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THE KNIGHTS OF THE CROSS.

THE
KNIGHTS OF THE CROSS.

BY
HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ,
AUTHOR OF "QUO VADIS," "WITH FIRE AND SWORD,"
"CHILDREN OF THE SOIL," ETC.

*AUTHORIZED AND UNABRIDGED TRANSLATION FROM
THE POLISH BY*

JEREMIAH CURTIN.

SECOND HALF.

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MAP OF POLAND
 AND THE
 TERRITORY OF THE ORDER
 BEFORE THE BATTLE OF
 GRUNWALD

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TERRITORY OF THE ORDER
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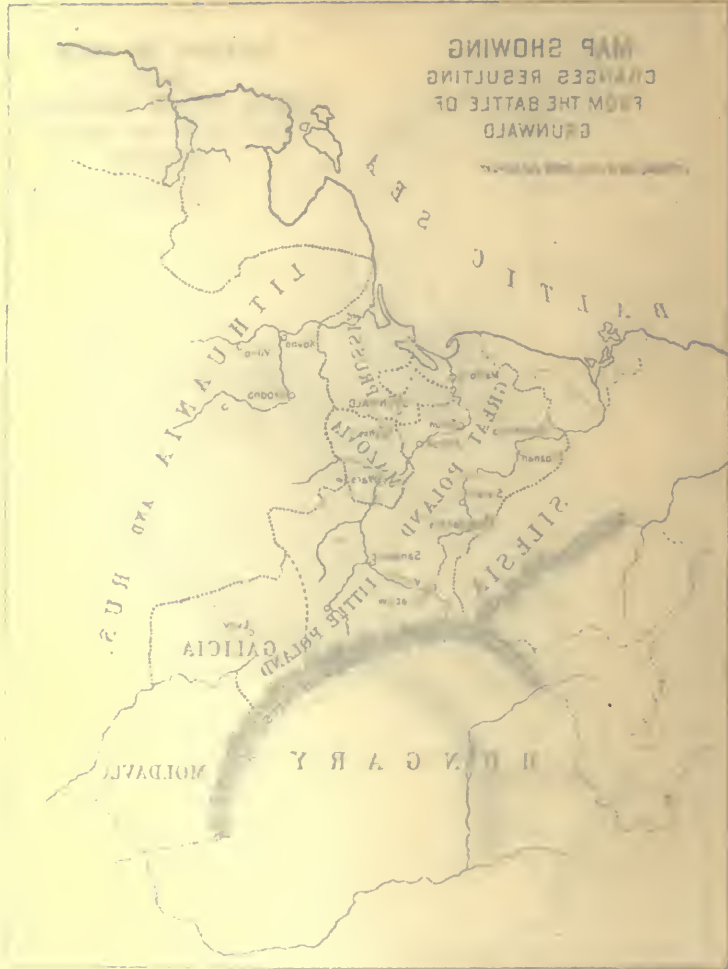


**MAP SHOWING
CHANGES RESULTING
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THE

KNIGHTS OF THE CROSS.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THOUGH Hlava was hastening to Zgorzelitze he could not move so quickly as he wanted, for the road had grown immensely difficult. After a sharp winter and hard frosts, after snows so abundant that whole villages were hidden beneath them, great thaws came. February, in spite of its name Luty (Savage), did not turn out in the least degree savage. First rose dense and impenetrable fogs, then rains came which were almost downpours, rains from which the white drifts thawed before the eye. During intervals between downpours winds blew such as were usual in March, hence fitful and sudden, — winds which broke up and blew away swollen clouds in the sky; on the earth they whined through thickets, roared through forests, and devoured that snow under which just before limbs and branches were dreaming in the calm sleep of winter. On the fields the widely spread water wrinkled its surface, rivers and streams rose. Fish alone were delighted with such abundance of the fluid element; all other creatures, held as it were on a halter, hid in huts and houses. In many places the passage from village to village was possible in boats only. There was no lack, it is true, in swamps and forests of roads or dams made of beams and round logs, but the dams had grown soft, and the logs in low places had sunk in quagmires, so that passage over them was dangerous or quite impossible. Especially difficult for Hlava was the advance through Great Poland, which was full of lakes where the overflows were greater than in other parts, and travelling, particularly for horses, more difficult. He had to halt often, and wait entire weeks, either in small towns, or in villages with nobles who received him and his people hospitably, according to custom, glad to hear him tell of the Knights of the Cross, and to pay with bread and salt for the news which he gave them. Therefore spring had announced itself in the world

distinctly and March had passed in greater part before he found himself near Zgorzelitse and Bogdanets.

Hlava's heart throbbed when he thought that he would soon see his lady, for though he knew that he would never win her, just as he would never win stars from the sky, he extolled and loved her with all the soul that was in him.

But he determined to go directly to Matsko, first because he was sent to him, and second because he was taking men who were to remain at Bogdanets. After Zbyshko had slain Rotgier he took his retinue, composed, according to the regulations of the Order, of ten horses and as many men. Two had gone to Schytno with the fallen knight's body, but Zbyshko, knowing the eagerness of old Matsko in seeking for settlers, sent the rest with Hlava as a gift to his uncle.

The Cheh, on reaching Bogdanets, did not find Matsko. The old man had gone, as the servants informed him, with crossbow and dogs to the forest, but he returned during daylight, and, on learning that a considerable retinue had halted at his mansion, he hurried his steps so as to meet the newcomers, and offer entertainment; he was tremendously astonished at first, and, throwing his crossbow and cap on the ground, cried out, —

“As God lives! they have killed him! Tell what thou knowest!”

“He is not killed,” answered Hlava; “he is well.”

When Matsko heard this he was confused somewhat and fell to panting; at last he drew a deep breath.

“Praise to Christ the Lord!” said he. “Where is the man?”

“He went to Malborg and sent me hither with tidings.”

“But why did he go to Malborg?”

“For his wife.”

“Ah! fear the wounds of Christ, boy. What wife?”

“The daughter of Yurand. There will be something to talk about, even the whole night through, but permit me, respected lord, to draw breath, for I am dreadfully road-weary, and since midnight I have lashed my beast forward.”

Matsko stopped inquiries for a while, though mainly because astonishment had taken speech from him. When he had recovered somewhat he shouted to the boy to throw wood on the fire and bring food, then he walked through the room, waved his hands, and talked in soliloquy, —

“I cannot believe my own ears — Yurand's daughter — Zbyshko married —”

“He is married and not married,” said Hlava, who now

told slowly what had happened, and how it had happened. The old man listened eagerly, interrupting with questions at times, for not everything was clear in the narrative. Hlava did not know, for example, exactly when Zbyshko had married, for there had been no wedding, but he declared positively that there had been a ceremony performed at the instance of Anna Danuta, the princess, though it was announced publicly only after the arrival of Rotgier, with whom Zbyshko, after challenging him to the judgment of God, had fought in presence of the court of Mazovia.

“ Ah! Has he fought? ” cried Matsko, with flashing eyes, and immense curiosity. “ Well, and what? ”

“ He cut the German in two; and God gave me luck also in fighting with Rotgier’s attendant. ”

Matsko panted again, this time with satisfaction.

“ Well, he is not to be laughed at. The last of the Grady, but, as God be my aid, not the least of them. Yes! and that time against the Frisians — a mere stripling in those days. ”

Then he looked once and a second time at the Cheh more attentively.

“ But thou also dost please me. It is clear that thou art not lying. I know a liar even through a plank. That attendant I do not esteem overmuch; thou hadst no great work with him, as thou sayst, but thou didst wrench the arm of that dog-brother, Danveld, and earlier thou didst kill the wild bull, — those are praiseworthy deeds. But the plunder, ” asked Matsko on a sudden, — “ was it considerable? ”

“ We took arms, horses, ten men, eight of whom the young lord has sent to you — ”

“ What did he do with the other two? ”

“ He sent them away with the body. ”

“ Could not the prince send his own men? Those two will never come back to us. ”

Hlava smiled at such greed, which for that matter Matsko showed frequently, and he answered, —

“ Spyhov is a great property. ”

“ Great! But what of that? It is not his yet. ”

“ Whose is it? ”

Matsko rose up.

“ Tell me! But Yurand? ”

“ Yurand is in a dungeon with the Knights of the Cross, and death is hanging over him. God knows whether he will

recover; if he does, whether he will return. Even should he recover and return, Father Kaleb has read his will, and he has declared to all that the young lord is his heir."

This news produced, it was clear, an immense impression on Matsko, for it was so favorable and unfavorable that he could not grasp it, nor bring into order the feelings which shook him one after another. The news that Zbyshko had married pricked him painfully at the first moment, for he loved Yagenka as if he had been her father, and wished with all his soul to unite her and Zbyshko. But on the other hand he had grown accustomed to look on the matter as lost, and again Yurand's daughter brought that which Yagenka could not bring, the favor of Prince Yanush, and a dowry which, she being an only child, was much greater. Matsko saw Zbyshko in his mind as the prince's *comes*, lord in Bogdanets and Spyhov; nay more, a castellan in the future. The thing was not improbable, for people said also in those days of a poor noble: "He had twelve sons; six fell in battle, and six became castellans." Both nation and family were on the highroad to greatness. Considerable property could only help Zbyshko on that road; hence Matsko's greed and his family pride had something in which to find comfort. Still the old man had no lack of reasons for fear. He had gone once himself to the Knights of the Cross to save Zbyshko, and had brought back iron between his ribs from that journey, and now Zbyshko had gone to Malborg, as if into the throat of the wolf. "Will he wait for his wife, or for death there? They will not look on him kindly," thought Matsko, — "he who has just killed a famed knight, and before that rushed against Lichtenstein. They, the dog bloods, love vengeance." At this thought the old knight was concerned greatly. It occurred to him also that as Zbyshko was choleric he would not escape without a battle against some German. But touching this he felt less fear. Matsko's greatest dread was that they might seize him. "They had seized Yurand and his daughter, they had not hesitated on a time to seize the prince himself in Zlotorya; why should they spare Zbyshko?"

Here this question occurred to him, "What would happen if the young fellow, though he should escape from the hands of the knights, were not to find his wife anywhere?" For an instant Matsko comforted himself with the thought that Zbyshko would inherit Spyhov after her, but that was brief comfort. The old man was concerned greatly

about property, but he was concerned no less about his race, about Zbyshko's children. "If Danusia should disappear like a stone under water, and no one know whether she were dead or living, Zbyshko would not be able to marry another — and then there would be no Grady of Bogdanets in existence. Hei! with Yagenka it would be otherwise! A hen could not cover Mochydoly with her wings, nor a dog with his tail, and she would give a birth every year without missing, just like that apple-tree out in the orchard." So Matsko's sorrow surpassed his delight at the new inheritance, and from this sorrow and alarm he fell again to inquiring of Hlava how and when the marriage had been solemnized.

"I have said, respected lord," answered Hlava, "that I know not; and I will not swear to my own guesswork."

"What is thy guesswork?"

"I did not leave the young lord during his sickness, I slept in the same room with him; but one evening he commanded me to go away, and later I saw how the Gracious Lady went to him, and with her the young lady, Pan de Lorche, and Father Vyshonek. I even wondered, for the young lady had a garland on her head, but I thought that they were to give my young lord the sacrament. Maybe it was at that time. I remember that he commanded me to array him beautifully, as for a wedding, but I thought then that it was to receive the Lord's body."

"And how was it afterwards? Were they alone?"

"Ei, they were not, and even if they had been he had not strength at that time to give himself food. And people had come who announced themselves as sent by Yurand, and she went away with those people in the morning."

"Has Zbyshko seen her since then?"

"Human eye has not seen her since that day."

Silence followed.

"What dost thou think?" inquired Matsko after a while; "will the Knights of the Cross give her up?"

Hlava shook his head and waved his hand. "To my thinking she is lost forever," said he, slowly.

"Why so?" inquired Matsko, almost with fear.

"For this reason: If they were to say that they have her there would be hope; it would be possible to make a complaint, or pay a ransom, or take her by force. But they say: 'We intercepted a girl and informed Yurand. He would not own her as his daughter, and in return for our

kindness he slew so many of our men that a good battle would not have slain more of them.”

“Then they did show Yurand some girl?”

“The report is that they did, God alone knows. Perhaps this is not true, and perhaps they showed him another girl. That the master of Spyhov killed people is true, and the Knights are ready to take oath that they never carried off his daughter. Oh, this is a terribly difficult matter. Even if the Grand Master should give an order they will say that they have never had the girl. Who can convict them? The case is all the more difficult since the courtiers at Tsehanov speak of a letter from Yurand in which he states that his daughter is not with the Knights of the Cross.”

“But maybe she is not.”

“I beg your Grace! If bandits carried her away it was only to get a ransom. Besides, bandits could not have written the letter, nor imitated Yurand’s seal, nor sent an honest-looking escort.”

“True, but what did the Knights of the Cross want of her?”

“Revenge on Yurand. They prefer revenge to mead and wine, and as to cause, they have cause enough. The master of Spyhov was a terror to the Order, and that which he has done just now has enraged them to the utmost. My lord too, as I hear, raised hands on Lichtenstein, and he has killed Rotgier. God aided me in wrenching the arm of that dog brother, Danveld. Ei! just think of it, there were four of them, cursed be their mothers! Now only one is alive, and he is old. Your Grace, we can bite also.”

Again came a moment of silence.

“Thou art clever,” said Matsko at last. “To thy thinking what will they do with her?”

“Prince Vitold was a mighty prince; they say that the German Cæsar bowed as low as his girdle to him, and how did the Knights treat Vitold’s children? Are their castles few? Are their dungeons few? Are their walls few? Are their ropes and halters few?”

“By the living God!” exclaimed Matsko.

“God stop them from hiding away my young master, even if he has a letter from Prince Yanush, and goes with Pan de Lorche, who is a powerful person and related to princes. Indeed I had no wish to come hither, for there it would be easier to fight, but he commanded me. I heard him talking once to the old master of Spyhov. ‘Art thou cunning?’

asked he, 'for I lack cunning; but with them cunning is needed. Oi,' said he, 'my uncle Matsko is the man for this place!' And that is why he sent me to Bogdanets. But even you could not find Yuřand's daughter, for she is in the other world perhaps by this time, and against death the greatest cunning is powerless."

Matsko fell into meditation, and only after long silence did he say, —

"Ah, there is no help then; cunning cannot fight against death. But if I should go there and discover even this, that they destroyed the girl, Spyhov would remain even in that case to Zbyshko, and he could come back alone and take another wife."

At this Matsko drew a deep breath, as if he had cast some weight from his heart, and Hlava inquired with a low, timid voice, —

"The young lady of Zgorzelitse?"

"Yes," answered Matsko, "all the more that she is an orphan, and Stan of Rogov with Vilk of Brozova are attacking her more and more."

Hlava sprang to his feet.

"The young lady an orphan? Where is her father?"

"Then thou knowest nothing?"

"By the dear God, what has happened?"

"Indeed, how couldst thou know? Thou hast come here directly, and we have talked only of Zbyshko. She is an orphan. True Zyh never warmed a place in the house unless he had guests there. When he had no guests it was straight-way unpleasant at home for him. The abbot wrote to Zyh some time ago that he was going to visit Prince Premko of Osvetsim and begged the knight to go with him. That was a delight for Zyh, so well was he acquainted with the prince, and more than once they had had gladsome times together. Zyh came to me. 'I am going to Osvetsim,' said he, 'and afterwards to Glevitse, but will you keep an eye on my house?' Something struck me then, and I said to him, 'Do not go, take care of your land and Yagenka, for I know that Stan and Vilk are thinking up something evil.' And thou shouldst know that the abbot, out of anger at Zbyshko, wanted Vilk or Stan for the girl; but later on, when he knew the fellows better, he had them beaten and thrown out of Zgorzelitse. This was well, but not very well, for they became desperately angry. There is a little peace just now, for they have had a duel and are in bed, but before that

there was not a moment of security. Everything is on my head, defence with guardianship. And now Zbyshko wants me to go to him,—how will it be here with Yagenka? I know not, but I will tell thee of Zyh. He paid no heed to my words; he went. Well, they feasted, they rejoiced. From Glevitse they went to visit old Nosak, Prince Premko's father.

“But Yasko, prince of Ratibor, out of hatred for Prince Premko, sent bandits against them under lead of a Cheh named Hran. Premko fell, and with him Zyh, struck by an arrow in the windpipe. The abbot they so stunned with an iron flail that his head trembles yet from it; he knows nothing of this world, and has lost speech, perhaps forever. But old Prince Nosak bought Hran from the lord of Zampah and gave him such torture that the oldest men have not heard of like suffering; but mind thee, that torture did not soften Nosak's grief for his son, nor did it resurrect Zyh, nor dry the tears of Yagenka. There is their amusement for them! Six weeks ago Zyh was brought home and buried.”

“Such a strong man!” said Hlava, with sorrow. “I was no broken bit of a warrior at Boleslavets, but he did not spend the time of one Our Father in taking me captive. That captivity, however, was such that I would not have changed it for freedom. A good, honest man! God grant him light eternal. Ah, I am sorry, sorry, but most of all for the young lady, the poor thing!”

“Yes, indeed, the poor thing. Many a girl does not love her mother as she did her father. And besides, it is dangerous for her to be in her own house alone. After the funeral the snow had not fallen on Zyh's grave when Stan and Vilka attacked Zgorzelitse. Luckily my people heard of their intention, so I took men and galloped over to help her. God granted us to beat Stan and Vilka grandly. After the battle the girl seized me by the knees. ‘I cannot be Zbyshko's,’ said she; ‘I will not be any one's; only save me from these traitors, for,’ said she, ‘I would rather have death than either one of them.’ I tell thee that thou wouldst not know Zgorzelitse, for it is a real castle. They attacked twice after that, but, believe me, they could do nothing. There is peace, since, as I say, they have cut each other up in such fashion that neither is able to move hand or foot for the moment.”

Hlava was silent, but while listening to the tale of Stan and Vilka he gritted his teeth, which sounded as if some one

were opening and closing a squeaky door, and then rubbed his strong hands along his powerful thighs, on which evidently he felt an itching. At last from his mouth came with difficulty the single word, —

“Reprobates!”

At that moment voices were heard in the entrance, the door opened suddenly, and in rushed Yagenka with her elder brother, the fourteen-year-old Yasko, who resembled her as much as if he and she had been twins.

Yagenka, hearing from peasants of Zgorzelitse, who on the road had seen an escort, that certain people led by Hlava were going to Bogdanets, was frightened in just the same way as Matsko, and when she heard still further that they had not seen Zbyshko, she was almost certain that something evil had happened, hence she flew with one breath to Bogdanets to learn the truth of the matter.

“What has happened? By the dear God!” cried she from the threshold.

“What could happen?” answered Matsko. “Zbyshko is alive and well.”

Hlava sprang toward his lady, and dropping on one knee, kissed the hem of her garment; she took no note of this whatever, for when she heard the answer of the old knight she turned her head from the fire to the shadow, and only after a while, as if recalling that she ought to give greeting, she said, —

“May Christ Jesus be praised!”

“For the ages of ages,” answered Matsko.

But now, noticing Hlava at her knees, she bent toward him, and said, —

“I rejoice from my soul, Hlava, to see thee, but why hast thou left thy lord?”

“He sent me hither, gracious lady.”

“What did he command?”

“He commanded me to come to Bogdanets.”

“To Bogdanets, — and what more?”

“He sent me for help, with a greeting and a bow —”

“To Bogdanets, and nothing more? Then it is well. But where is he himself?”

“He has gone to Malborg, to the Knights of the Cross.”

Alarm was evident on Yagenka’s face.

“Is life then not dear to him? Why did he go?”

“To seek, gracious lady, that which he will not find.”

“I believe he will not find it!” added Matsko. “As thou

canst not drive a nail without a hammer, so thou canst not force human will unless God's will be with thee."

"What do you mean?" inquired Yagenka.

Matsko answered her question with the question, —

"Has Zbyshko spoken to thee of Yurand's daughter? — for I have heard that he did speak."

Yagenka did not answer immediately; only after a time did she say, suppressing a sigh, —

"Oh, he did. And why should he not speak?"

"That is well, for since he spoke it is easier for me to talk," said the old man.

And he told her what he had heard from Hlava, wondering himself that at times the narrative came to him in disorder and with difficulty. But as he was really crafty, and the question with him was in every case not to mislead Yagenka, he insisted greatly on this, and moreover he believed it, that Zbyshko might never be the husband of Danusia, for Danusia was lost forever. From time to time Hlava supported him, repeating at one moment "As God lives," at another, "That is as true as life!" or, "It is thus, not otherwise."

The girl listened with eyelashes drooping toward her cheeks, making no inquiry, and so silent that the silence troubled Matsko.

"Well, and what dost thou say?" asked he, finishing the narrative.

She made no answer, but two tears glistened under her drooping lashes and rolled down her cheeks. After a while she approached Matsko, and kissing his hand said, —

"May He be praised!"

"For the ages of ages," answered the old man. "Then art thou hastening home? Stay with us."

But she would not stay, explaining that at home she had not given out supper. Matsko, though he knew that the noble woman Setsehova, who was at Zgorzelitse, might take her place, did not urge her overmuch to stay, understanding that sorrow is unwilling to show its tears, and that a man or woman is like a fish, which when it feels the hook within its body hides as deeply as possible under water. So he only stroked the girl's head, and conducted her in company with Hlava to the courtyard. But Hlava led forth his horse from the stable, mounted, and rode away after the lady.

Matsko, when he returned to the house, sighed, shook his head, and muttered, —

“There is a fool for thee, Zbyshko! That girl leaves her odor in the room!”

And the old man was sorry. He thought that if Zbyshko had taken her after their return home there would have been delight and pleasure there up to that moment. But now what? “Whenever she thinks of him the tear drops from her eye, and the fellow is wandering through the world, and will knock his head somewhere against Malborg fences till he breaks it; and the house here is empty, only weapons staring from the walls. No good from management, industry is profitless, Spyhov and Bogdanets useless, since there will be no one to whom it will be possible to leave them.”

Grief began to storm then in Matsko’s soul. “Wait, thou vagabond,” said he aloud; “I will not go for thee, and do thou do what may please thee!”

But at the same moment a terrible yearning for Zbyshko came on him as if in spite. “No, I will not go,” thought he, “but shall I sit here? This is the punishment of God! That I should not see that rascal even once again in life—this cannot be in any case! Again he has cut up a dog brother—and taken plunder. Another would have grown gray before winning a belt, but him the prince has belted already, and justly, though there are many splendid men among nobles; another like Zbyshko there is not, as I think.” And growing altogether tender he examined the armor, the swords, and the axes which were growing dark in the smoke, as if considering which to take with him and which to leave behind. Then he went out of the room, first because he could not stay in it, and second to have the wagons tarred and a double portion of oats given the horses.

In the courtyard, where it was dark now, he remembered Yagenka, who a while before had mounted her horse, and again he grew sad on a sudden.

“If I go, then go,” said he to himself, “but who will defend the girl here from Vilk and Stan? Would to God that a thunderbolt might split them!”

Meanwhile Yagenka was riding with little Yasko along the forest road homeward, and Hlava was dragging on in silence behind them, his heart filled with love and with sorrow. He had seen the girl’s tears; now he was looking at her dark form, barely visible in the gloom, and he divined her pain and sorrow. It seemed to him also that at any moment the robber hands of Stan or Vilk might reach out after her from

the forest darkness and density, and at this thought a wild desire for conflict seized him. This desire became at moments so great that the impulse came to grasp his axe or sword and slash even some pine-tree at the roadside. He felt that if he should give a good blow it would relieve him. Finally he would have been glad even to urge his horse into a rush, but they were riding on in front slowly, foot after foot, saying almost nothing; for little Yasko, though talkative usually, seeing after some attempts that his sister had no wish to speak, sank also into silence.

But when he was near Zgorzelitse sorrow rose in Hlava's heart and anger against Stan and Vilk. "I would not spare even blood," said he to himself, "if I could only comfort thee; but what can I do, I, poor unfortunate, unless to say that Zbyshko gave command to bow down to thee, and God grant that that give thee comfort!"

So after meditation he urged his horse up to Yagenka's.

"Gracious lady."

"Art thou riding with us?" asked the girl, starting up as if from a dream. "But hast thou something to tell me?"

"I have, for I forgot to say that my lord, when we were parting at Spyhov, called me, and said: 'Fall at the feet of the young lady of Zgorzelitse, since in good or evil fortune I shall never see her; for that,' said he, 'which she has done for uncle and for me may God reward her and preserve her in health.'"

"God reward him for the kind word," answered Yagenka. Then she added in a certain strange voice, so that Hlava's heart melted completely: "And thee, too, Hlava."

The conversation stopped for a time, but Hlava was pleased with himself, and with what she had answered, for he said in his mind: "At least let her not think that he has paid her with ingratitude." He began at once then to search in his honest head for something more to tell her of like sort, and after a while he began, —

"Young lady."

"What is it?"

"This — I wish to say — what I said to the old lord in Bogdanets, that that woman is lost for the ages, and he will never find her, even if the Grand Master himself were to help him."

"She is his wife," answered Yagenka.

The Cheh began to torture his head. "She is such a wife as —"

Yagenka did not answer, but at home, after supper, when Yasko and her younger brother had gone to sleep, she commanded to bring a pitcher of mead, and turning to Hlava inquired, —

“ Perhaps you would rather sleep ; I hope not, for I should like to talk a little.”

Hlava, though road-weary, was ready to talk even till daylight; hence he began to converse, or rather he related again minutely all the adventures of Zbyshko, Yurand, Danusia, and himself.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MATSKO was preparing for his journey, and Yagenka did not show herself in Bogdanets for two days; this time she spent in counselling with Hlava. The old man met her on the third day while going to church. She was on the way to Kresnia with her brother and a considerable number of armed attendants, for she was not sure that Vilc and Stan kept the bed yet and might not make an attack on her.

"I wanted to call at Bogdanets after mass," said she, greeting Matsko, "for with you I have urgent business, but we can talk of it now."

Then she rode out in front of the retinue, not wishing evidently that the young men should hear their words.

"Then are you going surely?" asked she, when Matsko was near her.

"Yes. To-morrow, with God's help, not later."

"And to Malborg?"

"To Malborg, or no, whithersoever it happens."

"Then listen to me. I have thought long over what I should do, and now I wish to ask advice of you. Formerly, you know, when father was living, and the abbot had strength in him, it was different. Besides, Stan and Vilc thought that I would choose one of them, and they restrained each other. But now I shall be defenceless; I shall be in Zgorzelitse as behind a palisade, as in a prison, for surely I shall suffer wrong from those two. Say yourself, is this true or not?"

"It is true; I also have thought of it."

"And what have you thought out?"

"Nothing; but I must say that this is a Polish country, and punishments of the law for violence to a maiden are terrible."

"That seems well, but 't is not difficult to spring over the boundary. I know too that Silesia is a Polish country; still the princes quarrel and attack one another. Were it not for that my dear father would be living. The Germans have

got in there; they rouse disturbance and commit wrongs, so that he who wants to hide among them hides. Surely I should not give up easily to either Vilc or Stan, but I am anxious also for my brothers. If I am not here there will be peace, but if I stay God knows what will happen. There will be attacks and battles. Yasko is fourteen years old, and no power, not to mention mine, can restrain him. The last time, when you hurried to help us, he rushed to the front. Stan struck into the crowd with his club, and barely missed Yasko's head. Yasko told the servants that he would challenge both those fellows to trampled earth. I tell you there will not be a day's peace, and something evil may happen Yasko and the other."

"Oh, Stan and Vilc are dog brothers," said Matsko with vehemence, "but they will not raise hands on children. Tfu! only Knights of the Cross would do that."

"They will not raise hands on children, but in an uproar, or, God preserve, at a fire, accidents are easy. What is the use of talking! Old Setsehova loves my brothers as if they were her own children, so care and guardianship will not be lacking them; but without me it would be safer far than with my presence."

"Perhaps so," said Matsko. Then he looked quickly at the girl. "What dost thou wish?"

"Take me with you," answered Yagenka with a lowered voice.

At this Matsko, though it was not difficult for him before to divine the end of the conversation, was astonished greatly; he stopped his horse, and cried, —

"Fear God! Yagenka."

She dropped her head, and said as if with timidity, and sadness, —

"Well, I choose to speak sincerely rather than hide my thoughts. Both you and Hlava say that Zbyshko will never find that other one, and Hlava expects still worse. God is my witness that I wish her no evil. May the Mother of God preserve and guard her, the poor thing. She was dearer than I to Zbyshko, but there is no help for that! Such is my fate. But you see until Zbyshko finds her, or if, as you think, he never finds her, then — then —"

"Then what?" inquired Matsko, seeing that the girl was becoming more and more confused and halting.

"Then I do not wish to be Stan's or Vilc's, or any one's."

“I thought that thou hadst seen the man already,” said Matsko, drawing breath with satisfaction.

“Ei,” answered she, still more sadly.

“Then what dost thou wish? How could I take thee among the Knights of the Cross?”

“Not necessarily among the Knights of the Cross. I should like to go now to the abbot, who is cast down with sickness in Sieradz. He has no loving soul there near him, but he is my godfather and benefactor. Were he well I should seek his protection, for people fear him.”

“I shall not oppose that,” said Matsko, who at the root of the matter was rejoiced at Yagenka’s decision, for knowing the Knights of the Cross he believed profoundly that Danusia would not escape their hands alive. “I will only say this to thee, that there is terrible trouble with a girl on the road.”

“There might be with another, but not with me. I have never fought yet, but it is no new thing for me to handle a crossbow, and endure toils in hunting. Whenever there is need of doing a thing I shall do it, never fear. I will take Yasko’s clothes, put my hair in a net, strap a sword at my side, and ride away. Yasko, though younger, is not a hair smaller, and he is so like me in the face that when we disguised ourselves at the carnival my dead father could not tell which was Yasko and which I. The abbot will not know, you will see, nor will another.”

“Will not Zbyshko?”

“If I meet him —”

Matsko meditated a while, then he laughed unexpectedly, and said, —

“But Vilk and Stan will go wild!”

“Let them go wild! The worst is that they may follow us.”

“Have no fear. I am old, but they would better not crawl under my fist. They have tried Zbyshko already.”

Thus conversing they reached Kresnia. In the church was old Vilk, who from time to time cast gloomy looks at Matsko, but the latter paid no heed to him, and returned home light-hearted with Yagenka after mass. But when they had taken farewell at the crossroads, and when he found himself alone in Bogdanets, less joyful thoughts entered his head. He understood that neither Zgorzelitse nor Yagenka’s family were really threatened by anything in case she went on a journey. “They are striving for the girl,” thought he, “that is another thing; but against the orphans or their

property Vilk and Stan will not raise a finger, for they would cover themselves with dreadful infamy, and every living man would hunt them down as real wolves. But Bogdanets will be defenceless. They will fill up the moats, drive off the cattle, entice away tenants! When I return, God knows if I shall be able to recover anything; I shall have to summon them to judgment, for not the fist alone, but law rules with us. Shall I return, though, and when? With me they are terribly angry because I have stood between them and Yagenka; but if she goes with me they will be angrier."

Sorrow and regret seized the old man, for he had begun to manage Bogdanets in proper fashion, and now he felt certain that should he return he would find desolation there and ruin.

"Well, we must find a cure," thought he.

So after dinner he had a horse saddled. He mounted and rode directly to Brozova, where he arrived about nightfall. Old Vilk was sitting in his front chamber at a cup of mead; the younger Vilk, who had been slashed by Stan, lay on a bench which was covered with skins; he was drinking also. Matsko went in unobserved and stood near the threshold, stern-faced, tall, bony, unarmed, but with a strong sword at his girdle. They recognized him immediately, for the bright light of the fire struck his face, and at the first moment both father and son sprang to their feet with the speed of lightning, and rushing to the wall each seized whatever weapon was nearest.

But the experienced Matsko, knowing men and their methods through and through, was not alarmed in any way; he did not reach for his sword; he merely put his hand on his hip and asked with a calm voice in which there was a certain tone of banter, —

"What do I see? Is this the noble hospitality of Brozova?"

Their hands dropped at these words, and after a little the old man's sword fell to the floor with a clatter. Young Vilk let his lance go, and they stood with necks stretched toward Matsko; their faces ominous, but astonished, and with shame on them.

Matsko smiled.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said he.

"For the ages of ages," answered Vilk with his son.

"And Saint George!"

"We serve him."

“I have come to neighbors in good-will.”

“And in good-will do we greet thee. A guest is a sacred person.”

Old and young Vilik hurried toward Matsko; both pressed his right hand, then gave him the seat of honor at the table. In a moment wood was in the chimney, the table was covered with a mat on which were placed plates full of meat, a pitcher of beer with a flagon of mead, and they set about eating and drinking. From time to time young Vilik cast at Matsko peculiar glances, in which honor for the guest was struggling to overcome hatred for the visitor; but still he served the guest so diligently that he grew pale from exertion, for he was wounded, and deprived of his usual vigor. Curiosity was burning both father and son to know why Matsko had come to them, though neither inquired touching anything, but waited till he should begin of himself to speak.

He, as a polite person, praised food, drink, and hospitality, and only when he had satisfied himself well did he say with a dignified air, —

“It happens more than once that people quarrel, yes, and fight, but peace between neighbors is above everything.”

“There is nothing more precious than peace,” replied Vilik, with equal dignity.

“When a man must prepare for a long journey it happens also,” continued Matsko, “that although he has lived in un-friendliness with some one, he is sorry to leave that man, and will not go without taking farewell of him.”

“God reward for the kind word.”

“Not word alone, but deed also, for I have come hither.”

“We are glad from our souls to see thee. Come every day even.”

“Let me honor you in Bogdanets as befits people who know knightly honor, but I must go soon on a journey.”

“To war, or to some holy place?”

“I should prefer to go to one or the other of these two, but I am to make a worse visit, for I am going to the Knights of the Cross.”

“To the Knights of the Cross?” cried father and son at the same moment.

“Yes,” answered Matsko. “But whoso goes among them without being their friend would better make peace with God as well as man, lest he lose not merely life, but eternal salvation.”

“This is wonderful,” said old Vilk. “I have not seen any man thus far who met them without suffering injustice and oppression.”

“Yes, it is the same with our whole kingdom!” added Matsko. “Neither Lithuania before it received holy baptism nor the Tartars were more grievous than those devilish monks are.”

“The solid truth; but do you know this too: they have been gathering and gathering, until they have gathered in all, and now would be the time to finish them in this style!”

Then the old man spat lightly in both hands, and the young one added, —

“It cannot be otherwise.”

“And surely it will be that way, but when? Not our head answers for that, but the king’s. Maybe it will be soon, maybe not soon — God knows. Meanwhile I must go to them.”

“And is it with a ransom for Zbyshko?”

At the mention of Zbyshko by his father, young Vilk’s face grew pallid from hatred in an instant, and became threatening.

But Matsko answered calmly: “Perhaps with a ransom, but not for Zbyshko.”

These words increased still more the curiosity of father and son, and the old man, unable to restrain himself longer, said, —

“You are free to answer or not. Why are you going there?”

“I will tell, I will tell,” said Matsko, nodding, “but first I will say something else. Now consider: after I go Bogdanets will remain under the sole care of God. At first, when Zbyshko went to war under Prince Vitold, the abbot looked after our property, yes, and Zyh also a little; but now neither the one nor the other will care for it. It is terribly painful for a man to think that he has been laboring and running for nothing. But you know how these things go. They will entice people away from me, will plow over the boundary; each will steal what he can of my cattle, and though the Lord Jesus permit my return in safety, I shall return to empty places. There is but one cure for this, one salvation: a good neighbor. Therefore I have come to beg you in neighbor fashion to take Bogdanets under your care, and let no one rob me.”

When old Vilk heard this request he looked at young Vilk, and young Vilk looked at old Vilk, and both were astonished beyond measure. A moment of silence followed,

for neither one found an answer immediately. Matsko raised the goblet of mead to his lips, drank it, then talked on as calmly and comfortably as if both had been his most intimate well-wishers, —

“Now I will tell you sincerely from whom I expect the greatest damage. From no one except Stan of Rogov. Of you, though we separated in unfriendliness, I should have no fear, because you are knightly people, who will stand up before the eyes of an enemy but will take no unseemly revenge behind his back. Oh, with you it is something different. A knight is a knight! — but Stan is a clown, and from a clown a man may expect anything; all the more since, as you know, he is terribly angry at me because I stood between him and Yagenka.”

“Whom you are saving for your nephew!” burst out young Vilko.

Matsko looked at the youth, and for a while held him under his cool glance; after that he turned to the old man, and said calmly, —

“You know my nephew has married a young heiress of Mazovia, and has received a worthy dowry.”

Again followed a silence which was still deeper; the father and son looked for some time at Matsko with open mouths. At last the old man said, —

“Hei, how is that? For people said — ‘Will you tell about it?’”

“It is just on that business,” continued Matsko, as if paying no heed to the question, “that I must go, and therefore I beg you to look in from time to time at Bogdanets, and let no one do any harm there, and do you, as worthy and honest neighbors, protect me, especially from Stan’s attacks.”

By this time young Vilko, whose mind was sufficiently nimble, considered at once that if Zbyshko had married it was better for him to have Matsko’s friendship, since Yagenka had confidence in the old man, and was ready to follow his advice in all things. Entirely new horizons opened at once before the eyes of the young water-burner. “I must do more than keep from opposing Matsko, I must have his favor,” said he to himself. And, though somewhat in liquor, he stretched his hand under the table quickly, caught his father’s knee, and pressed it as a sign not to say anything improper.

“Have no fear of Stan!” said he to Matsko. “Oho, let

him just try! He has cut me a little, it is true, but I have slashed his woolly face for him so that his own mother would not know him. Fear nothing, go on your journey in peace. Not a crow will be lost in Bógdanets."

"That is the right thing. I see that you are honorable people. Do you promise?"

"We promise!" cried both.

"And on your escutcheon?"

"On our escutcheon! More than that, on the Cross! So help us God!"

Matsko smiled to himself with pleasure, then said, —

"Well, this is what I expected. And since you act as you do I will say more. Zyh, as you know, gave me guardianship over his children; therefore I stood before Stan, and thee, young man, when you wanted to break into Zgorzelitse. But when I shall be in Malborg, or God knows where, poor guardianship will mine be. It is true that God stands above orphans, and that the man who wrongs them not only has his head cut off with an axe, but is declared infamous; still I am sorry to go, terribly sorry. Promise me then that not only will you not wrong Zyh's orphans, but that you will let no one else wrong them."

"We swear, we swear!"

"On your knightly honor and escutcheon?"

"On our knightly honor and escutcheon!"

"And on the Cross?"

"And on the Cross."

"God has heard. Amen," concluded Matsko; and he drew a deep breath of relief, for he knew that they would keep such an oath even though each one of them had to gnaw his fist from vexation and anger. And he began to take farewell immediately, but they detained him almost by violence. He had to drink more, and he became a gossip to old Vilk. Young Vilk, though he sought quarrels usually when in liquor, merely threatened Stan savagely, and attended Matsko as zealously as if he were to get Yagenka from him on the day following. But before midnight he grew faint from exertion, and when restored fell asleep like a stone. His father followed this example soon after, so that Matsko left both as if dead at the table. Having himself a head enduring beyond measure, he was not intoxicated, only somewhat rejoiced, so, while returning home, he thought almost with delight of what he had accomplished.

“Well,” said he to himself, “Bogdanets is safe, and Zgorzelitse is safe. They will be enraged because Yagenka is going, but they will guard my property and hers, for they must do so. The Lord Jesus has given man cleverness. When a thing cannot be got by the fist we must get it by clear wit. If I come back I shall not escape the old man’s challenge to the field, but never mind. God grant me to trap the Knights of the Cross in like manner. But with them it will be harder. Though a dog brother may be found among our people sometimes, if he swears on his knightly honor and escutcheon he will keep his oath; but for Knights of the Cross an oath is as spittle in the river. But maybe the Mother of God will support me, so that I may be of some use to Zbyshko, as I have been now to Zyh’s children and to Bogdanets.”

Then it occurred to him that really the girl need not go, for old and young Vilk would guard her as the sight of their eyes. After a while, however, he rejected that thought. “They will guard her, but Stan will attack all the more. Gods knows who will conquer, and it is sure that there will be battles and attacks in which Zgorzelitse will suffer,—Zyh’s sons, and Yagenka herself even. It will be easier for old Vilk and his son to take care of Bogdanets, and better for the girl in every case to be far away from those two quarrellers, and near the rich abbot.”

Matsko did not believe that Danusia could escape alive from the Knights of the Cross, so he did not abandon the hope that when Zbyshko returned a widower he would surely feel the will of God toward Yagenka.

“O mighty God!” thought he, “if having Spyhov he should marry Yagenka with Mochydoly, and with what the abbot will leave her, I should not begrudge a stone of wax for candles.”

In such meditation the road passed quickly. But he came to Bogdanets late at night, and was astonished when he saw the membrane windows lighted brightly. The waiting-men were not asleep, for he had barely ridden into the yard when the stable-boy ran out to him.

“Are there guests?” asked Matsko, dismounting.

“Yes. the young lord from Zgorzelitse, with the Cheh.”

Matsko wondered at this visit. Yagenka had promised to come before daylight in the morning, and they were to start immediately. Why had Yasko come, and so late? The old knight thought that something had happened in

Zgorzelitse and entered the house with some fear. In the large front chamber in a baked clay chimney, which in that house was used instead of the fireplace common in the middle of apartments, pitch-pine sticks were burning cheerily and brightly, and above the table were blazing in iron sockets two torches, by the light of which Matsko saw Yasko, Hlava, and another youth with a face as ruddy as an apple.

“What is the matter, Yasko? What is the matter with Yagenka?” asked the old noble.

“Yagenka gave command to tell thee,” said the youth, kissing Matsko’s hand, “that she has changed her mind and will stay at home.”

“Fear God, but what is this? How? What has shot into her head there?”

The youth raised his blue eyes to the old man and laughed.

“Why art thou giggling?”

At that moment Hlava and the other youth burst out also into joyous laughter.

“Well,” cried the supposed Yasko, “who will know me since you do not?”

Only then did Matsko look closely at the charming figure, and cry, —

“In the name of the Father and Son! A regular carnival! But why art thou here, thou imp?”

“Why? Whoso has a journey to make must be on the road.”

“But thou wert to come here to-morrow at daylight.”

“What an idea! To-morrow at daylight, so that all might see me! To-morrow they will think in Zgorzelitse that I am here, and will not look around till the day after. The housekeeper and Yasko know that I am going, but Yasko has promised on his knightly honor to tell only when people are alarmed. But you did not know me, did you?”

Matsko laughed now in his turn.

“Let me look again at thee. Hei! a wonderfully handsome lad thou art! — and peculiar. From such one might expect a new race — I tell the truth. Oh, if I were not old — well! But I tell thee, girl, take care of seeing me too often, take care!”

And laughing, he threatened with his finger, but he looked at her with great satisfaction, for he had never seen such a youth. She had a net of red silk on her head, she wore a coat of green cloth, trousers wide at the hips and close-fitting lower down; one leg of the trousers was the color of the

head net, the other was in perpendicular stripes. With a handsome sword at her side, her face as bright as the dawn, it was impossible to take one's eyes from her, such was the girl's beauty.

"Upon my word," said the rejoiced Matsko, "art thou some wonderful young lord, or a flower, or what?"

Then he turned to the other youth and asked: "But who is this here — some traitor of course?"

"This is only Anulka," said Yagenka. "I should feel awkward among you if I were alone; how could I go? So I took Anulka; it is pleasanter with company than alone, besides I need help and service. No one will know her either."

"Well, granny, here is a wedding for thee! One was not enough; we must have two."

"Do not tease."

"I will not tease, but in the daytime every one will know her and thee."

"Why should they?"

"Thy knees turn in — and hers also."

"Oh, give us peace!"

"I will, for my time is past; but will Stan and VilK give it? God knows. Dost know, thou gadfly, whence I come? From old VilK's house."

"By the dear God! What do you tell me?"

"The truth, as this is truth, that old and young VilK will defend Bogdanets and Zgorzelitse against Stan. Well, to challenge enemies, to fight with them is easy, but to make enemies guard one's property, no drone can do that."

Here Matsko told of his visit at VilK's house, how he had snared the men and hung them both on a hook. Yagenka listened with great astonishment, and when he had finished she said, —

"The Lord Jesus has not spared cunning in your case, and I see that everything will be as you wish."

"Ah, girl, if everything were as I wish thou wouldst have been mistress of Bogdanets this long time."

At this Yagenka looked at him for a while with her blue eyes, and then approaching kissed his hand.

"Why dost thou kiss me?" asked the old man.

"Oh, nothing! I merely say good-night to you, for it is late, and we must start before daybreak."

And taking Anulka with her she went out, and Matsko conducted Hlava to his room, where, after they had lain down on buffalo skins, both fell into deep, strengthening sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THOUGH after the destruction, fire, and slaughter inflicted on Sieradz in 1331 by the Knights of the Cross, Kazimir the Great had rebuilt the place which had been levelled with the ground, it was not over-brilliant, and could not compare with other cities of the kingdom. But Yagenka, whose life had been passed till then between Zgorzelitse and Kresnia, could not contain herself from astonishment and wonder at sight of the walls, the towers, the town hall, and especially the churches, of which the wooden church at Kresno could not give the least idea. At the first moment she lost her usual resolution to such a degree that she did not dare to speak aloud, and inquired only in whispers of Matsko touching all those wonders which dazzled her eyesight. But when the old knight assured her that Sieradz was to Cracow as a common torch to the sun, she could not believe, for it seemed to her impossible that there could be another city on earth of such splendor.

They were received at the cloister by the same decrepit friar who remembered from years of childhood the slaughter inflicted by the Knights of the Cross, and who on a former occasion had received Zbyshko. News of the abbot caused them sorrow and anxiety. He had remained a long time in the cloister, but had gone two weeks before to his friend, the Bishop of Plotsk. He was ailing continually. He had his wits in the morning, but in the evening his mind wandered. He tried to spring up, commanded the attendants to put on his armor, and challenged Prince Yan of Ratibor to battle. His wandering clerics had to hold him in bed by force, — a thing which was not done without great difficulty, and even danger. Two weeks before, he had regained his mind completely, and, though he had grown weaker, he commanded to take him to Plotsk immediately.

“He declared that he had not such confidence in any man as in the Bishop of Plotsk,” said the prior, “and that he wished to receive from his hands the Sacrament, and place his will in them. We opposed this journey as much as we

were able, for he was very weak, and we feared that he would not reach Plotsk alive. But it was not easy to oppose him, so his playmen prepared his carriage, and went away with him, God grant successfully."

"If he had died anywhere near Sieradz you would have heard of it," said Matsko.

"We should, so I think that he did not die, or at least that he did not breathe his last this side of Lenchytsa; but what may have happened beyond I know not. If you follow him you will learn on the road."

Matsko was afflicted by the news and went to consult with Yagenka, who had heard already from Hlava of the abbot's departure.

"What will be done?" asked he, "and what wilt thou do with thyself?"

"You will go to Plotsk, and I with you," answered Yagenka, mildly.

"To Plotsk?" repeated Anulka with her thin voice.

"See how they arrange matters! They will go right away to Plotsk as straight as the cast of a sickle."

"But how could I go back alone with Anulka? Unless I go farther it would have been better not to leave home at all. Do you not think that there they will be more stubborn and angrier than ever?"

"Old and young Vilk will defend thee against Stan."

"I fear Vilk's defence quite as much as Stan's attack. I see that you are opposing just to oppose, not in earnest."

Of course Matsko did not oppose sincerely. On the contrary he preferred that Yagenka should go with him, so when he heard her words he laughed, and said, —

"She has put off her petticoats and wants to have wit."

"Wit is in the head only," said Yagenka.

"But Plotsk is out of my way."

Hlava says that it is not out of the way, that by the road through Plotsk it is shorter to Malborg.

"Then have ye been advising already with Hlava?"

"Of course; and he said besides, 'If the young lord has fallen into any misfortune in Malborg much can be done through Princess Alexandra of Plotsk, for she is a relative of the King, and she is besides a special friend of the Knights of the Cross and enjoys great consideration among them.'"

"True, as God is dear to me!" cried Matsko. "All know that, and if she would give a letter to the Grand Master we could travel most safely through all lands of the Order."

They like her, for she likes them. That is good advice; that Hlava is not a dull fellow."

"Of course he is not!" cried Anulka, with enthusiasm, raising her blue eyes.

Matsko turned to her suddenly.

"But what hast thou to do in this case?"

The girl was terribly confused, and drooping her long lashes grew as red as a rose.

Matsko saw that there was no other way but to take the two girls farther, and he was willing in secret to do so; hence he continued his journey next morning after taking farewell of the prior. Because of the melting snow and the increase of water, he advanced with greater toil than ever. On the way he inquired about the abbot at many noble residences and priest's houses, or, where these failed, at inns where he halted. It was easy to follow the abbot's traces, for he had given alms, he had paid for masses, he had given for bells, and contributed to decaying churches, so that more than one poor grandfather who was travelling "to ask," more than one sexton, nay, more than one priest, remembered him with gratitude. People said generally that he "travelled like an angel," and they were praying for his health, though here and there fear was expressed that he was nearer eternal salvation than temporal recovery. In some places he had halted two or three days because of exceeding weakness; therefore it seemed probable to Matsko that they would overtake him.

But he failed in his reckoning, for the swollen waters of the Ner and the Bzura detained them. Before reaching Lenchytsa they were forced to halt four days in an empty inn which the innkeeper had deserted apparently through fear of high water. The road from the inn to the city, though covered with tree-trunks, had sunk, and for some considerable distance was changed to a mud-pit. Vit, Matsko's attendant, a native of that region, had heard something of a way through the forest, but was unwilling to serve as guide, for he knew that in the mud of Lenchytsa unclean powers had their residence, and especially the mighty Boruta, who was glad to entice people into bottomless places and rescue them only at the price of their souls' salvation. The inn itself was ill-famed, and though travellers in those days carried with them provisions and had no fear of hunger, a stay in such a house caused alarm even to Matsko.

At night they heard fighting on the roof; at times some

one knocked at the door. Yagenka and Anulka, who slept in a little room near the front chamber, heard also the pattering of small feet on the floor and ceiling, and even along the walls. This did not frighten them overmuch, for in Zgorzelitse they had been accustomed to imps which were fed by Zyh in his time, and which, by the general opinion of those days, were not malicious if one did not spare broken food on them. But one night a deep, ominous roar was given out in a neighboring thicket; next morning they found in the mud immense hoof tracks, which might be those of a wild ox or buffalo, but Vit said that they were tracks of Boruta, who though in the form of a man, and even of a nobleman, has hoofs instead of feet, and the boots in which he shows himself among people he takes off in the mud to spare them.

Matsko, on hearing that one might reconcile Boruta by drink, meditated all day over this: would it be sinful to show friendly feeling to an evil spirit?—and he consulted with Yagenka.

“I might hang an ox-bladder of wine or mead on the fence at night,” said he; “if it is drunk in the night, we shall know that *he* is about here.”

“If the heavenly powers are not offended,” replied Yagenka; “we must not offend, for we need a blessing to rescue Zbyshko.”

“I am afraid of that too, but I think this way: mead is not the soul. I will not give my soul; but what do the heavenly powers care for one ox-bladder of mead?” Then he lowered his voice and added: “For a noble to entertain a noble, though the most worthless, is a common occurrence, and people say that *he* is a noble.”

“Who?” inquired Yagenka.

“I have no wish to mention the name of the unclean one.”

But Matsko hung out on the fence with his own hands that evening a large ox-bladder in which drinks were carried usually, and next morning the bladder was empty to the bottom. It is true that Hlava, when they spoke of it, smiled somewhat strangely, but no one noticed him. Matsko was glad, for he hoped that when they crossed the swamp no unexpected hindrance or happening would meet them.

“Unless it is said untruly that *he* knows honor,” thought Matsko.

The first need of all was to inquire if there was really a way through the forest. There might be, for wherever the

ground is kept solid by plants and tree-roots the earth does not soften from rain easily. Vit, who as a man of the place might carry out that work best, cried at the mere mention of it: "I will not go, though you kill me!" Vainly did they explain to him that in the daytime unclean power cannot act. Matsko wished to go himself, but they settled on this, that Hlava, who was a daring fellow and glad to exhibit his daring before people, and especially before women, put an axe inside his girdle, took a staff in his hand, and started.

He set out before daylight, and they looked for his return about midday, but when they did not see him they began to fear. In vain did the servants listen near the edge of the forest. Vit merely waved his hand and said: "He will not come back; if he does woe to us, for God knows whether it will not be with a wolf snout and changed into a wolf man." When they heard this all were afraid; Matsko was not himself; Yagenka, turning toward the forest, made signs of the cross; Anulka from moment to moment sought in vain for an apron on knees which were now covered with leggings, and not finding anything with which to shade her eyes, she shaded them with her fingers, which soon became wet from tears falling one after the other.

But about the time of evening milking, just at sunset, Hlava returned, not alone, but with some human figure which he drove on a rope before him. All ran out at once toward him with shouts, and were delighted, but they grew silent at sight of the figure, which was small, had bent hands, long hair, was black, and dressed in wolf skins.

"In the name of the Father and the Son, what kind of an imp art thou bringing us?" cried Matsko.

"What do I care," answered Hlava; "he says that he is a man and a tar-burner, but what he is really I know not."

"Oh, that is no man!" exclaimed Vit.

Matsko commanded silence, then he examined the prisoner carefully, and said on a sudden, —

"Make the sign of the cross! make the sign of the cross for me this minute!"

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said the prisoner, and, making the sign as quickly as possible, he drew a long breath, looked with more confidence on the assembly, and said, —

"Praised be Jesus Christ! for I could not tell whether I was in the hands of devils or of Christians. O Jesus!"

“Have no fear. Thou art among Christians who are glad to hear holy mass. Who art thou?”

“A tar-burner, lord, and a watchman. There are seven of us in watch-houses with our wives and children.”

“How far are ye from here?”

“Not quite ten furlongs.”

“How do ye go to the city?”

“We have our way behind Chartsi Vandol (Devil’s Valley).”

“Chartsi Vandol? Make the sign of the cross again!”

“In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

“That is well. Can a wagon pass by that road?”

“There is mud now everywhere, though not so much as on the high-road, for wind blows in the Vandol and dries the mud. But to Budy it is terrible; though whoso knows the forest well can take a man to Budy slowly.”

“Wilt thou show the passage for a skoitsa? Well, let it be for two!”

The tar-burner undertook willingly to show the way, stipulating yet for half a loaf of bread; for though not dying of hunger in the forest those people had not seen bread for a long time. It was arranged to start on the following morning, since it was “bad” to start toward evening.

“Boruta,” said the tar-burner, “storms dreadfully at times through the forest, but he does no harm to common people. He is only chasing other devils because he is jealous of the princes of Lenchytsa. Still it is bad for any man to meet him at night, especially if the man has been drinking. In the daytime and when sober, no one need fear.”

“But thou wert afraid,” said Matsko.

“Because that knight caught me without my knowing it, and with such strength that I thought he was not a man.”

Yagenka laughed because they had all thought the tar-burner some foul being, and the tar-burner had thought them foul. Anulka laughed with her, till Matsko said, —

“Thy eyes are not dried yet from crying after Hlava, and now thou art grinning.”

Hlava looked at her rosy face, and seeing that her eye-lashes were still moist inquired, —

“Were you crying for me?”

“Oh, no,” answered the girl, “I was afraid — that is all.”

“You are noble; a noble person should be ashamed of

fear. Your mistress is not so timid. What harm could meet thee here in the daytime and among people?"

"Me? Nothing, but you."

"You say that you were not crying for me."

"Yes, because I was not."

"But why, then?"

"From fear."

"And now you are not afraid?"

"No."

"But why not?"

"Because you have come back."

Hlava looked at her with gratitude, smiled, and said, —

"In this way we might talk till morning. You are very cunning."

"Do not laugh at me," answered Anulka in an undertone.

Indeed, she might have been censured for anything rather than cunning, and Hlava, who was himself a sharp fellow, understood that quite well. He understood also that the girl was drawing closer to him daily. He loved Yagenka, but loved her as a subject loves a king, hence with the greatest honor and without any hope. Meanwhile, the journey brought him nearer to Anulka. In time of traveling old Matsko rode in front, usually with Yagenka, and Hlava rode with Anulka; but since he was as powerful as a bison, and his blood was just boiling when on the journey he looked at her clear eyes, at the yellow tresses which would not stay beneath the net, at her whole form shapely and beautiful, and especially at her legs, wonderful as if sculptured, which embraced the black horse, shivers passed from head to foot through him. Hence he could not restrain himself from glancing more and more at those perfections, and thought involuntarily that if the devil were to change himself to such a youth he might tempt him easily. At the same time that youth was as sweet as honey, and so obedient that he merely looked into Hlava's eyes, and was as joyous as a sparrow on a roof. At times strange thoughts came to Hlava's head, and once, when he and Anulka were somewhat in the rear, near the pack-horses, he turned to her suddenly, and said, —

"Do you know, I am here near you like a wolf near a lamb."

"Would you like to eat me?" asked she; and her white teeth just gleamed from sincere laughter.

"Yes, with all your bones!"

And he gazed at her with such a look that she blushed

under it; then silence fell between them, but their hearts beat powerfully, his with desire, hers with a certain sweet, intoxicating fear.

At first desire was uppermost in the Cheh, and when he said that he looked at Anulka as a wolf at a lamb, he told the truth. But that evening, when he saw her cheeks and eye-lashes moist with tears, the heart softened in him. She seemed good and in some way near to him, his as it were, and having an honest nature, which was also knightly, he did not become proud, and was not haughty at sight of those tears, but grew more hesitating, and considered her more. His former heedless speech left him, and though he trifled a little at supper with the timid girl, it was different, and at the same time he served her as the attendant of a knight was bound to serve a noble woman. Matsko, though considering mainly the journey of the morrow, noticed this, but merely praised him for his lofty manners, which, as the old man said, he must have acquired at the Mazovian court with Zbyshko. Then turning to Yagenka, he added, —

“Hei! Zbyshko—he would find his place even with a king!”

After that service at supper, when they had to part for the night, Hlava, after kissing Yagenka’s hand, raised in turn to his lips Anulka’s, wherewith he said, —

“Not only have no fear of me, but when near me fear nothing, for I will not yield thee to any one.”

Then the men disposed themselves in the front room; Yagenka and Anulka in a side chamber on the same plank bed, which was broad and well-covered. Neither of them was able to fall asleep soon, for some reason, but especially Anulka, who turned every moment on her coarse blanket. So after a time Yagenka pushed her head up, and whispered, —

“Anulka!”

“What?”

“It seems to me that thou art terribly fond of the Cheh. How is it?”

The question remained without an answer, so Yagenka whispered again, —

“Well, I understand that; so tell me.”

Anulka gave no answer; she merely pressed her lips to the cheek of her lady and kissed it repeatedly. But sighs raised the maiden breast of poor Yagenka time after time.

“Oi, I understand, I understand!” whispered she so quietly that Anulka’s ear barely caught the words.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON the morrow, after a mild, hazy night, came a day which was at times bright, at times gloomy, because of clouds which, driven by the wind, sped on in flocks through the sky. Matsko commanded to break camp just at the gray of dawn. The tar-burner, who had undertaken to guide them to Budy, declared that horses could pass everywhere, but in places men would have to take the wagons apart and carry them over in pieces just like packs, provisions, and clothing. This could not take place without delay and effort, but the people, hardened and accustomed to toil, preferred the greatest labor to slothful rest at the empty inn; therefore they took the road willingly. Even the timid Vit, emboldened by the words and presence of the tar-burner, showed no fear.

Immediately beyond the inn they entered a forest of lofty trees, without underbrush, in which with skilful driving it was possible to advance among the branches without taking the wagons to pieces. At times the wind ceased, at times it burst forth with unheard-of violence, striking the limbs of the pine-trees with giant wings, bending them, twisting them, turning them around as if they had been arms of wind-mills, and breaking them; the pine forest bent under the wild breath, and even during intervals between one attack and another it did not cease to roar and thunder, as if in anger at that attack and superior force. Now and then clouds hid the daylight completely, rain mixed with snow-flakes cut men's faces, and the air grew as dark as at evening twilight. At such times Vit lost his courage, and cried: "The evil one is angry and will harm us;" but no one paid heed to him. Even the timid Anulka did not take his words to heart, especially since Hlava was so near that she could strike his stirrup with hers, and he looked ahead as bravely as if he wished to challenge the very devil to combat.

Beyond the tall forest began one with an undergrowth, and therefore a thicket through which they could not go

with vehicles. They had to take the wagons apart; but that was done adroitly and in a twinkle. Wheels, poles, and axles, as well as packs and provisions, were borne by strong men on their shoulders. There were three furlongs of that bad road, and the party arrived at Budy late in the evening, where the tar-burners received them hospitably, and declared that they could reach the town through Chartsi Vandol, or, more correctly, by passing along the side of it. Those people, inured to life in the wilderness, saw bread and flour rarely, but they did not suffer from hunger, since they were wading in dried food of every sort, especially eels, with which all the swampy places were swarming. They gave these, therefore, bountifully, stretching out grasping hands to receive cakes in return for them. Among these people were women and children, all black from tar-smoke. One man more than a hundred years old remembered the massacre of Lenchytsa, and the utter destruction of that town by the Knights of the Cross in 1331. Matsko, Hlava, and the two young women, though they had heard almost the same narrative from the prior at Sieradz, listened with curiosity to the old man, who, sitting by the fire, and poking it, seemed to poke out the dreadful memories of his youth. So in Lenchytsa, as well as in Sieradz, they spared neither churches nor priests, and the blood of old men, women, and children flowed down the knife-blades of the conquerors. The Knights of the Cross, always the Knights of the Cross! Matsko's thoughts and Yagenka's flew continually toward Zbyshko, who was just then in the jaws of the wolf, as it were, among a hostile race, knowing neither pity nor guest rights. Anulka's heart grew faint; she was not even sure that they would not have to go among those terrible people in their chase after the abbot.

But the old man began to tell of that battle of Plovtsi, which put an end to the invasion of the Order. He had fought with an iron flail in his hands at that battle, as an attendant in the infantry furnished by a commune of land-tillers. In this battle perished the Grady save one, hence Matsko knew all its details completely; still he listened as if it were new to that narrative of the dreadful defeat of the Germans, when they fell under the swords of Polish knights and the power of King Lokietek.

"Ha! I remember it well, be sure of that," said the old man. "They came into this land, they burnt towns and castles. Why! they slaughtered children in the cradle; but

the black end came to them. 'Hei! that was a worthy battle. When I shut my eyes now I see the field there before me.'

And closing his lids he was silent, merely moving the coals lightly in the ashes, till Yagenka, impatient for the narrative, asked, —

“How was it?”

“How was it?” repeated the old man. “I remember the place as if I were looking at it this moment. There was brush, and on the right a swamp, and a strip of rye, a little field of it. But after the battle there was neither brush, nor swamp, nor rye; nothing but iron on all sides, swords, axes, spears, beautiful armor, one piece on the top of another, as if some one had covered the whole sacred earth with them. Never have I seen so many slain people together, never have I seen so much human blood flowing.”

Matsko's heart was strengthened again by this remembrance, so he cried, —

“It is true! The Lord Jesus is merciful! They seized hold of the kingdom at that time, like a fire or a pestilence. They destroyed not only Lenchytsa and Sieradz, but many other towns also. And what? Our nation is tremendously vigorous, and has inexhaustible strength in it. Even if thou, O dog brother of a German, seize a Pole by the throat thou'lt not choke him, he will knock out thy teeth for thee. For just look! King Kazimir has built up Lenchytsa and Sieradz in such beauty that they are better than ever, and meetings take place as of old in them, and the Knights of the Cross who were trampled at Plovtsi are lying there and rotting. God grant such an end to them always!”

The old man, hearing these words, began at first to nod his head in agreement, but at last he said, —

“They are not lying there, and perhaps they are not rotting; the king commanded foot soldiers to dig ditches after the battle, and men from the neighborhood came to help in the work, till their backs were all breaking. We put away the Germans in ditches and covered them in good order, so that disease might not hatch from them, but they did not stay there.”

“How, not stay? What happened?”

“I did not see this myself, but I tell what people said later. After the battle an awful wind came, which lasted twelve weeks, but only in the night-time. In the day the sun shone as is proper, but at night the wind almost tore

the hair from men's heads and faces. That was devils; whole crowds of them were roaring in the night wind, each with a pitchfork, and when a devil came up he thrust his fork into the ground, raised out a Knight of the Cross, and flew off to Hell with him. The people in Plovtsi heard a noise like that of dogs howling in packs, but they could not tell whether the Germans were howling from terror, or the devils were howling from gladness. It was that way till a priest blessed the ditches, and the ground froze so hard at the New Year that no fork could go into it."

Here he was silent, but added after a while, —

"God grant, lord knight, such an end as you say, though I shall not see the time; youths like these two will live to it, but they will not see what my eyes have seen."

Then he began to look at Anulka and Yagenka, to wonder at their beautiful faces, and shake his head.

"The poppy in the wheat field is no man's," said he, "and I have never seen any one like these two lads."

In this way they talked through a part of the night, then they lay down to sleep in the cabin on moss soft as down, and were covered with warm skins. When deep sleep had strengthened their limbs they moved on faster next morning, after clear daylight.

The road along Chartsi Vandol was not very easy, but it was also not difficult; hence before sunset they saw the castle of Lenchytsa. The town had been raised again from its ashes. It was of red brick, and even partly of stone. It had lofty walls, defended by towers, and the churches were richer than the churches of Sieradz. From the Dominicans they got news of the abbot easily. He was better, they said, and rejoiced in the hope of recovery, and some days before he had gone on his journey. Matsko did not wish greatly to overtake him on the road, for he had determined already to take the two girls to Plotsk, whither the abbot would have taken them; but as he was in a hurry to find Zbyshko he was terribly distressed by news that after the abbot's departure the rivers had swollen so that it was quite impossible to go farther. The Dominicans, seeing a knight with a considerable escort, and going, as he said, to Prince Ziemovit's, received and entertained him hospitably, and even gave him a tablet of olive-wood, on which was written in Latin a prayer to the angel Raphael, the patron of travellers.

His forced stay at Lenchytsa lasted two weeks during which time the young shield-bearer of the castle starosta dis-

covered that the passing knight's attendants were maidens, and fell in love madly with Yagenka; Hlava wished to challenge him to trampled earth straightway, but as this happened on the eve of their departure Matsko advised him against that action.

When they started on the journey to Plotsk the wind had dried the roads somewhat, for though frequent rains fell, as is usual in spring-time, they were brief in duration. The heat also was great, for spring had come at last. In the fields bright strips of water were shining in the furrows. From the plowed land came a strong odor of damp earth in the wind, the swamps were covered with buttercups; in the forest the wolf's foot had blossomed, and thrushes were raising a joyful twitter among branches. In the hearts of the travellers new hope and desire had risen, especially as they were travelling easily, and after sixteen days' journey they halted before Plotsk, but they arrived in the night-time. The gates were closed, hence they had to lodge outside the walls at a weaver's house. The girls, going to bed late, slept like stones, after the toil and hardships of a long journey. Matsko, whom no toil could conquer, did not wish to rouse them, but just as the gates were opened he went alone to the city, where he found the cathedral easily, and the bishop's house, where the first news which he heard was that the abbot had passed away six days earlier.

He was dead a week; but according to the custom of that age masses were celebrated over the coffin, and the funeral feasts continued six days. The burial was to take place that day, and after it services, and the final feast in honor of the departed.

Matsko from great distress could not look at the city, which moreover he knew somewhat from the time when he had travelled taking a letter from Princess Alexandra to the Grand Master. He returned as quickly as possible to the weaver's house outside the wall, and on the way said to himself, —

“ Well, he is dead; eternal rest to him! There is no help against death in this world; but what am I to do now with those two girls? ”

And he began to hesitate over this, and to think whether it would be better to leave them with Princess Alexandra, or Princess Anna Danuta, or take them to Spyhov. More than once on the road it had occurred to him that were Danusia no longer alive there would be no harm were Yagenka near

Zbyshko. He had no doubt that Zbyshko would mourn long for Danusia, whom he loved beyond all people, and would weep long after her; but he had no doubt either that if a girl like Yagenka were there at his side she would have her own effect. He remembered the young man, though his heart was tearing away beyond the pine woods of Mazovia, was taken by shivers when close to Yagenka. For these reasons, and believing also profoundly that Danusia had perished, he had thought more than once that in case the abbot died he would not send away Yagenka. But since he was somewhat greedy of earthly goods, he was concerned about property left by the abbot. The abbot had been angry at them, it is true, and had said that he would will them nothing; but might not compunction have come before death to him? That he had left something to Yagenka was certain, for more than once he had mentioned that fact in Zgorzelitse; through Yagenka it might also not miss Zbyshko. So at times a desire seized Matsko to tarry in Plotsk to learn the how and what, and occupy himself with that business; but he soon put an end to these thoughts. "I shall be here," said he, "bothering about property, and my boy may be stretching his hands from some dungeon of the Order, and awaiting salvation from his uncle." True, there was one escape: to leave Yagenka under the guardianship of the princess and the bishop, with the entreaty not to let her be wronged in case the abbot had willed her some property. But that idea did not please Matsko in any way. "As it is, the girl has a good fortune," said he to himself; "if she inherits from the abbot, some Mazovian will take her, as God is in heaven, and she will not hold out long either, for even Zyh said that she was as if walking on live coals of fire." And the old knight was frightened at this idea, for he thought that in that way Danusia and Yagenka both might miss Zbyshko, and for aught on earth he would not have that come to pass. "Let him have the one God has predestined, but one of these two he must take."

He determined first of all to save Zbyshko, and if he had to part with Yagenka he would leave her in Spychov, or with Princess Danuta, not in Plotsk, where the court was incomparably more brilliant, and where there were handsome knights in good number.

Burdened with these thoughts he went with brisk steps toward the weaver's to announce to Yagenka the death of the abbot, but he promised in soul not to tell her immedi-

ately, for unexpected bad news might stop her breath and make the girl barren.

When Matsko reached the house he found both maidens dressed, even ornamented, and joyous as thrushes; so sitting down on a bench he called the weaver's servant to bring a mug of heated beer, and then put frowns on a face which was stern enough without them.

"Dost hear," asked he, "how the bells of the town are ringing? Guess why they are ringing, for it is not Sunday, and thou hast slept over early mass. Wouldst thou like to see the abbot?"

"Of course I should like to see him," answered Yagenka

"Well, thou wilt see him, as King Nail."

"Has he gone farther?"

"He has gone farther indeed! But dost thou not hear that they are ringing bells?"

"Has he died?"

"Say eternal rest."

So all three knelt down and repeated eternal rest with voices resonant as a bell. Then tears flowed in streams along Yagenka's face, for she loved the abbot greatly. Though quick-tempered with people, he had wronged no one, and had done good with both hands, and her, his godchild, he loved as if she had been his own daughter. Matsko, remembering that the abbot was his kinsman and Zbyshko's, was moved also, and cried some; only when a part of his sorrow had vanished in tears did he take Hlava and the two girls to the church for the funeral.

The funeral was splendid. Bishop Yakob of Kurdvanov led the procession himself. All the priests and monks of Plotsk were there, all the bells were rung; discourses were delivered which no one understood save the clergy, for they were in Latin. Then clergy and laity returned to a feast at the bishop's.

Matsko went there taking the two youths, for he had every right as a relative of the dead man. The bishop too received him, as a kinsman of the abbot, with good-will and honor, but immediately after greeting he said, —

"There are some forests left you, the Grady of Bogdanets; but whatever remains and does not go to cloisters and abbeys is to belong to his goddaughter, a certain Yagenka of Zgorzelitse."

Matsko, who had not expected much, was glad of the forests, but the bishop did not see that one attendant of the

old knight raised moist eyes, as blue as star thistles, and said, —

“God reward him, but I would rather he were living.”

Matsko turned to her and said: “Be quiet, for thou wilt make shame for thyself.”

But he stopped suddenly; astonishment gleamed in his eyes; then his face grew stern and wolf-like, for at a distance, near the side of the door through which Princess Alexandra was entering at that moment, he saw Kuno Lichtenstein, bent in courtly client fashion, that same man through whom Zbyshko came near his death in Cracow.

Yagenka in her life had never seen such a Matsko; his face wrinkled like the jaw of an angry mastiff, and under his mustaches the teeth glittered. In one moment he tightened the belt around his waist, and moved toward the hated Knight of the Order. But half-way he restrained himself, and drew his broad hand along his hair. He remembered in season that perhaps Lichtenstein was at the court of Plotsk as a guest, or more likely an envoy, and that if he wished without making inquiry to fight with him, he would act just as Zbyshko had acted on the road from Tynets.

So, having more reason and experience than Zbyshko, he restrained himself, loosened his belt, made his face affable, and when the princess, after greeting Lichtenstein, spoke with the bishop, he approached her, bent low, reminded her who he was, and said that he considered her his benefactress because of the letter with which on a time she had furnished him.

The princess barely remembered his face, but she recalled the letter easily and the whole affair connected with it. She knew besides what had happened at the neighboring Mazovian court: she had heard of Yurand, and the kidnapping of his daughter, the marriage of Zbyshko and his deadly duel with Rotgier. Her curiosity was roused greatly by all these details, just as it would have been by a narrative of knight-hood, or by one of those ballads which were sung by minstrels among the Germans, or by choristers in Mazovia. It is true that the Knights of the Cross were not so hateful to her as to Anna Danuta, the wife of Prince Yanush, especially since they, wishing to win her to their side, surpassed one another in flattery and homage, and showered gifts on the lady richly; but this time her heart was on the side of the lovers. She was ready to aid them; and moreover it pleased her to have

in her presence a man who could relate the whole course of events most minutely.

And Matsko, who had determined earlier to win the protection and aid of the powerful princess by every means possible, seeing with what attention she listened, told her willingly of the sad fate of Zbyshko and Danusia, and almost moved her to tears, and this the more quickly since he himself felt more keenly than any one the misfortune of his nephew, and grieved with his whole soul over it.

“ I have heard nothing more touching in my life,” said the princess at last, “ and the greatest pity seizes me for this cause, that, having married the girl, she was his ; still he knew no happiness with her. But do you know surely that he did not ? ”

“ Ei, mighty God ! ” answered Matsko, “ would that he had ; but he married her at night, when he was tied to his bed with grievous illness, and at daybreak they took her.”

“ Do you think that Knights of the Cross took her ? For here they talk about robbers who deceived the Knights of the Cross by giving them another girl. They speak also of a letter from Yurand — ”

“ Not the judgment of people has decided this now, but the judgment of God. They say that that Rotgier was a great knight, who brought down the doughtiest, and still he fell at the hand of a stripling.”

“ Yes, such a stripling,” said the princess, smiling, “ that it would be very safe for any man not to creep into his way. An injustice was done, it is true, and you complain with reason ; but still of those four three are no longer living, and that old man who remains barely escaped death, as I hear.”

“ But Danusia, where is she ? and where is Yurand ? ” asked Matsko ; “ where are they ? God knows, too, whether some evil may not have befallen Zbyshko, who went to Malborg.”

“ I know, but really the Knights are not such scoundrels as you deem them. In Malborg, near the Grand Master and his brother Ulrich, who is a knightly person, nothing evil can have happened to your nephew ; he has a safe-conduct and letters from Prince Yanush. Unless he challenged some knight there and fell, for in Malborg there is always a number of the most renowned knights from all countries.”

“ Ei, I do not fear that greatly,” answered the old man. “ If they do not shut him up in a dungeon, or slay him treacherously, and he has some iron in his grasp, I am not

much afraid. Only once was there found a man stronger who put him back in the barriers, and that was the Prince of Mazovia, Henryk, he who was bishop here, and who was in love with the comely Ryngalla. Though Zbyshko was a mere boy in those days, he was as ready to challenge a certain man as to say amen to Our Father, — the man whom I, too, have promised to challenge and who is here.”

And he indicated with his eyes Lichtenstein, who was conversing with the Voevoda of Plotsk.

But the princess frowned, and said with that severe and dry tone which she used always when anger was beginning to seize her, —

“Whether you have made a vow or not, remember this, that he is on a visit; whoso wishes to be our guest must observe politeness.”

“I know, gracious lady,” answered Matsko. “I had already tightened my belt, and was going toward him, but I restrained myself, thinking that perhaps he was an envoy.”

“Yes, he is an envoy. And the man is distinguished among his own people; the Grand Master himself values his counsel, and does not refuse him anything. God perhaps granted that he was not in Malborg when your nephew was there. As to Lichtenstein, though of honorable family, people say that he is stubborn and vengeful. Did he recognize you?”

“He could not have done so, for he has seen me little. We were in helmets on the Tynets road, and afterwards I visited him only once on Zbyshko’s business, but that was in the evening when he was busy. I noticed now that he looked at me, but he did so only because I talked rather long with you, gracious lady, for he turned his eyes after that very quietly in another direction. He would have known Zbyshko, but he overlooked me, and has never heard of my vow, perhaps, having something better to think of.”

“How better?”

“Yes, better, for vows touching him have been made by Zavisha of Garbov, Povala of Tachev, Martsin of Vrotsimovitse, Pashko Zlodye, and Lis of Targovisko. Each one of these, gracious lady, could manage ten like him, and what must it be when he has all of them against him? Better for him that he had never been born than to have one such sword above his head. As to me, not only shall I not remind him of my vow, but I shall try to enter into intimacy with him.”

“For what purpose?”

Matsko's face took on a cunning expression immediately, and looked like the face of an old fox.

“For this purpose, that he should give me a letter of such kind that I may travel safely through the country of the Order, and, in case of need, rescue Zbyshko.”

“Is that worthy of knightly honor?” asked the princess, with a smile.

“It is,” answered Matsko in tones of decision. “Were I, for example, to fall on him from behind, without calling on the man to turn, I should disgrace myself; but to trick an enemy in time of peace by quick wit is no disgrace to any one.”

“Then I will make you acquainted,” said the princess.

So she beckoned to Lichtenstein, and presented Matsko; thinking that even were Lichtenstein to recognize him, no great harm would come of that.

But Lichtenstein did not recognize Matsko, for really he had seen him in a helmet on the Tynets road, and afterward had spoken with him only once, and that in the evening when Matsko came to him to beg pardon for Zbyshko's offence.

Still he bowed rather haughtily; but when he saw behind the knight two splendid, richly dressed attendants, he thought that no ordinary noble could have such, and his face brightened somewhat, though he did not cease to curve his lips haughtily, as he did always when not dealing with ruling persons.

“This knight is going to Malborg,” said the princess. “I myself will recommend him to the favor of the Grand Master; but he, hearing of the authority which you enjoy in the Order, would like to have a letter from you also.”

Then she turned to the bishop. Lichtenstein fixed his cold, steel eyes on Matsko and asked, —

“What motive inclines you, sir, to visit our pious and modest capital?”

“A pious and an honest motive,” answered Matsko, raising his glance; “were it otherwise, the gracious lady would not have vouched for me. But, in addition to sacred vows, I should like also to become acquainted with your Grand Master, who makes peace on earth, and is most renowned in the world of knighthood.”

“He for whom the gracious princess, your lady and benefactress, gives guarantee will not complain of our modest entertainment; but as to the Master, it will be difficult to

see him, for he went to Dantzig a month ago, whence he intended to go to Krolevets, and farther toward the boundary; for though a lover of peace, he is forced to defend the inheritance of the Order against the treacherous attacks of Vitold."

When he heard this Matsko was vexed so evidently that Lichtenstein, before whose eyes no one could hide anything, remarked, —

"I see that your desire to know the Grand Master is equal to your wish to perform religious vows."

"Yes, yes, of course," answered Matsko, promptly. "Then is war with Vitold certain?"

"Vitold has begun it himself by giving aid to insurgents in spite of his oath."

A moment of silence followed.

"Well, God grant that success to the Order which it merits," said Matsko at last. "I cannot make the acquaintance of the Grand Master, but in every case I will accomplish my vows."

But despite these words he did not know what he was to do, and with a feeling of immense vexation he put to himself this question, —

"Where am I to seek Zbyshko now, and where shall I find him?"

It was easy to foresee that if the Master had left Malborg and gone to war there was no reason to look for Zbyshko in Malborg, but in every case it was necessary to obtain more accurate information regarding him. Old Matsko was greatly vexed, but as he was a man of ready resources, he resolved to lose no time, but to continue his journey without delay on the morrow. It was easy for him to get a letter from Lichtenstein with the aid of Princess Alexandra, in whom the comtur had boundless confidence. He received, therefore, a recommendation to the Starosta of Brodnitsa and to the Grand Hospitaller in Malborg, but in return for these letters he presented Lichtenstein with a large silver goblet engraved beautifully in Vrotslav, such a goblet as the Knights were accustomed to place, filled with wine, near their beds at night, so as to have at hand, in case of insomnia, a remedy bringing sleep and consolation. This liberality of Matsko astonished Hlava, who knew that the old man was not overinclined to loading any one with presents, above all a German; but Matsko said, —

"I did this because I have made a vow touching that Knight, and I must fight with him. I could not in any way attack the life of a man who rendered me a service. It is not our custom to strike a benefactor."

"But it is a pity to lose the beautiful goblet," answered Hlava a little rebelliously.

"I do nothing without calculation, have no fear. If the merciful Lord Jesus permits me to bring down that German I shall win back the goblet, and capture a multitude of other costly things with it."

Then the two men, and with them Yagenka, began to counsel as to what they should do. It came to Matsko's mind to leave Yagenka and Anulka in Plotsk with Princess Alexandra, and to do so because of the abbot's will, which was deposited with the bishop; but the girl opposed this with all her unbending decision. It is true that it would have been easier to travel without her, for there would be no need of finding separate rooms, or thinking of ceremony, or danger, or various other things of similar import. However, they had not left Zgorzelitse to stay in Plotsk. The will in the bishop's hands would not be lost, and should it appear that the maidens must stay on the road somewhere, they would be safer in the care of Princess Anna than Alexandra, for at her court the people cared less for the Knights of the Cross, and were more inclined to Zbyshko. It is true that Matsko said, touching this, that wit does not belong to woman, and that it is not proper to argue with a girl, as if she had real reason; he did not oppose decisively, however, and soon yielded, for Yagenka drew him aside and said, with tearful eyes, —

"You know — God is looking at my heart — that I pray morning and evening for Danusia, yes, and for Zbyshko's happiness. God in heaven knows best of all the truth of this! But Hlava, and you too, declare that she is lost, that she will not escape from the hands of the Knights alive. If this be so, then I —"

Here she hesitated somewhat, the tears collected, flowed slowly down her cheeks, and she ended in a whisper, —

"Then I wish to be near Zbyshko —"

Those tears and words touched Matsko; still he answered, —

"If she perishes, Zbyshko will be so grieved that he will not look at thee."

"I do not want him to look at me, but I want to be near him."

"Thou knowest that I want what thou dost, but in his first grief he will be ready even to use harsh words against thee."

"Let him use harsh words," answered she, with a sad smile. "But he will not, for he will not know me."

"He will know thee."

"He will not know me. You did not know me. Tell him it is not I, but Yasko, and Yasko is like me to the very lips. Tell him that Yasko has grown, and it will not come to his head that it is I, and not Yasko."

The old knight said something now about knees bending inward, but as boys' knees also bend in sometimes, that could not be a hindrance, especially as Yasko's face was almost the same, and his hair, since the last cutting, had grown long again, and he wore it in a net like other noble youths, and knights also. For these reasons Matsko yielded, and now they fell to discussing the journey. They were to start on the morrow. Matsko decided to enter the lands of the Order, go to Brodnitsa, find an informant there, and if the Grand Master, in spite of the suppositions of Lichtenstein, was in Malborg yet, to go to Malborg; in the opposite case to cross the boundary of the Order in the direction of Spyhov, inquiring on the road for the young Polish knight and his retinue.

The old knight thought that he might learn something more easily of Zbyshko in Spyhov, or at the Warsaw court of Prince Yanush, than in any other place.

In fact they set out on the following morning. Spring had begun completely, hence there were overflows of water, and those of the Skrva and the Drventsa stopped the road, so that only on the tenth day after leaving Plotsk did they cross the boundary and find themselves in Brodnitsa. The town was clean and well-ordered, but immediately on entering one might recognize rigorous German rule, for immense walled gallows¹ had been built outside the town at the side of the Gorchenitsa road and decorated with bodies of hanged people, of whom one was a woman. On the watch-tower and on the castle waved a flag which had a red hand on a white field. But the travellers did not find the comtur himself in the place, for he had gone with a part of the garrison, and at the head of the neighboring nobility, to Malborg. This information was given to Matsko by an

¹ The ruins of the gallows remained till the year 1818.

old Knight of the Order blind of both eyes, who on a time had been comtur of Brodnitsa, and growing attached to the town and the castle, was passing the last of his life there. When the local priest read to him the letter from Lichtenstein, he received Matsko hospitably, and since he was living in the midst of a Polish folk he knew Polish speech excellently, so that it was easy to converse with him. It had happened to him also to be summoned to Malborg six weeks before, whither he had been called to a military council as a knight of experience; hence he knew what was happening at the capital.

When they asked him about the young knight, he said that he did not remember his name, but that he had heard of some knight who had roused wonder first of all by this, that he was belted notwithstanding his youthful years, and then by his success at the tournament which the Grand Master had arranged for foreign guests before he set out on his expedition. Gradually he recalled even this, that Ulrich-von Jungingen, the noble-minded though quick-tempered brother of the Grand Master, had conceived a liking for that knight, had taken him under his care, and given him special letters, which the young man took with him and went away toward the eastern boundary.

Matsko was comforted immensely by these tidings, for he had not the least doubt that that knight was Zbyshko. In view of this there was no reason to go to Malborg, for though the Grand Hospitaller, or other dignitaries, and Knights of the Order who remained there might give more minute information, they could in no case tell where Zbyshko was at the moment. Moreover, Matsko himself knew best of all where to find him. It was not difficult to divine that he was circling about Schytno, or, if he had not found Danusia in that place, he was searching for her in the remoter Eastern castles or towns of the comturs.

So, without losing much time, he moved through the territory of the Order toward the east, and Schytno. He passed the road quickly, for the numerous towns and villages were joined by highways which the Knights of the Cross, or rather merchants in the towns, had made, and maintained in good condition, — highways scarcely inferior to those which had appeared in Poland under the managing and active care of King Kazimir's government. Moreover, the weather was marvellous; the nights starry, the days serene, and at the hour of afternoon milking a warm, dry

breeze blew, which filled people's bosoms with health and good feeling. Wheat was green in the fields, the meadows were covered richly with flowers, and pine woods gave out the odor of resin. Over the whole road to Lidzbark, and thence to Dzialdovo, and farther to Niedzbov, the travellers saw not a single cloud on the sky. In Niedzbov at night came the earliest shower, with thunder, heard then for the first time that spring. The shower was a short one, and next morning the dawn appeared clear, rosy, golden, and so filled with light that as far as the eye could see everything glittered like strings of pearls and diamonds; the whole earth seemed to smile at the sky and to rejoice in the wealth of existence.

On that morning they went out of Niedzbov toward Schytno. The Mazovian boundary was not distant, and they could have turned to Spyhov easily. There was a moment even when Matsko thought of doing so, but after weighing everything carefully, he chose to push on directly to that terrible nest of the Order in which a part of Zbyshko's fate had been decided so gloomily. He took a peasant guide, therefore, and commanded him to lead the escort to Schytno, though a guide was not absolutely needed, for a straight road led on from Niedzbov, and on this road German miles were marked with white stones at the wayside.

The guide went some tens of steps in advance; after him came Matsko and Yagenka on horseback; then, rather far behind them, was Hlava with the fair Anulka; and still farther were wagons surrounded by armed attendants. It was early in the morning. The rosy color had not left the eastern side of the sky yet, though the sun was shining well, changing to opals the drops of dew on the grass and the trees.

"Art thou not afraid to go to Schytno?" asked Matsko.

"I am not," answered Yagenka. "The Lord God is above me, for I am an orphan."

"Thou hast cause to fear, for they keep no faith in that place. Indeed Danveld was the worst of dogs; Yurand rubbed out him and Gottfried — so Hlava says. The second after Danveld was Rotgier, who fell under Zbyshko's axe, but the old man too is unpitying, sold to the devil. People know nothing clearly, but I think that if Danusia has perished it is at his hands. They say that some misfortune met him as well as the others, but in Plotsk the

princess told me that he had squeezed out of it. He is the man whom we are to meet in Schytno. It is well that we have a letter from Lichtenstein, for likely the dog brothers fear him more than even the Grand Master. They say that he has weight, that he is cruel and very strict, and moreover vengeful. He does not forgive the slightest injury. I should not go to Schytno so confidently without this letter."

"And what is the name of that old man?"

"Siegfried de Löwe."

"God grant us to defend ourselves against him."

"God grant!"

Here Matsko laughed, and after a time continued, —

"The princess in Plotsk said to me, 'The wrong you commit is that of lambs against wolves, but in this case of the wolves three are no longer living, for the innocent lambs have slaughtered them.' And she is right if the truth be told."

"But Danusia and her father?"

"I asked the same question of the princess. But I am glad in soul that it seems very dangerous to wrong us; we understand, seest thou, how to grasp an axe and use it worthily. As to Danusia and Yurand, I think, as Hlava does, that they are no longer in this world, but really no one knows exactly. I am sorry indeed for Yurand, since during life he was consumed with grief for his daughter, and if dead he has died an awful death."

"When any one mentions him in my presence, I think immediately of papa, who is no longer in this life," answered Yagenka.

And she raised her moist eyes. Matsko nodded, and said, —

"He is in God's assembly and surely in endless light, for a better man than he there was not in our whole kingdom."

"Oi, there was not, there was not!" sighed Yagenka.

Further conversation was interrupted by the peasant guide, who reined in his colt all at once, then turning, flew toward Matsko at a gallop, and cried in a strange and terrified voice, —

"Oh, for God's sake! Look, lord knight, some one is coming toward us down the hillside!"

"Who? Where?" inquired Matsko.

"Over there! It must be a giant, or something."

Matsko and Yagenka, reining in their pacers, looked in the direction indicated by the guide, and in fact they saw on the hill, half a furlong or more away, a form which seemed to exceed the usual dimensions of man considerably.

"The fellow says truly that he is large," muttered Matsko.

Then the old man spat toward one side on a sudden and said, —

"A charm on the dog!"

"Why do you adjure?" inquired Yagenka.

"Because I remember how on the same kind of morning Zbyshko and I saw on the road between Tynets and Cracow a giant of such size. The people said then that it was Valger the Charming. Well, it turned out to be the lord of Tachev; but nothing good came of the matter. A charm on the dog!"

"This is not a knight, for he is on foot," said Yagenka, looking more sharply. "I see even that he has no weapons, he has nothing but a stick in his left hand."

"And feels the way out in front, as if the time were night," added Matsko.

"And he barely moves. It is sure that he is blind, or something."

"He is blind, he is blind! as I live!"

They spurred on, and soon halted in front of the old man, who, descending the hill very slowly, was searching for the road with a stick. He was indeed immense, though seen from near by he did not appear to them a giant. They discovered that he was entirely blind. Instead of eyes, he had two red depressions in his face. His right hand also was lacking; in place of it he carried a knot formed of a dirty rag. His white hair fell to his shoulders and his beard reached his girdle.

"The poor man has neither boy nor dog, and finds the road for himself by groping," said Yagenka. "In God's name I cannot leave him without help! I do not know whether he can understand me, but I will speak to him in our speech."

She sprang from her horse quickly, and standing in front of the old man looked for money in the leather pouch which depended from her girdle.

The old man, when he heard the tramp of horses, and the noise, stretched his stick forward, and raised his head in the manner of blind people.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said Yagenka. "Do you understand Christian speech, grandfather?"

But he, hearing her sweet voice, trembled, a wonderful ray shot across his face as it were of emotion and tenderness, he covered with his eyelids the empty pits of his eyes, and dropping the stick, fell before her on his knees with his arms stretched upward.

"Rise! I will help you. What is your suffering?" asked Yagenka with astonishment.

He made no answer, save that two tears rolled along his cheeks, and from his mouth came a sound something like a groan.

"Aa! a!"

"By the pity of God are you dumb, or what?"

"Aa! a!"

When he had uttered this he raised his hand, made a sign of the cross with it first, then passed it across his lips.

Yagenka, not understanding, looked at Matsko, who said, —

"It must be that he is showing how they cut his tongue out."

"Did they cut your tongue out?" asked the girl.

"Aa! a! a! a!" repeated the old man a number of times, nodding his head therewith.

Then he pointed at his eyes with his fingers, thrust forth his right arm without a hand, and made a motion with his left like giving a blow.

Now both understood him.

"Who did this to you?" asked Yagenka.

The old man made a number of signs of the cross in the air.

"The Knights of the Cross!" cried out Matsko.

The old man dropped his head toward his breast in sign of affirmation. A moment of silence followed. Matsko and Yagenka looked at each other with fear, for they had before them a clear proof of that lack of mercy and absence of measure in punishment for which the Knights of the Cross were distinguished.

"Savage measures!" said Matsko at last; "grievously have they punished him, and God knows whether justly. But we shall not discover that. If only we knew where to take him, for he must be a man of these parts. He understands our speech, for the people here are the same as in Mazovia."

"Do you understand what we say?" asked Yagenka.

He confirmed with his head.

"Are you from this place?"

"No," answered the old man with signs.

"Then you may be from Mazovia?"

"Yes."

"From the dominions of Prince Yanush?"

"Yes."

"And what were you doing with the Knights of the Cross?"

The old man could not answer, but his face assumed in one moment an expression of such immense pain that the compassionate heart of Yagenka quivered with the greater sympathy, and even Matsko, though no small thing could move him, said, —

"Surely the dog brothers have done him evil, and perhaps without fault on his part."

Yagenka pressed into the palm of the poor man some small money.

"Listen," said she, "I will not leave you. You will go with us to Mazovia, and in every village we will ask if that is not your place. Maybe we shall talk the way to it somehow. And stand up now, for we are not saints."

But he did not rise; on the contrary he inclined and embraced her feet, as if giving himself into her protection, and returning thanks; but at the same time a certain astonishment, and even, as it were, disappointment, shot over his face. Perhaps it was that while taking note of her voice he had thought himself standing before a young girl, while now his hand touched rough leggings such as knights and attendants wore while on journeys.

But she said, —

"This is what we will do. Our wagons will come soon; you can rest and gain strength. But you will not go at once to Mazovia, for we must go first to Schytno."

At this word the old man sprang to his feet. Dread and astonishment were expressed on his face. He opened his arms as if to bar the way, and from his mouth came wild sounds, as if he were filled with terror.

"What is the matter?" cried Yagenka, with alarm.

But Hlava, who had now come up with Anulka, and who for some time had been looking fixedly at the old man, turned quickly to Matsko with a changed face, and said in a voice full of astonishment, —

"By God's wounds! let me speak to him, lord, for you do not think who he is!"

Then, without waiting for permission, he sprang to the old man, placed his hands on his shoulders, and inquired, —

"Are you coming from Schytno?"

The old man, as if struck by the sound of his voice, grew calm, and nodded in affirmation.

"And were you not looking for your child there?"

A dull groan was the only answer to that question.

Hlava grew somewhat pale, looked a moment longer with his wild-cat glance at the features of the old man, then said slowly and with emphasis, —

"You are Yurand of Spyhov!"

"Yurand!!" screamed Matsko.

But Yurand tottered at that moment and fainted. The tortures which he had passed through, the lack of food, the toils of the journey had thrown him off his feet. That was the tenth day on which he was going along feeling his way, wandering, and searching for the road in front of him with a stick, in hunger, in struggling, uncertain whither he was going. Unable to ask for the road in the daytime, he directed himself only by the heat of the sunrays; the nights he passed in ditches by the wayside. When he passed through a hamlet or a village, or when he met people going in the opposite direction, he begged alms with his one palm and the voice that was left him; but rarely did a compassionate hand give him aid, for generally he was looked on as a criminal whom the punishment of law and of justice had overtaken. For two days he had kept himself alive with the bark of trees and with leaves, and he was in doubt whether he should be able ever to reach Mazovia — when on a sudden compassionate, kindred hearts had encircled him, and kindred voices, one of which reminded him of the sweet voice of his daughter — and when at last even his own name was mentioned, the measure of emotions overflowed, the heart was straitened in his breast, thoughts went around in his head like a whirlwind, and he would have fallen with his face in the dust of the road if the strong arms of Hlava had not caught him.

Matsko sprang from his horse, then both took Yurand, carried him to the wagons and placed him on some hay in one of them. There Yagenka and Anulka revived the man, gave him food, gave him wine to drink, and Yagenka, seeing that he could not grasp the cup, held the drink herself to

his lips. Immediately an invincible sleep seized the man, from which he was to wake on the third-day only.

Meanwhile they held a prompt and decisive council.

"I will say at once," called out Yagenka, "that it is not for us to go now to Schytno, but to Spyhov, so as to leave him in a safe place among his own people, and leave him surrounded by every care."

"Look, how thou art ordering this," answered Matsko. "It is necessary to send him to Spyhov, but not indispensable that we all go; one wagon can go with him."

"I do not order, but I think that we might learn much from him about Zbyshko and Danusia."

"In what language wilt thou talk with him, since his tongue is gone?"

"But who has shown you that he has no tongue, except himself? You see that without talking we have learned everything that was needed, and how will it be when we are accustomed to the indications of his head and hands? Ask him, for example, whether Zbyshko has returned from Malborg to Schytno, then be sure he will either affirm with his head, or deny; and it will be the same with other things."

"True!" said Hlava.

"I do not deny that this is true," said Matsko, "and I had the same thought myself; but with me judgment is first, and talk afterward."

Then he gave orders to turn the wagons toward the Mazovian boundary. On the way Yagenka approached time after time the wagon in which Yurand lay, fearing that he might have died while sleeping.

"I did not recognize him," said Matsko, "but that is no wonder. He was as strong as a wild bull! the Mazovians said that he was the only man among them who was able to meet Zavisha of Garbov — but now he is a real skeleton."

"There were reports," said Hlava, "that they were killing him with torture, but some people could not believe that Christians would act so with a belted knight, one having, moreover, Saint George for his patron."

"It was God's will that Zbyshko avenged him even in part. But see the difference between us and them. It is true that of four dog brothers three have fallen; but they fell in battle, and no man has cut the tongue out of one of them in captivity, or taken his eye out."

"God will punish them," said Yagenka.

But Matsko turned to Hlava, —

"How didst thou know him?"

"I did not know him at once, though I saw him later than you did. But something was going through my head, and the more I looked at him the more it kept going. He had no beard or white hairs before; he was a great lord, and a rich one; how was it possible to recognize him in such a beggar! But when the young lady said that we were going to Schytno and he began to howl, my eyes were opened that instant."

"It would be well to take him from Spyhov to the Prince, who cannot permit such a wrong done a man of importance to go unpunished."

"They will deny, lord. They carried off his child by deceit, and they denied; they will say of the master of Spyhov that he lost his tongue and his hand in battle, and his eye also."

"True!" answered Matsko. "Indeed they carried off the Prince himself on a time. He cannot war with them, for he cannot overcome them unless the king helps him. People talk of a great war, but here there is not even a small war."

"Yes, there is, with Prince Vitold."

"Praise be to God that he is a man who cares nothing for the Order. Hei, Prince Vitold is the prince for me! And in cunning they cannot beat him, for he alone is more cunning than all of them together. It used to happen that they, the dog bloods, would press on him till destruction, like a sword, was above his head, but he would slip away, like a snake, and bite them right there. Look out for him when he strikes, but look out still more when he coaxes."

"Is he that way with all?"

"Not with all, only with Knights of the Cross; with others he is kind and bountiful."

Here Matsko meditated, as if wishing to bring Vitold to mind better.

"He is a man entirely different from the princes in these parts," said he at last. "It was Zbyshko's duty to go to him, for under him and through him it is possible to do most against the Order."

After a moment he added, —

"Who knows that we may not find them both there yet, that is the place for most proper vengeance."

Then he spoke again of Yurand, of his evil fate, and the unutterable wrongs which he had suffered from the Knights of the Order, who first of all had murdered his beloved wife without cause, and then, paying vengeance with vengeance, had carried off his daughter, and tormented him with such cruel tortures that even Tartars would not have been able to invent anything to surpass them. Matsko and Hlava gritted their teeth when they thought that even the liberation of Yurand was a new and calculated cruelty. The old knight promised himself therefore in soul that he would try to find out accurately how that all was, and then pay for it with interest.

In such conversation and thoughts the journey to Spyhov passed. After a clear day came a calm, starry night, so they did not halt for a night rest; three times, however, they fed the horses plentifully. They crossed the boundary while it was still dark, and at dawn, under the direction of a hired guide, they were on the land of Spyhov. Old Tolima held everything under an iron hand there, evidently, for barely had they entered the forest when two armed men came out toward them; but these, seeing that there were no troops, merely a small escort, not only let them pass without question, but conducted them through flooded places and swamps impassable for persons unacquainted with the district.

At the castle, Tolima and Father Kaleb received the guests. The tidings that their lord had come, brought back by pious people, flew like lightning through the castle. But when they saw how he had come from the hands of the Knights of the Cross, such a storm of threats and rage burst forth that if there had been a knight in the dungeons of Spyhov no human power could have saved him from an awful death.

Horsemen wished to mount immediately, gallop to the boundary, seize what Germans they could find, and cast their heads at the feet of Yurand; but Matsko curbed this wish of theirs, for he knew that Germans lived in towns and castles, while the village people were of the same blood as he and Yurand's men, though living under the constraint of foreigners. But neither shouts, nor uproar, nor the squeak of well-sweeps could rouse Yurand, whom they carried from the wagon to his room on a bearskin, and placed on a bed there. At his side remained Father Kaleb, his friend from years of youth, and his foster-brother,

who loved him as if he had been his own brother. He began an imploring prayer that the Saviour of the world would restore to the unfortunate Yurand his eyes, his tongue, and his hand.

The road-weary travellers lay down to sleep after morning refreshment. Matsko woke when it was well on in the afternoon and gave command to call Tolima.

Knowing already from Hlava that Yurand, before his departure, had enjoined on all obedience to Zbyshko, and that he had given to him the inheritance of Spyhov through the mouth of Father Kaleb, he said to the old man in the voice of a superior, —

“I am the uncle of your young master, and until he returns my orders will be in force here.”

Tolima inclined his gray head, which resembled the head of a wolf somewhat, and surrounding his ear with his hand, inquired, —

“Then are you the noble knight of Bogdanets?”

“I am,” replied Matsko. “Whence do you know of me?”

“The young lord, Zbyshko, expected you here, and asked about you.”

When he heard this, Matsko sprang to his feet, and forgetting his dignity cried, —

“Zbyshko in Spyhov?”

“He was here, lord; he went away two days ago.”

“By the dear God! Whence did he come, and whither did he go?”

“He came from Malborg and stopped at Schytno on the way; whither he was going he did not tell us.”

“Did he not tell you?”

“He may have told Father Kaleb.”

“Ei, mighty God! Then we passed each other,” said Matsko, slapping his thighs with his hands.

Tolima put his hand around his other ear, —

“What do you ask, lord?”

“Where is Father Kaleb?”

“He is with the old master, at his bedside.”

“Bring him here! — But no — I will go myself to him.”

“I will call him!” said the old man.

And he went out. But before he brought the priest Yagenka came in.

“Come hither! Dost thou know what? Zbyshko was here two days ago.”

Yagenka's face changed in one moment, her legs, enclosed in tight leggings, could be seen trembling under her.

"Was he here, and has he gone?" asked she with a throbbing heart. "Whither?"

"Two days ago, but whither perhaps the priest knows."

"We must see the priest!" said she with a voice of decision.

After a while Father Kaleb came in. Thinking that Matsko was calling for him to inquire about Yurand, he said, anticipating the question, —

"He is sleeping yet."

"I have heard that Zbyshko was here!" exclaimed Matsko.

"He was; he went away two days ago."

"Whither?"

"He did not know himself whither. He went to search, — to the boundary of Jmud, where there is war now."

"By the dear God, tell me, father, what you know of Zybshko."

"I know only what he told me. He was in Malborg and gained powerful protection there; that of the brother of the Grand Master, who is the first knight among them. At his command Zbyshko has permission to search all the castles."

"For Yurand and Danusia?"

"Yes, but he was not searching for Yurand, since they told him that Yurand was not living."

"Tell from the beginning."

"Immediately; but I will draw breath and come to myself, for I am returning from the other world."

"How from the other world?"

"From that world to which a man does not go on horseback, but on prayer, and from the feet of the Lord Jesus, from whom I have begged for mercy on Yurand."

"You have asked for a miracle? Have you such power?" asked Matsko with great curiosity.

"I have no power whatever, but the Saviour has. If he wishes, he will return to Yurand eye, tongue, and hand."

"He can if he wishes," answered Matsko. "Still you have asked for no small thing."

Father Kaleb made no reply, perhaps he had not heard, for his eyes did not yet indicate full presence of mind, and it was evident that he had forgotten himself altogether in

prayer. So now he covered his face with his hands and sat some time in silence; at last he shook himself, rubbed his eyelids, and then said, —

“Now inquire.”

“How did Zbyshko win over to his side the Voyt of Samba?”

“He is not Voyt of Samba now.”

“No matter. Take note of what I ask, and tell what you know.”

“He won him at the tournament. Ulrich Von Jungingen is fond of encounters within barriers, so he met Zbyshko; for there was a multitude of knightly guests in Malborg and the Grand Master had arranged tournaments. The saddle girth burst on Ulrich’s horse, and Zbyshko might have brought him down easily, but he, seeing that, struck his spear against the ground, and besides supported the tottering man.”

“Hei! Well, seest thou?” cried Matsko, turning to Yagenka. “Ulrich fell to loving him for that?”

“Yes, for that. He would not meet him with sharp lances, or dull ones, and became his friend. Zbyshko, on his part, told him his sufferings, and he, because he cares for knightly honor, was inflamed with dreadful rage, and sent Zbyshko with a complaint to his brother. God grant him salvation for that, since there are not many among the Knights who love justice. Zbyshko told me too that Pan de Lorche assisted him much because they respect him there for his wealth and great family, and he gave testimony for Zbyshko in everything.”

“But what came of the complaint, and the testimony?”

“This, that the Grand Master commanded severely the comtur of Schytno to send to Malborg at once all captives and prisoners in Schytno, not excepting Yurand himself. As to Yurand, the comtur answered that he had died of his wounds and was buried near the church there. Other prisoners he sent to Malborg, among them the idiot girl, but our Danusia was not among them.”

“I know from Hlava,” said Matsko, “that Rotgier, he who was slain by Zbyshko, mentioned such a girl. He said at the court of Prince Yanush that they had mistaken her for Yurand’s daughter; and when the princess answered that they had seen and knew the real daughter of Yurand, who was not an idiot, he said, ‘You are right, but we thought that the Evil One had changed her.’”

“The comtur wrote the same to the Grand Master: that that girl was not in prison, but under guard; that they had taken her from robbers, who swore that she was Yurand’s daughter, who had been transformed.”

“And did the Master believe that?”

“He did not know himself whether he was to believe or not, but Ulrich flashed up with still greater anger, and obtained from his brother this, — that he should send an official of the Order with Zbyshko to Schytno, which happened. When they arrived at Schytno they did not find the old comtur, Siegfried, for he had gone to the war against Vitold, toward the eastern castles. They found an assistant voyt, who commanded to open all the cellars and dungeons. They searched and searched, but found nothing. They took people also to testify. One told Zbyshko that much might be learned from the chaplain, for he could understand the dumb executioner; but the old comtur had taken the executioner with him, and the chaplain had gone to Krolevets to some church congress. They meet there often, and send complaints against the Knights of the Cross to the Pope, for a hard life have the poor priests in the lands of the Order.”

“But it is a wonder to me that they did not find Yurand,” remarked Matsko.

“It is evident that the old comtur liberated him earlier. There was more malice in this liberation than if they had simply taken life from him; they wanted that he should suffer before death as much, nay more, than a man of his position could go through, blind, speechless, and without his right hand. Fear God! Neither able to go home, nor to ask about the road, nor to beg for bread. They supposed that he would die under a fence, sometime, from hunger, or that he would be drowned in water. — What did they leave to him? Nothing but the memory of what he had been, and the experience of wretchedness. And besides, it was torture upon torture! He might have been sitting somewhere near a church, or at the roadside, and Zbyshko might have passed by and not recognized him. Perhaps even he heard Zbyshko’s voice and could not call to him. Hei! I cannot talk from tears! God performed a miracle that you met him, therefore I think that He will perform one still greater, though my unworthy and sinful lips are those which beg for it.”

“And what more did Zbyshko say? Whither did he go?”

“He said this: ‘I know that Danusia was in Schytno, but they have either killed her or removed her. Old Siegfried,’ said he, ‘did that, and as God be my aid I shall not rest henceforth till I put hand on him.’”

“Did he say that? Then it is certain that he has gone to the eastern boundaries, but there is war there at present.”

“He knew that there was war, and therefore he went to Prince Vitold. He said that he should be able to accomplish something against the Knights of the Cross through Vitold more quickly than through the king even.”

“To Prince Vitold!” cried Matsko, springing up.

Then he turned to Yagenka, —

“Seest thou what sense? Did I not say the same? I foretold as true as life that we should have to go to Vitold.”

“Zbyshko had the hope,” said Father Kaleb, “that Vitold would burst into Prussia and capture the castles there.”

“If they give him time he will not fail,” answered Matsko. “Well! praise God, we know at least where to look for Zbyshko.”

“Then we must go at once,” said Yagenka.

“Be quiet!” cried Matsko. “It is not proper for attendants to give counsel.”

And he looked at her significantly, as if reminding her that she was an attendant, so she recollected herself, and was silent.

Matsko thought for a while, and then said, —

“We shall find Zbyshko certainly, for he is nowhere else, except at the side of Prince Vitold; but it will be necessary to know whether he has anything else to seek in the world besides those heads of the Knights of the Cross which he has vowed to get.”

“And how can that be known?” asked Father Kaleb.

“If I knew that that priest of Schytno had returned from the council I should like to see him. I have letters from Lichtenstein and can go with perfect safety.”

“That was no council, it was only a meeting,” said Father Kaleb, “and the priest must have returned long ago.”

“That is well. Leave the rest to my head; I will take Hlava, two attendants with war horses, and go.”

“And then to Zbyshko?” inquired Yagenka.

“And then to Zbyshko; but meanwhile thou wilt wait

here till I return from Schytno. I think that I shall not be gone longer than three or four days. The bones in me are strong, and toil is nothing new to me. But first I will beg you, Father Kaleb, for a letter to the chaplain of Schytno. He will believe me the more easily if I show him your letter, since priests have always more confidence in one another than in laymen."

"People speak well of that priest," answered Father Kaleb, "and if any one knows anything it is he."

Towards evening the letter was ready, and next morning before sunrise old Matsko was no longer in Spyhov.

CHAPTER XL.

YURAND woke from his long sleep in presence of Father Kaleb, and having forgotten in his sleep what had happened to him, and not knowing where he was, he began to feel of the bed and the wall near which the bed stood. But Father Kaleb seized him in his arms, and weeping from tenderness said, —

“It is I! Thou art in Spyhov! Brother Yurand! God has visited thee, but thou art among thy own. Pious people have brought thee home. Oh, brother Yurand! My brother!”

And pressing him to his breast, he kissed his forehead, his empty eyes, and, pressing him to his breast, again he kissed him. Yurand at first was as if stunned, and seemed to understand nothing, but at last he passed his left hand over his forehead and head, as if wishing to push back and scatter the heavy clouds of sleep and stupor.

“Dost thou hear and understand me?” asked Father Kaleb.

Yurand gave a sign with his head that he heard, then he reached with his hand for the silver crucifix captured by him once from a rich German knight; this he took from the wall, pressed it to his lips, to his breast, and returned it to Father Kaleb.

“I understand thee, brother. He remains to thee, and as He has brought thee out of the land of captivity, so He can return everything that was taken from thee.”

Yurand pointed upward in sign that everything of his would be turned thitherward, wherewith his eyepits were filled with tears, and immense pain was depicted on his suffering face.

Father Kaleb, seeing this movement and pain, felt convinced that Danusia was no longer alive, so he knelt at the bedside, and said, “O Lord, give her endless rest, and may eternal light shine on her; may she be in endless peace. Amen.”

At this the blind man rose, and sitting on the bed, began to move his head and motion with his hand, as if to forbid Father Kaleb, and restrain him; but they were unable to

understand each other, for at that moment old Tolima entered, and behind him the garrison of the castle, tried men, the foremost and oldest of the land tillers of Spyhov, foresters, and fishermen; they came because tidings of the return of the master of Spyhov had spread over all the place. They embraced his knees, they kissed his hand, and burst into plaintive weeping at sight of that maimed old man, who in nothing reminded them of the former terrible Yurand, the crusher of the Knights of the Order, the victor in every encounter. But some of them, namely, those who had followed him in expeditions, were swept away by a whirlwind of anger, hence their faces grew pale and became stubborn. After a while they collected in a group and whispered, pushing one another with their elbows, and shoving, until finally one of the garrison of the castle, who at the same time was the blacksmith of Spyhov, stood forth, a certain Suhar; he approached Yurand, seized his feet, and said, —

“As soon as they brought you hither, lord, we wanted to move on Schytno, but that knight who brought you forbade us. Do you, lord, give permission, for we cannot remain as we are without vengeance. Let it be as it was aforetime. They have insulted us, but they will not go unpunished, they will not. We went against them at your command, we will go now under Tolima, or without him. We must capture Schytno and make dog blood flow out of it, so help us God!”

“So help us God!” repeated other voices.

“To Schytno!”

“We must have blood!”

And immediately a flame seized their passionate Mazovian hearts. Foreheads were frowning, eyes flashing, here and there was heard the gritting of teeth. But after a while voices and gritting of teeth ceased, and the eyes of all were intent on Yurand.

His cheeks flushed at once, as if the former resolution had sprung up in him and the former ardor of battle. He rose and began to search along the wall with his hand. It seemed to the men that he was feeling for his sword, but this time his fingers met the cross which Father Kaleb had hung in its old place. He took it from the wall a second time, then his face became pallid, he turned to the men, raised his empty eyepits, and extended the crucifix in front of him.

Silence followed. It was evening in the world outside. Through the windows came the twittering of birds, which were settling for rest at the gables of the castle and in the linden-trees growing in the courtyard. The last ruddy sun-rays fell as they penetrated the chamber on the upraised cross and on the white hair of Yurand.

Suhar, the blacksmith, looked at Yurand, he looked around at his comrades, he looked at Yurand a second time, then he made the sign of the cross and left the room on tiptoe. After him went the others in like silence, and only when they had stopped in the courtyard did they begin to whisper to one another.

“Well, and what?”

“Shall we not go, or how?”

“He did not permit.”

“He leaves vengeance to God. It is clear that the soul has changed in him.”

And so it had in reality.

Meanwhile in the chamber with Yurand remained only Father Kaleb, old Tolima, and with them Yagenka and Anulka, who, having seen a group of armed men passing through the court, came to see what was happening.

Yagenka, bolder and more certain of herself than was Anulka, approached Yurand now.

“God give you His aid, Knight Yurand,” said she. “It is we who brought you hither from Prussia.”

His face brightened at the sound of that youthful voice. Evidently he recalled in more detail everything that had happened on the Schytno road, for he began to give thanks, nodding his head, and placing his hand on his heart repeatedly. She told him how they had met him, how Hlava had recognized him, Hlava, Zbyshko's attendant, and finally how they had brought him to Spyhov. She said also of herself that she with her comrade carried the sword, the helmet, and the shield for the knight Matsko of Bogdanets, the uncle of Zbyshko, who had set out from Bogdanets to seek his nephew and had gone to Schytno, but in three or four days would return again to Spyhov.

At mention of Schytno Yurand did not fall, it is true, into such excitement as on the road the first time, but great alarm was expressed on his face. Yagenka assured him, however, that Matsko was as cunning as he was resolute, that he would let no man trick him; moreover he had letters from Lichtenstein; with these he could go everywhere

safely. These words calmed Yurand notably. It was clear too that he wished to ask about many other things, and being unable to do so, he suffered in soul; seeing this the quick girl said, —

“When we talk oftener we shall be able to say everything.”

At this he smiled, stretched his hand toward her, and placing it on her head by feeling, he held it there a long time, as if blessing her. He was very grateful to her indeed; but besides, her youth pleased his heart, and that short, quick talk of hers, which reminded him of the twittering of birds.

From that time, whenever he was not praying, — and he prayed for whole days almost, — or when he was not sunk in slumber, he sought for her near by; and if she was not present he yearned for her voice, and in every way endeavored to let Father Kaleb and Tolima know that he would like to have that charming youth near him.

And she came, for her honest heart took sincere compassion on him; and besides, the time passed more quickly in his company, while she was waiting for Matsko, whose stay in Schytno was prolonged in some way strangely. He was to return in three days; meanwhile the fourth and fifth day had passed. The sixth day, toward evening, the alarmed girl was just going to beg Tolima to send men out to inquire, when information was sent from the watch oak that horsemen were approaching Spyhov.

After a while hoofs clattered on the drawbridge and Hlava rode into the courtyard with another attendant. Yagenka, who had already hurried down from the upper chamber, and was waiting, ran to him before he could spring from the saddle.

“Where is Matsko?” asked she, with throbbing heart.

“He has gone to Prince Vitold, and commands you to stay here,” answered the attendant.

CHAPTER XLI.

YAGENKA, when she learned that she was to stay at Matsko's command in Spyhov, was unable to utter a word for a while from astonishment, sorrow, and anger; she merely looked with widely opened eyes at Hlava, who, understood well how disagreeable the news was which he had brought her.

"I should like," said he, "to give you a report of what we have heard in Schytno, for we heard much that is new and important."

"And is it about Zbyshko?"

"No; but there is Schytno news — you know —"

"I understand. Let the boy unsaddle the horses, and you come with me."

And commanding the boy, she took Hlava upstairs with her.

"Why did Matsko leave us? why must we stay in Spyhov? and why did you return?" asked she in one breath.

"I returned," said Hlava, "because the knight Matsko commanded. I wanted to go to the war, but a command is a command. 'Thou wilt return,' said the knight; 'thou wilt take care of the lady of Zgorzelitse, and thou wilt wait for news from me. It may be,' said he, 'that thou wilt have to conduct her home, for, of course, she cannot go alone there.'"

"By the dear God! what has happened? Have they found Yurand's daughter? Did Matsko go not to Zbyshko, but only to find Danusia? Hast thou seen her? Hast thou spoken to her? Why didst thou not bring her, and where is she at present?"

When Hlava heard this avalanche of questions, he bent down to the knees of the lady and said, —

"Let it not cause anger to your grace that I do not answer all questions at once, for I cannot; but I will answer in turn one after another, if there be no hindrance."

"Well! Have they found her, or not?"

"No. But still there is certain news that she was in Schytno, and that they have taken her somewhere, perhaps to eastern castles."

“And we, why are we to stay in Spyhov?”

“Should she be found, as your grace sees, there would indeed be no reason to stay here.”

Yagenka was silent, but her cheeks flushed.

“I thought, and I think now,” said Hlava, “that we shall not snatch her alive from those dog brothers, but everything is in the Lord’s hand. I must tell from the beginning. We went to Schytno. The knight Matsko showed Lichtenstein’s letter to the under-voyt, and the under-voyt, since he had carried a sword behind Lichtenstein in his youth, kissed the seal before our eyes, received us hospitably, and suspected nothing. If we had had some men near by we might have taken the castle, so far did he trust in us. There was no hindrance either in seeing the priest, we talked two nights through, and learned wonderful things, which the priest knew from the executioner.”

“The executioner is dumb.”

“Dumb, but he knows how to tell the priest everything by signs, and the priest understands the man as if he were speaking with the living word to him. Wonderful is that which has happened; the finger of God must have been in it. That executioner cut off Yurand’s hand, plucked the tongue from him, and burnt out his eye. He is of such sort that when a man is in question he shudders at no punishment; even were they to command him to tear a man to pieces with his teeth, he would do so. But he will not raise a finger on any girl, and should they command him to do so, no punishment would move him. He is in this state of mind for the reason that once he himself had an only daughter whom he loved wonderfully, and whom the Knights of the Cross —”

Here Hlava hesitated and did not know how to continue; seeing which Yagenka said, —

“What do I care about an executioner’s daughter?”

“It touches the affair,” answered Hlava. “After our young lord cut up the knight Rotgier the old comtur Siegfried became almost insane. In Schytno they say that Rotgier was his son, but the priest denies that; though he confirms this, that never has a father loved a son more, and to gain revenge, he has sold his soul to the devil, as the executioner has witnessed. He talked to the dead man, as I to you; the corpse smiled at him from the coffin, gritted its teeth, and licked its lips with its black tongue when the old comtur promised the head of Pan Zbyshko.

But, since he could not get Pan Zbyshko then, he gave command to torture Yurand, and put Yurand's tongue and his hand into Rotgier's coffin. The corpse began to eat them raw —"

"Oh, terrible to hear such things! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!" said Yagenka, and rising, she threw a billet of wood on the fire, for it had grown dusk then.

"That is how it was," continued Hlava. "I do not know how it will be settled at the last judgment, for what belonged to Yurand must be returned to him. But how that will be done is beyond human reason. The executioner saw all this. So when the old comtur had sated the vampire with human flesh he went to offer him Yurand's daughter, for the dead man had whispered to him, as it seems, that he wanted to wash down his food with the blood of that innocent. But the executioner, who, as I have said, would do anything except to endure wrong done a girl, hid on the staircase. The priest says that he is not in his full mind, and is really a beast; but he understands that one thing, and when there is need, no man can equal him in cunning. He sat then on the stairs and waited for the comtur. The old comtur heard the breathing of the executioner, saw his gleaming eyes, and was frightened, for he thought it was the devil. Then the executioner gave the comtur a blow of his fist on the neck, thinking that would shock his spine so that there would be no sign left of violence; still he did not kill him. But Siegfried fainted and was sick from fright, and when he recovered, he feared to attack Yurand's daughter."

"But he took her away?"

"He took her away, and with her the executioner also. The old comtur did not know that it was he who had defended Danusia; he thought that it was some unknown power, good or evil. But he did not choose to leave the executioner in Schytno. He feared his testimony, or something, — he is dumb, it is true, but in case of a trial he might tell through the priest what he knows. So the priest said at last to the knight Matsko: 'Old Siegfried will not destroy Yurand's daughter now, for he is afraid; and though he should command another to do so, while the executioner is alive he will not desert her, all the more that he has defended her already.'"

"Did the priest know whither they had taken her?"

"He did not know exactly, but he heard that they said something about Ragneta, which castle is not far from the Lithuanian, or Jmud boundary."

"But what did Matsko say to this?"

"When he heard this he said to me next morning: 'If this is true maybe we shall find her; but I must go with all my breath to Zbyshko, so that they should not bring him to a hook, as they brought Yurand. If they tell him that they will give her up if he comes himself for her, he will go, and then old Siegfried will wreak on him such vengeance for the sake of Rotgier as human eye has never witnessed.'"

"That is true! that is true!" cried Yagenka with fear. "Since that is why he hurried off he did well."

After a while, turning to Hlava again, she said, —

"But he was mistaken in sending you back. Why guard us here in Spyhov? Old Tolima can guard, and there you would be useful to Zbyshko, for you are strong and clever."

"But in case of need, who will take you, young lady, to Zgorzelitse?"

"In case of need you will come here before them. They must send news through some one; let them send it through you — and you will take us then to Zgorzelitse."

Hlava kissed her hand and asked with emotion, —

"You will stay here meanwhile?"

"God is above the orphan! We will stay here."

"And it will not be dreary for you. What will you do here?"

"Beg the Lord Jesus to return happiness to Zbyshko, and to preserve you all in health."

When she had said this she wept heartily, and he bent to her knees again.

"You are just like an angel in heaven," said he.

CHAPTER XLII.

BUT she wiped away her tears and told the attendant to follow her and declare the news to Yurand. She found him in a large chamber, sitting with Father Kaleb, Anulka, and old Tolima; a tame she-wolf was at his feet. The sexton, who was also a chorister, was playing on a lute, and singing of some old battle which Yurand had fought against the "foul knights," and they, with heads leaning on their hands, were listening in deep thought and sadness. It was bright in the room from moonlight. After a day almost sultry had come a calm evening which was warm. The windows were open, and in the moonlight one could see bugs, which were flying about in the linden-trees growing in the courtyard. In the chimney a few bits of brands were smouldering yet, at which an attendant was heating mead mixed with sweet herbs and strengthening wine.

The chorister, or rather the sexton and servant of Father Kaleb, had just begun a new song about the "victorious meeting." "Yurand is advancing, under him is his chestnut steed," when Yagenka came in and said, —

"May Jesus Christ be praised!"

"For the ages of ages!" answered Father Kaleb.

Yurand was sitting on a bench with arms, his elbows leaning on the arms; but when he heard Yagenka's voice he turned at once toward her and greeted her with his head, which was milk white.

"Zbyshko's attendant has come from Schytno," said the girl, "and has brought news from the priest. Matsko will not return, for he has gone to Prince Vitold."

"How not return?" inquired Father Kaleb.

Then she told everything which she had heard from Hlava concerning Siegfried; how he had taken vengeance for the death of Rotgier, concerning Danusia, how the old comtur wished to sacrifice her to Rotgier, so that he might drink her innocent blood, and how the executioner had defended her unexpectedly. She did not conceal even this, that Matsko had hope now that he and Zbyshko would find Danusia, free her, and bring her to Spyhov. For this reason

precisely he had gone straight to Zbyshko, and commanded them to remain at Spyhov.

Her voice trembled at last as if with sorrow, or sadness, and when she had finished a moment of silence followed. But from the lindens was heard the singing of nightingales, which seemed to beat in through the open window in the manner of a rain shower and fill the room. The eyes of all were turned to Yurand, who, with closed lids and head thrown back, did not give the least sign of life.

“Do you hear?” asked Father Kaleb at last.

He bent his head back still more, raised his left arm, and pointed to the sky.

The light of the moon fell straight on his face, on his white hair, on his eyepits, and there was in his countenance such suffering, and at the same time such a boundless surrender to the will of God, that it seemed to all that they were looking at a soul freed from bodily bonds, a soul which had separated once and forever from earthly life, expected nothing in it, and looked for nothing.

Again followed silence, and again no sound was heard save the trilling of nightingale voices filling the yard and the chamber. But great compassion seized Yagenka on a sudden, and childlike love, as it were, for that hapless old man; so, following her first impulse, she sprang to him, and grasping his hand, fell to kissing it and covering it with tears at the same time.

“I too am an orphan,” cried she from the depth of her swollen heart — “I am no young man, I am Yagenka of Zgorzelitse. Matsko took me to keep me from wicked people, but now I will stay with you till God gives you back Danusia.”

Yurand did not exhibit the least astonishment, just as if he had known before that she was a girl, but he gathered her in toward him and inclined her to his bosom; while she, continuing to kiss his hand, spoke on in broken and sobbing accents, —

“I will stay with you now, and Danusia will come back. After that I will go to Zgorzelitse. God is above orphans. The Germans killed my father too, but your love will live and come back to you. God the Merciful grant this; grant it also the Most Holy Mother, the Compassionate!”

Then Father Kaleb knelt on a sudden, and called in a solemn voice, —

“Kyrie eleison!”

“Chryste eleison!” responded Hlava and Tolima together.

All knelt down, for they understood that to be a litany repeated not only in time of death, but for the rescue from mortal peril of persons near and dear to us. Yagenka knelt, Yurand dropped from the bench to his knees, and they continued in a chorus, —

“Kyrie eleison! Chryste eleison! — O Father in Heaven, O God, have mercy on us! O Thou Son, the Redeemer, Lord of the world, have mercy on us!”

The voices of people and the imploring words: “Have mercy on us!” were mingled with the trilling of the nightingales.

All at once the tame she-wolf rose from the bearskin lying near Yurand’s bench, approached the open window, rested her forepaws on it, and raising her triangular face toward the moon, began to howl in a low, plaintive voice.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THOUGH Hlava adored Yagenka, and his heart was growing more and more toward the beautiful Anulka, his young and brave soul was rushing forth to war first of all. It is true that he turned back to Spyhov at Matsko's order because he was commanded; still he found a certain consolation in the idea that he would be to both ladies a guard and protector. But when Yagenka herself said, which moreover was true, that nothing threatened them in Spyhov, and that his duty was at the side of Zbyshko, he accepted the statement with gladness. Matsko was not his immediate superior, hence he could easily excuse himself before the old knight by saying that he had not remained in Spyhov because his rightful lady had commanded him to go to Zbyshko.

Yagenka thought that a man of Hlava's strength and skill could always be of service to Zbyshko, and might rescue him from more than one strait. He had for that matter given evidence of this during the prince's hunt, where Zbyshko had almost lost his life by the wild bull. All the more might he be of service in war, especially a war like that on the Lithuanian boundary. Hlava was in such a hurry to the field, that while returning with Yagenka from visiting Yurand, he implored her, and said, —

"I wish to bow down before your grace to beg a kind word for the journey."

"How is that?" inquired Yagenka; "do you wish to go to-day even?"

"To-morrow morning before daylight, so that the horses may rest the night through. Jmud is terribly distant!"

"Then go, for thou wilt overtake the knight Matsko more easily."

"It would be difficult to do so. The old man is very strong in every labor, and he is a number of days in advance of me. Besides, he will go through Prussia to shorten the road, while I must go through forests. He has letters from Lichtenstein which he can show on the way; I have nothing to show but this to open a free passage before me."

And he placed his hand on the sword hilt at his side, seeing which Yagenka exclaimed, —

“Ah, but be careful! Since thou art going it is needful to reach the end of thy journey, and not stop in some dungeon of the Order. And in forests have a care for thyself, for there many wicked demons are living whom people honored before they turned to Christ. I remember how the knights Matsko and Zbyshko spoke of those things at my father’s house.”

“I remember, but I have no fear; for those are poor things without power, they have no influence. I will take care of those demons and the Germans also, should I meet any, if war only breaks out in earnest.”

“But has it not broken out? Tell me, what hast thou heard among the Germans of war?”

At this the prudent fellow knitted his brows, was silent a moment, and said, —

“It has, and it has not. We inquired carefully about everything, and especially did the knight Matsko inquire, for he is cunning and can circumvent any German. He asks, as it were, about something else, or pretends friendship, but he never betrays himself in any way; and he hits the quick every time, and from each man draws out news as a fish is drawn out with a hook. Should your grace wish to listen patiently, I will tell. Prince Vitold, some years ago, having plans against the Tartars and wishing peace on the German side, yielded Jmud to the Order. There was great accord and friendship. He permitted the Knights to build castles; he even helped them. He and the Grand Master met on an island, they drank, they ate, they declared mutual friendship. Even hunting in those forests was not forbidden the Knights of the Cross, and when the poor Jmud men rose against the dominion of the Order, Prince Vitold helped the Germans, and sent his forces to aid them, whereupon people murmured throughout all Lithuania because he was attacking his own blood. The under-voyt of Schytno told us all this and praised the rule of the Knights in Jmud, saying that they sent to the people of that region priests who were to baptize them, and in time of hunger sent wheat to feed them also. Perhaps they sent wheat, for the Grand Master, who has more fear of God than others, ordered it, but the Knights carried off the children to Prussia, and insulted the women before the eyes of their brothers and husbands. If any man opposed they

hanged him, and for that reason, young lady, there is war now."

"But Prince Vitold?"

"The Prince closed his eyes for a good while to the wrongs of this people and loved the Knights of the Order. Not long since the princess, his wife, went to Prussia, to Malborg itself, on a visit. They received her there as if she had been Queen of Poland. And this was not long ago, just lately! They covered her with gifts, and what feasts, tournaments, and various wonders there were no man could reckon. People thought that love would last forever between the Knights and Prince Vitold, till all on a sudden the heart changed in him."

"I think, from what my late father and Matsko said about Vitold that his heart changes often."

"Toward honest men never, but toward the Knights of the Cross often through this cause, that they themselves never keep faith in anything. Just now they wished Vitold to render up fugitives, and he answered that people of low estate he would give, but a free man he did not think of giving, since a free man has the right to live where it pleases him. Therefore the Knights and Vitold began to dispute, they wrote letters with complaints, they threatened each other. When the Jmud men heard of this they rose straightway and fell on the Germans. They cut down garrisons, they stormed castles, and now they are attacking even Prussia. Vitold not only is not restraining them, but he smiles at German vexation and sends aid to the Jmud men in secret."

"I understand," said Yagenka. "But if the aid is secret, there is no war yet."

"There is war with the Jmud men openly, and with Vitold in fact. The Germans are going from all sides to defend their outlying castles, and they would be glad to make a great raid on Jmud; but they must wait for this yet a long time, that is till winter, for the country is swampy and the Knights cannot fight there. Where a Jmud man goes safely, a German will stick fast; for that reason winter is the friend of the Germans. When frost comes the whole force of the Order will move, and Prince Vitold will go to strengthen the Jmud men — and he will go with permission of the King of Poland, for the king is his liege lord and is above the Grand Prince and all Lithuania."

"Then perhaps there will be a war with the King of Poland?"

"People say so; both there among Germans and here among us. For this reason the Knights are begging aid at all courts, and the cowls are burning their foreheads, as is usual with scoundrels, for of course the strength of the King is no jest, and Polish knights, should any one mention the Knights of the Cross, would spit on the palms of their hands that same instant."

Yagenka sighed on hearing this, and said, —

"A man has always a pleasanter life in this world than a woman, for, to take an example, thou wilt go to the war, just as Zbyshko and Matsko will, but we shall stay here in the house at Spyhov."

"How can it be otherwise, young lady? You will be here, but in all safety. Terrible even to-day is the name of Yurand to the Germans; I myself saw in Schytno how dread seized them straightway when they learned that Yurand is now in Spyhov."

"They will not come here, we know that, for the swamp defends us, and old Tolima, but it is grievous to stay here and have no tidings."

"When anything happens I will inform you. I knew before our visit to Schytno that two good fellows were preparing to go to the war of their own will from this place. Tolima cannot prevent them, for they are nobles from Lenkavitsa. Now they will go with me, and in case of need, I will hurry one of them hither immediately."

"God reward thee. I have known always that thou hast strong sense in every position, but I shall be grateful till death for thy kind heart and for thy good-will toward me."

"Not wrong of any sort, but benefactions, have I received from you. The knight, your father, took me captive and gave me freedom without ransom, but to serve you was dearer to me than freedom. God grant me, my lady, to shed my blood for you."

"God conduct thee, and go with thee!" answered Yagenka, extending her hand to him.

But he preferred to bend down and kiss her feet, thus giving her greater honor; that done, he lifted his head, and without rising from his knees, said with timidity and submission, —

"I am a simple man, but a noble, and I am your faithful servant — so give me some keepsake for my journey.

Do not refuse this! You may be sure that the hour of battle harvest is approaching, and Saint George is my witness that I shall be at the front, and not in the rear ranks of it."

"For what keepsake do you ask?" inquired Yagenka, somewhat astonished.

"Provide me with any little scrap for the road, so that should it happen me to die, it would be easier for me to die beneath your ensign."

Again he bowed to her feet, and a second time he joined his hands and entreated, looking into her eyes; but on Yagenka's face sad distress appeared, and after a moment she answered, as with an outburst of involuntary sorrow, —

"But, my dear, do not ask me for that, for nothing could come of a gift from me. Whoever is happy, let her give a gift to thee, for that person might bring thee happiness. But to speak truth, what is there in me? — nothing but sadness! And what is there before me? — nothing save misery! Oi! I cannot get happiness for thee, or for any one, since I do not possess it myself, and I cannot bestow it. Oh, my poor Hlava! it is evil in the world at this time, it is, it is —"

She stopped suddenly, feeling that if she were to say one word more she would burst into weeping; and, as it was, something like a cloud passed before her eyesight. Hlava was moved immensely, for he understood that it was bitter for her to go home to the neighborhood of the attacking Stan and Vilka, and also bitter to remain in Spyhov, to which place earlier or later Zbyshko might return with Danusia. Hlava understood perfectly what was passing in the heart of the maiden, but he saw no help for her misfortune, hence he only embraced her feet again, repeating, —

"Hei! if I could die for you! If I could die for you!"

But she said, —

"Rise! Let Anulka gird thee for battle, or give thee some other remembrance, for she looks on thee gladly this long time."

And she called her. Anulka came out soon from the adjoining chamber, for, listening near the door, she had failed to show herself merely through timidity, since the wish of taking farewell of the shapely attendant was seething in the maiden. Hence she came out confused, frightened, with throbbing heart, with eyes in which there were

both tears and a dreamy expression, and dropping her lids, she stood before him bright as an apple blossom, and speechless.

For Yagenka, Hlava felt, besides the profoundest attachment, both reverence and honor, but he dared not rise to her in thought; as to Anulka, since he felt hot blood in his veins, he could not escape her enchantment. Now her beauty seized him by the heart, and especially her tears and confusion, through which love appeared, as the golden bed of a river appears through clear water. So he turned to her.

"You know that I am going to the war," said he; "perhaps I shall fall in it. Do you grieve for me?"

"I grieve!" answered she, in a thin, girlish voice.

And that instant she began to shed tears, for she had them always in readiness. Hlava was moved to the uttermost and fell to kissing her hands, repressing, in presence of Yagenka, the desire for still more intimate kisses.

"Gird him, or give him a remembrance for the journey so that he may fight under your ensign," said Yagenka.

But it was not easy for Anulka to give him anything, for she was wearing a man's dress. She began to search; neither a ribbon nor a knot of any kind. The dresses of the two women were still in bark boxes, unopened since they had left Zgorzelitse; she fell therefore into no small anxiety, from which Yagenka relieved her by advising to give him her head net.

"In God's name! let it be the net!" said Hlava, rejoiced somewhat. "I will put it on my helmet—and unhappy will the mother of that German be who tries to remove it!"

Anulka raised both hands to her head, and after a little, bright streams of hair were scattered over her neck and shoulders; when Hlava looked at her thus, dishevelled and charming, his face changed. His cheeks flushed, and then he grew pale; he took the net, kissed it, and put it in his bosom, embraced still again the knees of Yagenka, and then Anulka with greater energy than was needed.

"Let it be that way!" said he, and went out of the room without uttering another syllable.

Though he was road-weary and unrefreshed, he did not lie down to sleep; he drank to kill that night, with the two nobles from Lenkavitsa, who were going to Jmud with him. But he did not lose his head; at the first dawn he was in the courtyard, where horses were waiting, ready saddled.

In the rear wall a membrane window was pushed aside slightly, and through the opening blue eyes looked into the courtyard. Hlava saw this, and wished to move toward them to show the net fixed to his helmet, and to take one more farewell, but Father Kaleb and old Tolima hindered him. They had come down to give counsel for the journey.

"Go to the court of Prince Yanush," said Father Kaleb. "Maybe the knight Matsko has stopped there. In every case thou wilt find sure tidings, since for thee there is no lack of acquaintances in that place. The roads from there to Lithuania are known, and it is easy to find a guide through the forests. If thou wish surely to go to Pan Zbysbko, go not to Jmud directly, for a Prussian force is there, but take the road through Lithuania. Look to this too: the Jmud men might kill thee before thou couldst say who thou art, but the case is different if thou come from Prince Vitold. For the rest, God bless thee, and the two other knights. May ye return in health and bring back the maiden, for which intention I shall lie in cross form each day after vespers till the first stars appear."

"I thank you, father, for the blessing," said Hlava. "To rescue that victim from those devilish hands is not easy; still, all things are in the hands of the Lord Jesus, and it is better to be cheerful than downcast."

"Of course it is; therefore I do not lose hope. Yes — hope strengthens us, though the heart's warnings are not useless. The worst is that Yurand himself, if her name is but mentioned, points toward the sky, as if he were showing her there."

"Indeed, he may see her there, after he lost his eyes."

And the priest began to speak partly to Hlava and partly to himself, —

"It does happen this way: when a man loses his earthly eyes, just then he sees that which no one else can see. It happens this way, it happens! But it does seem impossible that God should permit wrong to such an innocent. For what harm had she done to the Knights of the Cross? None! And, mind thee, she was as innocent as a lily of the Lord, and so good to people, and she was like a bird of the field, which is singing its song! God loves children and has pity for human suffering. Nay, if they have killed her He might resurrect her, as he did Piotrovin, who, after he had risen from the grave, lived for years.

Go in health, and may the hand of God guard you all and guard her."

Then he returned to the chapel to say morning mass. Hlava mounted his horse, bowed still again before the closed window, and rode away, for day had come entirely.

CHAPTER XLIV

PRINCE YANUSH of Mazovia and the princess had gone with a part of their court to the fishing of the spring season in Chersk, for they loved the sight greatly and considered it their foremost pleasure. Hlava learned from Mikolai of Dlugolyas many important things touching private affairs as well as questions of war. He learned, first of all, that the knight Matsko had evidently given up his intention of going to Jmud directly across the "Prussian hindrance," for he had been in Warsaw some days before, where he had found Prince Yanush and the princess. Concerning war, old Mikolai confirmed the reports which Hlava had heard in Schytno. All Jmud had risen as one man against the Germans, and Prince Vitold not only did not assist the Knights of the Cross, but, without declaring war yet, and while deluding them with discussions, he strengthened Jmud with money, with men, with horses and wheat. Meanwhile both he and the Order were sending envoys to the Pope, to the Emperor, to all Christian rulers. They accused each other of faith-breaking, deceit, and treachery. From Prince Vitold went, with letters declaring these things, the wise Mikolai of Reniev, who understood how to unravel the threads twisted into each other by German cunning. He did this by showing accurately the measureless wrongs inflicted on the lands of Jmud and Lithuania.

At the same time, since at the Diet of Vilno the bonds between Lithuania and Poland had been strengthened, the hearts of the Knights of the Cross were growing timid, because it was easy to foresee that Yagello, as the overlord of all lands which were under the ruling of Vitold, would stand during war on his side. Count Yan Sayn, the comtur of Grudziansk, and Count Schwartzberg, of Dantzic, went at command of the Grand Master to Yagello to inquire what they were to expect of him. The king gave no answer, though they brought gifts to him, — precious vessels and hunting-hawks. Therefore they threatened war, but insincerely, since they knew well that the Grand Master and the Chapter were in their souls afraid of the terrible

power of Yagello, and wished to defer the day of defeat and vengeance.

Hence all discussions broke like a spiderweb, especially those that were carried on with Vitold. In the evening, after Hlava's arrival at Warsaw, came fresh news to the castle: Bronish of Tsiasnota came, an attendant of Prince Yanush, whom he had sent somewhat earlier to Lithuania for tidings, and with him came two considerable princes of Lithuania with letters from Vitold, and from the Jmud men. The tidings were threatening. The Knights were preparing for war. They had strengthened castles, they had made powder, they had made stone cannon-balls, they had brought to the boundary camp-followers and knight-hood, while divisions of lighter cavalry and infantry had already crossed the boundaries of Jmud and Lithuania from the direction of Ragneta, Gotteswerder, and other boundary castles. In forest depths, in fields, in villages, shouts of war were heard, and every evening, above the dark sea of forests, flames were blazing already. Vitold had taken Jmud under his evident protection at last; he had sent his managers, and had appointed as leader of the armed people Skirvoillo, famed for bravery. Skirvoillo attacked Prussia, he burnt, destroyed, ravaged. Prince Vitold himself hurried off troops toward Jmud; some castles he provisioned, others, as, for instance, Kovno, he destroyed, lest it might become a stronghold for the Order; and it was no longer a secret to any man that when winter came and frost bound the swamps and wet places, or even earlier should the summer prove a dry one, a mighty war would begin, which would cover Jmud, Lithuania, and Prussian regions; for if the king aided Vitold, the day must come in which the German wave would either cover half a world, or be hurled back for long centuries into the bed occupied by it earlier.

But this was not to happen straightway. Meanwhile the groan of the Jmud people was heard throughout the world, — their despairing complaints of wrong and their calls for justice. That letter of the unfortunate people had been read in Cracow, in Prague, at the court of the Pope, and in other capitals of western Europe. To Prince Yanush open letters had been brought by those people who had come with Bronish. Hence not a few in Mazovia put hands to their sword-hilts involuntarily, considering in spirit whether they would not better place themselves under Vitold's banner of their own wish. They knew that Vitold,

the Grand Prince, liked the experienced Polish nobility, who were as stubborn in battle as the Lithuanians and Jmud men, and besides, better armed and better disciplined. Some were urged on by hatred for the ancient foes of the Polish race, and still others by compassion. "Listen to us, listen!" cried the Jmud people to kings, princes, and all nations. "We have been free and are people of good blood, but the Order wants to turn us into captives! They are not working for our souls, but for our land and our property. Our misery is such that we must beg or become robbers! How can they wash us in the water of baptism when their own hands are foul? We desire baptism, but not in blood and with the sword; we want religion, but we want it of the kind which is taught by honorable rulers like Yagello and Vitold. Hear us and save us, for we are perishing! The Knights of the Cross withhold baptism so as to oppress the more easily. Not priests are they sending, but hangmen; they have taken bees, cattle, all the fruits of the earth from us; now we are not permitted to fish, or to kill a wild beast in the forest. We are imploring! Listen to us! for look, they have bent our once free necks to night work at their castles; they have borne away our children as hostages; they dishonor our wives and daughters before the eyes of their husbands and fathers. It would be more fitting for us to groan than to speak! Our families they have burned with fire; they have taken off to Prussia men of high standing, great persons,—the Korkutsie, Vassygin, Svolek, and Sangayla; they murder us, and are gulping our blood as if they were wolves. Oh, listen to us! We are in every case human beings, not wild beasts. Why is it that we turn to implore the Holy Father to command that we be christened by Polish bishops? Because with our whole spirit we are thirsting for Christian baptism, but baptism in the water of love, not in the warm blood of extermination."

Thus and similarly did the Jmud people complain; hence, when their complaints were heard at the court of Mazovia straightway a number of tens of knights and nobles decided to go and assist them, understanding that there was no need to ask Prince Yanush for permission, even for this reason that his wife was Vitold's sister. Universal rage of heart boiled up when they learned from Bronish and the others that many noble youths who were hostages in Prussia, unable to endure the insults and cruelties inflicted on them by the Knights, had committed suicide.

Hlava was rejoiced at the willingness of the Mazovian knighthood, for he thought that the more men went from Poland to Prince Vitold, the hotter would the war grow, and the more surely would they effect something against the Knights of the Order. He was comforted by this also, that he would see Zbyshko, to whom he had grown attached, and the old knight Matsko, of whom he had this thought, that he was worth looking at in action. And with these men he would see new wild regions, fresh cities, new knight-hoods and armies, and finally Prince Vitold himself, whose glory was thundering widely through the world at that time.

So he resolved to go with "great and hurried marches," stopping in no place longer than was needed to rest horses. Those attendants who had come with Bronish and other Lithuanians to the court of Prince Yanush, and knew the roads and every passage, were to conduct him and all Mazovian volunteers from village to village, from city to city, and through wild and vast forests, with which Mazovia, Lithuania, and Jmud were covered for the most part.

CHAPTER XLV.

IN a forest about five miles west of Kovno, which Vitold himself had destroyed, were assembled the main forces of Skirvoillo, who, in case of need, moved them from place to place with the speed of a thunderbolt, and made swift attacks either across the Prussian boundaries or on large and small castles still in the hands of the Order, thus rousing the flame of war throughout the whole country. It was in that forest that his faithful attendant found Zbyshko, and in his company Matsko, who had arrived only two days before. After the greeting with Zbyshko, Hlava slept the whole night like a dead man, and only next day, in the evening, did he go forth to greet the old knight, who, being tired and out of humor, received him in anger, and inquired why, according to orders given, he had not remained in Spyhov; and Matsko was pacified in some degree only when Hlava, finding a favorable moment while Zbyshko was not in the hut, justified himself by quoting the express command of Yagenka. He said also that in addition to her command and his inborn inclination for warfare, he was led to those regions by the wish to send in case of need a herald with information to Spyhov. "The lady," said he, "whose soul is like that of an angel, prays for Yurand's daughter, though she prays against her own interest. But there must be an end to everything. If Yurand's daughter is no longer alive, may God give eternal light to her, for she was as innocent as a lamb; but should she be found, the need would come to let the lady know this at the earliest, so that she might go from Spyhov before, and not after the return of Yurand's daughter, so as not to seem pushed out with shame and without honor."

Matsko listened unwillingly, repeating from moment to moment: "That is not thy affair." But Hlava, having resolved to speak plainly, paid no heed, and at last he said, —

"Better the lady had remained at home; to her this journey has been of no service. We have persuaded the poor girl that Yurand's daughter is not living, but it may turn out the opposite."

"And who said that she was not living, unless thee?" inquired Matsko with anger. "Thou shouldst have held thy tongue behind thy teeth. I brought her away, for she was afraid of Stan and Vilko."

"That was a mere excuse," answered Hlava. "She might have remained at home without danger, for they would have hindered each other. But you were afraid, lord, that in case of the death of Yurand's daughter my lady might be lost to Pan Zbyshko, and that is why you brought her."

"How hast thou grown so insolent? Art thou a belted knight, or a servant?"

"A servant, but her servant; for I am watching that no harm should come to my lady."

Matsko grew gloomily thoughtful, for he was not rejoiced at his own course. More than once he had blamed himself for taking Yagenka from home, for he felt that in taking the maiden to Zbyshko some kind of injury had been done her, and, in case Danusia were found, much more than injury. He felt also that there was truth in the bold speech of Hlava, and that he had taken the girl mainly to keep her, if need be, for Zbyshko.

"That had not come to my head!" but he said this to befog both himself and Hlava; "she herself insisted on coming."

"She insisted, for we persuaded her that the other was no longer in this world, and that her brothers would be safer without her than with her. That is why she left home."

"Thou didst tell her!" cried Matsko.

"I — and it was my fault. But now we must show her how things are. We must do something, lord. If not, better we perished."

"What wilt thou do here?" asked Matsko, impatiently, "in a war with such an army? If anything better comes it will be in July, for here there are two seasons of war for Germans, — the winter, and a dry summer. But seest thou, there is no fire yet, there is only smouldering. Very likely Prince Vitold has gone to Cracow to inform the king, and gain from him permission and assistance."

"But there are castles of the Order near by. If we could take about two of them, perhaps we might find Yurand's daughter, or learn of her death."

"Or that she is not dead."

"In every case Siegfried took her in this direction. They told us that in Schytno, and we ourselves always thought so."

"But hast thou seen the army here? Come out behind the tent and look. Some have only clubs, and some have bronze swords inherited from their great-grandfathers."

"Yes. I have heard, though, that they are splendid men in battle."

"But they cannot capture castles with their naked breasts, especially castles of the Order."

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Zbyshko and Skirvoillo, the leader of the Jmud forces, — a man of small stature, about as tall as an armor-bearer, but strong in body and broad-shouldered. He had a breast so projecting that it seemed almost a hump, and disproportionately long arms, which extended well-nigh to his knees. In general, he reminded one of Zyndram, the famed knight with whom Matsko and Zbysbko had become acquainted in Cracow; he had an immense head, therefore, and was somewhat bow-legged. It was said of him, too, that he understood war well. His life had been spent in the field, hence against Tartars, with whom he had fought many years in Russia, and against Germans, whom he hated as he did pestilence. In those wars he had learned Russian, and later, at the court of Vitold, he learned something of Polish; he knew German, or at least repeated three words in it, — fire, blood, death. His immense head was always full of plans, and war stratagems, which the Knights of the Cross were unable either to foresee or to baffle; hence they feared him in the neighboring provinces.

"We have been talking of an attack, uncle," said Zbyshko, with unusual animation, "and have come so that you might give your experienced opinion."

Matsko seated Skirvoillo on a pine log which was covered with a bearskin; then he ordered the servant to bring a small keg filled with mead, which the knights began to draw into tankards and drink, for it strengthened them properly; then Matsko inquired, —

"Do ye wish to go on an expedition?"

"To burn German castles."

"Which? Ragneta, or New Kovno?"

"Ragneta," answered Zbyshko. "Three days ago we were at New Kovno and they beat us."

"They did indeed," said Skirvoillo.

"How did they do it?"

"They did it well."

"Wait," said Matsko, "for I know not this country. Where is New Kovno, and where is Ragneta?"

"From here to Old Kovno is not quite five miles," said Zbyshko, "and from Old to New Kovno the same distance. The castle is on an island. We wanted to go over to it, but they beat us at the passage. They followed us half a day, till we hid in this forest, and our men were so scattered that some of them only turned up this morning."

"But Ragneta?"

Skirvoillo stretched forth his arm, as long as a tree branch, toward the north, and said, —

"Far! far!"

"Just because it is far should we go," added Zbyshko. "There is peace there, because all the armed men in that region have joined us. The Germans in Ragneta expect no attack, hence we shall strike on men off their guard."

"That is true," said Skirvoillo.

"Do you think that we can take the castle?" asked Matsko.

Skirvoillo shook his head in sign of denial.

"The castle is strong," added Zbyshko, "by chance alone could we take it. But we shall ravage the country, burn towns and villages, destroy storehouses, and, above all, take captives, among whom may be considerable people, and such the Knights of the Cross ransom willingly, or else exchange for them." Here he turned to Skirvoillo: "You have acknowledged, prince, that I speak justly; and now consider: New Kovno is on an island. There we shall not destroy villages, drive away cattle, or take captives. And besides, they have just beaten us. Ei! let us go to a place where they are not expecting us at this moment."

"The victor is the last man to think of surprise," muttered Skirvoillo.

Here Matsko began, and began by supporting Zbyshko's opinion, for he understood that the young man had greater hope of learning something at Ragneta than at Old Kovno, and that at Ragneta he could more easily capture some considerable person whom he might exchange. He thought, too, that in every case it was better to go farther, and slip into a country less guarded, than to rush onto an island which was defended by nature, and guarded besides by a strong castle and a victorious garrison. As a man expe-

rienced in war, he spoke clearly and gave reasons so convincing that they might have satisfied any man. Both listened carefully. Skirvoillo moved his brows from time to time, as if in sign of agreement, and muttered: "He speaks justly." At last he pushed in his immense head between his broad shoulders, so that he seemed altogether a humpback, and fell to thinking deeply.

After a certain time he rose, and, without saying more, began to take leave.

"But, prince, how is it to be?" inquired Matsko. "Whither are we to go?"

"To New Kovno," answered Skirvoillo, briefly.

And he passed out of the hut.

Matsko and Hlava looked for some time at Zbyshko in astonishment, then the old knight struck his palms on his thighs and cried, —

"Tfu! Just like a log! That is as if a man were to listen and listen and never hear anything but his own thought. It is too bad to wear one's lips out on —"

"I have heard that he is that kind of man," said Zbyshko, "and to tell the truth, all people here are stubborn as few are. They listen to another man's opinions and then act as if he had blown against the wind."

"But why did he consult us?"

"We are belted knights, and he did it to consider the two sides. But he is not stupid."

"At New Kovno perhaps they expect us less than at any place," remarked Hlava, "for this very reason, that just now they have beaten you. In this he is right."

"Let us go, then, to look at those men I lead," said Zbyshko, who felt stifled in the tent; "I must tell them to be ready."

And they went out. Night had fallen, a night dark and cloudy, lighted only by camp fires, at which Jmud men were sitting.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FOR Matsko and Zbyshko, who had served formerly under Vitold, and had seen warriors enough from Jmud and Lithuania, this camp had no new sight; but Hlava looked at it curiously, as he considered what might be expected of those men in battle, and compared them with the knighthood of Germany and Poland.

The camp stood on a plain surrounded by swamps and a pine forest, hence defended from attack perfectly, since no other army could wade through those treacherous morasses. The plain itself on which the huts stood was muddy and sticky, but they had covered it with fir and pine branches crosswise, and so thickly that men rested on them as firmly as on dry earth. For Prince Skirvoillo they had built hurriedly "numi," or Lithuanian huts of round logs and earth; for the more considerable people a number of huts had been made of branches; common men, warriors, were sitting around fires beneath the open sky, having as defence against changes of weather and rain only sheepskins and hides which they wore on their naked bodies. In the camp no one was sleeping yet, for the men, having no work to do since the last defeat, had slept in the daytime. Some were sitting or lying around bright fires, fed by dry wood and the branches of briars; others were digging in the half-dead and ash-covered embers, from which came the odor of the usual food of Lithuanians, roasted turnips, and also the odor of partly cooked flesh. Between the fires were seen piles of arms, placed conveniently, so that in case of need it would be easy for each man to grasp his own weapon. Hlava looked curiously at spears with long, narrow heads forged of tempered metal; at clubs of young oak-trees, into which spikes or flints had been driven, at short-handled axes, like those of Poland, which mounted knights used, and axes with handles almost as long as those of a halberd, with which men on foot fought. There were also bronze weapons handed down from old times when iron was little used in those remote regions. Some swords were of bronze also, but most were of good steel brought from Novgorod. Hlava took in his hands spears,

swords, axes, pitchy bows which had been scorched; by the light of the camp-fires he tested their quality. There were not many horses near the fires, for they were feeding at a distance in the forest and on fields under guard of watchful herdsmen; but as the most distinguished boyars wished to have their steeds near by, there were in the camp some tens of them fed from the hands of slaves. Hlava wondered at the shape of those animals, small beyond comparison, with strong necks, and in general so strange that Western knights considered them a distinct beast of the forest, more like unicorns than genuine horses.

"Bulky war steeds are of no use here," said the experienced Matsko, thinking of his old campaigns with Vitold, "for a big horse will mire at once in soft places, but one of these little nags will go through any place, almost as a man would."

"But on the field," said Hlava, "these beasts cannot overtake the great German horses."

"They can indeed. And besides, the German will not escape his Jmud enemy, nor will he overtake him, for the Jmud horse is as swift, if not swifter, than the Tartar."

"Still to me this is wonderful; the Tartar captives whom I saw brought in by the knight Zyh were not large, and any horse might bear one of them, but these are sturdy fellows."

The men were in truth well-bodied. By the fires were evident, under skins and coats of sheepskin, broad breasts and strong shoulders. Man for man they were rather thin, but tall and bony; in general they surpassed in size the inhabitants of other parts of Lithuania, for they lived on richer and better lands, where famines, which tortured that region at one time and another, put themselves in evidence more rarely. The Grand Prince's castle was in Vilno; to Vilno went princes from the East and the West; embassies went there, foreign merchants went; so the citizens of the place and the inhabitants of the region about grew acquainted with foreigners somewhat. In Jmud the foreigner appeared only under the form of a Knight of the Cross, or a Knight of the Sword, who brought into remote forest villages conflagration, captivity, baptism in blood; hence each man there was sterner, ruder, and closer to the old time, more unbending toward every new thing, more a defender of old customs, old ways of warfare, and the ancient religion, because the religion of the Cross was

taught, not by a mild herald of the gospel, with an apostle's love, but by an iron-clad German monk, having in him the soul of an executioner.

Skirvoillo, and the more important princes and boyars, had become Christian already, since they had followed the example of Yagello and Vitold. Others, even the rudest and wildest warriors, carried in their bosoms a dim feeling that the end and the death of their old world and old faith was coming; and were ready to bend their heads before the Cross, should it only be a cross not raised by Germans, not raised by hands that were detested. "We implore baptism," cried they to all princes and peoples; "but remember that we are human, that we are not wild beasts to be given away, bought and sold." Meanwhile, since the old faith was dying, as a fire dies when no one casts a fresh stick on it, and since hearts were turned from the new faith which German preponderance represented, in their souls a vacuum was created, and fear with dreadful sorrow for the past, and deep sadness. Hlava, who from childhood had grown up in the joyous bustle of soldiers' life, with songs and sounding music, saw for the first time a camp so mournful and so silent. Scarcely here and there, near the fires of Skirvoillo's remotest huts, were heard the sounds of a pipe or a whistle, or the words of a low song hummed by a "burtinikas." The warriors were listening with bowed heads and eyes fixed on the light. Some were squatted in groups around the fires, with their elbows resting on their knees and their faces hidden by their hands, and covered with skins, like ravening beasts of the forest. But when they raised their heads toward the passing knights, a gleam of light from the fire showed blue eyes and mild faces, not at all fierce or robber-like, but resembling much more the faces of wronged and sad children. At the outskirts of the camping-ground, on mosses, lay those wounded warriors whom they had been able to bring in from the last battle. Soothsayers, or so-called "labdarysi" and "seitons," were muttering incantations above them and dressing their wounds, to which they applied healing herbs as the men lay there patiently in silence, enduring pain and torment. From among distant trees, from the direction of fields and meadows came the whistling of horseherds; at intervals wind rose, whirling the smoke of the camp around and filling with its voice the dark forest. As night advanced the fires became dimmer and died out;

silence came down and intensified that picture of gloom and of mental depression.

Zbyshko gave out orders to the men whom he had brought, and with whom he could speak easily, for among them was a small number of Plotsk people; then he turned to his attendant, Hlava, and said, —

“Thou hast seen enough; it is time to sleep now.”

“Of course I have seen enough,” answered Hlava, “but I do not rejoice much at what I have seen, for it is evident in a moment that the people are beaten.”

“Twice; four days ago at the castle, and the next day at the crossing. And now Skirvoillo wants to go for the third time, to pass through the third defeat.”

“How is it that he does not understand that with such troops he cannot succeed against Germans? Pan Matsko told me, and now I myself see, that they must be poor men for combat.”

“In this thou art mistaken, for they are warlike as few men on earth are. But they fight in a crowd, while the Germans fight in ranks. If you break the German line, a Jmud man will put down a German quicker than a German can put down a Jmud man. The Germans know this, close in, and stand like a stone wall.”

“As to taking castles, of course there is no word to be said of that,” remarked Hlava.

“Well, there are no materials for doing so,” answered Zbyshko. “Prince Vitold has the materials, and till he comes we shall not get any castle, unless by chance or through treason.”

Thus conversing, they reached the tent, before which a large fire was kept up by servants, and in it smoked meat prepared by them. It was damp in the tent and cold, so that both knights, and with them Hlava, sat down before the fire on rawhides. After they had refreshed themselves they tried to sleep, but sleep they could not. Matsko turned from side to side, and saw that Zbyshko, sitting near the fire, had embraced both knees with his arms.

“Listen!” said he. “Why didst thou advise to go far away to Ragneta, and not near by to this Gotteswerder? Why didst thou propose that?”

“Because something told my soul that Danusia is in Ragneta — and there they are less on guard than here.”

“There was no time to talk long, for I myself was weary, and after the defeat thou wert collecting men through the

forest. But now tell me truly: Dost thou wish to search for that girl?"

"That is no girl; she is my wife."

Then silence came, for Matsko knew well that there was no reply to that answer. If Danusia had been only Yurand's daughter he would, beyond doubt, have asked Zbyshko to think no more of her; but in view of the sacredness of marriage, it was simply a duty to search for her, and Matsko would not have put such a question had it not been that he had seen neither the betrothal nor the wedding, and thought always of Yurand's daughter as a maiden.

"Ah!" said he, after a while, "all that I could inquire of thee for two days past I have inquired, and thou hast said that thou knowest nothing."

"I have said so because I know nothing, save this, that God's anger is on me."

Hlava, straightening up from the bearskin, rose, and turning his ear, began to listen carefully and with curiosity.

"While sleep does not take sense from me," said Matsko, "talk on. What hast thou seen, what hast thou done, what hast thou accomplished in Malborg?"

Zbyshko put back the hair which, uncut in front for a long time, reached down over his brow, sat a while in silence, and then began, —

"Ah, if God would only let me know as much of my Danusia as I know of Malborg! You ask what I saw there? I saw the measureless strength of the Order, supported by all kings and all nations, and which is such that I know not whether anything on earth has power to conquer it. I saw a castle which no one save perhaps the Roman Cæsar can equal. I saw treasures beyond calculation, I saw arms, I saw armored monks, knights, and soldiers as numerous as ant-swarms, and relics as many as the Holy Father in Rome has. I tell you that the soul just grew benumbed in me, for I thought thus: how is any one to attack them; who can overcome them; who can stand against them; who are the people who will not be broken by the strength of those Knights of the Order?"

"We! perdition take their mother!" cried Hlava, unable to restrain himself.

Zbyshko's words seemed strange also to Matsko, and though he wished to learn all about the adventures of his nephew, he interrupted him.

“But hast thou forgotten Vilno?” asked he. “And are the times few that we have fought shield to shield, face to face with them? And hast thou forgotten what ill-success they had in meeting us — and how they complained of our stubbornness, saying that it was not enough to sweat horses and break lances, that they had to take our lives, or give their own up? There were men from foreign lands also who challenged us — but all went away in disgrace. Why hast thou grown there thus softened?”

“I have not grown softened, for I fought in Malborg where men met with sharp lances. But you do not know all the strength of those people.”

The old man grew angry.

“But dost thou know all the Polish strength? Hast thou seen our banners assembled? Thou hast not. But the German strength rests on injustice to man, and on treachery; for there is not a finger’s length of land where they are that belongs to them. Our princes took them in as a beggar is taken to a house — where gifts are given him; but they, when they had grown in strength, bit the hand that fed them, as a shameless mad dog might do. They gathered in lands, they took cities by treachery, that is where their strength lies! But though all the kings on earth went to aid them, the day of judgment and vengeance is approaching them.”

“You asked me to tell what I saw, and now you are angry. Better let me be silent,” said Zbysko.

Matsko muttered for a time as if angry, but after a while calmed himself, and continued, —

“Well, the case is like this: A pine-tree, immense, as a tower, stands in the forest before a man; he thinks: ‘That will stand for the ages of ages;’ but let him give a good blow with the back of an axe, the tree will sound hollow, and the dust of decay will drop from it. Such is the might of the Order. I asked thee to tell what thou hast done there, what thou hast accomplished. Hast thou met a man at sharp lances? — tell that to me.”

“I have. With insolence and impoliteness did they receive me in the first days, for it was known to them that I had met Rotgier. Perhaps something ill would have happened me had I not gone with a letter from Prince Yanush; besides, De Lorche, whom they reverence, guarded me from their malice. But later came feasts and tournaments, during which the Lord Jesus blessed me. You have heard that Ulrich, the Grand Master’s brother, took me into

his affection and gave a written command from the Master himself to deliver Danusia into my hands."

"People told us," replied Matsko, "that his saddle-girth burst, and seeing this thou didst refuse to strike him."

"I raised my lance point, and from that moment he loved me. Ei, dear God! but he gave me strong letters, with which I might go from castle to castle and search. I thought that the end of my torment and trouble had come — but now I am helpless here, sitting in a wild region, suffering in loneliness; day after day I am sadder and more tormented."

Here he was silent for a while, then he hurled a piece of wood into the fire with all his might, so that sparks shot up, and a burning brand with them.

"Yes," said he, "if that poor girl is groaning here somewhere in a castle, and thinks that I have forgotten her, may sudden death not escape me!"

And so much was there burning in him of evident impatience and pain that again he threw wood into the fire, as if carried away by a blind sudden pang, and all were astonished greatly, for they had not supposed that he loved Danusia to that extent.

"Restrain thyself!" exclaimed Matsko. "How was it with that letter? Did the comturs wish to disobey the Grand Master?"

"Command yourself, lord," said Hlava. "God will comfort you — perhaps quickly."

Tears glittered in Zbyshko's eyes, but he composed himself somewhat.

"The traitors opened castles and prisons," said he. "I went to all places. I searched till the war broke out — then, in Gerday Von Heideck, the voyt told me that military law changed everything, that letters of safe-conduct given in peace time were meaningless. I challenged him right there, but he would not meet me, and gave command to put me out of the castle."

"And in others?" inquired Matsko.

"From all the same answer. In Krolevets the comtur, who is Von Heideck's chief, was unwilling even to read the Master's letter; he declared that war was war, and told me to be off while I had a sound head on my shoulders. I asked for information in other parts — the same story everywhere."

"I know now," said the old knight. "It is clear that thou wilt effect nothing; thou hast chosen to come here, where at least revenge may succeed with thee."

"True. I thought also that I might take captives and seize some castles, but these men cannot take castles."

"Hei! wait till Prince Vitold himself comes; then it will be otherwise."

"God grant him to us."

"He will come. I heard at the Mazovian court that he will come, and perhaps the king will come too, and bring all the strength that is in Poland."

Further speech between them was interrupted by Skirvoillo, who came out of the shade unexpectedly and said, —

"We are marching to the conflict!"

When they heard this the knights stood up quickly. Skirvoillo approached his immense head to their faces and said in a low voice, —

"We have news: reinforcements are marching to New Kovno. Two Knights of the Cross are leading on soldiers with cattle and provisions. Let us stop them!"

"Then shall we cross the Niemen?" inquired Zbyshko.

"Yes. We know the ford."

"And do they know in the castle of those reinforcements?"

"They know, and will go out to meet them; on those who go out you will strike."

Then he explained where they were to lie in ambush, and in such wise as to hit unexpectedly on those who sallied forth from the castle. His plan was that two battles should take place at the same time, to avenge the defeats suffered recently; this might be carried out with the greater ease, since the enemy felt entirely safe after victory. Hence he designated the time of action and the places to which they must hurry; the rest he left to their bravery and foresight. They were delighted in heart, for they saw at once that he spoke to them as an accurate and experienced warrior. When he had finished he commanded to follow him and returned to his cabin, in which princes and boyar captains were waiting. There he repeated his orders, issued new ones, and raising to his lips a tube of carved wolf-bone, gave a shrill and far-sounding whistle, which was heard from one end of the camp to the other.

At that moment something boiled up along the dying fire places; here and there sparks glittered, then small flames

appeared which rose and increased every instant, and in the light of them were seen forms of wild warriors assembling around the fires with their weapons. The forest shook and roused itself. Soon from the depth began to come the calling of horseherds as they drove in their beasts to the camp ground.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THEY reached the Nievaja in the morning and crossed; one on horseback, another holding to a horse's tail, another on a bundle of grape-vines. This passed so quickly that Matsko, Zbyshko, Hlava, and those Mazovians who had come as volunteers, were amazed at the skill of that people, and they understood then for the first time why neither pinewoods nor swamps nor rivers could stop Lithuanian onsets. When they had come out of the water no man put off his clothing, no man threw off a sheepskin or wolf-hide; each warrior dried himself standing with his back to the sun till steam rose from him as from a tarpit; and after a short rest they moved swiftly northward. At dusk they reached the river Niemen. There the crossing was not easy, since it was over a great river swollen with the waters of springtime. The ford, known to Skirvoillo, had changed in places into deep spots, so that horses had to swim more than a quarter of a furlong. Two men were swept away from Zbyshko's and Hlava's side; these they tried to save, but in vain; because of darkness and deep water they lost sight of them quickly. The drowning men dared not call for aid, since their leader had commanded earlier that the crossing should be made in the deepest silence. All the rest reached the other shore successfully and remained there till morning.

At daybreak the whole army was divided into two parts. With one Skirvoillo went to meet those knights who were bringing reinforcements to Gotteswerder, the other Zbyshko led straight toward the island, to intercept those castle people sallying forth to meet the reinforcements. The day had grown bright overhead, and calm, but the forest, the meadows, and bushes were veiled with a thick whitish mist, which hid them completely. This was for Zbyshko and his men a favorable condition, because the Germans marching from the castle could not see them and withdraw in time from an encounter. The young knight was delighted greatly for this reason, and said to Matsko, who was riding near him, —

"In a fog like this we shall strike before they can see us; God grant that it grow not thin till even mid-day!"

That moment he rushed forward to give commands to captains in advance, but he returned quickly.

"Soon we shall come," said he, "to a road going from the ford opposite the island toward the heart of the country. There we shall place ourselves in the forest and wait for them."

"How didst thou learn of the road?" inquired Matsko.

"From men of the place. I have some tens of them among my people; they lead us everywhere."

"But how far from the castle and the island wilt thou attack?"

"Five miles."

"That is well, for were it nearer soldiers from the castle might hurry up with assistance; as it is, not only will they be unable to do that, but no shouts will be heard."

"You see, I have given thought to this."

"Thou hast thought over one thing, think now of another. If thy men of that place are faithful, send two or three of them to see when the Germans sally forth, and then hurry back and report to us."

"That is done already."

"Then I will tell thee something else: Command a hundred or two hundred men as follows: take no part in the battle, but the moment it commences hurry away and cut off the road to the island."

"That is the first thing to do," answered Zbyshko, "and that order has been given already. The Germans will fall into a swamp, as it were, or a trap."

When Matsko heard this he looked at his nephew with pleased eye, for he was glad that Zbyshko, in spite of his early years, understood warfare so keenly; hence he smiled and muttered, —

"Ours is the right blood!"

But the attendant, Hlava, rejoiced more in soul than even Matsko, for to him there was nothing so delightful as battle.

"I know not," said he, "how our men will fight, but they are advancing quietly, in order, and in them a tremendous willingness is evident. If that Skirvoillo has thought out all his work well, not a living leg should escape that belongs to an enemy."

"God grant that few get away," said Zbyshko. "But I

have issued orders to take as many prisoners as possible, and should there happen among them a knight or a brother of the Order, not to kill him."

"But why is that, lord?" asked Hlava.

"Look thou sharply too that this order be carried out. A knight, if from foreign parts, goes about in cities, or in castles; he sees a world of people and hears a world of news, and if he is a knight of the Order he hears more than others. This, as God lives, is true: I have come here to capture some one of the more important men, and exchange him. That dear girl is all that remains to me — in case she is living yet."

When he had said this he put spurs to his horse and pushed out to the head of the division to give final orders and escape from sad thoughts, for which there was then no time, since the place of the ambush was not distant.

"Why does my young lord think that his wife is still living, and that she is in these regions?" asked Hlava.

"He thinks so because Siegfried did not kill her at the first impulse in Schytno; this being so, we may hope that she is still living. If he had killed her the Schytno priest would not have given us the account he did give, an account which Zbyshko himself heard. It is hard for the greatest brute, even, to raise hands on a defenceless woman. What, defenceless woman? — on an innocent little girl!"

"Hard, but not for a knight of the Order. Have you forgotten Prince Vitold's children?"

"It is true that they have wolf hearts, still it is true also that they did not kill her in Schytno, and that Siegfried himself came to these parts; hence he may have hidden her in some castle."

"Ei! in that case, if we could only surprise this island and this castle!"

"But look at those men," said Matsko.

"True! true! but I have an idea to give my young master —"

"If thou hadst ten ideas thou couldst not throw stone walls down with pikes!"

And Matsko pointed to the line of pikes with which the greater part of the warriors were provided; then he asked, —

"Hast thou ever seen such an army?"

Hlava had indeed never seen such an army. Before him advanced a dense legion of warriors, and they advanced

without order, for in that pine wood and among bushes it would have been difficult to preserve order. Besides, men on foot were mingled with men on horseback, and to keep up with the horses they held to the manes, tails, and saddles of the animals. The shoulders of the warriors were covered with skins of wolves, bears, and panthers, and from their heads were thrust out wild-boar tusks, stag horns, and shaggy wild-beast ears; so that had it not been for their weapons standing upward, and the bows which they carried, and the quivers behind their shoulders, any onlooker might have thought, especially in the morning mist, all that to be the host of forest wild beasts issuing from their native lairs, driven on by desire of blood and by hunger. There was in it something terrible, and also as unexampled as that wonder called the "gomon," during which, as simple people think, wild beasts rush forward in a throng, and with them stones and trees, even.

At this sight one of those nobles of Lenkavitsa who had come with Hlava approached him, made the sign of the cross, and said, —

"In the name of the Father and the Son! We are going with a legion of wolves, and not people."

Hlava, though he beheld such a host for the first time, said, like a man of experience, who knows everything, and is astonished at no sight, —

"Wolves run in packs during winter, but the beast blood of the Order tastes well even in springtime."

And in truth it was springtime — it was May. Leshchyna, which was encircled with pine trees, was covered with tender green. From the velvety, soft mosses, over which the steps of the warriors passed without noise, appeared the white and tender blue of the sasanka, the young berry, and the fern leaf with its tooth-edged border. The trees, moistened with abundant rain, had the odor of damp bark, and from the earth surface of the forest came a strong odor of fallen pine leaves and decaying timber. The sun played with rainbow light on the water-drops hanging from the forest leaves, and the bird world announced itself joyously.

They advanced with increasing swiftness, for Zbyshko urged them forward. After a while he turned again to the rear of the division, where Matsko and Hlava were with the volunteers from Mazovia. The hope of a good battle had roused him greatly, as could be seen, for on his face

the usual anxiety was no longer evident, and his eyes gleamed as in the old time.

"Well!" cried he. "We are to be in front now, not in the rear!" And he took them to the head of the division.

"Listen," added he; "we may strike the Germans unexpectedly, but if they see us and are able to form in line, then we must be the first of our people to fall on them, for our armor is the surest, and our swords are the best in this division."

"That is what we shall do!" said Matsko.

Other men sat back with more weight in their saddles, as if they were going to make a charge straightway. This one and that drew breath into his breast and tried whether his sword would come easily from its scabbard.

Zbyshko repeated once more that if nobles or brothers in white mantles were found among men on foot they were not to be slain, but taken prisoners; then he sprang again to the guides, and after a moment stopped the division. They had come to the road which led from the landing-place opposite the island into the interior of the country. In fact there was no real road, but rather a trail made not long before through the forest, and levelled out only as much as was needed for warriors or wagons to escape from disaster. On both sides stood a lofty pine forest, and on both sides lay the great trunks of old pines cut down to open the roadway. The undergrowth of hazel was in places so dense that it hid altogether the depth of the forest. Zbyshko chose this place at a turn so that those approaching might not see him from a distance and have time to withdraw or to form in line of battle. He took both sides of the trail and gave command to await the enemy.

The Jmud men, accustomed to forest life, and to war in the wilderness, dropped down behind tree trunks, earth clumps, hazel bushes, and bunches of young fir as quickly as if the earth had swallowed them. Not a man gave out a sound, not a horse a snort. From time to time near the hiding people a little beast would pass, and then a big beast, which, when it saw that it had almost touched a man, roared and rushed terrified into the distance. At moments a breeze rose and filled the forest with a sound that was earnest and majestic, then there was stillness; after that naught was heard save the distant call of the cuckoo and the near hammering of woodpeckers.

The Jmud men listened to those sounds with immense

delight, for the woodpecker was to them the special herald of good tidings. Besides, the forest was full of those birds, and their hammering came in from all sides, strongly, insistently, like the labor of mankind. One might have said that all those birds had their forge in that forest, and since early morning had been hurrying thither to perform earnest labor. To Matsko and the men of Mazovia it seemed that they were listening to adzes fashioning rafters for a new house, and it called to their minds native regions.

But time passed, and still there was nothing to be heard save the voices of birds and the sounds of the forest. The mist lying near the ground was growing thinner, the sun had risen notably and had begun to give warmth, but the men were lying low all that interval. Finally Hlava, to whom waiting and silence had grown irksome, turned to Zbyshko's ear and whispered, —

“My lord, if God grant that not one of the dog brothers go with his life, might we not advance in the night-time, cross the river, surprise the castle and take it?”

“Dost think that boats are not on guard there, and that the men in them have not a password?”

“They are on guard; but prisoners if under the knife will give that word, nay more, will call it out to them in German. If we reach the island the castle itself will —”

Here he stopped, since Zbyshko put his hand over his lips suddenly, for from the road came the croaking of a raven.

“Be silent,” said he, “that is a signal.”

Something like two “Our Fathers” later, on the road appeared a Jmud man on a small, shaggy horse, whose hoofs were bound in sheepskin, so as not to make noise or leave traces.

The rider looked quickly on both sides and, hearing on a sudden an answer to the croaking, darted into the forest, and in one moment was with Zbyshko.

“They are coming!” said he.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ZBYSHKO asked hurriedly how they were moving, how many cavalry there were, how many men on foot, and above all, how far away they were. From the answer of the Jmud man he learned that the detachment was not greater than one hundred and fifty warriors; of these, fifty were horsemen not under the lead of a Knight of the Cross, but of some knight who was a layman and a foreigner; that they were advancing in rank, bringing behind them wagons on which was a supply of wheels; that in front of the division, at a distance of two shots of an arrow, was a guard formed of eight men, who left the road frequently to examine trees and bushes, and finally that they were about a mile and a quarter distant.

Zbyshko was not very glad that they were advancing in rank. He knew from experience how difficult it was to break united Germans, and how such a "union" could defend itself while retreating and fight like a wild boar surrounded by hunting-dogs. On the other hand he was pleased at the intelligence that they were not farther away than a mile and a quarter, for he inferred from this that the detachment which he had sent forward had gained the rear and that in case of German defeat this detachment would let no living soul escape. For the advance guard he did not care much; thinking beforehand that they would come, he had ordered the Jmud warriors either to let them pass without notice, or, if some tried to examine the forest, to snatch them up to the last man in silence.

This command proved superfluous. The guard appeared quickly. Hidden by mounds near the road, the Jmud men saw those soldiers perfectly, and saw how, halting at the turns, they talked with one another. The leader, a sturdy, red-bearded German, imposing silence by a nod, began to listen. In a moment it was clear that he hesitated as to this: should he search the forest? At last, when he heard nothing but the hammering of woodpeckers, it was evident that to his thinking the birds would not work with that freedom were any one concealed near them; hence he waved his hand and led on the avant-guard.

Zbyshko waited till they vanished beyond the next turn; then he went to the edge of the road quietly at the head of the heavy-armored men, among whom were Matsko, Hlava, the two nobles from Lenkavitsa, three young knights from Tsehanov, and some tens of the weightiest and best-armed nobles among the Jmud men. Further concealment was not greatly needed; hence Zbyshko intended, the moment that Germans appeared, to spring into the middle of the roadway, strike on them, and break their circle. Should that succeed and the general battle be turned into a series of duels, he might be sure that the Jmud men would master the Germans.

Again followed a moment of silence, interrupted only by the usual forest whisper. But soon there came to the ear of the warriors, from the eastern part of the roadway, the voices of people. Confused and rather distant, it changed by degrees into something more expressive and nearer.

Zbyshko at that moment led his detachment to the middle of the roadway and placed it there in wedge form. He stood himself at the head of it, having immediately behind him both Matsko and Hlava. In the next rank were three men, beyond them four others. They were all armed properly; lacking, it is true, the strong "wood" or lances of the knighthood, — those lances were a great hindrance in forest fighting, — but they held in their hands the short and for the first onset the easiest weapon, the Jmud spear, and had swords and axes at their saddles for battling in a throng of warriors.

Hlava put forward his ear anxiously, listened, and then whispered to Matsko, —

"Perdition take their mother! they are singing."

"But it is a wonder to me that the pine wood is closed before us and that we cannot see them from this place," replied Matsko.

To this, Zbyshko, who considered further concealment or even quiet talking as needless, turned and said, —

"That is because the road goes along the river and turns frequently. We shall see them all on a sudden; that will be better."

"Some one is singing a pleasant song!" put in Hlava.

In fact the Germans were singing a song far from religious; this was easy to discern from its note. After listening to it one discovered also that only a few tens of men were singing; and only one phrase was re-

peated by all, but this phrase went through the forest like thunder.

And so they came on to death, gladsome and full of rejoicing.

“We shall soon see them,” said Matsko.

That instant his face became dark and was wolf-like, in some sort, for the soul in him had grown merciless and unforgiving; besides, he had not paid yet for that wound from a crossbow which he received when journeying to save Zbyshko, bearing with him a letter from Vitold’s sister to the Grand Master. Hence his heart sprang up and the desire for vengeance flowed around it as if it had been in boiling water.

“It will not be well for the man who meets him first,” thought Hlava, as he cast his eye on the old knight.

Meanwhile the breeze brought up clearly the phrase which all were repeating in their chorus: “Tándaradéi! tándaradéi!” and right away Hlava heard the words of a song known to him:—

“Bi den rôsen er wol mac,
Tándaradéi!
Merken wa mir’z houlet lac.”

Now the song stopped, for on both sides of the road was given forth a multitude of croaks as loud and resonant as if a congress of ravens had been opened in that corner of the forest.

The Germans were astonished at this. Whence could so many of those birds have flown in, and why did all their voices come from the ground, and not from the treetops?

The first rank of soldiers just showed itself on the turn and stopped, as if planted, at sight of unknown horsemen out there in front of them.

That instant Zbyshko bent toward his saddle bow, spurred his horse and rushed forward,—

“At them!”

After him shot on the others. From both sides of the forest rose the dreadful cry of Jmud warriors. About two hundred paces divided Zbyshko’s men from the Germans, who in one twinkle lowered a forest of spears against the onriders; at the same instant the farther German ranks faced the two sides of the forest with equal swiftness, to defend themselves against two flank attacks. The Polish knights would have admired that accuracy had there been

time for admiration, and had not their horses swept them with the highest speed against the levelled, gleaming lances.

Through a chance, which for Zbyshko was fortunate, the German cavalry found itself in the rear of the detachment, near the wagons. They moved, it is true, at once toward the infantry, but could neither pass through nor ride around it, and consequently could not defend it from the first onset. Meanwhile crowds of Jmud warriors attacked the mounted Germans, rushing out of the thicket like a swarm of stinging wasps whose nest has been hit by the foot of a heedless traveller. Zbyshko struck with his men on the infantry. But his blow had no effect. The Germans put the ends of their heavy lances and halberds on the ground and held them with such firmness and so evenly that the light-horse of the Jmud men had not force to break that wall. Matsko's horse, struck by a halberd in the shank, reared on its hind-legs and then dug the earth with its nostrils. For a moment death was hanging over the old knight, but, experienced in all struggles and every adventure, he drew his foot out of the stirrups and grasped with his strong hand the sharp German spear, which, instead of entering his bosom, was used to support him; next he sprang out among the horses, and drawing his sword, struck right and left at spears and halberds, just as a keen falcon dashes savagely at a flock of long-billed storks. Zbyshko's horse was stopped in its speed and almost stood on its hind-legs. Zbyshko leaned on his spear for support and broke it, so he too took his sword. Hlava, who believed in the axe above all weapons, hurled his at the Germans, and was for a moment defenceless. One of the nobles from Lenkavitsa perished; at sight of this, rage so seized the other that he howled like a wolf, and, reining back his bloody horse till it reared, drove the beast toward the midst of the enemy at random. The boyars of Jmud hewed with their blades against the large and small spears, from behind which gazed the faces of soldiers, transfixed as it were with amazement, and also contracted by stubbornness and resolution. But the line did not break. The Jmud men, who struck at the flanks, sprang back at once from the Germans as from porcupines. They returned, it is true, but could effect nothing.

Some climbed in a twinkling into the trees at the roadside and began to shoot from bows into the midst of the soldiers.

whose leaders, seeing this, gave command to withdraw toward the cavalry. The German crossbows now gave answer, and from moment to moment a Jmud man hidden among branches fell to the earth like a ripe pine cone, and dying, tore with his hands the moss of the forest, or squirmed like a fish when 't is swept out of water. Surrounded on all sides, the Germans could not indeed count on victory; seeing, however, the seriousness of their own defence, they thought that even a handful might push out of those straits and escape to the riverside.

The thought came to no man to yield himself, for never having spared prisoners themselves, they knew that they could not count on the pity of a people brought to despair and to uprising. Hence they retreated in silence, man at the side of man, shoulder to shoulder, now raising, now lowering their lances and halberds, cutting, thrusting, or shooting from crossbows in so far as the confusion of battle permitted, approaching always their cavalry, which was fighting a life and death battle with other legions of the enemy.

Then something unlooked-for took place, something which settled the fate of the desperate struggle. That noble of Lenkavitsa, whom frenzy had seized at the death of his brother, bent forward, without dismounting, and raised the corpse from the earth, wishing evidently to secure it and put it somewhere in safety, so as to find it more easily when the battle was over. But that same moment a new wave of frenzy rushed to his head and deprived him entirely of reason; for, instead of leaving the road, he struck straight on the Germans and hurled the corpse onto their lance points, which, fastened now in its breast, sides, and bowels, went down beneath the burden. Before the soldiers could pull out their lances, the madman had rushed through the gap in their ranks unresisted, overturning men in his course like a tempest.

In a twinkle tens of hands were stretched toward him, tens of spears pierced the flanks of his horse; but meanwhile the ranks were broken, and before they could close again, one of the Jmud men, the one happening nearest, rushed in, after him Zbyshko, after him Hlava; and the awful struggle grew and increased every instant. Other nobles grasped also dead bodies and whirled them on to the German lance points. Jmud men attacked again from the two flanks. The whole detachment, up to that time well-

ordered, shook like a house in which the walls are bursting, opened like a log when a wedge is driven into it, and finally dropped apart.

The battle was changed in one moment into slaughter. The long German lances and halberds were useless in the onrush. On the other hand, the swords of the horsemen bit the skulls and the necks of the German footmen. The horses reared in the crowds of people, overturning and trampling the unfortunate soldiers. For horsemen it was easy to strike from above, so they cut without halting or resting. From the sides of the road rushed forth crowd after crowd of wild warriors in wolfskins, and with a wolf's thirst for blood in their bosoms. Their howls drowned voices imploring for pity, and drowned also the groans of the dying. The conquered threw away their weapons; some tried to escape to the forest; some, feigning death, fell on the earth there; some stood erect, with faces as pale as snow and with blinking eyes; others prayed; one, whose mind seemed lost from terror, began to play on a whistle, then raising his eyes up, he laughed till Jmud swords laid his skull open. The pine woods ceased to sound, as if terrified at the slaughter.

At last the handful of men of the Order melted. But for a time was heard in the brushwood the sound of brief fights, or the sharp cry of terror. Zbyshko and Matsko, and behind them all the light-horse, rushed now at the German cavalry, which, defending itself yet, had formed in a circle, for in that way the Germans always defended themselves when the enemy succeeded in meeting them with greater forces. The cavalry, sitting on good horses and in better armor than the footmen, fought bravely and with persistence which deserved admiration. There was no white mantle among them; they were mainly of the middle and smaller nobles of Prussia, whose duty it was to stand in line at command of the Order. Their horses were for the greater part armored, some with breast armor, and all in iron frontlets with a steel horn from the middle of the forehead. Leadership over them was held by a tall, slender man, in dark-blue armor and a helmet of the same shade with closed visor.

From the forest depth a shower of arrows was falling on them, but these shafts dropped harmless from their visors, hard shoulder-pieces, and breastplates. A wave of Jmud men on foot and on horseback had surrounded them closely,

but they defended themselves, cutting and thrusting with their long sword-blades so stubbornly that before their horses' hoofs lay a garland of corpses. The foremost attacking ranks wished to withdraw, but, pushed from behind, were unable. Round about came a crush and a trample. Eyes were dazed by the glitter of spears and the shining of sword-blades. Horses whined, bit, and stood on their hind-legs. The boyars of Jmud rushed in with Zbyshko, Hlava, and the Mazovians. Under their heavy blows the "circle" bent and swayed, like a forest in a strong wind, while they, like woodmen chopping where trees are thick, pushed forward slowly in the heat and the hard work.

Matsko gave command now to collect on the battle-field the long German halberds, and arming with these, about thirty warriors broke a way with them through the crowd to the Germans. "Strike the legs of the horses!" cried he, and a ghastly result ensued. The German knights could not reach these men with their swords, while the halberds cut the horses' legs terribly. The blue knight saw that the end of the battle was coming, and that nothing was left but to break through that crowd which cut off the road to retreat; if not, he and his party must perish.

He chose the first; at his command and in one twinkle a line of knights turned front to the side from which they had started. The Jmud men were at once on their backs, till the Germans, putting their shields on their shoulders, cut in front and at both sides, broke the ring which surrounded them, spurred on their beasts, and rushed like a hurricane eastward. Just then they were met by that detachment which was coming up toward the battle, but crushed by superior arms and horses, it fell flat before the Germans, like wheat beneath a wind storm. The road to the castle was open, but rescue was uncertain and distant, for the Jmud horses were swifter than those of the Germans. The blue knight understood this to perfection.

"Woe!" said he to himself; "not a man will escape, though I buy his life with my own blood!"

Thus thinking, he ordered those nearest to hold in their horses, and without noting whether any obeyed, he turned face to the enemy.

Zbyshko raced up first; the German struck at him and hit the side-piece of the helmet which covered his cheek, but did not crack it, and did not injure his face any. Zbyshko,

instead of answering with a blow, seized the knight by the middle, and wishing to take him alive at all costs, strove to drag the man from his saddle; but his own stirrup broke from excessive weight, and both combatants went to the earth. For a while they struggled, fighting with hands and feet; but soon the stronger and younger man mastered his opponent, and, pressing his bowels with his knees, held him there, as a wolf holds a dog which has dared to thrust a face up before him in the thicket. And he held him beyond need, for the German fainted. Meanwhile Matsko and Hlava ran up; when he saw them, Zbyshko shouted, —

“Come and bind him! He is some knight — and belted!”

Hlava sprang from his horse, but seeing how helpless the knight was, did not bind him, but opened his armor, took off his girdle with a misericordia which hung from it, cut the strap binding his helmet, and came finally to the screw which held the visor. But barely had he looked on the face of the knight when he sprang up.

“Oh, my lord! but just look!” cried he.

“De Lorche!” called out Zbyshko.

But De Lorche lay there pale, with sweating face and closed eyes, corpselike and motionless.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ZBYSHKO commanded to put him on one of the captured wagons, which was laden with new wheels and axles for that expedition which was advancing to the aid of the castle. He himself mounted another horse and moved on with Matsko in further pursuit of the fleeing Germans. That pursuit was not over-difficult, for German horses were bad for escape, above all on a road softened by spring rains considerably. Matsko especially, having under him a swift and lightly-built mare, which came to him from the dead noble of Lenkavitsa, passed after a few furlongs almost all the Jmud men, and soon overtook the nearest German. He hailed him, it is true, according to knightly custom, intending that he should either surrender as a captive, or turn back to give battle; but when the other, feigning deafness, threw away his shield to relieve his horse, and bending forward put spurs to the animal, the old knight struck him cruelly with his broad axe between the shoulders and hurled him from the saddle.

Thus did he avenge himself on the fugitives for that traitorous arrow which he had received, and they fled before him like a herd of deer, in which each bears in its heart fright unendurable, but in that heart no wish for defence or battle, no wish but that of escape from the terrible pursuer. Some ran into the forest; but one mired near a brook, and him the Jmud men choked with a halter. Whole crowds rushed into the thicket after the fugitives, and then began a wild hunt full of shouts, exclamations, and outcries. For a good while the secret places among trees resounded with yells, till the last man was taken. Then the old knight from Bogdanets, Zbyshko, and Hlava returned to the first field, on which the slain German soldiers were lying. The bodies had been stripped, and some of them mutilated cruelly by the vengeful hands of Jmud warriors.

The victory was considerable, and the men were roused by delight at it. After the recent defeat of Skirvoillo dissatisfaction had begun to seize Jmud hearts, especially as the reinforcements promised by Vitold had not come with such

speed as had been expected; but now hope and enthusiasm flashed up again, like a fire when fresh wood is thrown on its embers.

Too many had fallen on both sides for burial, but Zbyshko commanded to dig with spears graves for the two nobles of Lenkavitsa, who had been the main cause of victory, and to bury them under two pine-trees, on the bark of which he cut crosses with his sword-point. Next he intrusted Hlava with guarding De Lorche, who was still unconscious; then he moved his men on, and marched hurriedly by that same road toward Skirvoillo, so as to give effective aid, if needed. He marched long before he struck upon the battlefield, but the action was over; it was covered, like the first field, with bodies of Jmud men and Germans. Zbyshko understood easily that the terrible Skirvoillo must have won also a notable victory; for if he had been beaten, they would have met Germans marching toward the castle. The victory must have been bloody, however, since farther on, beyond the real field of battle, the bodies of slain men were lying closely together. The experienced Matsko concluded from this that a part of the Germans had been able to retreat from the disaster. Whether Skirvoillo had overtaken them or not was difficult to determine, since the trails were deceptive and effaced one by another. Still, Matsko inferred that the battle had taken place there much earlier, — earlier, perhaps, than Zbyshko's battle, for the bodies were blackened and swollen, and some were gnawed by wolves, which fled to the thicket when armed men approached them.

In view of this, Zbyshko resolved not to wait for Skirvoillo, but to go back to the last and safe camping-place. Reaching there late in the evening, he found the Jmud leader, who had arrived somewhat earlier. His face, usually gloomy, was lighted up now with an ominous pleasure. He inquired immediately about Zbyshko's battle, and learning of the victory, said, with a voice like the croaking of a raven, —

“I am pleased with thee and pleased with myself. Reinforcements will not come soon; but if the Grand Prince comes, he too will be pleased, for the castle will belong to us.”

“Whom have they taken as prisoners?” asked Zbyshko.

“Only roaches; no pike. There was one, there were two, but they got away. Pikes with sharp teeth! they bit through our men and vanished.”

“God gave me one,” said Zbyshko. “A rich knight, and distinguished, though a layman — he is a foreigner.”

The terrible commander put his hands at both sides of his neck, then made a gesture, as if pointing upward, and indicated a rope going from his neck in that direction.

“It will be thus for him,” said he, “as well as for the others — this way!”

Zbyshko frowned.

“Hear me, Skirvoillo,” said he. “It will not be that way for him, or any way like that; he is my friend and captive. Prince Yanush belted us at the same time, and I will not let thee lay a finger on him.”

“Thou wilt not?”

“I will not.”

And they looked each into the eyes of the other, frowning, wherewith Skirvoillo's face contracted and resembled the head of a bird of prey. It seemed that both might burst out in passion; but Zbyshko, unwilling to quarrel with the old leader, whose virtue he knew, and whom he respected, and having moreover a heart that was quivering from the events of the day, seized him by the shoulders suddenly, pressed him to his bosom, and asked, —

“Can it be possible that thou wouldst take him from me, and with him my last hope? Why do me an injustice?”

Skirvoillo did not ward off the embrace, and at last, sticking his head forth from between Zbyshko's arms, he looked at him from under his eyebrows, and panted.

“Well,” said he, after a moment of silence, “to-morrow I shall give command to hang my captives, but if thou need one, I will give him.”

Then they embraced a second time and parted in good feeling, to the great delight of Matsko, who said, —

“It is evident that with him thou canst effect nothing through harshness, but by kindness thou mayst mould him as wax.”

“That is the nature of the people,” answered Zbyshko; “but the Germans do not know it.”

Then he gave command to bring to the fire De Lorche, who was resting in the hut; Hlava soon brought him, without his weapons, without his helmet, but in a skin coat, on which his armor had left traces, and with a red cap on his head. De Lorche had learned from Hlava whose prisoner he was; but for that very reason he came cold, haughty,

with a face on which, by the light of the fire, one could read contempt and decision.

"I thank God," said Zbyshko to him, "that He gave thee into my hands, for from me nothing threatens thee."

And he stretched his hand toward him with friendliness, but De Lorche did not move even.

"I will not give a hand to knights who have disgraced knightly honor, and who are fighting at the side of Saracens against Christians."

One of the Mazovians present interpreted these words, the meaning of which Zbyshko himself divined; so that at the first moment the blood boiled up in him as water in a caldron.

"Idiot!" shouted he, grasping, in spite of himself, the hilt of his misericordia.

But De Lorche reared his head.

"Kill me!" said he, "for I know that ye spare no prisoners."

"But do ye spare them?" exclaimed the Mazovian, unable to endure such words quietly. "Were ye not the men who hanged on the shore of the island all those whom ye captured in the battle before this? In return, Skirvoillo hangs your men."

"They were hanged," replied De Lorche, "but they were Pagans."

One might detect a certain shame in his answer, and it was not difficult to divine that in his soul he had no praise for such an action.

Meanwhile Zbyshko recovered himself, and said with calm dignity, —

"De Lorche, we received belts and spurs from the same hand; thou knowest me, therefore, and knowest that the honor of knighthood is dearer to me than life and happiness; so listen to what I will say under an oath on Saint George: Many of the people hanged were baptized long before yesterday, and those who are not Christians yet are stretching their hands to the Cross as to redemption; but knowest thou who hinder them, who keep them from redemption and baptism?"

The Mazovian interpreted Zbyshko's words in a minute, so De Lorche looked with inquiring glance at Zbyshko's face.

"The Germans."

"Impossible!" cried the Knight of Lorraine.

“By the lance and the spurs of Saint George, it is the Germans! for if the Cross should prevail here they would lose the excuse for invasions, and for lording it over this land and oppressing the unfortunate people. Moreover, thou hast learned them, De Lorche, and knowest better if their acts are caused by justice.”

“I thought that it destroys sin to fight with Pagans, and bend them to baptism.”

“But the Germans baptize them with a sword and with blood, not with the water of salvation. Read this letter, and thou wilt know straightway if thou art not serving those men of injustice, those robbers and elders of hell, against the faith and the love of the Saviour.”

And he handed De Lorche the letter of the Jmud men to kings and princes, which letter had been sent around everywhere. De Lorche took the letter and began to run his eyes over it near the firelight.

He read it quickly, for reading was no strange trick to him; he was astonished beyond measure.

“Is all this true?” asked he.

“It is, so help me, and thee, God! who knows best that I am serving, not my own cause alone, but the cause also of justice.”

De Lorche was silent for a time, and then said, —

“I am your prisoner.”

“Give thy hand,” replied Zbysbko. “Thou art my brother, not my prisoner.”

So they gave their right hands to each other and sat down to a common supper, which Hlava had commanded the attendants to make ready. During the meal De Lorche learned with no less astonishment that Zbysbko, in spite of the letters, had not discovered Danusia, and that the comturs had denied the validity of his safe-conduct because of the outbreak of war.

“Now I understand why thou art here,” said he, “and I thank God that He gave me to thee as a prisoner, for I think that the Knights of the Cross will exchange for me the one for whom thou art looking; otherwise there would be a great outcry in the West, for I come from a great family.”

Here he struck his hand on his cap suddenly, and said, —

“By all the relics in Aix La Chapelle! At the head of the reinforcements which were moving toward Gotteswerder were Arnold von Baden and old Siegfried de Löwe. We

know this from letters which have come to the castle. Are they not taken prisoners?"

"No!" answered Zbyshko, springing up. "None of the more important were taken. But, as God lives, thou givest me great tidings. As God lives! there are other prisoners, from whom I shall know before they hang them whether Siegfried was not bringing some woman."

He summoned the attendants to bring torches and ran to the place where Skirvoillo's captives were; De Lorche, Matsko, and Hlava ran with him.

"Listen to me," said De Lorche on the way. "Let me out on my word; I myself will search all Prussia through for her, and if I find her I will return to thee, and then thou canst exchange me for her."

"If she is living! if she is living!" said Zbyshko.

By this time they had run to where Skirvoillo's captives were. Some of them were lying on their backs, others were near the trees, lashed to them cruelly with bark ropes. The torch gleamed brightly over Zbyshko's head, so that the eyes of all those unfortunates were turned toward him.

Then from the depth came a shrill voice full of terror, —

"Oh, my lord and defender! save me!"

Zbyshko snatched from the hands of the attendant a couple of flaming torches, sprang to the tree from beneath which the voice came, and raising the torches cried, —

"Sanderus!"

"Sanderus!" exclaimed Hlava, astounded.

But Sanderus, unable to move his stiffened arms, stretched his neck up, and again cried, —

"Mercy! I know where the daughter of Yurand is! Save me!"

CHAPTER L.

THE attendants unbound him immediately, but since his limbs were benumbed, he fell to the earth; and when they raised him, he fainted time after time, for he had been terribly frightened. They took him to the fire at command of Zbyshko, gave him food and drink, rubbed him with tallow, and covered him warmly with skins. Sanderus did not regain consciousness, but fell into a sleep so profound that Hlava was barely able to rouse him at noon the day following.

Zbyshko, whom impatience was burning as with fire, came to him straightway. But at first he was unable to learn from him anything; for, either through terror after dreadful experiences, or through the helplessness which possesses weak souls when the threatening danger has passed them, such an irresistible weeping seized Sanderus that he struggled vainly to answer the questions put to him. Sobs closed his throat, his lips quivered, and tears flowed from his eyes as abundantly as if his life were going out with them.

At last, recovering a little, and strengthened by mare's-milk, which the Lithuanians had learned to use from the Tartars, he fell to complaining that those "sons of Belial" had fastened him to a crab-tree with lances, that they had taken his horse, on which he was carrying relics of exceptional virtues and value, and to finish all, after they had lashed him to the tree, ants so bit his legs and body that certain death was awaiting him, if not that day, then the morrow.

At last Zbyshko became angry, sprang up, and said, —

"Answer, vagabond, the questions which I put, and see to it that something worse does not strike thee!"

"My lord," said Hlava, "close by is a hill of red ants; give command to put him on that hill and he will find a tongue between his lips very quickly."

Hlava did not say this in earnest, and he smiled even, for in his heart he had good-will for Sanderus; but Sanderus was terrified.

"Mercy! Oh, mercy!" cried he. "Give me a little more

of that Pagan strong drink, and I will tell everything; what I have seen and what I have not seen!"

"If thou tell one lie I will drive a wedge between thy teeth!" replied Hlava.

But he brought a skin of mare's-milk a second time. Sanderus seized it, fastened his lips to it greedily, like a child to the breast of its mother, and began to sob, opening and closing his eyes in succession, till he had drained off two quarts, or perhaps more, then he shook himself, put the skin on his knee, and said, as if yielding to necessity, —

"This is foulness!" Then he turned to Zbyshko: "Now inquire, my deliverer!"

"Was my wife in that detachment in which thou wert?"

On Sanderus' face appeared a certain astonishment. He had heard, it is true, that Danusia was Zbyshko's wife, but that the marriage was secret, and that she had been carried off immediately; so he thought of her always as the daughter of Yurand. Still, he answered in a hurry, —

"Yes, Voevoda! she was, but Siegfried de Löwe and Arnold von Baden broke through the enemy."

"Didst thou see her?" asked the young man, with throbbing heart.

"I did not see her face, lord, but between two horses I saw a basket cradle, entirely closed; they were carrying some one in the cradle, and that same lizard was looking after it, that same serving-woman of the Order who came from Danveld to the hunting-lodge. And I heard sad singing also, and it came from the cradle."

Zbyshko grew pale from emotion; he sat on a tree trunk, and for a time did not know what more to ask. Matsko and Hlava were also moved immensely, for they heard great and important news. Hlava thought, perhaps, at the same time of his own beloved lady, who had remained in Spyhov, and for whom this news would be the sentence of misfortune.

Silence followed.

At last the cunning Matsko, who did not know Sanderus and had barely heard of the man previously, looked at him with suspicion and asked, —

"What sort of person art thou, and what wert thou doing among the Knights of the Order?"

"What sort of man am I, great, mighty knight," answered the vagrant, "let these present answer, — this valiant prince (he indicated Zbyshko), and this brave count here from Bohemia, who know me this long time."

It was evident that the mare's-milk had begun to help him, for he grew lively, and turning to Zbyshko said in a clear voice, in which there was no sign of his previous faintness, —

“My lord, you have saved my life twice. Without you the wolves would have eaten my body, or the punishment of bishops would have struck me; they, led into error by my enemies — oh, how unthankful this world is! — gave command to prosecute me for selling relics which they suspected of being unauthentic. But you, lord, took me in your train. Thanks to you the wolves did not eat me, and prosecution did not strike me, for I was considered as one of your people. Never have I lacked food or drink in your following — better than this mare's-milk here, which is disgusting, but which I drink to show that a poor, pious pilgrim draws back from no trial.”

“Buffoon, tell at once what thou knowest, and jest no further!” cried Matsko.

Sanderus raised the skin to his lips and emptied it; then, as if not listening to Matsko's words, he turned a second time to Zbyshko.

“I love you, lord, because you protected me. The saints, as the Scriptures say, sinned nine times each day, so it happens to Sanderus also to sin sometimes; but Sanderus has not been, and will never be ungrateful. Hence, when misfortune came to you, you remember, lord, that I said to you: I will go from castle to castle, and, while edifying people along the highway, I will seek for what you have lost. Of whom have I not made inquiry! Where have I not been! It would need a long time to tell; it is enough that I found her; and from that moment a burr does not stick to a coatflap as I stuck to old Siegfried. I made myself his servant, and from castle to castle, from the place of one comtur to that of another, from city to city, I went with him unceasingly up to this last battle.”

Emotion now mastered Zbsytko and he said, —

“I am thankful to thee, and reward will not miss thee. But tell now what I ask: Wilt thou swear on thy soul's salvation that she is living?”

“I will swear on my soul's salvation!” answered Sanderus, seriously.

“Why did Siegfried leave Schytno?”

“I know not, lord, but I imagine why. He was never starosta in Schytno, and he left it fearing, perhaps, the

command of the Grand Master, who, as men say, wrote to him to give up the captive girl to the Princess of Mazovia. Maybe he fled in view of this letter, for the soul in him was roasting from pain and desire of vengeance for Rotgier. They say now that Rotgier was his own son; I know not how that is, but I do know that something has turned in his head from rage, and that while he is living he will never let Yurand's daughter — I intended to say the young lady — go out of his possession."

"This all seems strange to me," interrupted Matsko on a sudden; "for if that old dog is so vindictive against the whole blood of Yurand he would have killed Danusia."

"He wanted to kill her," retorted Sanderus, "but something happened of such sort that he was very sick afterward, and just missed giving out his last breath. His servants whisper much concerning this. Some say that while going at night to the watch-tower to kill the young lady he met the Evil Spirit; others say that it was an angel. But in every case, they found him on the snow in front of the tower, and no breath in him. Now, when he remembers this, the hair stands on his head, and he dares not raise hands on the lady, and fears to order others to kill her. He takes with him the dumb executioner of Schytno, but it is unknown why he does so, for the executioner is afraid as well as others to kill her."

These words made a great impression. Zbyshko, Matsko, and Hlava drew up to Sanderus, who made the sign of the cross, and continued, —

"It is not pleasant to be there among them. More than once have I heard and seen things which make the hair rise on a man's body. I have told your graces that the old comtur is wrong in the head somehow. Nay, there must be something more, since spirits from the other world visit him. Whenever he is alone something pants near him, exactly as when breath is beginning to fail a man. But this is that Danveld, who was slain by the terrible master of Spyhov. And Siegfried says to him: 'What dost thou want here? Masses cannot help thee; why dost thou come to me?' The other grits his teeth, and again pants. But still oftener comes Rotgier, after whom there is also a smell of sulphur in the chamber, and he talks still more with the comtur. 'I cannot!' answers Siegfried to him, 'I cannot! When I am alone I will do it, but not this time!' I heard also how he asked: 'Would this ease thee, my son?'

“And it always happens that for two or three days after such a visit he says no word to any man, and on his face dreadful suffering is evident. He guards the cradle carefully, both he and that serving-woman of the Order, so that no person at any time can see the young lady.”

“But do they not torture her?” asked Zbyshko, in a dull voice.

“In clear truth I will tell your lordship that blows or cries I have not heard, but I have heard sad singing, and sometimes it was as if a bird piped complainingly.”

“Woe!” cried out Zbyshko.

But Matsko interrupted further inquiry.

“Enough of this!” said he. “Tell now of the battle. Didst thou see it? How did they escape, and what happened to them?”

“I saw,” answered Sanderus, “and I will tell everything. They fought at first savagely, but when they knew that they were surrounded on all sides, they began to think how to burst through. The knight Arnold, who is a real giant, was the first to break the ring and open such a road that he made a way for the old comtur, and also some people, with the cradle borne by two horses.”

“And was there no pursuit? How did it happen that no one caught up with them?”

“There was pursuit, but it could do nothing, for when it came near the knight Arnold faced around and engaged it. May God not grant any man to meet him, for he has strength so dreadful that it is nothing for him to fight alone with a hundred. Three times did he turn, and three times was pursuit stopped. The men who were with him perished — all of them. He was alone at last, wounded, it seems to me, and his horse wounded also, but he survived, and gave time to the old comtur for safe escape.”

Matsko, listening to this narrative, could not help thinking that Sanderus was speaking truly, for he remembered that, beginning with the place where Skirvoillo had fought, the road in its further continuation was covered with bodies of Jmud men, slashed as dreadfully as if the hand of a giant had slain them.

“But how couldst thou have seen all this?” inquired he.

“I saw it,” answered the vagrant, “because I slipped in behind the tail of one of the horses which was carrying the cradle, and I fled with those beasts till a hoof struck my

stomach; then I fainted and fell into the hands of your mightiness."

"This may have happened," said Hlava, "but see that thou lie not; if thou do thou'lt come out badly."

"The mark is on me yet," said Sanderus; "whoso wishes may examine; still it is better to believe my word than be damned for incredulity."

"Though thou mightst tell the truth sometimes without wishing it, thou wilt howl for dealing falsely in sacred wares," added Hlava.

And they began to chaff, as they had formerly, but the conversation was interrupted by Zbyshko, —

"Thou hast passed through this country, hence thou knowest it. What castles are there near here, and where, as it seems to thee, might Arnold and Siegfried secrete themselves?"

"Castles near by there are none, for everything here is a forest, through which this road was cut a short time ago. Settlements and villages there are not, since those which existed the Germans have burnt, for the reason that when this war broke out the people off there, who are of the same race as those here, rose up also against the dominion of the Order. I think, lord, that Arnold and Siegfried are wandering now through the forest and will go back to the place whence they came, or go secretly to that fortress to which we were marching before this unfortunate battle."

"Surely this is true," said Zbyshko.

And he thought deeply. From his wrinkled brows and concentrated expression it was easy to see with what effort he was thinking, but this did not last long. After a while he raised his head and said, —

"Hlava, let horses and men be ready, for we will take the road straightway."

The attendant, who had the habit of never inquiring for the reason of orders, rose, and, without answering, ran to the horses; but Matsko fixed his eyes on his nephew, and asked with astonishment, —

"Ah! Zbyshko? Hei! But whither art thou going? What? How?"

But Zbyshko answered with a question: "What do you think, ought I not do this?"

The old knight was silent. The astonishment quenched on his face gradually, he moved his head once and a second

time, then breathed from his full breast, and said, as if in answer to himself, —

“Well! let it be so — there is no help!”

And he went himself toward the horses. Zbyshko turned toward De Lorche, and through a Mazovian, who knew German, said to him, —

“I cannot ask thee to help me against people with whom thou art serving under one banner; hence thou art free, go whithersoever it please thee.”

“I cannot help thee now with the sword against my knightly honor,” answered De Lorche, “but as to freedom, I will not take it. I will remain thy captive on word of honor, and present myself at summons wherever thou mayest indicate. But do thou in case of need remember that for me the Order will exchange any captive, for not only do I come of a powerful family, but from one that has served the Order.”

And they began to take farewell, placing, as the custom was, their hands on each other’s shoulders, and kissing each other’s cheeks, during which De Lorche said, —

“I will go to Malborg, or to Mazovia, to the court, so that thou mayest know where to find me; if not here, I shall be there. Let thy envoy just say two words to me: Lorraine Guelders.”

“Very well,” answered Zbyshko. “I will go now to Skirvoillo to get the sign which every Jmud man will reverence.”

He went then to Skirvoillo. The old leader gave the sign, and made no difficulty as to departure, for he knew what the question was; he loved Zbyshko, he was grateful for the last battle, and besides, he had no right to stop a knight who was of another people, and who had come through personal desire alone. So thanking Zbyshko for the notable service which he had rendered, he gave him provisions which might be of use in that ravaged country, and took farewell, with the wish that they might meet in life again during some great and decisive conflict with the Order.

Zbyshko was impatient, for something like a fever was consuming him. When he came to his escort he found everything ready, and among the people his uncle on horseback, in chain mail, and on his head a helmet. So, approaching him, he asked, —

“Are you, also, going with me?”

“But what am I to do?” inquired Matsko, somewhat testily.

To this Zbyshko said nothing; he merely kissed the mailed right hand of his uncle, then mounted his horse, and rode forward.

Sanderus rode with them. Zbyshko and his uncle knew the road well to the field of battle, but farther Sanderus was to be the guide. They counted also on this, — that they would meet somewhere in the forest local peasants, men hating their lords of the Order; these would help them in tracking the old comtur and Arnold von Baden, of whose unearthly strength and bravery Sanderus had told so much.

CHAPTER LI.

To the battlefield on which Skirvoillo had cut down the Germans the road was easy, because it was known; they reached it, therefore, quickly, but rode on in haste because of the unendurable odor given out from unburied corpses. The passing knights dispersed wolves, immense flocks of crows, daws, and ravens. Soon after, they began to search for tracks along the way. Though a whole detachment had passed that road earlier, the experienced Matsko found on the trodden earth gigantic hoof-prints going in a direction opposite to that by which the expedition had come, and explained as follows to the young men less acquainted with military questions, —

“It is lucky that there has been no rain since the battle. Just look! Arnold’s horse, as carrying a man bulky beyond others, must have been immense also, and it is easy to note that galloping in escape, he struck the earth more forcibly with his feet than if he had been going slowly, and so he dug deeper holes in it. Look, whoever of you has eyes, how the horseshoes have left their marks in damp places! With God’s help we will track on the dog brothers worthily, unless they have found refuge behind walls by this time.”

“Sanderus said,” answered Zbyshko, “that there are no castles in the neighborhood; and this is true, for the country has been occupied freshly by the Knights of the Order, and they have not been able to build themselves up in it. Where are they to hide? The common men, who live here, are in the camp with Skirvoillo, for they are the same people as the Jmud men. The villages, as Sanderus has told us, have been burnt by the Germans, the women and children are hidden in secret parts of the forest. We shall overtake unless we spare our horses.”

“We need to spare them, for even if we should overtake those men our salvation is in the horses afterward,” said Matsko.

“Knight Arnold.” put in Sanderus, “was struck during the battle on his shoulders with a club. He paid no attention at first to this; he fought on; but afterward it must

have affected him, for it is always so; at first such a wound is not much, but it pains later on. For this reason he cannot flee quickly, and may be forced to take rest."

"But the people, hast thou said that with the knight Arnold and the old comtur there are no people?" inquired Matsko.

"There are two men with the cradle, which is borne between two saddles: There was a good sized party of others, but those the Jmud men overtook and cut to pieces."

"It must be this way," said Zbyshko; "the men at the cradle will be tied by our attendants, you, uncle, seize Siegfried, and I will strike on Arnold."

"Indeed," answered Matsko, "I am able to handle Siegfried, for through the love of the Lord Jesus there is strength in my bones yet. But do not trust overmuch in thyself, for that man must be a giant."

"Oh, we shall see," answered Zbyshko.

"Thou art strong, I do not deny that, but there are stronger. Hast thou forgotten those knights of ours whom we saw in Cracow? Couldst thou manage Povala of Tachev, or Pashko Zlodye, or still more, Zavisha Charny? Do not vaunt too much, think of the issue."

"Rotgier was no piece of a man," muttered Zbyshko.

"But will there be no work for me?" inquired Hlava.

He received no answer, for Matsko's mind was occupied with another thing.

"If God bless us," said he, "we must reach Mazovian forests somehow. There we shall be safest, and finish everything at one blow."

But after a while he sighed, thinking surely that even then not everything would be finished, for they would have to do something for Yagenka.

"Hei!" muttered he, "wonderful are God's dispensations! I think often of this: why did it not happen thee to marry quietly, and me to sit near thee in peace? For that is the way it happens oftenest among nobles in our kingdom; we alone are dragging our way along through various lands and pathless places, instead of keeping house at home in Christian fashion."

"Well, that is true, but God's will!" answered Zbyshko.

And they rode on for a time in silence; then the old knight turned again to his nephew.

"Dost thou believe in that vagabond? What sort of man is he?"

“He is frivolous and a rogue, perhaps, but to me he is very well-wishing, and I fear no treachery on his part.”

“In that case let him ride ahead, for if he overtakes them they will not be frightened. He will say that he has fled from captivity, which they will believe easily. It will be better so; for if they see us from a distance, they will be able either to hide somewhere or make ready to defend themselves.”

“At night he will not advance alone, for he is timid,” answered Zbyshko; “but in the daytime it would be better as you say. I will tell him to halt three times in the day and wait for us; if we do not find him at the halting-place it will mean that he is with them, then we can follow on his trail and strike unexpectedly.”

“But will he not forewarn them?”

“No. He is more well-wishing to me than to them. I will tell him, too, that when we attack we will bind him also, so that he need not fear their revenge afterward. Let him not know us at all.”

“Then dost thou think to leave them among the living?”

“Well, how is it to be?” answered Zbyshko, with vexation. “If this were in Mazovia, or somewhere in our country, we could challenge them, as I challenged Rotgier, and fight to the death with them; but here in their land this cannot be. Here it is a question of Danusia, and of speed. Here we must act in a breath and quietly, so as not to call peril on our heads by inquiring; after that, as you have said, we are to rush with what breath is in our horses to Mazovia. If we strike unexpectedly, we may find them without weapons, nay, without swords even! How kill them then? It would be a shame. We are both belted knights, and so are they.”

“That is true,” answered Matsko. “But it may not come to fighting.”

Zbyshko wrinkled his brows and on his face was expressed deep resolution, evidently innate in all men from Bogdanets; at that moment he had become, especially in his looks, as much like Matsko as if he had been his uncle's own son.

“How I should like,” said he, in a deep voice, “to throw that bloody cur Siegfried under Yurand's feet! God grant me to do so!”

“Oh, may He grant it!” repeated Matsko, immediately.

Thus conversing, they rode over a good piece of road.

Night had fallen, — a pleasant night, indeed, but without moonlight. They had to halt to rest the horses and strengthen the men with food and sleep. Before resting, however, Zbyshko told Sanderus that he was to go ahead, and alone, on the morrow. To this he agreed willingly, stipulating only, that in case of peril from wild beasts, or people of the country, he should have the right to return to them. He begged also that he might stop, not three, but four times in the day, for some alarm always seized him in a lonely country, even where there were provisions; but what must it be in a forest as wild and ugly as that in which they found themselves! .

The night camp was pitched, and having strengthened their bodies, they lay down on skins before a small fire made at a bend and distant from the road about half a furlong. The attendants took turns in watching the horses, which, when unsaddled, dozed after they had eaten oats, one putting its head on the neck of another. But barely had dawn silvered the treetops when Zbyshko sprang up, roused the others, and they moved on their further journey at daylight. The tracks left by the immense hoofs of Arnold's stallion were found again without difficulty, for stamped in the low, muddy earth, common there, they remained without drying. Sanderus went ahead and vanished from sight, but half-way between sunrise and mid-day they found him at the resting-place, and he told them that he had not seen a living thing except a bison, before which he had not fled, however, for the beast stepped out of the road first. At mid-day, at the first meal, he declared that he had seen a bee-keeper with a ladder; that he did not stop him, simply out of fear that in the forest depth there might be others like him. He asked the man about this and that, but they could not understand each other.

During the next march Zbyshko began to be alarmed. What would happen should they come to more elevated and drier places, where on a hard road tracks would fail? Also if pursuit should continue too long and bring them to a more inhabited country, where, among people accustomed from of old to obey the Order, an attack and the rescue of Danusia would be almost impossible; where Siegfried and Arnold, though unprotected by the walls of any castle, would be safe, for the local people would take their part surely.

But luckily those fears proved vain, for at the next halt

they did not find Sanderus at the time appointed, but discovered on a pine-tree, standing at the roadside, a large cut in the form of a cross, made freshly as was evident. Then they looked at each other, their faces grew serious and their hearts beat more quickly. Matsko and Zbyshko sprang from their saddles to examine the tracks, and sought carefully, but not long, for the same thing was evident to both men.

Sanderus had left the road for the forest, following the tracks of the great horse, not so deeply made as on the road, but with sufficient clearness; for the ground was turfy, and the great beast pressed down at every step the needle-like pine leaves, on which were left dark depressions at the edges of the hoof-prints.

Before the quick eyes of Zbyshko were not hidden other tracks; hence he mounted his horse, Matsko mounted his also, and they counselled with Hlava in voices which were as low as if the enemy had been right there before them.

Hlava advised to advance on foot at once, but they were unwilling to do so, for they knew not how far they might have to go through that forest. Foot attendants, however, were to go before, and send back word if they saw anything.

They moved into the forest soon. The next cut on a pine-tree assured them that they had not lost the traces of Sanderus. Soon, too, they discovered that they were on a road, or at least on a forest trail over which people must have gone more than one time. So now they felt sure that they would find some settlement, and in it those for whom they were searching.

The sun had sunk already toward its setting and was shining with golden light among the pine-trees. The evening promised to be clear. The forest was quiet, for birds and animals were inclining toward their night rest. Only here and there among branches still in sunlight jumped squirrels all red from evening sunshine. Zbyshko, Matsko, Hlava, and the attendants rode one behind another, in goose line. Knowing that the foot attendants were in advance considerably, and would forewarn in season, the old knight was speaking to his nephew and did not restrain his voice excessively.

“Let us count with the sun,” said he. “From the last resting-place to the point where the cross was cut we passed a big piece of road. On the clock of Cracow it would be

about three. That being the case, Sanderus is a good while among them, and has had time enough to tell his adventures. If only he does not betray us."

"He will not betray us."

"And if they believe him," said Matsko; "for if they do not believe him it will go ill with us."

"But why should they not believe him? Or do they know us? But him they know. It happens frequently that prisoners escape."

"This is important: if he tells them that he is escaping from captivity, perhaps they will fear pursuit of him, and move on immediately."

"No. He will be able to explain that. And they will understand that such a pursuit could not happen."

For a while they were silent; then it seemed to Matsko as if Zbyshko were whispering something to him, so he turned and asked,—

"What dost thou say?"

But Zbyshko had his eyes raised and was not whispering to Matsko; he was committing to God Danusia and his bold undertaking.

Matsko himself was beginning to make the sign of the cross, but he had hardly made the first move in it when one of the attendants in front turned back suddenly from the depth of the forest.

"A tarpit!" said he. "They are there!"

"Stop!" whispered Zbyshko, and that instant he sprang from his horse.

After him Matsko, Hlava, and the attendants, three of whom received the command to hold themselves with their horses in readiness, and see, God defend, that none of the horses neighed. To the five others Matsko said,—

"There are two horseboys there and Sanderus; these you will bind in one flash for me, and if any one who is armed tries to defend himself, strike his head."

And they moved forward immediately. On the road Zbyshko whispered yet to his uncle,—

"You take old Siegfried, and I will take Arnold."

"Only be careful," answered the old man.

And then he beckoned to Hlava, letting him know that at every instant he must be ready to give aid to his master.

Hlava nodded, meaning that he would; then he drew breath into his breast, and felt to find if the sword would

leave its scabbard easily. But Zbyshko saw that and said, —

“No! To thee I give command to rush to the cradle straightway, and not leave it for the space of a hand’s breadth during battle.”

They went on quickly and in silence, always amidst dense hazel-brush; but they had not gone far, at the most two furlongs, when the brush ceased on a sudden and formed the border of a small plain, on which were evident the extinguished remnants of a tarpit, and two earthen huts, or “numis,” in which, beyond doubt, had dwelt tarburners till war expelled them. The rays of the setting sun lighted with immense gleam the plain, the pit, and the two huts standing at some distance from each other. On a log before one of them two knights were sitting; before the other a broad-shouldered, red-haired man, and Sanderus. These two were occupied with cleaning armor with cloth, but at Sanderus’ feet were lying in addition two swords which he had the intention of cleaning later.

“Look,” said Matsko, pressing Zbyshko’s arm with all his force, so as to restrain him. “He has taken their swords and armor from them purposely. Well done! He with the gray head must be —”

“Forward!” cried Zbyshko, suddenly.

And they shot out to that plain like a whirlwind. Men there sprang up also, but before they could run to Sanderus the terrible Matsko had seized Siegfried by the breast, bent him onto his back in one instant and was above him. Zbyshko and Arnold closed like two falcons, wound their arms around each other, and began to wrestle desperately. The broad-shouldered German, who before that had been sitting near Sanderus, rushed with his sword, it is true; but before he could wield it, Matsko’s man, Vit, had struck him with the back of an axe on his red head and stretched him. They hurried then, at command of the old man, to bind Sanderus. He, though knowing that the thing was agreed on, roared from fright, as a year-old calf does when a man is cutting its throat.

But Zbyshko, though so strong that he had pressed sap from the limb of a young tree, felt that he had come, as it were, not into the arms of a man, but a bear. He felt this, too, that were it not for the armor, which he wore, not knowing but he might meet with sword points, the gigantic German would crush his ribs or break the backbone in him.

It is true that the young man raised Arnold from the ground somewhat, but the German then raised him still higher, and summoning all his strength, strove to strike the earth once with him in such fashion that he would never rise from it.

But Zbyshko also pressed him with such fierce effort that the German's eyes were bloodshot; then he drove his leg between Arnold's knees, struck him behind one knee-joint and whirled him to the earth.

More correctly, both fell, and Zbyshko fell under; but that moment the observant Matsko, throwing the half-crushed Siegfried into the hands of his attendants, rushed himself to his prostrate nephew, and in one twinkle bound Arnold's legs with his belt; then he sprang up and sat on him, as on a slaughtered wild boar, and put the point of his misericordia to the man's throat.

The German screamed piercingly, his arms dropped without strength at both sides of Zbyshko, and he groaned, not alone from the prick of the weapon, but because he felt pain inexpressible from the blow on his shoulders received in the battle with Skirvoillo.

Matsko grasped him by the neck with both hands and dragged him off Zbyshko; Zbyshko rose from the earth into a sitting posture, then tried to rise to his feet, but had not the strength for it; he sat down again and for a long time was motionless, his face pale and sweat-covered, his eyes bloody, his lips blue, and he gazed forward fixedly, as if not completely conscious.

"What is this?" inquired Matsko, frightened.

"Nothing; but I am terribly wearied. Help me to stand on my feet again."

Matsko put his hands under Zbyshko's armpits and raised him.

"Canst thou stand now?"

"I can stand."

"Art in pain?"

"I am not, but breath fails me."

Meanwhile Hlava, who noticed that evidently on the open place everything was over, appeared before the hut, holding by her shoulder the serving-woman of the Order. At sight of her Zbyshko forgot his struggle; his strength returned to him, and he sprang to the hut in one instant as though he had never fought with the dreadful Arnold.

"Dannsia! Danusia!" cried he.

But to that cry there was no answer.

“Danusia! Danusia!” repeated Zbyshko.

And he was silent. It was dark in the hut, so at the first moment he could see nothing. But from beyond the stones, which were piled around the fireplace, a quick and loud breathing came, which was like that of a beast driven into a corner.

“Danusia! by the living God! It is I! I am Zbyshko!”

And then he saw her eyes in the gloom; they were opened widely, filled with dread, and no gleam of mind in them.

So he sprang to her and caught her in his arms; but she did not know him, and tearing herself from his grasp, she repeated in a panting whisper,—

“I’m afraid! I’m afraid! I’m afraid!”

CHAPTER LII.

NEITHER mild words nor fondling nor imploring availed; Danusia recognized no person, and did not regain her senses. The one feeling which had mastered her whole being was a trembling terror, like that which birds show when captured. She would eat nothing in presence of any one, though, when food was brought, from the greedy looks which she cast at it hunger was evident, perhaps even hunger of long standing. When left alone she rushed to eat with the greed of a wild beast; but when Zbyshko entered the hut she sprang away and hid behind a bundle of dry hops in one corner. Vainly did her husband open his arms, vainly did he stretch his hands toward her, vainly did he implore, while repressing his tears. She would not leave that hiding-place even when the fire was stirred, and when by its light she could recognize Zbyshko. Memory seemed to have left her together with her reason. But he gazed at her and at her thin face, which had on it an expression of terror grown rigid; he gazed at her sunken eyes, at the torn rags of clothing which covered her, and the heart whined in the man from pain and rage at the thought of what kind of hands she had been in, and how they had treated her. At last such fierce and mad anger mastered him that he grasped his sword, rushed at Siegfried, and would have slain him surely had Matsko not seized his arm.

Uncle and nephew wrestled then almost as enemies, but the young man was so weakened by recent struggling with Arnold that the old knight overcame him and held his hand twisted.

“Art mad?” asked he.

“Let me go!” answered Zbyshko, gritting his teeth, “or the soul will tear apart in me.”

“Let it tear apart! I will not free thee! Better break thy head on a tree-trunk than disgrace thyself and our family.”

And pressing Zbyshko's hand as in an iron vice, he said, threateningly, —

“Look here! Revenge will not escape thee, and thou art a belted knight. How is this? Wilt thou slaughter a bound captive? Thou wilt not help Danusia by doing so, and what wilt thou gain? Nothing save infamy. Wilt thou say that kings and princes have slain captives? They may have done so, but not in our land. And what the world forgives them it would not forgive thee. They had kingdoms, cities, castles, but what hast thou? Knightly honor. The man who would not blame them would spit in thy eyes. Master thyself, in God’s name!”

A moment of silence followed.

“Unhand me!” repeated Zbyshko, gloomily; “I will not kill him.”

“Go to the fire; we will take counsel.”

Matsko led him to a fire which the attendants had made near the tarpits. When he was seated the old knight thought a while, and said,—

“Remember, too, that thou hast promised to deliver this old hound to Yurand. Yurand will avenge the tortures which he has passed through, and also Danusia’s sufferings. He will repay Siegfried, have no fear! And it is thy duty to yield to Yurand in this case. It belongs to him. Besides, what is not permitted thee is free to Yurand. He did not take the prisoner, but he will get him as a gift from thee. Without disgrace, nay, without blame, he may skin him alive if he wishes. Dost understand?”

“I understand. Thou speakest with reason.”

“It is evident that reason is coming back to thee. Should the devil tempt a second time, remember this among other things: thou hast vowed to fight Lichtenstein and other knights; shouldst thou slay a captive, and the deed be bruited about by attendants, no knight would meet thee, and he would be right not to do so. God preserve thee from such a plight! There is no lack of trouble in any case, but whatever happens let no disgrace come. Let us talk now rather of what we are to do, and how we are to manage.”

“Talk on,” said Zbyshko.

“I would counsel this way: that serpent who is attending Danusia might be killed, but it would not besem knights to stain themselves with woman’s blood, so we will deliver her to Prince Yanush. She was plotting treason even in the hunting-lodge, in presence of the prince and princess; let Mazovian courts judge her, then, and if they

fail to break her on the wheel, they will offend God's justice. Till we find another woman to attend Danusia, she will be needed; after that she may be tied to the tail of a horse. Now we must go hence to the Mazovian wilderness at the quickest."

"Not this moment, of course, for it is night. Perhaps also God will give more memory to Danusia to-morrow. Let the horses rest well. We will move at daybreak."

Further conversation was interrupted by Arnold von Baden, who, lying on his back at some distance, and bound with his own sword behind his knees, had begun to cry out something in German. Old Matsko rose and went to him, but unable to understand his speech well he looked around for Hlava.

Hlava was unable to come at once, for he was occupied. When the two men had begun their talk at the fire, he went to the serving-woman of the Order, put his hand on her neck, and shaking her like a pear-tree, said, —

"Listen! Thou wilt go to the hut and spread a bed of skins for the lady; but first thou wilt put on her thy own good clothing, and take for thyself the rags in which ye have forced her to travel. Thy mother is in hell!"

And he, also unable to restrain his sudden anger, shook her with such force that the eyes were creeping out of her head. He might have broken her neck, perhaps, but as she seemed to him of use yet, he let her go at last, saying, —

"We will choose out a limb later on for thee."

She seized his knee in terror, but when in answer he kicked her, she ran into the hut, and threw herself at Danusia's feet.

"Defend me!" screamed she. "Do not give me up!"

Danusia merely closed her eyes, and from her lips came the usual panting whisper, —

"I'm afraid! I'm afraid! I'm afraid!"

And then she grew rigid altogether, for every approach of that woman had caused this result always. She let herself be unclothed and dressed in the new garments. The serving-woman spread the bed, and laid Danusia on it as she might a figure of wax or wood; then she sat by the fire, not daring to leave the hut.

But Hlava came in after a while and, turning to Danusia, said, —

"You are among friends, my lady; sleep quietly, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit." He made

the sign of the cross, then, without raising his voice, lest he might frighten Danusia, he said to the woman of the Order, —

“Thou wilt lie bound outside the door; but if thou make an outcry and frighten her I will break thy neck the next minute. Stand up, and go!”

Leading her out of the hut he bound her, as he had promised, strongly, then he went to Zbyshko.

“I gave command to dress the lady in the clothing which that lizard herself wore,” said he. “The bed is spread and the lady is sleeping. Better not go in, lest she be frightened. God grant that she regain her mind to-morrow after sleep; and think now of food for yourself, and rest.”

“I will lie at the threshold of the hut,” answered Zbyshko.

“In that case I will take the woman aside to that corpse with the red hair; but you must eat, for there is a long road and no small toil before you.”

So saying he went to bring dried meat and dried turnips, which they had taken in Skirvoillo’s camp for the road, but barely had he put a supply before Zbyshko when Matsko sent him to Arnold.

“Find out carefully,” said he, “what that mountain roller wants, for though I know some of their words I cannot understand this fellow.”

“I will bring him to the fire; then, lord, you may talk with him.”

And ungirding himself Hlava put his belt under Arnold’s arms and drew him onto his back. He bent greatly under the weight of the giant, but being a strong fellow he bore him to the fire and threw him down like a bag of peas near Matsko.

“Take the bonds from me,” said the knight.

“I may do so,” answered Matsko, “through Hlava, if thou wilt swear by thy knightly honor to hold thyself a prisoner. And even without that I will command to take the sword from beneath thy knees and unbind thy arms so thou mayest sit near us, but I will not take the bonds from thy feet till we have bargained.”

And he beckoned to Hlava, who cut the ropes on the German’s arms, and then helped him to sit upright. Arnold looked haughtily at Matsko and Zbyshko, and inquired, —

“What sort of people are ye?”

“How darest thou inquire? What is that to thee? Discover for thyself.”

“It is this to me, that I can swear on knightly honor only to knights.”

“Then look!”

And Matsko, pushing aside his coat, showed the belt of a knight above his hips.

At this Arnold was greatly astonished, and inquired only after a while, —

“How is this? And still ye plunder people through the forest, and help pagans against Christians.”

“Thou liest!” exclaimed Matsko.

And the conversation began thus, unfriendly, haughty, at moments like fighting. But when Matsko shouted angrily that it was the Order alone which prevented the baptism of Lithuania, and when he brought forward all the arguments, Arnold was astonished again, and stopped talking, for the truth became so evident that it was impossible not to see it, or to deny it. The German was struck specially by these words from Matsko, who made the sign of the cross as he uttered them, —

“Who knows whom ye serve really, — if not all, then some of you?” and he was struck because there was in the Order itself a suspicion that certain comturs rendered honor to Satan. No action was brought against them, lest infamy might result to all, but Arnold knew well that those reports were whispered among the Brothers, and that stories of that kind were current. Meanwhile Matsko, knowing Siegfried’s strange deeds from what Sanderus had told, alarmed the simple-minded giant Arnold thoroughly.

“And that Siegfried with whom thou wert marching to the war,” said he. “Is he serving God and Christ? Hast thou never heard how he talks with evil spirits, how he whispers to them and laughs or gnashes his teeth in their company?”

“It is true!” muttered Arnold.

But Zhyshko, to whose heart sorrow and anger flowed in a new current, shouted suddenly, —

“And thou art talking of knightly honor! Shame on thee, for thou hast helped a hangman and a hell-dweller! Shame on thee, for thou hast looked calmly at the torture of an unprotected woman, a knight’s daughter, and perhaps thou hast tortured her thyself. Shame on thee!”

Arnold stared and said, making the sign of the cross, —

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit! How is this? Do you speak of that possessed girl in whose head twenty-seven devils are living? I —?”

"Woe! woe!" broke in Zbyshko with a hoarse voice. And seizing the hilt of his misericordia he looked again with a wild glance toward Siegfried, who was lying in the dark at some distance.

Matsko put his hand on his nephew's arm quietly and squeezed it with all his might to restore thought to the young man, and turning toward Arnold, he said,—

"That woman is the daughter of Yurand of Spyhov, and is the wife of this knight. Thou canst understand now why we tracked thee and thy company, and why thou hast become our prisoner."

"In God's name!" said Arnold. "Whence? How? Her mind is disturbed!"

"For the Knights of the Cross stole her away as they might steal an innocent lamb, and brought her by torture to that state."

At the words "innocent lamb" Zbyshko brought his fist to his lips and pressed his knuckles against his teeth, while from his eyes great tears of irresistible pain dropped one after another. Arnold sat thoughtfully. Hlava told him in a few words of Danveld's treachery, the seizure of Danusia, the torture of Yurand, and the duel with Rotgier. When he had finished there was a silence unbroken save by the sound of the forest and the crackling of sparks in the camp-fire.

They sat thus for some time, till at last Arnold raised his head.

"I swear," said he, "not only on knightly honor, but on the cross of Christ, that I have hardly seen that woman, that I knew not who she was, and that I have moved no hand to torture her in any way, at any time."

"Swear now that thou wilt go with us of thy own will, without trying to escape, and I will command to unbind thee altogether," said Matsko.

"Let it be as thou sayest; I swear! Whither wilt thou take me?"

"To Mazovia, to Yurand of Spyhov."

Thus speaking, Matsko himself cut the ropes on Arnold's legs and pointed to the meat and the turnips. After a while Zbyshko rose and went to lie at the threshold of the hut, where he did not find the serving-woman of the Order, for the attendants had taken her to their place among the horses. Zbyshko lay on a skin which Hlava brought him, and resolved to wait without sleep, hoping that daylight would bring a happy change to Danusia.

Hlava returned to the fire, for something was weighing on his soul, which he wished to tell the old knight from Bogdanets. He found him sunk also in thought, paying no heed to the snoring of Arnold, who after his toil had eaten of meat and turnips immensely and was sleeping as soundly as a stone.

“But are you awake?” inquired Hlava.

“Sleep flies from my lids,” answered Matsko. “God grant a good morrow.” Then he looked toward the stars. “The Great Bear is in the sky, and I am thinking how all this will turn out.”

“I too have no thought of sleep, for the lady of Zgorzelitse is in my head.”

“Hei, true, a new trouble! She is in Spyhov, that is true.”

“Yes, in Spyhov. We took her from her home. Why did we take her?”

“She herself wished to go,” was the impatient answer of Matsko, who talked of this matter reluctantly, for in his soul he felt guilty.

“True, but what now?”

“Ah, what? I will take her home, and let the will of God be done;” but after a while he added: “Very well, let the will of God be done; if only Danusia were in health and like other people we should know at least what to do. But now, the devil knows! If she does not recover — and if she does not die — May the Lord Jesus incline either to this or to that side —”

But Hlava at that moment was thinking of Yagenka.

“You see, your Grace,” said he, “when I left Spyhov and took farewell of the lady, she said: ‘In case something happens, come hither thou before Zbyshko and Matsko; they must send some one with news, let them send thee, and thou wilt take me to Zgorzelitse.’”

“Oh! it is true,” answered Matsko, “that when Danusia comes it would be awkward for Yagenka in Spyhov. It is sure that she would need to go home immediately. I am sorry for the orphan, I am sorry, but, since the will of God did not favor, the position is difficult! How arrange this? Wait — thou sayest that she commanded thee to return before us with the news, and take her home?”

“She commanded as I have told thee faithfully.”

“Well, then, thou mayest go before us. There is need also to tell Yurand that his daughter is found, so as not to kill

the man with sudden joy. As God is dear to me there is nothing better to be done. Return; say that we have recovered Danusia and will come soon with her, and do thou take that poor girl and conduct her home."

The old knight sighed. In truth he was sorry for Yagenka, and those plans which he had cherished in his soul. After a while he said, —

"Thou art a man of wit, and thou art stalwart I know that, but wilt thou be able to guard her against wrong or accident? On the road the one or the other may happen."

"I shall be able, even were I to lay down my head. I can take a number of good men whom the master of Spyhov will not begrudge me, and conduct her safely to the end of the earth were it needed."

"Do not trust over much in thyself. Remember too that thou must have an eye on Vilk and Stan in Zgorzelitse — but I am not speaking to the point; we had need to watch them while there was another man in view, but as she has no hope now of Zbyshko she must marry some one."

"Still I shall guard the lady even from those two knights, for Pan Zbyshko's wife, the poor thing, is barely breathing — she is just as if dead!"

"True, as God is dear to me, the poor thing is barely living, she is as if dead."

"We must leave that to the Lord God; and now let us think only of the lady."

"In justice," said Matsko, "I ought to conduct her to her father's house. But the position is difficult. For various great reasons I cannot leave Zbyshko. Thou sawest how he gritted his teeth and rushed at that old comtur to stab him, as one would a wild boar. Should that girl die on the road, as thou sayest, I am not sure that even I could restrain him. Should I be absent nothing could hold him back, and infamy would fall on him and our whole family forever. God avert this, amen!"

"There is a simple method," said Hlava. "Give me Siegfried. I will not lose him, and only in Spyhov will I shake him out of the bag before Pan Yurand."

"God give thee health! Oh thou hast wit!" cried Matsko, delighted. "A simple thing! a simple thing! Take him, and if thou deliver him alive at Spyhov, do with him as thou choolest."

"Give me also that Schytuo bitch. If she does not resist on the road, I will take her also to Spyhov; should she resist I will hang her on a limb."

"Terror might leave Danusia sooner, and she might come to her mind more quickly were she freed from the sight of those two. But if thou take her what are we to do without the help of a woman?"

"You will surely meet people in the forest, or find fugitives with women. Take the first woman you come upon; any will be better than that wretch. Meanwhile Pan Zbyshko's care will suffice."

"To-day thou art speaking with more wit than common. That too is true. She may come to herself more quickly when she sees Zbyshko always near her. He can be to her a father and a mother. Let it be so. When wilt thou start?"

"I shall not wait for the dawn, but lie down now. It is not midnight yet, I think."

"The Great Bear is still shining, but the triangle has not appeared."

"Praise be to God that we have settled on something, for I was cruelly saddened."

Hlava stretched then before the dying fire, covered himself with a shaggy skin, and was asleep in a moment. But the sky had not whitened in the least, and it was deep night when he woke, crawled forth from under the skin, looked at the stars, stretched his limbs, which were somewhat stiffened, and roused Matsko.

"For me it is time to be off," said he.

"But whither?" asked Matsko, half asleep, rubbing his eyes with his fists.

"To Spyhov."

"Oh, true? Who is this snoring beside us? He would wake a dead man."

"Knight Arnold. I will throw limbs on the fire and go to the attendants."

He went, but returned with a hurried step and called in a low voice from some distance, —

"I have news, lord, — and bad news!"

"What has happened?" cried Matsko, springing up.

"The serving-woman has fled. The attendants took her to their place among the horses — may the thunderbolts split them! — when they fell asleep she slipped out, like a snake, from among them, and fled. Come, lord."

Matsko was alarmed and moved quickly with Hlava toward the horses, but they found only one attendant; the others had rushed off in search of the fugitive. But that search was a stupid one, through darkness and among thickets; in fact, they returned soon with their heads down. Matsko belabored them with his fists, but without words; then he went back to the fire, for there was nothing else to do.

Zbyshko came soon from his post of sentry at the hut door. Sleepless he had heard the tramping and wished to learn what the trouble was. Matsko told him of the arrangement with Hlava, then of the escape of the serving-woman.

“That is no great misfortune,” said he. “She will die of hunger in the forest, or be found by people who will beat her, unless wolves find her earlier. The one pity is that punishment in Spyhov has missed her.”

Zbyshko was sorry that punishment had missed her, but otherwise he received the news calmly. He did not oppose the departure of Hlava with Siegfried, for everything which did not touch Danusia directly was to him indifferent. He began at once to speak of her, —

“I will take her to-morrow on the horse, in front of me, and we shall travel on in that way.”

“Is she sleeping?” inquired Matsko.

“Sometimes she whines a little, but I cannot tell whether she is awake or asleep. I am afraid to go in, lest I frighten her.”

Further conversation was interrupted by Hlava, who, seeing Zbyshko, said, —

“Oh, your Grace is up also? Well, it is time for me to go. The horses are ready, and the old devil is tied to the saddle. It will be dawn soon, for the nights are short at this season. God be with you, your Graces.”

“Go with God, and be well!”

But Hlava drew Matsko aside, and said, —

“I wished to make an earnest request of you. If something happens, some misfortune, or — what shall we call it? — hurry a man off directly to Spyhov, and if we have gone from there let him overtake us.”

“Very good,” said Matsko, “I forgot to tell thee to take Yagenka to Plotsk. Go to the bishop there, tell him who she is, say that she is the goddaughter of the abbot, that he, the bishop, holds a will in her favor, and

mention the guardianship over her, for that is in the will also."

"But if the bishop commands us to remain in Plotsk?"

"Obey him in all things, and do what he advises."

"Thus will it be, lord. With God!"

"With God!"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE knight Arnold, on hearing next morning of the flight of the serving-woman, smiled, but said the same as Matsko, that either the wolves would devour her or the Lithuanians would kill the wretch. In fact this was likely, for villagers of Lithuanian origin hated the Order and all who had relations with it. The peasants had fled in part to Skirvoillo, in part they had revolted, here and there they had slain Germans and then concealed themselves quickly, with their families and cattle, in deep inaccessible forests. Matsko and Zbyshko sent out to search for the serving-woman next day, but without result, for the search was not over earnest, since the two men had their heads filled with other things, and had not given orders with sufficient sternness. They were in haste to set out for Mazovia, and wished to move at once after sunrise, but could not do so, for Danusia had fallen into deep slumber before daylight, and Zbyshko would not permit any one to rouse her. He had heard her "whining" in the night, and thought that she was not sleeping, so now he expected much good from this sleep. Twice he stole up to the hut, and twice, by the sunlight coming in between the logs, he saw her closed eyes and open mouth, as well as the deep flush on her face, such as children have when sleeping soundly. The heart melted in him from emotion. "God give thee health and rest, dearest flower!" said he. And then he said again: "Thy misfortune is over, thy weeping is ended, and the merciful Lord Jesus will grant thy happiness to be as the waters of a river which have not flowed past yet." As he had a simple soul and was generous, he raised it to God and asked himself, "With what am I to give thanks; with what can I repay; what can I offer to some church, from my possessions, my grain, my herds, wax, or other things of like nature precious to Divine Power?" He would have promised even then and mentioned exactly what he was offering, but he preferred to wait, since he knew not in what health Danusia would wake, or whether she would wake in her senses; he was not sure yet that he would have anything for which to be thankful.

Matsko, though knowing that they would be perfectly safe only in the territories of Prince Yanush, thought that it was not proper to disturb Danusia's rest, as it might be her salvation; so he kept the attendants ready and also the pack-horses, but he waited.

Still, when midday had passed and she slept on, they grew frightened. Zbyshko, who looked through the cracks and the door unceasingly, entered the hut for the third time and sat on the log which the serving-woman had drawn to the bedside, and on which she had changed her clothes for Danusia's.

He sat there and looked at her; she had not opened her eyes yet, but after as much time had passed as would have been needed to say without haste one "Our Father" and "Hail, Mary," her lips quivered a little and she whispered, as if she beheld him through her closed eyelids, —

"Zbyshko!"

In an instant he threw himself on his knees before her, seized her thin hands, and kissed them with ecstasy.

"Thanks to God!" said he, in a broken voice; "Danusia, thou hast recognized me."

His voice roused her; she sat up on the bed and with eyes now open repeated, —

"Zbyshko!"

Then she muttered and stared around as if in wonder.

"Thou art not in captivity," said he; "I have torn thee away from them, and we are going to Spyhov."

But she drew her hand away from his grasp, and said, —

"All this happened because father's leave was not given. Where is the princess?"

"Wake, oh, my berry! The princess is far from here, but we have taken thee from the Germans."

"They have taken my lute too and broken it against a wall," continued she, as if talking to herself without hearing him.

"By the dear God!" exclaimed Zbyshko.

Now he noted for the first time that her eyes were gleaming and vacant, her cheeks on fire. At that moment the idea flashed through his head that perhaps she was grievously ill and mentioned his name twice only because it occurred to her in the fever; his heart quivered from dread, and cold sweat came out on his forehead.

"Danusia!" said he, "dost thou see me and understand?" But she answered in a voice of humble entreaty: "Water — Drink!"

“ Merciful Jesus ! ”

He sprang out of the hut, and at the door struck against Matsko; he threw at him the one word “ Water,” and rushed toward the brook which was flowing near by through forest moss and a thicket.

He returned soon with water, which he gave to Danusia, who drank eagerly. Matsko had entered the hut, for he had come to learn how things were, and was looking with a frown at the sick woman.

“ She is in a fever,” said he.

“ Yes,” groaned Zbyshko.

“ Does she understand what thou sayest ? ”

“ No.”

The old man frowned again, then raised his hand and rubbed the back of his head and his neck with it.

“ What is to be done ? ”

“ I know not.”

“ There is only one thing,” said Matsko.

But Danusia interrupted him at that moment. When she had finished drinking she fixed on him eyes widely open from fever, and said, —

“ I have not offended thee ; forgive.”

“ I forgive, child ; I wish only thy good,” answered the old knight, with some emotion.

“ Listen,” said he to Zbyshko. “ There is no reason why she should stay here. When the wind blows around her, and the sun warms her, she may feel better. Do not lose thy head, boy, but put her into that same cradle in which they carried her, or on thy saddle, and to the road ! Dost understand ? ”

After these words he started to leave the hut and give final orders, but barely had he looked out when he stood as if fixed to the earth. A strong detachment of infantry, armed with spears and halberds, had surrounded on four sides, as with a wall, the hut, the field, and the tarpits.

“ Germans ! ” thought Matsko.

His soul was filled with a shudder, but he grasped his sword-hilt, gritted his teeth, and stood like a wild beast which, brought to bay by dogs on a sudden, is preparing to defend itself desperately. Meanwhile the giant Arnold with some other knight approached from the tarpits, and when he had come up he said, —

“ The wheel of fortune changes ; I was your prisoner, but now you are ours.” He looked then with pride at the

old knight, as at some creature beneath him. He was not a bad man at all, nor over-cruel, but he had the defect common to Knights of the Order, who, affable in misfortune, and even yielding, could never restrain their contempt for the conquered, or their limitless pride when they felt superior power behind them. "You are prisoners," repeated he, loftily.

The old knight looked around gloomily. In his breast beat a heart that was not timid, it was even bold to excess. Had he been in armor on his war-horse, had Zbyshko been at his side, if both had held in their hands swords, axes, or those terrible "trees" which the Polish knights of that period wielded so skilfully, he might have tried, perhaps, to break through that wall of spears and halberds. It was not without reason that foreign knights called to the Poles at Vilno, "Ye despise death too much," thus reproaching them. But Matsko was on foot before Arnold, alone, without armor; so when he saw that the attendants had laid down their weapons, and remembered that Zbyshko was in the hut with Danusia and unarmed, he understood, as a man of experience and greatly accustomed to warfare, that he was helpless; so he drew his sword from its sheath slowly and cast it at the feet of the knight who was standing near Arnold. That knight spoke with no less pride than Arnold, but in good Polish and affably:—

"What is your name, sir? I shall not command to bind you if you give your word, since you, as I see, are a belted knight, and have treated my brother humanely."

"I give my word," answered Matsko. And when he had told who he was, he inquired if he might go to the hut and warn his nephew against any unwise act. On receiving permission he vanished in the door, and after a while appeared again bearing in his hand a misericordia.

"My nephew," said he, "has not even a sword with him, and begs to remain with his wife till you start from here."

"Let him stay," said Arnold's brother. "I will send food and drink to him, for we shall not start immediately; the men are tired, and we need food and rest ourselves. I beg you to join us."

They turned then and went toward that same fire at which Matsko had spent the night previous, but whether through rudeness or pride,—the former was common enough among Germans,—they went in advance, letting Matsko follow. But he, having seen very much, and understanding what manners were proper on every occasion, inquired,—

“Gentlemen, do you invite me as a guest or as a prisoner?”

Arnold's brother was ashamed, for he halted and said, —

“Pass on, sir.”

The old knight went ahead, but not wishing to wound the vanity of a man who to him might be greatly important, he said, —

“It is evident, sir, that you know not only various languages, but polite intercourse.”

Arnold understood only a few words. “Wolfgang,” asked he, “what is the question? What is he saying?”

“He talks sensibly,” answered Wolfgang, who was flattered by Matsko's words, evidently.

They sat at the fire, to which food and drink were brought. The lesson given the Germans by Matsko was not lost, for Wolfgang ordered to serve him first. In conversation the old knight learned how he and his nephew had been caught: Wolfgang, a younger brother of Arnold, was leading the Chluhov infantry to Gotteswerder, also against the insurgent Jmud men. As they came from a distant province they had failed to come up with the cavalry. Arnold had no need to wait for them, knowing that on the road he would meet other mounted divisions from towns and castles near the Lithuanian boundary; for this reason the younger brother came somewhat later, and was on the road in the neighborhood of the tarpits when the serving-woman who had fled in the night-time, informed him of the mishap which had met his elder brother. Arnold, listening to that narrative, which was repeated to him in German, laughed with satisfaction, and declared at last that he had hoped things would turn out so; but the experienced Matsko, who in every strait tried to find some relief, thought it useful to win those two Germans; so he said, —

“It is always grievous to fall into captivity, but I am grateful that God has not given me into other hands, for, by my faith, you are real knights who observe honor.”

At this Wolfgang closed his eyes and nodded, rather stiffly, it is true, but with evident satisfaction.

“And you know our speech so well,” continued Matsko.

“God, I see, has given you a mind for everything.”

“I know your language, for in Chluhov the people talk Polish. My brother and I have served seven years there under the comtur.”

“And you will receive his office after him; it cannot be

otherwise. But your brother does not speak our language as you do."

"He understands some, but does not speak. My brother has more strength than I, though I am not a piece of a man, but his wit is duller."

"Oh, he is not dull, as it seems to me," said Matsko.

"Wolfgang, what does he say?" inquired Arnold again.

"He praises thee."

"Of course I do," added Matsko, "for he is a true knight, and that is the main thing. I tell you sincerely that I intended to free him to-day on his word, and let him go whithersoever he wished, if he would return in a year even. That is as it should be among belted knights;" and he looked into Wolfgang's face carefully.

Wolfgang frowned and said: "I would let you go on your word perhaps, if you had not helped pagan dogs against our people."

"We have not," answered Matsko.

And now rose the same kind of sharp dispute as on the day previous with Arnold. Though truth was on the old knight's side, he had more trouble now, for Wolfgang was keener than his brother. But from the discussion came this good, that the younger brother too heard of all the crimes of Schytno, its false oaths and treacheries, and also of the fate of the unfortunate Danusia. Touching this and the crimes which Matsko brought before him, he had nothing to answer. He was forced to confess that their revenge was just, and that the Polish knights had the right to act as they had acted.

"By the sacred bones of Liborius, I shall not pity Daneld. They say that he practised the black art, but God's power and justice are greater than the black art. As for Siegfried, I have no means of knowing if he served the devil also, but I shall make no pursuit to save him; for, first, I have not the cavalry, and, second, if he tortured that girl, let him not peep even once out of hell." Here he stretched himself and added: "God aid me now and at my death hour."

"But with that unfortunate martyr, how will it be?" inquired Matsko. "Will you not give permission to take her home? Is she to die in your dungeons? Think of God's anger."

"I have no affair with the woman," answered Wolfgang, abruptly. "Let one of you take her to her father if he will come back, but I will not let off the other."

“Not if I were to swear on my honor, and the spear of Saint George?”

Wolfgang hesitated somewhat, for the oath was a great one, but at that moment Arnold asked him the third time, “What does he say?” And on learning what the question was he opposed passionately and rudely the liberation of both on their word. In this he found his own reckoning. He had been beaten by Skirvoillo in the greater battle, and in single combat by those Polish knights. As a soldier he knew too that his brother’s infantry must return to Malborg, for if they wished to go on to Gotteswerder they would go after the destruction of the previous detachments, as if to be slaughtered. He knew, therefore, that he would have to stand before the Master and the marshal, and he understood that his disgrace would be decreased could he show even one considerable captive. One living knight whom he could present to the eye would mean more than a story stating that he had captured two.

Matsko, hearing the hoarse outburst and curses of Arnold, understood straightway that he ought to accept what they gave since he would gain nothing more, and he said, turning to Wolfgang, —

“Now I ask you for another thing; I am sure that my nephew will himself understand that he is to be with his wife, and I with you; but in every case permit me to inform him that there is no parleying in this matter, for such is your will.”

“Very good; it is all one to me,” answered Wolfgang; “but let us talk of the ransom which your nephew is to bring for himself and for you, since on this depends all.”

“Of the ransom?” inquired Matsko, who would have deferred this conversation till another day. “Have we not time enough before us? When one has to do with a belted knight a word is the same as ready money; and as to the amount, we may leave that to conscience. Before Gotteswerder we took captive a considerable knight of yours, a certain Pan de Lorche, and my nephew, he it was who took him, let the knight go on his word, making no mention at all of the amount of the ransom.”

“Did you capture De Lorche?” asked Wolfgang, quickly. “I know him; he is a wealthy knight. But why have we not met him on the road?”

“Because, as is evident, he went not to Malborg, but to Gotteswerder or Ragneta,” answered Matsko.

“Oh, he is wealthy and of noted family,” said Wolfgang. “You have made a rich capture; it is well that you mentioned this, I will not free you now for a trifle.”

Matsko bit his moustache, but raised his head proudly, and said, —

“We know our worth without that.”

“So much the better,” answered the younger Von Baden; but immediately he added, “so much the better, but not for us, — we are humble monks who have vowed poverty, — but better for the Order, which will use your money to the glory of God.”

Matsko made no answer to this, but he looked at Wolfgang as if to say, “Tell that to some other man,” and after a while they began to arrange the terms. This for the old knight was disagreeable and difficult, for on the one hand he was very sensitive to losses, and on the other, he understood that it became neither him nor Zbyshko to put on themselves too small a value. He squirmed therefore like an eel, all the more since Wolfgang, though of smooth and pleasant speech, proved to be immensely greedy, and as hard as stone. The only comfort for Matsko was the thought that De Lorche would pay for all, but he regretted the lost hope of gain. He did not count on the ransom of Siegfried, for he thought that Yurand, and even Zbyshko, would not renounce the old comtur’s head for any sum. After long talk he agreed as to the amount of money and the interval, and, having stipulated the number of attendants and horses which Zbyshko was to take, he went to tell him. At the same time he advised his nephew to set out immediately. Evidently he did this through fear lest some new thought might strike the Germans.

“Such is the knightly condition,” said he, sighing; “yesterday thou hadst them by the head, to-day they have thee. Yes, it is difficult; God grant that our turn come another day. But lose no time; by going quickly thou wilt overtake Hlava, and it will be safer for you both in company; but once out of the forest and in the inhabited part of Mazovia ye will find entertainment, assistance, and care at the house of any noble or land-tiller. With us no one refuses these services to a stranger, much less to our own people; for this poor woman there will be perhaps salvation in the journey.”

Thus speaking, he looked at Danusia, who, sunk in half lethargy, breathed loudly and quickly. Her transparent

hands lying on the dark bearskin trembled feverishly. Matsko made the sign of the cross on her, and said, —

“God change this, for she is spinning fine, as it seems to me.”

“Do not say that,” cried Zbyshko, with despairing emphasis.

“God is mighty. I will direct to bring the horses here, and do thou go.”

Matsko went from the hut, and arranged everything for the journey. The Turks given by Zavisha brought the horses with the cradle, which was lined with moss and skins, and Vit, the attendant, brought Zbyshko’s saddle-horse.

After a while Zbyshko bore Danusia out of the hut on one arm. There was something so touching in this that the brothers Von Baden, whose curiosity had led them to the hut, when they saw the half-childish form of Danusia, her face which resembled the faces of sacred virgins in church pictures, and her weakness so great that she could not move her head which had dropped heavily on Zbyshko’s shoulder, looked at each other, and their hearts rose against the authors of such misery.

“Siegfried had the heart of an executioner, not of a knight,” whispered Wolfgang to his brother; “and though she was the cause of freeing thee, I will have that serpent flogged with rods.”

They were moved by this too, that Zbyshko was carrying Danusia on his arm as a mother would a child, and they understood his love, for both had the blood of youth in their veins yet.

Zbyshko hesitated a while whether to take the sick woman to the saddle, and hold her before him on the road, or put her in the cradle. He decided finally for the cradle, thinking that it would be easier for Danusia to travel lying down. Then approaching his uncle, he bent to kiss his hand in parting. Matsko, who loved him as the apple of his eye, though he had no wish to show emotion before Germans, did not restrain himself, but embraced Zbyshko firmly, pressing his lips to his rich golden hair.

“God go with thee,” said he; “but think of the old man, for captivity is bitter in every case.”

“I will not forget,” answered Zbyshko.

“May the Most Holy Mother give thee solace!”

“God reward thee for those words, and for everything.”

After a while Zbyshko was on his horse, but Matsko

thought of something, for he sprang to his nephew, and putting his hand on his knee, said, —

“Listen! If thou overtake Hlava, be careful as to Siegfried that thou bring no disgrace on thyself and my gray hairs; Yurand may act, not thou. Swear to me on thy sword and on thy honor!”

“Until you are freed I will restrain Yurand also, so that the Germans should not avenge Siegfried on you,” answered Zbyshko.

“Art thou so concerned about me?”

“Thou knowest me, I think,” replied Zbyshko, smiling sadly.

“To the road! Go in health!”

The horses started and soon the bright hazel thickets hid them. All at once Matsko grew terribly sad and lonely; his soul was tearing away with all its force after that dear boy, in whom the whole hope of his race lay. But immediately he shook himself out of his sorrow, for he was a firm man, with self-mastery.

“Thank God that I am the captive, not Zbyshko,” thought he; and turning to the Germans, he asked, —

“And, gentlemen, when will you start, and whither will you go?”

“We will start when it pleases us,” answered Wolfgang, “and we shall go to Malborg, where first of all you will have to stand before the Grand Master.”

“Hei, they are ready there to cut my head off for helping the Jmud men,” thought Matsko. But he was comforted by this, that De Lorche was in reserve, and that the Von Badens themselves would defend his life if only to save the ransom.

“If they take my head, Zbyshko will not need to come himself, and decrease his property;” and this thought brought him a certain solace.

CHAPTER LIV.

ZBYSHKO could not overtake his attendant, for Hlava travelled night and day, resting only as much as was absolutely needed to save the horses from falling dead. These beasts, since they ate only grass, were weak and could not go so far through the forests in a day as in places where oats were found easily. Hlava spared not himself, and had no regard for the advanced age and weakness of Siegfried. The old Knight of the Cross suffered terribly, therefore, all the more since the strong Matsko had hurt his bones previously at the tarpit. But most grievous for the old man were the gnats swarming in the damp forests. He could not drive them away, for his hands were tied, and his feet bound under the horse's belly. Hlava did not, it is true, inflict any torture, but he had no pity on Siegfried, and freed his right hand only when they halted for eating. "Eat, wolf snout, so that I may bring thee alive to the master of Spyhov." Such were the words with which he encouraged him to refreshment. At the beginning of that journey the thought had come to Siegfried to kill himself by hunger; but when he heard Hlava say that he would open his teeth with a dagger, and put nourishment down his throat forcibly, he preferred to yield rather than permit insult to his honor as a knight, and his dignity as a member of the Order.

Hlava wished at all costs to reach Spyhov considerably earlier than Zbyshko, so as to save his lady from confusion. He, a petty noble, simple but clever and not deficient in knightly feeling, understood clearly that there would be something of humiliation for Yagenka to be in Spyhov at the same time with Danusia. "We may tell the bishop in Plotsk," thought he, "that the old lord of Bogdanets, because of guardianship, had to take her with him; and then, let it be only mentioned that she is under the protection of the bishop, and that she has at Zgorzelitse an inheritance from the abbot, even a voevoda's son will not be too much for her." This reckoning sweetened the toils of his journey, for he was troubled by the thought that the happy news

which he was taking to Spyhov would be for his mistress a sentence of misery.

Anulka appeared before his eyes often as blushing as an apple. At those times he touched the sides of his horse with spurs, as much as the road permitted, such was his hurry to Spyhov.

They advanced by uncertain roads, or rather without roads, straight ahead as the cast of a sickle. Hlava knew only that going always a little to the west and always to the south they must reach Mazovia, and then all would be well. In the daytime he followed the sun, and when the journey stretched into the night he looked at the stars. The wilderness before him seemed to have neither bound nor limit. Days and nights flowed past in a night-like gloom. More than once Hlava thought that Zbyshko would not bring a woman alive through those terrible uninhabited regions, where there was no place to find provisions, where at night they had to guard their horses from bears and wolves, and leave the road in the daytime before bulls and bisons, where terrible wild boars sharpened their tusks against pine roots, and where frequently he who did not shoot from a crossbow, or pierce with a spear the spotted sides of a fawn or a young pig, had no food for days in succession.

“What will he do,” thought Hlava, “travelling with a woman nearly tortured to death and almost breathing her last breath?”

Time after time he had to go around broad morasses or deep ravines at the bottom of which torrents, swollen by spring rains, were roaring. There was no lack, in this wilderness, of lakes in which he saw at sunset herds of elk or deer swimming in ruddy, smooth waters. Sometimes he noticed smoke, announcing the presence of people; a number of times he approached such forest places, but wild men ran out to meet him; these wore skins of wild beasts on their naked bodies, they were armed with clubs and bows, and stared ominously from beneath matted locks. The attendants mistook them for wolf-men. Hlava had to make quick use of the first astonishment caused by the spectacle of a knight, and ride away as swiftly as possible. Twice arrows whistled behind him, and the shout “Vokili!” (Germans!) followed. But he chose rather to fly than explain who he was. At last after many days he began to suppose that he might have passed the boundary. He learned first

from hunters speaking Polish that he was on Mazovian ground at last.

It was easier there, though eastern Mazovia was one rustling wilderness. Uninhabited places had not ended yet; still, wherever there was a house, the inhabitants were less morose, — perhaps because they had not met with continual hatred, and perhaps, too, because Hlava spoke a language understood by them. His only trouble was the immense curiosity of those people, who surrounded the horsemen in crowds and overwhelmed them with questions.

“Give him to us, we will take care of him!” said they, on learning that the prisoner was a Knight of the Cross.

And they begged so persistently that Hlava was forced often to be angry, or to explain that the prisoner belonged to Prince Yanush. Then they yielded. Later on, in a region inhabited by nobles and land-tillers, it did not go easily either. Hatred was seething there against the Knights of the Order, for people remembered vividly in all places the treachery and wrong inflicted on the prince when in time of profound peace the Knights seized him in Zlotoria and held him prisoner. They did not wish, it is true, “to do justice” there to Siegfried, but this or that sturdy noble said: “Unbind him. I will give him a weapon and call him to death inside a barrier.” Into the head of those, Hlava drove the idea as with a spade that the first right to vengeance belonged to the ill-fated master of Spyhov, and that they were not free to take that right from him.

In settled regions the journey was easy, for there were roads of some kind, and the horses were fed everywhere with oats and barley. Hlava drove quickly, therefore, halting in no place, and ten days before Corpus Christi he was at Spyhov.

He arrived in the evening, as he had when Matsko sent him back from Schytno with tidings of his departure for the Jmud land, and, just as on that day, Yagenka, seeing him from the window, ran down quickly. He fell at her feet, unable to utter a word for some time; but she raised him and took the man upstairs as quickly as possible, not wishing to ask questions before people.

“What news?” inquired she, quivering from impatience, and hardly able to catch her breath. “Are they alive? Are they well?”

“They are alive! they are well.”

“And she? — have they found her?”

"She is found. They have rescued her."

"Praised be Jesus Christ!"

But in spite of these words Yagenka's face became as if frozen, for all her hopes were scattered to dust in one moment. But strength did not leave her; she did not lose presence of mind; after a while she mastered herself perfectly, and asked, —

"When will they be here?"

"After some days. The road with a sick woman is difficult."

"Is she sick?"

"Tortured to death. Her mind is disturbed from suffering."

"Merciful Jesus!"

A brief silence followed, but Yagenka's lips grew pale, and moved as if in prayer.

"Did she not come to her mind in presence of Zbyshko?" asked she.

"Maybe she did, but I do not know, for I left there immediately to inform you, my lady, before they could reach Spyhov."

"God reward thee. Tell how it was."

Hlava narrated briefly how they had intercepted Danusia and captured both the giant Arnold and Siegfried. He declared too that he had brought Siegfried to Spyhov, since the young lord wished to deliver him to Yurand as a gift and for purposes of vengeance.

"I must go now to Yurand," said Yagenka when the narrative was finished.

And she went, but Hlava was not long alone, for Anulka ran out to him from a closet, and he, whether he was not entirely conscious from immense toil and weariness, or whether he was yearning for her and forgot himself the moment he saw the girl, he seized her by the waist, pressed her to his bosom, and kissed her cheeks, lips, and eyes in such a way as if long before he had told her all that is told young girls usually before such an action.

And perhaps really he had told her in spirit during his journey, for he kissed and kissed without stopping; he drew her to him with such vigor that the breath was almost stopped in her. She did not defend herself, at first because she was astonished, and then because of faintness, which was so great that she would have fallen to the floor perhaps if less powerful arms had held her. Fortunately this did not

last long, for steps were heard on the stairway, and Father Kaleb burst into the chamber.

They sprang away from each other, and the priest overwhelmed the Cheh with questions, which were hard for him to answer since he could not catch breath. The priest thought the man's trouble caused by toils of the journey, and when he had heard confirmation of the news that Danusia was found and recovered, and her torturer brought to Spyhov, he fell on his knees to thank God. Meanwhile the blood quieted in Hlava's veins somewhat, and when the priest rose the Cheh told calmly how they had found and rescued Danusia.

"God did not restore her," said the priest on hearing everything, "to leave her mind and soul in darkness and in control of unclean powers. Yurand will place his holy hands on her, and bring back health and reason with one prayer."

"The knight Yurand?" asked Hlava, with astonishment. "Has he power like that? Can he become a saint during earthly life?"

"Before God he is a saint while alive, and when he dies people will have in heaven one more patron, a martyr."

"But you have said, reverend father, that he will place his hands on his daughter's head. Has his right hand grown out again?—for I know that you begged the Lord Jesus to make it grow."

"I have said 'hands,' as is said usually," answered the priest; "but with divine grace even one hand suffices."

"Surely," answered Hlava.

But there was in his voice a certain disappointment, for he had hoped to witness an evident miracle. Further conversation was interrupted by the coming of Yagenka.

"I have told him the news carefully," said she, "so that sudden joy might not kill him. He dropped down at once in cross form and is praying."

"He lies whole nights thus, but now he will be sure not to rise till to-morrow," answered Father Kaleb.

That was in fact what happened. They looked in a number of times at him, and each time they found him lying, not asleep, but in prayer so earnest that it equalled mental oblivion. The guard, who from the tower of the castle overlooked the land and watched over Spyhov according to custom, declared later on that he saw during that night a certain unusual brightness in the chamber of the "old master."

Only next morning, considerably after matins, when Yagenka looked in again, did he inform her that he wished to see Hlava and the captive. They brought Siegfried in from the dungeon then. His hands were bound crosswise on his breast, and, in company with Tolima, all went to Yurand.

At the first moment Hlava could not see Yurand well, for the membrane windows admitted little light, while the day was dark because of clouds which had covered the sky completely, and announced a dreadful tempest. But when his keen eyes had grown used to the gloom, he barely recognized the old man, so thin had he grown, and so wretched. The giant had changed into an immense skeleton. His face was so white that it did not differ much from the milky color of his beard and hair, and when he bent toward the arm of the chair and closed his eyelids, he resembled a real corpse, as it seemed to Hlava.

Near the armchair stood a table; on the table was a crucifix, near it a pitcher of water and a loaf of black bread; in the latter was thrust a misericordia, or that dreadful knife which knights used to despatch the wounded. Yurand had taken no nourishment save bread and water for a long time. A coarse hair shirt served him as clothing; this he wore on his naked body; the shirt was girded by a grass rope. Thus lived the wealthy and once terrible knight of Spyhov since his return from captivity in Schytno.

When he heard people enter he pushed away with his leg the tame she-wolf which kept his feet warm, next he straightened his body; then it was that he seemed to Hlava like a dead man. A moment of expectation followed, for those present thought that he would make a sign for some one to speak; but he sat motionless, white, calm, with lips somewhat open, as if he had sunk really into the endless repose of death.

"Hlava is here," said Yagenka, in her sweet voice, at last; "do you wish to hear him?"

He nodded in sign of assent; then Hlava began his narrative for the third time. He mentioned briefly the battles fought with the Germans near Gotteswerder, described the struggle with Arnold von Baden and the recovery of Danusia, but not wishing to add pain to those glad tidings brought the old martyr, and rouse new fear in him, he concealed the fact that Danusia's mind was disturbed by long days of cruel torture.

But since his heart was envenomed against the Knights of the Order, and he desired that Siegfried should be punished

unsparingly, he took pains not to hide that they had found her terrified, reduced to wretchedness, so sick that it could be seen how they had treated her in the fashion of hangmen, and that if she had remained longer in their dreadful hands she would have withered and died, just as flowers wither and perish when trampled. After this new narrative came the no less gloomy roar of the approaching tempest. Meanwhile bronze-colored cloud-packs rolled forward more and more mightily over Spyhov.

Yurand listened without a movement or a quiver, so that it might have seemed to those before him that he was sleeping. But he heard every word and understood it, for when Hlava spoke of Danusia's misery, two great tears gathered in his empty eye-pits and flowed down his cheeks. Of all earthly feelings, there remained to him only this one: love for his daughter.

Then his bluish lips moved in prayer. Outside were heard still distant thunderpeals, and from moment to moment lightning illuminated the windows. Yurand prayed long, and tears fell to his white beard a second time. At last he ceased to weep, and a long silence followed, which continuing beyond measure grew irksome to those present, for they knew not what to do with themselves.

At last old Tolima, the right hand of Yurand, his comrade in all battles, and the main guardian of Spyhov, said, —

“Standing before you, lord, is that hell-dweller, that wolf-man of the Order who tortured your child and tortured you; let me know by a sign what I am to do with him, and how I am to give him punishment.”

At these words a sudden light passed over Yurand's face, and he motioned to bring the prisoner near him.

In a twinkling two attendants seized Siegfried by the shoulders and brought him to the master of Spyhov. Yurand stretched out his hand and passed his palm over Siegfried's face, as if wishing to recall those features, or impress them on his memory for the last time, then he dropped his hand to the captive's breast, felt the arms lying on it crosswise, touched the cords, — and, closing his eyes, bent his head forward.

Those present supposed that he was meditating. But whatever he was doing, the act did not last long, for after a while he recovered and directed his hand toward the loaf into which was thrust the ominous misericordia.

Then Yagenka, Hlava, even old Tolima, and all the attendants held the breath in their breasts. The punishment was a hundred times deserved, the vengeance was just, but at the thought that the old man half alive there before them would grope his way to the slaughter of a bound captive, the hearts shuddered in their bosoms.

But he, taking the knife by the middle of the blade, stretched his index finger to the point, so that he might know what it touched, and then he began to cut the cords on the arms of Siegfried.

Wonder seized all, for they understood his wish now, and were unwilling to believe their eyesight. This deed, however, was too much for them. Hlava murmured first, after him Tolima, and then the attendants. But Father Kaleb inquired in a voice broken by irresistible weeping, —

“Brother Yurand, what is your desire? Is it to liberate the prisoner?”

“Yes,” answered Yurand, with a motion of his head.

“Do you wish that he should go unpunished, free of vengeance?”

“Yes!”

The muttering of indignation and of anger increased, but Father Kaleb, not wishing that the unparalleled deed of mercy should be hindered, turned to the murmurers, and cried, —

“Who dares oppose a saint’s will? To your knees!”

And kneeling himself, he began, —

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come —”

And he said the Lord’s prayer to the end. At the words, “and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” his eyes turned involuntarily to Yurand, whose face was brightened really as with light from another world.

And this sight together with the words of the prayer conquered the hearts of all present, for old Tolima, with a soul hardened in endless battles, made the sign of the holy cross, and embraced Yurand’s knees.

“If your will is to be accomplished, lord,” said he, “it is necessary to conduct the prisoner to the boundary.”

“Yes,” nodded Yurand.

Lightning flashed oftener and oftener at the window; the tempest drew nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER LV.

Two horsemen were riding toward the boundary of Spyhov in the wind, and in rain which at moments became a down-pour. These two were Tolima and Siegfried. Tolima was conducting the German lest the peasant guards, or the servants at Spyhov, who were burning with terrible hatred and desire of revenge, might slay him on the road. Siegfried rode without weapons, but unbound. The rain driven by wind was already on them. Now and then when an unexpected thunderclap came, the horses rose on their haunches. The two men rode in silence along a deep valley; often they were so near each other, because of the narrow road, that stirrup struck stirrup. Tolima, accustomed for years to guard captives, looked from moment to moment at Siegfried with watchful eye even then, as if for him it were a question that the captive should not rush away unexpectedly; and each time a quiver passed through him, for it seemed to the old man that the knight's eyes were glittering in the darkness like the eyes of a vampire or an evil spirit. He even thought of making the sign of the cross on him, but remembering that under the sign of the cross he might howl with a voice that was not human, then change, and gnash his teeth, a still greater fear possessed him. The old warrior, who could strike alone on a whole crowd of Germans, as a falcon strikes partridges, was afraid of unclean powers, and had no wish to deal with them. He would have preferred simply to show the road to the German and return, but he was ashamed of himself for this thought, and conducted Siegfried to the boundary.

There, when they reached the edge of the Spyhov forest, an interval in the rain came, and the clouds were brightened by a certain strange yellow light. It grew clearer, and Siegfried's eyes lost their former unearthly gleam. But then another temptation attacked Tolima. "They commanded me," said he to himself, "to conduct to the boundary this mad dog in the greatest security; I have conducted him, but is he to go away untouched by vengeance or punishment, this torturer of my lord and his child? Would it not

be a worthy deed and dear to God to destroy him? Ei! I should like to challenge him to the death. We have no weapons, it is true, but five miles from here, in my lord's house at Vartsimov, they will give the wretch a sword, or an axe, and I will fight with him. God grant me victory and then I will cut him up, as is proper, and bury his head in a dung heap!" So spoke Tolima to himself, and, looking greedily at the German, he moved his nostrils, as if catching the odor of fresh blood. And he was forced to struggle with his desire grievously, to fight with himself sternly, till, remembering that Yurand had granted the prisoner life and freedom, not to the boundary merely, but beyond it, and that if he should slay him the holy act of his lord would be defeated, and the reward for it in heaven be decreased, he overcame himself at last, reined in his horse, and said, —

"Here is our boundary, and to yours it is not distant. Go in freedom; if remorse does not choke thee, and God's thunderbolts do not strike, nothing threatens thee from people!"

Then Tolima turned about, and Siegfried rode on with a certain wild petrification in his face, without answering a word, and as if not hearing that any one had spoken. He went on by a road now wider, and was as if sunk in a dream.

The cessation in the storm was brief, and the clearness of short duration. It grew so dark again that one might have thought that the gloom of night had fallen on the world. The clouds sank almost to the tops of the pine-trees. From above came an ominous growl, and as it were an impatient hiss and the quarrelling of thunders which the angel of the storm was restraining yet. But lightning illuminated from moment to moment with a blinding glitter the awful sky and the terrified earth, and then was to be seen a broad road lying between two black walls of forest; advancing along the middle of that road, was a lone man on horseback. Siegfried rode forward half conscious, devoured by fever. Despair was eating his soul from the time of Rotgier's death; the crimes which he had committed through revenge, the remorse, the terrifying visions, the tortures of his soul had dimmed his mind for a time to such a degree that only with the greatest effort did he defend himself from madness, and even at moments he gave way to it. Recently the toils of the journey, under the firm hand of Hlava, the night passed in the prison of Spyhov, and the

uncertainty of his fate, but above all that unheard-of act of favor and mercy which was almost superhuman, and which simply terrified him,—all these rent the old knight to the last degree. At times thought became torpid and dead in him, so that he lost power of seeing what was happening to him; but again fever roused him, and there rose in the man at once a certain dull feeling of despair, of loss, of ruin,—a feeling that all was now quenched, ended, gone, that a limit of some sort had been reached, that around him was naught but night and nothingness, and, as it were, a kind of ghastly pit filled with terror, to which he must go in every case.

“Go! go!” whispered suddenly some voice at his ear.

He looked around, and saw Death, in the form of a skeleton sitting on a skeleton horse, pushing along at his side there, and rattling his bones.

“Art thou here?” asked the Knight of the Cross.

“I am. Go on! go on!”

And at that moment Siegfried saw that he had a companion on the other side also; stirrup to stirrup with him was riding some kind of thing with a body like that of a man, but with a face that was not human, for the thing had a beast's head with ears standing erect, long, pointed, and covered with black hair.

“Who art thou?” cried Siegfried.

But that thing, instead of an answer, showed its teeth, and growled deeply.

Siegfried closed his eyes, but immediately he heard a louder rattle of bones, and a voice speaking into his very ear.

“It is time! it is time! hurry! go on!”

And he answered, “I go.” But that answer came from his breast as if some one else had given it.

Then, as if pushed by some irresistible force from outside, he dismounted, and removed from his horse the high saddle of a knight, and then the bridle. His companions dismounted also, but did not leave him for the twinkle of an eye; they led him from the middle of the road to the edge of the forest. There the black vampire bent down a limb and then helped him to fasten the reins of the bridle to it.

“Hurry!” whispered Death.

“Hurry!” whispered certain voices from the tree tops.

Siegfried, as it were sunk in sleep, drew the second rein through the buckle, made a halter, and standing on the

saddle, which he had placed under the tree, put the halter around his neck.

“Push away the saddle! — It is done! Aa!”

The saddle pushed by his foot rolled some steps away, and the body of the ill-fated knight hung heavily.

For a flash it seemed to him that he heard some hoarse, repressed roar, that the ghastly vampire rushed at him, shook him, and tore his breast with its teeth, so as to bite the heart in him. But afterward his quenching eyes saw something else: Death dissolved into a kind of white cloud there before him, pushed up to him slowly, embraced, surrounded, enveloped him, and finally covered everything with a ghastly, impenetrable curtain.

At that moment the storm grew wild with immeasurable fury. A thunderbolt struck with an awful explosion in the middle of the road, as if the earth had sunk in its foundations. The whole forest bent under a whirlwind. The roar, the whistle, the noise, the crashing of tree-trunks, and the crack of breaking limbs filled the depth of the forest. Torrents of rain, driven by wind, hid the light, and only during brief bloody lightning-flashes was the corpse of Siegfried visible, whirling wildly above the road.

Next morning a rather numerous escort advanced along that same road. At the head of it rode Yagenka with Anulka and Hlava; behind them were wagons conducted by four attendants armed with swords and crossbows. Each of the drivers had at his side also a spear and an axe, not counting forks and other weapons useful on journeys. These were needful both in defence against wild beasts and robber bands, which raged always along the boundaries of the Order. Against these it was that Yagello complained bitterly to the Grand Master, both in letters and personally in the meetings at Ratsiondzek. But having trained men and defensive weapons, one might be free of fear. The escort advanced, therefore, with self-confidence and boldly.

After the storm came a marvellous day, fresh, calm, and so clear that where there was no shade the eyes of the travellers blinked from excess of light. Not a leaf moved on the trees, and from each leaf hung great drops of rain which glittered with rainbow colors in the sun. Amid the needle-like leaves of the pine, these drops glistened like great diamonds. The downpour of rain had formed on the

road little streams which flowed toward lower places with a gladsome murmur, and formed shallow pools in depressions. The whole region was irrigated, wet, but smiling in the clearness of morning. On such mornings delight seizes man's heart, so the drivers and attendants sang to themselves in low voices, wondering at the silence which reigned among those who were riding before them.

They were silent, for sorrow had settled down in Yagenka's soul. In her life something had come to an end, something was broken; and the girl, though not greatly used to meditation, and unable to explain to herself clearly what was happenin in her mind and what appeared to her, still felt that everything by which she had lived up to that time had failed her, and gone for nothing; that every hope in her had been dissipated, as the morning mist is blown apart on the fields, that she must renounce everything, abandon everything, forget everything, and begin life anew. She thought too that though by the will of God the future would not be altogether bad, still it could not be other than sad, and in no case so good as that might have been which had just ended.

And her heart was pressed by immense sorrow for that past which was now closed forever, and the sorrow rose in a stream of tears to her eyes. But she would not let those tears come, for, in addition to the whole burden which weighed down her soul, she felt shame. She would have preferred never to have left Zgorzelitse rather than return as she was returning then from Spyhov. She had not gone there merely to deprive Stan and Vilk of a reason for attacking Zgorzelitse; this she could not hide from herself. No! This was known also to Matsko, who had not taken her for that reason either, and it would be known surely to Zbyshko. At the latter thought her cheeks burned, bitterness filled her heart. "I was not haughty enough for thee," said she in spirit, "and now I have received what I worked for." And to anxiety, uncertainty of the morrow, regretful sadness and undying sorrow for the past, was joined humiliation.

But the further course of her grievous thoughts was interrupted by some man hurrying to meet them. Hlava, who kept a watchful eye on everything, spurred his horse toward the man, and from the crossbow on his shoulder, his badger-skin bag, and the feathers on his cap, recognized a forester.

"Hei, but who art thou? Halt!" cried he, to make sure.

The man approached quickly, his face full of emotion, as

men's faces are usually when they wish to announce something uncommon.

"There is a man," cried he, "hanging on the road before you!"

Hlava was alarmed lest that might be the work of robbers, and inquired quickly, —

"Is it far from here?"

"The shot of a crossbow — at the very road."

"Is no one with him?"

"No, no one; but I frightened away a wolf which was sniffing him."

The mention of a wolf pacified Hlava, for it showed that there were no people near by, nor any ambush. Meanwhile Yagenka said, —

"See what it is!"

Hlava galloped forward and after a while returned still more quickly.

"Siegfried is hanged!" cried he, reining in his horse before Yagenka.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit! Siegfried? The Knight of the Cross?"

"The Knight of the Cross. He hanged himself with the bridle."

"Hanged himself?"

"It is evident that he did, for the saddle is lying near him. If robbers had done the deed they would have killed the man simply, and taken the saddle, for it is of value."

"How shall we pass?"

"Let us not go that way! let us not go!" cried Anulka, in fear. "Something will catch us."

Yagenka too was frightened a little, for she believed that foul spirits gathered in great crowds around bodies of suicides. But Hlava was daring and felt no fear.

"Oh," said he, "I was near him and even pushed him with a lance, and still I feel no devil on my shoulder."

"Do not blaspheme!" called Yagenka.

"I am not blaspheming," answered Hlava, "but I trust in the power of God. Still, if you are afraid we can go around through the forest."

Anulka begged them to go around, but Yagenka thought a while, and said, —

"Ei, it is not proper to leave a corpse unburied. Burial is a Christian act enjoined by the Lord Jesus. Siegfried was a man in every case."

“True; but a Knight of the Cross, an executioner who hanged himself! Let crows and wolves work at him.”

“Do not say idle words. God will judge him for his sins, but let us do our part. No evil will attach to us if we carry out a pious command.”

“Let it be as you wish,” answered Hlava.

And he gave needful orders to the attendants, who obeyed with disgust and hesitation. But fearing Hlava, with whom dispute was dangerous, they took, in the absence of spades, forks and axes to make a hole in the earth, and went to work. Hlava went with them to give an example, and when he had made a sign of the cross he cut with his own hands the strap by which the corpse was hanging.

Siegfried's face had grown blue in the air and was ghastly, for his eyes were not closed and they had a terrified expression. His mouth was open as if to catch the last breath.

They dug a depression there at his side quickly, and with fork-handles stuffed the body into it, face downward. After they had covered it the attendants sought stones, for the custom was from time immemorial to cover suicides with stones, otherwise they would rise at night and waylay travellers. There were stones enough on the road and among the mosses of the forest. So there soon rose above the Knight of the Cross a tomb, and then Hlava cut out with an axe, on the trunk of the pine-tree, a cross, — which he made, not for Siegfried, but to prevent evil spirits from assembling on that spot, — and then he returned to the company.

“His soul is in hell, but his body is in the earth,” said he to Yagenka; “now we may go.”

And they moved forward. But Yagenka when riding past broke a twig from the pine-tree and threw it on the stones. Following the example of their lady, all the others did in like manner, for custom commanded that also. They rode on a long time in thoughtfulness, thinking of that evil enemy the Knight of the Cross, and the punishment which had overtaken him, till at last Yagenka said, —

“The justice of God does not spare, and it is not proper to say even ‘eternal rest,’ for that man, since there is no rest for him.”

“You have a compassionate heart, since you commanded to bury him,” answered Hlava. And then he added with a certain hesitation: “People say — well not people perhaps,

only wizards and witches — that a rope, or a strap even, on which a man has hanged himself gives luck in all things; but I did not take the strap from Siegfried's neck because for you I expect happiness, not from enchantment, but from the power of the Lord Jesus."

Yagenka made no answer at the moment, and only after a while, when she had sighed a number of times, did she say, as if to herself, —

"Ei! My happiness is behind, not before me!"

CHAPTER LVI.

ONLY on the ninth day after Yagenka had gone did Zbyshko appear on the boundary of Spyhov, but Danusia was so near death then that he had lost every hope of bringing her alive to her father. Next day, when she answered disconnectedly, he saw at once that not merely was her mind shattered, but that her body was seized by sickness of some kind, against which there was no more strength in that child exhausted by captivity, confinement, torment, and continual terror. It may be that the noise of the desperate encounter between Zbyshko, Matsko, and the Germans had overfilled the measure of her fear, and that the sickness had come in that moment. It is enough that fever had not left her from that day till almost the end of the journey. This had been a favoring circumstance thus far, for Zbyshko had brought her like a dead person, without consciousness or knowledge, through the terrible wilderness by means of immense efforts.

After they had passed the wilderness and entered a grain country where there were land-tillers and nobles, toils and dangers were over. When people learned that he was bringing a child of their own race rescued from the Knights of the Order, and moreover a daughter of the famed Yurand, of whom minstrels sang so many songs, in castles, houses, and cottages they outstripped one another in services and assistance. They furnished provisions and horses. All doors stood open. Zbyshko had no further need to carry her in the cradle between horses, for sturdy youths bore her in a litter from village to village with as much care and reverence as if they were bearing a sacred object. Women surrounded her with the tenderest attention. Men, while listening to the narrative of the wrongs wrought on her, gritted their teeth, and more than one of them put his iron armor on straightway and seized his sword, axe, or lance to set out with Zbyshko and avenge "with addition," for it did not seem enough to that stern generation to avenge one wrong by another evenly.

Zbyshko was not thinking at that moment of vengeance, but only of Danusia. He lived amid glimpses of hope when the sick woman seemed better for a moment, and in dull despair when her condition grew worse to appearance. As to the last, he could not deceive himself longer. At the beginning of the journey the superstitious thought flew through his head frequently, that perhaps somewhere in those long, roadless places through which they were passing, Death was following step by step after them, just lurking for the moment to rush at Danusia and suck the remnant of life from her. This vision, or rather this feeling, was so distinct, especially in dark nights, that the desperate wish seized him often to turn back, challenge that vision, as a knight may be challenged, and fight to the last breath with it. But at the end of the road the case was still worse, for he felt Death, not behind, but in the midst of the company; not visible, it is true, but so near that its freezing breath blew around them; and he understood that against such an enemy bravery was of no avail, a strong hand of no use, a weapon of no use, — that he must surrender to that enemy the dearest life as booty, supinely, without a struggle.

And that feeling was of all the most dreadful, for with it was connected a sorrow as irresistible as a whirlwind, as deep as the sea. How was his soul not to groan in Zbyshko, how was it not to be rent with pain when, looking at his beloved, he said to her, as if with involuntary reproach: "Have I loved thee for this, have I sought thee for this, and fought thee free, just to cover thee with earth the day after, and never see thee a second time?" And while speaking thus he gazed at her cheeks blooming with fever, at her dull, wandering eyes, and again he asked: "Wilt thou leave me? Dost thou not grieve? Dost thou prefer to be away from me rather than with me?" And then he thought that there might be disorder in his own head; his breast rose with immensely great weeping, which rose but could not burst forth, since a certain rage was barring the way to it, and a certain anger at the merciless, cold, and blind power which had unfolded itself above that guiltless woman. Had that evil Knight of the Cross been present there then, Zbyshko would have torn him asunder in the manner of a wild beast.

When they reached the hunting-lodge he wished to halt there, but it was deserted during autumn. From the guards he learned, moreover, that Prince Yanush had gone to his

brother at Plotsk and taken the princess; he abandoned his plan, therefore, of visiting Warsaw, where the court physician might save the sick woman. He must go to Spyhov, and to him this was terrible, for he thought that all was ending, and that he would take only a corpse home to Yurand.

But just a few hours of road before Spyhov a brighter ray of hope struck his heart again. Danusia's cheeks grew pale, her eyes became less dull, her breath, not so loud, was less hurried. Zbyshko saw this at once and soon commanded the last halt so that she might rest the more quietly. They were about five miles from Spyhov, far from human dwellings, on a narrow road between a field and a meadow. But a wild pear-tree standing near-by offered shelter from the sunrays; they halted, therefore, under its branches. The attendants dismounted and unbridled their horses, so that the beasts might eat grass more easily. Two women occupied in serving Danusia, and the youths who carried her, wearied by the road and by heat, lay down in the shade and fell asleep quickly. Zbyshko alone watched at the litter, and sitting on the roots of the pear-tree did not take his eyes from the sick woman.

She lay there in the afternoon silence, motionless, with closed eyelids. But to Zbyshko it seemed that she was not sleeping. Indeed, when at the other end of the broad meadow a man who was mowing stopped and began to sharpen his scythe with a whetstone, she quivered slightly, opened her eyes for an instant, and closed them; her breast rose as if with a deeper breathing, and from her lips came a barely audible whisper, —

“Sweet flowers.”

Those were the first words not feverish and not wandering which she had uttered since the beginning of the journey; indeed from the meadow warmed by the sun the breeze brought a really strong perfume, in which were felt hay and honey with various fragrant plants. So Zbyshko's heart trembled from delight at the thought that consciousness was returning to the sick woman.

In his first rapture he wished to cast himself at her feet, but fear that he might frighten her restrained him, and he only knelt at the litter, bent over her, and said quietly, —

“Danusia! Danusia!”

She opened her eyes, looked at him some time, then a smile brightened her features, and she said “Zbyshko,” just as she had in the tarburners' hut, but with far greater con-

sciousness. And she tried to stretch her hands to him, but failed because of surpassing weakness; he put his arms around her with a heart as full as if he were thanking her for some immense favor.

“Thou hast come to thyself,” said he. “Oh, praise to God — to God —”

Then his voice failed him, and for some time they looked at each other in silence. The silence of the field was broken only by the fragrant meadow-breeze which murmured among the leaves of the pear-tree, the chirping of crickets in the grass, and the distant, indistinct singing of the mower.

Danusia gazed with growing consciousness and did not cease smiling, just like a child that in its sleep sees an angel. But in her eyes began now to appear a certain wonder.

“Where am I?” asked she.

Then a whole swarm of brief answers, interrupted through delight, broke from Zbyshko’s lips, —

“Thou art with me! Near Spyhov. We are going to thy father. Thy misfortune is ended. Oi! my Danusia! Danusia! I sought thee and redeemed thee in battle. Thou art not in German power now. Have no fear of that! We shall soon be in Spyhov. Thou hast been ill, but the Lord Jesus had mercy. How much pain there was, how much weeping! Danusia! — Now it is well! — There is nothing before thee but happiness. Ei, how I have searched, how I have wandered! — Ei, mighty God! — Ei!”

And he drew a deep breath, but almost with a groan, as if he had thrown the last weight of pain from his heart.

Danusia lay quietly, recalling to herself something, pondering something, till at last she asked, —

“Then thou didst not forget me?”

And two tears which had gathered in her eyes rolled down her face slowly to the pillow.

“I forget thee!” exclaimed Zbyshko.

There was in that restrained exclamation more force than in the greatest vows and declarations, for he had loved her with his whole soul at all times, and from the moment when he had found her she was dearer than the whole world to him.

Meanwhile silence came again; only, in the distance the mower stopped singing and began to whet his scythe a second time.

Danusia’s lips moved again, but with a whisper so low that Zbyshko could not hear it; so, bending down, he inquired, —

“What dost thou say, berry?”

And she repeated,—

“Sweet flowers.”

“We are at a meadow,” answered he, “but soon we shall go to thy father, who is freed from captivity also. And thou wilt be mine till death. Dost hear me well, dost understand?”

With that, great alarm racked him, for he noted that her face was growing paler, and that small drops of sweat were coming out on it thickly.

“What is the matter?” asked he, in desperate fear.

He felt the hair rising on his head, and cold passing through his bones.

“What troubles thee? Tell!” repeated he.

“Darkness!” whispered she.

“Darkness? The sun is shining, and does it seem dark to thee?” asked he, with panting voice. “Just now thou wert speaking reasonably. In God’s name, say one word even!”

She moved her lips again, but could not even whisper. Zbyshko divined only that she was uttering his name, that she was calling him. Immediately after that her emaciated hands began to tremble, and hop on the rug with which she was covered. That lasted a moment. There was no cause for mistake then — she was dying!

But terrified and in despair, Zbyshko fell to imploring her, as if a prayer could do anything, —

“Danusia! O merciful Jesus! — Wait even to Spyhov! Wait! wait! O Jesus! O Jesus! O Jesus!”

While he implored thus the women woke, and the attendants ran up; they had been at a distance near the horses in the meadow. But understanding with the first cast of the eye what was happening, they knelt and began to repeat aloud the Litany.

The breeze stopped, the leaves ceased to rustle on the pear-tree, and only words of prayer were heard amid the great silence of the meadow.

Danusia, before the very end of the Litany, opened her eyes once more, as if wishing to look for the last time on Zbyshko and the world of the sun; next moment she dropped into the sleep of eternity.

The women closed her eyelids and then went to the meadow for flowers. The attendants followed; and they moved in sunshine, among abundant grass, like spirits of the field, bending down from moment to moment and weeping,

for in their hearts they had pity. Zbyshko knelt in the shadow at the litter, with his head on Danusia's knees, without a movement or a word; he was as if dead himself, but they circled about, now nearer, now more distant, plucking the yellow marigolds, the white pimpernel, the thickly growing rosy sorrel, and white flowers with the odor of honey. In damp depressions they found also lilies of the valley, and broom on the green ridge next the fallow land. When they had each an armful they surrounded the litter in a mournful circle and strewed flowers and plants on the remains of the dead woman, leaving exposed only her face, which amid the lilies looked white, calm, at rest in a sleep that could not be broken; the face was serene and simply angelic.

To Spyhov it was not quite five miles; so after some time, when sadness and pain had passed with their tears, they raised the litter and moved toward the pine forest from which the lands of Spyhov began.

The attendants led the horses after the procession. Zbyshko himself helped to carry the litter in front, and the women, laden with bundles of plants and flowers, preceded, singing pious hymns; they advanced slowly between the green meadow and the level, gray, fallow land, like any procession of mourners.

On the blue sky there was not the slightest cloud, and the whole world was nestling in golden sunlight.

CHAPTER LVII.

THEY came at last with the remains of Danusia to the pine forests of Spyhov, at the edge of which Yurand's armed guards stood night and day watching. One of these hurried off with the news to old Tolima and Father Kaleb; others conducted the procession by what was at first a winding and sunken, but later a broad forest roadway, till they reached the place where trees ended, and open, wet lands began, and sticky morasses swarming with water-birds; beyond these quagmires on a dry elevation stood Yurand's fortress. They saw at once that the sad tidings concerning them had reached Spyhov, for barely had they emerged from the shade of the pine woods onto the bright open plain when to their ears came the sound of a bell from the fortress chapel. Soon after, they saw many people, men and women, coming toward them from a distance. When this company had approached to a point within two or three bow-shots Zbyshko could distinguish persons. At the head of the procession walked Yurand himself, supported by Tolima, and feeling with a staff out in front of his body. It was easy to distinguish the master of Spyhov by his immense stature, by the red pits in place of eyes, and by the white hair which fell to his shoulders. At his side in a white surplice, and holding a cross in his hand, walked Father Kaleb. Behind them was borne a banner with Yurand's ensign; with it moved the armed "warriors" of Spyhov, and behind them married women with veils on their heads, and young girls with hair hanging loose on their shoulders. In the rear of the procession was a wagon on which they were to place the remains of Danusia.

On seeing Yurand, Zbyshko commanded to put down the litter, — he himself was carrying the end next the head, — then he approached Yurand and cried in that terrible voice with which immense pain and despair express themselves, —

“ I sought her till I found her and freed her, but she preferred God to Spyhov.”

And pain broke him utterly, for he fell on Yurand's breast, embraced him, and groaned out, —

“ O Jesus! O Jesus! O Jesus! ”

At this sight the hearts of the armed attendants were enraged, and they fell to beating their shields with their spears, not knowing how to express in another way their pain and their desire for vengeance. The women raised a lament, they wailed one louder than another, they put their aprons to their eyes, or covered their heads with them altogether, and called in heaven-piercing voices: “ Ei! misfortune! misfortune! For thee there is gladness, for us only weeping. Ei! misfortune! Death has cut thee down! The Skeleton has seized thee! Oi! oi! ” — while some of them, bending their heads backward and closing their eyes, cried: “ Was it evil for thee with us, O dearest flower; was it evil? Thy father is left in great mourning, while thou art there in God's chambers! Oi! oi! ” Others again told the dead woman that she had not pitied her father or her husband in their tears and loneliness. And this wail of theirs and this weeping were expressed in a half chant, for those people could not express their pain otherwise.

At last Yurand, withdrawing from Zbyshko's arms, reached out his staff in sign that he wished to go to Danusia. That moment Tolima and Zbyshko caught him by the arms and led him to the litter; there he knelt by the body, passed his hand over it from the forehead to the hands of his dead daughter, which were crossed, and he inclined his head repeatedly, as if to say that that was his Danusia and no other, that he knew his own child. Then he embraced her with one arm, and the other, which had no hand, he raised upward; all present answered in the same way, and that dumb complaint before God was more eloquent than any words of sorrow. Zbyshko, whose face after the momentary outburst grew again perfectly rigid, knelt on the other side, silent, resembling a stone statue; round about it became so still that the chirping of the field crickets was heard and the buzz of each passing fly.

At last Father Kaleb sprinkled Danusia, Zbyshko, and Yurand with holy water, and began “ *Requiem æternam.* ” After the hymn he prayed aloud a long time; during the prayer it seemed to the people that they heard the voice of a prophet, for he begged that the torture of that innocent

woman might be the drop which would overflow the measure of injustice, and that the day of judgment, wrath, punishment, and terror would come.

Then they moved toward Spyhov; but they did not place Dansasia on the wagon, they bore her in front of the procession on the litter strewn with flowers. The bell ceased not to toll, it seemed to summon and invite them; and they moved on across the broad plain singing in the immense golden light, as if the departed were conducting them really to endless glory and brightness. It was evening, and the flocks had returned from the fields when they arrived. The chapel, in which they laid the remains, was gleaming from torches and lighted tapers. At command of Father Kaleb seven young girls repeated in succession the litany over the body till daylight. Zbyshko did not leave Dansasia till morning, and at matins he placed her in a coffin which skilled workmen had cut out of an oak-tree in the night-time, and put a plate of gold-colored amber in the lid above her forehead.

Yurand was not present, for strange things had happened to him. Immediately after reaching home he lost power in his feet, and when they placed him on the bed he lost movement as well as consciousness of where he was and what was taking place there. In vain did Father Kaleb speak to him; in vain did he ask what his trouble was. Yurand heard not, he understood not; but lying on his back, he raised the lids of his empty eyepits and smiled with a face transfixed and happy, and at times he moved his lips, as if speaking with some person. The priest and Tolima thought that he was conversing with his rescued daughter, and smiling at her. They thought also that he was dying, and that with the sight of his soul he was gazing at his own eternal happiness, but in this they were mistaken, for, deprived of feeling and deaf to all things, he smiled whole weeks in the same way. Zbyshko, when he set out at last with the ransom for Matsko, left his father-in-law in life yet.

CHAPTER LVIII.

AFTER the burial of Danusia Zbysnko was not confined to his bed, but he lived in torpor. For a few days at first he was not in such an evil condition: he walked about, he conversed with his dead bride, he visited Yurand and sat near him. He told the priest of Matsko's captivity, and they decided to send Tolima to Prussia and Malborg, to learn where the old knight was and ransom him, paying at the same time for Zbyshko the sum agreed on with Arnold von Baden and his brother. In the cellars of Spyhov there was no lack of silver, which Yurand in his time had received from his lands or had captured, so Father Kaleb supposed that the Knights if they received the money would liberate the old man without trouble, and would not require the young knight to appear in person.

"Go to Plotsk," said the priest to Tolima at starting, "and take from the prince there a letter of safe conduct. Otherwise the first comtur on the way will rob and imprison thee."

"Oh! I know them myself," said Tolima. "They are able to rob even those who have letters."

And he went his way. But Father Kaleb was sorry, soon after, that he had not sent Zbyshko. He had feared, it is true, that in the first moments of suffering the young man would not be able to conduct himself in the way needed, or that he might burst out against the Knights of the Cross and expose himself to peril; he knew also that it would be difficult for him to leave immediately the tomb of the beloved with his recent loss and fresh sorrow, and just after such a terrible and painful journey as that which he had made from Gotteswerder to Spyhov. But later he was sorry that he had taken all this into consideration, for Zbyshko had grown duller day by day. He had lived till Danusia's death in dreadful effort, he had used all his strength desperately: he had ridden to the ends of the earth, he had fought, he had saved his wife, he had passed through wild forests;

and on a sudden all was ended as if some one had cut it off with a sword-stroke, and naught was left but the knowledge that what he had done had been done in vain, that his toils had been useless, — that in truth they had passed, but with them a part of his life had gone; hope had gone, good had gone, loving had perished, and nothing was left to him. Every man lives in the morrow, every man plans somewhat and lays aside one or another thing for use in the future, but for Zbyshko to-morrow had become valueless; as to the future, he had the same kind of feeling that Yagenka had had, while riding out of Spyhov, when she said, “My happiness is behind, not before me.” But, besides, in his soul that feeling of helplessness, emptiness, misfortune, and evil fate had risen on the ground of great pain and of ever-increasing grief for Danusia. That grief penetrated him, mastered him, and at the same time was ever stiffening in him. So at last there was no place in Zbyshko’s heart for another feeling. Hence he thought of it only; he nursed it in himself and lived with it solely, insensible to everything else, shut up in himself, sunk, as it were, in a half dream, oblivious of all that was happening around him. All the powers of his soul and his body, his former activity and valor, dropped into quiescence. In his look and movements there appeared a kind of senile heaviness. Whole days and nights he sat, either in the vault with Danusia’s coffin, or before the house, warming himself in sunlight during the hours after midday. At times he so forgot himself that he did not answer questions. Father Kaleb, who loved him, began to fear that pain might consume the man as rust consumes iron, and with sadness he thought that perhaps it would have been better to send him away, even to the Knights of the Cross, with a ransom.

“It is necessary,” said he to the sexton, with whom in the absence of other men he spoke of his own troubles, “that some adventure should pull him, as a storm pulls a tree, otherwise he may perish utterly.” And the sexton answered wisely by giving the comparison, that when a man is choking with a bone it is best to give him a good thump behind the shoulders.

No adventure came, but a few weeks later Pan de Lorche appeared unexpectedly. The sight of him roused Zbyshko, for it reminded him of the expedition among the Jmud men and the rescue of Danusia. De Lorche did not hesitate in the least to rouse these painful memories. On the contrary, when he learned of Zbyshko’s loss he went at once to

pray with him above Danusia's coffin, and spoke of her unceasingly. Being himself half a minstrel, he composed a hymn for her which he sang with a lute, at night, near the grating of the vault, so tenderly and with such sadness that Zbyshko, though he did not understand the words, was seized by great weeping which lasted till the daylight following.

Wearied by sorrow, by weeping and watching, he fell into a deep sleep; and when he woke it was clear that pain had flowed away with his tears, for he was brighter than on preceding days, and seemed more active. He was greatly pleased with Pan de Lorche, and thanked him for coming; afterward he inquired how he had learned of his misfortune.

De Lorche answered, through Father Kaleb, that he had received the first tidings of Danusia's death in Lubav, from old Tolima, whom he had seen there in the prison of the comtur, but that he would have come to Spyhov in every case to yield himself to Zbyshko.

News of Tolima's imprisonment made a great impression on the priest and on Zbyshko; they understood that the ransom was lost, for there was nothing more difficult on earth than to snatch from the Knights of the Cross money once seized by them. In view of this it was necessary to go with ransom a second time.

"Woe!" cried Zbyshko. "Now my poor uncle is waiting there and thinking that I have forgotten him. I must go with all speed to my uncle."

Then he turned to De Lorche, —

"Dost know how it has come out? Dost know that he is in the hands of the Knights of the Order?"

"I know, for I saw him in Malborg, and that is why I have come hither."

Father Kaleb fell now to complaining, —

"We have acted badly, but no one had a head. I expected more wisdom from Tolima. Why did he not go to Plotsk, instead of rushing in without a letter among those robbers?"

At this De Lorche shrugged his shoulders, —

"What are letters to them? Or are the wrongs few which the Prince of Plotsk, as well as your prince, has suffered? On the boundary attacks and battles never cease, for your men, too, are unforgiving. Every comtur then, what! every voit, does as he pleases, and in robbery one merely outstrips another."

“All the more should Tolima have gone to Plotsk.”

“He wanted to do so, but they seized him near the boundary on this side in the night-time. They would have killed him if he had not said that he was taking money to Lubav for the comtur. In this way he saved himself, but now the comtur will produce witnesses to show that Tolima made that declaration.”

“But Uncle Matsko, is he well? Are they threatening his life there?” inquired Zbyshko.

“He is well,” answered De Lorche. “Hatred against ‘King’ Vitold, and against those who helped the Jmud men, is great, and surely they would have slain the old knight were it not that they do not wish to lose the ransom. The brothers von Baden defended him for the same cause, and finally the Chapter are concerned about my head; were they to sacrifice that, they would rouse the knighthood of Guelders, Burgundy, and Flanders. Ye know that I am kin to the Count of Guelders.”

“But why are they concerned about thy head?” interrupted Zbyshko, in wonder.

“Because I was captured by thee. I said the following in Malborg: If ye take the life of the old knight of Bogdanets, his nephew will take my head.”

“I will not take it! so help me God!”

“I know that thou wilt not, but they are afraid that thou wilt, and Matsko will be safe therefore. They answered me that thou wert in captivity also, for the Von Badens let thee go on thy word of a knight, therefore that I had no need to go to thee. But I answered, that thou wert free when I was captured.—And I have come to thee! While I am in thy hands, they will do nothing to thee or Matsko. Do thou pay the Von Badens thy ransom, and for me demand twice or thrice as much. They must pay. I do not say this because I think that I am of more value than thou art, but to punish their greed, which is despicable. Once I had quite a different opinion, but now they and life among them have disgusted me completely. I will go to the Holy Land to seek adventures there, for I will not serve among the Knights of the Cross any longer.”

“Oh, stay with us, lord,” said Father Kaleb. “And I think that thou wilt, for it does not seem to me that they will ransom thee.”

“If they will not pay, I will pay myself. I am here with a considerable escort. I have laden wagons, and that which is in them will suffice.”

Father Kaleb repeated these words to Zbyshko. Matsko surely would not have been indifferent to them; but Zbyshko was a young man and thought little of property.

"On my honor," said he, "it will not be as thou sayst. Thou hast been to me both friend and brother; for thee I will take no ransom."

Then they embraced each other, feeling that a new bond had been secured between them. De Lorche smiled, and said, —

"Let it be so. Only let not the Germans know of this, for they will tremble about Matsko. And they must pay, for they will fear that if they do not I shall declare at Western courts and among the knighthood that they are glad to see foreign guests, and as it were invite them and are pleased at their arrival; but when a guest falls into captivity they forget him. And the Order needs men greatly at this moment, for Vitold is to them a terror, and still more are the Poles and King Yagello."

"Then let it be in this way," said Zbyshko. "Thou wilt stay here or wherever thou wishest in Mazovia, and I will go to Malborg for my uncle, and will feign tremendous animosity against thee."

"Do so, by Saint George!" answered De Lorche. "But first listen to what I tell thee. In Malborg they say that the King of Poland is to visit Plotsk and meet the Grand Master there or in some place upon the boundary. Knights of the Order desire this meeting greatly, for they wish to note whether the king will help Vitold, should he declare war against them openly for the Jmud land.

"Ah! they are as cunning as serpents, but in Vitold they have found their master. The Order is afraid of him, for never does it know what he is planning, or what he may work out. 'He gave Jmud to us,' say they in the Chapter, 'but by this land he holds a sword above our heads, as it were, continually. Let him utter one word,' say they, 'and rebellion is ready.' In fact, that is the case. I must go to Vitold's court when I can. Maybe it will happen me to fight in the lists there, and besides, I have heard that women of that region are of angelic beauty sometimes."

"Thou hast spoken of the coming of the Polish king to Plotsk?" said Father Kaleb.

"I have. Let Zbyshko attach himself to the royal escort. The Grand Master wishes to win Yagello and will refuse him nothing. Ye know that when the need comes no men can

be more humble than the Knights of the Cross are. Let Zbyshko be of the king's retinue, and let him claim his own; let him complain as loudly as is possible against the evil doings of the Order. The Germans will listen differently in presence of the king, and in presence of Cracow knights, who are famous everywhere, and whose decisions are widely current in the world of knighthood."

"Excellent advice! by the Cross of the Lord, it is excellent!" exclaimed Father Kaleb.

"It is!" confirmed De Lorche. "And opportunity will not be lacking. I heard in Malborg that there will be feasts and tournaments, for foreign knights will surely wish to meet the knights of Poland. As God is true! Juan of Aragon is coming; he is the greatest knight of all in Christendom. Do ye not know that from Aragon he sent his gauntlet to your Zavisha, so that it should not be said in foreign courts that there is on earth another man who is his equal?"

The arrival of De Lorche, the sight of him, and conversation with the man so roused Zbyshko from that painful torpor in which he had been buried, that he listened to the news with curiosity. Of Juan of Aragon he knew, for it was the duty of every knight in that age to know and recollect the names of all who were most renowned as champions; the fame of the nobles of Aragon, especially of Juan, had passed through every Christian land. No knight had ever equalled him inside barriers; the Moors fled at the very sight of his armor; and the opinion was universal that he was the greatest knight in Christendom.

At this news, therefore, the warlike, knightly soul of Zbyshko responded, and he asked very eagerly, —

"Did he challenge Zavisha Charny?"

"It is about a year since the gauntlet came and Zavisha sent his own to Aragon."

"Then will Juan come surely?"

"It is not known whether he will come, but there are reports that he will. The Knights of the Order have sent him an invitation long ago."

"God grant us to see such things."

"God grant!" said De Lorche. "And though Zavisha should be killed, as may happen easily, it is great glory for him that such a man as Juan of Aragon challenged him; nay, honor for thy whole people."

"We shall see!" answered Zbyshko. "I only say, 'God grant us to see such things.'"

“And I add my voice.”

But their wish was not to be accomplished then; for the old chroniclers relate that the duel of Zavisha with the renowned Juan of Aragon took place only some years later in Perpignan, where in presence of the Emperor Sigismund, Pope Benedict XIII., the King of Aragon, and many princes and cardinals, Zavisha Charny of Garbov hurled down from his horse with the first touch of his lance his opponent, and won a famous victory. Meanwhile both Zbyshko and De Lorche comforted their hearts, for they thought that even if Juan of Aragon could not appear at that time, they would see famous deeds of knighthood, for champions were not lacking in Poland who were little inferior to Zavisha, and among the guests of the Order it was possible at all times to find the foremost men in wielding weapons from France, England, Burgundy, and Italy, — men ready to struggle for the mastery with every comer.

“Hear me,” said Zbyshko to Pan de Lorche. “It is irksome to me without my Uncle Matsko, I am in a hurry now to ransom him, so I will start for Plotsk to-morrow. But why shouldst thou stay here? If thou art my captive, come with me, and thou wilt see Yagello and the Polish court.”

“I desired to ask this of thee,” said De Lorche, “for I have long wished to see the Polish knights, and besides I have heard that the ladies of the royal court are more like angels than dwellers in this earthly vale.”

“A little while ago thou didst say something like this of Vitold’s court,” remarked Zbyshko.

CHAPTER LIX.

ZBYSHKO had said to himself in spirit reproachfully that while suffering he had forgotten his uncle. And since he was accustomed in every case to accomplish quickly whatever he had planned, he set out with De Lorche for Plotsk the next morning. Roads at the boundary even in time of greatest peace were full of peril because numerous ruffian bands were upheld there by the Knights of the Order, and attended by their fostering care. With this King Yagello reproached them keenly. In spite of complaints which were supported in Rome even, in spite of threats and stern measures of justice, the neighboring comturs often permitted their hirelings to join robber bands, disowning, it is true, those who had the ill fate to fall into Polish hands, but giving refuge to those who returned with booty and prisoners, not only in villages of the Order, but also in castles.

Into robber hands of just this kind did travellers fall frequently and also inhabitants near the border, and especially were children of wealthy parents snatched away for the sake of ransom. But the two young knights, having considerable retinues, composed each, besides wagoners, of a number of armed footmen and mounted attendants, did not fear attack, and reached Plotsk without adventure; there a pleasant surprise met them immediately on their arrival.

At the inn they found Tolima, who had come a day earlier. It had happened in this way: the starosta of the Order at Lubav, hearing that Tolima, when attacked near Brodnitsa, had succeeded in hiding a portion of the ransom, sent him back to that castle with an order to the comtur to force him to show where the money was hidden. Tolima made use of that circumstance and fled. When the knights wondered that he had succeeded so easily, he explained the affair to them as follows: "It was all through their greed. The comtur at Brodnitsa would not send a more numerous guard with me, for he did not wish to make a noise about the money. Perhaps he had agreed with the man of Lubav to divide, and

they thought if there was noise they would have to send a large part to Malborg, or give those Von Badens all thou didst remit to them. So he sent only two guards to take me, — one a confidential man at arms, who had to row with me on the Drventsa, and some kind of scribe. Since they wished no one to see us, they sent us at nightfall, and ye know that the boundary is near by there. They gave me an oar of oak — well — and God's favor, for here I am in Plotsk."

"I know, but did not the others return?" called out Zbyshko.

A savage smile lighted Tolima's face.

"The Drventsa flows always into the Vistula," said he. "How could they return against the current? The Knights of the Cross will find them perhaps in Torun."

After a while he added, turning to Zbyshko, —

"The comtur of Lubav took from me a part of the money, but that which I hid when attacked I recovered, and have given it, lord, to thy attendant for keeping; he lives in the castle with the prince, and it is safer in his hands than with me in the inn here."

"Then is my attendant in Plotsk? What is he doing?" inquired Zbyshko, with wonder.

"He, after bringing Siegfried, went away with that young lady who was at Spyhov and is now in waiting on the princess here. As I told thee."

But Zbyshko, dazed by his grief for Danusia, had not inquired and knew nothing. Now he remembered that Hlava had been sent away in advance with Siegfried; and while recalling this his heart was straitened with sorrow, and with desire for vengeance.

"True," said he. "But where is that executioner? What has happened to him?"

"Did not Father Kaleb tell? Siegfried hanged himself, and you have passed his grave in coming hither."

A moment of silence followed.

"Hlava said that he was going to you, and he would have gone long ago, but he was forced to guard the young lady, who fell ill here after coming from Spyhov."

"What young lady?" inquired Zbyshko, shaking himself out of painful remembrances, as if out of a dream.

"Why, that one, your sister or kinswoman who came with the knight Matsko to Spyhov in a man's dress, and found our lord groping along on the highway. Without her, neither the knight Matsko nor your attendant would have recog-

nized our lord Yurand. Our lord loved her greatly after that, for she took as much care of him as would a daughter, and she was the only one except Father Kaleb who understood him."

The young knight opened his eyes widely with astonishment.

"Father Kaleb told me nothing of a young lady, and I have no kinswoman."

"He did not tell, since you forgot everything through pain. You knew not God's world."

"And what is the name of that young lady?"

"Yagenka."

It seemed to Zbyshko that he was dreaming. The idea that Yagenka could come from distant Zgorzelitse to Spyhov had not occurred to him. Why should she come? It was no secret that the girl was glad to see him and was attached to him in Zgorzelitse, but he had told her that he was to marry Danusia; in view of this he could not suppose in any case that Matsko would bring her to Spyhov with the intent to give her to him in marriage. Besides, neither Matsko nor Hlava had mentioned her. Hence all this seemed to him wonderfully strange and beyond explanation, so he fell to overwhelming Tolima with questions like a man who cannot believe his own ears and desires that incredible news be repeated.

Tolima could not tell him more than he had told already, but he went to the castle to look for Hlava, and soon, before sunset, returned with him. The Cheh greeted his young master gladly but also with sorrow, for he had heard of everything which had happened in Spyhov. Zbyshko also was glad from his whole soul, feeling that Hlava had a faithful and friendly heart, one of those which a man needs most in misfortune. He grew tender and sorrowful in telling of Danusia's death, and Hlava shared his sorrow, pain, and tears, just as a brother might share them with a brother. All this lasted long, especially as at the prayer of Zbyshko Pan de Lorche repeated for them that morning hymn which he had composed about the dead woman, and sang it to the sound of a cithara at the open window, raising his eyes and his face toward the stars.

At last they were relieved considerably, and then spoke of affairs awaiting them in Plotsk.

"I have taken this road to Malborg," said Zbyshko, "for thou knowest that my uncle is a captive, and I am going to him with ransom."

"I know," replied Hlava. "You have done well, lord; I wished myself to go to Spyhov to advise you to come hither. King Yagello will have a meeting in Ratsiondz with the Grand Master; near the king it will be easier to make a claim, because in presence of majesty the Knights of the Cross are not so haughty, and they feign Christian honesty."

"Tolima told me that thou hadst the wish to go to Spyhov, but the ill health of Yagenka, Zyh's daughter, detained thee. I hear that Uncle Matsko brought her to these regions, and that she was in Spyhov. I wonder greatly at this. Tell me, why did my uncle take her from Zgorzelitse?"

"There were many reasons. The knight Matsko was afraid that if he left her without protection the knights Vilk and Stan would fall on Zgorzelitse, and injustice be inflicted on the younger children. Her absence, as you know, was better than her presence, for in Poland it happens that a noble takes a girl by force if he cannot get her otherwise, but no one would raise a hand on little orphans; the sword of an executioner prevents that, and infamy severer than a sword. But there was another reason: the abbot died and made the young lady heiress to his lands over which the bishop here has care. Therefore knight Matsko brought the lady here to Plotsk."

"But did he take her to Spyhov?"

"He took her during the absence of the bishop and the prince and princess, for there was no one with whom to leave her. And it is well that he took her to Spyhov, for had the young lady not been with us, we should have passed the lord Yurand as a strange old beggar. It was only when the lady pitied him that we discovered who the old beggar was. The Lord God arranged this all through her pitying heart."

And he told how Yurand afterwards could not live without her, how he loved and blessed her; and though Zbyszhko knew this already from Tolima, he listened to that narrative with emotion, and with gratefulness to Yagenka.

"God give her health!" said he at last. "But it is a wonder to me that ye did not mention her."

Hlava was a little troubled, and wished to gain time to think over the answer, and asked, —

"Where, lord?"

"With Skirvoillo, off there in the Jmud land."

"Did we not say anything? As I live! It seems to me

that we said something, but there were other thoughts in your head."

"Ye said that Yurand had returned, but not a word of Yagenka."

"Ei! have you not forgotten? But God alone knows! Perhaps the knight Matsko thought that I spoke of her to you, and I thought that he spoke. To tell you anything at that time, lord, would have been the same as not to tell. And no wonder! Now it is different. Luckily the lady is in Plotsk; she will be of service to the knight Matsko."

"What can she do?"

"Just let her say one word to the princess, Alexandra, who loves her greatly! The Knights of the Cross refuse nothing to the princess, for, first, she is the king's own sister, and, second, she is a great friend of the Order. Now, as you have heard, perhaps, Prince Skirgello (the king's brother) has risen up against Vitold, and fled to the Knights of the Cross, who wish to assist him and put him in the place of Vitold. The king is very fond of the princess, and lends his ear to her gladly, as they say; so the Knights of the Order wish that she should incline the king to the side of Skirgello against Vitold. They understand, their mother is in hell! that could they be free of Vitold, they would be at rest. Therefore the envoys of the Order are bowing down before the princess from morning until evening, and try to divine every wish of hers."

"Yagenka loves my uncle greatly, and will take his part," said Zbyshko.

"Be sure of that. She will not do otherwise. But go, lord, to the castle, and tell her how to act and what to say."

"I am going with Pan de Lorche to the castle, in any case. I came here for that purpose. We have only to curl our hair now, and dress befittingly."

After a while he added, —

"I intended to cut my hair in mourning, but forgot to do so."

"It is better as it is," said Hlava.

He stepped out to summon the attendants, and returned with them while the two young knights were arraying themselves properly for the evening banquet at the castle, then he narrated further what was happening at the courts of the king and the prince.

"The Knights of the Order," said he, "undermine Vitold with all their power; for while he is alive and rules a power-

ful country at commission of the king, they can know no peace. In fact, he is the only man they fear. Hei! they are digging and digging, like moles! They have roused against him already the prince and princess here, and people say that even Prince Yanush bears anger against him because of Vizna."

"But have Prince Yanush and Princess Anna Danuta come also?" inquired Zbyshko. "There will be a multitude of people here whom I know; I am not in Plotsk now for the first time."

"Yes," answered Hlava, "they are both here; they have many affairs with the Knights of the Order, which they will bring up against the Grand Master in presence of the king."

"Well, and the king, on whose side is he? Is he not angry at the Knights, and does he not shake his sword above them?"

"The king does not like the Knights of the Order, and they say that he has been threatening them with war this long time. As to Vitold, the king prefers him to his own brother, Skirgello, who is a drunkard and a whirlwind. And therefore the knights who attend his Majesty say that the king will not declare against Vitold, and will not promise the Order not to help him. This may be true, for during some days past Princess Alexandra is very attentive to the king and seems in some way anxious."

"Has Zavisha Charny come?"

"He has not, but a man cannot take his eyes from those here already, and should there be war— Mighty God! chips and splinters will fly from the Germans!"

"It is not I who will pity them."

A few Our Fathers later, they were in splendid dress and on the way to the castle. The evening feast that day was to be, not at the prince's palace, but at the house of the city starosta, Andrei of Yasenets, whose spacious mansion stood within the castle walls at the Greater Bastion. Because of the wonderful night, which was almost too warm, the starosta, fearing lest the air might be too sultry in the chambers, commanded to set the tables in the court, where between the stone flags grew yew and service trees. Burning tar kegs illuminated the place with a clear yellow light, but clearer still were the rays of the moon, which on a cloudless sky, amid swarms of stars, shone like the silver shield of a champion. The crowned guests had not appeared yet, but there was a throng already

of the local knighthood, of clergy and of courtiers, both of the king and the princes. Zbyshko knew many of them, especially those of Prince Yanush, and of his former acquaintances of Cracow: he saw Kron of Koziglove, Lis of Targovisko, Martsin of Vrotsimovitse, Domarat of Kobylany, and Stashko of Harbimovitse, and finally Povala of Tachev, the sight of whom pleased him specially, for he remembered the kindness which that famous knight had shown him formerly.

But he was unable to approach any man immediately, for the local knighthood of Mazovia had surrounded each of them in a close circle, inquiring of Cracow, of the court, of the amusements, of various warlike excellencies, gazing meanwhile at their brilliant dresses, their hair, the splendid curls of which were rubbed with the white of eggs to give consistency, taking from them models of manners and politeness in everything.

But Povala recognized Zbyshko, and, pushing aside the Mazovians, he approached him.

"I know thee, young man," said he, pressing his hand. "How art thou, and whence hast thou come? God bless me! I see a belt and spurs on thee. Other men wait for these till gray hairs, but thou, it seems, art serving Saint George most worthily."

"God give you happiness, noble lord!" answered Zbyshko. "Had I hurled down from his horse the best German, I should not be so glad as I am to see you in health at this moment."

"I am glad to see thee. But where is thy father?"

"That was my uncle, not my father. He is a captive among the Knights of the Cross, and I am going with ransom to release him."

"And that maiden who put a veil on thee?"

Zbyshko made no answer, he only raised his eyes, which filled with tears in one moment, seeing which the lord of Tachev said, —

"This is a vale of tears, a real vale of tears, nothing else. But let us go to a bench under the service-tree; there thou wilt tell thy sad adventures."

And he drew him to a corner of the courtyard. Zbyshko sat down at his side and told of Yurand's misfortunes, of the seizure of Danusia, how he had sought her, and how she had died after he had rescued her. Povala listened carefully, and on his face were seen in turn wrath, amazement,

compassion, and horror. At last, when Zbyshko had finished, he said, —

“I will tell this to our lord the king. He has in every case to make claim of the Master on behalf of little Yasko of Kretkov, and obtain the stern punishment of those who seized the boy; and they seized him to get a rich ransom. For them it is nothing to raise hands on children.”

Here he was thoughtful for a while, then he spoke on as if in soliloquy, —

“An insatiable race, worse than Turks and Tartars. In their souls they dread the king and us; still they cannot hold back from robbery and murder. They attack villages, slaughter land-tillers, drown fishermen; they seize children as wolves might. What would they do did they not fear us? The Grand Master sends letters against our king to foreign courts, but fawns before his eyes like a dog, for he knows our strength better than others do. But at last he has over-filled the measure.”

Again he was silent for a moment, then he laid his hand on Zbyshko's arm.

“I will tell the king,” repeated he; “this long time wrath is boiling in him, like water in a pot, and be sure of this, that dreadful punishment will not miss the authors of thy suffering.”

“O lord,” replied Zbyshko, “not one of them is alive now.”

Povala gazed at him with great well-wishing friendliness.

“God give thee aid! It is clear that thou dost not forget injustice. Lichtenstein is the only man whom thou hast not repaid, for I know that thou hast not had the chance yet. We also made a vow against him in Cracow; but to fulfil this vow there must be war — God grant us to see it! — Lichtenstein could not fight a duel without the Grand Master's permission, and the Master needs Lichtenstein's wit, therefore he sends him continually to various courts; he will not give him permission easily.”

“First, I must ransom my uncle.”

“Yes, true; and I have inquired about Lichtenstein. He is not here, and will not be in Ratsiondz; he has been sent to the King of England for archers. But let not thy head ache over thy uncle. If the king or the princes here say a word, the Grand Master will not permit evasion touching the ransom.”

“All the more, as I have a considerable captive who is a rich man and famous among them. He would be glad surely

to bow down to you, lord, and become acquainted, for no one respects famous knights more than he does."

Then he nodded to De Lorche, who had come near; and he, having asked previously who the knight was with whom Zbyshko was conversing, approached hurriedly, for indeed he had flushed up with desire to know a man so famous as Povala.

When Zbyshko had made them acquainted, the polished knight of Guelders bowed with the utmost elegance, and added, —

"There could be only one greater honor beyond pressing your hand, and that would be to meet you within barriers, or in battle."

At this the strong knight of Tachev smiled, for near the slender and small De Lorche he looked like a mountain.

"But I am glad," said he, "that we shall meet at full cups only; God grant never elsewhere!"

De Lorche hesitated somewhat, and then answered as if with a certain timidity, —

"But shouldst thou assert, noble lord, that the damsel Yagenka of Dlugolyas is not the most beautiful and most virtuous lady on earth, it would be for me a great honor — to contradict, and —"

Here he stopped and looked into the eyes of Povala with respect, nay, even with homage, but quickly and with attention.

Povala, whether it was because he knew that he could crush De Lorche with two fingers, as he might a nut, or because he had a soul which was immensely kind and gladsome, laughed aloud and said, —

"On a time I made a vow to the Princess of Burgundy, and she in those days was ten years older than I; but if you, sir, wish to assert that my princess is not older than your damsel Yagenka, we shall have to take to horse straightway."

When he heard this, De Lorche looked in amazement for a while at the lord of Tachev, then his face began to quiver, and at last he burst into kindly laughter.

Povala bent forward, put one arm around De Lorche's body, then raised him from the ground and swayed him back and forth as easily as if the man had been an infant.

"*Pax! pax!* as Bishop Kropidlo says!" exclaimed Povala. "You have pleased me, knight, and as God is true we will never fight for any lady."

Then embracing De Lorche, he placed him on the ground ; for just at the entrance the trumpets sounded suddenly, and the Prince of Plotsk entered with his consort.

“The prince and princess here precede the king and Prince Yanush,” said Povala, “for though the feast is given by the starosta, it is given in Plotsk, where they are rulers. Come with me to the princess, for thou knowest her since the feast at Cracow, when she took thy part before Yagello.”

And seizing Zbyshko by the arm, he conducted him through the court. Behind the prince and princess came courtiers and damsels, all in grand array, and brilliant ; since the king was to be there, so the whole space was as bright from them as if they had been flowers. Zbyshko, while approaching with Povala, examined faces from a distance, thinking to find among them some acquaintance, and all at once he halted from astonishment ; for close behind the princess he saw, a figure and a face well known indeed to him, but so serious, beautiful, and queenlike that he thought his eyes must be deceiving him.

“Is that Yagenka — or perhaps the daughter of the Prince of Plotsk?”

But that was Yagenka, the daughter of Zyh, for at the moment when their eyes met, she smiled at once with friendliness and compassion ; then she grew pale a little, and, dropping her eyelids, stood with a golden circlet on her dark hair, and with the immense brilliancy of her beauty, tall and wonderful, resembling not merely a young princess but a ruling queen.

CHAPTER LX.

ZBYSHKO fell at the feet of Princess Alexandra of Plotsk and offered her his service. She did not recognize the young knight at first, for she had not seen him for a long time. Only when he told her his name did she say, —

“Indeed! But I thought you some one from the king’s court. Zbyshko of Bogdanets! Of course! Your uncle was a guest here, the old knight of Bogdanets, and I remember how tears gushed in streams from me and my damsels when he told us thy story. And have you found your bride? Where is she at present?”

“She is dead, gracious lady.”

“O dear Jesus! Do not say that, for I shall not restrain my weeping. She is in heaven surely, that is the one consolation, and thou art young. A weak creature is woman. But in heaven there is recompense for all things, and there thou wilt find her. But the old knight of Bogdanets, is he here with thee?”

“He is not, for he is a captive with the Knights of the Cross, and I am going now to ransom him.”

“Then he too has failed of luck! But he seemed a quick man, who knew every custom. But when he is ransomed, come here to us. We shall be glad to see you both, for I say sincerely that he is not lacking in wit, as thou art not lacking in comeliness.”

“I will do so, gracious lady, all the more since I have come hither now purposely to beg of your Grace a favor for my uncle.”

“Very well, come to-morrow before the hunt; I shall have time then.”

Further conversation was interrupted by a new outburst of drums and trumpets announcing the arrival of Prince Yanush and his princess. As Zbyshko and the Princess of Plotsk stood near the entrance, Anna Danuta saw the young knight and approached him immediately without noticing the obeisance of their host, the starosta.

The young man's heart was rent again at sight of Princess Anna, so he knelt before her, and seizing her knees remained in silence. She bent over him and pressed his temples, dropping tear after tear on his bright head, exactly as a mother while weeping over a son's misfortunes.

And to the great astonishment of guests and courtiers she wept long, repeating, —

“O Jesus! O Jesus the Compassionate!” Then she raised Zbyshko and said: “I weep for my Danusia, and I weep over thee. But God has so disposed that thy toils were fruitless, and now our tears are fruitless also. But do thou tell me of her, and of her death, for though I were to listen till midnight I should not hear enough.”

And she took him to one side, as the lord of Tachev had done previously. Those of the guests who did not know Zbyshko inquired concerning his adventures, and for some time all conversed only of him, and Danusia, and Yurand. The envoys of the Order asked also Friedrich von Wenden, the comtur of Torun, sent to meet the king, and Johann von Schönfeld, the comtur of Osterode. The latter, a German, but from Silesia, knowing Polish well, inquired easily what the question was, and when he had heard it from the lips of Yasko of Zabierz, an attendant of Prince Yanush, he said, —

“Danveld and De Löwe were accused before the Grand Master of practising the black art.”

Then observing quickly that even the statement of such things might cast a shadow on the whole Order, like that which had fallen on the Templars, he added immediately, —

“That was a statement of gossips, but it was not true, for there are no men of that kind in our order.” But Povala, who was standing near, answered, —

“They who prevented the baptism of Lithuania may oppose the Cross.”

“We wear the Cross on our mantles,” answered Schönfeld, haughtily.

“But men should wear it in their hearts,” said Povala.

That moment the trumpets sounded still louder, and Yagello appeared with the archbishop of Gniezen, the bishop of Cracow, the bishop of Plotsk, the castellan of Cracow, and other dignitaries and courtiers, among whom were Zyndram and the young Prince Yamont, an attendant of Yagello. The king had changed little since Zbyshko had seen him first. He had the same quickly glancing eyes, on

his cheeks was the same pronounced ruddiness, he wore his hair long, as at Cracow, and put it behind his ears frequently. It seemed to Zbyshko, however, that he had more dignity of bearing and more majesty in his person, as if he felt surer on that throne which after the death of the queen he had desired to leave straightway, not knowing that he would be firm on it, and as if he were now more conscious of his great power and importance. The two Mazovian princes took their places at once at both sides of the sovereign; in front the German envoys greeted him with bows; and round about stood dignitaries and the foremost courtiers. The walls surrounding the court trembled from unceasing shouts, the sound of trumpets, and the thundering of drums.

When at last silence came, the envoy Von Wenden began to mention something touching the affairs of the Order; but the king, when he noted whither the conversation was tending, waved his hand impatiently and said in his deep, sonorous voice, —

“Better defer negotiation. We have come to this place for pleasure and are glad to see food and drink, not thy parchments.”

Meanwhile he smiled affably, not wishing the Knight of the Cross to think that he was answering in anger, and added, —

“There will be time in Ratsiondz to speak of affairs with the Grand Master.” Then he turned to the Prince of Plotsk, —

“But to-morrow to the wilderness to hunt — is it so?”

This question was a declaration at the same time that he did not wish to speak that evening of aught besides hunting, which he loved with all his soul, and for which he came to Mazovia gladly, since Little and Great Poland were less wooded and so populous in places that forests were lacking altogether.

The faces of guests then grew gladsome, for they knew that the king, whenever he conversed of hunting, was joyous and indeed gracious also. The Prince of Plotsk began at once to tell whither they would go, and what game would be provided. Prince Yanush had sent one of his attendants to bring from the city his two “defenders” who had led wild bulls out of snares by the horns, and had broken the bones in bears, for he wished to show these two men to Yagello.

Zbyshko wished greatly to go and bow down to Prince Yanush, but he could not approach him. He saw from a dis-

tance, however, Prince Yamont, who had forgotten evidently the sharp answer which on a time the young knight had given him in Cracow, for he nodded in a friendly manner, telling him by winks to come whenever possible. At that moment some hand touched the young man's shoulder, and a sweet, sad voice was heard right at his side there, —

“Zbyshko!”

He turned quickly and saw Yagenka. Occupied earlier in greeting the Princess of Plotsk, and then in converse with Anna Danuta, he could not approach Yagenka; so she herself, making use of the confusion caused by Yagello's entrance, came to him.

“Zbyshko,” repeated she, “may God and the Most Holy Lady comfort thee!”

“God reward you,” answered Zbyshko.

And he looked with gratitude into her blue eyes, which at that moment were as if covered with dew. They stood face to face there in silence. For though she had come to him like a kind and mourning sister, she seemed in her queenly bearing and brilliant court dress so different from the former Yagenka that at the first moment he dared not even say *thou* to her, as had been his wont at her father's house, and in Bogdanets. And it seemed to her that after those words which she had spoken there was no more to say to him. This continued till embarrassment was evident on their faces. But just at that moment it became less crowded in the court, for the king sat down to supper.

Princess Anna Danuta approached Zbyshko again, and said, —

“This will be a sad feast for us both, but serve me as before.”

So the young man had to leave Yagenka; and when the guests were seated he stood behind the princess to change dishes and to pour out water and wine for her. While serving he looked involuntarily from time to time at Yagenka, who, being a damsel of the Princess of Plotsk, sat at her side, and he could not but admire her beauty. Yagenka, since he had seen her at home, had grown considerably; she was not changed so much by her stature, however, as by a dignity of which she had not had a trace before. Formerly, when in a sheep-skin coat and with leaves in her dishevelled hair she chased through forests and pine woods on horseback, she might have been taken really for a beautiful peasant; now, at the first cast of the eye, she seemed a maiden of

birth and high blood, such repose was there in her face. Zbyshko noted also that her former gladness had vanished; but he wondered less at this, for he had heard of her father's death. He was astonished still more by that peculiar dignity of hers, and at first it seemed to him that her garments gave this appearance. So he looked in turn at the golden circlet which surrounded her forehead white as snow, and her dark hair falling in two tresses to her shoulders, then on her blue, closely fitting robe embroidered with a purple strip, beneath which was indicated clearly her arrowy form and her maiden bosom. "A real princess." But he saw afterward that it was not her dress alone which had caused the change, and that though she were to put on a simple sheep-skin at that time, he could not consider her so lightly and bear himself with her so freely as in past time.

He noticed also that various young men, and even older knights, gazed at her eagerly and with attention; and once, when he was changing the plate before the princess, he saw Pan de Lorche lost in gazing at her, and, as it were, rapt into Paradise. And at this sight he felt anger in his soul at him. The knight of Guelders did not escape the watchfulness of Princess Anna Danuta, who, recognizing him, said quickly, —

"See Pan de Lorche! He is falling in love again surely, for he is dazed altogether."

Then bending over the table somewhat, she glanced toward Yagenka sidewise.

"By my faith," said she, "other lights will pale before this torch."

Zbyshko was drawn toward Yagenka, for she seemed to him like a beloved and loving kinswoman, and he felt that a safer confidant for his sorrow he could not find, nor could he find more compassion in any heart; but he had no chance to speak to her that evening, for first he was occupied with service, and, second, during the whole time of the feast the chorus sang songs, or the trumpets made such loud music that even those who sat side by side could hardly hear one another. The princesses and ladies left the feast earlier than the king, princes, and knights, whose custom it was to amuse themselves at goblets till late hours. Yagenka carried a cushion for the princess, so it was not possible to delay; she, too, departed, but in going she smiled at Zbyshko a second time, and bowed to him.

It was almost daylight when the young knight, Pan de

Lorche, and their two attendants went back to the inn. They walked on for a time, sunk in thought; but near the inn De Lorche said something to his attendant, a Pomorian who spoke Polish easily, and the man turned to Zbyshko, —

“My lord,” said he, “would like to ask something of your Grace.”

“Very well,” replied Zbyshko.

De Lorche spoke to his attendant again awhile. The Pomorian, smiling slightly, said, —

“My lord would like to inquire if it is certain that that damsel with whom your Grace conversed before the feast is a mortal being, or if she is some saint or angel.”

“Tell thy lord,” answered Zbyshko, with a certain impatience, “that he has asked me that question already, so I wonder now to hear it a second time. In Spyhov he told me that he was going to Vitold’s court to see the beauty of Lithuanian damsels, then for a similar cause he wished to visit this place, in Plotsk to-day he wished to challenge the knight Povala in behalf of Yagenka of Dlugolyas, and now again he is aiming at another. Is that his constancy; is that his knightly faith?”

Pan de Lorche listened to this answer through the mouth of his attendant, sighed deeply, looked awhile at the sky, which was growing pale, and then answered, —

“Thou speakest justly. Neither constancy nor faith, for I am a sinful man and unworthy to wear the spurs of knight-hood. As to Panna Yagenka of Dlugolyas, I have made a vow to her, it is true, and God grant that I shall keep it; but see how I shall move thee when I tell how cruelly she treated me at Chersk.”

Here he sighed again, and looked at the sky, on the eastern rim of which a strip was growing clearer. When the Pomorian had interpreted his words De Lorche continued, —

“This is what she said to me: ‘I have an enemy, a master of the black art: he dwells within a tower in the middle of a forest; he sends a dragon out every year against me; this dragon comes to Chersk in autumn, and watches to see if he can seize me.’ When she told this I declared immediately that I would give battle to that dragon. Ah! consider my story further: when I reached the appointed place I saw a dreadful monster waiting for me; delight filled my soul, for I thought that either I should fall or rescue the maiden from his disgusting jaws, and win eternal glory. But when I went near and thrust a spear into the monster — Canst

thou think what I discovered? An immense bag of straw on wooden wheels, and it had a tail all stuffed with straw! I won people's laughter instead of glory, and then I had to challenge two Mazovian knights; from both I suffered sad defeat inside barriers. Thus was I treated by the woman whom I had exalted beyond all others, and whom alone I wished to love."

The Pomorian, while interpreting these words, thrust his tongue into his cheek and bit it at moments, so as not to burst into laughter, and Zbyshko at another time would have laughed surely, but pain and unhappiness had destroyed gladness in him utterly, so he answered with a serious face, —

"She may have done this only through frivolity, and not in malice."

"I have forgiven her, and thou hast the best proof of that in this, that I wished to fight with the knight Povala in defence of her beauty and her virtue."

"Do not fight with him," said Zbyshko, more seriously.

"I know that it would be death, but I would rather fall than live in endless suffering and sadness."

"Povala has no such things in his head. Better go to him with me to-morrow, and conclude a league of friendship."

"I will do so, for he has pressed me to his heart; but to-morrow he is going with the king to hunt."

"Then we will go early. The king loves to hunt, but does not despise rest, and he has conversed long to-night."

And they did thus, but in vain; for Hlava, who had gone still earlier to the castle to see Yagenka, announced that Povala had slept, not in his own lodgings, but in the king's chambers. Their disappointment, however, was recompensed, for Prince Yanush met them, and commanded both men to join his escort. Thus they were able to be present at the hunt. While going to the forest Zbyshko found the chance of speaking to Prince Yamont, who gave him pleasant tidings.

"While undressing the king for sleep," said he, "I reminded him of thee, and of thy Cracow adventure. And the knight Povala, who was present, added immediately that thy uncle had been seized by the Knights of the Cross, and he begged the king to claim him. The king, who is dreadfully incensed at the knights for stealing little Yasko, and for other attacks, grew still more raging. 'Not with a pleasant word,' said he, 'should one meet them, but with a lance!

with a lance! with a lance!’ And Povala threw fuel on that fire purposely. This morning, when the envoys of the Order were waiting at the gate, the king did not even look at them, though they bowed to the earth before his Majesty. Hei! they will not get a promise now that the king will not assist Prince Vitold, and they will not know what first to lay their hands on. But be sure of one thing, the king will not fail to press the Master about thy uncle Matsko.”

Thus Prince Yamont delighted Zbyshko’s heart, and still more did Yagenka delight it; for, accompanying Princess Alexandra to the forest, she strove to ride back side by side with Zbyshko. During hunts there was always great freedom; people returned usually in couples. And since it was not important for one couple to be too near another, they could speak without restriction. Yagenka had heard earlier of Matsko’s captivity from Hlava, and had lost no time in helping. At her request the princess had given a letter to the Grand Master and had gained, besides, this, that Von Wenden, the comtur of Torun, had mentioned the affair in a letter in which he gave an account of what was happening in Plotsk. He boasted before the princess that he had added, “Wishing to please the king, we should not raise difficulties in this case.” And the Grand Master was concerned beyond measure at that moment to please the powerful sovereign as far as possible, and turn all his own forces with perfect safety on Vitold, whom thus far the Order had been quite unable to manage.

“I have done what I could, taking care to avoid delay,” said Yagenka; “and since the king will not yield to his sister in great things, he will try to please her at least in the smallest, hence I have great hope.”

“Were the affair not with such treacherous people,” said Zbyshko, “I would take the ransom straightway, and thus end the matter; with them, however, it may happen to a man as it happened with Tolima, — they will take the money, and not free the person who brought it unless power stands behind him.”

“I understand,” said Yagenka.

“You understand everything now,” answered Zbyshko; “and while I live I shall be grateful to you.”

“Why not say *thou* to me, as an acquaintance from childhood?” asked she, raising her sad and kind eyes to him.

“I know not,” answered he, innocently. “Somehow it is

not easy for me ; and you are not the young girl of former days, but — as it were — something — entirely — ”

And he could not find the comparison ; but she interrupted his efforts and said, —

“ Some time has been added to my age — and the Germans have killed my father in Silesia.”

“ True ! God grant eternal light to him ! ”

They rode on some time side by side in silence, and thoughtfully, as if listening to the low sound of the pine-trees, then she inquired, —

“ But after ransoming Matsko wilt thou stay in these parts ? ”

Zbyshko looked at her as if in wonder, for up to that moment he had been given so exclusively to mourning and sadness that it had not come to his head to think of what would happen later. So he raised his eyes as if in meditation, and after a while he said, —

“ I know not ! O merciful Christ ! how can I know ? I know that when I travel anywhere my fate will follow after me. Hei ! a sad fate ! I will ransom my uncle, and then go perhaps to Vitold to accomplish my vows against the Knights of the Cross ; and perhaps I shall perish.”

At this the girl's eyes grew misty, and bending toward the young man somewhat, she said in a low voice, as if entreating, —

“ Do not perish ; do not perish ! ”

And again they ceased to speak, till at the very walls of the place Zbyshko shook himself out of thoughts that were gnawing him.

“ But you — but thou — wilt thou stay here at the court ? ” asked he.

“ No. It is dreary for me here without my brothers, and without Zgorzelitse. Stan and Vilk must be married before this, and even if they are not I do not fear them.”

“ God grant me to bring Uncle Matsko to Zgorzelitse. He is such a friend of thine that thou mightst depend on him always. But do thou remember him also.”

“ I promise sacredly to be, as it were, his own child to him.”

And after these words she wept in earnest, for in her heart there was gloom and trembling.

Next day Povala of Tachev appeared at Zbyshko's inn and said to him, —

“After communion the king will go to meet the Grand Master; thou art numbered with his knights and wilt go with us.”

Zbyshko flushed from delight at these words, for not only did the fact of including him with the knights of the king protect him from the treachery and attacks of the Knights of the Cross, but conferred great renown on him also. Among those knights were Zavisha Charny and his brothers Farurey and Kruehek, Povala himself, and Kron and Pashko Zlodye, and Lis, with many other tremendous and glorious knights, famed at home and in foreign countries. Yagello took a small detachment, for some he had left at home, and some were seeking adventures in distant lands and in lands beyond the sea; but he knew that with them he might go even to Malborg without fearing the treachery of the Order, for in case of need they would crush walls with their mighty arms and open a road for him among Germans. Zbyshko's young heart might warm also with pride at the thought that he would have such companions.

At the first moment he forgot his own grief even, and pressing Povala's hand, he said with delight, —

“To you, and to no one else, am I indebted, — to you! to you!”

“To me in part,” answered Povala, “in part to the gracious princess here, but most to our gracious sovereign. Go at once and embrace his feet, so that he may not suspect thee of ingratitude.”

“In so far as I am ready to die for him, so help me God!” exclaimed Zbyshko.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE meeting at Ratsiondz, on an island of the Vistula, to which the king went about Corpus Christi, took place with bad omens, and did not lead to such agreement and settlement of various questions as those which took place two years later, and at which the king recovered the land of Dobryn, and with Dobryn Bobrovniki, which had been mortgaged treacherously by Opolchik.

At his arrival Yagello was greatly irritated by the calumny against him spread by the Knights of the Cross at the courts of western Europe, and in Rome even, and he was indignant at the dishonesty of the Order. The Grand Master would not discuss the affair of Dobryn; he refrained purposely; and both he and other dignitaries repeated to the Poles daily: "We wish no war with you, nor with Lithuania, but the Jmud land is ours, for Vitold himself gave it. Promise not to help Vitold, and war with him will be ended sooner; there will be leisure then to speak of Dobryn, and we will make great concessions." But the king's counsellors, having quick wit with much experience, and knowing the deceit of the Order, did not let themselves be tricked. "When ye increase in power, your insolence will increase also," said they to the Grand Master. "Ye say that ye have no concern with Lithuania, but ye wish to seat Skirgello on the throne in Vilno. By the dear God! that is Yagello's inheritance; he alone can decide whom he wishes to make prince in Lithuania. Therefore restrain yourselves, lest our great king punish you."

To this the Master replied that if the king was the real lord of Lithuania, let him command Vitold to abandon war and give Jmud back to the Order, otherwise the Order must strike Vitold wherever it could reach and wound him. In this manner the disputes dragged on from morning until evening, like a road winding round in a circle. The king, not wishing to bind himself to anything, grew more and more impatient, and told the Master that if Jmud were happy under

the control of the Order, Vitold would not move a finger, for he would have neither excuse nor reason. The Grand Master, who was a man of peace, and knew Yagello's strength more clearly than did others, strove to pacify the king; and notwithstanding the muttering of some comturs who were proud and passionate, he spared no flattering words, and at moments showed humility. But since even in that humility veiled threats were heard frequently, all ended in failure. Discussions on important points were dropped quickly, and on the second day they spoke only of inferior questions. The king attacked the Order sharply for maintaining bands of ruffians and for attacks and robberies along the border, for the stealing of Yurand's daughter and of little Yasko, for murdering fishermen and land-tillers.

The Grand Master denied, evaded, swore that, that had been done without his knowledge, and in return he made reproaches, saying that not only Vitold, but Polish knights as well had assisted pagan Jmud men to war against the Order. To prove this he gave instance of Matsko of Bogdanets. Fortunately, the king knew through Povala what the knights of Bogdanets were seeking in the Jmud land, and was able to answer the reproach, all the more easily that in his retinue was Zbyshko, and in that of the Master the two Von Badens, who had come with the hope of fighting with Poles inside barriers.

But there was no meeting of that sort. The Knights of the Cross had wished, in case discussions went smoothly, to invite King Yagello to Torun, and have feasts there and spectacles for many days to do him honor; but as discussions had failed, producing only mutual dislike and anger, desire for amusements was lacking. Only privately, in the morning hours, knights tried one another a little in strength and dexterity, but as the gladsome Prince Yamont said, that went against the grain of the Knights of the Cross, for Povala proved stronger in the arm than Arnold von Baden, Dobek of Olesnitsa at the lance, and Lis of Targovisko in jumping over horses surpassed all men. On this occasion, Zbyshko arranged the ransom with Arnold. De Lorche, as a count and a man of great note, looked down on Arnold, opposed that arrangement, and affirmed that he took all on himself. But Zbyshko considered that knightly honor commanded him to pay the amount of ransom promised; therefore, though Arnold was ready to reduce the sum, he would not accept the reduction, or Pan de Lorche's interference.

Arnold von Baden was a simple soldier whose highest merit was the giant strength of his arm; he was dull enough, not loving money, and wellnigh honest. There was no cunning of the Order in that man, hence he did not hide from Zbyshko why he was willing to decrease the ransom. "It will not come," said he, "to negotiations between the great king and the Master, but it will to exchange of prisoners, and then thou wilt take thy uncle for nothing. I prefer to get a part rather than nothing, for my purse is ever slender, and often can stand hardly three tankards of beer a day, while I suffer when I have less than five or six of them."

Zbyshko was angered by these words. "I pay," said he, "because I gave my knightly word; I will pay no less than what I promised, so thou mayst know that we have that much value." Thereupon Arnold embraced him, while the Polish knights and those of the Order gave praise, saying: "Justly dost thou wear a belt and spurs while so young, for thou knowest dignity and honor."

Meanwhile the king and the Grand Master arranged indeed for exchanging prisoners, whereupon strange things came to light which caused bishops and dignitaries of the kingdom to write letters afterward to the Pope and to various courts in Europe. In the hands of the Poles there were, it is true, many prisoners, but these were grown men in the bloom of life, captured with armed hand in battles and engagements on the boundary; while in the hands of the Knights of the Cross were found mainly women and children seized during night attacks and held for ransom. The Pope himself turned attention to this; and despite the acuteness of Johann von Felde, the procurator of the Order at the Holy See, he gave in public expression to his indignation and his anger.

There were difficulties as to Matsko. The Master did not make them seriously, but only in appearance, so as to add weight to each concession. He declared, therefore, that a Christian knight, who had fought side by side with the Jmud men, should in justice suffer death. In vain did the king's counsellors bring up anew all that was known to them of Yurand and his daughter, and the terrible wrong inflicted on them and on the knights of Bogdanets by the servants of the Order. Through a strange chance the Master in his answer used words employed by the Princess Alexandra when speaking to the old knight of Bogdanets, —

"Ye call yourselves lambs and our people wolves, but of

the four wolves who took part in carrying off Yurand's daughter not one is alive now, but the lambs are going safely through the world yet."

And this was true, but to this truth the lord of Tachev, who was present, answered with the following question, —

"True. But has any one of them been slain by treachery, or have those who fell not fallen sword in hand, every man of them?"

The Master had no answer to this; and when he saw also that the king had begun to frown and his eyes to flash, he yielded, not wishing to bring the dread sovereign to an outburst. It was agreed then that each side should send envoys to receive the captives. On the Polish side were appointed Zyndram, who wished to look from near by at the power of the Order, and Povala, also Zbyshko.

Prince Yamont rendered this service to Zbyshko. He spoke to the king on his behalf, with the idea that the young knight would thus see his uncle sooner, and bring him away the more surely, since he would go for him as an envoy of Yagello. The king did not refuse the prayer of the prince, who, because of his joyful nature, kindness, and unusual beauty, was the favorite of his Majesty and all the court officials; withal he never asked for himself any favor. Zbyshko thanked him from his whole soul, for now he felt convinced that Matsko would escape from the Knights of the Order.

"No man envies thee," said Zbyshko to Yamont, "thy place near the king; and thou art near him justly, since thy intimacy is used for the good of others, and a better heart than thine, I think, no one has."

"It is pleasant near the king," replied Yamont, "but I would rather be in the field against Knights of the Order, and this I envy thee, that thou hast fought against them."

After a while he added, —

"Von Wenden, the comtur of Torun, arrived here yesterday, and this evening ye will go to him for the night, with the Master and his retinue."

"And then to Malborg?"

"And then to Malborg."

Here Prince Yamont laughed, —

"That road is not long, but it will be unpleasant, since the Germans have won nothing from the king, with Vitold too they will have no pleasure. He has gathered all the power of Lithuania and is marching to the Jmud land."

“If the king assists, there will be a great war.”

“All our knights are begging the Lord God for it. But even if the king, through regard for Christian blood, should not make a great war, he will help Vitold with grain and money; and it will not be without this, too, that Polish knights will go as volunteers to him.”

“As I live they will go,” answered Zbyshko. “And perhaps the Order will declare war against the king because of that.”

“Oh, no! while the present Master lives there will be no war.”

And he was right. Zbyshko had known the Master earlier; but now on the road to Malborg, being, with Zyndram and Povala, at his side nearly all the time, he could observe more closely and estimate the man more accurately. In fact, that journey only confirmed him in the conviction that the Grand Master, Conrad von Jungingen, was not depraved and wicked. He was forced often to act unjustly, for the whole Order was founded on injustice. He had to commit injustice, for the Order reposed on injustice to man. He had to utter calumny, for the practice of calumny had come to him, together with the insignia of his office, and from early years he had grown accustomed to consider calumny as diplomatic skill merely. But he was not a tyrant; he feared the judgment of God, and as far as he was able he restrained the pride and insolence of those dignitaries of the Order who were urging on to war against the power of Yagello. He was a weak man, however. The Order had been accustomed for generations to prey on the property of others, to plunder, to take adjoining lands by force or treachery; since Conrad not only was unable to restrain that predatory hunger, but in spite of himself, by force of acquired impetus, he yielded to it and strove to satisfy this craving. Distant were the days of Winrich von Kniprode, days of iron discipline, with which the Order astonished the whole world of that time. Even during the rule of Conrad Wallenrod, the Master who preceded Jungingen, the Order grew intoxicated with its own might, which was always growing, and which temporary defeats could not diminish, it became intoxicated with glory, with success, with human blood, so that the bonds which held it in union and in strength were loosened. In so far as he was able the Master maintained right and justice; in so far as he was able he lightened personally the iron hand of the Order, which weighed on peasants, on

citizens, and even on the clergy and on nobles living by feudal right on lands of the Order; hence near Malborg this or that citizen or land-tiller might be not only well-to-do, but wealthy; while in more remote places the tyranny, cruelty, and disorder of the comturs trampled justice, spread oppression and extortion, squeezed out the last copper by means of taxes imposed without warrant and even without pretext, pressed out tears, and often blood, so that in whole extensive regions there was one groan, universal wretchedness, and universal complaint. If even the good of the Order commanded greater mildness, as at times in Jmud, those commands came to naught in view of the disorder of the comturs and their native cruelty. So Conrad von Jungingen felt like a charioteer who is driving maddened horses and has dropped the reins from his hands, abandoning his chariot to the will of fate. Hence evil forebodings mastered his soul frequently, and frequently those prophetic words occurred to him: "I established them as bees of usefulness; I settled them on the threshold of Christian lands; but they have risen against me. They care not for the souls, and they have no compassion for the bodies, of the people who turned from error to the Catholic faith, and to me. They have made slaves of those people, and by neglecting to teach them the commands of God, and by depriving them of the holy sacraments, they expose them to greater torments of hell than if they had continued Pagans. They make wars to satisfy their own greed, hence the hour will come when their teeth will be broken, and the right hand will be cut from them, and their right leg shall be lame, so that they will confess their offences."

The Master knew that those reproaches, which the mysterious Voice uttered against the Order in the vision to Saint Bridget, were true. He understood that, that edifice, reared on the land of another, and on wrong done another,—that edifice, resting on calumny, treachery, and tyranny, could not endure. He feared that, undermined for whole years by blood and by tears, it would fall from one blow of the strong Polish hand; he felt that the chariot drawn by raging horses would end in the abyss, so he strove that at least the hour of judgment, defeat, wrath, and suffering should come as late as possible. In spite of his weakness, he presented therefore in one thing an invincible opposition to his insolent and haughty counsellors: he would not permit a war with Poland. In vain did they reproach him with fear and incompetence; in

vain did the comturs of the border urge war with all their might. He, when the fire was just ready to burst forth, always withdrew at the last moment, and then gave thanks to God at Malborg that he had been able to arrest the sword raised above the Order.

But he knew that war must come. Hence that knowledge that the Order was built, not on the justice of God, but on injustice and calumny, and that feeling of an approaching day of destruction, made him one of the most unhappy men on earth. He would beyond doubt have given his life and blood could it have been otherwise, and were there time yet to turn to a way of justice; but he felt that it was late then. To turn would mean to give to the rightful owners all those rich and fertile lands seized by the Order, God knows how long since, and with them a multitude of cities as rich as Dantzic. And that was not all! It would mean to renounce the Jmud region; to renounce attacks on Lithuania; to put the sword in the scabbard; finally, to remove altogether from those regions in which there were no more people for the Order to Christianize, and settle in Palestine a second time, or on some of the Grecian islands, to defend the Cross there from real Saracens. But this was impossible, since it would have been equivalent to a sentence of destruction to the Order. Who would agree to that? What Grand Master would ask for it? The soul and life of Conrad were covered with a shadow, but if a man were to appear with an advice of this sort, the Master would be the first to condemn him to a dark chamber as one who had lost his senses. The Order had to go on and on till the day when God himself should fix the limit.

So Conrad advanced, but in gloom and in suffocating sorrow. The hair on his chin and temples had grown silvery, and his eyes, once quick, were half covered with their heavy drooping lids. Zbyshko did not note a smile even once on his countenance. The Master's face was not severe nor even overcast; it was only tortured, as if by silent suffering. In his armor, with a cross on his breast, in the centre of which was a black eagle on a quadrangular field, and in a great white mantle also adorned with the Cross, he produced the impression of dignity, of majesty and sorrow. Conrad had been a joyous man, he had loved jests, and even at that time he was not averse to splendid feasts, spectacles, and tournaments, nay, he even took part in them; but neither in the throng of brilliant knights, who came as guests to

Malborg, nor in a joyous outcry, amid the sounds of trumpets and the clatter of weapons, or amid goblets filled with Malvoisie, was he ever gladsome. When all around seemed full of strength, splendor, inexhaustible wealth, invincible power; when the envoys of the emperor and of kings of the west shouted with enthusiasm that the Order could stand by itself for all kingdoms, and the strength of the world, — he alone was not deceived, he alone remembered the ominous words in the vision of the saint: “The time will come when their teeth will be broken, and their right hand cut from them, when their right leg will be lame, so that they will confess their offences.”

CHAPTER LXII.

THEY went by land through Helmno to Grudziondz, where they stopped for the night and passed the next day, for the Grand Master had to judge a question of fishing between the castle starosta of the Order and the neighboring nobility whose lands bordered on the Vistula. Thence they sailed on barges of the Order down the river to Malborg. Zyndram, Povala, and Zbyshko passed all the time at the side of the Master, who was curious to learn what impression would be made, especially on Zyndram, by the might of the Order when he looked from near by at it. This concerned Conrad, because Zyndram was not only a valiant and terrible knight in single combat, but an uncommonly skilful warrior. There was no other man in the kingdom who knew, as he did, how to lead large armies, muster regiments for battle, build castles as well as storm them, and throw bridges across broad rivers; no other man who understood "guns" so well, — that is, arms of various nations, and all military tactics. The Master, knowing that much depended on the opinion of Zyndram in the counsel of the King, thought that if he could astonish him by the greatness of the Order's wealth, and by its army, war would be deferred for a long time. And, above all, the sight of Malborg might itself fill the heart of every Pole with dread, for no other fortress on earth could compare, even approximately, with that one, counting the High Castle, the Middle Castle, and the First Castle.¹ Already, from afar, in sailing down the Nogat, the knights saw the mighty bastions standing out against the sky. The day was bright and clear, so they could see them perfectly; and after some time, when the barges had approached, the points of the church gleamed still more on the lofty castle and the gigantic walls, towering some above others, partly in red brick, but mainly covered with that celebrated gray-white coating which only masons of the

¹ Frederic II., King of Prussia, brought Malborg to complete ruin after the fall of the Polish Commonwealth.

Order had the skill to fabricate. The immensity of the walls surpassed every structure which the Polish knights had seen in their lives thus far. It might seem that edifice grew there on edifice, creating in that place, low by nature, as it were, a mountain, the summit of which was the High Castle, the sides the Middle and the First Castle. There radiated from that giant nest of armed monks such uncommon might and power that even the long and usually gloomy face of the Grand Master cleared somewhat as he gazed at it.

“*Ex luto* Marienburg. Marienburg¹ from the mud,” said he, turning toward Zyndram; “but no human power can crush that mud.”

Zyndram made no answer, and in silence he took in with his eyes all the bastions and the immensity of the walls strengthened by monstrous escarps.

“You gentlemen,” added Conrad, after a moment of silence, “who understand fortresses, what do you say to this?”

“The fortress seems to me impregnable,” replied the Polish knight, as if in meditation; “but —”

“But what? What can you criticise in it?”

“But any fortress may change masters.”

At this the Grand Master frowned.

“In what sense do you speak?”

“In this sense, that the judgments and decisions of God are hidden from the eyes of man.”

And again he looked in meditation on the walls, while Zbyshko, to whom Povala had interpreted his answer correctly, looked at him admiringly and with gratitude. He was struck at that moment by the resemblance between Zyndram and the Jmud leader Skirvoillo. Both had immense heads of the same kind, driven in, as it were, between broad shoulders; both had mighty breasts and the same form of bowed legs.

Meanwhile the Master, not wishing that the last word should remain with the Polish knight, began a second time:

“They say that our Marienburg is six times greater than Vavel, the castle of Cracow.”

“In Cracow on the cliff there is not so much space as here on the plain,” replied Zyndram; “but our heart in Vavel is greater.”

Conrad raised his brows wonderingly, —

“I do not understand.”

¹ Marienburg in German; Malborg in Polish.

“But what is the heart in any fortress, if not the church? Our cathedral in Vavel is three times as large as that here.”

While saying this, he indicated the fortress church, really not large, on which glittered a great mosaic figure of the Most Holy Lady on a golden background.

Again Conrad was not pleased with the turn of speech.

“You have ready but strange answers,” said he.

Meanwhile they had arrived. The excellent police of the Order had evidently notified the town and the castle of the Grand Master’s coming, for at the landing, in addition to a number of brothers, were trumpeters of the town, who greeted the Grand Master usually with their trumpets when he landed. Horses were waiting at the shore for him. When the party had mounted, they passed through the town and entering the Weaver’s Gate at the side of the Sparrow Bastion, rode up to the First Castle. At the gate the Master was greeted by the Grand Comtur, Wilhelm von Helfenstein, — who bore only the title, since for some months his duties had been performed actually by Kuno Lichtenstein, then absent on a mission to England, — and, besides, by the Hospitaller Conrad Lichtenstein, a relative of Kuno, by the Grand Master of the Wardrobe, Rumpenheim, and the Grand Treasurer, Burghard von Wobecke, and finally by the Petty Comtur, the overseer of the workshops and the management of the castle. Besides these dignitaries there were some ordained brothers, who had charge of church affairs in Prussia, and who oppressed other cloisters grievously, as well as parish priests, whom they forced to work on roads even, and at ice-breaking. With those ordained men stood a multitude of lay brothers, — that is, knights not bound to canonical observances. Their large and strong bodies (the Order accepted no weak men), their broad shoulders, curly beard, and stern faces made them resemble the greedy robber knights of Germany more than brothers. From their eyes stared daring insolence and boundless pride. They did not like Conrad because he feared war with the might of Yagello; frequently at the Chapters they reproached him openly with cowardice, made pictures of him on the walls, and roused jesters to ridicule him to his eyes. But this time they inclined their heads with apparent humility, especially since the Master appeared in company with foreign knights; and they hurried quickly to hold his horse’s bridle and the stirrups.

The Master alighted, and turned at once to Helfenstein.

“Are there tidings from Werner von Tettingen?” asked he.

Tettingen, as Grand Marshal, or commander of the armed forces of the Order, was on an expedition then against the Jmud men and Vitold.

“There is nothing important,” answered Helfenstein, “but damage has been done. The rabble burnt villages near Ragneta and towns around other castles.”

“In God is our hope, that one great battle will break their rage and stubbornness,” replied the Master.

When he had spoken, he raised his eyes, and his lips moved a moment in a prayer for the success of the armies of the Order.

Then he turned toward the Polish knights and said, —

“These are envoys of the King of Poland: the knight of the Mashkovitse, the knight of Tachev, and the knight of Bogdanets, who have come with us for the exchange of prisoners. Let the comtur of the castle show them guest-chambers, and entertain and treat them as is proper.”

The Knights of the Order looked with curiosity at the envoys, but especially at Povala, whose name, as a renowned champion, was known to some of them. Those who had not heard of his deeds at the courts of Bohemia, Burgundy, and Poland were filled with wonder at his stature, and his battle stallion of such size that he reminded men who in youth had visited the Holy Land and Egypt, of elephants and camels.

Some recognized Zbyshko, who had fought within barriers at Malborg; and those greeted him rather kindly, remembering that Ulrich, the strong brother of the Master, who enjoyed great favor in the Order, had shown him real esteem and friendship. Not less attention and wonder were roused by him who, in a future then not distant, was to be the most dreadful of all the scourgers of the Order, namely, Zyndram; for when he had dismounted he seemed, because of his uncommon strength and lofty shoulders, to be almost hump-backed. His arms of exceeding length and his bow-legs roused smiles on the faces of the younger brothers. One of them, known for his love of jesting, even approached him, wishing to say a word, but when he looked into the eyes of the lord of Mashkovitse, he lost desire somehow, and walked away in silence.

Meanwhile the comtur of the castle went with the guests, conducting them. They entered, first, a court of no great

width, in which, besides a school, an ancient storehouse, and a saddler's workshop, was the chapel of Saint Nicholas; then passing the Nicholas bridge they entered the First Castle proper. The comtur for some time conducted them amid strong walls, strengthened here and there by greater or smaller bastions. Zyndram looked with care at everything; the comtur, even without inquiry, indicated various buildings willingly, as if he wished the guests to see all objects in the utmost detail.

"That great building which your Graces see before you on the left is," said he, "our stable. We are poor monks, but people say that elsewhere even knights are not lodged as horses are in this place."

"People do not reproach you with poverty," said Povala; "but there must be something here besides horse-stalls, since this building is so high, and you, of course, do not lead your horses up stairways."

"Above the stable, which is on the ground-floor and in which there are four hundred horses, are storehouses; these contain a stock of wheat to last ten years, I think. There will never be a siege here; but even should there be, no enemy will conquer us by famine."

Then he turned to the right and again passed a bridge between the bastion of Saint Laurence and the Armor Bastion, and led them to another square, immense, lying in the very centre of the First Castle.

"Observe, your Graces," said the comtur, "that what you see to the north there, though by the power of God impregnable, is only the 'Vorburg,' and may not be compared in strength with the Middle Castle, to which I shall conduct you, still less with the High Castle."

In fact, a separate moat and a special drawbridge divided the Middle Castle from that square; and only in the castle gate, which stood considerably higher, could the knights, when they had turned, at the suggestion of the comtur, take in once more with their vision all that great quadrangle which was called the First Castle. Edifice rose there at the side of edifice, so that it seemed to Zyndram that he saw a whole city. There were inexhaustible supplies of wood laid away in piles as large as houses, heaps of stone cannonballs standing up like pyramids, cemeteries, hospitals, and magazines. Somewhat aside, near a lake in the centre, were the mighty red walls of the "Temple;" that is, an immense storehouse, with an eating-hall for mercenaries and servants.

At the north wall were to be seen other stables for the horses of knights, and for choice steeds of the Master. At the opposite side of the quadrangle were dwellings for various managers and officials of the Order; again storehouses, granaries, bakeries, rooms for clothing, foundries, a great arsenal, prisons, the old cannon foundry, — each building so strong and so fortified that in each it was possible to make a stand as in a separate fortress, and all were surrounded by a wall, and by a crowd of tremendous bastions; outside the wall was a moat; outside the moat a circle of great palisades; beyond the palisades, on the west, rolled the yellow waves of the Nogat. On the north and west gleamed the surface of a broad lake, and on the south towered up the still more strongly fortified Middle and High Castles.

A most terrible nest, which had an expression of immense strength, and in which were joined the two greatest powers known to man in that century, — the power of the church and the power of the sword. Whoso resisted the first, was cut down by the second. Whoso lifted an arm against both, against him rose a shout through all Christendom, that he had raised that arm against the Cross of the Saviour. And straightway knights rushed together from all lands to give aid. That nest, therefore, was swarming at all times with armed men and artisans, and in it, at all times, activity buzzed as in a beehive. Before the great buildings, in the passages, at the gates, in the workshops, there was everywhere movement, as at a fair. Echo bore about the sound of hammers and chisels fashioning stone cannonballs, the roar of wind-mills and tread-mills, the neighing of horses, the rattle of arms and of armor, the sound of trumpets and fifes, calls and commands. On those squares all languages were heard, and one might meet warriors from every nation; hence the unerring English archers, who pierced a pigeon tied to a pole a hundred yards distant, and whose arrows went through breastplates as easily as through woollen stuff, and the terrible Swiss infantry who fought with double-handed swords, and the Danes, valiant, though immoderate in food and drink, and the French knights, inclined equally to laughter and to quarrel, the silent and haughty Spanish nobles, the brilliant knights of Italy, the most skilful swordsmen of all, dressed in silk and satin, and during war in impenetrable armor forged in Venice, Florence, and Milan, the knights of Burgundy, Friesland, and finally Germans from every German country. The

“white mantles” circled about among all as superiors and masters. “A tower filled with gold,” or, more accurately, a separate chamber, built in the High Castle next the dwelling of the Grand Master, really filled from top to bottom with coin and bars of precious metal, permitted the Order to entertain “guests” worthily, as well as to assemble mercenaries, who were sent on expeditions and to all castles to be at the disposition of voits, starostas, and comturs. So that to the power of the sword and the power of religion were joined here great wealth, and also iron discipline, which, though relaxed in recent times by excess of confidence, and intoxication over the strength of the Order, was still maintained by the force of ancient custom. Monarchs went there not only to fight against Pagans or to borrow money, but to learn the art of governing; knights went there to learn the art of war, for in all the world of that day no one knew how to govern and wage war as did the Order. When it settled in those regions, it owned not one span of earth save a small district and a few castles bestowed on it by a heedless Polish prince; now it possessed a broad country, larger than many kingdoms, containing fertile lands, strong cities, and impregnable castles. It possessed and watched, as a spider possesses its extended web, every thread of which it holds beneath its body. From out that place, from out that High Castle, from the Grand Master, and from the “white mantles,” went in every direction, by post messengers, commands to feudatory nobles, to city councils, to mayors, to voits and assistant voits, to captains of mercenary troops; and what there in that centre had been originated and determined by mind and will was executed far from there and quickly by hundreds and by thousands of fists in armor. Hither flowed in money from whole regions, wheat, all kinds of provisions, tribute from the secular clergy groaning under a grievous yoke, and also from other cloisters at which the Order looked with unfriendly eye. From out that place, finally, grasping hands were stretched against all surrounding lands and nations.

The numerous Prussian people of Lithuanian speech had been swept from the earth at that period. Lithuania had felt till recently the iron foot of the Knight of the Cross weighing on her breast so cruelly that for every breath she gave, blood went from her heart with it. Poland, though victorious in the dreadful battle at Plovtse, had still lost in the time of Lokietek her possessions on the left bank of

the Vistula, together with Dantzic, Chev, Gniev, and Sviet. The Order of Livonian Knights stretched out after Russian lands; and those two Orders moved forward, like the first gigantic wave of a German sea, which was covering Slav lands with an ever-widening deluge.

Suddenly the sun of the German Order was obscured behind a cloud. Lithuania had received the Cross from Poland, and Yagello had received the throne at Cracow with the hand of the marvellous Yadviga. The Order, it is true, had not lost a single land through this, or a single castle, but it felt that against its power a power was now arrayed, and it lost the reason of its existence in Prussia. After the baptism of Lithuania the Order had only to return to Palestine and guard pilgrims on their way to the Holy City. But to return would be to renounce wealth, rule, power, dominion, cities, lands, and whole kingdoms. So the Order began to squirm in rage and terror, like a monstrous dragon in whose side the barbed shaft has sunk deeply. The Grand Master Conrad feared to risk all on one cast of the die, and trembled at the thought of war with Yagello, the ruler of Polish and Lithuanian lands and of those broad Russian regions which Olgierd had dragged from the throat of the Tartar; but the greater number of the Knights of the Cross urged on to war, feeling that they must fight a life-and-death battle while their forces were intact and before the halo of the Order should grow pale, while the whole world was hastening to give aid to them, and before the thunders of the Papacy could fall upon that nest of theirs. It was a question of life and death then for the Order not to spread the Christian faith, but to uphold the heathen.

Meanwhile, among nations, and at the courts of Europe, they accused Yagello and Lithuania of having performed a baptism that was false and counterfeit, declaring it impossible that that could be done in a single year which the sword of the Knights had not done in generations. They incensed against Poland and its sovereign, kings and knights, as against guardians and defenders of Pagan institutions; and their complaints, which were disbelieved in Rome alone, went through the world in a broad wave, and brought to Malborg princes, counts, and knights from the west and south of Europe. The Order gained confidence and felt itself all-mighty. Marienburg, with its two tremendous castles and its First Castle, dazzled men through its strength more than ever. They were dazzled by its wealth and its seeming

discipline; and the whole Order appeared more commanding, more inexhaustible for coming ages, than it had been at any time; and no man among princes, no man among knightly guests, no man even among Knights of the Order, save the Grand Master Conrad, understood that from the hour when Lithuania had become Christian, something of such character had happened as if those currents of the Nogat, which defended on one side the formidable fortress, had begun to undermine its walls in silence and irresistibly. No man understood that, though power remained yet in that enormous body, the soul had flown from it; whose came freshly and looked at that Marienburg reared *ex luto*, at those walls, bastions, black crosses on gates, mantle-rooms, and storehouses, thought, first of all, that even the gates of hell would not prevail against the Cross there, in its northern capital.

With a similar thought did not only Povala and Zbyshko look at it, they who had been there previously, but also Zyndram, a man far keener of mind than they were. Even he, as he gazed at that armored swarming place of soldiers, embraced by the circle of bastions and by gigantic palisades, grew dark in the face, and to his mind came, in spite of him, the insolent words with which the Knights of the Cross had threatened Kazimir, the Polish king, —

“Our force is greater; if thou yield not, we will hunt thee to Cracow itself with our sword-blades.”

Meanwhile the comtur of the castle conducted the knights farther on, to the Middle Castle, in the eastern flank of which were guest-chambers.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MATSKO and Zbyshko held each other in a long embrace, for each had loved the other always, and during recent years adventures and mishaps met in common made that love still stronger. The old knight divined from the first glance at his nephew that Danusia was not in the world then, so he made no inquiry; he merely drew the young man to his bosom, wishing to show by the power of that pressure that Zbyshko was not altogether an orphan, that there was still a kindred soul which was ready to share a sad fate with him.

At last, when sorrow and pain had flowed away with their tears considerably, Matsko asked, after a long silence, —

“Did they seize her again, or did she die in thy arms?”

“She died in my arms at the very edge of Spyhov,” said Zbyshko.

And he told what had happened, and how it had happened, interrupting his narrative with sighs and weeping. Matsko listened attentively; he sighed also, and at last inquired, —

“But is Yurand still living?”

“Yurand was living when I left Spyhov, but he has not long to abide in this world, and to a certainty I shall not see him again.”

“It would have been better, perhaps, to remain at Spyhov.”

“But how was I to leave you in this place?”

“A couple of weeks earlier or later would be the same.”

Zbyshko looked at his uncle carefully, and said, —

“You must have been sick. You look like Piotrovin.”¹

“Perhaps, for though the sun warms the world, it is always cold underground, and the dampness is terrible because there is water around all these castles. I thought that the mould here would kill me. There was no air to breathe, and my wound opened because of my suffering, — that wound, thou knowest, through which the arrow splinter came out after I had drunk bear’s oil.”

¹ A man brought to life according to popular tradition by Saint Stanislav.

“I remember,” said Zbyshko, “for Yagenka and I went for the bear. But did the dog brothers keep you underground here?”

Matsko nodded his head, and answered, —

“To tell the truth, they were not glad to see me, and it was going ill with me. There is great hatred here against Vitold and the Jmud men, but still greater against those of our people who help them. It was useless for me to tell why we went to the Jmud land. They wished to cut my head off, and if they did not cut it off it is only because they did not wish to lose the ransom; for, as thou knowest, money has more charms for them than even vengeance, and besides they wish to have in hand a proof that King Yagello helps Pagans. That the Jmud people, the unfortunates, beg for baptism, if only it is not from German hands, is known to us who have been in their country; but the Knights pretend not to know this, and they calumniate those people at all courts, and with them our king, Yagello.”

Here Matsko was seized by a panting fit, so he had to be silent for a time, and only after he had regained breath did he continue, —

“And I might have died underground, perhaps. It is true that Arnold von Baden took my part; he wished to save the ransom. But Arnold has no weight here, and they call him a bear. Luckily De Lorche heard of me from Arnold, and he made a tremendous uproar immediately. He may not have told thee of this, for he hides his own good deeds willingly. They hold him in consideration here, for a De Lorche held high office once in the Order, and this man is rich and of renowned family. He told them that he was our captive, and that if they took my life, or if I died through dampness and hunger, thou wouldst behead him. He threatened even to tell throughout the courts of western Europe how the Knights of the Cross treat belted knights. They were frightened, and removed me to a hospital where there is better food and the air is purer.”

“I will not take one copper from De Lorche, so help me God.”

“It is pleasant to take ransom from an enemy, but it is a proper thing to forgive a friend,” added Matsko; “still, since there is, as I hear, an agreement with the king about exchange of prisoners, thou wilt not have to ransom me.”

“Well, but our knightly word?” inquired Zbyshko.

“The king’s agreement is an agreement, still Arnold might accuse us of dishonor.”

When he heard this Matsko was concerned; he thought a while and said, —

“But it might be possible to reduce the amount somewhat.”

“We put our own estimate on ourselves. Are we of less value now?”

Matsko was concerned still more, but there was an expression of wonder in his eyes, and, as it were, of still greater love for Zbyshko.

“He will guard his honor; he was born with that power,” muttered the old man.

And he sighed. Zbyshko thought that it was from regret for the money which they had to pay Arnold, so he said, —

“You know that we have wealth enough now, if only our fate were not so grievous.”

“God will change it for thee,” said the old knight, with emotion. “I have not long to live in this world as I now am.”

“Do not say that! You will be well, only let the wind blow around you.”

“The wind? The wind bends a young tree, but breaks an old one.”

“Nonsense! the bones are not decaying in you yet, and it is a long way from you to old age. Be not sad!”

“Wert thou gladsome, I should laugh. But I have another cause for sadness, and to tell the truth, not only I, but all of us.”

“What is it?”

“Dost remember how I reproached thee in Skirvoillo’s camp because thou didst glorify the might of the Order? Our men are firm in the field, I know they are, but from near by, I see these dog brothers now for the first time.”

Matsko lowered his voice, as if fearing lest some one might overhear him.

“And I see now that thou wert right; I was not. May the hand of God defend us; what power, what strength! The hands of our knights are itching, and they wish to strike the Germans at the earliest; but they do not know that all nations and kings are helping the Order, that Knights of the Cross have more money, that they are better trained, that their castles are stronger and their battle weapons better.

May God's hand defend us! Both among us, and here, people say that it must come to a great war, and will come; but when it comes may God have mercy on our kingdom and our people!"

Here he clasped his iron-gray head with his palms, rested his elbows on his knees, and was silent.

"Well," said Zbyshko, "you see, taken separately, many of our men are stronger than single champions on their side, but as to a great war you yourself have grown thoughtful."

"O! I have indeed! And God grant that those envoys of the king will grow thoughtful also, but especially Zyndram."

"I saw how gloomy he became. He is a great man in war, and they say that no one in the world is so skilful in battle."

"If this is true, perhaps there will be no war."

"If the Knights of the Cross see that they are stronger, then war will come surely. And I tell you sincerely, God grant us an end of some sort, for we cannot live longer in this way."

In his turn Zbyshko, as if crushed by his own and the general misfortune, dropped his head.

"I grieve for our noble kingdom," said Matsko; "but I fear that God has punished us for great boasting. Thou rememberest how, in front of the cathedral in Cracow before mass, at the time when thy head was to be cut off, and was not, the knighthood challenged Timur the Lame, the master of forty kingdoms, the man who made a mountain of human skulls, — the Knights of the Cross were not enough for them, they must challenge all opponents at once, — and in this was offence against God, perhaps."

Zbyshko at this reminder seized his golden hair, for great grief had come on him unexpectedly, and he cried, —

"But who saved me at that time from the headman, if not she? O Jesus! My Danusia! O Jesus!"

And he tore his hair, and then began to gnaw his fist, with which he tried to stifle his sobbing, so did the spirit whine in the man from sudden pain.

"Keep God in thy heart, boy! be quiet!" cried Matsko. "What wilt thou gain? Restrain thyself! Be calm!"

But Zbyshko was unable for a long time to calm himself, and he came to his mind only when Matsko, who was really ill yet, grew so faint that he tottered on his feet, and fell to the bench quite unconscious. Then the young man placed

him on the bed, strengthened him with wine, which the comtur of the castle had sent, and watched over him till the old knight dropped asleep.

They woke late next morning fresher and rested.

"Well," said Matsko, "it must be that my time has not come yet; and I think that if the breeze of the field were blowing about me I could ride to the end of my journey."

"The envoys will remain here some days yet," answered Zbyshko, "for people are coming with requests about captives caught in Mazovia or Great Poland while robbing; but we may go whenever you wish, and when you feel strong enough."

At this moment Hlava came in.

"Dost know what the envoys are doing?" asked the old knight of him.

"They are visiting the church and the High Castle, — the comtur of the castle acts himself as their guide; afterward they will go to the chief refectory to a dinner to which the Grand Master is to invite your Graces."

"But what hast thou been doing since early morning?"

"Looking at German mercenaries, infantry, which captains are drilling, and I compared them with our Cheh men."

"Dost thou remember Cheh infantry?"

"I was a stripling when the knight Zyh captured me, but I remember well, for I was curious about such things from boyhood."

"Well, and what?"

"Oh, nothing! The infantry of the Order is strong and well trained, but the men are bullocks, while our Chehs are wolves. Should it come to action — but then your Graces know that bullocks do not eat wolves, and wolves like beef tremendously."

"That is true," said Matsko, who evidently knew something of this; "the man who rubs against your people jumps back from them as from a porcupine."

"In battle a mounted knight is as good as ten footmen," said Zbyshko.

"But only infantry can take Malborg," answered Hlava.

Remarks on infantry stopped there, for Matsko, following the course of his own thoughts, said, —

"Hear Hlava; to-day, when I get up and feel in strength, we will go."

"But whither?"

"Of course to Mazovia. To Spyhov," said Zbyshko.

“And shall we stay there?”

Here Matsko looked at his nephew inquiringly, for thus far they had not spoken of what they were to do in future. The young man had his decision ready, but evidently had no wish to grieve his uncle, so he replied indirectly, —

“First, you must be well.”

“And then what?”

“And then? You will go back to Bogdanets. I know how you love Bogdanets.”

“But thou?”

“I love it too.”

“I do not say that thou shouldst not go to Yurand,” said Matsko, slowly, “for if he dies, we ought to bury him properly; but attend to what I say, for being young thou art not my equal in prudence. Spyhov is unfortunate in some way. Whatever good has met thee, has met thee elsewhere, but in Spyhov, only grievous suffering and anguish.”

“You speak the truth, but Danusia’s body is in Spyhov.”

“Be quiet!” exclaimed Matsko, fearing lest unexpected pain should seize Zbyshko, as it had the day previous.

But on the young man’s face were reflected only tenderness and sorrow.

“There will be time for counsel,” said he, after a while.

“You must rest in Plotsk anyhow.”

“Care will not fail your Grace in Plotsk,” put in Hlava.

“True,” added Zbyshko. “Do you know that Yagenka is there? She is a damsel of Princess Alexandra. But of course you know, for you brought her there. She was in Spyhov too. It was a wonder to me that you said nothing of her while we were with Skirvoillo.”

“Not only was she in Spyhov, but had it not been for her, Yurand would be groping along a highway with his stick, or would have died somewhere at the roadside. I brought her to Plotsk for the Abbot’s legacy, and I said nothing to thee about her; if I had, thou wouldst not have heard it. Thou wert paying no attention to anything, poor fellow, at that time.”

“She loves you greatly,” said Zbyshko. “Praised be God that we needed no letters, but she got letters from the princess on your behalf, and through the princess from the envoys of the Order.”

“God bless the girl, for on earth there is not a better than she!” replied Matsko.

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Zyndram and Povala, who, since they had heard of Matsko's fainting fit, had come to visit him.

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" said Zyndram, when he had crossed the threshold. "How is it with you to-day?"

"God reward you! In a small way. Zbyshko says that if the wind were to blow around me I should be well immediately."

"Why should you not? You will be well! All will be well," put in Povala.

"Besides, I have rested thoroughly. Not like your Graces, who, as I hear, rose early."

"First people came to us to claim prisoners," said Zyndram, "and afterward we examined the management of the Order, — in the First Castle and the other castles."

"Firm management, and firm castles!" muttered Matsko.

"Surely they are firm. In the church there are ornaments in the Arabic style; the Knights said that they had learned that style from the Saracens in Sicily, and in the castles are special rooms on pillars which stand alone, or in clusters. You will see yourselves the great refectory. The fortress is tremendous in all its parts, such a fortress as there is in no other place. Such walls a stone cannon-ball, though the greatest, could not bite in any way. By my faith, there is pleasure in looking at it."

Zyndram said this so joyously that Matsko looked at him with astonishment, and asked, —

"But their wealth and good order, and troops, and guests, have you looked at them?"

"They showed us all, as if through friendliness, but really to make the hearts sink in us."

"Well, and what?"

"Well, God grant that when war comes we shall drive them from here, beyond the mountains and seas, — to the place whence they came."

Matsko, forgetting his sickness at that moment, sprang to his feet in astonishment.

"How is this, lord?" asked he. "Men say that you have a quick mind. As to me, I grew faint when I saw what their power is. In God's name, whence do you get your conviction?"

Here he turned to his nephew.

"Zbyshko, command to bring wine, that which they sent us. Sit down, your Graces, and talk, since a better cure

for my sickness than your discourse no physician could think out."

Zbyshko, also very curious, put the wine on the table himself, and with it goblets; all sat around the table then, and Zyndram spoke as follows, —

"This fortress is nothing; for what the hand of man has reared, the hand of man can pull down. Ye know what keeps brick together? Mortar! But do ye know what keeps people together? Love."

"By God's wounds! honey is flowing from your lips!" exclaimed Matsko.

Zyndram, rejoiced in his heart by that praise, continued, —

"Of the people in this region one has in bonds with us a brother, another a son, another a relative, another a son-in-law, or some one else. The comturs of the boundary command their men to go out and rob us; hence many of them are slain, and many of them we capture. But since people here have learned already of the exchange of prisoners between the king and the Grand Master, they came to us from early morning to give the names of captives, which names our scribe entered down. First of all came a cooper, a rich citizen, a German, who has a house in Malborg, when he said at last: 'If I could serve your king and kingdom in any way, I would give my life and not merely my property.' I sent him away, thinking the man a Judas. But after him came a parish priest from near Oliva, to ask about his brother, and he spoke as follows: 'Is it true, lord, that ye are going to war with our Prussian masters? If ye are, be it known to you that the whole people here when they say "Thy kingdom come," are thinking of your sovereign.' Afterward appeared two nobles for their sons: these nobles live near Shtum on feudal lands; there were merchants from Dantzic, there were artisans, there was a bell-founder from Kvidjyn, there was a crowd of various people, and they all said the same thing."

Here Zyndram stopped and looked around to see that no men were listening behind the doors; on returning he finished in a somewhat lower voice. —

"I inquired long about everything. Throughout all Prussia the Knights of the Cross are hated by priests, nobles, citizens, and land-tillers. And not only are they hated by people who use our speech, or the Prussian, but even by Germans. The man who is forced to serve, serves; but the

plague is more beloved than the Knights of the Cross are. That is the truth of the matter."

"Yes, but what has this to do with the power of the Order?" asked Matsko, anxiously.

Zyndram smoothed his broad forehead with his hand, thought a while, as if seeking a comparison, then smiled, and inquired, —

"Have you ever fought within barriers?"

"I have, and fought frequently."

"Then what do you think — Will not a knight be thrown from his horse at the first onset, even though he be the mightiest, who has the saddle girths cut under him, and also his stirrup straps?"

"As true as life!"

"Well, do you see? the Order is a knight like that."

"It is, as God is just!" shouted Zbyshko. "Even in a book thou'lt find nothing to beat that!"

And Matsko was so excited that he said in a voice trembling somewhat, —

"God reward you. For your head, lord, the armorer must fashion a helmet purposely, as there is none ready made on earth to fit it."

CHAPTER LXIV.

MATSKO and Zbyshko promised themselves to leave Malborg straightway, but they did not depart during the day on which Zyndram had strengthened their spirits so mightily, for there was a dinner at the High Castle, and then a supper in honor of guests and envoys, to which Zbyshko was invited, and for Zbyshko's sake also Matsko. The dinner was given to a select company in the Grand Refectory, into which light came by ten windows, and the ceiling of which in pointed arches rested, through a rare architectural device, on one column. Of foreigners, besides Yagello's knights, there sat down to the table only one Suabian count, and one Burgundian, who, though a subject of rich lords, had come at their command to borrow money from the Order. Of local persons, besides the Grand Master, four dignitaries took part in the dinner, so-called pillars of the Order; that is, the grand comtur, the almoner, the master of the wardrobe, and the treasurer. The fifth pillar, the marshal, was at that time on an expedition against Vitold.

Though the Order had vowed poverty, they ate on gold and silver and drank Malvoisie, for the Master wished to dazzle the Polish envoys. But despite a multitude of dishes and abundant cheer, that feast was somewhat irksome to the guests, because of difficulty in conversation and ceremonies which were to be observed on all sides. But supper was more gladsome, in the Grand Refectory (Convents Remter), for the Order met there, and all those guests who had not marched yet against Vitold with the army of the marshal. No dispute disturbed its joyousness, nor any quarrel. It is true that knights from other lands, foreseeing that they would have to meet the Poles sometime, looked at them with unfriendly eye, but the Knights of the Cross had informed them beforehand of the need to conduct themselves quietly, and had begged them most earnestly to do so, fearing lest they might offend the king and the entire kingdom in the persons of the envoys. But even then the ill-will of the Order was made manifest; they forewarned the guests

against Polish temper: "For every word," said they, "sharper than common, the Poles will tear a man's beard out, or thrust a knife into his body." So the guests were astonished afterward at the courtesy of Povala and Zyndram, and the more quick-witted said that Polish manners were not rude, but that the tongues of the Knights of the Cross were malignant and venomous.

Some of them, accustomed to refined amusements at the polished courts of western Europe, took away ideas not entirely favorable concerning the manners of the Knights in Malborg; for at that feast there was an orchestra noisy beyond measure, there were rude songs of "playmen," rough jests of buffoons, and dances of barefooted maidens. And when guests wondered at the presence of women in the High Castle, it was said that the prohibition had been removed long before, and that the great Winrich Kniprode himself had danced in his day there with the beautiful Maria von Alleben. The brothers explained that women not only lived in the Castle, but came to feast in the refectory, and that the past year Prince Vitold's wife, who lodged in the old armory of the First Castle, had appeared every day in the refectory to play draughts made of gold, which the Knights presented each time to her.

They played that evening also, not only draughts, but chess and dice; there was more of play than conversation, which was drowned by songs and by that too noisy orchestra. Still, amid the universal uproar quieter moments came, and, seizing one of these, Zyndram, as if knowing nothing, asked the Grand Master whether its subjects in all lands loved the Order.

To this Conrad gave the following answer, —

"Whoso loves the Cross is obliged to love the Order."

That answer pleased the Knights and the guests, hence they praised it. The Grand Master, pleased at this, continued, —

"Whoso is our friend is happy under us; but whoso is an enemy, against him we have two methods."

"What are they?" inquired Zyndram.

"Perhaps your Honor does not know that I come from my chambers to this refectory by small stairways in the wall, and near those stairways there is a certain vaulted chamber; were I to conduct you hither you would know the first method."

"As true as life!" exclaimed the brothers.

Zyndram divined that the Master was speaking of that "tower" filled with gold, of which the Knights boasted, so he hesitated a while, and then said,—

"Once, oh, very long ago, a certain German Cæsar showed an ambassador of ours, whose name was Skarbek, such a chamber, and said: 'I have something with which to overcome thy lord!' But Skarbek threw into it a costly ring, and added, 'Go thou gold to gold; we Poles like iron better.' And you know what came after that, your Honor? After that came Hundsfeld."¹

"What is that Hundsfeld?" inquired a number of knights together.

"That," answered Zyndram, quietly, "was a field on which they were unable to bury all the Germans, and at last dogs finished the burial."

Knights of the Order and brothers when they heard this were greatly confused, and knew not what reply to make, while Zyndram said, as if in ending,—

"Thou wilt do nothing with gold against iron."

"Well," exclaimed the Master, "our second method is always iron. Your Honor saw at the First Castle armorers' workshops. Hammers are forging night and day there, and they forge swords and armor that have no equal elsewhere."

In answer Povala stretched out his hand to the middle of the table, and took a strip of iron used for cutting meat; in length it was an ell and in width more than half a span. This he wound into a roll easily, like parchment, and raised it high so that all might see the roll; after that he gave it to the Master.

"If the iron of your swords is of this sort, you will not do much with them."

And he smiled with satisfaction, while the spiritual and lay knights rose from their seats and hurried in a crowd to the Grand Master; then they passed the iron roll from one to another, but all were silent, having timid hearts in their breasts in view of this strength in Povala.

"By the head of Saint Liborius!" exclaimed the Master at last, "you have iron hands, lord."

But the Burgundian count added,—

"And better iron than this. He folded the strip as if it were wax."

"He did not even flush, and his veins were not swollen," said one of the brothers.

¹ Dogsfield (Psie Pole in Polish). This battle was fought in 1109 near Breslau.

“Yes,” answered Povala; “our people are simple: they have not such wealth and comfort as I see in this place, but they are healthy.”

And now Italian and French knights approached him and spoke to him in their resonant speech, of which Matsko said that it was as if some one were rattling tin plates. They wondered at his strength; then he touched goblets with them and answered, —

“Such things as this are done at feasts among us frequently, and it happens that even a girl will roll a smaller strip.”

But the Germans, who liked to boast among strangers of their size and strength, were enraged and out of countenance, so old Helfenstein called across the table, —

“This is a shame for us! Brother Arnold von Baden, show that our bones, too, are not made of church tapers! Give Arnold a strip.”

The servants brought a strip quickly and placed it before Arnold; but he, whether it was that the sight of so many spectators confused him, or that he had really less strength in his fingers than Povala, bent the strip halfway, but was unable to finish.

More than one of the foreign guests, to whom the Knights of the Cross had whispered previously, and more than one time, that war with the King of Poland would begin the next winter, fell to thinking deeply, and remembered that winter in those regions was terribly inclement, and that it would perhaps be better to return in time to a softer climate and their native castles.

There was this wonderful thing in the situation, that such thoughts came to their heads in July, — a time of hot days and splendid weather.

CHAPTER LXV.

At Plotsk, Zbyshko and Matsko found no one at the court, for the prince and princess, with their eight children, had gone to Chersk, at the invitation of Princess Anna Danuta. From the bishop they learned that Yagenka was to remain in Spyhov with Yurand till he died. This news was agreeable, for they themselves were on the way to Spyhov. Meanwhile Matsko praised greatly Yagenka's kindness, since she had remained with a dying man, who was not even kin to her, instead of going to Chersk, where dances and pleasures of every sort would surely not be lacking.

"Perhaps she did this not to miss us," said the old knight. "I have not seen her this long time, and should be glad to see her now, for I know that she likes me. The girl must have grown, and must still be handsome."

"She has changed wonderfully," said Zbyshko. "She was always a beauty. I remember her as a simple maiden, while now she might go to kings' chambers."

"Has she changed so? Well, hers is that old Yastremets stock of Zgorzelitse which in time of battles called, 'To feasts!'"

A moment of silence followed, then the old knight said again. "It will be as I have told thee; she will wish to go to Zgorzelitse."

"I wonder that she left it."

"But the abbot's property? Besides, she feared Stan and Vilk; I told her myself that for her brothers it would be safer without her than with her."

"By my faith, they could not attack orphans, anyhow."

Matsko thought awhile.

"But will they not take vengeance on me because I took her away, and does there remain even one beam in Bogdanets? God knows! I know not, besides, whether I shall be able to defend myself when I go back. The fellows are young and strong, while I am old —"

"Ei! old; say that to the man who does not know you," answered Zbyshko.

Matsko did not speak in perfect sincerity, for with him it was a question of something else, but immediately he waved his hand.

“If I had not been sick in Malborg — well, that too,” said he. “But we will talk of it in Spyhov.”

And next day, after their night rest, they set out for Spyhov.

The days were clear, the road dry, easy, and besides safe; for because of the recent agreement the Knights of the Cross restrained robbery on the border. Moreover, the two knights were of that class of travellers whom it was better for a robber to bow to from afar than attack at close quarters, so the journey passed quickly, and the fifth day after leaving Plotsk they halted in the morning at Spyhov. Yagenka, who esteemed Matsko as her best friend on earth, greeted him almost as she would her father; while he, though no common thing could move him, was moved by that kindness of the girl whom he liked so much, and when later, Zbyshko, after he had inquired about Yurand, went to the tomb of his Danusia, the old knight sighed deeply.

“Well,” said he, “God took the one He wished to take, and left the one He wished to leave; but I think that our troubles and wanderings in wildernesses and wild places are ended.”

After a while he added, —

“Ei! where has the Lord Jesus not carried us during these recent years!”

“But the hand of God guarded you,” said Yagenka.

“True, it guarded us, but indeed it is time to go home.”

“We must stay here while Yurand lives.”

“But how is he?”

“He looks up and smiles. It is clear that he sees Paradise, and in it Danusia.”

“Dost thou look after him?”

“I do; but Father Kałeb says that angels look after him. Yesterday the housekeeper saw two of them.”

“They say,” answered Matsko, “that it is most fitting for a noble to die in the field, but it is well, too, to die on a bed if one dies like Yurand.”

“He eats nothing, he drinks nothing, but smiles continually.”

“Let us go to him; Zbyshko must be there.”

But Zbyshko remained only a short time with Yurand, who recognized no one; he went then to Danusia’s coffin in the

vault. There he remained till old Tolima went to bring him to refreshment. When coming out he noticed by the light of the torch that the coffin was covered with garlands of star thistles and marigolds, while the space round about was swept clean and strewn with odorous plants. The young man's heart rose at sight of this, and he asked, —

“Who adorned the tomb in this way?”

“The young lady from Zgorzelitse,” answered Tolima.

Zbyshko said nothing then, but later, when he saw Yagenka, he bowed down to her knees quickly, embraced them, and cried, —

“God reward thee for thy goodness and for those flowers placed above Danusia!”

And when he said this he wept earnestly, while she embraced his head with her hands, like a sister who consoles a mourning brother.

“O my Zbyshko,” said she, “would that I could comfort thee still more!”

Then abundant tears fell from her eyes also.

CHAPTER LXVI.

SOME days later Yurand died. Father Kaleb celebrated masses a whole week above his body, which showed no decay,—in this all beheld a miracle,—and for a week guests came in crowds to Spyhov. Then followed a time of quiet, such as there is usually after a funeral. Zbyshko went to the vault, and sometimes he went to the forest with his crossbow, from which, however, he shot at no beast, but walked in forgetfulness; till at last one evening he returned to the chamber where the girls were sitting with Matsko and with Hlava.

“Listen to what I will say,” said he, unexpectedly. “Sorrow profits no one; hence it is better for you to go to Zgorzelitse and Bogdanets than to sit here grieving.”

Silence followed, for all divined that words of great import were coming, and only after a time did Matsko add,—

“Better for us and for thee as well.”

But Zbyshko shook his bright head.

“No! I will return, God grant, to Bogdanets, but now I must take another road.”

“Ei!” cried Matsko; “I said that the end had come, but now there is no end! Fear God, Zbyshko!”

“But you know that I made a vow—”

“Is that a reason? Danusia is gone, and the vow is gone also. Death has released thee from the oath.”

“She would have released me, but I did not swear to her; I swore to God on my knightly honor. What do you wish? On knightly honor!”

Every word touching knightly honor had an influence on Matsko that seemed as it were magical. He guided himself in life by few commands except those of God and the Church, but he guided himself by those unswervingly.

“I do not tell thee not to keep thy oath,” replied Matsko.

“But what?”

“This, that thou art young and hast time for everything. Come now with us; thou wilt rest—shake thyself free of

pain and sorrow — and then thou wilt go whithersoever thou wishest.”

“I will tell you as truly as at confession,” answered Zbyshko: “I am going, you see, whither I must go; I talk with you, I eat and drink, like every man, but I say truly that within me and within my soul I cannot help myself in any way. There is nothing in me but sadness, nothing but pain, nothing but those bitter tears which flow from my eyes whether I will or not.”

“Among strangers it will be still worse.”

“No; God sees that I should die in Bogdanets. When I tell you that I cannot, it means that I cannot! I need war, for in the field one forgets more easily. I feel that when I accomplish my vow, when I am able to say to that saved soul, ‘I have fulfilled everything that I promised,’ only then will she release me. Earlier she will not. You could not hold me with a rope in Bogdanets.”

After these words there was such silence in that chamber that flies were heard as they passed beneath the ceiling.

“If it would kill him to be in Bogdanets, better let him go,” said Yagenka, finally.

Matsko put his two palms on his neck, as was his custom at moments of perplexity, sighed then deeply, and said, —

“Ei, mighty God!”

But Yagenka continued, —

“Zbyshko, but thou wilt swear, that if God preserves thee, thou wilt not remain off there, but return to us?”

“Why should I not return? I shall not avoid Spyhov, but I will not remain here.”

“For,” continued the girl, in a voice somewhat lower, “if thou art concerned for the coffin we will take it to Kresnia.”

“Yagus!”¹ cried Zbyshko, with an outburst.

And he fell at her feet in the first moment of transport and gratitude.

¹ One of the many variants of Yagenka.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE old knight wished absolutely to go with Zbyshko to the armies of Prince Vitold, but Zbyshko would not permit his uncle even to speak of this. He insisted on going alone, without retinue, without wagons, with only three mounted men, one of whom was to carry provisions, the other, arms and clothing, the third, bearskins on which to sleep. In vain did Yagenka and Matsko implore him to take even Hlava, as a man of tried strength and devotion. He resisted, and refused, saying that he must forget the pain which was gnawing him, while the presence of Hlava would remind him of all that had happened and was past.

But before he departed there were weighty discussions as to what should be done with Spyhov. Matsko's advice was to sell the estate. He called that land unfortunatate; it had brought, he said, nothing save disaster and misfortune to any one. There was in Spyhov much wealth of every kind: money, arms, horses, clothing, sheepskin coats, precious furs, costly implements, herds of cattle. In Matsko's soul the question was to increase with that wealth Bogdanets, which was dearer to him than any other spot. They counselled long over this, but Zbyshko would not consent to sell Spyhov at any price.

"How am I," said he, "to sell Yurand's bones? Am I to repay in that way the benefactions with which he has covered me?"

"We have promised to take Danusia's coffin," answered Matsko; "we can take Yurand's body also."

"But he is here with his fathers, and without his fathers he would be wretched in Kresnia. If you take Danusia, he will be here far away from his daughter; if you take him with her, then the fathers will be here without both."

"Dost thou not remember that Yurand in Paradise sees all people daily? and Father Kaleb says that he is in Paradise," answered the old knight.

But Father Kaleb, who was on Zbyshko's side, said, —

"His soul is in Paradise, but his body will be on earth till the day of judgment."

Matsko stopped a while, and following further his own thought, added, —

“Well, Yurand does not see a man who is not saved; for that there is no remedy.”

“What use in trying to get at God’s judgments?” said Zbyshko. “But may the Lord not permit a stranger to dwell above the sacred remains of Yurand! Better leave all here, but Spyhov I would not sell, though I got a principality in return for it.”

Matsko knew after these words that there was no help; he knew his nephew’s stubbornness, and did homage in the depth of his soul to it, as well as to everything that was in the young man; so after a while he added, —

“It is true that the boy speaks against my grain, but there is truth in what he tells us.”

And he was vexed, for in every case he knew not what to do. But Yagenka, who had been silent so far, appeared now with a new advice, —

“If an honest man could be found to manage Spyhov, or to rent it, that would be excellent. Best would be to rent the place, for there would be no trouble, nothing but ready money. Might not Tolima? He is old and understands war better than land management; but if not he, then perhaps Father Kaleb?”

“Dear young lady,” answered the priest, “there is land ready for me and Tolima, but that which will cover us is not that on which we are walking.”

Then he turned to Tolima.

“Is this true, old man?”

Tolima surrounded his pointed ear with his palm, and asked what the question was, and when they explained in a lower voice, he answered, —

“That is the holy truth. I am not for land management. I go deeper with an axe than a plough; before I die I should like to avenge my lord and his daughter.”

And he stretched forth his lean but sinewy hands with fingers curved like the talons of a bird of prey, then turning his gray head, which resembled a wolf’s head, toward Matsko and Zbyshko, he added, —

“Take me, your Grace, against the Germans; that is my service!”

And he was right. He had added no little to Yurand’s wealth, but it was by war and plunder, not by land-tilling.

So Yagenka, who during this conversation had been thinking what to say, spoke again, —

“A young man is needed here, a man who fears no one, for the boundary of the Order is close by; a man who not only would not hide from the Germans, but would hunt them; so, without hesitation, I think that Hlava is the man for this place.”

“See how she will fix it!” cried Matsko, who, in spite of his love for Yagenka, was unwilling that a woman should have a voice in such matters, and moreover a woman who was unmarried.

But Hlava rose from the seat where he had been sitting, and said, —

“God sees that I should go to the war gladly with Pau Zbyshko, for he and I have shelled out German souls somewhat, and we might shell out more of them in the future. But if I am to stay, I will stay. Tolima is a friend of mine; he knows me. The boundary of the Order is near by. Well! that is just as is proper. We shall see which neighbor will be first to grow sick of the other. I fear them! No; let them fear me. May the Lord Jesus not permit me either to wrong your Graces and grasp everything. In this matter the lady can speak for me; she knows that I would rather die a hundred times than show dishonest eyes to her. Of land management I know what I have learned in Zgorzelitse; but I see that the axe and sword are more needed here than the plough in land management. And this all is greatly to my liking; but still, to stay here —”

“Well, what?” inquired Zbyshko. “Why dost thou hesitate?”

Hlava was confused greatly, and stammered as he said, —

“It is this, when the young lady goes away all will go with her; to make war is well, and to manage land is well also, but to do it here all alone — without assistance. It will be awfully dreary without the young lady — and without this — just as I wanted to say — and as the young lady is going away not without attendants — then as no one would help here — I do not know —”

“What is the man talking about?” inquired Matsko.

“You have a quick mind, but have not noticed anything,” answered Yagenka.

“What is it?”

Instead of answering, she turned to Hlava, —

“But if Anulka were to stay with thee, couldst thou hold out?”

At this Hlava fell at her feet so suddenly that dust rose to the ceiling.

“With her I could hold out in hell!” cried he, embracing Yagenka’s feet.

When Zbyshko heard this cry he looked at Hlava with astonishment, for he had not known anything previously and had not suspected. Matsko wondered also at how much woman means in man’s affairs, and how through her everything may succeed or may fail altogether.

“God is gracious to me,” muttered he, “because I am not curious about women.”

However, Yagenka, turning again to Hlava, said, —

“Now we only need to ask if Anulka will hold out with thee.”

She called Anulka, who entered, knowing or guessing evidently what the question was, for she came in with her arm across her eyes, and her head drooping so that they saw only the parting of her bright hair, which was much brighter from the sunlight which now fell on it. Anulka halted at the door; then, springing forward to Yagenka, dropped on her knees before her, and hid her face in the folds of the lady’s skirt.

But Hlava knelt near her, and said to Yagenka, —

“Bless us, young lady!”

CHAPTER LXVIII.

NEXT day came the moment of Zbyshko's departure. He was sitting high on a large war-horse, and his friends had surrounded him. Yagenka, standing near the stirrup, raised her sad blue eyes to the young man in silence, as if wishing to look at him sufficiently before parting. Matsko and Father Kaleb were at the other stirrup, and near them stood Hlava and Anulka. Zbyshko turned his face first toward one side, then toward the other, exchanging such brief words as are said usually before a long journey: "Be well!" "May God conduct thee!" "It is time!" "Hei! it is time! it is time!"

He had taken farewell before of all, and of Yagenka, at whose feet he had fallen in giving thanks for her goodness. But now, as he looked at her from his lofty saddle, he wished to say some new heartfelt word, since her uplifted eyes and face said to him so expressively, "Come back!" that the heart rose in him with palpable gratitude. And as if responding to her unspoken eloquence he said, —

"Yagus, to thee as to my own sister — Thou knowest! I will say no more!"

"I know. God reward thee."

"And remember uncle."

"And do thou remember —"

"I shall return, be sure of that, unless I perish."

"Do not perish."

Once already, in Plotsk, when he had mentioned this expedition, she said the same words to him, "Do not perish;" but this time these words came from profounder depths of her spirit, and, perhaps to hide her tears, she bent the same moment, so that her forehead touched Zbyshko's knee for an instant.

Meanwhile the mounted attendants at the gate, who were holding pack-horses ready now for the road, began to sing:

"The ring will not be lost; the golden ring

Will not be lost.

A raven will bear it back from the field

To the maiden."

"To the road!" called out Zbyshko.

"To the road."

"God conduct thee! The Most Holy Mother!"

Hoofs resounded on the wooden drawbridge, one of the horses gave a prolonged neigh, others snorted loudly, and the party moved on.

But Yagenka, Matsko, Father Kaleb, Tolima, and Hlava, with his wife and the servants who remained in Spyhov, went out on the bridge and looked after them as they departed. Father Kaleb continued making the sign of the cross after them for a long time, till at last they disappeared beyond an alder thicket.

"Under that banner no evil fate will strike them," said he.

"True, but it is of good omen also that their horses gave tremendous snorts," added Matsko.

But neither did he remain long at Spyhov. In a fortnight the old knight finished arrangements with Hlava, who took the estate as a tenant. Matsko, at the head of a long row of wagons surrounded by armed attendants, set out with Yagenka toward Bogdanets. Father Kaleb and old Tolima looked at those wagons without entire satisfaction, for in truth Matsko had stripped Spyhov to some extent, but since Zbyshko had left all things to his management no one dared oppose him. He would have taken still more had he not been restrained by Yagenka, with whom he disputed, it is true, being astonished at her "woman's reasons," but still he obeyed her in almost everything.

They did not take Danusia's coffin, however, for as Spyhov was not sold, Zbyshko preferred that she should remain there with her fathers. They took a large stock of money and wealth of various sorts, captured for the greatest part from Germans in battles fought by Yurand. So Matsko, as he looked at the laden wagons covered with matting, was delighted in soul at the thought of how he would strengthen and arrange Bogdanets. His delight was poisoned, however, by the fear that Zbyshko might fall, but knowing the knightly skill of the young man he did not lose hope that he would return in safety, and he thought of this with rapture.

"Perhaps God wished," said he to himself, "that Zbyshko should obtain Spyhov first, then Mochydoly, and all that remained after the abbot. Let him only come back, I will build him a worthy castle in Bogdanets; and then we shall see!"

Here it occurred to him that Stan and Vilc would to a certainty not receive him with superfluous delight, and that perhaps he would have to fight them; but he had no fear of this, just as an old war-horse feels no fear when he must go to battle. His health had returned; he felt strength in his bones, and knew that he would manage easily those quarrellers who were dangerous, it may be, but without knightly training. He said something different, it is true, a short time before, to Zbyshko, but he said it only to restrain that young man from going.

“Hei! I am a pike, and they are gudgeons,” thought he; “they would better not come near me head foremost.”

But something else alarmed him immediately: “God knows when Zbyshko will come back; meanwhile he looks on Yagenka only as a sister. Now does not the girl look at him also as a brother, and will she wait for his uncertain return?”

So he looked at her and said, —

“Listen to me, Yagna: I will not talk of Stan and Vilc, for they are uncouth peasants, and not for thee. Thou art now a court lady! But as thy years — my late friend, Zyh, told me that the will of God was on thee then, and that was some time ago. For I know — they say, that when a girl feels the garland too tight on her head she seeks some one to remove it. It is to be understood that neither Stan nor Vilc — but what dost thou notice?”

“Of what are you inquiring?” asked Yagenka.

“Wouldst thou marry no man?”

“I? I shall be a nun.”

“Do not say anything frivolous! But if Zbyshko comes back?”

She shook her head.

“I shall be a nun.”

“But if he should love thee? If he should beg, and beg terribly?”

The girl turned her blushing face toward the field; but the wind, which was blowing from the field just then, brought to Matsko the low-voiced answer, —

“I would not be a nun.”

CHAPTER LXIX.

THEY remained a time in Plotsk on business of Yagenka's inheritance and the abbot's will; afterward, when provided with documents, they moved forward without resting much on their journey, which was easy and safe, for the heat had dried swamps and narrowed rivers, while the roads lay through a peaceful country inhabited by people who were of Polish race, and hospitable. From Sieradz, however, the careful Matsko despatched an attendant to Zgorzelitse, to announce his own coming and that of Yagenka; because of this Yasko, Yagenka's brother, hurried out halfway to meet them and conducted them home at the head of armed attendants.

There was much rejoicing when they met, with many greetings and many outcries. Yasko and Yagenka had always resembled each other as much as two drops of water, but he had outgrown her. He was a splendid young fellow, daring, joyous, like his father, from whom he had inherited a love for singing, and he was as lively as a fire spark. He thought himself a person of years and strength; he considered that he was a mature man, for he managed his attendants as a genuine chief, and they carried out every command of his in a flash, fearing evidently his power and importance.

Matsko and Yagenka wondered at this; while Yasko looked with delight at the beauty and polish of his sister, whom he had not seen for a long time. He told them meanwhile that he had been preparing to visit her, and had they delayed a little in coming they would not have found him at home. He wished to see the world, he said, rub against men, get knightly training, and find a chance to fight in one and another place with knights on their wanderings.

"To learn the world and the manners of people is a good thing," said Matsko in answer, "for a man learns what he is to do and say in every juncture, and it strengthens the native wit in him. But as to fighting, it is better that I should say that thou art too young yet than that a strange knight should say so, and besides not fail to laugh at thee."

“He would cry after laughing,” said Yasko; “if not he, then his wife and children would surely cry.”

And the youth glanced around with tremendous daring, as if to say to all knights wandering through the world, “Prepare for death!” But the old man of Bogdanets inquired, —

“Well, Stan and Vilk, have they left thee in peace? I ask, for they were glad to look at Yagenka.”

“They have indeed; Vilk was killed in Silesia. He attacked a German castle there, and he took it; but they hurled down a beam of wood from the walls on him, and two days later he let his last breath out.”

“A pity for him. His father went also in his day to Silesia against the Germans, who oppress our people — and plunder them. To take castles is the worst work of all, for neither armor nor knightly training assist a man. God grant that Prince Vitold will not try castles, but will crush the Knights of the Order in the field! But Stan, what is he doing?”

Yasko began to laugh.

“Stan is married. He took the daughter of a free land-tiller in Wysoki Breg, a great beauty. Hei! not only a good-looking girl, but a manager: she does not give the man his will once, and slaps his hairy face for him; she leads Stan by the nose, as a bear-trainer leads his beast on a chain.”

The old knight was immensely amused when he heard this.

“Look at her! All women are the same! Yagenka, thou too wilt be like the others! Praise to God that there was no trouble with those two quarrellers; it is a real wonder to me that they did no harm to Bogdanets.”

“Stan wanted to do something, but Vilk, who was wiser, gave him no chance. He came to us at Zgorzelitse, and inquired, ‘What has become of Yagenka?’ I told him that she had gone for an inheritance from the abbot. ‘Why did not Matsko tell me?’ asked he. ‘But is Yagenka thine, that he should tell thee?’ said I to him. So, after thinking a while he said, ‘True, she is not mine.’ And as he had a quick mind, he saw, of course, that he would win you and us to his side by defending Bogdanets from Stan. So they met on the Lavitsa near Piaski, cut each other up, and then drank to kill, as they always did.”

“Lord light Vilk’s soul!” added Matsko.

And he sighed deeply, glad that there were no damages in Bogdanets beyond those caused by his long absence.

In fact, he found none; on the contrary there was an increase of cattle, and from the small herd of mares there were colts, some from the Frisian war horses unusually large and powerful. There was a loss only in this, that some captives had fled, but not many, for they could flee only toward Silesia, and there the Germanized robber knights treated captives worse than did Polish nobles. But the enormous old house had inclined toward its fall considerably. The plaster had fallen; the walls and ceiling had grown crooked; and the larch beams, cut two hundred years or more before, had begun to rot. Throughout all the rooms, inhabited of old by the numerous Grady of Bogdanets, it leaked during the great summer rains. There were holes in the roof, which was covered by broad patches of green and reddish moss. The whole building had squatted and looked like an immense mouldering mushroom.

"With care it would last, for it began to decay only a little while ago," said the knight to old Kondrat, the head laborer, who in the absence of his lords looked after the property.

"I could live here till death," added Matsko after a time, "but Zbyshko needs a castle."

"For God's sake! A castle?"

"Hei! But why not?"

It was the darling idea of the old man to build a castle for Zbyshko and his future children. He knew that a noble who dwelt, not in an ordinary mansion, but behind a moat and a palisade, and who besides had a watch-tower where a guard gazed on the surrounding regions, was considered as somebody right away by his neighbors, and such a man managed more easily. Matsko did not desire much for himself at that time, but for Zbyshko and Zbyshko's sons he would not stop at little, all the more since their property had increased now considerably.

"Let him take Yagenka, and with her Mochydoly and the abbot's inheritance: no one in these parts could equal us then. God grant such an outcome!"

All this depended on one thing: would Zbyshko come home? that was uncertain and dependent again on God's mercy. Matsko said then in his mind, that for him it was needful to be in the best favor with the Lord God and not merely offend Him in nothing, but win Him in every way possible. With this intent he spared on the church of Kresnia neither wax nor game; and a certain evening when visiting at Zgorzelitse, he said, —

“I will go to-morrow to the grave of Yadviga, our holy queen.”

Yagenka sprang up from the bench in great fear, —

“Have you bad tidings?”

“I have none of any kind, for I could not at this time. But thou rememberest how, when I was sick from that splinter in my side, — that one, thou knowest, when ye went, thou and Zbyshko, for beavers, — I vowed that if God would return me health, I would go to her grave. All praised my desire then. And indeed! The Lord God has holy servants enough up there, but not every saint — and there are many — has such influence as our Lady, whom I fear to offend, because I am concerned about Zbyshko.”

“True, as life!” said Yagenka. “But you have only just returned from a terrible journey.”

“Never mind! I want to finish all, and then sit down at home quietly till Zbyshko comes back here. Only let our queen intercede for him before the Lord Jesus, and even ten Germans cannot beat him with his good armor. After the journey I shall build the castle with firmer hope.”

“But you have strong bones.”

“It is true that I am still active. I will say something else too. Let Yasko, who is impatient for a journey, go with me. I have experience, and shall be able to restrain him. And should any accident happen, — for the boy’s hands are itching, — thou knowest that for me it is no new thing to fight on foot or on horseback, with sword or with axe.”

“I know. No one could guard him better than you.”

“But I think that it will not happen to him to fight; while the queen was alive, Cracow was filled with foreign knights, who wished to look at her beauty, but now they prefer Malborg, since there is more Malvoisie to be found in the kegs there.”

“Yes, but there is a new queen now.”

Matsko made a wry face and waved his hand.

“I have seen her! And will say no more — dost understand?”

After a while he added, —

“In three or four weeks we shall be back here.”

In fact, that happened. The old knight commanded Yasko to swear on his knightly honor and on the head of Saint George that he would not insist on a longer journey, and they rode away.

They reached Cracow without accident, for the country was at peace, and safe from all attacks of Germanized princes beyond the border, and from robber German knights by fear of the power of the kingdom and by the determined bravery of the knighthood. After performing their vows, the old knight and Yasko were presented at the royal court by Povala of Tachev and the little prince, Yamont. Matsko supposed that at the court and in offices they would ask him eagerly about the Knights of the Cross, since he had become well acquainted with the Order, and had looked at it closely. But after consulting with the chancellor and with the sword-bearer of Cracow, he saw with astonishment that their knowledge of the Knights of the Cross was not less than his, but still greater. They knew to the minutest detail all that was happening in Malborg itself and in other castles, even the remotest. They knew what detachments of troops there were, how many warriors there were, how many cannon, how much time was required to assemble the armies, what the plans were in case of hostilities. They knew even details concerning every comtur, — was he quick-tempered and abrupt, or was he thoughtful; and they had recorded all points as carefully as if war had been appointed for the morrow.

The old knight was immensely delighted at this, for he understood that they were preparing for war far more deliberately, strenuously, and wisely than in Malborg.

“The Lord Jesus has given us as much, or greater bravery,” said Matsko to himself, “and surely more mind and greater foresight.”

And such was the case at that period. He learned also soon whence information came to them: it was given by inhabitants of Prussia, people of all ranks, Germans as well as Poles. The Order had succeeded in rousing such hatred against itself that all people in Prussia looked at Yagello’s armies as salvation. Matsko remembered then what Zyndram had told him in Malborg, and said to himself in spirit, —

“That man has a head indeed! — a pile of wisdom.”

And he recalled every word of Zyndram’s; and once he borrowed even from that wisdom, for when it happened that young Yasko inquired concerning the Knights of the Cross, he answered, —

“They are strong, the beasts; but what thinkest thou, will not a knight fly out of his seat, even though he be the

mightiest, if the saddle-girth and the stirrup-straps are cut under him?"

"He will fly out, as true as I stand here," said the youth.

"Ha! seest thou?" cried Matsko, with a thundering voice.

"This is what I wanted to bring thee to!"

"Why so?"

"Because the Order is just such a knight."

And after a while he added, —

"Thou wilt not hear this from any common mouth — never fear."

And when Yasko could not understand clearly what the question was, he fell to explaining the affair to him, but forgot to add that he had not thought out the comparison himself, but that it had come word for word from the strong head of Zyndram.

CHAPTER LXX.

THEY did not remain long in Cracow, and would have remained there a shorter time had it not been for the prayer of Yasko, who wanted to look at the people and the city, for all seemed a marvellous dream to him. But the old knight was in an immense hurry to return to his domestic hearth and his fields, so even prayers did not avail much, and on Assumption Day both had returned, — one to Bogdanets, the other to Zgorzelitse.

And thenceforward life began to drag on for them rather monotonously, filled with the toil of land management and every-day work in the country. In Zgorzelitse, which was low, and especially in Yagenka's Mochydoly, the harvest was excellent; but in Bogdanets, because of the dry year, the crops turned out to be thin, and no great labor was needed to collect them. In general there was not much tilled land in Bogdanets, for the property was under forest, and because of the long absence of the owners even those plots which the abbot had fitted for ploughing by grubbing up roots were abandoned through lack of workmen. The old knight, though sensitive to every loss, did not take this to heart overmuch at that time, for he knew that with money it would be easy to introduce order and arrangement in all things, — if only there was some one for whom to work and labor. But just this uncertainty poisoned his days and his industry. He did not let his hands drop, however: he rose before day, he rode out to the herds, looked at the work in the field and the forest, he even selected a place for the castle and was choosing out timber for building; but when after a warm day the sun was dissolving in the golden and ruddy gleams of evening, a terrible yearning would seize the man, and, besides yearning, a fear such as he had never experienced till those days. "I am running about here, I am toiling," said he to himself; "while off there my poor boy is lying in some field, perhaps pierced by a spear, and wolves in packs are snapping their teeth at him." At this thought

his heart straitened with great love and great pain. He listened then carefully to hear the sound of horse hoofs which announced the daily coming of Yagenka, for through pretending in her presence that he had good hope, he gained it for himself and strengthened his suffering soul somewhat.

She appeared each day, usually toward evening, with a crossbow at her saddle, and with a spear, against attack when going home. It was not a thing at all possible that she should ever find Zbyshko at Bogdanets unexpectedly, since Matsko did not dare to look for him before a year or a year and a half had passed; but evidently even that hope was hidden in the girl, for she did not appear as she had in the old time, in a skirt girded with a strip of tape, in a sheepskin coat wool outward, and with leaves in her dishevelled hair, but with a beautifully braided tress, and her bosom covered with colored cloth of Sieradz.

Matsko always went out to meet her, and his first question was ever the same as if some one had written it down for him. "But what?" And her first answer was, "Well, nothing!" He conducted her then to a large room, and they chatted, near the fire, about Zbyshko, Lithuania, the Knights of the Cross, the war, — talking always in a circle, always about the same things, — and never did these conversations annoy either one of them; on the contrary, they never had enough of those subjects.

And so it continued for months. It happened that Matsko rode to Zgorzelitse, but Yagenka went oftener to Bogdanets.

Sometimes, when there was disturbance in the neighborhood, or when old he-bears in a rage were inclined to attack, Matsko conducted the girl home. When well armed the old man, thanks to uncommon strength, feared no wild beasts, since he was more dangerous to them than they could be to him. At such times he rode stirrup to stirrup with Yagenka, and frequently the pine forest gave forth a threatening sound from the depth of it, but they, oblivious of everything which might happen, conversed only of Zbyshko: where was he? what was he doing? had he killed, or would he kill quickly, as many Knights of the Cross as he had promised Danusia and her mother? would he return soon? Yagenka put questions to Matsko which she had put hundreds of times to him, and he answered them with as much thought and attention as though he heard them then for the first time.

“Do you say,” inquired she, “that a battle in the field is not so dangerous for a knight as the taking of castles?”

“But look, what happened to Vilk? Against a beam of wood thrown from a wall no armor can save a man; but on the field, if a knight has proper training, he may avoid surrender though ten be against him.”

“But Zbyshko? Has he good armor?”

“He has a number of suits of good armor, but that taken from the Frisians is the best, because it was forged in Milan. A year ago it was a little large, but now it is just right for him.”

“Then against armor like that no weapon prevails, does it?”

“What the hand of man has made may be destroyed by the hand of man also. Against Milan armor is the Milan sword, or the arrows of the English.”

“The arrows of the English?” asked Yagenka, with alarm.

“But have I not told thee of them? There are no better archers on earth than the English, unless those of the Mazovian wilderness; but the Mazovians have not such good bows as the English. An English arrow will go through the best armor a hundred yards distant. I saw them at Vilno. And not a man of them missed, and there were some who could hit a falcon while flying.”

“Oh, the sons of Pagans! How did you manage them?”

“There was no other way but to rush straight at them. They handle halberds well, the dog-ears, but hand to hand our man will take care of himself.”

“Besides, the hand of God guarded you, and now it will guard Zbyshko.”

“I pray often in this way: ‘O Lord God, thou hast created and settled us in Bogdanets, so guard us henceforth and let us not perish.’ Ha! it is God’s business now to protect us. Indeed, it is no small affair to manage the whole world and miss nothing, but first we must bring ourselves into notice as best we can by being bountiful to the holy church, and, second, God’s mind is not man’s mind.”

Thus did they converse frequently, giving consolation and hope to each other. Meanwhile days, weeks, and months flowed by. In the autumn Matsko had an affair with old Vilk. There had been from of old a boundary dispute between the Vilks and the abbot, about a forest clearing which the abbot, when he held the mortgage on Bogdanets, had seized and cleared of roots. In his day he had challenged

even the two Vilks to a duel with lances or long swords, but they had no wish to fight with a churchman, and before the court they could effect nothing. Old Vilk claimed that land now; and Matsko, who was not so eager for anything on earth as for land, following his own impulse, and roused also by the thought that barley would grow on that fresh soil to perfection, would not hear of surrender. They would have gone to law beyond doubt had they not met by chance at the priest's house in Kresnia. There, when old Vilk, after a harsh dispute, said at last on a sudden, "I will rely on God rather than people; He will take revenge on your family for the injustice done me," the stubborn Matsko grew mild immediately; he became pale, was silent for a moment, and said then to his quarrelsome neighbor, —

"Listen, it was not I who began this affair, but the abbot. God knows which side is right; but if you intend to say evil words against Zbyshko, take the place, and may God so give health and happiness to Zbyshko as I from my heart give this land to you."

And he stretched his hand out to Vilk, who, knowing him from of old, was greatly astonished, for he did not even suspect what love for his nephew was hidden in that heart which seemed so hard to him. For a long time he could not utter a syllable, till at last, when the priest of Kresnia, pleased at such a turn of affairs, made the sign of the cross on them, Vilk said, —

"If that be the case, it is different! I am old and have no one to whom I could leave property. I was not thinking of profit, but of justice. If a man meets me with kindness, I will add to him even out of my own store. But may God bless your nephew, so that in old age you may not weep over him as I over my one son!"

They threw themselves into each other's arms then, and for a long time they disputed over this, who was to take the newly cleared land. But Matsko let himself be persuaded at last, since Vilk was alone in the world, and had really no one to whom he might leave the property.

Then Matsko invited his neighbor to Bogdanets, where he entertained him with food and drink generously, for he had in his own soul immense gladness. He was comforted by the hope that barley would come up on that new land most splendidly, and also by the thought that he had turned God's disfavor from Zbyshko.

“If he returns, he will have no lack of land and cattle,” thought Matsko.

Yagenka was no less pleased with that settlement.

“Now then,” said she, after hearing how all was ended, “if the Lord Jesus wishes to show that concord is dearer to Him than quarrels, He must bring back Zbyshko unharmed to you.”

At this Matsko’s face grew as bright as if a sun-ray had fallen on it.

“So I think too!” said he. “The Lord Jesus is all-powerful, there is no doubt of that, and there are ways to win the heavenly powers, but a man must have prudence.”

“You have never lacked that,” said the girl, raising her eyes to him. And after a while, as if she had thought over something, she said, —

“But you do love that Zbyshko of yours! You love him! Hei! you do love him.”

“Who would not love him?” replied the old knight. “And thou? Dost thou hate him?”

Yagenka did not answer directly; but as she was sitting on a bench by Matsko’s side, she moved up still nearer, and turning her head away punched him then slightly with her elbow.

“Give peace!” said she; “how have I offended you!”

CHAPTER LXXI.

BUT the war about Jmud between the Knights of the Cross and Vitold had occupied people in the kingdom so greatly that they could not avoid inquiring as to its progress. Some felt sure that Yagello would give aid to his cousin, and that all would soon see a general expedition against the Order. The knighthood were impatient for action; and in all settlements of nobles, men said to one another that a considerable number of the lords of Cracow, who were in the king's council, had inclined to war, considering that it was necessary to finish once for all that enemy who would never be satisfied with his own, and whose mind was intent on seizing what belonged to another even when fear before the power of his neighbor had seized him. But the prudent Matsko, who as a person of experience had seen and learned much, did not believe that war was impending, and he spoke of this matter often to Yasko and other neighbors whom he met at Kresnia.

“While the Grand Master Konrad lives, nothing will come of this, for he is wiser than others, and he knows that it would be no common war, but a slaughter: ‘Thy death, or mine.’ And he, knowing the power of the king, will not let matters go that far.”

“Yes; but if the king should declare war first?” inquired the neighbors.

Matsko shook his head.

“You see, I have examined everything closely, and I have noted some points. If the king were of our ancient stock, if he were of kings Christian for generations, he might perhaps strike first on the Germans. But our Vladislav Yagello (I have no wish to diminish his fame, for he is an honorable lord, may God preserve him in health) was Grand Prince of Lithuania and a pagan before we chose him king; Christianity he received only some time ago, while the Germans calumniate his Majesty throughout the world and say that the soul in him is pagan. For this reason it would seem terribly unbecoming in him to declare war first, and spill the blood of Christians. For this cause he

will not move to help Vitold, though his hands are itching, for I know this, that he hates the Knights of the Cross as he does leprosy."

By such speeches Matsko acquired for himself the reputation of being a keen man who could lay everything out, as it were, on the table. So in Kresnia people gathered around him in a circle after Mass every Sunday, and afterward it was customary for this or that neighbor, when he heard news, to turn in at Bogdanets, so that the old knight might explain to him what an ordinary noble head could not analyze. Matsko received all with welcome, and spoke to each of them willingly; and when at last the guest, having said what he wanted, was departing, the host never forgot to take farewell of him in these words, —

"You may wonder at my reason, but when Zbyshko, with God's will, comes back here, you will begin to wonder really! He might sit even in the king's council, such a wise and ingenious man is he."

And by persuading guests of Zbyshko's greatness he persuaded himself of it at last, and also Yagenka. Zbyshko seemed to them both from afar like the king's son in a fairy tale. When spring appeared they could hardly remain in the house. Swallows returned, storks returned, land-rails were playing in the meadows, quails were heard in the green growth of grain; earlier than all, flocks of cranes and teal had come. Zbyshko alone did not return to them. But after the birds had flown back from the south, a winged wind from the north brought news of war. Men spoke of battles and numerous encounters in which the clever Vitold at one time was victor, at another the vanquished; they spoke of great disasters, which winter and diseases had wrought among the Germans. Till at last the joyful news thundered throughout the country, that Keistut's valiant son had taken New Kovno, or Gotteswerder; he had destroyed it, he had not left one stone on another, or one beam on another. When this news reached Matsko, he mounted his horse and flew off to Zgorzelitse without halting.

"Ha!" said he, "those places are known to me; for Zbyshko and I with Skirvoillo beat the Knights of the Cross there, — beat them mightily. There it was that we captured that honest De Lorche. Well, it was God's will to sprain the German foot this time, for that castle was hard to take."

But Yagenka had heard before Matsko came of the storm-

ing of New Kovno, — she had even heard more; namely, that Vitold had begun negotiations. This last news concerned her more than the former, for should peace be concluded Zbyshko would return home, of course, were he living.

Then she fell to inquiring of the old knight if that were credible; and he, when he had thought a while, answered, —

“Every news is credible in Vitold’s case, for he is a man different altogether from others, and surely the keenest of all lords in Christendom. When he needs to extend his dominion toward Russia, he makes peace with the Germans; and when he has done what he planned, he takes the Germans again by the forelock! They cannot manage either him, or that suffering Jmud land. One time he takes it away from them, another time he gives it, and not only gives it, but helps them to crush it. There are men among us, yes, in Lithuania also, who take this ill of him that he plays thus with the blood of that ill-fated people. And I, to speak truth, would consider it infamous on his part, if he were not Vitold. But I think to myself, ‘Well, he is wiser than I, and he knows what he is doing.’ I have indeed heard from Skirvoillo himself that Vitold has made of that land a boil always festering in the body of the Order, so that that body should never have health in it. Women in the Jmud land will always bear children, and it is no harm to spill blood unless it be spilt to no purpose.”

“I care only for this: will Zbyshko come back,” said Yagenka.

“If God permit, he will come; but may the Lord grant, girl, that thou hast said these words at a lucky moment.”

Still months passed. News came that peace had been really concluded, grain with its heavy ears had grown yellow, the fields sown with buckwheat were ruddy, but of Zbyshko no tidings.

At last when the first work was done, Matsko could endure no longer and declared that he would hurry to Spyhov, and as it was nearer to Lithuania get news there and inspect Hlava’s management.

Yagenka insisted on going with him, but he would not take her, so they began disputes on this point, which held out a whole week if not longer. At length, on a certain evening when they were disputing in Zgorzelitse, a youth from Bogdanets rushed into the yard like a whirlwind, barefoot, without a cap on his yellow head, and cried to them before the porch on which they were then sitting, —

“The young lord has come home!”

Zbyshko had come home indeed, but he was strange in some way: not only had he grown thin and was tanned by the winds of the fields and seemed suffering, but he was also indifferent and of few words. Hlava, who, with his wife, had come also, spoke for Zbyshko and for himself. He said that the young knight's expedition had found success evidently, for he had placed on the tomb of Danusia and her mother in Spyhov a whole bundle of peacock and ostrich plumes from knights' helmets. He had brought back captured horses and suits of mail, two of which were of very great value, though terribly hacked with blows of swords and axes. Matsko was burning with curiosity to know everything in detail from the lips of his nephew, but the latter merely waved his hand and answered in single syllables, and the third day he fell ill and was forced to his bed. It appeared that his left side had been battered and that two of his ribs had been broken, these, being badly set, “hindered” him in walking and in breathing. The injuries received in his encounter with the bison were felt also, and to complete the breaking up of his strength the journey from Spyhov was added. All this of itself was not terrible, for the man was young, and as sound as an oak-tree; but at the same time he was possessed by immense weariness of some kind, as if all the toils which he had ever gone through had begun now to move through his bones for the first time. Matsko thought, to begin with, that after two or three days' rest in bed all would pass, but the opposite had happened. There was no help from rubbing with ointments, or smoking with herbs, which the local shepherd recommended, nor from the decoctions sent by Yagenka and the priest of Kresnia: Zbyshko grew weaker and weaker, more and more wearied, more and more gloomy.

“What is the matter with thee? Wouldst thou like something, perhaps?” inquired the old knight.

“I want nothing: all things are the same to me,” replied Zbyshko.

In this way, day followed day. Yagenka, coming to the idea that this was perhaps something more than an ordinary cough, and that the young man must have some secret which was crushing him, fell to urging Matsko to try once more to discover what that could be.

Matsko consented without hesitation, but after thinking a while he said, —

“Well, but would he not tell it more easily to thee than to me? For — as to liking — he likes thee, and I have seen this, that when thou art moving through the room his eyes follow thee.”

“Have you seen that?” inquired Yagenka.

“If I have said that his eyes follow, they follow. And when thou art not here for a long while, he looks time after time toward the door. Ask him thou.”

And it rested there. But it turned out that Yagenka did not know how, and did not dare to ask. When it came to something serious, she understood that it would be necessary to speak of Danusia and of Zbyshko’s love for the dead woman, and those things could not squeeze through her lips.

“You are shrewder,” said she to Matsko, “and you have more mind and experience: speak you; I am not able.”

Matsko, willing or unwilling, set about the task; and one morning when Zbyshko seemed somewhat fresher than usual, the old man began a conversation of this sort.

“Hlava tells me that thou hast placed a good bundle of peacock plumes in the vault of Spyhov.”

Zbyshko, without taking his eyes from the ceiling, at which as he lay face upward he was gazing, merely nodded his head in agreement.

“Well! The Lord Jesus has given thee luck; for in war it is easier to find camp followers than knights. A man may get as many common warriors as he pleases; but to find a knight one must look around very carefully sometimes. But did they come under thy sword of their own will?”

“Some I challenged a number of times to trampled earth, and once they surrounded me in battle,” said the young man, lazily.

“And thou didst bring booty enough?”

“Something; Prince Vitold gave me a present.”

“Is he so bountiful yet?”

Zbyshko nodded his head again, not having evidently the wish to speak further.

But Matsko did not yield up the victory, and determined to approach the real subject.

“Tell me sincerely,” said he: “when the tombs were covered with those crests, thou must have been relieved immensely? A man is always glad when he accomplishes a vow. Wert thou glad?”

Zbyshko removed his sad eyes from the ceiling, turned them on Matsko, and answered as if with a certain astonishment, —

“No.”

“No? Fear God! I thought that when thou shouldst satisfy those saved souls, there would be an end to thy trouble.”

The young man closed his eyes for a moment, as if in thought, and answered at last, —

“It is clear that souls in paradise do not wish human blood.”

A moment of silence followed.

“Then why didst thou go to that war?” inquired Matsko, at last.

“Why?” answered Zbyshko, with a certain animation; “I thought that it would ease me. I thought that I should please Danusia and myself. But when all was over I was astonished. I came out of the vault where the coffins are, and I was as much oppressed as before. So it is clear that to souls in paradise human blood has no value.”

“Some one must have told thee that, for never wouldst thou have thought it out thyself.”

“I remarked it myself just because the world did not seem more gladsome to me afterward than before. Only Father Kaleb said, —

“‘To kill an enemy in war is no sin, it is even praiseworthy,’ and these were enemies of our race.”

“I do not consider it a sin either, and I am not sorry for those Germans.”

“But is thy grief always for Danusia?”

“Well, when I think of her I am sorry. But it is the will of God! She is happier in the court of heaven, and — I am now accustomed to my present state.”

“Then why not shake off these glooms? What dost thou need?”

“If I knew what.”

“Thou wilt not fail of rest, the cough will soon leave thee. Go to the bath, bathe well, drink a bottle of mead, perspire, and hots!”

“Well, and what next?”

“Thou wilt be glad right away.”

“Whence shall I get gladness? I shall not find it in myself; and as to lending me gladness, no one will lend it.”

“But thou art hiding something!”

Zbyshko shrugged his shoulders.

“I have no gladness in me, but I have nothing to hide.”

And he said this so sincerely that Matsko dropped his suspicions that moment, and began at once to smooth his gray forelock with his broad palm, as was his custom when thinking severely, and at last he said, —

“Well, I will tell it, something is lacking thee. One work is finished, but the other is not begun yet; dost understand?”

“Perhaps I do, but not clearly,” answered the young man. And he stretched himself like one who is sleepy.

But Matsko was convinced that he had divined the true reason. He was greatly delighted, and his alarm ceased altogether. He gained also more confidence in his own prudence, and said in spirit, “It is not to be wondered at that men ask advice of me!”

And when after that conversation Yagenka came on the evening of that same day, before she could dismount he told her that he knew what troubled Zbyshko.

The girl slipped down from the saddle in one moment, and then for the inquiry, —

“Well, what is it? tell!”

“It is just thou who hast the medicine for him.”

“I? what?”

And he put his arm around her waist and whispered something into her ear, but not long, for in a moment she sprang back from him as if burned, and hiding her blushing face between the saddle-cloth and the high saddle, she cried, —

“Go away! I cannot endure you!”

“As God is dear to me, I am telling truth,” replied Matsko, laughing.

CHAPTER LXXII.

OLD Matsko had divined the truth clearly, but only half of it. In fact one part of Zbysko's life had ended completely. Whatever the young knight thought of Danusia, he grieved for her, but he said to himself that she must be happier in the court of heaven than she had been at the court of Prince Yanush. He had grown inured to the idea that she was no longer in the world; he had become familiar with it, and considered that the position could not be changed in any way. When in Cracow he had admired immensely the figures of sacred virgins outlined on glass and framed in lead on church windows. These figures were colored and gleaming in the sunlight, and now he imagined Danusia as being just like them. He saw her transparent, heavenly, turned toward him in profile, with palms placed together, and eyes uplifted, or he saw her playing on a lute among a host of celestial musicians, who in heaven play to the Holy Mother and the Divine Infant. There was nothing earthly in her now; to his mind she had become a spirit so pure and disembodied that when at times he remembered how Danusia had served the princess at the hunting-lodge, how she had laughed and conversed, how she had sat down at the table with others, he was filled as it were with wonder that such things could be. During his expedition with Vitold, when questions of warfare and battles had swallowed his attention, he ceased to yearn for his celestial one as a man yearns for a woman, and thought of her only as a devotee thinks of his patron saint. In this way his love, by losing gradually earthly elements, changed more and more into what was only a remembrance, sweet and pure as the sky itself, and became simply religious reverence.

Had he been a man of frail body and deeper thought he would have become a monk, and in the calm life of a cloister would have preserved that heavenly reminiscence as something sacred till the moment in which his soul could fly from the shackles of its body into endless space, just as a bird rushes forth from its cage. But the third decade of his years had begun not long before; he was able to squeeze with his fist the sap out of green chips and could so press

the horse under him with his legs as to take the beast's breath away. He was like all nobles of that period. If they did not die in childhood or become priests, they knew neither bound nor limit in physical vehemence and vigor; they let themselves out into robbery, loose life, drunkenness, or they married in youth and went to war in mature age when summoned, taking with them twenty-four or more sons, all of whom had the robustness of wild boars.

But he knew not that he was a man of this kind, all the more since he had been sick. Gradually, however, his ribs, which had been set unskilfully, grew together, and showed merely a slight lump on one side which hindered him in no way, and which not only mail but ordinary clothing might conceal entirely.

His weariness had passed. His rich yellow hair, cut in sign of mourning for Danusia, had grown again to a point below his shoulders. His former extraordinary beauty had returned. When some years before he had walked forth to meet death at the hands of the executioner he looked like a youth of great family, but now he had become still more beautiful, a genuine king's son. In shoulders, in breast, in arms and loins he was like a giant, but in features he resembled a maiden. Strength and vigor were boiling in him, as liquid in a caldron; invigorated by continence and long rest, life was coursing through his bones like blazing fire. He, not knowing what this meant, thought himself sick yet, and continued to lie in bed, glad that Matsko and Yagenka nursed him, cared for him, and divined his wishes. At moments it seemed to Zbyshko that he was as happy as if in heaven; at moments, especially when Yagenka was not there, existence appeared wretched, sad, unendurable; fits of yawning and stretching, with feverishness, seized him at such moments, and he declared to Matsko that on recovering he would go again to the ends of the earth against the Germans, Tartars, or some other like savagery, to rid himself of life, which was weighing him down terribly. Matsko, instead of opposing, nodded and agreed; meanwhile he sent for Yagenka, after whose coming thoughts of new expeditions vanished from Zbyshko as snows melt when warmed by the sun of springtime.

Yagenka came promptly, both when summoned and of her own accord, for she loved Zbyshko with all the strength of her heart and soul. During her stay at the court of the

bishop and that of the prince in Plotsk she saw knights as fine and as famous for strength and bravery as Zbyshko, knights who knelt before her more than once and vowed faith for a lifetime; but this was her chosen one, she had loved him from early years with her first love, and the misfortunes through which he had passed only increased that love to the degree that he was dearer to her, and a hundred-fold more precious, not only than all knights, but than all princes on earth. Now, when returning health each day made him more splendid, her love turned almost into madness and hid all the rest of the world from her.

But she did not confess this love to herself, even, and from Zbyshko she concealed it most carefully, fearing lest he might disregard her a second time. Even with Matsko she was now as secretive and silent as she had been aforetime outspoken. The care shown in nursing the young knight was all that could betray her, so she strove to give to it another pretext; hence on a certain day she said hurriedly to Zbyshko, —

“If I look after thee a little it is from good will toward Matsko, but didst thou think otherwise?”

And, as if to arrange the hair on her forehead, she shaded her face with her hand, and looked at him carefully through her fingers. Attacked thus on a sudden by the question, he blushed like a young girl, and only after a while did he answer, —

“I did not think anything. Thou art now another person.”

A moment of silence followed.

“Another person?” asked Yagenka at last, in a peculiar low and soft voice. “Well, it is sure that I am different. But that I should not endure thee, may God not permit that!”

“God reward thee for even this word,” replied Zbyshko.

And thenceforth it was pleasant for them in each other's company, though in some way uneasy and awkward. At times it might seem that they were speaking of something aside, or that their thoughts were elsewhere. Silence was frequent between them. Zbyshko never rose from the bed, and, as Matsko had stated, followed Yagenka with his eyes whithersoever she went, for she seemed to him, especially at moments, so wonderful that he could not look at her sufficiently. It happened too that their glances met unexpectedly, and then their faces flamed, the maiden's breast

moved with hurried breathing, and her heart beat as if she expected to hear something which would make the soul melt and flow apart in her. But Zbyshko was silent, for he had lost his former boldness completely; he feared to frighten her with some heedless word, and, in spite of what his eyes saw, he persuaded himself that she was showing him mere sisterly kindness out of friendship for Matsko.

He mentioned this once to his uncle; he tried to speak calmly, with indifference; he did not even note that his words became more and more like a complaint, half sad and half filled with reproaches.

Matsko listened patiently. At last he said the single word, "Simpleton!" and walked out of the room.

But when he was in the stable he rubbed his hands, and struck his thighs with great gleefulness.

"Ha!" said he, "when she came to thee for nothing thou wouldst not even look at her. Take thy fill of fright now, since thou art a simpleton. I will build the castle, and thou meanwhile, let thy mouth water. I will say nothing to thee; I will not take the cataract from thy eye, even wert thou to make more noise than all the horses in Bogdanets. When shavings are piled on a smouldering fire a blaze will burst up sooner or later in every case, but I will not blow, since there is no need, I think."

And not only did he not blow, but he even opposed Zbyshko and teased him like an old fox glad to trifle with youthful inexperience. So one day when Zbyshko said again that he would go to some distant war to rid himself of a life which was unendurable, the old man said to him, —

"While the lip under thy nose was bare I directed thee, but now — thou hast thy own will! If thou wish at all risks to trust in thy own wit and go — go."

Zbyshko sprang up with astonishment and sat erect in bed.

"How is this? Thou dost not oppose?"

"Why should I oppose? I only grieve terribly for our family which might perish with thee, but I may find a way to avoid this."

"How a way?" inquired Zbyshko, in alarm.

"How? Well, my years are considerable, no use in denying that — but there is no lack of strength in my bones. Seest thou, some younger man might chance to please Yagenka — but as I was a friend of her father — who knows but I —"

"You were a friend of her father," answered Zbyshko,

“but you never had any good feeling for me—never! never!”

And he stopped, for his chin began to quiver, and Matsko said, —

“Pshaw! since thou hast resolved to destroy thyself, what can I do?”

“Well! do what you like—but I will leave here this very day!”

“Simpleton!” repeated Matsko.

And he left the room to look at the laborers, both men from Bogdanets and those whom Yagenka had lent him from Zgorzelitse and Mochydoly to help dig the moat which was to surround the castle.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

ZBYSHKO did not carry out his threat, it is true, and did not leave Bogdanets, but after the course of another week his health had returned to him completely and he could not remain longer in bed. Matsko declared that it was their duty to visit Zgorzelitse and thank Yagenka for the care bestowed on him. So on a certain day, after he had steamed himself well in the bath, Zbyshko resolved to go straightway. With this object he commanded to take from the chest his beautiful garments so as to use them instead of the every-day clothes he was wearing, and then he occupied himself with curling his hair; but that was no small, easy task, and the difficulty lay not alone in the wealth of that hair which dropped down behind like a mane below his shoulders. Knights in every-day life wore their hair in a net shaped like a mushroom, which in time of expeditions had this good side, that the helmet chafed them perhaps less, but on various ceremonial occasions, such as a wedding, or visits to houses in which there were young ladies, they arranged it in beautifully twisted rolls, which frequently were rubbed with the white of an egg to give them consistency and gloss. Precisely in this way did Zbyshko wish to dress his hair. But the two women summoned from the servants' house were unused to such work and were unable to do it. His hair, all dry, standing out after the bath, could not be made to lie down, and was like a badly thatched roof of straw on a cottage. The combs, cut out of buffalo horn artistically and won from the Frisians, did not help, nor did a curry-comb for which one of the women went to the stable. Zbyshko began at last to be impatient and angry — when Matsko walked into the room with Yagenka, who had come unexpectedly.

“Praised be Jesus Christ!” said she.

“For the ages of ages!” answered Zbyshko, with a radiant face. “Well, this is wonderful! We were just making ready to go to thy house, and thou art here!”

His eyes gleamed with delight, for it was thus with him always; whenever he saw her it was as bright in his soul as if he were looking at the sunrise.

But when Yagenka saw the women, comb in hand, and troubled, when she saw the curry-comb lying on the bench at Zbyshko's side and his hair standing out in all directions, she fell to laughing.

"By my word, it is a bundle of straw, a bundle of straw!" cried she, showing the wonderful white teeth between her coral lips. "We might put thee in a hemp field or a cherry garden, to frighten the birds away!"

Zbyshko frowned.

"We were making ready to visit Zgorzelitse," said he; "in Zgorzelitse thou wouldst not attack a guest, but here thou hast the privilege of making sport of me as much as may please thee, and upon my faith thou art always glad to make sport of me."

"I glad to make sport of thee!" exclaimed Yagenka. "Oh, mighty God! Why, I have come to invite you both to supper; and I am laughing not at thee, but at these women. If I were in their place I could arrange matters quickly."

"Thou couldst not."

"But who dresses Yasko's hair?"

"Yasko is thy brother," answered Zbyshko.

"Of course he is!"

Here the old and experienced Matsko resolved to assist them.

"In families," said he, "when a knightly youth's hair grows, after cutting, his sister dresses it; in mature age a man's wife dresses his hair for him; but it is the custom also that if a knight has no sister or wife, a noble maiden serves him, even though she be entirely unrelated."

"Is there really such a custom?" inquired Yagenka, dropping her eyes.

"Not only in mansions, but in castles. Yes! even at the king's court," answered Matsko.

Then he turned to the women.

"Since ye can do nothing, go to your own place!"

"Let them bring me warm water," added Yagenka.

Matsko went out with the women, as if to see that there was no delay in serving, and after a moment he had warm water brought in, and when it had been placed in the room the young people were left with each other. Yagenka having wet a towel moistened Zbyshko's hair well with it; when the hair had stopped flying up and had lain down with the weight of dampness, she took a comb and sat on the bench at the side of the young man to proceed with the work.

And they sat there side by side, both comely beyond

measure, both immensely in love with each other, but ill at ease and silent. Yagenka began at last to arrange his golden hair, and he felt the vicinity of her upraised arms, of her hands, and he shivered from head to foot, restraining himself with all his force of will lest he might seize her by the waist and press her with all his might to his bosom.

In the silence the hurried breath of both was audible.

“Perhaps thou art ill?” inquired the girl after a while.

“What troubles thee?”

“Nothing,” answered the young knight.

“But somehow thou art panting.”

“Thou art panting too —”

Again there was silence. Yagenka’s cheeks were as red as roses, for she felt that Zbyshko did not take his eyes from her face for an instant; so, to talk away embarrassment, she asked, —

“Why dost thou look at me in that way?”

“Does it annoy thee?”

“It does not annoy, but I ask.”

“Yagenka?”

“What —”

Zbyshko drew in a long breath, sighed, moved his lips as if for further conversation, but it was clear that he had not sufficient courage yet, since he merely repeated again, —

“Yagenka.”

“What?”

“If I am afraid to tell something —”

“Be not afraid. I am a simple girl, not a dragon.”

“Of course not a dragon! But Uncle Matsko says that he wants to take thee!”

“Yes he does, but not for himself.”

And she stopped as if frightened at her own words.

“By the dear God! My Yagus! — but what answer hast thou to give, Yagus?” cried Zbyshko.

But unexpectedly Yagenka’s eyes filled with tears, her beautiful lips began to quiver, and her voice became so low that Zbyshko could hardly hear it when she said, —

“Papa and the abbot wished — while I — as thou knowest! —”

At these words delight burst forth in Zbyshko’s heart like a sudden flame; so he caught the girl in his arms, lifted her up as he might a feather, and shouted wildly, —

“Yagus! Yagus! thou my gold! my sun — hei! hei!”

And he shouted so that old Matsko, thinking that some strange thing had happened, rushed into the room. When he saw Yagenka raised aloft by his nephew, he was astonished that everything had passed with such unlooked-for rapidity, and he exclaimed, —

“In the name of the Father and the Son, restrain thyself, boy!”

Zbyshko rushed toward him, placed Yagenka on the floor, and both wished to kneel down, but before they could do so Matsko seized them in his bony arms and pressed them with all his strength to his breast.

“Praised be He!” said the old man. “I knew that it would come to this, but still my delight! God bless you! It will be easier for me to die now. The girl is like the purest of pure gold. Before God and the world! In truth! Let come now what may, since I have lived to this delight. God has visited, but He has comforted us. We must go right away and tell Yasko. Ei, if Zyh were alive now! — and the abbot — But I will take the place of both, for in truth, I so love you that I am ashamed to tell it.”

And though he had in his bosom a heart that was steeled, he was so filled with emotion that something pressed his throat; so he kissed Zbyshko again, and after that Yagenka on both cheeks, and coughing out, half in tears, “Honey, not a woman!” he went to the stables to have the horses saddled.

When he had gone from the room he stumbled with delight against sunflowers growing in front of the house, and began to look at their dark disks surrounded with yellow leaves; he was just like a drunken man.

“Well! There is many a seed there,” said he, “but God grant that there will be a greater number of Grady in Bogdanets.” Then going toward the stables he began again to mutter and to count, —

“Bogdanets, the abbot’s property, Spyhov, Mochydoly — God always knows whither He is taking things. Old Vilk’s day will come, and it is worth while to buy Brozova — fine meadows!”

Meanwhile Yagenka and Zbyshko came out to the front of the house, joyous, happy, radiant as the sun.

“Uncle!” called Zbyshko from afar.

The old man turned toward them, stretched out his arms, and cried out, as he might in the woods, —

“Hop! hop! Come to me!”

CHAPTER LXXIV.

ZBYSHKO and Yagenka lived in Mochydoly while old Matsko was building a castle for them in Bogdanets. He built it with toil, for he wished that the foundations should be of stone laid in lime mortar, and the watchtower of brick, which was difficult to procure in that neighborhood. During the first year he dug the moat, which work was rather easy, for the eminence on which the castle was to stand had been entrenched on a time, perhaps in days which were still pagan; hence he needed only to clear those depressions of trees and hawthorn bushes with which they were overgrown, and then extend and deepen them sufficiently. While digging, the men reached an abundant spring, which in no long time filled the moat, so that Matsko had to provide an exit for the excess of water. Then on the rampart he reared a palisade and began to collect building timber for the walls of the castle, — oak beams, so thick that three men could not embrace one of them, and larch, which rots neither under clay plaster nor under a turf covering. He set about raising those walls only after a year, although he had the assistance of men from Zgorzelitse and Mochydoly. But he set about it all the more earnestly since Yagenka had given birth to twins. Heaven opened before the old knight then, since there was some one for whom he might labor and bustle, and he knew that the race of the Grady would not perish, that "The Dull Horseshoe" would be moistened yet more than once in the blood of the enemy. To the twins were given the names Matsko and Yasko.

"They are boys," said the old man, "to be praised, such boys that in the whole kingdom there are not two to equal them — and it is not evening yet."

He loved them immediately with a great love, and as to Yagenka, she hid the world from him. Whoso praised her before his eyes could get anything from the old man. People really envied Zbyshko for having such a wife, and glorified her not merely for the wealth which she had brought, since she was as brilliant in that region as the most beautiful flower in a field. She had given her husband a great dowry; but she had given more than a dowry,

for she had given immense love, and beauty which dazzled the eyes of men, and noble manners, and a vigor of such sort that many a knight could not boast of the like. It was nothing for her some days after childbirth to rise up to house management, and then go to hunt with her husband, or to hurry on horseback from Mochydoly to Bogdanets and return before midday to Yasko and Matsko. So her husband loved her as the sight of his eyes, old Matsko loved her, she was loved by the servants for whom she had a humane heart, and in Kresnia, when she entered the church on Sunday, she was greeted by murmurs of admiration and homage. Her former worshipper, the quarrelsome Stan of Rogov, had married the daughter of a free land-tiller. Stan after mass used to visit the inn with old Vilko, and, having drunk somewhat, say to the old man: "Your son and I cut each other up more than once because of her, and we wanted to marry the lady, but that was just like reaching for the moon in heaven." Others declared aloud that one might look for another such woman only at the king's court in Cracow. In addition to her wealth, beauty, and refinement people honored also her incomparable health and vigor, and there was only one opinion on this point: "that she was the first woman who had ever planted a bear with a fork in the forest, and she had no need to crack nuts with her teeth; she put them on the table pressed them in her hand suddenly and cracked them as if they had been crushed with a stone." So she was praised in the parish of Kresnia and in the neighboring villages, and even in Sieradz, the chief town of the province.

But while envying Zbyshko of Bogdanets because he had won her, men did not wonder over much, for he too was illustrious by such military fame as no one else in that region. The younger possessors and nobles related to one another all the stories touching Germans whose souls Zbyshko had "shelled out" of them in battles under Prince Vitold, and on trampled earth in duels. They said that no man had ever escaped him, that in Malborg he had unhorsed twelve knights, among others Ulrich, the Grand Master's brother; finally, that he was able to meet even knights of Cracow, and that the invincible Zavisha Charny himself was a well-wishing friend of his. Some were unwilling to give faith to such uncommon stories; but even those men, when it was a question whom the neighborhood ought to choose, should it come to rivalry between Polish and foreign

knights, said: "Of course, Zbyshko!" and only afterward did the hairy Stan of Rogov and other local strong men, who in knightly training were far behind the young heir of Bogdanets, come into consideration.

Great wealth equally with his fame had won for Zbyshko honor from his neighbors; for he had received with Yagenka Mochydoly and the great property of the abbot. That was not his merit, but earlier he had Spyhov together with immense treasures accumulated by Yurand, and besides people whispered to one another that the booty alone won and taken by the knights of Bogdanets in arms, horses, clothing, and jewels, would suffice to buy three or four good villages. Men saw therefore in this a certain special favor of God toward the race of the Grady with the escutcheon "The Dull Horshshoe," which till recent times had been so reduced that besides empty Bogdanets it had nothing — now it had increased beyond all others in that region. "Moreover, there had remained in Bogdanets after the fire only that poor, bent, decayed house," said old people, "and from lack of laboring hands the owners of the property had been forced to mortgage it to their relative — but now they are building a castle!" Astonishment was great, but since it was accompanied by the general instinctive feeling that the whole nation was advancing with irresistible impulse toward some immense acquisition, and since by the will of God such was to be the future order, there was no malicious envy; on the contrary, the region about boasted and was proud of those knights of Bogdanets. They served as a living proof of what a noble might do if he had a strong arm and a manful heart, with knightly eagerness for adventure. More than one man, therefore, at sight of them felt that for him the place was too narrow among his household goods, and within his native limits, and that beyond the boundary there was a hostile power, great wealth and broad lands, which he might win with immense gain to himself and the kingdom. That excess of strength, which was felt by families, extended over the whole nation, so that it was like a seething liquid which must boil over in a caldron. The wise lords at Cracow, and the king, who loved peace, might restrain that strength for a season, and defer war with the hereditary enemy, but no human power could extinguish it, or even restrain that impetus with which the general spirit of the people was advancing toward greatness.

LXXV.

MATSKO had lived to happy years in his life. He declared to his neighbors repeatedly that he had received more than he himself had hoped for. Even old age had only whitened the hair on his head and in his beard; it had not taken from him health or strength. His heart was full of such great joyfulness as up to that time he had never experienced. His face, formerly severe, had become more and more kindly, and his eyes smiled at people with a friendly expression. In his soul he had the conviction that all evil had ended forever, that no care, no misfortune would dim the days of his life now flowing onward as quietly as a clear river. To war till old age, to manage in old age and increase wealth for his "grandchildren," — that at all times had been the highest wish of his heart; and now all this had come to pass perfectly. Land management went just as he desired. The forests had been felled in considerable part, the stumps rooted out, and the new land was green every spring with a fleece of various kinds of grain; herds increased, in the fields were forty mares with colts, which the old noble inspected daily. Flocks of sheep and herds of cattle pastured in groves and on fallow lands. Bogdanets had changed thoroughly; from a deserted settlement it had become a populous, a wealthy place, and the eyes of him who approached it from Zgorzelitse by the forest highway were dazzled by the watchtower seen from afar, and the walls of the castle still unblackened and glittering with gold in the sun and the purple evening twilight.

So old Matsko was rejoiced in heart by cattle, by management, by his fortunate fate, and he did not contradict when people said that he had a lucky hand.

A year after the twins there came to the world another boy, whom Yagenka called Zyh in honor of her father.

Matsko received the new visitor with delight and was not troubled in the least by this, that were it to go farther in such wise the property accumulated with so much effort and toil would have to be divided. "For what had we?" asked he, speaking of this once to Zbyshko. "Nothing! still

God prospered us. Old Pakosh of Sulislavitse has one village and twenty-two sons, but they are not dying of hunger. Are the lands in the kingdom and Lithuania small in extent? Are the villages and castles in the hands of the dog brother Knights few in number? Hei! well, since the Lord Jesus has favored us so much, there will be a proper place (for them) since there are castles there, all of red brick, of which our gracious king may make places for castellans." And it was a thing worthy of note that though the Order had risen then, as it were, to the summit of its greatness, because in wealth, power, and the number of trained troops it surpassed all Western kingdoms, still this old knight thought of the castles of the Order as future residences for his grandsons; and surely many in Yagello's kingdom had a like thought, not merely because those were old Polish lands on which the Order had settled, but because a feeling of mighty power was storming in the nation, and seeking an outlet on every side.

Only in the fourth year, counting from Zbyshko's marriage, was the castle finished, and even then with the assistance not only of local laborers and men from Zgorzelitse and Mochydoly, but also from the region about, especially from old Vilk of Brozova, who, left alone in the world after the death of his son, had become very friendly to Matsko, and afterward turned his heart toward Zbyshko and Yagenka.

Matsko adorned the chambers of the castle with booty which either he and Zbyshko had taken in war, or which had been inherited from Yurand of Spyhov; added to these were effects left by the abbot and others which Yagenka had brought from her own home. He put in glass windows from Sieradz, and arranged a magnificent residence.

Zbyshko with his wife and children moved into the castle only on the fifth year, when the other buildings, such as stables, cowhouses, kitchens, and baths were finished, and also cellars, which old Matsko had made of stone and lime-mortar, so that they should have endless durability. But he did not move into the castle himself; he preferred to remain in the old bent house, and to every prayer of Zbyshko and Yagenka he answered in the negative, expressing his mind in the following manner, —

"I will die here where I was born. You see, during the time of the war of the Grymaliti and Nalentchi Bogdanets was burned to the ground, all the cottages, yes, even the

fences, but this old house remained. People said that it did not burn because of the abundance of moss on the roof, but I think that the favor of God and His will were in this occurrence, so that we should return here and increase again out of the old house. During the time of our campaigning I complained more than once that we had nothing to which we might return, but not altogether justly did I say that. By my faith, there was nothing to keep house here with, and as to putting something into one's mouth — but there was a place in which to take refuge. Well, for the young people it is quite different, but I think this, since that old house has not left us, it is not proper for me to leave it."

And he remained. But he liked to visit the castle, so as to look at its grandeur and greatness in comparison with the old dwelling, and at the same time to look at Zbyshko and Yagenka, and at his "grandsons." All that he saw was in considerable part his own work; but it filled him with pride and admiration. Sometimes old Vilk visited him to "chat" at the fireside, or he visited Vilk in Brozova for the same purpose. So once he explained to him his ideas touching "the new order."

"You know," said he, "it is strange to me sometimes. Though in truth Zbyshko, even in Cracow, was at the king's castle — why! they came near cutting his head off there! — and in Mazovia, and at Malborg, and with Prince Yanush. Yagenka was reared also in wealth, but they had not their own castle. Now, however, it is as if they had never lived in another way. They walk, I tell you, they walk in the chambers, walk, — and give commands to the servants, and when they are tired they sit down. A real castellan and his lady! They have also a chamber in which they dine with mayors, managers, and dependants, and in it there are higher seats for him and for her; others have lower seats and they wait till the master and mistress have been served properly. That is court usage, but I am to remember that they are not some great lords, but a nephew and a nephew's wife, who take me, their old pet, and seat me in the first place, and call me benefactor."

"For that reason the Lord Jesus blesses them," remarked old Vilk.

Then, nodding his head in sadness, he drank a little mead, stirred brands in the fire with an iron poker, and said, —

"But my boy is dead!"

"God's will."

“ Well ! His older brothers, of whom there were five, laid down their lives long ago. But you know that. The will of God, of course. But this last boy was the best of them all. A real Vilks ; and if he had not fallen he too would be living now in his own castle.”

“ Better that Stan had fallen.”

“ What is Stan ? He is as if carrying millstones on his shoulders. But how many times did my boy cut him up. My son had knightly training, while Stan’s wife now raps him on the face, for, though he is a strong fellow, he is stupid.”

“ Hei ! he is as dull as a horse’s rump ! ” added Matsko.

And when there was an occasion he exalted to the skies not only Zbyshko’s knightly training, but also his wit, saying that in Malborg he had met the foremost knights within barriers, “ and that for him to converse with princes was the same as to crack nuts.” He praised also his nephew’s wisdom and skill in management, without which he would soon consume the castle and the property.

Not wishing, however, that old Vilks should suppose that anything similar could threaten Zbyshko, he finished in a lowered voice, —

“ Well, with the favor of God there is rich property enough — more than people think ; but do not repeat this to any one.”

People divined, they knew and told one another to exaggeration, especially of the wealth which the lord and lady of Bogdanets had removed from Spyhov. It was said that they had brought money in salt kegs from Mazovia. Matsko had accommodated with a loan of between ten and twenty gryvens the wealthy heirs of Konietspole, and this confirmed the belief of the neighborhood absolutely in his “ treasures.” For that reason the significance of the lords of Bogdanets increased, the respect of people rose, and there was never a lack of guests at the castle ; which fact Matsko, though sparing, did not consider with an unwilling eye, for he knew that that too added to the fame of the family.

More especially splendid were the christenings, and once a year, after the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, Zbyshko gave a great feast to the neighborhood, at which noble women were present to look at knightly exercises, hear stories, and dance with young knights by the light of pitch torches till morning. Then old Matsko rejoiced his eyes and delighted his heart in gazing at Zbyshko and Yagenka,

they looked so dignified and lordly. Zbyshko had become more manful in appearance; he had grown, and though with his powerful and tall figure his face seemed always too young, still when he fastened his abundant hair with a purple band, arrayed himself in splendid garments embroidered with silver and gold threads, not only Matsko, but many a noble said to himself in soul: "God be merciful! He is really a prince sitting in his own castle." But often knights who knew western customs knelt before Yagenka, and begged her to be the lady of their thoughts. She was radiant with such splendor of health, strength, and beauty. The old master of Konietspole, who had been voevoda of Sieradz, was astonished at sight of her, and compared her to the morning dawn, and also to the "dear sun," which gives brightness to the world, and puts enlivening heat even into old bones.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

IN the fifth year, however, when uncommon order had been introduced into all the villages, when above the watch-tower a banner with "The Dull Horseshoe" had been waving for some months, and Yagenka had given birth to a fourth son, whom they called Yurand, old Matsko said one day to Zbyshko, —

"Everything succeeds, and if the Lord Jesus would give one more thing I could die in peace."

Zbyshko looked at his uncle inquiringly, and after a while asked, —

"Are you speaking of war with the Knights of the Cross? — for what else do you need?"

"I will say to thee what I have said before, that while the Grand Master Conrad lives there will be no war."

"But is he to live forever?"

"I cannot live forever either, and therefore I am thinking of something else."

"Of what?"

"Better not ask. Meanwhile I am setting out for Spyhov, and perhaps I shall visit the princes in Plotsk and in Chersk."

This answer did not astonish Zbyshko greatly, for in the course of recent years, old Matsko had gone to Spyhov a number of times; hence he only asked, —

"Will you stay long?"

"Longer than usual, for I shall halt at Plotsk."

Something like a week later, Matsko started, taking with him a number of wagons, and good armor, "for the event of having to fight within barriers." When going he declared that he might remain longer than usual, and in fact he did remain during half a year, and there were no tidings of him. Zbyshko began to be alarmed, and at last sent a messenger purposely to Spyhov, but that man met Matsko beyond Sieradz and returned with him.

The old knight was rather gloomy at first, but after he had inquired of Zbyshko carefully touching everything which had happened during his absence, and was set at

rest because all had gone well, his face cleared somewhat, and he began first to speak of his expedition.

“Dost thou know that I have been in Malborg?” asked he.

“In Malborg?”

“But where else?”

Zbyshko looked at his uncle for a while with astonished eyes, then he slapped his own thighs suddenly, and added, —

“As God is true! But I had forgotten about death!”

“Thou art free to forget, for thou hast accomplished thy vows,” said Matsko; “but God forbid that I should set aside my oath and honor. It is not our custom to neglect — and, so help me the holy cross, as long as there is breath in my nostrils I shall not neglect anything.”

Now it grew dusky, and Matsko’s face became threatening and resolute in such a way as Zbyshko had seen only in former years, when with Vitold and Skirvoillo they were going to battle with the Knights of the Cross.

“Well, and did you accomplish your vow?”

“No. I did not, for he would not meet me.”

“Why so?”

“He has become grand comtur.”

“Is Kuno Lichtenstein grand comtur?”

“Yes. Perhaps they will choose him Grand Master. Who knows? Even now he thinks himself the equal of princes. They say that he manages everything, and that all affairs of the Order are on his shoulders, while the Grand Master undertakes nothing without him. How was such a man to appear on trampled earth? To ask him would be to rouse the laughter of people.”

“Did they bring thee to ridicule?” asked Zbyshko, and his eyes flashed suddenly with anger.

“The Princess Alexandra of Plotsk laughed. ‘Go,’ said she, ‘and challenge the Roman Cæsar. To Lichtenstein,’ said she, ‘as we know challenges have been sent by Zavisha Charny, Povala of Tachev, and Pashko Zlodye, and even to those men he gave no answer, for he cannot. He is not lacking in courage, but he is a monk and he has an office so considerable and of such dignity that those things do not come to his head, — and he would lose more honor by accepting than by not paying attention to challenges.’ That is what Princess Alexandra said.”

“And what was your answer?”

“I was terribly cast down, but I said that even in that

case I must go to Malborg, so that I might say to God and man that I did what was in my power. I begged the lady then to arm me with some message, and give me a letter to Malborg, for I knew that otherwise I should not bring my head out of that wolf's-nest. In my soul I thought this way: 'He would not, it is true, grant a meeting to Zavisha, or Povala, or Pashko, but if, in presence of the Master himself, of all the comturs and guests, I slap him on the face or pull his beard and mustache, he will meet me.'

"God support you!" cried Zbyshko, with enthusiasm.

"Well," continued the old man. "There is a way for everything if a man has a head on his shoulders. But in this case the Lord Jesus withdrew his favor, for I did not find Lichtenstein in Malborg. They told me that he had gone to Vitold as an envoy. I knew not what to do then, whether to wait or to follow him. I was afraid of missing him on the road. And since I was acquainted from former times with the Grand Master and the grand keeper of the wardrobe, I explained to them, as a secret, why I had come; they shouted at me that that could not be."

"Why?"

"For the very same reason which the princess in Plotsk had given. And the Grand Master said also: 'What wouldst thou think of me should I fight a duel with every knight from Mazovia or Poland?' Well, he was right, for he would have been out of the world long ago. Then he and the keeper of the wardrobe were astounded, and told of this at the supper table in the evening. Their story acted on the company as the blowing of a man would on a swarm of bees, especially on the guests; a crowd started up at once. 'Kuno,' cried they, 'may not fight, but we may.' I chose three then, wishing to fight with them in turn, but the Master, after great petitions, gave permission to fight with only one, whose name was Lichtenstein, and who was a relative of Kuno."

"Well, what?" cried Zbyshko.

"This — I have brought back his armor, but I am sorry for its condition; it is smashed so that no one would give a gryven for it."

"Fear God! then you have fulfilled your vow?"

"At first I was glad, for I thought myself that I had, but afterward I thought: 'No, that is not the same!' And now I have no peace, for it is not the same."

Zbyshko fell to consoling him, —

“ You know that in such matters I do not spare myself, or any one, but if things had happened to me as to you I should be satisfied. And I say now that the greatest knights in Cracow will support me. Zavisha Charny himself, who knows most of knightly honor, will surely say nothing different.”

“ Dost thou say that? ” inquired Matsko.

“ But just think : they are famous throughout the whole world, and they challenged him also, but none of them have done so much as you. They vowed death to Lichtenstein, but you have slaughtered a Lichtenstein.”

“ That may be,” said the old knight.

But Zbyshko, who was curious in knightly affairs, said,—

“ Well! tell me : was he young, or old, and how was the struggle ? on horseback, or on foot? ”

“ He was thirty-five years old, he had a beard to his girdle, and was on horseback. God assisted me so that I overcame him with the lance, but after that it came to swords. I tell thee the blood gushed from his mouth so that his whole beard was drenched with it.”

“ But have you not complained frequently that you are growing old ? ”

“ Yes, for when on horseback, or on the ground, I hold firmly, but I cannot spring into the saddle in full armor.”

“ But Kuno himself would not have escaped you.”

The old man waved his hand contemptuously, in sign that with Kuno it would have gone much easier, then they went to look at the captured “ plates,” which Matsko had taken only as proof of victory, for they were too much shattered, and therefore without value. But the hip piece and the leg armor were uninjured and of excellent workmanship.

“ But I should prefer that these were Kuno’s,” said Matsko, gloomily.

“ The Lord God knows what is best,” answered Zbyshko.

“ You will not reach Kuno if he becomes Grand Master, unless in some great battle.”

“ I inclined my ears to what people said,” replied Matsko.

“ Some declared that after Conrad would come Kuno, while others mentioned Ulrich the brother of Conrad.”

“ I should prefer Ulrich,” said Zbyshko.

“ I too, and knowest why? Kuno has more mind and is more cunning, while Ulrich is passionate. He is a truthful knight who observes honor, but he just quivers for war with us. They say also that were he to be Grand Master there

would come such a tempest as has not been in the world. Fits of weakness fall frequently on Conrad. Once he fainted in my presence. Hei, perhaps we may live to it."

"God grant! But are there some new misunderstandings with the Kingdom?"

"There are both old and new. A Knight of the Cross is always a Knight of the Cross. Though he knows that thou art stronger, and that it is evil to quarrel with thee, he will lie in wait since he cannot do otherwise."

"But they think that the Order is mightier than all kingdoms."

"Not all of the Knights think so, but many do, and among others Ulrich; for really their power is tremendous."

"But you remember what Zyndram said —"

"I remember. And every year it is worse among them down there. A brother does not receive a brother, as even Germans in Prussia received me when no Knight of the Cross was looking on. All the people have enough of the Knights."

"Then there is not long to wait?"

"Not long, or even long," answered Matsko. And after stopping a while he added: "But meanwhile it is necessary to labor and increase property, so as to appear in the field worthily."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE Grand Master Conrad died only a year later. Yasko of Zgorzelitse, Yagenka's brother, first heard the news in Sieradz, both of his death and of the election of Ulrich von Jungingen; he was the first also to bring it to Bogdanets, where, as well as in all noble houses, it shook souls and hearts to their depth. "Such times are come as have not been hitherto," said old Matsko, with solemnity, while Yagenka brought at the first moment all the children to Zbyshko, and began herself to take farewell of him, as if he had to set out next morning.

Matsko and Zbyshko knew, it is true, that war would not break out as suddenly as fire in a chimney, but nevertheless they believed that it would come to war, and they began to prepare. They chose horses, arms, exercised their attendants and servants in the military art, — the mayors of villages managing by German law, who were obliged to appear in expeditions on horseback, and the poorer nobles and possessors were glad to join themselves to the more wealthy. The same thing was done on all other estates. Everywhere hammers were beating in forges, everywhere men were cleaning old armor, rubbing bows and straps with tallow melted in kettles, wagons were ironed, supplies of provisions, both grits and dried meat, were prepared. In churches on Sundays and holidays people inquired for news; they were sad when tidings of peace came, for every man carried deep in his soul the conviction that there was absolute need to finish immediately with that dreadful enemy of the whole Polish race, and that the kingdom could not flourish in strength, peace, and labor till, according to the words of Saint Bridget, the teeth of the Order were broken and its right hand cut from it.

In Kresnia more especially did men gather around Matsko and Zbyshko as persons who knew the Order and knew what war with the Germans was. People not only asked news of them, but inquired about methods against the Germans. "How are we to fight best with them?" asked they. "What is their style of warfare? In what are they superior to the

Poles, and in what inferior? When lances are broken, is it easier to smash the armor on them with an axe, or is a sword better?"

In truth Matsko and his nephew were expert in these things, so people listened to them with great attention, all the more since the conviction was universal that the war would not be easy, that the Poles would have to measure themselves with the foremost knights of all nations, and not be satisfied with crushing the enemy at this point or that, but crush thoroughly "to the foundation," or perish utterly. So nobles said then among one another and among landowners: "Since it is necessary, we must go through it, — their death or ours." And to that generation of men who bore in their souls a prophetic feeling of coming greatness this did not decrease willingness, — on the contrary, it increased that willingness every day and hour; but they approached the work without empty boasting and self-praise, or rather they approached it with a certain resolute concentration, with gravity, and prepared for death.

"Destruction is written down for them or for us."

But meanwhile time passed and extended, and there was no war. There were reports, it is true, of disagreements between King Vladislav Yagello and the Order, and also reports touching the land of Dobryn, which had been purchased years before, and touching boundary disputes and a certain Drezdenko of which they heard then much for the first time, but concerning which both sides were disputing, as was said; but there was no war. Some began to doubt if there would be, for there had always been disputes, but they ended usually in meetings, negotiations, and the despatch of envoys. In fact news went out that this time two certain envoys of the Order had come to Cracow, while Polish envoys had gone to Malborg. There were reports of mediation by the kings of Bohemia and Hungary, and even by the Pope himself. At a distance from Cracow people knew nothing in detail, hence various, though frequently strange and impossible, reports circulated through the country; but there was no war.

At last even Matsko, within whose memory not a few threats of war had been made and negotiations had taken place, did not know what to think of the whole situation, so he set out for Cracow to obtain more reliable data. He did not remain long in the city, for on the sixth week he returned, and returned with a face greatly brightened; so when the nobility,

curious for news, as usual surrounded him in Kresnia, he answered their numerous queries with the question, —

“ Well, are your lances and spears and axes sharpened? ”

“ But what? Well now! By the wounds of God! what news? Whom have you seen? ” called out people from all sides.

“ Whom have I seen? Zyndram of Mashkovitse! But what news? Such news that ye will have to saddle your horses at once, I think.”

“ As God is true! How is that? Tell.”

“ Have ye heard of Drezenko? ”

“ Of course we have heard. But the little castle is like many a one, and there is no more land there than with you in Bogdanets, we think.”

“ That is a vain cause for war — is it not? ”

“ Of course it is a vain cause for war. There were greater, but afterward nothing came of them.”

“ But do ye know what a saying Zyndram uttered because of Drezenko? ”

“ Tell quickly, for the caps are burning our heads! ”

“ He said this to me: ‘ A blind man was going along the road and he fell over a stone. He fell because he was blind, still a stone was the cause of his fall.’ This Drezenko is such a stone.”

“ How is that? How? But the Order is standing yet.”

“ Ye do not understand? Then I will tell you again in this way. If a vessel is too full one drop will make the liquid in it overflow.”

Such great enthusiasm seized those knights that Matsko had to restrain it, for they wished to mount their horses and ride to Sieradz.

“ Be ready,” said he, “ but wait patiently. They will not forget us, be sure.”

So the people continued in readiness, but they waited long, so long indeed that some began to doubt a second time.

But Matsko did not doubt, for as the coming of birds announces spring, he, as a man of experience, knew how to infer from various signs that war was approaching, and a great war.

First of all, such immense hunts had been ordered in all forests and wildernesses of the crown as the oldest men could not remember. Beaters were assembled in thousands to drive in game. In these hunts fell whole herds of buffaloes, bulls, deer, wild boar, and also smaller animals. The forests were

smoking for entire weeks; meat was dried, smoked, salted for future use and sent to the chief towns of provinces, and thence to be stored at Plotsk. It was evident that the question was one of supplies for great armies. Matsko knew well what to think of this, for Vitold had ordered the very same kind of hunts before each large expedition to Lithuania. But there were other signs also. For instance, peasants had begun to flee in crowds from "under the German" to the kingdom and to Mazovia. To the district of Bogdanets mainly the subjects of German knights in Silesia had come, but people saw that everywhere the same movement was going on, but especially in Mazovia. Hlava, who was managing in Spyhov in Mazovia sent from there between ten and twenty Mazovians who had fled to him from Prussia. These men had begged permission to take part in the war "on foot," for they wished to avenge wrongs on the Knights whom they hated with all their souls. They said that some boundary villages in Prussia were almost wholly deserted, for the free land tillers had moved out of them with their wives and children to the Mazovian Principalities.

The Knights of the Cross hanged, it is true, all fugitives whom they caught, but nothing could restrain the unfortunate people, and many a one of them preferred to die rather than live under the terrible yoke of the Germans. Later "grandfathers" (minstrels) from Prussia swarmed through the whole kingdom. All went to Cracow. They came from Dantzic, from Malborg, from Torun, and even from distant Krolewets, from all Prussian towns and from all places where there were commandants. Among them were not only minstrels, but sextons, organists, various cloister servants, and even clerics and priests. It was thought that they would bring information touching everything carried out in Prussia, such as: military preparations, strengthening of castles, garrisons, mercenary troops, and foreign officers. In fact people whispered to one another that the voevodas in the chief towns of provinces, and, in Cracow, members of the city council, had shut themselves in with those visitors for whole hours, listening to them and writing down the facts which they gave. Some went back unobserved to Prussia and then returned anew to the kingdom. News came from Cracow that the king and the lords of the council knew through them of every step taken by the Knights of the Cross.

The opposite took place in Malborg. A certain spiritual

personage who had fled from that capital stopped at Koniets-pole and told the masters there that Ulrich von Jungingen and other Knights of the Order did not trouble themselves about news from Poland, feeling certain that with one blow they would conquer and overturn all the kingdom, "so that not a trace would be left of it." He repeated therewith the words of the Grand Master Ulrich uttered at a feast in Malborg: "The more there are of them the cheaper will sheepskin coats be in Prussia." Hence they prepared for war with delight and intoxication, confident in their own strength, and in the aid which all, even the most distant kingdoms, would send them; but in spite of these signs of war preparations and efforts, the war did not come so quickly as people wished.

It was tedious at home for Zbyshko of Bogdanets also. All things had long since been made ready, the soul in him was rushing forth to battle and to glory, hence each day's delay annoyed him, and frequently he mentioned this to his uncle, just as if war or peace depended on Matsko.

"You see you promised to a certainty that it would come, and now there is nothing and nothing," said Zbyshko.

"Thou art wise, but not very!" answered Matsko.

"Dost thou not see what is happening?"

"But if the king at the last hour agrees? They say that he does not want war."

"They say so, for he does not. But who, if not he, shouted: 'I should not be a king were I to permit them to take Drezdenko!' but as the Germans took Drezdenko they keep it to this hour. Of course the king does not wish to spill Christian blood, but the lords of the council who have quick wit, feeling the superior power of the Poles, are pushing the Germans to the wall — and I may say this to thee, that if Drezdenko were not in question, something else would be discovered."

"As I have heard, the Grand Master Conrad himself took Drezdenko, and he feared the king, surely."

"He feared him, for he knew Polish strength better than others, but even he was unable to restrain the greed of the Order. In Cracow they told me as follows: Old von Ost, the heir of Drezdenko, at the time when the Knights seized Nova Marchia, did homage as feudatory of the king, for that had been Polish land for ages, so he wished to belong to the kingdom. But the Knights of the Cross invited him to Malborg, made him drunk with wine, and enticed from

him a document. Then the king's patience failed him at last."

"By my faith it must have failed him!" exclaimed Zbyshko.

"It is as Zyndram said," added Matsko. "Drezdenko is only a stone over which the blind man stumbled."

"If the Germans give up Drezdenko, what will happen?"

"Another stone will be discovered. But the Order will not give up that which it has once swallowed, unless we open its stomach, and God grant us soon to do that."

"No!" cried Zbyshko, strengthened in spirit, "Conrad might have surrendered it, Ulrich will not. He is a true knight on whom there is no stain, but he is terribly passionate."

So they conversed with each other, and meanwhile an event came like a stone which, pushed down a steep mountain-path by the foot of a traveller, rushes to the abyss with ever growing impetus. Suddenly the news thundered throughout the whole country that the Knights had attacked and plundered Santok, which had been mortgaged to the Yohánites. The new Grand Master, Ulrich, when the Polish envoys came to congratulate him on his election, left Malborg purposely. From the first moment of his government he commanded to use German instead of Latin in communications with the king and Poland, and thus showed at last what he was. The lords at Cracow, who were urging to war in secret, understood that he was urging to it publicly, and not only publicly, but blindly and with such insolence toward the Polish people as the Grand Masters had never shown, even when their power was really greater and the kingdom was less than at that time.

But dignitaries of the Order, less passionate and craftier than Ulrich, men who knew Vitold, strove to win him to their side by gifts, and used flattery which passed every measure so that one would have had to seek for its like in those times when temples and altars were reared to Roman Cæsars while still living. "The Order has two benefactors," said the envoys of the Order as they bowed down before the viceroy of Yagello: "the first is God, the second Vitold, for this reason every wish and every word of Vitold is sacred for the Knights of the Cross." And they implored Vitold to mediate in the affair of Drezdenko with this idea, that if, as a subject of the king, he would undertake to judge his superior, he would offend him thereby, and

the good relations between them would be broken, if not forever, at least for a long time. But since the lords who formed the council in Cracow knew of everything which was done and planned in Malborg, the king also chose Vitold as arbiter.

And the Order regretted the choice. The dignitaries of the Order to whom it seemed that they knew the Grand Prince, did not know him sufficiently, for Vitold not only adjudged Drezdenko to the Poles, but, knowing also, and divining how the affair must end, roused Jmud again and more fiercely, — showing a more and more threatening visage to the Order, he began to assist Jmud with men, with weapons, and with grain sent from fertile lands in Poland.

When this took place — all, throughout every land of the immense State, understood that the decisive hour had struck.

It had struck indeed.

Once in Bogdanets, when old Matsko, Zbyshko and Yagenka were sitting in front of the castle gate, enjoying the warmth and the marvellous weather, an unknown man appeared suddenly on a foaming horse, he reined back his steed before the gate, threw at the feet of the Knights something that looked like a garland woven from the osier and the common willow. Then he shouted: “Vitsi! Vitsi!” (the summons, the summons) and shot away.

They sprang to their feet in great excitement. Matsko’s face became threatening and solemn. Zbyshko stepped forward to urge the messenger to hasten on with his summons; then he turned with fire in his eyes, and shouted, —

“War! God has given it at last! War!”

“And not such a war as we have seen before, but a great one!” added Matsko, with solemnity.

Then he turned to the servants, who in one moment gathered around their master.

“Sound horns on the watchtower toward the four sides of the world!” shouted he; “and let others run to the villages for the mayors! Bring out the horses and attach them to the wagons! Do it in a breath!”

His voice had not ceased to sound yet when the servants hurried in different directions to carry out his orders, which, moreover, were not difficult, since all had been ready long before: men, wagons, horses, armor, arms, provisions. The knights had nothing to do but take their seats and drive on.

But before starting Zbyshko asked Matsko, —

“Will you not remain at home?”

“I? What is in thy head?”

“According to law you can stay, for you are a man of advanced years, and there should be some protector for Yagenka and the children.”

“Well, listen to that! I have waited to white hairs for this hour.”

It sufficed to look at his cold, resolute face to know that words were of no use in that case. Besides, notwithstanding his seventh cross,¹ the man was as sound as an oak, yet; his arms moved easily in their joints, and an axe wielded by them just whistled through the air. He could not, it is true, spring in full armor on to a horse without touching the stirrups, but there were many young men, especially knights of western Europe, who could not do that either; he had immense training, however, in knightly deeds, and in all that region there was not a warrior of more experience.

It was evident also that Yagenka had no fear of remaining alone, for on hearing her husband's words she rose, kissed his hand, and said, —

“Be not troubled about me, dear Zbyshko, for the castle is a good one; and know this, that I am not over timid; to me neither crossbow nor lance is a novelty. It is not the time now to think of wife and children, when there is need to save the country. God will be our guardian.”

Her eyes filled quickly with tears, which rolled down in great drops on her beautiful lily-like face, and pointing to the group of children she spoke on with emotion, and a quivering voice, —

“Hei! were it not for those little ones, I should lie at thy feet till I received permission to go to the war with thee.”

“Yagus!” cried Zbyshko, seizing her in his arms.

She embraced his neck, nestling up to him with all her strength, and said, “Only come back to me, my golden, my only one, my dearest of all!”

“But thank God every day that he has given thee such a wife,” added Matsko, in a deep voice.

An hour later they lowered the flag from the watchtower in sign that the master was absent.

Zbyshko and Matsko permitted Yagenka with the children to accompany them as far as Sieradz. One hour later all set out with men and a whole train of wagons. The day was clear and still. The forests were in a motionless quiet.

¹ Seven X.'s — seventy years.

The herds on the fields and fallow lands enjoyed the midday rest, chewing their cuds slowly, as if in thought. Because of the dryness of the air there rose in one and another place along the roads rolls of yellow dust, and above those rolls gleamed, as it were, numberless little fires glittering in the sunlight; Zbyshko pointed them out to his wife and children, saying, —

“Do ye know what is glittering there above the dust? Those are spears, lances, and darts. It is clear that the summons has reached every one, and the people are marching against the Germans from all sides.”

In fact such was the case. Not far beyond the boundary of Bogdanets they met Yagenka's brother, Yasko, who, as heir of Zgorzelitse, was quite wealthy; he marched with three lancers, and took with him twenty men. Soon after, at a crossroad, rose up toward them from beyond dust-clouds the face of Stan of Rogov, overgrown with hair; he was not, it is true, a friend of the lords of Bogdanets, but this time he called from a distance, —

“Bear down on the dog brothers!” He bowed toward them with good will, and galloped on farther in the grayish dust.

They met also old Vilk of Brozova. His head trembled a little from age, but he too was marching on, to avenge the death of his son, whom the Germans had slain in Silesia.

And as they approached Sieradz the clouds of dust on the road were more and more frequent, and when from afar the tower of the city was visible the whole road was swarming with knights and their wagons, with armed townspeople who were all marching to the place of muster. Seeing that numerous, healthy, stalwart people, stubborn in battle and enduring beyond all others in foul weather, in rains, in cold, and every kind of toil, old Matsko was strengthened in spirit.

And such a stream of well-equipped warriors were approaching towns not only in the kingdom, but throughout the whole immense extent of the lands ruled by Yagello and Vitold. From the Carpathians and the Black Sea to the shores of the Baltic peoples were hurrying to restrain the German inundation, and put an end to the quarrel of ages with one giant effort.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

AND war had burst forth at last. Not abounding in battles, and during the early moments not over favorable to the Poles. Before the Polish forces had come up the Knights of the Cross captured Bobrovniki, levelled Zlotoria with the ground, and invaded the unhappy land of Dobryn, won recently with so much effort. But Bohemian and Hungarian mediation allayed for a time the storm of war. A truce followed, during which Vatslav, King of Bohemia, was to arbitrate the dispute between Poland and the Order.

Neither side ceased, however, to assemble troops and concentrate them during the mouths of winter and spring. When the King of Bohemia, who was bribed, gave his decision in favor of the Order, war of necessity burst forth anew.

Meanwhile summer came, and with it arrived the "nations" under Vitold. After crossing the river at Chervensk both armies united, and the regiments of the princes of Mazovia joined them. On the other side, in the camp at Sviet, were a hundred thousand Germans encased in iron. Yagello wished to cross the Drventsia and advance by the shortest road to Malborg, but when the crossing proved to be impossible, he turned from Kurentnik to Dziedzic, and after destroying Dombrovna, or Gilgenburg, a castle of the Order, he encamped there.

He, as well as the Polish and Lithuanian dignitaries, saw that a general battle must come soon, but no one supposed that it could come before a number of days had passed. They supposed that the Grand Master, having stopped the road before the king, would give rest to his legions, so that they might come to a life-and-death battle fresh and unwearied. With this expectation the armies of the king halted for the night at Dombrovna.

The capture of the fortress, though without orders, and even against the will of the military council, filled the hearts of the king and Vitold with pleasure; for the castle was strong, surrounded by a lake, it had thick walls, and was held by a numerous garrison. Still the Polish knights took

it almost in the twinkle of an eye, and with such irresistible spirit that before the whole train had come up there remained of the town and the castle only ruins and burnt remnants, in the midst of which the wild warriors of Vitold, and the Tartars under Saladin, were cutting down the last of the German infantry, who defended themselves with desperation.

But the fire did not last long, for it was extinguished by a shower of short duration though tremendously violent.

The whole night of July 14 was marvellously changeable and showery. Whirlwinds brought tempest after tempest. At moments the heavens seemed to be ablaze from lightning, and thunders mingled in awful explosion from the east to the west. Frequent lightning filled the air with the odor of sulphur, then again the roar of rain outsounded all else. Again wind scattered clouds, and amid the tattered fragments of them stars and the great bright moon were visible. Only after midnight did it calm down somewhat so that men could at least kindle fires. In fact thousands and thousands of them blazed up then in the immense camp of the Poles and Lithuanians. The warriors dried their drenched garments and sang songs of battle.

The king was watching also, for in a house standing at the very edge of the camp, in which he had taken refuge from the storm, a council of war was in session to which account was rendered of the capture of Gilgenburg. Since the regiment of Sieradz had taken part in storming that castle, its leader, Yakob of Konietspole, was summoned with others to justify himself for storming the place without orders, and for not stopping the attack though the king had sent to restrain them his own usher and a number of confidential attendants.

For this reason the voevoda, uncertain whether blame would meet him, or even punishment itself, took with him a number of the foremost knights, and among others old Matsko and Zbyshko, as witnesses that the usher appeared only when they were on the walls of the castle and at the moment of most stubborn struggle with the garrison. As to this, that he had attacked the castle, "It is difficult," said he, "to inquire about everything when the troops are dispersed over a space of many miles. Sent out in advance, I understood that I was bound to crush obstacles before the army and to fight with the enemy wherever I met them."

On hearing these words the king, Prince Vitold, and the lords, who in soul were delighted with what had happened,

not only did not censure the voevoda and the men of Sieradz, but praised their valor, saying that they had captured the castle and the brave garrison quickly. Matsko and Zbyshko were able then to gaze at the chiefs commanding in the kingdom, for, besides the king and the princes of Mazovia, were present the two leaders of all the legions: Vitold, who had brought up the troops of Lithuania, Jmud, Rus, Bessarabia, Wallachia, and the Tartars, and Zyndram of Mashkovitse, with his escutcheon "The same as the sun," the sword-bearer of Cracow, and supreme manager of the Polish forces, who surpassed all in his knowledge of military science. Besides him there were in that council many warriors and statesmen; for instance: the castellan of Cracow, Krystin of Ostrov, the voevoda of Cracow, Yasko of Tarnov, the voevoda of Posnan, Sendzivoi of Ostorog and Sandomir, Mikolai Mihalovitse and the parish priest of Saint Florian, and the vice chancellor Mikolai Tromba, and the marshal of the kingdom, Zbigniev of Brezie, and Peter Shafranyets, the chamberlain of Cracow, and finally Ziemovit, son of the Prince of Plotsk, the only young man among them, but a man wonderfully "wise in war," and whose opinion the great king himself esteemed highly.

But in the adjoining roomy chamber the greatest knights were waiting so as to be at hand and in case of inquiry give aid with counsel. The fame of these men sounded widely throughout Poland and in foreign kingdoms. So Matsko and Zbyshko saw there Zavisha Charny and his brother Farurey, and Skarbek Abdank, and Dobko of Olesnitsa, who on a time had unhorsed twelve German knights in Torun in a tournament, and the gigantic Pashko Zlodye, and Povala of Tachev, who was their good friend, and Kron of Koziglove, and Martzin of Vrotsimovitse, who carried the grand banner of the kingdom, and Florian Yelitchik, and Lis of Targovisko, who was terrible in hand-to-hand conflict, and Stashko of Harbimovitse, who in full armor could leap over two horses.

There were many other famous knights who marched before the banner from various lands, and from Mazovia, who were called "men before the banner" because they went in the front ranks to battle.

Their acquaintances and especially Povala greeted Matsko and Zbyshko with gladness, and began to converse of former times and events with them.

"Hei!" said Povala to Zbyshko. "Thou hast heavy

reckonings indeed with the Knights of the Cross, but I think now thou wilt pay them for everything."

"I will pay them with blood even; indeed I will pay for everything!"

"But thou knowest that thy Kuno Lichtenstein is now grand comtur?"

"I know, and my uncle knows also."

"God grant me to meet him," interrupted Matsko; "for I have a special account with that man."

"I know! but we too have challenged him," answered Povala. "He answered that his office did not permit him to meet us. Well! perhaps it will permit him now."

To this, Zavisha, who spoke always with great dignity, said, —

"He will be his to whom God predestines him."

But Zbyshko from pure curiosity laid his uncle's case before the judgment of Zavisha, and asked if Matsko had not accomplished his vow by this, that he had fought with a relative of Lichtenstein, who had offered himself as substitute, and which relative he had killed. All cried out that he had accomplished it. The stubborn Matsko alone, though he was comforted by the decision, said, —

"Yes, but I should feel surer of salvation if I could meet him."

And then they began to talk of the capture of Gilgenburg, and of the approaching great battle, which they expected soon, for there was nothing left the Grand Master but to bar the way before Yagello.

Just as they were breaking their heads over the question of how many days there would be before the encounter, a tall, thin knight approached them; he was dressed in red cloth with a cap of similar material on his head, and spreading his arms he said in soft, almost feminine accents, —

"A greeting to thee, Knight Zbyshko of Bogdanets!"

"De Lorche!" exclaimed Zbyshko, "thou here!"

And he seized him in his embrace, for a pleasant memory of the man had remained with him, and when they had kissed each other, as if they were the nearest of friends, he inquired with delight, —

"Art thou here on our side?"

"There are many knights of Guelders perhaps on the other side," answered De Lorche. "but I owe service from Dlugolyas to my lord, Prince Yanush."

"Then thou art the heir of old Mikolai of Dlugolyas?"

“Yes. After the death of Mikolai, and of his son, who was killed at Bobrovniki, Dlugolyas came to the wonderful Yagenka, who for the last five years is my wife and lady.”

“In God’s name!” cried Zybshko, “tell how all this happened to thee!”

But De Lorche, greeting old Matsko, said, —

“Your former armor-bearer, Hlava, told me that I should find you both here, and now he is waiting in my tent, and is watching over the supper. True, it is far from here, since it is at the other end of the camp, but we will pass quickly on horseback — so come with me.”

Then turning to Povala, with whom he had become acquainted formerly at Plotsk, he added, —

“And you, noble sir. It will be an honor and a happiness for me.”

“Very well,” answered Povala. “It is pleasant to converse with acquaintances; and besides, we shall look at the camp.”

And they went out to mount their horses. But before mounting, De Lorche’s servant put the cloak on his shoulders, which evidently he had brought on purpose. When this man approached Zybshko, he kissed his hand, and said, —

“An obeisance and honor to you, lord. I am your servant of years ago, but you cannot recognize me in the dark. Do you not remember Sanderus?”

“As God is dear to me!” cried Zybshko.

At that moment was renewed in him the remembrance of past pains and sorrows, and of former misfortunes, just as a couple of weeks before, when the troops of the king joined the regiments of the princes of Mazovia, and he met his former armor-bearer Hlava after a long interval. So he said, —

“Sanderus! Well, I remember those former times and thee! What hast thou done since those days, and where hast thou been? Art thou bearing relics about yet?”

“No, lord. Till last spring I was a sexton at the church in Dlugolyas, but as my late father occupied himself with the military art, when the war broke out brass on the church bell-towers became disgusting to me, and the desire for steel and iron was roused in me —”

“What do I hear?” cried Zybshko, who somehow could not imagine to himself Sanderus standing up to battle, with a sword, or a spear, or an axe in his hand.

But, while holding the stirrup for him, Sanderus said, —

“A year ago, at command of the Bishop of Plotsk, I went

to Prussian regions, and thereby rendered considerable service, — but I will tell that later; and now mount, your greatness, for that Bohemian count whom you call Hlava is waiting for us with supper at the tent of my lord.”

Zbyshko sat on the horse, and approaching Pan de Lorche he rode at his side so as to speak with him freely, for he was curious to learn his story.

“I am tremendously glad,” said Zbyshko, “that thou art on our side, but I wonder, for thou hast served the Knights of the Cross.”

“Those serve who take pay,” replied De Lorche, “but I have never taken pay. No, — I went to the Knights of the Cross only to seek adventures and win the belt of a knight, which, as is known to thee, I received from the hands of a Polish prince. And while remaining long years in those countries I came to know on whose side was justice; and when I also married here and settled down, how could I appear against you? I am now a man of this country, and observe how I have learned your language. I have even forgotten my own somewhat.”

“But thy property in Guelders? For, as I have heard, thou art a relative of the ruling house there, and an heir to many castles and villages.”

“I yielded my inheritance to my relative, Foulk de Lorche, who paid me for it. Five years ago I was in Guelders and brought back from there considerable wealth, with which I purchased property in Mazovia.”

“But how did it happen thee to marry Yagenka of Dlugolyas?”

“Ah, who can understand a woman? She trifled with me always till the time came when I was tired of such action, and declared to her that from grief I would go to a war in Asia, and never return again. She began to cry unexpectedly, and said, ‘Then I will be a nun.’ I fell at her feet for those words and two weeks later the Bishop of Plotsk blessed us in church.”

“Hast thou children?” inquired Zbyshko.

“After the war Yagenka is going to the grave of Queen Yadviga to implore her,” answered De Lorche, sighing.

“That is well. They say that method is certain, — and that in such cases there is no better intercessor than our holy queen. Before long all will go to Cracow, for a decisive battle will take place in a few days, and then peace will come.”

“Yes.”

“But the Knights of the Cross of course consider thee as a traitor?”

“No,” answered De Lorche. “Thou knowest how I guard my knightly honor. Sanderus, at command of the Bishop of Plotsk went to Malborg, so I sent through him a letter to the Grand Master Ulrich, in which I notified him of the end of my service and explained to him the reasons why I am on your side.”

“Ha! Sanderus!” cried Zbyshko. “He told me that brass in the church bells has become disgusting to him, and that a desire for steel is roused in him, which seems strange to me, for he had always the heart of a hare.”

Pan de Lorche laughed.

“Sanderus,” said he, “has only this much to do with steel that he shaves me and my armor-bearers.”

“Is that it?” asked Zbyshko, amused.

They rode on sometime in silence, then De Lorche raised his eyes toward the sky, and said, —

“I have invited you to supper, but it will be breakfast before we reach my tent.”

“The moon is shining yet. Let us go on!”

So coming up with Matsko and Povala they rode four abreast through the broad street of the camp, which was traced out, at command of the leaders, between tents and fires, so that passage might be commodious.

Wishing to reach the tents of the Mazovian regiments which were at the other end of the camp, they had to pass the whole length of it.

“Since Poland is Poland,” said Matsko, “no one has seen such armies, for nations have come in from all regions of the earth.”

“No other king can bring out such armies,” answered De Lorche, “for no king has such a mighty kingdom.”

But the old knight turned to Povala, and asked, —

“How many regiments have come with Prince Vitold?”

“Forty,” answered Povala. “Our Polish and the Mazovian regiments number fifty, but they are not arranged in the same way as Vitold’s men, for with him sometimes a number of thousands serve under one banner. Ha! We have heard that the Grand Master called them a rabble, better at spoons than at swords, but God grant that he said that in an evil hour for himself, since I think that the Lithuanian spears will be terribly reddened with the blood of the Order.”

“But these whom we are passing now, who are they?” inquired Pan de Lorche.

“Those are Tartars; Vitold’s feudatory, Saladin, brought them.”

“Are they good in battle?”

“Lithuania understands how to war with those Tartars, and has conquered a considerable part of them, for this reason they were forced to come to this war. It is difficult for knights of western Europe to meet them, for they are more terrible in retreat than attack.”

“Let us look at them more nearly,” said De Lorche.

And they rode toward the fires, which were surrounded by men whose arms were entirely naked. They were dressed, notwithstanding the summer season, in sheep-skin coats, the wool outside. They were sleeping for the greater part directly on the ground, or on straw which was steaming from heat, but many were sitting on their heels near the blazing fires; some were shortening the night hours by singing wild songs in nasal tones and striking in accompaniment one shin bone of a horse against another, which produced a strange and disagreeable clatter; some had small drums or were thrumming on stiffly drawn bow-strings; others were eating pieces of meat freshly snatched from the fire, still steaming and bloody, on which they blew through pouting, bluish lips. In general these people looked so wild and ill-omened that it was easier to take them for some terrible creatures of the forest than human beings.

The smoke of the fires gave out a sharp odor of the horse-flesh and mutton which were roasting in them, and round about from burnt hair and heated sheep-skin coats the smell was unendurable, while from fresh hides and blood it was nauseating.

From beyond the street, where there were horses, came the smell of dung and sweat; those beasts, a number of hundreds of which were kept for scouting in the neighborhood, had gnawed the grass from beneath their own feet and were biting one another, squealing shrilly, and snorting. Horse-boys quieted them with their voices and with rawhide whips.

It was unsafe to go alone among the Tartars, for those wild people were greedy to a degree unheard of. Directly behind them were a few companies of Bessarabians, a little less wild, with horns on their heads; and long-haired Wal-lachians, who instead of steel armor had wooden, painted

plates on their breasts and shoulders, and wore masks representing vampires, skeletons, or beasts; and farther on, Serbs, whose camp, asleep at that-hour, sounded in the daytime at halts, as if it were one immense lute; so many flutes, balalaikas, moltaukas, and various other musical instruments were there in it.

The fires flashed, and from the sky, amid clouds which the strong wind blew apart, shone the great clear moon, and by those gleams our knights reviewed the camp. Beyond the Serbs were situated the unfortunate Jmud men. The Germans had drawn torrents of blood from those people, and still they sprang up to new battles at every summons from Vitold. And now, as if with a prescience that their evil fate would end soon and forever, they had marched to that camp under lead of Skirvoillo, whose name alone filled the Germans with rage and with terror. The fires of the Jmud men touched directly on those of Lithuania, for they were the same people, they had the same customs, and almost the same language.

But at the entrance of the camp of Lithuania a gloomy picture struck the eyes of the knights. There on a gallows made of unhewn poles were hanging two bodies, which the wind swayed with such force that the gallows-frame squeaked complainingly. The horses snorted at sight of the bodies and rose on their haunches, while the knights made the sign of the cross with devotion, and when they had ridden farther Povala said, —

“Prince Vitold was with the king, and I was there when men brought in the criminals. Our bishops and lords had complained previously that Lithuanians are too savage in warfare, and do not even spare churches. So when these were brought in (they were considerable people, but the unfortunates had, as it seems, desecrated the Holy Sacrament) the prince was so filled with anger that it was a terror to look at him, and he commanded the two men to hang themselves. One of them urged on the other: ‘Well, hurry! thou wilt make the prince still more angry!’ And terror fell on all, for the men did not fear death, but the anger of the prince, just as much, or more, than God’s anger.”

“Yes, I remember,” said Zbyshko, “when in Cracow the king was enraged at me about Lichtenstein, Prince Yamont, who was an attendant of the king, advised me immediately to hang myself. And he gave that advice out of friendship, though I should have challenged him to trampled earth had

it not been, as is known to you, that they were to cut my head off."

"Prince Yamont has learned knightly customs since then," said Povala.

Thus conversing they passed the great camp of Lithuania and the three splendid regiments of Rus, of which the largest was that of Smolensk, and went to the Polish campground. In that were fifty regiments, the kernel and also the forehead of all the forces. In that camp the armor was superior, the horses larger, and the knights better exercised, being second in nothing to those from the West of Europe. In strength of body, in endurance of hunger, of cold, and of labor, those men from Great and Little Poland even surpassed the warriors of the West, who were softer and more intent on their own comfort. The Poles were simpler in manners, their armor was more rudely forged, but its temper was better, while their disdain for death and their immense persistence in battle astonished many a time those knights from afar, in those days, the French and English.

De Lorche, who knew Polish knights from of old spoke thus, —

"Here is the strength and the hope. I remember that in Malborg the knights complained more than once that in battle they were forced to purchase every hand-breadth of earth with streams of blood."

"Blood will flow in a river now also," said Matsko, "for the Order has never assembled such forces thus far."

"The Knight Korzbog, who went with letters from the king to the Grand Master," added Povala, "declared that the Knights of the Cross say that neither the Roman Cæsar nor any king has such forces, and that the Order could conquer all kingdoms."

"Pshaw! we are greater in number," said Zbyshko.

"That is true, but they think little of Vitold's forces, because made up, as they say, of men armed in any fashion, and because they are crushed at the first blow, like an earthen pot beneath a hammer. But whether that be true or untrue, I know not."

"It is true, and untrue," answered the prudent Matsko. "Zbyshko and I campaigned with them once. Their weapons are inferior, and their horses are small, hence it happens often that they flee before the onset of Knights of the Order; but their hearts are as brave, or even braver than those of the Germans."

"That will be shown soon," said Povala. "Tears flow to the king's eyes continually at the thought that so much Christian blood will be shed, and at the very last moment he would be glad to conclude a just peace, but the pride of the Knights will not let matters end thus."

"As true as life! I know the Knights of the Order, and we all know them," added Matsko. "God has already arranged the scales on which he will place our blood and that of the enemies of our race."

They were not far now from the Mazovian regiments, among which stood the tent of Pan de Lorche, when they saw in the middle of the "street" a large crowd of people close together and looking at the sky.

"Stand, there! stand!" cried a voice in the crowd.

"But who is speaking, and what are ye doing?" inquired Povala.

"I am the parish priest of Klobuko. But who are ye?"

"Povala of Tachev, the knights of Bogdanets, and Pan de Lorche."

"Oh, that is you, lords," said the priest in a mysterious voice, as he approached Povala's horse. "But look at the moon and see what is happening on it. This night is prophetic and wonderful!"

The knights raised their faces and looked at the moon, which had grown pale, and was near to its setting.

"I cannot distinguish anything," said Povala. "But what do you see?"

"A monk in a cowl is fighting with a king who is wearing his crown. Look! Oh, there! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit! Oh, how terribly they wrestle, — God be merciful to us sinners."

There was silence round about, for all held the breath in their breasts.

"Look! look!" cried the priest.

"True, there is something there," said Matsko.

"True! true!" confirmed others.

"Ha! the king has thrown the monk!" cried the priest on a sudden. "He has put his foot on him! Praised be Jesus Christ!"

"For ages of ages!"

At that moment a great black cloud covered the moon, and the night became dark, but the light of fires quivered in bloody stripes across the road.

The knights rode on, and when they had gone some distance Povala inquired, —

“ Did ye see anything? ”

“ At first, nothing, ” answered Matsko, “ but afterward I saw distinctly both the king and the monk. ”

• “ And I. ”

“ And I. ”

“ That is a sign from the Lord, ” said Povala. “ Ah, in spite of the tears of our king, it is evident that there will be no peace. ”

“ And the battle will be such as the world does not remember, ” said Matsko.

And they went farther in silence, with hearts overflowing and solemn.

But when they were not far from De Lorche's tent a whirlwind rose with such force that in the twinkle of an eye it scattered the fires of the Mazovians. Through the air went thousands of firebrands, blazing splinters, and sparks, while it was filled with clouds of smoke.

“ Hei ; it is blowing dreadfully ! ” said Zbyshko, pulling down his cloak which the wind had thrown over his head.

“ And in the wind it is as if groans and the weeping of people were heard. ”

“ Dawn is not distant, but who knows what the day will bring him ? ” added De Lorche.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

AT dawn the wind not only did not cease, but it rose to such a degree that men could not pitch that tent in which from the beginning of the expedition the king had heard three holy masses each day. At last Vitold ran up with entreaties and the prayer to defer service to a more fitting time in forest quiet, and not to delay the advance. His wish was in fact gratified, for it could not be otherwise. At sunrise the armies moved in a body, and behind them an endless train of wagons.

After they had marched an hour the wind went down somewhat, so that the flags were unfurled. And then the fields to an immense extent were covered, as it were, with flowers of a hundred colors. No eye could embrace the legions, or that forest of various banners under which the regiments moved forward. The land of Cracow advanced under a red banner with a white, crowned eagle; that was the grand banner of the kingdom, the chief standard of all the troops. It was borne by Martsin of Vrotsimovitse, a knight mighty and famous. Behind it marched the household regiment; one body had the double cross of Lithuania above it, the other a knight with a sword raised to strike. Under the banner of Saint George marched a powerful division of mercenaries and foreign volunteers, formed mainly of Moravians and Bohemians. Many of these had volunteered for that war, since the 49th regiment was made up of them exclusively. Those men were properly infantry, which marched behind the lancers; they were wild, unruly, but so trained to battle, and so terrible in encounter, that all other infantry when they struck on these sprang away as quickly as possible, just as a dog starts back from a porcupine. Battle-axes, scythes, common axes, and especially iron flails formed their weapons, which they wielded in a manner that was simply terrible. They took service with any one who paid them, as their only element was war, plunder, and slaughter.

At the side of the Moravians and Bohemians marched under their own banner sixteen regiments of the Polish lands, among these one from Premysl, one from Lvov, one from Galicia, three from Podolia, and behind them infantry from

the same lands armed mainly with pikes and scythes. The princes of Mazovia, Yanush, and Ziemovit led the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd regiments. Next marched the bishops', and then the nobles' regiments to the number of twenty-two. Hence Yasko of Tarnov, Yendrek of Tenchyn, Spytko Leliva, Kron of Ostrovo, and Mikolai of Mihalov, and Zbigniev of Brezie, and Kuba of Konietspole, and Yasko of Ligenza, and the Kmitas, and the Zakliks, — and besides them the houses of Gryfits, and the Bobovskis, and Kozli Rogi, and others who assembled in battle under a common escutcheon and "watch-word." And so the land bloomed beneath them, as fields bloom in spring. A sea of horses moved forward, and a sea of men, above them a forest of lances with colored streamers, like small flowers, and in the rear, in clouds of dust, the townspeople and the free earth-tillers' infantry. They knew that they were going to a dreadful battle, but they knew that it was "necessary," hence they advanced with willing hearts.

On the right wing moved the legions of Vitold, under banners of various colors, but with the same device, the Lithuanian knight with upraised sword. No eye could take in all the legions, for they marched through fields and forests for a width of almost five English miles.

Before midday the armies came near Logdau and Tannenberg, and halted at the edge of a forest. The place seemed to be suited for rest and secure from sudden attack; for on the left flank it was protected by the water of Lake Dombrovna, on the right by Lake Luben; before the armies an expanse of field was open to the width of five miles.

In the centre of that expanse, rising gently toward the west, were the fields of Grünwald, and a little to the right stood the gray straw roofs, and the empty melancholy fallow lands of Tannenberg. The enemy, who could descend toward the forest from the height, might be seen easily, but it was not supposed that they could come up sooner than the day following. So the armies halted there only to rest; but since Zyndram, skilled in matters of war, had preserved, even while marching, the order of battle, they took position so that they might be ready for action at any instant.

At command of the leader they sent forward immediately, on light and swift horses, scouts in the direction of Grünwald and Tannenberg, and still farther to examine the region around. But meanwhile the chapel tent was pitched on the

lofty bank of Lake Luben, for the king was eager for divine service, so that he might hear his usual masses.

Yagello, Vitold, the Mazovian princes, and the military council betook themselves to the tent. Before it had assembled the foremost of the knights, both to commit themselves to God before the dreadful day and to look at the king. And they saw him as he went in coarse campaign clothing, with a serious countenance on which grievous care had settled visibly. Years had changed his form little, and had not covered his face with wrinkles or whitened his hair, which at that time he put behind his ears with the same quick movement as the first time when Zbyshko saw him in Cracow. But he walked as if bent beneath that tremendous responsibility which weighed on his shoulders, and as if he were sunk in great sorrow. In the army men said to one another that the king wept continually over the Christian blood which was to be shed, and it was so in reality. Yagello trembled in view of war, especially with men who bore the cross on their mantles and banners, and he desired peace with all his soul. In vain did the Polish lords, and even the Hungarian mediators Stsibor and Gara represent to him the haughtiness and confidence of the Order, with which the Grand Master Ulrich was filled. Ulrich was ready to challenge the whole world to battle. It was in vain that the king's own envoy, Peter Korzbog, swore on the cross of the Lord, and on his own escutcheon that the Order would not hear of peace, and that Count von Wende, the comtur of Gniev, was the only man inclined toward it; other knights of the Order covered Count Wende with ridicule and insults, and still the king had hope that the enemy would recognize the justice of his demands, spare human blood, and end the terrible dispute with a just treaty.

He went, therefore, to pray for this object in the chapel; his simple and kindly soul was tormented with immense fear. In former days Yagello had visited with fire and sword the lands of the Order; that he had done, however, when he was a pagan prince of Lithuania, but now, when as a Polish king and a Christian he saw burning villages, ruins, blood, and tears, he was seized with the fear of God's anger, especially since that was only the beginning of war. If it might stop even there! But to-day or to-morrow nations would exterminate each other, and the earth would be steeped in blood. That enemy is unjust indeed, but still he carries the cross on his mantle, and he is defended by such great

and holy relics that the mind draws back before them in terror. The whole army also thought of these relics with fear. Not spears, nor swords, nor axes did the Poles dread chiefly, but those holy relics. "How raise a hand on the Grand Master?" asked knights who knew no fear, "if on his armor he bears a reliquary, and in it the bones of saints and the wood of the cross of the Saviour."

Vitold was burning for war, it is true; he urged to it and he hurried to the battle, but the pious heart of the king became cowardly when he thought of those heavenly powers with which the Order had shielded its injustice.

CHAPTER LXXX.

FATHER BARTOSH of Klobuko had finished one mass, Yarosh, the parish priest of Kaliska, was soon to begin a second, and the king had gone out in front of the tent to straighten his knees wearied somewhat with kneeling, when a noble, Hanko Ostoichyk, rushed up on a foaming horse, like a whirlwind, and shouted before he sprang from the saddle, —

“Germans! Gracious lord! — they are coming!”

At these words the knights started, the king's face changed; he was silent during the twinkle of an eye, and then exclaimed, —

“Praised be Jesus Christ! Where didst thou see them, and how many regiments?”

“I saw one regiment at Grünwald,” answered Hanko, with a panting voice; “but beyond the hill dust is moving, as if more were advancing.”

“Praised be Jesus Christ,” repeated the king.

Hereupon Vitold, to whose face the blood rushed at the first word from Hanko, and whose eyes began to burn like coals, turned to the courtiers, and cried, —

“Defer the second mass! Bring a horse for me!”

The king placed his hand on Vitold's shoulder, and said: “Go thou, brother, but I will remain and hear the second mass.”

Vitold and Zyndram sprang to their horses; but just at the moment when they turned toward the camp, Peter Oksha, a second scout, flew up shouting from a distance, —

“The Germans! the Germans! I saw two regiments!”

“To horse!!” called voices among the courtiers and the knights.

But Peter had not ceased shouting, when again the clatter of horse-hoofs was heard, and a third scout rushed up, after him a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth. All had seen German regiments advancing in greater and greater numbers. There was no longer a doubt that the whole army of the Order would bar the road to the troops of Yagello.

The knights scattered in a twinkle; each rushed to his own regiment. With the king at the chapel tent remained

only a company of courtiers, priests, and attendants. At that moment a bell sounded, in sign that the parish priest of Kaliska was beginning the second mass, so Yagello, stretching out his arms, placed his hands together piously, and raising them toward heaven, entered the tent with deliberate step.

When, after the second mass, the king went out again in front of the tent, he could convince himself with his own eyes that the scouts had spoken truly, for on the edges of the broad sloping plain something seemed black, as if a pine wood had grown up suddenly on the empty fields, while above that pine wood, colors played and changed in the sunlight, a rainbow of banners. Still more distant, far off beyond Grünwald and Tannenberg, a gigantic cloud of dust was rising toward the sky.

The king took in at a glance that whole tremendous horizon, then turning to the reverend vice-chancellor Mikolai, he inquired, —

“Who is the saint of to-day?”

“This is the day of the sending of the Apostles,” answered the vice-chancellor.

The king sighed, and said in a sad, broken voice, —

“So the day of the apostles will be the last in life, for the many thousands of Christians who will fall on this field.”

And he indicated with his hand the broad, empty plain in the middle of which, about half-way to Tannenberg, stood a group of oaks centuries old.

Meanwhile, his horse was led up, and in the distance appeared sixty lancers whom Zyndram had sent to be the king's body-guard.

This guard was led by Alexander, the youngest son of the Prince of Plotsk, a brother of that Ziemovit who, gifted with exceptional “wisdom in war,” had sat in the military council. Next to Alexander in command was Zygmunt Korybut, a Lithuanian, and nephew of the monarch, a youth of great hopes and great destinies, but of restless spirit. Of the knights most famous were: Yasko Monjyk of Dombrova, a genuine giant, almost equal in bulk to Pashko, and in strength yielding but little to Zavisha Charny; Zolava, a Bohemian baron, small and slender, but of immense skill, famous at the courts of Bohemia and Hungary for duels, in which he had brought down between ten and twenty Austrian nobles; and Sokol, another Bohemian,

an archer above archers; Beniash Verush of Great Poland, and Peter of Milan, and the Lithuanian boyar Senko of Pochost, whose father, Peter, led a Smolensk regiment; and Prince Fedushko, a relative of the king; Prince Yamont, and finally Polish knights "chosen from thousands;" these had all sworn to defend the king from every mishap of war, to the last drop of their blood. And immediately near the person of Yagello were the reverend vice-chancellor Mikolai, and the royal secretary Zbigniev of Olesnitsa, a young man of learning, skilled in letters and in writing, who at the same time surpassed in strength men of his years considerably. The king's weapons were cared for by three armor-bearers: Chaika of Novy Dvor, Mikolai of Moravitsa, and Danilko of Rus, who carried the king's bow and quiver. The suite was completed by some tens of attendants who, mounted on swift horses, were to rush to the armies with orders.

The armor-bearers arrayed their lord in brilliant, glittering mail, then they led up to him a chestnut steed, also "chosen from thousands," which snorted, as a good omen, beneath its steel head-piece, and, filling the air with a neigh, reared somewhat, like a bird about to fly. The king, when he felt the steed under him and a spear in his hand, changed in a flash. Sadness vanished from his face, his small dark eyes glittered, and on his cheeks appeared a flush; but that was only during an instant, for when the reverend vice-chancellor began to make the sign of the cross on him he grew serious again and bent humbly his head, which was covered with a silvery helmet.

Meanwhile the German army, descending gradually from the elevated plain, passed Grünwald, passed Tannenberg and halted at the middle of the plain in complete battle array. From below, from the Polish camp, that tremendous line of gigantic knights and horses enclosed in mail, was perfectly visible. In so far as was permitted by the wind which moved the banners, quick eyes distinguished accurately various designs embroidered on them, such as crosses, eagles, griffins, swords, helmets, lambs, bison and bear heads.

Old Matsko and Zbyshko, who had warred previously with Knights of the Order and knew their troops and escutcheons, showed their Sieradz friends two regiments of the Master himself, in which served the very flower and choice of the knighthood, and the grand banner of the whole Order, which was carried by Friedrich von Wallenrod, and the banner of Saint George with a red cross on a white

ground — and many other banners of the Order. But unknown to them were the standards of the various foreign guests, thousands of whom had come from every country in Europe: from Austria, Bavaria, Suabia, Switzerland, from Burgundy, famous for its knighthood, from rich Flanders, from sunny France, — whose knights, as Matsko had declared on a time, even if prostrate on the earth, would still utter words of bravery, — and from England beyond the sea, the birthplace of terrible archers whom Mazovian hunters alone could equal — and even from distant Spain, where amid ceaseless struggles with Saracens manhood and honor had flourished in a way to surpass all other countries. And the blood began to storm in the veins of those strong nobles from Sieradz, Konietzpole, Kresnia, Bogdanets, Rogov, and Brozova, as well as from other Polish lands, at the thought that they would have soon to join battle with the Germans, and with all that brilliant knighthood of Europe. The faces of the older men grew stern and serious, for they knew how dreadful and merciless that work would be; while the hearts of the young men began to whine, just as hunting dogs whine when, held on a leash, they see the wild beast at a distance. So some of them, grasping more firmly in their hands lances, hilts of swords, and handles of axes, reined back their horses, as if to let them go at a dash; others breathed hurriedly, as if for them it had grown too narrow in their armor.

But the more experienced warriors calmed the younger men by saying: "It will not miss you; there will be plenty for each — God grant that there be not too much."

But the Knights of the Cross, looking from above at that forest plain, saw on the edge of the pine wood only a few Polish regiments, and they were not at all certain that the army with the king at the head of it was before them. It was true that on the left, at the lake, were visible also gray crowds of warriors, and in the bushes glittered something like lance-points, that is, light spears used by Lithuanians. That, however, might be only a considerable scouting party of Poles. Spies from captured Gilgenburg, a number of whom had been brought before the Master, were the first to declare that in front of him stood all the Polish-Lithuanian forces.

But in vain did they speak of the strength of those forces. The Grand Master would not believe them, for from the beginning of that war he believed only what was favorable

to him, and which augured inevitable victory. He sent out neither scouts nor spies, thinking that there must be a general battle in every case, and that the battle could end only in dreadful defeat for the enemy. Confident in a force such as no previous Grand Master had ever brought to the field he despised his opponent, and when the comtur of Gniev, who had made investigations himself, explained to him that Yagello's troops were more numerous than those of the Order, he answered: "What troops are they? With the Poles alone shall we have to struggle somewhat but the rest, even if greater in number, are the last of men, better at a spoon than a weapon."

And, hastening with all his forces to the battle, he was flushed with great delight, for all at once he found himself face to face with the enemy. The purple of the grand banner of the kingdom, seen on the dark background of the forest, permitted no further doubt that before him the main army had its position.

It was impossible, however, for the Germans to attack the Poles standing near the pine wood and in it, for the Knights of the Order were formidable only on the open field; they did not like battle in dense forests, and knew not how to fight in them.

Therefore they assembled in brief council, at the side of the Grand Master, to determine how to entice the enemy out of the forest.

"By Saint George!" exclaimed the Grand Master. "We have ridden ten miles without resting; the heat is oppressive and our bodies are covered with sweat beneath our armor. We shall not wait here till it please the enemy to come forth to meet us!"

To this Count Wende, a man important through age and knowledge, replied, —

"My words have been ridiculed here already, and ridiculed by those who, as God knows, will flee from this field on which I shall fall" (here he looked at Werner von Tetlingen), "but I shall say what my conscience commands as well as my love for the Order. The Poles lack not courage, but, as I know, the king is hoping till the last moment for messengers of peace."

Werner von Tetlingen made no reply; he merely snorted with contemptuous laughter.

Wende's words were not pleasing to the Grand Master, so he answered, —

“Is it a time now to think of peace? We have to counsel about another affair.”

“There is time always for God’s business,” answered Von Wende.

But Heinrich, the fierce comtur of Chlubov, who had sworn that he would have two naked swords borne before him till he could plunge both in Polish blood, turned his thick, sweating face to the Master and exclaimed in great anger, —

“Death is dearer to me than infamy, and even were I alone, I should attack with these swords the whole Polish army!”

Ulrich frowned somewhat.

“Thou art speaking against discipline!” said he.

Then he said to the comturs, —

“Take counsel only as to how we shall entice the enemy out of the forest.”

So different men gave different counsels, till finally Gersdorf’s plan pleased both the comturs and the foremost guests, namely: to despatch two heralds to the king with the announcement that the Grand Master sends two swords to him, and challenges the Poles to mortal combat; and if they have not field enough, he will withdraw somewhat with his army so as to yield proper space to them.

The king was going just then from the edge of the lake to the left wing of the Polish regiments, where he had to belt a whole assembly of knights, when on a sudden he was informed that two heralds were coming from the army of the Order.

Vladislav Yagello’s heart beat with hope.

“Now they are coming with a just peace!”

“God grant!” said the priests.

The king sent for Vitold, but he, occupied with marshaling his troops, could not go to Yagello. Meanwhile the heralds, without hurry, approached the camp. In the bright sunlight they were perfectly visible on immense war-horses covered with housings: one of the men had on his shield the black eagle of the Caesar on a golden ground, the other, who was a herald of the Prince of Stettin, had a griffin on a white ground. The ranks opened in front of them; they dismounted and stood for a while before the king, and then kneeling, but not to show honor, accomplished their mission.

"The Grand Master Ulrich," said the first herald, "challenges thy majesty, O lord, and Prince Vitold to mortal battle, and to rouse the bravery which evidently is lacking you, he sends these two naked swords."

When he had said this he placed the swords at the king's feet.

Yasko Monjyk of Dombrova interpreted these words, but barely had he finished, when the second herald pushed forth and spoke thus, —

"The Grand Master Ulrich has commanded to inform you also, lord, that if the field for battle is too narrow he will withdraw his troops somewhat so that you should not remain idle in the forest."

Yasko again interpreted his words, and silence followed. But in the king's suite the knights gritted their teeth in secret at such insolence and insults.

Yagello's last hopes were dissipated like smoke. He had waited for an embassy of peace and concord; an embassy of pride and war had come. He raised his tearful eyes, and answered, —

"We have swords in abundance, but I accept these as a presage of victory which God himself sends into my hands through you. And the field of battle will be determined also by Him, to whose justice I turn now and make complaint of the wrongs done my people, and of your pride and injustice."

Two great tears flowed down his sunburnt cheeks. Meanwhile the voices of the knights in the suite were heard saying, —

"The Germans are withdrawing. They are giving the field!"

The heralds rode away, and after a while they were seen again advancing up the hill on their immense horses, and seemed brilliant in the sunlight from silk which they wore above their armor.

The Polish armies advanced somewhat from the forest and thickets in regular order. In front marched the body which was called "the forehead," formed of the most formidable knights; behind them the "main body," and after the main body infantry and mercenaries. In that way was formed between the bodies two long streets through which Zyndram and Vitold were flying; the latter, without a helmet on his head, in splendid armor, was like a flame driven forward by the wind.

The knights took deep breaths into their breasts and fixed themselves firmly in their saddles.

The battle was to begin right there.

The Grand Master was looking meanwhile at the king's army which had come out of the forest.

He looked long at the immensity of it, at the wings spread out like those of an enormous bird, at the banners moved by the wind, and suddenly the heart was pressed in him by some terrible, unknown feeling. It may be that he saw with the eyes of his soul piles of corpses and rivers of blood. He had no fear of man, but perhaps he feared God, who up there in the heights of heaven was holding the scales of victory. For the first time it came to his mind what a ghastly day that would be, and for the first time he felt the responsibility which he had taken on his shoulders.

His face grew pale, his lips quivered, and from his eyes came abundant tears. The comturs glanced at their leader with amazement.

"What is troubling thee, lord?" inquired Count Wende.

"Indeed this is a fitting time for tears!" said the fierce Heinrich, comtur of Chluhov.

The grand comtur, Kunó Lichtenstein, pouted, and said, —

"I censure this openly, Master, for now it becomes thee to rouse the hearts of the knights, and not weaken them. In truth we have never seen thee thus up to this moment."

But in spite of all efforts tears flowed to the Grand Master's black beard, as if some other person were weeping within him.

At last, however, he controlled himself somewhat, and turning stern eyes on the comturs he commanded, —

"To the regiments!"

They sprang each man to his own regiment, for the Master had uttered his words with great power; and stretching his hand to the armor-bearer, he said, —

"Give me the helmet!"

Men's hearts in both armies were beating like hammers, but the trumpets had not given the call yet for battle. A moment of expectation had come, which was more grievous perhaps than battle itself. On the field, between the Germans and the army of the king, there towered up, on the side toward Tannenberg, a group of oaks, centuries old, on to which peasants of the neighborhood had climbed, so

as to gaze at the struggle of those armies more gigantic than the world had seen within time to be remembered. But apart from this one group of trees the whole field was vacant, gray, ghastly, resembling a lifeless steppe. Nothing moved on it but the wind, while above it death was hovering in silence. The eyes of the knights turned in spite of them to that ominous and silent plain. Clouds which rushed over the sky hid the sun at intervals, and the gloom of death settled down in those moments.

A whirlwind rose up now. It roared through the forest tearing thousands of leaves away; it rushed into the field, seized dry grass-blades, whirled clouds of dust upward, and bore them into the eyes of the Knights of the Order.

At that very moment the air quivered from the shrill sound of horns, crooked trumpets, whistles; and the entire Lithuanian wing rose like a countless flock of birds when ready to fly.

They started, as was their custom, at a gallop. The horses, stretching their necks and dropping their ears, tore forward with all the strength that was in them; the riders flew on with a terrible shout, raising their swords and lances, against the left wing of the Knights of the Order.

The Grand Master was there just at that moment. His emotion had passed, and from his eyes sparks issued now instead of tears. Seeing the hurrying legions of Lithuania, he turned to Friedrich Wallenrod, who led the left wing of the Order, and said, —

“Vitold has attacked first. Begin you — in the name of God!”

And with a movement of his right hand he sent forward fourteen regiments of the Knights encased from head to foot in iron.

“Gott mit uns (God with us)!” cried Wallenrod.

The regiments, lowering their lances, began to advance at a walk. Then, precisely like a rock pushed from a mountain side which falls and gains ever increasing impetus, they from a walk passed to a trot, and then to a gallop, and rushed forward irresistible, like an avalanche which must rub out and crush everything in front of it.

The earth groaned and bent under them.

The battle might extend any moment and flame up along the whole line, hence the Polish regiments began to sing the ancient war hymn of Saint Voytseh. A hundred thousand heads covered with iron, and a hundred thousand pairs of

eyes were upraised, and from a hundred thousand breasts came forth one gigantic voice which was like the thunder of heaven, —

“ Mother of God, Virgin,
Glorified of God, Mary!
From Thy Son, our Lord,
O Mother whom we implore, only Mother,
Obtain for us — pardon of sins!
Kyrie eleison !”

And there was such an immense, such a tremendous and conquering force in those voices and in that hymn, as if indeed the thunders of heaven had begun to tear themselves free. Spears quivered in the hands of the knights, banners and flags quivered, the air quivered, tree branches quivered in the forest, and the echoes roused in the pine wood began to answer in the depths, to call, and, as it were, to repeat to the lakes, to the fields, to the whole land in the length and the breadth of it, —

“ Obtain for us — pardon of sins !
Kyrie eleison !!”

And they sang on, —

“ This is the holy time
Of Thy Son the Crucified.
Hear Thou this prayer which we raise to Thee;
Bear it to Him, we implore of Thee:
‘ Give, Lord, on earth worthy life to us;
After life give us a dwelling in paradise,’
Kyrie eleison —”

The echo repeated in answer, “Kyrie Eleiso-o-o-on!”

Meanwhile, on the right wing a stubborn battle had commenced, and it moved more and more toward the centre.

The uproar, the squealing of horses, the terrible shouts of men were mingled with the hymn. But at moments the shouts ceased, as if breath failed the combatants, and during one of those intervals it was possible once more to distinguish those thundering voices, —

“ Adam, thou God’s assistant,
Thou who art in Divine company,
Place us, thy children, where Angels are reigning;
Where there is gladness,
Where there is love,
Where angels see their Creator forever,
Kyrie eleison —”

And again the echo "Kyrie eleiso-o-on!" rushed through the pine wood. The shouts on the right wing increased, but no one could see or distinguish what was taking place there, for the Grand Master Ulrich, looking from above at the battle, hurled on the Poles in that moment twenty regiments under the lead of Kuno Lichtenstein.

Zyndram rushed like a thunderbolt to the Polish head legion, in which the very foremost knights were, and pointing with his sword to the approaching host of Germans, he cried so piercingly that the horses in the first rank rose on their haunches, —

"At them! — Strike!"

Then the knights, bending forward over the shoulders of their horses, and pointing their spears out in front of them, started.

The Lithuanians bent beneath the terrible onrush of the Germans. The first ranks, formed of the best armed and richest boyars, fell to the ground as flat as a bridge. The following ones closed in rage with the Knights of the Order; but no bravery, no endurance, no human power could save them from defeat and destruction. And how could it be otherwise, since on one side fought a knighthood completely enclosed in armor, and on horses protected also with armor; on the other, large men, it is true, and strong, but on small horses, and protected themselves by skins only? In vain, therefore, did the stubborn Lithuanians seek to reach the skin of the Germans. Spears, sabres, lance-points, clubs set with flint or nails rebounded from the metallic "plates" as they would from a cliff, or the wall of a castle. The weight of the German warriors and horses crushed Vitold's unfortunate legions; they were cut by swords and axes, their bones were pierced and crushed by halberds, they were trampled by horse-hoofs. Prince Vitold hurled vainly into those jaws of death new legions; vain was persistence, useless was rage, fruitless contempt of death, and rivers of blood were unavailing!

The Tartars fled first, then the Bessarabians with Wallachians; and soon the Lithuanian wall burst, and wild panic seized all the warriors.

The greater part of the Lithuanian troops fled in the direction of Lake Luben, and after them chased the main German forces, making such a terrible harvest that the whole shore was covered with corpses.

Meanwhile the second and smaller part, in which were three regiments of Smolensk, withdrew toward the Polish wing pressed by six German regiments, and later by those also who returned from pursuing. But the men of Smolensk, better armed, gave more effective resistance. The battle here turned into a slaughter. Every step, almost every hand's breadth of land was bought with torrents of blood. One of the Smolensk regiments was almost cut to pieces, but two others defended themselves with desperation and rage, resembling that of a wild boar when attacked by a company of bears. Nothing, however, could stop the irrepressible Germans.

Some of their regiments were seized by the frenzy of battle. Single knights, spurring their rearing steeds, rushed on at random with upraised axe or sword into the densest throng of the enemy. The blows of their swords and axes were almost preterhuman; the whole body, thrusting, trampling, and crushing horses and riders of the Smolensk regiments, came at last to the flank of the main forehead, and main Polish legion, for two regiments during more than an hour had struggled with the Germans led by Kuno Lichtenstein.

The task was not so easy for the Knights of the Order in that spot, since there was equality of arms and horses, and similar knightly training. So the Polish "wood" even stopped the Germans and pushed them back, especially when three terrible regiments struck them: the Cracow, the light horse, under Yendrek of Brohotsitse, and the household regiment, which was led by Povala of Tachev.

But the battle raged with the greatest din when, after the spears had been broken, men took to swords and axes. Shield struck shield then, man struggled with man, horses fell, banners were hurled to the earth; under the blows of hammers and axes, helmets, shoulder-pieces and breast-plates burst, iron was covered with blood, heroes dropped from their saddles as pines fall when their trunks are chopped through.

Those Knights of the Cross who at Vilno had been in battles with the Poles, knew how "unbending" and "persistent" a people they were, but new men and guests from abroad were seized at once with amazement akin to terror. Many a knight reined in his steed without thinking, looked ahead with doubt, and before he could decide what to do he had perished.

And just as hail falls unsparingly from bronze-colored clouds on to wheat fields, so thickly did merciless blows fall, swords struck, axes struck — they struck without halt, without pity; they sounded like iron plates in a forge; death extinguished lives as a whirlwind puts out tapers; groans were wrested from breasts, eyes were quenched, and the whitened faces of youth sank into endless night.

Upward flew sparks struck out by iron, fragments of lance-handles, shreds of flags, ostrich and peacock plumes. Horse-hoofs slipped on bloody armor lying on the ground, and on bodies of horses. Whoso fell wounded was mashed by horse-shoes.

But of the foremost Polish knights no one had fallen thus far, and they advanced in a throng and an uproar, shouting the names of their patrons, or the war cry of their families. They went as fire sweeps along a parched steppe, fire which devours grass and bushes. The foremost, Lis of Targovisko seized the comtur of Osterode, Gamrat, who, losing his shield, wound his white mantle around his arm and shielded himself from blows with it. But Lis cut through the mantle and the armor and crushed the German shoulder-blade with a thrust; he pierced the comtur's stomach, and his sword-point gritted against the man's spinal column. The people of Osterode screamed with fear on seeing the death of their leader, but Lis rushed in among them as an eagle among cranes, and when Stashko and Domarat hurried to help him, the three together shelled lives out dreadfully, — just as bears shell pods after entering a field in which green peas are growing.

There Pashko killed a brother of the Order, Kune Adelsbach; Kune, when he saw the giant before him, grasping a gory axe on which were blood and matted hair, was terrified in heart and wished to yield himself captive; but to his destruction Pashko did not hear in the din, and rising in his stirrups split the man's head with its steel helmet as one might cut an apple. Immediately afterward he quenched Loch of Mexlenburg and Klingenstein, and the Swabian Helmsdorf of a great countly family, and Limpach of Mayence, and Nachtervits also from Mayence, till at last the Germans began to retreat before him to the left and the right in terror; but he struck at them as at a tottering wall, and every moment it was seen how he rose in his saddle for a blow, then were visible the gleam of his axe and a German helmet going down between horses.

There also was the powerful Yendrek of Brohotsitse, who, when he had broken his sword on the head of a Knight who had an owl's face on his shield, and a visor in the form of an owl's head, seized him by the arm, crushed him, and snatching the man's sword, took his life from him with it immediately. He also seized the young Knight Dünnheim, whom, seeing without a helmet, he had not the heart to kill; being almost a child, Dünnheim looked at him with the eyes of a child. Yendrek threw him, therefore, to his attendants, not thinking that he had taken a son-in-law, for that young knight afterward married his daughter and remained thenceforth in Poland.

Now the Germans pressed on with rage, wishing to rescue young Dünnheim, who came of a wealthy family of counts on the Rhine, but the knights before the banner, Sumik and two brothers from Plomykov, and Dobko Okwia, and Zyh Pykna, pushed them back, as a lion pushes back a bull, and pressed them toward the banner of Saint George, spreading destruction and ruin among them.

With the knightly guests fought the royal household regiment, which was led by Tsiolek of Zelihov. There Povala of Tachev overturned men and horses with his preterhuman strength, and crushed steel helmets as if they had been eggshells. He struck a whole crowd alone; and with him went Leshko of Goray, also another Povala, of Vyhuch, and Mstislav of Skrynev, and two Bohemians, Sokol and Zbislavek. Long did the struggle last here, for three German regiments fell on that single one; but when Yasko of Tarnov came with the 27th regiment to assist, the forces were more or less equal, and the Germans were driven back almost half the shot of a crossbow from the point where the first encounter had happened.

But they were hurled still farther by the great Cracow regiment, which Zyndram himself brought, and at the head of which among the men before the banner went the most formidable of all Poles, Zavisha Charny. At his side fought his brother Farurey, and Florian Yelitchyk, and Skarbek. Under the terrible hand of Zavisha valiant men perished, as if in that black armor death were advancing in person to meet them. He fought with frowning brow and distended nostrils, calm, attentive, as if performing some ordinary labor; at times he moved his shield slightly, warded off blows, but at each flash of his sword the terrible cry of a stricken man gave answer, while he did not even

look around, but advanced, toiling forward, like a black cloud out of which from moment to moment a lightning flash crashes.

The regiment of Poznan, having for its ensign a crownless eagle, fought also for life and death, while the archbishop's regiment and the three Mazovian regiments advanced with it in rivalry. But all the others too surpassed one another in venom and in valor. In the Sieradz regiment Zbyshko of Bogdanets rushed like a raging wild boar into the thickest of the throng; at his side went old Matsko, terrible, fighting with judgment, as a wolf fights which bites to kill and not otherwise.

Matsko sought Kuno Lichtenstein with his eyes on all sides, but, unable to see him in the throng, he selected others, those who wore the richest armor, and he hewed persistently. Not far from the two knights of Bogdanets the ominous Stan of Rogov fought wildly. At the first encounter his helmet was broken; so he fought bareheaded, terrifying the Germans with his hairy and bloody face which seemed not human, but the face of some monster of the forest which they saw before them.

But hundreds and then thousands of knights, on both sides, covered the earth — till at last, under the blows of raging Poles, the battered German wall began to totter; then something happened capable of changing the fate of the whole battle in one moment.

Returning from the pursuit of the Lithuanians, heated and intoxicated with victory, the German regiments saw before them the flank of the Polish wing. Judging that all the king's armies were beaten and the battle won decisively, they were returning in great unordered crowds, with shouting and singing, when they beheld all at once in front of them a savage slaughter, and the Poles, almost victorious, surrounding the German legions.

So these Knights of the Order, lowering their heads, looked with astonishment through the openings of their visors at what was happening, and then where each one stood he thrust spurs into his horse's flanks and rushed into the whirl of battle.

And so throng followed throng, till soon thousands hurled themselves at the Polish regiments now wearied with battle. The Germans shouted with delight when they saw approaching aid, and began to strike at the Poles with new ardor.

A desperate battle seethed up throughout the whole line; torrents of blood flowed along the earth; the sky grew cloudy and dull thunder rolls were heard, as if God himself wished to interfere between the combatants.

But the victory was inclining toward the Germans. Disorder was just beginning in the Polish body; the legions of the Knights of the Order were growing frenzied, and had begun in one voice to sing the hymn of triumph, —

“Christ ist erstanden! (Christ has arisen!)”

But just then something still more tremendous took place. One of the Knights of the Order while lying on the ground opened with a knife the belly of the horse ridden by Martin of Vrotsimovitse, who bore the grand banner of Cracow, a crowned eagle, which was sacred for all the king's armies. Steed and rider went down on a sudden; with them the banner tottered and fell.

In one moment hundreds of arms were stretched out to grasp the banner. From all German breasts a roar of delight burst forth. It seemed to them that the end had come, that terror and panic would seize the Poles straightway, that the hour of defeat, death, and slaughter was at hand, that they would have merely to hunt and cut down the fugitives.

But just there a bloody deception was in wait for them.

The Polish armies shouted as one man, in desperation at sight of the falling banner, but in that shout, and in that desperation there was no fear, only rage. One might have said that living fire had fallen on their armor; the most formidable men of both armies, not thinking of rank, without order, each from where he stood, rushed to one spot like raging lions. That was not a battle now around the banner, but a storm let loose. Warriors and horses were packed into one monstrous whirl, and in that whirl men's arms moved like whips, swords clanked, axes bit, steel gritted against steel; there was a groaning, there were wild cries from men whom others were slaughtering. All these sounds were mingled in one ghastly roar which was as terrifying as if the damned had torn free on a sudden from the abyss of hell. Dust rose and out of it rushed, blinded from terror, riderless horses with bloodshot eyes and manes scattered wildly.

But this lasted only a brief time. Not one German came out of that tempest. After a while the rescued banner waved again over the Polish legions. The wind stirred it, unfurled it, and it bloomed forth in splendor, like a gigantic flower, —

a sign of hope, a sign of God's wrath against Germans, — and of victory for the knights of Poland.

The whole army greeted the banner with a shout of triumph; and they fell upon the Germans with such rage as if every regiment had come with double strength and twice as many warriors.

Now the Germans were attacked without mercy, without rest, without even such an interval as is needed to draw a single breath. They were pressed on all sides, cut unsparingly with blows of swords, scythes, axes, and maces; they began to totter — and withdraw.

Here and there were heard voices calling for quarter. Here or there fell out of action some foreign knight with face white from fear and astonishment, and he fled in frenzy whithersoever he was borne by his no less terrified steed. The majority of the white mantles, which brothers of the Order wore over their armor, were lying now on the field of battle.

Grievous alarm seized the hearts of the leaders of the Order, for they understood that their only salvation was in the Grand Master, who up to that time stood ready at the head of sixteen reserve regiments.

He, looking from above on the battle, understood also that the moment had come, and he moved his iron legions as a storm moves heavy waves, which bring ruin to ships on the sea.

But still earlier, on a raging steed appeared Zyndram before the third Polish line, which had not taken part yet in the conflict. Zyndram watched over everything and was mindful of the course of the battle. There, among the Polish infantry, were some companies of heavy Bohemian infantry. One of these had hesitated earlier before the engagement, but repentant in season it remained on the field, and, rejecting its leader, was flaming now with desire for battle, so as to redeem with its valor a moment of weakness. The main power, however, was made up of Polish regiments composed of cavalry, but unarmored, poor landholders, and of infantry from towns, and, more numerous than others, free land-tillers armed with pikes, heavy lances, and scythes point downward.

“Make ready! Make ready!!” shouted Zyndram, in his tremendous voice, as he flew along the ranks with lightning swiftness.

“Make ready!!” repeated the inferior leaders.

Understanding that the hour had come to them these men rested the handles of their spears, flails, and scythes on the

ground, and making the sign of the holy cross they fell to spitting on their immense and toil-marked hands.

And that ominous spitting was heard through the whole line; then each man seized his weapon, and drew breath. At that moment an attendant rushed up to Zyndram with a command from the king, and with panting voice whispered something in his ear. But Zyndram, turning to the infantry, waved his sword, and shouted, —

“Forward!”

“Forward!!” was shouted by the leaders.

“Advance! On the dog brothers! At them!!”

They moved. To go with even steps and not break ranks they all began to repeat at once, —

“Hail — Ma — ry — full — of — gra — ce — the Lord — is — with — thee!!”

And they advanced like an inundation. The mercenary regiments advanced, the town infantry, the free land-tillers from Little and Great Poland, and the Silesians who before the war had taken refuge in the kingdom, and the Mazovians who had fled from the Knights of the Order.

The whole field glittered and gleamed from their scythes, pikes, and lances.

At last they arrived.

“Strike!” shouted the leaders.

“Uch!” Each man grunted as a strong woodcutter grunts when he strikes the first blow with his axe, and they began with all the strength that they had, and all the breath that was in them.

The uproar and shouts reached the sky.

The king, who from a height had followed the whole battle, continued to send messengers in every direction. He had grown hoarse from giving orders, and, seeing at last that all the troops were engaged, he began himself to be eager for conflict.

His attendants would not permit this, out of fear for the sacred person of their sovereign. Polava seized the horse's bridle, and though the king struck him with a lance on the hand he did not let go. Others stopped the way, begging, imploring, and representing that he could not change the battle by taking part in it.

But all at once the greatest danger hung over the king and his whole retinue.

The Grand Master, following the example of those who

had returned after the dispersal of the Lithuanians, and wishing also to attack the Polish flank, advanced in the arc of a circle; in consequence of this his sixteen chosen regiments had to pass very near the eminence on which stood the king, Vladislav Yagello. The danger was noted, but there was no time to withdraw. They merely furled the royal banner, and at the same time the king's secretary, Zbigniev of Olesnitsa, rushed with all speed on horseback to a neighboring regiment which was just making ready for the oncoming enemy, and which was led by the knight Mikolai Kielbasa.

"The king is in danger! To the rescue!" cried Zbigniev.

But Kielbasa, having lost his helmet, pulled away from his head a piece of cloth wet with blood and sweat, and showing it to the messenger shouted in terrible anger, —

"Look if we are idle here! Madman! Dost thou not see that that cloud is sweeping down on us, and we should merely lead it to the king were we to leave this place? Be off, or I shall put a sword through thee!"

And unmindful of the man with whom he was speaking, panting, borne away with anger, he aimed really at Zbigniev, who, seeing with whom he had to deal, and what was more, that the old warrior was right, raced back to the king and repeated what he had heard.

Hence the royal suite pushed forward in close rank to protect the sovereign with their breasts. This time, however, the king permitted no one to restrain him, he stood in the first rank. But barely had they taken their places when the German regiments were so near that the escutcheons on their shields could be distinguished perfectly. The sight of these regiments was indeed sufficient to fill the most daring hearts with a quiver, for that was the very flower and pick of the knighthood.

Arrayed in brilliant armor, on horses as immense as lions, not wearied by battle, in which they had taken no part up to that hour, they advanced like a hurricane, with a thundering of horse-hoofs, with a roaring, with a rustling of flags and banners, and the Grand Master himself flew before them in a broad white mantle, which, spread out by the wind, looked like the giant wings of an eagle.

The Grand Master had passed the king's retinue and was rushing to the main battle, for what did a handful of knights standing at one side signify to his mind? He did not suspect that the king was among them, and did not recognize him.

But from one of the regiments sprang forth a gigantic German, and whether it was that he recognized Yagello, or was enticed by silvery armor, or wished to show his knightly valor, he bent his head forward, levelled his spear, and rushed directly at Yagello.

The king put spurs to his horse and before his suite could detain him he had sprung toward the German. And they would have met without fail in mortal combat had it not been for that same Zbigniev, the youthful secretary of the king, who was skilled in the knightly calling as well as in Latin. He, having a piece of a lance in his hand, rode against the German from one side, and striking him on the head with it crushed his helmet and brought him to the earth. That moment the king struck the man with a sword on the naked forehead and killed him.

Thus perished a famous German knight, Dippold von Köckeritz. Prince Yamont seized the horse, and the German knight lay, mortally stricken, in his white mantle above his steel armor, and with a gilded girdle. The eyes turned in his head, but his feet dug the earth for some time yet, till death, the greatest pacifier of mankind, covered his head with night and put him to rest forever.

Knights from that same regiment of Helmno wished to avenge the death of their comrade, but the Grand Master, shouting, "Herum! herum!" barred the way, and hurried them on to where the fate of that bloody day was to be decided, that is, to the main battle.

And again something wonderful happened. Mikolai Kielbasa, who was nearest the field, recognized the enemy, it is true, but in the dust, the other Polish regiments did not recognize them, and thinking them Lithuanians returning to the battle, did not hasten to meet them. Dobko of Olesnitsa was the first to spring out before the oncoming Grand Master, and recognized him by his mantle, his shield and the great gold reliquary, which he wore on his breast outside the armor. But the Polish knight dared not strike the reliquary with his lance, though he surpassed the Grand Master in strength immensely; Ulrich, therefore, threw up the knight's spear-point, wounded his horse somewhat, then the two, passing each other, described a circle, and each went to his own people.

"Germans! The Grand Master himself!" shouted Dobko.

When they heard this the Polish regiments rushed with the greatest impetus toward the enemy. Mikolai Kielbasa was the first to strike them with his regiment, and again raged the battle.

But whether it was that the knights from the province of Helmno, among whom there were many of Polish blood, did not strike earnestly, or that nothing could restrain the rage of the Poles, it suffices that this new attack did not produce the effect which the Grand Master had looked for. It had seemed to him that his would be the finishing blow to the power of Yagello; meanwhile he saw soon that it was the Poles who were pushing, advancing, beating down, cleaving, taking, as it were, in iron vices his legions, while his knights were rather defending themselves than advancing. In vain did he urge them with his voice, in vain did he push them with his sword to the battle. They defended themselves, it is true, and defended themselves mightily, but there was not in them either that sweep or that fire which victorious armies bear with them, and with which Polish hearts were inflamed. In battered armor, in blood, in wounds, with dented weapons, their voices gone from their breasts, the Polish knights rushed on irresistibly to the densest throng of the Germans, as wolves rush at flocks of sheep; and the Germans began to restrain their horses, then to look around behind, as if wishing to learn whether those iron vices were not surrounding them more and more terribly, and they drew back slowly, but continually, as if desiring to withdraw unobserved from the murderous enclosure.

But now from the direction of the forest new shouts sounded suddenly. This was Zyndram, who had led out and sent the country people to battle. Soon was heard the biting of scythes on iron and the hammering of flails on armor; bodies began to fall more and more densely; blood flowed in a stream on the trampled earth; and the battle became like one immense flame, for the Germans, seeing salvation only in the sword, defended themselves desperately.

And both sides fought in that way, uncertain of success, till huge clouds of dust rose all at once on the right flank of the king's army.

"The Lithuanians are returning!" roared Polish voices in gladness.

They had divined the truth. The Lithuanians, whom it was easier to disperse than to conquer, were returning, and, with an unearthly uproar, they rushed, like a whirlwind, on their swift horses to the conflict.

Then some comturs, and at the head of them Werner von Tetlingen, raced up to the Grand Master.

“Save thyself, lord!” cried the comtur of Elblang, with pallid lips. “Save thyself and the Order, before their circle encloses us!”

But the knightly Ulrich looked on him gloomily, and waving his hand toward heaven, he cried, —

“May God not permit me to leave this field on which so many brave men have fallen! May God not permit me!”

And, shouting to his men to follow, he hurled himself into the density of the battle. Meanwhile the Lithuanians had rushed up, and such a chaos and such a seething began that in it the eye of man could distinguish nothing.

The Grand Master was struck in the mouth by the point of a Lithuanian lance and twice wounded in the face. He warded off blows for a time with his failing right hand, but thrust finally with a spear in the neck he fell to the earth, like an oak tree.

A crowd of warriors dressed in skins covered him completely.

Werner von Tetlingen with some regiments fled from the field of battle, but an iron ring closed around all the remaining regiments, a ring formed of Yagello's warriors.

The battle turned into a slaughter, and the defeat of the Knights of the Cross was so exceptional in all human history that few have happened which we might compare with it. Never in Christian times, from the days that Romans struggled with Goths, or with Attila, and Charles Martel with the Arabs, did armies fight with each other so mightily. But now, like reaped grain, one of the two forces lay on the field for the greater part. Those regiments which the Grand Master had led last to the battle surrendered. The Helmno men planted their flags on the ground. Other Knights sprang from their horses, in sign that they were willing to go into captivity, and knelt on the blood-covered earth. The entire regiment of Saint George, in which foreign guests served, surrendered also, with the Knight leading it.

But the battle continued yet, for many regiments of the Order chose to die rather than beg for captivity or quarter.

The Germans fought then, according to their military custom, in an immense ring and defended themselves as wild boars do when wolves have surrounded them. The Polish-Lithuanian circle enclosed that ring, as a serpent encloses the body of a bull, and became narrower and narrower. Again arms thrashed, flails thundered, scythes bit, swords cut, spears pierced, and axes hewed. The Germans were cut down as a forest is cut—and they died in silence, gloomy, immense, unterrified. Some raising their visors, took farewell of comrades, giving one to another the last kiss before death; some hurled themselves blindly into the seething battle, as if seized by insanity, others struggled as in a dream; in cases they killed each other, one thrusting his misericordia into the throat of another, or one opened his breast to a comrade with the prayer, “Stab!” The rage of the Poles soon broke the great circle into a number of smaller groups, and then again it was easier for single Knights to escape. But in general those separate groups fought with rage and despair. There were few at that stage who knelt down begging for quarter, and when the terrible onset of the Poles dispersed the smaller groups also, even single Knights would not yield themselves alive to the victors. That was for the Order and all Western knighthood, a day of the greatest disaster, but also of the greatest glory. Under the gigantic Arnold von Baden, who was surrounded by country infantry, a rampart of Polish bodies had been piled up, while he, mighty and invincible, stood above it, as stands a boundary pillar on an eminence. At last Zavisha Charny himself came to him; but seeing the knight without a horse, and not wishing to attack him from behind contrary to knightly usage, he sprang off his horse and called to him from a distance.

“Turn thy head, German, and surrender, or meet me.”

Arnold turned and recognizing Zavisha by his black armor, and his shield, said in his gloomy soul, —

“Death is present, and my hour has come, for no one can escape that man alive. But if I could conquer him I should win immortal glory, and save my life perhaps.”

Then he sprang toward him and they struggled like two tempests on that ground covered with corpses. But Zavisha surpassed all men in strength so tremendously that unfortunate were the parents to whose children it happened to meet him in battle. In fact Arnold's shield, forged in Malborg

burst, his steel helmet cracked like an earthen pot, and the giant fell with his head split in two.

Heinrich, the comtur of Chluhov, that most inveterate enemy of the Polish race, who had sworn that he would have two swords borne in front of him till he plunged both in Polish blood, was rushing from the field stealthily, as a fox slips away when surrounded by a legion of hunters, when Zbyshko of Bogdanets barred the road to him. "Erbarne dich meiner! (Have pity on me!)," cried the comtur, when he saw the sword above his head, and he clasped his hands in terror. The young knight, hearing this, was unable indeed, to withhold his hand and the blow, but he was able to turn his sword and strike only with the side of it, the fat and sweating face of the comtur. He pushed the man then to his attendant, who tied a rope around his neck and took him, like an ox, to the place whither they conducted all captive Knights of the Order.

Old Matsko searched the bloody field for Kuno Lichtenstein, and the fate of that day, for the Poles lucky in everything, gave the man into his hands finally. A handful of Knights of the Cross, fleeing from the dreadful defeat, had secreted themselves in the forest. The sunlight reflected from their armor betrayed their presence to pursuers. All fell on their knees and surrendered immediately, but Matsko, learning that the grand comtur of the Order was among the prisoners, commanded Lichtenstein to stand before him, and removing the helmet from his own head, he inquired, —

"Kuno Lichtenstein, dost thou know me?"

Wrinkling his brows, and fixing his eyes on the face of the old knight, he replied after a while, —

"I saw thee in Plotsk, at the court."

"Not there," answered Matsko; "thou didst see me before that! Thou didst see me in Cracow, when I begged thee for the life of my nephew, who, for an inconsiderate attack on thee was condemned to loss of life. At that time I made a vow to God, and swore on my knightly honor, that I would find thee and meet thee in mortal combat."

"I know," answered Lichtenstein, and he pouted his lips haughtily, though immediately afterward he grew very pale. "But now I am thy prisoner, and thou wouldst disgrace thyself wert thou to raise a sword on me."

At this, Matsko's face contracted ominously, and it became, as was usual on such occasions, exactly like a wolf's face.

"Kuno Lichtenstein," said he, "I will not raise a sword on a disarmed man, but I tell thee this: If thou refuse me battle, I will command to hang thee with a rope, like a dog."

"I have no choice. Come out!" cried the grand comtur.

"To the death, not to captivity," forewarned Matsko.

"To the death!"

And after a while, they fought in presence of the German and Polish knights. Kuno was younger and more adroit, but Matsko surpassed so much in strength of arms and legs his opponent that in the twinkle of an eye, he brought him to the ground, and pressed his breast with his knee.

The comtur's eyes turned in his head with terror.

"Spare!" groaned he, throwing out foam and saliva from his lips.

"No!" answered the implacable Matsko.

And putting the misericordia to the neck of his opponent, he thrust it in twice.

Kuno coughed dreadfully; a wave of blood burst through his lips, death quivers shook his body, then he stretched — and the great pacifier of knights put him to rest forever.

The battle became now a pursuit and a slaughter. Whoso would not surrender perished. There were many battles and conflicts in the world during those centuries, but no man remembered a defeat so dreadful. Before the king had fallen, not only the Order of the Cross, but all the Germans who as the most brilliant knighthood assisted that "Teutonic vanguard," which was eating more and more deeply into the Slav body. Of about seven hundred "white mantles," who as leaders went before that Germanic deluge, there remained barely fifteen. More than forty thousand bodies (of the Knights of the Cross and guests) lay on that blood-stained field in endless sleep. The various banners which as late as midday waved over that immense army of the Order had all fallen into the bloody and victorious hands of the Poles, — not a single banner was saved; and now the Polish and Lithuanian knights threw them down at the feet of Yagello, who, raising his pious eyes heavenward, repeated with emotion, —

“O God! thou hast wished this!”

The foremost captives were presented to his Majesty. Abdank Skarbek brought in Prince Kazimir of Stetten; the Bohemian knight of Trotsnov¹ brought Conrad, prince in Olesnitsa; Predperko of Koplidov brought Gersdof, who was fainting from wounds; he had led all the foreign knights under the banner of Saint George.

Twenty-two nations had taken part in that battle of the Order against the Poles, and now the king's secretaries were writing, and they recorded the prisoners who, kneeling before his Majesty, begged for pardon, and a return home when ransomed.

The entire army of the Order had ceased to exist.

The Polish pursuit captured the immense camp of the Knights of the Cross, and in it, besides those who had escaped, a great number of wagons laden with fetters for the Poles, and wine to be used at a great feast after victory.

The sun was near its setting. A brief, abundant shower had laid the dust. The king, Vitold, and Zyndram, were preparing to visit the field of battle, when men bore in before them bodies of fallen leaders. The Lithuanians brought the body of the Grand Master, Ulrich von Jungingen, pierced with spears, covered with dust and clotted blood, and placed it before Yagello. The king sighed with pity, and looking at the immense body lying on the ground, face upward, he said, —

“Here is the man who, this morning, thought himself superior to every potentate on earth —”

Then tears began to flow like pearls along his cheeks; after a while he said, —

“But he died the death of the valiant; so we will celebrate his manfulness, and honor him with a proper Christian burial.”

And immediately, he issued an order to wash the body carefully in the lake, array it in splendid robes, and cover the coffin with a mantle of the Order.

Meanwhile, they brought in more and more bodies, which the captives recognized. They brought in Kuno Lichtenstein, his throat cut terribly with a misericordia, and Friedrich Wallenrod, the marshal of the Order; the grand keeper of the wardrobe, Count Albrecht von Schwartzberg, and the grand treasurer, Thomas Mercheim, and Count

¹ Yan Zisca, afterward the famous leader of the Hussites.

Wende, who fell at the hand of Povala of Tachev, and more than six hundred bodies of famous comturs and brothers. The servants placed them one by the other, and they lay, like felled trees, with faces looking heavenward, and white as their mantles, with open, glassy eyes, in which rage, pride, the frenzy of battle, and terror had grown fixed. At their heads were planted the captured banners—all of them! The evening breeze now furled, now unfurled the colored banners, and they rustled above those men lying there as if in sleep. From afar, about twilight, were visible Lithuanian divisions bringing in captured cannon, which the Knights used for the first time in open battle, but which had not caused any harm to the conquerors.

Around the king on the eminence, had assembled the greatest Polish knights, and breathing with wearied breasts they looked at those flags, and at those corpses lying at their feet, just as reapers, wearied from heat, look at cut and bound sheaves. Grievous had the day been, and terrible the fruit of that harvest; but now the great, divine, gladsome evening had come.

Hence, immeasurable happiness brightened the faces of the conquerors, for all understood that that evening had put an end to the suffering and toils not only of that day, but of whole centuries.

The king, though conscious of the immensity of that defeat of the Order, looked still as if in amazement before him, and at last he inquired, —

“Is the whole Order lying here?”

To this the vice-chancellor, Mikolai, who knew the prophecies of Saint Bridget, said, —

“The time has come when their teeth are broken, and the right hand cut from them!”

Then he raised his hand, and began to make the sign of the cross, not only on those who lay near, but on the whole field between Grünwald and Tannenberg. In the air, which was bright from gleams after the setting sun, and purified by the rain, they could see distinctly the immense battle-field steaming and bloody, bristling with fragments of spears, lances, and scythes, with piles of bodies of horses and men, amid which were thrust upward dead hands and feet and hoofs; and that sad field of death extended, with its tens of thousands of bodies, farther than the eye could reach. Camp followers were moving about over that im-

mense cemetery, collecting arms and removing armor from the dead bodies.

But above in the ruddy air were storming and circling flocks of eagles, crows, and ravens, screaming and croaking with delight at sight of the food before them.

And not only was the perfidious Order of the Knights lying there stretched at the feet of the king, but all the German might, which up to that battle had been flooding unfortunate Slav lands like a sea, had broken itself against Polish breasts on that great day, that day of purification and redemption.

So to thee, great festival of the past, and to thee, blood of sacrifice, be praise, honor, and glory through all ages.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MATSKO and Zbyshko returned to Bogdanets. The old knight lived long after that, and Zbyshko waited in health and strength to see those memorable moments in which through one gate the Grand Master of the Order went forth out of Malborg with tears in his eyes, and through another gate entered, at the head of troops, the Polish voevoda to take possession, in the name of the king and the kingdom, of the city and the whole country as far as the blue waves of the Baltic.

THE END.

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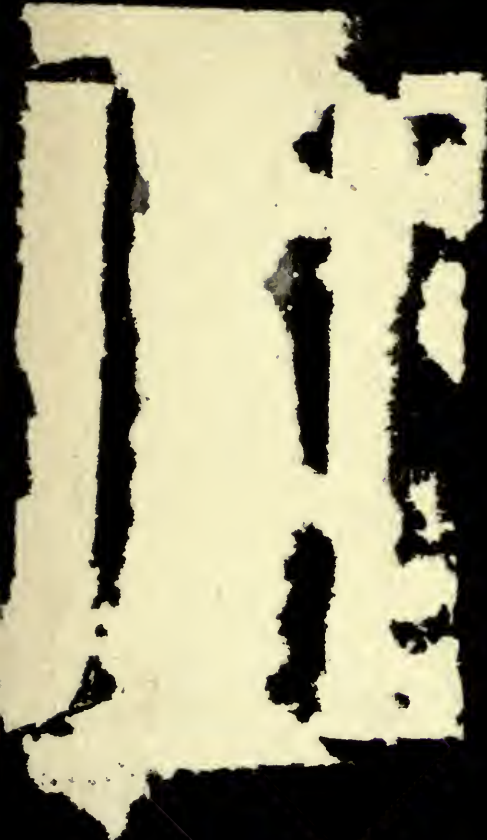
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