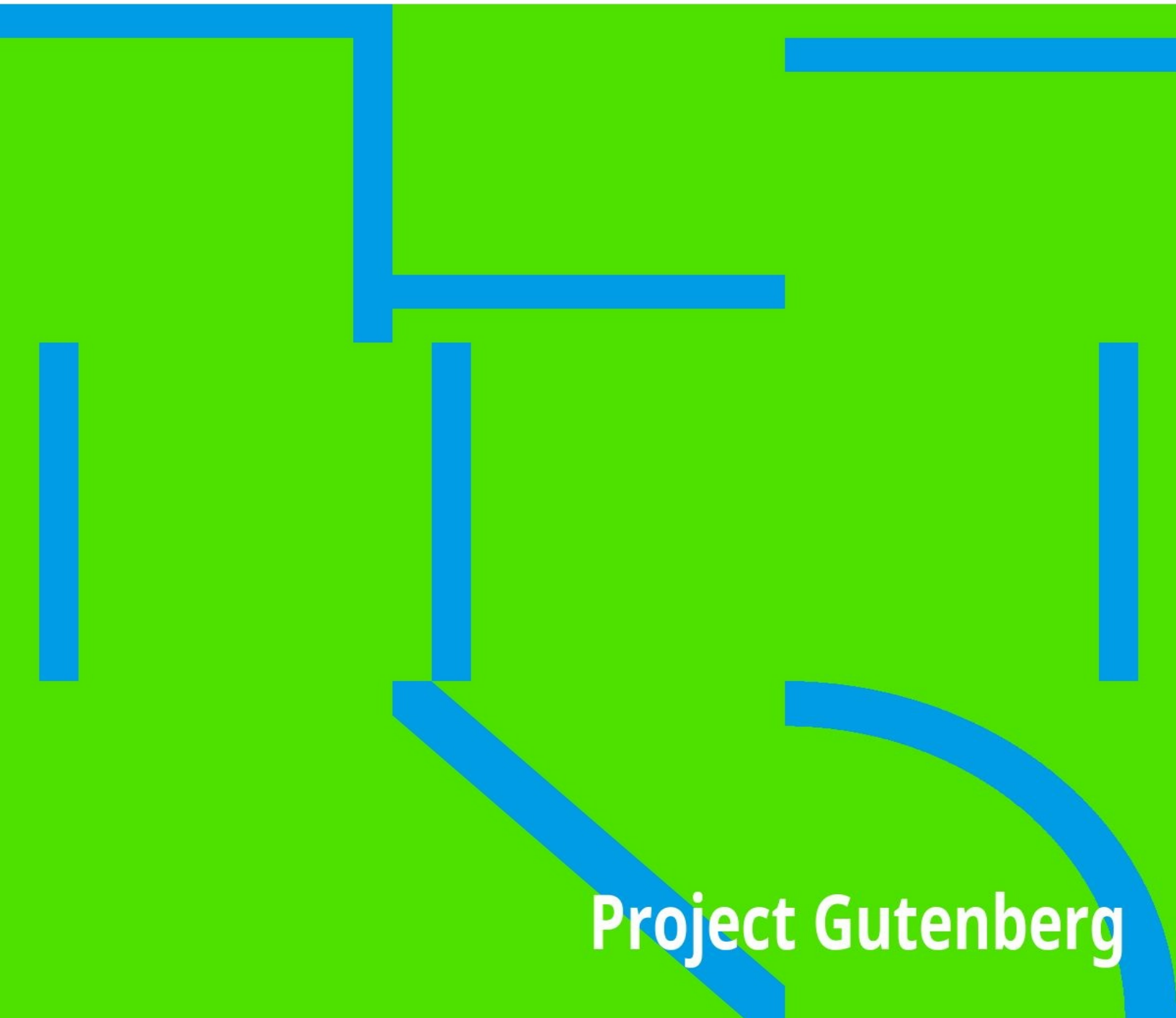
Pretty Michal

Mór Jókai



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PRETTY MICHAL

A FREE TRANSLATION OF MAURUS JÓKAI'S ROMANCE
"A SZÉP MIKHÁL"

BY
R. N. BAIN

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PRETTY MICHAL.

CHAPTER I.

Wherein is shown how sagely the Rev. Master Fröhlich brought up his motherless daughter, pretty Michal.

In the days when the Turkish Sultan ruled in Hungary as far as Ersekujvar and Eger, the German Kaiser from Eger to the Zips country, and George Rakoczy, Prince of Transylvania, from Zips to the Szeklerland—all three of whom were perpetually fighting among themselves, sometimes two against one and sometimes all together indiscriminately, so that the inhabitants had a very lively time of it—in those days (somewhere about 1650) the learned and reverend Master David Fröhlich was the pride of the Keszmár Lyceum and Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy there. Master Fröhlich knew everything which could be reasonably expected of a man. He knew how to calculate solar and lunar eclipses. He knew how to take the old town-clock to pieces when it got out of order and put it together again. He could fix the weather for a whole year beforehand. He understood the *aureus calculus* and could cast a horoscope with any man living. He knew by heart which trades could be carried on best in each of the twelve months. He had at his fingers' ends the arcana and secret properties of all herbs and plants, could explain sympathies and antipathies, nay, he could be implicitly trusted in the manufacture of amulets.

But his most difficult science was that of which we are now about to speak.

He had one beautiful daughter whom he had brought up without the help of a mother, and that, surely, is a feat of which any man might be proud! His wife had died on the very day on which she had given birth to the child, and the widower had forthwith steadily set before himself the problem of educating the girl without the slightest female intervention.

The way in which he managed by artificial contrivances to find a substitute for mother's milk was a miracle of itself; but even that was as nothing compared with the masterly system of education which he himself invented and applied, in order to make his daughter grow up a discreet and modest maiden, despite the grievous want of maternal supervision. For he would neither marry again, nor trust his daughter to female nurses and servants, nor even admit any of his own kinswomen into the house.

He inaugurated his system at her very baptism, by giving his daughter the name of Michal. At first hearing, everyone, of course, takes this for a man's name, never suspecting that a damsel lurks behind it; perhaps only one among a thousand even knows that it is a girl's name after all. Was not one of the wives of King David called Michal?—she, I mean, who laughed when she saw the great King dancing in the street. So the reverend and learned gentleman christened his little daughter Michal, arguing that the Evil One would not so lightly venture to tackle a name with such a masculine ring about it.

Then he personally instructed his daughter in all good things from her babyhood upward. She never went to school. Everything, from the alphabet to the catechism, she learnt at home. Later on, as the damsel's mind grew stronger, he taught her not only the Latin and Greek tongues, but all the sciences which are useful and necessary in life; *e. g.*, the tabular calculations as to how much meat, butter, meal, peas, grain, salt, etc., a prudent housewife should dispense for two, four, eight, sixteen, etc., persons per day, week, or month, so that the domestics may neither suffer hunger nor yet overload their stomachs (N. B., salt must be particularly well looked after lest the mice get at it, for everyone knows that when mice eat salt they multiply prodigiously); item, wherewith to feed the livestock; how much meal and bran should be got in exchange from the miller for so much wheat; how to prepare yeast, knead dough, bake bread, not forgetting to always turn the tub toward the north. And bread making in the Highlands of North Hungary was a serious business in those days, for rye meal was often scarce, and bread had to be made of spelt, buckwheat, sweet peas, and other disgusting things. Galen especially recommends bean meal bread. Dioscorides, on the other hand, prefers a judicious admixture of onions. Nay, in hard times, when no corn is to be had, poor people must be prepared to make bread of dried quinces, medlars, elderberries, hips and haws, and fungus, while the clergy and people of quality must be content with honey bread, maize bread, or even oil cakes. Flesh bread, too, of which Pliny so much approves, may be used occasionally, or curd bread, which was the favorite dish of Zoroaster. The Rev. Master Fröhlich also taught his daughter how to preserve fruit, and how to convert it into blue, green, red, and yellow jellies, without using any injurious pigments.

Moreover in these sciences beer brewing was also included, for the ladies of Keszmár were wont to make their own ale. Every citizen there owed his beer to his wife and daughter. No one ever thought of getting it from the inn.

Nor was that all. It was part of every good housewife's business in those days to

keep in store all manner of medicines, and to know how to concoct health-giving cordials from hundreds of wonder-working herbs. To them the medical science was far from being the finger and thumb work which our modern doctors make it, who, after prescribing you a dozen doses or so of ipecacuanha against fever, hold themselves absolved from all further responsibility. Our grandmothers had efficacious cordials against every malady under the sun, and in cases of serious illness they dosed the patient with the infallible elixir known as Galen's specific, the principal ingredients of which were Oriental pearls, red coral, and emeralds powdered fine, cubeb balsam, lignum aloes, muscat blossoms, frankincense, musk, bezoar, manus Christi, flesh-colored rose leaves, oil of cinnamon, and kirmis berries. Extraordinary, indeed, was the amount of knowledge which the housewife of yore had to carry about in her noddle!

And besides the generally recognized alphabets of our own days there were, at that time, three-and-thirty other symbols, the signification whereof every good cook was bound to know by heart before she could mix her ingredients. An oval with a stroke through it meant "salt"; a square with a cross beneath it, "cream of tartar"; a square with a horn, "oil"; a horseshoe, "spirits of wine"; an oblong, "soap"; one triangle, "spring water"; two triangles, point to point, "distilled water"; a crown with a star, "regulus stellatus." Without a knowledge of this science, no woman was regarded as perfect.

And then again the various kinds of aquavitæ! Nowadays most of us do not even know the proper meaning of the term; then, their manifold and salutary effects were universally recognized and appreciated. Everyone knew, for instance, that they kept the blood warm and fluid; removed all venom; dried up all sluggish humors; strengthened the memory, etc. Then there were various mysterious oils, the most costly of which was victriol (quite a different thing from vitriol), which our great-grandmothers called "potable gold," to say nothing of a multitude of waters, vinegars, acids, antidotes, plasters, and pastils no reputable housewife could afford to be without, for was she not the natural doctor and nurse of the whole family?

And the art of cookery was not a whit less abstruse than the art of pharmacy. The stomachs of our ancestors were accustomed to very complicated dishes. Cookery was a more difficult science than metaphysics.

Then, too, the whole charge of the garden lay upon the housewife's shoulders, and gardening was by no means the simple affair it is nowadays. Our great-grandmothers, in their gardening capacity, knew a whole host of things which

have long since been forgotten. To prevent the fruit falling from the tree before its time, they bored a hole in the roots and drove through it a whitethorn peg; to prevent the cherries from ripening too soon, they surrounded the roots with unslacked lime; when they wanted scarlet pippins, they softened the grafts in pike's blood, and when they wished to propagate aromatic fruit, they bored a hole in the trunk of the tree and filled it with fragrant oil. Our grandmothers were so clever that they could compel a pear tree to bring forth grapes; they could grow citrons as large as your head, figs with almond kernels inside and the letters of the alphabet outside, and even nuts without shells. They knew how to graft medlars on coffee trees, which then produced an entirely new fruit, exceedingly luscious and fragrant. When they wanted the bitter almond to bear sweet almonds, they took counsel of Theophrastus and drove iron nails into the roots. They knew the good and bad effects of winter upon all kinds of garden produce. Even the simple, unsophisticated potato, only just introduced from America, and called by them *adenes cardensis*, was powerless against their innumerable artifices. Our great-grandmothers knew and cultivated scores of vegetables the very names of which are unknown to their posterity. All their dishes were pungent with the most exquisite spices. They carried on a regular trade in all manner of wholesome herbs and pigment plants. Saffron alone was taken by the ton to the Zips markets, and thence exported to Turkey. The kitchen garden was a veritable gold mine to the thrifty housewife.

Nor must the flower garden be forgotten. In those days a speculation in tulips was going on which can only be compared with the Bourse speculations of our own days. The horticulturist had to carry about in his head a whole dictionary of French botanical terms if he meant to make a living. A lady gardener who understood her business had to know what species of flowers could be planted and sown under the zodiacal signs ♈, ♉, ♊, or ♋, ♌, ♍; to which the signs ♎, ♏, and ♐ are baleful; and how seldom those flourish which are planted under the signs ♑, ♒, and ♓; in fact, she had to have her almanac at her fingers' ends. The floral art had its own literature and its own professors, who disposed of tulips and carnations to the value of millions, and sent whole fleets laden with bulbs and plants to China and America. Nay, the most distinguished writers of Europe did not deem it beneath their dignity to dabble in the flower trade, just as the writers of our own day dabble in politics.

It was certainly much more beneficial for young women to read about such things than to fill their heads with the scandal and tomfoolery of these later times.

If, however, they must needs know something about love and antipathy, they could gather from these sage botanical records that the fig tree and the rue love each other, for which reason it is advisable to plant rue close to fig trees, especially as it keeps away those sworn enemies of figs, the frogs; that the asparagus loves the reed and the rosemary the sage, for which reason whoever sets about planting rosemary must first of all rub his hand well with sage leaves, so that the young transplants may thrive; that the orange tree loves the cypress and the vine the cherry tree, and that the lily thrives beside the rose, but also beside the garlic—'tis only a matter of taste. On the other hand, there are plants which hate, which absolutely cannot endure each other. For instance, when one plants the noble anthora close to the wild najollus, it dries up and withers, despite the most constant care; the angelica and the hemlock infallibly throttle each other; while the antipathy of the vine to the colewort goes so far that when a man who has drunk a little too much wine eats of the colewort he instantly becomes sober, and if you mix a little wine in the pot where the colewort is boiling it will never get soft, stew it as long as you will.

Now pretty Michal mastered all these sciences not only with edifying assiduity, but even with real enthusiasm; she found pleasure, employment, and profit therein. Her books, her science, and her flowers not only rejoiced her heart, they filled her pockets likewise. Her garden especially was a veritable gold mine, for while in those days a goose cost only a shilling and a young ox ten shillings, no one considered paragon tulip bulbs dear at ten pounds a piece. But (and this in Pastor Fröhlich's opinion was the greatest gain of all) the flowers and the books left the damsel no time for idle pranks; to this end the whole pedagogical system of the reverend gentleman had been directed from the very first.

Whenever his lectures called him away from home, the professor took down his grammars, lexicons, and other folios before he started, and gave Michal as much to learn by heart as would occupy her the whole time he was away at the Lyceum; then he locked the house door and walked off with the key in his pocket. The very first thing he did when he came home again was to make her repeat the set task from beginning to end. Such a method is infallible. A servant-maid, a governess, may deceive the cleverest cross-questioner, the ancient folios never. They tell him at once whether the damsel's eyes have been fixed on the book all the time, or whether they've been straying about elsewhere.

In this way pretty Michal picked up a very considerable store of general information.

Sundays and festivals were the only days on which she left the house, and then she used to walk to church by her father's side. On such occasions she wore a coffee-brown frock, with a collar reaching to the chin, and sleeves which hid the very tips of her fingers. The other girls prided themselves on the taste with which they adorned their girdles, but pretty Michal's girdle could not boast of as much as a silver buckle. Her *parta*, as the headdress of the Hungarian maidens is called, was quite black, and over it was thrown a veil which completely covered her face in front, and hung down so far over her shoulders behind that it was absolutely impossible to make out whether her twin long, pendent pigtails were blond or chestnut-brown. Her eyes, too, were not permitted to declare whether they were black or blue. During service they were well hidden behind their long lashes, for she modestly kept them fixed upon her prayer-book the whole time, and if she raised them during the sermon it was only to rivet them upon the preacher. Moreover, the very wise and proper regulation which not only separated the sexes, but made the men sit right behind the women, prevented her from ogling anybody even if she had a mind to. As for the students, they sat so high up in the choir that they could see nothing from thence but the notice-boards and the Decalogue.

Further, the reverend gentleman never took Michal to weddings or other entertainments, the canonical prescriptions forbidding a clergyman's daughter to dance. In fact, he did not even let her make the acquaintance of other girls, for fear she should get a liking for the frivolous ways of the gossiping minxes.

We must not forget to mention, too, that his house was so constructed as to exclude by anticipation every possible temptation. All the windows of pretty Michal's bedroom looked out upon the courtyard, which was shut in on two sides by the blank walls of the opposite houses, while the third side opened into the garden, which was cut off from the outer world by a still higher wall richly embroidered with iron nails and sharp spikes. Thus, pretty Michal's heart might be regarded as a stronghold which no foe could capture either by force or by fraud; and in the light of a foe was regarded every mortal of the masculine gender who did not happen to be a favorite of the reverend gentleman.

CHAPTER II.

Wherein is shown how the evil dragon brought to naught all the sage devices of our reverend friend.

The Rev. Professor David Fröhlich had a very particular favorite, who can also be said to have deserved that rare distinction. The name of this young man was Henry Catsrider—a very curious name, certainly, yet the bearer thereof had very little ridicule to fear in consequence, for his big, strong frame inspired his fellow-scholars with respect. For the noble art of wrestling (commended of old, remember, by no less a person than Aristotle) had never been neglected in our schools, and in the art of wrestling no one could vie with Catsrider except a young Calvinist from Kassa called Valentine Kalondai. The latter, however, could well hold his own, even against Catsrider, and a very pretty sight it was to see them contending together on the village green, each hugging the other closely and planting his chin firmly on his opponent's shoulder. Catsrider had long, coarse, light hair, twisted up into a knot on both sides of his head, and a waxed and pointed mustache.

Unhappily, although the Hungarian lad was quite a match for the Zipser in all corporeal exercises, in mental contests he was far inferior to him. There, indeed, Catsrider stood without a rival. He was always eminent-issimus in every science, while Valentine Kalondai was constantly at the bottom of his class.

Ex moribus—in morals—there was also all the difference in the world between the two students. Valentine Kalondai was no despiser of wine and music. He even lived on friendly terms with folks like the Silesian Simplicissimus, whom everyone else looked down upon as a loafing vagabond, who could do absolutely nothing but blow the trumpet; while Catsrider was the model of a well ordered youth. It was now ten years since he had come, a poor boy, to Keszmár, and all that time he had conscientiously supported himself by the labor of his hands. He meant to take orders, and therefore diligently studied theology; but, besides that, he served in the house of the Rev. David Fröhlich and assisted that gentleman in his Museum Physicum, wherefore the professor loved him dearly, and long ago destined him to be pretty Michal's consort in her journey through life.

Valentine Kalondai, indeed, had no need to appropriate a very great amount of learning. He had a rich widowed mother at Kassa, from whom, when he came of age, he was to take over his patrimony. He had only been sent to the Keszmár Lyceum to pick up as much knowledge as might be necessary for a citizen of Kassa who hoped one day to be elected sheriff of his native town; he only required to learn as much Latin as his late father of blessed memory, who likewise had held that dignity, and part of whose office it had been to pronounce over delinquents the *capite plectetur*, or the more merciful *harum palczarum*, and correspond with pen as well as with cannon with the Imperialist generals, though it certainly must be admitted that he could give a better account of himself with the cannon than with the pen. Valentine therefore had no call to learn absolutely more than he chose.

Henry, on the other hand, was obliged to turn night into day in order to cut a decent figure at the examination which preceded his ordination; and, to do him justice, he passed through it with the utmost distinction. He was immediately afterward presented to the living of Nagy-Leta—which fortunately happened to be vacant at that very time—naturally on condition that during the year of grace, conceded as usual to the widow of the late incumbent, he was to make no claim whatever upon the resources of the benefice. On that solemn day, the Rev. David Fröhlich invited the new pastor to dinner to meet the superintendent and the presbyters.

After the meal was over, pretty Michal was also allowed to appear at table, first, to be complimented by the superintendent on account of the banquet they had all enjoyed so much—whereupon her face, ruddy enough already from the kitchen fire, grew ruddier still—and secondly, that she might just moisten her lips with a little wine in honor of her father's guests.

When the guests had all withdrawn, pretty Michal had the tables cleared away by the maids, and very carefully put all the soiled napkins and tablecloths into the cupboard, and all the old ancestral pottery and glazed earthenware upon the dresser. When all this had been done, the professor bade his little daughter remain in the room. He had something to say to her.

The learned gentleman was in a very good humor, not only in consequence of the exhilarating drinks he had drunk, and the lively table-talk he had freely indulged in, but also on account of something else besides.

He lit his pipe and began to smoke, although he was still wearing his *reverende*,

which ought, properly speaking, never to betray the faintest odor of tobacco.

"My daughter Michal," said he at last, with a sly assumption of gravity, "we did not finish our *pensum* to-day. And the rule is: 'Nulla dies sine linea!' What does that mean?"

"One should never let a day pass without doing one's allotted task," answered Michal.

"Then bring hither your exercise-book."

The damsel dutifully obeyed. In the kitchen all that it was necessary to do had already been done, so the voice of science could be listened to without self-reproach. She sat her down therefore and took up her pen, or, as our ancestors would then have said, her *calamus*.

"It is wholesome to exercise the mind after a long meal," said the learned gentleman from the midst of the clouds of smoke which enveloped him, "but it would not be well if every day was spent in such junketing: 'Qui amat vitam longam, amet mensam brevem!' Write that down in your book and translate it."

Michal wrote and translated at the same time: "Let him who would see many days keep a spare table!"

"The Italians say: 'La cucina piccola fa la casa grande, la tavola e un ladrone segreto!' Write that down also and tell me what it means."

The damsel recited as she wrote: "A small kitchen enlarges a house, but a liberal table is a secret thief!"

"That is what Petrus Novus said to Hugotius Fagiola when the latter lost two cities because of a single banquet. Write: 'Plures interierunt vinolentia quam violenta!' How would you construe that?"

"More men have perished through wine than through violence."

"Very good! Nevertheless on extraordinary days extraordinary things must happen, and to-day has been no ordinary day, for it has seen a clergyman ordained and a maiden sued for."

In an instant every trace of color had vanished from pretty Michal's face.

The learned gentleman puffed away tremendously, and quoted these saws in the

midst of volumes of smoke.

"What saith Dubravius? 'Si qua voles nubere apte, nube pari!'—Wilt thou marry well, so marry within thy station! Again Ambrosius, in answering the question what one should look for in a consort, saith: 'Ammorem, morem, rem'—Love, morals, means."

A good maxim, truly, but for all that the damsel did not write it down in her exercise-book.

"And here we have a wooer who possesses all three. He brings love with good morals and has somewhat besides. His station in life indeed is not very illustrious, for, like me, he is only a parson. But Macrobius saith, 'Amores sunt sicut flores'—Maidens are like flowers, that is to say, they soon wither; and as Drexelius Trismegistus hath it, 'Sæpius ima petet melius qui scandere novit'—He often sinks into the depths who seeks the heights. Write that in your book, my daughter, 'tis a golden precept! Nor be appalled at your suitor's poverty. Cyprian saith: 'Paupertas dura sed secura et sine cura'—Poverty is hard, but hardy, and has naught to care for. Write that down also, my daughter Michal!"

But pretty Michal did not record these golden maxims, either in the original or yet a translation. On the contrary she laid her pen aside and said: "I don't like him!"

The reverend gentleman gave a great start of astonishment. "That is a paradox. To love no one—that is possible; but not to love a particular person—that is absurd. Have you then any idea what love is? 'Amantes sunt dementes'—Lovers are demented. What don't you like about him? His red hair, eh? 'Homo rufus rare bonus, sed si bonus valde bonus'—A red-haired man is rarely good, but if good then very good indeed. Or perhaps you don't like him because he belongs to another nation? Nay, but mark what the wise Queen Christina used to say: 'There are only two kinds of nations on the whole earth, the god-fearing and the godless.' If you don't like him now, you'll learn to like him by and by. The Italians say: 'Amore noné senza amaro'—Love is not without bitterness. Every good girl has to be shoved out of doors by her parents, because she would much rather stay at home than go away; but later on she is very grateful to them for getting her off their hands."

But pretty Michal, thanks to her much learning and her long domestic sway, had grown up with such a stout heart that in this one thing she even dared to gainsay her father and all his philosophic authorities to boot, for she said to the reverend

gentleman:

"Nevertheless, I can't like him who desires my hand from you because I don't like him, and I don't like him because I like another."

On hearing these words, the scholar let his pipe fall from his mouth.

"That is indeed an *argumentum ad hominum*," said he. "You love another, eh? Where on earth did you pick him up? Where did you set your eyes upon him? When have you spoken to him?"

The maiden cast down her eyes and said nothing.

This was too much. The learned professor rose from his chair straightway, and said in an austere, dictatorial voice: "Write in your book, 'Virginitas dum aspicitur, inficitur'—Where maidenhood is concerned mere inspection is infection. Whom have you allowed to look into your eyes?"

"No one," answered Michal.

"No one! Where then have you spoken to anyone?"

"Nowhere."

"But if you have spoken to no one, neither with your eyes nor yet with your mouth, how could you possibly have fallen in love with anyone? Make a clean breast of it. You know that the smallest lie is a greater sin than the greatest crime honestly confessed. In what way have you been carrying on this intrigue?"

"By writing."

"Has anyone written to you then?"

"Yes, and I've replied."

"But how is that possible? My house is barred and bolted night and day. You cannot even look out upon the street. You were never allowed to go anywhere without me. The garden is protected by a moat. A suspicious character could not possibly get in here unless he flew down from the sky."

"It came down from the sky."

"It! What do you mean by it?"

"The dragon."

At first the professor's mind wandered off to the dragon which St. George had scotched, but perhaps not quite killed; but he bethought himself and asked, "A paper dragon,[1] I suppose?"

[1] *Sárkany*, like its German equivalent *Drache*, means a kite as well as a dragon.

"Yes. They were flying a dragon in the market-place, and I was watching it for a long time. Suddenly it fell into our garden, and remained hanging on an apple tree. I went to take it down, and when I had it in my hand I saw that it was covered all over with verses addressed to me, and they were so lovely that I cannot find words to describe them."

"Lovely! pshaw! profane scribble I call them. Does not Macrobius say: 'Ignibus iste liber quod ipse ignibus liber!'—Into the flames with that book if thou wouldst escape the flames thyself! And what makes you think that these shameless verses were addressed to you?"

"They were no such thing. Had they been shameless verses I should have thrown them away. They were beautiful, true-hearted verses, with my name written over every one of them, for there is no other girl here called Michal. I tried to answer them."

"To answer them! How?"

"I fastened what I wrote to the dragon with the written side turned inward, then, with the help of the pack-thread which still remained attached thereto, I let it mount up again."

"But suppose he to whom it belonged never got it?"

"He most certainly got it, for the next day he sent me the answer."

"Again by means of the dragon?"

"No. The next day he wrote me by the balloon."

The balloon in question was a large inflated box bladder, covered over with calf skin. The youth of the town used this balloon in their athletic exercises, knocking it into the air with their fists, and otherwise disporting themselves therewith.

"I see it all now. The rascal placed his letter inside the balloon, and threw it into our garden. You took out your letter, stuck in your reply, and pitched the balloon back again."

To think that neither Theophrastus nor Trismegistus should have foreseen such a case: an aërial correspondence, carried on without the intervention of the post-office!

"And how far has this precious correspondence proceeded?"

"We have both sworn eternal fidelity to each other."

"There we have it! What is the use of bolts and bars and all human wisdom? So you have pledged away your hand without your father's consent. Don't you know that among the Protestants the consent of the parents is requisite to a marriage; without it, no betrothal is valid and no wedding can be solemnized?"

"Then has he who demands my hand from you brought with him the written consent of his father to his marriage with me?"

"He has no father; he is an orphan."

"You said just now that the smallest lie was a greater sin than the greatest crime honestly confessed. And I say that he, my suitor, has lied. He has a father who is a rich man of high degree."

"Who told you so?"

"The dragon and the balloon. He boasted of it to a friend, and the heavenly posts have brought me tidings thereof."

Now, indeed, the reverend gentleman was as fairly caught as ever the devil was by a witch's foot. To this reply there was absolutely no rejoinder.

"I'll take him to task for it to-morrow," said he, "and meantime I postpone the inquiry. After it is over, however, I shall require the name of this rascally seducer. And now, my daughter Michal, proceed to your chamber and consider yourself in arrest there for the next four and twenty hours."

And thus ended the festive day on which Henry Catsrider was ordained a priest.

CHAPTER III.

Wherein is clearly shown that he who tends the sheep is much more honorable than he who slaughters them.

Next morning the reverend gentleman sent for Henry and submitted him to a very severe cross-examination, which lasted for more than an hour. When Henry at last departed, he was not only as red as a boiled crab, but he made his exit head foremost and somewhat precipitately; from which circumstance the maid-servants, who were listening all the time at the kitchen door, drew various conclusions.

Immediately afterward the reverend gentleman's bell rang three times, which signified that Miss Michal was wanted in the library.

The reverend gentleman was in full canonicals; he united in himself at that moment both the paternal and the maternal authority. He was surrounded by open books, like a general in the midst of his staff; other books, bound in pigskin, stood on the shelves like a phalanx drawn up in battle array, and on the cupboards and presses stood stuffed birds and the skeletons of various animals, like so many witnesses or accusers. The human skeleton in the corner seemed particularly on the alert. The electrical machine was also in readiness to contribute its flashes; but the only being among all these objects which gave any sign of life was the big clock, on the top of which stood a little dog, which kept time with the pendulum by wagging his tail and thrusting out his tongue.

Michal, during the whole of the following examination, fixed her eyes steadily on the mechanical dog; and ever afterward, when she looked back upon that momentous interview, she always saw before her the figure of the little dog wagging his tail and thrusting out his tongue.

"My daughter Michal," began the scholar, "I have spoken to the candidate of faith and love, and learnt everything from him. On my asking him whether he had a father, he answered yes. What is he? A man of position who dwells at Zeb, and is the chief judge of the place. I asked him why he had left his father and given himself out for an orphan. He said he had done so because his father was a

Catholic, while he himself desired to become a Protestant clergyman. Such a desire is certainly most praiseworthy. A young man who is ready to eat the bread of affliction rather than be false to his conscience reveals a great character. Moreover this answer is the best defense to the charge you have brought against him, viz., that of daring to make a proposal of marriage without his father's consent. The law does not recognize the consent of a Catholic father, but only of a Protestant. Therefore Henry Catsrider stands absolved from the accusation that he knowingly perpetrated a fraud. Reticence after all is not falsehood. Then, too, his new confession of faith releases him from all parental authority, thus putting the father completely out of court."

The big folios and the stuffed birds signified their approval by saying nothing, and the skeleton also was silent as to the fact that his own head had formerly been severed from his body because he had put into practice similar subtleties in his lifetime; only the automatical dog kept on wagging his tail, as if to say, "No, no!" and professing his scorn of the professor's sophisms by thrusting out his tongue.

Michal answered not a word.

"Thus all your negations are confuted, and now let us hear your affirmations. What is the name of the young man who has presumed to make you a declaration of love?"

"Valentine Kalondai."

The learned man no sooner heard this name than he smote violently with the palm of his hand on the volume of Macrobius lying open before him.

"'Quis hominum?'—What sort of a man is he?"

"An honest man!" cried Michal, with flashing eyes.

"What do you know about it? You only go by his outward appearance. 'Quanta especies sed cerebrum non habet'—a handsome face but no brains. 'Non bene casta caro quæ bene pasta caro'—Well fed, ill bred. But I have had occasion to learn something about the fellow's inner man. 'Flocci, nihili'—A feather brain, a nonentity. 'Classis primæ exultimis'—Always the first in his class, counting from the bottom. And how about his morals? He is a wine-bibber. 'Ubi vinum intrat, ibi ratio exit'—When the wine's in, the wit's out. He is a dancer and a serenader. He goes about with musicians and other lewd fellows. All that, indeed, might

have been overlooked; but do you know what the trade of his parents was, ay, and still is? Did he confess *that* to you in his sinful correspondence? And this trade, remember, he must carry on to his dying day, for he does not know enough —far from it—to raise him to a higher rank. Do you know whose wife you would be if your senseless wish were to be fulfilled?"

The girl grew pale. There had been nothing said about this in the correspondence.

The professor took down his note-book and read out the name and description of the accused:

"'Parentes, Sarah, vidua macellarii'—Sarah, the butcher's widow. His father was a butcher, and he will be a butcher too. People who work in blood! What do you say to that? Can the daughter of the clergyman become the wife of a butcher? And when she has to choose between a man who tends the sheep of the Lord and a man who slaughters cattle, how can she possibly give her hand to the latter? Have I brought you up all these years only that your lot may be an eternal shedding of blood? To wake up with blood every day, and every day to lie down with blood! Every day to smell blood on the hand of him who embraces you! To be bound to a man whose calling in life it is to lay violent hands on God's creatures! Have you really the courage to choose such a lot?"

The mechanical dog wagged his tail and put out his tongue.

It seemed to Michal as if everything was turning round and round: the portraits of the scholars, the stuffed birds, even the skeleton with its clattering joints. How could she defend herself against so many?

The scholar saw from the corpse-like pallor of his daughter's face the crushing impression his words had produced upon her. It was in a much gentler voice that he now continued:

"Now go to your room, or rather to your little garden, and think over what I've just been saying. Write first of all in your copy book: 'Fathers have their children's welfare more at heart than the children themselves.' Yet the decision shall rest with you alone. Your fate is in your own hands. I'll do no violence to your feelings. If indeed there be really more strength in your heart than I ever anticipated, show it now! If you have the courage to knit your life to those who work in blood, give us a specimen of it at home here. You have two pretty doves in a cage. I bought them for you on your birthday. Slaughter them with your own

hand and make some broth of them; you may prepare it any way you like. It doesn't matter to me now. I shall then know your decision. Go now, and think the matter over!"

Pretty Michal went down into the garden and walked to and fro among the rose trees. In the middle of the path was the dovecote, and in it were the two fan-tailed pigeons which she had to slaughter, she who had never had the heart to kill so much as a kitchen fly. If she could have had her own way she would have liked everyone to have been a vegetarian. And now she was to kill her favorite doves.

She had no one to whom she could turn for advice, no one to whom she could pour out her griefs. Here was a case in which neither the philosophers, nor the calf-bound polyhistors, nor yet her daily playfellows, the flowers, could be of the slightest assistance. She had no other friends than the flowers, and they could only tell her what they knew themselves, *e. g.*, that the virginal lily loves the garlic, although the one exhales perfumes and the other stinks; and the noble anthora withers away whenever it is planted beside the najollus for although the latter certainly has splendid blossoms, (the corolla is a helmet whereon sit two doves), it nevertheless brings destruction upon its fair neighbor—and so on *ad nauseam*.

And then she began thinking that perhaps the feeling which had been nourished in her breast by this exchange correspondence was not exactly love after all. She had only seen the young man from afar, only spoken to him in her dreams. She might easily renounce him. She had no mother to tell her difficulties to, and from her father she had learnt nothing but cold prudence. Mathematics is a pitiless science. According to mathematics, love is not a number which counts, but a mere cipher. Among geometrical figures you will find every conceivable shape but nothing in the shape of a heart. She could get no further information about her lover. The games of ball in the market-place were now forbidden, and who knew but what poor Valentine was locked up besides? It was so easy to find a pretext. Perhaps he had renounced her himself already. Perhaps he had gone back to his native place.

Should she therefore sacrifice her favorite doves for his sake?

At noon the same day Michal brought both the doves to her father, not roasted or stewed on a dish, but alive in their cage, whereupon the professor kissed his

dutiful little daughter on both cheeks.

Three weeks later he united pretty Michal and Henry Catsrider in holy wedlock, and gave them both his parental as well as his sacerdotal blessing.

Valentine Kalondai had had no opportunity of doing anything desperate in the meantime. After the assembled Consistory had publicly upbraided him for all the sins he had hitherto committed—to wit: his dancing in the woods; his keeping a big dog; his propensity to all kinds of idle jesting; his playing truant at church; his consorting with fiddlers and trumpeters; tussling with night watchmen; making the beadle drunk and dressing him up in woman's clothes; smoking in the streets, etc.—he was sent to jail for a week, and then solemnly expelled from the Keszmár Lyceum with the *consilium abeundi*, and thus prevented from doing anything whereby he might perhaps have prevented the consummation of his rival's wedding. So the ceremony was performed without let or stay, and pretty Michal became the wife of the man who tended the Lord's flock instead of the man who slaughtered the sheep.

CHAPTER IV.

Wherein are described all manner of robbers and dangers,
wherefrom the righteous are wondrously delivered.

Henry had made up his mind to take his young wife to Zeb immediately after the wedding, before settling down at the parsonage of Leta. It was ten years since he had seen his father, who was naturally full of wrath and sorrow at the disappearance of his son. But a fair daughter-in-law would, no doubt, be the best mediator between them. At any rate, there was no harm in trying, for the old man was very rich and Henry was his only son. Many a wrinkled brow has been stroked smooth again ere now by the soft hand of a pretty woman.

The learned Professor Fröhlich himself fully approved of this plan, for although the books of the philosophers are full of golden maxims which demonstrate that all earthly treasures are but dross, nevertheless, in this practical world of ours, where one can get nothing without money, a little money is ever so much better than any amount of golden maxims.

Besides, the old gentleman had very little of the good things of this world to bestow upon his daughter. Alchemy could no more make gold then than it can now.

It was as much as he could do to dower the bride with new gowns and underlinen, and here, too, he looked rather to simplicity than to splendor. Instead of giving his daughter silk and satin robes, he impressed upon her the wise saw: 'Mulier superbe amicta, in facie picta, in sermone ficta—non uni vitio est addicta'—The woman who flaunts in frippery, paints her face, and talks mincingly, is the slave of more than one vice already. The husband must see to the rest, and the husband in this case was but a poor, hungry parson, whose benefice for a whole year to come would be but an empty title. During all that time he must be content with a curate's pay. After that, however, he would certainly do very well, especially if his father helped him with a little ready money to go on with.

Meanwhile a journey had to be undertaken, and a journey in those days was no

joke. The mountain roads could only be crossed on horses or mules, and the beasts, drivers and all, had to be hired. Then, for security's sake, you had to wait till a regular caravan had assembled, for the whole region was blackmailed in those days by three powerful bands of robbers, whose leaders were called Janko, Bajus, and Hafran. Janko was famed for his physical strength and agility, Bajus for his craft and cunning, but Hafran, or Raven, as the Slovacks called him, for his ferocity. Each of them commanded from fifty-five to sixty men. Sometimes they all united and fought regular pitched battles with the soldiers and police sent out to capture them. It was, therefore, not advisable for single families or small parties to undertake long journeys like that from Keszmár to Zeb. One had to make arrangements months beforehand, and wait till the dealers in cloth, haberdashery, and spices were ready to set out with their wares for Eperies; these were then usually joined by a dozen or so of butchers and cattle-dealers from Lower Hungary, as many cattle-drovers, half a dozen strolling fiddlers, sundry Slovack linen and oil merchants, and some thirty students traveling homeward in vacation and provided with stout bludgeons; thereto were, of course, to be added the drivers of those who had to make the journey by horse or mule, or pay for the transport of their goods, so that the whole caravan generally numbered one hundred and fifty strong, and the robbers would think twice before venturing to attack so large a party. On this occasion, moreover, Fortune added to their company a Polish nobleman who had been on a visit to his kinsmen in Hungary, and was returning home with an escort of forty men-at-arms. Whoever was disposed to go a two days' journey from Keszmár might safely commend his soul to God in such a goodly company.

Now although the good and learned Professor David Fröhlich could not endow his daughter with much worldly wealth, yet by way of compensation he gave her richly of what he himself possessed, for his parting present was a sack-load of wonder-working medicinal herbs. Among them was the "weapon balsam," which he fully directed her how to use in case her husband was wounded by the way. In such a case she was first of all to stick into the wound a piece of wood of the same shape as the weapon which had inflicted it, and then draw it out and anoint it with the balsam. The wound would then infallibly heal—in course of time. In case, however, of a gunshot wound, when the bullet remained in the body, she was to beat flat and bind upon the wound a leaden bullet which had previously shot a wild boar, for it is well known that all such bullets attract and draw out all other bullets. In one corner of the sack he stuck that valuable counselor in all the ills of life, the book "Georgica Curiosa," which was an inventory of all the healing herbs with which the sack was filled. Nay, his love for his daughter made

the worthy man part with even his most precious talisman—the plague amulet. This was a little blue silk cushion filled with the leaves of herbs beneficial against the plague, and inscribed with the following charm in letters of gold: "Longe, tarde cede, recede, redi!" which is really a very good charm, for it means that one should hasten away as far and as soon as possible from the place where the plague prevails, and not return for a long time after it is all over. This amulet the learned man had worn, fastened by a silken cord round his neck, night and day for years. Now, however, he said good-by to it, and the tears came into his eyes as he tied it round his daughter's white neck, and whispered tenderly:

"Never take it off, my dear, never take it off! It was your mother's."

Then the great scholar, after carefully observing the aspects of the seven planets, was very particular to calculate beforehand a day which, owing to a propitious conjunction, would be a very favorable day for traveling, for warfare, for the donning of new clothes, for courtships, and for making visits and purchases.

He took leave of his son-in-law and his daughter on the previous evening, for the caravan was to depart before sunrise, while Orion was in the ascendant, at which time the learned man would already have surrendered his limbs to repose. Now, all the world knows that whoever is involuntarily aroused from his slumbers at such a time will wake up every day at the self-same hour for a whole year afterward and not be able to go to sleep again: such a contingency therefore was to be guarded against at any cost.

Pretty Michal wept long and sore when the time came to say good-by. She wept for her good, affectionate father, for her flowers, her serving-maids, her little room which looked out upon the garden, her kitchen, bright with burnished copper vessels; but the ungrateful little thing did not weep very much for the learned books she left behind her, though, indeed, she could never cease to think of those with whom she had had her daily conversation for years. Nay, she so managed as to leave behind her the whole sack-load of medicinal herbs collected with such wisdom, "Georgica Curiosa" to boot. Instead of that she took with her one of her fan-tailed pigeons, which she dexterously smuggled into her long pocket.

The amulet fastened round her neck she held in high honor, not because it was a febrifuge, but because it was the solitary memento of her mother which she possessed.

Her husband, also, was motherless. He, too, had never known a mother's love.

Perhaps, too, she shed a few tears as she threw behind the fire a certain carefully folded up bundle of papers. They were the billets-doux which had reached her through the aërial post. She held them tightly in her hand till the mules jangling their bells stood before the door. Longer than that she could not hold them. She fancied she had destroyed them when she had burnt them, but, alas! the burning of those letters was only so much labor lost.

But joy always follows after sorrow.

Michal was going on a journey for the first time in her life. For the first time in her life she was to see field and forest beneath the open sky. Set in a frame of the most beautiful landscape, even her husband looked better than he had ever looked before. Never had she thought him so agreeable, and he cut quite a stately figure on horseback; indeed, she scarcely recognized him as the same being who used to trip so humbly after the professor with his books under his arm, for he could sing cheerily among the students who walked along by his side, and his merry laugh was heard from one end of the caravan to the other.

The city walls of Keszmár and the well-known mountains had long ago been left far behind, and Michal kept thinking to herself that she was now her own mistress, and that she had a master who was at the same time her slave. The house that she would henceforth call her home would have a very different appearance from the one she had just left. There would be no one to supervise or keep her in order; she would have no other monitor but her own conjugal virtue. She would be a model of a wife, upon whom all eyes should be fixed, and of whom people would say: "Try and be like that God-fearing lady, learn from her sobriety, decency, piety, frugality, and domestic economy; learn from her how to speak sensibly in four languages, and still more sensibly to keep silence." Thus she tried to discern, through the enigmatical gloom of the future, the joys and delights that her soul longed for, so as the better to accommodate herself to her new position.

She was the only woman in the whole company.

A driver had been assigned to her, who was to lead her mule by the bridle whenever the path went through a brook or over a stone, and stimulate it whenever it had to clamber up the steep mountain-side. He was an enigmatical Slovack lad, with bast shoes and a hat with a brim drawn deep down over his eyes. "Gee!" and "Whoa!" were the only sounds he ever uttered, and these were naturally addressed to the mule.

The character of the region had suddenly and completely changed. Mountains, pine forests, and roaring waterfalls succeeded one another in rapid succession.

The numerous company sat them down on the fresh grass at the foot of a shady tree by the side of a purling brook, and everyone produced his knapsack, his wallet, or his flask. The wealthier of them shared their good fare with the students, who expressed their thankfulness by singing merry songs. There was one student who particularly distinguished himself by his facetiousness, and whom everyone called Simplex. He, too, introduces himself under that very name in his contemporary memoirs, from which we have borrowed many of the data of this our veracious history. He was an itinerant student, drummer, and trumpeter, and a wag and good fellow to boot. He soon succeeded in gaining Henry's goodwill, and he also favored the young bride with his company from time to time, taking the whip out of the hands of the sleepy driver and rating him soundly in Polish, which the other endured without a murmur.

The jests of Simplex put the company in high good-humor. Even Michal caught the contagion of the general merriment. The spicy, fresh air seemed to relieve her mind of sorrow.

Suddenly, on reaching the summit of a lofty mountain, another panorama unfolded itself before their eyes. The steep mountain wall was succeeded by a deep glen, and the tops of the huge pine trees massed together below seemed to the naked eye to be a meadow of a wonderful green perpetually in motion. In the distance arose lofty rocks, piled one above the other and split up by chasms full of ice and snow. The path wound steeply down into this glen, where it was already night, and by the side of the path ran a mountain stream, which, pouring forth from the crevices of the granite rocks, plunged downward in a hundred glistening columns like a crystal organ.

But it was not this splendid sight, but another, very strange and very terrible, on the other side of the way, which riveted pretty Michal's attention.

In the crevice of a projecting rock a lofty stake had been firmly planted; on the top of the stake was a wheel, and on the wheel lay something distantly resembling the shape of a man. The hands and feet hung loosely down; the neck and skull were thrown backward and reclined half over the tire of the wheel. Large black birds swept slowly round and round, and though startled by the approaching hub-bub were not scared away.

It never so much as entered into pretty Michal's mind what this strange object

could be, she had absolutely no name for it.

"What's that?" cried she with a shudder, involuntarily reining up her mule.

But Henry was not there to answer her question. He had ridden on in advance with the students, who had now begun to sing in order to cheer the caravan during its perilous descent into the glen.

"That is the sign-post of the glen," said the driver; "don't look in that direction, my lady!"

Michal turned her head toward the speaker, but she immediately felt that it would have been far better for her to have riveted her sorrowing gaze on that nameless, hideous object, than to have looked into the eyes of him who had just addressed her, for the sight of him filled her with unutterable anguish. Now for the first time she recognized him. The silent, ragged driver was Valentine Kalondai!

"By the five wounds of Christ, it is Valentine!" murmured Michal in a voice stifled with emotion.

"Then you have recognized me at last?"

"What do you want here?"

"To accompany you."

"Wherefore?"

"To serve you if you should need anything, to defend you if you should be in danger, and, finally, to find out whither they are taking you."

"Valentine," said the girl, withdrawing the reins of the mule from the youth's hand, "it is sin to act thus. You will disgrace us both. I am dead to you now. If you have ever loved me, bury me! Bewail me as one who has died in the Lord. Make me not as one of those who will hereafter rise up and accuse you before God! I am now a married woman. I have plighted my troth to another. Not even for your sake will I lose my hope of salvation. I beseech you by the tender mercies of God not to pursue me. Remain here and forget that you ever saw me! Here, in this frightful glen, where I know not what awaits me, though I feel that it is full of horror, I cannot pray to God to protect me from all danger while you are by my side. I would not have the heart to go into those terrible depths if I felt

myself laden with sin and perjury. If you love anything which belongs to me, oh, love my soul! If you would preserve me from harm, be jealous of my honor! Remain behind, I say, and follow me no further!"

The young man opened his lips to say something in reply, but not a word came forth, only a long-drawn sigh; a hot breath in the cold autumnal air was it, or, perhaps, a part of his very soul? Then he pulled his hat deeper down over his eyes and remained standing in the way, while Michal on her mule ambled further on.

"Jacky, my boy!" cried a jesting voice in the ear of the startled driver, and at the same time someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Simplex, the merry trumpeter.

"How far you have dropped behind your mistress!"

"Yes, and I will drop back still further, friend Simplex. She has recognized me. She has driven me away. I have now but one favor to ask of you. If you are really my friend, prove it by doing me a great service. I cannot accompany her further. You do so in my stead. If any evil befall Michal, stand by her and save her. You have your wits about you and know the region thoroughly. Be near her as long as possible. Let me know how it befalls, be it good or evil. You will find me at Kassa, in my mother's house."

Nowadays we should hurl back such a commission at the suggester's head. Nowadays everyone looks after himself, and no one is such a fool as to run after a woman whom a second person loves and a third person has married. But in former days men were different. Besides, they had not so much to do then as they have now, and a social law was then in force which has long since become obsolete, the law of friendship. It was not codified, yet its authority was universally deferred to and folios were written about it. This law of friendship gave a man the right to demand great things from his neighbor, and those who obeyed this law were bound together by stronger ties than any ties of kinship. We shall presently give many examples to show how much in those days the unwritten law of friendship was needed, a law passed by no parliament, sanctioned by no monarch, enforced by no tribunal, yet everywhere valid and effectual.

The trumpeter, contemptuously dubbed Simplex, promised to do all that his friend required of him and gave him his hand upon it, whereupon he hastened to overtake the lady, who was now some distance ahead.

But Valentine Kalondai remained standing on the hillside listening till the clattering of the horses' hoofs had quite died away. Then he turned and walked

slowly off, to the great joy of the crows and ravens, who so long as he stood there did not venture to resume their banquet beneath the gallows. Meanwhile Michal was trying to overtake her husband, who was well on in front surrounded by the merry students.

The road became rougher and rougher as it wound down into the valley. The broad, well-wooded mountain-sides confined it within a precipitously shelving glen. The brook zigzagged across it and tore out the rolling stones, so that the very mules had to pick their way cautiously along. At first the way wound among large blocks of stone, but presently it ended abruptly at a yawning chasm among the rocks. Here the mountain stream plunged, roaring and foaming, down into a dizzy depth. Beyond the bridge the path reappeared, but now it was confined more than ever between two steep rocky walls, down the smooth slaty sides of which the moisture trickled continually, diffusing a misty, cavernous sort of smell over the whole of the dark rocky defile, which was overshadowed by nodding pine trees. The mules no longer picked their way among rocks, but among bones. All around lay the skeletons of men and of horses inextricably mixed together.

"Is this a burial-ground?" asked Michal of her Henry, not without a shudder.

But Henry had no answer ready. He said that he had never been that way before; he had gone to Keszmár by another road over the mountain ridge, a road which you could only pass on foot. But Simplex was at hand and he explained the mystery of the bones strewing the way, as he had heard it during his wanderings in the mountains from the lips of his guides.

Many years ago, the troops of the Prince of Transylvania, with some Turkish auxiliaries, had blockaded a regiment of Imperial cavalry in this defile, and after breaking down the bridge leading to the glen had massacred the whole lot without mercy. There was no place to bury the dead, and so they had lain there ever since. The students, from sheer mischief, now picked up two or three of the skulls and trundled them along the road. No doubt they were not the first who had amused themselves by playing bowls with dead men's bones.

"If Hafran were to catch you here, he and his merry men would play at bowls with your heads also," cried Simplex, without however either spoiling their good-humor or putting Michal in a better humor.

In the evening twilight they came to the kopanitscha, where it was advisable to stay the night. It consisted of a group of houses formed of the trunks of trees,

surrounded by a palisade of sharp stakes, with loopholes at regular intervals. A low door, made of heavy beams, led into the palisade, where, as the neighing of horses promptly testified, other travelers had already arrived.

The door was opened to their knocking, and the first arrivals, among whom were the students and the young married couple, were admitted. Far behind toiled the merchants and drivers with their cattle and heavily laden wagons, and last of all came the Polish nobleman and his armed retainers.

There were enough barns and out-houses to accommodate them all. Hay for fodder and straw for bedding were also to be had in abundance. The host was cooking flesh in a large caldron on an open hearth. One wing of the house was already occupied by a company of Polish merchants, bringing cloth and spices to the Eperies market, and accompanied by an escort of twelve hired soldiers, in helmets and coats of mail, armed with swords and blunderbusses.

The wife of the kopanitschar, or host, a good-looking young person, immediately took charge of the pastor's wife, whom she led into her own private room, that she might not have to listen to the loose talk which would certainly flow from the unwashen mouths of so many men.

"For no one will close an eye here the whole night through," remarked the worthy woman confidentially. "Here in the mountains lurk Janko, Hafran, and Bajus, all three of them!"

Michal asked who these three worthies were.

The hostess told her they were three robber chiefs, each more terrible than the other. Hafran was cruel, Bajus a crafty rogue, but Janko a true hero who knew not fear.

How the eyes of the woman sparkled when she mentioned Janko!

Michal asked her whether she was not afraid to live in so lonely a place with so many robbers about.

"Oh! Janko will do us no harm," said the young hostess, smiling; and Michal was still such a child that she gave no heed to the woman's sparkling eyes and smiling lips.

The hostess then began to tell her how powerful the robbers were. People were forever hanging, beheading, and breaking them on the wheel, and yet they never

seemed to grow less. The militia of three counties combined with the Imperial troops were not strong enough to root them out of the mountains. And then she kept Michal awake till long after midnight by telling her of the adventures and exploits of the robbers, and the terrible fate which awaited them at the hands of the vihodar of Zeb.

"Who is he?" asked Michal.

What! not hear of the vihodar! He was the headsman of Zeb, a man famed far and wide. They call him the vihodar. Every child knows of him; but bandits, witches, and painted damsels know him best of all. Michal's idea of these last three species of mankind was very vague; she had never even heard tell of them before. She, too, told the hostess whence she came, whither she was going, and how she had only been married the day before, and this was the first night that she and her husband had ever slept under the same roof.

About midnight Henry Catsrider came to his wife, and told her that the region was not safe. The mountain path over which they had to go was occupied by a band of robbers, and the number of the robbers was great. It is true the caravan was also numerous, but the members of it could not agree among themselves as to what was the best thing to be done. The Polish nobleman, who had many musketeers with him, said that he had not come all that distance to be shot down like a dog. He would send to Janko and offer him a ransom if he would let him pass through the glen unmolested. He was also willing to pay a ransom for all who cared to join him. But the merchants and the drovers would not agree to this, asserting that however willing the robbers might be to negotiate when they had to do with armed noblemen or poor ambulant students, they certainly would not allow wealthy merchants and fat drovers to escape scot free. Not to defend themselves, therefore, would be to lose everything. The fact is they had been over-persuaded by the Polish merchants, who had brought with them twelve Imperial soldiers, and were firmly persuaded that they could keep the robbers at bay. All they wanted was rainy weather.

"Why do they want rainy weather?" asked Michal.

"I'll tell you," whispered the kopanitschar's wife. "When it rains the robbers cannot fire, because their lunts won't burn and the powder gets moist. These twelve soldiers, however, have new-fangled muskets, which are fired, not with a lunt, but by a flint; the flint strikes upon a piece of steel, the steel gives out a spark, and the spark fires the powder. They say that these cunning firearms come

from France. The soldiers would like to try them against the robbers, and they only want rainy weather in order that the robbers may not be able to fire upon them in return."

"But," remarked Henry, "the question is which party we ought to join, the Polish nobleman's, who trusts in the clemency of the robbers and will pay them a ransom, or the merchants', who rely upon their firearms?"

"Join neither," said the hostess. "An idea occurs to me. I am sorry for that pretty young creature. She was only married yesterday. I'll be bound to say she has not kissed her husband yet. You must not go with the merchants, for the danger will be very great. I know Janko. When he is attacked he is like a bear with a sore head. He cares not a fig for muskets, and does not value his life at a boot-lace. It would not be becoming for you to be mixed up in a skirmish. It is not a clergyman's business to fight. But neither must you join the Polish nobleman and trust to the clemency of the robbers. I know Janko. The sight of a pretty woman makes him like the very devil. He would rather leave a sack of gold untouched than a pretty woman. I should not like you to fall into his hands. But I have a third plan ready. It would not do at all for a large company, but two or three people might very well try it. My husband will lead you over the mountain ridge, but let the horse, the mule, the drivers, and the baggage go on with the Polish nobleman; and when they pass over the bridge where Janko bars the way, and when the blackmail has been levied, the drivers can halt at the Praszkinocz csarda with the beasts and the baggage. Meanwhile my husband will guide you so securely to the csarda that not a hair of your head shall be rumpled."

Michal thought the advice good. It was the best way of escaping two great dangers.

They put together in all secrecy what they needed most, entrusting the remainder of the baggage to one of the drivers (the other had evidently run away, for Henry could find him nowhere); the host brought alpenstocks, bast shoes with nails in the soles, which they put on forthwith, and they all set out in the gloom of twilight.

Suddenly they remarked that they were four. Simplex, the trumpeter, was trotting on behind them. He said that as he was not inclined to send his flesh to market he preferred scaling the mountains with them to accompanying the merchants or the magnate.

Michal had no objection. It was only one familiar face the more, and he had

quite won her heart by his gayety and good-humor. Besides that, he could help her to talk to the guide, who was a native Pole and therefore unintelligible without an interpreter, for Simplex could patter Polish very well.

The wish of the Polish merchants was gratified: it began to rain. Scarcely was the little group half an hour's journey from the kopanitscha, scarcely had it begun to ascend the footpath, when it was enveloped in so dense a mist that only the experience of its guide saved it from being lost in the wilderness.

The experienced mountaineer comforted them with the assurance that the mist would not be long in their way, for it was nothing but a descending cloud. They would soon be able to look down upon it with a clear sky over their heads. By sunrise they would be among heights never visited by clouds.

Simplex, on this occasion, approved himself a highly useful traveling companion. To prevent the young wife from growing weary on the slippery way, he hewed down with his hanger two young pine trees and made a litter out of them, on which weary Michal was made to sit, while he and the guide bore her between them over the most difficult parts of the way.

The kopanitschar spoke Polish with the trumpeter in order that the lady might not understand what they were talking about. He said to him that if either of them were to slip, litter-bearers, lady, and all would infallibly plunge headlong into the abyss, the bottom of which could not be seen for the mists, though they could hear the murmuring of the mountain stream far below them. Or if they lost themselves in the thick mists and strayed into a chasm or a snowdrift, whence not even a chamois could force his way out again; or if they met the man-eating bear which haunted the forests; or if they fell foul of the robbers' camp, then God have mercy on their souls!

And while the young bride was thus sitting between them on her litter, she took the fan-tailed pigeon from her pocket, and fed it out of her hand and gave it drink from her lips, unconscious of the thousand deadly perils which surrounded her, and whispered caressingly: "My dovey, my darling little dovey!"

The young morning was now beginning to dawn, for the mist was growing lighter and snow fell instead of rain; they had already reached the Alpine regions.

"We are on the right road," murmured the kopanitschar; "there goes the track of the bear through the juniper tree, and yonder is the place by which the hares, the

wild goats, and the buffaloes go up every morning to drink out of the mountain tarn. We are close upon the Devil's Castle."

But surely he must have been mistaken! How can that be the right way which leads to the Devil's Castle?

"What is that shimmering in the bushes?" inquired Simplex anxiously.

"The eyes of a lynx," growled the guide; "he is on the lookout for young chamois."

But a lynx has two eyes, and there was only a single bright point shimmering there. It was the lunt of a musket, which someone was hiding beneath his mantle to prevent it from going out.

"Halt!" cried a voice from the bushes, and at a distance of only ten paces a wild shape sprang up, resting its heavy firearm on an iron fork fastened in the ground. The robber did not aim at the two rustically clad shapes who were carrying the litter, but at the gentleman who was following a considerable distance behind.

"Jesus, Maria!" cried Michal, "he is shooting at my husband!"

"Don't shoot at him, Hanack!" cried Stevey to the robber, "don't you see that he's a clergyman?"

The challenge was of use, the freebooter lowered his lunt. Possibly, too, he was somewhat taken back at finding himself face to face with three men, one of whom was armed with an ax and another with a hanger; besides, he was not quite certain whether his powder was wet or dry. He therefore used clemency and answered amicably:

"Oh! 'tis you, Stevey, eh? Whom are you leading?"

"A clergyman and his wife."

"Then it is a Lutheran! A lucky thing for him! Had he been a Papist, I should have chucked him down that hole. But when you get to where Hamis is keeping watch, tell him that you are guiding a Romish priest and his sister, for he is ready to flay a Lutheran alive."

"Don't be afraid," said the kopanitschar kindly to the lady, "a single robber will not think of attacking three men. This is the outermost picket, the camp is down in that deep hollow yonder."

They hastened onward, and now Michal begged her husband not to lag so far behind her.

The guide had calculated rightly that by ascending the steep upward path through the bear's track they would reach the mountain's summit before sunrise, by which time the clouds would lie below them. The mists over their heads now began to clear away. As the rays of the sun dissipated the snow clouds, it was as if millions of crystal needles were shimmering in the air, till a gust of wind suddenly swept them all away and revealed the clear blue sky. Then the sun came forth amidst the Alpine summits. At first, however, they did not see the sunrise to advantage, for their way led through a dense grove of young pine trees growing up among the charred stumps of a burnt forest. The litter was here of no use. They had to creep through the young undergrowth on all fours.

The guide now told the travelers to remain where they were; he would go ahead and look about to see if it was all right. With that he crept cautiously forward among the thick bushes, taking great care not to disturb the rustling leaves in the silent woods. In a little time he came back very crestfallen. It was not safe. The robbers were encamped close by the Devil's Castle.

Then Simplex also crept close to the extreme edge of the wood, and there saw with his own eyes, at the foot of the old tower rising above the steep precipices, forty men armed with muskets and axes lying on the grass round a fire, on which a substantial breakfast was broiling.

There are some insanely audacious ideas which only the extremity of despair can suggest, and Simplex was just the sort of man to whom such mad ideas would naturally occur. So now, too, he hit upon an expedient which none but a devil-may-care ex-student with a taste for adventure would ever have thought of.

"Listen, Stevey!" said he suddenly to the guide, "I'll scare away all the robbers!"

"Stop!" cried the terrified guide; "are you mad?"

But the deed was already done. Simplex took the trumpet from his shoulder and blew a mighty alarum that re-echoed far and wide through forest and dale, and then he cried aloud: "Run! the soldiers are coming!"

The robbers no sooner heard it than they sprang to their feet in terror. Many of them even took the precaution to discharge their firearms in the direction of the forest, so as to give the alarm to their remaining companions who were

encamped all about. A general stampede ensued. Simplex kept on blowing his trumpet with all the strength of his lungs; the guide threw himself with his face to the ground, praying three different prayers simultaneously, and tossing his arms and legs about like an epileptic; while Henry Catsrider, in his agony, hastily climbed up a tree.

Now when pretty Michal saw the panic-stricken robbers scattering in all directions, the guide in convulsions, Simplex trumpeting with all his might and main, and her clerical husband hastily clambering up the nearest tree, she could not refrain from bursting into a hearty peal of laughter. If die she must, she might just as well have one more good laugh before she did die. It could make not the slightest difference.

But no sooner had the threatened peril been so marvelously averted than the laughter of the pretty lady infected the trumpeter to such a degree that he let his instrument fall to the ground; then the kopanitschar also rose from the ground and burst into a hoarse guffaw, and at last Henry Catsrider himself descended from his perch and also burst out laughing.

The young lady thought how funny it is when man and wife laugh in unison. It is perhaps a wife's greatest bliss to be able to laugh when her husband laughs, and weep when he weeps.

But the kopanitschar gave the trumpeter a violent blow on the back and said, half in jest and half in anger: "I'll never be your guide again as long as I live! May the vihodar of Zeb get hold of you!"

Michal thought to herself how strange it is when a husband suddenly breaks off in the middle of a peal of laughter as if he had had a cold douche. Must not a wife in such a case also cease laughing?

"But now we must pack off as quietly as possible while the road is clear," continued the kopanitschar. "We must not stop a minute till we get to Praszkinocz!"

So they all took to their heels and tried to reach the Devil's Castle as quickly as they could, where the fires were still burning, and hacked and bloody pieces of bone, and half-roasted hunks of flesh on huge wooden spits, were scattered all about. The spring bubbling forth from the plateau formed, deep down in the valley below, a small lake covered with water lilies and the broad red flowers of the water clover. Hither came the wild beasts of the forest to slake their thirst.

From the foot of the ruin the valley sinks abruptly down toward the northwest, where it has quite a winterly aspect. The whole declivity is covered by a layer of snow, which the rays of the sun are never able to entirely melt. The sun only shows his face there for an hour at noon every day, and what is then melted quickly hardens into a coating of ice of a mirror-like smoothness. While on the southeastern side of the mountain snow and rain are always falling and clouds obscure the landscape, a bright sky smiles on the other side and you can see as far as Poland. In the valley beneath, at least two miles distant from the ruins of the Devil's Castle, lies the little village of Praszkinocz. A serpentine path winds down the slippery sides of the mountains into the village below, but few people ever use it, save an occasional charcoal-burner or wood-cutter.

"Alas, Stevey!" cried Simplex, shuddering at the sight of this perilous descent, "we shall never get off with a whole skin that way. 'Tis like the glass mountain of Prince Argyrus, and he, at all events, had an enchanted horse to fall back upon. If we creep down on all fours we shan't get there in two days, and what's to become of this delicate creature?"

"Have no fear, trumpeter," said the guide calmly, and he set to work felling a pine with his ax.

Meanwhile Simplex explored every hole and corner of the ruins to see if he could discover any hidden treasure which the robbers might have left behind, while Michal searched in the grass, which had been protected from the snow by the overhanging pine branches, for gentian and wood angelica, and great was her joy when she discovered some specimens of those wonder-working herbs.

But Henry stood aloof, holding his forehead with his hands as if his head ached.

As the pine branch fell to the last stroke of the ax, the roll of musketry suddenly began to resound from behind the mountains. The sharp volleys at once put an end to the composure of the party.

"Listen!" cried the guide; "the robbers have come to blows with the soldiers over there," and with that he dragged the fallen pine trunk to the edge of the declivity and poised it over the serpentine path, with the hewn-off end pointing downward.

"And now to horse, to horse! You, trumpeter, get up behind. His reverence must sit in the middle with his lady behind him, who must clip him tightly round the waist. Each one of us must hold fast to the branches on both sides, and draw up

his legs so as not to get entangled in the wayside shrubs and briars. I'll sit in front and be coachman and pilot."

After thus assigning to everyone his place, the guide sat astraddle on the thick end of the trunk, and the three men jogged the dangerous vehicle along like a six-footed dragon till it toppled over the edge of the slope.

"Forward, dragon! in Heaven's name, forward!"

The pine trunk, once set in motion, glided down the smooth, mirror-like incline like a dart. The guide, spreading out his long legs, steered it right and left, and when it flew down a little too quickly, he sharply planted both his heels against the ground to slacken speed, and cried:

"Wo-ah, dragon, wo-ah!"

No gondolier, no coachman, could have steered or driven more skillfully. A single false shove, a single obstacle in the path, and all four of them would have been hurled into the abyss below and dashed to pieces.

But no footless serpent could have writhed more deftly down than the pine trunk. It was a sight worth seeing, this lightning-like flight down a mountain of glass.

"Holloah! hie! fly away, thou devil's steed!"

Silly Simplex, in a transport of delight, took the trumpet from his shoulder, and catching the mane of the pine tree firmly by one hand, blew a postilion-march with all his might.

"Holloah, ho! holloah, ho! This is the way the devil brings home his bride."

Michal, too, loosed her arm from her husband's neck and began to clap her hands for joy. What a rapture to fly down so swiftly! She feared nothing, she delighted in the very danger. Her heart was innocent. No sin oppressed her conscience. Well for her that she had had sense enough to shut her ears against the tempter. If only the shadow of a sin had now darkened her soul she would not have been so blithe in the midst of danger, but would have looked down with a shudder at the awful abyss which seemed both Death and Hell.

"Put your arms round me again or I shall fall off!" cried the man in front of her. His face was as pale as wax. A vertigo had seized him. And Michal had to hug him tightly lest he should lose his equilibrium, and she clasped him to her breast

till they got to the bottom of the glen. The flight along the icy slope had lasted half an hour, on foot it would have taken them half a day at least to traverse it.

So they all thanked God that they had come off with a whole skin. And it was not long before they had to thank God for much more than that. At midday they were rejoined by their fellow travelers who had come through the valley, and fearful tales they had to tell of the dangers which they had encountered.

Janko, to whom a mounted messenger had been sent on beforehand to negotiate with the robbers, had granted the travelers a free passage thorough the defile, and the Polish nobleman paid for all those who accompanied him, students included, the ransom demanded. But in the meantime Hafran's robbers (it was these whom Simplex had scared away with his trumpet from the Devil's Castle) fell upon the Keszmár merchants who were marching far behind in the rear, cut down the drivers, tortured the merchants, and carried off the mules and pack-horses. But while they were thus making free with the booty, the twelve soldiers, armed with their new-fangled muskets which could be fired off even in rainy weather, fell upon the robbers, who could not shoot because of the wet. About forty of the freebooters bit the dust. Hafran, with the remainder, escaped by the skin of his teeth among the rocks, contriving to carry the whole of the spoil along with him, including the baggage of the young married people, who now had nothing left but what they were actually wearing. All the beautiful embroidery, lace, and fine linen which pretty Michal had worked and woven with her own hands, an inestimable treasure, had become the booty of these vagabonds.

"May the vihodar of Zeb break every one of them on the wheel!" cried the kopanitschar.

At these words Henry's face became fiery red.

But Michal threw her arms round his neck and consoled him.

"Let us thank God," said she, "for so marvelously delivering us from so great a peril."

She knew now what a great danger she had escaped, but she had no idea of the still greater danger that she was about to encounter.

CHAPTER V.

Which will be a short chapter but not a very merry one.

The young married people had now neither horse nor mule to carry them any further. They had to look about for some sort of vehicle to take them to Zeb, and the wagoner whom they hunted up at last swore by hook and by crook that he would go by sledge or not at all, for snow had fallen in Praszkinocz, and there was now a sledging track all the way. As they could not be choosers they of course consented. Simplex begged them to take his bundle with them, for he too wanted to get to Eperies. He had come off the luckiest of them all, for as he had carried his few worldly possessions slung over his shoulder, he had not been plundered by the robbers. The wagoner granted him his request, and even allowed him to run along behind the sledge and hang on by the trestle when he was tired.

He ran as long as the sledge-track lasted, but, as might have been anticipated (though the driver absolutely refused to believe in the possibility of any such thing), when they arrived at the foot of the mountain they saw that there was no more snow but only mud. Simplex had now to shove the sledge much oftener than mount behind it, especially when the road lay uphill. The clergyman also had to lend a hand occasionally, while the countryman in front dragged the horses along by main force. Thus, in addition to their other troubles, they were saddled with a sledge on muddy roads.

They had fallen far behind the caravan; even the carriers with the baggage were now a long way ahead of them. It was late in the evening before they saw in the distance the lofty church of Zeb with its copper roof, and the bastions of the city embowered in gardens. The wind wafted to their ears the sound of the evening *Ave Maria,* and a very comfortable sound it is to him who sits snugly by his own fireside. But it is far from pleasant to those who are outside the walls, for after the *Angelus* all the gates are closed, the bridges drawn up, and not a living soul that wanders in a bodily shape upon the earth is admitted within the city.

"We are shut out," growled the wagoner, scratching his head. "Now we shall

have to sleep under some haystack. I only wish we had not taken that vagabond student's bundle into the sledge, that was what made us creep along so slowly."

But if Simplex had not helped to shove on the sledge they would not have got so far as this.

"Pray let us go on a little further," said the clergyman. He was walking along moodily by the side of the sledge. No one was inside it but Michal.

The sun had set. Its scarlet glare still lit up the summits of the distant Carpathians, but the only objects which they illuminated here below were one or two mansions scattered among the hills, the gates of the city, and a large, lonely building standing outside the walls. The walls and roof of this building shone blood-red in the evening twilight, but from the huge chimney issued volumes of pitch-black smoke. Glowing red clouds, betokening wind, accompanied the setting sun, and a flock of crows which had been startled from their resting-place flew, loudly croaking, out of the woods toward the town as forerunners of the approaching storm.

The flock of crows alighted on a dismal-looking scaffolding, which stood on a hill on this side of the red house. It consisted of roofless columns rising gauntly out of a square mass of masonry and united by four iron bars. From each of these four columns a huge iron hook boldly projected. The crows settled down in thick clusters on the iron bars. Nowhere in the whole region was a tree, a shrub, or any asylum for man or beast to be seen.

"Whatever can that be?" thought Michal.

Simplex and the wagoner dragged the horses forward. Henry walked beside the sledge, and held it fast with one hand to prevent it from toppling over.

"Whither are we to go now?" growled the wagoner. "We must pass the night outside here, I suppose. There is no shelter anywhere, and during the night the witches will do us a mischief."

"There are no such things as witches," remarked Henry dryly.

"But I say there are. I'm sure of it. Barbara Pirka is certainly a witch. They assemble here at midnight."

"Silence!" cried Henry sternly, and with that he seized the reins of the horses and began to lead them away from the road.

"Sir," said the carter, hesitating, "why are you going in that direction? Here is no other house but that one yonder," and he pointed to the lonely house which stood below the town, all lurid in the evening twilight.

"And thither we must go."

"Jesus Christ preserve us!" stammered the wagoner, "that is the house of the vihodar."

"And thither I say we must go."

Then he went to his wife, and wrapped her in his mantle to protect her from the cold night air.

"Is your father's house much further?" she asked tenderly.

"There it is, straight before us," answered Henry; "my father is the vihodar of Zeb!"

CHAPTER VI.

Contains the proper explanation of things which have hitherto remained obscure.

So his father is the vihodar of Zeb, the headsman, the man who works in blood, not the blood of sheep and oxen, but the blood of men!

This is his house, his territory.

His house is shut out from the town, the boundary of his dominion is the gallows.

Those stakes by the wayside with wheels fastened to them are his mile-posts. The robber bands are his ripe wheat, which he mows down with his sword and harrows with his wheel.

He is the judge of final appeal before whom all criminals must appear—truly a great and distinguished personage. People make haste to get out of his way whenever he walks the streets, and salute him by drawing their caps over their eyes whenever he passes by. His sway extends from the sixteen towns of Zips as far as Kassa, and letters patent from the Emperor and the King of Poland give him the right to kill and torture.

Michal spoke not a word, but closed her eyes and lay back in the sledge.

The sledge, on quitting the boggy ground and reaching the level turf, again had a smooth course before it where some progress could be made. Here Henry again mounted. Simplex and the driver also took their places on the box-seat. The horses shied at the gallows, and galloped off with the sledge as if they had broken loose altogether. The driver cried piteously, as if he were being led to execution.

"Don't disturb yourself, countryman," cried Simplex consolingly, "at home the headsman is a great personage. He regales his guests with good pottage, new milk, and old tokay. Dine with him but once, and you'll have something to talk of for the rest of your life. I know him. He is a good and honest man. I played to his

singing once, and he filled my cap with thalers."

"It is indeed a dreadful house," whispered Henry in Michal's ear, "and the master of that house is an object of terror. It is an awful thing to sleep in that house, and a still more awful thing it is to speak face to face with its grim master, although I say it who am his son. Listen, and do not abhor me. Horror drove me thence in my early boyhood; I fled; my father's business filled me with loathing. I wanted to live in the world, beloved and respected by my fellow-men. I departed into a strange land; I was determined they should never hear of me again at home. Begging my way along, I hardly earned my daily bread; I suffered cold and hunger; I went about in the rags which the hand of charity bestowed upon me; I became a scholar and a slave; I learned to practice obedience and humility; in all the world I found but a single benefactor, who took me in, instructed, educated, and ennobled me; and by subtlety I've robbed this single benefactor of his most precious treasure, his only daughter. I told him not who my father was; had I told him, he would not have given me his daughter. No one knows the family name of my father; his grandfather dwelt in this very house, he took over this ghastly office from his predecessor, and this predecessor was called the vihodar. It was a name the people gave him, and so, from generation to generation, the dweller in this house has been called; but my father has not forgotten his family name, and he knows that there is one other man in the world besides himself who bears that name. Old Catsrider is a very rich man. He has pocketed many gold pieces and has hoarded them up. Why, indeed, should a hangman spend his money, or on what? In amusements? He has no time for such things. In pomp or display? He cannot acquire property. But I have not come hither because I covet his treasures; not on that account have I brought you to the door of this sad house, no, but because I deceived your father in giving out that my own father was a Catholic. That is not true; he is a Protestant. Our canons are very stringent. A marriage solemnized without the consent of the parents on both sides is invalid. I dare not run the risk of one day seeing the hangman enter the church, tug me by my surplice and say: 'I, Christian Catsrider, tear you, my son, down from this holy place, because you are living in illicit union with a woman who is not your wife.'

"I must obtain the consent of my father to our marriage, or else you and I are dishonored and our marriage is void. Do you understand now?"

At this question the young woman sprang to her feet and for an instant she was seized with the desire of springing out of this infernal vehicle as it flew along the dry grass, and flying, flying, flying, till some bottomless abyss swallowed her

up; but the next moment she submitted to her fate, bowed her head, hid her hands beneath her mantle, and said:

"I will be obedient!"

"My great love for you was the cause of my crime. Will you hate me for it?"

It was with a very low voice that the young wife replied:

"I will be gentle."

"This humiliation will only last for a night," said the husband encouragingly. "Early to-morrow morning we will go on our way. No one will ever find out who was the father of the pastor of Great Leta. We will live in peace and honor and walk in the way of the Lord."

"Amen!" answered the wife, but she heaved a great sigh.

Meanwhile the sledge had arrived in front of the lonely house.

CHAPTER VII.

Wherein are described the house and the mistress of the house.

It was a house unlike all other houses. Banished beyond the walls of the city, it had to defend itself as best it could. A deep moat filled with stagnant water and covered with green slime completely surrounded it, and the drawbridge which crossed the moat led up to a fortified palisade which formed a second line of circumvallation. But the drawbridge was now drawn up and the portcullis let down. On the tops of the palings the hides of various kinds of animals were hanging out to dry.

The walls of the house were made of a rude sort of rubble, odd bricks without a trace of mortar. The lower windows were mere loopholes; the upper windows were of every conceivable shape and size, but all, without exception, were guarded by a double iron trellis-work. Right opposite the drawbridge stood the door, made of heavy oaken beams, traversed in all directions by strong iron bands, and embossed with large iron-headed nails.

Inside the house a pretty hubbub was going on. Even a long way off the howling of dogs could be heard; but close at hand it sounded like a perfect pandemonium; there must have been twenty dogs there at the very least.

For the house had already been barred and bolted, and the travelers beyond the moat might have cried and shouted all night without anyone hearing them had not the trumpeter made one of the party, and he now blew with all his might the *reveil*, wherewith the Imperial heralds were wont to demand admission at the gates of a castle.

At this trumpet-blast the drawbridge was slowly lowered amidst a great rattling and clatter of bolts and chains, but as the door still remained closed, Simplex went boldly up to it, and knocked loudly with his fists.

Through the barking of dogs, which now broke forth again with redoubled vigor, a hoarse female voice shrieked:

"Who is at the gate there?"

"The pastor of Great Leta and his wife," Simplex roared back.

Whereupon a furious yelling and a cracking of whips was heard, as if someone inside was dispersing a pack of dogs, and as they scampered howling back, the creaking door slowly turned upon its rusty hinges, allowing a glimpse into the vaulted hall which was lit by a swinging lamp.

In the doorway appeared a woman with a large bunch of keys in her hand.

It was a tall bony shape in a yellow frock, with its head wrapped in a red cloth, from beneath which coal-black, stubbly bristles peeped forth.

There had been a time when this woman was beautiful. She had oval features, a dimpled chin, red cheeks, black eyebrows, sparkling eyes, and a lofty forehead, but her whole face was now full of wrinkles, and the furrows on her forehead looked like the stave lines in a music-book.

"Jesus, Mary, and St. Anna protect me!" cried the wagoner, with chattering teeth. "If it is not Barbara Pirka in the flesh!"

The woman laughed aloud when she perceived the sledge.

"What! do even the clergy ride on besoms nowadays?" she cried, with rough pleasantry, while a couple of serving-men, whose shirt-sleeves were tucked up to their elbows, drew the bridge up again behind the in-gliding sledge and then shut the groaning door.

"A pleasant evening, Mother Pirka," said Simplex, chucking the woman under the chin; "'tis a long time since we two met together. Do you recognize me, eh?"

"Hah!" stammered the wagoner, "you'll pay for chucking her chin like that. The old hag will twist your neck for you this very night. Mark my words!"

"Be off, you devil's student!" cried the woman; "why can't you get out of my way? Where, pray, is the pastor of Great Leta?"

"He is lifting his wife out of the sledge yonder. Is the master at home?" The hangman was usually styled the master.

"Where should he be? He's in his workshop of course. But your beard has grown since last I saw you."

"Since Mother Pirka regaled me with cheese soup, eh? Don't you recollect? I then promised to marry you as soon as I had grown up. Come now, shall we have a marriage feast?"

"If you give her too much of your jaw she'll ride you, the hag," said the wagoner, tugging one of his horses by the mane; "she'll put a bridle in your mouth at night, and ride you to the very top of the Krivan!"[2]

[2] One of the highest peaks of the Karpathians.

"You shall have all you want," said Barbara to Simplex. "Let the others eat first, and then come into the kitchen. You shall have a good supper."

"I'll take good care not to eat any of it," said the wagoner. "She'll be sure to give me something to drink which will turn me into a swine."

"You'll then at least have a finer burial than if you had remained a man," jeered Simplex.

Nothing could induce the wagoner to stir a step from beside his horses, and he was quite content to sup upon the buckwheat balls which he had brought with him in his knapsack. Simplex, on turning in himself about midnight, derisively assured his snoring companion that he neighed as if he were turned into a horse already.

Meanwhile the woman led the priest and his wife into the palisaded mansion.

It was a massive structure, consisting of numerous rooms united together by long narrow passages with heavy iron-clouted doors. She stopped at last in a hexagonal vaulted chamber, from the central arch of which hung a huge lamp. But a far brighter light came from the hearth, whereon enormous logs were sparkling and crackling.

Nothing in this chamber called to mind the dismal business of the master of the house. Old-fashioned presses were ranged around the walls, and in the midst of the chamber stood a round table with feet resembling tigers' claws, and leather-covered chairs all round it. In a corner stood a dumb-waiter covered with glittering plate and pewter. Small pictures and clusters of weapons were visible on the walls. This chamber led into a small side-room, the door of which was so low that a person entering it had to duck his head.

"This will be your bedroom," said the woman; "it is a nice, quiet place, out of hearing of the howling dogs."

Barbara Pirka no longer recognized Henry, though they had often torn each other's hair out in the good old times.

The woman remarked that Michal's clothing was wet through, and that her shoes had suffered from her wanderings through the mountains.

"Would madam like to change her clothes?" asked the old woman obsequiously.

"I have no change," replied Michal, "the robbers have taken the whole of our baggage, and we ourselves only escaped from them by the devious mountain paths."

"D——d scoundrels! It would be as well perhaps if you were to lie down in a warm bed, and take a little hot wine. That would do you good, and you need not come to supper."

"I thank you for your kindness," said Michal, who was thinking all the while of the object of their coming thither—viz., the reconciliation with Henry's father —"but I wish to eat in company with the master of the house."

"Do you really?" remarked the woman, contracting her brows. "Are you not afraid of him, then? Have you so strong a heart? So much the better."

With that she turned and left the room, and there was but time for the husband and wife to exchange a few words, whereby Michal learnt that Barbara Pirka was an old housekeeper of the Catsriders, when back she came again with a change of raiment on her arm.

It consisted of a dress of heavy purple silk, embroidered at the skirts with colored garlands, a girdle of Turkish stuff, and a broad lace collar; the bodice was fastened in front with gold clasps.

"You would do well to put on these dry clothes."

Michal allowed the housekeeper to undress her, and then help her on first with the silk dress, which had been airing all the time over the fire, and then with the golden-clasped bodice, the Turkish girdle, and the lace collar.

"Just look, now! It might have been made for her."

Then she took Michal's wet shoes from her feet and gave her instead slippers of fine red Korduan leather, and as there was no mirror in the room, she herself supplied its place by turning her round and round and surveying her from head to foot.

"Just as if it had been made to order. Don't be afraid, my dear lady pastor. No common wench ever wore that dress. It was a noble, beautiful lady who once made a brave show therein, and she only wore it twice. She looked like a flower,

and was the fairest of the fair. I chopped off her head myself."

Michal felt her knees totter. She was wearing on her body the garments of a woman who had died a felon's death.

CHAPTER VIII.

In which are described the joys of long-parted but finally reunited kinsmen, and every one learns to know exactly how he stands.

But even if Michal had wished to take off the clothes there was no time to do so, for the housekeeper now said that supper was upon the table, and that the master of the house awaited his guests in the dining-room. Michal meekly bowed her head on her husband's shoulder, and allowed herself to be led into the presence of the great and terrible man.

The dining-room was in every respect like the other rooms. It had just as many angles and arches, and was whitewashed in precisely the same way. In the middle stood a table laid for three persons, each cover consisting of two pewter dishes, one on the top of the other. There were also two big-bellied, glazed jugs, with pewter lids, a chased silver tankard for one of the guests, a Venetian crystal glass for the other, and a wooden mug for the master of the house.

The master of the house already stood beside the table with his hands resting on the back of his chair. He was a tall, commanding figure, with very broad shoulders. He wore a brown Polish jacket with long sleeves, a broad, buckled girdle, and long jack-boots. His features were hard and angular, his hair short and bristly; but his beard, already grizzled, hung down in two long flaps, the ends of which were stuck into his girdle. His look was grave and tranquil, but without the slightest trace of human feeling.

Michal felt that her husband's hand was trembling as he approached the master of the house, though he made superhuman efforts to appear calm.

"Peace and blessing rest upon this house!" stammered Henry, whereupon the old man sighed deeply but without returning the salutation.

"Is your reverence the pastor of Great Leta?" It was the first time he had addressed Henry. His voice was deep and sonorous as if it proceeded from a bronze statue, his whole body seemed to reëcho the sound.

"I have been elected the successor of the late pastor. Forgive me, master, for causing you so much inconvenience!"

"Your visit is nothing unusual," returned the old man, "the late pastor of Leta was often a guest in this sad house," and he thereupon beckoned to his guests to be seated.

"This is my wife," stammered Henry.

The old man did not even affect the bare semblance of cordiality. He coldly said: "Women also, nowadays, seem to love sad spectacles." Michal, however, before sitting down, folded her hands on the back of the chair, and piously inclining her head said grace.

The old man wrinkled his eyebrows and turned his face away.

Then they sat down to eat.

Nothing but vegetables was served, and after the vegetables came cheese. No flesh was to be seen, not a dish was there which required the assistance of a knife. Of beer and wine, however, there was no stint. The master of the house urged no one to eat, he left that to the housekeeper. She poured out for Michal beer and wine. Michal begged for water instead, but this they would not give her. They told her that the water of Zeb gave skin diseases to those who drank of it. So she had to sip beer.

During the meal no one broke silence, but after the first cup was drunk, the master of the house raised his voice.

"Did the rascals plunder your reverence as well?"

"We ourselves only escaped as by a miracle."

"They will receive their reward. Your reverence will see them the day after to-morrow."

Henry stared at him with astonishment.

"Yes, the soldiers have captured six of them, and these with some others will be executed the day after to-morrow."

Henry looked blankly at the old man, whose sharp eyes took in his astonishment at once.

"What! has not your reverence been sent here on purpose to give the last consolations of religion to those of the poor sinners who are of the same communion as yourself?"

Henry's face grew pale.

The old man guessed his thoughts.

"Such an office is no doubt none of the most pleasant. Not every clergyman likes to be at the side of the poor sinners during such a sad spectacle. The Franciscans of Eperies are sent to shrive the Catholics, the pastors of Great Leta to comfort the Protestants. Indeed this office is part of the cure. On every such sad occasion the pastor of Great Leta has to sit in the felons' car by my side with the delinquents opposite. He is therefore a frequent guest at my house."

To Henry it seemed as if the house were falling about his ears. He had known nothing of all this till now. He began to wipe away the sweat from his brow.

"Did not your reverence know then that the black cassock of the pastor of Great Leta and the red mantle of the vihodar of Zeb go together? Did the Consistory conceal the fact from your reverence when they recapitulated the emoluments of the benefice—a denarius for each baptism, a Mary-florin for each burial, and a Kremnitz ducat for the last sacraments administered to each poor felon?"

"To tell you the truth," stammered Henry, "I did not go very closely into the question of the temporalities. I only thought about my spiritual duties."

"Then if you have not come hither to act as chaplain at the execution of the law's sentence, to what other circumstances does my poor house owe the honor of your society?"

Michal threw Henry an encouraging look, signifying that now was the time to confess everything.

"I will tell you my story, master," began Henry. "Ten years ago I fled from my father's house. My father loved me. He was good to me. I was his only son, and I forsook him, nevertheless, because I did not want to follow his trade, because I strove after higher things. It was my wish to become a scholar and a clergyman. For the last ten years I have not let my father know where I was. During that time I have endured much misery; but I have also been compensated for it. I have made progress in the path of learning. I was the first among my fellow-scholars. The high-born sons of great statesmen and churchmen sat on the same

bench with me, with me the poor mendicant student; but no one has ever sat before me. I outstripped them all. I was the favorite of the professor and the presbyters. When I mounted the pulpit to preach, the people strained their ears so as not to lose a single word, and no one ever went to sleep when I was speaking. When scarcely four-and-twenty years of age I was elected a regular minister, and the superintendent confirmed the choice. I was not even obliged to officiate beforehand as chaplain in the usual way. 'Twas the greatest distinction which could have befallen a theologian. In the examination which preceded my consecration, my replies were such that the whole Consistory cried unanimously, 'Eminentissime!' And my benefactor, my protector, the famous, most learned Dr. David Fröhlich, crowned the efforts of my laborious life by giving me his only daughter to wife. I then resolved to seek out in his solitude my long-deserted father, who thought me dead, and was passing his declining years in dreary abandonment. I said to my beloved wife, 'Let us go and seek out my poor old father, let us present ourselves as traveling strangers and take him by surprise. We owe our first visit to him.' My beloved agreed to my wishes. On the day after the wedding we set out to visit my father, but robbers waylaid our caravan and took from us our horse and mule. We ourselves, guided by good men, escaped by making a long detour over the mountains, after which we continued our journey by sledge in wretched plight. Night overtook us. We found the gates of the city closed. We were too much afraid of robbers to pass the night outside. We perceived a house in front of the town. We begged for admittance and it was granted, and now we beg pardon for the trouble we have caused."

The master of the house kept his eyes fixed on the lips of the speaker till he had quite finished.

"Then a mere chance has brought your reverence hither?"

Henry's lips refused to say yes, he merely nodded with his head, as if, forsooth, it were not as great a sin to lie with the whole head as with the mouth alone!

"Then until your reverence has received your father's blessing, you cannot, I presume, taste of the earthly joys of wedded life?" inquired the master of the house, thereby betraying not only his acquaintance with ecclesiastical ordinances but the possession of the art of expressing himself politely.

"True, but such consent I hope to obtain this very day, for I am now in my father's house. My name is Henry Catsrider," and with that the young man rose from his seat.

But the lady, in a transport of conjugal loyalty and devotion, threw herself at the father's feet, seized his hand and kissed it.

She actually kissed the hand of the vihodar, the headsman. With glowing, cleaving lips she kissed the hand which had never been kissed.

CHAPTER IX.

In the course of which the stern father, in the hardness of his heart, chastizes his lost son, but finally grants forgiveness to the repentant prodigal.

When Christian Catsrider felt the kiss of the young bride on his hand, he hissed three times like one who has been seared with a red-hot iron.

But when Henry also would have approached him, the old man stretched out his long arm, and laying his hand on his son's shoulder forced him back into his seat with as much force as if he had used a heavy iron lever for the purpose.

It was only to Michal that the old man spoke.

"So this tender creature has not come hither to see the horrors of an execution after all? I am glad of it. On such occasions there are generally more women present than men, ay, and young women too! What's her name? Michal—and this fellow—Henry! Ah!"

With that he rose from the table.

But Michal still held his iron hand in her hands, and clasping it tightly with her fingers softly whispered grace, the old man turning his head aside all the time. Then he drew his hand out of Michal's hands, but as she still kept kneeling at his feet as if expecting something more, the old man let his long sleeve fall right over his hands till the very tips of his fingers were covered, and then he laid them gently on Michal's head so that that innocent head might not be polluted by the touch of his bare hand.

Then Michal arose from her knees.

But the master did not extend his hand to his son. On the contrary, when the housekeeper entered to clear the table, he told her to leave it alone for the present, and first of all conduct the gentle lady to her room, make her a comfortable bed, lay her down in it and lull her gently to sleep. "The reverend gentleman," he added, "will remain behind with me, for I've a couple of words to

say to him."

Michal thanked him for his courtesy, and holding out her hand to her husband, asked him shyly:

"I suppose you will come soon?"

"As soon as I have received my father's blessing," replied Henry, unctuously, from which Barbara Pirka gathered that the clergyman was the master's son.

The heavy doors had no sooner closed behind the two women than Christian Catsrider said to his son:

"Follow me!"

With that he took out of his side pocket a key with a double ward, and unlocked therewith a secret door, discovering a spiral staircase which led up to a tower.

Henry knew from experience that the old man kept his treasures in this tower. That his father should lead him thither seemed therefore an omen of good.

"Take the lamp and go on before."

Henry took the lamp and led the way up the staircase whilst the old man closed the iron door behind them.

After ascending twelve steps, they came to a large round room. Heaped up all round lay, not the treasures of the master, but all the instruments of his trade which were employed in the torturings and executions of those times, with a description of which we will not harrow the readers of this sufficiently sad story. Nowadays these instruments are only to be found in museums; men have discovered other ways of ameliorating their fellow-creatures.

Henry looked around him with horror at this frightful arsenal. He could not imagine what the old man had to say to him in such a place.

The master did not leave him very long in doubt. On the wall hung an enormous two-edged sword in a sheath of black leather. This sword the old man took down, and drew from its red velvet-lined sheath the broad blade, which was concave at both edges from much grinding, and of a mirror-like brightness; then, seizing the weapon with both hands, he said to his son in a cold, calm voice:

"Kneel down, my lad. You must die!"

"Oh! my father!" cried Henry.

"No, not your father. Your judge and executioner."

"Why do you want to kill me?"

"I have been headsman of Zeb for forty years. During that time I have dispatched many malefactors to the other world; but such a precious scoundrel as you are it has never yet been my misfortune to meet."

"What offense have I committed?" asked the horror-stricken Henry.

"You have run through a whole catalogue of crimes, each one of which is sufficient to bring a man to the scaffold. You are a thief! You have robbed the benefactor who received you into his house. You are a liar! You have denied your own father. You are a blasphemer! You have stretched out your hand toward the sacrament of the altar, knowing all the time that you were profaning that holy rite. You are a murderer—a parricide! For never was a man's affection so cruelly murdered as mine has been by you, to say nothing of the honor of this innocent woman and her father. Enough; you must die!"

"But if I have committed such crimes, why not bring me before the judges? I ought to be judged according to law and equity."

"Hold your tongue. You are beyond the pale of the law. There is a statute in force against abductors. That statute says that whosoever is caught in the act of abducting a youth or a maiden need not be brought before the tribunals, but may be sent direct to the headsman who is to judge and sentence him forthwith. Now you are such a robber. You have abducted a girl. You are caught in the act. And I will be a merciful judge to you, for I'll condemn you simply to be beheaded. Undress and kneel down!"

Henry rallied all his courage. He began to smile. Perhaps the old man was jesting with him. Perhaps he wanted to try his courage.

"'Tis well, my father. You've scared me enough now. A truce to jesting. I've neither murdered nor robbed. I am certainly anything but a parricide. If I did not honor my father, I should not be here now. Pray give me your blessing, therefore, and let me go to my wife. Michal followed me of her own free will, and she is waiting for me now."

"The virgin you have brought with you is not your wife, and she awaits you in

vain. At dawn I will send her back to her father under a strong escort together with the news of your death."

At these words the son was seized with a paroxysm of rage. Trusting in the great strength by which he had so often distinguished himself among his fellow-scholars, he fell fiercely upon his father. He fancied he would be able to wrest the sword from him, break loose from this ambuscade, and venture another leap through the dormer window and over the palisades, as he had done ten years before. But he reckoned without his host. The old man had only to stretch out his left hand, seize him by the chest and hurl him like a young kitten to the other side of the room, where he bounded head foremost against the wall, and fell all of a heap.

"It only needed that," murmured the old man. "Now that you have raised your hand against your master and judge, against your own father, you've not another crime to commit. This is the first case among the thousands of which I have had experience in which the condemned has presumed to wrestle with the headsman. Curer of souls indeed! In what Bible did you learn that, I should like to know."

The humiliated wretch, after this overthrow, lost his strength of mind altogether. The hero who had thus found his master in a physical encounter no longer felt equal to an intellectual contest; he writhed to his father on his knees, and cried, sobbing loudly all the time:

"Mercy, my father! I am your only son!"

"A precious only son, truly, who has outraged his own father. You fled from me. You said to yourself: 'My father pursues a dishonorable trade. I will not share his fate!' Alas! that it should be so. I cleanse the human race of its filth. My hand cannot be as white as a lily. They send for me to wipe away all their dirt, all that is vile and disgusting. A terrible fate! But someone, if it be only one in a hundred thousand, must submit to it. Evil-doers thrive like a brood of serpents. You have seen them yourself. You have been surrounded by them. You have felt how powerful they are even where the sword has been whetted to destroy them. I have already peopled many a room in hell with these damned spirits, and yet they spring up again like so many poisonous funguses. But for the gallows the dominion of Satan in these parts would gain the upper hand. I too live in a state of horror night and day. When I am alone I loathe myself. When I lay me down to sleep, someone must stand by my bedside to wake me when I dream, for the dreams I dream are ghastly. Once I even resigned my office. The King's grace

releases the headsman after a thirty years' service, and a Royal decree ennobles him after a thirty years' obloquy. But I had not laid the sword aside for more than six months when traveling in the district became impossible. In the town, women were robbed in the broad daylight, and malefactors danced in the churches, which they had broken open and plundered. I again began to work in blood. A ghastly work! Men hide themselves, dogs howl, grazing flocks disperse when they scent me from afar. There is no seat for me in the church, and every door in the town is closed against me. The good abhor me even more than the evil. But for all that I care nothing. What does grieve me is that my son should loathe me. The thousands of terrifying shapes which are waiting for me in the next world to stone me with their decapitated heads do not frighten me. My own son, who smites me in the face, he it is who really hurls me into hell."

"No, my father," interrupted Henry, "I adjure you by the living God not to say so. I do not abhor you. You, too, serve humanity. I condemn you not. But Heaven has not given me so strong a heart as yours. I have chosen the mission of reconciliation, of amelioration. I, too, would destroy the evil which you destroy, if not with the sword at least by the Word of God."

"Then you think it belongs to the eternal fitness of things that your father should be a headsman, while you are a curer of souls; that when you are dispensing the Lord's Supper, all the people should look with fear and loathing at your hand to see whether you have not inherited some blood-mark from your father; that the children in your parish should come into the world with red blotches instead of moles; that the rabble, when we sit side by side in the felons' car, should cry out: 'There go the headsman and his son, the parson; the old 'un flays the sinners, and the youngster patches 'em up again!' Perhaps, however, you think nothing of the sort. Perhaps you will prefer to go on denying your father. Perhaps you will prefer to live a lie six days in the week, and then ascend the pulpit to preach eternal truth on the seventh day. But then would not the words 'Our Father' stick in your throat? Would you not hear the devil whispering in your ear every time you repeated the fifth commandment? But enough of this. Keep steady! Stretch out your head, and let us make an end of it!"

The young man was almost in a state of collapse. He tried to raise himself from the floor with one hand, and, as if even the cold stones had pity upon him, there suddenly resounded from the room below a soft chant, a lowly prayer sung by a woman's gentle voice:

Glory be to God the Lord,

My refuge and my great reward.
To Him my prayer shall ever be
Who holp me in extremity.

The young man began to sob. The father leaned with both hands upon his sword. For a long time he was silent. He would not speak so long as that evening prayer lasted.

His son threw himself sobbing on the ground, and moistened the flagstones with his tears.

"Do you wish to live?" asked the father in a low voice.

Henry rose from the ground with overflowing joy. He was certain from this sudden softness of tone that the mortal rage of his father had given way to a milder frame of mind.

"Are you not sorry for that poor creature?" inquired his father.

"I love her as I love my own soul."

"I didn't ask you that, I asked you whether you feel compassion for her; you need say no more."

"Yes, I do."

"Do you feel compassion for your father?"

"I love and honor you."

"Don't talk so much, but answer my question!"

"God knows that I feel compassion for you."

"You take the name of the Lord into your mouth much too often. If you want to live, if you have any pity for me and for that poor creature, rise up! Don't blubber! It's not pretty and does not become you. You are a man, remember! Take off that garment! Here's another! Put it on and follow me!"

Henry took off his black cassock and put on the linen jacket which the old man had taken out of a cupboard for him. It was a plain jacket, without either buttons or buckles, and fastened round the waist by a leather girdle. It did not escape Henry that the old man carefully counted out two hundred gold pieces, which he

took from the same cupboard and put into the girdle. "'Tis yours," said he, as he buckled the girdle round his son's body. Then he beckoned to him to take the lamp and again go on in front, only this time they descended the staircase. The old man took the sword with him.

Henry was thinking to himself that if he could only escape from his father with a whole skin he would never venture within those walls again so long as the old man was alive.

But the old man also knew very well what his son's thoughts were, and he himself was thinking of how he could best prevent him from doing anything of the sort again.

CHAPTER X.

In which is shown how vain it is for womankind to murmur against the course and order of this world.

Pretty Michal was trembling in all her limbs when the housekeeper undressed and put her to bed.

Barbara Pirka went out of her way to be agreeable and obliging. She wanted to make Michal a hot salt and bran poultice and prepare her a posset of centaury, but these and sundry other good offices Michal absolutely declined, declaring that she had no fear of catching cold.

After putting the young woman to bed, she sat down beside her, and rubbed Michal's tiny white feet between her hands. She said it was good remedy against sleeplessness and anxiety.

"My hand has power," explained Pirka; "I am a seventh child and a witch to boot."

An ill-bred person would have burst out laughing; but Michal looked at Pirka with an astonishment which had more of reverence in it than of fear. She had never seen a witch before.

It pleased Pirka to see how Michal folded her hands together as if in prayer.

"Yes. Now I'm a witch and can make and mar as I please. But even those whom I benefit must suffer for it. I was once the wife of a headsman myself. The business pleased me. The only thing that surprises me is how a judge can leave to another the torturing and execution of those he has condemned to death instead of doing it himself. If I were the Emperor I would make a decree that every judge should be his own executioner. I was always at my husband's side when he was at work. I would not have stayed away at any price. When the felon was a woman I used to clip off her hair with a pair of shears. What a lot of lovely hair I've cut off in my time! After my husband's death (a mad dog bit him and he died from the effects of it), I continued the business with an assistant. My

assistant was a lanky, awkward fellow. Once he put me to shame on the scaffold by breaking down altogether at his task, so I snatched the sword out of his hand and finished the job myself. Then they took the business away from me and kicked me out: they said that it was not meet that a woman should wield the headsman's sword. So I came hither and entered the service of this vihodar. He could get no other servant, and no other master would look at me. But you are shivering, my dovey! Shall I tell you some pretty tale, my pet?"

At the word "dovey" Michal suddenly recollected her favorite fantail pigeon, which she had put into her pocket, and she begged Barbara to take out the poor creature and give it meat and drink. She had brought some grain with her.

"All right, my darling! But the dove cannot remain in this house. There are so many owls and hawks here that the timid creature would die of fright at the very sight of these savage birds of prey; and besides, don't you know that if your little hen pigeon were to live here and lay eggs without pairing, and hatch them, the brood would be goblins instead of chickens?"

Superstition is contagious. Michal already began to believe that her dove would hatch a brood of gnomes.

She began to be tormented with a desire to know exactly how she stood, and what was going on about her. Pirka was a queer creature, certainly; but she was the only woman in the house, and women always hold together, especially in such a house as this. She was not afraid of speaking out before Pirka.

Pirka fed the dove and gave it water, and then stuck it into Michal's pocket again.

"There now!" she said. "She feels all the better for that, I know."

Then she covered up the pretty lady with a warm counterpane and a bearskin, and while doing so caught sight of the small silk sachet which was fastened round her neck. Pirka's eyes began to sparkle savagely. She thought it was an amulet against witchcraft; but Michal told her that it was only a talisman against the plague, nothing more. Then Pirka laughed.

"You don't need that here. The plague never penetrates into this house. At the time of the great Egyptian sickness the headsmen were the gravediggers. Not one of them died."

"How was that?"

"Why, don't you know? They've made a compact with Death."

Of course no one need take this literally, but it is certain that men with such blunted nerves as headsmen are not so liable to contagion as other people.

"It is a memento of my poor mother," said Michal, pressing the silken sachet to her lips.

"Don't do that," said Pirka, in a warning voice. "As often as one kisses such mementos the dead person turns round in his grave."

At this Michal could not restrain her tears.

"Come, come, my pretty darling, don't weep! Shall I tell you a pretty tale? What shall it be about?"

Michal ceased to sob. She begged Pirka to tell her the story of the lady whose dress she had worn that day.

"Alas, alas, my darling! that is a very sad story; you'll not be able to sleep if you hear that."

But she told her about it all the same.

"There was once a wondrously beautiful lady, the only daughter of a noble house. They married her to a Polish lord whom she did not love. She loved another, a beautiful, brown Hungarian lad, and what is more she took care never to be very far away from him. One day the Polish nobleman observed that his wife had on a beautiful dress of cornflower-blue silk. He asked her: 'Where did you get that beautiful silk dress from?' She replied: 'My mother sent it to me from Szeszko as a birthday gift.' The husband did not shirk the trouble of riding all the way to Szeszko and asking his mother-in-law whether she had sent her daughter the beautiful blue dress. Back he came to his wife. 'Wife, your mother has told me that she sent you that blue dress. You have lied and your mother has lied also. Confess now from whom you got that beautiful dress.' Then his wife told him she had bought it at the Lemberg fair with her own money from an Armenian of Ungvar. The husband did not shirk the trouble of riding all the way to Ungvar. There he sought out the Armenian and asked if his wife had purchased from him the cornflower-blue dress. Then he came back and sent for his wife. 'Wife, wife, you have not spoken the truth, and the Armenian has lied as well as you, for he said you *did* buy the cornflower dress from him.' Then, at last, the woman confessed that she got the cornflower-blue dress from her lover.

It was the death of her. She was condemned to be beheaded. She was obliged to mount the scaffold in her beautiful dress, and there take it off and put on sack-cloth. Never had so handsome a face, so majestic a figure and such a soft, swan-like neck been seen there before. It was then I met with the mishap I've already told you of. When my chief assistant seized the sword and saw such a beautiful creature before him, he grew green in the face, his eyes became fixed and glazed, his knees tottered, and at last, as if seized by an epileptic fit, he fell down and tumbled backward off the scaffold. Then I gave the sword to my younger assistant. He, however, sank down on his knees before the kneeling lady, held the handle of his sword in front of him like a crucifix, and began to chant an *Ave Maria*. The sheriff was filled with dismay, the Polish nobleman, who stood close by, began to curse, called all who dwelt in Hungary cowardly milksops, and spat on the scaffold. Filled with fury thereat, I seized the sword and with a single blow cut off the woman's head. Then I took up the head by its long tresses and dashed it in the nobleman's face. 'You Polack,' I cried, 'take home what is yours!' That was why they drove me away."

A cold shudder ran through Michal's limbs despite all her warm wrappings.

"How long Henry remains away," she whispered softly.

"I'll go out, my pretty lambkin, and listen at the door to hear what he is saying to the old master."

So Pirka went through the dining-room and stopped to listen at the iron door and find out what was going on in the tower; and Michal, meanwhile, sang that evening hymn which had reached the ears of the headsman and his son.

Soon afterward Barbara Pirka returned, and with a sly grin whispered in Michal's ear:

"Don't fret, darling, the old man has made it all up, and now they are hugging and kissing each other."

But still Henry did not come back to his wife.

The howling of many dogs resounded through the courtyard below. The hideous din penetrated the thick vaults and double corridors and reached the very room where Michal lay.

"They will soon be quiet," said the housekeeper grimly.

Michal, in order to change the subject to something more agreeable, asked Pirka whether there was any garden to the house.

"You can't keep one," answered Pirka. "Here neither tree nor flower will flourish. The master's wife found that out long ago, when she tried to garden. The first summer after she came here, all the branches of the trees curved inwardly as if they would have crept under the ground, and the roots were devoured by worms. Nothing prospers but the black elder-tree, and even that produces red berries."

Meanwhile, the howling of the dogs grew fainter, as if the number of them was gradually growing smaller.

"What a long time Henry remains away," sighed the young wife.

"He'll very soon be here now, my pretty sweetheart!"

By this time only two dogs were howling in the courtyard below.

Pirka smiled, and began to arch her eyebrows.

"His reverence will be here almost immediately," said she.

And now only a single dog was howling through the night.

The storm, too, furiously shook the window-casements.

Suddenly the last dog ceased barking.

Pirka blinked, and said:

"The master will soon be here now."

During these odd scenes, Michal consoled herself with the reflection that the whole thing would be over in a day. Even the last day and the last night of a condemned felon must come to an end. Let them once get over this unpleasant day and they would go right away. They would have a home of their own, a quiet, peaceful parsonage all to themselves, with a large flower garden and a dove-cot.

Barbara Pirka had prophesied rightly. Soon after the last dog had quite ceased howling a man's step was heard approaching the door of the bedroom. Pirka murmured an incantation in the gipsy tongue over Michal, which might have been a blessing for all that Michal knew to the contrary. Then the old woman withdrew.

Immediately afterward Henry came in. The first thing he did was to extinguish the lamp, so that his wife might not see his face. Then he undressed and lay down beside her, for they both shared the same couch. Henry threw the bearskin coverlet off the bed; he was bathed in sweat.

The young wife was shivering, and her teeth chattered. She drew herself up like a hedgehog, and dared not close her eyes. To prevent herself from falling asleep she kept on repeating all the quotations which she knew by heart one after the other.

But Henry was in a raging fever. He kept tossing about on his couch, and murmured repeatedly, "Jesus, Maria, and St. Joseph!" and whenever sleep was about to overcome him he would almost throttle himself, and plunge with his feet till he almost kicked out the footboard.

The wife trembled, the husband groaned, the tempest outside shook the window-panes, the weathercocks creaked on the roof, the owls hooted in the lofts, and so the night wore on.

It was only toward morning that sleep sank down upon the young wife's weary eyelids. She had already kept vigil for two nights running, and now her slumber was tormented by frightful dreams till, when the morning was far advanced, Barbara Pirka came and woke her.

The housekeeper brought the sleeper a steaming wine-posset in a porcelain bowl.

Michal was not in the least refreshed by her repose. She felt weaker than ever. A parching thirst tormented her. All her bones ached. She was glad that Pirka had brought her drink. She cared little whether the woman was a witch or not, and she felt that it would not much matter if the hag's potion were to enchant her and change her into some bestial shape.

She eagerly took the bowl and drained it to the very dregs.

Then she called Barbara Pirka, and said:

"Where is my husband?"

Pirka replied:

"He has gone to town with his father."

"And what is my husband doing in town?" asked pretty Michal once more.

"He is helping his father to catch dogs."

CHAPTER XI.

Wherein is shown what terrible perils befall women who are not resigned to their fate, and do not obey their lords and masters.

Pretty Michal did not immediately expire on receiving this answer. For a moment, indeed, she really believed her heart would have ceased to beat there and then. Everything around her seemed to be turning pitch-black, and the horror which froze her breast made itself felt even to the tips of her fingers. Then she held her breath and fancied that her last hour had come.

But she very soon found that death is not to be had for the mere asking.

And surely the old witch must have put something in her drink, some magic charm capable of producing a complete moral transformation; for how else account for the evil thoughts which now suddenly occurred to her as she sat there on the edge of the bed, thoughts which, so far from keeping to herself, she uttered quite loud? Was she speaking to the old hag at her side or to some invisible being? Heaven only knows, but there she sat gazing steadily before her, with her fingers on her lips and her elbows on her knees.

"What then, after all, is the use of all the wisdom of the learned, of all the precepts of the saints? Why cast horoscopes, why consult the stars, if it is all to end like this? And they had said: 'How can you, a clergyman's daughter, give your hand to a man who works in blood, for he'll be bound to follow his father's trade? Will you allow your whole life to be a ceaseless bloodshedding? What! every day to rise and shed blood, and every night to lie down with blood! Every day to trace blood on the hands of him who embraces you! To be bound for life to a man whose very calling it is to lay violent hands on God's innocent creatures!' Alas! alas! Then it was only the blood of sheep and oxen that was in question. And now! What avails it, then, all the wisdom of the wise, when such things are possible? What if the little automatic dog had wagged his tail and stuck out his tongue by way of warning? And to think that a living wise man should have had no idea of the impending ruin of a human soul, and that soul his very daughter! What, then, is the use of amulets and talismanic necklaces? What

is the good of the angelic choirs in heaven when they cannot protect the faithful from such calamities?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Barbara Pirka, "there are very many more men in this world, my jewel, than there are angels in heaven. It is not everyone that has a guardian angel to look after him, but there isn't a man in this world who hasn't seven devils all to himself. I, too, was carried off from my father's house by my husband. He told me he was a tanner, and I, silly fool! did not inquire what sort of hides he tanned. But I made him pay one hundred-fold for that one deceit, I warrant you."

Michal stared blankly at her. She did not understand a word of what Pirka was talking about.

Pirka shrugged her shoulders.

"My ruby! won't we put on our clothes?"

"No!" cried Michal, defiantly, and throwing herself back in the bed. "Where are the clothes in which I came hither?"

"They are still very wet and hanging up to dry. They are tattered and torn, too, and want a lot of mending."

"I'll wait here till I get them."

So she stayed in bed. She would have nothing to do with the terrible finery which had belonged to the unhappy Polish lady.

And all day long nobody troubled her. Everyone in the house had something to do in town.

Barbara Pirka brought her her dinner; but the hag had no sooner taken it in than she had to take it out again. Michal would not touch a morsel.

Late in the afternoon the men came home. Michal again heard a horrible howling and yelping, brawling voices and heavy footsteps. It was only when they passed her door that they trod softly. Someone standing outside whispered to them:

"Pst! be quiet! The lady keeps her bed!"

"If she keeps her bed, she must be ill!" so thought they all.

When it was dark, Barbara Pirka came down again and lit the lamp in Michal's

room.

How happy the evening hours had been to Michal at home, when she could go to her book-shelves and take down her learned folios. Then she had never felt alone.

But here there were not even books!

The night was far advanced. Every living thing had long ago gone to sleep. Cautious footsteps approached the chamber where Michal lay.

The door opened and Henry entered.

He wore a gold-embroidered doublet buckled round with a stately girdle; his sleeves were trimmed with gold lace right up to the elbows. His large, tight-fitting jack-boots were of yellow buckskin, and they too were richly embroidered with lace. No bride could have wished for a more handsomely equipped bridegroom. But he had no sooner entered the room than Michal sprang from her bed, and wrapping herself in the bearskin, shrieked in a voice hoarse with rage:

"How dare you come in hither? This is the bedroom of my husband, the pastor of Great Leta! None else has any business here at all!"

The witch's potion must certainly have changed Michal's very nature, for language such as this was the last thing to be expected from so meek and gentle a creature in the hour of her terrible dereliction.

And some mighty spell really was at work, for that big, strong man, who could have brought the weak creature before him to her knees in the twinkling of an eye, was so frightened by Michal's repellent gesture, so timidly apprehensive of her furiously flashing eyes, that he could not utter a word, but slunk out of the chamber like a whipped cur.

Some person who had been eavesdropping outside all the time giggled aloud, and then was heard the voice of a man blaspheming the name of God, and gnashing his teeth with rage.

Surely that was not the parson of Great Leta?

Certainly not. But what has become of him? Well, after the work of yesterday night and to-day, the doors of every church are shut against Henry Catsrider, and

the steps leading to every pulpit are broken down as far as he is concerned.

The old vihodar had taken very good care that his son should never be a clergyman again.

And Michal remained alone with her phantoms.

She thought upon the vanished days of her maidenhood; of the innocent joys amidst which her days had glided so sweetly away; of the studies, which had always been a source of delight to her.

Whither had vanished all those joys and all those studies? What availed her now the books of all those learned men? What to her now was moral philosophy, horticulture, or domestic economy? Here there was no morality, no garden, no home! Her life at home had been a monastic life, but it was a veritable heaven compared with this hell.

But when she fell a-thinking how happy she might have been if she had given her hand to him whom her heart had chosen—who was not perhaps very learned, but certainly upright, honest, good-hearted, and over head and ears in love—then indeed evil thoughts began to arise within her.

When the moon shone through the iron bars of her window she could not help thinking what a nice time the witches must have of it; they had only to bestride their broomsticks and scud through the air, even narrow iron bars could not stop them.

What if her forsaken sweetheart were thinking of her now? Would he ever learn into what depths of misery the mistress of his heart had fallen?

While she was thinking of these things, and drying her streaming eyes, she suddenly heard in the court below the tune of one of her favorite songs, which ran thus:

The cloud wherein the crow doth stay,
The dark black cloud will pass away!

Someone was playing this air on a Hungarian field-trumpet.

This instrument is called the farogato, and very few know how to play it. It is certainly a difficult instrument. Let anyone but a connoisseur attempt to blow it, and he will bring forth a sound not at all unlike the howl of a dog on whose tail someone has trodden. But he who really knows the secret of the field-trumpet can play thereon every imaginable air, in tones which will go to one's very heart. You'll find yourself weeping without exactly knowing why. The good old songs, as they come forth from the instrument, recall to you the lullaby which your mother used to sing at your cradle, and the hymn which was sung at your father's burial. It does you good and makes you sad at the same time. But when a real connoisseur takes up the farogato and blows into it with all his might, then indeed he brings forth notes which excite the martial sentiments of every hearer, notes which can be heard for two miles round. It sounds just as if a host were marching forth to battle and to victory.

It was this instrument which, thirty years later, inspired the rebel troops of Rakóczy in the campaigns. After the insurrection was over, therefore, the peace-abiding government collected together all the farogatos in the land and destroyed them, just as if they had been so many double-mortars. Only a single specimen still remains, which is exhibited as a great curiosity in the Royal Museum at Buda-Pest, and only a single man in the whole land knows how to play it.

We have said this much about the farogato in order to give some idea of the great joy which arose in Michal's heart, when she suddenly heard it playing her favorite song.

Her father had often spoken to her about an out-at-elbow vagrant student, whom the scholars derisively nicknamed Simplex, and who had wrought much mischief there with his music by enticing the sons of the Muses away from their studies thereby. Kalondai, in particular, had to thank this fellow for the corruption of his morals, in fact they were hand and glove. Besides that, Simplex was a low fellow, who had not been ashamed to serve a twelve months' apprenticeship with the civic trumpeter of Zeb, and since then had spent all his time in gadding about the country as an itinerant musician, earning a penny here and a penny there at wedding feasts and such like riotous entertainments. All this

the learned professor had told his daughter in high dudgeon; but what a comfort it was to her that she knew it now. From the fact that she heard all her favorite songs played one after the other in the courtyard below, she drew the following conclusion: If Simplex has come hither, it is only because Kalondai sent him. If he is staying here, it is certainly only because he wants to find out something about me. When he discovers what my position is, he will return to his bosom friend and tell him everything.

And the thought consoled her.

For hours and hours she listened in the beautiful moonlight to the well-known melancholy strains, which her serving-maids used to sing when they heard the field-trumpet's blare outside. She, too, had now and again hummed "The Hunter's Song," or "The Polish Lay of the Three Hundred Widows," with its ghostly finale supposed to represent the Dance of Death.

Simplex played these airs very prettily. Michal could have listened to him all night.

Early in the morning Pirka appeared, and brought her the wine posset spiced with cloves, cinnamon, and muscat-nut.

While she was sipping it, Michal angrily asked: "Who is that tiresome man who keeps on blowing his trumpet all night in the courtyard below?"

She was already learning to be sly. It is ever so with women. Treat them with tenderness and affection, and they are as gentle as doves and speak straight out what they think. But just bully, offend, or persecute them, and they become as crafty as serpents. No one teaches them deceit, and yet they are masters in it. Then they think before they speak, and their tongues say one thing and their hearts another.

So that was why Michal complained so angrily about that tiresome man. She knew by instinct that the best way to keep him in the house was to complain of him.

"Oh, my darling!" said Barbara Pirka, "don't say that! He is my trumpeter, quite a superior young man, I assure you."

"And pray when will he take himself off and let people sleep o' nights?" she

asked with dissembled bitterness.

"He is not so easily got rid of, darling! If you were to chuck him out of doors with a pitchfork he would come in again through the window. He enjoys himself amazingly with the lads! Would you believe it, they got up a fine dance last night! There was no lack of partners either, for each of the lads brought in a large watch-dog, made it stand on its hind-legs, and danced with it that way. If you had been there you'd have split your sides for laughing. Last of all, everyone made his partner kiss the musician. Ha! ha! ha!"

"The beast!" cried Michal, wiping her mouth in disgust. "And why then does he not run away from a place where they treat him so vilely?"

"I'll tell you, my dear little squirrel! 'tis because he is desperately in love with me."

Then Michal thought how great must be the friendship of these two men, when one of them is willing to live as a guest in the headsman's house, make sport for the headsman's henchmen, endure their brutal jests, nay, even make love to this domestic witch, simply to bring his friend tidings of the woman who has been the cause of all his misery!

All that day Barbara Pirka did not bring Michal the clothes in which she had come, nor did Michal again put on the fine dress which had been given to her. She preferred to feign illness and lie in bed.

But Henry dared not show his face to her all that day.

Neither on that nor yet on the following day did he appear before her. He was waiting till Michal got up.

She, however, would take nothing but broth, so that she might say she was ill and not be obliged to get up.

And night after night she listened at the window to the farogato, and it sometimes seemed to her as if someone was urging the musician to play with all his might.

Meanwhile Henry steadily plied his trade. The better to inure him to it, he was never allowed to be sober for a moment. They gave him heavy beer to drink

which muddled his head. They gave him garlic to eat, and the very consciousness that he has eaten garlic is sufficient to make a man regard himself as the enemy of all refinement. The coarse jests which he heard from his father's henchmen, familiarity with dirt and filth, the drunken orgies into which he was plunged, so brutalized him that at last he absolutely did not know how to approach such a tenderly nurtured creature as Michal in a propitiatory manner. So he learnt to sing filthy songs instead, and vied with the headsman's lads themselves in cursing and swearing.

If the reverend professor could have seen his son-in-law now he would have fancied that this was an homunculus whom some alchemist had inflated with another and an inferior soul.

That his wife had driven him out of her bedchamber was not regarded as anything extraordinary. In these days the women of Zeb were so shamefaced and coy that it was considered by no means proper for young married people to begin billing and cooing while the honeymoon was yet young. Nay, it was even requisite that the husband when he stole the first kiss from his bride should bear away the marks of her ten nails in his face, just as if he had been engaged in taming a wild panther; while a woman who at the beginning of the honeymoon was able to pitch her husband twice out of the bridal-chamber could reckon upon reaping a whole harvest of praise.

It was consequently nothing unusual if a modest young spouse, with a good opinion of herself, abstained from eating during the first few days of her honeymoon, or even made as though she had been struck dumb. It showed that she had been piously brought up, that was all. It was only when this self-imposed abstinence lasted long enough to endanger the lady's life that third parties stepped in and put a stop to it.

So Michal had her own way entirely, neither getting up, nor dressing, nor speaking, nor taking any nourishment to speak of.

But on Friday, when Pirka came in to see her, Michal sneezed violently. Now when anybody sneezes on Friday it signifies that his enemies will triumph over him. So, at least, Pirka interpreted it.

Then she observed that the iron window shutters had been left open all night, and she scolded Michal for it.

"It is not good," she said, "to sleep in moonlight, for it draws all the strength out

of one's heart." Then she whispered to Michal that to-day the young master was going to accomplish his masterpiece. What that masterpiece was, Michal had little difficulty in guessing.

On such occasions, to each of the headsman's assistants is given a flask of brandy wherewith to strengthen his heart. The master himself partakes of brandy mingled with hartshorn and sunflower dew, which (we have it on the authority of Arnoldus de Villanova) is such an efficacious cordial that so long as a man drinks thereof he will probably never die.

It chanced, moreover, that on this very day Henry was bitten by a strange dog, and as there was no knowing whether the beast might not be mad they made young Catsrider swallow a large pill of very pungent spices as an antidote; and no doubt this too had an inflammatory effect upon his blood.

Add to this that the old master on this particular evening gave a great feast to all his apprentices, at which they first drank heavy old beer and then strong red wine. The apprentices on this occasion mocked Henry unmercifully, and called him a milksop, fit only to be stuck up in a corner and beaten with a spindle by his wife. The wine mounted to his head, and the blood and the gibes did the rest. The feast was no sooner over than Henry went straight to the door of Michal's chamber, set his shoulders against it, and tore it off its hinges.

Next morning, pretty Michal had a blue mark under one eye and a wheal on her forehead, and the precious amulet, the amulet she had received from her father as a bridal gift, was no longer round her neck.

"What's the good of you," cried she, addressing the amulet, "if you cannot defend me? How can you save me from the Black Death when you cannot save me from the hand of man?"

Then she took the dove which she had brought with her from home, and said to it:

"It is all your fault! Why was my heart so soft on your account, why had I not the courage to kill you there and then? If I had wrung your neck, plucked your feathers, stuck you on a spit and carved you, I should not be here now! Fly home! Take back the amulet! I'll tie it round your neck. Take it to my father! May the amulet defend you on the way from vultures and hawks, may it preserve

my father from ever feeling such heavy woe as I am feeling here."

With that, she took the amulet and fastened it beneath the dove's wings with the ribbon, in such a way as to show that it had not been unloosed but torn from her neck. Then she opened the window and let the dove go.

The dove cooed, flew into the air, and Michal saw it no more.

And pray what became of the dove? Only this. On the same day it came home to Keszmár and tapped at the window, while the great scholar sat poring over his folios. The learned Professor Fröhlich, much amazed, admitted the winged messenger through the casement, and still greater grew his astonishment when he perceived beneath her wings the precious amulet, tied by a ribbon which had evidently been violently torn. Being a very great and learned mathematician, he naturally concluded therefrom that some great evil must have befallen his daughter; whereupon, without thinking of consulting the heavenly bodies as to whether this was a lucky day for traveling, without waiting for a caravan to pass by that way and pick him up, he took his hat and stick and went off at once and alone to seek his daughter.

He made straight for Great Leta, now going on foot, now sitting on a wagon, now riding on an ass, according as opportunity offered. The young married couple must certainly be at Great Leta, thought he.

But at Great Leta the late pastor's widow received him with great lamentations. She had not set eyes on the young people. It was wrong, very wrong of them not to come, for all the new-born children in the place were being taken to the next parish to be christened; and still more scandalous, during the Leutschau fair last week, Protestant malefactors had to be accompanied to the scaffold by a Papist priest. Such things were no less than flagrant infringements of the Council of Linz, and had lost the parish four Kremnitz ducats.

Thence the learned gentleman proceeded to Zeb, where he inquired after Henry's father, old Catsrider.

No one had ever heard such a name at Zeb. The father and grandfather of Henry had always been called the vihodar, and that was all. Not even in the civic accounts was the name of Catsrider to be found. So they laughed the old man out of countenance with his Catsriders. They told him that people were making an April fool of him. But for all that he would not budge, but actually made a house to house visitation through the town of Zeb, to find out what had become of his

son-in-law and his daughter.

Yet for all his learning and wisdom it never once occurred to him to visit the solitary house which stood without the city walls.

CHAPTER XII.

Consists of a very few words which are, however, of all the more consequence.

When Barbara Pirka visited the young woman next morning, she was greatly astonished to find her quite dressed. Michal had on the beautiful cornflower-blue silk dress of the beheaded Polish countess.

She drove out the housekeeper with her morning broth.

"Bring me broiled flesh and red wine," she cried, imperiously.

So she could speak and eat again at last!

When Barbara Pirka returned with the cold meat, flavored with garlic, and a flask of wine, Michal sat down at the table and took a long draught, and then she ate, and then she drank again.

"Fill up!" she cried to the housekeeper.

After she had eaten and drank her fill, she turned to Barbara Pirka and said:

"What ought a wife to do who hates her husband?"

"Leave that to me, I understand a little about it."

Then Michal asked a second question:

"What ought a wife to do who loves another?"

"Leave that to me also, I understand a good deal about it."

"And what ought a woman to do who no longer believes in Heaven?" asked Michal for the third time.

"I'll tell you, my little squirrel, for no one knows more about that than I do."

CHAPTER XIII.

Wherein the knavish practices of the evil witch are only insinuated, but not yet fully divulged.

First of all, Barbara Pirka brought on a platter a specific whereby the blue marks caused by blows can be made to vanish in no time. It consists of the piece of cornflower roots plucked on the morning of Corpus Christi Day by a left-handed person with his back to the sun, and the juice of the cardamom plucked on Maundy Thursday, and mixed with the honey of the queen bee. With this balsam she rubbed Michal's bruises, who felt all the better for it. Then Barbara praised Michal greatly, and said that Master Henry would also make a fine show with the scratches he had received from her.

And now she proceeded to answer Michal's first question.

"So you want to know, my little poppet, what a wife should do who does not love her husband? She ought to pretend she loves him very much; for jealousy is like a savage dog—when he's hungry he's wakeful, but when he has his bellyful he goes to sleep. A wife who does not love her husband ought always to take care that he neither hears nor sees anything. And there grows no wonder-working herb in all the mountains around which can make a man half so blind or deaf as when his wife kisses him on the eyes, and whispers in his ear, 'My darling!' A scold is always carrying her husband about on her back, but a good-humored wife is always sitting on her husband's jacket, and he must carry her about wherever she likes. A pretty woman needs no bridle to make a horse of a bearded man like we witches do. She needs only a silken thread, the silken thread of her wheedling voice. The hand with which a pretty woman strokes her husband's cheek is a real gold mine, far more productive than the gold mines of Kremnitz. But a woman who wants an answer to the second question must have money. Yes; and I can give an answer to the third question also. So sure as I'm Barbara Pirka and the leader of the witches, I'll bring your sweetheart to you, my pretty little violet! I'll not so much as ask you his name nor where he dwells, whether it be far or near. All I've got to do is to send my little buck-goat in quest of him, and my little buck-goat will carry him whithersoever you like, if only

you'll follow my advice in all things."

The witch's influence over the poor weak girl was already so strong that she followed her advice implicitly. When she met her husband at supper time, she was not ashamed to embrace and caress him, although others were looking on; nay, she even allowed him to take her on his lap and tenderly kiss the blue marks on her face, which blows not given in wrath had left behind them. It is true there was nothing blameworthy in all this fondling. Were they not man and wife? But we know that it was all deceit on the wife's part, for she loathed from the bottom of her heart the man who, under the lying pretense of making her a parson's wife, had torn her away from the darling of her heart, tied her to a common hangman, buried her alive, and made it impossible for her ever to show her face in respectable society again. But she followed the evil counsel of Barbara Pirka so well that she flattered and fondled her husband to the top of his bent, although he no longer wore the splendid scarlet doublet of yesterday, but only a day-laborer's common linen blouse. In his joy he unfastened his leather girdle and shook out the two hundred gold pieces into her lap.

"That is your nuptial gift," said he.

Let no one maintain after this that a hangman can't behave handsomely!

Next morning Michal requested Barbara Pirka to give her an answer to her second question, viz., What a woman must do who loves another than her husband?

"Alas, pet! that is not a very easy question to answer. The loves must first be looked up. Only my little buck-goat can find him, and he cannot set out until he has been shod with golden shoes."

Michal put her hand into her pocket, and took out four gold pieces. These she handed to the witch, at the same time jingling her pockets to show that there were many more gold pieces where those came from.

The witch laughed.

"What, my little gold cockchafer! don't you know then that goats have divided hoofs? My little buck-goat, therefore, requires not four but eight little shoes for his feet."

Michal immediately gave her four more gold pieces.

"And now, my dear little froggy! you will see that the black buck-goat will bring you your sweetheart, only we must wait till the old and the young master are well out of the way, which will certainly happen when the Eperies annual fair begins."

Michal believed everything the witch told her.

What else could she have done? All her former faith had been destroyed. She believed in nothing more. The wisdom of her father, the amulet of her mother, had become utterly worthless in her eyes. She had been deceived, humbled, imprisoned, mocked, tormented, she who had never hurt a living thing, she who had always been so good!

"Well," thought she, "now I'll be wicked, perhaps that will bear better fruit."

But Barbara Pirka immediately gave Simplex four of the eight gold pieces, the rest she kept for herself, and from that day forth Michal no longer heard the songs of the field-trumpet sounding in the courtyard.

CHAPTER XIV.

Which goes to prove that the society of great folks is not always a thing to be desired.

The reason why pretty, unhappy Michal no longer heard the field-trumpet in the courtyard was because Pirka had already sent off Simplex to seek the beloved of Michal's heart; for the old witch had already discovered that this beloved was Simplex's bosom friend—but that was all. For the trumpeter, like the prudent German he was (an Hungarian, who always carries his heart on his sleeve, would have blabbed out everything straight off), did indeed let her know that Michal had been married against her will; but he shrewdly mentioned no names, and put her off with a few lines when she pressed him too closely. Let her find out the truth for herself! What else was she a witch for?

But wicked Pirka knew quite enough already to ruin the poor innocent creature altogether. For 'tis not so much because they themselves are already sold to Beelzebub that such hags lay traps for young ladies, but because they well know that they may fleece to their heart's content, all whom they have once got into their clutches.

So she gave four of her eight ducats to Simplex to buy him food on his journey, and told him which was the best way to take, for the trumpeter had told her this much, that Michal's sweetheart lived in Transylvania.

Simplex was a good, honest fellow, and he had frequented the schools long enough to know that the Consistory would probably quash a union which had been fraudulently contracted; and in the present case the fraud was patent to everyone, for the wooer who had introduced himself as a clergyman turned out to be a common hangman. Simplex meant to inform his bosom friend at once, when Valentine might, if he liked, take steps to annul the marriage and make the lady his own lawful wife in the proper way.

And no doubt it was just because Simplex was thus following the path of truth and justice that he was so wondrously delivered from the extraordinary dangers which befell him on the way—dangers from which, perhaps, he would never

have escaped at all if he had simply set out with the evil intention of discovering Michal's sweetheart, as the witch had supposed when she sent him off.

So he shouldered his trumpet, and had scarcely proceeded more than an hour's journey through a deep valley, known as the Wolf's Dale, which lies between rocks so steep and narrow that it is as much as two mules can do to pass each other therein, when two wild shapes suddenly pounced out upon him from an ambush, and whirling their axes over their heads, dictatorially cried:

"Halt!"

The honest trumpeter could not possibly be expected to know who these people were, for at that time the militia used to dress exactly like robbers so as to be better able to capture those gentry. They wore sheepskin caps on their heads; their shirts, which had first been soaked through with grease and then smoked dry in a chimney, were as black as ink; belts bristling with knives girded their loins; they were shod with bast shoes, and in their hands they carried muskets and long-handled axes.

The waylayers told the trumpeter to wait till their comrades came up and decided what was to be done with him; if he uttered a syllable in the meantime, he would immediately be cut to pieces. Then they whistled, and down from the rocks sprang four similar wild figures, who took the trumpeter into custody and haled him along with them.

They forced him to crawl up the steep sides of the narrow rocky gorge, by means of holes hewn therein at regular intervals, and serving as footholds and resting-places to venturesome climbers. It was just like mounting a chimney. Here and there still larger holes gaped forth from the rocky walls, from the depths of which a frightful growling resounded. But Simplex's companions bade him fear nothing. These were only bears' dens, they said. Mother Bruin was too much engaged at this season in suckling her young to bestow much attention on those who did not wantonly attack her. Yet Simplex, for all that, had not the slightest wish to make the acquaintance of a monster which is, perhaps, a still more dreadful enemy than even a robber. He knew the habits of the terrible beast, which, when it meets a man on a narrow path, rises on its hind legs and crushes him to death in its embrace.

On reaching the top of this perilous ladder, Simplex saw before him a spacious plateau surrounded by steep rocks. This was the robbers' lair.

Huge pine-trees stretched down their branches from the rocks, thus forming a sort of natural canopy over the valley. Out of the cleft of a granite rock gurgled a merry little brook, half dammed up by two huge jagged stones. The object of this dam Simplex learned later on.

The first glance at the spectacle now before him made his eyes twinkle. This natural chamber was occupied by more than a hundred robbers. Most of them were sitting round a caldron, which hung simmering over a large fire, on a iron tripod. One of the robbers served as cook, another as scullion. The former was cutting up a sheep, with which he filled the caldron, while the latter stirred the mess round and round, adding milk instead of water and frequent handfuls of saffron, cinnamon, and cloves. Truly a bandits' banquet! Others were squatting on barrels and playing dice. All of them spoke very low. No one attempted to attack the caldron beforehand, or stave in one of the many casks of wine, beer, and brandy lying about the place. The discipline among them was perfect.

In the midst of the rocky place, bales of goods were piled one on top of the other, just as they are exhibited for sale at fairs and in market-places. Aloft on this costly throne sat the three robber chieftains.

They were dressed precisely like their comrades, yet each had his distinguishing marks, so that Simplex, who had often heard them described by the country people, was able to identify them at a glance.

The first of the robber chieftains was Hafran, whose love of pomp was notorious. His girdle had a fringe of gold ducats, and from the corners of his hat hung strings of rose nobles, the largest coin then in vogue. His fingers were covered with gold rings, and the sheath and handle of his sword sparkled with precious stones. His gigantic stature was an additional and unmistakable distinction.

The second chieftain was Bajus. He prided himself on a huge mustache, each end of which terminated in a rose noble. Whenever he wanted to drink or speak, he had first to stroke back both ends of his mustache behind his ears.

The third chieftain was Janko. His body was small and thin; no one would have taken him for a man of monstrous strength. Yet he could leap from a sitting posture on to the shoulders of the tallest man, and had even been known to mount a galloping horse, or a wagon going at full speed, at a single bound. In wrestling, he could have given odds to Samson himself.

Him, too, Simplex recognized by the hellebore he was munching. For Janko, like the son of Cambyses, had made a practice of chewing hellebore from his youth upward, thus securing himself against the chance of being poisoned; though his own mouth thereby became so poisonous that all the women whom he kissed fainted instantly, and all the men whom he bit died. Even now the leaves of a large bunch of hellebore were sticking out of his mouth all the time he talked to Simplex, to whom he put these questions:

"Who are you? What's your name? Whence do you come? Whither are you going? Whom do you serve?"

Simplex put on as nonchalant an air as he was capable of, for fear is a grievous fault in the eyes of such bandits, but they are always indulgently disposed toward a man of pluck.

"I am an orphan from Silesia," said he. "I've never had either father or mother. I don't even know what name I received at my baptism, but my comrades call me Simplex because they say I am so very simple. I come from Keszmár, where Master Matthias, the town crier, has been teaching me the trumpet, and I am on my way to Saros, where I hope to enter the service of some great lord who loves music."

The robber chieftain fixed a piercing look on the speaker and never once left off chewing his hellebore.

"If you come from Keszmár you must have passed the kopanitscha of Hamar on your way. Did you see the wife of the kopanitschar?"

"Yes, and a wondrously lovely little creature she is."

At these words the eyes of the robber sparkled.

"That woman is my sweetheart! Did you see her husband?"

"Yes, and a very polite old man he is."

"Well, if you know them, go back to them once more. I'll pay your traveling expenses"—here he proudly jingled the ducats in his girdle. "Tell them that they are both on my bad books; the woman because she a little time ago drank mead and danced till morning with the headman of Leta at the church consecration there; the man because he lately guided the son of the vihodar of Zeb and his wife over the mountains, and thus helped them to escape us. Tell them that I

mean to pay them a visit shortly. The woman must then put on her best humor, and the man must not show his face at all. For if I once kiss the woman's lips and bite the man's cheek, the pair of them will have had enough of me for some time to come." At these words the robber spat out the hellebore, and Simplex perceived that his mouth and teeth were perfectly yellow. "That is the message you must deliver to them, trumpeter. For the present, however, you will remain with us; eat and drink as much as your stomach can hold, and then show us what you can do with the trumpet. We'll pay for it, of course."

Poor Simplex rejoiced exceedingly at escaping so well, and having the prospect of turning an honest penny besides, he loudly and solemnly protested that he would faithfully deliver the robber's message.

Meanwhile the sheep's flesh in the great caldron was quite done, and the robbers sat down to eat. The caldron was lowered on to the outspread skins, which served as tablecloth and napkin, and the robbers carved for themselves with their huge clasp-knives. But if their meat was coarse and their table rude, their drinking vessels were magnificent. They consisted of gold and silver chalices and pocals, the spoil of many a church and castle, and as often as a robber took a draught he drank to the memory of some comrade or other who had ended a glorious career on the wheel, gallows, or stake, winding up with a full recital of the deceased's exploits—*e. g.*, how many men he had killed, how many robberies he had achieved, what lady of quality had been his doxy, and how at the last he had manfully endured all manner of torments rather than betray his comrades.

And after each toast Simplex had to blow a long flourish.

And as the feast proceeded, the robbers became more and more communicative. They began to boast loudly of their own heroic deeds; how, for instance, they had plundered great caravans, attacked noblemen's castles, and extirpated everyone therein in a different sort of way; how they had filled a Jew's mouth with molten lead, and nearly died with laughter at the queer faces he pulled; how they had forced a rich miser by torture to discover his hidden treasure; how they had tied the captured militiamen to the branches of trees and then torn them limb from limb; and how they had set fire to a church in which a lot of peasants had taken refuge and burnt them all alive. Everyone vied with his neighbor in boasting, and tried to make himself out more ferocious than the rest. And Simplex blew incessantly with his trumpet, so as to hear as little as possible of their ghastly stories.

The robbers forced him also to eat and drink with them, and well for him it was that he had learnt in his student days to hold a full skin. For he was well aware that so long as he could keep on trumpeting he was safe. It fared with him as with the piper in the story, who piped to the wolf to save himself from being eaten up.

Meanwhile night had set in; the rocky chamber was lit only by the heaps of smoldering logs; the robbers began to dance a wild dance, and Simplex was forced to mount upon a barrel and play for them with all his might. They stamped with their feet, roared, howled, fired off their guns, and so deftly hurled their axes at the barrel on which Simplex was standing that they all stuck fast in it without hurting a hair of his head.

He, poor wretch! dared not spring off for the life of him. It was a perfect pandemonium.

At last Hafran commanded Simplex to sound an alarm.

Simplex blew him an alarm accordingly.

"You rascal!" cried the robber captain, "it was with just such an alarm as that that they startled us at the Devil's Castle; were you the devil's trumpeter on that occasion?"

Perhaps the drink which Simplex had already taken had flown to his head, perhaps he thought it might go worse with him if he did not make a clean breast of it, at any rate he replied:

"Yes, 'twas I!"

"The devil it was!" cried Hafran furiously. "I'll cut you in two this very instant. Don't you know that you drove us into the very jaws of the devil with your d ——d trumpet, and that forty of our comrades went straight to hell in consequence! Stay where you are on that barrel, that I may cut you in two at a blow!"

With that he drew his broad palash from its sheath, and grasped it with both hands.

But this time Simplex did not take the matter as a joke, but sprang down from the barrel and fled to his protector, Janko, who, laughing with hideous glee, warded off with his sword the strokes which Hafran aimed at poor Simplex, all

the while opening wide his yellow-stained jaws, which with their yellow fangs looked like the jaws of a lion.

"Serve you all right!" cried he as he warded off Hafran's blows. "What! fifty of you to be scared by a single trumpeter! Let him be in peace! He has to carry a message to my sweetheart. Whoever touches him is a dead man!"

At this the wrath of Hafran against Simplex subsided, but he insisted on his leaping over his bare palash, and little as Simplex felt inclined to jump into the air just then, he had to do it; and the jest so took the fancy of the robbers that they one and all made the trumpeter jump over their swords likewise, till at last he became so tired that he threw himself prone on the ground and allowed himself to be beaten with the flats of their swords rather than jump over them any more.

Meanwhile Janko had gone to sleep. It was his custom to slumber in a sitting position, but he slept so deeply that not even a roaring lion could have awakened him.

Gradually also the remaining robbers fell down one by one heavy with drink.

Only Bajus remained sober.

It was a wise provision of the robbers that one of their leaders should always remain sober; he drank nothing but mead mixed with water, and mounted guard over the whole band when they had drunk their fill.

It was already midnight; the moon came forth from behind the rocks and shone among the dark pine branches.

"Up, you rogues!" cried Bajus, "the banquet is over. Make ready to depart elsewhere, that we may all be on the right spot at the right moment in the morning."

At this command all the fires were extinguished one after the other. When it was quite dark they began to deliberate in whispers which of their plans should be carried out first.

One plan was to attack the Iglo annual fair in the broad daylight, set the town on fire, plunder the merchants, and sack the town-hall.

Their second plan was to steal their way into the lair of the vihodar of Zeb through a secret subterranean passage, capture him and his son alive, and make them suffer all the tortures which they had inflicted on their comrades; as for the young woman, they would cast lots for her.

For a long time they could not come to any agreement.

At last they resolved to attack the Iglo fair; the vihodar they would leave to some subsequent occasion, especially as they would first of all have to gain over Barbara Pirka, for otherwise that evil witch was quite capable of throttling all the assailants one after the other single-handed.

Simplex listened, and his teeth chattered with fear. What he heard filled him with joy and terror at the same time—joy because he had now an additional argument for moving his bosom friend to rescue Michal from her frightful position; terror lest the robbers might suddenly remember that they were betraying their horrible secrets to one who was not of their band. And if they should remember, what would become of him?

He would have given anything to have been able to creep inside the crevices of the rocks near which he was cowering, so that the robbers might not perceive him.

All at once the moon, which had now risen, shone full on the spot where Simplex stood, and Hafran perceived him.

"What shall we do to prevent this fellow from betraying us?" cried he, and with that he took him by the collar and dragged him into the midst of them.

"Strike him dead!" cried Bajus.

Poor Simplex was greatly terrified; he began to piteously implore them not to do him any harm.

"Silence, fellow!" cried Hafran; "a stout-hearted lad must not blubber. He must stand firm even when the skin is being flayed from his body. Whine, and you are a dead man! We'll have no cowards here! Tremble if you dare!"

"Strike him dead!" repeated Bajus, who was quite sober.

"That'll never do," said Hafran. "We promised Janko that we would not kill the trumpeter. Besides, the fellow has played well and entertained us finely. He has

made good again all the harm he did with his cursed trumpet at the Devil's Castle. At the same time we must not let him go away before us, or he will betray us to the county train-bands. Let us take him a little way down the road and smash one of his legs, so that he may not be able to go any further. In the morning some wayfarer or other will be sure to find him and take care of him. What do you say?"

But this proposition was anything but satisfactory to Simplex; not at any price would he hear of having his leg broken.

"Come, come, lad!" cried Hafran, soothingly. "Don't be scared at such a trifle! A small fracture is an everyday occurrence. The shepherdess in the hut by the roadside will put it in splints for you, mutter a charm over it, and you'll be able to dance a jig with it in no time. Here are twelve dollars to pay your expenses in the meantime; you wouldn't get as much as that from the county if you went to law about it."

And they seized poor Simplex by both arms to drag him to the place where his leg was to be shattered. Then despair suggested the saving thought of begging the robbers to allow him to blow his own funeral march, and holding the funnel of his trumpet to the ear of the sleeping Janko he blew with such force that the robber chieftain started up from his sleep and leapt his own height in the air.

"Janko! they want to kill me! Don't allow it, Janko!" cried the agonized wretch.

Janko yawned and stretched himself. Then he roughly repulsed the mob which surrounded him, and wrapped Simplex in his mantle.

"Fear nothing, my lad! I'll not let them hurt you!"

But the rest became more and more importunate.

"Are you mad, Janko? Will you let him saddle us with the gendarmes while we are all drunk? They will fall upon us while we are sound asleep, and then where shall we be? We must either kill him or break his leg."

"We'll do neither the one nor the other," said Janko; "we'll buy him off. D—n it! let's be gentlemen! What are you most in need of, my lad? I see your clothes are in rags. You'd better have it out in good stout cloth."

With that he lifted up one of the bales of goods and opened it. It contained scarlet cloth.

He began to measure it with his arm.

"There you have five ells of cloth for your coat and vest. Hafran, you measure him as much from your share for his hose, and you, Bajus, give him of yours for a mantle."

They fell to cursing, and curses fell as thick as hailstones; but Janko left them no peace till Hafran had clipped him off five ells of green Turkish cloth for his hose, and Bajus had contributed just as much blue English cloth for his mantle.

"But now he must give back the twelve dollars," remarked Bajus; "if his leg is not to be broken, he won't require money for mending it."

"Not so," said Janko; "when a gentlemen has given a musician money he does not ask it back again."

"Well, all right; but at any rate you must also give him six dollars as we have done."

But Janko could not be made to see this at all.

"Why should I give him money when you've given him some already?

"Then I'll smash one of his legs, for I mean to have value for my money."

The poor trumpeter tried to put an end to the dispute by instantly volunteering to return the twelve dollars; but it had like to have gone ill with him in consequence, for he thereby so deeply wounded Hafran's pride that the robber chief at once fired his gun at him. Fortunately Simplex ducked so nimbly that only his cap was grazed.

"What do you take us for, you bumpkin? A gentleman does not ask his money back again from a musician. Either Janko must give you as much as I have given you, or I will strike you dead."

So this struggle between ferocity and magnanimity plunged the poor trumpeter into a dilemma from which there seemed absolutely no escape. The robbers whirled their axes over his head.

"Listen to me," cried Janko suddenly, "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll dig a deep ditch, and make the trumpeter get into it. Then we'll clap an empty barrel over him and peg it down fast, so that he won't be able to see in what direction we have gone. He must sleep in the ditch to-day, but to-morrow he may free himself

with his ax and go his way."

This wise accommodation pleased all parties. The robbers forthwith dug a deep hole in the earth, put Simplex inside it, clapped over him a cask, the bottom of which had previously been knocked out, and charged him as he valued his life not to stir from the spot till dawn of day.

He did exactly as he was bid, and that was very wise of him, for when everything was perfectly still, and he might well have fancied the robbers were miles away, a shot suddenly cracked quite close to him and the bullet perforated the cask. It was a warning that he was being watched. So there he sat, and there is no knowing how long he might have remained without budging had not a fresh danger supervened; the hole in which he sat suddenly began to fill with water. Higher and higher rose the tide till it reached his very mouth, and he was forced to pull himself up to the top of the cask to escape drowning. At last he plucked up courage to look through the hole which the bullet had made, and he then saw that the whole of the rocky chamber had been converted into a watershed, and not a living soul was anywhere visible.

Then he smashed in the side of the cask with his ax, scrambled out of the hole, which was now completely filled with water, and immediately grasped the meaning of the robbers' stratagem.

With the above-mentioned improvised weir they had dammed up the mountain stream, and used its bed as a short cut into the next valley, for it was passable so long as the water was confined within the rocky chasm; when the water had risen high enough to overflow into its bed again, it would of course blot out all traces of their passage.

But Simplex, without bestowing much thought upon this feat, thanked the Almighty for so miraculously delivering him from so great a danger; which deliverance, moreover, strengthened him in the belief that the errand on which he was bound was a righteous one.

Thereupon, with much fear and trembling, he clambered down the rock-hewn way by which he had ascended, not forgetting to shout a good-morning into the hole of the mother bear as he passed.

He naturally omitted to return to the kopanitscha and deliver Janko's message to the pretty hostess; but he did tell an oil-merchant, whom he met on the way, the frightful things which had happened to him and bade him deliver the message at

the kopanitscha, as it was all on his way. The oil-merchant, on the other hand, gave him a piece of good advice; to wit, that when he came to the town of Saros he should hand over the bundle which he was carrying on his back to the mayor, for the plundered merchants had advertised their wares broadcast, and if people saw and recognized their stolen cloth on his person they would measure him a jacket which he would not get rid of his whole life long.

And worthy Simplex followed the advice which was given him. No sooner had he arrived at Saros than he handed over the costly cloth stuffs to the town authorities, and the merchants rewarded him with a ducat and let him go on his way unmolested, as he himself in his extant memoirs modestly informs us.

CHAPTER XV.

Valentine really becomes one of those who work in blood.

Valentine's mother had become a widow in her first youth. Her husband, an eminent citizen of Kassa and sheriff there, had been detained as a hostage by the Turks at Buda, whither he had gone on a diplomatic mission, and, succumbing to an attack of the Oriental plague, died in captivity, leaving behind him a widow and a little orphan son. He could only make his will orally, in the presence of two other hostages as witnesses, but it was on that very account all the more religiously adhered to. It prescribed that his widow should retain possession of the whole of his property so long as it pleased God to preserve her in the flesh, so that she might bring up her little son in the fear of the Lord, in all pious ways, in the true Christian Calvinistic faith, and, "quantum potest," in all knowledge and learning.

These testamentary dispositions were most rigorously observed. Dame Kalondai herself carried on the business of her late husband, who had been butcher and ham-curer as well as sheriff, and she never gave her son a stepfather, though in her day she must have been a very pretty woman. Even now she was so buxom and blooming that she looked like a gigantic edition of a swaddling babe. She had taken particular care that Valentine should be properly educated. He always had nice clothes and well-bound books, and when the proper time came she sent him to Keszmár, though it was with a very heavy heart that she consented to part from her little son for so long a time.

So worthy Dame Sarah did not see her little son again for three full years, and when at last he did appear before her she could scarcely recognize him.

She could not get it into her head that the man with the big mustache was really her own little son. His father at his age had had no sign of one.

Then she tried to persuade him that he had grown thin. The melancholy which Valentine could not hide from her she ascribed to some illness or other. The bad mountain-water was certainly to blame for it.

And she had good remedies against such complaints. They were not, indeed, of the drastic sort of which the professor at Keszmár had so large a store; her remedies were simply good and tasty dishes which she prepared for her little son with her own hands. She invented a savory dish against every ill of life, and you had only to taste of it to be instantly cured. And when the evil was caused by bad water, with what could you more certainly cure it than with good wine?

But Valentine's sadness would yield neither to the most delicate cookery nor to the most savory meats; he allowed the daintiest tit-bits to remain on his plate untouched, as if he meant to save them for someone else, and he drank the good wine mixed with water.

Worthy Dame Sarah vainly bothered her little son to tell her what was the matter with him. On all such occasions he would only smile, kiss his mother on the cheek, and tell her that there was absolutely nothing the matter with him, his disposition had only changed a little lately, he said. He naturally did not tell Dame Sarah anything of what had happened to him at school.

Now if anyone ever wants to know what is really going on at his own house, let him just go to his neighbor's and there he'll find out all about it.

One Sunday evening Dame Sarah came home from her neighbors', the Fürmenders.

"Why, Valentine!" she cried, "what is this I hear of you? Young Fürmender says that you were expelled from the school at Keszmár!"

"If he says so he speaks the truth."

Oh how delighted was Mistress Sarah when she heard these words!

"If it's only that which grieves you, my dear, good child!" said she, soothingly, "don't think anything more about it. Your father was expelled from three schools, but that did not prevent him from getting a wife and becoming sheriff. You, too, will pick up a nice girl, and may become sheriff as well, one day. Don't fret yourself about it. I never meant you to be a parson."

With that she kissed and embraced him, and he really did seem a little more cheerful after all these tokens of motherly love.

Very soon, however, his face was as long as ever.

Dame Sarah's remedies were inexhaustible. The best thing for such moping, woebegone fellows, is certainly wedlock. An unmarried man is like a widower and a widower has cause to be miserable.

She choose for him a virtuous, discreet damsel, the sister of the above-mentioned young Fürmender, Catherine by name, who was by no means indisposed toward the stately Valentine Kalondai. Beautiful, indeed, you could scarcely call her; but her mother had not been a whit prettier, and yet she had managed to do very well.

Then she took her son Valentine to the social gatherings, where the young lads and lasses, beneath the eyes of their parents, made merry with one another in all meekness and sobriety.

But Valentine led neither blonde nor brunette out to dance. There he stood leaning against the wall as if he had been put there for the express purpose of propping it up, and kept as still as if he was afraid of missing a single word of the conversation that was going on around him.

And when the bolster dance followed, during which it is the amiable custom for the lads and lasses to alternately carry round a silken bolster, deposit it in front of the person whom he or she likes best, kneel down upon it, and so remain till the favored one tenderly raises the suppliant and dances with her, whereupon it is his turn to carry the bolster round—then, I say, Valentine behaved very badly. For when Kitty Fürmender brought the bolster to him, and sank down on her knees before him, Valentine would not dance with her, and did not even raise her up, but rudely told her that he had made a vow never to dance again. Then Kitty naturally burst out crying, for how could an honest girl be insulted more grossly?

When they got home Dame Sarah said to her son:

"I say, Valentine, young Fürmender says you are possessed by evil spirits."

"I don't much care if I am."

"And for that reason you don't trust yourself to talk with the girls. He also says you will have nothing to do with your father's business because you have a horror of blood."

"He says that, does he? Well, I'll just show you to-morrow that I've no fear of blood, and am well able to carry on my father's trade."

Dame Sarah rejoiced greatly at these words, for nothing would have pleased her better than to have seen her son relieve her of the cares of the business; and no sooner had Valentine declared his intention of approving himself a master in his craft than she handed over to him the keys of the chamber in which were preserved the tools and weapons of his father, the butcher's ax, the knives, muskets, and swords, which no man's hand had been allowed to touch since his death. It is not surprising, therefore, if all these implements were somewhat rust-eaten, and it was only natural that Valentine should spend the whole of the forenoon in furbishing them up with polishing powder, tow, and chalk, till they shone as bright as mirrors. He was evidently determined that his father's tools should gleam quite splendidly when he wrought his promised masterpiece.

At midday Dame Sarah served up all Valentine's favorite dishes, and after she had feasted her little son right royally, she told him that she had given due notice to the guild-master that her boy was about to qualify himself for his profession, and also that she had already paid for the license. All ready in the stall stood the fat ox whereon he was to display his dexterity on this occasion. In the cellar a cask of wine had been broached, and on the counter she had deposited four or five gold pieces, as it was quite possible that the 'prentice hand of the young master might have lost its cunning, so that he would not be able to fell the ox at a single blow, in which case he would have to pay to the butcher's guild a gold piece for every extra blow till the ox fell.

"Alas, dear mother," cried Valentine, "my guild-master is not where you seek him. Captain Count Hommonai will be my guild-master. It is not in the slaughter-house, but on the battlefield that I mean to achieve my masterpiece. I will not strike oxen, which are unable to defend themselves, but Turks, who can give back blow for blow. War shall be my trade."

At first Dame Sarah would not believe him, she thought it was only the wine which was speaking out of him; but when Valentine fetched down his father's arms, the old sword, the musket, the long three-edged dagger, all most splendidly burnished, the good woman burst into tears, fell upon his neck, begged him to stay at home, and adjured him not to commit such an act of folly. He was still too weak a lad for that sort of thing, she said. What! had she brought him up so nicely, and even got a learned professor to teach him Latin, only that he might now go away and be cut down by the first wild Turk he met, or get one of his legs torn off by a chain-shot, and leave his widowed mother comfortless? But all this had not the slightest effect upon Valentine. He replied that his father had gone to the wars before him, and he meant to do what his father had done.

Now when Dame Sarah saw that all her maternal begging and praying and all her fine words were quite thrown away upon her son, she suddenly turned round and overwhelmed him with the bitterest curses.

"Very well, then, you wicked, obstinate son, if you *will* bring trouble and sorrow down upon your mother's head, go, and be hanged to you. I know all about it. Young Fürmender has told me that you have chummed up with a vagabond sort of fellow, one Simplex, who serves as field-trumpeter with Count Hommonai, and is your dearest bosom friend. He it is who leads you astray into all kinds of wickedness. He it is who has persuaded you to be a soldier. Very well, if your comrade is dearer to you than your own mother, be off with you. You may go and die far away where I can't get you buried, for all that I care. If one of your hands is cut off I'll disown you, for my son had both his hands. You may go and beg your bread, but don't look to me for help. From me you don't get a red farthing. Your father left all his property to me, remember."

"Except his weapons," said Valentine. He asked for nothing more, but went straight off to Captain Hommonai and enlisted under his banner. They gave him a horse, a wolf skin, and three Polish guldens by way of enlistment-money, and kept fast hold of him, for the troops were to set out for the camp at Onod at a moment's notice.

And Mistress Sarah hardened her heart to such a degree, that as the banderium marched out of the town the same night amidst the blare of clarions, she did not even stand in the doorway to greet her son for the last time; but she hid herself behind the flower-pots in the window, and while she peered yearningly after him, she poured out all the fury of her heart upon the trumpeter by wishing that he might break his neck on the way. And this curse was within an ace of being fulfilled upon worthy Simplex.

CHAPTER XVI.

Wherein is shown of what great use it is when a mother is hardhearted toward her only son. Also concerning divers skirmishes with the Turks, things not to be read of without a shudder.

Rumor said that the Turks had invaded the Tokay district and ravaged Hegylaja, and this, too, just at vintage time when the whole rural population was living in the vineyards.

Now an Hungarian does not lightly surrender to the foe the chiefest of the three mountains in his coat of arms, to wit, the Tokay mountain. Orders, therefore, were given by the Palatine of Hungary on the one side and by the Prince of Transylvania on the other for the banderia of Zemplin and Alany to turn out immediately, unite with the Zipsers at Onod, and fall upon the Turks whenever and wherever they might meet them.

It was at the very time when he was celebrating the feast in honor of his wedding with the lovely Isabella Peruyi, that the local commander, Count John Hommonai, received the order to depart.

They were just at the last dance, the torch-dance, during which the guests and the bridesmaids dance before the bride to the bridegroom's house, when the herald summoned the bridegroom from the midst of the dancers, whereupon the gentlemen threw away their torches and mounted their horses, while the count himself had only time to impress a kiss on the lips of his beloved bride and recommend her to God's protection on the very threshold of the bridal mansion.

The departure of the troops took place in the dead of night. Valentine rode beside his faithful Simplex, who not only had to blow the field-trumpet but also to beat the kettle-drums, which hung down on both sides of his saddle. His horse was naturally the sorriest of hacks, for all the others were much too spirited to patiently endure the roll of kettle-drums close behind their ears.

"Look ye, comrade Simplex," said Valentine, "our present campaign will be my

ordeal. You have told me that my poor Michal is unhappy and wants to see me; that she has never reached Great Leta, that she has been shamefully deceived by her husband; that she suffers much, and is exposed to indescribably great dangers. More than that you will not tell me, nor have I asked to know more, but I have been thinking ever since such thoughts as these: Shall I not be committing a grievous sin if I go seek her? Shall I not be d——d for it along with her? It does not matter very much, perhaps, if I'm d——d, although I, too, should like to see my dear old father in Paradise, and the sight of my good mother among the blessed would rejoice me greatly; but the thought that I might drag this unhappy creature down to hell with me, fills me with horror. Her place is in heaven among the angels. But you've such an enticing way of putting matters, that I'm no longer able to decide whether what I am about to do is good or bad. Now I mean to leave it to the decision of the Lord of Hosts. When we stand on the battlefield, he who tries the hearts and reins will read in my breast that I still love my Michal, though she has bound herself by an oath to another, and if this feeling be a sin, the guards of the Lord, the angels of Death are there, and he can charge them to call me away so as to prevent me from committing evil. If, however, I return in safety, if sword and bullet (and I certainly shall not keep out of their way) leave me unhurt, that will be a sign that the heavenly Omnipotence is ready to perform a miracle for my sake, whereby I shall win back again her whom I had given up for lost. If I return safe and sound, if no evil befall me, I'll go and seek my Michal."

"But in that case you must take care that I come back too, for without me you will not find your Michal, even if you were to set out to seek her with Christopher Columbus himself for your guide."

"Have no fear, comrade, we will live and die together."

But Valentine lagged behind the troop. A load lay upon his breast. From his earliest childhood he had been wont every night, as it grew dark, to say this prayer: "Be with me, O Lord my God! and let my poor, good mother awake safe and sound. Amen." His tutor had taught him a much finer prayer in Latin; but this prayer he never could recollect. He could never reconcile himself to the secula seculorum; why should he ask good things for himself for a thousand years to come? He was content to pray for what he wanted day by day. That would be quite enough if it were granted him. He made as if he were only dismounting to tighten his loosened saddle-girth, and when he was out of hearing of his comrades' curses, he covered his face in his furred horse-cloth and muttered his short prayer, whereupon he swung himself into his saddle with a

lightened heart and galloped after his comrades.

By morning they stood before Nemeti, which is half an hour's journey from Göncz, and there the captain, officers, and gentry swear the banner oath under the open sky. Then they halted, and after a short rest proceeded on further.

Just as they were about to cross the Hernad at Nemeti, whom do you think they found on the banks? Why, Dame Sarah with a huge Kassa wagon drawn by three stout horses. The wagon was well laden. It contained a Gönczer cask full of wine, a keg of plum brandy, fresh white bread, cakes, sheep cheeses in small trusses, and in the midst of this ambulant storehouse beamed the radiant countenance of the buxom citizeness of Kassa, with both her round white arms bare to the elbow.

"My dear, good mother! What do you want here?" cried Valentine, rushing to the wagon.

"Oh, you wicked son! if you are bent on following this trade, I, at any rate, won't let you die of hunger. Come, eat and drink! Call hither, too, the gentleman officers and your good companions. There is enough here for everyone."

They did not wait to be asked twice, but crowded round the wagon straightway, and Dame Sarah helped them to everything with both hands. When she perceived the trumpeter she singled him out from the rest.

"Hi! come here, trumpeter! May the thunderbolt strike the ground within three yards of you! You've seduced my son, have you? Then come hither and sit down by me, and if you don't eat your fill it will be the worse for you."

Good Simplex did what he could. He sat down in the wagon at Dame Sarah's side, and ate and drank his fill; but soon his appetite began to flag, and at last he protested he could go on no longer.

"Fellow! you must eat or I'll stuff it down your throat."

And with that she seized Simplex by both arms, shook him like a sack which must be made to hold still more, and compelled him to begin his meal over again.

But worthy Valentine was more delighted at the sight of his mother's strong, stout arms, than at all the good things she distributed, and he covered the good creature with kisses.

"And now, dear mother, turn back, there can be enough of a good thing," said he, perceiving that the main body of the hussars had reached the ford on the opposite side, and only the rear guard still remained behind. The officers also urged her to turn back.

"Turn back, eh? Do you really think I have come all this way, with a heavy-laden wagon, only to turn back? I will follow my son to the very end of the world. I'll not leave him just when things are going badly with him. Why should I be afraid when others are not?"

In vain they represented that it was not the proper thing for a woman to roam about in regions haunted by fighting Turks. There was no reasoning with her, they were obliged to take her along with the baggage wagons.

Meanwhile the scouts brought tidings that the Turkish predatory bands were assembling on the other side of the Theiss at Plakamocz. It was a good thing that all the ferry-boats at Tokay had been drawn up on to the shore, thus preventing the enemy from crossing over without great difficulty.

Count Hommonai therefore resolved to seek the Turks beyond the Theiss, and led his troops toward Tokay.

When they had crossed to the other side of the river, they could nowhere find a trace of the enemy, who evidently intended to entice the Hungarians further inland, and then drive them back upon the Theiss.

Dame Sarah would have followed them to the other side also, but this they would on no account allow her to do. The baggage wagons had to be left behind on the opposite bank. She then begged that, at least, they would let her drive up to the highest hill thereabouts, from whence she might watch her little son scuffling with the Turks.

"Take care, good mother, that a cannon ball does not hurt you."

"Fiddlesticks! You call yourself a student, and don't even know that a cannon ball cannot fly across a river because the water draws it down," cried Dame Sarah, triumphantly, and with that she drove to the top of the hill, where she stood up on the wagon and thence surveyed the course of the skirmish, while her great lout of a coachman, in his fear and anguish, crawled under a wagon, and viewed the fight with his back. And yet the fellow called himself a man!

First of all, five Turkish horsemen appeared on the top of a hill. How many more

lay behind the hill, nobody of course could tell.

To the left stretched a large morass covered with rushes, on the right lay an oak forest. The presumption was that the whole thicket was swarming with hidden foes.

So out against the five Turkish horsemen rode just as many and no more, from the Hungarian side, whereupon the five Turks turned tail and galloped off, the Hungarians also instantly returning to their ranks.

Then seven or eight Turkish horsemen reappeared, and began insulting the Hungarians, not with words indeed, which would have been quite thrown away at so great a distance, but with all sorts of outrageous gestures; while the Hungarians, not to be outdone, retaliated in kind with great spirit and originality. Tiring at last, however, of this pantomimic war, eight of the Hungarian horsemen dashed against the Turks with couched lances. In the ensuing mêlée all sixteen lances were splintered to atoms, whereupon the horsemen on both sides returned to their respective places.

At last the Hungarian commander grew weary of these tantalizing tactics, divided his troops into four battalions, and sent one of them off to encompass the forest. On this division coming close up to the outskirts of the wood, a swarm of Turkish horsemen rushed out upon them with loud cries; whereupon the Hungarians feigned flight till they had drawn the pursuers within reach of the second line of battle, when they suddenly turned and drove the Turks, who were now completely surrounded, toward the morass. Here, however, they themselves fell into an ambush of janizaries, who picked them off from among the bushes, and at the same moment from behind the sedges there poured forth a whole stream of horsemen of all sorts, Albanians, *Spahis*, and Moors, who attacked them on all sides like a swarm of hornets.

The Hungarian captain now set his third division in motion, in which were also Valentine and his comrade Simplex.

Dame Sarah, from the opposite shore, saw how they charged the foe.

"Why, the plucky lad sits on horseback as if he had never learnt anything else all his life! If only his poor father could see him!"

Valentine had never learnt the trade of a soldier, but he did what he thought was the right thing, grasping his father's broad crooked sword in his right hand, and his long three-edged dagger in his left, at the same time throwing his horse's reins over its neck. Simplex, likewise, drew his broadsword and wrapped his wolfskin round his left arm by way of a buckler.

Two horsemen were coming straight at them; one of them was an Albanian in a coat of mail, the other a distinguished *Spahi*, an Aga at the very least.

The Albanian horseman was covered from head to foot with a coat of scale armor; his horse's head and neck were protected in the same way, and it also bore a huge spike on its forehead, so that the pair looked for all the world like a crocodile mounted on a unicorn, and worthy Simplex was so astonished at this strange sight that he forgot he had a sword in his hand. Besides, thought he, what weapon can cut down a man who is cased in steel? So in his terror he merely held his wolfskin buckler in front of his head, and the Albanian aimed a mighty blow at him with his sword, which was like to have felled him to the ground.

Fortunately Valentine observed the danger of his comrade, and while throwing him a word of encouragement, smote the Albanian so violently on the head with the dagger in his left hand, that the scaly monster immediately plunged headlong from his horse; but at the same time the *Spahi* aimed a terrific blow at Valentine's neck.

"Don't you touch my son, you heathen you!" cried Dame Sarah from the wagon on the opposite shore; and whether it was the effect of her voice or of Valentine's rapid hand it is difficult to say, but at any rate the youth parried the blow of the Turk so well that he struck the sword out of his hand, and at the same time sliced off a piece of his thumb. Then he seized the *Spahi* by the collar and led him away captive, the Turk all the time begging for mercy, and promising him a ransom of two hundred gold guldens if he spared his life.

Valentine brought his captive safely to the rear, where the captain praised him for

his valor, but said that they had now had quite enough fighting for one day. The skirmish was over. On both sides there were just enough of killed and wounded to satisfy honor, neither more nor less, so that both generals could tell their hosts that they had conquered. Those of the enemy who had not taken flight were cut down, and those who could not work their way out of the morass were drowned. As for the leaders, neither of them had lost a hair, and if either of them cared to fire a haystack on his retreat and claim to have burnt a fortress, no one would be a whit the wiser and his reputation would be made.

But all this time Simplex was nowhere to be found, which greatly embarrassed the whole company, for he had with him the field-trumpet and the kettle-drum of the banderium, and without them they could of course neither beat a recall nor sound a reveille.

But Valentine was more embarrassed than them all, for if Simplex were lost, who was to lead him to his Michal? All that he knew of her at present was that her husband had not taken her to Great Leta as he had promised, but to some other place.

Valentine, therefore, begged the captain to allow him to return to the battlefield with two companions, to search for Simplex on the margin of the morass where they had last fought side by side. The undertaking was not without danger, for bands of marauders were wont to prowl about the battlefield to plunder the fallen and make captive the survivors; so the captain, Count Hommonai, gave Valentine not two, but six horsemen, who were to help seek the field-trumpeter by the borders of the morass.

But Simplex had not been cut down by the Turks after all. Such a glorious death was by no means his ideal. When the battle was raging its fiercest, when the opposing warriors fell upon each other tooth and nail, and there was such a whirring and clashing of lances and battle-axes that it was as much as a man could do to avoid having an eye knocked out—then, I say, Simplex, without thinking twice about it, sprang nimbly from his nag, unbuckled both his kettle-drums, left his steed to its own devices, hid the trumpet in the bushes, and crept himself into a place where the reeds and sedges were thickest. Then when the din of battle was over and everything was quite still again, he crept out of his hiding-place and looked about him.

Here and there a few couples were still fighting in the distance, but all around lay only the bodies of those who had already had their fill of fighting in this life.

Close to the swamp, too, he espied the charger of the Albanian horseman. It was quietly grazing, but the Albanian, whose head Valentine had split open, lay on the ground still holding fast the reins in his convulsively clenched fist, so that the horse dragged him along whenever it changed its place. The trumpeter immediately appropriated this beautiful beast. First he loaded him with the kettle-drums, then he took off all the Albanian's finery, hung it on the end of his lance, and so rode toward the camp. Valentine and his comrades met him when he was already half-way there.

Simplex made the most of his victory. He demonstrated how he had first cloven the Albanian horseman to the very saddle-bow, and then torn his horse away from under him by main force. Valentine listened to him in silence, for in those days it was an understood thing that when one friend had achieved an heroic deed which sufficed for two, he was to relinquish half the glory of it to his less fortunate comrade; and further, that one friend should never put another to shame by publicly contradicting him when he drew the long-bow too strongly.

Simplex was highly commended by the captain, who made him a present of the Albanian's horse (his former sorry nag had returned of its own accord to the camp), so that he was richly recompensed. Then he gave the signal for the scattered horsemen to reassemble, and in the evening the Hungarians retreated in perfect order to the other side of the Thiros, almost everyone of them taking back with him a captive Turk.

Valentine brought his prisoner to his mother, who was as much delighted as any child to whom his father brings home from the chase a live wild cat. The good woman would not hear of the Turk being bound to the wagon, and compelled to run after it on foot all the way to Kassa; but assigned him a place near the coachman, merely taking the precaution to bind one of his feet to the trestle with a leather strap, so that it might not occur to him to spring down and run away. After that she tied up the poor fellow's maimed thumb.

With what pride would she not exhibit this real live Turk at home!

Young Fürmender would no longer be able to say that Valentine was possessed by evil spirits, and that he was afraid of blood.

CHAPTER XVII.

In which it is shown by an edifying example that he who pursues the path of evil must needs fall into the ditch.

They all arrived safely at Kassa. Dame Sarah with the captive Turk had got home even sooner than her son.

"Do you know, Valentine," said she, "this Turk is a very good, pious fellow! He is as gentle as a lamb, and can speak Hungarian like a native. He learnt it at Grosswardein. All the way home I was holding up to him the glory of the Christian religion, and he listened to me with the greatest attention. How nice it would be if only I could convert him to the true faith!"

"Anything but that, dear mother!" cried Valentine, in consternation. "Pray don't get it into your head to convert this Turk, or he'll remain where he is, and I shall lose his ransom, and be two hundred ducats out of pocket in consequence."

His impious speech scandalized worthy Dame Sarah greatly.

"But, but, my son, are these two hundred ducats more to you than the soul of a converted heathen? How can you speak so impiously? Suppose the Apostles had thought as you do! And why lay such stress upon these two hundred ducats? If you want money, here hang the keys at my girdle. I'll give them to you. Thrust your arm into the great money chest, take the whole treasure away with you if you will, for we have an honest trade which brings us in as much gold and silver as we want. But if you must earn money, at all events don't earn it by offering men's flesh for sale. Say! Will you have the keys?"

"God bless you, my dear mother! I don't want your gold. I'll spend no money but what I've earned, piece by piece, by the sweat of my brow."

"Eh, eh, young fellow! I see what it is. You have something on your mind which you don't want your old mother to know. Come, sir, confess that you're in love! Out with it, don't be shamefaced! Your father was just such another mealy-mouth. For two whole years he was dangling after me without the pluck to open

his mouth, till at last I was forced to take pity on him. Come, now, speak the truth! You are in love?"

"Perhaps I am."

"Who's the lady?"

"That's more than I can tell you."

"Some poor lass, I suppose of lowly birth perhaps? Perhaps a peasant's daughter, or maybe, even a serving-maid? I don't care. Let her family be what it may, if only she herself is a virtuous virgin, you may bring her to my house without fear. If she is clumsy, I'll gladly shut one eye and only see that she loves you. If she knows absolutely nothing at all, I'll be her teacher, and she shall learn from me everything which a right-minded housewife ought to know. Come, now! Who is it?"

"I cannot say, my good mother!"

"Valentine! Valentine!" cried Dame Sarah, threatening her son with the large carving-knife which she always kept hanging by her side. "You are after no good thing. You love a woman who has already got a husband. Don't deny it! I see by your sudden change of color that I've hit the mark. Valentine, you are walking in evil ways! Bethink you what is in store for you—here on earth the sword of the headsman, and in the next world the fires of hell! You know that in matters of morality our laws don't jest! I have seen with my own eyes many a head, quite as comely as yours, roll in the sand—the sole offense of these poor sinners was presuming to cast sheep's eyes at women who had no business to have lovers at all. But I pray God that he'll place an obstacle in your path at the very outset, which will make it impossible for you to go any further on the way where shame, death, and damnation await you. God will hear me!"

But Valentine reflected that he too had recommended his affairs to God. Had he not said that if he returned safe and sound from the battle, it should be a sign that his intention of seeking out his beloved in her misery was right and pious? And, lo! the blessing of God had followed hard upon his footsteps; he had not only returned home safe and sound, but had brought back with him a captive whose ransom would enable him to face all manner of unknown perils with far more courage than if he only had an empty purse. Therefore he impatiently waited for the kinsfolk of his prisoner Achmed to send him the ransom from Grosswardein. But it was just at this time that Dame Sarah was moving heaven and earth to

convert the Turk. Every day she read to him extracts from the Gospels, and taught him to sing hymns. He had even got so far as to renounce those articles of his creed which prohibited the drinking of wine and the eating of ham, when he one day put to Dame Sarah the ticklish question, whether a converted Turk might not keep all four of his wives? The worthy dame smote her hands together in horror.

"What! you have four wives, you d——d Turk? Well, then, you may remain in your heathenish faith for all I care. Go with your four wives to your Turkish hell, but don't contaminate ours." And with that she washed her hands of him altogether.

A few days later the Turk's ransom reached the hands of Captain Hommonai, who paid over the money to Valentine, and Achmed was sent off to Grosswardein.

So Valentine had at last enough money to carry out what he had so long been brooding over.

His first step was to beg Captain Hommonai for a short furlough for himself and his comrade Simplex, which furlough he very easily obtained, inasmuch as my lord count was just then in the middle of his honeymoon, and therefore ill disposed to engage in martial feats for some time to come. The Turks also were keeping very quiet in that part of the country.

The two hundred ducats Valentine already had in his pocket. All that he now required for his journey was a good cloth mantle, a stout ax, a flask, and a knapsack.

It was also of no small assistance to our two honest comrades that the general ordered the squadron of cavalry to which they belonged to proceed to Onod (which was half-way to Zeb), for Valentine was thereby able to conceal from his mother the fact that he had obtained leave of absence. So they reached Onod safely, and thence made their way across country to seek Michal.

Yet the prayers of Dame Sarah were more efficacious than the resolutions of the two friends, for as they were passing through the Onod forest, out of the bushes sprang twelve of those miscreants who then pursued the accursed trade of kidnaping Christian men and women in order to sell them to the Turks. Valentine indeed made a good fight for it, and broke no end of jaws and noses; but at last he was overpowered by numbers. Then the robbers gagged him, and tied him

with his comrade to a tree, and naturally left him very little of the two hundred ducats which they found upon his person. Then they separated to seek fresh booty. In the evening they returned with a woman and a young girl, and at dusk they tied the captives to their saddles and haled them away.

Thus Dame Sarah's pious wish that her son Valentine might light upon an obstacle which should hinder him at the very outset from pursuing his evil way, was exactly fulfilled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Wherein is related what very different fates befell the two honest comrades.

The wicked kidnapers took off all their captives' upper garments, leaving them nothing but their shirts and hose to cover their limbs with, and drove them in this guise through all the villages they came to.

The captive girl had bruised her feet on the stony ways so that it was as much as she could do to limp painfully along. Valentine could not bear to see the robbers goading the poor child on with their whips, as if she were a brute beast, so, as if he had not enough wretchedness of his own to carry, he must needs take her on to his shoulders and trudge along with her to Eger, where they happened to arrive on market day. The slaves were driven straight to the market place, where a brisk traffic in oxen, sheep, and buffaloes was going on, and one of the accursed robbers blew a hoarse, squeaking fife, to advertise his slaves, and after attracting a crowd around them, began to praise their good points with a glib tongue. He called attention to Valentine's mighty arms as he stood there defiantly protruding his broad chest; but as for Simplex, he pulled such wretched faces and was so doubled up by his misery, that the robber felt bound to flip him now and then with his whip just to put a little life into him. The female slaves were treated with even less ceremony, for the robber tore the very smocks from their shoulders to show the purchasers how smooth their skins were.

First of all the woman and her little daughter were sold. A Mudir required them both, so at all events they had the consolation of each other's society.

Then there came an under-sized Turkish butcher who dealt in sheep flesh, and rejoiced greatly when he learnt from Valentine that he was a butcher's assistant. He did not chaffer very long about him, but paid the thousand ducats which the robber demanded for Valentine, put him in chains, and drove him off, at the same time bidding him be of good cheer, as he would be very well treated, have enough to eat, and when the vintage time came, might work in the vineyards in the open air, and have plenty of sour wine to comfort his heart with.

But for Simplex no purchaser could be found. They all looked at his hands, which were quite smooth and soft, for how could trumpet blowing make them hard? Nobody would have him. In vain did the robber make him dance at the end of a rope like a bear, and cry continually:

"Buy! buy! Who'll buy this *giaour*?"

At last, finding that no one would buy him, he led him to the fortress to the pasha. There the Muteshin came to meet him, and the robber said that he had brought him a captive soldier, for all captive soldiers had to be handed over to the pasha, who made an immense profit out of them by buying them dirt-cheap and then reselling them to their friends at fancy prices. The Muteshin, therefore, paid the robber forty ducats down for Simplex, one of which the godless wretch gave to the poor captive as a sort of parting gift.

Simplex was then sent straight to the smithy, and there such heavy fetters were fastened to his legs that he could scarcely drag them along. After that they stuck him in a subterranean dungeon, already occupied by some fifty other persons, who said very little to each other, but squatted on the floor, as near as they could get to the narrow, single window, and carved pipes, plaited scourges, or wove Turkish girdles in order to earn a few aspers. Many of them, however, lay against the wall as if they were sick, and these had their feet tied up. A barber came down to them in the morning and evening to change their bandages, and rub their wounded soles with soothing salves.

Simplex asked them what long journeys they had been taking to make the soles of their feet so sore. One of them answered:

"Just wait a bit. It will be your turn soon to take the same journey and find out where Bambooland lies."

And, indeed, before the week was out, Simplex's curiosity was satisfied, and he had no need to bother his head about the matter any more.

When his turn came he was led to the Kaimakan.

The Kaimakan was a fat-faced, big-bellied man who loved his joke. He was smoking a pipe with a very long stem, and sat with crossed legs on a bright carpet.

He addressed Simplex most affably, called him "my dear son!" and asked whence he was, who his relations were, how much property he had, and where

his estate lay.

Simplex gave him the same answer which he had given to the robber captain, Janko. He said that he was a poor orphan.

At this the Kaimakan fairly screamed with laughter.

"Ha! ha! Of course! of course! Just as if you had got it all up. All the lot of you answer like that when the question is first put to you. I know! I know! You have neither father nor mother, don't even know where you were born, are as poor as a church mouse, carry your house on your shoulders, your bread in your breast, and begging is your trade. 'Tis the usual answer to the first question, but we'll now see what you've got to say to the second question."

He gave a nod, and four soldiers instantly threw Simplex to the ground. Two of them tied his feet together and hoisted them up with a cord till the soles pointed heavenwards, whereupon the other two so belabored them with bamboo sticks, that Simplex, in reply to the continually reiterated questions, confessed that he was a prince, that his father was the Doge of Venice, and his godfather the King of Poland, and that they would certainly send, on application, his weight in gold by way of ransom.

At this the soles of his feet were belabored still more—poor Simplex really thought his last hour had come.

Then followed the third examination. The Kaimakan ordered poor Simplex's swollen and lacerated soles to be well rubbed with soothing balsam, told the soldiers to give him a cooling drink, and then began to address him still more amicably.

"Look now, my dear son! Why talk such nonsense? Why say at one moment that you are a poor orphan, and the next that you are a prince? Surely there must be someone in the wide world who would give something to save your skin, some good friend or other who would pay your ransom for you? Just reflect a moment! Surely we don't ask so very much?"

Then it occurred to Simplex that he had one good friend, only unfortunately this friend had also fallen into captivity at Eger, where a butcher had purchased him; if he were in a position to buy his friend off he would certainly do so.

"Oh, come, now! there's sense in that. And what kind of master-butcher is it, then, who purchased your friend?"

"He has a blistered face."

Now as there was no less than thirty and three butchers in Eger whose faces had all been blistered by the fly bites which are part and parcel of their trade, the Kaimakan summoned them all to the fortress, so that Simplex might pick out the right one.

He selected Valentine's master, Ibrahim.

The Kaimakan ordered Ibrahim to bring his slave thither forthwith.

Worthy Valentine was horrified when he saw his poor Simplex in such a condition.

"Poor Simplex! in what misfortune have you not been plunged on my account! I am much better off, for I have a mild sort of master who lets no one beat me but himself, and uses not a stick but a thong of hippopotamus leather."

"But why do you endure it? Why don't you write to your mother to ransom you?"

"I have written to her and prayed her to send the ransom for us both, nor had I long to wait for an answer. She says she is quite ready to pay down the ransom, but only on condition that I henceforth become her slave, do everything she commands, go nowhither without her knowledge and consent, never consort with you again, and utterly forget her whom I love most of all in the world, otherwise she'll leave me in the hands of the Turks."

"And what answer did you make?"

"I wrote to her: 'God bless you, my dear mother, but I prefer to remain where I am, for I'll never forget my beloved, even in death, nor deny my faithful comrade, whom I have sworn to stand by as long as I live.'"

"Bravo, Valentine!" cried Simplex; then snapping his fingers at the Kaimakan, "your servant, Pasha! Now I'll go back to prison again. When the soles of my feet are healed, you can begin the examination over again, if you like!"

So Simplex was carried back to his dungeon, and there he had leisure to learn to make Turkish lace at an asper an ell, and reflect what an absurd sort of destiny it is when a man is beaten on the soles of his feet because his friend is enamored of a woman who can never be his.

Meanwhile the wounds on the soles of his feet began to heal, but that was no consolation to him, for he had been told beforehand that as soon as he was able to stand upright he would again be cross-examined. There were many among the prisoners who had been tortured in this way three or four times. The Turks called it "negotiating." He who offered little, got much.

At last the day arrived when he had again to go before the Kaimakan. He knew it twenty-four hours in advance, for the prisoners who were to be examined got nothing to eat the day before. Bamboo is less injurious when taken on an empty stomach.

Simplex was all of a tremble when he entered the antechamber. The Kaimakan was sitting on his carpet, and on a low table before him steamed a dish of pilaf, that is, sheep's flesh mixed with rice; beside him lay two bamboo canes.

"Ah! Come hither, my son, and choose," said the Kaimakan to the trembling wretch, "which you will have: this dish of pilaf or a hundred strokes on the soles of your feet with these two bamboos? Don't tremble, but choose whichever you like. Here are paper, ink, and pens, write me out a receipt. If you want pilaf, write that you have received pilaf; but if you choose stripes, acknowledge that you've had stripes."

Simplex did not understand it at all. He could not see the point of the Kaimakan's joke. But he did not want the bastinado again, and the pilaf pleasantly tickled his nostrils. So he did not take long to make up his mind, but sat down and consumed the pilaf to the very last morsel. It pleases the Turks when one does not despise their favorite dishes. Simplex knew that.

"Now, my son," said the Kaimakan, when Simplex had finished, "now write that I have this day regaled you with pilaf instead of bamboo, and address your letter to your dear comrade, the honorable, noble, and valiant Valentine Kalondai, that accursed, unbelieving dog who has not only freed himself from captivity without a ransom, but has taken his master, the sheep butcher, along with him to Onod, and now he offers him in exchange for you, and threatens to requite his prisoner good or evil, according as you are treated here."

So Simplex had to testify in writing that the Turks had shown him all possible kindness. Then the fetter was taken off one foot and fastened to his girdle as a sign that he was half free; but he had to go about with the chain on the other foot till his good friend came to take it off.

CHAPTER XIX.

The story now to be related very much resembles the story of Joseph and Potiphar, but not quite, inasmuch as it is not Joseph, but Potiphar, who is finally cast into prison.

It will be worth the trouble to listen how Valentine escaped from captivity. It is a wondrous story, though perfectly true, for Simplex records it in his memoirs.

Valentine's master, the mutton salesman, had a beautiful vineyard, and in the vineyard a pretty wooden hut which, being a Turk, he called his kiosk.

As the vintage time drew near, the Turk went every day into his vineyard, and made his slave accompany him.

The rain had very much damaged the garden paths, and he was anxious to have them put right again. He dare not trust the work to an ordinary day laborer, as such people generally require to be paid and eat the grapes as well; but his slave he could command to work for nothing, and let him touch a single berry if he dared! And at the end of every day's work he said to him: "Show me your tongue!" for the Eger grapes are so black that they dye the tongues of those who eat of them. Poor Valentine was often sick with longing, as he stood breaking stones in the melting heat with thousands of lovely grapes smiling on every side of him, and he was unable to pluck one of them!

Meanwhile his master would be sitting in the kiosk, and as the Turks are forbidden by their religion to drink wine publicly, he only drank on the sly, with not a human soul to keep him company.

Now the Turk had a very beautiful slave, or wife, which with the Moslems is pretty much the same thing. She was called Jigerdilla, which signifies "the piercer of hearts." She was a Circassian. He had purchased her at Buda from a slave-dealer who had brought a whole shipload of female slaves from Stamboul. The only difference between a wife and a slave is that the slave works, the wife doesn't; Jigerdilla did not work.

The Turkish damsel had, from the very first, taken a fancy to the handsome,

stately Hungarian whom her husband had brought into the house as a slave; but it was impossible to begin to intrigue with him there, because too many eyes were on the watch. But whenever she followed her husband into the vineyard, she could speak more freely with Valentine, especially when the meat seller had so well applied himself to the good red wine that they had to prop him up between them all the way.

Kermes Ibrahim—the butcher was called Kermes from his red beard—used sometimes bid his slave sing while he worked, not only because singing makes a man work lustily, but also, and especially, because he would thereby be preserved from the temptation of plucking the grapes. No man can sing and eat at the same time.

Sometimes, when Ibrahim was overpowered by sleep and lay stretched out full length on his carpet, Jigerdilla would join in Valentine's songs, and it is no small encouragement on a lady's part when she accompanies a gentleman's song with her own voice.

But as soon as Jigerdilla began to accompany his songs, Valentine stopped short.

"Why do you leave off?" she asked him.

"Because you've begun, and I'm afraid you'll awaken Ibrahim, and he'll beat me for it."

"Fear nothing! Ibrahim sleeps soundly. I have mixed opium with his tobacco. If you fired off cannons close to his ear he would not awake. We might kiss each other over his body, and still he would not awake."

Valentine made as though he did not understand.

Then Jigerdilla began to sing a popular ballad all about love. Even in those times such ditties used to be sung, but on the sly, in the woods or the meadows; for within the walled cities the clergy forbade them, preached whole series of sermons against them, called them "flower songs," said that they only served to corrupt good manners.

And it certainly is very strange what liberties are taken in singing. If a gentleman said to a pretty woman in simple prose, "My dear, prithee give me a couple of kisses!" she would, there and then, give him an answer with her hand which would make his eyes flash fire; but if he sang the self-same sentence in an elegant manner, the lady would forthwith sit her down at the piano and play the

accompaniment. And, again, if a pretty woman were to say to a gentleman, in the presence of her husband, "Taste and see how sweet my kiss is!" the husband would instantly cry vengeance, and send for sword and pistols; but when madame sings the same words in a fine soprano voice before a whole roomful of people, the husband himself is the first to applaud and cry, "Da capo!"

And Jigerdilla could sing those enticing songs so seductively that it was impossible to listen to her and remain cold.

But Valentine manfully hardened his heart, and would not accompany her.

"Can't you sing these songs, then?" asked Jigerdilla derisively.

"I know one or two of them, and have sung them quite often enough. It was for nothing but that that I was expelled from college. But I have vowed that not a single flower song shall cross my lips so long as I am in captivity."

The Turk had in his garden a fine and costly plum tree, and in those days plum trees were accounted curiosities. The fruit upon it was round and red as a rose. Gardeners call them bonameras.

Ibrahim was proud of this tree. He had told Valentine beforehand, that if he dared to pluck a single plum, he would break every bone in his body. He had destined all the fruit for the table of the pasha.

One afternoon, Jigerdilla again accompanied her lord into the garden. She again mingled opium with his tobacco so as to make him dead-drunk, and then, as Valentine still refused to sing a flower song with her, she threw herself on the grass in a pet, and pretended to fall asleep.

The sun was shining fiercely, and so great was Valentine's thirst that his tongue cleaved to the very roof of his mouth. The grapes he dare not touch, for their juice left a black stain behind it, but the rosy red plums smiled at him so enticingly. They, at any rate, were not numbered. So fancying that no one saw him, he ventured to steal up to the tree, drew down a branch, and ate of the plums that were reserved for the pasha's table.

"The pasha would get the fever if he ate so many. Why should he have them all?"

Suddenly he heard behind him a mocking peal of laughter—Jigerdilla had been on the watch all the time—and in his terror he started back so violently, that he

snapped off the branch of the plum tree which he had pulled down toward him.

"Ha, ha, Valentine! Now you can look forward to something pleasant."

Back he went to his work very much ashamed, and he now worked with such zeal that he finished in one hour what it usually took him two to do. But Jigerdilla gave him no peace. She made ribald songs upon him, pelted him with green nuts, and mocked him in all sorts of ways.

And Valentine felt just like a child who has been naughty and expects to be beaten for it. The Turk had often said that he would not give a branch of this tree for a hundred denarii. How many blows with a whip would he reckon to a denarius?

When it was evening the butcher awoke. He fell to drinking again, and he drank so much that his wife and his slave had to prop him up on his way back to the house.

As he passed by the bonamera tree, he perceived that a branch had been broken off.

At this sight he immediately became quite sober.

"Who did that?" he roared, tearing his whip from his girdle, while his eyes rolled about as if he were the brother of the hippopotamus whose hide had supplied the lashes of his whip.

But before Valentine could say a word, Jigerdilla had already exclaimed:

"I did it. What does it matter if there be one paltry branch more or less?"

The only misfortune which happened in consequence was this: Ibrahim raised his whip without more ado, and belabored the back of his dear wife with the full force of his fury, and perhaps he would have flayed her from her head to her heels had he not accidently stumbled and fallen on his nose, when the blood spurted out so violently that he had enough to do to stop it till he got home.

But in the meantime, Jigerdilla had endured sufficient stripes to convince Valentine that hot indeed must be the passion felt for him by this woman, who was ready to take a slave's fault on her own shoulders, and suffer the punishment which ought to have been his.

At noon, next day, all three went into the vineyard together.

When Ibrahim had gone to sleep as usual, Jigerdilla called Valentine to her.

"I still feel sore from yesterday's stripes," she said. Then she gave him a silver box of ointment.

"I can't reach the wounds on my shoulder. Rub them for me with this balsam."

With that she let her dress glide down over her shoulders so that Valentine could see her naked, snow-white neck and back; but he also saw great red wheals, as thick as his finger, stretching right across the velvety skin.

Valentine rubbed them well with the fragrant balsam, and then asked Jigerdilla if her wounds felt a little easier.

"I should get well much more quickly if only you would kiss them!"

Valentine recoiled at these words.

"How should I kiss the shoulders of a strange woman who is also my master's wife?"

"Your master is sleeping, he sees nothing."

"But God sees."

The Turkish lady looked around in astonishment.

"I see no one!"

"God is present everywhere, though invisible."

"If He is invisible, His whip must also be invisible, and He therefore cannot beat me with it."

"Nay, but His invisible whip can beat right sorely. Look at me! I have not done but only thought of doing something which God forbids, and for that one sin I now bear these fetters."

"I would take off your chains every night. I know where Ibrahim keeps the keys of them—in his girdle. You shall only be a slave by day. At night you shall be free, and the ransom would not be dear, we could easily agree about it; you could pay it off in kisses."

"But that would be a sin before God!"

"How can it offend God if a man kisses a woman?"

"Because that would be breaking His commandment, which forbids a man to lust after that which belongs to another."

"Come now, tell me!" cried Jigerdilla, suddenly giving another turn to the conversation, "how could you quietly look on yesterday, while Ibrahim whipped me instead of you? Why did you not seize his arm and confess that it was you who did the mischief?"

"I'll tell you why. I did not keep silence for fear of the blows, but because I was afraid that Ibrahim would have killed you if I had told the truth."

"And what made you fear that Ibrahim would have killed me?"

"Because you took my fault on your shoulders."

"And what conclusion could Ibrahim draw from that?"

But this Valentine would not tell her.

Jigerdilla, however, helped him out.

"He might have thought," continued she, "that I belong more to you than to him. And why, indeed, might I not belong wholly to you?"

"Because you are his."

"It is true. He bought me for five hundred ducats; but if you gave him one thousand ducats for me he would hand me over to you, for he is greedy, and fond of money."

Valentine laughed heartily at these words.

"Whence would a poor devil like me get one thousand ducats?"

"Wait a bit, and I'll tell you something which I've never told to anybody else. Sit down by me! Nay! sit so that you can look into my eyes. When Ibrahim bought this vineyard, the kiosk already stood there, and in the kiosk was an oven. During vintage time, Ibrahim often took it into his head to sleep in the open air, and I had to bake bread for him. Once, as I was taking the loaves out of the oven, I found a ducat sticking to one of them. I said nothing about it, but waited till it was night, when I took up a knife and ripped up the floor of the oven. The whole of the underlying mortar was full of ducats. I suppose that when the town was

taken by the Turks, some rich proprietor or other hid them there, and afterward perished in the war. I did not take away the treasure, but left it there, spread fresh mortar over it, and made a fire upon it to burn the mortar hard. The treasure is there now. I said nothing to Ibrahim about it, for if he got the money he would only drink the more and beat me oftener; nay, he would bring fresh wives into the house, and I should have trouble and strife enough. So I'll give the whole treasure to you. You can then ransom yourself and purchase me, and you'll have enough left for both of us to live comfortably together."

Valentine was in a sad difficulty. What was he to do? Fate gave him the chance of securing a pretty woman and a lot of money besides. At last he summoned his religion to his assistance.

"It is impossible, my good lady," said he apologetically; "the men of my faith do not buy women with money. No, our women, following the bent of their hearts, freely give their hands to the men of their own choice. And the men who marry them pay them for their devotion, not with gifts and gold, but with equal devotion and sympathy."

At these words Jigerdilla smote her hands together.

"Then your religion will suit me very well. If in your country such things are not matters of cash and barter, but free-will offerings, that is just what I should like. I'll follow you of my own free will. I'll fly with you, learn to know your God, go to your church, and take in baptism whatever name you like to give me."

Valentine ought to have found the offer very tempting. Had Dame Sarah been at his side she would certainly have said:

"Look, my son, now you've got fortune by the forelock, hold on fast with both hands and never let go again. You'll get a wondrously beautiful young woman, with large black eyes and a small red mouth, and a whole oven full of ducats besides; and (which is the main thing after all) you'll be saving an erring, unbelieving soul for an eternal salvation, and will thus obtain for yourself a claim upon Paradise." And it would have been the most natural thing in the world to have thought so.

But Valentine was very far indeed from thinking so. So long as the image of Michal lived in his heart, he saw in every other woman, however beautiful, only an evil spirit of temptation to which one has only to say, "Depart hence!" and it will instantly vanish into the air.

He loved another.

But he did not tell Jigerdilla so.

Instead of that he pulled a very wry face, bowed himself humbly, and said:

"How could I be such a villain as to seduce my master's wife?"

At this, Jigerdilla, fairly beside herself with rage, tore off her slipper, struck Valentine in the face, and cried:

"Be off, slave! Take your spade and set about your work!"

Then she covered herself once more with her veil that the bumpkin might not see her face again, and her contempt for him was so great that she did not even think it worth while to fear that the craven would abuse the secret that he had learnt. "He who dare not touch his master's wife will certainly never dare to lay a hand on his master's treasure."

Then, with a good deal of unnecessary bustle, she bounced out of the vineyard, first stopping to bestow on the slumbering Ibrahim a kick sufficiently vicious to awaken him.

The Turk, thus roughly aroused from his narcotic sleep, began first of all to throw his arms and legs about; then he revolved five or six times on his axis, and finally rolled over a little hillock into the garden below. There he lay for some time, dreaming on with wide-open eyes and addressing the paradisaical shapes which the opium had conjured up before him. Then he stared blankly into the world around him; began blinking with his eyes and plunging with his knees, and at last raised himself on his elbows and bellowed for his slave.

Valentine hastened up to him.

"Where is my wife?"

"Am I your wife's keeper? Perhaps she has gone home."

"I dreamt that she had been nibbling again at my plums. These women are so greedy. But I know that you, Valentine, have not eaten of my plums. Nor shall you do so, you dog! These plums are like the fruit of the tuba tree which stands in Paradise, and which you can never taste, you *giaour*, you swine, you! What have you done with my wife? It would be as well if I plucked all these plums and sent them to the pasha. What do you think he'll give me for them? Do you

think that I can climb up that tree? What! I tell you I can fly up it like a squirrel."

Opium smokers in their drunken reveries always fancy themselves strong and agile. Yet the worthy man could not stand, much less fly.

So Valentine helped Ibrahim to climb the plum tree. The Turk was determined to pluck every one of the plums himself; the hand of a slave should never profane the dessert of the pasha.

And the poor slave was all the time thinking to himself that when he got home with his lord, Jigerdilla would treat him exactly as Potiphar's wife treated Joseph. A woman has no need to betake herself to the Old Testament to learn how to avenge herself on the man who has slighted her advances.

She will certainly get him beaten to death by her husband.

And to make the resemblance between the two cases more complete, there was a vision to be interpreted.

"What is the meaning of the dreams I've just been dreaming?" growled Ibrahim, in the tree. "I dreamt that a hen pounced down upon an eagle and flew away with him—not the eagle with the hen, but the hen with the eagle."

"Just you come down from that tree and I'll let you know all about it," thought Valentine to himself, and while Ibrahim was plucking the plums, he took out of his master's discarded girdle the key of his own fetters and quickly freed his feet. Then he planted himself close beside the tree.

Ibrahim was so busily engaged in plucking his fruit, and so lost in admiration at his beautiful bonameras, that it quite escaped him that the sun was going down, and that they had begun to sound the retreat in the fortress. Now this signified that everyone was to leave off laboring in his field or vineyard, for at the third signal the gates were closed, and whoever then remained outside had to stay there all night. Only at the third signal did Kermes reflect that it was growing late, and begin to climb down from the plum tree. First he handed to Valentine the basket-load of bonameras, and then he slowly began to let himself down, and begged his slave to help him.

And Valentine did help him, for just when Ibrahim was hanging with both hands to a branch between heaven and earth, Valentine threw the basket at him, plums and all, tore him to the ground, bound his hands to his back, and kicked him into the kiosk. The neighbors observed nothing of all this, for they were much too

intent upon getting to the town themselves before the gates were closed, to notice what others were doing.

Valentine next locked the door of the kiosk and set about tearing up the mortar flooring.

Jigerdilla had spoken truly; there was no lack of ducats. Valentine did not let the opportunity escape him, but swept all the gold pieces together and put them into Ibrahim's knapsack. Then he donned the Turk's kaftan, turban, and girdle, compelling him to put on his own slave's clothes; and when it grew dusk, he threw a rope round his neck, and said to him:

"Now we are going to Onod, and if you dare to utter a word by the way, I'll break your own ax to pieces over your bald pate!" And as Ibrahim Kermes was very anxious about his beautiful ax, and still more so about his skull, he allowed himself, with true Mohammedan resignation, to be driven through the alley between the vineyards into the wood and from thence into the next village. There Valentine hired from the Christian magistrate a four-horse wagon, and drove with his captive master to Onod, where he arrived early next morning safe and sound.

CHAPTER XX.

In which is a very circumstantial, if not very pleasant,
description of all the conditions to be observed in the exchange
and purchase of slaves.

On arriving at the fortress of Onod, Valentine at once handed over his prisoner and the money he had brought with him (of course deducting the two hundred ducats which the robbers had taken away from him) to the Commandant of the fortress, that he might ransom therewith the persons who were languishing in the dungeons of Eger, and especially the woman and child who had been abducted with him and sold at the Eger cattle market. As for the imprisoned butcher, he proposed to exchange him for the field-trumpeter, Simplex.

By this noble deed Valentine so completely won the hearts of the brave warriors of Onod, that they made him a corporal on the spot. Moreover, the liberated lady also visited him with her daughter, expressed her thanks by kissing his hands and embracing his feet, informed him that she was a rich proprietress, and insisted upon giving him her daughter to wife as soon as she had reached maturity, the young lady at present being only twelve years of age.

Valentine thanked her for her offer, but begged her to bring up her daughter for some other more fortunate mortal. Who could tell where his bones might be bleaching in five or six years' time?

It was only pretty Michal that he had always in his thoughts.

He could scarcely wait for Simplex to appear, so impatient was he to set out with him to discover Michal.

But the ransom of the prisoners did not go off so smoothly after all. The Kaimakan of Eger wrote to the Commandant of Onod that he did not consider the Eger butcher worth four hundred gulden, the amount of the trumpeter's ransom. There were still two and thirty butchers at Eger, and therefore he would not give more than two hundred gulden for this particular butcher. If the other two hundred gulden were not paid in cash, the whole of the Christian prisoners

at Eger should suffer for it on the soles of their feet. Annexed to the Kaimakan's letter was a heart-rending petition from the Christian prisoners, in which they implored the Commandant to fulfill the desire of the Kaimakan for their sakes.

The Commandant of Onod thereupon fetched out of prison the six and twenty Turks who were in captivity there, and made them address a solemn memorial to the Kaimakan of Eger, whom they piteously besought not to bastinado the Christian captives, as in such a case they, the Turkish captives, would be visited with still more grievous torments.

The principal sufferers, however, were the two prisoners who were to be exchanged, and from whom both sides tried to extort as much as possible, so that in their mutual distress they grew quite fond of each other.

At last Valentine sent the extra two hundred gulden, and both Simplex and the Turkish butcher were escorted to Eger with fetters on only one leg. There the Kaimakan received his gold and the butcher his wife. Ibrahim Kermes celebrated his liberation with a banquet, to which Simplex was also invited, and regaled with mutton in twelve different editions. Finally, Ibrahim presented him with a pair of red morocco slippers, while Jigerdilla sent Valentine a couple of superfine laced pocket-handkerchiefs, with initials embroidered in the four corners in Turkish letters, and wet with the tears from her lovely eyes at the recollection of him.

But Ibrahim Kermes swore by the beard of the Prophet that he would never again buy a Calvinist *giaour* as a slave, even if he could get him for a single denarius.

And now, after all this, it is high time that Valentine set out to seek his unhappy Michal.

CHAPTER XXI.

Is full of good tidings, inasmuch as it treats of the discomfiture of evil-doers.

Simplex had quite won Valentine's heart by warning him of the dangers threatening his sweetheart which he had overheard in the robber's camp. It is true he did not tell him the whole truth for fear of frightening him too much, or even making him lose courage altogether. But so much he did tell him: that Catsrider, instead of taking his Michal to the parsonage which, as a curer of souls, he ought to have occupied, had remained in his father's house, where they had treated Michal very cruelly. But he added that, sooner or later, the robbers would destroy the house, and then Michal had a most terrible fate to expect.

"What shall I do? Merciful Heaven, what shall I do?" groaned poor Valentine.

"My dear fellow," said Simplex, "what you have to do is perfectly plain. You must carry off your beloved from the place at once."

"But that would be a sin against God."

"Yet you'll do it all same. Just you come along with me. One word with her, one look at her, and I'm sure you'll do what I've said."

"God preserve me from so great a sin."

"Now just listen to me. I'm a Lutheran. I don't believe in predestination. But you are a Calvinist. You are bound to believe in it. You know for certain that everything which happens, or may happen to you, is already recorded in a great book which has been written before the beginning of the world. Your will can alter nothing therein, and if it is recorded of you that you must die on the top of a mountain, and you don't go up the mountain, the summit will come down to you and place itself beneath your feet. I say you have only got to take the first step, and all the other steps will follow as a matter of course. If you resolve to see your beloved, you will never leave her again, but will bring her back with you, though you walked in the shadow of the gallows all the way along. If all this had

not been preordained, you would have remained at home and married Kitty Fürmender."

They were discoursing thus as they proceeded along the highway, provided this time with such good weapons that not every kidnaper of slaves would have cared to attack them. But as far as these waylayers were concerned, they felt themselves pretty safe, for they had chosen not the Kassa road but the Gäuz road, and such abductors very seldom ventured on the left bank of the Hernad, because the river is liable to overflow, and thus often prevents them from escaping when hard pressed by pursuers.

What our wanderers really had to fear were the ordinary robber bands who terrorized those regions, and whose exact whereabouts could only be learnt by experience; for these bandits were here, there, and everywhere, and very often broke into Poland, where they were naturally as welcome guests as here in Transylvania.

Simplex undertook to find out all about the robbers from the frequenters of the fairs, who were generally best informed on the subject. His friend he left at an inn in the meantime.

When he returned, his face was beaming with joy.

"Didn't I say that we were Fortune's own children? Didn't you come into the world in a caul, Valentine? The town is full of joy. All three robber bands have been captured. They fell into an ambuscade while on their way to plunder the Iglo fair. Three counties and the Imperial soldiers were banded together for the occasion. They drove them out of their rocky lairs, occupied every point of exit, and at last the robbers ran short of powder, and all who had not already fallen surrendered. The haughty Hafran and the cruel Bajus were taken alive. Their comrades, to obtain a pardon, delivered them up bound hand and foot. But most wonderful of all is Janko's story. It was I who contributed to his overthrow. The pursuers were unable to lay hands upon him, for when he saw himself abandoned by his own people and surrounded on every side, he cut down a pine tree and glided with it over a rocky precipice; then he climbed up another steep rock like a wild cat, so that no one could come up with him. Yet he was taken after all, and he has a woman to thank for it. He had sent a message through me to the wife of the kopanitschar of Hamar (and I passed it on to an oil merchant) that she should treat him friendly when he next came to her, but that her husband should not show his face at all. Now, when he saw himself so hotly pursued,

Janko fled straight to the kopanitschar's wife, who is his sweetheart. The woman received him with open arms, made him a great feast, and they were right merry together. Wine flowed all night, and a couple of bagpipers played the music by turns. They soon got tired of playing, but Janko never tired of dancing. He drank on to midday, and was in such high good-humor that he did not know what to do with himself. At last he scattered handfuls of gold among the gaping peasantry, and while they were fighting for it among themselves, he went out into the fields, declaring that whosoever dared to follow him would be a dead man. And, indeed, no one had the courage to follow him but one man, and that man was the kopanitschar.

"Janko had looked for him all night long in order to kill him, but he had remained concealed in a hayrick till midday. At midday, he crept out of his hiding-place and went to look for Janko. He had no other weapon but a long, two-pronged wooden fork, which they use in those parts to toss hay.

"And he found Janko stretched out at full length in the meadow, and fast asleep. The kopanitschar caught him round the neck between the prongs of the fork, and pinned him fast to the ground. The terrible robber was caught and quite harmless. In vain he roared and cursed; the kopanitschar's iron fist and wooden fork held him down till the rest mustered up sufficient courage to hasten up and secure him.

"To-morrow the whole three of them will be executed at Eperies, and we will be there to see it all."

CHAPTER XXII.

Wherein is related what end was reserved for the evil-doers by way of deterrent example, which example, however, only distressed the soft-hearted without terrifying the stiff-necked.

"I won't be there to see it," said Valentine to Simplex. "A shudder runs through my whole body when I think of a man torturing another. If a man were to beat, tweak, or flay me, I should only laugh at it; but when I see one man tormenting another, it makes my blood boil. I feel no dizziness when I stand on the edge of the loftiest precipice, but when I see another hovering over the abyss, I am beside myself with terror. I am amazed that there should be people who delight in watching the bloody scenes on the scaffold. The battlefield is quite another thing. There you fight man to man; there you do not hear the cries of the dying. The death I deal to one man, another man may at any moment deal to me. But I won't see men who are bound hand and foot tortured to death; I won't hear them shriek with anguish beneath the hand of the headsman."

"You'll go, notwithstanding," returned Simplex. "As I've already said, if you are a true Calvinist, you'll resign yourself to predestination, and must not say: 'I'll go hither, or, I'll go thither!' You will do what it was preordained you should do at the beginning of the world, and the place you are now going to is the town of Eperies, and the market place in that town."

And it all happened exactly as Simplex said. For they had no sooner stepped out of the tavern than they were stopped by a patrol of drabants, who learning that they were soldiers, showed them the mandate of the Commandant of Eperies, whereby all the soldiers on leave in the district were ordered to Eperies, to remain in the market place during the day, so that the people might not disturb the execution of the law's sentence, or the comrades of the robbers release them by a sudden and audacious onslaught.

So Valentine had to march to Eperies, with the other men-at-arms, whether he liked it or not.

Crowds of people were pouring into the town that day, from all quarters, as if a

great banquet were to be given, or a lord lieutenant installed—gentlemen in coaches or on horseback, peasants sitting ten in a wagon, students, apprentices, peddlers, sacred-image sellers, and deceivers of all sorts.

Simplex and Valentine were sent on by wagon the same night to Eperies, where they arrived at dawn next morning.

At that time, Eperies no longer presented the smiling aspect of half a century before. The internecine disorders, the religious discussions, the ravages of robbers, had laid bare the whole region. The stumps of trees and wildering weeds were all that remained of the orchards which had once encircled the city walls, and whole rows of ruined pleasure houses were left to tell what a merry life had once been there.

Instead of the fine old plum and lordly apple trees quite another sort of grove had grown up around the bastions—a ghastly grove of gaunt, withered trees, laden with sad fruits, a wood of gallowses, wheels, and spikes, on which the bones of criminals were rotting. The three captured robber bands had largely contributed to this gruesome grove. The lesser fry, the receivers of stolen goods, and the women who had brought the robbers' powder from the town, had been executed outside the trenches, three days before; only for the three robber chieftains was reserved the supreme distinction of being done to death *within* the walls. One could not make too sure of them.

In the great square, where the townhall and the large covered market stand opposite to each other, that terrible edifice, generally called the scaffold, had been raised. It towered high up and could only be ascended by ladders, which the headsman's apprentices, when they went to work, drew up after them so that none might follow. In the middle of the scaffold stood a broad block against which heavy wheels were leaning. On each side of the block two thick stakes were fastened with heavy dependent chains, the links of which could be locked and unlocked. From the top of each of these stakes projected huge forks with bars across them and hooks hanging down from the bars.

In front of the townhall a dais had been erected for the convenience of the sheriffs, mayor, and town councilors. A guard of honor stood in front of the dais, and the scaffold was environed by soldiers three deep. Valentine tried to get into the hindermost row. He wanted to see as little as possible of the terrible spectacle. Simplex stood by his side, so as to be at hand in case his friend was taken ill. The great square was filled with a gaping crowd. At the windows stood

or sat gayly dressed women, just as if a Corpus Christi procession were about to pass. The very roofs of the houses were covered with human heads. Booths had been erected in the market place, where cakes and mead were offered for sale, steaks basted, and pancakes tossed in large pans. The biographies of the robbers, printed on coarse paper with red frontispieces, were also hawked about.

Conspicuous among the itinerant gypsies and peddlers was a woman who offered for sale long thongs fastened to the end of a stick, and was particularly importunate with Simplex.

"Come Mr. Trumpeter, won't you buy a thong made out of the skin flayed from the robbers' backs?"

Simplex at once recognized the voice; it was Pirka the witch. So under the pretext of chaffing with her, he at once entered into a conversation.

"What are these thongs of human skin good for?"

"They are good against the plague and falling sickness. They also keep wild beasts away, and compel the most stubborn of sweethearts to surrender."

"And how much are they apiece?"

"Four thalers."

But Valentine could stand it no longer.

"Don't be a fool," said he to Simplex, "she's cheating you. Those thongs of fool leather, you'll get them from the farriers for a penny apiece."

"That's all you know about it, Mr. Corporal," cried the witch, gnashing her teeth; "my husband is not a knacker who flays horses, but a headsman who flays men."

Valentine shuddered, and spat on the ground.

"Then if your wares be really genuine, they are doubly loathsome. Be off with you!"

Simplex gave Pirka a nudge with his elbow and pointed at Valentine with a wink, whereupon Pirka looked slyly askance at him, and arching her elbows and screwing up her mouth, said to Valentine:

"Well, well, Mr. Corporal, for all your fine airs you'll be glad enough before long to take something from me which comes through the headsman's hands."

Simplex trod on her foot to make her hold her tongue, and then they began talking together in a low voice, as if they were only haggling about the thongs.

The next moment Pirka had as completely vanished as if the earth had swallowed her up.

When the clock in the townhall tower struck eight, the bells of the Franciscan convent close by began to ring, the roll of drums was heard proceeding from the courtyard, and the sad procession appeared in the market place.

First came the magistrates, who ascended the cloth-laid steps of the dais, on the top of which the town-clerk recited the sentence aloud. Then came the guards, sword in hand, and between them the three delinquents, each of whom had a cord round his neck, the end of which was held by one of the headsman's apprentices. Last of all came the headsman, the old vihodar himself, on a white horse, dressed in a long red mantle half covering his steed; a black biretta with a red plume covered his head, and he held a naked sword in his right hand. Two of his henchmen led the horse. Behind him marched eight apprentices, who brought with them a whole arsenal of instruments of torture.

Valentine turned his head aside in order to see nothing of all this. Had he but looked, he would certainly have recognized *one* of the headsman's assistants.

The mob saluted the robbers with a fearful howl, which they answered with hideous curses. But their filthiest imprecations were hurled at the women among the spectators, who were ready to sink into the ground for shame.

All three delinquents bore traces of torture on their bodies. They were covered with burns and sores. Yet they showed no signs of weakness. On the contrary, they greeted the old vihodar with wild laughter, and scornfully challenged him to show them of his skill.

He coolly tossed the scarlet mantle from his shoulders, and in a low voice distributed his commands to the apprentices, who were already assembled on the scaffold.

The mob set up a frightful yell at the sight of the grim, stalwart graybeard, to which he responded with a mock bow like a stage hero.

He opened the proceedings with Bajus.

Valentine had no need to stop his ears, for Bajus never uttered a sound. Not a sigh escaped him. The people all round whispered to one another in shuddering awe. The robber's cold contempt of death, and the calmness with which he endured all manner of tortures, raised him in their eyes to the rank of a hero.

In the deep stillness which prevailed, nothing was to be heard but the droning of the heavy wheel.

It was all over with Bajus.

The next in order was the haughty Hafran.

With him the bloody drama took quite another turn.

The vihodar's assistants had sufficed for the first robber. He himself had only given his directions in a low voice. But honor constrained him to cope personally with the second robber.

Hafran was a frantic devil. He howled curses at the vihodar and overwhelmed him with insults. He told him to his face that he was a clumsy bungler.

Then the old vihodar took his biretta from his head, doffed his coat, and set about accomplishing his masterpiece.

The spectators had reason to be satisfied with both performers. The old vihodar exhausted all his skill upon the robber, and the robber never ceased hurling defiance at the vihodar. They cursed and reviled each other like devils. The robber laughed at all the torments, and infuriated the vihodar by asking him derisively when he was going to begin. The vihodar was quite beside himself for rage, and excelled himself in the invention of fresh torments. Every time he produced a fresh instrument of torture, he asked the robber how the entertainment pleased him.

The Franciscan monk who was on the scaffold to afford the delinquents the last consolations of religion, tried to pacify them both, and begged them for Heaven's sake to leave off cursing; but neither paid the slightest attention to him. The robber had the last word. Even when he was so mangled and mutilated that he no longer resembled anything human, even then he howled words of scorn in the face of his tormentor. At last they plunged a hook into his side and hoisted him aloft, and even then he showered down insults upon all the women present at the bloody spectacle, till at last he gave up his unconquerable spirit, which had surely made some mistake in choosing a simple human body for its earthly

dwelling-place.

The old vihodar was ashamed. He felt that this heroic resistance had very considerably impaired his prestige in the opinion of the people. This blot upon his escutcheon must be wiped off.

The third robber chieftain, Janko, still remained. He should serve to restore the honor of the vihodar.

The old vihodar proposed to do great things with him. He had the fetters removed from the feet of the delinquent, and would not even allow him to be bound to the stake.

"We will have a dance together!" said he to Janko.

That word was the death of him.

The next moment, such a yell of horror burst forth from the crowd that even Valentine's curiosity was aroused. He looked toward the scaffold, and what he saw there really was astounding.

Janko, the mighty leaper, the instant his chains were taken from his feet, had sprung upon the vihodar, pressed down his chest with his knees, and bit him in the neck exactly on the spot where the great jugular artery is. This he bit clean through, and—as if to justify the fable, that whomsoever Janko bit with his envenomed fangs was a child of death—the old vihodar fell to the ground like a log of wood, and when the apprentices sprang forward to tear the delinquent away from him, the headsman was already dead.

This incident so revolted Valentine that he reeled, and clinging tightly to Simplex, stammered: "I really believe I am going to faint."

"Hold up a little bit longer!" whispered Simplex in his ear.

As soon as the people learnt that Janko had killed the vihodar with a single bite, a fearful tumult arose.

Everyone began to applaud the delinquent and cry: "Vivat Janko," while they pelted the headsman's assistants with stinking eggs and rotten apples.

At last the blare of trumpets and the roll of kettle-drums drowned the voice of the mob, and the sheriff arose on the dais and declared that despite the unhappy accident which had befallen the old vihodar, the execution of the law's sentence must proceed notwithstanding. The young master, the son of the vihodar, was there, and he was to do his duty, and that at once.

The uproar ceased and the crowd in intense expectation looked toward the scaffold for the new performer to appear. It was plain, from the deep silence that now ensued, that the newcomer had something to say.

Valentine kept his eyes closed. He was deeply agitated. Had he not been in the ranks he would have run away.

And now, in the midst of the general silence, he heard the young master addressing the people:

"This evil-doer who has killed my father is not worthy to be put out of the world

by a human hand in a human way."

Valentine listened in amazement. That voice was familiar to his ear. It seemed to him as if he had once heard it from the pulpit.

But the other proceeded:

"There is a mode of execution used in distant Abyssinia, where the black skins of evil-doers are insensible to ordinary torture. They are sewn alive in fresh buffalo hides and hung in the sun. So soon as the hide begins to dry and shrink, the evil-doers learn to sing a veritable song of hell. That is the way in which I mean to execute this delinquent."

"What's that?" cried Valentine, "whose voice is that? Who but one that has attended the lectures of the learned Professor David Fröhlich could have heard of this Abyssinian tale? Who is it?"

He looked up and recognized the man in scarlet on the scaffold.

"That is Henry Catsrider, the husband of your Michal!" cried Simplex, looking him full in the face.

To Valentine Kalondai it seemed as if everything was turning round and round. He staggered, and would have fallen if Simplex had not seized him by the arm and led him away. Nobody heeded them. During this horrible scene many others, even among the soldiers, had fallen senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In which it is shown not only that Satan is the author of all evil, but also that the grisly witches, his handmaidens, are always ready with their malicious practices to plunge poor mortals into utter destruction.

Barbara Pirka had run straight home to the lonely house that stood outside the walls of Zeb. She knew all the short cuts across the mountains, so that she could have given a horseman an hour's start and yet have beaten him easily. Night made no difference to her. She never lost herself, and wandered fearlessly through the wilderness in company with the will-o'-the-wisps and other evil spirits, with whom she manifestly stood on the most friendly terms.

The morning light found her at the Girjo kopanitscha. Here the wife of the kopanitschar of Hamar kept house alone. Her husband, after capturing Janko, had turned her out of doors, and then enlisted in the county militia. What else, then, could his wife do but turn witch? She had already began her novitiate in the school of Barbara Pirka.

"Well, Annie!" cried Barbara on entering, "what do you think? To-day, to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow, three livelong days, is Janko to be tormented. To-night, however, I bring you guests. Make ready a good supper. We shall have music, too, and will hold a wake in Janko's honor."

With that she gave the kopanitschar's wife a ducat to provide supper, and then taught her the diabolical art of tying knots in the entrails of absent foes, so that they may pine away and perish miserably. That very night, all the headsman's apprentices were seized with cramps in the stomach, and if this was not caused by the quantities of sour wine which they had been drinking all day it was certainly due to the malpractices of the two hags.

All this time the young wife was sitting in the upper story of the headsman's house, absolutely alone. Only two of the apprentices were left behind to look after the premises, and they took it in turns to keep watch in the tower and guard the drawbridge.

The lonely house was well protected against every attack. Pointed stakes, planted at the bottom of the moat encircling the walls, made it impossible for anyone to swim over. The narrow windows of the massive walls were guarded by strong iron palings and iron casements, and two gigantic dogs, which would have tackled the most strongly armed intruder, ran loose in the courtyard. Both apprentices were armed with muskets, the barrels of which were so large that one could have fired whole handfuls of lead out of them if necessary.

The young wife was left at home when everyone went to the bloody procedure at Eperies. She, indeed, had not the slightest wish to go with them. Her soul died away within her at the very thought of the frightful things which had such a horrible attraction for other women. But her husband, too, had no wish to take her. He was far too jealous of her, and however kindly the young woman might treat him, he felt that it was deception, every bit of it, and did not trust her. Besides, he feared that Valentine Kalondai might be among the crowds which flocked from every quarter toward Eperies.

Barbara Pirka was charged to remain at home, and on no account quit the house till they all returned. The doorkeepers, too, were to let no one in or out, not even Pirka.

As if it were possible to keep a witch under lock and key! She was at Eperies before the vihodar and his company, although she did not set out till an hour later.

Michal had told Pirka that she should not require her during her husband's absence, and might therefore leave her to herself. She could cook what she wanted; she had learnt to do so at home. In the kitchen was a well from which she could draw water by means of a windlass, an iron chain, and two buckets, so she had no occasion to go down into the courtyard for water. She could therefore lock all the doors behind her (the trellised door leading to the staircase as well as the door closing the corridor), and when at night she had also barred and bolted the heavy oaken door of the kitchen, she felt herself quite secure against all human violence.

All the more defenseless was she against those things which cannot be kept out by bolts and bars.

When the ordinary sounds of day had died away in the house, when the heavy tread of jack-boots, the rough voices, the filthy jests, the hoarse curses of the drunken roysterers, had grown dumb, then the intervening silence brought with it

those invisible beings who announce their presence in whispers, sighs, and groans. In every corner she fancied she saw a victim whose blood had grown dry on the hands of the inhabitants of that house. She fancied they came forth to demand back from her their dissevered lives, to claim for their freezing limbs the clothes which the hangman had inherited from them. Every shadow appeared to beckon to her. Lifeless objects became animated and spoke to her. Behind her back she heard a perpetual whimpering and sobbing, and when she stirred the fire the moist logs spat and spluttered. There was a buzzing all around her like the whirring of cockchafers. When the wind arose, there was a howling and groaning all through the house as if whole hosts of spirits were haunting it, and they entered visibly into the dreams of the poor agonized lady, and drove her toward dizzy abysses with their grotesquely hideous faces and mutilated figures.

When, however, she had scared away these imaginary specters, the cold and dreary horror of reality swept before her mind in a still more terrible shape.

What sort of a life was she leading? She was chained to a man whom she loved not when she first married him, but whose very presence filled her now with fear and loathing. She had been deceived, most cruelly deceived. She had been shut out of the world forever, and chained alive to the open gate of hell, where all who entered in mocked and gibbered at her with their decapitated heads. She was without hope, without the prospect of ever escaping from her prison, of ever seeing her fate take a favorable turn, of ever having her woes alleviated. She was tortured by the thought that her father had forgotten her; but what agonized her still more was the reflection that her lover was thinking of her even now, knowing nothing of her misery, fancying her happy, and cursing and adoring her at the same time.

Then there came to her those evil thoughts which are far more terrible than all the pale specters of the tomb and the scaffold—doubt in a heavenly Providence, rebellion against human morality and human justice. The custom which gave a father a right to dispose of the destiny of his child revolted her. She cursed the altar before which a man and a woman are bound together with inseparable chains. She hated human society, which stifles the longings of the heart in the name of respectability. She grew dimly conscious that despair might make her wicked, very wicked.

She began to be afraid of herself.

At night she dared not, and indeed had no desire to sleep in her bedroom. She

loathed the marriage bed, and made for herself a sort of couch in the kitchen. The kitchen was her most secure asylum. All night long she kept a roaring fire (she could not bear to remain in the dark) and on the fire she placed pots of water which she kept continually boiling. She had no weapons, and even if she had had them what use would they have been in her weak hands? But she thought herself quite capable of drenching with boiling water any man who dared to approach her.

She had now been shut up alone for five days, and the frightful solitude had made her very nervous. Solitary confinement is the worst of all torments, it is worse than hunger. She would have felt much more comfortable if Pirka had been with her. Even the witch's words, with all their devilish insinuations, were better than the eternal, ghostly gibbering of the crackling logs, this piping and squeaking through doors and window crevices, and this howling in the chimney when the wind blew.

On the fifth morning, as she was turning the windlass in order to draw water from the kitchen well, the words escaped her:

"Oh, that the devil would bring Pirka hither!"

Scarcely had she said it, when she perceived that the windlass began to turn round of its own accord, and from out of the ascending bucket rose the bristly, angular form of Barbara Pirka.

Michal cried:

"Jesus, Maria!" and shrieked aloud for terror.

But Pirka laughed, and said to her:

"Ha, ha! my pretty little lady! You can't lock out a witch you see. A witch can find her way in through any loophole."

Michal really believed that Pirka had come straight out of the water, although her clothes and boots were quite dry.

"Eh, what great supper are we getting ready yonder!" cried Pirka, catching sight of the army of pots on the hearth. Then she looked into them all, one after the other. "Water, water, nothing but boiling water. Well, well! let us put something into one of them that we may have a little good broth."

With that she took out of her knapsack a handful of scraps of paper, and threw them into the boiling water.

"These are names clipped out of the perpetual almanac," whispered she to Michal, with a grin. "The first that comes to the surface will be the name of our beloved."

Then she took a ladle, and fished out the first piece of paper which appeared on the surface of the boiling water. Michal, she said, was to see what was written on it.

Michal took the scrap, and read aloud the name:

"Valentine!"

In her terror she threw it back into the flames.

But the flames, so far from consuming the wet scrap of paper, tossed it up into the air, and the name of the beloved one flew up the chimney with the smoke.

"It won't burn, ladykin!" laughed Pirka. "Hocus-pocus! there it is again!"

And now she had another scrap of paper in her hand, on which was also written the word, Valentine!

"Well, and how has my little lady been amusing herself all this time?" asked Pirka, stroking pretty Michal's hands. "Has she not been wishing that her Pirka was with her again?"

Michal could not deny that she had.

"But those who believe in what the cards say," pursued Pirka, somewhat irrelevantly, "must pay for it, and those who do not believe must also pay, ay, and much more dearly too."

"Let us see!"

Michal crouched down beside Pirka on the mat, where the witch had spread the cards.

"Oh, oh! Great things are in store for us," began Pirka, pointing to the cards. "This here is the old vihodar, and that yonder is his son. Look, there's a coffin. Death threatens the old vihodar. The robbers will kill him."

"What nonsense," interrupted Michal.

"I don't say it. The cards say it. Victory and might await the young master. He kills the robber, and will be promoted to his father's place."

Michal laughed.

"That is certainly not true. Henry would quit the headsman's trade if his father died. He would go to Germany where nobody knows him, and try to get a professorship. He has promised me it a hundred times."

"Well, well, I know nothing. I only say what the cards say. Look now! There is the heart lady! Oh, what a joy awaits her. Her beloved is close at hand. That rose means burning love. That dog is fidelity. This dove-cot is felicity. This very day she will meet him."

"Go along with you, Pirka! It is all nonsense."

"Well, well, my little lady, we shall see. The cards never lie. This very night she will see him."

"He is far away; who knows how far?" sighed Michal.

"Yes, but I've a little buck-goat, and when I send him away and say to him, 'Go, bring me the pretty youth hither whom my lady dotes upon; so true as I came out of that well, my little buck-goat will bring the young man hither though he were even on the Turkish borders."

Michal began to grow frightened.

"Hither he shall not bring him," cried she.

"No, not into this hideous hole, perhaps, not into the house of the vihodar, but into a quiet little cot where the doves bill and coo on the gables."

"But how am I to get there? I should not care about sitting on the buck-goat."

"Nor need you. Barbara Pirka can take her pretty little lady wherever she can go herself, and will lead her through beautiful flowery meadows to the house of bliss by a path on which not even the feet of a butterfly could get wet with dew. The fair lady will then disguise herself as a peasant girl, so that none who meet her on the road may recognize her; but she will also take nice clothes with her, so as to meet her beloved in gorgeous apparel. She must dress herself in his

presence three times running, the first time in scarlet, the second time in corn-flower blue, and the third time in purple; she must also put on gold earrings and a goodly chain, and on her head she must wear a coif of pearls. She must pack up all these splendid things. The headsman has bought them for his wife, and she has not worn them once yet. Eh! how beautiful we shall look!"

"Tempt me not, Satan!"

"The cards have said it and Pirka will do it. The pretty lady may like or lump it, that is her lookout. In any case she will pay the price for it."

Michal believed and disbelieved at the same time.

She put together the three dresses—the delicate rose-colored dress, the corn-flower blue, and the purple one; then she hung them all up before her one after the other, examined them all, and considered which would suit her best. Then she let Pirka disguise her as a peasant girl, and put on her a short frock and high red shoes. (In the vihodar's house there was a whole collection of costumes, Heaven only knows whence he got them.) She turned herself round and round, and was quite glad that she looked so pretty, but when Pirka said to her:

"Come, now let us go!" she shrank back, and answered that to do so would be to sin against God.

At that moment a flourish of trumpets was heard before the gates. It was the signal by which Henry usually announced his arrival. The drawbridge now rattled down, and the friendly barking of the watch dogs showed that the newcomer was an old friend.

The blood flew to Michal's face.

"My husband has come. Now you see how the cards have lied!"

She had barely time to roll up the three beautiful dresses into a bundle and pitch them into a dark corner. The peasant costume she was obliged to keep on. However, she could tell her husband that it was her kitchen dress.

The keys of the corridor and the trapdoor Michal handed to Pirka, that she might admit the knocker below.

And now, as she pretended to be busy about the hearth, she awaited the appearance of that face which always made her sick at heart, but which had

nevertheless on this occasion, so she thought, come between her and a great temptation, a grievous sin. Yet it was not her husband after all, but a still more detestable shape. It was the second apprentice, who used to lend the vihodar a helping hand in all his great achievements. The first apprentice already worked on his own account.

The intruder did not bestow upon her so much as the shadow of a salutation, but slouched down upon the kitchen bench, threw his heavy hat on the hearth, and blandly said to the lady:

"Give me to drink, my pretty mistress! I'm perishing with thirst."

Then he emptied a bumper of beer to the very dregs, and after that set about delivering his message.

"I bring you good news, my pretty young mistress! The devil has carried off the old vihodar. The accursed Janko has bitten him in the neck with his poisonous teeth and the old 'un croaked straight off."

Michal thought, with a shudder, that the cards had said as much.

"Now your husband will be master in his own house. All the treasures belong to him. And the honor, too. The Count of Zips and the Lord Lieutenant of Saros have already, under their hand and seal, appointed him public executioner in his father's stead, with jurisdiction over the whole hill country, and he has just been accomplishing his masterpiece on Janko, who is still roaring for pain and will roar two days and two nights longer, so that all Eperies will hear him. The woman who does not faint, the child who does not get the falling sickness, and the dog who does not go mad through hearing this howling, will be fit to join the witches' sabbath on the Peak of Lomnitz."

Michal shivered as if in an ague. So Henry had voluntarily taken over his father's office; nay! at once accomplished his hellish masterpiece? He had not thought of flying, though no one could have compelled him to remain. He actually takes delight in cruelty! What! the ex-clergyman, the meek curer of souls, could within so short a time become a bloody headsman, and thus close against Michal every way of escaping from this hell! And all this had been prophesied by the cards of the wise woman!

And as if to raise her horror, disgust, and loathing to the highest pitch, the fellow stepped up to her and said, with a hideous leer:

"My pretty young mistress! you must give the bearer of so many good tidings a couple of busses."

The fellow may have been drunk (he had looked in at every tavern on his way home) but his demand was certainly based on a very ancient custom.

"It is a law with us," said he to the terrified, recoiling woman, "that whoever first brings the news to the headsman's wife that her husband has been installed as master shall receive a couple of good, smacking busses from the young mistress."

And with that he stroked out his stubbly mustaches with both hands and stretched out his arms to clasp pretty Michal round the waist.

This shameless impudence put the tender lady into such a violent rage that she now did what she had all along been meditating; she snatched from the hearth a pot full of boiling water, and soused the importunate loafer from head to foot, scalding him so severely that for one moment he was quite dazed. And during that one moment, Michal rushed upon him, hurled him back with all her might, Pirka assisting her, and their united efforts succeeded in pitching the big strong man headlong out of the kitchen. Then they quickly slammed to the heavy oaken door.

But the parboiled wretch, speedily recovering himself and now madder than ever, fell to cursing and swearing, threatened to do Michal a mischief, and called loudly to his fellow-apprentices to help him; whereupon they hastened up with iron clubs (which also played a part at executions in those days), and began hammering at the oaken door with all their might.

Michal gave herself up for lost. She would rather have sprung down the well than have stopped till the murderers had battered in the door.

"Don't be alarmed, my pretty ladykin," said the witch, taking her by the hand. "The cards have twice spoken the truth, haven't they? And depend upon it they will speak the truth the third time also. Will you trust me now?"

"Take me, body and soul!" cried the unhappy woman, throwing herself into the witch's arms.

"Well! let the pretty lady first take this burning fagot in her hand and step into the bucket. I'll turn the wheel and let her down, not into the water, but only as far as the middle of the shaft. There she will find a narrow platform by an opening,

where she must wait till I have let myself down, too."

Michal, in the extremity of her bitterness and despair, was capable of anything, so she allowed Pirka to let her down into the well. By the light of the burning fagots, she found the described opening and stepped into it. The bucket again ascended, and in a short time Pirka also came down, holding fast in her hands the other end of the chain and gradually letting the bucket down ring by ring. On arriving opposite to the opening, she, too, sprang out of the bucket and unloosed it from the chain, whereupon the other bucket loosing its equilibrium, fell down into the water, and the chain ran rattling up to the wheel.

"Well, my pretty little lady! I think we may now go on a little further," said Pirka, who carried on her back the bundle in which were all Michal's fine clothes.

At the end of the narrow passage was an open iron door, which led into a low vaulted cellar, full of large barrels containing pitch, tar, sulphur, and tow, in fact all the raw materials of the headsman's trade, besides sundry tanned hides, the exuviæ of his triumphs. This cellar terminated in a long corridor, and at the end of the corridor was another iron door.

Pirka had a key which opened this door, so she was able to go in and out of the house unseen whenever she liked.

The object of this subterraneous way was to enable the headsman to escape, in case robber bands besieged his house and drove him to extremities. The little iron door led into a wood.

In the cellar was a flight of wooden steps leading up to a trapdoor.

Before quitting this corridor, Pirka wove out of the tow a huge skein, which reached from one end of the corridor to the other, and as she opened the door for Michal to go out, she hurled the burning fagot into the tow.

"Why do you throw the fagot into the tow?" asked Michal.

"Because it would only betray us outside here; nor do we want it, for the moon is still high."

"But the cellar might catch fire?"

"All the better for us, for then they will not be able to pursue us that way if they

find out how we have escaped."

"But if the cellar burn, the house may burn too."

"And what then? Is there anything burning there which my pretty mistress or myself would greatly miss?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A true relation of the thoughtlessness of youth, and the artifices whereby women enthrall their lovers.

"I am afraid!" said Michal, when she found herself in the middle of the dark forest.

"What's there to be afraid of?" cried Pirka. "The wild beasts, the bears, and the wolves, have been scared away into other regions by the shooting match between the county militia and the robbers, so that they won't come back again in a hurry. The robber bands, too, have been rooted out. At this moment they are dancing in the air round the bastions of Eperies. We shall have peace and quiet now for at least a year to come. Not that the people have been terrified by the fate of the executed robbers; not a bit of it. On the contrary, many a man will be thereby stimulated to live and die as bravely as they have done. But it will be a year at least before the new robber bands seek (and perhaps find) the treasures hidden by the older ones. No amount of torture could force from the prisoners the secret of their hidden treasures. They endured everything rather than give up their gold and silver. Till there is another outbreak of highwaymen, therefore, every traveler may go singing through the woods without the slightest fear. From robbers and wild beasts you are now quite secure."

"It is God that I am afraid of," said Michal.

The witch pressed the wrists of the young woman together till they cracked again.

"If ever you dare to repeat that word again," said she, "I'll leave you in the midst of this dark wood, and then you may either fly or seek Him whom you fear so much; I'll wash my hands of you."

Then Michal said not another word, but followed the witch, who led her so surely through the sylvan labyrinth that she actually stopped at a place in the midst of the thickest thicket, drew a knife from out of the trunk of a tree, and showed it to Michal.

"Look! This knife I stuck into that tree in the broad daylight, as I passed by this way, and now I have found it again in darkest night."

Not an hour had passed, and the moon still stood in the sky, when they arrived at the kopanitscha of Görgö.

"Here we stop," cried Pirka. "This is the house where the doves bill one another on the gables."

Just then, however, all the doves were asleep; but in the courtyard a woman was wandering about, who raised her hands toward the moon, and made all sorts of frantic gestures.

Pirka greeted her with strangely sounding words, not one of which Michal understood, and the kopanitschar's wife answered in the same fashion.

"Have you offered up a witch's prayer, and if so, for what have you prayed?"

"I have prayed that the devil may take the old vihodar."

"He has got him already. Janko bit him in the neck, and immediately he was a dead man."

"Beelzebub be praised!" cried the kopanitschar's wife, and she frisked about for joy.

"Cook us some supper, sisterkin," said Pirka to Annie.

"What sort of a guest have you brought me?" asked the latter.

"You know well enough without being told."

Then Annie recognized Michal, and laughed with all her might. Witches always rejoice when they see an innocent soul rushing to perdition.

With that the pair of them led her into the kitchen, and made a great fire, on which they put sundry pots. But Pirka filled a smaller pan with water, and after performing all sorts of mystic hocus-pocus over it, put it also on the fire, first of all throwing into it a scrap of paper, on which the word Valentine was written.

"What does that pot do on the fire?" asked Annie.

"As soon as all the water in it has boiled away, so that nothing remains in it but the scrap of paper, my buck-goat will bring this pretty little lady her stately lover.

Make ready the supper, I say, there will be five of us."

"I don't like odd numbers," said Annie; but she forthwith fell to killing and plucking fowls, and baking little cakes.

Michal sat at the window and shivered.

During the cooking, Annie sang obscene flower songs, and Pirka kept on drawing her pan away from the fire and putting it on again.

Annie asked her why she did that.

"When the water boils fiercely, my buck with the stately lover is running so fast that the poor young man can hardly draw his breath; but when I remove the pan from the fire, he goes along more quietly, and the poor fellow can take breath again."

In ordinary circumstances Michal would have laughed aloud at such superstition. But to-day she had gone through so many dreadful things, and she was so staggered by the actual fulfillment of two of the events predicted by Pirka's cards, that she dared not deny the possibility of a third. Half of the witch's prophecy had already come to pass. She had escaped from her husband's house, and was now awaiting her lover in a strange place. Everything was possible after that.

"He is coming now. He is quite near!" cried Pirka, looking into the pan. "I already hear the galloping of my buck-goat, I already hear his four feet on the roofs of the houses. Now he is springing over the Krivan, now he is running along the Polish Saddle.[3] Hi! Hi! How he is galloping! Quick, my little buck, quick! quick!"

[3] Two of the Karpathian Alps.

Michal's common sense was quite dazed by all these insane proceedings. She was no longer mistress of herself.

"And now it's time to dress," continued Pirka, and with that she took off Michal's peasant garb, and arrayed her in a rosy colored robe. She laced tightly her bodice to show off her waist, and combed out and plaited her long tresses to make them crisp and wavy. Her sweetheart was coming, so she must look nice to please him. The young lady was quite bewildered. She let them do what they liked with her.

Outside the moon had gone down. It had grown quite dark. A silent, starless

night, dank with heavy falling dew.

"Now he'll be here almost directly," cried the witch, as the water bubbled away at the bottom of the pan.

And now the blare of a farogato began to resound through the silent night. Nearer and nearer came the music. Michal's heart beat quickly. She recognized her favorite song. She scarcely knew whether she was awake or dreaming, whether she was in the world or out of it. There was a buzzing in her ears. The air around her was full of dancing specters. Her body seemed too narrow for her soul. Nearer and nearer came the song. At the bottom of the pan, the last drop of water had long since evaporated.

"My buck-goat has arrived," cried the witch, in triumph.

At that moment, Valentine Kalondai entered and advanced toward Michal.

It was no longer joy, it was frenzy which took possession of the young woman. Up she sprang with a shriek, and then threw herself on her beloved's breast, wound her arms round his neck, pressed her lips to his mouth as if she would have inhaled his very soul, and wetted his cheeks with her tears.

How long did they hold each other thus embraced? An eternity perhaps, like that which Mirza Shah experienced when, at the Persian Magian's command, he crept under a tub, and dreamed away a whole lifetime in a single moment. At least, Michal fancied that it must have been a very long time, for on coming to herself again she said, with a sigh: "What a pity that the morning is breaking! Look! there is the dawn already?"

A great light had suddenly sprung up in the sky.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Barbara Pirka, "that certainly would be a crazy sun which rose in the west! What you see there is the morning sheen of hell. The house of the headsman is burning. A pretty dawn that certainly!"

The fire threw a frightful blood-red glare over mountain and forest, and gilded the white rocks in the distance as if they too were flaming. The stars twinkled faintly through the ruddy glow.

"Now you may sleep in peace, my children," said Barbara Pirka. "By the time

the young vihodar returns, he will find only the ruins of his house, and will fancy that his wife has been burnt likewise. He will seek her no more on this earth."

"And even if he should seek her," cried Valentine defiantly, "I would not give her up to him though heaven and earth commanded it. I would rather get together a band of robbers and wage war against all humanity, than allow my beloved to be ever torn from me again. Whoever would take my Michal away from me must tear her from my arms on the very scaffold."

And he smote the butt-end of his musket so violently on the ground, that both the witches leaped up to the very ceiling for joy.

But Michal fell upon Valentine's neck and stammered:

"With thee by my side, I'll go forth into the wild forest and face cold and tempest. With thee I'll brave death, yea, damnation itself. I crave no other death than the death by which thou diest. I desire no other eternity, be it bliss or woe, than the eternity which unites our soul in one, my angel, my king, my sun!"

And Simplex thrust his trumpet through the window and sounded a wedding march, which awoke the echoes in the neighboring hills.

CHAPTER XXV.

Man cannot fathom the wiles which witches imagine when they unite in wedlock lovers whom they have clandestinely brought together.

The kopanitschar's wife now brought in the supper, and all five of them straightway sat down and made merry in honor of the festive occasion. This done, the witches began to feel frisky, and called to Simplex to bring out his trumpet into the courtyard and play them a jig. He very complaisantly complied with this request, sat him down on the edge of the well and made music for the ladies, while they, taking each other by the hand, danced a dance which looked for all the world as if they were possessed. Their wooden shoes rattled and clattered, their disheveled tresses floated in the wind, and the terrified bats flitted over their heads. The flames of the headsman's house lit up this dance of witches, and the wild figures, leaping in the blood-red glare, cast long, spasmodic shadows on the whitewashed walls of the inn, just as if Beelzebub himself were leading the frolic.

"Blow, blow, trumpeter!" they cried, and Simplex blew and blew till his breast was nigh to bursting, and yet he was so bewitched that he could not take the trumpet from his mouth, nay! he even felt constrained to drum all the time with both his heels on the sides of the well. If a good, honest Christian had come upon this spectacle unawares, he would have been rooted to the ground with terror.

Meanwhile the lovers were left to themselves. They had quite enough to tell each other. First, Valentine made Michal tell him of all the horrors she had gone through, and what desperate suffering she had endured, and then he related to her the many contrarieties which had befallen himself. Of course, too, they did not forget to richly indemnify each other for their past woes by a liberal exchange of caresses. In particular, when Valentine recounted the history of Jigerdilla, Michal did not grudge him an ample compensation for the kisses which, for her sake, he had refused the Turkish lady. At the same time Valentine treated his beloved as his bride indeed, but not as his affianced wife.

At the first cockcrow the witches ceased to dance. Simplex they sent into the loft

to sleep of his fatigue. The kopanitschar's wife set about preparing breakfast; but Pirka went into the room of the lovers to ask them what they had been dreaming about. Then she sent Valentine out, but whispered in his ear as she passed, that he might peep through the window if he liked, and then she helped Michal on with the cornflower-blue dress. After that she called the young man in again.

Valentine was enchanted at the sight of the beautiful lady, and protested that if she had looked in the first dress like a bride, she looked in the second one like a saint on an altar screen. Pirka thereupon pulled a very wry face, for she did not like to hear tell of saints and altars. So she drove Valentine out again, and bade him go wake his friend who had been dozing all night, and yet was as heavy as ever. While Valentine was wrangling in the loft with Simplex, who swore by hook and by crook that he had been trumpeting all night long for the benefit of the witches, and had scarcely had more than forty winks, Pirka took off Michal's blue dress which made her look like a saint, and arrayed her in the purple one. When Valentine saw her in this he declared that she now looked just like a queen.

But the witches tried to persuade Simplex that he had only dreamt that he had been playing all night, and that it was not from overmuch blowing of trumpets but from excessive mastication at supper the night before, that his jaws were so sore.

The lovers, too, protested that they had heard nothing of the whole entertainment. They had been so much occupied with each other that they had been unconscious of all else. They had not only not heard the trumpet of Simplex, they had not even heard the clarion of the Archangel Uriel who (according to the ancient formula: "Michal on my right, Gabriel on my left, Raphael behind me, Israel before me, Uriel above my head") flies above the head of each one of us, and blows his clarion whenever we are about to plunge into some dreadful danger. Well for us if we heed the warning!

But the lovers had heard nothing.

When Annie served the breakfast (goat's milk, cheese, and brandy mixed with honey and sugar), Valentine's spirits rose so high that he vowed over again what he had already vowed the night before, viz.: that if anyone tore away his Michal from him, he would turn highwayman and gather a robber band around him.

But women have, generally speaking, more common sense in the broad light of day than they have at dead of night; so Michal now said that it need not come to

that. Valentine must take her back to her father's house. There she would bring a divorce suit against her husband on the plea that he had married her in a wrong name and under false pretenses, and that his marriage with her was consequently invalid. As soon then as the marriage was dissolved, Valentine must come forward and woo her, when she certainly would not send him away with a flea in his ear.

At this Barbara Pirka burst into a peal of laughter.

"Trust to parsons, and you'll soon see what a pretty dance they'll lead you! The parsons have many creases in their surplices, and they shake a fresh ordinance out of every crease. Do what you say, by all means! Bring your action against Henry Vihodar, formerly clerk in holy orders, and now headsman, and you'll find that justice is on the side of the longest purse. It is true that the vihodar's house is merrily burning, but his treasures in the basement of the tower cannot be burnt, and he will be a very rich man. He'll confront you with a dozen witnesses who will testify that the Keszmár professor knew very well what his son-in-law's trade was. He will manufacture forged letters with false seals, and what will be the end of it all? Why, Squire Valentine will be found guilty of abduction and put out of the way. No, no! don't go to law. You'll get no good by it. Besides, I've a much better plan."

"Let's hear it then. But mind! I mean to be my Valentine's wife, not his mistress," said Michal.

"Yes, the pretty lady shall become her Valentine's wife, but she must listen to me. She knows now that my cards always speak the truth. So hearken to me, my children! You go out, Annie! We don't want you prying here. You, Simplex, can stay where you are, for you know how to hold your tongue."

So Annie went away, and as soon as she was out of hearing, Pirka, in a low whisper, began to expound her crafty scheme.

"Listen now! Not far from here is a town called Bártfa. Every town, as you know, has its peculiar laws and customs. At Kassa, for instance, clandestine lovers caught together are beheaded. At Bártfa they are much more cruel. There, if a lass accosts a lad in the streets after vespers, or if a lad is caught talking with a lassie in a gateway, the watchman lays hands on the pair and claps them into jail. Next morning, without any of the usual preliminary fiddle-faddle, without even asking for their baptismal certificate or requiring the consent of their parents, or obtaining a special license or dispensation, the magistrates send for a

parson and splice them straight off. Only as man and wife are they permitted to pass through the city gates. Hence the proverb:

If thou comest from Bártfa without a wife,
Good luck will befriend thee the rest of thy life.

And a marriage contracted at Bártfa is valid everywhere."

"But," sagely objected Michal, "supposing one of the parties be already married?"

"Then both parties are publicly scourged to death. But I've taken precautions against that also. My late pretty mistress, the young vihodar's wife, is no more. Her father fancies that he has married her to the pastor of Great Leta; but his reverence also is no longer to be found on the face of the earth. The people of Great Leta have already provided themselves with another curer of souls, and his wife is an old woman with a hunch on her back. Henry Vihodar firmly believes that his wife has perished in his burning house, from which, indeed, no living soul could possibly have escaped when once the sulphur and the tar caught fire. Besides, the young headsman will soon marry again. So you two must come along with me to Bártfa, where I'll pretend that the pretty lady is my daughter, and will put her out to service. You, squire, must seek a farm laborer's place in the same town. The rest depends entirely on yourselves. If once you are caught together, you'll not be allowed to depart thence except as man and wife, and then you can go to—— Where did you say you lived?"

It was just on the tip of Valentine's tongue to say Kassa, when Simplex anticipated him and said Klausenburg, which is in the opposite direction. For it is also the duty of a true friend when he sees that his comrade cannot lie, to lie for him. And here it was very necessary not to let the witch know where Valentine lived, lest she might take it into her head, at some future day, to pay him and his wife a visit when they least desired it.

"Very well," pursued the witch, "then you can go to Klausenburg and take your marriage certificate with you. No one will think of asking any further questions. People will say, they've been married at Bártfa, and no more will be said about it. Are you pleased with my plan?"

They were so pleased with it that they fell to kissing each other over and over again, and in their joy had almost wasted a kiss or two on Pirka herself, which would have been a useless piece of extravagance.

"But we cannot take service with all our silk clothes and gewgaws," said Pirka.

"We must put on the rustic dress in which we came hither."

Michal readily consented to this change of raiment, and going into the adjoining room, she took off her dress, her earrings, and her necklace. Her three dresses and all her jewels she gave to Pirka, who had calculated on obtaining these perquisites all along.

"Do you think Valentine will like me in this dress?" asked the pretty young lady, as she put on her sober weeds again.

"It won't quite do yet," said Pirka. "Even through this rustic garb people might easily spy out the fine lady. We cannot take service with this rose and milk complexion, for everyone would immediately ask us out of what castle we had escaped. We must find a remedy against that also. We must make freckles on our cheeks and foreheads, so that we may not look so pretty."

"But will Valentine love me if I am ugly?"

"Sweetheart! he would love you even if you were as hideous as I am."

With that, the witch took freshly plucked wolf's milk flowers, the juice of which rubbed into the skin leaves behind spots resembling freckles which cannot be washed away by water, and only very gradually fade away. Pirka well rubbed Michal's face with the juice of the wolf's milk flowers till she was as speckled and as spotted as a pea hen. It was as well that there was no mirror at hand to tell pretty Michal what a fright she had become.

This done, Pirka led her back to Valentine, and said to him: "Well! how does my serving wench please you?" But he, without troubling himself in the least about the freckles, embraced his beloved as fervently as before.

When, however, the kopanitschar's wife came in again and saw the ugly serving maid, she asked what had become of the wondrously beautiful lady who had lately been there.

Pirka replied that she had bestraddled a broomstick, flown out of the window, and left this wench behind in her stead.

Annie believed Pirka, and bawled to Michal to take herself off and feed the swine.

So little did she recognize Michal.

Then Pirka took her bundle on her back and went off with Michal and Valentine to show them the way to Bártfa, while Simplex stayed behind with the kopanitschar's wife, so that in case the headsman's assistants should stop there for a drink on their way back from Eperies, he might give them an earful of lies. And that is really what he did do. Simplex actually saw and spoke to Henry himself, and made him believe that he, Simplex, had stood close to the burning house, and seen and heard the two women shrieking for help behind a window; but no one could get at them, and the whole tower in which they were had been burnt to the ground. Henry Catsrider, therefore, might be quite sure that he had become an orphan and a widower on the same day.

At Bártfa, meanwhile, Pirka got Michal a place in a respectable shopkeeper's family, where they willingly took her in because she was so very plain. It was a sort of guarantee that no one would attempt to court her, and thereby deprive them of a useful servant.

Yet even this maid only kept her place for three days, for on the evening of the fourth day, they caught her talking in a gateway with a farm laborer from over the way, who had only come to Bártfa a few days before. The guilty pair were immediately seized; for the people of Bártfa, who took good care never to fall into their own mouse traps, were immensely delighted whenever they could catch strangers in them. So both man and maid were committed to jail, and taken next day before the clergyman, when they were married in due form and then discharged. In the marriage certificate handed to them on their departure, Valentine Kalondai's name stood there right enough, but Michal was therein described as Milly Barbara.

Neither of them reflected, at the time, that this was a false certificate; all that they then thought about was that they at last belonged to each other.

Barbara Pirka had kept very quiet till after the wedding was over, and then Valentine gave her all the money he had about him (some hundred and fifty ducats or so), only keeping enough to buy victuals for his wife and himself on their way home. Then he said to Pirka:

"Now we are going to Transylvania, but you had better go to Poland, for here you might be called to account for the valuables in your possession."

Pirka laughed.

"I am going, I am going, and I will not stop till I get to Poland. I know that you

are very fond of me, children; yet for all that you would like to see two foreign lands lying between me and you."

And at that time two foreign lands really did lie between Transylvania and Poland. The chroniclers called them Hungary and Turkey.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The mummery receives its due punishment; nevertheless, Mercy and Compassion come to the mummer's aid, and deliver her out of all her troubles.

When Valentine got home to Kassa, he introduced his beloved Milly to his mother with these words:

"My dear lady mother! you used to say that if she whom I love were even a poor serving maid, you would not consider her origin too curiously, but if only she had a good heart, would accept her as your daughter-in-law. Well! See now, I've brought you my beloved wife, and here she is!"

Milly's face, we may add, was still terribly disfigured by the freckles which the wolf's milk flower juice had eaten into her skin.

Good Dame Sarah smote her hands together.

"Well, my dear son! I'll only say that if this was the young person for whose sake you could desert your mother, and rather endure the Turkish slavery than renounce her and play her false—then, I say you are as immovable as Mount Sion itself; and if you can really love this young person so very much she must have within her hundreds of good qualities."

"And so indeed she has," returned Valentine, and he there and then kissed Milly's freckled face. What cared he though the whole world thought his wife ugly, so long as he knew that she was beautiful?

In the very first week of their acquaintance, Dame Sarah severely tested her daughter-in-law in every possible way, and discovered that she was an angel from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. She was dutiful, obedient, not fastidious in her work, brisk, cleanly, early to rise and late to bed, sweet-tempered, a great stopper-at-home, modest, and shamefaced. And Dame Sarah had made up her mind to be very strict with her; to find fault with everything she did; and scold and chide her on every possible occasion. But this scolding and chiding was heavenly music to poor Milly's ears, compared with what she had

been obliged to endure at that other house, so that the only effect of Dame Sarah's fiercest anger on Milly was to make her kiss her mother-in-law's hands and thank her for the scolding with tears of gratitude. It was equally true, indeed, that it was extremely difficult for Dame Sarah to be really angry. Her face was so round that no wrinkling of her forehead could make it look angular, and her voice was so soft that even her chiding seemed like friendly coaxing. Milly had never known a mother. It had always been the wish of her heart to find a mother in her husband's house. And now she had found what she had wished for; and her soul was satisfied.

When Valentine brought Milly home, she possessed nothing in the world but the clothes on her back. Dame Sarah chided her daughter-in-law again and again because of her bad and scanty attire. Then she bought her woolen stuff for a suit of clothes, cut out the pattern herself, and threw it to Milly, that she might make herself a dress by next Sunday, with which to go to church and show herself among respectable people.

And Michal had to pretend that she did not understand a word of what her mother-in-law explained to her. She who had manufactured the most recondite tarts and cakes at home, and had been far famed as a model housewife, now listened in silence while her mother-in-law told her how a simple soup was made! She dared not even betray her knowledge of needlework and millinery. She dared not say that she could stitch beautifully, and even weave lace. She who was so clever with her fingers now stitched so clumsily that Dame Sarah had to take half her work to pieces again. She held her needle so awkwardly, and her stitches were so irregular, and full of knots and crinkles, that when she tried on her Sunday dress, which had cost her so much trouble, it was found to be a perfectly absurd misfit. In front it was too long, and behind it was too short; where it ought to have fitted tightly it bulged out, and *vice versa*.

And yet this dress pleased her.

And, stranger still, her husband liked her in it too.

The town of Kassa had a lot to say about the lady whom Valentine had brought home as his wife.

"Ah, well! such a treasure was quite worth the trouble which Squire Valentine took to discover it!"

"But, at least, she is of very distinguished parentage: her father was lord-

lieutenant of the sheep!"

"Such a beauty has not been seen in Kassa for many a long day!"

"And all that is as nothing compared with her riches. Why, when she climbs up a nut tree to hang out the clothes, she leaves nothing behind her that she can call her own!"

Everyone looked forward to the day when Dame Sarah would present her daughter-in-law to her acquaintances, the notabilities of Kassa.

And what would they have said if they only could have seen her in a dress of her own making!

The anxiously awaited Sunday dawned at last. In the early morning, however, a sergeant came and tapped at Valentine's window, awoke him from his slumbers, and told him that his captain, Count Hommonai, commanded him to mount his horse at once, and ride into the market place fully armed.

Valentine was still a soldier, a corporal in fact. Obey he must. He therefore took leave of his mother and his wife, armed himself, and was at his post at the appointed time. Thence, without showing the slightest regard for the sacredness of the Sabbath, the captain marched off his troops straightway, for tidings had come that a host of Turks had penetrated as far as Naggy Ida, burning all the hamlets in their way. Count Hommonai, therefore, did not take very long to reflect, but quickly collected two hundred horsemen, and set out from Kassa to chastise the Turkish marauders.

Thus it was that Milly or Michal was left entirely in charge of Dame Sarah.

Early in the morning the young lady put on the new dress that was so admirably adapted to spoil her pretty figure altogether. Then she prepared to go to church.

When she was quite ready, Dame Sarah said to her: "Take off that dress, you shall not go to church in that, but in another."

And with that she opened her lofty wardrobe and took out her own beautiful silk dress which she had worn in her younger days, her bodice embroidered with gold flowers, her apron fringed with broad lace, her costly cambric pocket-handkerchief, and gave them all to her daughter-in-law, and while she laced the bodice on to Michal's slim waist, she said, with great self-complacency: "I was just as slim myself, dear, in the first years of my marriage. In those days this was

my gala costume, I've never worn it since."

Then she put her beautiful gold-laced coif on Michal's head, and praised at the same time her daughter-in-law's lovely hair. That, at any rate, was a thing of beauty, let her face be never so ugly.

Then she took her gorgeously attired daughter-in-law along with her, first of all thrusting into her right hand the best bound prayer book with a posy in it. How Michal's silk dress rustled as she walked along the streets!

The young wife was perfectly happy, not so much because she actually wore the silk dress, as because Valentine's mother thought her worthy to wear it.

Yet her happiness was only to last till she got to church.

The old cathedral of Kassa had again fallen into the hands of the Protestants, and they now held divine service in it. The first row of pews was assigned to the wives of eminent burgesses who had held office in the town. Among them sat Dame Sarah, for her late husband had been sheriff, and she herself was a rich woman.

In the corner pew sat the wife of old Fürmender. With her pointed nose and large gray coif, she resembled a guinea fowl, and when she spoke the resemblance was more striking than ever. Beside her sat her maiden daughter, and next to her there was room for a dozen more at the very least.

When Dame Sarah and pretty Michal came to the pew Dame Fürmender rose from her place and let Dame Sarah pass in, but when Michal tried to follow her, Dame Fürmender sat back in her place again, thrust her elbows on to the desk in front, and would not let Michal pass.

"Servants must sit in the back seats," said she.

"That is the wife of my son Valentine," cried Dame Sarah, much hurt.

"He too is nothing but an expelled student and a common soldier," replied Dame Fürmender, who excelled at repartee.

At this Michal burst into tears.

She was not distressed on her own account, but she could not bear to hear her husband run down.

And now all the women crowded together at the corner of the pew, and turned their backs upon her just to let her know that there was no room for her anywhere.

Poor Michal could have sunk into the ground for shame, when all at once a wondrously beautiful, handsomely dressed lady stepped out of a richly carved pew covered with heraldic emblazonments which stood close to the central column, hastened toward Michal, and said to her: "What! is there no room for the young lady? Pray come into my pew, there is room enough there." And with that she took pilloried Michal by the hand, led her to her own pew, made her sit down beside her, and pushed toward her her beautiful gold-clasped prayer book, so that they might both sing out of it together.

Now this lady was the Countess Isabella Hommonai the wife of the Captain-General and Commander of Kassa, whom the latter, as we have already mentioned, had married a short time before.

The whole sisterhood of backbiters was most cruelly checkmated, their vexation nearly choked them.

But Michal, with streaming eyes, prayed the Almighty to protect her beloved Valentine in his present great peril, save him from wounds and captivity, and bring him back safe and sound. She had nothing else to pray for.

And when divine service was over, the countess did not consider it beneath her dignity to accompany Michal out of church, waited in the porch for Dame Sarah, and then said to Michal, who gratefully kissed her hand, that she must make haste and come and pay her a visit at the castle.

All the other women heard it and were ready to burst for envy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Wherein is shown how great a force the will of a woman is, and how quickly it can alter the order of things which man devises.

Three days later, Count Hommonai brought back his forces, after successfully driving the Turkish freebooters into the neighboring county; it was for the neighboring county to drive them on still further.

Valentine came riding safe and sound into his own courtyard, and great was Michal's joy when she saw him return in such a merry mood. Nevertheless, she surrendered the first kisses to her mother-in-law.

"Well, have you cut down many Turks?" inquired Dame Sarah.

"I've felled a few, but I did not count how many."

"I'm only glad they've done you no harm," said Michal joyfully.

"You've been praying for me, darling, have you not? Were you not in church, did you sit by my mother?"

"Oh, no!" cried Dame Sarah, eager to tell everything. "That wicked old Fürmender woman would not let her come into the pew. She said to her: 'Servant maids must sit behind.' And do you know who it was that found her a seat after all? Why the good Countess Hommonai! Yes, the countess herself actually made Michal come and sit down beside her in her own beautiful pew."

Valentine snatched his cap from his head as if the countess stood before him in person.

"God bless her for it! You thanked her for her graciousness, I hope?"

"At the time we hardly knew what to say, we were so confused; but her ladyship has invited Michal to the castle."

"And have you been?"

"Not yet, I waited for you. We must go together."

Valentine scratched his head.

"With Count Hommonai I should think nothing of going against a whole host of dog-headed Tartars, but how can I approach the countess? She is such a fine lady, and I am such a stupid blockhead."

But he had to go all the same, and that at once, for scarcely had he had time to change his clothes when the captain's carriage drove up to the door, and a heyduke brought the message that the count and countess wished to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Kalondai.

"Well, I don't know what will be the end of it," stammered Valentine. He was so nervous that he could not even tie his neckerchief properly, and kept on buttoning his coat at one moment a button too high, and at another a button too low, so that he had to begin it all over again.

But he had to go, for the carriage was waiting outside.

Dame Sarah now gave her daughter-in-law another dress to wear, a trifle simpler than the former one, and hung a handsome mantle round her shoulders.

The Countess Hommonai come forward to meet her guests to the very door of the room, and received Michal with great cordiality.

"And to think, my dear!" said she, "that while I was delivering you out of the hands of the Philistines last Sunday, your husband should be rescuing mine from the hands of the Turks! But you have heard all about it already, I dare say?"

"I have heard nothing. My husband never boasts of his exploits."

"He never boasts, eh? Then he's all the more a man."

Valentine grew fiery red.

They had got thus far, when the count himself entered the countess's chamber. And he was as handsome a man as she was a woman. He had long, chestnut-brown hair rolling down his shoulders, red cheeks, an open forehead, a well-twisted mustache, and a stately figure.

And the count also was very kind to them both, and ignoring altogether the fact that he was a magnate and a captain, while Valentine was only a simple

gentleman and a corporal, he held out his hand and shook Valentine's so vigorously that Valentine grew visibly.

But the countess made Michal sit down beside her on the sofa, which was covered with a beautiful gobelin.

Valentine thought that Michal, now that she was in polite society, would put on the fine manners she had learnt at home and thus betray herself. All the more pleasantly surprised was he, therefore, when he saw that Milly could clean forget Michal, so well did she know how to fall into the ways of the rustics. First of all, she shyly hesitated to sit down at all. Then she dusted the corner of the sofa a little with her skirt before sitting down on the edge of it, just as the country people are wont to do, at which the countess secretly smiled.

"Yes, my husband would certainly at this moment be a prisoner among the Turks," said the countess to Milly, "if your husband had not saved him. Mine had ventured forward a little too far. When the Turks had been put to flight, and the hussars were busy tying the prisoners together in couples, my lord captain took it into his head to capture the pasha single-handed. The pasha, however, had already taken to his heels, and nobody had a horse swift enough to catch him but my husband, who accordingly overtook and captured him. But while he was securing him, up came the pasha's attendants, who threw a hair lasso round my husband's neck and pulled him from his horse. Then they began to hale him away, when Kalondai perceived the danger of his captain, and dashed forward at the head of two of his men. The Turks, overtaken, and thus prevented from dragging away my husband alive, at once resolved to kill him, and one of them drew a saber to cut off his head. But Kalondai was quicker than the Turk, and cut him down with a single blow. Thus he saved my husband's life and liberty. The mark of the cord is still visible on my husband's neck, and the cord itself (which he has brought home with him) I shall always preserve among my curiosities. So now you see how well we did in praying together out of the same prayer book. You have a brave husband!"

Valentine's heart swelled with pride at this great praise.

"And he shall be rewarded for his valor," put in the count. "I'll give him the pick of the prisoners and of the captured horses, and I make him my lieutenant besides."

"I thank my gracious lord for his goodness," replied Valentine (he was never at a loss when he had men to deal with, it was only with women that he felt shy); "if

I may choose, I'll pick out from among the captives a good-natured fellow of humble rank who may help my mother in her household duties. A horse I don't want. I am content with that I have. But if my lord captain will do me a favor, I beg of him a better horse for my comrade Simplex, the field-trumpeter, for his present nag is lame. As to my promotion to the rank of lieutenant, I thank my lord captain for it, but I must decline it. That is no post for one like me who has never learnt the art of war. I should like, however, to make another request of my gracious lord. It is the inmost wish of my poor mother that I should relieve her of the cares of the business, which is a heavy burden to her. I therefore beg permission to leave the service that I may carry on the trade of a butcher."

The count laughed.

"But you have clean forgotten one of your best arguments: 'As I have only just been married, I would much rather remain at home with my wife than scamper after the foe!' You are right. I would say the same if I only could. I'll release you at once from your military service."

"But not that you may become a butcher," said the countess. "A man like you deserves a better place. The post of castellan has become vacant, and my husband has the gift of it. My dear, you must make Mr. Kalondai our castellan."

"It shall be done," declared the count.

"Alas, your ladyship!" cried Milly, when she saw that her husband could not immediately find an answer, "I fear me greatly that my husband will never do for such a post as that. He is, like me, very ignorant. He did not learn very much at school and they kicked him out at last. Now, a castellan has to speak with many great lords, and read many letters which are written in Latin and German, and even French perhaps. How could my poor dear husband read and answer all these letters? A mischief would surely come of it."

"I tell you what," said the countess; "I know Latin, German, and French. Come to me at the castle twice a day, and I'll instruct you in all those languages. Nay, you must. I have nothing else to do, and what you learn from me you must teach your husband at home, and thus he will very soon know everything required of him in his new office."

"That will do very well," said the count.

Now it would have been downright rudeness to have rejected such a generous

offer. A greater reward and distinction they could not have desired. Nevertheless, they resolved to keep the matter secret and not even tell it to Dame Sarah, who would certainly have boasted of it all over the town. All they let her know was that the countess had permitted Milly to come to the castle daily to learn cookery from her cook and stitching from her housekeeper. Now *we* know that Milly could do all these things ever so long ago; but the astonishment of Dame Sarah was great indeed when her daughter-in-law, every time she returned from the castle, proceeded to manufacture some new cake or pastry, while she soon hemmed handkerchiefs so beautifully that it was a marvel how she did it.

It was also a great surprise for Dame Sarah when Valentine chose for her from among the imprisoned Turks a good-humored fellow who had been a butcher's apprentice in his native place. To him the shop could safely be intrusted, for a Turk, when properly treated, is an upright, diligent, and sober servant, and devoted to his master. Dame Sarah treated him like her own son, and would not allow him to be branded, as was usually done in those days.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Wherein occur such astounding transformations that people are scarcely able to recognize their very selves. Michal, however, is calumniated in a matter wherein she is absolutely innocent.

However great was the astonishment of Dame Sarah at Milly's rapid proficiency in the culinary and other female sciences, it was as nothing compared with the astonishment of the Countess Hommonai at the swift apprehension of her pupil. You had only to read a passage over to her once, and she immediately knew it by heart, and what is more, never again forgot it. She could repeat one hundred foreign words after hearing them pronounced for the first time. "This young woman is a genius," said the countess to her husband. She had no idea that her pupil had learnt long ago what she was now teaching her.

Moreover, the countess gradually weaned her from all her boorish habits, and accustomed her to polite manners, which Milly appropriated all the more readily as they were what she had always been used to, whereas her rusticity was a mere disguise and pretense.

Wonderful, too, was the scientific progress which Milly brought about in worthy Valentine, her husband.

For Valentine had taken her at her word, and made it the goal of his ambition to obtain the post of castellan, so that his wife might enjoy the title of châtelaine. And wondrous indeed were his advances on the path of learning. Perhaps, too, Valentine might have proved an apter scholar in his younger days if grammar and syntax had only been recited to him by such sweet lips, and if the *hic*, *hæc*, *hoc* had been impressed upon him with sweet kisses instead of with *ferula* and *signum*. Perhaps, too, the stronger will that goes hand in hand with mental maturity helped him more quickly onward.

After some months he had got on so well that he could not only clearly expound the Latin and German letters which the count laid before him, but could even reply to them; nay, even in French he got so far that no one could have cheated him in a bargain conducted in that language.

So Milly was instructed by the countess, and Valentine was instructed by Milly, and all three took delight in the progress that was being made.

"What a pity it is," said the countess to her husband on one occasion, "that such a clever, highly endowed young woman, who has such a fine figure, such good features, and such a pleasant manner, should be disfigured by so many hideous freckles. If only we could remedy this evil! I have a wash, the famous Aqua Regina, which dates from the days of Elizabeth, the mother of our king, Louis the Great; my face is quite smooth and soft from using it—let us try it on her, perhaps it will do something to remove these hideous freckles."

Milly dared not assent at once, but said she must first ask her husband if he wished her face to be free from freckles, as it was with her freckled face that he had fallen in love originally. She must also communicate beforehand with her mother-in-law, as that lady might possibly regard her daughter-in-law's endeavor to beautify her face as a species of coquetry.

But both Valentine and his mother acquiesced in the experiment. They said that a medicament which the countess used herself could not possibly do Milly any harm.

The disfiguring freckles which had been produced by the juice of the euphorbia naturally vanished from Michal's face after she had washed herself twice or thrice with the Aqua Regina. In a few days she had quite a different appearance. She got a white and red complexion, and a skin as pure as dew. The countess was triumphant with joy that her wash should have produced such a marvelous effect, and Dame Sarah also was beside herself with astonishment when she saw her daughter-in-law growing daily in grace and beauty; but the happiest of all was Valentine, as he gradually won back his adored Michal, whom he regarded as the fairest, best, and wisest woman in the whole world.

The ladies of Kassa, however, were by no means disposed to regard this wondrous transformation with favorable eyes. At that time (now, of course, it is quite different) the complexions of the fair Kassa burgesses, owing to the bad spring water, the close air, the sour wine, but also and especially to the plague which broke out there on the average every seven years—the complexions of the fair Kassa burgesses, I say, were then of that peculiar yellowish tinge which in the faces of the Venetian ladies is called *morbidezza*, but which in Hungary usually went by the name of the Kassa color. Lest, however, we should be saddled with the charge of calumny, we hasten, in our justification, to cite the

following words from one of the original sources of our present history: "The people, more particularly the women folk, are of a pale and yellow color, which in Hungary is called the Kassa color." (*Vide* Johan Christopher Wagner's "Town and History Mirror," 1687.)

That, however, was two hundred years ago. Nowadays, the complexion of the ladies of Kassa, like the complexions of their fair sisters elsewhere, consists of roses and lilies; and it is also no longer true what the same author says of the wine of Kassa, to wit, that it gives foreigners the gout.

Now when the women at morning service in church on Christmas Day perceived Milly sitting demurely in the countess's pew, they were scandalized beyond expression at her red and white cheeks, on which not the smallest freckle was to be seen.

They could not of course insult her to her face, because her distinguished patroness was present; but they put their heads together in the vestry, and quitted it with the steadfast determination to submit the case to the consideration of the dean.

Dame Fürmender took it upon herself to be the mouthpiece of the pious sisterhood. She informed the dean that a young woman had come to church that very morning with her cheeks painted white and red, which lewd and unchristian conduct had sorely troubled the whole of the pious congregation.

There was service again in the afternoon, when the very reverend gentleman was wont to catechize. For in those days it was the custom for young persons, both bachelors and spinsters, and especially young married people from foreign parts, to be called forth into the midst of the congregation and be catechized by the very reverend gentleman in front of the Lord's Table; so that it might be made manifest whether they were well grounded in the principles of the creed and the confession, and also that they might confess publicly, before the whole church, that they belonged to the true evangelical Christian faith; lest at the distribution of the Lord's Supper, on the following day, the bread and wine might be given to such as did not even know why the sacred elements were so given, or lest those should communicate who were morally unworthy so to do.

The first person whom the very reverend gentleman called up that afternoon was the young wife of Valentine Kalondai.

Milly rose from her place and stepped modestly but fearlessly forward. She felt

quite secure, for she knew her whole catechism by heart. It came as easy to her as the Paternoster.

But great was her astonishment when the very reverend gentleman, instead of questioning her on the mystery of the Trinity or as to the necessity of communicating in both kinds, roughly addressed her as follows:

"Dost thou know, pious Christian lady! the commandment of God which forbids all the faithful daughters of his Church to make of the face which he of his grace has given to each one of them, another face after the manner of the heathen, by anointing it with all kinds of false and meretricious salves as the daughters of Midian were wont to do?"

Milly answered with a perfectly clear conscience:

"I know it."

"Then, if thou knowest it, wherefore doest thou the contrary?"

"My countenance is just as God has made it," replied Milly, with a tranquil heart.

"If what thou hast said be true, come wash thyself herein!"

The very reverend gentleman beckoned, and the sacristan placed on the marble font a large silver basin full of crystal clear water.

Milly most willingly washed her face in the basin, and after she had done so, the water was as pure as it had been before.

"And now wipe thy face with this!"

With that he handed the young woman a towel, with which she rubbed her face all over with all her might, yet not the smallest trace of anything red or white was to be seen upon the snowy napkin, while her face had only become rosier than ever from the scrubbing.

The dean was astonished.

"How comes it," cried he, "that thy face, which was once so full of freckles, is now without a single speck upon it?"

"Freckles always disappear in winter," answered Milly.

And that was no more than the truth. From many faces freckles disappear in

winter, and it was just then the very depth of winter.

At this, the very reverend gentleman grew very wroth. He struck the table violently with his book, and stretching forth his hand, exclaimed:

"Then thou hast been foully calumniated by thine accuser, Dame Fürmender, the wife of Augustus Zwirina, who, by way of punishment for such a calumny, is excluded from to-morrow's communion."

Dame Fürmender, who was sitting in the corner of the front pew, where everyone could see it, got up, courtesied, and went straight out of the church.

But the dean kept Michal back in order to catechize her, and began to put various questions to her, which she answered so promptly and so correctly that he was perfectly delighted. He absolutely could not leave off catechizing her.

He went out of his way to find harder and ever harder questions, to every one of which the lady nevertheless found an appropriate answer, so that at last the audience began to whisper to each other that the maids of Bártfa must be as learned as chaplains. Finally the dean sent her back to her place with a warm eulogy and his benediction.

Thus the day on which Michal was to have been put to shame ended with her exaltation and the utter discomfiture of her calumniators. Dame Sarah was naturally triumphant, but she was not more delighted than the good Countess Hommonai, who justly imagined that Michal had her to thank for all her knowledge.

And the countess was quite right in thinking so, for though it is true that Milly had originally received her beauty and her wisdom from God, nevertheless, both her bodily and her spiritual excellences had been so completely killed and buried by the contrarieties of fate that their resurrection might well be regarded as the work of the countess.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Concerning a terribly great contest, from which it will be seen that where his spouse's honor was concerned, Valentine put no bounds to his fury.

But all this was not enough for Valentine. Henceforward he went about like a raging lion, and whenever he talked with anyone in the street, his gestures were those of a man who is about to pull up his shirt sleeves for a fight.

At last he fell in with Simplex.

"I must trounce someone to-day, or else I shall certainly get the fever or the jaundice. Friend Simplex, if ever you were my good comrade, if the health of your friend is at all dear to you, find me someone on whom I can vent my wrath."

"Most willingly, my dear good comrade, I'll find you someone."

"Anyone will do. I don't care who it is, a sword-eater, a stone-breaker, a giant! I'll fight him. A woman has insulted me, but I cannot take revenge upon a woman. Procure me, from somewhere or other, a man whom I can trample underfoot. Bring me a Turkish pasha, or a robber chieftain, or a dog-headed Tartar, that I may devour him."

"I need not look so far as that. I'll find you an antagonist much nearer home. If you want such a one, know that you have no greater enemy than young Ignatius Fürmender, or Zwirina. You have been insulted by his mother; the son must now pay for the mother's rudeness."

"You've hit it," cried Valentine, giving Simplex a mighty blow on the back from sheer friendship. "Not in vain do they call you knowing. He never once occurred to me. To think that I should be looking everywhere for a foe, when he is under my nose all the time. It is just like the man who went in search of the horse on which he was actually riding. Here! take my glove and this gulden, and notify to the sheriff that I challenge Ignatius Zwirina to break a lance with me."

Simplex accepted the commission, went straight to the sheriff, and informed him that Valentine Kalondai desired to challenge Ignatius Zwirina to fight him with lances, according to ancient law and custom. The sheriff made a note thereof, and took the deposited gulden, at the same time calling Simplex's attention to the fact that as the city found the lances, each of the combatants would have to pay a Hungarian gulden extra for every lance that broke in his hand. Thereupon he handed him a written permission, duly sealed with the seal of the city of Kassa, for Valentine Kalondai to challenge Ignatius Zwirina to fight him with lances, according to ancient law and custom, as prescribed by the statutes of the city of Kassa.

Thus provided with the official authorization, Simplex, accompanied by the town trumpeter, next proceeded to the house of the Zwirina family, and finding the door closed, bade the trumpeter blow a flourish three times, and then proclaimed the challenge before the crowd, which had in the meantime assembled in the streets:

"Ignatius Zwirina! With the permission and consent of the sheriff of Kassa, I hereby challenge you in the name of the good and valiant Valentine Kalondai, to break with him, according to ancient law and custom, one, two, or three lances, as the case may be. Take this glove, and on the first day of carnival appear on the ropewalk behind the townhall, duly armed and mounted, to answer the challenge in your own person, if you would be regarded as a stout-hearted fellow and not as an errand-boy of your lady-mother."

Then the trumpeter sounded three more flourishes, and Simplex nailed Valentine's glove to the Zwirinas' door.

There the glove remained till Twelfthnight. Nobody took it down. For according to the statute all such duels had to be fought out between Twelfthnight and Shrovetide, whereby all and sundry were given to understand that the town council regarded such combats as mere carnival frolics. This wise ordinance assumed that the hot-blooded youth of the parish had their fling during Shrovetide. If anyone felt as if he did not know what to do with himself, it was open to him to fight to his heart's content during the prescribed season and have done with it, for, Shrovetide over, it was strictly forbidden to break the peace, or in any way disturb or harass one's neighbors. It was also generally found that after all such combats the young fellows, even when they had belabored each other most soundly, became the best friends in the world, and it was considered the most shameful cowardice to bewail the bumps and bruises dealt out on such

occasions, be they what they might.

It was also considered equally disgraceful when the person so challenged did not appear on the field of battle at the appointed day and hour. Now this was the case with Ignatius Zwirina, who had no very fervent desire to make the acquaintance of Valentine Kalondai's cudgel.

Epiphany arrived, and the whole youth of the parish, as well as the officials appointed to watch the proceedings and keep order, waited in vain from dawn till eve for the appearance of the challenged. The challenger rode idle and alone up and down the ropewalk.

When evening came, and it was no longer to be expected that the defaulter would either appear in person or send people to excuse his absence, Valentine was authorized to take his lance in his hand, having at the end of it a lantern made of a bladder with a lighted candle inside it, and a pair of ragged old drawers hanging over it, and then to ride through the town and proclaim at the corner of every street:

"Noble gentlemen, burgesses, and honest inhabitants of this town! which of you has seen, which of you knows that cowardly knave Ignatius Zwirina? Who can tell me into which hole he has crawled? Is he in the oven, under the bed, or beneath his mother's skirts? Whoever finds him, tell him not to be afraid but show himself, for I won't eat him. Here I have a pair of ragged hose. Let him come out and patch them for me, and I'll pay him for the job."

This was the formula of degradation which was the meed of those who failed to appear on such occasions.

Moreover, the whole youth of the town used to take up the heckling with such spirit that further existence in the town of Kassa became an absolute impossibility for the person so distinguished. Ignatius Zwirina, however, was already deputy syndic of his native place. He therefore could not afford to fly, and his good friends persuaded him so long that at last he resolved to answer Valentine's challenge, and break a pair of lances with him on the following day. Then, of course, the public mockery ceased.

On the following day a still greater crowd of spectators appeared on the ropewalk, fifty drabants had also been sent by the corporation to keep order, and Count Hommonai had come on horseback to see the fight.

At the appointed hour both horsemen appeared, accompanied by their friends. Valentine wore a breastplate, a helmet, and greaves, but Ignatius was clad in mail from top to toe, both in front and behind; he was plainly of opinion that the back is also vulnerable.

They took the places assigned to them on the opposite sides of the lists, and the umpire then produced two long wooden lances without iron points, and two stout oaken cudgels exactly alike. The challenged had the first choice of weapons, and what he left were handed to the challenger.

They rode bareback, guiding their horses by their knees, to which their reins were fastened, for in their right hands they held their lances and in their left their cudgels.

The moment the trumpet sounded, both horsemen couched their lances and rushed upon each other with a fearful crash.

Ignatius Zwirina was a big lout of a fellow. Placed on the scales he would certainly have weighed much more than Valentine. He aimed viciously at Valentine with his lance; but Valentine struck the shaft of it so sharply with his cudgel that it broke off in the middle, and at the same time with his own lance he struck his antagonist full in the breast, so that Ignatius flew backward into the air off his steed and fell flat on the ground.

Valentine immediately sprang from his horse and punched and pommeled the back and shoulders of the prostrate champion, as prescribed by the rules of the contest, till his cudgel broke; but all this belaboring did very little damage to the defeated combatant, for, besides the coat of mail he wore behind, his mother had well stuffed his clothes with horsehair. Yet, for all that, he did get one or two knocks which he did not forget in a hurry, and that was no more than his due, for he had often vexed Valentine with his evil tongue.

And there the matter would have ended had not old Fürmender thought fit to reopen it all again.

For when, after the contest was over, the defeated youth was carried home in a basket, according to ancient practice, the old man took it so to heart that he immediately buckled on his saber, took down the statutes, ran with them to the captain, and called his attention to the paragraph which strictly forbade persons serving in the army to challenge young civilians. He therefore demanded that Valentine should be punished for his challenge as being a gross breach of the

law.

But the good captain diligently searched through his diary and showed the conscientious complainant that Valentine Kalondai on such and such a day, viz., on the Wednesday before the last Sunday in Advent of the past year, had been relieved of his military duties, and therefore no longer fell within the category incriminated by the statute. All that could be done therefore, suggested the captain, was for old Mr. Fürmender to well rub the blue and red bruises of his Nassy with butter, which he would find a sovereign specific.

And that not a shadow of a doubt as to Valentine's true position might remain, the count that very day publicly advertised Valentine Kalondai's appointment as castellan. Now, no doubt this post is essentially a civic office, but inasmuch as the castellan is practically the commandant's lieutenant, it had for a long time always been given to a soldier, especially since the days when one of the civic magistrates had been discovered in collusion with the castellan to betray the town into the enemy's hands. In memory of this event, the Hamor gate, through which the enemy had been admitted, was walled up in perpetuity.

Thus Kalondai's enemies were completely put to shame, and Dame Sarah experienced the joy of seeing her son's wife, the damsel from Bártfa, sitting in the first place of the front pew of the cathedral; which pew Dame Fürmender Zwirina had refused to occupy any longer, having given notice to the dean that she would henceforth take sittings in the suburb church instead.

CHAPTER XXX.

Which teaches that outward beauty, be it never so precious a property, is often most dangerous to its possessor.

From this time forth, Valentine, by virtue of his new office, daily visited the commandant's house, where he was always a welcome guest. In the townhall also, he was held in high honor.

The land, just then, was in very difficult circumstances. A town like Kassa, shut in between three distinct masters and anxious to please all three, without giving such a preference to any one of them as might offend the other two, had a very hard time of it. By virtue of the pacification putting an end to the late religious wars, Kassa fell within the jurisdiction of George Rakoczy, Prince of Transylvania, whose Suzerain was the Turkish Sultan. But the pashas of Eger and Grosswardein often took it into their heads to make predatory raids on their own account as far as Kassa and Tokay, and then the good people of Kassa could not wait, as it is the fashion nowadays, till the English had held indignation meetings to protest against the Turkish atrocities; but they forthwith mounted their steeds, seized their weapons, and smote the troops of their own Prince's Suzerain; and this they often did, moreover, in concert with their adversaries the Hungarians of that portion of the kingdom of Hungary which belonged to the Kaiser. In those days, therefore, it required no small discrimination to judge accurately which of the many strangers passing to and fro were to be reckoned with as friends, and which as foes; which could be put off with promises, and which had really to be sent away with presents; which might merely be threatened with stripes, and which ought really to get them.

Now at this very time, there came from that part of the land which both Hungary and Transylvania claimed as their own, a person of great distinction, Belisarius Zurdoki by name. One of his ancestors had returned to Hungary from Wallachia with great treasures, and this his descendant had also the reputation of being a very rich man.

Zurdoki made a great display at Kassa. He said he had come to visit Count

Hommonai, with whom he was distantly connected on his mother's side. He brought quite a court with him, equerries, pages, a secretary, a chaplain, a huntsman, a master of the hounds, a jester, gypsy musicians, a falconer, heydukes, couriers, domestics, lackeys, coachmen—in fact, there was no counting the multitude he brought in his train. He took up so much space in Count Hommonai's castle that there was no room left for its lawful owners.

And all the time he resided at Kassa, he did nothing but give splendid entertainments. There was absolutely no end to them.

Belisarius Zurdoki was already over sixty, but though his age was venerable, he had no very extraordinary reputation for morality. He had had so many wives, morganatic and otherwise, to say nothing of those from whom he had been separated, that he himself no longer recollected their proper sequence. He had little respect for the sex, and held that there was not a woman in the world who could not be bought with gifts, only some were more highly priced than others.

He himself, however, had not been in the way when beauty was being served out. He had a broad, satyr face, with a red nose sinking right down upon his mustache; his head, after the prevailing Turkish fashion, was clean shaved, with the exception of a single gray lock over his brows which bobbed up and down whenever he wagged his head. His mustache hung down limp on both sides in the Turkish style, and his stomach was not unlike a large beer barrel.

And yet he tried to make the world believe that he was such an amiable man that the woman was yet to be born who could resist him, be she never so young, beautiful, and accomplished.

That he was also smelling and purring around the Countess Isabella Hommonai was patent to everyone, but the count would not for the world have taken any notice of it. Yet he heartily laughed over it all in secret with the countess, who made sport of the old rake, and told her husband everything he said.

One day Zurdoki gave a great banquet at the castle, on which occasion he brought out all his silver plate to make a goodly show, and invited the whole of the civic notabilities. Pretty Michal was there too, the prettiest of the whole company, and as she was dressed very simply her beauty was, of course, all the more striking. She was even lovelier than the countess herself. Her natural refinement and smiling coyness could not be imitated by those who did not possess those graces. With proud humility, she wore over her wondrously beautiful tresses the matron's coif, which showed that all this loveliness already

had a master.

How the old voluptuary feasted his eyes upon this beautiful apparition! He was all fire and flame instantly, like an old worm-eaten tree stump, which blazes up whenever the young herdsmen smoke the wasps out of its hollow trunk.

He had no longer a single look for the countess, but followed close upon the heels of the beautiful châtelaine, though Valentine occasionally, as if by accident, gave him a violent nudge in the ribs with his elbow, or trod sharply on his foot with his spurred boots.

At table, the enamored Zurdoki distinguished pretty Michal so very markedly that all the women present whispered spiteful things to each other about it. The countess was naturally an exception. She only laughed at the coxcombry of the old inamorato, and was quite persuaded beforehand that such a sage damsel as pretty Michal would be more than a match for him.

After dinner, the martial and amatory airs which had been played during the banquet were succeeded by dance music, and the guests flocked into the dancing-room.

The Hungarian dances of those days were very different from the dances we dance now. What are now called csardaszes and friszes were then only danced at rustic weddings. At polite entertainments, the dance consisted of slow and stately figures, accompanied by the clash of colliding spurs, of rhythmical involutions, and evolutions, with much extending of hands and kneeling on cushions, or, at most, of a defiant manly stamping with the feet and majestic movements of the body; not like our present system of dancing, when everyone seems bent on jostling his neighbor into a corner, and makes a whirligig of his partner. The earlier dances did very well for a time, whose motto was, *Festina lente!*

The ball began with the minuet-like dance known as the palotas. It was Zurdoki's duty as host to open the ball, and he lost no time in doing so. With grandiose *aplomb*, he sauntered up to the fairest of the fair, and held toward her a silken handkerchief as a sign that he had chosen her for his partner. This was, indeed, a notable distinction for Michal, especially as the countess was also present in the saloon.

But pretty Michel did not accept the extended handkerchief, the other corner of which she ought to have held so as to begin the palotas, but bowed modestly, and

said so that everyone could hear it: "Your pardon, gracious sir! but I've only been a poor serving maid and have never learnt dancing!"

And this was no more than the simple truth, for she certainly had been a serving maid and never learnt dancing.

At this unexpected rebuff, Zurdoki became as red as a turkey cock, and in his fury sought out the most hideous woman in the room. This was old Dame Fürmender, and with her he opened the ball.

And during the whole of the dance he was cudgeling his brains as to the meaning of pretty Michal's words. "She had not learnt to dance because she was only a serving maid! Now serving maids can dance, and dance very well too! Yet surely she must have spoken the truth, for otherwise she would never have dared to publicly put to shame her host when he invited her to dance. Who are the women who really do not dance? Why, who but the daughters of Protestant pastors?"

Thus pretty Michal, when she said she could not dance, had already betrayed a part of her secret. When once an old bloodhound has got a scent, he will surely run down his prey!

As already mentioned, in consequence of an unfortunate episode in the history of the city of Kassa, when a sheriff had attempted to betray the city into the hands of the enemy, extra precautions had been taken to prevent similar conspiracies in the future. One of these precautions was that all letters brought by couriers from abroad, to whomsoever they might be directed, should be first opened by the magistrates, and only then handed over to their respective owners. And to take away all appearance of espionage from this precautionary measure, such letters were opened under the pretext of fumigating them to avoid the infection of the plague. And fumigated they certainly were, but the castellan used first to copy them and communicate their contents to the commandant, who could thus keep a watch upon the citizens, and prevent them from plotting behind his back.

Zurdoki, too, during his residence at Kassa, received a foreign letter which was delivered to him open and fumigated.

"You may try and spell out this letter as much as you like," laughed the great man. "I warrant you won't be able to make much of it!"

And, indeed, it was a very curious epistle. In the first place the letters were all so

much mixed up together that you could see at a glance that it was cipher writing.

Valentine recollected that the learned Professor David Fröhlich possessed, among other sciences, the key of cipher writing. Perhaps he had communicated this also to his daughter.

So he showed the letter to Michal.

Michal had indeed been initiated into the mystery of such writings, and as at that time there were very few variations in cipher writing, a person who held the key of one of them might very easily decipher all the others; and in fact, Valentine succeeded, with the aid of the key supplied to him by Michal, in deciphering the whole letter.

But now a second difficulty arose. This letter was written in a language which he had never seen before. It was like German, and yet it was not German. He had again to apply to Michal, and asked her if she understood this strange tongue.

"Yes! it is Swedish."

"What! you know Swedish too?"

"My father taught it me. He corresponded a good deal with the king of Sweden, who supported our schools."

"Then translate me this letter."

Michal did as she was told, and Valentine then hastened with the solved enigma to the commandant, Count Hommonai.

The letter contained very remarkable things. Count Hommonai had no sooner taken note of its contents than he sent for Zurdoki.

"Sir!" he at once began, without so much as asking Zurdoki to take a seat, "you are here with no good intention."

"How?" replied Zurdoki, attempting to give a jocose turn to the matter. "Do you mean that I am perhaps a little too attentive to some of your pretty little ladies here?"

"It is not a question of women, now, cousin! I allude to your correspondence with the Swedish Minister."

"Well! let us hear what you make of it."

"I can tell you if you choose to listen. Your master is George Rakoczy, prince of Transylvania."

"He is your master, also," retorted Zurdoki.

"Yes, to-day, perhaps, but he may not be so to-morrow. George Rakoczy, not content with the good fortune of being lord of Transylvania and of fifteen adjacent Hungarian counties, strives after higher fame. Although on his accession he swore to the Estates never to commence a war without their consent, he has nevertheless interfered in the present dispute between Sweden and Poland, first offering to assist Poland against Sweden in consideration of receiving the thirteen towns of Zips; and now, when the Swedes have entangled him in their net, he turns round and negotiates with them through you, demanding no less a reward for his services than the whole kingdom of Poland; and in order to gain the consent of the German Emperor thereto, he now offers him the five Hungarian counties on the other side of the Theiss."

"I deny the truth of that," blustered Zurdoki. "All that is mere sophistical gabble."

"Here you have the contents of the letter which the Swedish Minister writes to you. Read it!" said Hommonai, handing him the copied letter.

Zurdoki was dumfounded.

"Whence did you get this? Who is there in Kassa that can read cipher? Who understands Swedish here, I should like to know?"

"Why, my castellan, of course."

"What! that butcher boy! that expelled student?"

But for all that he could no longer deny the contents of the letter.

And now Count Hommonai spoke very sharply to Mr. Zurdoki. He told him it would be a piece of folly on the part of the Prince of Transylvania to attack Poland with the Cossacks, on whose friendship no one could depend, whereas the Poles had always been good neighbors. Transylvania and Hungary had quite enough to do at home. They should sweep the dust off their own thresholds, and not meddle with the affairs of other lands. We should only be too glad to be able to defend ourselves against the foes we actually have, and not try and saddle

ourselves with fresh ones. Besides, an enterprise so foolishly begun could not possibly have any good issue. The German Emperor would not approve of it because the Pole was his ally. The Sultan, too, would refuse his consent, and the end of it would be that George Rakoczy would lose the five counties without receiving anything in return. Nay, he might at last even lose his Transylvanian throne also.

Like every ill-bred fellow when he is driven into a corner, Zurdoki now took refuge in low abuse. He insisted that he was right. He raised his voice. He asked how they dared to break open his private letters, and what business the Commandant of Kassa had to criticise the plans of the Prince of Transylvania. Let the commandant look to his patrolling and leave politics to his superiors.

"And I mean to show you," retorted Hommonai, "that the city of Kassa also has to do with politics. If George Rakoczy thinks fit to exchange Hungarian counties for a kingdom, the city of Kassa will also think fit to shut its gates against all suspected persons who cannot give a good account of themselves. As for you, sir, you are my kinsman, and I have hitherto willingly seen you in my house. But I now beg to inform you that your carriage is waiting, and nothing prevents you from taking your departure immediately."

That was indeed a snub! What! to refuse hospitality to a guest! Zurdoki could not swallow that calmly. He stuck out his chest and said haughtily to Hommonai:

"Look ye, my lord Count! You know as well as I do the real reason why you drive me out of your house. It is because you fear I might be dangerous to your dear wife!"

Hommonai was a finished gentleman. Even in his insults he was exquisite.

"I have a book which I will send you at once," said he to Zurdoki; "if you look into it attentively, you will find that it is really quite impossible for me to be jealous of you."

Zurdoki was very curious to see this odd book. He could scarcely wait patiently for the heyduke to bring it to him. It was bound in heavy morocco covers, and when Zurdoki opened them he found nothing inside but a mirror. In that he read that Hommonai could not be jealous of so ugly a face as his.

He dashed the mirror to the ground and rode away from Kassa that very day. The goal of his journey was his castle at Saros.

CHAPTER XXXI.

'Tis a true proverb which says that the devil sends an old woman when he cannot come himself; but of course it only applies to wicked old women, for there are very many gentlewomen well advanced in years who lead a God-fearing life and do good to their fellow-creatures.

Mr. Zurdoki left Kassa in rage and fury, and there were very many reasons why he should so leave it. In the first place the object of his scheming had been frustrated by his enforced departure from the city. He was to have spurred on to action there the party which leaned to Vienna, and thus facilitated George Rakoczy's plan of handing over to Ferdinand of Austria the trans-Theissian counties. At Kassa, Mr. Zwirina was his willing ally, but now all communication between them was cut off. He was also well aware that the citizens of Kassa are very stiff-necked people. Whenever they say "no," the Sultan, the Kaiser, and the Prince of Transylvania may say "yes," in vain. For when the potentates lay their heads together, and lay out the land in a way the people of Kassa don't like, the sheriff of Kassa simply wets his fingers and rubs out the proposed line of demarcation. Nor do they much mind being besieged for a couple of years or so; they have often enough experienced that. And when the Imperial general sends his shots into the city, they shoot them back again into his camp, and at last undermine the very ground beneath his feet. You had to be very clever indeed to get the better of the citizens of Kassa.

The threads of Zurdoki's crafty policy had been woven together in the letter deciphered by Valentine Kalondai, and Zurdoki was one of those who were perpetually urging the ambitious George Rakoczy to conquer Poland. The governorship of Cracow was the prize reserved for himself, and the prospect of the loss of that lucrative post piqued him exceedingly.

The second cause of his rage was his unsatisfied personal grudge against those who had forestalled him, viz., Count Hommonai and Valentine Kalondai.

In the third place he was in love with the wives of the count and the castellan, and the old miscreant had got the idea into his shaven head of corrupting them

both, and to this idea he stuck through thick and thin.

On arriving at Saros, he gave up all the time that was not devoted to political intrigues to elaborating this evil design.

That Dame Kalondai had been married to her husband at Bártfa he had already learnt from old Dame Zwirina, who had told him so immediately after that memorable dance. He also knew from the same person that Michal's face, during her earlier residence at Kassa, had been disfigured by great brown patches, which had subsequently vanished in a most marvelous manner. She had said then that they were freckles, which always go away in winter; yet since then another summer had come and gone, and yet not a single freckle had reappeared.

From this Zurdoki's crafty intellect concluded that if the roses and lilies on Dame Kalondai's face were not of artificial growth, the disfiguring freckles must have been painted on designedly, and there must be some reason for it.

He took the trouble to go all the way to Bártfa, searched on the spot the records which testify to the marriage of Valentine Kalondai, and learnt therefrom with whom pretty—nay, ugly Michal, had been in service.

There they recollected the freckle-faced girl very well, and they also told him what sort of a person it was who had brought the damsel thither.

But to find this woman now was not very easy.

Red Barbara had certainly gone to Poland, where she had no reason to fear that she would fall into the hands of Henry Catsrider, who, if he came across her, would guess at once that she had set his house on fire, and that the two charred skulls which had been found under the débris were the remains, not of Barbara and Michal, but of the two lads. And thus he could ferret out many other things, especially if he took the trouble to investigate how the splendid garments and jewels which he himself had bought to rejoice pretty Michal's heart had found their way to the Cracow rag market.

Nevertheless Mr. Zurdoki persistently followed up his clew.

The witch, he argued, must have had associates in the country. Witches form a sort of guild, and are closely united to one another. So he searched and searched till at last he found the wife of the Kopanitschar of Zeb. There he gave a great banquet, danced all night with the Kopanitschar's wife, and after exhausting all his flatteries upon her, well plying her with wine and loading her with gifts, he

learnt from her that she had indeed been acquainted with a woman who had sprung up from the bowels of the earth one night with a freckle-faced girl, and had then flown away through the air with her. The Kopanitschar's wife also knew where Red Barbara was now to be found.

In those days the more the witches were persecuted, the more they multiplied. Many lonely old women, and even younger ones who were separated from their husbands, not to mention a few young widows, got it into their heads that they were witches. They took great pride in the idea that men were afraid of them, and regarded them as supernatural beings, and for the sake of this senseless reputation did not even flinch from the horrors of a lingering death. There were quack anointers among them, too, who distributed to the others a salve made of stupefying, poisonous herbs, which, when well rubbed into their bodies, took away their senses, gave them delirious visions, and made their excited fancy believe that they were at witches' sabbaths in the society of the devil; or gave them morbidly voluptuous dreams such as haunt opium eaters, so that on awakening they firmly believed that their dreams were solid facts, and thus they openly confessed to deeds which they had only dreamt of doing. To such magic ointment-makers the rank and file of the witches looked up as their natural chiefs, went enormous distances to consult them, and in fact never lost sight of them.

Thus Annie knew very well where Red Barbara was to be found, although the latter had not considered it expedient to return to Hungary.

With Barbara's money it had been lightly come, lightly go! She had gone with her hoard of ducats and her costly dresses to Sandomir, where she gave herself out for a great lady, lived riotously with the professional thieves of the place, and after spending all her ready cash, sold her jewels likewise. Then the pretty dresses went too, till at last she found herself once more the same old tattered hag she had been before, and began again to haunt young women to tell them lies about their future, and give them bad advice in return for clandestine ducats.

This was just the sort of woman Zurdoki wanted.

He commissioned Annie to seek out Barbara, and gave the latter money for her journey, besides a letter certifying that she belonged to his household. This certificate she was to show to all and sundry who might stop her on the way. He was now quite certain of success.

Meanwhile, great changes were taking place at Kassa.

The day for the election of the sheriff had arrived, for according to ancient custom a new sheriff had to be elected every year.

Valentine Kalondai, with God's help, had already advanced very far. He had administered the office of castellan so excellently well that everyone was persuaded that the Keszmár professors had acted very unjustly in expelling him from college. But since discovering Zurdoki's intrigues, he had risen so high in the opinion of his fellow-citizens that, when the time for the election of the sheriff came round, no one would hear of anybody else for that office but him. Besides, said they, did not his father sacrifice himself for the benefit of the town when he was sheriff, and Valentine was much more fitted for the post than ever his father had been.

That the commandant, Count Hommonai, was a great patron of his, and warmly recommended him everywhere, naturally did him no harm either.

Nevertheless, to appease the opposite faction and prevent the citizens from quarreling among themselves, it was arranged that Mr. Zwirina, senior, who had hitherto been curator, should be made burgomaster, while Ignatius his son should become curator in his stead. In this way all parties were satisfied.

All three elections took place in the most orderly way. First, on Epiphany, the burgomaster—or, as he was then called, the superrector—was appointed, and then the curator, who had a weighty office to perform. He had to choose from among the most respectable citizens a hundred persons, who were to duly elect the sheriff. Fifty of these electors had to be Hungarians, and the remaining fifty Germans and Slovacks in equal numbers. As to confessions of faith, four-and-thirty of the hundred had to be Calvinists, three-and-thirty Lutherans, and just as many Papists.

It was no light manner to get together one hundred electors who should satisfy all these requirements.

At last, however, the hundred electors were all found, and then all the gates were closed, and no one was allowed to enter the city.

The hundred electors assembled in the townhall, and agreed among themselves as to the sheriff-elect.

Then they proceeded in perfect silence to the market-place, where a car drawn

by six horses, and covered by a black cloth baldeluir, which made it look just like a hearse, awaited them. The retiring sheriff had to sit down in this car, and the hundred electors walked alongside it on foot, as if they were accompanying a corpse on its last journey to the churchyard. And it was indeed, to the churchyard that the procession went, and all the streets were thickly strewn with straw, so that the rattling of the car might not be heard.

In front of the churchyard the representatives of the guilds, with the symbols of their trade on long poles, were drawn up in two lines: the butcher held his hatchet, the cobbler his last, the tailor his shears, the mason his trowel, the metal-smelter his mortar, the carpenter his ax, the joiner his plane. But the guild of the organ-builders was represented by the image of its patron St. Cecilia, fastened in a banner.

And all this time the town was as silent as the grave. No music, no noise of any kind was allowed.

The electors and the guildsmen marched into the very center of the churchyard, which was likewise covered with straw, and all stood around the chapel in a half-circle. Then the retiring sheriff arose in the car, which was laden with eighteen long, smoothly planed boards of the hardest wood, and said to the burgesses:

"Gentlemen and judges, let thy servant depart!" whereupon the curator answered in the name of the rest:

"Thou hast served us faithfully, depart in peace!"

Then the sheriff came down from the car.

"To whom am I to give these eighteen boards?" he asked.

"To the noble, valiant, worshipful burgher, Valentine Kalondai," replied the curator, in the name of the electors.

Then the car was turned round, and went back into the town as silently as it came, and this time, not only the hundred electors, but the representatives of the guilds also escorted it.

The car stood still before Kalondai's house, the doors and windows of which were shut, as indeed were the windows and doors of all the houses, and closed they must remain till the pealings of the church-bells gave them the signal to reopen.

At the knocking of the curator, Valentine Kalondai appeared on the balcony.

"What do the citizens require of me?"

"Admittance with our car and our tools," answered the curator.

"And what am I to do with your car and your tools?"

"Valentine Kalondai, the citizens of the town of Kassa have this day, of their own free will, chosen you their sheriff. These tools which we have brought with us are the symbols of our prosperity, which we now intrust to your safe keeping. For a whole year to come the care of our peace and our prosperity lies in your hands. But on this car, according to ancient law and custom, we have brought you eighteen boards: six for your coffin, in case you die in the service of our city, but twelve for the fagots round your stake in case you betray the town wherein you were born. Will you admit us within your gates?"

"Come in, and welcome, in God's name!" said Valentine, and thereupon he opened the gate of his courtyard, and the heavy car lumbered rattling in.

Dame Sarah had overheard the conversation in the next room, and, through the closed window, said to pretty Michal:

"I know not how it is, but I am so delighted that my teeth chatter, and an ague shakes me."

"'Tis just the same with me," whispered pretty Michal.

But Valentine went down into the courtyard to the electors, and took the eighteen boards, six of which were for a coffin for the faithful, and twelve for fagots for the faithless sheriff.

Then they escorted the sheriff-elect to the townhall. There the two eldest town-councilors led him by the hand to the council-chamber, and bade him take his place in the sheriff's chair, at the upper end of the table, which was covered with a green cloth. Then the four youngest town-councilors seized the four legs of the chair and raised it, Valentine and all, on to their shoulders, and carried him out on the balcony of the townhall, while the hundred electors in the council-chamber shouted aloud, "*Vivat!*"

At the third *vivat* all the mortars in the market-place were fired off, and immediately afterward all the bells in the church towers rang out, the town band

blew with the trumpets, the town drummer beat the big drum in the square, in front of the cathedral, and the civic watch fired three salvos out of their heavy muskets, while all the people filled the air with their loud rejoicings. The straw was swept away from all the streets, and fresh green grass, specially mowed for the occasion, laid down instead. Then the procession set out again from the townhall, the guilds going before with their banners and the militia with their weapons, with the sheriff in the midst under a canopy—and thus the guard of honor proceeded to the churches of all denominations, as a sign that the new head of the town would honor the creeds of all confessions according to law and custom. There they prayed in the Hungarian, German, and Slovack languages, and after making the circuit of the town, set the sheriff on horseback, and placed the civic sword in his hand to signify that, in case of war, he was ready, if necessary, to defend the city by force of arms; whereupon they accompanied him back to his house, while the trumpets blew and the bells pealed continuously. And by this time all the doors and windows were opened, and thronged with spectators.

Among the many trumpeters who strode along before the sheriff's horse was worthy Simplex, who looked up from time to time at his old friend, as if he thought that a part of all this pomp and splendor belonged to him. And Valentine Kalondai looked down from his high horse upon his old bosom friend, and beckoned kindly to him with his naked sword; nay, when they came to his own gate, he stuck his middle finger into his open mouth and pointed up at the house, which means in all the languages of the world, "Mind you also come up to the banquet!"

For the good old custom then prevailed that the elected sheriff, when the solemn function was over, should entertain the whole of the magistrates, not forgetting their lowliest servant, so that no one took it ill of him in the least for inviting the civic trumpeter to table also.

And now the women had all their work cut out for them, and indeed on all such festive occasions they have by far the hardest part to play. The men can very soon get through their hocus-pocus, and it does not very much matter whether they gabble off their set speeches like parrots, or stick fast in the middle of them like asses; but what with cooking and baking and roasting, the poor women have no rest or repose for a whole week beforehand, for the comfort and convenience of the guests depend entirely upon them, and they must see to it that no one has the slightest cause to grumble. For the last three nights they had scarcely closed an eye.

A good old sumptuary ordinance provided that the lesser burgesses should be first provided for in roomy tents erected in the courtyard, while the notables, among whom the commandant and his lovely wife took precedence, were regaled in the family mansion itself.

Besides these two groups of guests, there was yet another sort, consisting of the beggars of the town.

These ragged ones limped in a long row through the streets, and stopped in turn at the bottom of the flight of steps which led up to the door of the pantry. On the lowest of these steps stood pretty Michal, and gave them a huge loaf apiece, while Ali, the Turk, filled each one's jug with as much beer as it would hold.

After the male came the female beggars. The Calvinists saluted pretty Michal with "God give you blessing and peace!" the Papists with "Praised be Jesus Christ!" and pretty Michal returned each salutation most sweetly. Whenever she saw a beggar-woman with a child in her arms, she gave her two loaves instead of one, and although herself a Protestant, she nevertheless always answered the "Praised be Jesus Christ!" with a devout "For ever and ever, Amen." And the beggars said to one another as they went away, "Oh! what a beautiful, good, blessed creature! May God preserve her for a hundred years to come!"

All at once there came hobbling along among the beggars, a woman whose head was swathed in a red cloth, who held one hand to her mouth, and looked at the young woman with her large piercing black eyes, as if she would have devoured her.

When this strange shape reached pretty Michal, she whispered in her ear, with a mocking, singing drawl, not the usual salutation, but the words, "Praised be—the pretty lady!" And then, for a single instant, she showed her face, which was distorted by a devilish grin.

Pretty Michal collapsed utterly. Had not the faithful Ali caught her in his arms, she would have dashed her head against the stones.

The beggar with the red cloth had disappeared in the crowd. Most likely no one had observed her, but, at any rate, no one troubled himself about her.

On hearing that pretty Michal had fainted, all the women came running together, and carried her into the house. Then, with many winks and smiles, they whispered to each other over her body. When a young wife faints there is no

reason to be alarmed. The indisposition goes away of its own accord. The more initiated playfully take the husband to task for it, and he generally blushes and looks stupid enough. When a young wife swoons away, she is not so very desperately ill after all. The women soothed and calmed pretty Michal, and told her not to exert herself and not to sit at table. They could drink to her health, or rather to her speedy recovery, without her assistance.

So the banquet went on right merrily without her, especially after Dame Sarah had received the reassuring intelligence that there was really nothing the matter, the young wife only required a little rest. They drank to the prosperity of the land, the town, and all the distinguished guests present, without exception. The new sheriff had to clink glasses and drink bumpers with so many people that his happiness was almost too much for him. Even the two Zwirinas made Latin verses in his honor, so that his triumph that day was complete. At last Count Hommonai himself raised his beaker, and looking at Valentine, cried: "God preserve the man whom I love most of all my fellow-men, and with whom I am ready to share all my riches and all my honor!"

Then Valentine raised his tankard and proposed this toast:

"God preserve the friend who has shared with me all the contrarieties of life, my good comrade Simplex!"

And the commandant drank with the sheriff to the health of the trumpeter, although one or two fastidious gentlemen turned up their noses in consequence. But the majority liked Valentine all the better for not forgetting his lowly comrade in the hour of his greatest elevation.

Very late at night the merry company dispersed, and Greek fire flamed on all the bastions in honor of the happy day.

Valentine hastened to his Michal. His brain was reeling. He was brimful of the splendor of that day's triumph. In such a condition, a man deems it impossible that his own spouse, the second half of his soul, can perhaps be just as full of grief and despair as he of joy.

Beaming with pride, he advanced toward the bed on which pretty Michal lay. But she, with a horrified face, fell upon his neck, drew his head down toward her and whispered in his ear what she could have screamed aloud for terror:

"Let us fly. Red Barbara is here!"

At these words, Valentine's face grew pale, and the pride of his heart was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Whereby we learn that it is not good to come to close quarters with Satan, for if we catch him by the horns he butts us, if we clutch him by the throat he bites us, and if we hold him by the neck he kicks us.

"Perhaps it was not she after all?"

"It was. She looked at me, spoke to me, mocked me, and threatened me. Oh! all my limbs are still trembling!"

"Don't tremble, darling! Lay your hand on my breast and warm it. Have I not the power to defend you?"

"No! Though you had the power to defend me against all the world, you would be powerless against this woman, and you know it."

"Don't be afraid of her! She was in rags, you say? I'll pay her off, and she'll hold her tongue and go her way. Even if it will cost me my whole fortune, I'll buy her off and give you peace. Don't be afraid of her! She will certainly come again to see what she can get. Here is the key of my strong-box. Give her money. Manage so that mother knows nothing about it. As soon as you have satisfied her, I'll have all the foreign itinerant beggars, quacks, and fortune-tellers drummed out of the town within twenty-four hours, and then she also will vanish."

Valentine's soothing words had very little effect upon pretty Michal. All night long she was plagued by horrible dreams, and frequently sprang out of bed as if Death himself was after her.

Next day, while Valentine was at the townhall, Michal listened anxiously whenever a door creaked or a dog barked, and often peeped into the street through the closed window; but no one disturbed her all that day. The terrific form did not appear.

The third day passed, and the fourth, and yet the dreaded specter did not appear. Michal began to believe that the terrible beggar-woman had after all only been a

phantom, the mere creature of her own imagination.

And so Friday arrived, when the beggars of the town visit every house in turn, and every door must be opened to them.

Pretty Michal used personally to distribute the Friday's alms, a piece of bread and a penny, at the kitchen door.

At last the shape swathed in the red cloth, the shape so long expected in fear and trembling, came to the half-open door, and began the usual beggar's whine, "Praised be the—"

Michal did not let her finish the blasphemous salutation, but seized her by the hand and drew her rapidly into a side chamber. Here the beggar-woman took the cloth from her head, and laughed in Michal's face.

"Well! Here I am again! Eh? Have you thought about me much? Have you often mentioned me to your husband? Have you ever said: 'I wonder where poor Barbara is? If only we could see her once more?' Do you still recognize me? I haven't grown much younger since then, have I?"

"Barbara!" said Michal, rallying all her courage, "we must not converse very long together or else my mother will hear it."

"Ah, ha! So you have another mother besides me?"

"I know what you want—money. I'll give you all I can, and then, in God's name, go!"

"I don't want money—there now! I have enough of that and to spare. Look!" and with that she showed her a netted purse in which were at least two hundred ducats. "I want something else. I won't go from hence in anyone's holy name, for I've not come hither to be sent away, but to talk to you. Yes, to talk to you, in all secrecy, yet without fear. I already know all the habits of this household. At two o'clock in the afternoon your husband goes to the townhall to attend to his business. At the selfsame hour, the old lady has her afternoon nap. She has need of it, poor thing. In the afternoon the shop is closed, and not opened again till six in the evening; for no one sends for meat in the afternoon, and meanwhile the apprentices are busy at the drawbridge. But behind the gate is a side door, through which the meat is carried up into the shop, to be cured and salted; through that door I can creep in unobserved. Even the dogs don't bark at me. Be there in the afternoon when it strikes two! Then I'll tell you something."

With that she quickly whipped the cloth round her head again, and whisked out of the room, shuffling and scraping all the way down the long corridor as beggar-women do.

Michal remained behind, tormented by agonizing doubts. What did this woman, who had so much power over her, mean to do with her? If she will not let her silence be bought with gold, what price will she demand for it?

She said nothing to anyone, not even to her husband, about the rendezvous; but it seemed an age to her before Valentine went off to the townhall, and her mother-in-law began dozing in her armchair. At the stroke of two, she was already in the shop below, the trellis-door of which, leading to the street, was closed, while the side door near the gateway stood ajar.

Red Barbara appeared punctually. She looked cautiously round for fear of an ambush, and then slowly closed the door behind her that it might not creak. Then she stroked pretty Michal's face with her rough red hand, and said with cunning flattery:

"Eh! my little sweetheart, how lovely you have grown since last I saw you!"

Her touch, her words, made Michal shudder.

"I don't wonder at all at the enamoured Zurdoki going quite off his head about you."

"Zurdoki?"

"Yes, my dear little cockchafer! You may be quite sure that I have not come all the way to your dismal town of Kassa for my own amusement, but because I have been sent thither. The fine stout gentleman, the gracious, rich, and kind old gentleman, said to me: 'Go, dear gossip Barbara, go to the town of Kassa, seek there my wondrous little flower, the pretty wife of Valentine Kalondai, your own dear daughter, whom you got married to her husband at Bártfa, and take her this costly girdle. She must wear it for my sake, and it will make her more beautiful than ever!'"

The girdle was inlaid with turquoises and Orient pearls, a gift meet for a princess.

Michal dashed it angrily to the ground.

"Shameless wretch!"

"Whom do you call shameless? Me?"

"No, the sender."

"Oh, my treasure! I don't say that's all. He will give you very much more than that. He will load you with precious things, so that your beauty will shine forth still more resplendently."

"I won't have his presents!"

"Who dares to talk of presents here? It is not presents that a pretty woman receives. Oh, no! When any one brings a costly offering to a saint, he does it to open the way to heaven in the next world; and when anyone sends costly offerings to a pretty woman, *he* does it to obtain heaven here below. That is no present, but a well-earned reward."

"Reward! For what?"

"For what? How simple we are! Why, for admitting someone into your heaven, of course."

"What! The horrible old devil really believes that of me?"

"Come, come! A man is never horrible, and the devil is never old. If you think him ugly I'll give you a magic potion, and with that in your body you'll think him a prince."

"Go to hell with him! ugly or handsome. I'll none of him! I have a husband whom I love."

"You have two husbands, and one of them you do not love. Your first and lawful husband, whom you have forsaken for the more comely one, lives the life of a lonely, dismal bachelor at Zeb. You are on a crooked path. Do you fancy you can keep straight? No! you must go on as you have begun. Do you think that I only took you away from the house of the headsman of Zeb, in order that one stout butcher's wife the more might in course of time sit in the front pew of the Cathedral of Kassa?"

"You frightful woman! What do you mean to do with me?"

"What do I mean to do with you? Why, you little fool! I want to give you the

whole world. I want you to find out what sort of fruit grew on the tree of which our mother Eve plucked one. Why, when she was about it, did she not pick ten or twenty? If I had wished you to join the ranks of the saints as a martyr, I should have left you in the house of the headsman of Zeb, shouldn't I? Do you suppose that I do not know how to value your beautiful white velvety skin, your large sparkling eyes, your round cheeks, your inviting lips, your fine figure? All the noble opals in the mines of Dubink are not half as numerous as the precious stones which will be laid at your feet whenever you like. Your fingers will turn whatever they touch to gold. If you only do what I tell you, you'll be richer than King Darius. And it won't cost you the least trouble. It will seem as if you only dreamt it all. Who can call you to account for what you dream? Do you go to confession merely for dreaming that you are another man's wife. Fear nothing! If only you will put yourself in my hands, you will tread on no one's corns. But if you try to get away from me, it will only be so much labor lost. I have only to send a letter, a word, to Henry Catsrider, and you and your Valentine are lost. We shall see pretty Michal publicly scourged with rods and branded with red-hot irons in the market-place, and they will strike off the head of the sheriff of Kassa; for your lawfully wedded husband still lives, and you were not separated from him when you married the second."

Michal shuddered. She felt herself in the grip of a vise. She could only tear herself away by force. Feminine cunning suggested an idea, and rage and pride matured it into a regular plan. She would pretend to lend an ear to the evil counsels of her seducer. She would ostensibly consent to the disgraceful offer, lure Zurdoki to her, and when quite sure of him, would tell her husband everything.

A man like Valentine would most certainly kill both the seducer and his go-between, and such a homicide is justified by the laws and customs of every nation.

Then she meditated killing by the hand of her husband the one being in the world who was in possession of her secret. She had reason enough for hating with a deadly hatred the witch who came to her with such a dastardly proposal, and whose devilish intention it was to hand her innocent soul over to perdition; but at the bottom of this murderous idea was the constant thought that, when once Barbara was out of the way, her secret would be secure. So she whispered gently to Barbara:

"I'm only afraid someone will find me out."

Barbara's eyes flashed and sparkled like those of a wolf pouncing on his prey. She fancied the little bird was caught already.

"Leave it all to me," she replied, also in a whisper, "no true woman ever lets herself be caught. One who really knows what's what can even manage to be in two places at the same time. You know how to treat your husband so that he sees least when he's most on the alert. Only rely upon me. Has anyone ever suspected our former secret? Very well, then! It will be the same with this one also. No headsman can tear from me with red-hot pincers what I know about you, and no stately youth can wheedle it out of me with fond caresses; but a single shifty look from you may make me blab."

And Michal so far overcame her heartfelt horror of the evil witch as to press her hand and promise that they two would hold together as heretofore. Then she told her to be at the same place on the morrow, at the same time.

"And when the proper time comes," she added, confidentially, "you must once more practice enchantments with the pan of water on the fire, and the buck-goat will bring me the enamored swain."

Michal was well aware that it was no buck-goat, but his own legs, that had brought Valentine to her on that occasion; but she wanted to flatter the witch, who was much gratified by the allusion. She winked roguishly, patted Michal's cheeks once more, and after promising to come on the morrow, whisked out of the door as stealthily as she had come.

But Michal went up into her own room, threw herself on the bed, and wept bitterly. And when, a little time afterward, Dame Sarah asked her how it was that her eyes were so red, she pretended she had been working too long at a piece of fine white embroidery. Dame Sarah thereupon locked up every piece of white embroidery in her wardrobe, so that Michal might not ruin her eyes. When, however, her husband came home and asked whether Barbara had been there yet, she pretended that the woman had not appeared that day also.

Next day the witch came again after it had struck two o'clock, locked herself up with Michal in the butcher's shop, and had a whole hour's conversation with her.

And when Red Barbara had gone away, pretty Michal again went up into her bedroom, and wept till her mother-in-law awoke from her afternoon nap. And when Dame Sarah again asked her why her eyes were so red, she pretended that the scent of the sweet basil plant in her room was too strong, and had given her a

headache.

Dame Sarah immediately had all the flowers which stood in glazed jars on Michal's window-sill removed elsewhere.

And this evening also pretty Michal deceived her husband by assuring him that Red Barbara had never been there.

The following day was Sunday. Pretty Michal declared she did not feel well and could not go to church. This time Dame Sarah and Valentine went to the house of God without her. During their absence Red Barbara again visited Michal, and the young woman dismissed the witch with the assurance that she was quite ready to receive the gracious gentleman if he would only come, whereupon Red Barbara promised to hasten on her hobby-horse (a broomstick, no doubt!) to Saros, and Michal might expect her return any day.

When Michal heard that the witch was about to depart, she felt much relieved. That day she told her husband that Red Barbara had been there, and had departed satisfied. The same afternoon Valentine had it publicly proclaimed, that all foreign vagrants must quit the town by the following morning, or in default thereof be whipped with rods.

And now nothing was heard of the evil witch for some time to come.

But the roses did not come back to pretty Michal's cheeks, nor did the wrinkles vanish from Valentine's brow. Dame Sarah observed them both with anxious curiosity. Something dreadful was going on, of that she felt quite certain, especially as pretty Michal had now altogether left off going to church.

This much indeed Dame Sarah knew for certain. On the day of the election of the sheriff, just before her daughter-in-law had swooned away, a strange beggar-woman with a red cloth round her head had been seen to approach her, and now sundry friends and acquaintances told her that at the very time when she was wont to enjoy her afternoon nap, this same beggar-woman had been seen to step into the shop, and not come out again for some considerable time.

"My daughter-in-law is bewitched," said she to herself, "and no other than that evil witch has done it."

And pretty Michal pined and fell off from day to day, and no one knew what was the matter with her.

Meanwhile political events were ripening toward a catastrophe. Neither the remonstrances of his own subjects nor the prohibition of the Sultan could deter George Rakoczy. He collected a host and, uniting with the Cossacks and the Wallacks, went out against Poland. To win over the Emperor Ferdinand, however, he transferred to him the whole of that part of the land which lay along the banks of the Theiss; though, to be sure, this liberality was not of the slightest use to him. The Kaiser took, indeed, the counties offered to him, but declared at the same time that he did not approve of Rakoczy's attack on Poland, and, if necessary, would drive him out from thence by force of arms.

In consequence of these events, the town of Kassa had to send a deputation to Pressburg to negotiate with the delegates of the Emperor and the Palatine as to the maintenance of the privileges of the town and the confirmation of its religious liberties, and the sheriff, Valentine Kalondai, was chosen the spokesman of this deputation.

This mission took him away from home for some time, and there was very much weeping and sobbing on pretty Michal's part when he departed. Valentine would have liked to have taken her with him to Pressburg, but it was scarcely prudent to venture upon so long a journey at winter-time with such an invalid. On his departure, however, he was very urgent with his mother to guard his beloved Michal as the very apple of her eye; but, indeed, all such exhortations were quite superfluous, for good Dame Sarah dearly loved her daughter-in-law, and was constantly racking her brains as to what had made her so very sad all at once. Immediately after Valentine's departure there was a great fall of snow, and Dame Sarah persuaded her daughter-in-law to take a sledge drive into the town to see the carnival revels. The fresh air might do her good, and the bracing cold would perhaps bring back the roses to her cheeks.

Michal herself was very fond of sledging. She therefore let them bring her her furred pelisse, and harness the horses to the jingling sledge. Behind her on the box-seat sat the faithful Ali, loudly cracking his long whip.

Just as they were turning round the corner of the church into the public square, a swarm of frisky masqueraders began to pelt the sledge with snow. One of the snowballs fell right into Michal's lap, and as she shook it off her pelisse, there fell at her feet from the crumbling snow, a little crumpled piece of paper.

She picked it up and saw that something was written on it.

"At two o'clock this afternoon I shall be there!"

So she has come back. She has dared to creep back into the town, despite the prohibition. She has been watching for the time when the husband would not be at home!

When pretty Michal got home again her face was paler than ever. All her limbs were as cold as ice. Perhaps she would even have been taken ill had not Dame Sarah, there and then, insisted upon her swallowing a hot wine-and-nutmeg posset. She rallied all her strength, however, so as to be able to go and meet the evil witch when she came. She was in her power, she must obey her in all things, she must go wherever she bade her.

Even her indignation was paralyzed by the circumstance that Valentine was now far away from her. The trap had been laid, the sword sharpened; but who was to kill the evil being that had fallen into the snare?

As soon as dinner was over and Dame Sarah asleep, she slipped unobserved down into the usual trysting-place. The shop had a double door in the gateway. When Michal had opened the outer door, she thought to herself how strange it would be if the witch were already standing between the two doors.

And there, indeed, the witch really was, so that Michal did not even scream out when she saw her.

Witches can get into any room through a keyhole—especially if they have the assistance of a skeleton key.

"Alas, alas! my little poppet, how pale you have grown," whimpered Barbara, when she saw Michal. "You must get back your rosy color somehow, or else there's an end to all your glory. In this moldy city even you are catching the Kassa color, and it is, therefore, high time that you left it."

"But how dare you come into the town again?" said Michal, "when you know very well how strictly it is forbidden for all such—such——"

"Don't pick your words, sweetheart! Call a spade a spade! You mean to say, such a vagabond brood of witches, who are beaten with rods whenever they are caught. I know it. But the devil does not forsake his daughters. The witch has sense enough, when she enters Kassa by the Eperies gate, to come, not with her crutch in her hand and her bundle on her back, but in a jingling sledge, drawn by three horses; and when I throw aside this ragged mantle, I also am a person of

honor."

Red Barbara let the mantle fall from her shoulder, and took the red cloth from her head, and Michal fancied she saw upon the witch the same purple mantle which had once belonged to her, and of which Valentine had said that it made her look like a queen. But the satin robe was somewhat stained and shabby, and Red Barbara looked more like a witch in it than ever. Nothing is so disgusting as when such shameless old women trick themselves out in gay apparel.

"Have no concern on my account! I also have come hither in a sledge. I have left it standing at the corner, and have thrown these rags over me. There is a thick mist. No one has seen me."

"What do you want of me?" asked Michal trembling.

"First of all that you will sit down on this little chair."

"Why?"

"I cannot bear to see you so pale."

"And what then?"

"I have a nice remedy against all such pale faces. If I rub your cheeks a little with it, they will bloom like roses."

"What? You would rouge my face," cried Michal, with a shudder, retreating into the furthest corner of the shop, and holding her hands before her face.

"Don't be so scared! This remedy only lends a red color to a pale cheek. Who's the worse for that? Come here, I say, when I call you! Have I not anointed your face once before. Then, indeed, I covered you with ugly freckles. That pleased the lover you had then. The lover you have now likes it otherwise."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, oh! You want to know everything beforehand, do you? Won't you trust me till I have told you everything from beginning to end? Very well, then, I'll tell you. The fool who adores you, the great, rich lord, awaits you near to the town, in the Eperies tavern. He has harnessed five fleet horses to his sledge. My sledge will carry you to him."

"Me?"

"Don't be afraid. You won't catch cold. I've brought a fur mantle with me."

"I am to fly from here!"

"You can do it now. Your husband is not at home."

"By the mercy of God, I implore you to depart from me."

"Name not that potentate, for by so doing, you only offend the devil, whose friendship we have now much need of. We have not much time to lose. The great lord must travel to Poland the day after to-morrow to the Prince; he will take you with him wherever he goes, to Cracow, to Warsaw. He will make a noble lady of you, and when you have had enough of him you can come back to your present husband. You can make him believe that you went away to see your father the Keszmár professor."

"Depart from me, Satan!" cried Michal, violently removing the witch's arms from her body.

"That's right! cry aloud! Make a noise that the servants and neighbors may come running up. Let them lock me up and make me confess all about our acquaintance. That will be very pleasant for both of us, won't it?"

"Have mercy upon me and depart!"

"I'm not such a fool as that. You are the little goose that lays me the golden eggs."

"I'll give you all my money, all my jewels, only do not ruin me."

"Don't talk to me of compassion and mercy! I hate you. In the first place, I can't endure that a person I can make just like myself should be a pious, church-going, happy woman. In the second place, I've given my word to bring you with me. My reputation as a witch is at stake. And, finally, I'm furious with you because you tried to deceive me. You lied to me. You told me you lived in one place, when you lived in another, so that I might not find you. Instead of honoring and supporting me as your adopted mother, you paid me off once for all with a beggarly pittance that only made my mouth water for more. Now I don't mean to let you escape from my clutches again. When once you have given yourself up to me, you are mine forever, and if you are mine you are the devil's. Come along with me!"

A mist swam before Michal's eyes, her feet tottered, her whole body was palsied. She could not speak, she only staggered, and sought with her hands for a support to keep her from falling.

"If you faint," whispered Barbara, "it will be all the worse for you, for then I shall take you in my arms and carry you off. The sledge is close at hand, the mist is thick, and the snow is falling. No one will ever find out whither you have vanished."

Michal shuddered all over, and fell her full length upon the floor.

Good Dame Sarah did not take her usual afternoon nap that day. On the contrary, she took out her Bible and read therefrom in a loud voice to keep herself awake.

All at once it occurred to her to see what Michal was about. She went up to her room, but she was not there.

A side door which led from Michal's door to the basement stood open. The young woman must consequently have gone out through this door.

The wind had blown the freshly fallen snow into the corridor, and in this snow Dame Sarah recognized the impressions of Michal's small, narrow boots. These footprints led her right down to the gate, and thence, guided by the patches of snow which Michal had shaken from her feet, she arrived at the door of the butcher's shop.

She crept toward it and began to listen. Then she suddenly tore open the door and rushed in.

Red Barbara was stooping over the form of the senseless woman, and grasping her round the body in order to raise her up and carry her away.

"So I've caught you at last, eh! you horrible, godless witch!"

The hag, taken quite by surprise, uttered a hoarse shriek, like a vulture startled from her prey and, springing up from Michal's side, extended her crooked fingers like the talons of a bird of prey, and raised them aloft to strike. But her claws would have been of little use to her, even if she had borrowed them from her patron Beelzebub himself, against the attack which Dame Sarah in her rage and fury now made upon her.

That lady's iron hand seized the witch with irresistible might. In vain she twisted and wriggled. Dame Sarah bent the witch's body back over the chopping-board.

"Let me go, woman!" yelled Barbara, with bloody, foaming lips. "Don't hold me like that or you'll rue it! I can bite, and my bite is worse than that of a mad dog. I'll drag you down to hell with me if you don't let me go."

"You'd bite me, you b——, would you?" cried Dame Sarah, with grim fury; "then bite yourself!" and with that, thrusting one of Barbara's arms against Barbara's own mouth, she forced the witch's clenched fist in between her wide open jaws. "Bite away, and choke!"

The face of the witch was already livid, her eyes were starting out of their sockets, she was very near being choked with her own fist. And Dame Sarah would certainly have bestowed a great benefit upon her own family, and all the powers in heaven and earth would certainly have forgiven her, if she had not loosed her hold upon the evil creature till its pestilential soul had gone to hell.

But it was otherwise decreed in the great book of predestination.

The uproar made by the two struggling women drew the whole household to the spot. The servants hastened promptly to the assistance of their mistress, and after tearing a considerable quantity of hair out of Red Barbara's head, they tied her hands behind her and, as she would not go willingly, they dragged her through the snow to the lockup. All the way thither the witch never ceased shouting: "For this I'll revenge myself on your whole house."

Michal knew nothing of all this, for she lay in a swoon. It was already late in the evening when she came to herself and gradually recognized the faces of those who stood round her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Which shows what a good thing it is when "publica privatis præcedunt," or, in other words, when public duties take precedence of private affairs.

As the time approached when the return of Valentine Kalondai with the deputation from Pressburg might be reasonably expected, Simplex joined the town watchman, with whom he, as trumpeter, stood on terms of good fellowship, and watched with him for the approach of the sledges.

The carnival was now pretty far advanced, when a postilion arrived to say that the deputation was already on its homeward way, and the town was to send four fresh horses to meet it, so that it might make its solemn entry with due dignity; the four nags which had been hired at Pressburg being by this time splashed up to the very ears with mud.

As the deputies approached the gate, Simplex seized his trumpet—it was the custom when notables drew near to play in their honor a selection of the choicest melodies—and played a tune, the text of which begins with these words:

Hasten, little nag, gallop and fly,
At home thy mistress sick doth lie.

He thought that Valentine would understand the allusion.

And Valentine did understand it, but he would not take the hint. He told the coachman to drive direct to the townhall.

The civic coachman was a very old man. He had many a time driven Valentine's father on the business of the town, and was also very much attached to his son.

"Mr. Sheriff," he inquired, as they passed beneath the portcullis, "hadn't we better drive home first of all?"

"No, old fellow! the business of the city comes first. I'll go home afterward."

As the sledge stopped before the townhall, where the town-councilors, apprised of the arrival of the deputies, had already assembled, the first person whom Valentine met on dismounting was Count Hommonai.

He drew Valentine aside.

"Have you been home yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied the other, "'publica præcedunt privatis.'"

"Go home first."

"No, my lord! That I will not do. Tidings may there be awaiting me which will either irritate or delight me, and so either make me too severe or too soft-hearted. The circumstances of the city are at this moment so very serious that, till they have been set right, we must let our private affairs go. So, by your leave, the townhall first and my own house afterward."

And when Valentine explained in the council the actual situation of affairs, everyone said that he had acted quite rightly.

The Prince of Transylvania, in order to bring King Ferdinand over to his side, had surrendered to him the five counties on this side of the Theiss which had been ceded to Transylvania by the Peace of Linz. Then, shutting his ears against all good advice, he had invaded Poland, and his first attack was crowned with success, for Cracow fell into his hands.

King Ferdinand had accepted the portions of Transylvania offered to him, but at the same time intimated to Prince George Rakoczy that if he did not evacuate Poland at once, he, Ferdinand, would be forced to make common cause with the Poles, and compel him to do so by force of arms.

And now, too, the Sultan was very wroth with Prince George Rakozcy for beginning the war without his consent, and also for surrendering portions of the land to Ferdinand. When they are wroth in Stamboul it is no joke. The Sultan declared that George Rakoczy had forfeited his throne, and issued an athname which gave the scepter to Achatius Baresai, at the same time commanding the Khan of the Crim Tartars to march into Transylvania and chastise his rebellious vassal.

So the town of Kassa had now to choose between two things.

It might quietly conform to the will of Prince George Rakoczy, and consent to be transferred to Ferdinand of Austria, the first consequence of which would be that the troops of the Prince of Transylvania would quit the town in order to garrison the fortress of Onod, while a Walloon regiment, under the command of General Löffelholz, would take their place; in which case the Jesuits would have their cloisters restored to them, and would reënter the town behind the Walloons.

That would be a bitter morsel to swallow.

The second alternative for the town, in case it disliked the Emperor's friendship, was to throw itself into the arms of the Turks. The Sultan had deposed George Rakoczy, and appointed Achatius Baresai Prince in his stead. If the town of Kassa chose, it could side with Baresai and summon the Pasha of Eger to its assistance.

One of these two courses had to be adopted.

Good advice was now scarce.

There lay the stone which one fool had cast into the well, and one hundred wise men could not pull it out.

The session of the council, when these things had been explained was extraordinarily stormy. Valentine Kalondai, who presided, was scarcely able to maintain order, so heated were the tempers of his colleagues.

One of them threatened to burn his house to the ground rather than permit

German troops to be quartered upon him, while another protested that he would rather massacre his own wife and children than allow the Turkish janissaries to perpetrate their atrocities upon them; and while some exhausted the whole vocabulary of abuse against the unbelieving heathen, others excelled themselves in blackening the Jesuits. Thus there arose two fiercely antagonistic parties, neither of which would give way a hair's breadth to the other.

The president alone was silent.

At last the superrector turned to him and asked him for his opinion.

"Well, if you want to know what I think," began Kalondai, "let me tell you that I do not agree with either opinion. Judging the case on its merits, I think the Theiss counties ought not to have been ceded to Ferdinand till he had fulfilled his obligation of assisting George Rakoczy against Poland, which he has not done. But on the other hand, neither has the Sultan any right to dispose of the free city of Kassa; such right belongs to the Estates of the Realm alone. So again, Rakoczy can only be deposed by the Estates of Transylvania, and if they wish Baresai for their Prince they alone can elect him. My opinion, therefore, is that neither Walloon horsemen nor Turkish *Spahis* be allowed to enter here, but we must close the city gates, and, if need be, oppose force to force as our fathers have done. If the council wish it so, I'll stake my head upon the issue, and God shall judge betwixt us."

But Mr. Zwirina was by no means enamored of so adventurous a policy, and he so dexterously strung together the evil consequences which would accrue to the town from such obstinacy—to wit, bombardments with red-hot bullets, loss of life, famine, plague, conflagrations, bankruptcy of the merchants, ruin of the guilds, storms, capitulations, wholesale blackmailing, nay, even the wresting of the churches from the hands of the Protestants—that when it came to voting, the majority of the council decided that the town ought rather to conform to the will of the Prince by submitting to the change, than come to loggerheads with the Kaiser and the Sultan at the same time; and that the Walloons should be allowed to enter, especially as they were, after all, the soldiers of the King of Hungary.

No sooner had this resolution been adopted than Count Hommonai took the golden key of the town from his neck and threw it on the table, saying that from henceforth he no longer regarded himself as commandant, and would discharge his troops forthwith. He would now, he said, retire to his estates to shoot stags and plant cabbages.

"If you go, I go too," said Valentine Kalondai. "I also lay down the sheriff's staff on the table; let a better man bear it!"

And so saying, he placed the gold-headed Spanish cane on the table, and rose from his seat. It must certainly have been his guardian angel that gave him the idea of resignation at that moment, for he thereby averted the point of the sword that was actually suspended over his head.

But now he was suddenly assailed on all sides. His friends, his enemies also (especially the latter), begged and prayed him to remain. Most earnestly of all Mr. Zwirina implored him not to forsake the town at such a crisis. Was he not so very much wiser than they all? Without him the concord of the town would become sheer anarchy; it was just at such times as these that they needed a strong hand like his to guide them, for where could they find such another? At last they attacked him on his weak point. It was cowardice, they said, to hide his head just as danger was approaching. They pestered him so long that at last the voice of ambition drowned the suggestion of his good angel; but it is only fair to say that his love for his native place, and his sense of duty, also, contributed not a little thereto. He allowed them to lead him back to his place, for which complacency he received a loud *vivat*. They even wished to lift him up in the air, chair and all, as upon the occasion of his election, but he motioned to them not to do so.

Then Count Hommonai withdrew from the council-chamber; he had no longer any business there.

Valentine Kalondai declared, however, that he would only hold office till the new order of things had been established; then they must elect them a new sheriff in his place.

After this weighty matter had thus been satisfactorily settled, the recorder and the fiscal procurator brought in sundry official documents, which only needed the signature of the sheriff, the council having already passed them; they were urgent criminal cases, in which every delay would be cruel. In all penal matters a swift execution is merciful. Not till all this business had been disposed of could Valentine quit the council-chamber.

The first document presented for his signature was a death-warrant.

It was the first sentence of death he had ever signed; his heart beat violently.

To kill a man in the battlefield, in the heat of the combat; to manfully grapple with a man who is already mowing his way through the ranks, sword in hand, first bidding him defend himself or surrender; to cut down with a strong hand and dash to pieces a man who breaks into the land as an enemy, and ravages it like a wild beast—all that he had often and cheerfully done, as became a soldier. But to sit in a soft armchair and kill a man in cold blood, a man in fetters who cannot fly, who cannot defend himself; a man of the same town as yourself, a fellow-citizen, perhaps an acquaintance, who, pale with mortal agony, begs you for mercy; to kill such a man by breaking the staff of office over him—in such a thing as that he was quite a novice.

He asked what crime this man had committed.

"He has killed his wife."

A terrible crime!

"He killed his wife, and she, too, big with child."

A horrible, unnatural crime. Such a wound as that none but the headsman can heal.

The headsman! He had not thought of that on the day of his triumph, when he had visited every church, and prayed before every altar, "God preserve this noble city from the misfortune of requiring the headsman to come hither to execute justice before the year is out!"

That will, indeed, be a painful meeting when Valentine Kalondai and Henry Catsrider meet each other in the narrow path leading to the scaffold, the one as the judge of wretched criminals, the other as the torturer, the executioner of the condemned felons!

How will he be able to look that man in the face?

He would not submit to the inevitable. He requested that the charge brought against the accused should be laid before him. A sheriff cannot sign a death-warrant before he has heard the defense of the accused.

The conrector, acting as secretary, then recited to him both the accusation and the defense. A militiaman—Valentine knew him very well, for he was a butcher's apprentice—came home drunk one night from patrolling. His wife began scolding him, and he furiously drew his sword and aimed a blow at her. He only

meant to hit her with the flat of the blade, but the devil jogged his hand, and the point went right through her heart. She died. The murderer gave himself up immediately the deed was done. He repented of his crime, and himself demanded death as his punishment.

"Then he did this dreadful deed when he was in liquor and is now sorry for it?" said Valentine, by way of extenuation.

"Yes, and that is certainly a reason for mitigating the punishment," replied the superrector. "Just for that very reason he has only been condemned to be beheaded, otherwise he would have been quartered alive for his bloody deed."

"Has he any children?" asked the sheriff.

"Seven," replied the conrector.

"He leaves behind him seven orphans," sighed Valentine, "seven innocent orphans, who will be forever branded as the children of the man who died beneath the hand of the headsman!"

"So it is!" answered the cold and grim superrector; "seven will be branded with infamy for the crime of one. But if we were to pardon him, all the inhabitants of Kassa would be branded for all time."

"I don't ask you to pardon him. Lifelong imprisonment in the treadmill of the civic reservoir, with the sting of conscience in his heart, would be a still greater punishment for him than death."

"Pray don't let us have any mawkish sentiment, good Master Sheriff! If we don't kill, people will kill us. If we pardon the evil-doers we shall leave the good defenseless. This hard-mouthed people requires an example which shall strike its eyes and so frighten it. If we pardon one malefactor, a hundred others will spring up. It is a sad duty, no doubt, but it is a duty none the less, and must be done."

The cold sweat started out on Valentine's forehead like the morning dew on a flower-bed, as he dipped the pen into the inkhorn, and his large powerful hand trembled so much as he wrote his name under the warrant that his signature, ordinarily so bold and energetic, was now scarcely legible.

"Are there any more arrears?"

"One more sentence, only one, a 'harum palczarum.'"

We must linger a little on these words in order to find out what they mean. Both of the German chroniclers whom we here follow write "harum pallizarum," possibly a corrupt contraction with Latin terminations of the Hungarian expression "három pálczára," *i. e.*, "with three staves." But what is the meaning of the expression? In the annals of the Debreczin town council we find this peculiar punishment (reserved for witches found guilty of pimping and seduction) very plainly described. The Debreczin chronicle says, "let them be crowned with three staves!" The German chronicler adds it was very seldom that anyone survived this punishment. The head of the condemned was pressed between three staves, and then the executioner slowly screwed them together, thereby causing the felons truly infernal torments. Very often they swooned away, and then they were beaten with bunches of thorn till they came to again.

This was the horrible sentence which Valentine Kalondai had now to sign.

When he read the name of the condemned, he fancied the whole house was sinking with him.

"Red Barbara!"

Sparks and rings of fire danced before his eyes.

That *she* should have fallen into *his* hands!

"Examine the documents, Master Sheriff; the case will interest you!" said the conrector.

Valentine Kalondai read.

It was indeed a hellish message which these documents conveyed.

The confessions of the imprisoned witch, the charge brought by Valentine's mother, the testimony of acquaintances and friends all showed that a detestable plot had been forged against his happiness and honor. The accused denied nothing. She confessed everything at the very first examination. The great and mighty Mr. Zurdoki had sent her to corrupt the wife of Valentine Kalondai. She had intended, by fair means or foul, to have carried Michal off and made her Zurdoki's mistress. She had been paid to do so, and had got everything ready for carrying out this diabolical plan.

But when they had asked by what means she had managed to approach the wife of Valentine Kalondai, and how she had got her to listen to her filthy

insinuations, seeing that Michal had recoiled from them with horror, nay, at least, had even fainted away, the accused had simply replied: "I am a witch, I can do everything." Nay, even when they applied the question extraordinary, she stood them out that she had no other help but her own magic power. At last, however, under the extremest torture, she had declared herself the mother of Dame Valentine Kalondai. That was why the latter had allowed her free access to her person. Nay, so far did this woman's impudence go, that she actually maintained that when the sheriff came home, he would be the first to implore the town council to let the mother of his wife go free.

Valentine felt as if the whole world was falling to pieces over his head. And then it was that the maxim occurred to him, that it was just when the universe lies in ruins around him that a true man raises his head most defiantly.

His friends and foes at the green table were watching him with curiosity and concern to see what he would do. Would he quail beneath the blow, and justify the assertion of the witch by imploring them to do her no harm?

Valentine Kalondai took the pen, dipped it into the inkhorn, and wrote, no longer with a trembling hand, the date and his own name at the bottom of the warrant, underlining the words "with three staves" twice, and taking good care not to mistake the inkhorn for the sandbox when he sanded his signature.

And then, his heavy fist still reposing on the bundle of documents, he requested the conrector to fold together a sheet of paper and, "fracto margine," to write, in the name of the town council, a letter of citation to the headsman of Zeb, Henry Catsrider, bidding him, as in duty bound, to appear within eight days at the city of Kassa, in order to execute the law's sentences which had been passed that day, copies of which were sent him. He was then to present his account to the civic auditor, who was authorized to discharge it. This citation Valentine also subscribed.

He had still a faint glimmer of hope.

When Henry Catsrider receives this citation and learns that he, the headsman of Zeb, must come face to face with Valentine Kalondai whom he had formerly robbed of his beloved, he was then a genius, a luminary, a cleric and a scholar, face to face with him who had once been an expelled convict, but now was sheriff; when he reflects that he who was now a branded monster, an outcast from every city, is to appear before his former rival, who was now the first magistrate of one of the most important cities of the land; and when, besides all

that, Henry Catsrider discovers that one of the condemned, on whom a masterpiece of his hellish art was to be performed, was his father's former housekeeper, who had once actually been his own nurse and suckled him, why, then, he would surely have human feeling enough to remain at home, and, as he was often wont to do, send his oldest apprentice to execute the sentence in his stead.

Valentine actually believed that there was still some human feeling left in Henry Catsrider!

When all this had been done he arose from his seat of honor.

The whole town council bowed before him. The conrector, Ignatius Zwirina the younger, expressed the satisfaction felt by all the burgesses at having a sheriff whose wise and firm administration would serve as an example to all his successors.

And now Valentine hastened home.

He asked no questions. He let no one speak. He stifled the words on the lips of his mother and his wife with kisses. Then he took his pretty Michal on his knee, and whispered in her ear in the tones of a lover to his lady:

"Come what may or must! Be it weal or woe, our comfort is that we shall share it together!"

And pretty Michal was content that it should be so.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The fulfilment of the proverb, as you make your bed so must you lie in it, comes to pass.

Valentine Kalondai knew Henry Catsrider ill, and all his psychological calculations foundered completely.

During the last few years Henry Catsrider's nature had entirely degenerated.

When Valentine was his fellow-student at the college of Keszmár, Henry was a stuck-up youth, proud of his learning, who was always boasting to his comrades of his mental capacity and his physical strength till he became positively unendurable. The weaker ones he persecuted. In his wrestling-bouts with them he shockingly maltreated them, and when they played pranks he reported them to the authorities. But the end and aim of all his brutal self-assertion was to become a clergyman. In this calling he would also have been sly and tyrannous, always looking after himself and a scourge and a burden to his colleagues; but his father had violently torn him away from this path of life, and forced him to go back to his proper trade. And perhaps the old man was right.

For this was, after all, the trade for which Henry was intended by nature, and within a few years he was as much at home in it as if he had done nothing else all his life. Coarse society soon brings down everyone who mixes in it to its own level. The feeling, too, that all the world despises him, arouses in a man the defiant instinct to avenge himself on the whole world for such contempt. Till then he had led the life of a recluse, but now he suddenly plunged into a continual orgy, and hated sobriety. The ghastly death of his father had filled him with the cruelty of a wild beast, and the destruction of his house had extinguished in him the last sparks of human feeling. After the loss of his wife, whom he had loved passionately, he sank completely into the slough of vileness, and sought the society of those women whom not the altar but the pillory would sooner or later unite to him—to-day a glowing kiss, to-morrow a hissing iron. As, moreover, he had lost a large part of his treasures in the burning of his house, he became avaricious likewise. He wanted to make up again what he had lost.

Just then they were beginning in Poland to play at games of chance with the painted cards invented by Peter Gringenoir, and Henry spent all his time in the Polish cities playing cards with the cheats and filchers of the district. And in these gambling dens he generally managed to lose some fresh piece of his silver plate which he brought with him in the leg of his boot. Woe betide them who then fell into his hands!

Once he was warned by the authorities that he would be degraded and expelled from his office if he did not attend to it better.

After all this we may readily suppose that Henry Catsrider, when he received the summons from the town council of Kassa, did not hesitate a moment to appear personally in answer to it. That this summons was signed by Valentine Kalondai, as sheriff, did not disturb him in the least. On the contrary, the idea of appearing before his former rival as executioner rather tickled him than otherwise. That one of the victims was Red Barbara afforded him the greatest satisfaction. He suspected at once that the witch had set his house on fire and stolen a portion of his treasures. That she had also filched from him his greatest treasure was, however, unknown to him as yet. He would not for any consideration have relinquished to anyone else the bliss of tormenting her.

A week after the dispatch of the citation, the wagon of the executioner of Zeb rattled over the stones of the market-place of Kassa. It was a black vehicle, with red wheels and axles, on which the somber company, like a troupe of itinerant comedians, brought with them all the requisites of their terrible stage. Mounted drabants and musketeers escorted them before and behind.

The worshipful town council had a very hard time of it that day. In the early morning, two squadrons of Walloon cuirassiers had marched into the town, blowing, not the Hungarian farogato whose richly varying melodies so much delighted the people, but those shrill trumpets which were only invented for the annoyance of mankind. And between the two squadrons of cavalry, sitting on mules and chanting discordant hymns, the Jesuit fathers also came back to the town.

The colonel of the foreign soldiers and the superior of the Jesuits hastened together to the townhall, and a great dispute arose between them in the council-chamber as to which of them should have the precedence. General Löffelholz asserted that, by virtue of his rank, he was entitled to settle military matters with the magistrates first of all. Prior Hieronymus, on the other hand, appealed to the

privileges of his order, which placed him above every temporal authority.

Neither the soldier nor the monk would give way, and the pair of them kept their heads covered, the one with his plumed hat, the other with his hood. At that moment the sound of clanking spurs was heard coming along the corridor, and now both the contending parties gave way before the third comer.

The man who now entered also wore a plumed biretta on his head, but it was scarlet. His powerful body was dressed in a scarlet coat, and over it he wore a long scarlet mantle.

The clergyman and the soldier instantly made way for him. They were careful not to come into contact with so much as the hem of his garment.

It was the headsman.

Henry Catsrider's face had very much altered since he had laid aside his priestly garb. His former long fair hair was now clipped short, and his beard flowed down in two long reddish wisps. His face was puffy from much drinking, and his large eyes, that had once been so sparkling, now gleamed out of his coppery, swollen countenance like smoldering embers. His large, coarse mouth was all awry. The humanized wild beast had relapsed again into its original savagery. Even if he had worn no hangman's weeds, all the world might have read his frightful profession from his face. As he approached, everyone timidly made way for him.

And if there was anyone who had as much cause to shudder at the appearance of this shape, as if the skeleton with the scythe had suddenly sprung up out of the ground before him, it was certainly Valentine Kalondai. To him this creature was not only the man of blood, but the man whom he had robbed of his wife.

Even at the time when passion had led him to this step—a step to which a whole host of concurring circumstances, hot blood, and the force of fate had constrained him—even then he had thought that he might one day fall in with him whom he had made a widower, but he had then said, "I will rather get together a robber band than surrender my beloved to destruction!" That would have been a very different kind of meeting. A meeting like this was more than human foresight could have foreseen.

All eyes turned to him who was the head of the city, the president of the town council.

And even at that moment his strength of mind did not forsake him. He looked Henry Catsrider straight in the face, as if they had never known each other, as if he had never trespassed against him.

The headsman planted himself in front of the sheriff and said: "'They have called me, and I have come!'"

Valentine, with perfect *sangfroid*, completed the quotation:

"'I have sprung from the dust of an accursed earth.'"

This distich, it is said, was written in Chaldaic characters on the wings of those locusts which first appeared at the call of Moses, and always reappear when the Lord would abase the pride of man.

Everyone knew this saying. The words of the sheriff, therefore, called forth a slight smile on every face, and a murmur of merriment ran through the room because he had so dexterously turned the tables on the coarse intruder.

Still more satisfied with his wisdom were they when he pronounced judgment in the precedence dispute. "The Church first, then the temporal power, last of all the headsman."

But the Walloon general, a strapping fellow, tapped his saber, said he was the first man in the town, and made a terrible to-do.

Valentine Kalondai thereupon shoved back his presidential chair, laid down his mace, girded on his sword, and donned his hat. There were now four persons in the council-chamber who had their hats on.

Then he turned to the general and said: "Have we come hither to deliberate or to fight?"

The Walloon perceived that he had met his match. Such courage pleased him. He held out his hand to the sheriff and said with a laugh: "Well, well, Master Sheriff, I have not come hither to squabble. Pray sit down again and deliberate," and with that he drew back.

This resolute behavior made such an impression on the members of the council that, as the sheriff resumed his seat, they greeted him with a loud *vivat*, while the victorious prior stretched forth his skinny arm toward him and said: "Deus benedicat tibi!"

"I have asked no blessing of your reverence; he who sits in the judgment-seat may not even accept a benediction;" and he forthwith began to investigate the points in dispute between the city and the College of Jesuits.

If you really want to test a man's presence of mind and dialectic skill, just engage him in an argument in a foreign language. Valentine now showed that he could negotiate with the Jesuit in Latin and with the Walloon in German, without stammering or stuttering in the least. And indeed, as the conrector could not help remarking to his neighbor, the sheriff was a far greater master of both languages than those with whom he was negotiating. His precise, curial style was easily victorious over the Jesuit's dog Latin, and his expressive German, with his pithy Lutheranisms, was more than a match for the general's Platt-Deutsch dialect.

And the headsman was standing behind him all the time!

The questions before him were by no means easy to solve. On the part of the town a charter had to be drafted and signed, guaranteeing to the Jesuits all their privileges and possessions, and declaring their cloisters a sacred asylum, whose very threshold the secular authorities should never cross. The College of Jesuits had also to subscribe an agreement pledging itself not to convert Protestants to the Roman faith by force, artifice, moral pressure, or any sort of cajolery.

Valentine's clear intelligence knew exactly how to hit the proper mean between these directly antagonistic pretensions, and keep the document entirely free from those artfully insinuated clauses whereby the Jesuits tried again and again to smuggle in their mental reservations.

The prior was satisfied with the compact, and when Valentine took up his pen to subscribe it the other unctuously exclaimed:

"Such a good sowing will produce a good harvest!"

And Valentine could not help thinking, as he handled the pen, "I wonder what sort of harvest the letters I am now sowing will bring in to me."

The matters to be settled with the general, too, were not a whit less captious. The relations between the military and the civic authorities had to be very carefully defined and settled, once for all. The city had an armed garrison of its own, and reserved to itself the complete control of this garrison. The gates were to be watched by both parties together. So the Gordian knot to be untied was this: how two sets of men diametrically opposed in nationality, religion, and politics were

to be made to consent to be faithful guardians of the law of the land and the prerogatives of the Kaiser, without prejudicing the liberties of the city, or interfering in any way with one another, or attempting to violently hew the knot in two with the sword.

And that Kalondai settled this complicated matter also in the wisest possible way is sufficiently obvious from the fact that neither party was quite contented with his decision.

Last of all, it occurred to him that there was still someone standing behind him—the headsman.

He did not tell the fellow to stand forth, but alluded to him in the third person, and as the man had a Slovack accent, he addressed him in the Slovack tongue, just as if they had never squabbled with each other in their youth in the Hungarian, German, and Latin languages.

"Master Henry will be at his post on the scaffold at six o'clock to-morrow morning, and there await with his apprentices the arrival of the magistrates."

He wasted no more words on the subject, but closed the session and went home.

In the evening of the same day the very reverend dean was sent for to come to Kalondai's house to give a lady the sacrament of the altar.

The dean at once supposed that Dame Sarah was on the point of death, and great was his astonishment when they led him to the bedside of the younger lady. It was pretty Michal who desired the last sacraments.

The very reverend gentleman was beyond measure astonished thereat. Had he not seen Michal piously praying in church only the day before! And now she desired the sacrament of the dying!

"Would you haggle with God?" asked Valentine.

So pretty Michal partook of the Lord's Supper, and the clergyman gave her his benediction.

And pretty Michal at that moment had no bodily ailment, yet for all that she was on the point of death.

Next day—it was a dark January morning—the gloomy scaffold stood ready in the market-place of Kassa. The early risers could see through the thick mists the

headsman's apprentices, in their pointed caps, moving like hellish shadows about the burning fire, in which they were heating their terrible tools red-hot, and warming their hands the while, to prevent them from growing stiff.

When the clock in the church-tower struck seven, the watchmen on the bastions struck the big drum three times, whereupon the felon's bell in the tower of the townhall began to toll—a sad, heartrending sound. Then the gates of the courtyard were thrown open, and out came the procession in the usual order, the headsman first on horseback, then the convict, and last of all the members of the town council, the sheriff, the superrector, the conrector, the syndic, and the civic warden. All these took their places on the dais, with the sheriff in the center, while the headsman dismounted from his horse and ascended the scaffold.

The soldier who had been condemned to be beheaded was accompanied to the place of execution by his comrades. It was the special privilege of every citizen of Kassa who suffered capital punishment to go to the scaffold free and unfettered, take leave there of his family and friends, and not be maltreated by the headsman.

The convict in question advanced with a cheerful countenance and head erect. Two of his comrades accompanied him, consoling and consoled by him.

"Never mind, gossips! I am not the first to whom it has happened. I don't take it so much to heart, and it doesn't hurt anyone else. God bless those who are left behind!"

Then he kissed and embraced his little children one after the other, and distributed them among his friends.

"To you I give my little son, and to you I leave my little daughter."

And so he parted with them all.

Who is that weeping so loudly?

It is the sheriff beneath his canopy. He cannot refrain from sobbing.

The convict had compassion upon his judge, and said to him:

"Weep not, Master Sheriff! you have pronounced a righteous judgment over me. I deserve to die. Not a drop of my blood will ever burden your soul, for it was a righteous sentence. Turn your head aside if you find it hard to see the sentence

carried out!"

But Valentine Kalondai did not cover his eyes. He bade them weep no more, but watch the scene to the very end.

He was learning!

He was learning how to mount the seven steps of the scaffold with a firm step, how to cheerily tap the headsman on the shoulder, ask him if his ax was sharp, and then send his last greetings to those at home.

The man sat down without any assistance on the low stool, put his hands on his knees, stretched forward his head, and began to sing the well-known verse: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O ----" The word "Lord" was still upon his lips as he stood before the throne of God.

Valentine had learnt something.

Another and far more terrible scene now ensued. They brought up the witch.

She did not endure her fate calmly. She bit, kicked, scratched, cursed the saints and all mankind, and called upon the devil to help her. They had to bind her by force to the pillar.

And Henry Catsrider actually took pleasure in the hideous contest.

It is one of the most ghastly privileges of the headsman to wound with words the wretches whom he is worrying to death, to torture their souls as well as their bodies.

"Oh—oh, you old witch! So you have come under my hands at last, eh?"

"I suckled you, you dog! You have sucked witch's milk from me. Show yourself the devil you are!"

"Come along then, you queen of witches, come and be crowned!"

With that he placed upon her head the crown, made of three staves, and began to screw them together.

Red Barbara turned her face toward Valentine Kalondai and cried; "Judge! make them take this crown off, it hurts me!"

"Wait a bit!" said the headsman, with a harsh laugh; "I'll give you a sedative

immediately;" and seizing a scourge with one hand, he gave a vicious twist at the screw with the other.

The tortured hag bellowed for anguish.

"Judge, let them kill me outright, let me die!"

"Don't be afraid! I'll wake you up again," sneered the headsman, and he tore her gown from her shoulders, so as to give freer play to the lashes of his scourge.

It was just such another purple gown as that in which Michal had once so greatly excited Valentine's admiration, and the recollection of that dress occurred to Henry also.

"Is not this the dress you stole from my wife, you thief, you incendiary?" and again the lash hissed through the air.

"Do you strike me, you hangman? You knacker, you! I'll strike you back now! I'll brand your face so that you will bear the marks about with you to your dying day. You cuckold, you horned beast! You have crowned me, have you! I'll crown you still better. Your wife, your pretty Michal, still lives, and is the mistress of that sheriff yonder! You have two horns on your head, bear them as best you can!"

The headsman's apprentices began to laugh.

Furious with rage at this taunt, the headsman gave the gibbering witch such a blow on the head, with the leaden knob of his scourge, that she never spoke another word on this earth; then, rushing to the edge of the scaffold, he stretched out his arm and pointed his whip at Valentine.

The town-councilors sprang to their feet with a shudder.

Then Valentine said in a calm voice: "It is so—it is true!"

Augustus Zwirina immediately turned toward him and said: "Then, Mr. Valentine Kalondai, the time has come for you to lay down the sheriff's staff!"

Valentine surrendered his staff, descended from the tribune, and went straight home. He went quite alone. Not a soul accompanied him.

When he got home, pretty Michal could read from his face that misfortune had overtaken him.

"It's all up. We are betrayed and openly accused."

Pretty Michal was not dismayed by this intelligence, she was prepared for it.

"I only ask one thing of you," said she to Valentine, "and as you love me, you must grant it. Our sole defense is that Henry Catsrider, when he married me, gave himself out to my father as a different person from what he really was. That is an impediment which nullifies the marriage. We might, therefore, defend ourselves by contending that I was not his true and lawful wife, that he married me under false pretenses, and kept me in his house by force. I pray and beseech you not to offer any such defense. My poor father knows not what has befallen me, and I wish him never to know it."

"But I have a mother."

"Her heart will break for your sake. I know it. But then she will live forever among the choirs of angels. She has nothing to reproach herself with. Her inward monitor does not accuse her. But it is my father's own fault that I came into this terrible situation. If he ever learns that he is the sole cause of all this sorrow and shame, it will not only be the death of him, but it will make him lose his hopes of heaven."

Valentine kissed his pretty Michal.

"You are right. We will not defend ourselves."

At that moment worthy Simplex appeared.

"Quick, comrade! Take horse! The gates are not yet closed. Twelve of your trusty friends have banded to assist your flight. There is no time for reflection. The town council is at this moment deciding your fate."

But Valentine answered: "If I alone were concerned, I do not say that I would not attempt to escape. But there are two of us, and rather let my head be thrown into the dust along with the head of my Michal than her name and mine should be written over the pillory to our eternal shame. Here we remain, come what may."

"Good! Be it so!" said Simplex. "But, at least, defend yourself. You know the rule: 'Si fecisti, nega!' We will give the accusers enough to do. I will swear that I saw with my own eyes the wife of Henry, the hangman, perish in the flames. I don't care very much whether I am a cell higher or lower in hell. I know the commandment says: 'Thou must not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' But

there is nothing said about bearing false witness to befriend thy neighbor."

"No, my good Simplex! we don't do that. If my Michal were to say that she had never been Henry's wife, but was another person, she would next be asked who she really was then, and who her father was. But this she never will say. Do you understand why?"

"Yes, comrade, I do understand. She would spare the white hairs of her father."

"And if she would not answer this question, would you like them to lay upon the rack her whom I adore?"

Valentine, in his anguish, pressed the trembling creature to his breast, while Simplex gnashed his teeth, and struck his forehead with his fist.

"And finally," said Valentine, proudly raising his head, "I would rather die one hundred times over, and see my wife die before my eyes, than let a single lie cross my lips, which would make me blush when I stood face to face with the knacker of Zeb. Rather let my blood trickle to the ground than stream into my face for shame! What! would you have me lie to this man, and then turn my face away from him? I will oppose him boldly, tell him the truth, and then spit in his face."

"Right, Valentine, right! You are acting like a true man," said Simplex, while pretty Michal fell at her husband's feet and kissed his hands. "Then you must accept our last offer. If you will neither fly nor lie, our twelve trusty friends will give good bail to the city magistrates to prevent you from being put in fetters."

"I will accept that offer thankfully, and make bold to say that they will lose nothing by it."

Simplex had no sooner departed than a message came from the town council, summoning Valentine and his wife to appear before it.

Dame Sarah now learnt for the first time whereof her children were accused, and was terribly enraged thereat.

Dressed just as she used to be indoors (she did not even throw her fur mantle over her shoulders), she rushed after her children. She would like to see who would dare to rob her of them.

She followed the accused into the council-chamber. The halberdiers would have

kept her back, but she sent them spinning to the left and right against the doorposts, and forced her way up to the green table itself. She could scarcely restrain herself while the syndic read out the accusation, according to which Valentine had abducted the wife of Henry Catsrider, and unlawfully cohabited with her. Then Dame Sarah could contain herself no longer.

"The whole thing is a lie, a shameless, scandalous calumny! What! my daughter-in-law, Milly, the wife of the headsman of Zeb! Step forth, you scarlet juggler! Produce the marriage certificate which can show that my daughter-in-law, Milly, was ever married to the knacker of Zeb! Your wife, forsooth, you red dog! This gentle, pious creature, who is a veritable angel! Or name, if you can, the clergyman who united you at the altar, you spawn of hell, you flayer of men, you scarecrow, with this angelic creature!"

Henry was terribly alarmed. His teeth chattered and his chin waggled, beard and all, at this woman's onslaught, for he could not have proved that Michal had been married to him, the hangman. He had married her as a clergyman. He had obtained her hand by subtlety. And all this would now come out. He did not know what to say. Words failed him.

But still more frightened was Michal. Full of terror she pressed her husband's hand.

Then Valentine turned to Henry Catsrider and said:

"I forbid you to answer that question. It has no bearing on the case. I acknowledge and confess that my consort was this man's wife. I took her from him because it was better for her to die with me than to live with him, and I am responsible for it to God alone and his avenging cherubim."

"But here below you are also responsible to the high tribunal of the worshipful city of Kassa," said the presiding superrector. "You know the law. You know that death is the penalty for such a transgression."

"I await death."

"You shall not be disappointed."

Pretty Michal crossed her arms over her breast, and turning her martyr-like face to heaven, looked up as if transfigured, while Valentine supported her with his stalwart arm.

A solemn pause ensued, and then the silence was broken by the heartrending cry of Dame Sarah:

"I appeal!"

"To whom?" inquired the cruelly cold voice of the superrector.

"To the Prince."

"He lies in a Polish dungeon."

"To the Kaiser, then."

"He died last week."

"Then I appeal to God!" cried the mother, in her bitter agony.

"He's napping!" answered a deep, hollow voice, which seemed to come from the very bowels of the earth. It was the headsman who had spoken.

But the dean there and then arose from his place at the green table, and gave the speaker such a buffet in the face that the blood flowed in streams from his mouth and nose.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Things in this world do not always exactly turn out as men devise beforehand.

The Zwirinas had won a complete triumph over the Kalondais. They were amply revenged for the humiliation in the cathedral, for the defeat in the duel. Their wounded pride was satisfied.

The sentence pronounced by the town council was that both the guilty parties should be beheaded, the woman first. Moreover, the headless bodies were not to be buried in the churchyard, but in the churchyard ditch where all the asses of the town browsed on the abundant thistles.

This was an aggravation of the original sentence. But it was a case where a memorable example had to be made. A vile transgressor had intruded himself into the highest office of the town; an infamous woman, living in adultery, had dared to appropriate the foremost pew in the cathedral, thus defiling the most respectable society in the town with her presence, and shamelessly laying claim to honors which did not belong to her. Public opinion was shocked and outraged by such a scandal. It was an offense which death alone could not atone for. It must be pursued even beyond the grave.

Yet the judges had at least so much humanity—they would not let Henry Catsrider execute his own wife. It was enough that the seducer should be made over to him.

And again the felon's bell rang, again the gates of the townhall were thrown open, and in the midst of the sad procession came the unhappy pair, supporting one another; Michal in a snow-white garment, her beautiful face bound round with a white fillet, but Valentine in his court dress, in his jacket with the foxskin collar, and with his long hair flowing down his shoulders.

The members of the council took their places on the dais beneath the baldachin, and in the midst of them sat Augustus Zwirina.

When they reached the scaffold, Valentine would have supported Michal as she ascended the steps, but she needed no assistance. It was with an easy heart and a light step that she mounted up.

In the distance could be heard the shrieks of a woman, whom the halberdiers had to keep back by main force lest she should make a disturbance. It was Dame Sarah.

When they had got to the top of the scaffold, which was hung with black cloth, Valentine kissed the hands and the cheeks of his Michal.

"Do you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

"For your horrible death?"

"It unites me eternally with you."

"Do you expect that we shall meet again?"

"I'll wait at the gates of heaven till you come."

"And if for my sin's sake I go to hell?"

"I'll pray to God till he releases you."

"Would you like to pray again now?"

"No, my heart is at peace."

"Amen!"

Then she sat her down on the little stool, and bound up her hair with the white fillet.

An iron coffin was there to hold them both.

The headsman's henchman stood close by the little stool, leaning on his sword.

Michal recognized and spoke to him.

"Tell me now, Master Matthias! was I not always a good mistress to you?"

"Would to God you had never been!" murmured the rough fellow.

"Deal gently with me now, and God reward you for it."

A flash, a whiz, and human justice was satisfied. But there above the angels were awaiting their sister, and asked her which was the better of the two—death, or what they call life on earth?

Henry Catsrider sprang from the other end of the scaffold to pick up the corpse.

"Touch her not!" cried Valentine, with the voice of an angry lion, "or I'll give you a blow which will send you to the other world before me."

With that he threw off his jacket, and called to the crowd around:

"Whoever will come and help me, shall have my foxskin jacket!"

"Here I am!" cried a well-known voice, and the faithful Simplex ascended to the scaffold.

"Help me to lay her in the coffin!" said Valentine; "and then don't forget what I asked you to do." And with the help of his friend he laid his pretty Michal in that sad bed from which no one ever rises again till the last trump.

Then he embraced his faithful comrade and sent him away.

"Now it is our turn, Henry Catsrider!" said he, turning to his mortal foe.

The dean, who had accompanied him so far to give him the consolations of religion, exhorted him to turn to God in this the last moment of his life and to pray. Valentine beckoned him away.

"I believe in a God, but not in the bloodthirsty God in whom you believe."

"Do not die without the blessing of the Church," said the clergyman appealingly.

"Can I require a greater blessing from the Church than to have for my confessor the executioner who cuts off my head?"

The crowd below took great pleasure in this passage of arms.

Valentine, in fact, was seized by that desperate merriment which is known as gallows humor. The spirits of those who had preceded him in this dreadful stage swept around him and suggested bitter jibes and taunts.

"Well, my good friend," said Valentine jocosely, to Henry, "is it to-day with you

or to-morrow? Your eyes look as crooked as if you had not slept all night. I fear me you will not strike where you aim."

Henry had indeed been drinking hard all night to keep up his spirits.

"Well! How shall I do up my hair?" asked Valentine, sitting down on the little stool, and tying up his locks with the self-same white fillet (it was red now) which Michal had wound round her tresses.

"Will it do so?"

"A little higher!" said Catsrider.

"What! higher still? Well! how will that do for you?"

This nonchalance made the headsman perfectly furious. He had no opportunity of reveling in the mental agony of his foe, for, even on the very threshold of death, Valentine only bantered him. In ordinary times it was not in Valentine's nature to behave thus, but now a feeling of mad disdain had come over him, whereby he expressed the utter scorn he felt for all his enemies.

"Now, master headsman, pray don't keep me waiting."

Rage filled Henry's heart, and rage is a bad marksman. He raised his sword, and the blow fell just where the hair on Valentine's head was coiled in its thickest folds. The false blow made Catsrider lose his balance. He stumbled, fell sprawling, and struck his head so hard against the corner of the coffin intended for Valentine that he remained lying there senseless.

The mob raised a fearful howl when, after the blow had descended, they saw the delinquent spring up while the executioner lay prone on the ground.

"Let him go free!" cried some; "when the headsman misses his blow the delinquent should be reprieved." Others, however, were for the headsman's apprentices taking up the sword and completing the sentence.

During this uproar Valentine looked down from the lofty scaffold. He saw the excitement of his enemies on the dais, and heard them cry:

"Down with him!"

He saw a desperate woman attempting to force her way through the crowd, and recognized in her his mother. He threw a glance at his slain beloved, and then an

idea suddenly flashed through his brain.

"Hither, Valentine, hither!" It was the voice of Simplex.

Valentine sprang down from the scaffold among the crowd.

"After him, seize him!" cried the members of the town council to the drabants surrounding the scaffold.

The throng was very dense. Each man pressed hard upon his neighbor. But when Valentine broke through, a path was made for him which closed immediately on his pursuers. Not one of the crowd laid hands on him. Simplex and his comrades covered his flight.

He escaped from the crowd, and ran along the street with his pursuers hot upon his heels, headed by the superrector with his gold-headed stick of office raised aloft, the headsman (who had in the meantime recovered) with his drawn sword, and the drabants with their halberts.

At the end of the street Valentine found an open door, through which he darted. This door closed behind him, and when the pursuers came up and loudly demanded admission, it suddenly reopened and out stepped the Prior of the Jesuits, Father Hieronymus, with the charter in his hand. They could tell it by the long pendant seals.

"Be off!" cried he, "this house is an asylum!"

It was the cloister of the Jesuits. The secular authorities were debarred from crossing the threshold by their own charter.

So wondrously fulfilled was the prophecy of the prior, that the seed which Valentine had sown when he subscribed this document would one day turn out to his advantage.

When, however, they brought the news to Dame Sarah that her son had fled to the cloister of the Jesuits, and now remained beneath their protection, the poor lady was quite overcome and said:

"Would that he had rather died by the side of his Michal!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Wherein carnival revels are described.

Out of this incident a great dispute arose. The worshipful corporation held it as a point of honor that when once they had condemned a man to death, that man's head must be severed from his body. The College of Jesuits maintained, on the other hand, that whoever had once taken refuge in their cloister could be removed by no earthly authority from that sacred asylum.

And besides their respective rights in the matter, each party had other reasons in *petto*.

Those who had got the government of the city through Kalondai's fall could never feel absolutely at their ease so long as he remained alive. They were afraid that the rapid turn of Fortune's wheel might bring him to the helm again, and then, woe betide them.

But the Jesuits calculated that Valentine, out of gratitude for his deliverance by them, would become their convert, in which case their hands at Kassa would be greatly strengthened.

Both parties therefore thought it worth while to send plenipotentiaries to the Palatine and the Supreme Court of Hungary, petitioning for a decree in their favor.

Meanwhile the gates of the Jesuit cloisters were watched day and night, so that Valentine might not escape.

There were two persons who made it their special business to watch the cloister: Augustus Zwirina, who sent a drabant, and Henry Catsrider, who sent one of his own apprentices.

The headsman had another reason, besides mere personal vengeance, for cutting off Valentine's head. His own neck was in danger. The world is so bad that even the headsman has enemies. Report said that Henry was drunk when he came to

execute the law's sentence, and that was why he missed his aim. And the executioner has his own executioner also, who strikes him in the face in the middle of the market place, if he commits a fault sufficiently grievous to carry deprivation from his office along with it.

Therefore Henry bowled up at the windows of the cloister every evening, and threatened to quarter Valentine alive when he got him into his hands.

The watchers allowed no suspicious person to leave the cloister unsearched. It happened once that a servant died at the cloister. As they were carrying the corpse away to be buried, the town council ordered the coffin to be searched to make sure that Valentine was not being smuggled out in that way, and a stringent order was issued forbidding people to go out at night without lanterns, under the penalty of imprisonment.

At last the judgment of the Supreme Tribunal on the asylum question reached Kassa.

The judgment ran as follows: "Whereas the Jesuits have the right of asylum for their cloister, but whereas it is forbidden them to forcibly detain those of another persuasion, it is now hereby declared that the privilege of sanctuary can only be accorded to Valentine Kalondai on condition that he consents to be received into the bosom of the Catholic Church as a priest, but if he remains in his former faith he is to be handed over to justice. Three days' grace, moreover, are allowed to the said Valentine Kalondai, within which time he is to come to a decision."

With this politic document both the Jesuits and the Zwirina faction were very well satisfied. The former calculated that the delinquent who had escaped from the scaffold would much rather submit to the tonsure than lose his whole head, and would rather renounce the friendship of Calvin than dear life itself, and this they thought would be a great triumph for them. But this very thing would have been no small triumph to Zwirina and Co. also, for the whole Hungarian party, which consisted for the most part of Calvinists, would be humbled to the dust by such an apostasy. As a renegade, Valentine Kalondai would be as good as dead and buried.

When Dame Sarah heard of this judgment, she said to Simplex, who since the days of her calamity had been a constant visitor at her house: "Go to my son, and tell him that I would rather see his head severed from his body than his soul separated from my soul. He will understand what I mean."

But Simplex had something else to say to Valentine, of which Dame Sarah knew nothing.

Two days of the respite had already elapsed; the third was Shrove Tuesday, the day of fools.

Valentine had as yet not declared his resolution, but he had now only till vespers to do so. If he still remained silent, then it would be taken as a sign that he preferred to submit to the sentence of death.

Henry Catsrider had had the scaffold reërected. Valentine could see it from the cloister window.

No one else, however, troubled himself about it, for it was the last day of carnival, and all the world was thinking of the carnival frolics. All day long boisterous masks paraded the streets—men disguised as women, all sorts of guys dressed up on horseback; and in the evening, they all met together to carry out the carnival and bury him. The lads vied with one another as to who should make the greatest fools of themselves. One lengthened his legs with stilts, another made himself up as a giant. There were some who stuck themselves all over with feathers, and strutted about like birds, while others stuffed themselves out till they were as big as barrels. One trumpeted, another rattled, a third drummed away on a huge frying-pan.

The most attractive mask of all, however, was the carnival horse, which consisted of two men. The first man made up the fore part of the horse; he wore the horse's head, which was true to nature and as large as life, while the other, who planted his head in the middle of the first man's body, composed the rear part of the horse; both were covered with a large horsecloth, on which lay a saddle with the dependent stirrups, and the whole thing looked exactly like a real horse. The man in front had all the fun of the thing. He could trumpet whenever he felt inclined, he drank whatever people liked to give him, and he held a large whip in his hand, with which he struck at everyone who came too near him. But the poor fellow who formed the rear part of the horse had a much harder billet. He saw nothing and heard nothing, and was obliged to scramble along in a stooping position wherever the man in front chose to lead him; and if his leader did not look well after him, he got from everyone of the passers-by a sounding thump on the hindermost part of his person. It was not easy, therefore, to find someone willing to accept this rôle, and generally some lubber of an apprentice, who had failed in everything else, was pitchforked into it.

Now just at that time there was no such apprentice in all the guilds of Kassa, so that there was absolutely no one to take up this unpleasant rôle but the poor, good-natured Turk Ali, who could be persuaded to do anything, and everyone could see his red slippers peeping out from under the horsecloth as the carnival steed pranced along. It was an open secret that the carnival horseman who rode this steed was Simplex himself.

Behind the carnival steed came the carnival himself in a cart drawn by two oxen. He lay in a red coffin, which was covered all over with fools' caps, bells, and masks. Giants with heads as large as barrels and gigantic storks walked alongside of him, carrying his escutcheon on a pole, and behind the coffin marched a roystering band of apprentices made up as buxom wenches, who offered their tankards to everyone who passed and would absolutely take no denial.

The carnival's funeral procession stopped before the dwelling of every guildmaster and every clergyman. The leader of the procession pronounced a loud eulogium on every notability, to which the notability in question responded by refilling the empty tankards with wine or beer. On each such occasion the fool's sacristan awoke the carnival in his coffin, lifted up the pall and gave him a drink. The carnival was also an apprentice, and he certainly had one of the very best billets, for all he had to do was to lie still and drink.

When the carnival's funeral procession arrived in front of the cloister of the Jesuits, the two armed watchmen, the drabant and the headsman's assistant, were still standing there, one on each side of the door.

The waggish crowd pressed upon them from all sides, and while the funeral car with its canopy, its cortége, and its banners surrounded the door, one of the buxom wenches fell upon the neck of the drabant and kissed and hugged him, while a giant raven with a pointed beak forced his tankard on the headsman's assistant, and compelled him to drain it to the dregs, finally bonneting him with the empty tankard.

All this lasted for a single brief instant, but it was quite long enough for the cloister door to open and close again. What had happened in the meantime was known only to the initiated.

Then the fools' procession went on more noisily than ever.

When they arrived at the Miskolcz gate, the superrector Zwirina and his

halberdiers barred the way.

"Whither are you going?" said he to the carnival horseman.

Simplex held a quill to his mouth, and squeaked through it in a thin, chirpy, birdlike voice:

"We are going to bury the dead carnival."

But Augustus Zwirina was a knowing man, and he had his suspicions.

"Let me see if this carnival is really dead," said he.

And with that he tore the cover from the face of the figure lying in the coffin.

The fellow representing the carnival rose in his bier, distended his broad mouth, and grinned in the superrector's face. He was an honest brushmaker's apprentice. The whole crowd burst into roars of laughter and derisive yells. Everyone instantly guessed that the superrector had sought for Valentine Kalondai in the carnival's coffin.

Old Zwirina was very angry and ashamed.

"You may take him to hell, if you like!" cried he to the crowd of revelers, and, by way of jocose emphasis, he gave the backward part of the carnival horse a spanking thump, but received a kick in return which sent him sprawling into the mud. The horse, which lost one of the red slippers of its hind feet in consequence, then bolted off like mad, while Simplex yelled like a cockney horseman on a runaway nag, tugged at the reins, and implored the laughing crowd to stop the beast. But the mob only chivied the horse all the more, till it had far outdistanced its panting escort. When at last he arrived in the neighborhood of the churchyard, Simplex blew his trumpet with all his might, and at the shrill sound two stout lads leaped up out of the cemetery ditch, leading after them a horse saddled and bridled.

"Valentine!" cried Simplex, "ecce tuum Bucephalum!"

Then the man forming the hinder part of the carnival steed sprang quickly forth from beneath the horsecloth. It was not the Turk Ali, but Valentine Kalondai.

The condemned convict threw himself upon the horse and galloped off.

Simplex and the comrades who had assisted him in the execution of this stratagem threw their masquerading costumes into the churchyard ditch, and after making a wide circuit of the town, returned to it by the Leutschau gate as if they knew nothing at all about it.

The Turk Ali had exchanged rôles with Valentine in the gates of the cloister.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Lenten penance succeeds the carnival revels.

When they brought the news to Augustus Zwirina that Valentine Kalondai had happily escaped, the big fat man suddenly grew blue in the face, and was struck down with apoplexy on the spot. So swiftly did death overtake him that he had not even time to make his will.

This extraordinary case made a huge sensation throughout the town. Whole processions of acquaintances thronged the house of mourning, and in the courts of the Zwirinas there was wailing and woe.

Now the courtyard of the Kalondais was only separated from that of the Zwirinas by a narrow partition wall. When then Dame Sarah heard the lamentations in her neighborhood, and learnt the cause thereof, viz., that her son had managed to escape and that the superrector had died of grief in consequence, she planted herself in the passage, and, despite the keenness of a February morning, began to sing the psalms in which King David celebrates the humiliation of his enemies. The louder grew the lamentations next door, the louder she sang her revengefully exultant psalms.

Who could forbid her? Were they not sacred songs?

On the day of the funeral, too, she sat on the balcony of her house, and while the priests and the choristers below were intoning dirges by the side of the bier, and the relations of the dead man accompanied these mournful songs with their sobs, the butcher's widow, dressed in white, as if she were holding high festival, mingled her exultant songs of triumph with their sobs and dirges.

And henceforward, through the still watches of the night, when everyone was asleep, Dame Sarah sang her psalms and exulted over her fallen and humiliated enemies.

Who could forbid a poor forlorn widow to seek comfort for her afflicted soul in spiritual songs?

As for Henry Catsrider, he was driven from his profession three days later for putting to shame the dignity of his office, the reputation of the city, and the majesty of the law by his bungling. On the same scaffold which he himself had erected his own apprentices tore his red mantle from his shoulders and the red cap from his head, struck him three times in the face before all the people with the great silver seal hanging round his neck (which was a gift from the King of Poland), and finally drove him away amid the derisive laughter of the crowd.

What became of the degraded headsman, how and where he ended his days, on these points nothing has ever been recorded.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

In which it is shown how ghosts haunt churchyards.

The adherents of the disgraced faction did not cease persecuting Valentine Kalondai.

From the very first they had sent pursuers after him who had followed hard upon the fugitive; but at a certain inn, when they were already close upon him, two men, evidently instructed beforehand, met him with a fresh horse. The fugitive mounted and was instantly off again, while his pursuers thought it best to slowly ride their jaded nags back to town.

The new superrector, young Ignatius Zwirina, calculated thus: Valentine Kalondai will one of these days come back of his own accord to the neighborhood of Kassa. His beloved rests there in the churchyard ditch, and he will never be able to keep away from the spot where she whom he loves so much reposes.

So in the ditch where pretty Michal had been cast he kept nine musketeers in ambush, night and day, that they might seize Valentine when he came thither, and shoot him down if he sought to fly.

The trap was laid for him, and they made certain that he would fall into it.

Nor did he remain long away.

In the first stormy night, when the Lenten wind drove the shapeless clouds from one end of the sky to the other and shook the leafless trees, and the will-o'-the-wisps darted about among the graves, a lonely horseman approached the churchyard from the plains.

A poplar which had been torn down by the storm marked the spot where pretty Michal lay.

"I hear the tramp of horses' hoofs," murmured one of the musketeers in the ditch.

"What if it be the devil riding on a buck-goat?"

"Yes, indeed, who else would think of riding over the plains at such a time?"

"Look how the will-o'-the-wisps are dancing!" said a third, raising his head a little above the ditch.

From time to time, a reddish tongue of flame shot up from among the graves, casting a lurid glimmer on the angels praying on the monuments.

Then it seemed as if the deep notes of a horn were mingling with the howling of the storm. It sounded like a subterranean music. A shudder ran down the backs of the musketeers in the ditch and their teeth chattered.

"An accursed signal that!"

When the midnight rider reached the churchyard, he dismounted from his horse, bound it to an elderberry tree, and replied to the signal with a trumpet-blast of his own, whereupon a spectral flame shot up among the tombstones.

"Do you hear that? The devils are answering one another."

"It is either the devil or Valentine Kalondai."

"If it be Valentine Kalondai he will come hither, and we will take him prisoner; but if it be the devil 'twere best to leave him alone."

That was very sage advice, certainly.

The horseman found the churchyard-gate open and went in.

He went straight to the spot where he had seen the flames shoot up.

It was no will-o'-the-wisp, no perambulating spirit, but Simplex, who, to scare the watchers and guide Valentine, had ignited lycopodium powder from time to time.

"Hush!" said he to his approaching friend, "they are on the watch."

"Let them watch!" murmured Valentine; "I have a sword with me. Though I should die on the spot for it, I mean to speak to my beloved."

"You shall speak to her. Follow me! but duck your head that they may not see us."

With that he led Valentine along among the graves till they came to a large monument. It was a red marble obelisk, surmounted by a wreathed urn. The bed round the grave was planted with violets and primroses with an ivy border. On the pediment lay several wreaths.

"Look there!" said Simplex, drawing a dark lantern from beneath his mantle; "look and read!"

Valentine drew near and saw on the splendid monument the name, "Augustus Zwirina," followed by a long litany of the deeds and services of that distinguished citizen.

"Why have you led me to the grave of my mortal foe?" asked Valentine sternly.

"It is not your mortal foe who sleeps here," returned Simplex, "but pretty Michal. The night after they had buried your mortal foe, I came to the churchyard with the faithful Ali. Then we set to work and dug out the coffin of pretty Michal and brought it hither, and placed it where the coffin of Zwirina had been laid, and now you can be quite easy in your mind, for your beloved reposes in consecrated ground, and flowers bloom over her all the year round."

Valentine threw himself with his face to the ground.

"Listen how the ghosts are weeping!" said one of the watchers to his comrade.

"Depend upon it, Beelzebub is tormenting them!"

"Don't look back or they'll twist your neck for you!"

After Valentine had wept to his heart's content, and consoled himself with the reflection that his tears would filter through the mound to his sleeping love and give her sweeter dreams, he arose and said to Simplex:

"But suppose the thing becomes known?"

"There are only three of us who know anything about it. One is Ali the Turk; your mother has emancipated him, and he has now gone home to Thessaly. The second is the grave, and the grave tells no tales. I myself am the third, and I can keep as silent as the grave."

Valentine pressed his faithful friend to his heart and covered him with kisses. And then he kissed the grave and the flowers which covered it:

"Don't you hear how the specters are kissing each other?" whispered one of the musketeers.

"No doubt Lucifer is caressing them!"

"And whither then have you removed Augustus Zwirina?"

"Why, where he ought to be, of course! We laid the good man in the churchyard ditch in the place intended for Michal, and all the asses of the town will come and nibble their thistles over his head from one year's end to the other."

"Listen how the ghosts are laughing!"

"I would not go among them if they gave me the whole city of Kassa."

Even the howling wind seemed to take up the ghostly laughter and carry it on further. It was indeed a ghastly jest—a jest fit even to provoke a loud peal of laughter in a churchyard at midnight, that pretty Michal and the author of her death should have changed places with each other, that pretty Michal should have been laid in the flower-strewn bed, in the grave dug in consecrated ground and watered with tears, while the author of her death should have been cast forth into the churchyard ditch, to gaze up at the asses when they came to chew the thistles over his head.

"Now that you have spoken with your beloved, hasten away!"

"God bless you, my loyal comrade! Greet my dear mother. Tell her that to-morrow I am off to the wars. Eger is to be stormed. Tell her to pray that I may die a glorious death!"

With that he hastened back to his horse and darted away into the waste night.

"The ghost is riding back to his realm!"

"All good spirits praise the Lord!"

And if Dame Sarah prayed as her son desired her, her prayer was certainly heard in heaven. At the brilliant assault by which the city of Eger was won back to Hungary, Valentine Kalondai died a hero's death on the field of honor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

In which everyone at last gets his deserts.

Old Zurdoki, whose unseemly amours had been the cause of the tragedy of two loving hearts, so far from being sobered by this sad occurrence, so far from taking to heart the blood of the gentle lady which had flowed through his foul fault, had no sooner escaped from Poland with a part of the Prince's routed troops (the rest had been carried away captive to the Crimea by the Tartars) than he set about another evil prank. Failing to seduce one of the pretty women, he now spread his nets for the second.

Here, too, he soon found a willing go-between. Even if Red Barbara were no more, there was still enough of witches and to spare. Was not Annie, the wife of the kopanitschar, at hand? So far from being scared at the fearful fate of her superior, she burned to occupy the vacant place of honor in the witches' ranks. For the saying of the sages, that from the blood of one martyr a hundred others spring up, is equally true when applied to evil-doers. Among sinners also there are enthusiasts who count it an honor to suffer for hell, and where one felon is executed a hundred are always ready to step into his shoes. This was especially the case with witches. The burnt and tortured members of that grim sisterhood always had immediate and innumerable successors. The world seemed too small to hold them all. The love of evil notoriety took possession of them like a sort of intoxication, and plunged into the abyss even those who otherwise would never have thought of becoming witches. It is thus that we are able to explain why Annie undertook a far more dangerous commission than even that by which Barbara had found her death. Moreover, the dazzling promises of Zurdoki, who was no niggard with his money, had also great weight with her. And Zurdoki was now richer than ever. George Rakoczy, when the Crim Tartars invaded Hungary, had intrusted the whole of his treasures to Zurdoki to conceal them in Berga Castle. On the way thither as much of this treasure might be lost as Zurdoki pleased. Who amid the hurly-burly of those troubled times would ever think of calling him to account for it?

So Zurdoki intrusted to Annie the billet-doux which he had written to the lovely

Isabella, the spouse of Count Hommonai. He had not been very particular in his style, nor had he wasted his ardor in romantic effusiveness, but he went straight to the point like the man of business he was. He said he was ten times richer than Hommonai, and if the countess were kind to him, he would give her three hundred ducats down and a diamond collar such as princesses wear, besides making a will in her favor, whereby she would inherit after his death a city, a castle, two-and-twenty villages, and all the flocks, herds, and studs thereunto belonging.

Zurdoki, therefore, did not woo very romantically, perhaps, but for all that the letter was full of burning love. He thought that the handsomeness of the gift would make the lovely lady forget the ugliness of the giver.

But Isabella was very wroth when she received this shameful proposal. She immediately took the letter to her husband, and begged him to order the bearer of it to be exemplarily whipped. They were then dwelling at their castle at Saros.

"No," said Count Hommonai; "why whip the bearer of the letter, it is the writer who deserves a whipping." And he there and then dictated to his wife the answer she was to send to Zurdoki, which was so worded as to seem to consent to his proposition.

Annie, whom Isabella also rewarded most handsomely, took back the letter and delivered it to the ancient Celadon.

The object of Hommonai's stratagem was to get Zurdoki into his hands, so Zurdoki fell into the trap which he himself had laid.

Count Hommonai had an occasion ready to hand. He had a pair of old retainers, a coachman and a female lodge-keeper, both of Turkish extraction, and living together as man and wife after the Turkish fashion. These the count had converted to the Calvinistic Christian faith, and now they were to be united at the altar according to the Christian rite.

Such cases used to make a great sensation, for in those days, when the Turk was a mighty potentate who had two-thirds of Hungary in his power, and kept the remaining third in constant fear and trembling, it was an extraordinary phenomenon when a Mussulman pair voluntarily denied the Prophet and went over to the Christian faith. Therefore, all the neighboring gentry were invited from far and near, and most of them came, so that Count Hommonai's castle had to be enlarged in all haste by wooden annexes, so as to provide suitable

accommodation for the servants of so many guests.

To this memorable wedding Zurdoki was also invited. Indeed it may be said that it was mainly on his account that the whole affair was got up.

He was well aware of this; but he fancied that the lady had arranged it all for love of him, whereas it was the husband's doings, and there is always a great difference between the motives of a husband and the motives of a wife.

Zurdoki arrived on the day of the wedding and brought thirty retainers with him. Hommonai received him very heartily, and did not once allude to the old theme of dispute; nay, he even allowed the old coxcomb to dance attendance upon his wife and whisper all sorts of tender compliments in her ear.

The ceremony was conducted with all due solemnity, and the behavior of the converted couple engrossed all the attention of the assembled guests. They could talk of nothing but how the bridegroom could not draw the ring off his finger; how he gave the bride his left hand instead of his right; how the bride, under the influence of the baptismal water, began to sneeze; and how the bridegroom drained the chalice to the very dregs instead of only sipping it; and how both of them, when they should have said "yes," only shook their heads, which, with the Turks, signifies assent. Who, under such circumstances, had any time to notice that Zurdoki was constantly whispering to the lady of the house?

Next followed a splendid banquet of four-and-twenty courses. During the meal Simplex played on the farogato, so as to put even the gypsy musicians to shame. Since Valentine's death he had entered the service of Count Hommonai as trumpeter, at a salary of five hundred gulden and his keep, which shows in what high estimation a skillful trumpeter was held in those days.

After the meal was over the ladies withdrew to their rooms to dress for the dance, but the gentlemen remained behind over their cups.

Then, according to a good old custom of Russian origin, the "fratina" went from hand to hand. This "fratina" was a silver pocal, set with precious stones and engraved with many sage saws, and the men drank to each other out of it and drained it to the very dregs. No one laughed at him who fell in this contest. The servants simply picked him up and carried him into his bedroom, that he might there sleep off his carouse.

He to whose head the wine flew soonest was the host himself. He very soon had

had enough, and laid his head down on the table. They quickly carried him away.

"This wine really is very strong," said Zurdoki. "I suppose the vintage is of the year of the great comet? It has got into my head too." And with that his tongue began to loll out, his head sank back in his easy-chair, and the tankard fell from his hand.

"He's had his fill too," said the guests, whereupon four servants raised him from his chair and carried him to his room.

But Zurdoki was not drunk after all; he had only been pretending. As soon as he was alone in his room he locked the door, and sought for a tapestried door concealed at the foot of the bed. Through this he proceeded to a little corridor which led direct into the countess's room.

The time of the rendezvous could not have been better chosen. The guests who had not already succumbed to the wine proceeded from the dining-room to the dancing-room, and there practiced a martial dance among themselves till the fumes of the wine had evaporated and the ladies assembled, when they began to dance together the palotás, the polonaise, the torch dance, and the dance of the three hundred widows.

No one thought of the absent.

Zurdoki found the countess in her chamber; she had been waiting for him, and was quite alone.

The old inamorato at once fell down upon his knees before the lovely lady, and to convince her of the sincerity of his passion laid at her feet the promised gifts; a purse filled with gold, the collar of brilliants, and the will and testament, authenticated by the seal of a cathedral chapter.

"All this is thine, my beloved, if thou wilt receive me favorably."

"Get up, sir! and you will certainly have a warm reception," replied the lovely Isabella.

At this the enamored old buck sprang to his feet, as fiery and lusty as a young weasel.

On the wall opposite were life-size portraits of Count Hommonai and his wife, but between them hung a beautiful Venetian mirror in a cut-glass frame. The old

vulture placed himself before this mirror, and, stroking his gray mustache, exclaimed very complacently, as if rejoicing in his beauty: "Come now, my lord Count Hommonai, which of us two is the handsomer fellow now?"

"Why, I am, of course, and always shall be!" cried Count Hommonai; for he was behind the picture, which opened like a tapestried door, and out he stepped.

The terror-stricken Zurdoki stood there with his mouth wide open. He now perceived that they had been fooling him all along.

Count Hommonai did not exchange many words with him, but seized him by the collar and thrust him into the room where all the other guests were dancing. They were not a little astonished to see their host and his friend, who, as they fancied, had been overcome with wine, now appear among them quite brisk and sober. But what astonished them still more was the circumstance, that whereas they had both been carried off to their respective bedrooms a few moments before, they now both came out of the countess's chamber.

"Look, gentlemen!" cried the count derisively, "look at that old buck-goat who would fain browse in my garden!"

At this, a roar of laughter greeted the discomfited Lothario, and his terror at being caught in forbidden ways now turned into furious rage at being mocked in public. Perceiving his page, to whom he had intrusted his sword when he sat down at table, he beckoned to him, tore the weapon from his hand, and planting himself in front of Hommonai, exclaimed:

"Shame, confusion on you, to entice a nobleman into a trap and ridicule your guest in your own house! But you shall not boast of it to anyone, and the marriage feast which you arranged on my account shall now be turned into a funeral wake. You must fight me, sir!"

Hommonai's only intention had been to make the old libertine a butt and a laughing-stock. He had, therefore, no weapon with him. But when Zurdoki drew his sword and challenged him to single combat, he also called his page, sent him for a rapier, and stood on his defense. The guests in the hall fell back to give the combatants room. Nobody attempted to intervene. It was only right that such an insult should be settled by arms.

First the furious Zurdoki aimed a mighty blow at the count, but miscalculating the length of his saber, the point of his weapon only grazed the yellow, gold-

gallooned jack-boots of the count, and then struck the floor. But the blow which Hommonai dealt him in return settled him on the spot, and he breathed forth his filthy soul at the feet of the aggrieved husband.

And everyone present said it served him right. Hommonai ought to have killed him a year ago at least. Then Zurdoki would not have persuaded Prince George Rakoczy to undertake his unlucky campaign, then many good Hungarian warriors would not have fallen into captivity, and Hungary and Transylvania would not have been wasted with fire and sword.

But when the Countess Isabella heard that her husband had killed the old fool, she said:

"What a pity he had but one life! He has only atoned for the blood of my poor Michal. Valentine Kalondai is still unavenged."

They then called the maids, who cleansed the floor with hot water. Meanwhile the host led his guests into the castle gardens, and told them of all the miserable plots in which the evil-minded old libertine had played a part, down to his latest intrigue when he had attempted to seduce the countess. To prove his words he produced the gifts and the will which were to have served as a decoy, and gave them to the Protestant bishop who had celebrated the wedding of the Turkish couple, that he might employ them for the benefit of the College of Sarospatak. Zurdoki had spent not a farthing on church or school, but now his sinful liberality was to be turned to pious uses.

Then they returned to the dancing-room; the fiddles, flutes, and farogatos struck up, and the guests danced over the very spot where Zurdoki's blood had flowed, just as if absolutely nothing had occurred.

And surely you cannot express your contempt for a man more emphatically than by dancing over the spot where his blood has been, only an hour after his death!

Simplex, from whose contemporary diary we have compiled this history, most of whose events the narrator had himself witnessed and experienced, subsequently entered the service of Achatius Baresai, whom the Padishah had made Prince of Transylvania in George Rakoczy's stead. He also accompanied his Highness on his journey to Turkey. His latest memoirs are dated from Stamboul. What ultimately became of him no one has ever been able to find out.

CHAPTER XL.

All things pass away, but science remains eternal.

But the learned Professor David Fröhlich continued for many years to implant the sciences in the youthful mind, and enrich the world with his inventions. Down to the very day of his death he was in constant correspondence with the most distinguished European scholars, and was still informed about everything which was going on in foreign parts.

But what had become of his daughter Michal he never could find out.

Oftentimes, indeed, he would cast her horoscope and compare its various aspects; but he always arrived at precisely the same conclusion, viz., that his daughter Michal was now leading a most blissful life in some far-distant land, the very name of which was unknown to him.

And perhaps it really was so!

THE END.

Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

A missing period was added after "CHAPTER XXXI" in the Table of Contents.

In Chapter I, "with real enthusiasm,;" was changed to "with real enthusiasm;".

In Chapter II, "the more merciful harum palzarum" was changed to "the more merciful harum palczarum", missing quotation marks were added after "the god-fearing and the godless" and before "Write in your book", and an extraneous quotation mark was removed after "marry within thy station!".

In Chapter III, "he aswered yes" was changed to "he answered yes".

In Chapter IV, "neck and skull were thown backward" was changed to "neck and skull were thrown backward", a missing quotation mark was added after "fire upon them in return", and "mixed up in a skirmrish" was changed to "mixed up in a skirmish".

In Chapter IX, "commited such crimes" was changed to "committed such crimes", and "humilated wretch" was changed to "humilated wretch".

In Chapter XI, "of one her favorite songs" was changed to "of one of her favorite songs".

In Chapter XIV, "passed the kopanitscha of Hamer" was changed to "passed the kopanitscha of Hamar".

In Chapter XVI, "Gönez" was changed to "Göncz", and "Gönezer cask" was changed to "Gönczer cask".

In Chapter XVIII, "Simplex was caried back to his dungeon, and there he had leasure" was changed to "Simplex was carried back to his dungeon, and there he had leisure".

In Chapter XIX, "great red wheels" was changed to "great red wheals".

In Chapter XXII, "Frölich could have heard" was changed to "Fröhlich could have heard".

In Chapter XXIII, "my pretty young misstress" was changed to "my pretty young mistress".

In Chapter XXVI, "her daughter-in law's lovely hair" was changed to "her daughter-in-law's lovely hair".

In Chapter XXVII, "the good Countess Hommonia" was changed to "the good Countess Hommonai", and "Kalondai preceived the danger" was changed to "Kalondai perceived the danger".

In Chapter XXVIII, "was then of that pecular yellowish tinge" was changed to "were then of that peculiar yellowish tinge".

In Chapter XXIX, "Valentine Kolondai desired to challenge" was changed to "Valentine Kalondai desired to challenge".

In Chapter XXX, "With grandoise aplomb" was changed to "With grandoise aplomb", and "Frölich possessed" was changed to "Fröhlich possessed".

In Chapter XXXI, "makiug the circuit of the town" was changed to "making the circuit of the town", and "The Calvinists saluted prety Michal" was changed to "The Calvinists saluted pretty Michal".

In Chapter XXXIII, a quotation mark was added after "három pálczára".

In Chapter XXXVI, "ag reat dispute" was changed to "a great dispute".

In Chapter XXXVIII, an extra quotation mark was removed before "look and read".

In Chapter XXXIX, "Zurdoki aimed a mighy blow" was changed to "Zurdoki aimed a mighty blow".

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