the chief of squadron should discourage him still more or laugh at him; he therefore replied without hesitation,--

"What does that matter? As soon as the hair turns gray, one is old. But it is weakness and poverty which make us feel our years; and God knows the number of them."

"Pshaw! pshaw! God knows, but man knows too; I can tell you pretty well how old you are," interrupted the chief of squadron, counting on his fingers. "You were six or seven years old when you were taken as shepherd boy at the *dwor*. I was not here then; but when I came to this country forty years ago, your late master told me you had then been living with him about seventeen years. So counting it all up, you are now past sixty, my brother."

"That may be; but since I feel well and strong--"

"Ah, that is a great blessing!" cried the chief of squadron. "You are not like me; I am wretched and infirm, tried sorely by God, despised by men, and cast down to the very earth itself, which should long since have swallowed me up."

"Gracious lord, you ought not to speak so."

"Come, come! we all know our own troubles. The ass must rub the place that hurts."

"Well, then," said Iermola, slowly, "to go back to my story: in order to rear my little one, I shall be obliged to work for him and for myself. I am not very strong, and I get along slowly working in the fields. I would like to find some other means of living,--to learn some trade or other."

"Why, you are crazy, my friend," cried Druzyna, laughing till he choked; "your apprenticeship would be a long one. And besides, how would you ever learn? You have now neither arms nor eyes nor strength."

"I cannot, however, go and beg."

"Bless me! of course you would not wish to do it."

"No, I am not willing to do it, neither for the child nor for myself. I should be ashamed to go wandering up and down the roads with a sack. No, no! a hundred times no!"

"Very good; but how will you be able to learn a trade at your age?"

"Why, it seems to me that I should learn now more easily than when I was young. A man is more attentive at my age; he knows the usefulness of things, and is not so easily distracted; and then he likes to keep his hands occupied,--it soothes him."

"Ah, my dear friend, you must be young indeed, to be able to speak in that way. Believe me, my good man, the young man has nothing in common with the old one. The old man has a different heart, a different body, a different head,--is another man, in fact, and a weaker and more unhappy one. As for you, you are fortunate indeed, if you can at your age feel the strength and courage to work."

"Truly, it seems to me that since I have succeeded in learning to read I could also learn a trade."

"Well, well, perhaps you can, but at least choose something easy," answered Druzyna, shaking his head.

"Some one advised me to learn weaving; but I should not have enough money to buy a loom, and I should not know where to find a place to put it. My own room is so small."

"Well, what are you thinking of doing?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I came here to beg Procope--"

"Ah, ah! to make pots!" cried the chief of squadron. "Well, but if yours are no better than his, you will not make a fortune."

"Perhaps if he will only show me how to begin, in the end I may do better than he; but Procope is jealous of his knowledge and proud of his trade; he would not be willing to teach me."

"There is a way to remedy that difficulty," said the chief of squadron. "I will send for him and speak a few words to him. There are no secrets which he will refuse to share with you after he has received my orders."

Iermola shook his head sadly. "What one is forced to do, one never does well," he said.

"Well, see if he will do it of his own accord; and if you are not successful, I will come to your assistance."

Then after a few moments, the old man sent Iermola off much more tranquil and comfortable, and ordered him to present himself again in the evening and inform him of the result of his interview with Procope.

X.

WHAT A STRONG WILL CAN ACCOMPLISH

On his way to the potter's house, which was situated on a little hill where one could see the bright kiln surrounded by freshly moulded pottery and shaded by an old pear-tree, Iermola gave himself up to thought. It seemed to him that at last he had hit upon a wise and happy idea. His wrinkled old face began to light up; he rubbed his hands and walked on toward Procope's cabin with a firmer and lighter step.

The potter of Malyczki, after having married off his daughter, had established himself, with a very young servant and a little apprentice, in this cottage then vacant, where he for the greater part of his time led the idle life of a village epicurean.

Generally he did but little work, for he relied upon the half-rusty roubles which he had earned in his youth; he was seldom seen seated at his wheel or busy with his kiln, but could be found frequently at the inn, or seated at his own table before a well-supplied plate and a brimming goblet which his servant had just brought to him.

Iermola therefore found the man he was seeking, at table, in front of a pint of brandy and a great bowl of fresh milk thick with cream. Procope's hair was quite gray, but he was still erect and vigorous. He was a peasant of tall and massive figure, with broad shoulders, strong as an oak, and had a white beard which reached to his girdle. One glance at him was sufficient to tell that he had strength to struggle with a bear. When he was tipsy at the inn, every one was afraid of him; for he would shake the village boys with his long arms as though he were shaking a pear-tree to make the pears fall off. He could put his broad shoulders to the axle and move a loaded wagon; and with one hand he could lift a bag of wheat as easily as any one else would a handful of straw.

The potter wore a pair of well-tarred leather boots, large white pantaloons, cut after the cossack fashion, and a shirt of gray cloth, fastened at the neck by a large red button, and lower down by a broad belt of the same colour, and was stirring his spoon in his porringer while watching the servant, who was seated in front of him, showing her white teeth and covering her face with her hands as she laughed. At this moment Iermola appeared in the doorway, and saluted the inhabitants of the potter's house in the following pious fashion,--

"Slawa Bohn! Glory to God!"

The two old men had long known each other; and besides, Procope was generally pleasant and hospitable to every one so long as he was not intoxicated; when he was, he was terrible. But just then he was perfectly sober, and he immediately rose from his table. The servant disappeared, and the two men embraced each other cordially.

"Well, what is it that the Lord God sends you to say to us?" was the potter's first remark. "You will drink one good glass, won't you?"

"I will take one glass," said Iermola, "though it is not my custom to drink at all."

"Ah, ah! a good drink of brandy never did anybody any harm. After that, we will talk over your business, if you have any."

"Ah, yes! I have something very important to talk about," replied the new-comer; "but it is a long story."

"Then begin at once."

"Wait a while, till I recover my breath."

"As long as you like."

As he spoke, the servant reappeared; she removed the bowl and spoon, leaving the brandy on the table. The two old men began by complaining of the weather and the high prices of provisions. Procope lamented considerably over the inconveniences of his trade; and gradually they conversed with frank cordiality.

"You must know," said Iermola, suddenly, not without much internal agitation, "that I am myself the son of a potter. From time immemorial my ancestors owned kilns and made pottery."

"Ah, indeed! really?" answered Procope, with visible astonishment.

"Yes, truly, as I have told you; but my father and mother died when I was quite an infant, and I can barely remember the fact that they worked in pottery. But to-day there is still in our old garden a fine potter's kiln, which is overgrown with grass. As for my paternal property, it has passed into other hands."

"But never in the world was there a potter found among the people of Popielnia."

"My father was from Wolhynia, and he lived only a very short time after coming here."

"Ah! that is a different matter," replied the potter, slowly sipping his brandy.

"And, you see, in my old age, I have taken it into my head to take up my old trade again," stammered Iermola, blushing and looking down.

Procope stared at him, then began rubbing his head and speaking in broken sentences.

"You want to take the bread out of my mouth, you wicked old man," he muttered in a menacing tone.

"Only listen to me," continued Iermola, much agitated; "instead of injuring your trade, perhaps it may be that I can help you to gain something. Do not be frightened without reason."

"All right, let me hear; tell me."

"You have no son; your daughter is married; and you have laid by a nice little pile of money. It seems to me that it is high time for you to take some rest. The clay you find about here is good for nothing. You are obliged to go a long distance to sell your pottery, for no one will buy it here; the quality is too poor."

"Come, come! look out; mind what you are saying," growled the angry potter, striking the table with his fist.

"Do not be angry, Procope; remember that I can do nothing without your assistance."

"You want to rob me."

"Not at all; you will see that my plan will bring you quite a neat little income."

"All right, let me hear it, then; and the devil take you!"

"Well, it is this: if you would only just help me a little at first, I am sure I could succeed; it seems to me that it runs in the blood to do it. Let us build, in partnership, a kiln at Popielnia. We will both attend to the firing of the pottery; and as a compensation for your trouble, half of my profits shall belong to you as long as you live, and you need do nothing all day long but lie down with your feet in the sun and your head in the shade."

At this Procope shook his head gravely.

"That would not be a bad thing; but who will go security for you?"

"Your lord."

"The old officer, the wicked old scoundrel?" cried Procope.

"Yes, he himself; he has seen and pitied the trying situation in which I am placed in my old

age, and has advised me to do this to remedy it."

Procope was confounded, and for a moment made no reply. He looked puzzled, and pulled his beard.

"Is it really the chief of squadron who advises you to do this? What does he know about the business? You all seem to think that it is as easy to turn pots as to plough a furrow, and that one can light a kiln as easily as he can make soup. Now, I have worked at making pottery all my life, and still I do not always succeed."

"Because you do not take the trouble to do it. You have money enough, food, and a cottage; why should you worry yourself when there is no need of it?"

"That is true enough; but do you really believe, my old friend, that you can learn easily? Mind, I tell you that this thing needs a young head."

"Only try me; your lord will be pleased if you will."

"The devil take him with his lord!" muttered Procope. "Do you suppose the lord cares for the needs of one man?"

"But suppose we should find at Popielnia some good clay for making white pottery? You only make dark things which are ugly and good for nothing."

At these words, Procope rose up in a perfect rage, his fists clinched and his eyes bloodshot.

"They are good for nothing?" he cried in a voice like thunder. "Just wait till I get hold of you, old scoundrel, and you will see that your lord himself will not be able to help you."

"And will you be any better off after you have killed an orphan child and a poor old man?" answered Iermola, humbly, looking down.

His gentleness and submission disarmed the old potter; and he began to smile.

"What orphan are you talking about?" said he.

"Ah! so you know nothing about it all?"

"Nothing at all; I have been travelling for a long time. Tell me about the orphan."

Then the old man, quite satisfied with having appeased the terrible potter, who, though violent and passionate, was really good-hearted, set to work to narrate his adventure, without omitting the least incident or smallest detail, as peasants always do when they tell a story; and fortunately he succeeded in telling it in such a way as to interest and touch Procope. The old potter called his servant that she might hear it also; and thanks to Iermola's touching recital, a whole hour passed without their knowledge. True feeling called forth true feeling; and pity arose in their hearts.

Procope continued to swear and grumble, now, however, no longer at his visitor, but at those unworthy, miserable, wretched creatures who had been so hard-hearted as to abandon a poor child to all the chances of fate and the miseries of an orphan's life. Iermola's situation consequently interested him and excited his pity; perhaps also the remembrance of the dreaded lord, so well known to all his serfs, contributed to increase this favourable impression. To make a long story short, when the little company rose from the table, after having talked for several hours, the potter promised Iermola to come to Popielnia the next day to see the child and look for clay.

Having obtained this promise, which was sealed in a good bumper of brandy, Iermola returned to the *dwor* to inform his protector of the fortunate result of his day's visit; then hastening through the woods by an unfrequented path, he reached Popielnia, anxious about his little charge and fearful lest Horpyna had hindered him from sleeping by too much petting, or made him sick by stuffing him with sweets.

Tired and dusty, his lips parched, his brow damp with perspiration, full of anxiety concerning the next day's interview with Procope, and trembling lest he had entertained vain hopes and lost precious time, Iermola at last reached the widow's cabin. He immediately seized his dear little Radionek and devoured him with kisses as though he had not seen him for a year; then not desiring to confess to his neighbour the proceedings of the day, he hastened to return to his own cabin.

The next morning he was up at daybreak. He was obliged again to intrust the baby to Horpyna, for it would have been impossible to hold him in his arms as he wandered about the vicinity with Procope; then he busied himself sweeping and arranging his cabin, putting out a flask of brandy, and roasting in his oven a good-sized piece of meat for Procope's dinner, knowing he would not be content with a little, for he was accustomed to living very abundantly.

The potter of Malyczki kept his promise faithfully; about eight o'clock in the morning his little one-horse carriage stopped before the old inn. They put up the mare as well as possible in a half-fallen angle of the wall, and then, as Procope, after having taken two or three drinks of brandy,

asked to go first to see the baby, they immediately repaired to the widow's cabin. They were probably expected, judging from the sumptuous reception which was offered them.

The old woman, anxious to second Iermola's efforts, and urged on by her vanity to appear liberal and magnificent in the presence of her guest, had prepared an excellent soup of oatmeal and gruel, a large dish of sausages,--the favourite meat of the inhabitants of Popielnia,--and also a large and appetizing omelet, which greatly added to the luxury of the reception, and at the same time gave the potter a great idea of the widow's opulence.

Consequently the old artisan, overflowing with good-humour, thought the baby pretty, interesting, and good; it is true that Iermola expatiated upon all his virtues and precocious characteristics.

At last, a little later, as the poor foster-father was burning with impatience, the two men left the cabin to go off on their search for potter's clay, though Procope separated himself with evident regret from the dishes and bottles, and would gladly have deferred the expedition to another time.

Iermola sent up fervent prayers to God from the very bottom of his heart, imploring Him to point out to him some good clay; for to tell the truth, he had not the least idea where to go to look for any, and had scarcely any hope of finding it. He, however, comforted himself by saying that Providence often accomplished more than men dared hope for. Having always heard that oak-trees grow best in clay soil, and knowing that the peasants went to look at the foot of the trees around his garden, in the very place where the baby had been put, for the clay which they used to repair their cabins, he resolved, guided by some vague instinct, to go first to that spot.

The two men took from Iermola's cabin a large strong spade, and went together down the little slope which led to the bottom of the garden. Procope, in order to appear important, walked slowly, with both hands stuck through his belt.

"Why, there is nothing here but pure sand," said the old potter at first. "The clay, if there is any, must be underneath it; and who knows if it is good for anything? It seems to me we had better look somewhere else."

They went on a few steps farther, and when they came to the big oak, which Iermola had christened Radionek's tree, the old man took a notion to dig in that place.

Procope, who, naturally listless, disliked exertion, seated himself quietly on the ground; and Iermola, spitting upon his hands, went bravely to work. The first spadefuls of earth he threw up were absolutely worthless; it was only white sand, then gray sand, then yellow sand, then gravel. Suddenly the spade encountered something heavier, more compact, and offering greater resistance; and digging down, Iermola found some clay. But this clay would not do: it was yellow and full of small pebbles; it was thoroughly mixed with sand and gravel.

Iermola offered a sample of it to Procope on the spade, but he contented himself with giving it a scornful glance and shrugging his shoulders.

"Dig deeper; dig somewhere else," he growled, red and breathless from the effect of his recent good cheer; "and--see here, give me your pipe."

Iermola at that moment would have given not only his pipe, but even his last shirt, to conciliate the good graces of the old potter; so quickly taking his clay pipe, which was already lighted, from his lips, he handed it to his companion, and bending down, he silently went to work again with his spade.

At the bottom of this layer of clay another appeared, thicker and deeper, but Procope was not satisfied with that; it was not the real potter's clay. Underneath the third layer suddenly appeared a sort of green earth, very curious-looking, dense and compact as stone, of a dirty cloud-colour and filled with fawn-coloured veins. As he saw this strange, disgusting-looking earth, Iermola felt cold in his very heart; he threw down his last spadeful of earth with a jerk, and almost breathless, leaned upon his spade. At that moment Procope's eye caught sight of a few pieces of earth which rolled to his feet; his face lighted; he stooped, took a bit of it in his fingers, mashed it and cracked it with his teeth.

"Oh, ho!" he cried, in a transport of delight, "You surely knew about this bed of clay. Do you know what sort of earth this is? Why, it is a kind of potter's clay which never has been found within twenty leagues around; there is none known of nearer than Wlodzimiez. Ah, you old raven, old rogue! I did not know you were so designing," continued Procope, letting fall his pipe.

Iermola was struck dumb with astonishment at these words; but he comprehended the necessity of appearing to have acted knowingly, while in reality the hand of Providence alone had led him.

He smiled mysteriously and shook his head.

"And is the bed deep? Dig a little farther and see," said the potter. "When I say that there is not such clay within twenty leagues from here, so tender and strong, and as fat to eat as butter--"

Unless you go to Wlodzimierz-- Oh, such pots as we shall bake! Such pots!"

They both then began to dig, and soon discovered a thick and abundant bed of clay. True, they again came upon some veins of whiter earth, mixed with gravel and sand; but these slight layers soon disappeared, and the precious clay, thick and greenish, was there alone, rich and inexhaustible. They carried some of it away with them in an old cloak,--a good big lump which they wanted to try; and having drunk several bumpers to finish up the affair, Procope remounted his carriage and took the road to Malyczki.

Thus it was that the discovery was made at Popielnia of clay, the existence of which had until then never been suspected. That very evening the future potter, the first of all the potters who have rendered the village famous, knelt down in his chamber after Procope's departure, his eyes wet with tears of joy, and prayed fervently.

"The child will have bread!" he cried, perfectly wild with delight. "I thank Thee, my God! Thou hast heard my prayer. The child will have bread!"

XI.

A POTTERY AT POPIELNIA

"The Lord God feeds and clothes his servants," says the Slavic proverb; and the servants of God are men of kindly hearts, throughout whose lives the guiding hand and love of God is as clearly seen as in the destiny of the children of darkness may be traced the result of sin and evil.

This world is so wisely regulated and so skilfully directed that all the good done here bears good fruit by reason of natural causes; while evil carries with it not only its punishment, but in addition the principles and germs of evil. Often the inevitable results of these two great causes are for a time invisible to the eyes of men; a day comes, however, when one sees appear upon the surface what has been fermenting in the vast depths. Often too the great results of good and evil, done here below, are not made manifest in this world; the justice of God, hindering us from seeing them, allows us only to have a presentiment of them. There is one thing certain,--that wherever in this life one meets with faith, love, and devotion, he can be sure also of finding peace of mind and heart, superhuman strength and power.

There is in this world nothing like this for directing the will and making it a power. Love has insight, spiritual presentiments, an innate intelligence, an instinctive knowledge, which amount to infallibility.

Wherever love is found, and under whatever form it appears, when one meets it, one recognizes his king. The animal, raised and animated by love, becomes human. Maternal tenderness, devotion, and fidelity ennoble it. There is nothing sadder in this world, nothing more repulsive, than a life blasted by selfishness and hatred, by the voluntary separation of one being from the duties and interests of others.

The world is framed and bound together by this great tie of love, which makes it one, entire and lasting; and the heart in which no love exists is excluded from the family of God.

Love had sufficed to transform, to strengthen, to rejuvenate Iermola, this weak and poor old man; it had come to the brink of the tomb to give him a new life and to give him more strength than he had had in his youth. You ask me perhaps why I have chosen a being so small and so weak as the representative of a feeling so sublime and generous. But he who has love in his heart is never either small or weak. As for the rest, I shall here repeat the Latin axiom, *Natura maxime miranda in minimis*. This truth was not made to be perceived only by the microscopic world of learned men and naturalists; in the moral world there are very many opportunities to apply it.

But to return to the moment when that fine potter's clay was found at Popielnia,--a great event in the life of our old man,--everything came to him abundantly and without trouble; everything appeared easy to him, although neither the village people nor strangers could understand how an old and almost decrepit man had been able to learn a trade of which until then he had been entirely ignorant. But with man, will is everything; and when a powerful feeling directs it, to what elevated aim may not the two attain?

The clay was tried at Malyczki, where Procope's pottery kiln was all ready for use; and when Procope had turned a couple of pots out of the new clay, after marking them, he put them in among his others. As soon as the kiln was cold, they hastened to take out the pots and examine them, and found two which were white, pretty, light, and resonant, quite different from those made of the Malyczki clay; the sight of them alone threw Procope and all who were present into

ecstasies of delight.

Neither of them had cracked during the firing, and when they were both taken to Popielnia and put in the widow's cottage, every one in the village came to see the wonderful things; and Iermola, perfectly beside himself, hugged the two jugs and wept.

After this it was easy enough to come to an understanding with Procope with regard to the apprenticeship to the trade, the construction of the kiln, setting up the wheel, and other necessary implements; the most difficult part of the business was conciliating the terrible steward Hudny, whose permission was indispensable before digging the clay or building the kiln in the garden. Fortunately, the steward's wife proposed to make something by this new industry. One of the new pots was given her to try; and after that Hudny put no more insurmountable obstacles in the way of the manufacturers. Not being willing, however, to depart from his long-established custom, he gave Iermola to understand that he would be obliged to pay him cash if he expected to obtain permission to work at his trade. So many obligations, so many necessary expenses now overwhelmed the future potter,--who was still unacquainted with his future trade,--that he scarcely knew how he should be able to undertake it. Procope was not willing to give him his time for nothing; the establishment, the tiles, the different instruments, and the digging of the clay were all sources of expense. The poor man's room was now too small; he had to repair, as well as he could, another one, which was next to it. All these preparations caused much loss of time; and the little supply of money was diminished and exhausted with frightful rapidity.

So before the poor man could be in a condition to make anything by his new business, he was compelled to go considerably into debt. Once he thought of using Radionek's money, which he had put away so carefully; but he could not make up his mind to resort to that means. He feared, moreover, and not without reason, lest he should be annoyed by disagreeable conjectures, and exposed perhaps to painful persecutions, if he chanced to allow even one ducat to be seen in his hands.

Fortunately, the widow, while she scratched her ear and shook her head, decided from time to time to open one of her sacks in order to help her old friend, for she was sincerely attached to him as well as to Radionek, the beautiful adopted child. Nevertheless, as the expenses increased, she grew more and more afraid that the whole pottery business would be a failure; and she frequently reproached herself for having encouraged the old man to choose that trade.

Procope, whom the old chief of squadron had ordered into his presence, telling him in plain terms that he expected Iermola's business to be successful, had set himself bravely to work, hoping, however, secretly to derive considerable profit for himself.

As for Mr. Steward Hudny, Iermola paid him twenty florins for permission to dig clay and build a kiln. Then he was obliged to hire two workmen to fit up and plaster another room. A fortnight from that time old Iermola hauled, mixed, and prepared the clay, turned and dried his pots, and was at last ready to fire the first pottery which had ever been manufactured in Popielnia. Procope undertook to watch the fire; and the first burning succeeded so well that on the whole there were very few pots injured.

Then when all the pots had been carried in and ranged round the room, the eyes of the two old men sparkled with delight, their handiwork looked so good and so pretty, was so resonant, so round, and so neat, and promised to be so good and solid. The pots stood the second firing splendidly, and as novelties are the rage even in a village, at the expiration of a few days they were all sold out,--not one jug or dish was left. The profits of the sales, it is true, were not sufficient to pay off all the debts; but the cossack's widow received a part of what was due her, the old man kept some for himself, Procope made a feast with the portion which came to him, the steward's wife pocketed her share, and Iermola, justly proud, entertained brilliant hopes for the future.

In the midst of all these worries Iermola never lost sight of little Radionek, and always kept him in his arms as much as possible. The child gave less trouble every day; one could almost see him grow. His intelligence developed; and it was evident already that he would one day be a charming frolicsome child. In his busiest moments Iermola intrusted him to Horpyna, who was always glad to have him; but he never allowed him to spend the night under a strange roof, for he was too lonely without him. When the baby was away, the poor goat did not know what to do with herself. If she stayed with the baby, she missed the old man; if she followed Iermola, she would bleat sadly as if calling for Radionek.

Fortunately, the first hours spent in the stupid lessons of his apprenticeship passed so rapidly that Iermola became convinced of the truth of the proverb, "It is not the saints who make the pots boil." Thanks to his quick mind, he learned rapidly the first principles of his art; but the turning and sizing of pots, the manipulation and preparation of the clay, were far more easy to comprehend than the manner of arranging the pottery in the kiln and managing the fire. The care necessary to keep the fire moderate, to prevent its going out, and to extinguish it at the proper time, so that the pots should not be burned too much, was the greatest difficulty of all for him,--a difficulty which could only be overcome by long habit and experience.

Procope, who was anxious to make himself very necessary to the old man, only half revealed to him the secrets of his art, which in great measure Iermola was therefore obliged to guess at, and

only learned the truth after long groping in the dark. His strong and tenacious will enabled him to concentrate all the faculties of his mind on this one object; and this was a great help to him.

By the time the winter was over, and spring once more clothed in verdure and flooded with water the shores of the river Horyn, when the mariners again appeared on its banks with their rafts, Iermola had really, in every sense of the word, become a potter; his whole stock of pottery was sold at once to the carpenters and woodcutters in the forest. They literally grabbed for them; and the steward's wife was seriously angry because none were left for her, and the old man was obliged to give up even the small dishes he had kept for himself.

Meantime little Radionek grew and developed every day, and possessed every grace and beauty which were necessary to delight a father's heart.

He already began to call Iermola by that dear name, and this brought the tears to the old man's eyes; the child was learning to walk alone, and no longer needed the old goat, for he could now manage to eat a crust of bread, and the good Jewess was only needed to amuse him.

At the end of the year a little kid was added to the family; Iermola was not vexed at this, although he was sometimes much displeased to see that the Jewess bestowed her attention upon her young offspring to the neglect of his adopted son. Radionek played with his innocent, frolicsome little brother in such a pretty, sportive fashion that the old man, as he watched them, often held his sides for laughter, and this furnished him excellent reasons for going and embracing his child and being grateful to the kid.

Thus into this solitary ruin, which a year before had been dreary and almost deserted, hope, joy, and life had entered with the foundling child. One would scarcely have recognized Iermola, he seemed so much younger, and was so active, contented, and clever. The portion of the inn which he inhabited had been repaired and carefully covered, and another room furnished next his; the garden where the kiln stood was shut in by a small, very solid gate and by carefully trimmed hedges; it was evident that the good man was gradually acquiring comfort and competency. Iermola had employed a servant to help him and to take care of the goats; he was a little orphan about ten years old named Huluk. It was impossible for Iermola to do everything by himself; and now he had enough to pay for the child's services.

He really needed a woman in the cabin; but the widow came often and overlooked the household. Besides, his bread was baked, and his linen washed and mended at her house; and it was she also who prepared most of his dishes and undertook to make provision for the winter.

Every time that Iermola boasted to her of the results of his trade, she reminded him of her broken pot, which had first suggested the idea to him; and there is no telling how many times she told the story over, and commented on the accident. Providence had also granted her what she desired most; for her Horpyna had at last made a very brilliant marriage.

The young secretary who had for so long been attentive to Horpyna and made her frequent visits, after much hesitation, reflection, and a great struggle with his feelings, had concluded to listen only to the voice of his heart and asked her mother's consent to their marriage. This was not exactly the person the widow would have chosen, though her daughter was marrying an officer and making a brilliant match. She would have greatly preferred that she should have married a rich peasant, a farmer, who would probably have lived near her. But the young man would not hear of such a plan; he was preparing himself to be a surveyor, and was ambitious. The widow therefore was obliged to give up her daughter, and live alone at Popielnia on the small estate which the old lord had given her. The wedding was very elegant; and the next day after, when the young man, impatient to be settled in his own house, had carried off his bride, the widow, not being able to remain all alone in her deserted cottage, where everything reminded her of her daughter, went and spent the whole day with her friend Iermola. From that time she rarely passed a day without going to his house, for she could talk freely with him about her dear Horpyna, of her utter loneliness and her sad old age; and as Radionek at such times touched her heart and distracted her mind, she gradually became very fond of him.

XII.

PATERNAL HAPPINESS

We now pass over an interval of ten years before we again seek the child and old man whom we left growing and working, and dreaming hopefully of the future.

Everything in the neighbourhood had changed very much, and nothing more than Radionek, whom no one would have recognized, he had grown so tall and handsome.

The peasants, whose children, early accustomed to rough work, grow slowly and seem with difficulty to get away from the earth, looked upon Iermola's adopted son with astonishment, and shook their heads, saying that he must owe all his strength, elegance, and beauty to the vigorous blood and strong constitution which he inherited by birth. None of his little companions in the village could be compared to him; and it was certain that none of them had such a father as his, or had been, like him, surrounded from the cradle by constant care and tender love. Radionek's appearance attracted every one at once; his features were fine and remarkably regular, his face rather too oval, his nose straight, his mouth small and expressive, his eyes brown and full of fire and life, and his whole countenance full of pride and happiness, sensibility and strength. His hair was cut close above his forehead after the Polesian fashion, thus revealing still more the nobility of his expression by exposing his brow; his beautiful, fine long hair, which had been allowed to grow on the back of his head, fell in golden curls upon his shoulders. Seeing the elegance of his vigorous and supple body, one could scarcely believe that he had been deprived of his natural nourishment when an infant. The breadth of his shoulders foretold a figure of unusual height and strength; the simplicity of his education, which had early accustomed him to rough work, inconveniences of all sorts, and the inclemency of the seasons, had gifted him with the agility, vigour, and elasticity of a young wild animal.

The expression of Radionek's eyes betokened a bright clear mind; he had a firm, frank glance, as though he knew nothing about the struggles and burdens of life, or at least, if he knew of them, did not fear them. The child, young and full of curiosity, lively and tender, animated by pure and ardent sentiments, owed his amiable qualities and his uncommon development to the affectionate heart and tender love of his excellent father. Thus it is that the love of one being is shed upon all who surround him, elevates and ennobles them, and bestows upon them intelligence and strength,—unique and precious gifts which no other power on earth can bring them. Radionek, who felt himself surrounded by Iermola's care and protection, and who from his infancy had seen about him only what was cordial and tender, was accustomed to sweet sentiments, and had imbibed them; he loved all things,—and loving, he was happy. All the inhabitants of the village considered him their nursling; and with the exception of the steward Hudny, who was still at Popielnia, though each year he made preparations to take a large farm, there was not a single person who did not take great pleasure in welcoming and petting the little boy.

In all their plays, in all their undertakings, the children of the village, both girls and boys, obeyed the slightest sign from Radionek; and although he was a little better clothed and was handsomer than any of them, and though he knew more than they did, he never took advantage of his superiority, or even overestimated it. He was pleasant and affable to all, and never wounded any one. It is rare that any real father ever watches over and teaches his child as Iermola watched over and taught Radionek. During his earliest years, he had cared for his body; later, when his ears and his eyes were opened, he began to awaken his soul and to prepare him for the struggles of life.

The instinct of affection had in this respect guided him marvellously; and thus was wrought imperceptibly one of the miracles of life. The master learned and developed along with his pupil. Will had enlarged and softened his heart; feeling had elevated and enlightened his mind. In seeking for the true and the good for his child, Iermola had found them for himself; the chilled, sleeping, half-dead seed had produced fruit, late, but excellent and fine.

The old man, wishing to instruct the child, had been obliged first to learn himself; he had studied, compared, reflected, meditated, prayed, and he had finally learned by the power of love what is rarely accomplished by wit and reason. He knew but little, it is true; but that little was a great deal. The child knew how to read, and read no book but the Bible.

Here it was that he found nourishment, from the healthful source of life.

Besides, the old man, who feared constantly that he might die and leave Radionek entirely orphaned, had taken care to teach him his trade as soon as he had acquired some skill and quickness, and to make him fully acquainted with all the little secrets of his daily work, the knowledge of which gives a man independence and teaches him to depend upon himself. Our peasants are still in that stage of barbarism which belongs to half-civilized people, and which gives them a certain superiority over civilized races, enabling them to supply all their own wants. Even a very young villager knows how to do a great many things. Every day he is obliged to try his skill in some way; he is at once farm-hand, carpenter, miller, architect, mason, dyer, weaver, and in almost any case of urgent necessity he easily succeeds in doing what is needed.

Among people living in a state of higher civilization and bound together by joint responsibility, the case is quite different. Such a mode of living reduces them to real inferiority; the English emigrants who settle as colonists in new countries almost all succumb to the difficulties of a life which is unendurable to them. Not only in large cities, but even in the villages, the necessities of life can all be bought ready-made, and consequently each one knows only one trade; all necessities can be obtained by exchange. It is true that in this way each particular article is skilfully manufactured and sold cheaply, and a profit is made by exchange. We cannot, however, recognize as healthy and beneficial the result of civilization in the exclusive employment of the faculties of man, which in time transforms him into a sort of machine, and if he is thrown out of his place, in the end renders him useless, as a wheel cast from the axle. This evil is only the fatal consequence of the imprudent and excessive division of labour, which offers great advantages

doubtless, but which, carried to an extreme, presents great dangers. In this respect our nation is not yet subject to the prejudices which in the West exercise such a baleful influence.

Iermola, like every peasant of his time, knew therefore a great many things which he had learned in the business and events of ordinary life; and if he did not place these things in the honourable rank of attainments, they nevertheless constituted for him an inestimable treasure.

A potter by trade, and a very skilful potter, he was at the same time a tolerable fisherman, having learned, at first for his own amusement, to use the netting-needle and to set weirs. He used the axe skilfully, was not unacquainted with the different sorts of work necessary in a mill, was an excellent teamster, and knew a great many things in connection with out-of-door work which are usually known only by regular farm-hands.

While the child, during these ten years, had grown wonderfully and become much handsomer, our good Iermola had grown very little older; there was scarcely any noticeable change in his appearance. He stooped perhaps a little more; and sometimes his limbs were stiffer and more weary. He still devoted himself constantly to his adopted son, and worked in his pottery; and this continual activity kept up his courage and strength. One of the most important secrets of the higher knowledge of life--which unfortunately is not learned from the lips of a master--is a healthful and constant employment. Many old men have prematurely given up life, which they might have sensibly prolonged if they had not allowed the fire to grow cold and die out. In the laborious life of peasants all the hours of the day are occupied; the body does not languish in weak repose; motion strengthens and preserves it. With us, very often intellectual languor and idle effeminacy kill the body, formed to move and act; the unused organs fall into a sort of atrophy; the intellectual faculties even, reduced to inaction, wear out and are destroyed; we sleep and sleep, and finally we cannot waken. Iermola, on the contrary, lived a life of labour and motion; consequently he did not seem to grow old, he at most only faded.

In fact, the manufacture of his pottery was not very laborious, neither were the household duties which devolved upon him; Radionek and Huluk spared him all the most tiresome work. But his life was not an idle one; and he did not give up a single hour more to rest during the day under pretexts of fatigue or great old age.

The deep peace which reigned in his mind and heart contributed wonderfully toward preserving him in such a healthy and happy condition. He could not even imagine that any one would some day come and demand the child of him, and have the right to take him away. A few years more and he would see Radionek, his darling child, a man, comfortably settled, married, no longer needing help, flying with his own wings. The trade in pottery increased daily. Old Procope had died a few years after Iermola had ended his apprenticeship with him; and his pottery kiln, managed by a young servant, had yielded only more and more indifferent articles till it had finally fallen entirely into disuse.

But Iermola had no need of this favourable circumstance to dispose of his pottery, for which there was always an excellent market; but he was none the less well pleased to find that the town of Malyczki was henceforth supplied from Popielnia. Moreover, the vessels made from his excellent clay were so solid and so light, had, in fact, so many attractive qualities, that it was not necessary to recommend them very much; it was not even necessary to carry them very far, but only to the little neighbouring town, where the Jews and hawkers bought them up at once. The potters in the vicinity made only extremely fragile ware, of a dark, heavy sort of clay; consequently, as soon as white pottery was put upon the market, there was a rush for it, and it sold for much better prices than the other.

Iermola made only pots and dishes and housekeeping utensils of different sizes, shaping them always after the long-used models, and never thought of inventing other forms; but Radionek, who had now grown to be quite a big boy and was becoming every day more active, inquiring, and mischievous, began to weary of turning and burning perpetually the same vessels of the same old-fashioned shape. At first he began to vary the stripes and the red festoons which are always found on the pottery of the country; he amused himself by getting up new and more complicated and elegant designs, which he constantly altered. Then he took it into his head to give new and less simple forms to his dishes,--to make plates, pitchers, and little twin vases, of a quite new curve and design. Finally, he undertook to manufacture clay toys for children, and even small figures of horses, which also served as whistles, thus carrying out without knowing it the old Hindoo tradition; for in the old Indian land small horses made of baked clay are still used as talismans in the fields and gardens. All his playthings were badly baked and not very successful; but the old man had not the heart to forbid his dear Radionek such childish amusements.

When for the first time all these new shapes and designs of pottery ware were taken to the fair and displayed in the market, the good women gathered round them and shook their heads long and gravely. Such novelties frightened them and seemed useless; they were accustomed only to the old sizes and shapes, and severely criticised these innovations. But these little fancy articles, being cheap and amusing, pleased the children and young girls; the rich villagers bought for their children the little horses and twin vases instead of *obwarzanki*^[6] and honey cakes; and by the time the fair was over, the whole supply was well sold. Iermola, highly delighted, smiled as he stooped down and kissed Radionek's forehead; and the boy clapped his hands, jumped up, and threw his arms around Iermola's neck.

But at this same fair our Radionek spied some glazed porringers and plates, some saucepans which were of a beautiful green colour inside, and other utensils ornamented with a brilliant vitreous glazing which Iermola and he did not know how to give to their wares; and the boy began to feel anxious and somewhat envious.

They returned home; Radionek was quite gloomy.

"What is the matter? Should you not, on the contrary, be rejoicing?" said Iermola to him. "Your little designs have been successful beyond your expectations; why are you making yourself miserable, my child?"

The child looked up at him and embraced him in silence. "See here, father," said he, after a moment, "when I think of all those beautiful glazed things, I cannot sleep."

"Those glazed things? You wish to make some like them? And what good would that do? Our wares, such as they are, sell well, thank God! In order to make glazed dishes, you must have another kind of clay, and work it in another way, and perhaps use other implements; that would give us a great deal of trouble. Why bother our heads with it all?"

"But, father, you did not see how much the merchants charged for their glazed porringers. And how beautiful they were, all painted with different-coloured flowers, and so solid and neat-looking! The people said that nothing one might put into them would stain them, as is the case with other kinds, and also that it is much less trouble to keep them clean. Now, father, why should not we make them also?"

"Good Lord! what sort of an idea have you taken into your head?" cried Iermola, with a sigh, for he was content with his present life, and desired no other. "You do not know, my child, how difficult it is. As for me, it is too late for me to learn new things; and for you, it is too soon. If you desire it very much, you can learn when you are a man."

To this Radionek made no reply. He kept to himself the earnest desire which he had conceived; and though in the bottom of his heart he never forgot the beautiful glazed pottery, he spoke no more about it, for fear of worrying the old man.

But the good father desired above all things to gratify his child's wishes, although he did not sympathize with his youthful hopes, which might lead to such bitter disappointment if the enterprise was unsuccessful. Good Iermola therefore resolved to spare neither time nor pains until he could somehow make that unfortunate glazed pottery; and as he never decided upon any important matter without consulting his neighbour the widow, he went out one evening to ask her advice.

In this other house also, the ten years which had passed had brought many noticeable changes, which had come about gradually and almost insensibly; the widow had lost some of her strength, but she continued to manage actively her house and farm. Horpyna, now the wife of a steward, lived a few miles away; having begun life making her own dresses and wearing a silk handkerchief on her head, she now wore bonnets and hats, and was not quite happy when her mother came to see her, because she wished to pass as the daughter of a gentleman. She rarely came to Popielnia; and when she did come, it was always because she had some request to make of her mother. The old widow of Harasym was always thankful for these short and rare visits, and was always ready to give anything Horpyna asked, provided she had the comfort of seeing her daughter and her grandchildren. When very soon Horpyna would prepare to depart and would not consent to leave one of her children with her mother, the poor old woman would burst into tears, and for several days she would remain seated silently in front of her stove, scorching her face and swallowing her tears; but lest she should bring shame upon her daughter, she regarded her wishes and never went to her house. This continual solitude and constant longing had rendered the widow much sadder than formerly; she found her only consolation in the companionship of Iermola, to whom she could speak of Horpyna and make her lamentations. He in his turn talked to her of Radionek, and in any important matter always sought the advice and experience of his old friend.

So at this moment, when the question of undertaking the manufacture of glazed pottery arose, he hastened to take counsel of her, leaving Radionek and Huluk busy about some work in the shop.

"Well, what news have you brought from the market?" asked the widow. "Did my Horpyna happen to be there?"

"Yes, she was there," said Iermola. "One is scarcely able to recognize her, she has become such a fine lady; she was driving in a painted carriage with two horses and handsome leather harness. They put up at the hotel, and came out to the fair grounds to make purchases."

"And she did not ask you anything about me?" sighed the old woman.

"Of course,--of course she did; how could she have failed to do so? She charged me to give you her love, and she called to me from her carriage for the express purpose; she patted my little Radionek's cheeks."

"And did she have any of her children with her?"

"No, not one."

And this exchange of question and answer would have continued endlessly had not the widow been struck with the expression of anxiety and grief upon her neighbour's face.

"But what is the matter with you? Are you sick, old man?" said she.

"Ah! you are right," answered Iermola, sighing and seating himself on the bench; "I have another great trouble."

"Well, well! tell me about it. We will see what can be done."

"Ah! this will be a difficult matter to remedy. My youngster, who is obstinate and impetuous as any crazy young thing, has seen the glazed pottery at the fair; and now he has taken it into his head to manufacture some of it, and I cannot possibly make him give up the idea."

"Well, did I not tell you so?"

"What did you tell me?"

"Why, don't you remember? When he began to make his little horses, and his little queer-shaped jugs which scarcely held a pint apiece, I predicted that by the end of the year he would be wishing to make beautiful fine pottery."

"Well, it has happened as you said," answered Iermola, "and now it is impossible to make him listen to reason. I have said what I could to him, but that does not prevent my being anxious to please him; and I really do not know how to do it."

"Why, go and examine the glazed ware closely."

"Ah, mother, I would willingly do that; but it would not help me at all. It is not difficult to turn the dishes; but to glaze them is a very difficult matter, because several drugs must be mixed together for that purpose, and besides, one must know how long to bake them. My eyes are not very good now, and neither is my memory," sighed the old man. "But if you only knew, mother, how much I would like to please my child!"

"But how can you do it?"

"I do not know yet at all; but even if one cannot succeed, one can always try."

"Yes, I am sure of that," answered the widow, with a smile; "how can you possibly refuse your child anything? I know all about that, you see. I was just so about my Horpyna; we scold and fret, but we end by doing what they wish. Consequently you will go, my poor old man, to learn to make the fine glazed pottery."

"Yes, certainly I shall go," sighed Iermola. "Only I would not like the child to know about it. If I should not succeed, it would trouble him very much, but if I could only learn all by myself-- Good Lord, how glad I would be!"

"That's just the way I used to do,--just the way," cried the widow. "Ah, my God! I know all about it. But tell me, where would you go?"

"I would take a little money and go and look up one or two of the potters who sold the glazed ware at the fair; they might teach me if I paid them. If I did not succeed at once, I would take the child; he would understand at once. The only thing I fear is that they would drive me away. How could I propose such a thing to them,--to come to them to learn for the purpose of taking away their living?"

"Ah! you are right; you might not get along so easily perhaps as you did with Procopie; but Nad syrotojn Boh z kalitojn,"^[7] she added, "and with the help of Providence, you may be able to succeed."

"That is what I think," said Iermola, rising to take leave of the widow. "To-morrow I will pretend to have a little business, and will go to town; please, neighbour, while I am gone, have an eye upon Huluk and Radionek, and do not let them cut up any pranks. They would just as soon go out on the river in a leaky boat or do some other such silly thing."

"Oh, no; they are very quiet, reasonable boys."

"Yes, certainly they are, thank God; but they are so hot-blooded. If a notion strikes them, they are capable of getting lost in the forest, or jumping into the river. May God preserve us from any such misfortune!"

"But it will be hard to keep them near me."

"Certainly; but you can see what they do, and warn them, neighbour."

So saying, the two old people separated, and Iermola immediately announced to the boy that the Jews in the little town owed him some money for his pottery, and had told him to come for it after the fair was over; and that as he wished to collect all the little sums which were due him, he perhaps would be obliged to remain away some days.

He then enjoined upon both boys to be very good, and work well during his absence, and not to go near the river, or wander in the forest.

"Are you going to walk?" Radionek asked him.

"What do you mean? I surely shall not go in a carriage," answered the old man, smilingly.

"But couldn't you hire a wagon?"

"How could I? There is not a single horse in the whole village, except Chwedko's mare, which he would not lend for anything in the world; and as for being dragged along by oxen, I would rather walk. Besides, my legs swell when I sit all the time, and it will not do me any harm to stand up a while."

Poor old Iermola did not remember his age, and attributed the swelling of his limbs to his sedentary occupation, while it was really the effect of age and weakness. He was never willing to spend anything upon himself; and from the moment his business began to pay him anything, he put by all he could spare for Radionek, so that if he should die, the child would not be left penniless. He would certainly have preferred to use Chwedko's mare; but that would have cost him something, and Iermola was extremely economical in everything that concerned himself.

So Radionek was unable to persuade him to hire a wagon; but toward evening he sent Huluk to the village secretly, to learn whether any one was going to town. Then, as he had laid by a few coppers, the product of his work, he charged Huluk, if he found no other opportunity, to hire Chwedko's mare, enjoining it upon the old man to say that having himself some business in the town, he offered a seat gratis to his neighbour Iermola. Everything happened as fortunately as possible. Chwedko's wagon was not hired out for the next day; and the old man, having received two florins for his trouble, engaged positively to feign and lie. Accordingly, by the end of the evening Radionek had everything arranged; and when Huluk returned from the village Radionek went and kissed the old man's hand.

"Father," said he, as he did so, "we have just met Chwedko; he is going to town to-morrow with his mare, and he says that he is lonely by himself and wants you to go with him. In this way it will cost you nothing, good father."

"Chwedko? Where? How?" asked Iermola, in great surprise, as he embraced Radionek. "You are joking, my child, aren't you?"

"No, indeed; ask Huluk," replied Radionek, who exercised over his young valet an authority born of intelligence and affection.

"Oh, certainly not," answered the boy. "I understood him plainly, I assure you; he even begged that you should not start till he comes, for to-morrow, before day, he will be at the door of your cabin."

Iermola bent his head in token of consent, and after that was anxious only concerning the purpose of his journey.

At the bottom of his heart he was quite content to go with Chwedko and so rest his old limbs. He embraced Radionek once more, and then went to bed, always thinking about the beautiful glazed pottery.

Radionek, who was now silent on the subject, thought of it as much. Although he no longer spoke about it, lest he should worry the old man, in his dreams he was constantly handling the large dishes and beautifully glazed pitchers, all painted red and green and white, black and yellow, so as to make them bright and beautiful and attractive. The poor child wearied his brain trying to discover the secret of those preparations which to him seemed like magic, but having no idea, no suggestions on the subject, it was impossible for him to come anywhere near the truth; he could only sigh and worry and grow weary.

XIII.

THE GRAY MARE

The morning of the next day was clear and bright; from early dawn the sky had been perfectly clear and radiant, which is the sign of a storm. A few fleecy white clouds hung above the forest,--an indication that a shower of rain would fall toward evening; the sun was burning hot; there was not a breath of air. Chwedko was as good as his word, and appeared with his horse and wagon at the appointed hour; he did more than this,--he carefully kept Radionek's secret. He went into the cottage to announce his arrival and light his pipe, calling Iermola hurriedly, as if he had gone out of his way, and complained of being obliged to go on the journey.

"Come, father, come; be quick! Are you ready? When there are two of us, the road will not seem so long. The Devil has sent me on a trip to the city; and the road is very long, and it is so hot. What will it be at noon? We must hurry. Sit down, sit down; do not be ceremonious!"

Iermola took his little bag of money and hid it in his bosom, and was then ready to start.

"Come, let us be off, neighbour."

The two old men sat down in the wagon on a bundle of hay, and Chwedko's gray mare, fastened by her collar surmounted by a bow of wood ornamented with little bells, having cast a glance at her master, decided to start, and went trotting through the village.

In the ordinary life of our lower classes, the creatures which aid them in their work and supply their needs form a portion of their society; the pet lamb, goat, cow, calf, horse, even the goose and hen of the courtyard become companions and sincere friends. How many cares and regrets are had on their account, and how much trouble they give!

From time to time they quarrel, fight, and injure one another; but if one of the household animals falls sick or dies, there is lamentation and weeping. Chwedko's gray mare, of which we should here make mention, for it richly deserves it, belonged to the class of the elect, with whom it is difficult to live, but who, nevertheless, cannot be dispensed with. Gifted with numberless good qualities and terrible faults, she constituted the entire wealth of her master; she was at once his consolation and his perpetual torment, and played a most important part in his life.

In the first place, she was almost the only animal of her kind in this village of Polesia, where the soil was cultivated almost entirely by the aid of oxen; she was consequently well known, respected, and depended upon to execute all pressing commissions, for which one was obliged to hire Chwedko and his horse. The old man, thanks to his gray mare, earned not less than three hundred florins a year; that is to say, three times more than the animal was worth, by taking merchandise to the town and hiring his wagon to the Jews. It might be said with truth that it was Chwedko's mare who fed her master. As for the mare herself, she ate very little. In summer she had no food but the fresh green grass, on which she browsed along the roadsides; in winter a little aftermath, straw from gleanings of grain, a handful of hay, very rarely a small bag of oats, sufficed for the poor beast, which was sober from necessity. Of medium size, old as the hills, healthy, and inured to fatigue, with a sharp backbone and strong neck, the gray mare possessed a bodily vigour which was only comparable to that of her character. When moderately loaded, she would start off at her little trotting pace, and continue the same indefatigably so long as she caught no sight of a stick; but strike her with it once, and from that moment no human power could force her to budge from the spot. Chwedko consequently only carried his stick as a matter of form, and because no villager ever left his cabin without one; but he took care never to show it to his gray, and if when a little tipsy, he inadvertently gave her a touch with it, he knew full well that he should be punished for it by remaining for at least half an hour, nailed to the spot.

The mare's instinct, rendered perfect by long experience, had become infallible; she always knew where her master was going, carried him, guided him, avoided the ruts and muddy places, chose the best roads, and stopped where it was necessary to stop, with a precision which was marvellous,--for the reins, as well as the stick, well-worn, were almost past use, and were there only as a matter of form. Chwedko talked with his mare as if he were talking to a man, only employing at such times a more sonorous voice, which the mare at once recognized as being intended for her alone. He praised her, petted her, encouraged her, and loved to talk to her so well that it had given rise to a proverb in the village where he lived; whenever any one told the same story frequently he would be jeered at and told, "Ah, that is Chwedko's mare."

The gray mare, naturally very grateful, knew no one but her master, and would not allow any one else to approach her, she was so obstinate and cross; he only could drive her or manage her. All the village people knew her as well as they had known Iermola's goat, which was now dead; as they knew Hudny's chestnut horse and Madam Szmula's black cow. A true type of the peasant horse, lean, small, bony, short and thickset, with heavy well-built legs and a full set of teeth, like all September colts, whose teeth always indicate youth, the gray, when starting out on an expedition, invariably limped with her left foot; but this slight infirmity disappeared when she became animated and warmed up.

She had a large head and one eye, slightly injured, and a rough coat; in many places the hair had come off, from a habit she had of rubbing herself against the stable wall. Her tail and mane were very thin, and much tangled, and to look at her one would not have given three coppers for her; yet nevertheless more than one fat nag, well-cared-for, well-fed, and handsome in appearance, would not have been able to compete with her in strength and endurance. She could go the whole day without eating, contenting herself with drinking; for the peasants and Jews

water their horses six times a day, thinking thus to supply the place of hay, which they use so sparingly. Hunger was for her a thing usual and to be scorned; in the evening she satisfied her empty stomach with a little hay and a handful of oat-straw. She was not dainty; she did not care for bedding; she would find grass to browse upon in places so dry and barren that a goose even would not pasture there; she only insisted that no one should offend her.

When she scented a bag of oats anywhere, she invariably succeeded in getting at it and eating it; she did not fail to eat up the bark strings, finding them both pleasant and profitable. Whenever a strange horse ate his oats in her presence, she always succeeded in getting them away from him, even if it was necessary to fight for it; and she knew equally well how to defend herself against men and dogs, either with her teeth or her heels. Strangers could only approach her very cautiously, for she was always ready to salute them with a kick. This inestimable creature had already served Chwedko at least twenty years, and could not have been less than five years old when she was first put in harness; still up to this time, with the exception of a slight blowing, she had no defects.

Chwedko and Iermola, being seated in the wagon, and having lighted their pipes, began to talk together in a friendly fashion, without paying the slightest attention to the gray mare, who took upon herself the entire charge of keeping the road.

"Do you remember, neighbour, the day I made you buy the goat?" said the former, smiling. "Ah, ha! that was a good bargain. Szmula has never yet forgiven me for it."

"May God reward you, Chwedko! it was an excellent bargain. The goat is now dead, it is true; but she brought up the child for me."

"Yes, and he is a very pretty boy now; God bless him!"

"I should say he is pretty,--pink and rosy and fresh, as fresh as a strawberry. Ah, what a good child he is, what a dear child!" added Iermola; "it would take a year's time to tell how intelligent he is, and how prudent and honest and amiable."

"Just like my mare, if you'll excuse me," interrupted Chwedko; "my gray is a real treasure. Come, get up, my old woman; gee, gee, my dove, get up! And what an idea it was for you to become a potter in your old age!"

"Bless me! I had to make bread for the child."

"Certainly; but do you not think his parents will come for him some day?"

"And who would dare to come and take him from me?" cried Iermola, much agitated. "If they are coming to take him away, why should they ever have abandoned him?"

"One never can tell about these things," said Chwedko. "Sometimes parents abandon their children forever; but sometimes they come back and say, 'He is ours; you must give him back to us.'"

Iermola, still more agitated, trembled at these words.

"How is he theirs?" he cried. "How? The poor little innocent, did they not cast him away, throw him down under a hedge? And who picked him up, reared him, rocked, petted, and fed him? He is now more mine than theirs."

"You think so? Bless me! I know nothing about it," said Chwedko. "But I should figure it out another way. And have you ever told the little fellow how he happened to come to you?"

"I have kept nothing secret from him; moreover, the whole matter is known through the village. Some one would have told the child; what was the good of keeping it from him? I told him the whole story as soon as he could understand me; and he assured me at once that if his parents should now come for him, he would not leave me."

"He has a good heart."

"A heart of gold, I tell you, my little eaglet, my Radionek."

"Now tell me why you are going to town," said Chwedko, after a moment's pause.

"Must I tell you the real truth?" answered Iermola.

"Of course; but what notion have you taken up?"

"Well, I am not going to the next town; I am going farther."

"Really? Your little boy told me that you were going to collect your money from the Jews."

"Yes, I told him that; but I have another plan."

And here Iermola heaved a deep sigh, and then related to his companion the story of the

glazed pottery, to which Chwedko only replied by a scornful laugh and a shrug of his shoulders.

"Ah, ah! your little fellow wants the moon. And since you are contented with your business, why not stick to it without running after new ideas? Sometimes, neighbour, people turn fools with trying to be too wise. You make simple, old-fashioned pottery, and you find purchasers, because even the poorest creature cannot do without some of them, the most wretched must have a pot to boil his vegetable stew. But it will be altogether a different thing with your glazed ware; you will be obliged to go to town to sell it, for no one will buy it in the village. The Jews will buy it from you and pay you a poor price. At the fair one makes little; it will be quite a different thing."

"But the child wishes to do it so very much."

"You will see that this will not help you at all."

"Perhaps it may be so; but how can I do it?"

"You may try, of course, for you will not mind the time. But do you believe that these potters will be sufficiently tempted by your money to give you the secrets of their art?"

"But I will pay them well."

"They are not so foolish as to give a florin for a penny. Do they not know that you want to take the bread out of their mouths? You are not going to learn for your amusement,--that is clear."

At these words, Iermola seemed troubled and bowed his head.

"All that is very true," said he; "but when once God has helped you, He never abandons you till the end. I hesitated very much before, when I went to see Procope; I did not even know where to go to find clay. Yet it was found, and everything succeeded, and now--well, something will turn up."

Something will turn up, is the great unanswerable argument of our poor people, to which they have recourse when all others fail,--an argument which answers for everything and puts an end to all difficulties, for it tacitly expresses faith in Providence and confidence in the intervention of God.

At this moment the gray mare, being accustomed always to eat her small ration of hay in front of the inn, situated about a third of the way and in the midst of the wood, did not go past the well-known place, but stopped of her own accord. Chwedko also got down here regularly to drink a small glass of brandy and light his pipe.

He felt, however, some confusion, seeing that the gray had stopped without his permission; he dared not, in Iermola's presence, go and take his dram without any excuse, but he got down from the wagon and threw a handful of hay to the mare.

"How warm it is!" said he, as he shook his pipe.

"It is indeed; the sun burns one."

"Would you like to go into the dining-room for a moment? Sometimes, when I feel as if there was something heavy on my stomach, I take a little dram."

"How about the heat?"

"Oh, a little brandy is refreshing."

"Very well, neighbour, let's take a drink; I will pay for it," said Iermola, as he got down from the wagon.

The inn in question was one among others where the Jew was constantly on the watch for the peasant, his poor dupe.

The Israelite who lived here did not hesitate to avow that he made his living by selling brandy. There was no courtyard in front of the inn and no stable for horses.

The house was crooked and broken-down, half in ruins and considerably sunken in the ground; but the narrow space in front of it showed at a glance that it was much frequented.

It was situated at a cross-road where three ways met, in the midst of an old forest of oak and undergrowth of alder, visibly damaged by the wheels of wagons, and offering a sight to travellers which at once explained the history of Dubowka (this was the name of the inn hidden among the brush-wood). All around there was nothing but remains of straw, hay, grain, bark, bones, bits of bread, egg-shells, fragments of broken china,--to say nothing of the different spots which showed plainly that many of the teams which stopped in front of the inn of Iuk remained there longer than they had intended.

Upon these remains of hay, straw, millings, and sometimes grain, the Jew's cow and goats, accustomed to live by plunder, grew fat, for as soon as a wagon appeared, one could be sure to

see one of these animals steal from behind the house, with the step of a wolf, and retire quietly with the straw or hay upon which they proposed to feed. It was useless to try to drive them away even with a stick; in fact, they ran off whenever the door was opened, but returned again immediately with the double persistency of hunger and gluttony.

The old labourers, being well acquainted with the habits of the place, never left their wagons in front of the inn without leaving their wives or children standing, whip in hand, to drive off the bold invaders. But these impertinent creatures were so sly! if for a moment the children would turn their heads or the mothers begin to scold, one of the goats would jump up on his hind-feet at the back of the wagon and do much damage. Iuk, the owner of the inn, was a little Jew of the very worst kind; lame and quarrelsome, a fool, but a fool after the manner of Sologne, avaricious and mean, in every sense of the words, he cheated and stole from the peasants, without the slightest consideration or shame, and often ended his quarrels with them by fighting with his fists, knowing very well that he would make them repay him in money for every bruise or blow he might receive; and whether beaten or beating, he would always manage to get the advantage.

How he succeeded in living night and day in such endless tumult and turmoil, in constant fuss and noise, never closing his doors, and only lying down to sleep about daybreak on an empty bench, is something that never will be understood.

Iuk knew every one, having studied carefully not only each individual in his own community, but also each one of those belonging to the small neighbouring towns. As soon as the wagons of the peasants of the vicinity stopped before his door, he knew at the first glance whether he must be ready to receive them with a smile, a blow of his fist, a low bow, or a scornful expression.

"Those from Popielnia," said he, "are all great lords; they must always have an onion or a clove of garlic to eat with their bit of bread, and almost every one of them buys a buttered roll. Those from Malyczki are good workmen, but better drunkards; and from Wiezbera they are all Bohemians, all thieves."

The Jew, having seen from his window the gray head of Chwedko's mare, recognized at once the custom which was coming to him; and as there was at that moment no one in the inn, he came out upon the door-sill.

"Ha! ha! ha!" said he, stretching his limbs, "here is Chwedko going to the city again. What business have you there, my good fellow, that you go there so often? And you also, old potter? This is not market-day. You have some engagement down there, doubtless."

"Yes, you are right; an engagement."

"Meantime, give us a glass of good brandy."

"Why do you say good?" returned Iuk, bridling up. "Do I ever have any bad at my house? There is none at the house of Szmula, your great lord, like mine, you well know; and he pours it out half water, at that."

"That is all true; Iuk's brandy is real good, pure gin," said Chwedko, spitting as he spoke, for his mouth began to water.

"I tell you there is none in all the neighbourhood like it. Do me the favor to taste it; you will see that only the nobility drink better. Old, fragrant, clear, strong, it is more than twelve years old; I bought it at Bebnow. It cost me dear; but I love what is good, I do,--that is my way."

As they spoke, they entered the room, to which one had to descend as into a cellar, for the wretched building had sunk considerably into the ground. The ceiling almost rested on the heads of the inhabitants; and the well-trodden dirt floor, which took the place of a plank one, had sunk so low that the windows of the inn were, on the outside, on a level with the ground.

The peculiar situation of this old building; the elevation of the small place in front, where the vehicles stopped; the entire absence of paving or any drainage,--all contributed to form before the door a deep black-looking pond which never dried up and which one had to cross by means of stones. The Jewish innkeeper's ducks and geese paddled here at will; and the travellers who frequented the place, as they stooped to pass under the low door, were obliged to cross very cautiously this offensive Black Sea lest they should get soaked above their calves. The Jew had never felt the necessity of remedying this inconvenience. In times of great drought it often happened that the pond thickened up and was transformed into a gluey and almost solid mud-hole; but the first rain that came would dilute it again, and it would extend half over the room. Iuk did not find this the least obstacle to the comfort of domestic life.

In the inner room there were the Jew's wife (a fat, dirty matron with her breast uncovered), his six children of different sizes, a servant, a few goats, some pet chickens and geese, and only one traveller,--a stranger, who wore a coarse woollen cap, and was asleep, sitting on a bench with his head resting on the table. Chwedko, as he entered, slipped upon one of the stones in the mud-hole, splashed the black water all over himself, and swore a terrible oath which wakened the stranger.

The latter wore a costume closely resembling that of the towns-people,--a cloak with lappets

turned back and faced, a green belt, a large hat; and he had an iron-shod stick which he laid down beside him, with his small bundle tied up in a handkerchief. He was still young, apparently scarcely thirty years old, and had a tall, robust figure, and a round red face. He seemed to know nothing of poverty, for gay life and good cheer had left their traces on his brow and eyes; and it was easy to see that he was tipsy, thanks to the good old brandy of Bebnow, for he had scarcely raised his head when he pulled up his mustache and began to sing a tavern song. At this moment Chwedko was plunging and splashing in the mud-hole, which caused the stranger to burst into a loud laugh and shout,--

"Help! help! The gentlemen from Popielnia are drowning!"

Iuk and his people at this also laughed; and the merry fellow, putting his hands on his hips, began to stare impertinently at the two new-comers.

"And how do you know that we are from Popielnia?" asked Iermola.

"Bah! it is not hard to tell that. All the people of Popielnia wear a mark."

"What do you mean? A mark? Do they mark us like sheep with a red cross on our backs?"

"Is it possible that you do not know," answered the stranger, "that the tailors in your village make hoods for you different from any which are made anywhere else in the world?"

From time immemorial, in fact, the hooded *sukmanes* of the inhabitants of Popielnia had been cut and made in a peculiar fashion, which fact Chwedko and Iermola had for the moment forgotten. They also, desiring to preserve the old custom, would never have bought or worn any hood which was not of the exact shape worn by their ancestors.

"And you,--where do you come from?" asked Chwedko of the young man.

"From a country which is beyond the seventh sea of the seventh river, and the seventh mountain," answered the merry joker.

"Ah, ah! Even in that distant country it seems, then, that they know about the people of Popielnia; that is very complimentary to us. But without joking, my brother, tell us from what land the Lord God has led you."

"From Mrozowica, neighbour."

Mrozowica was a large colony of freemen of the lower class, who paid taxes to the Government instead of doing service; it was just there that the potters lived to whom Iermola wished to apply, and the old man felt his heart beat as he heard the name pronounced.

"From Mrozowica?" he repeated eagerly. "And where are you going, if I may ask?"

"I am going over the world as far as my legs will carry me."

"All over the world? Oh, that is very far!"

"Well, yes; but I am tired of staying forever in the same place, sitting on the ground with my legs crossed. I have started out to look for poverty along the road."

"Why seek for it?" said Chwedko. "It comes soon enough of its own accord."

"Let it come. I do not fear it; we will quarrel together," answered the merry stranger.

"Do you happen to be a tailor?" asked Iermola, timidly. "You noticed the shape of our hoods so quickly."

"Why not? Why shouldn't I be a tailor?" answered the fellow, putting his hands on his hips. "Rather ask me what I have not been. I have been a farmer; I have been a blacksmith; I have been a carpenter; I have been a tailor; I have been a dyer, a musician, and a shoemaker. Ta, ta! All those are miserable trades, starving occupations. Now I am no longer so silly; I am going to be a lord."

"That is your idea, is it? Upon my word, you have not made a bad choice," said Chwedko, bursting into a laugh. "Not a bad thought, my brother. I salute you, my lord." And taking off his hat, he bowed down to the ground.

"But it seems to me," said Iermola, "that since you have so soon grown weary of all your different occupations, perhaps you will quickly tire of being a lord."

"Oh, well, then I will turn beggar; it is a fine trade, and I had as soon be one thing as another," answered the fellow as he sang,--

"My stick, it is my friend;
My wallet is my wife."

"Upon my word, this is a merry, pleasant fellow; and we have met him just at the right moment," muttered Iermola. "While the gray is eating her hay, and Chwedko is finishing his onion and his glass of brandy, I can easily learn something about the potters in Mrozowica.--See here, brother," said he, drawing nearer the stranger, "won't you take a glass of brandy?"

"If you will pay for it, why shouldn't I? A Bohemian will hang himself for the sake of company."

"Iuk, give us a good drink of your best Bebnow brandy."

"Give it to us, Iuk, you pagan dog, do you hear?" said the young fellow from Mrozowica.

"You see," said Iermola, drawing nearer, "I am just going to Mrozowica to--"

"Well, take care to take two sticks with you, and sew up your pockets; for they are all thieves and rascals there."

"Ah, you must be joking."

"It is true; ask any one who has ever been there. There is not one honest man there."

"But how about the potters?"

"Bah! they are the worst of all."

"Dear me! I am greatly disappointed."

"Why?"

"Ah! there are a great many reasons which you would not care to hear."

"I really would not advise you to go there," continued the young man. "If you want a cracked pot, you will be sure to find it there."

"But you see that is not what I want."

"What is it you do want, then?"

"I want-I want--" said Iermola, scratching his head.

At this moment Chwedko, who had fortified himself with a good drink of brandy, and who had resolved to serve as interpreter, interrupted the conversation without ceremony.

A sober man always finds it extremely difficult to talk with a man who has been drinking; but nothing is easier than for a tipsy man to come to an understanding with another who is also half intoxicated.

"He wants--you see," murmured Chwedko, in the young fellow's ear--"this Iermola here--is a sort of potter. But he knows nothing--not at all--about glazed pottery; and he would like to learn how to glaze, you see."

"Ta, ta! And why does he go to Mrozowica to learn that?"

"Bless me! where should he go?"

"Why, I can teach him myself. How much will he pay me to do it?"

Iermola and Chwedko, filled with astonishment, stared at each other in silence.

"You are joking, aren't you? Are you a potter yourself?"

"I am the son of a potter, and I worked six years in glazed pottery. But it is a foolish trade; I am tired of it," answered the man from Mrozowica. "Daub yourself with the glazing, black yourself up with the mixtures, roast yourself in the fire,--that is all the pleasure to be found in it. I spit upon it and left; but that does not prevent my having worked a long time with Father Martin, or hinder me from knowing all about glazing, no matter what colour you wish to use. And my pottery was always bright and polished like glass."

"Really?"

"Bless my heart! if you wish it, I will prove it to you."

"How much will you charge me?" said Iermola, with a bright smile.

"How much will you give me?"

Iuk, comprehending that some sort of bargaining was going on in his presence without his being able to know just what it was about, hastened to join the group, planting his snout between the two faces, and fearing lest an opportunity to sell something should slip from under his nose.

"What are you bargaining over there?" he muttered.

"A cat in a sack," answered the fellow from Mrozowica.

"Come, come! why do you joke so?" replied the innkeeper. "What is there for sale? I will buy it."

"They are haggling over the price of glazing pitchers," answered Chwedko.

The Jew, not being able to comprehend, shrugged his shoulders and withdrew a few steps, keeping a watch from his seat by the stove over the traders, who would be obliged to come to him for the drink which would clinch the bargain.

After having haggled sufficiently, they ended the matter by the payment of five roubles. They shook hands, drank a bumper of Bebnow brandy, and Iermola, accompanied by the man from Mrozowica, prepared to return to the village.

"In this case, I shall not go on to the city to-day," muttered Chwedko, somewhat confused; "the rain would certainly catch me on the road."

Iermola and Siepak (that was the name of the newcomer) seated themselves beside Chwedko on the wagon-box, and they returned together to Popielnia, to the great despair of Iuk, who was not able to succeed in getting at the matter, and who vaguely scented under it all a sum of money which was beyond his reach.

Thus it was that the art of glazing pottery was introduced into Popielnia; and Iermola thanked God for it as though a miracle had been wrought.

XIV.

IMPROVEMENT AND DECEPTION

It was about noon--for they had not hastened on the way and had stopped a long time at the inn--when our travellers, having persuaded the gray to beat a retreat, disappeared from the village and stopped with Siepak before the entrance of the old inn.

In front of the door sat Radionek, rapidly turning an enormous porringer, and Huluk, as he helped him, was talking with him in gay tones.

As soon as he saw his father, Radionek, both surprised and alarmed, sprang forward to assist him to descend.

"So here you are, father. Did anything happen on the way, that you have come back so soon?"

"Nothing, nothing at all, my child; only I met this honest fellow, who has worked a long time with the potters in Mrozowica, and he has offered to teach me to glaze pottery."

Radionek, overcome with joy, jumped up and cried, "Is it really true? Can it be possible?"

"Why, yes, I know how to glaze as truly as I stand here," cried the merry Siepak; "and I shall be very glad indeed to play a good trick upon my neighbours in Mrozowica, for I never shall forget the rascality of those lazy fellows."

"I'm not your brother; you're not my father."

Thus sang Siepak, with his hands on his hips, standing on top of the wagon. Then jumping lightly to the ground, he began to examine with the air of a connoisseur all the implements used in the manufacture of the pottery; but it was easy to recognize in him one of those boastful loungers, those village blusterers, who regard everything from the height of their own grandeur, and make little of everything done by others. The working implements which composed the stock of the poor potter seemed very poor to him; as he looked over them, he shrugged his shoulders so scornfully and seemed so amused that Iermola and Radionek felt sad and confused.

Siepak manifested equal scorn in regard to their wares; he treated them unceremoniously as so much trash and rubbish, threw them about, cracked some of them, and stretching himself on the bench, began to boast loudly of what he knew and what he could do, over and above what others knew and what others could do.

This conduct was not pleasing to Iermola, who understood men; but he endured Siepak's ridiculous bragging in silence, hoping at least to be able to gain something from his teachings, though seeing him behave in such a manner caused him to lose confidence in him.

Meanwhile the man from Mrozowica ordered them to fry him a bit of bacon and give him a pint of brandy; then he lay down in the sun for a nap, and toward evening he repaired to the inn.

The next day Iermola was to go to the town to buy some litharge, colours, and other ingredients necessary for glazing the pottery; while Radionek, under the direction of Siepak, who was always joking and singing, should get ready the vessels which were to hold the mixtures to be used in glazing.

When finally the preparation of the glazings began, Siepak showed himself skilful and adept beyond all expectation, so much so that his companions were more astonished than they had at first been at his swaggering; but he had scarcely worked half an hour in the cabin, when he could contain himself no longer, and ran off to the inn, where he flattered the musicians, collected half the villagers, and ordering a pailful of brandy to be placed in the midst of the assembly, he led the carousal and dance until about midnight.

That night late, two of Siepak's comrades, as drunk as he, brought him back, staggering, screaming, and singing, and laid him down on the ground before Iermola's door; Huluk and Radionek regarded him with astonishment mingled with deep pity.

Some time passed before any positive proof of the work could be attained; but during that time Iermola's adopted son, gifted with a mind as quick as it was retentive, had profited so well by the lessons of the cunning young journeyman, and having seen some of the manipulation, had so well divined the rest, that the work of preparing the pottery was no longer unknown to him. He was equal to the emergency; it was sufficient to give him a few suggestions, to put him in the way, to explain some of the processes, and the child's ingenious mind and practical sense supplied what his instructor wanted. Iermola was extremely anxious to get rid of the Mrozowica man's presence as soon as possible, for he feared the effect of it upon Radionek; but in fact, it seemed that the light-headed Siepak was chosen expressly for the purpose of disgusting the child with a life of the frightful emptiness and wretched pleasures of which he had a daily proof. Siepak, it must be said, was an example of a curious moral type,—a type frequently met with among the lower classes, in all its strange ingenuousness; intelligent, adroit, active, and variously gifted, he got but little good out of either pleasure or labour, soon wearying of the one, and never being satisfied with the other.

Sometimes, exhausted by his dissipations, he would lie all day long upon his back in the hay, half tipsy, singing with all his might, or else uttering heart-rending sighs as though he were about to die. Then he would go to work with earnestness for an hour, and his hand, which at first would tremble and refuse to serve him, would in a few moments acquire astonishing skill and dexterity; but he would scarcely begin to do well, when he would get tired and give it all up, call in the first passer-by, talk and joke with him, and most frequently end by going off to the inn, where behind the table he spent most of his time.

After some attempts which were not altogether unsuccessful, Radionek, under his direction, had begun to use the glazing on his pottery without much difficulty, when Siepak, who was already tired of his sojourn in Popielnia, of Szmula, of the old inn and the quiet which reigned in the village, finding no companions whose tastes suited his own, demanded of the old potter the remainder of the sum which would be due him, and furnished with this, set himself up at Szmula's house, where for three days he kept up a ceaseless orgy accompanied by silly music.

The fourth day, taking his valise on his shoulder and his travelling stick in his hand, Siepak started off and disappeared, without bidding any one good-by,—to the great regret of the Jew innkeeper and a few dissipated companions who had every evening passed some pleasant hours at his expense. From that moment he was never again seen in Popielnia.

Then the old peacefulness, which had been for a while disturbed, returned to the modest dwelling. Radionek went to work earnestly, and at first wanted to glaze all the pottery; but the old man restrained him by wise observations.

"Remember," said he, "that the manufacturing of them is not all; we must sell them in order to succeed. We cannot tell how our new wares will be received in the market. If no one wishes to buy our glazed pitchers and dishes; if we get badly paid for them,—we should have done better with our common pottery, which sells perfectly well. God only knows whether we shall succeed in selling our finest plates and dishes; and if we make no more dark dishes and coarse pots, the people will get in the habit of going somewhere else to get them."

Iermola succeeded in persuading the child, who resigned himself to glazing only half the burning. Up to that time their trade had been very good. The old man feared lest this change of affairs should injure it, but Radionek wanted to do something new, and did not count the cost; his father's fears seemed to him silly and groundless. With the lower classes, nothing is accepted and adopted at once. It is necessary to proceed slowly and carefully in order to introduce any new custom; for, obedient to their conservative instinct, our peasants hold with a firm grasp to the habits and even the prejudices bequeathed them by their ancestors.

This is what happened after the burning, which was half of common pottery and half glazed ware, was fired. The day of the great *pardon* arrived, and also the week of the town fair. The stock of pots and plates and dishes was all completed. Chwedko's mare was hired for the day; the wagon was carefully packed; and the old man and the child, leaving Popielnia at midnight, reached the little town about daybreak. They were accustomed to display their wares always on the same spot, under the pent-house of the largest Jewish inn on the square, where all the people attending the fair, accustomed to see them there, could come and find them with their eyes shut. From morning till night the crowd used to gather round them; and generally the sale was enormous. Our potters made haste to unpack their wares as soon as they reached their favourite corner, and separated the common pottery from the glazed. Radionek, as he waited for customers, palpitated with hope; Iermola trembled with fear. When day broke, the crowd began to assemble, and at once pressed around the goods exposed for sale.

But it was in vain that the two merchants offered to purchasers their most successful dishes, their best glazed and newest-shaped pitchers, at very moderate prices. Most of the housekeepers gravely shook their heads without saying anything; others frankly declared that they preferred to supply themselves from the potters in Mrozowica.

In fact, custom prevailed, and neither the beauty of the wares nor the cheapness of the prices could induce any one to buy; in vain Iermola and Radionek sounded their praises and boasted of their good quality. The customers listened with a mocking and incredulous air, and went off to supply themselves from the merchants long known. Radionek wept in silence; and the old man tried to console him by representing to him that it must be so at first, and that they must resign themselves to be patient and learn to wait.

Toward evening they sold part of the glazed ware to some strangers; and there was no common pottery left in Iermola's collection.

But as for the other vessels, many were left on hand; and a Jew in the little town bought them all at half price because the old man did not want to take them home.

When Iermola and Radionek had counted up their expenses, they found that they had lost. The child was very sad as they went along; but the old man comforted him as well as he could, thus endeavouring to prepare him for the future great disappointments of life, which, though bitter, should not destroy either a man's hope or his courage.

XV.

THE OTHER FATHER.

We have carefully described the life of these simple poor people, and the most important events which had happened to them,—the changes in their employments, the acquisition of new acquaintances, the least increase of their comfort. Their days passed in perfect uniformity and an equally profound peacefulness; Radionek at least conceived of no existence happier than this which had fallen to his lot. His father loved him and as far as he possibly could gratified his wishes; he succeeded in his undertakings; he had something to occupy him, something to amuse him; and the distant and unknown future seemed smiling and peaceful.

Sometimes, it is true, the child sat dreamily on the door-sill of the cabin with his eyes fixed on the waters of the river Horyn, on the woods and fields, paying by a moment of inexpressible sadness his debt to the vague and infinite desires and aspirations which arise in the heart of man through the whole course of his life. Then would recur to his mind the remembrance of things his father had told him,—the strange manner of his being found under the oak-tree, his mysterious origin, and the singular and incomprehensible fate which had cast him into the old man's arms. Radionek could not comprehend why he had been forgotten and abandoned; something told him that he would be remembered some day. Sometimes it seemed to him in the silence that he heard the sound of wheels and horses coming to announce the arrival of guests whom he was expecting,—strange, terrible, unknown guests.

In his imagination he often pictured to himself under various forms those parents whom he had never known; but whenever he thought of the grief that his departure would be to Iermola, the bitterness of the separation from him, his constant solitude, he burst into tears and resolved never to leave him. In him as in all other young and ardent beings awoke the desire to see new things, to do something different from the old life; but he felt in the bottom of his heart that whatever he might gain by a change of position, he would surely lose some portion of his real happiness. Where could he be better off? Where happier or freer? He worked only as much as he wished to do, varying his occupations; and the old man rarely had anything to say. It is true that

Iermola had reared the boy from the first in such a manner as to be able to control him by encouragement and reason; and he had no need of threats. The old man had made himself a child so as to understand Radonek; the child had endeavoured to attain the maturity of the old man. They shared time and years as they shared all the other things of life.

The days and months were passing in this perfect peace, which at any moment a sudden change might disturb, when one evening Chwedko, returning from Malyczki, passed by the old inn, because the little bridge had been carried away on the other road, and wishing to light his pipe, went into Iermola's house. The gray, who was not at all anxious thus to extend her circuit, had made, it is true, some signs of stopping; but feeling that the stable was not far off, she had allowed herself to be persuaded.

The old potter and the child were seated on the threshold,--the former smoking his pipe, and the latter talking aloud of his hopes for the future,--when Chwedko stopped in front of them with his wagon, and greeted them in his usual fashion, saying,--

"Glory to God!"

"World without end! Where do you come from?"

"From Malyczki."

"Did you go there alone?"

"I carried Mikita the potatoes I had sold him."

"What is the news down there?"

"Oh, there is some news; there is a great deal of news," answered Chwedko, seating himself on the trunk of a fallen tree. "The old chief of squadron is dead."

"The old man is dead!" replied Iermola. "Peace to his soul! he has suffered a long time."

"And he knew pretty well how to make others suffer."

"So he is really dead!" repeated Iermola. "You see old men must look out; death may call them any time. I trust he will not come for us very soon."

"He was very sick," said Chwedko; "and I do not see how he held out so many years. But there is a regular upturning at the *dwor*."

"And how about his son?"

"His son and his people and every one whom he has tormented so much shed fountains of tears over him. All the people from the village are in the courtyard; it is a pitiful scene of desolation."

"It is the destiny of us all," replied Iermola, with a sigh.

"Yes, truly," continued Chwedko; "but to tell the truth, the chief of squadron was a perfect tyrant over his family. Sick, helpless, and infirm as he was, to the hour of his death he never gave up his keys nor the management of his household, never confided in either his son or his young ward. His son has grown old in his service without enjoying his fortune and without being able to attempt to direct his household; he never would allow him to marry, nor would he permit him to go away from him. He kept the young lady in equal bondage; and though he knew they loved each other, he always forbade them to marry under penalty of his curse."

"Ah, well, they will marry now," said Iermola.

"So you do not know about it, then? They have already been married for a long time; no one knew it at the *dwor* except the old housekeeper. The parish curate married them. There were witnesses; but what good did that do them? They could not live together, because the old father kept them both always by his bedside night and day; he would have one or other of them always by him. In addition to this, matters were so arranged at the *dwor* that the stewards and servants were obliged to tell the master everything the young lord did, or else he would scold and abuse them all; and he had assured his son of his curse if he ever dared to think of such a marriage."

"The old man was a little stern, it is true," said Iermola, "but he had his good side. And besides, he suffered a great deal,--so much that during the long hours of the night, one might hear him crying out almost every moment, 'Good Lord, have mercy on me and take me out of this world!' Toward strangers his manner was gentle as a lamb. It was he who managed so nicely to get Procope to teach me how to make pottery; and when I went to see him, he talked with me and told me stories of old times, and joked and laughed. But that was because he was an old friend of my master."

The old men continued to talk a long time about the chief of squadron, relating in turn various small events of his life, mourning and regretting the dead man as people generally do, for each one of us on leaving this world leaves behind a certain measure of regret and remembrance. They

were still talking when the sound of carriage-wheels was heard at a distance on the road from Malyczki; and they could hear that the vehicle which was coming was not the wagon of a peasant.

"That must certainly be Hudny going home," said Iermola. "Let us go inside the cabin; it is best that he should not see us."

"Oh, no, it is not he," answered Chwedko; "it must be a stranger. From the sound of the wheels I should say it was a covered carriage. Some one has lost his way, surely."

Curious to know who it could be, they stood still with their eyes fixed on that side of the plain which extended beyond the oaks and which was crossed by a narrow pathway. Soon, sure enough, a covered carriage appeared, a very neat and almost elegant one, which was coming at a brisk trot toward the village. "Who can it be, I wonder," murmured Iermola.

"Those are the chief of squadron's horses. And that is the young lord and his wife, I am sure. But why are they coming here?"

The carriage approached rapidly; and instead of going past the old inn, where the child and the two old men were standing gazing at it with astonished faces, it stopped suddenly in front of them.

A man of somewhat more than thirty years, and a woman who was still young, got out of it together and hastened up to Iermola; but before reaching him, they stopped. Then a startled cry, sobs, and tears were heard. The young woman rushed to Radionek; the strange man also stepped toward the boy, who drew back frightened.

Iermola understood the whole matter at once. He turned pale, stumbled, and was obliged to sit down, he felt so faint and overcome; for him had sounded that fatal hour, the very thought of which he had always dismissed from his mind with mortal terror.

"My son! my dear child!" cried the lady.

"Marie, be calm, for the love of God, and let us speak to them first!"

The child, who was gazing at his mother with his large, brilliant, and astonished eyes, threw himself into Iermola's arms as though he wished to call upon him to help him.

"He does not know me," cried the young woman, in a sad tone. "He does not know me, and he cannot know me; he runs away from me and repulses me. He cannot do otherwise. Oh, it would have been better to give up everything, to bring down upon our heads your father's curse, rather than abandon our child. He is ours no longer; we have lost him!" As she said this, she wept bitterly and wrung her hands.

"Marie, be calm, I beg you!" repeated the young man.

In the midst of this scene of grief and trouble, Iermola had time to become less agitated, and his face now wore a grave, sad expression.

"This child," said the father, in a choking and deeply agitated voice,--"this child, whom you found twelve years ago under the oak-trees, is our son. In order to escape the curse with which our father threatened us, and the watchfulness of the people who would have accused us before him if they had known of our secret marriage, we were compelled to send him away from us, to abandon him for a time, and to forget him. But the priest who married us, and who baptized the child, will be our witness; the man who placed him here--"

"He may indeed have been your son," slowly answered the old man, to whom strength had returned at this critical moment, "but now he is mine alone; he is my child. You see he does not know his mother, that when his father calls him he runs to me. I have reared him by the labour of my old age, by taking the bread from my own mouth. No one shall take him from me; Radionek will never leave me."

The mother, as she heard this, sobbed aloud. Jan Druzyna held her; but he himself blushed, trembled, and various expressions passed over his countenance.

"Listen, old man," he cried, "whether you will or no, you will be obliged to give up this child, whose caresses we have longed for so many years."

"If I should give him up to you, he would not go with you," answered Iermola; "he does not know you. He would not abandon the old man who has brought him up."

Radionek stood motionless, pale, and troubled. His mother held out her hands to him; her eyes sought his; her lips sought his lips. The mysterious power of maternal feeling roused itself to draw him to her; and the boy's eyes filled with tears.

"Anything for your son, anything you can ask!" cried Jan Druzyna.

"And what should I take from you?" replied the old man, indignantly. "What could you give me which would supply the place of my beloved, my only child? I ask nothing of you,--nothing but

permission to die near him and to die in peace."

As he spoke, the old man burst into tears; his limbs shook, and he leaned against the wall to keep from falling. Radionek held him up, and helped him to sit down again on the door-sill; and Iermola, laying his hand on the child's fair head, kissed him passionately. The young mother wrung her hands in despair; her grief increased, and she became beside herself. At last she threw herself upon her child, ardent and strong as a lioness, and strained him in her maternal arms.

"You are mine!" she cried, choked by her tears; "you are mine!"

And already Radionek no longer sought to avoid her caresses; he had just received his mother's first kiss,--a kiss so sweet, so penetrating, so long awaited.

The father also tremblingly approached his child, and kissed him through his tears.

Iermola watched them with a glance now sad and despairing, now bright and burning with jealousy; one single moment, one single word, had been sufficient to deprive him of his treasure.

"It was happiness enough for me," murmured the old man. "God takes it all from me. I must give him up; fate had only lent him to me. And I shall doubtless not live long. Sir," said he then, in a voice full of tears and emotion, "you see it is I who now supplicate you. I am old; I shall not live long; leave me my child until I die. I shall die soon, I am very old; then you will drag him away from my coffin. How could I live without him? Ah, do not leave me alone for the last days I have to live in this world; do not punish me; do not kill me, if for no other reason but because I have welcomed and reared your child!"

"We will take you away with the little fellow," cried Jan. "Come with him; we are more grateful to you than any words can express."

The old man interrupted him by sobbing violently; and Radionek hastened to run to Iermola as soon as he heard him crying. He knelt down beside him and hid his weeping face on his lap.

"My father, my father!" he cried, "do not weep; I will never leave you. We will not go away from your cabin; we will stay here together. I am so happy with you, I want nothing more."

Then the mother, seeing herself still forsaken, began to sob again, and nearly fainted. The neighbours, attracted by the noise, gathered on the spot and were witnesses of the scene. The cossack's widow, Chwedko, Huluk, and others shed the tears of compassion which the poor have always ready even for the griefs and miseries which they cannot comprehend, for the tears of others always suffice to move them to pity.

At last the father aroused from the momentary state of stupefaction into which his wife's words had thrown him; he sighed, and going up to his wife, spoke to her for a moment in a low voice.

"Whether you are willing or not," said he, aloud, in a stern voice, "you will be obliged to give the child up to us; he is ours, and we have witnesses of the fact. But you may ask anything you desire in exchange."

Iermola trembled and rose quickly to his feet.

"The child does not know you," he cried; "you will be obliged to take him by force. I will not give him up to you of my own free will, for he is not your child. I will bring witnesses to contradict yours. This is not the child of a gentleman; he is a villager, a working boy, an orphan. Call him; you do not even know his name; and he will not listen to you, for he does not know your voice."

"Why, the old man is insane," cried Jan Druzyna, trembling with rage. "Very well; we shall be compelled to resort to other means,--to those which our rights grant us. Do you, then, wish to deprive the child of the advantages and benefits of the position to which he was destined?"

"What position? What destiny?" replied the old man, proudly. "Ask him if he has ever been unhappy with me,--if he wants anything more, if he needs anything. I know the sort of life which is lived in the *dwors* where I have been. Do not destroy my peace; do not desolate my old age; do not take away my child."

The young mother then drew near him and took him by the hand.

"My father, my brother," said she; "I understand your grief, I know what you lose in losing this child; but I, have I not swallowed my tears for twelve long years? Would you have the heart to refuse an unfortunate mother her dearest joy, her only treasure? Would you be so cruel as to force us to be ungrateful? No, you will come with us; you will rejoice when you see the child's happiness, and you will share ours."

These words of the mother went deeper into Iermola's heart; he became more like himself, dried his tears, and said in a low voice,--

"Oh, the hour has come before which I would rather have died! For so many years I have seen it in my dreams, I feared every shadow, I dreaded each stranger, thinking he came to take away from me the child of my old age. I trembled; I prayed God that He would let me die first, but He has purposely prolonged my days. May He receive the present hour as an expiation for all my sins!"

During this conversation, Radionek, agitated, troubled, and not knowing what to do, looked first at the old man and then at his parents. His father's eyes expressed great impatience, mingled with tenderness and a certain irritation; his mother wore a more quiet expression, more compassionate and gentle. Iermola felt his strength forsake him again; he once more fell into his seat, his head bent down, his hands clasped.

The conversation, thus abruptly disturbed, was resumed, but in a more peaceful and ordinary tone. Druzyna had evidently intended to take his son away at once; but an hour passed, night came on, and he still did not know what to do. Iermola, overcome, no longer offered any resistance; he kept silence, exhausted, and only questioned the child with his eyes.

"Come, let us go," said the young man at last, as he turned toward his wife. "We will come back to see him to-morrow."

"But the child?"

Radionek heard the words; frightened, he threw himself into the arms of his adoptive father, and Iermola, touched and grateful, pressed him to his breast.

"You are a good dear child," he cried. "You will not go away from me; you will not leave me alone; you will not forget your old father. You know I should die without you; you can do as you like when you have closed my eyes. And may God's eternal blessings follow you then!"

Druzyna, who was gazing in silence upon this scene, led, or rather dragged his wife away by force, carried her to the carriage, and ordered the coachman to return home. Chwedko set off for the village, where he spread this important piece of news.

After Druzyna's departure, there was no visible change in the old inn, but the peace and happiness which the day before had reigned beneath that thatched roof had flown away. Iermola, silent and motionless, remained seated on the door-sill; Radionek at times wept quietly, and at others gave himself up to dreamy meditation. Then they drew near each other and spoke a few sad, tender words in a low voice. The morning found them still in the door-sill, half asleep, and cowering in each other's arms as though they feared some one would come to separate them.

The broad daylight, as it opened their eyes to the sun, which dispels the terrors of night and revives the forces of life, brought back to them the remembrance of the events of the day before; but it presented them in another light, and awoke in them other sentiments, which gathered about each event, each serious thought, like mercenary servants grouped around a coffin. A thousand ideas, a thousand confused impressions crowded upon their minds, each struggling with the other to clear away the difficulty.

Neither the old man nor Radionek felt himself capable of working that morning. The ordinary course of their life had been interrupted; they did not know what to do with themselves. In the child's mind arose, now a thousand images of a brilliant, an unknown future, now regret for past days filled with so much happiness, and which would never return.

He tried to recall the features of his mother, those of his young father whom he had seen only in the dim twilight. Sometimes his heart leaned toward them; sometimes he trembled, agitated by a feeling of fear. What would become of him near them? Would he be better or worse than here? And in either case, he would be obliged to begin a new life, to leave his peaceful corner, go to a strange house, renounce all his old happiness, and bid adieu to what he had loved so well.

Iermola dreamed also; the new day had brought him new thoughts. According to his custom, he went to see the widow, as he always did when he felt in need of some one to talk to.

"Are you crazy?" cried the old woman as she saw him. "How could you yesterday evening have been so obstinate as to keep the child, just as if you had any sort of prospects for him? And besides, he is the son of a lord; he has his position already given him. And could it have done you any harm to go to the *dwor* with Radionek and live peacefully, enjoying his good fortune?"

"Yes, yes! but how could I be to him there what I have been to him up to this hour? I should no longer be his father; I should become his serving-man. They would take his heart away from me little by little; they would spoil and ruin my child. Do I not know something about the life of lords and rich people? Food a little more delicate, clothes a little finer, words a little smoother; but are they happier? God knows we cannot tell anything about it. Ask them if they do not weep in secret, if there are no sad moments spent under their roofs, if their happiness is as great, as pure, as it appears from a distance."

"It is doubtless your great grief which causes you to talk in this way," cried the widow, shrugging her shoulders. "Their life is not like ours, that is certain. If our fate is the better of the two, why is it that all do not wish to live as we do? It is indeed a rare thing that a great lord is

willing of his own accord to live as we do; while each one of us, on the contrary, would like to taste their bread. But the truth must be told."

Iermola remained silent for a few moments, leaning his head on his hand.

"Neighbour," said he, at last, "when we shall come to die, it will then matter very little to us whether during our lives we have eaten bread of fine wheat flour or coarse rye bread; no matter how a man has lived, it will be all the same to him, provided he has clean hands and a pure conscience to present before God. And as for knowing whether my child will then have been better off as lord of his father's house or with me, a potter in the old inn, upon my word, it is a serious question which I cannot take upon myself to answer."

"But you will nevertheless be obliged to give him up; there is no way of avoiding it."

"I shall not prevent him from following them if he will; but he must choose between us, because I myself wish to die as I have lived. I shall lay my bones in our old cemetery. I have already tasted the bread of servitude. I will not go in my last years to hold out my hand and bow down before young fools who would laugh at me,--not for any amount. I will remain in Popielnia; as for Radionek, if he wishes, he can go play the lord at Malyczki."

"And how will you be able to live without him, poor old man?"

"And you, how have you managed to live without Horpyna, without your grandchildren? Unless, indeed, you can see them by stealth."

"Ah! that is true, that is true," sighed the widow. "With pain and tears we rear our children, to see them, as soon as they have wings, fly out of the nest; as for us, we are left behind with broken wings to look at them far off."

"It is not for long, however," added Iermola, with a sad smile; "our days are numbered. A few more will pass, and then death will come knocking gently at our window; our eyes will close, and all will be over. We shall then have only to render our account to the Lord God."

"Ah, you speak sad words, neighbour."

"Because, as you see, my heart is not merry."

While this conversation was taking place in the widow's house, Radionek, who had not the heart to go to work, sat in the door-sill, thinking and dreaming. At one time his heart inclined him toward that unknown world; at another his tenderness for the old man called him back and held him.

Parents! a mother!--these are sweet words, which bring sweet thoughts and have great power over an orphan's heart; for no one can take the place of a father, no one can take the place of a mother.

The idea of living at the *dwor*, of being rich, of being a master, seemed very pleasant to the boy; but as he knew nothing of any other life than the one he had lived until that moment, he did not know what awaited him in that higher position. His ardent childish curiosity alone painted the unknown future for him. Then he said to himself that it would be very sad for the old man to be separated from him; he recalled all that he had done for him, how much he had loved him. He did not know whether even maternal tenderness, so powerful and God-inspired, could equal that love.

While he was thus reflecting, the carriage he had seen the day before drew near, arrived, and stopped. Radionek might have run away and hidden himself, but he had not the strength; his mother saw him from a distance, waved her hand to him, and he remained motionless. His parents hastened to him, embraced him, and wept.

"It is true,--it is true, is it not, that you are coming with us?" cried Marie Druzyna, gazing in agitation upon the handsome young fellow, whom it distressed her to see dressed in peasant's clothes and a coarse cloak. "You will see," said she, "how happy you will be with us; you have suffered, but all that will soon be forgotten."

"But I have not suffered," cried Radionek, who began to grow bold, "and I shall never forget my old father. I shall be very, very much grieved to leave him."

"I am your father," said Jan Druzyna, in a grieved and irritated tone; "call the old man what you will, but do not give him the name which belongs to me."

"Oh, he has been a father to me for a long time, and will be as long as he lives. He has loved me so dearly."

"And we? Shall not we love you also? Do you not know that you have cost us many tears?"

"I did not see you shed them; but I know that the old man has wept over me, and more than once I have seen his tears fall."

"We will take him away with us."

"He would not want to go," murmured Radionek.

At that moment, as though moved by some sad presentiment, Iermola arrived, having seen the carriage, and run till he was almost out of breath, trembling, half suffocated, fearing lest he should not find the child.

The husband and wife greeted him kindly, but with coldness and reserve; he returned them a glance of indifference.

"To-day," said Jan Druzyna, "you must make up your mind to give the child up to us. We cannot do without him; and he must be present at his grandfather's funeral."

"He can do as he pleases," answered the old man; "if he wishes to go with you, I shall not prevent him."

"You will come,--you will come!" cried the mother, rushing up to Radionek.

The child hesitated, turned pale, and burst into tears.

"No, no, I cannot," he murmured; "I cannot leave you, my father."

"You may come to see him as often as you wish," said Jan, restraining himself and speaking gently.

There was a moment's silence; the child, beside himself, turned first toward the thoughtful, sad old man, then toward his mother, who seemed to implore him with her eyes not to send her away.

"Do with me what you choose," said Radionek, at last. "I do not know what to do, I can't think; I am weak and sad. I do not want to leave you two; but at the same time I wish to stay here always. Why will you not live here with us?"

Thus pleadings, prayers, and promises continued to be exchanged till half the day had passed; and at last when the carriage drove away from the old inn, it bore in it poor Radionek, who was weeping and holding out his hands to Iermola and promising him to come back the next day and kiss him.

XVI.

ALONE!

He who rests and builds on the human heart should first look well into it and lay his foundations deep, lest the edifice of his hopes should tumble and fall for want of solid support. The human heart in its depths is only mire and mud; at moments this bottom thickens up and is condensed, but soon it becomes damp and dissolves under the flow of a thousand hidden brooks.

There are, however, some rare hearts formed of more lasting material, in which a furrow once ploughed is never effaced. Old Iermola, who had loved only once in his life, having found only one being upon whom he could lavish all the strength of his love, and to whom he had attached all the fibres of his soul, felt that nothing could replace to him this child whom he had loved, and whose loss he could not endure.

The grief he felt as he saw the carriage which contained Radionek drive away, it is impossible to describe. It was not a violent and passionate despair, nor a tempest of regrets, desires, and bitterness; but it was a feeling vast, deep, bitter, deadly as poison, slow and cold as the mountain ices. His weeping eyes dried suddenly, and became haggard, strange, constantly fixed in the same direction. He heard nothing, thought nothing. An indescribable confusion filled his brain, which seemed enveloped in the mazes of a black and tangled thread. He had lost all consciousness of self, all strength and will to act; he stood there petrified, half frozen, on the threshold, his hand extended, his lips parted, and remained there thus a long, very long time, without taking any account of the moments or the hours, letting the time go by without feeling it.

Huluk, who was a good boy, finding that he could not rouse Iermola from this stunned condition either by taking hold of his hand or calling him in a loud voice,--for the old man did not hear, and would not have understood him if he had heard,--ran to the widow's house for help.

The good woman came immediately, somewhat agitated, and severely blaming the old man for

what she called his want of sense.

"You act like a child," she said. "How can you be so silly at your age? You ought to rejoice at Radionek's good fortune."

She began to lecture him in this way from a distance as soon as she could see him; but as she drew nearer, she perceived with fright that he could not hear her; he did not move his head, and gave no sign of life.

His eyes were turned toward the oak-trees, his mouth hanging open, his head bent down, his hands extended, stiff, and already almost benumbed.

The cossack's widow ran to him, began to rub him hard, and at the same time to talk to him, sparing him neither hard words nor reproaches, for she did not know what else to do.

"Have you really gone crazy, old idiot? Do you think they have taken him away to butcher him? For shame! for shame! Ask God's pardon; it is a real sin."

But she was obliged to scold and shake him a long time before she saw life or consciousness return. At last he burst into tears, began to sob, to murmur indistinct words, and finally his reason revived.

"It is all over," he said; "all my happiness is over. I no longer have my darling, my treasure, my Radionek. He is now a rich and powerful lord at Malyczki; but at my house there is no child, and there will never again be one there."

Then he began to break up his pitchers and porringers and his working implements, and threw them out of the door.

"What good will all this be to me? I want to return to my former life, to forget that the child was mine, that I had a son. I know what they will do with him; they will spoil him and turn his head. Radionek will be lost to me. The sweet child will never more speak to me and give me loving smiles as he used to do; he will always sigh for their handsome house, their plastered house. He will be cold in my hut; the fresh water and hard bread will not seem good to him; Iermola will be to him only a garrulous, insupportable old grumbler. Oh, I have been weak and mean-spirited! I have been crazy. I should have run away,--run far away with him to some place where they would not have been able to find us, and where they could not have taken him from me."

The cossack's widow listened and shrugged her shoulders; from time to time she tried to say a kind word to him, but she knew that it is necessary always to allow a great grief to vent and exhaust itself, so she let Iermola cry and groan. At every step the old man came upon something to remind him of the child, in the room which was still so full of mementos of him. Here was his drugget cloak; there a little painted pitcher which he had made himself, the first vase, glazed and ornamented with flowers, which he had so lovingly made, his square cap with a red border, of the Polesian fashion, and in a corner, the little bench upon which he loved to sit, the porringer from which he ate his meals, the goat he played with, and which was bleating because it did not see him.

"Oh, I must end it all by bursting my head against the wall!" cried Iermola. "How can I live without him? I feel as if my child were dead."

The widow, who now began to be frightened because she thought that Iermola's grief was not of the kind which would soon subside, sent Huluk to beg Chwedko to come immediately to the old inn. Chwedko, being warned of what was going on, and considering brandy as the greatest possible comforter, took care to take with him a bottle full of it. He began by talking pleasantly and even congratulating his old friend, then he compared in a melancholy way the old man's attachment for Radionek to that he bore his gray mare; then having exhausted all his eloquence, and not knowing what else to do, he drew the bottle from his pouch and set it on the table.

At the sight of it Iermola's eyes sparkled; he seized the bottle and emptied it at one draught. But man has moments of internal upheaval, so deep and so intense that the effect of things with which he comes in contact is no longer manifested according to the general laws of nature. The human being who has reached such a state of excessive excitement and agony no longer feels either hunger or cold, and will even be proof against poison; as, for instance, in the heat of battle, a soldier will take, without becoming intoxicated, an enormous quantity of liquor, which ordinarily would certainly have laid him on the ground. Just so it was with Iermola, who wished to get drunk and could not succeed, for he felt no inconvenience or stupefaction, in spite of the large quantity of brandy he had swallowed.

"What a head he must have to stand a pint of strong gin!" murmured Chwedko, with a sort of respect.

"It is not his head which is strong; it is his grief," said the widow, in a low voice. "Give him a bucketful of it now, and you would not make him tipsy; grief keeps him awake."

As the evening came on, they made every effort to induce him to spend the night at the

widow's cottage, but they could not persuade him to do so. The old man seated himself again on the door-sill, and began to muse and sigh with his eyes fixed on the oaks. The two neighbours were compelled by urgent business to return home, Chwedko remembering that it was time to water his mare, and the widow having to prepare her supper and milk her cow. They were both obliged to leave him; and Huluk, the poor orphan, was left alone with him, weeping.

The evening advanced; night came on, and still Iermola did not move from the spot. He slept there a few moments, for sorrow had overcome him. Then he awakened suddenly and remained so, still motionless. Huluk, suffering for the want of sleep, watched over him and kept up a low wailing.

It was about the first cock-crowing when a shadow of some one moving fell suddenly upon the threshold of the cabin. Huluk, who had the eyes of a lynx, immediately recognized Radionek, who was running along the road leading from Malyczki. The old man had not seen him, but he had felt his coming; he trembled, looked around, and cried, "Radionek!"

"Yes, it is I, my father."

"It is you, my good child; ah, the Lord be praised! I was dying without you, do you see, and you have come to bring me back to life. But how did you come? On foot?"

"On foot, father. Did I not know the road? And why should I be afraid to walk at night?"

"Did you come alone?"

"With my stick."

"And did they give you permission to come?"

"Bah! I did not ask it. They put me to bed, but I was so troubled I could not close my eyes. I cannot tell you how anxious I was; I felt obliged to come back to you. And when the morning comes and they do not find me, they will know well enough where to look for me."

Iermola, as he embraced him, felt his strength and presence of mind return, and he quickly revived.

"Huluk," he cried in a glad, strong voice, "the poor child is doubtless cold; he is hungry too. Surely they could not have given him anything to eat. Light the fire. Is there anything to eat? I also feel as if my stomach was empty."

"How astonishing!" murmured the boy; "yesterday neither of them ate one mouthful."

"Ah, that is true, upon my word."

"I will light the fire myself, father, and get your breakfast ready," said Radionek. "Let me wait upon you as I used to do."

"Ah, no, no, my child! sit down beside me; tomorrow they will take you away again. Do not leave me, I beg you. But you are cold out here; the dew is falling. Come inside, my child."

When the fire kindled by Huluk began to light up the room with its bright red flames, the old man, as he looked at Radionek, perceived that his parents, although they had not had time to change his dress entirely, had nevertheless considerably altered his costume. His mother had found for him in her closet a fine white shirt, had tied a pretty cravat around his neck, had washed, combed, and curled his beautiful golden hair, had fastened a girdle round his waist, put one of his father's caps on his head, and poured over his clothing a perfumed essence. These changes in the child's dress seemed to Iermola so many signs of abjuration, of bondage, so many new fetters belonging to his new position; he sighed as he examined them, though the child was charming to look at in this half-altered costume. They were silent for a moment, for the old man had grown sad again; he gazed at the child, and was troubled as he thought of the future.

"To-morrow," said he to himself, "they will come for him, and take him away again; the poor child will not be able to come back to me any more,--they will keep a strict watch over him. Who knows, perhaps they may punish him for having returned to comfort his old father.--Are you happier with them?" he asked after a moment. "Give me at least the comfort of knowing that you are happy."

"I was comfortable; but I was sad," answered the boy. "My grandfather's body is laid out on a bed; the priests are chanting in the great hall. My mother kept me by her side all day and asked me all about what I did here. She made me tell her all about our life; she clasped her hands and cried, and every moment she thanked you and thanked God. They gave me something to eat, petted me, and kissed me. They wanted to change my clothes entirely, but I begged them so hard not to do it that at last they let me alone; but they have sent for a tailor to make me some new clothes. My father said"--that name, given by Radionek to the lord Jan Druzyna, struck sadly on the poor man's ears--"my father said that he should get a tutor to instruct me; and he has given me a pretty horse."

"God grant that you may always be happy there!" sighed the old man. "I am sure they will love

you; but I am also sure that you will more than once long for our cabin and the peaceful days you spent in it."

They would thus have passed the rest of the night, talking and without sleeping, if Iermola, fearing Radionek might be sick, had not made him go to bed; he then sat down beside him to watch over him and see him sleep. In the morning the anxious father came; and though he did not scold the child, he told him in a gentle voice of the dreadful fright his imprudence had caused his mother. This made Radionek sad; he looked down and made no reply.

"To prevent the recurrence of such an adventure," said Druzyna, "we will take Iermola to Malyczki; there is a vacant room in the house, and we will care for him as he has cared for you."

"No, no!" answered the old man, shaking his head, "I will not go to live with you; I love my child dearly, but I will not go. I am now accustomed to being my own master; it would be hard for me to eat the bread of dependence in my old age. I should soon repent of the change and get tired of it. Some one or other would laugh at me, would say something to wound me; that would cause me suffering, and trouble the child too. Your servants have no respect for strangers; they would think they were doing me a favour. No, a thousand times no! I will stay here."

It was in vain that Radionek's father begged, supplicated, and endeavoured to persuade the old man. Iermola kissed his child and pressed him in his arms, kept him by his side, wept over him, blessed him, and at last sat down on the door-sill as though awaiting death.

Very strange indeed are often the destinies of men and the decrees of God. In some cases the thread of life breaks, though spun of pure gold and shining silk; in others, neither pain nor sorrow can succeed in breaking the black, shadowy thread which they shake with their cruel hands. Iermola survived the separation, and could not die. He was sick; he grew old again; he stooped, and became gloomy and taciturn; he entered upon another phase of life; but his vital forces, which he had not squandered, still sustained him. Fate had deprived him of everything but seeing the child at a distance, the power of tormenting himself, of longing, and of comforting himself with memories.

After Radionek was gone, he gave up his trade of potter, giving up all his implements and materials to Huluk, who had learned something from watching him work. For his part, he contented himself henceforth in his garden and in the little home he had made for himself, spending his days sometimes dreaming and musing in the room where he had reared his child, sometimes in making long visits and holding long talks with his friend, the widow.

She was the only person, in fact, who really understood him and would listen to him patiently. The similarity of their positions had established a real sympathy between them. He was filled with compassion for her, because she was deprived of the presence of Horpyna, who since she had become a great lady no longer came to see her mother; and she mourned and longed for Radionek almost as much as he did himself.

They spent long hours talking together before the fire, recalling happy times, and though they had a hundred times repeated the same story, each of them knew how to listen patiently when the same chain of remembrances fell again from their lips.

"Do you remember how pretty my Horpyna was when she dressed herself on Sunday to go to the *cerkiew*? You would not recognize her now, since she has nursed her five children, she is so thin and changed, though she eats fine white bread and leads the life of a great lady. Oh, it is not a healthy life; the body and the soul perish together."

"And my Radionek," answered the old man, "wasn't he much prettier with his little *sukmane* and his shaved head, than in the fine clothes they make him wear now?"

At first Radionek came every day to see his foster-father, sometimes alone, sometimes with a servant, or with either his father or mother; after a while he only came to Popielnia in a carriage on Sunday. At last he came no longer; and the old man about once a month, when his desire to see his child became insupportable, would drag himself along with the aid of his stick to the places frequented by his beloved charge, hoping to see him, if only for a moment at a distance.

At first also, Radionek would rush to the old man as soon as he saw him; no one could stop him, so intense was his feeling and so swift his motion.

Then when Iermola would send in his name, he would be obliged to wait a moment; gradually he would have to wait sometimes an hour; and it happened once that after having waited all day long at the door, he did not see his child, and went away in tears.

They took him to the farm and gave him something to eat; but it was not bodily nourishment which the old man needed, it was the pleasure of seeing and having his child once more, of feasting and living in his presence, which alone could satisfy him and restore peace and comfort to his home.

Iermola did not complain; he knew very well that his child, his dear child, was not to blame for this neglect and desertion; that Radionek's parents and tutors endeavoured by every means in their power to make him forget the existence of his adoptive father; and that the child, whenever

he could see him, would whisper to him with tears that he would like to run away and go back to Popielnia.

XVII.

IN BONDAGE

Iermola's pupil was soon scarcely to be recognized; the hearty village child when dressed in the costume of the nobility, fed on choice and delicate food, and shut up between four walls quickly began to grow pale and dwindle away.

And although he had grown rapidly tall and slender, he was like a tall frail plant which the least breath of wind could overturn.

His mother mourned over him; even his father became anxious. They redoubled their care and attention to him and endeavoured to amuse him; but the more they surrounded him with care and assiduous precautions, the sadder and weaker the boy became. Often during his lesson hours, or when receiving the tenderest caresses, he would seem dreamy and absent; tears would fill his eyes, and when asked what he wanted, he would only smile to hide his tears.

The memory of his former life, of the early years of his childhood spent in the sweet freedom of the fields, in independent work and careless pleasure, now weighed upon the child's heart like a mountain of stone; the change in his existence, so violent and grievous, crushed this frail child as a plant which is roughly transplanted. At night, in his dreams, he saw again the hut, the happy mornings he spent turning his pottery, the walks on the river shore and in the woods, those bold excursions, those paths and avenues so constantly frequented in the vicinity and in other villages, in that small world where he felt strong, independent, active, and living his own life. At his father's house he was bound by ties sweet, it is true, but strict and tenacious; he had been, as it were, carried back to his infancy, surrounded by minute recommendations and useless cares. Fears and anxiety were entertained for him; he was not allowed to develop his powers or exercise his will.

Deprived as he was of Nature, of the open air and the sunshine to which he had been accustomed, he longed for all of these things as he longed for his old Iermola. He was doubtless comfortable with his father and mother, but he sighed for his old life, his sweet orphan life; and at last these longings and continual struggles affected him seriously, and he fell ill.

His parents, not understanding the child's real state of mind, irritated the wound, instead of healing it; attributing his sad, languid condition to the old man's influence, they endeavoured to keep him away from Radionek, thus making a great mistake and doing a great injustice. But the more they sought to detach the child from old Iermola, the more he clung to him with all the strength of his affection; indignation at the injustice which was done him, the ingratitude which was shown him, was added to his feelings of pity and affection, and oppressed his heart.

He dared not say anything in the presence of his father, whose severity resembled that of the grandfather; and he saw plainly that his love for the old man grieved his mother, who was jealous of it, reproaching her son on this account as though it were a weakness and a sin.

A very important event soon made a change in Radionek's life; a little brother was added to the family, who was named Wladzio, on whom the father and mother lavished most of the tenderness they had formerly bestowed upon their first-born, soon allowing him to see their changed feelings toward him, and frequently rallying him about Iermola. All these influences united quickly sufficed to break down the strength of this child, who had once developed so freely and so happily, and who was now oppressed by his dependent and miserable position.

Radionek, formerly so frank, jovial, and gay, had become dreamy, timid, and sad; he passed whole nights weeping over his lost happiness,—the happiness of the days spent with the old man he so dearly loved. His heart felt like breaking when he would see Iermola come dragging himself along on foot, leaning on his stick, all the way from Popielnia to Malyczki, then stop at the stairway, and wait like a beggar for the favour of seeing his child.

If he was allowed to come in, servants were there to see that Radionek was not moved to pity, did not talk too much, did not stay too long, and did not complain of any one; and often, very often, the poor child was forced to content himself with seeing the old man through the window. The old man spent long hours leaning against the columns of the stairway. The servants pushed him away or teased him, then sent him off without pity; and finally at twilight he would go away toward his own house, his head bowed, and looking behind him every moment.

Then Radionek would weep, tremble, and become feverish; and the increase of his ailments was attributed to Iermola's importunate conduct, since even without communicating with him, he agitated and grieved him by his presence.

Humiliating and bitter as it was to have been tutor and father, and now to be only a wretched and famished beggar, waiting at the door for a little pity and tenderness, the old man complained of nothing. He uttered no bitter reproaches, no abuse, though well-merited; he kept silence and concealed his grief so as to avoid, if possible, being sent away entirely. But when they had driven him away two or three times in succession without allowing him to see his child, he returned oftener, was obstinate in his purpose and in his sad patience, until he would finally succeed in catching Radionek as he passed by. And when he saw the pretty face grow paler and paler, the beautiful eyes more and more weary, when he heard the languid, plaintive voice,--he felt his indignation boil over and rage like a tempest.

But the knowledge of his feeble old age, his weakness, and the poverty and contempt which were crushing him, did not allow him even to dream of making any resistance.

And so things went from bad to worse.

The young mother, delighted with her little Wladzio, grew more and more weary of the faults and weaknesses of his brother; the father threatened and scolded in vain.

Then they tried a change of treatment; cares and caresses were doubled, and physicians were sent for. One of them had the wisdom to recommend for the child frequent exercise in the sun and open air; the other, perceiving traces of grief, counselled them to try moral influences. And every time Radionek's ailments were enumerated, Iermola was always blamed for them.

At last, Jan Druzyna, anxious and unhappy, having had a long struggle with himself, resolved to get rid of the importunate old man once for all.

One morning, according to his custom, Iermola, who for three weeks had seen his dear child only on rare occasions, through the window, though he had dragged himself every day to Malyczki, had gained entrance to the door, and driven away with his stick the dogs which the grooms of the pack had set upon him.

The servants, previously instructed to worry him and rid the house of him, tried to drive him away; but the old man refused to allow them to do so. He remained there till toward noon, silent, gloomy, always expectant, like Lazarus at the rich man's gate. Then Jan Druzyna, weary and irritated by the sight of this sad-looking apparition, which seemed a living reproach to him, came out of the house and went himself to encounter Iermola.

"My dear fellow," said he to him in a short, dry tone, and seating himself on a bench midway of the stairway, "for several days now I have seen you here constantly; why are you so obstinate about staying here? Why do you wish to torment our child every moment for nothing? Tell me, what do you want? We will give you anything in our power, only do not disturb our peace. You say you love our child; then do not torment him. The sight of you agitates him, grieves him, and prevents his becoming attached to us; do you not think you ought to understand this, and be more reasonable? If you think by acting in this way that you will get the better of us, you are mistaken. Tell me now what you want, and put an end to this."

"But, my lord, I want nothing,--nothing but to see my child, to kiss him and bless him," answered Iermola, with still more humility and gentleness.

"You see, it is high time that you should give up these ideas, which are only follies. You brought him up; we have been willing to repay you for that. Now that is all over; the child has returned to us. Let him remain in peace. You love him, so you say, yet you make him unhappy."

"Who? I, my lord?"

"Yes, you, certainly. See how he is changed; he is withering away and consumed with fever."

"And it is I,--I,--who am the cause of it, my lord?"

"Assuredly it is not us."

"It is you,--it is you who are killing him," then cried the old man, his patience all exhausted. "I gave him back to you happy, vigorous, in good health; you have shut him up, destroyed his strength, and made him miserable and sad. The child loves me, and he has reason to love me. If he did not, he would be heartless; and you,--you do all you can to teach him ingratitude."

"Are you beside yourself, old man?" cried Jan Druzyna, in a rage. "What do you mean? How dare you answer? Go off; go off immediately, and never think of stepping your foot in this house again, for you will be driven out of it."

At these words Iermola turned pale, trembled, was seized with fright, and tried to speak; but words failed him.

"You drive me away," said he at last. "I shall go away, since you order me to do so; and my feet

will never again cross your door-sill. Remember, remember, unjust man, that as you have taken the child from me, God, who judges and punishes, will take him away from you."

Having uttered this terrible imprecation, which the mother heard just as she was hastening to restrain her husband, and which caused her to recoil, frightened and fainting, Iermola, desperate and beside himself, making use of the remnant of his strength, fled down the stairway and crossed the great courtyard without turning his head to look behind him.

After a few moments Jan Druzyna recovered himself. He realized his wrong-doing; and the prophetic words of the old man began to weigh upon his heart. The sight of the old man, who was rapidly disappearing from sight in the distance, was a cruel reproach to him. Not knowing what to do, he rushed into the house and entered just in time to receive his fainting wife in his arms.

She wished to go for Radonek and send him after Iermola, to soothe his anger, and bring him back to her family, but when she entered the child's room she found him on the floor, cold and pale as marble, and before any one could revive him, Iermola was already far away.

When night came, the poor man dragged himself wearily to the house of his old friend the widow, to whom he wished to make his lament and tell everything. He had not seen her for a week, for every morning early he had started for Malyczki; he therefore did not know that the poor woman had been very ill for three days. He had scarcely put his foot inside the door when he saw that according to custom the glass had been taken out of the windows, a coffin placed in the middle of the room, and a little way off the brotherhood with their banners, the cross, and the priest with the book, were coming to the burial.

Then Iermola, like one waking from a dream, gazed a long, long time upon the coffin, knelt down, and began to pray.

"She too! she too!" he murmured. "Come, it is time for me to die." He felt the chill of evil foreboding run through his veins. "But first," said he, "we must go with her to the cemetery and throw a handful of dust on her coffin."

Silent and sad, he stood a moment near the door, leaning on his stick; then he joined the funeral procession, in which there was neither daughter nor son-in-law nor grandson, only the servants, the neighbours, and distant relatives of the deceased.

The cemetery was situated about halfway between the *dwor* and Iermola's dwelling; toward this spot, therefore, the funeral procession moved. In the dim twilight the long line of tapers borne in the hands of the brotherhood were reflected above on the moving folds of the banners. Chwedor had already dug the grave; a great heap of yellow clay was piled up on the edge of it. The priest blessed it and made a sign to lay the body of the widow within it; then each of those present threw in a handful of sand and murmured a last farewell. Iermola paid this last duty with much feeling; then, half beside himself, he slowly took the road back to his hut. There was no longer any reason why he should hasten there now.

Huluk, who considered himself already quite the master of the house and the little business, and who, although good-hearted, really began to find Iermola somewhat in his way, was at this moment leaning against the doorway, dreaming of a future full of glad, ambitious hopes. It seemed to him that if Iermola were no longer there, he could so easily take possession of the pottery kiln and the little garden, marry little Pryska, and become a master-workman in every sense of the word. His old master at first seemed useless to him, then troublesome and in the way.

"What news have you for me? Did not the cossack's widow send for me when she was taken sick?" said the old man as he came near.

"Yes, certainly, Chwedor came three times of his own accord; she had something to say to you, but you were not here."

"Ah, now she can speak no more," replied Iermola, in a mournful, almost indifferent voice, as he entered the house. "What is the use of talking about it? It is all over now. Everything in this world must come to an end."

He repeated these words as he walked up and down the room; then he seated himself on one of the benches and began to doze. Huluk then went out, shrugging his shoulders.

"What is the old man thinking of?" said he. "Wouldn't it be better for him to go off with a sack and beg? Then I could marry Pryska, and all would go well; but so long as he stays here, how can I think of it? Oh, what a bother!"

Confusion and discord now reigned in the chamber which formerly was so clean and well kept; it was easy to see that no one cared for it any longer. Huluk had taken some of the furniture into the next room; the old man had distributed some among his old friends; the rest was scattered here and there and covered with dust. There had been no fire in the stove for a long time; there was no pile of wood in the woodshed, no provisions in the house; a few cooking utensils lay in the corners, dusty and half broken. The old man had no longer any heart to notice all this. When he woke in the morning, he felt as if he could take courage and do something; but after a little while

everything seemed so sad, so bitter, so grievous, the hut itself, with all its memories, became so hateful to him, that for the first time he thought of leaving it forever. He could not sit on the door-sill without looking at the clump of oaks under which he had seen, wrapped in his long white clothes, the child who had been the hope and comfort of his old age. These memories were still so fresh and heart-breaking that the old man could not endure them while surrounded by them, and, as it were, fed upon them.

"I will go away,--yes, I will; may God pardon them! I will go and wander about the world, grieving and praying," said he; "I will go from church to church praying for my child. What else can I do here? Here there is no longer any place for me; there are no friends for me. With a sack on my back and a stick in my hand I will start out. I can do no good by staying here."

He took from his usual hiding-place some silver and copper money, so that in case death should come suddenly on the road or among strangers, enough would be found on his person to bury him decently and pay for a Mass for the repose of his soul; he made up a bundle of clothing and put it on his shoulder, put some linen in two bags which he tied together with cords and threw over his back after the fashion of a beggar's sack, and when thus ready to start, he called Huluk. The latter, as he came out of his room and saw his old master dressed as a beggar, trembled and felt confused, as though his thought had been divined. His heart beat violently; he began to pity Iermola sincerely, to be disgusted with his favourite project for the future and the business.

"You see I am going to wander about the world, my child," said the old man, gently. "I leave you all I have; live for God and according to God's command. May God grant you happiness here, a longer happiness than mine! Everything here is yours; if some day I should return, you will not refuse me shelter and a piece of bread. But no one need fear; I shall not trouble any one long."

Huluk then burst into tears, and fell at the old man's feet, for this generous gift was a great thing for the poor orphan; and Iermola felt touched when he saw him weeping.

"Are you going now?" cried the young man.

"What should I do here?" sighed the old man. "They have just buried the widow; Chwedko is ill, and perhaps may never get up again. I have not a single friend now in the whole village, and worse than all, I no longer have my child, my child!"

As he spoke, he wiped away his tears, which filled his eyes and flowed over his cheeks; he went forward, stepped over the threshold, and started off, feeling as though he saw everything moving around him,--the fields, the cottages, the hedges, the trees. Huluk watched him go slowly through the village; the dogs that knew him barked around him; then he plunged into the forest and disappeared, taking the road leading to the town.

Three days later, when the child, ill in bed, was found to be in real danger; when a physician, wiser than the others and better acquainted with his past life, told his parents plainly that old Iermola must be sent for, that the child must be sent back to his old life, to the work and food to which he had been accustomed,--then the father and mother hastened with him to Popielnia. But what was their astonishment and Radionek's despair when they found that the old man was no longer there, and learned that he had gone away, begging his bread and seeking to forget the past and his sad memories.

The terrible and touching grief of the poor foster-father at last moved the hearts of the parents, who had been too slow to recognize their error, and were beyond measure frightened by the tears and regrets of the child, thunder-struck and desperate at the disappearance of his father. Messengers were sent in every direction to bring Iermola back, but they returned disappointed; all their efforts had been fruitless. The parents, then going back to their first opinion, were not really sorry; they said to themselves that in the end Radionek would forget.

But Radionek, who had been called Jules since his return to his parents' house, continued to grow weaker, and faded away in spite of the tenderest care; nothing interested or amused him. He did not complain, he even tried to smile; but he was silent and sad. It was evident that he was longing for something; an indefinable and unknown malady wore him away by degrees. He seemed to find a little pleasure only when allowed to wander alone in the garden or the woods, or when permitted to ride on horseback; but his parents, being anxious lest these airings were too lonely and tiresome for the child, kept him always near them.

XVIII.

THE LAST JOURNEY

Iermola, after leaving the dwelling where he had lived so long, wandered from church to church, from village to village; he went, came, moved constantly from place to place, exposed to a thousand new privations, endeavouring to accustom himself to this wandering life, which nevertheless had its charm for the bereaved man, who had conceived a hatred and disgust for his little paternal corner. But the sorrow followed him,--a slow, ineradicable sorrow, the result of the remembrance of his joy, of his broken hopes and the sweet and bitter memory of Radionek, his dear child.

If only Radionek at least could be happy! But in the few moments when the old man had been permitted to be near him, the poor old fellow had not only caught sight of traces of grief and heart-heaviness on his child's face, but he also perceived his weariness and sorrow in the least word he spoke, referring to the dreams and memories of the past. Radionek's eyes always filled with tears whenever he spoke of Popielnia and the happy days spent in the old inn, around the kiln making pottery; more than once significant words such as, "Oh, if those times could only return!" escaped him.

A more intense agitation always disturbed the old man, whenever he thought of Radionek. He felt that his parents, while accustoming him to his new life, would weaken him by excess of care and tenderness or chill him by severity and coldness. His father and mother loved him doubtless, but their affection was very different from that of poor Iermola; accustomed as they were to the severe manner of their old father, they treated the child coldly and sternly, though loving him tenderly in the bottom of their hearts. Moreover, they did not know how to treat him, how to approach him, even what to say to him; for they had never been petted and cared for since they were born. Radionek did not understand them well, and feared them very much. In a word, his adoptive father was a real father to him; his own father seemed to him more like an adoptive one.

The farther the old man went from Popielnia and Malyczki, the more terrible became his sad forebodings and anxiety; so one day he turned aside from his route and went back nearer to his dear child, and resolved firmly to see him once more, if only at a distance, or at least to learn what he was doing and hear something about him. It seemed that his old limbs renewed their strength in order to make this journey; he had never felt so well, and though he had to go at least three leagues, he made them in one day, and at night reached the domain of Malyczki.

In order to reach the inn where he had to find lodging, even at the risk of being recognized he was obliged to go through the village. Doing so, he passed by Procope's cabin, and to his astonishment he found it ruined and deserted, the garden overgrown with wild grasses and brushwood, the old pear-tree which shaded the kiln, withered and broken, and the kiln itself fallen in and covered with briars, and looking like ruins after a fire. It was evident that no one lived any longer in the cabin, for the window had been taken out of it; a part of the roof was gone; but the door, still shut and bolted, prevented any one's entering.

It was easy to understand this desertion; Procope's daughter lived in a larger and better furnished cabin near by. His son-in-law, though he cultivated the old man's land, had not needed this dwelling; he had found no tenant to keep it up, and consequently the old house, abandoned by the servant shortly after the old man's death, soon went to ruin.

A strange, new thought then came into Iermola's mind.

"Suppose I rent this house; suppose I settle myself here," said he to himself. "In this way I might succeed in seeing my child. Who would know I was here? Perhaps they would not recognize me; perhaps they might not even see me; and if I did not see my Radionek often, I could at least go under his window at night."

As he thus spoke, his eyes filled with tears; he stopped and was thinking of and regretting Procope, when a female voice, coming from a neighbouring garden where they were gathering hemp, called out to him,--

"See here, old father, why do you stop there in the road? You will be run over; look, the wagons are coming down the mountain."

Iermola raised his eyes and recognized the village woman who was speaking to him; she was Nascia herself, Procope's daughter, who, with some young girls, was working in her garden. Evidently she had not recognized him; and judging by her kindly warning that she must be pleasant and good-natured, Iermola, after reflecting a few moments, approached her.

Nascia was a woman in the prime of life, pink, smiling, large, healthy, and well-built, having a handsome, regular face, somewhat too round perhaps, but even with this defect a perfect type of village beauty. Her colour was bright, her eyes black; her coral lips spoke of happiness, light-heartedness, and strength; and her white teeth, which showed plainly when she smiled, gleamed like mother-of-pearl beside her slightly brown cheeks. She was really good, energetic, charitable, and compassionate, though a little coquettish; a faithful wife and tender mother, though she was very fond of laughing and joking. Her husband, the son of Kolenick, the richest labouring-man in the village,--a short man, pale, slim, sickly, and languid,--respected her as he did his patron saint and feared her as he did the fire; yet he loved her dearly, and would have been ready to die for her always.

"You do not recognize me, Nascia Kolesnikowa," said the old man, in a low voice, as he approached her. "I am Iermola, whom you know very well; you remember the man who learned to make pottery under Procope, your father."

"What? Is this you carrying a beggar's sack? What can have happened to you? You had a trade and something laid by. But then old age--"

"Oh, there is a long story to tell you. You remember, of course, that I brought up your master's son?"

"I know all about it; people did nothing but talk about it."

"Well, they have taken him away from me."

"Bless me! what would you have them do? He was their child, not yours."

"But my good Nascia, wasn't he a little mine too? And now they will not even allow me to see him, as if I went there, God help me! to cast a spell over my poor dear boy. So I am tired of living. No one will receive me here; at Popielnia I am all alone,--no one is left to me; even my neighbour, the cossack's widow, has lately died. Now I have left, and I go wandering about the world."

"Poor old man, are you then so grieved at having lost your child?"

"Oh, Nascia, he was my all, my joy, my life; and they had no pity on me, they took him away from me. Then he began to droop and dwindle away; God only knows what will become of him. They will not let me go near him. Tell me, have those people the fear of God in their hearts? The lord drove me away himself, and forbade my putting foot on his estate."

"Is it possible?"

"I swear it to you by the wounds of Christ; he drove me away without pity."

"He has the blood of the old chief of squadron. He will be like his beloved father," said Nascia, in a low voice, looking behind her to be sure that no one heard her. "How could they be so unjust thus to drive away their friend, their benefactor!"

"Therefore as I have said to you, there was nothing left for me but to drag myself about from place to place. But when I began my wanderings, I was again seized with such an intense desire to see my child that I could not stand it, and I came back to get one more look at him."

"And have you seen him?"

"No, I have just gotten here; I do not know even where to find shelter."

"Come, come into our house!"

"God bless you, Nascia, and reward you by blessing your children! But I cannot accept your offer; some one would see me at your house and go and tell them. I do not want them to know at the *dwor* that I am here; I will go away after I have seen the child, even if I only see him at a distance. But tell me, is Procope's cabin vacant?"

"Certainly it is; we have not repaired it, because after the servant went away, we could not find a tenant. When it falls down entirely, the garden will be much larger."

"But until it tumbles down?"

"Oh, well, it will remain as it is."

"If you will allow me to stay there only one week, I will pay you rent for it."

Nascia burst into a laugh.

"Why should you pay," said she, "for the pleasure of lodging in a hole, in a ruin? Why, you will on the contrary do my Sydor a service, for he has an idea of repairing the cabin. If he could have found some one to stay there and keep it up, it would have lasted much longer. If you think of staying in it, I will send you the window which we had taken out of the frame and laid aside for fear some one should steal it. Will that suit you?"

"Do you really mean it? You are not joking?" said Iermola, in a tone of glad surprise.

"Quite the contrary. I have not the slightest desire to joke."

"Then may God protect and bless you!" cried the old man, clasping his hands. "You will see that I shall take good care of the old house; I will clean it up and repair it, and in return I will wait upon you whenever you wish me to do so. Oh, I shall be much happier here! I shall at least be near my child; I shall hear from him."

"Come, then, it is all settled. Sydor will be pleased too; there is nothing more to be said. As for me, I shall be pleased if you will only look after the garden a little."

"I will not only look after it, I will take care of it myself; you will see, I will put a beautiful, strong enclosure round it, provided I can find enough small boughs near by."

"That will be nice, very nice," said Nascia, with a joyous smile; "now come, take supper with us. You can have a talk with my husband and bring back the window, and as I will give you a little dry wood to light a fire in the old fireplace and drive away the dampness, you can sleep to-night in your cabin."

As she spoke, Nascia began to gather up her bundles of hemp, then called a servant, and singing a village song in a loud clear voice, she walked slowly along toward her cabin, not taking the narrow path over the foot-bridge which led from one garden to the other, but the public road, because she was so loaded down with her hemp. Sydor Kolenick's cabin was situated just on the edge of the public road, at the entrance of the second lane, so that the farther ends of the two gardens touched; it was spacious, solid, and quite new.

At a glance one could see that the household was comfortable and flourishing. The principal room was large and handsome; great gilded images were hung in one corner; the table, large and clean, was covered with a perfectly white cloth, and there was on it a large golden loaf, well baked, and covered with a fine napkin. The pewter and earthen pitchers, pails, and tubs were whole, shining, and new as if they had just come from the market; everything, indeed, was clean, dainty, substantial, cheerful, and comfortable.

The master of the house alone was unlike his wife and his surroundings; small, thin, withered, stunted, wretched-looking, with a red eye, a cloth tied round his jaws, and a beard unshaven for three weeks, he looked forty years old, though he had not yet reached thirty.

"Here is old Iermola from Popielnia," said Nascia to her husband, who, seated near the fire, was smoking his pipe to cure his toothache; "he offers to rent Procope's hut, and in addition to work the garden, if you will kindly agree to take him as a tenant."

"Iermola, ah, yes! I remember him. How do you do, old father, and what are you doing here?" said Sydor, his mouth full of saliva and speaking with difficulty.

Nascia did not allow the old man time to reply, for to all her other good qualities she added the gift of extraordinarily earnest and fluent eloquence. She began at once to relate Iermola's history; and as Sydor had a compassionate heart and was easily influenced by his wife's impressions, he was immediately filled with pity for the old man's forlorn situation, and sitting down beside him on the bench, began to chat with him.

"And what ails you?" said Iermola, suddenly, remembering that he had formerly dispensed remedies in the village. "Perhaps I could cure you."

"I do not know whether it is my teeth or my jawbone which gives me so much pain. At first one of my decayed teeth began to hurt me; and now my whole head and face burns and seems ready to burst, I suffer so."

"Have you never tried the remedy, rather disagreeable, but sometimes very good, of smoking a pipe of moss from the oak-trees instead of tobacco?"

"No, really."

"The only thing is to be careful about choosing the moss," said Iermola. "Are there any oak-trees near you?"

"Yes, indeed; the courtyard is full of them."

Iermola went out immediately to look for some; he had no trouble in finding a good handful, dried it, picked out the straws and fragments of bark, then filled a pipe with it, and presented it to the suffering Sydor. The pipe was scarcely lighted before a strong disagreeable odour filled the room and made Nascia sneeze violently; but either from this effect of the remedy or because the pain was coming to an end, Sydor soon ceased to suffer and moan, and the couple could not thank the old man sufficiently. Then the patient's face began to swell, but this was the natural consequence of the disease.

"Let it swell," said Sydor, "provided I have no more pain. A while ago I was ready to burst my head open against the wall."

Thus, thanks to a handful of moss, Iermola had been able to make a friend. Nascia gave him the window which had been taken out, some kindling-wood to light the fire in his stove, and bits of pine to burn instead of a torch. Then she made him eat his supper; and remembering that he would need something the next day, she filled a pot for him, after which Iermola went away, happy and well pleased, to occupy his new dwelling.

There is nothing so sad as an empty, solitary house after the dead owner has passed away; one seems to feel the presence of the corpse everywhere. Procope's cottage had been deserted for several months. Dampness and mildew had begun to invade it; small mushrooms had sprung up in the corners; a few grains of grass-seed and wheat, thrown by the wind into the cracks and

crevices, sent up their frail stalks, yellow and pale for want of air and light; the moisture stood in drops upon the walls; the ground-floor was covered with gray mosses; and numberless insects had made their nests among the rubbish.

But it all seemed endurable and comfortable to Iermola; and he was ready to remedy everything, to find compensations and resources for himself, happy and comforted as he was by the fact of being near his child and the hope of seeing him again.

He put in the window, lighted the fire, swept and cleared the floor, opened the door, repaired and set up as well as he could two old benches, then having spread his bags on the floor, he laid down upon them, impatient to rest after the long tramp he had taken over an uneven, woody, and sandy road.

He spent the whole of the next day in repairing and cleaning up his room; he helped Nascia to work her garden; and in the evening he went in the direction of the *dwor*, the situation and extent of which he knew perfectly well. He had waited till the twilight came on, so that no one would recognize him, and he avoided going on the side next the great courtyard, where so often he had been so inhospitably received; but he took a foot-path winding round the orchard, and also took the further precaution to wear his beggar's costume and sack. From this narrow path, which separated the garden from the farm buildings, he could plainly see the broad garden walk, the *dwor*, and the lawn where Radionek walked oftenest. He was allowed to play here alone, because the orchard, not very large, was surrounded by a strong, high hedge, and consequently the child could not go out. But at this moment the garden was empty; and Iermola, looking anxiously through the openings in the hedges, could see no one but the gardener. There was a light, however, in Radionek's room; the old man gazed at the light, sighed, and went away.

His heart, however, felt much lighter since he had been near his child, and by consequence able to be of aid to him. He found he had regained sufficient strength to take an interest in his small household; and he now felt refreshed and went back to bed almost joyfully. On his return he saw that Nascia had not forgotten his supper, for he found on the stove a small pot, well covered up, full of oatmeal gruel, enough to last him two days.

The next day was passed in the same way; and Iermola took care to go to the *dwor* every day, and at last had the happiness to see Radionek walking all alone in the garden just on the other side of the hedge.

"Radionek," he cried, "for the love of God, come and speak to me; say something, if only one word!"

At the sound of the well-known voice, though so low and stifled the tone, the boy trembled, stopped, and then with one bound leaped to the top of the hedge.

"My father," he cried, "is it you? What are you doing here?"

"Be still, be still; do not betray me! I came to see you."

"How long since you came?"

"A few days ago."

"Where are you staying?"

"In Procope's old hut. Oh, do not betray me! Be careful, my son; we shall see each other every evening." Radionek trembled and flushed with pleasure; but at that moment some one approached, a voice sounded in the garden. The old man disappeared; and Jules pretended to his parents that he had wandered there to look for birds' nests. They reproved him gently for having, by jumping, exposed himself to falling, and then took him back to the house, fearing for him the freshness of the evening air and the dew. No one, however, remarked the change which had come over the child; Radionek, extremely agitated, did not sleep the whole night.

The next day he would not play anywhere but in the walks of the garden. Iermola did not fail to come in the evening. They found a place where the hedge was not so thick, and they could talk more conveniently. But they could not talk long; and the old man went away discontented and troubled. His heart, full of a great joy, was having a struggle with his conscience; Radionek was begging and pleading with him to take him away with him, to fly with him far away from Malyczki, for the life he was leading had become insupportable to him. His parents' affection was becoming more and more weaned from him every day, and was bestowed instead upon his brother. He had ceased to be their pet, their darling; he was becoming almost a burden and a nuisance to them. They scolded him for his wild ways, his sadness, his weakness, and his ill health; they called him teasingly the peasant of the family.

He possessed everything, it is true, except sympathy, affection, and tenderness; but accustomed as he was to the deep love of his old father, it was this heart-penury which caused him so much suffering.

"But how can I take you away?" replied the old man. "They are your parents, after all; they will say I have stolen you away. You have been accustomed with them to have all sorts of dainties;

how can I give them to you? Where shall we hide ourselves? They will follow us, and at last they will find us; then we shall both be more wretched than ever."

But the child had his answer for all these questions; and Iermola began to give way. His parents did not love him as his adoptive father had loved him; how could he live with them? He did not need dainties or choice and delicate food, for he would steal the servants' coarse, black bread, which reminded him of the simple meals of his early years; and several times he had been mocked at and punished because he preferred that coarse, common food. It would be easy to hide themselves, he added, by going far, far away into some unknown country. Who would recognize him if he wore the dress of a peasant,--a coarse druggert stable coat, for instance?

At the thought of this bold plan, this sudden deliverance, Iermola's soul was filled with hope and happiness; but he soon grew sad again as he thought of the impossibility of putting it into execution, and felt honest, conscientious scruples arise within him. Suppose he should happen to die on the way, to whose care should he leave the child? Was it wise or just to snatch him from his family and from a sure and peaceful future? The old man began to reproach himself for having come, for having disturbed poor Radionek; he thought of running away from the village, so as not to expose the child to further trial.

He meant to go away at once. He felt that Radionek exercised over him an influence more and more powerful; but that evening when they were talking together near the garden hedge, he must have betrayed himself entirely by some imprudent word or the trembling and tearful tone of his voice, for the boy took leave of him sadly and silently, and the old man did not suspect then that Radionek had taken a firm and definite resolve. The old vagabond had scarcely returned to his cabin when he began by the light of his pine torch to collect his clothes and bundle them into his sack. He was still occupied with this task when the door suddenly opened, and a young peasant of slight figure rushed into the room. The old man did not at first recognize him who had concealed himself under this humble garb; but his heart beat violently, and then he uttered a cry. It was Radionek, dressed in the clothes he had taken from one of the valets at the *dwor*. The poor old frightened father clasped his hands in terror and trembled all over as he saw his child.

"Do not be frightened, father, it is I; I have come back to you," cried Radionek, throwing himself on his neck. "Be quick, be quick! let us go before they find I have run away. Put some bread in your sack; we will plunge into the forest, and by to-morrow morning they will not be able to overtake us. Somewhere we will find a cottage, some kind people, a river shore, a bank of clay; and we will work and sing and turn pots once more, good father."

The old man's speech and breath failed him.

"Oh, my child, my child! what have you done?" he answered.

"What have I done? Yesterday my father and mother told me that I was not worthy of their care and love. Go, they said to me a hundred times; go back to your old potter whom you love so much, since you sigh so for your old life! We can easily do without you; we are satisfied with Wladzio. You see, they themselves have advised me to do it."

It must have been through strong love on the one hand and great weakness on the other that Iermola at last consented to an act which he considered only as a theft; but he had not the strength to resist his child's entreaties. Radionek begged him, kissed him, hugged him, fell on his knees to him. At last the old man lost all power over himself, and taking the child by the hand, rushed from the cabin.

XIX.

THE DRAMA IN THE FOREST

The night, so dark that one could not see a step before him, was fortunately very mild and perfectly still; there was not a breath of wind. The inhabitants of the village had been asleep a long time; now and then there was the noise of the barking of a dog tied to the door-sill of some cabin, the hoarse song of the cocks who kept watch over the village, and in the distance the cry of the night birds,--owls and screech-owls,--as they answered each other like vigilant guards on sentry duty. The old man and the child passed through the village in silence; they reached the crossroads, crossed themselves before the great crucifix set up on the spot, and took by chance the road which crossed a vast region of marshes and bare brush-wood, beyond which one entered the wood leading to Lithuania. Prudence obliged them to avoid open roads; nevertheless, it was important to go in some certain direction. Iermola, who formerly had been an excellent hunter, easily succeeded in finding his way in the midst of a forest, guiding himself now by the light of the sky and now by the mosses on the trees. In the daytime he knew that he could easily succeed

in not getting lost; but he scarcely thought it possible during the night, and not on the beaten road,--to keep the same direction. He therefore turned into a narrow pathway leading to a pitch-kiln situated about a mile off, in a clearing called Smolna, and resolved to follow it until daylight, when he would leave it and turn to the north through the coppices and bogs.

The two walked on in silence, each praying in a low voice. Radionek seemed born again. He held his head up joyfully; he supported Iermola; and when they reached the protecting forest which surrounded them with its undergrowth and concealed them with its shadows, they both began to breathe more freely.

"Oh, good father," said the young refugee, "two, three, five days more perhaps, of patience, fatigue, and effort, and we shall come to some place in the open fields where we can settle down and be quiet. No one will know us; no one will hunt for us. We shall have enough bread; I saw that you put it in your sack. We shall not be obliged to go into the villages; there is water in the woods, and we shall not die of thirst even if we have to suck the leaves on the trees. During the day we will rest, we will sleep on the thick brakes; and we will walk all night and early in the morning."

The old man sighed as he listened to him, for he knew very well that all this was neither so simple nor so easy; he did not wish to frighten the child, but he said to himself that the strength of both of them would doubtless give out, and that in the woods they were exposed to face a thousand dangers, and meet with a thousand obstacles. Some one passing, meeting the two fugitives, might arrest them and turn them over to justice. Thoughts like this, and others still more sad, crushed the old man's spirit; but he forced himself to smile and say nothing, and listened to the joyous babble and tender outpourings of the child, who had been so long deprived of such enjoyment that now he could not be satisfied, and his old father had not the strength to undeceive him or tell him to be silent.

The fear of being surprised had doubtless quickened their pace, for long before daylight they reached the clearing of Smolna, where the path stopped. From there no beaten road could be seen through the undergrowth, which was literally ploughed down in every direction by the wheels of the wagons of the peasants who came there for wood and resin torches.

Day had scarcely dawned; the road became more and more rugged and difficult. The old man determined to make a halt, knowing very well that no one would come to look for them in that place. They lighted a fire with boughs and some coal picked up near the kiln; and Radionek, full of joy, stretched himself at the old man's feet.

"No, no," said he, "they will not look for me; they are not even sorry I am gone. Do you suppose I am at all necessary to them? They never have understood me; and I never have been able to comprehend them. My mother has Wladzio; my father has Wladzio. They will be happier without me in the house."

Here, however, he could not help sighing.

"However, some day," he continued, "after a while,--after a long while,--I shall go to see my mother again. But now I should suffer too much, living with them; I do not like to think of it even. I should surely die of grief. There I was shut up all alone; no one ever talked to me as you used to talk to me, father. They were always telling me, whatever I did, that I had the manners of a peasant; that peasants did so and so. Yes, it is true, I am a peasant; they,--they are masters and lords. My little brother Wladzio is the only one I regret; he already began to know me, and smiled so sweetly on me as he would hold out his arms for me."

"My dear child," said Iermola, "do not talk in that way. Perhaps at this moment they are weeping over there and cursing me. You break my heart; you make me remember that I have betrayed them."

"Ah, well! let us talk about our happy life in Popielnia, father. Do you remember the time when we used to make our porringers, our little dishes, and when we went with Chwedko to the fair, and how astonished and pleased you were when we succeeded with our first glazed pitchers?"

"Ah, those days will never come again," sighed the old man.

"Why should they never return? I have forgotten nothing,--nothing at all. It was useless for them to forbid me over there; I used, in secret, to make little pots and porringers of the clay Iwaneck would bring me, and I know still how to glaze dishes and other things. We will build a kiln; you will see how we will work."

Talking thus, they both fell asleep; and when the song of the oriole which was warbling above their heads aroused them from their slumber, it was broad day, but under the trees hung a thick, damp fog.

The old man rose quickly; the child followed him; and they began to travel northward, guiding themselves by the thick mosses which grew on the trunks of the trees.

Although our great forests have been in some places greatly diminished, frequently cleared, and often half cut down and partly destroyed, the heart of them still recalls the majesty of the

early ages of the world; here the coppices are so thick and the brakes so impenetrable that one finds the greatest difficulty in going through them.

Here the wild beast has his lair, where he hears no murmur but that of the giant trees which shelter him at their feet. The great waving branches, broken down by the winds, are thrown up in heaps and rot in great mounds, overgrown with mosses and pale grasses; the wild hop-vine crowns them, and running plants cover them with their interlacing tendrils.

Here and there, under a thick bed of dry, half-rotten leaves, flows a black-looking brook, bearing with it dead grasses and the remains of other plants.

Sometimes it spreads itself and forms a large pond of stagnant water and moving mud, in the midst of which grow water-lilies and rushes; farther on, it again contracts and runs in a narrow, miry bed, interrupted by unevenness of the land, hummocks of turf, and trunks of trees.

These gloomy coppices are succeeded by rude clearings and fields of small extent. Here, the opening seems wider and less savage; there young shrubs grow thickly; farther on, marshes and thickets appear; and at last you see the open fields.

The gloomiest places in these wild forests are those where fire has devastated them, leaving deep traces of its ravages. Great trunks still stand, dry and blackened; the branches of the pine-trees put out sad, yellow-looking leaves; scanty, miserable grass begins to cover the ground.

Sometimes the flight of a bird breaks this awful silence; a squirrel leaps and makes the boughs of an oak-tree bend; a hungry raven goes by cawing; a black swan darts into the thickest part of the forest, or a startled deer bounds over the tall grasses. Then the woods fall again into their majestic, eternal sleep.

The deeper you penetrate, the fewer traces you find of man's passage. At first there is a road, then a path, and farther on broken bushes, trodden grass, a tree cut down, trails of yellow chips in places where beams have been hewn, a hut where hunters have been on the watch, the cabin of a sentinel, the trench of a charcoal-burner, the ashes of a shepherd's fire; then one sees only the traces of animals, then no traces of anything, for the wild animal leaves few traces behind him when he has passed by.

On the second day of their journey, when they began to go deeper into the heart of the forest, which stretched toward the north like a great green sea, they only at rare intervals came upon any indications of the passage of man. The silence was universal and profound; and it was rare that the noise of the woodman's axe, resounding in the distance, obliged them to withdraw rapidly from the direction whence the sound came.

The old man, guiding himself by inspecting the mosses and the part of the sky whence the light came, continued to go northward. They neither saw nor encountered any one; and toward evening they stopped on a little rising ground, shadowed by such thickly growing pine-trees and hazel-nut bushes that they could allow themselves boldly to light a fire without fear of being betrayed by the smoke or by the crackling of the flames.

Iermola then declared that they were too far from Malyczki for any one to discover any trace of them. Their feet, in fact, had left no impression upon the slippery, moss-covered ground under the sombre dome of the pines; chance alone could put the pursuers on their track.

The two travellers were extremely tired; so after having eaten a bit of dry bread and drank out of the hollow of their hands some water from the brook in the forest, they stretched themselves on the ground near their fire, which sent up a clear red flame. Iermola roasted a few potatoes which he had brought with him; and this was their evening meal.

Radionek appeared happy all the time, but now he scarcely talked at all. His breath seemed to fail him sometimes; for having been a long time accustomed to an indoor life, he could with difficulty endure such a rapid march.

A wandering blackbird, roused by the crackling of the flames, wished them good-evening; a light breeze, passing over the summits of the pines, awoke vague murmurs in the depths of the forest. Then all was hushed; and a solemn silence began to reign again over the immense and gloomy forest.

The third day they came to woods less thick, where the trees grew smaller; low, tangled brush-wood took the place of the old trees of pine and oak; the earth was damper, softer, and more thickly covered with verdure.

They comprehended that they were coming to the low and often inundated regions; they would have to go along the edge of some vast marshes, for here and there they perceived at a distance large tracts covered with mud, interspersed with salt-water ponds.

It became impossible to follow the direction they had at first chosen; but as they had still some bread, and as their strength seemed not yet in danger of giving out, Iermola determined to turn a little to the left so as to avoid encountering the marshes. Radionek, quite restored, proposed to seek a frequented road, follow it, stop in the nearest village, and afterward go on fearlessly into

the interior of the country; but Iermola did not yet dare thus to tempt fortune. Choosing, therefore, the more elevated land, across the clearings of brakes and brush-wood, they walked on in the solitude three more days, when at the end of the last day the old man, as they stopped for rest, remarked such a change in the child's face that he was seriously alarmed, and resolved to run the risk and look for the public road himself.

In fact, poor Radionek could hardly walk any longer; his courage alone kept him on his feet and supplied his strength. Unaccustomed to fatigue and labour, exposed thus to constant exertion just after a long illness, he was every moment in danger of fainting away and never rising again.

He was pale and oppressed, and complained of a great heaviness in his head. Soon he fell into a deep, heavy sleep, from which Iermola could scarcely rouse him.

It was then necessary to seek for help, to find men, a shelter, a village; and in the mean time, as our travellers had just come across a wood-cutter's hut on the road, Iermola pretended to be weary, and proposed to stop, although the day was not nearly ended.

The portion of the forest where they then were was much less wild than that which they had crossed some days before, when they plunged through the brakes.

Here and there was an old forgotten beam, bits of wood chips, a trunk recently deprived of its branches, attesting that some villages must be quite near; the air, moreover, impregnated with the odour of smoke and fragrance of the fields, gave evidence of the existence of some inhabited place in the vicinity.

These various indications contributed to restore the old man somewhat; but on the other hand, seeing the child so sadly weakened, he did not know what to do, how to be able to go, or where to look for help for Radionek.

Their terrible and threatening position rose before him in all its horrors. Nevertheless the poor old man, recommending himself to the all-powerful mercy of God, employed his remaining strength in preparing a bed of leaves in one corner of the hut, and determined to go in search of a village as soon as poor Radionek should go to sleep. The fainting child, having taken a few swallows of water, had scarcely stretched himself on his bed before he was sleeping like a rock.

The old man's limbs also trembled under him, and his head swam; he was greatly in need of rest and sleep, but he could not think of either one or the other. Leaning on his stick, he plunged into the forest in search of the village, which from all indications could not be far away.

Sure enough, in the distance, behind a long stretch of bushes and brush-wood he soon perceived quite a large village, whose blackened houses were ranged in a half-circle along the edge of the lake. It was surrounded by gardens full of large pear-trees; wells with sweeps and with cranks could be seen in the distance; two old *cerkiew*s with cupolas rose at the two extremities, but there was no *dwor* to be seen; in the centre, however, on a little hill surrounded by the rains of ramparts and old fallen walls, there was a small plank house, which could not be the residence of the lord, but must be that of the steward.

The old man, after making these observations, concluded that the village he saw before him was not one of the little towns of Wolhynian Polesia.

The country around him, though somewhat resembling his native land, was more marshy, flatter, and more dreary-looking. He was convinced, upon examining the different style of the dwellings, the sandy hills, the clear water of the lake, and the larch-trees growing near the Russian church, that according to appearances he must be in a corner of Dobrynian Russia, or else in the vicinity of Pinsk.

But the village was too far off for him to go there for assistance, to leave the child all alone in that hut just at nightfall. Accordingly the old man after a moment retraced his steps; he sat down on the sill of the door, leaned against the doorway, and fell into an anxious and disturbed sleep, with his eyes always fixed on Radionek, whose face in the half-light was pale and motionless as that of a marble statue. For some moments he listened to his breathing; he watched his sleep. Then again, broken down by fatigue, he returned and sat down; and in this position, thoroughly overcome by sleep and weariness, he at last unwillingly closed his tired eyes.

Near them a bright fire, built of branches and dry leaves, burned and sparkled until daylight; and in the morning, the old man, feeling a little more quiet, slept two or three hours much more peaceably.

When he woke, he saw with astonishment the great bright, glad sun shining above his head, the sweet morning light smiling at him through the trees, and a woman, still young and beautiful, though very pale, regarding him in silence mingled with surprise, doubt, and sorrow.

This new-comer, who had very black eyes and hair, was tall and slender; she was dressed in a gown of coloured calico and wore on her head a handkerchief arranged after the fashion of the women belonging to the lesser nobility. She held in her hand a closed knife, a basket in which to put mushrooms, and some provisions wrapped in a white linen bag.

Iermola, when he saw her, was as much surprised as she was; he opened his mouth, was about to exclaim, to pronounce a name, then stopped, hesitated in doubt, and looked again.

But the stranger, starting back a few steps, cried at the same time,--

"Are you old Iermola?"

"Is it you, Horpyna? Is it you, my dear lady?" answered the old man, correcting himself quickly.

"What are you doing here?"

The unhappy creature, full of trouble, was silent, not knowing what to reply.

"You are here alone?"

"No, madame, with Radionek."

"You have run away from Popielnia? Tell me, then, what has happened to you?"

Iermola had no need of dissimulation in the presence of one whom he knew so well, and whom he esteemed so highly; he therefore in a few words told her his whole story.

She listened attentively, grieved, and somewhat indignant, but above all filled with astonishment, and in the bottom of her heart a little displeased at the coming of this old friend who could reveal to every one her real origin (for since she had lived in that country, she had pretended to belong to the lesser nobility). But she did not wish to refuse the unfortunate man either her assistance or her advice, for she had been very fond of the child, and besides, she was really sympathetic and charitable.

"It is useless to think of mushrooms to-day," said she, shutting up her knife; "come to the village. My husband is the steward there; there is a vacant cabin,--one formerly occupied by the blacksmith. We will put you in it for the present."

At this Iermola threw himself at her feet and embraced them, then went to rouse the child.

But all night Radionek had been in a burning fever; he had talked in his sleep of things the old man could not understand. He seemed disturbed and in pain; and when it was necessary to waken him, it was impossible to do so. He sat up on his bed, trembled, looked round bewildered, did not recognize Iermola, and fell back upon his bed, complaining first of being very cold and then of a burning heat. It was impossible to be mistaken any longer; the child was in the early stage of some terrible illness. Iermola, exhausted and in despair, wrung his hands and sobbed aloud.

"He is cold and tired; he must have drunk some bad water when he was in a perspiration," cried Horpyna. "Do not be so anxious; that is not so bad, only the poor child may be sick for a few days."

"But how can I carry him to the village? Perhaps it would be better to let him be quiet here."

"Certainly, do not rouse him; the fever will soon pass off," said the steward's wife. "I will go back home and send you something to eat, for hunger alone is enough to cause illness. Light a fire in the fireplace; stop up the cracks in the door as well as you can; cover the child up well, and do not move from here. I will send you some herb tea."

Iermola took off all of his own clothes except his shirt, to cover his child, then sat down weeping beside his bed. Horpyna hastened to return, for she loved Radionek, whom she had cared for when he was a baby; and she felt a sincere pity for him.

After a few hours, the messenger whom she sent from her house arrived, bringing some fresh bread, some water, some herbs good in sickness, and some brandy for Iermola; a boy also accompanied him, who was to remain at the hut to assist the old man.

But it was still impossible to rouse Radionek sufficiently to make him take the refreshing tea which Horpyna had prepared.

His face burned like fire; his eyes, half open, shone with a strange light. The fever and delirium were evidently increasing.

In the silent forest, under the sombre branches of the old pine-trees, was about to be enacted the last scene of this drama of love,--this rustic drama, which would perhaps be improbable, if it were not strictly true in every detail, true in its sad simplicity.

The day after the one on which he had gone to sleep in the forester's hut, Radionek opened his eyes for a moment, recognized and smiled upon the old man, who rejoiced and began to hope; but this smile was like the last flicker of a dying lamp.

The child began to amuse himself, to talk in a low voice, telling of all he meant to do when he should get rested and well again; he proposed to go to work immediately, spoke in turn of Popielnia, Huluk, the widow, the happy days of the past, Malyczki, and the sorrowful days of trial. He tried especially to reassure and cheer the old man, who wept bitterly; but while he was speaking, he grew weaker and fell again into a doze, then a violent fever came on, during which he threw himself about, cried, trembled, as though he thought himself pursued by some invisible enemy, and so he died in the arms of Iermola, upon whose breast he sought shelter, and who held him tightly in his embrace.

The old man strained to his bosom a long while the beautiful, pure young form, now still and cold, which he could not make up his mind to surrender to the grave; he did not utter a word, but the big tears fell from her eyes,—silent, bitter tears. At last his breast heaved, and a great sorrowful cry escaped him.

"My child! my child!" Then he buried his hands in his gray hair, and fled like a madman into the depths of the forest.

In the cemetery of Horodyszcz may still be seen the tomb of Radionek, whose history the people relate, embellishing it with a thousand wonderful, almost superhuman circumstances. Not even a poor cross of black wood marks this neglected tomb; but the white and pink thorn gives it the fragrance of its flowers and the velvety verdure of its leaves.

At the door of a neighbouring church there has stood for a long time a little old man, bent, decrepit, called by the people of the vicinity old Father Skin-and-Bones, because it seems that his skin, yellow, wrinkled, and sadly withered, alone holds his bones together.

On Sundays the villagers gather round him to laugh at and tease him; for who would not laugh to see him constantly hugging in his arms an old doll, wrapped in rags like a baby swaddled in its long clothes? He rocks it on his heart, and sings it to sleep, now and then kissing it, talking to it in a low voice, and often weeping over it. He thinks he is still caring for, rocking and petting his darling child, the poor old beggar, skin and bones, Iermola, the poor old father.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1](#): The name given to the dwellings of the nobility.

[Footnote 2](#): A disease of the hair peculiar to Poland.

[Footnote 3](#): A sort of boat or raft.

[Footnote 4](#): Presents usually made by a young peasant of these countries to a young girl whom he asks in marriage.

[Footnote 5](#): Popular proverb, signifying that nothing is impossible.

[Footnote 6](#): A sort of cake thrown into warm water and then baked in the oven.

[Footnote 7](#): God has pity on the orphan.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IERMOLA ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive

Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.