The Slaves of the Padishah

The Turks in Hungary

by Mór (Maurus) Jókai, 1825-1904

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Introduction

Török Világ Magyarországon, now englished for the first time, is a sequel to *Az Erdély arany kora*, already published by Messrs. Jarrold, under the title of *Midst*

the Wild Carpathians (*The Golden Age in Transylvania*). The two tales, though quite distinct, form together one great historical romance, which centres round the weakly, good-natured Michael Apafi, the last independent Prince of Transylvania, his masterful and virtuous consort, Anna Bornemissza, and his machiavellian Minister, Michael Teleki, a sort of pocket-Richelieu, whose genius might have made a great and strong state greater and stronger still, but could not save a little state, already doomed to destruction as much from its geographical position as from its inherent weakness. The whole history of Transylvania, indeed, reads like an old romance of chivalry, cut across by odd episodes out of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and the last phase of that history (1674-1690), so vividly depicted in the present volume, is fuller of life, colour, variety, and adventure than any other period of European history. The little mountain principality, lying between two vast aggressive empires, the Ottoman and the German, ever striving with each other for the mastery of central Europe, was throughout this period the football of both. Viewed from a comfortable armchair at a distance of two centuries, the whole era is curiously fascinating: to unfortunate contemporaries it must have been unspeakably terrible. Strange happenings were bound to be the rule, not the exception, when a Turkish Pasha ruled the best part of Hungary from the bastions of Buda. Thus it was quite in the regular order of things for Hungarian gentlemen to join with notorious robber-chieftains to attack Turkish fortresses; for bandits, in the disguise of monks, to plunder lonely monasteries; for simple boors to be snatched from the plough to be set upon a throne; for Christian girls, from every country under heaven, to be sold by auction not fifty miles from Vienna, and for Turkish filibusters to plant fortified harems in the midst of the Carpathians. Jókai, luckier than Dumas, had no need to invent his episodes, though he frequently presents them in a romantic environment. He found his facts duly recorded in contemporary chronicles, and he had no temptation to be unfaithful to them, because the ordinary, humdrum incidents of every-day life in seventeenth century Transylvania outstrip the extravagances of the most unbridled imagination.

No greater praise can be awarded to the workmanship of Jókai than to say that, although written half a century ago (the first edition was published in 1853), *Török Világ Magyarországon* does not strike one as in the least old-fashioned or out of date. Romantic it is, no doubt, in treatment as well as in subject, but a really good romance never grows old, and Jókai's unfailing humour is always—at least, in his masterpieces—a sufficient corrective of the excessive sensibility to which, like all the romanticists, he is, by temperament, sometimes liable.

Most of the characters which delighted us in *Midst the Wild Carpathians* accompany us through the sequel. The Prince, the Princess, the Minister, Béldi, Kucsuk, Feriz, Azrael, and even such minor personages as the triple renegade, Zülfikar, are all here, and remain true to their original presentment, except Azrael, who is the least convincing of them all. Of the new personages, the most original are the saponaceous Olaj Beg, whose unctuous suavity always conveys a menace, and the heroic figure of the famous Emeric Tököly, who, but for the saving sword of Sobieski, might have wrested the crown of St. Stephen from the House of Hapsburg.

R. Nisbet Bain.
December, 1902.

Chapter I

THE GOLDEN CAFTAN.

The S___ family was one of the richest in Wallachia, and consequently one of the most famous. The head of the family dictated to twelve boyars, collected hearth-money and tithes from four-and-fifty villages, lived nine months in the year at Stambul, held the Sultan's bridle when he mounted his steed in time of war, contributed two thousand lands-knechts to the host of the Pasha of Macedonia, and had permission to keep on his slippers when he entered the inner court of the Seraglio.

In the year 1600 and something, George was the name of the first-born of the S___ family, but with him we shall not have very much concern. We shall do much better to follow the fortunes of the second born, Michael, whom his family had sent betimes to Bucharest to be brought up as a priest in the Seminary there. The youth had, however, a remarkably thick head, and, so far from making any great progress in the sciences, was becoming quite an ancient classman, when he suddenly married the daughter of a sub-deacon, and buried himself in a little village in Wallachia. There he spent a good many years of his life with scarce sufficient stipend to clothe him decently, and had he not tilled his soil with his own hands, he would have been hard put to it to find maize-cakes enough to live upon.

In the first year of his marriage a little girl was born to him, and for her the worthy man and his wife spared and scraped so that, in case they were to die, she might have some little trifle. So they laid aside a few halfpence out of every shilling in order that when it rose to a good round sum they might purchase for their little girl—a cow.

A cow! That was their very ultimate desire. If only they could get a cow, who would be happier than they? Milk and butter would come to their table in abundance, and they would be able to give some away besides. Her calf they would rear and sell to the butcher for a good price, stipulating for a quarter of it against the Easter festival. Then, too, a cow would give so much pleasure to the whole family. In the morning they would be giving it drink, rubbing it down, leading it out into the field, and its little bell would be sounding all day in the pasture. In the evening it would come into the yard, keeping close to the wall, where the mulberry-tree stood, and poke its head through the kitchen door. It would have a star upon its forehead, and would let you scratch its head and stroke its neck, and would take the piece of maize-cake that little Mariska held out to it. She would be able to lead the cow everywhere. This was the Utopia of the family, its every-day desire, and Papa had already planted a mulberry-tree in the yard in order that Csákó, that was to be the cow's name, might have something to rub his side against, and little Mariska every day broke off a piece of maize-cake and hid it under the window-sill. The little calf would have a fine time of it.

And lo and behold! when the halfpennies and farthings had mounted up to such a heap that they already began to think of going to the very next market to bring home the cow; when every day they could talk of nothing else, and kept wondering what the cow would be like, brindled, or brown, or white, or spotted; when they had already given it its name beforehand, and had prepared a leafy bed for it close to the house—it came to pass that a certain vagabond Turkish Sheikh shot dead the elder brother, who was living in Stambul, because he accidentally touched the edge of the holy man's garment in the street. So the poor priest received one day a long letter from Adrianople, in which he was informed that he had succeeded his brother as head of the family, and, from that hour, was the happy possessor of an annual income of 70,000 ducats.

I wonder whether they wept for that cow, which they never brought home after all?

Mr. Michael immediately left his old dwelling, travelled with his family all the way to Bucharest in a carriage (it was the first time in his life he had ever enjoyed that dignity), went through the family archives, and entered into possession of his immense domain, of whose extent he had had no idea before.

The old family mansion was near Rumnik, whither Mr. Michael also repaired. The house was dilapidated and neglected, its former possessors having lived constantly abroad, only popping in occasionally to see how things were going on. Nevertheless, it was a palace to the new heir, who, after the experience of his narrow hovel, could hardly accommodate himself to the large, barrack-like rooms, and finally contented himself with one half of it, leaving the other wing quite empty, as he didn't know what to do with it.

Having been accustomed throughout the prime of his life to deprivation and the hardest of hard work, that state of things had become such a second nature to him, that, when he became a millionaire, he had not much taste for anything better than maize-cakes, and it was high festival with him when puliszka[1-1] was put upon the table.

On the death of his wife, he sent his daughter on foot to the neighbouring village to learn her alphabet from the cantor, and two heydukes accompanied her lest the dogs should worry her on the way. When his daughter grew up, he entrusted her with the housekeeping and the care of the kitchen. Very often some young and flighty boyar would pass through the place from the neighbouring village, and very much would he have liked to have taken the girl off with him, if only her father would give her away. And all this time Mr. Michael's capital began to increase so outrageously that he himself began to be afraid of it. It had come to this, that he could not spend even a thousandth part of his annual income, and, puzzle his head as he might, he could not turn it over quickly enough. He had now whole herds of cows, he bought pigs by the thousand, but everything he touched turned to money, and the capital that he invested came back to him in the course of the year with compound interest. The worthy man was downright desperate when he thought upon his treasure-heaps multiplying beyond all his expectations. How to enjoy them he knew not, and yet he did not wish to pitch them away.

He would have liked to have played the grand seignior, if only thereby to get rid of some of his money, but the rôle did not suit him at all. If, for instance, he wanted to build a palace, there was so much calculating how, in what manner,

and by whom it could be built most cheaply, that it scarce cost him anything at all, but then it never turned out a palace. Or if he wanted to give a feast, it was easy enough to select the handsomest of the boyars for his guests. Whatever was necessary for the feast—wine, meat, bread, honey, and sack-pipers—was supplied in such abundance from his own magazines and villages, that he absolutely despaired to think how it was that his ancestors had not only devoured their immense estates, but had even piled up debts upon them. To him this remained an insoluble problem, and after bothering his head for a long time as to what he should do with his eternally accumulating capital, he at last hit upon a good idea. The spacious gardensurrounding his crazy castle had, by his especial command, been planted with all sorts of rare and pleasant plants—like basil, lavender, wild saffron, hops, and gourds—over whom a tenant had been promoted as gardener to look after them. One year the garden produced such gigantic gourds, that each one was as big as a pitcher. The astonished neighbours came in crowds to gaze at them, and the promoted ex-boyar swore a hundred times that such gourds as these the Turkish Sultan himself had not seen all his life long.

This gave Master Michael an idea. He made up his mind that he would send one of these gourds to the Sultan as a present. So he selected the finest and roundest of them, of a beautiful flesh-coloured rind, encircled by dark-green stripes, with a turban-shaped cap at the top of it, and, boring a little hole through it, drew out the pulp and filled it instead with good solid ducats of the finest stamp, and placing it on his best six-oxened wagon, he selected his wisest tenant, and, dinning well into his head where to go, what to say, and to whom to say it, sent him off with the great gourd to the Sublime Porte at Stambul.

It took the cart three weeks to get to Constantinople.

The good, worthy farmer, upon declaring that he brought gifts for the Grand Seignior, was readily admitted into the presence, and after kissing the hem of the Padishah's robe, drew the bright cloth away from the presented pumpkin and deposited it in front of the Diván.

The Sultan flew into a violent rage at the sight of the gift.

"Dost thou take me for a swine, thou unbelieving dog, that thou bringest me a gourd?" cried he.

And straightway he commanded the Kiaja Beg to remove both the gourd and the man. The gourd he was to dash to pieces on the ground, the bringer of the gourd was to have dealt unto him a hundred stripes on the soles of his feet, but the sender of the gourd was to lose his head.

The Kiaja Beg did as he was commanded. He banged the gourd down in the courtyard outside, and behold! a stream of shining ducats gushed out of it instead of the pulp. Nevertheless, faithful above all things to his orders, he had the poor farmer flung down on his face, and gave him such a sound hundred stripes on the soles of his feet that he had no wish for any more.

Immediately afterwards he hastened to inform the Sultan that the gourd had been dashed to the ground, the hundred blows with the stick duly paid, the silken cord ready packed, but that the gourd was full of ducats.

At these words the countenance of the Grand Seignior grew serene once more, like the smiling summer sky, and after ordering that the silken cord should be put back in its place, he commanded that the most magnificent of caftans should be

distributed both to the bastinadoed farmer and to the boyar who had sent the gift, and that they should both be assured of the gracious favour of the Padishah.

The former had sufficient sense when he arrived at Bucharest to sell the gay garment he had received to a huckster in the bazaar, but his master's present he carefully brought home, and, after informing him of the unpleasant incident concerning himself, delivered to him his present, together with a gracious letter from the Sultan.

Master Michael was delighted with the return gift. He put on the long caftan, which reached to his heels, and was made of fine dark-red Thibetan stuff, embroidered with gold and silken flowers. Gold lace and galloon, as broad as your hand, were piled up on the sleeves, shoulder, and back, to such an extent that the original cloth was scarcely visible, and the hem of the caftan was most wondrously embroidered with splendid tulips, green, blue, and lilac roses, and all sorts of tinsel and precious stones.

Master Michael felt himself quite another man in this caftan. The Sultan had sent him a letter. The Sultan had plainly written to him that he was to wear this caftan. This, therefore, was a command, and it was possible that the Sultan might turn up to-morrow or the next day to see whether he was wearing this caftan, and would be angry if he hadn't got it on. He must needs therefore wear it continually.

But this golden caftan did not go at all well with his coarse fur jacket, nor with his wooden sandals and lambskin cap. He was therefore obliged to send to Tergoviste for a tailor who should make him a silk dolman, vest, and embroidered stockings to match the golden caftan. He also sent to Kronstadt for a tasselled girdle, to Braila for shoes and morocco slippers, and to Tekas for an ermine kalpag with a heron's plume in it.

Of course, now that he was so handsomely dressed, it was quite out of the question for him to sit in a ramshackle old carriage, or to bestride a fifty-thaler nag. He therefore ordered splendid chargers to be sent to him from Bessarabia, and had a gilded coach made for him in Transylvania; and when the carriage and the horses were there, he could not put them into the muddy wagon-shed and the sparrow-frequented, rush-thatched stable, but had to make good stone coach-houses and stables expressly for them. Now, it would have looked very singular, and, in fact, disgusting, if the stable and coach-house had been better than the castle, whose shingle roof was a mass of variegated patches and gaping holes where the mortar had fallen out and left the bricks bare; so there was nothing for it but to pull down the old castle, and to order his steward to build up a new one in its place, and make it as beautiful and splendid as his fancy could suggest.

Thus the whole order of the world he lived in was transformed by a golden caftan.

The steward embellished the castle with golden lattices, turrets, ornamental porches and winding staircases; put conservatories in the garden, planted projecting rondelles and soaring belvederes at thecorners of the castle and a regular tower in the middle of it, and painted all the walls and ceilings inside with green forests and crooked-beaked birds.

Of course, he couldn't put inside such a place as this the old rustic furniture and frippery, so he had to purchase the large, high, shining hump-backed arm-

chairs, the gold-stamped leather sofas, and the lion-legged marble tables which were then at the height of fashion.

Of course, Turkey carpets had to be laid on the floor, and silver candelabra and beakers placed upon the magnificent tables; and in order that these same Turkey carpets might not be soiled by the muddy boots of farmyard hinds, a whole series of new servants had to be invented, such as footmen to stand behind the new carriage, cooks for the kitchen, and a special gardener for the conservatories, who, instead of looking after the honest, straightforward citron-trees and pumpkins, had gingerly to plant out cactuses and Egyptian thistles like dry stalks, in pots, whence, also, it came about that as there was now a regular gardener and a regular cook, pretty Mariska had no longer any occasion to concern herself either with garden or kitchen, nor did she go any more to the village rector to learn reading or writing, but they had to get her a French governess from whom she learnt good taste, elegant manners, embroidery, and harp-strumming.

And all these things were the work of the golden caftan!

Chapter II

MAIDENS THREE.

The family banner had scarce been hoisted on to the high tower of the new castle, the rumour of Mariska's loveliness and her father's millions had scarce been spread abroad, when the courtyard began to be all ablaze with the retinues and equipages of the most eminent zhupans,[2-2] voivodes,[2-3] and princes; but Master Michael had resolved within himself beforehand that nobody less than the reigning Prince of Moldavia should ever receive his daughter's hand, and stolidly he kept to his resolution.

Now the reigning Prince of Moldavia no doubt had an illustrious name enough, but he also had inherited a very considerable load of debt, and what with the eternal exactions of the Tartars, and the presents expected by all the leading Pashas, and other disturbing causes, he saw his people growing poorer and poorer, and his own position becoming more and more precarious every year. He therefore did not keep worthy Master Michael waiting very long when he heard, on excellent authority, that there was being reserved for him in Wallachia a beautiful and accomplished virgin, who would bring to her husband a dowry of a couple of millions, in addition to an uncorrupted heart and an old ancestral title.

So, gathering together all the boyars, retainers, and officers of his court, he set off a-wooing to Rumnik, where he was well received by the father, satisfied himself as to the young lady's good graces, demanded her hand in marriage, and, allowing an adequate delay for the preliminaries of the wedding, fixed the glad event for the first week after Easter.

Master Michael, meantime, could think of nothing else but how he could cut as magnificent a figure as possible on the occasion. He invited to the banquet all the celebrities in Moldavia, Servia, Bosnia, and Transylvania. He did not even hesitate to hire from Versailles one of Louis XIV.'s cooks, to regulate the order and quality

of the dishes. On the day of the banquet the good gentleman was visible everywhere, and saw to everything himself. Quite early, arrayed in the golden caftan, the heron-plumed kalpag, and the tasselled girdle, he strutted about the courtyard, corridors and chambers, distributing his orders and receiving his guests; and his heart fluttered when he beheld the courtyard filling with carriages, each one more brilliant than its predecessor, escorted by gold-bedizened cavaliers, from which silver-laced heydukes assisted noble ladies, in splendid pearl-embroidered costumes, to descend. There was such a rustling of silk dresses, such a rattling of swords, and such an endless procession of elegant and magnificent forms up the staircase, as to make the heart of the beholder rejoice.

Master Michael rushed hither and thither, and pride and humility were strangely blended on his face. He assured all he welcomed how happy they made him by honouring his poor dwelling with their presence; but the voice with which he said this betrayed the conviction that not one of his guests had quitted a home as splendid as his own poor dwelling.

Then he plunged into the robing-chamber of the bride, where tire-women, fetched all the way from Vienna, had been decking out Mariska from early dawn. It gave them no end of trouble to adjust her jewels and her gewgaws, and if they had heaped upon the fair bride all that her father had purchased for her, she would have been unable to move beneath the weight of her gems.

Thence the good man rushed off to the banqueting-room, where his domestics had been busy making ready two rows of tables in five long halls.

“Here shall sit the bride! That arm-chair to the right of her is for the Patriarch—it is his proper place. On the left will sit Prince Michael Apafi. He is to have the green-embossed chair, with the golden cherubim. The bridegroom will sit on the right hand of the Patriarch. You must give him that round, armless seat, so that he cannot lean back, but must hold himself proudly erect. Over there you must place Paul Béldi and his spouse, for they are always wont to sit together. Their daughter Aranka will also be there, and she must sit between them on that little blue velvet stool. Opposite to them the silk sofa is for Achmed Pasha and Feriz Beg, recollect that they won’t want knife or fork. The Dean must have that painted stone bench, for a wooden bench would break beneath him, and no chair will hold him. The three-and-thirty priests must be placed all together over there—you must put none else beside them, or they would be ashamed to eat. Don’t forget to pile up wreaths of flowers on the silver salvers; and remember there are peculiar reasons for not placing a pitcher of wine before Michael Teleki. Achmed Pasha must have a sherbet-bowl placed beside the can from which he drinks his wine, and then folks will fancy he is not transgressing the Koran. Place goblets of Venetian crystal before the ladies, and golden beakers before the gentlemen, the handsomest before Teleki and Bethlen, the commoner sort before the others, as they are wont to dash them against the walls. The bridegroom should have the slenderest beaker of all, for he’ll have to pledge everyone, and I want no harm to befall him. Mind what I say!”

Nearly all the wedding guests had now assembled. Only two families were still expected, the Apafis and the Telekis, whom Master Michael in his pride wished to see at his table most of all. He glanced impatiently into the courtyard every time

he heard the roll of a carriage, and the staircase lacqueys had strict injunctions to let him know as soon as they saw the Prince's carriage approaching.

At last the rumbling of wheels was heard. Master Michael went all the way to the gate to receive his guests, shoving aside all the vehicles in his way, and bawling to the sentinels on the tower to blow the trumpets as soon as ever they beheld the carriage on the road. The goodly host of guests also thronged the balconies, the turrets, and the rondelles, to catch a glance at the new arrivals, and before very long two carriages, each drawn by four horses, turned the corner of the well-wooded road, carriages supported on each side by footmen, lest they should topple over, and escorted by a brilliant banderium of prancing horsemen.

They were instantly recognised as the carriages of the Prince and his Prime Minister, and the voices of the trumpets never ceased till the splendid, gilded, silk-curtained vehicles had lumbered into the courtyard, although the master of the castle was already awaiting them at the outer, sculptured gate, and himself hastened to open the carriage door, doffing first of all his ermine kalpag. But he popped it on again, considerably nonplussed, when, on opening the carriage, a beardless bit of a boy, to all appearance, leapt out of it all alone, and there was not a trace of the Prince to be seen in the carriage. Perhaps he had dismounted at the foot of the hill in order to complete the journey on foot, as Master Michael himself was in the habit of doing every time he took a drive in his coach, for fear of an accident.

But the youthful jack-in-the-box lost no time in dispelling all rising suspicions by quickly introducing himself.

"I am Emeric Tököly," said he, "whom his Highness the Prince has sent to your Worship as his representative to take part in the festivities, and at the same time to express his regret that he was not able to appear personally, but only to send his hearty congratulations, inasmuch as her Highness the Princess is just now in good hopes, by the grace of God, of presenting her consort with an heir, and consequently his Highness does not feel himself capable of enduring the amenities which under these circumstances Ali Pasha might at such a time think fit to force upon him. Nevertheless he wishes your Worship, with God's will, all imaginable felicity."

Master Michael did not exactly know whether to say "I am very glad" or "I am very sorry;" and in the meanwhile, to gain time, was turning towards the second carriage, when Emeric Tököly suddenly intercepted him.

"I was also to inform your Worship that his Excellency Michael Teleki, having unexpectedly received the command to invade Hungary with all the forces of Transylvania, has sent, instead of himself, his daughter Flora to do honour to your Worship, much regretting that, because of the command aforesaid, which will brook neither objection nor delay, he has been obliged to deny himself the pleasure personally to press your Worship's hand and exchange the warm kiss of kinsmanship; but if your Worship will entrust me with both the handshake and the kiss, I will give your Worship his and take back to him your Worship's."

The good old gentleman was absolutely delighted with the young man's patriarchal idea, forgot the sour and solemn countenance which he had expressly put on in honour of the Prince, and, falling on the neck of the graceful young gentleman, hugged and kissed him so emphatically that the latter could scarcely

free himself from his embraces; then, taking Flora Teleki, the youth's reported *fiancée*, on one arm, and Emeric himself on the other, he conducted them in this guise among his other guests, and they were the first to whom he introduced his daughter in all her bridal array.

A stately, slender brunette was Mariska, her face as pale as a lily, her eyes timidly cast down, as, leaning on her lady companion's arm, and tricked out in her festal costume, she appeared before the expectant multitude. The beauty of her rich black velvet tresses was enhanced by interwoven strings of real pearls; her figure, whose tender charms were insinuated rather than indicated by her splendid oriental dress, would not have been out of place among a group of Naiads; and that superb carriage, those haughty eyebrows, those lips of hers full of the promise of pleasure, suited very well with her bashful looks and timid movements.

Amongst the army of guests there was one man who towered above the others—tall, muscular, with broad shoulders, dome-like breast, and head proudly erect, whose long locks, like a rich black pavilion, flowed right down over his shoulders. His thick dark eyebrows and his coal-black moustache gave an emphatically resolute expression to his dark olive-coloured face, whose profile had an air of old Roman distinction.

This was the bridegroom, Prince Ghyka.

When the father of the bride introduced the new arrivals to the other guests, his first action was to present them to Prince Ghyka, not forgetting to relate how courteously the young Count had executed his commission as to the transfer of the kisses, which, having been received with general hilarity, suggested a peculiarly bold idea to the flighty young man.

While he was being embraced by one after the other, and passed on from hand to hand so to speak, he suddenly stood before the trembling bride, who scarce dared to cast a single furtive look upon him, and, greeting her in the style of the most chivalrous French courtesy, at the same time turning towards the bystanders with a proud, not to say haughty smile, pardonable in him alone, said, with an amiable *abandon*: "Inasmuch as I have been solemnly authorised to be the bearer of kisses, I imagine I shall be well within my rights if I deliver personally the kisses which my kinswomen, Princess Apafi and Dame Teleki have charged me to convey to the bride."

And before anyone had quite taken in the meaning of his concluding words, the handsome youth, with that fascinating impertinence with which he was wont to subdue men and women alike, bent over the charming bride, and while her face blushed for a moment scarlet red, imprinted a noiseless kiss upon her pure marble forehead. And this he did with such grace, with such tender sprightliness, that nothing worse than a light smile appeared upon the most rigorous faces present.

Then, turning to the company with a proud smile of self-confidence on his face: "I hope," said he, tucking Flora Teleki's hand under his arm, "that the presence of my fiancée is a sufficient guarantee of the respect with which I have accomplished this item of my mission."

At this there was a general outburst of laughter amongst the guests. Any sort of absurdity could be forgiven Emeric, for he managed even his most practical jokes so amiably that it was impossible to be angry with him.

But the cheeks of two damsels remained rosy-red—Mariska's and Flora's. Women don't understand that sort of joke.

The bridegroom, half-smiling, half-angry, stroked his fine moustache. "Come, come, my lad," said he, "you have been quicker in kissing my bride than I have been myself."

But now the reverend gentlemen intervened, the bells rang, the bridesmaids and the best men took possession of the bride and bridegroom, the ceremony began, and nobody thought any more of the circumstance, except, perhaps, two damsels, whose hearts had been pricked by the thoughtless pleasantry, one of them as by the thorn of a rose, the other as by the sting of a serpent.

And now, while for the next hour and a half the marriage ceremony, with the assistance of the Most Reverend Patriarch, the Venerable Archdeacon, three-and-thirty reverend gentlemen of the lower clergy, and just as many secular dignitaries, is solemnly and religiously proceeding, we will remain behind in the ante-chamber, and be indiscreet enough to worm out the contents of the two well-sealed letters which have just been brought in hot haste from Kronstadt for Emeric Tököly by a special courier, who stamped his foot angrily when he was told that he must wait till the Count came out of church.

One of the letters was from Michael Teleki, and its contents pretty much as follows:

> "My dear Sir and Son, "Our affairs are in the best possible order. During the last few days our army, 9,000 strong, quitting Gyulafehervár, has gone to await Achmed Pasha's forces near Déva, and will thence proceed to unite with Kiuprile's host. War, indeed, is inevitable; and Transylvania must be gloriously in the forefront of it. Do not linger where you are, but try and overtake us. It would be superfluous for me to remind you to take charge of my daughter Flora on the way. God bless you. "Michael Teleki. "*Datum Albæ Juliæ*.
>
> "P.S.—Her Highness the Princess awaits a safe delivery from the mercy of God. His Highness the Prince has just finished a very learned dissertation on the orbits of the planets."

The second letter was in a fine feminine script, but one might judge from it that that hand knew how to handle a sword as well as a pen.

It was to the following effect:

> "My dear Friend, "I have received your letter, and this is my answer to it. I can give you no very credible news in writing, either about myself or the affairs of the realm. A lover can do everything and sacrifice everything, even to life itself, for his love. (You will understand that this reference to love refers not to me, a mournful widow, but to another mournful widow, who is also your mother.) I do not judge men by what they say, but by what they do. All the same, I have every reason to think well of you, and I shall be delighted if the future should justify my good opinion of you. "Your faithful servant, "Ilona."
>
> P.S.—I shall spend midsummer at the baths of Mehadia."

The noble bridal retinue, merrily conversing, now returned from the chapel to the castle, the very sensible arrangement obtaining, that when the guests sat down to table each damsel was to be escorted to her seat by a selected cavalier known to be not displeasing to her. The only exceptions to this rule were the right reverend brigade, and Achmed Pasha and Feriz Beg, the two Turkish magnates present, whose grave dignity restrained them from participating in this innocent species of gallantry.

First of all, as the representative of the Prince of Transylvania, came Emeric Tököly, conducting the aged mother of the bridegroom, the Princess Ghyka; after him came Paul Béldi, leading the bride by the hand. Béldi's wife was escorted by the master of the house, and her pretty little golden-haired daughter Aranka hung upon her left arm.

Feriz Beg was standing in the vestibule with a grave countenance till Aranka appeared. The little girl, on perceiving the youth, greeted him kindly, whereupon Feriz sighed deeply, and followed her. The bridegroom led the beautiful Flora Teleki by the hand.

On reaching the great hall, the company broke up into groups, the merriest of which was that which included Flora, Mariska, and Aranka.

"Be seated, ladies and gentlemen! be seated!" cried the strident voice of the host, who, full of proud self-satisfaction, ran hither and thither to see that all the guests were in the places assigned to them. Tököly was by the side of Mariska, opposite to them sat the bridegroom, with Flora Teleki by his side. Aranka was the *vis-à-vis* of Feriz Beg.

The banquet began. The endless loving-cup went round, the faces of the guests grew ever cheerier, the bride conversed in whispers with her handsome neighbour. Opposite to them the bridegroom, with equal courtesy, exchanged from time to time a word with the fair Flora, but the conversation thus begun broke down continually, and yet both the lady and the prince were persons of culture, and had no lack of mother-wit. But their minds were far away. Their lips spoke unconsciously, and the Prince grew ever gloomier as he saw his bride plunging ever more deeply into the merry chatter of her gay companion, and try as he might to entertain his own partner, the resounding laughter of the happy pair opposite drove the smile from his face, especially when Flora also grew absolutely silent, so that the bridegroom was obliged, at last, to turn to the Patriarch, who was sitting on his right, and converse with him about terribly dull matters.

Meanwhile, a couple of Servian musicians began, to the accompaniment of a zithern, to sing one of their sad, monotonous, heroic songs. All this time Achmed Pasha had never spoken a word, but now, fired by the juice of the grape mediatized by his sherbet-bowl, he turned towards the singers and, beckoning them towards him, said in a voice not unlike a growl:

"Drop all that martial jumble and sing us instead something from one of our poets, something from Hariri the amorous, something from Gulestan!"

At these words the face of Feriz Beg, who sat beside him, suddenly went a fiery red—why, he could not have told for the life of him.

"Do you know *The Lover's Complaint*, for instance?" inquired the Pasha of the musician.

"I know the tune, but the verses have quite gone out of my head."

“Oh! as to that, Feriz Beg here will supply you with the words quickly enough if you give him a piece of parchment and a pen.”

Feriz Beg was preparing to object, with the sole result that all the women were down upon him immediately, and begged and implored him for the beautiful song. So he surrendered, and, tucking up the long sleeve of his dolman, set the writing materials before him and began to write.

They who drink no wine are nevertheless wont to be intoxicated by the glances of bright eyes, and Feriz, as he wrote, glanced from time to time at the fair face of Aranka, who cast down her forget-me-not eyes shamefacedly at his friendly smile. So Feriz Beg wrote the verses and handed them to the musicians, and then everyone bade his neighbour hush and listen with all his ears.

The musician ran his fingers across the strings of his zithern, and then began to sing the song of the Turkish poet:

“Three lovely maidens I see, three maidens embracing each other;
Gentle, and burning, and bright—Sun, Moon, and Star I declare them.
Let others adore Sun and Moon, but give me my Star, my belovéd!”
“When the Sun leaves the heavens, her adorers are whelméd in slumber;
When the Moon quits the sky, sleep falls on the eyes of her lovers.
But the fall of the Star is the death of the man who adores her—
And oh! if my load-star doth fall, Machallah! I cease from the living!”

General applause rewarded the song, which it was difficult to believe had not been made expressly for the occasion.

“Who would think,” said Paul Béldi to the Pasha, “that your people not only cut darts from reeds, but pens also, pens worthy of the poets of love?”

“Oh!” replied Achmed, “in the hands of our poets, blades and harps are equally good weapons; and if they bound the laurel-wreath round the brows of Hariri it was only to conceal the wounds which he received in battle.”

When the banquet was over, Tököly, with courteous affability, parted from his fair neighbour, whom he immediately saw disappear in a window recess, arm-in-arm with Flora. He himself made the circuit of the table in order that he might meet the fair Aranka, but was stopped in mid-career by his host, who was so full of compliments that by the time Tököly reached the girl, he found her leaning on her mother’s arm engaged in conversation with the Prince. Aranka, feeling herself out of danger when she had only a married man to deal with, had quite regained her childish gaiety, and was making merry with the bridegroom.

Tököly, with insinuating grace, wormed his way into the group, and gradually succeeded in so cornering the Prince, that he was obliged to confine his conversation to Dame Béldi, while Tököly himself was fortunate enough to make Aranka laugh again and again at his droll sallies.

The Prince was boiling over with venom, and was on the verge of forgetting himself and exploding with rage. Fortunately, Dame Béldi, observing in time the tension between the two men, curtseyed low to them both, and withdrew from the room with her daughter. Whereupon, the Prince seized Tököly’s hand, and said to him with choleric jocosity: “If your Excellency’s own bride is not sufficient for you, will you at least be satisfied with throwing in mine, and do not try to sweep every girl you see into your butterfly-net?”

Tököly quite understood the bitter irony of these words, and replied, with a soft but offensively condescending smile: “My dear friend, your theory of life is erroneous. I see, from your face, that you are suffering from an overflow of bile. You have not had a purge lately, or been blooded for a long time.”

The Prince’s face darkened. He squeezed Tököly’s hand convulsively, and murmured between his teeth:

“One way is as good as another. When shall we settle this little affair?”

Tököly shrugged his shoulders. “To-morrow morning, if you like.”

“Very well, we’ll meet by the cross.”

The two men had spoken so low that nobody in the whole company had noticed them, except Feriz Beg, who, although standing at the extreme end of the room with folded arms, had followed with his eagle eyes every play of feature, every motion of the lips of the whole group, including Dame Béldi and the girl, and who now, on observing the two men grasp each other’s hands, and part from each other with significant looks, suddenly planted himself before them, and said simply: “Do you want to fight a duel because of Aranka?”

“What a question?” said the Prince evasively.

“It will not be a duel,” said Feriz, “for there will be three of us there,” and, with that, he turned away and departed.

“How foolish these solemn men are,” said Tököly to himself, “they are always seeking sorrow for themselves. It would require only a single word to make them merry, and, in spite of all I do, they will go and spoil a joke. Why, such a duel as this—all three against each other, and each one against the other two—was unknown even to the famous Round Table and to the Courts of Love. It will be splendid.”

At that moment the courier, who had brought the letters, forced his way right up to Tököly, and said that he had got two important despatches for him.

“All right, keep them for me, I’ll read them to-morrow. I won’t spoil the day with tiresome business.”

And so he kept it up till late at night with the merriest of the topers. Only after midnight did he return to his room, and ordered the soldier who had brought the letters to wake him as soon as he saw the red dawn.

Chapter III

THREE MEN.

Tököly’s servant durst not go to sleep on the off-chance of awaking at dawn in order to arouse his master, and so the sky had scarcely begun to grow grey when he routed him up. Emeric hastily dressed himself. A sort of ill-humour on his pale face was the sole reminder of the previous night’s debauch.

“Here are the letters, sir,” said the soldier.

“Leave me in peace with your letters,” returned Emeric roughly, “I have no time now to read your scribble. Go down and saddle my horse for me, and tell the coachman to make haste and get the carriage ready, and have it waiting for me

near the cross at the slope of the hill, and find out on your way down whether the old master of the house is up yet."

The soldier pocketed the letter once more, and went down grumbling greatly, while Emeric buckled on his sword and threw his pelisse over his shoulders. Soon after the soldier returned and announced that Master Michael had been up long ago, because many of his guests had to depart before dawn, amongst them the Prince, also the Turkish gentleman; the bride was to follow them in the afternoon.

"Good," said Emeric; "let the coachman wait for me in front of the Dragmuili *csarda*.[3-4] You had better bring with you some cold meat and wine, and we'll have breakfast on the way." And with that he hastenedto the father of the bride, who, after embracing him heartily and repeatedly, with a great flux of tears, and kissing him again and again, and sending innumerable greetings through him to every eminent Transylvanian gentleman, took an affectionate leave of him.

Tököly hastened to bestride his horse on hearing that his adversaries had been a little beforehand with him, and, putting spurs to his horse, galloped rapidly away. Master Michael looked after him in amazement so long as he could see him racing along the steep, hilly way, till he disappeared among the woods. A soldier followed him at a considerable distance.

Emeric, on reaching the cross, found his adversaries there already. Feriz Beg had brought with him Achmed Pasha's field-surgeon. Tököly had only thought of breakfast, the Prince had thought of nothing.

"Good morning," cried the Count, leaping from his horse. The Beg returned his salute with a solemn obeisance; the Prince turned his back upon him.

"Let us go into the forest to find a nice clear space," said Tököly; and off he set in silence, leading the way, while the soldiers followed at some distance, leading the horses by the bridles.

After going about a hundred yards they came to a clear space, surrounded by some fine ash-trees. The Prince signified to the soldiers to stop here, and, without a word, began to take off his dolman and mantle and tuck up his sleeves.

It was a fine sight to behold these men—all three of them were remarkably handsome fellows. The Prince was one of those vigorous, muscular shapes, whom Nature herself seems specially to have created to head a host. As he rolled up the flapping sleeves of his gold-embroidered, calf-skin shirt, he displayed muscles capable of holding their own single-handed against a whole brigade, and the defiant look of his eye testified to his confidence in the strength of his arms, whose every muscle stood out like a hard tumour, while his fists were worthy of the heavy broadsword, whose blade was broadest towards its point.

Feriz Beg, on discarding his dolman, rolled up the sleeves of his fine shirt of Turkish linen to his shoulders, and drew from its sheath his fine Damascus scimitar, which was scarce two inches broad, and so flexible that you could have bent it double in every direction like a watch-spring. His arms did not seem to be over-encumbered with muscles, but at the first movement he made, as he lightly tested his blade, a whole array of steel springs and stone-hard sinews, or so they seemed to be, suddenly started up upon his arm, revealing a whole network of highly-developed sinews and muscles. His face was fixed and grave.

Only Emeric seemed to take the whole affair as a light joke. With a smile he drew up his lace-embroidered shirt of holland linen, bound up his hair beneath

his kalpag, and folded his well-rounded arms, whose feminine whiteness, plastic, regular symmetry, and slender proportions, gave no promise whatever of anything like manly strength. His sword came from a famous Newcastle arms manufactory, and was made of a certain dark, lilac-coloured steel, somewhat bent, and with a very fine point.

"My friends," said Emeric, turning towards his opponents, "as there are three of us in this contest, and each one of the three must fight the other two, let us lay down some rule to regulate the encounter."

"I'll fight the pair of you together," said the Prince haughtily.

"I'll also fight one against two," retorted Feriz.

"Then each one for himself and everybody against everybody else," explained Tököly. "That will certainly be amusing enough; in fact, a new sort of encounter altogether, though hardly what gentlemen are used to. Now, I should consider it much nobler if we fought against each other singly, and when one of us falls, the victor can renew the combat with the man in reserve."

"I don't mind, only the sooner the better," said the Prince impatiently, and took up his position on the ground.

"Stop, my friend; don't you know that we cannot commence this contest without Feriz?"

"Pooh! I didn't come here as a spectator," cried the Prince passionately; "besides, I have nothing to do with the Beg."

"But I have to do with you," interrupted Feriz.

"Well," said Tököly, "I myself do not know what has offended him, but he chose to intervene, and such challenges as his are wont to be accepted without asking the reason why. No doubt he has private reasons of his own."

"You may stop there," interrupted Feriz. "Let Fate decide."

"By all means," observed the Count, drawing forth three pieces of money impressed with the image of King Sigismund—a gold coin, a silver coin, and a copper coin—and handed them to the Turkish leech. "Take these pieces of money, my worthy fellow, and throw them into the air. The gold coin is the Prince, the copper coin is myself. Whichever two of the three coins come down on the same side, their representatives will fight first."

The leech flung the pieces into the air, and the gold and silver pieces came down on the same side.

The Prince beckoned angrily to Feriz.

"Come, the sooner the better. Apparently I must have this little affair off my hands before I can get at Tököly."

Tököly motioned to the leech to keep the pieces of money and have his bandages ready.

"Bandages!" said the Prince ironically. "It's not first blood, but last blood, I'm after."

And now the combatants stood face to face.

For a long time they looked into each other's eyes, as if they would begin the contest with the darts of flashing glances, and then suddenly they fell to.

The Prince's onset was as furious as if he would have crushed his opponent in the twinkling of an eye with the heavy and violent blows which he rained upon him with all his might. But Feriz Beg stood firmly on the self-same spot where he

had first planted his feet, and though he was obliged to bend backwards a little to avoid the impact of the terrible blows, yet his slender Damascus scimitar, wove, as it were, a tent of lightning flashes all around him, defending him on every side, and flashing sparks now hither, now thither, whenever it encountered the antagonistic broadsword.

The Prince's face was purple with rage. "Miserable puppy!" he thundered, gnashing his teeth; and, pressing still closer on his opponent, he dealt him two or three such terrible blows that the Beg was beaten down upon one knee, and, the same instant, a jet of blood leaped suddenly from somewhere into the face of the Prince, who thereupon staggered back and let fall his sword. In the heat of the duel he had not noticed that he had been wounded. Whilst raining down a torrent of violent blows upon his antagonist, he incautiously struck his own hand, so to speak, on the sword of Feriz Beg, just below the palm where the arteries are, and the wound which severed the sinews of the wrist constrained him to drop his sword.

Tököly at once rushed forward.

"You are wounded, Prince!" he cried.

The leech hastened forward with the bandages, the dark red blood spurted from the severed arteries like a fountain, and the Prince's face grew pale in an instant. But scarcely had the surgeon bound up his wounded right hand than his eye kindled again, and, turning to Emeric, he cried: "I have still a hand left, and I can fight with it. Put my sword into my left hand, and I'll fight to the last drop of my blood."

"Don't be impatient, Prince," said Emeric courteously; "ill-luck is your enemy to-day, but as soon as you are cured you may command me, and I will be at your service."

The Prince, who was already tottering, leaned heavily on his soldiers, who hastened towards him and conveyed him half unconscious to the carriage awaiting him. His wound was much worse than it had seemed at first, and there was no knowing whether it would not prove mortal.

Only two combatants now remained in the field—Emeric and Feriz. The Beg was still standing in his former place, and beckoned in dumb show to Emeric to come on.

"Pardon me, my worthy comrade," said the Count, "you are a little fatigued, and a combat between us would be unfair if I, who have rested, should fight with you now. Come, plump down on the grass for a little beside me. My man has brought some cold provisions for the journey; let us have a few mouthfuls together first, and then we can fight it out at our ease."

This nonchalant proposal seemed to please Feriz, and, leaning his sword against a tree, he sat down in the grass, whilst Emeric's servant unpacked the cold meat and the fruit which he had brought for his master, together with a silver calabash-shaped flask full of wine.

Emeric returned the flask to the soldier. "Look you, my son," said he, "you can drink the wine, and then fill the flask with spring water, for Feriz Beg does not drink wine, and there are no other drinking utensils; I, therefore, will also drink water, and so we shall be equal." Feriz Beg was pleased with his comrade's free and easy behaviour, took willingly of the food piled up before him, and not only

drank out of the same flask, but even answered questions when they were put to him.

A faint scar was visible on the forehead of the young Beg, which the fold of his turban did not quite conceal.

"Did you get that wound from a Magyar?" inquired the Count.

"No, from an Italian, on the isle of Candia."

"I thought so at once. A Magyar does not cut with the point of his sword. I see the hand of an Italian fencing-master in it. I can even tell you the position you were in when you received it. The enemy was beside you, in front of you, on your right hand, and on your left. Now you employed that masterly circular stroke which you have just now displayed, whereby you can defend yourself on all sides at once. Then the foe in front of you suddenly rose in his saddle, and with a blow which you did not completely ward off, scarred your forehead with the point of his sword."

"It was just like that."

"It is one of the master-strokes of Basanella, and very carefully you have to watch it, for there is scarce any defence against it; the sword seems to strike up and down in the same instant, as if it were a sickle, and however high you may hold your own sword, the blow breaks through your defence. There is, indeed, only one defence against it, and that the simplest in the world—dodge back your head."

"You are quite right," said Feriz Beg smiling, and after washing his hands, he again took up his sword, "let us make an end of it."

"I don't mind," said Tököly; and lightly drawing his own sword with his delicate white hand, just as if it were a gewgaw which he was disengaging from its case to present to a lady, he took up his position on the ground.

"Just one word more," said Tököly with friendly candour. "When you fight with a single opponent, do not rush forward as if you were on a battlefield and had to do with ten men at least, for in so doing you expend much force uselessly, and allow your opponent to come up closer; rather elongate your sword and allow only your hand to play freely."

"I thank you for the advice," said Feriz smiling. Had it been anybody else he would probably have thrust back the advice into his face. But Emeric imparted it to him with such a friendly, comrade-like voice as if they had only come there for the fun of the thing.

Then the combat began. Feriz Beg, with his usual impetuosity, pressed upon his adversary as if he would pay him back his amicable counsels in kind; while Tököly calmly, composedly smiling, flung back the most violent assaults of his rival as if it were a mere sport to him, so lightly, so confidently did his sword turn in his hand, with so much finished grace did he accompany every movement—in fact, he hardly seemed to make any exertion. The most violent blows aimed at him by Feriz Beg he parried with the lightest twist of his sword, and not once did he counter, so that at last Feriz Beg, involuntarily overcome by rage, fell back and lowered his sword.

"You are only playing with me. Why don't you strike back?"

"Twice you might have received from me Basanella's master-stroke, so impetuously do you fight."

In a duel nothing is so wounding as the supercilious self-restraint of an opponent. Feriz Beg grew quite furious at Tököly's cold repose, and flung himself upon his opponent as if absolutely beside himself.

"Let us see whether you are the Devil or not," he cried.

At the same instant, when he had advanced a pace nearer to Tököly, the latter suddenly stretched forth his sword and at the instant when he parried his opponent's blow, he made a scarce perceptible backward and upward jerk with the point of his sword, and at that same instant a burning red line was visible on the temples of Feriz Beg. The young Turk lowered his sword in surprise as his face, immediately after the unnoticed stroke, began to bleed. Tököly flung away his sword and, tearing out his white pocket-handkerchief, rushed suddenly towards his opponent, stanched the wound with the liveliest sympathy, and said, in a voice tremulous with the most naïve apprehension: "Look now! didn't I tell you all along to watch for that stroke?"

By this time the leech had also come up with the bandages, and examining the wound, observed consolingly:

"A soldierly affair. Only the skin is pierced. In three days you will be all right."

Tököly, full of joy, pressed the hand of Feriz Beg.

"Henceforth we will be good friends," said he. "Before God, I protest I never gave you the slightest cause of offence."

"I shall rejoice in your friendship," said Feriz solemnly, "but if you wish it to last, listen to my words: never approach a girl whom you do not love in order to make her love you, and if you are loved, love in return and make her happy."

"You have my word of honour on it, Feriz," replied Tököly. "Of all the girls whom I have seen since I knew you, not one of them have I loved, and by none of them do I want to be loved."

Feriz Beg could not refrain from shaking his head and smiling.

"Apparently you forget that your own bride was among them."

Tököly bit his lips in some confusion, and answered nothing; he thought it best to pass off this slip of the tongue as a mere jest. Then the two reconciled antagonists embraced and returned to the roadside cross. Tököly constrained the Beg to take his coach and go on to Ibraila, while he himself mounted his horse, and taking leave of Feriz, took the road leading to the Pass of Bozza.

The soldier-courier now fancied it was high time that the urgent letters, of which he was the bearer, should be read, and accordingly asked his master about it.

"Well, where are your two letters?" asked the Count very languidly.

"There are not two, sir, but three."

"What! have they multiplied?"

"Miss Flora gave me the third half an hour before she took coach to go home."

"Then she has gone on before, eh? Well, let us see what they write about."

Teleki's was the first letter which Emeric perused; he glanced through it rapidly, as if it had no very great claim upon his attention. When he came to that part of it where he was told to look after Flora, he paused for a little. "Well, I can easily overtake her," he thought, and he took the second letter, which was subscribed with the name of Helen. Twice he perused it, and then he returned to it a third time, and his face grew visibly redder. Involuntarily he sighed as he thrust the

letter into his breast pocket just above his heart, and looked sadly in front of him, as if he were listening to the beating of his own heart.

Then he broke open the third letter.

It contained an engagement ring, nothing else. That was all—not a single accompanying word or letter.

For an instant Emeric held it in his hand in blank amazement; his steed stopped also. For some minutes his face was pale and his head hung down.

But in another instant he was again upright in his saddle, and he exclaimed in a voice loud enough to be heard afar:

"Well, it's not coming off then, so much the better!"

Then he threw away the envelope in which the ring had been, and drawing out the letter which he had thrust into his bosom, he put the ring into it and then returned it to his bosom; then, with a glowing face, he turned his horse's head and, in the best of humours, called to his soldier: "We will not go to Transylvania. Back to Mehadia!"

Chapter IV

AFFAIRS OF STATE.

The year was a few weeks older since we saw Tököly depart from Rumnik, after reading the three letters, and behold, Michael Teleki still lingered at Gyulafehervár, and had not gone with the Transylvanian forces to Déva.

He had been feeling ill for some days, and had not been able to leave his room. A slow fever tormented his limbs, his face had lost its colour, he was hardly able to hold himself up, and every joint ached whenever he moved. He had need of repose, but not a single moment could he have to himself, and just when he would have liked to have shown the door to every worry and bother, the Prince at one moment, and the Turkish Ambassador at another, were continually pressing their affairs upon him.

At that moment his crony Nalaczi was with him, standing at the window, while Teleki sat in an arm-chair. All his members were shaken by the ague, his breath was burning hot, his face was as pale as wax, and he could scarce keep his lips together.

By his chair stood his page—young Cserei—whilst huddled up in a corner on one side was a scarce visible figure which clung close to the wall with as miserable, shamefaced an expression as if it would have liked to crawl right into it and be hidden. What with the darkness and its own miserableness, we should scarce recognise this shape if Teleki did not chance to give it a name, railing at it, from time to time, as if it were a lifeless log, without even looking at it, for, in truth, his back was turned upon it.

"I tell you, Master Szénasi, you are an infinitely useless blockhead—"

"I humbly beg—"

"Don't beg anything. Here have I, worse luck, been entrusting you with a small commission, in order that you might impart some wholesome information to the

people, and instead of that you go and fool them with all sorts of old wives' stories."

"Begging your Excellency's pardon, I thought—"

"Thought? What business had you to think? You thought, perhaps, you were doing me a service with your nonsense, eh?"

"Mr. Nalaczi said as much, your Excellency."

Mr. Nalaczi seemed to be sitting on thorns all this while.

"Now just see what a big fool you are," interrupted Teleki. "Mr. Nalaczi *may* have told you, for what I know, that it might be well for you to use your influence with the common people by mentioning before them the wonders which have recently taken place, and thereby encouraging them to be loyal and friendly to each other, but I am sure he did not tell you to manufacture wonders on your own account, and terrify the people by spreading abroad rumours of coming war."

"I thought—" Here he stopped short, the worthy man was quite incapable at that moment of completing his sentence.

"Thought! You thought, I suppose, that just as I was collecting armies, you would do me a great service by preaching war? So far as I am concerned, I should like to see every sword buried in the earth."

"Begging your Excellency's pardon——"

"Get out of my sight. Never let me see you again. In three days you must leave Transylvania, or else I'll send you out, and you won't thank me for that."

"May I humbly ask what I am to do if your Excellency withdraws your favour from me?" whined the fellow.

"You may do as you like. Go to Szathmár and become the lacquey of Baron Kopp, or the scribe of Master Kászonyi. I'm just going to write to them. I'll mention your name in my letter, and you can take it."

"And if they won't accept me?"

"Then you must tack on to someone else, anyhow you shan't starve. Only get out of my sight as quickly as possible."

The "magister" withdrew in fear and trembling, wiping his eyes with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Sir," said Nalaczi, when they were alone together, "this violence does harm."

"The only way with such fellows is to bully them whatever they do, for they are deceivers and traitors at heart, and would otherwise do you mischief. Kick and beat them, chivy them from pillar to post, and make them feel how wretched their lot is, if you don't want them to play off their tricks upon you."

"I don't see it in that light. This irritability will do you no good."

"On the contrary it keeps me up. If I had not always given vent to my feelings I should have been lying on a sick-bed long ago. Take these few thalers, go after that good-for-nothing, and tell him that I am very angry with him, and therefore he must try in future to deserve my confidence better, in which case I shall not forget him. Tell him to wait in the gate for the letter I am about to write, and when once he has it in his hand let him get out of Transylvania as speedily as he can. Remind him that I don't yet know about what happened in the square at Klausenberg, and if I did know I would have him flogged out of the realm; so let him look sharp about it."

Nalaczi laughed and went out.

Teleki sank back exhausted on his pillows, and made his page rub the back of his neck violently with a piece of flannel.

At that instant the Prince entered. His face was wrath, and all because of his sympathy. He began scolding Teleki on the very threshold.

"Why don't you lie down when I command you? Does it beseem a grown-up man like you to be as disobedient as a capricious child? Why don't you send for the doctor; why don't you be blooded?"

"There is nothing the matter with me, your Highness. It is only a little hæmorrhoidalis alteratio. I am used to it. It always plagues me at the approach of the equinoxes."

"Ai, ai, Michael Teleki, you don't get over me. You are very ill, I tell you. Your mental anxiety has brought about this physical trouble. Does it become a Christian man, I ask, to take on so because my little friend Flora cannot have one particular man out of fifteen wooers, and a fellow like Emeric, too—a mere dry stick of a man."

"I don't give it any particular importance."

"You are a bad Christian, I tell you, if you say that. You love neither God nor man; neither your family, nor me—"

"Sir!" said Teleki, in a supplicating voice.

"For if you did love us, you would spare yourself and lie down, and not get up again till you were quite well again."

"But if I lie down—"

"Yes, I know—other things will have a rest too. The bottom of the world isn't going to fall out, I suppose, because you keep your bed for a day or two. Come! look sharp! I will not go till I see you lying on your bed."

What could Teleki do but lie down at the express command of his Sovereign.

"And you won't get up again without my permission, mind," said the Prince, signalling to young Cserei, and addressing the remainder of his discourse to him. "And you, young man, take care that your master does not leave his bed, do you hear? I command it, and, till he is quite well, don't let him do any hard work, whether it be reading, writing, or dictation. You have my authorisation to prevent it, and you must rigorously do your duty. You will also allow nobody to enter this room, except the doctor and the members of the family. Now, mind what I say! As for you, Master Teleki, you will wrap yourself well up and get yourself well rubbed all over the body with a woollen cloth, clap a mustard poultice on your neck and keep it there as long as you can bear it, and towards evening have a hot bath, with salt and bran in it; and if you won't have a vein opened put six leeches on your temples, and the doctor will tell you what else to do. And in any case don't fail to take some of these *pilulæ de cynoglosso*. Their effect is infallible." Whereupon the Prince pressed into Teleki's hand a box full of those harmless medicaments which, under the name of dog's-tongue pills, were then the vogue in all domestic repositories.

"All will be well, your Highness."

"Let us hope so! Towards evening I will come and see you again."

And then the Prince withdrew with an air of satisfaction, thinking that he had given the fellow a good frightening.

Scarce had he closed the door behind him than Teleki beckoned to Cserei to bring him the letters which had just arrived.

The page regarded him dubiously. “The Prince forbade me to do so,” he observed conscientiously.

“The Prince loves to have his joke,” returned the counsellor. “I like my joke, too, when I’ve time for it. Break open those letters and read them to me.”

“But what will the Prince say?”

“It is I who command you, my son, not the Prince. Read them, I say, and don’t mind if you hear me groan.”

Cserei looked at the seal of one of the letters and durst not break it open.

“Your Excellency, that is a *secretum sigillum*.”

“Break it open like a man, I say. Such secrets are not dangerous to you; you are a child to be afraid of such things.”

Cserei opened the letter, and glancing at the signature, stammered in a scarce audible voice: “Leopoldus.”**(4-5)**

Teleki, resting on his elbows, listened attentively.

> “Your Highness and my well-disposed Friend—I have heard from Baron Mendenzi Kopp and worthy Master Kászonyi of your Excellency’s good dispositions towards me and Christendom, and your readiness to help in the present disturbances. All my own efforts will be directed to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the Christian Princes, so that there may not be the slightest occasion that the Turkish War should extend, and that the whole power of the Ottoman Empire should be hurled on me and my dominions. But I hope that the fury of these barbarians, by the combination of the foreign kings and princes, shall, with God’s assistance, be so opposed and thwarted as to make them turn back from the league of the combined faithful hosts. Meanwhile, I assure your Excellency and the Estates of Transylvania of my protection, so long as you continue well-disposed towards me, and I entrust the maintenance of this good understanding between us to Messrs. the illustrious Baron Kopp and the Honourable Mr. Kászonyi. Wishing your Excellency good health and all manner of good fortune, etc., etc.”

Cserei looked at the doors and windows in terror, for fear someone might be listening.

“And now let us read the second letter.”

Cserei’s top-knot regularly began to sweat when he recognised at the bottom of the opened letter the signature of the Grand Vizier, who thus wrote to the Prince:

> “Most illustrious Prince, hearty love and greeting!—We would inform thee of our grace and favour that we have sent a part of our army to the assistance of the imprisoned heroes in our most mighty master the Sultan’s fortress of Nyitra, where the faithless foe are besieging them. It is therefore necessary that thou with thy whole host and all the necessary muniments of war should hasten thither without loss of time, so as to unite both in heart and deed with our warriors, who are on their way against the enemy. We believe that by the grace of God thou wilt be ready to render useful service to the mighty Sultan, and so be entitled to participate in his favour and liberality. We, moreover, after the end of the solemn feast days which we are wont to keep after our fasts are over, will follow our advance guards with our countless hosts, and thou meanwhile must manfully take this business in hand, so

that thy loyalty may shine the more gloriously in martial deeds. Peace be to those who are in the obedience of God."

Poor Cserei, when he had read this letter through, had a worse fit of ague than his master. He anxiously watched the face of the statesman, but the only thing visible in his features was bodily suffering. There was no sign of mental disturbance.

The blood flew to his face, the veins were throbbing visibly in his temples.

"Come hither, my son," he said in a scarcely audible voice; "bring me a glass of water, put into it as much rhubarb powder as would go on the edge of a knife, and give it me to drink."

Cserei fancied that the sick Premier had not mastered the contents of the letter because of a fresh access of fever, and, having prepared the rhubarb water in a few moments, gave it him to drink, whereupon Teleki crouched down beneath his coverlet. He could have done nothing better, for now the ague burst forth again, so that he regularly shivered beneath its attack. Cserei wanted to run for a doctor.

"Whither are you going?" asked Teleki. "Fetch ink and parchment, and write."

The lad obeyed his command marvelling.

"Bring hither the round table and sit down beside it. Write what I tell you."

The pen shook in the lad's hand, and he kept dipping it into the sand instead of into the ink.

Teleki, in a broken voice, dictated a letter as well as the fever would allow him.

"Most Exalted Grand Vizier and Well-beloved Sir—We learn from your Highness's dispatch that the armies of the Sublime Sultan who have lately been besieging the fortress of Nyitra are now endeavouring to combine their forces, and though this realm has but a meagre possession of the muniments of war remaining to it, we shall be prepared most punctually to hold at your Highness's gracious disposition as much, though it be but little, forage, hay, and other necessary stores as we still possess, you making allowance for all inevitable defects and shortcomings. Moreover, rumour has it that the hostile hosts are beginning to show themselves on the borders of Transylvania, which irruption, though it be no secret, is yet to be confirmed, and should it be so we must meet it with all our attention and energy. As to this your Highness shall be informed in good time, and in the meanwhile we commit you to God's gracious favour, etc., etc."

Cserei sighed and thought to himself: "I wonder whence all the hay and oats is to come?"

But Teleki knew very well that in consequence of last year's bad harvests and inundations the Turkish army was suffering severely from want of hay, so that what with him was an occasion for delay, with them was an occasion for hurrying—whence we may draw the reflection that the great events of this world are built upon haycocks!

"Address the second letter," continued Teleki, "to his Excellency Baron Mendenzi Kopp and to the honourable Achatius Kászonyi, commandants of the fortress of Szathmár," and he thus went on dictating to Cserei, whilst in the intervals of silence the groans which the ague forced from his breast were distinctly audible.

"With joy we learn of the intention of your Honours to endeavour to seize one of the gates of entrance of the enemy of our faith, through which he was always ready to come for our destruction. May the God of mercy forward the designs of your Excellencies. If, on this occasion, your Excellencies could also find time to make a feigned attack upon Transylvania in order to give us a reasonable excuse of our inability to lend the Turks the assistance they expect from us, you would make matters easier for us, and render us an essential service. On the other hand, if we should be compelled against our wills to send our soldiers against the Christian camp, in conjunction with the enemies of our faith, we assure your Excellencies that our host will be a purely nominal one, etc., etc. "

P.S.—The bearer of this letter can be employed by your Excellencies as a courier or otherwise."

Cserei looked with amazement at the man in whom mental vivacity seemed to rise triumphant even over the lassitude of fever.

"Take a third sheet of paper, and address it to the Honourable Ladislaus Ebéni, Lieutenant-Governor of the fortress of Klausenburg.

"We hasten to inform your Honour that preparations are being made by the Commandant of the fortress of Szathmár, which leads us to conjecture that he meditates making an irruption into Transylvania. It may, of course, be merely a feint, but your Honour would do well to be prepared and under arms, lest he have designs against us, and is not merely making a noise. We, meanwhile, will postpone the advance of our arms into Hungary, lest, while we are attacking on one side, we leave Transylvania defenceless on the other. Once more we counsel your Honour to use the utmost caution, etc."

"And now take these letters and carry them to the Prince, that he may sign them."

"And what if he box my ears for allowing your Excellency to dictate?" said the frightened lad.

"Never mind it, my son, you will have suffered for your country. I, too, have had buffets enough in my time, not only when I was a child, but since I have grown up." And with that he turned his face towards the wall and pulled the coverlet over him.

Fortunately Cserei found Apafi in the apartment of the consort, and thus avoided the box on the ear, got the letters signed, and dispatched them all in different directions, so that all three got into the proper hands in the shortest conceivable time. And now let us see the result.

The Grand Vizier blasphemed when he had read his, and swore emphatically that if there were no hay in Transylvania he would make hay of their Excellencies.

Baron Kopp and Mr. Kászonyi chuckled together over *their* letter. The Commandant murmured gruffly: "I don't care, so you needn't."

Mr. Ebéni, however, on reading his letter, deposited it neatly among the public archives, growling angrily:

"If I were to call the people to arms at every wild alarm or idle rumour, I should have nothing else to do all day long. It is a pity that Teleki hasn't something better to do than to bother me continually with his scribble."

Chapter V

THE DAY OF GROSSWARDEIN.

In order that the horizon may stand clearly before us, it must be said that in those days there were two important points in Hungary on the Transylvanian border: Grosswardein and Szathmár-Németi, which might be called the gates of Transylvania—good places of refuge if their keys are in the hand of the Realm, but all the more dangerous when the hands of strangers dispose of them.

At this very time a German army was investing Szathmár and the Turks had sat down before Grosswardein, and the plumed helmets of the former were regarded as as great a menace on the frontiers of the state as the half-moons themselves.

The inhabitants of the regions enclosed between these fortresses never could tell by which road they were to expect the enemy to come. For in such topsy-turvy days as those were, every armed man was an enemy, from whom corn, cattle, and pretty women had to be hidden away, and their friendship cost as much as their enmity, and perhaps more; for if they found out at Szathmár that some nice wagon-loads of corn and hay had been captured from local marauders without first beating their brains out, the magistrates would look in next day and impose a penalty; and again, on the other hand, if it were known at Grosswardein that the Szathmárians had been received hospitably at any gentleman's house, and the daughter of the house had spoken courteously to them, the Turks would wait until the Szathmárians had gone farther on and would then fall upon the house in question and burn it to the ground, so that the Szathmárians should not be able to sleep there again; and, as for the daughter of the house, they would carry her off to a harem, in order to save her from any further discoursing with the magistrates of Szathmár.

And, last of all, there was a third enemy to be reckoned with, and this was the countless rabble of *betyárs*, or freebooters, who inhabited the whole region from the marshes of Ecsed to the morasses of Alibuner, and who gave no reason at all for driving off their neighbour's herds and even destroying his houses.

In those days a certain Feri Kökényesdi had won renown as a robber chieftain, and extraordinary, marvellous tales were told in every village and on every *puszta*[5-6] of him and the twelve robbers who followed his banner, and who were ready at a word to commit the most incredible audacities. People talked of their entrenched fortresses among the Bélabora and Alibuner marshes which were inaccessible to any mortal foe, and in which, even if surrounded on all sides, they could hold out against five regiments till the day of judgment. Then there were tales of storehouses concealed among the Cumanian sand-hills which could only be discovered by the scent of a horse; there were tales of a good steed who, after one watering, could gallop all the way from the Theiss to the Danube, who could recognise a foe two thousand paces off, and would neigh if his master were asleep or fondling his sweetheart in the tavern; there were tales of the gigantic strength of the robber chief who could tackle ten *pandurs*[5-7] at once, and who, whenever he

was pursued, could cause a sea to burst forth between himself and his pursuers, so that they would be compelled to turn back.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Kökényesdi was neither a giant who turned men round his little finger nor a magician who threw dust in their eyes, but an honest-looking, undersized, meagre figure of a man and a citizen of Hodmezö-Vásárhely, in which place he had a house and a couple of farms, on which he conscientiously paid his portion of taxes; and he had bulls and stallions, as to every one of which he was able to prove where he had bought and how much he had paid for it. Not one of them was stolen.

Yet everyone knew very well that neither his farms nor his bulls nor his stallions had been acquired in a godly way, and that the famous robber chief whose rumour filled every corner of the land was none other than he.

But who could prove it? Had anybody ever seen him steal? Had he ever been caught red-handed? Did he not always defend himself in the most brilliant manner whenever he was accused? When there was a rumour that Kökényesdi was plundering the county of Mármaros from end to end, did he not produce five or six eye-witnesses to prove that at that very time he was ploughing and sowing on his farms, and was not the judge at great pains to discover whether these witnesses were reliable?

Those who visited him at his native place of Vásárhely found him to be a respected, worthy, well-to-do man, who tossed his own hay till the very palm of his hand sweated, while those who sought for Kökényesdi on the confines of the realm never saw his face at all; it was indeed a very tiresome business to pursue him. That man was a brave fellow indeed who did not feel his heart beat quicker when he followed his track through the pathless morasses and the crooked sand-hills of the interminable *puszta*. And if two or three counties united to capture him, he would let himself be chased to the borders of the fourth county, and when he had leaped across it would leisurely dismount and beneath the very eyes of his pursuers, loose his horse to graze and lie down beside it on his *bunda*[5-8]—for there was the Turkish frontier, and he knew very well that beyond Lippa they durst not pursue him, for there the Pasha of Temesvar held sway.

Now, at this time there was among the garrison of Szathmár a captain named Ladislaus Rákóczy. The Rákóczy family, after Helen Zrinyi's husband had turned papist, for the most part were brought up at Vienna, and many of them held commissions in the Imperial army. Ladislaus Rákóczy likewise became a captain of musketeers, and as the greater part of his company consisted of Hungarian lads, it was not surprising if the Prince of Transylvania, on the other hand, kept German regiments to garrison his towns and accompany him whithersoever he went. It chanced that this Ladislaus Rákóczy, who was a very handsome, well-shaped, and good-hearted youth, fell in love with Christina, the daughter of Adam Rhédey, who dwelt at Rékás; and as the girl's father agreed to the match, he frequently went over from Szathmár to see his *fiancée*, accompanied by several of his fellow-officers, and he and his friends were always received by the family as welcome guests.

Now, it came to the ears of the Pasha of Grosswardein that the Squire of Rékás was inclined to give away his daughter in marriage to a German officer, and perchance it was also whispered to him that the girl was beautiful and gracious.

At any rate, one night Haly Pasha, at the head of his Spahis, stole away from Grosswardein and, taking the people of Rékás by surprise, burnt Adam Rhédey's house down, delivered it over to pillage, beat Rhédey himself with a whip, and tied him to the pump-handle, while, as for his daughter, who was half dead with fright, he put her up behind him on the saddle and trotted back to Grosswardein by the light of the burning village.

Ladislaus Rákóczy, who came there next day for his own bridal feast, found everything wasted and ravaged, and the servants, who were hiding behind the hedges, peeped out and told him what had happened the night before, and how Haly Pasha had abducted his bride. The bridegroom was taciturn at the best of times, but a Hungarian is not in the habit of talking much when anything greatly annoys him, so, without a word to his comrades, he went back to the governor and asked permission to lead his regiment against Grosswardein.

The general, perceiving that persuasion was useless, and that the youth would by himself try a tussle with the Turks if he couldn't do it otherwise, took the matter seriously and promised that he would place at his disposal, not only his own regiment but the whole garrison, if only he would persuade the neighbouring gentry to join him in the attack on the Turks of Grosswardein.

As for the gentry, they only needed a word to fly to arms at once, for there was scarce one of them who had not at one time or other been enslaved, beaten, or at least insulted by the Turks, so that the mere appearance of a considerable force of regular soldiers marching against the Turks was sufficient to bring them out at once. The Turks, having once got possession of Grosswardein, had established themselves therein as firmly as if they meant to justify the Mussulman tradition that he never abandons a town that he has once occupied, or never voluntarily surrenders a place in which he has built a mosque, and indeed history rarely records a case of capitulation by the Turks—*their* fortresses are generally taken by storm.

From the year 1660, when Haly Pasha occupied the fortress, a quite new Turkish town had arisen in the vacant space between the fortress and the old town, and this new town was surrounded by a strong palisade, the only entrances into which were through very narrow gates. This new town was inhabited by nothing but Turkish chapmen, who bartered away the goods captured by the garrison, and Haly Pasha's Spahis did a roaring business in the oxen and slaves which they had gathered together, attracting purchasers all the way from Bagdad. Thus from year to year the market of Grosswardein became better and better known in the Turkish commercial world, so that one wooden house after another sprang up, and they built across and along the empty space just as they liked, so that at last there was hardly what you would call a street in the whole place, and people had to go through their neighbours' houses in order to get into their own; in a word, the whole thing took the form of a Turkish fair, where pomp and splendour conceals no end of filth; the patched up wooden shanties were covered with gorgeous oriental stuffs, while in the streets hordes of ownerless dogs wandered among the perennial offal, and if two people met together in the narrow alleys, to pass each other was impossible.

This fenced town was not large enough to hold the herds that were swept towards it, there was hardly room enough for the masters of the herds; but on the

banks of the Pecze there was a large open entrenched space reserved for the purpose, where the Bashkir horsemen stood on guard over the herds with their long spears, and had to keep their eyes pretty open if they didn't want Kökényesdi to honour them with a visit, who was capable of stealing not only the horses but the horsemen who guarded them.

Take but one case out of many. One day Kökényesdi, in his *bunda*, turned inside out as usual, with a round spiral hat on his head and a large knobby stick in his hands, appeared outside the entrenchment within which a closely-capped Kurd was guarding Haly Pasha's favourite charger, Shebdiz.

"What a nice charger!" said the horse-dealer to the Kurd.

"Nice indeed, but not for your dog's teeth."

"Yet I assure you I'll steal him this very night."

"I shall be there too, my lad," thought the Kurd to himself, and with that he leaped upon the horse and grasped fast his three and a half ells long spear; "if you want the horse come for it now!"

"I'm not going to fetch it at once, so don't put yourself out," Kökényesdi assured him. "You may do as you like with him till morning," and with that he sat down on the edge of the ditch, wrapped himself up in his *bunda*, and leaned his chin on his big stick.

The Kurd durst not take his eyes off him, he scarce ventured even to wink, lest the horse-dealer should practise magic in the meantime.

He never stirred from the spot, but drew his hat deep down and regarded the Kurd from beneath it with his foxy eyes.

Meanwhile it was drawing towards evening. The Kurd's eyes now regularly started out of his head in his endeavours to distinguish the form of Kökényesdi through the darkness. At last he grew weary of the whole business.

"Go away!" he said. "Do you hear me?"

Kökényesdi made no reply.

The Kurd waited and gazed again. Everything seemed to him to be turning round, and blue and green wheels were revolving before his eyes.

"Go away, I tell you, for if this ditch was not a broad one I would leap across and bore you through with my spear."

The *bunda* never budged.

The Kurd flew into a rage, dismounted from the horse, seized his spear, and climbing down into the ditch, viciously plunged his spear into the sleeping form before him.

But how great was his consternation when he discovered that what he had looked upon as a man in the darkness was nothing but a propped up stick, on which a *bunda* and a hat were hanging! While he had been staring at Kökényesdi, the latter had crept from out of the *bunda* beneath his very eyes and hidden himself in the ditch.

The Kurd had not yet recovered from his astonishment when he heard the crack of a whip behind his back, and there was Kökényesdi sitting already on the back of Haly Pasha's charger, Shebdiz, and the next moment he had leaped the ditch above the Kurd's head, shouting back at him:

"The trench is not broad enough for this horse, my son!"

Master Szénasi was one of those who had been sent to find Kökényesdi, and he now arrived at Demerser, the famous robber's most usual resting-place in those days, and pushing his way forward told him that the gentlemen of Szathmár had sent him to ask him, Kökényesdi, to assist them in their expedition against the Turks.

Kökényesdi, who was carrying a sheaf on his back, looked sharply at the magister, who dared not meet his gaze, and when he had finished his little speech he roared at him:

"You lie! You're a spy! I don't like the look of your mug! I'm going to hang you up!"

Szénasi, who was unacquainted with the robber chief's peculiarities, was near collapsing with terror, whereupon Kökényesdi observed with a smile:

"Come, come, don't tremble so, I won't eat you up at any rate, but tell the gentleman that sent you here that another time he mustn't send a spy to me, for to tell you the truth I don't believe in such faces as yours. You may tell the gentleman, moreover, that if he wants to speak to me he must come himself. I don't care about making a move on the strength of idle chatter. I am easily to be found. Go to Püspök Ladánya, walk into the last house on the right-hand side and ask the master where the Barátfa hostelry is, he'll show you the way; and now in God's name scuttle! and don't look back till you've got home."

The magister did as he was bid, and on getting home delivered the message to his masters, whereupon they immediately set out; Raining going on the part of the military, János Topay on the part of the Hungarians, together with Ladislaus Rákóczy himself and the captain of the gentry of Bárodság.

The gentlemen safely reached Püspök Ladánya, where they had to wait at the magistrate's house till night-fall, although Raining would have much preferred to meet Kökényesdi by daylight, and Rákóczy was burning to carry through his enterprise as soon as possible.

While they waited Raining could not help asking the magistrate whether it was far from there to the Barátfa inn?

The magistrate shook his head and maintained there was no such inn in the whole district, nor was there.

Raining fancied that the magistrate must be a stranger there, so he asked two or three old men the same question, but they all gave him the same answer: there might be a *barátfa puszta*[5-9] here but there could be no inn on it, or if there was an inn, the *puszta* itself did not exist.

"Well, if they don't know anything about it at the last house we had better turn back," said Raining to himself; and, when it had grown quite dark, he approached the house and began to talk with the master who was dawdling about the door.

"God bless thee, countryman! where's the barátfa inn?"

The man first of all measured the questioner from head to foot, and then he merely remarked: "God requite thee! over yonder!" and he vaguely indicated the direction with his head.

"We want to go there; can't you show us the way?" asked Topay.

The man seized the questioner's hand and pointed with it to a herdsman's fire in the distance.

"Look; do you see the shine of its windows there?"

“Which is the way to it?”

“That way ‘tis nearer, t’other way it’s quicker.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you go that way you’ll go astray the quicker, and if you go t’other way you may plump into a bog.”

“You lead us thither,” intervened Rákóczy, at the same time pressing a ducat into the man’s fist.

He looked at it, turned it round in his palm and gave it back to Rákóczy with the request that he would give him copper money in exchange for it. He could not imagine anyone giving him gold which was not false.

When this had been done he neatly led the gentlemen through the morass—wading in front of them, girded up to his waist—through those hidden places where the water-fowl were sitting on their nests, and when at last they emerged from among the thick reedy plantations they saw a hundred paces in front of them a fire of heaped up bulrushes brightly burning, by the light of which they saw a horseman standing behind it.

Here their guide stopped and the three men trotted in single file towards the fire, which suddenly died out at the very moment they were approaching it, as if someone had cast wet rushes upon it.

Topay greeted the horseman, who lifted his hat in silence and allowed them to draw nearer.

“There are three of you gentlemen together,” he observed guardedly; “but that doesn’t matter,” he continued. “It would be all the same to me if there were ten times as many of you, for there’s a pistol in every one of my holsters, from which I can fire sixteen bullets in succession, and in each bullet is a magnet, so that even if I don’t aim at my man I bring him down all the same.”

“Very good, very good indeed, Master Kökényesdi,” said Topay; “we have not come here for you to pepper us with your magnetic globules, but we have come to ask your assistance for the accomplishment of a doughty deed, the object of which is an attack upon our pagan foes.”

“Oh, my good sirs, I am ready to do that without the co-operation of your honours. In the courtyard of a castle in the Baborsai *puszta* there is a well some hundred fathoms deep and quite full of Turkish skulls, and I will not be satisfied till I have piled up on the top of it a tower just as high made of similar materials.”

“So I believe. But you would gain glory too?”

“I have glory enough already. I am known in foreign countries as well as at home. The King of France has long ago only waited for a word from me to make me chief colonel of a long-tailed regiment, and quite recently, when the King of England heard how I bored through the hulls of the munition ships on the Theiss, he did me the honour to invite me to form a regiment of divers to ravage the enemy under water. And I’ve all the boys for it too.”

“I know, I know, Master Kökényesdi, but there will be booty here too, and lots of it.”

“What is booty to me? If I choose to do so, I could bathe in gold and sleep on pearls.”

“Have you really as much treasure as all that?” inquired Raining with some curiosity.

“Ah,” said Kökényesdi, “you ought to see the storehouse in the Szilicza cavern, where gold and silver are filled up as high as haystacks. There, too, are the treasures dug up from the sands of the sea, nothing but precious stones, diamonds, rubies, carbuncles, and real pearls. I, myself, do not know how many sackfuls.”

“And cannot you be robbed of them?”

“Impossible; the entrance is so well concealed that no man living can find it. I myself can never tell whether I am near it; the shifting sand has so well covered it. Only one living animal can find it when it is wanted, and that is my horse. And he will never betray it, for if anyone but myself mounts him, not a step farther will he go.”

“And how did you come into possession of these enormous treasures?” asked Raining with astonishment.

“God gave them to me,” said the horse-dealer, raising his voice and his eyebrows at the same time.

“Very edifying, no doubt, my friend,” said Topay; “but tell me now, briefly, for how much will you join us against the Turks of Grosswardein?—not counting the booty, which of course will be pretty considerable.”

“Well—that is not so easily said. Of course I shall have to collect together my twelve companies, and it will cost something to hold them together and give them what they want and pay them.”

“At any rate you can name a good round sum for the services you are going to render us, can’t you? Come! how much do you require?”

The robber chief reflected.

“Well, as it is your honours’ own business I hope your honours won’t say that I tax you too highly. Let us look at the job in this way: suppose I came to the attack with seventeen companies, and I charge one thousand thalers for each company. Let us say each company consists of one thousand men, that will be a thaler per head—and what is that, ‘twill barely pay for their keep. Thus the whole round sum will come to seventeen thousand thalers.”

“That won’t do at all, Master Kökényesdi. ‘Twere a shame to fatigue so many gallant fellows for nothing, but suppose you bring with you only a hundred men and the rest remain comfortably at home? In that case you shall receive from us seventeen hundred florins in hard cash.”

“Pooh!” snapped the robber, “what does your honour take me for, eh? Do you suppose you are dealing with a gipsy chief or a Wallachian bandit, who are paid in pence? Why, I wouldn’t saddle my horse for such a trifle, I had rather sleep the whole time away.”

“But you have so much treasure besides,” observed Raining naïvely.

“But we may not break into it,” rejoined the robber angrily.

“Why not?”

“Because we have agreed not to make use of till it has mounted up to a million florins.”

“And what will you do with it then?”

“We shall then buy a vacant kingdom from the Tartar king, where the pasturage is good, and thither we will go with our men and set up an empire of our own. We will buy enough pretty women from the Turks for us all, and be our own masters.”

Topay smiled.

"Well," said he, "this seventeen hundred florins of ours will at any rate purchase one of the counties in this kingdom of yours." He was greatly amused that Raining should take the robber's yarn so seriously, and he pushed the German gentleman aside. "Mr. Kökényesdi," said he, "you have nothing to do with this worthy man; he is come with us only to see the fun, but it is we who pay the money, and I think we understand each other pretty well."

"Why didn't you tell me so sooner?" said the robber sulkily, "then I shouldn't have wasted so many words. With which of you am I to bargain?"

"With this young gentleman here," said Topay. "Ladislaus Rákóczy. I suppose you know him by report?"

"Know him? I should think I did. Haven't I carried him in my arms when he was little? If it hadn't been so dark I should have recognised him at once. Well, as it is he, I don't mind doing him a good turn. I certainly wouldn't have taken a florin less from anyone else. I'll take from *him* the offer of seventeen hundred thalers."

"Seventeen hundred florins, *I* said."

"I tell your honour, you said thalers—thalers was what *I* heard, and I won't undertake the job for less; may my hand and leg wither if I move a step for less."

"Oh, I'll give him his thalers," said Rákóczy, interrupting the dispute; whereupon the robber seized the youth's hand and shook it joyfully.

"Didn't I know that your honour was the finest fellow of the three?" said the robber. "If, therefore, you will send these few trumpery thalers a week hence to the house of the worthy man who guided you hither, I will be at Grosswardein a week later with my seventeen hundred fellows."

"But, suppose we pay you in advance, and you don't turn up?" said Raining anxiously.

The robber looked at the quartermaster proudly.

"Do you take me for a common swindler?" said he. Then he turned with a movement of confiding expansion to the other gentlemen.

"We understand each other better," he remarked. "Your honours may depend upon me. God be with you."

With that he turned his horse and galloped off into the darkness. The three gentlemen were conducted back to Ladány.

"Marvellous fellow, this Kökényesdi," said Raining, who had scarce recovered yet from his astonishment.

"You mustn't believe all the yarns he chooses to tell you," said Topay.

"What!" inquired Raining. "Had he then no communications with the French and English Courts?"

"No more than his grandmother."

"Then how about those treasures of which he spoke?"

"He himself has never seen them, and he only talked about them to give you a higher opinion of him."

"And his castle in the puszta, and his seventeen companies of freebooters?"

"He invented them entirely for your honour's edification. The freebooter is no fool, he lives in no castle in the puszta, but in a simple village as modest Mr. Kökényesdi, and his seventeen companies scarcely amount to more than seventeen hundred men."

“Then why did he consent so easily to take only seventeen hundred thalers?”

“Because he does not mean to give his lads a single farthing of it.”

Raining shook his head, and grumbled to himself all the way home.

In a week’s time they sent to Kökényesdi the stipulated money. Raining, moreover, fearing lest the fellow might forget the fixed time, did not hesitate to go personally to Vásárhely, to seek him at his own door. There stood Master Kökényesdi in his threshing-floor, picking his teeth with a straw.

“Good-day,” said the quartermaster.

“If it’s good, eat it,” murmured Kökényesdi to himself.

“Don’t you know me?”

“Blast me if I do.”

“Then don’t you remember what you promised at the Barátfa inn?”

“I don’t know where the Barátfa inn is.”

“Then haven’t you received the seventeen hundred thalers?”

“What should I receive seventeen hundred thalers for?”

“Don’t joke, the appointed time has come.”

“What appointed time?”

“What appointed time? And you who have to be at Grosswardein with seventeen hundred men!”

“Seventeen oxen and seventeen herdsmen on their backs, I suppose you mean.”

“Well, a pretty mess we are in now,” said Raining to himself as he wrathfully trotted back to Debreczen, and as he rushed into Rákóczy’s room exclaiming, “Well, Kökényesdi has toasted us finely!” there stood Kökényesdi before his very eyes.

“What, you here?”

“Yes, I am; and another time your honour will know that whenever I am at my own place I am not at home.”

It was the Friday before Whit Sunday, and the time about evening. A great silence rested over the whole district, only from the minarets of Varalja one Imâm answered another, and from the tombs one shepherd dog answered his fellow: it was impossible to distinguish from which of the two the howling proceeded.

A couple of turbaned gentlemen were leisurely strolling along the bastions. Above the palisaded gate the torso of a square-headed Tartar was visible, with his elbows resting on the ramparts, holding his long musket in his hand. The Tartar sentinel was gazing with round open eyes into the black night, watching lest anyone should come from the direction in which he was aiming with his gun, and blowing vigorously at the lunt to prevent its going out. While he was thus anxiously on the watch, it suddenly seemed to him as if he discerned the shape of a horseman approaching the city.

In such cases the orders given to the Osmanli sentinels were of the simplest description: they were to shoot everyone who approached in the night-time without a word.

The Tartar only waited until the man had come nearer, and then, placing his long musket on the moulding of the gate, began to take aim with it.

But the approaching horseman rode his steed as oddly as only Hungarian *csikósok*[5-10] can do, for he bobbed perpetually from the right to the left, and dodged backwards and forwards in the most aggravating manner.

“Allah pluck thy skin from off thee, thou drunken Giaour,” murmured the baffled Tartar to himself, as he found all his aiming useless; for just as he was about to apply the lunt, the *csikós* was no longer there, and the next moment he stood at the very end of his musket. “May all the seven-and-seventy hells have a little bit of thee! Why canst thou not remain still for a moment that I may fire at thee?”

Meanwhile the shape had gradually come up to the very gate.

“Don’t come any nearer,” cried the Tartar, “or I shan’t be able to shoot thee.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” said the other. “Then why didn’t you tell me so sooner? But don’t hold your musket so near to me, it may go off of its own accord.”

We recognise in the *csikós* Kökényesdi, whose horse now began to prance about to such an extent that it was impossible for the Tartar to take a fair aim at it.

“I bring a letter for Haly Pasha, from the Defterdar of Lippa,” said the csikós, searching for something in the pocket of his fur pelisse, so far as his caracolling steed would allow him. “Catch it if you don’t want to come through the gate for it.”

“Well, fling it up here,” murmured the sentinel, “and then be off again, but ride decently that I may have a shot.”

“Thank you, my worthy Mr. Dog-headed Hero; but look out and catch what I throw to you.”

And with that he drew out a roll of parchment and flung it up to the top of the gate. The Tartar, with his eyes fixed on the missive, did not perceive that the *csikós*, at the same time, threw up a long piece of cord, and the sense of the joke did not burst upon him until the *csikós* drew in the noose, and he felt it circling round his body. Kökényesdi turned round suddenly, twisted the cord round the forepart of his horse, and clapping the spurs to its side, began galloping off.

Naturally, in about a moment the Tartar had descended from the top of the gate without either musket or lunt, and the cord being well lassoed round his body, he plumped first into the moat, a moment afterwards reappeared on the top of the trench, and was carried with the velocity of lightning through bushes and briars. Being quite unused to this mode of progression, and vainly attempting to cling by hand or foot to the trees and shrubs which met him in his way, he began to bellow with all his might, at which terrible uproar the other sentries behind the ramparts were aroused, and, perceiving that some horseman or other was compelling one of their comrades to follow after him in this merciless fashion, they mounted their horses, and throwing open the gate, plunged after him.

As for Kökényesdi, he trotted on in front of them, drawing the Tartar horde farther and farther after him till he reached a willow-wood, when he turned aside and whistled, and instantly fifty stout fellows leaped forth from the thicket on swift horses with *csákánys*[5-11] in their hands, so that the pursuing Turks were fairly caught.

They turned tail, however, in double-quick time, having no great love of the *csákánys*, and never stopped till they reached the gate of the fortress, within the walls of which they yelled to their heart’s content, that Kökényesdi’s robbers were at hand, had leaped the cattle trench at a single bound, seized a good part of the herds and were driving the beasts before them; whereupon, some hundreds of Spahis set off in pursuit of the audacious adventurers. When, however, the robbers had reached the River Körös, they halted, faced about and stood up to

their pursuers man to man, and the encounter had scarce begun when the Spahis grew alive to the fact that their opponents, who at first had barely numbered fifty, had grown into a hundred, into two hundred, and at last into five or six hundred: from out of the thickets, the ridges, and the darkness, fresh shapes were continually galloping to the assistance of their comrades, while from the fortress the Turks came rushing out on each other's heels in tens and twenties to the help of the Spahis, so that by this time the greater part of the garrison had emerged to pounce upon Kökényesdi's freebooters; when suddenly, the battle-cry resounded from every quarter and from the other side of the Körös, whence nobody expected it, the *bandérium*[5-12] of the gentry of Báródság rushed forth, and swam right across the river; while from the direction of Várad-Olaszi, amidst the rolling of drums, Ladislaus Rákóczy came marching along with the infantry of Szathmár.

"Forward!" cried the youth, holding the banner in his hand, and he was the first who placed his foot on the storming-ladder. The terrified garrison, after firing their muskets in the air, abandoned the ramparts and fled into the citadel.

Rákóczy got into the town before the Spahis who were fighting with Kökényesdi, and who now, at the sound of the uproar, would have fled back through the town to take refuge in the citadel, but came into collision with the cavalry of Topay, who reached the gates of the town at the same moment that they did, and both parties, crowding together before the gates, desperately tried to get possession of them, during which tussle the contending hosts for a moment were wedged together into a maddened mass, in which the antagonists could recognise each other only from their war-cries; when, all at once, from the middle of the town, a huge column of fire whirled up into the air, illuminating the faces of the combatants. The fact was that Kökényesdi had hit upon the good idea of connecting a burning lunt with the tops of the houses, and making a general blaze, so that at least the people could see one another. By this hideous illumination the Spahis suddenly perceived that Rákóczy's infantry had broken through the ramparts in one place, and that a sturdy young heyduke had just hoisted the banner of the Blessed Virgin on the top of the eastern gate.

"This is the day of death," cried the Aga of the Spahis in despair; and drawing his sword from its sheath, he planted himself in the gateway, and fought desperately till his comrades had taken refuge in the town, and he himself fell covered with wounds. It was over his body that the Hungarians rushed through the gates after the flying Spahis.

At that moment a fresh cry resounded from the fortress: "Ali! Ali!" The Pasha himself was advancing with his picked guards, with the valiant Janissaries, with those good marksmen, the Szaracsies, who can pierce with a bullet a thaler flung into the air, and with the veteran Mamelukes, who can fight with sword and lance at the same time. He himself rode in advance of his host on his war-horse, his big red face aflame with rage; in front of him his standard-bearer bore the triple horse-tail, on each side of which strode a negro headsman with a broadsword.

"Come hither, ye faithless dogs! Is the world too narrow for ye that ye come to die here? By the shadow of Allah, I swear it, ye shall all be sent to hell this day, and I will ravage your kingdom ten leagues round. Come hither, ye impure swine-eaters! Your heads shall be brought to market; everyone who brings in the head of a Christian shall receive a ducat, and he who brings in a captive shall die."

Thus the Pasha roared, stormed, and yelled at the same time; while Topay tried to marshal once more his men who were scattering before the fire of the Turks, galloping from street to street, and re-forming his terrified squadrons to make head against the solid host of the advancing Turks, which was rapidly gaining ground, while Kökényesdi's followers only thought of booty.

"A hundred ducats to him who shoots down that son of a dog!" thundered the Pasha, pointing out the ubiquitous Topay, and, finding it impossible to get near him, roared after him: "Thou cowardly puppy! whither art thou running? Look me in the face, canst thou not?"

Topay heard the exclamation and shouted back very briefly:

"I saw *thy* back at Bánfi-Hunyad."**(5-13)**

At this insult Ali Pasha's gall overflowed, and seizing his mace, he aimed a blow with it at Topay, when suddenly a sharp crackling cross-fire resounded from a neighbouring lane, and amidst the thick clouds of smoke, Rákóczy's musketeers appeared, sticking their daggers into their discharged firearms, a practise to which the bayonet owed its origin at a later day. The Turkish cavalry, crowded together in the narrow street, was in a few moments demoralised by this rapid assault. The improvised bayonet told terribly in the crush, swords and darts were powerless against it.

"Allah is great!" cried Ali. "Hasten into the fortress and draw up the bridge, we are only perishing here. Only the fortress remains to us."

His conductors, against his will, seized his bridle, and dragged him along with them; and when a valiant musketeer, drawing near to him, cut down his charger, the terrified Pasha clambered up into the saddle of one of his headsmen, and took refuge behind his back.

A young Hungarian horseman was constantly on his track. Nobody could tell Ali who he was, but one could see from his face that he was the Pasha's fiercest enemy, and animated by something more than mere martial ardour. This young horseman gave no heed to the bullets or blades which were directed against him; he was bent only on bloodshed.

It was young Rákóczy, to whom bitterness had given strength a hundredfold. Forcing his way through the flying hostile rabble, he was drawing nearer and nearer to Ali every moment, cutting down one by one all who barred the way between him and the Pasha, and the Turks quailed before his strong hands and savage looks.

At length they reached the bridge, which was built upon piles, between deep bulwarks, and led into the fortress, the front part of whose gate was fortified by iron plates and huge nails, and could be drawn up to the gate of the tower by round chains. On the summit of the tower of the citadel could still be seen the equestrian statue of St. Ladislaus derisively turned upside down between the severed legs of two felons.

The Hungarians and the Turks reached the bridge together so intermingled that the only thing to be seen was a confused mass of turbans and helmets, in the midst of a forest of swords and scimitars, with the banner of the Blessed Virgin cheek by jowl with the crescented horse-tails.

At the gate of the citadel stood two long widely gaping eighteen-pounders commanding the bridge, filled with chain, shot, and ground nails; but the

Komparajis dare not use their cannons, for in whatever direction they might aim, there were quite as many Turks as Hungarians. On the bridge itself the foes were fighting man to man. Rákóczy was at that moment fighting with the bearer of the triple horse-tail, striving to take the standard pole with his left hand, while he aimed blow after blow at his antagonist with his right.

"Shoot them down, you good-for-nothings!" roared Ali Pasha, turning back to the inactive and contumacious Komparajis. "Reck not whether your bullets sweep away as many Mussulmans as Hungarians, myself included! Sweep the bridge clear, I say! Life is cheap, but Paradise is dear!"

But the gunners still hesitated to fire amongst their comrades, when Ali sent two drummers to them commanding them to aim their guns aloft and fire into the air.

The contest on the bridge was raging furiously; the Janissaries had placed their backs against the parapet, and there stood motionless, with their huge broad-swords in their naked fists, like a fence of living scythes, tearing into ribbons everything which came between them.

Then it occurred to a regiment of German Drabants to clamber up the parapet of the bridge, and tear the Janissaries away from the parapet; some ten or twenty of these Drabants did scramble up on the bridge, when the parapet suddenly gave way beneath the double weight, and Janissaries and Drabants fell down into the deep moat beneath, throttling each other in the water, and whenever a turbaned head appeared above the surface, the Germans standing at the foot of the bridge beat out its brains with their halberds.

Meanwhile, the two fighting heroes in the middle of the bridge were almost exhausted by the contest. They had already hacked each other's swords to pieces, had grasped the banner, the object of the struggle, with both hands, and were tearing away at it with ravening wrath.

The Turkish standard-bearer then suddenly pressed his steed with his knees, making it rear up beneath him, so that the Turk stood now a head and shoulder higher than Rákóczy, and threatened either to oust him from his saddle or tear the standard from his hand.

At that moment the white figure of a girl appeared on the summit of the rampart of the tower, her black locks streaming in the wind, her face aglow with enthusiasm.

"Heaven help thee, Ladislaus!" cried the girl from the battlement of the tower; and the youth, hearing from on high what sounded like a voice from heaven, recognised it, looked up and saw his bride—a superhuman strength arose in his heart and in his arm, and when the Turkish standard-bearer made his charger rear, Rákóczy suddenly let the flag-pole go, and seizing the bridle of the snorting steed with both hands, with one Herculean thrust, flung back steed, rider, and banner through the palisade into the deep moat below.

"There is no hope save with God!" cried Ali in despair, for his terrified people at the sight of this prodigy had dragged him along with them against his will.

"Ladislaus! Ladislaus! My darling!" resounded from above. The youth was fighting with the strength of ten men; three horses had already been shot under him, and a third sword was flashing in his hand. Already he was standing on the drawbridge; his sweetheart threw down a white handkerchief to him, and he was

already waving it above his head in triumph, when a well-directed bullet pierced the young hero's heart, and he collapsed a corpse on the very threshold of his success, in the very gate of the captured fortress at the feet of his beloved.

At that same instant a heart-rending shriek resounded, and from the top of the tower a white shape fell down upon the bridge; the beautiful bride, from a height of thirty feet, had cast herself down on the dead body of her beloved, and died at the same instant as he, mingling their blood together; and if their arms did not, at least their souls could, embrace each other.

This spectacle so stupefied the besiegers, that Ali Pasha had just time enough swiftly to raise the drawbridge and save the fortress and a fragment of his host. Of those who remained outside, not a single soul survived. Kökényesdi massacred without mercy everything which distantly resembled a Turk, together with the camels and mules, sparing nothing but the horses, and when every house had been well plundered, he set the town on fire in twelve places, so that the flames in half an hour consumed everything, and the whole city blazed away like a gigantic bonfire, the rising wind whirling the smoke and flame over the ditch towards the fortress.

"Ali Pasha may put that in his pipe and smoke it," said Kökényesdi, rejoicing at the magnificent conflagration.

But the bodies of Ladislaus Rákóczy and his sweetheart they bore away, and buried them side by side in the family vault at Rákás.

Chapter VI

THE MONK OF THE HOLY SPRING.

About a day's journey from Klausenburg there used to be a famous monastery, whose ruined tower remains to this day.

Formerly the ample courtyard was surrounded by a stone wall, massive and strong, within which crowds of pilgrims, coming from every direction, found a convenient resting-place. For at the foot of this monastery was a famous miraculous spring, which entirely disappeared throughout the winter and spring, but on certain days in the summer and autumn was wont to trickle through the crevices of the rocks, and, for a couple of weeks or so, to bubble forth abundantly, whereupon it gradually subsided again.

During this season whole hosts of suffering humanity, the lame, the paralytic, the aged, the mentally infirm, and the childless mothers, would come from the most distant regions; and the Lord of Nature gave a wondrous virtue to the waters, and the sufferers quitted the blessed spring crutchless and edified, both in body and mind. There could be seen, hung up on the walls of the church, votive crutches which the cripples had left behind them; and more than one great nobleman, out of gratitude to the holy spring, enriched the altar with gold and silver plate.

The larger part of the building was reserved for noble guests, the common people encamped in the courtyard beneath tents; and behind the building a

splendid garden was laid out, which the worthy monks always magnificently maintained. Even to this day, in the grassy patches round about the spot, it is possible to discover the savage descendants of many rare and precious flowers.

At the period in which our history falls, the convent of the holy well was represented by a single reverend father, whom the common tongue simply called Friar Gregory, and there was scarce a soul in Transylvania who did not know him well. He was a big man, six feet in height, with a flowing black beard, swarthy, lean, with a bony frame, and with hands so big that he could cover a six-pound cannon ball with each palm. A simple habit covered his limbs, head-dress he had none, and his broad shining forehead was without a wrinkle. His droning voice was so powerful that when he sang his psalms he made more noise than a whole congregation.

At the times when the holy spring was flowing, the cellar and pantry of the good friar stood wide open to rich and poor alike, for whatever he earned in one year he never put by for the next, and whatever the wealthy paid to him the needy had the benefit of; and whenever any clerical colleague happened to come his way, whether he were Orthodox, Armenian, Calvinist, or Unitarian, he could not make too much of him; all such guests, during their stay, regularly swam in milk and butter, and remembered it to the very day of their death.

Just at this very time the Right Reverend Ladislaus Magyari's little daughter, Rosy, was suffering from a complaint which gave the lie to her healthy name, and her father thought it just as well to take her to the holy spring, perchance the healing water would restore to her wan little face the colour of youth.

Brother Gregory was beside himself with joy; the best room was prepared for his right reverend colleague, and brother cook, brother cellarer, and brother gardener were ordered to see to it that meat, drink, and heaps of flowers were provided for the honoured guests. No two people in the wide world were so suited to each other as Father Gregory and Dean Magyari; their hearts were equally good, and each of them had a head upon his shoulders. They rose up early in the morning to argue with each other on dogmatic questions—to wit, which faith was the best, truest, happiest, most blessed, and surest, and kept it up till late in the evening, by no means neglecting the frequent emptying of foaming beakers during the contest, pounding each other with citations, entangling each other with syllogisms, flooring each other with authorities, and overwhelming each other with anecdotes; and it always ended in their shaking hands and agreeing together that every faith was good if only a man were true to himself.

While her father was thus manfully battling, pretty pale Rosy would be amusing herself in the garden or by the spring with little girls of her own age, and the fresh air, the scent of the flowers, and the beneficent water of the spring gradually restored to her face its vanished bloom; and Magyari joyfully thought how delighted her mother would be if she were able to embrace her convalescent child, and, in sheer delight at the idea, spun out his disputatious evenings whilst Rosy in an adjacent cell was sleeping the sleep of the just.

The two worthy gentlemen were sitting over their cups one beautiful evening, when a loud knocking was heard at the outer gate. The rule was that at sundown the pilgrim mob was to betake itself to the courtyard of the cloister, and the gate

should be closed. The friar who kept the gate came to announce that four queer-looking monks demanded admission, were they to be let in?

"There can be no question about it," said Father Gregory. "If any desire admission, bring them to us, and provide refreshment for them."

In a few moments the four friars in question entered. They were dressed in coarse black sackcloth habits, with the cowls drawn down over their heads. All that was to be seen of them was their eyes and shaggy beards. With deep obeisances, but without a word, they approached the two reverend gentlemen. The Father rose politely and greeted them respectfully in Latin: "Benedicite nomen Domini." They only kept on bowing and were silent.

"Nomen dei sit benedictum!" repeated Gregory, fancying that his guests did not hear what he said, and as they did not reply to that, he asked with great astonishment:

"Non exandistis nomen gloriosissimi Domini, fratres amantissimi?"

At this the foremost of them said: "We do not understand that language, worthy brother."

"Then what sort of monks are ye? To what confession do ye belong? Are ye Greeks?"

"We are not Greeks."

"Then are you Armenians?"

"We are not Armenians."

"Arians, then?"

"Neither are we Arians."

"Are you Patarenes?"

"No, we are not."

"Then *in gloriam æterni* to what order do you belong?"

"We are robbers," thereupon exclaimed the one interrogated, throwing aside the fold of his cloak, beneath which could be seen a belt crammed with daggers and pistols. "My name is Feri Kökényesdi," said he, striking his breast.

Magyari thereupon leaped from his chair, which he immediately converted into a weapon; it at once occurred to him that he had an only daughter to defend, and he was ready to fight the robbers on behalf of her. But the father pulled him by the cassock and whispered: "Pray be quiet, your Reverence," and then with an infinitely placid face he turned towards the robbers. "So that is the order to which you belong," said he. "Still, if you have come as guests, sit down and eat what you desire."

"But that is not sufficient. Outside this monastery there are 1700 of us, and all of them want to eat and drink, for it is only the ancient prophets who, when hungry, were content with the meat of the Word."

"Let them also satisfy their desires."

"However, the main thing is this: in your Reverence's chapel is a whole lot of very nice gold and silver saints, who certainly befriend those who sigh after them, and as we cannot come running to them here every day in order to entreat their aid, we had better take them along with us, that they may be helpful to us on the road."

"Thou hast a pretty mother-wit, frater! Who could refuse thee anything?"

“It is also no secret to us, Father Gregory, that your Reverence’s cellar is crammed with kegs full of good money, silver and gold. May we be allowed to relieve your Reverence of a little of this burden?”

“He is quite welcome to it,” thought the father, well aware that there was absolutely nothing at all.

“Do not imagine, your Reverence,” continued the robber, “that we cannot extort a confession, if it should occur to your Reverence to conceal anything. It would be just as well, therefore, if your Reverence were to reveal everything before we cut up your back with sharp thongs.”

The brother smiled as good-humouredly as if he were listening to some pleasing anecdote.

“Have you any other desires, my sons?”

“Yes, a good many. There is a great crowd of women collected together in your Reverence’s courtyard. We have taken no vows of celibacy, therefore we should like to choose from among them what would suit us.”

Magyari felt the hairs of his head rising heavenwards, a cold shiver ran through him from head to foot, and he would have risen from his place had not the monk pressed him down with a frightfully heavy hand.

“For God’s sake, my dear son, do not so wickedly. Take away the saints from the altar if you like, but harm not the innocent who are now peacefully slumbering in the shadow of God’s protection.”

“Not another word, Brother Gregory,” cried the robber, closing his fist on his dagger, “or I’ll set the monastery on fire and burn every living soul in it, yourself included. A robber only recognises four sacraments: wine, money, wenches, and blood! You may congratulate yourself if we are content with the third and dispense with the last.”

“So it is!” observed another of the cowled and bearded robbers, tapping Magyari on the shoulder. “Do you recognise me, eh, your Reverence?”

Magyari, with a sensation of shuddering loathing, recognised Szénasi, a canting charlatan whose frauds he had often exposed.

“We know well enough,” said the fellow with an evil chuckle, “that you have a fair daughter here. I am going to pay off old scores.”

If Magyari had not been well in the brother’s grip, he would have gone for the wretch. Every fibre of his body was shivering with rage.

Only the brother remained calm and smiling. Joining his hands together, he made a little mill with the aid of his two thumbs.

“Wait, my dear son, cannot we come to some agreement. You know very well that my money is concealed in barrels, but so well hidden is it that none besides myself know where it is. Even if you turned this monastery upside down you would not find it. You may also have heard that once upon a time there lived a kind of men called martyrs, who let themselves be boiled in oil, or roasted on red-hot fires, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, without saying a word which might hurt their souls. Well, that is the sort of man *I* am. If I make up my mind to hold my tongue, you might tear me to bits inch by inch with burning tweezers, and you would get not a word nor a penny out of me. Now ‘tis for you to choose. Will you carry off the money and leave the poor women-folk alone, or will you lay your

hands on the down-trodden, lame, halt, consumptive beggar-women, whom you will find here, and not see a farthing? Which is it to be?"

The four robbers whispered together. No doubt they said something to this effect: only let the pater produce his money, and then it will be an easy thing for us to take back our given word and satisfy our hearts' desires. They signified that they would stand by the money.

"Look now! you are good men," said the father, "take these two torches and come with me to the cellar and go through my treasures, only you must do none any harm."

"A little less jaw, please," growled Kökényesdi. "Two go in front with the torches, and Brother Gregory between you. I'll follow after; the magister can remain behind to look after the other parson. Whoever speaks a word or makes a signal, I'll bring my axe down on his head—forward!"

And so it was. Two of the robbers went in front with torches; after them came the brother with Kökényesdi at his heels with a drawn dagger in his hand; last of all marched Magyari, whom Master Szénasi held by the collar at arm's-length, threatening him at the same time with a flashing axe.

Thus they descended to the cellar. The good father, with timid humility, hid his head in his hood and looked neither to the left nor to the right.

The cellar was provided with a large, double, iron trap-door. After drawing out its massive bolts, the worthy brother raised one of its flaps, bidding them lower the torches for his convenience.

As now the first robber descended and the second plunged after him, the father suddenly kicked out with his monstrous wooden shoe and brought the door down on his head, so that he rolled down to the bottom of the stairs; and then, quick as thought, he turned upon Kökényesdi, seized his hands, and said to Magyari:

"You seize the other!"

Kökényesdi, in the first moment of surprise, thrust at the brother, but his dagger glanced aside against the stiff hair-shirt, and there was no time for a second thrust, for the terrible brother had seized both his hands and crushed them against his breast with irresistible force with one hand, while with the other he dispossessed him of all the murderous weapons in his girdle one by one, shaking him with one hand as easily as a grown man shakes a child of nine; then he dragged him towards the cellar door, pressing it down with their double weight so that those below could not raise it.

Mr. Magyari that self-same instant had caught the magister by the nape of the neck and, mindful of the wrestling trick he had learnt in his youth when he was a student at Nagyenyed, quickly floored, and, not content with that, sat down on the top of him with his whole weight, so that the poor meagre creature was flattened out beneath him. Magyari at the same time relieved his sprawling hands of their murderous weapons in imitation of the good priest.

Kökényesdi admitted to himself that never before had he been in such a hobble. In a stand-up fight he had rarely met his equal, and more than once he had held his own against two or three stout fellows single-handed; but never had he had to do with such a man as Brother Gregory, one of whose hands was quite sufficient to pin his two arms uselessly to his side, while with the other hand he explored his remotest pockets to their ultimate depths and denuded them of every sort of

cutting and stabbing instrument. When the robber realized that even his gigantic strength was powerless to drag his antagonist away from the cellar door beneath which his two comrades were vainly thundering, he endeavoured to free himself by resorting to the desperate devices of the wild-beasts, lunging out with his feet and worrying the iron hand of the monk with his teeth; whereupon Brother Gregory also lost his temper and, seizing Kökényesdi by the hair of his head, held him aloft like a young hare, so that he was unable to scratch or bite any more.

"Do not plunge about so, dilectissime; you see it is of no use," said the brother, holding the robber so far away from him by his hairy poll with outstretched hand that at last he was obliged to capitulate.

"Thou seest what unmercifulness thou dost compel us to adopt, amantissime!" said the brother apologetically, but still holding him aloft with one hand and shaking a reproving finger at him with the other. "Dost thou not shudder at thyself, does not thine own soul accuse thee for coming to plunder holy places? Or dost thou not think of the Kingdom of Hell to the very threshold of which evil resolves have misguided thy feet, and where there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth?"

"Let me go, you devil of a friar!" gasped the robber, hoarse with rage.

"Not until thou hast come to thyself and art sorry for thy sins," said the brother, still holding in the air his dilectissime, whose eyes by this time were starting out of his head because of the tugging pressure on his hair; "thou must be sorry for thy sins."

"I am sorry then, only let me go!"

"And wilt thou turn back to the right path?"

"Yes, yes, of course I will."

"And thou wilt steal no more?"

"Not a cockchafer."

"Nor curse and swear?"

"Never no more."

"Very well, then, I'll let thee go. But, colleague Magyari, first of all tie all these daggers and axes together and fling them out of the window."

Mr. Magyari, who had meanwhile disposed of the magister by tying his hands and legs so tightly that he was unable to move a muscle, effected the clearance confided to him, while Brother Gregory deposited on the ground his convert, who leaned against the wall breathing heavily.

"Well, you monk of hell, give me something to eat if there's anything like a kitchen here."

"Oh, my dear son," said the pater tenderly, stroking the face of his lambkin; "believe me, that there is more joy in heaven over one converted sinner—"

"You're a devil, not a friar; for if you were a man of God you could not have got over Kökényesdi so easily—Kökényesdi, who was wont to overthrow whole armadas single-handed—and now to be beaten by an unarmed man!"

"Thou didst come against me with an axe and a *fokos*,[6-14] but I came against thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, and He who permitted David the shepherd to pluck the raging lion by the beard and slay him, hath aided my arm also in order that I might be a blessing to thee."

“Blessing indeed!—hang me up! I deserve it for letting myself be collared by a parson.”

“Oh, my dear son, to attribute such flagrant cruelty to me! Heaven rejoices not in the death of a sinner.”

“Then let me go!”

“How could I let thee go when thou art but half converted? Rather remain here, my son, in this holy seclusion and try and cleanse thy soul by holy penance and prayer.”

The robber foamed with rage.

“Where is there a nail that I may hang myself upon it?”

“That thou certainly wilt never be able to do, for a worthy pater shall always be by thy side to teach thee how to sing the Psalter.”

The robber gnashed his teeth and stamped with his feet as he cast at the terrible brother bloodshot glances very similar to those which a hyena casts upon a beast-tamer whom he would like to tear to bits and grind to mincemeat, but whom he durst not attack, being well aware that if he but lay a paw or even cast an eye upon him he will instantly be felled to the ground.

“Besides that,” continued the brother, “by way of a first trial thou shalt presently deliver a God-fearing discourse.”

“I preach a sermon!”

“Not exactly a sermon, but inasmuch as thy faithful followers outside the walls of the monastery may be growing impatient at thy long absence, thou wilt stand at a window and, after assuring them of thy heart-felt penitence, thou wilt send the worthy fellows away that they may depart to their own homes.”

“Very well,” said Kökényesdi, thinking all the time, let me once be planted at the window in the sight of my bands and at a word from me they will break up the whole monastery, and I will leap out to them at the first opening.

Then Brother Gregory called Magyari aside and whispered in his ear: “You meanwhile will get the carriage ready and take your seat in it with your daughter, and as soon as you perceive that the rabble has departed from the monastery, you will drive straight to Klausenburg and inform Mr. Ebéni, the commandant, that a mixed band of freebooters, together with the garrison of Szathmár, has invaded the realm. I detected a helmet beneath a cowl of one of the rascals I kicked into the cellar. Try to defend the capital against their attacks. God be with you!”

The two priests pressed each other’s hands, whereupon Brother Gregory, taking the robber by the arms and shoving him through a little low door, in order that no mischief might befall him, caught him by the nape of the neck and began to force him to ascend a narrow corkscrew staircase, two or three steps at a time.

It was evening now and dark, and there was nothing about the corkscrew staircase to suggest to the robber whither he was being led till at last the brother opened a trapdoor with his head and emerged with him on to a light place and deposited him in front of a lofty window.

The robber’s first thought was that he could clear the window at a single bold leap, but one swift glance from the parapet made him recoil with terror; beneath him yawned a depth of at least fifty ells, and, glancing dizzily aloft, he perceived hanging above his head the bells of the monastery. They were in the tower.

“So now, my dear son,” said the brother, “stand out on this parapet and call in a loud voice to thy faithful ones that they may draw nigh and hear thee. Then thou wilt speak to them, and in case thou shouldst be at a loss for words, I shall be standing close by this bell-tongue to suggest to thee what thou shalt say. But, for God’s sake, beware of thyself, dilectissime! Thou seest what a frightful depth is here below thee, and say not to thy faithful followers anything but what I shall suggest to thee, nor give with thy head or thy hand an unbecoming interpretation to thy words, for if thou doest any such thing, take my word for it that at that same instant thou shalt fall from this window, and if once thou dost stumble, thou wilt not stop till thou dost reach the depths of hell.”

The robber stood at the window with his hair erect with horror. He actually trembled—a thing which had never occurred to him before. His valour, that cold contempt for death which had always accompanied him hitherto, forsook him in this horrible position. He felt that at this giddy height neither dexterity nor audacity were of the slightest use to him. Beneath his feet was the gaping abyss, and behind his back was a man with the strength of a giant from whom a mere push—nay! the mere touch of a finger, or a shout a little louder than usual, were sufficient to plunge him down and dash him into helpless fragments on the rocks below. The desperate adventurer, in a fever of terror never felt before, crouched against one of the pillars of the window clutching at the wall with his hand, and it seemed to him as if the wall were about to give way beneath him, as if the tower were tottering beneath his feet; and he regarded the ground below as if it had some horrible power of dragging him down to it, as if some invisible force were inviting him to leap down from there.

Meanwhile his bands, who were lying in ambush outside the monastery, perceived the form of their leader aloft and suddenly darted forward in a body with a loud yell.

“Speak to them, attract their attention!” whispered the brother; “quick, mind what I say!”

The robber indicated his readiness to comply by a nod of his swimming head, and repeated the words which the brother concealed behind the tongue of the bell whispered in his ear.

“My friends” (thus he began his speech), “the priests are collecting their treasures; they are piling them on carts; there are sacks and sacks crammed with gold and silver.”

A hideous shout of joy from the auditors expressed thorough approval of this sentence.

“But the worthy brethren have no wine or provisions in this monastery, but in their cellars at Eger there is plenty, so let two hundred of you go there immediately and get what you want.”

The freebooters approved of this sentiment also.

“As for the desires that you nourish towards the womenfolk here, I am horrified to be obliged to tell you that for the last three days the black death, that most terrible of plagues, which makes the human body black as a coal even while alive, and infects everyone who draws near it, has been raging within the walls of this monastery during the last three days. I should not therefore advise you to break into this monastery, for it is full of dead and dying men, and so swift is the

operation of this destroying angel that my three comrades succumbed to it even while I was ascending this tower, and only the Turkish talisman I wear, composed of earth seven times burnt, and the little finger of a baby that never saw the light of day, have preserved me from destruction."

By the way, Father Gregory had discovered all these things while he was investigating the robber's pockets.

At this terrifying message the horde of robbers began to scatter in all directions from beneath the walls of the monastery.

"For the same reason neither I myself nor the treasure of the monastery can leave this place till all the gold and silver that has been found here has been purified first by fire, then by boiling, and then by cold water, lest the black death should infect you by means of them. And now before making a joint attack on Klausenburg, as we had arranged—which, in view of the height of its walls and the strength of its fortress, would scarcely be a safe job to tackle—you will do this instead: Hide yourselves in parties of two hundred in the forests of Magyar-Gorbo, Vista and Szucság, and remain there quietly without showing yourself on the high road; at the same time four hundred of you will go round at night by the Korod road, and the rest of you will make for the Gyalu woods, and go round towards Szász Fenes. Then, when the garrison of Klausenburg hears the rumour that you are approaching by the Korod road, they will come forth with great confidence; and while some of you will be enticing them further on continually, the rest of you can fall on the defenceless town and plunder it. All you have to do is to act in this way and never show yourselves on the high road."

The robbers expressed their approval of their leader's advice with a loud howl; and while Kökényesdi tottered back half senseless into the brother's arms, they scattered amongst the woods with a great uproar. In an hour's time all that could be heard of them was a cry or two from the darkened distance.

The people assembled in the monastery had been listening to all this in an agony of terror; only Magyari understood the meaning of it. When the brother came down from the tower, Kökényesdi was locked up with his two comrades, and the two reverend gentlemen embraced and magnified each other.

"After God, we have your Reverence to thank for our deliverance," said Magyari with warm feeling, holding his trembling little daughter by the hand.

"But now we must save Klausenburg," said Gregory.

"I will set out this instant; my horse is saddled."

"Your Reverence on horseback, eh? How about the girl?"

"I will leave her here in your Reverence's fatherly care."

"But think."

"Could I leave her in a better place than within these walls, which Providence and your Reverence's fists defend so well?"

"But what if this robber rabble discover our trick and return upon the monastery with tenfold fury?"

"Then I will all the more certainly hasten to defend the walls of your Reverence, because my only child will be within them."

With that the pastor kissed the forehead of his daughter, who at that moment was paler than ever, fastened his big copper sword to his side, seized his shaggy

little horse by the bridle, opened the door for himself, and, with a stout heart, trotted away on the high road.

But the brother summoned into the chapel the whole congregation, and late at night intoned a thanksgiving to the Lord of Hosts; after which Father Gregory got into the pulpit and preached to the faithful a powerful and fulminating sermon, in which he stirred them up to the defence of their altars, and at the end of his sacred discourse he seized with one hand the gigantic banner of the church—which on the occasion of processions three men used to support with difficulty—and so stirred up the enthusiastic people that if at that moment the robbers had been there in front of the monastery, they would have been capable of rushing out of the gates upon them with their crutches and sticks and dashing them to pieces.

Chapter VII

THE PANIC OF NAGYENYED.

While the priests were girding swords upon their thighs, while the lame and the halt were flying to arms in defence of their homes and altars, the chief commandant of the town of Klausenburg, Mr. Ebéni, was calmly sleeping in his bed.

The worthy man had this peculiarity that when any of his officers awoke him for anything and told him that this or that had happened, he would simply reply "Impossible!" turn over on the other side, and go on slumbering.

Magyari was well aware of this peculiarity of the worthy man, and so when he arrived home, late at night, safe and sound, he wasted no time in talking with Mr. Ebéni, but opened the doors of the church and had all the bells rung in the middle of the night—a regular peal of them.

The people, aroused from its sleep in terror at the sound of the church-bells at that unwonted hour, naturally hastened in crowds to the church, where the reverend gentleman stood up before them and, in the most impressive language, told them all that he had seen, described the danger which was drawing near to them beneath the wings of the night, and exhorted his hearers valiantly to defend themselves.

The first that Mr. Ebéni heard of the approaching mischief was when ten or twenty men came rushing to him one after another to arouse him and tell him what the parson was saying. When at last he was brought to see that the matter was no joke, he leaped from his bed in terror, and for the life of him did not know what to do. The people were running up and down the streets bawling and squalling; the heydukes were beating the alarm drums; cavalry, blowing their trumpets, were galloping backwards and forwards—and Mr. Ebéni completely lost his head.

Fortunately for him Magyari was quickly by his side.

"What has happened? What's the matter? What are they doing, very reverend sir?" inquired the commandant, just as if Magyari were the leader of troops.

“The mischief is not very serious, but it is close at hand,” replied the reverend gentleman. “A band of freebooters—some seventeen companies under the command of a robber chief—have burst into Transylvania, and with them are some regular horse belonging to the garrison of Szathmár. At this moment they cannot be more than four leagues distant from Klausenburg; but they are so scattered that there are no more than four hundred of them together anywhere, so that, with the aid of the gentlemen volunteers and the Prince’s German regiments, you ought to wipe them out in detail. The first thing to be done, however, is to warn the Prince of this unexpected event, for he is now taking his pleasure at Nagyenyed.”

“Your Reverence is right,” said Ebéni, “we’ll act at once;” and, after dismissing the priest to look after the armed bands and reconnoitre, he summoned a swift courier, and, as in his confusion he at first couldn’t find a pen and then upset the inkstand over the letter when he hadwritten it, he at last hurriedly instructed the courier to convey a verbal message to the Prince to the effect that the Szathmárians, in conjunction with the freebooters, had broken into Transylvania with seventeen companies, and were only four hours’ march from Klausenburg, and that Klausenburg was now preparing to defend itself.

Thus Ebéni gave quite another version to the parson’s tidings, for while the parson had only mentioned a few horsemen from the Szathmár garrison he had put the Szathmárians at the head of the whole enterprise, and had reduced the distance of four leagues to a four hours’ journey which, in view of the condition of the Transylvanian roads, made all the difference.

The courier got out of the town as quickly as possible, and by the time he had reached his destination had worked up his imagination to such an extent that he fancied the invading host had already valiantly covered the four leagues; and, bursting in upon the Prince without observing that the Princess, then in an interesting condition, was with him, blurted out the following message:

“The Szathmár garrison with seventeen bands of freebooters has invaded Transylvania and is besieging Klausenburg, but Mr. Ebéni is, no doubt, still defending himself.”

The Princess almost fainted at these words; while Apafi, leaping from his seat and summoning his faithful old servant Andrew, ordered him to get the carriage ready at once, and convey the Princess as quickly as possible to Gyula-Fehervár, for the Szathmár army, with seventeen companies of Hungarians, had attacked Klausenburg, and by this time eaten up Mr. Ebéni, who was not in a position to defend himself.

Andrew immediately rushed off for his horses, had put them to in one moment, in another moment had carried down the Princess’ most necessary travelling things, and in the third moment had the lady safely seated, who was terribly frightened at the impending danger.

The men loafing about the courtyard, surprised at this sudden haste, surrounded the carriage; and one of them, an old acquaintance of Andrew’s, spoke to him just as he had mounted the box and asked him what was the matter.

“Alas!” replied Andrew, “the army of Szathmár has invaded Transylvania, has devastated Klausenburg with 17,000 men, and is now advancing on Nagyenyed.”

Well, they waited to hear no more. As soon as they perceived the Princess's carriage rolling rapidly towards the fortress of Fehervár, they scattered in every direction, and in an hour's time the whole town was flying along the Fehervár road. Everyone hastily took away with him as much as he could carry; the women held their children in their arms; the men had their bundles on their backs and drove their cows and oxen before them; carts were packed full of household goods; and everyone lamented, stormed, and fled for all he was worth.

Just at that time there happened to be at Nagyenyed the envoy of the Pasha of Buda, Yffim Beg, who had been sent to the Prince to hasten his march into Hungary with the expected auxiliary army, and who absolutely refused to believe Teleki that they ought to remain where they where, as it was from the direction of Szathmár that an attack was to be feared.

The worthy Yffim Beg was actually sitting in his bath when the panic-flight took place; and, alarmed at the noise, he sprang out of the water, and wrapping a sheet round him rushed to the window, and perceiving the terrified flying rabble, cried to one of the passers-by: "Whither are you running? What is going on here?"

"Alas, sir!" panted the breathless fugitive, "the Szathmár army, 27,000 strong, has invaded Transylvania, has taken everything in its road, and is now only two hours' march from Nagyenyed."

This was quite enough for Yffim Beg also. Hastily tying the bathing-towels round his body and without his turban, he rushed to the stables, flung himself on a barebacked steed and galloped away from Nagyenyed without taking leave of anyone; and did not so much as change his garment till he reached Temesvár, and there reported that the countless armies of Szathmár had conquered the whole of Transylvania!

Thus Teleki had gained his object: the Transylvanian troops had now good reasons for staying at home. Yet he had got much more than he wanted, for he had only required of Kászonyi a feigned attack, whereas the band of Kökényesdi had ravaged Transylvania as far as Klausenburg.

The fact that the worthy friar and Mr. Ladislaus Magyari had captured the leader of the freebooters made very little difference at all, for the crafty adventurer had bored his way through the wall of his dungeon that very night, and had escaped with his three comrades.

Early next morning, on perceiving that his captives had escaped, Father Gregory was terribly alarmed, imagining that they would now bring back the whole robber band against him; and, hastening immediately to collect the whole of the pilgrims, loaded wagons with the most necessary provisions and the treasures of the altar, conducted them among the hills, and there concealed them in the Cavern of Balina, carrying the sick members of his flock one by one across the mountain-streams in front of the cavern and depositing them in the majestic rocky chamber, which more than once had served the inhabitants of the surrounding districts as a place of refuge from the Tartars, having a large open roof through which the smoke could get out, while a stream flowing through it kept them well supplied with drinking-water. In an hour's time fires and ovens, made from fresh leaves and mown grass, stood ready in the midst of the place of refuge; and on a stone pedestal, in the background, always standing ready for such a purpose, an altar was erected.

Meanwhile Kökényesdi had hastened to overtake his bands which had scattered at the word of the brother in order to re-unite them before the people of Klausenburg could capture them in detail. Szénasi he dispatched to call back the wanderers who had been sent to the cellars of Eger and besiege the monastery.

When Szénasi returned with the two hundred hungry men he only found empty walls, and to make them emptier still—he burnt them down to the ground.

He then sat down, and by the light of the conflagration wrote a sarcastic letter to Teleki, in which he informed him with a great show of humility that he had made the required diversion against Transylvania, that he kissed his hand, that he might command him at any future time, and that he was his most humble servant.

He had scarcely sent off the letter by a Wallachian gipsy, picked up on the road, when he saw a company of horsemen galloping towards the burning monastery, and recognised in the foremost fugitive Kökényesdi.

"It is all up with us!" cried the robber chief from afar, "we are surrounded. All the parsons in the world have become soldiers, and turned their swords against us as if they were Bibles. The Calvinist pastor, the Catholic friar, the Greek priest, and the Unitarian minister—every man jack of them has placed himself at the head of the faithful, and are coming against us with at least twenty thousand men: students, artisans and peasants, the whole swarm is rushing upon us. I and fifty more were set upon by the whole Guild of Shoemakers, who cut down twenty of my men; they were all as mad as hatters, and when the peasants had done with us, the gentlemen took us up: they united with the German dragoons, and pursued my flying army on horseback. Every bit of booty, every slave they have torn from us; this Calvinist Joshua is always close on my heels, not a single one of our infantry can be saved."

The robber chief behaved as the leader of robber bands usually do behave. When he had to fight, he fought among the foremost; but when he had to run, then also he was well to the front. When he was beaten, he cared not a jot whether the others got off scot-free, he only thought of saving himself.

When he had announced the catastrophe from horseback to the terrified Szénasi, he clapped spurs to his nag, and, without looking back to see whether anyone was following him, he galloped off, and left Szénasi in the lurch with the footmen.

The fox is always most crafty when he falls into the snare. The perplexed hypocrite perceived that however quickly he might try to escape, the cavalry would overtake him at Grosswardein and mow him down. Unfortunately, he knew not how to ride, and therefore could not hope to save himself that way. Already the trumpets of the Transylvanian bands were blaring all around him; fiery beacons of pitchy pines were beginning to blaze out from mountain-top to mountain-top; on every road were visible the flying comrades of Kökényesdi, terrifying one another with their shouts of alarm as they rushed through the woods and valleys, not daring to take refuge among the snowy Alps, where the axes of the enraged Wallachians flashed before their eyes; and there was not a single road on which they did not run the risk of being trampled down by the Hungarian banderia and the German dragoons.

In that moment of despair Szénasi quickly flung himself into the garments of a peasant, climbed up to the top of a tree, and as soon as he perceived the first band of German horsemen approaching him, he called out to them.

"God bless you, my noble gentlemen!"

They looked up at these words and told the man to come down from the tree.

"No doubt you also have taken refuge from the robbers, poor man!"

"Ah! most precious gentlemen! they were not robbers, but German soldiers in Hungarian uniforms who had been sent hither from Szathmár. Take care how you pursue them, for if your German soldiers should meet theirs, it might easily happen that they would join together against you. I heard what they were saying as I understand their language, but I pretended that I did not understand; and while they made me come with them to show them the road, they began talking among themselves, and they said that they had had sure but secret information from the Klausenburg dragoons that they were going to attack the town. The Devil never sleeps, my noble gentlemen!"

The good gentlemen were astounded; the intelligence was not altogether improbable, and as, just before, a vagabond had been captured who could speak nothing but German, a mad rumour spread like wild-fire among the Magyars that the dragoons had an understanding with the enemy and wanted to draw them into an ambush; and so the gentlemen told the students, and the students told the mechanics, and by the time it reached the ears of Ebéni and the parsons, there was something very like a mutiny in the army. The gentry suggested that the Germans should be deprived of their swords and horses; the students would have fought them there and then; but the most sensible idea came from the Guild of Cobblers, who would have waited till they had lain down to sleep and then bound and gagged them one by one.

Master Szénasi meanwhile went and hunted up the dragoons, whom he found full of zeal for the good cause entrusted to them, and had a talk with them.

"Gentlemen!" said he, "what a pity it is, but look now at these Hungarian gentlemen! Well, they are shaking their fists at you, so look to yourselves. Someone has told them that you are acting in concert with the people of Szathmár, so they won't go a step further until they have first massacred the whole lot of you."

At this the German soldiers were greatly embittered. Here they were, they said, shedding their blood for Transylvania, and the only reward they got was to be called traitors! So they sounded the alarm, collected their regiments together, took up a defensive position, and for a whole hour the camp of Mr. Ebéni was thrown into such confusion that nothing was easier for Master Szénasi than to hide himself among the fugitives. All night long Mr. Ebéni suffered all the tortures of martyrdom. At one time he was besieged by a deputation from the Magyars, who demanded satisfaction, confirmation, and Heaven only knows what else; while the worthy parsons kept rushing from one end of the camp to the other, with great difficulty appeasing the uproar, enlightening the half-informed, and in particular solemnly assuring both parties that neither the Hungarian gentlemen wanted to hurt the Germans nor the Germans the Hungarians, till light began to dawn on them, and the reconciled parties were convinced, much to their astonishment, that the whole alarm was the work of a single crafty adventurer who clearly enough

had gained time to escape from the pursuers when they had him in their very clutches.

Chapter VIII

THE SLAVE MARKET AT BUDA-PESTH.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, Haji Baba, the most celebrated slave-dealer of Stambul, having been secretly informed beforehand, by acquaintances in the Seraglio, that a great host would assemble that summer beneath Pesth, hastily filled his ship with wares before his business colleagues had got an inkling of what was going to happen; and, steering his bark with its precious load through the Black Sea and up the Danube, reached Pesth some time before the army had concentrated there.

Casting anchor in the Danube, he adorned his vessel with oriental carpets and flowers, and placing a band of black eunuchs in the prow of the vessel with all sorts of tinkling musical instruments, he set about beating drums till the sound re-echoed from the hills of Buda.

The Turks immediately assembled on the bastions of the castle of Buda right opposite, and perceiving the bedizened ship with its flags streaming from the mast and sweeping the waves, thereby giving everyone who wanted to know what sort of wares were for sale there, got into all sorts of little skiffs and let themselves be rowed out thither.

The loveliest damsels in the round world were there exhibited for sale.

As soon as the first of the Turks had well intoxicated himself with the sight of the sumptuous wares, he hastened back to get his money and come again, telling the dozen or so of his acquaintances whom he met on the way what sort of a spectacle he had seen with no little enthusiasm, and in a very short time hundreds more were hastening to this ship which offered Paradise itself for sale.

Hassan Pasha, the then Governor of Buda, perceiving the throng from the windows of his palace, and ascertaining the cause, sent his favourite Yffim Beg to forbid the market to the mob till he, the general, had chosen for himself what girls he wanted; and if there was any one of the slave-girls worthy of consideration, he was to buy her for his harem.

Yffim Beg hastened to announce the prohibition, and when the skiffs had departed one by one from the ship, he got into the general's curtained gondola and had himself rowed over to the ship of Haji Baba.

The man-seller, perceiving the state gondola on its way to him, went to the ship's side, and waited with a woe-begone face till it had come alongside, and stretched forth his long neck to Yffim Beg that he might clamber up it on to the deck.

The Beg, with great condescension, informed the merchant that he had come on behalf of the Vizier of Buda, who was over all the Pashas of Hungary, to choose from among the wares he had for sale.

Haji Baba, on hearing this, immediately cast himself to the ground and blessed the day which had risen on these hills, and the water and the oars which had brought the Beg thither, and even the mother who had made the slippers in which Yffim Beg had mounted his ship.

Then he kissed the Beg's hand, and having, as a still greater sign of respect, boxed the ears of the eunuch who happened to be nearest to the Beg, for his impertinence in daring to stand so near at all, led Yffim into the most secret of his secret chambers. Heavy gold-embroidered hangings defended the entry to the interior of the ship; after this came a second curtain of dark-red silk, and through this were already audible sweet songs and twittering, and when this curtain was drawn aside by its golden tassels, a third muslin-like veil still stood in front of the entrance through which one could look into the room beyond without being seen by those inside.

Fourteen damsels were sporting with one another. Some of them darting in and out from between the numerous Persian curtains suspended from the ceiling, and laughing aloud when they caught each other; one was strumming a mandoline; five or six were dancing a round dance to the music of softly sung songs; another group was swinging one another on a swing made from costly shawls. All of them were so young, all of them were of such superior loveliness, that if the heart had allowed the eye alone to choose for it, mere bewilderment would have made selection impossible.

Yffim Beg gazed for a long time with the indifference of a connoisseur, but even his face relaxed at last, and smilingly tapping the merchant on the shoulder, he said to him:

"You have been filching from Paradise, Haji Baba!"

Haji Baba crossed his hands over his breast and shook his head humbly.

"All these girls are my pupils, sir. There is not one of them who resembles her dear mother. From their tenderest youth they have grown up beneath my fostering care; I do no business with grown-up, captured slave-girls, for, as a rule, they only weep themselves to death, grow troublesome, wither away before their time, and upset all the others. I buy the girls while they are babies; it costs a mint of money and no end of trouble before such a flower expands, but at least he who plucks it has every reason to rejoice. Look, sir, they are all equally perfect! Look at that slim lily there dancing on the angora carpet! Did you ever see such a figure anywhere else? How she sways from side to side like the flowering branch of a banyan tree! That is a Georgian girl whom I purchased before she was born. Her father when he married had not money enough for the wedding-feast, so he came to me and sold for a hundred denarii the very first child of his that should be born. Yes, sir, not much money, I know, but suppose the child had never been born? And suppose it had been a son! And how often too, and how easily I might have been cheated! I am sure you could not say that five hundred ducats was too much for her if I named that price. Look, how she stamps down her embroidered slippers! Ah, what legs! I don't believe you could find such round, white, smooth little legs anywhere else! Her price, sir, is six hundred ducats."

Yffim Beg listened to the trader with the air of a connoisseur.

"Or, perhaps, you would prefer that melancholy virgin yonder, who has sought solitude and is lying beneath the shade of that rose-tree? Look, sir, what a lot of

rose-trees I have all about the place! My girls can never bear to be without rose-trees, for roses go best with damsels, and the fragrance of the rose is the best teacher of love. That Circassian girl yonder was captured along with her father and mother; the husband, a rough fellow, slew his wife lest she should fall into our hands, but he had no time to kill his child, for I took her, and now I would not sell her for less than seven hundred ducats; there's no hurry, for she is still quite a child."

Here Yffim Beg growled something or other.

"Now that saucy damsel swinging herself to and fro on the shawl," continued the dealer, "I got in China, where her parents abandoned her in a public place. She does not promise much at first sight, but touch her and you'll fancy you are in contact with warm velvet. I would let you have her, sir, for five hundred ducats, but I should charge anyone else as much again."

Yffim Beg nodded approvingly.

"And now do you see that fair damsel who, with a gold comb, is combing out tresses more precious than gold; she came to me from the northern islands, from a ship which the Kapudan Pasha sent to the bottom of the sea. I don't ask you if you ever saw such rich fair tresses before, but I do ask you whether you ever saw before a mortal maid with such a blindingly fair face? When she blushes, it is just as if the dawn were touching her with rosy finger-tips."

"Yes, but her face is painted," said Yffim Beg suspiciously.

"Painted, sir!" exclaimed Haji Baba with dignity. "Painted faces at my shop! Very well! come and convince yourself."

And, tearing aside the muslin veil, he entered the apartment with Yffim Beg.

At the sight of the men a couple of the charming hoydens rushed shrieking behind the tapestries, and only after a time poked their inquisitive little heads through the folds of the curtains; but the Georgian beauty continued to dance; the Chinese damsel went on swinging more provocatively than ever; the beauty from the northern islands allowed her golden tresses to go on playing about her shoulders; a fresh, tawny gipsy-girl, in a variegated, elaborately fringed dress, with ribbons in her curly hair, stood right in front of the approaching Beg, eyed him carefully from top to toe, seized part of his silken caftan, and rubbed it between her fingers, as if she wanted to appraise its value to a penny; while a tiny little negro girl with gold bracelets round her hands and legs, fumigated the entering guest with ambergris, naïvely smiling at him all the time with eyes like pure enamel and lips as red as coral.

The robber-chapman was right, there was not one of these girls who felt ashamed. They looked at the purchaser with indifference and even complacency, and everyone of them tried to please him in the hope that he would take them where they would have lots of jewels and fine clothes, and slaves to wait on them.

Haji Baba led the Beg to the above-mentioned beauty, and raising the edge of her white garment and displaying her blushing face, rubbed it hard, and when the main texture remained white, he turned triumphantly to the seller.

"Well, sir! I sell painted faces, do I? Do you suppose that every orthodox shah, emir, and khan would have any confidence in me if I did? Will you not find in my garden those flowers which the Sultana Valideh presents to the greatest of Emperors on his birthday, and which in a week's time the Sultan gives in marriage

to those of his favourite Pashas whom he delights to honour? Why, I don't keep Hindu bayaderes simply because they stain their teeth with betel-root and orange yellow, and gild their eyebrows; accursed be he who would improve upon what Allah created perfect! The black girl is lovely because she is black, the Greek because she is brown, the Pole because she is pale, and the Wallach because she is ruddy; there are some who like blonde, and some who like dark tresses; and fire dwells in blue eyes as well as in black; and God has created everything that man may rejoice therein."

While the worthy man-filcher was thus pouring himself forth so enthusiastically, Yffim Beg, with a very grave face, was gazing round the apartment, drawing aside every curtain and gazing grimly at the dwellers behind them, who, clad in rich oriental garments, were reclining on divans, sucking sugar-plums and singing songs.

Haji Baba was at his back the whole time, and had so much to say of the qualifications of every damsel they beheld, that the Turkish gentleman must have been sorely perplexed which of them to choose.

He had got right to the end of the apartment, when unexpectedly peeping into the remotest corner, he beheld a damsel who seemed to be entirely different from all the rest. She was wrapped in a simple white wadding-like garment, only her head was visible; and when the Beg turned towards her, both his eyes and his mouth opened wide, and he stood rooted to the spot before her.

It was the face of the Queen in the Kingdom of Beauty. Never had he seen such a look, such burning, glistening, flashing eyes as hers! The proud, free temples, beneath which two passionate eyebrows sparkled like rainbows, even without a diadem dispensed majesty. At the first glance she seemed as savage as Diana surprised in her bath, at the next she was as timorous as the flying Daphne; gradually a tender smile transformed her features, she looked in front of her with a dazed expression like betrayed Sappho gazing at the expanse of ocean in which she would fain extinguish her burning love.

"Chapman!" cried the Beg, scarce able to contain himself for astonishment, "would you deceive me by hiding away from me a houri stolen from heaven?"

"I assure you, sir," said the chapman, with a look of terror, "that it were better for you if you turned away and thought of her no more."

"Haji Baba, beware! if perchance you would sell her to another, or even keep her for yourself, you run the risk of losing more than you will ever make up again."

"I tell you, sir, by the beard of my father, look not upon that woman."

"Hum! Some defect perhaps!" thought Yffim to himself, and he beckoned to the girl to let down her garment. She immediately complied, and, standing up, stripped her light mantle from her limbs.

Ah! how the Beg's eyes sparkled. He half believed that what he saw was not human, but a vision from fairy-land. The damsel's shape was as perfect as a marble statue carved expressly for the altar of the Goddess of Love, and the silver hoop encircling her body only seemed to be there as a girdle in order to show how much whiter than silver was her body.

"Curses on your tongue, vile chatterer!" said Yffim Beg, turning upon the chapman. "Here have you been wasting an hour of my time with your empty

twaddle, and hiding the beauties of Paradise from my gaze. What's the price of this damsel?"

"Believe me, sir, she won't do for you."

"What! thou man-headed dog! Dost fancy thou hast to do with beggars who cannot give thee what thou askest? I come hither to buy for Hassan Pasha, the Governor of Buda, who is wont to give two thousand ducats to him who asks him for one thousand."

At these words the damsel's face was illuminated by an unwonted smile, and at that moment her large, fiery eyes flashed so at Yffim Beg thathis eyes could not have been more blinded if he had been walking on the seashore and two suns had flashed simultaneously in his face, one from the sky and the other from the watery mirror.

"It is not that," said the slave merchant, bowing himself to the ground; "on the contrary, I'll let you have the damsel so cheaply that you will see from the very price that I had reserved her for one of the lowest *mushirs*, in case he should take a fancy to her—you shall have her for a hundred dinars."

"Thou blasphemer, thou! Dost thou cheapen in this fashion the masterpieces of Nature. Thou shouldst ask ten thousand dinars for her, or have a stroke on the soles of thy feet with a bamboo for every dinar thou askest below that price."

The merchant's face grew dark.

"Take her not, sir," said he; "you will be no friend to yourself or to your master if you would bring her into his harem."

"I suppose," said the Beg, "that the damsel has a rough voice, and that is why she is going so cheaply?" and he ordered her to sing a song to him if she knew one.

"Ask her not to do that, sir!" implored the chapman. But, already, he was too late. At the very first word the girl had laid hold of a mandolin, and striking the chords till they sounded like the breeze on an æolian harp, she began to sing in the softest, sweetest, most ardent voice an Arab love-song:

"In the rose-groves of Shiraz,
In the pale beams of moonlight,
In the burning heart's slumber,
Love ever is born.
"'Midst the icebergs of Altai,
On the steps of the scaffold,
In the fierce flames of hatred,
Love never can die."

The Beg felt absolutely obliged to rush forthwith upon Haji Baba and pummel him right and left for daring to utter a word to put him off buying the damsel.

The slave-dealer patiently endured his kicks and cuffs, and when the jest was over, he said once more:

"And again I have to counsel you not to take the damsel for your master."

"What's amiss with her, then, thou big owl? Speak sense, or I'll hang thee up at thine own masthead."

"I'll tell you, sir, if only you will listen. That damsel has not belonged to one master only, for I know for certain that five have had her. All five, sir, have

perished miserably by poison, the headman's sword, or the silken cord. She has brought misfortune to every house she has visited, and she has dwelt with Tartars, Turks, and Magyars. Against the Iblis that dwells within her, prophets, messiahs, and idols have alike been powerless; ruin and destruction breathe from her lips; he who embraces her has his grave already dug for him, and he who looks at her had best have been born without the light of his eyes. Therefore I once more implore you, sir, to let this damsel go to some poor mushir, whose head may roll off without anybody much caring, and do not convey danger to so high a house as the palace of Hassan Pasha."

The Beg shook his head.

"I thought thee a sharper, and I have found thee a blockhead," said he, and he signified to the damsel to wrap herself in her mantle and follow him.

"Allah is my witness that I warned you; I wash my hands of it," stammered Haji Baba.

"The girl will follow me; send thou for the money to my house."

"The Prophet seeth my soul, sir. If you are determined to take the damsel, I will not give her to you for money, lest so great a man may one day say that he bought ruin from me. Take her then as a gift to your master."

"But I have forgotten to ask the damsel's name?"

"I will tell you, but forget not every time that name passes your lips to say: 'Mashallah!' for that woman's name is the name of the devil, and doubtless she does not bear it without good cause, nor will she ever be false to it."

"Speak, and chatter not!"

"That damsel's name is Azrael... Allah is mighty!"

Chapter IX

THE AMAZON BRIGADE.

It was three days since Azrael had come into the possession of Hassan Pasha, and in the evening of the third day Haji Baba was sitting in the prow of his ship and rejoicing in the beautiful moonlight when he saw, a long way off, in the direction of the Margaret island a skiff, and then another skiff, and then another, row across the Danube, and heard heart-rending shrieks which only lasted for a short time.

Presently the skiffs disappeared among the trees on the river bank, the last hideous cry died away, and from the rose-groves of the castle came a romantic song which resounded over the Danube through the silent night. The merchant recognised the voice of the odalisk, and listened attentively to it for a long time, and it seemed to him as if through this song those shrieks were passing incessantly.

The next day Yffim Beg came to see him, and the merchant hospitably welcomed him. He set before him a narghile and little cups of sherbet, and then they settled down comfortably to their pipes, but neither of them uttered a word.

Thus a good hour passed away; then at last Haji Baba opened his mouth.

“During the night I saw some skiffs row out towards the island, and I heard the sound of stifled shrieks.”

And then they both continued to pull away at their narghiles, and another long hour passed away.

Then Yffim Beg arose, pressed the hand of Haji Baba, and said, just as he was moving off:

“They were the favourite damsels of Hassan Pasha, who had been sewn up in leathern sacks and flung into the water.”

Haji Baba shook his head, which signifies with a Turk: I anticipated that.

Not long afterwards the whole host began to assemble below Pesth, encamping on the bank of the Danube; a bridge suddenly sprang into sight, and across it passed army corps, heavy cannons and wagons. First there arrived from Belgrade the Vizier Aga, with a bodyguard of nine thousand men, and pitched their tents on the Rákás; after him followed Ismail Pasha, with sixteen thousand Janissaries, and their tents covered the plain. The Tartar Khan’s disorderly hordes, which might be computed at forty thousand, extended over the environs of Vácz; and presently Prince Ghyka also arrived with six thousand horsemen, and along with him the picked troops of the Vizier of Buda; the whole army numbered about one hundred thousand.

So Haji Baba did a roaring trade. There were numerous purchasers among so many Turkish gentlemen; there was something to suit everyone, for the prices were graduated; and Haji thought he might perhaps order up a fresh consignment from his agents at Belgrade, hoping to sell this off rapidly so long as the camp remained. But he very much wanted to know how long the concentration would go on, and how many more gentlemen were still expected to join the host, and with that object he sought out Yffim Beg.

The Beg answered straightforwardly that nearly everyone who had a mind to come was there already. The Prince of Transylvania had treacherously absented himself from the host, and only Kucsuk Pasha and young Feriz Beg’s brigades were still expected; without them the army would move no farther.

At the mention of these names Haji Baba started.

“You have as good as made me a dead man, sir. I must now go back to Stambul with my whole consignment.”

“Art thou mad?”

“No, but I shall become bankrupt, if I wait for these gentlemen. Never, sir, can I live in the same part of the world, sir, with those fine fellows, whom may Allah long preserve for the glory of our nation! I have two houses on the opposite shores of the Bosphorus, so that when these noble gentlemen are in Europe I may be in Asia, and when they come to Asia I may sail over to Europe.”

“Thou speakest in riddles.”

“Then you have not heard the fame of Feriz Beg?”

“I have heard him mentioned as a valiant warrior.”

“And how about the brigade of damsels which is wont to follow him into battle?”

Yffim Beg burst out laughing at these words.

“It is easy for you to laugh, sir, for you have never dealt in damsels like me. But you should know that what I tell you is no jest, and Feriz Beg is as great a danger to every man who trades in women as plague or small-pox.”

“I never heard of this peculiarity of his.”

“But I have. I tell you this Feriz Beg is a youth with magic power, in whose eyes is hidden a talisman, whose forehead is inscribed with magic letters, and from whose lips flow sorcery and magic spells, so that whenever he looks upon a woman, or whenever she hears his words even through a closed door, that woman is lost for ever. Just as he upon whom the moon shines when he is asleep is obliged to follow the moon from thenceforth, so, too, this young man draws after him with the moonbeams of his eyes all the women who look upon him. Ah! many is the great man who has cursed the hour in which Feriz Beg galloped past his windows and thereby turned the heads of the most beauteous damsels. Even the Grand Vizier himself has wept the loss of his favourite bayadere Zaida, who descended from his windows by a silken cord into the sea, and swam after the ship which bore along Feriz Beg; and one night my kinsman, Kutub Alnuma, who is a far greater slave merchant than I am, was, while he slept, tied hand and foot by his own damsels to whom he heedlessly had pointed out Feriz Beg, and the whole lot incontinently ran after him.”

“And what does the youth do with all these women?”

“Oh, sir, that is the most marvellous part of the whole story. For if he culled all the fairest flowers of earth for the sake of love, I would say that he was a wise man, who tasted the joys of Paradise beforehand. But it is quite another thing, sir. You will be horrified when I tell you that he at whose feet all the beauties of earth fling themselves, never so much as greets one of them with a kiss.”

“Is he sick, then, or mad?”

“He loves another damsel, a Christian girl, who is far from here, and for whom he has pined from the days of his childhood. At the time of his first battle he saw this girl for the first time, and as often as he has gone to war since, it is always with her name upon his lips that he draws his sword.”

“And what happens to the girls he takes away?”

“When the first of these flung themselves at his feet, offering him their hearts and their very lives and imploring him to kill them if he would not requite their love, to them he replied: ‘You have not been taught to love as I love. Your love awoke in the shadows of rose-bushes, mine amidst the flashing of swords; you love sweet songs, and the voice of the nightingale, I love the sound of the trumpet. If you would love me, love as I do; if you would be with me, come whither I go; and if Allah wills it, die where I die.’ Ah, sir, there is an accursed charm on the lips of this young man. He destroys the hearts of the damsels with his words so that they forget that Allah gave them to men as playthings and delightful toys, and they gird swords upon their tender thighs, fasten cuirasses of mail round their bosoms, and expose their fair faces to deadly swords.”

“And do these women really fight, or is it all a fable?”

“They do wonders, sir. No one has ever seen them fly before the foe, and frequently they are victorious; and if they have less strength in their arms than men, they have ten times more fire in their hearts. And if at any one point the fight is most dogged, and the enemy collecting together his most valiant bands has tired out the hardly-pressed spahis and timariots, then the youth draws his sword and plunges into the blackest of mortal peril. And then the wretched women all plunge blindly after him, and each one of them tries to get nearest to him, for they know

that every weapon is directed against him, and they ward off with their bosoms the bullets which were meant for him. And so long as the youth remains there, or presses forward, they never leave him, the whole battalion perishes first. And at last, if he wins the fight and remains master of the field, the youth dismounts from his horse, collects the bodies of the slain who have fallen fighting beside him, kisses them one by one on their foreheads, sheds tears on their pale faces, and with his own hands lays them in the grave. And, believe me, sir, these bewitched, enchanted damsels are mad after that kiss, and their only wish is to gain it as soon as possible."

"And is there none to put an end to this scandal? Have the generals no authority to abolish this abomination? Do not the outraged owners demand back their slave-girls?"

"You must know, sir, that Feriz Beg stands high in the favour of the Sultan. He is never prominent anywhere but on the battlefield, but there he gives a good account of himself; and if anybody who came to his tents to try and recover his slave-girls by force, he might easily be sent about his business minus his nose and ears. Besides, who could say that these warriors of Feriz are women? Do they not dispense thrusts and slashes instead of kisses? Do you ever hear them sing or see them dance and smile so long as they are under canvas? Oh, sir, I assure you that you would do well if you told all those who buy slave-girls from me to guard the damsels from the enchanting dark eyes of this man, for there is a talisman concealed in them. And, in particular, forget not to tell your master to conceal his damsel, for you know not what might happen if a magician caused a female Iblis[9-15] to enter into her. If an enamoured woman is terrible, what would an enamoured she-devil be? You bought her, take care that she does not sell you! The day before yesterday you threw his favourite women into the water, the day after to-morrow you might—but Allah guard my tongue, I will not say what I would. Watch carefully, that's all I'll say. Yet to keep a watch upon women is the most difficult of sciences. If you want to get into a beleagured fortress, hide an enamoured woman in it, and she'll very soon show you the way in. Take heed to what I say, sir, for if you forget my words but for half an hour, I would not give my little finger-nail for your head."

Whereupon Yffim Beg arose without saying a word and withdrew, deeply pondering the words of the slave-dealer. But Haji Baba that same night drew up his anchors, and at dawn he had vanished from the Danube, none knew whither.

Chapter X

THE MARGARET ISLAND.

On the Margaret island, in the bosom of the blue Danube, was the paradise of Hassan Pasha, and to behold its treasures was death. At every interval of twenty yards stands a eunuch behind the groves of the island with a long musket, and if any man fares upon the water within bullet-reach, he certainly will never tell anyone what he saw.

Paradise exhales every intoxicating joy, every transient delight; it is full of flowers, and no sooner does one flower bloom than another instantly fades away; and this also is the fate of those flowers which are called damsels, for some of these likewise fade in a day, whilst others are culled to adorn the table of the favourite. This, I say, is the fate of all the flowers, and frequently in those huge porcelain vases which stand before Azrael's bed, among its wreaths of roses and pomegranate flowers, one may see the head of an odalisk with drooping eyes who yesterday was as bright and merry as her comrades, the rose and pomegranate blossoms.

Oh, that woman is a veritable dream! Since he possessed her Hassan Pasha is no longer a man, but a piece of wax which receives the impression of her ideas. He hears nothing but her voice, and sees nothing but her. Already they are beginning to say that Hassan Pasha no longer recognizes a man ten feet off, and is no longer able to distinguish between the sound of the drum and the sound of the trumpet. And it is true, but whoever said so aloud would be jeopardizing his head, for Hassan would conceal his failings for fear of being deprived of the command of the army if they became generally known.

All the better does Yffim Beg see and hear, Yffim Beg who is constantly about Azrael; if he were not such an old and faithful favourite of Hassan Pasha he might almost regret that he has such good eyes and ears. But Azrael's penetrating mind knows well enough that Yffim Beg's head stands much more firmly on his shoulders than stand the heads of those whom Hassan Pasha sacrifices to her whims, so she flatters him, and it is all the worse for him that she does flatter.

Hassan Pasha, scarce waiting for the day to end and dismissing all serious business, sat him down in his curtained pinnace, known only to the dwellers on the fairy island, and had himself rowed across to his hidden paradise, where, amidst two hundred attendant damsels, Azrael, the loveliest of the living, awaits him in the hall of the fairy kiosk, round whose golden trellis work twine the blooms of a foreign sky.

Yffim Beg alone accompanies the Pasha thither.

The Governor, after embracing the odalisk, strolled thoughtfully through the labyrinth of fragrant trees where the paths were covered by coloured pebbles and a whole army of domesticated birds made their nests in the trees. Yffim Beg follows them at a little distance, and not a movement escapes his keen eyes, not so much as a sigh eludes his sharp ears; he keeps a strict watch on all that Azrael does and says.

In the midst of their walk—they hadn't gone a hundred paces—a falcon rose before them from among the trees and perched on a poplar close by.

"Look, sir, what a beautiful falcon!" cried Yffim Beg.

Azrael laughed aloud and looked back.

"Oh, my good Beg, how canst thou take a wood-pigeon for a falcon? why it was a wood-pigeon."

"I took good note of it, Azrael, and there it is sitting on that poplar."

"Why, that's better still—now he calls a nut-tree a poplar. Eh, eh! worthy Beg, thou must needs have been drinking a little to see so badly."

“Well, that was what I fancied,” said the Beg, much perplexed, and for the life of him not perceiving the point of the jest. Why should the odalisk make a fool of him so?

“But look then, my love,” said Azrael, appealing to the Pasha; “thou didst see that bird fly away from the tree yonder, was it not a wood-pigeon flying from a nut-tree?”

Hassan saw neither the tree nor the bird, but he pretended he did, and agreed with the odalisk.

“Of course it was a wood-pigeon and a nut-tree.”

Yffim Beg did not understand it at all.

They went on further, and presently Yffim Beg again spoke.

“Shall we not turn, my master, towards that beautiful arcade of rose-trees?”

Azrael clapped her hands together in amazement.

“What! an arcade of roses! Where is it?”

“Turn in that direction and thou wilt see it.”

“These things! Why if he isn’t taking some sumach trees full of berries for an arcade of rose-trees!”

Hassan Pasha laughed. As for Yffim Beg he was lost in amazement—why did this damsel choose to jest with him in this fashion?

At that moment a cannon shot resounded from the Pesth shore.

“Ah!” said the Pasha, stopping, “a cannon shot!”

“Yes, my master,” said Yffim, “from the direction of Pesth.”

“From Pesth indeed,” said Azrael, “it was from Buda; it was the signal for closing the gate.”

“I heard it plainly.”

“Excuse me, my good Beg, but thy hearing is as bad as thy sight. I am beginning to be anxious about thee. How could it be from the direction of Pesth when the whole camp has crossed over to Buda?”

“Maybe a fresh host has arrived, which now awaits us.”

“Come,” cried Azrael, seizing Hassan’s hand, “we will find out at once who is right;” and she hastened with them to the shore of the island.

On the further bank the camp of Feriz Beg was visible; they were just pitching their tents on the side of the hills. A company of cavalry was just going down to the water’s-edge, at whose head ambled a slim young man whose features were immediately recognised, even at that distance, both by the favourite Beg and the favourite damsel.

Only Hassan saw nothing; in the distance everything was to him but a blur of black and yellow.

“Well, what did I say?” exclaimed Yffim Beg triumphantly; “that is the camp of Feriz Beg, and there is Feriz himself trotting in front of them.”

The words were scarce out of his mouth when the terrible thought occurred to him that Azrael had no business to be looking upon this strange man.

The odalisk, laughing loudly, flung herself on Hassan’s neck.

“Ha, ha, ha! the worthy Beg takes the water-carrying girls for an army!”

Then Yffim Beg began to tremble, for he perceived now whither this woman wanted to carry her joke.

“My master,” said he, “forbid thy slave-girl to make a fool of me. The camp of Feriz Beg is straight in front of us, and thou wilt do well to prevent thy maid-servant from looking at these men with her face unveiled.”

“Allah! thou dost terrify me, good Beg!” said Azrael, feigning horror so admirably that Hassan himself felt the contagion of it.

“Say! where dost thou see this camp?”

“There, on the water-side; dost thou not see the tents on the hillocks?”

“Surely it is the linen which these girls are bleaching.”

“And that blare of trumpets?”

“I only hear the merry songs that the girls are singing.”

In his fury Yffim Beg plucked at his beard.

“My master, this devilish damsel is only mocking us.”

“Thou art suffering from deliriums,” said Azrael, with a terrible face, “or thou art under a spell which makes thee see before thee things which exist not. Contradict me not, I beg; this hath happened to thee once before. Dost thou not remember when thou fleddest from Transylvania how, then also, thou didst maintain that the enemy was everywhere close upon thy heels! Thou also then wert under the spell of a hideous enchantment, for thy eunuch horseman who remained behind at Nagyenyed, and is now a sentinel on this island, hath told me that there was no sign of any enemy for more than twenty leagues around, and he remained waiting for thee for ten days and fancied thou wert mad. Most assuredly some evil sorcery made thee fly before an imaginary enemy without thy turban or tunic.”

Yffim Beg grew pale. He felt that he must surrender unconditionally to this infernal woman.

“Was it so, Yffim?” cried Hassan angrily.

“Pardon him, my lord,” said Azrael soothingly; “he was under a spell then, as he is now. Thou art bewitched, my good Yffim.”

“Really, I believe I am,” he stammered involuntarily.

“But I will turn away the enchantment,” said the damsel; and tripping down to the water’s-edge she moistened her hand and sprinkled the face of the Beg, murmuring to herself at the same time some magic spell. “Now look and see!”

The Beg did all that he was bidden to do.

“Who, then, are these walking on the bank of the Danube?”

“Young girls,” stammered the Beg.

“And those things spread out yonder.”

“Wet linen.”

“Dost thou not hear the songs of the girls?”

“Certainly I do.”

“Look now, my master, what wonders there are beneath the sun!” said Azrael, turning towards Hassan Pasha; “is it not marvellous that Yffim should see armies when there is nothing but pretty peasant girls?”

“Miracles proceed from Allah, but methinks Yffim Beg must have very bad sight to mistake maidens for men of war.”

Yffim Beg durst not say to Hassan Pasha that he also had bad sight; he might just as well have pronounced his own death sentence at once. Hassan wanted to pretend to see all that his favourite damsel pointed out, and she proceeded to befool the pair of them most audaciously in the intimate persuasion that Hassan

would not betray the fact that he could not see, while Yffim Beg was afraid to contradict lest he should be saddled with that plaguy Transylvanian business.

Meanwhile, on the opposite bank, Feriz Beg in a sonorous voice was distributing his orders and making his tired battalions rest, galloping the while an Arab steed along the banks of the Danube. The odalisk followed every movement of the young hero with burning eyes.

"I love to hear the songs of these damsels; dost not thou also, my master?" she inquired of Hassan.

"Oh, I do," he answered hastily.

"Wilt thou not sit down beside me here on the soft grass of the river bank?"

The Pasha sat down beside the odalisk, who, lying half in his bosom, with her arm round his neck, followed continually the movements of Feriz with sparkling eyes.

"Look, my master!" said she, pointing him out to Hassan; "look at that slim, gentle damsel, prominent among all the others, walking on the river's bank. Her eyes sparkle towards us like fire, her figure is lovelier than a slender flower. Ah! now she turns towards us! What a splendid, beauteous shape! Never have I seen anything so lovely. Why may I not embrace her—like a sister—why may I not say to her, as I say to thee, 'I love thee, I live and die for thee?'"

And with these words the odalisk pressed Hassan to her bosom, covering his face with kisses at every word; and he, beside himself with rapture, saw everything which the girl told him of, never suspecting that those kisses, those embraces, were not for him but for a youth to whom his favourite damsel openly confessed her love beneath his very eyes!

And Yffim Beg, amazed, confounded, stood behind them, and shaking his head, bethought him of the words of Haji Baba, "Cast forth that devil, and beware lest she give you away!"

Chapter XI

A STAR IN HELL.

Let the gentle shadows of night descend which guard them that sleep from the eyes of evil spectres! Let the weary errant bee rest in the fragrant chalice of the closed flower. Everything sleeps, all is quiet, only the stars and burning hearts are still awake.

What a gentle, mystical song resounds from among the willows, as of a nightingale endowed with a human voice in order to sing to the listening night in coherent rhymes the song of his love and his melancholy rapture. It is the poet Hariri whom, sword in hand, they call Feriz Beg, "The Lion of Combat," but who, when evening descends, and the noise and tumult of the camp are still, discards his coat of mail, puts on a light grey *burnush*, and, lute in hand, strolls through the listening groves and by the side of the murmuring streams and calls forth languishing songs from the depths of his heart and the strings of his lute, uninterrupted by the awakening appeals of the trumpet.

Many a pale maid opens her window to the night at the sound of these magic songs—and becomes all the paler from listening to them.

The eunuchs steal softly along the banks of the Margaret Island with their long muskets, and stop still and watch for any suspicious skiff drawing near to the island; and the most wakeful of them is old Majmun, who, even when he is asleep, has one eye open, and in happier times was the guardian of the harem. He sits down on a hillock, and even acarrier-pigeon with a letter under its wings could not have eluded his vigilance. He has only just arrived on the island, having previously accompanied Yffim Beg into Transylvania, and therefore has only seen Azrael once.

His eyes roam constantly around, and his sharp ears detect even the flight of a moth or a beetle, yet suddenly he feels—some one tapping him on the shoulder.

He turns terrified, and behold Azrael standing behind him.

"Accursed be that singing over yonder. I was listening to it, so did not hear thee approach. What dost thou want? Why dost thou come hither in the darkness of night? How didst thou escape from the harem?"

"I prythee be quiet!" said the odalisk. "This evening I went a-boating with my master, and a gold ring dropped from my finger into the water; it was a present from him, and if to-morrow he asks: 'Where is that ornament?' and I cannot show it him, he will slay me. Oh, let me seek for it here in the water."

"Foolish damsel, the water here is deep; it will go over thy head, and thou wilt perish."

"I care not; I must look for it. I must find the ring, or lose my life for it."

And the odalisk said the words in such an agony of despair that the eunuch was quite touched by it.

"Thou shouldst entrust the matter to another."

"If only I could find someone who can dive under the water, I would give him three costly bracelets for it; I would give away all my treasures."

"I can dive," said Majmun, seized by avarice.

"Oh, descend then into the water for me," implored the damsel, falling on her knees before him and covering the horny hand of the slave with her kisses. "But art thou not afraid of being suffocated? For then in the eyes of the governor I should be twice guilty."

"Fear not on my account. In my youth I was a pearl-fisher in the Indian Ocean, and I can remain under water and look about me like a fish, even at night, while thou dost count one hundred. Only show me the place where the ring fell from thy finger."

Azrael drew a pearl necklace from her arm and casting it into the water, pointed at the place where it fell.

"It was on the very spot where I have cast that; if thou dost fetch up both of them for me, the second one shall be thine."

Majmun perceived that this was not exactly a joke, and laying aside his garment and his weapon, bade the damsel look after them, and quickly slipped beneath the water.

In a few seconds the eunuch's terrified face emerged above the water and he struck out for the shore with a horrified expression.

“This is an evil spot,” said he; “at the bottom of the water is a heap of human heads.”

“I know it,” said the odalisk calmly.

The eunuch was puzzled. He gazed up at her, and was astounded to observe that in the place of the sensitive, supplicating figure so lately there, there now stood a haughty, awe-inspiring woman, who looked down upon him like a queen.

“Those heads there are the heads of thy comrades,” said Azrael to the astounded eunuch, “whom last night and the preceding nights I asked to do me a service, which they refused to do. Next day I accused them to the governor and he instantly had their heads cut off without letting them speak.”

“And what service didst thou require?”

“To swim to the opposite shore and give this bunch of flowers to that youth yonder.”

“Ha! thou art a traitor.”

“No such thing. All I ask of thee is this: dost thou hear those songs in that grove yonder? Very well, swim thither and give him this posy. If thou dost not, thy head also will be under the water among the heap of the others. But if thou dost oblige me I will make thee rich for the remainder of thy life. It is in thine own power to choose whether thou wilt live happily or die miserably.”

“But I have a third choice, and that is to kill thee,” cried the eunuch, gnashing his teeth.

Azrael laughed.

“Thou blockhead! Whilst thou wert still under the water it occurred to me to fill thy musket with earth and gird thy dagger to my side. Utter but a cry and thou wilt have no need to wait for to-morrow to lay thy head at thy feet.”

At these words the damsel squeezed the eunuch’s arm so emphatically that he bent down before her.

“What dost thou command?”

“I have already told thee.”

“I am playing with my own head.”

“That is not as bad as if I were playing with it.”

“What dost thou want of me?”

“I want thee to row me across to the opposite shore.”

“There is only one skiff on the island, and in that Yffim Beg is wont to fish.”

“Oh, why have I never learnt to swim!” cried Azrael, collapsing in despair.

“What! wouldst thou swim across this broad stream?”

“Yes, and I’ll swim across it now, this instant.”

“Those are idle words. If thou art not a devil thou wilt drown in this river if thou canst not swim.”

“Thou shalt swim with me. I will put one hand on thy shoulder to keep me up.”

“Thou art mad, surely! Only just now thou didst threaten me with death, and now thou wouldst trust thy life to me! I need only hold thee under for a second or two to be rid of thee for ever. Water is a terrible element to him who cannot rule over it, the dwellers beneath the waves are merciless.”

“By putting my life into thy hands I show thee that I fear thee not. Lead me through the water!”

“Thou art mad, but I still keep my senses. Go back to the Vizier’s kiosk while he hath not noticed thy absence. I will not betray thee.”

“Then thou wilt not go with me?” said the odalisk darkly.

“May I never see thee again if I do so,” said Majmun resolutely, sitting down on a hillock.

“Wretched slave!” cried Azrael in despair, “then I will go myself.”

And with that she cast herself into the water from the high bank. Majmun, unable to prevent her leap, plunged in after her and soon emerged with her again on the surface of the water, holding the woman by her long hair.

She suddenly embraced the eunuch with both arms, turned in the water so as to come uppermost and raising her head from the waves, cried fiercely to the submerged eunuch:

“Go to the opposite shore, or we’ll drown together.”

The eunuch, after a short, desperate struggle, becoming convinced that he could not free himself from the arms of the damsel who held him fast like a gigantic serpent, with a tremendous wrench contrived to bring his head above the water and cried unwillingly:

“I’ll lead thee thither.”

“Hasten then!” cried Azrael, releasing him from her arms and grasping the woolly pate of the swimmer with one hand; “hasten!”

The eunuch swam onwards. Nothing was to be seen but a white and a black head moving closely together in the darkness and the long tresses of the damsel floating on the surface of the waves.

“Is the bank far?” she presently asked the slave, for she was somewhat behind and could not see in front of her.

“Art thou afraid?”

“I fear that I may not be able to see it.”

“We shall be at the other side directly. The stream is broad just now, for the Danube is in flood.”

A few minutes later the negro felt firm ground beneath his feet, and the odalisk perceived the branch of a willow drooping above her face. Quickly seizing it, she drew herself out of the water.

Softly and tremulously she ran towards the grove of trees which concealed what she sought, and on perceiving the singer, whose enchanting tones had enticed her across the water, she stood there all quivering, holding back her breath, and with one hand pressed against her bosom.

The young singer was sitting on a silver linden-tree. He had just finished his song, and had placed the lute by his side, and was gazing sadly before him with his handsome head resting against his hand as if he would have summoned back the spirit which had flown far far away on the wings of his melody.

“Now thou canst speak to him,” said Majmun to the damsel.

Azrael stood there, leaning against a weeping willow and gazing, motionless, at the youth.

“Hasten, I say. The night is drawing to an end and we have to get back again. Wherefore dost thou hesitate when thou hast come so far for this very thing?”

The odalisk sighed softly, and leant her head against the mossy tree trunk.

“Thou saidst thou wouldst rush to him, embrace his knees, and greet him with thy lips, and now thou dost stand as if rooted to the spot by spells.”

The damsel slowly sank upon her knees and hid her face in her garment.

“The girl is really crazy,” murmured the negro; “if thou hast come hither only to weep, thou couldst have done that just as well on the other side.”

At that moment the voice of a bugle horn rang out from a distance through the silent night, whereupon the singer, suddenly transformed into a warrior, sprang to his feet. It was the first *reveille* from the camp of Buda to awake the sleepers, and Hariri disappeared to become Feriz Beg again, who, drawing his sword, quickly hastened away from among the willow-trees, and in his hurry forgot his lute beneath a silver birch.

“Thou seest he has departed from thee,” cried the negro malevolently, seizing the damsel’s hand. “Hasten back with me while yet there is time.”

The girl arose—holding her breath as she gazed after the youth—and waited till he had disappeared among the bushes; then she drew forth the wreath of flowers which she had hidden in her bosom, and took a step forward, listening till the retreating footsteps had died away, and then suddenly rushed towards the abandoned lute, pressed it to her heart, covered it with kisses, and fell down beside it filled with agony and rapture.

Then she took the wreath and cast it round the lute, and the wreath was composed of these flowers: A rose. What does a rose signify in the language of love?—“I love thee, I am happy.” Then a pomegranate-flower, which signifies: “I love none but thee!” Then a pink, which signifies: “I wither for love of thee.” Then a balsam, which signifies: “I dare not approach thee.” And, finally, a forget-me-not, which signifies: “Let us live or die together.”

This wreath the odalisk fastened together with a lock of her own hair, which signifies: “I surrender my life into thy hands!” For a Turkish woman never allows a lock of her hair to pass into the hand of a stranger, believing, as she does, that whoever possesses it has the power to ruin or slay her, to deprive her either of her reason or her life.

Majmun gazed at her in astonishment. Was this all she had come for through so many terrible dangers?

“Hasten, damsel, with thine incantations,” said he, “the camp is now aroused and the dawn is at hand.”

Azrael cast a burning kiss with her hand in the direction whither Feriz had disappeared; then returning to the slave, she said, with her usual commanding voice:

“Remain here and count up to six hundred without looking after me, and by that time I shall have come back.”

Majmun counted up to six hundred with a loud voice.

Meanwhile, Azrael ran along the dam of the river bank till she came to the sluice, which she raised by the exertion of her full strength. The liberated water began to flow through the opening with a mighty roar.

Then Azrael hastened back to the negro.

“And now for the island,” said she.

And once more they traversed the dangerous way, Azrael lying on her back with a hand on the negro's head. In her bosom was a poplar leaf, which afforded her great satisfaction.

On reaching the island Azrael richly recompensed the negro, and said to him:

"To-morrow morning, at dawn, thy master, Yffim Beg, will seek thee and command thee to accompany him and Hassan Pasha across the bridge to the other side where stands the camp of Feriz Beg. Thou wilt find no one there, but look at the place where we were this night, and if thou shouldst find there a nosegay or a wreath, bring it to me!"

Majmun listened with amazement. How could Azrael have found out all about these things?

Azrael returned to the kiosk, where Hassan Pasha was still sleeping the deep sleep of opium. He awoke in the arms of his favourite, and he could not understand why her hands were so cold and her kisses so burning.

The odalisk told him she had been dreaming. She had dreamt that she swam across the river enticed by the singing of the Peris.

Hassan smiled.

"Go on sleeping, and continue thy dream," said he.

The sun was high in the heaven when Hassan Pasha quitted the kiosk. Yffim Beg was awaiting him.

"Wilt thou not ride to Pesth there to mark out the place for the camp of Feriz Beg, who has just arrived?"

Azrael shrewdly guessed that Yffim Beg was for leading the Governor to the Pesth shore to satisfy him as to the peasant girls whom he was said to have mistaken for soldiers by some evil enchantment. She also thought how convenient it would be for her that they should take Majmun with them for the whole day.

Hassan accordingly accepted Yffim's invitation, and galloped with him and Majmun over to the opposite shore, where Yffim was amazed to discover that not a soul of Feriz Beg's host was visible.

In the night the suddenly released water had covered the whole ground of their camp, and they had been obliged to retire farther away from the river and seek another encampment beyond Pesth.

Yffim Beg would have liked to have torn out his beard in his wrath if he had not been restrained by the general's presence.

But Majmun, under the pretext of clearing the way, reconnoitred the scene of yesterday's interview, and there, in the roots of the silver birch, he found that a wreath had been deposited. He concealed it beneath his *burnush*, and carried it home to Azrael.

The wreath was composed of two pieces—a branch of laurel and a spray of thorn.

The damsel bowed her head before this answer. She knew that it signified: "Suffer if thou wouldst prevail!"

Chapter XII

THE BATTLE OF ST. GOTHARD.

It was a beautiful summer evening; there was a half-moon in the sky, and a hundred other half-moons scattered over the hillocks below. The Turkish host had encamped among the hills skirting the river Raab.

Concerning this particular new moon, we find recorded in the prophetic column of the *Kaossa Almanack* for the current year that it was to be:

"To the Germans, help in need;
To the Turks, fortune indeed;
To the Magyars, power to succeed.
And whoever's not ill
Shall of health have his fill,
For 'tis Heaven's own will."

The worthy astrologer forgot, however, to find out in heaven whether there are not certain quarters of the moon beneath which man may easily die even if they are not sick.

The great Grand Vizier Kiuprile, after resting on the ruins of Zerinvár, turned towards the borders of Styria and united with the army of the Pasha of Buda, below St. Gothard.

Kiuprile's host consisted for the most part of cavalry, for his infantry was employed in digging trenches round Zerinvár, whose commandant, in reply to an invitation to surrender the fortress and not attempt to defend it with six hundred men against thirty thousand, jestingly responded: "As one Hungarian florin is worth ten Turkish piasters, one Hungarian warrior necessarily must be worth ten Turkish warriors." And what is more, the worthy man made good this rate of exchange, for when the victors came to count up the cost, they found that for six hundred Hungarians they had had to pay six thousand Osmanlis into the hands of his Majesty King Death.

Kiuprile had then pursued the armies of the Emperor, but they refused to stand and fight anywhere; and while their enemies were marching higher and higher up the banks of the Raab, they seemed to be withdrawing farther and farther away on the opposite shore.

The army of the Pasha of Buda should have gone round at the rear of the imperial forces, in order to unite with the Pasha of Érsekújvár, the former having previously cut off every possibility of a retreat; but Hassan, as an independent general, did not follow the directions sent him, simply because they came from Kiuprile, and he also made straight for the Raab by forced marches, in order to wrest the opportunity of victory from his rival.

Thus the two armies came together, on July 30th, below the romantic hills of St. Gothard, each army pitching its tents on the right bank of the river, and occupying the summits of the hills, which commanded a view of the whole region.

And certainly the worthy gentlemen showed no bad taste when they took a fancy to that part of the kingdom. In every direction lay the yellow acres, from which the terrified peasants had not yet reaped the standing corn; to the right were the gay vineyard-clad hills; to the left the dark woods and stretch upon stretch of undulating meadow-land, bisected by the winding ribbon of the Raab.

On a hill close by stood the gigantic pillared portico of the Monastery of St. Gothard, with fair pleasure-groves at its base. Farther away were the towers of four orfive villages. The setting sun, as if desirous of making the district still more beautiful, enwrapped it in a veil of golden mist.

"Thou dog!" cried Hassan Pasha to the peasant who alone received the terrible guests in the abandoned cloisters, "this region is far too beautiful for the like of you monks to dwell in. But you will not be in it long, my good sirs, for I mean to take it for myself. The peasant after all is lord here. He eats his own bread and he drinks his own wine, and he has a couple of good garments to draw over his head. But stop, things shall be very different, for I shall have a word to say about it."

The honest peasant took off his cap. "God grant," said he, "that more and more of you may dwell in my domains, and that I may build your houses for you." The man was a grave-digger.

Hassan Pasha and his suite occupied the monastery, whose vestibule was filled with priests and magistrates from every quarter of the kingdom, whose duty it was to collect and bring in provisions and taxes due to the Turkish Government. And what they brought in was never sufficient, and therefore the poor creatures had to send deputies as hostages from time to time, who followed their lords on foot wherever they went, and relieved each other from this servitude in rotation; some of them had been here for half a year.

The Turkish army was more than 100,000 strong, and the right bank of the river was planted for a long distance with their tents. The monastery constituted the centre of the camp; there was the encampment of Hassan's favourite mamelukes and the selected corps of cloven-nosed, gigantic negroes, who used to plunge into the combat half-naked, and neither take nor give quarter. Alongside of them was the cavalry of Kucsuk Pasha, a corps accustomed to the strictest discipline. Close beside the tents of this division, within a quadrilateral, guarded by a ditch, you could see the camp of the Amazon Brigade, whose first thought when they pitch their tents is to entrench themselves.

Close to the camp of Kucsuk lies the Moldavian army, from whose elaborate precautions you can gather that they have a far greater fear of their allies all around them than of the foe against whom they are marching. From beyond the monastery, right up to the vineyards of Nagyfalva, the ground is occupied by the noisy Janissaries of Ismail Pasha, who, if their military reputation lies not, are more used to distributing orders to their commanders than receiving orders from them. Beyond the vine-clad hills lies the cavalry of the Grand Vizier, Achmed Kiuprile, and all round about, wherever a column of smoke is to be seen or the sky is blood-red, there is good reason for suspecting that there the marauding Tartar bands are out, whom it was not the habit to attach to the main army. Far in the rear, along the mountain paths, on the slopes of the narrow forest passes, could be seen the endlessly long procession of wagons laden with plunder, intermingled with long round iron cannons and ancient stone mortars, each one drawn along by ten or twelve buffaloes, striving laboriously and painfully to urge their way forward, and if one of them stops for a moment, or falls down, all the others behind it must stop also.

It is now evening, and from one division of the army to another the messengers from headquarters are hurrying. Kiuprile's messenger comes to inform Hassan

that the army of the enemy has taken up its position on the opposite bank, between two forests, the French mercenaries and the German auxiliary troops have joined it, so that it would be well to attack it in the night, before it has had time properly to marshal its ranks.

"Thy master is mad," replied Hassan; "how can I fly across the water? Before me is the river Raab. I should have to fling a bridge across it first—nay two, three bridges—which it would take me days to do, and I cannot even begin to do it till the old ammunition waggons have arrived. Go back, therefore, and tell thy master that if he wants to fight I'll sound the alarm."

The messenger opened his eyes wide, being unaware of the fact that Hassan was short-sighted, and consequently only knew the river Raab from the map, not knowing that at the spot where he stood the river was not more than two yards wide, and could be bridged over in a couple of hours without the assistance of old ammunition wagons—so back the messenger went to Kiuprile.

He had scarce shown a clean pair of heels, when the messenger of Kucsuk Pasha arrived to signify in his master's name that the battle could not be postponed, because no hay had arrived for the horses.

Hassan turned furiously on the captive magistrates.

"Why have you not sent hay?"

The wisest of them, desirous to answer the question, politely rejoined: "It has been a dry summer, sir, the Lord has kept back the clouds of Heaven."

"Oh, that's it, eh!" said Hassan. "Tell Kucsuk Pasha that he must give his horses the clouds to eat; the hay of the Magyars is there, it seems."

This messenger had no sooner departed than a whole embassy arrived from the Janissaries, and the whole lot of them energetically demanded that they should be led into battle at once.

"What?" inquired Hassan mockingly, "has your hay fallen short too, then?" The Janissaries are infantry, by the way.

"It is glory we are running short of," said the leader of the deputation stolidly; "it bores us to stand staring idly into the eyes of the enemy."

"Then don't stare idly at them any longer; away with those mutinous dogs and impale them, and put them on the highest hillock that the whole army may see them."

The bodyguard, after a fierce struggle, overpowered the Janissaries, and pending their impalement, locked them up in the cellar of the cloisters.

By this time Hassan Pasha was in the most horrible temper; and just at that unlucky moment who should arrive but Balló, the envoy of the Prince of Transylvania.

Hassan, who could not see very well at the best of times, and was now blinded with rage besides, roared at him:

"Whence hast thou come? Who hath sent thee hither? What is thy errand?"

"I come from Kiuprile, sir," replied Balló blandly.

"What a good-for-nothing blackguard this Kiuprile must be to send to me such a rogue as thou art, except in chains and fetters."

"Well, of course he knows that I am the envoy of Transylvania, and represent the Prince."

“Represent the Prince, eh? Art thou the Prince’s cobbler that thou standest in his shoes? Hast thou brought soldiers with thee?”

“Gracious sir—”

“Thou hast *not*, then? Not another word! Hast thou brought money?”

“Gracious sir!”

“Not even money! Wherefore, then, hast thou come at all? Canst thou pay the allotted tribute?”

“Gracious sir!”

“Don’t gracious sir me, but answer—yes or no!”

“Well, but——”

“Then why not?”

“The land is poor, sir. The heavy hand of God is upon it.”

“Thou must settle that with God, then, and pray that it may not feel my heavy hand also. Wherefore, then, hast thou come?”

Balló made up his mind to swallow the bitter morsel.

“I have come to implore you to remit the annual tribute.”

At first Hassan did not know what to say.

“Hast thou become wooden, then,” he said at last, “thou and thy whole nation? What right have ye to ask for a remission of the tribute?”

“Gracious sir, the tribute is five times more than what Gabriel Bethlen was wont to pay.”

“Gabriel Bethlen was a fine fellow who paid in iron what he did not pay in silver; if he paid fourteen thousand thalers for the privilege of fighting alongside of us, ye may very well pay down eighty thousand for sitting comfortably at your own firesides. What, only eighty thousand for Transylvania, a state that is always digging up gold and silver, when a single sandjak[12-16] pays the Pasha of Thessalonica twice as much?”

At these words the national pride awoke in the breast of Balló.

“Sir, Thessalonica is a subject province, and its Pasha has unlimited power over his sandjaks, but Transylvania is a free state.”

“And who told thee that it shall not become a sandjak like the rest?” said Hassan grimly. “Before the moon has waxed and waned again twice, take my word for it that a Turkish Pasha shall sit on the throne of Transylvania! Dost thou hear me? By the prophet I swear it.”

“The Grand Seignior has also sworn that the ancient rights of Transylvania should never be infringed. He swore it on the Koran and by the Prophet.”

“It is beneath the dignity of the Grand Seignior, our present Sultan,” cried Hassan, “to remember the oath sworn by the great Suleiman; not what he says, but what his viziers wish, will happen. And vainly do ye entrust your heads to his hand, while the sword of execution remains in our hands! I’ll humble you, ye stony-headed, most obstinate of all nations! Ye shall be no different from the Bosnian rajas who themselves pull the plough!”

Balló raised his head with a bitter look before the wrathful vizier.

“Then, sir, you must find another population for Transylvania, for you will not find there now the men you seek. You may see no end of murdered Magyars there, but a degraded Magyar you will never find.”

At these words Hassan drew his sword, and with his own hand would have decapitated the presumptuous ambassador, but the mamelukes dragged him away, assuring the Pasha that they would impale him along with the Janissaries.

"Place the stake in front of my window that I may speak to the insolent wolf while he is well spitted."

The men-at-arms did indeed thrust Balló into the cellar along with the Janissaries, and began to plant a long, sharp-pointed stake in front of the Pasha's window, when, all at once, a frightful din arose behind their backs, for the Janissaries, hearing that their comrades had been condemned to death without mercy, had revolted in a body. In a moment they had cut down those of their officers who remonstrated, and while one body rushed towards the monastery, beating their alarm-drum and blowing their horns, the others attacked the negro giants guarding the impalement stakes already planted on the top of the hill, and in a few moments the executioners were themselves writhing on the stakes.

Meanwhile the mamelukes of Hassan, who were preparing to resist the insurgents, put to flight by the furious Janissaries, made for the courtyard of the cloister and its garden, which was surrounded by a stone wall, and after barricading the entrances, succeeded with great difficulty in shutting the iron gates in the faces of their assailants, and prepared vigorously to defend them.

The insurgents surrounded the monastery, and bombarding its windows with bullets and darts, began to besiege it at long-firing distance.

Hassan, distracted by rage and fear, fled into the tower of the monastery, leaving his guards to defend the gates till the other divisions of the army should come to quell the insurgents, but they did not stir. Hassan perceived from his tower that not a man from Kiuprile's army was coming to his assistance, though they very well could see his jeopardy and hear the din of the firing a long way off. On the other side the Moldavians had pitched their camp on the hills, but it never entered their minds to draw nearer; on the contrary, they were only too delighted to see Turks devour Turks in this fashion. Ismail Pasha's army seemed rather to be retreating than approaching, and from Kucsuk and his son he durst not hope for assistance, as they were his personal enemies.

At that moment the insurgents caught sight of the stake planted before the window, and set up a howl of fury.

"Ah, ha! Hassan had this planted here for himself. Let's fix up Hassan!"

With a shudder the Vizier reflected on the enormous difference between the throne of Transylvania and the stake on which he might be planted instead, and cursed softly as he murmured to himself:

"That rogue of a Christian must have prayed to his God that I might be brought to shame here;" and grasping in his terror the solitary bell-rope that hung there, and winding it round his neck, he stood by the window, so that if the rebels should burst through the gates he might leap out and hang himself, rather than that they should wreak their horrible threats upon him.

The night had now set in, but the besiegers kindled pine branches, by whose spluttering light they streamed round the monastery; and then came a sudden and continuous firing of guns and beating of drums and a frightful braying of buffalo horns.

The banner of danger had already been planted on the summit of the tower, but from no quarter did help arise, and from time to time the sound of a bell rang through the air as a chance bullet struck it.

Hassan, full of terror, drew back behind the window curtains. Suddenly a yell still more terrible than the hitherto pervading tumult filled his ear—the besiegers had discovered the cellar in which their comrades had been confined, and, bursting in the doors, liberated them, and the Transylvanian deputy along with them, who speedily left this scene of uproar behind him.

At the sight of their bound and fettered comrades, the Janissaries' wrath increased ten-fold. The leader of the released captives, waving an axe over his head with a fierce howl, and hurling himself at the iron gate, hammered away like the roaring of guns; whilst the rest of them, who hitherto had been firing at the windows from a distance, now attacked the entrances with unrestrainable fury, raining showers of blows upon the gates.

But the gates were of good strong iron plates, well barricaded below with quadraginal paving-stones. The besiegers' arms grew weary, and the mamelukes on the roof flung stones and heavy beams down upon them, doing fearful execution among their serried ranks; whilst every mameluke who fell from his perch, pierced by a bullet, was instantly torn to pieces by the crowd, which flung back his head at the defenders.

"Draw back!" cried the officer in command, who stood foremost amidst the storm of rafters and bullets. "Run for the guns! At the bottom of that hill I saw a mortar planted in the ground; draw it forth, and we'll fire upon the walls."

In an instant the whole Janissary host had withdrawn from below the monastery, and the whole din died away. Yet the dumb silence was more threatening, more terrible, than the uproar had been. Very soon a dull rumbling was audible, drawing nearer and nearer every instant; it was the rolling of a gun-carriage full of artillery. Hundreds of them were pushing it together, and were rapidly advancing with the heavy, shapeless guns. At last they placed one in position opposite the monastery; it was a heavy iron four-and-twenty pound culverin, whose voice would be audible at the distance of four leagues. This they planted less than fifteen yards from the monastery, and aimed it at the gate.

"There is no help save with God!" cried Hassan in despair; and he took off his turban lest they should thereby recognise his dead body.

At that instant a trumpet sounded, and the cavalry of Kucsuk Pasha appeared in battle array, making its way through the congested masses of the insurgents; while Feriz Beg, at the head of his Spahis, skilfully surrounded them, and cut off their retreat.

Kucsuk Pasha, with a drawn sword in his hand, trotted straight up to the gun and stood face to face with its muzzle.

"Are ye faithful sons of the prophet, or fire-worshippers, giaurs, and idolators, that ye attack the faithful after this fashion?" he asked the insurgents.

At these words the ringleaders of the insurgents came forward.

"We are Janissaries," he said, "the flowers of the Prophet's garden, who are wont to pluck the weeds we find there."

"I know you, but you know me; ye are good soldiers, but I am a good soldier too. Hath Allah put swords into the hands of good soldiers that they may fall upon one

another? Ye would weep for me if I fell because of you, and I would weep for you if ye fell because of me—but where would be the glory of it? What! Here with the foe in front of you, ye would wage war among yourselves, to your own shame, and to the joy of the stranger? Is not that sword accursed which is not drawn against the foe?"

"Yet accursed also is the sword which returns to its sheath unblooded."

"What do ye want?"

"We want to fight."

"And can you only find enemies among yourselves?"

"Our first enemy is cowardice, and cowardice sits in the seat of that general who alone is afraid when the whole camp wants to fight. We would first slay fear, and then we would slay the foe."

"Why not slay the foe first?"

"We will go alone against the whole camp of the enemy if the rest refuse."

"Good; I will go with you."

"Thou?"

"I and my son with all our squadrons."

At these words the mutineers passed, in an instant, from the deepest wrath to the sublimest joy. "To battle!" they cried. "Kucsuk also is coming, and Feriz will help!" These cries spread from mouth to mouth. And immediately the drums began to beat another reveille, the horns gave forth a very different sound, they turned the cannons round and dragged them to the river's bank, and began to build a bridge over the Raab with the beams and rafters that had been hurled down upon them.

The hostile camp lay about four hours' march away, on the opposite bank, between two forests, and by an inexplicable oversight, had left that portion of the river's bank absolutely unguarded.

The Janissaries swam to and fro in the water strengthening the posts and stays of the improvised bridge by tying them stoutly together, and by the time the night had begun to grow grey, the first bridge ever thrown over the Raab was ready and the infantry began to cross it.

It was only then that the German-Hungarian camp perceived the design of the enemy, and speedily sent three regiments of musketeers against the Turks, who fought valiantly with the Janissaries, and drove them right back upon the bridge, where a bloody tussle ensued as fresh divisions hastened up to sustain the hardly-pressed Mussulmans.

Meanwhile a second bridge had been got ready, over which Kucsuk's cavalry quickly galloped and fell upon the rear of the musketeers.

These warriors, taken by surprise and perceiving the preponderance of the enemy, and obtaining no assistance from their own headquarters, quickly flung down their firearms and made helter-skelter for their own trenches.

The next moment the two combating divisions were a confused struggling mass. Kucsuk's swift Spahis cut off the retreat of the Christian infantry; only for a few moments was there a definite struggle, the tussle being most obstinate round the standards, till at last they also began to totter and fall one after the other, and three thousand Christian souls mounted on high together, pursued by a roar of triumph from the Mussulmans, who, seizing the advanced trenches, planted

thereon their half-moon streamers, and plundered the tents which remained defenceless before them.

At that moment the Christian host was near to destruction, and if Kiuprile had crossed the river and Hassan Pasha had shared the fight with Kucsuk, he would have become famous.

But the two chief commanders remained obstinately behind on the further shore. Kiuprile, who the evening before had himself wanted to begin the fight when he had received a negative answer, had now not even saddled his nag, and looked on with sinister sangfroid while the extreme wing of the army was engaged. Hassan, on the other hand, would have liked nothing better if the Janissaries, and Kucsuk their auxiliary, had lost the battle thus begun without orders, and so far from hastening to their assistance remained sitting up in his tower. He could see nothing of the battle, but he heard a cry, and fancying that it was the death-yell of the Janissaries, took his beads from his girdle and began zealously to pray that the Prophet would keep open for them the gates of Paradise.

"Master, master!" exclaimed Yffim Beg, "gird on thy sword and to horse!"

The Pasha heard nothing. At last Yffim Beg, in despair, seized the bell-rope, and pulled the old bell right above Hassan's head, whereupon the latter rushed in terror to the window.

"What is it? What dost thou want?"

"Hasten, sir!" roared Yffim Beg. "Kucsuk Pasha has beaten the enemy, taken their trenches, and is plundering their tents. Do not allow him to have all the glory of scattering the Christians!"

Hassan leapt from his seat. If he had heard that Kucsuk's men were being cut to pieces he would have gone on praying, but Kucsuk triumphed—had all the triumph to himself. The thought was a keen spur to his mind. Up everyone who could stir hand or foot! Forward Spahis and Arabs! To battle every true believer! Let the dervishes go up in the tower and sing dirges for the fallen! Let the ground shake beneath the rolling of the guns! Let the horns ring out for now is the day of glory!

In an instant the camp was alert, and crowds of warriors rushed towards the bridge. Every man pressed hard on the heels of his fellow; those who were crowded into the water did their best to reach the opposite shore by swimming; whole companies swam through on horseback, and the heavy iron guns moved forward as rapidly as if they had wings. It was only now that the vast numbers of the Ottoman host became manifest, it seemed suddenly to spring out of the ground in every direction; the tiny little cramped Christian camp over against them looked like an island in an inundation.

In the very centre of the host could be seen Hassan Pasha with a brilliant suite, twenty horse-tail banners fluttered around him, the pick of his veterans at his side. On the left was the army of Ismail Pasha; on the right were the hosts of the Moldavians. Their immediate objective was the trenches already occupied by Kucsuk Pasha.

At that moment Yffim Beg was seen galloping along the front of the host with the Vizier's commands for Kucsuk Pasha.

"Ye remain where now you are, and move no farther till a fresh command arrives. Feriz Beg and his battalion move forward along the outermost wing."

Hassan could not endure that two such heroes should help each other in the battle, and that the son should deliver the father. Kucsuk beat the tattoo. Feriz Beg moved along the left wing, where he formed the reserve.

Then the reveille sounded; a hideous yell filled the air; the Mussulman host, with bloodthirsty rage, rushed upon the front of the Christian army. No power on earth can save them! But what is this? Suddenly the impetus of the assailants is stayed. Along the front of the camp of the Christian infantry star-shaped trenches have been dug during the night and planted full of sharp stakes. The foremost row of the assailants pause terror-stricken in front of these trenches, and for an instant the onset is arrested. But only for an instant. The powerful impact of the rearward masses flings them into the deadly ditch, one after another they fall upon the pointed stakes, a mortal yell drowns the cry of battle, in a few moments the star-shaped trenches are filled with corpses and the rushing throng tramples over the dead bodies of their comrades to get to the other side of the ditch. And now the roar of the cannons begin. Up to that moment the guns of the Christians have remained inactive, concealed behind the gabions. Now their gaping throats face the attacking host. At a single signal the roar of eighty iron throats is heard, bullets and chain-shot make their whirring way through the serried ranks, the crackling mortars discharge sackloads of acorn-shaped balls, while the fire-spitting grenades terrify the rearmost ranks.

The Mussulmans host recoils in terror, leaving their dead and wounded behind them. Horrible spectacle! Instead of the lately brilliant ranks the ground is strewn with mangled bloody limbs, writhing like worms in the dust. The next moment the splendid array again covers the ground; the corpses are no longer visible, they are hidden by the feet of the living. The beaten squadrons are sent to the rear; fresh battalions fill their places; the assault is renewed. The fire of the guns no longer keeps them back. They cast down their eyes, shout “Allah!” and rush forward. An earth-rending report resounds, a fiery mine has exploded beneath the feet of the assailants; fragments of human limbs intermingled with strips of tempest-tossed banners fly up into the air amidst whirling clouds of smoke. The second assault is also flung back, and in the meantime the Christian army has succeeded in drawing a line of wagons across their front. And now a third, now a fourth, assault is delivered, each more furious than the last. The Christians begin to despair; every regiment of the Turkish host is now engaged with them, only Kucsuk has received no order to advance. Hassan would win the battle without him.

There he stands, together with his staff, directing the most perverse of battles, hurling his swarms against unassailable rocks, assaulting entrenched places with cavalry; at one time distributing orders to regiments which had ceased to exist, at another sending to consult with commanders who had fallen before his very eyes. Those around him listened to his words with astonishment, and not one of them durst say: “Dismount from your horse, you cannot see ten yards in front of you!” The din of the renewed assaults sounded in his ears like a cry of triumph. “Look how they waver!” he cried; “look how the Christian ranks waver, and how their banners are falling in the dust! Shoot them, shoot them down!” and none durst say to him: “These are thy hosts whose death-cries thou dost hear, and it is the fire from the Christian guns which mow down whole ranks of thy army!”

The Ottoman host had begun its tenth assault, when Hassan sent a courier to Kiuprile on the opposite shore with this message: “Thou canst return to Paphlagonia! We have won the battle without thee. Tell them at home what thou hast seen!”

Kiuprile, seriously alarmed lest he should have no part in the glory of the contest, immediately mounted the whole of his cavalry, flung a bridge over the river, and began to cross it.

This happened at the very moment when Ismail Pasha was leading the Osmanlis to the tenth assault.

The leader of the Christian host, Montecuculi, no sooner perceived Kiuprile’s movement, than he called together his generals and gave them to understand that if they awaited Kiuprile where they stood they would be irretrievably lost.

They were just then loading their guns with their last charge.

Many faces grew pale at this announcement, and a deep silence followed Montecuculi’s words. Yet his words were the words of valour. Three heroes had been in his army—one of them, the French general, the Marquis de Brianzon, had already fallen; the other two, still present, were the German general, Toggendorf, and the Hungarian cavalry officer, Petneházy.

At the commander-in-chief’s announcement the faces of both remained unmoved, and Toggendorf, with the utmost *sang-froid* came forward: “If we must choose between two deaths,” said he, “why not rather choose death by advancing than death in flight?”

“Not so, my lad,” cried Petneházy, enthusiastically grasping his comrade’s hand; “we choose between death and glory, and he who seeks glory will find a triumph also.”

“So be it,” said Montecuculi, with cool satisfaction, thrusting his field-glass into his pocket and drawing forth his thin blade; and, while he sent the two heroes to the two wings, he placed himself in front of the army, and commanded that the barrier of wagons should instantly be demolished.

The last discharge thundered forth, and from amidst the dispersing clouds of smoke two compact army columns could be seen rapidly charging—they were Toggendorf’s cuirassiers and Petneházy’s hussars.

Petneházy made straight for the still hesitating Moldavian army, which, with Prince Ghyka at its head, had as yet taken no part in the fight. Heaven itself gave him the inspiration. The Prince of Moldavia had been waiting for a long time for some one to attack him, that he might at once quit the field of battle to which he had been constrained to come, though it revolted his feelings as a Christian to do so; consequently, when Petneházy was within fifty yards of his battalions, they, as if at a given signal, turned tail without so much as crossing swords with the foe, galloped off to the left bank of the Waag, and so quitted the field.

This flight threw the whole Turkish army into disorder. A more skilful general would indeed have withdrawn the whole host, but, because of his short-sightedness, Hassan did not perceive that the Moldavians had fled, and nobody durst tell him so. Ismail Pasha immediately hastened to fill up the gap; but before he had reached the spot, Toggendorf’s cuirassiers were upon him, and he was caught between two fires in a moment. The Janissaries received the full brunt of the swords of the cuirassiers and the hussars, and in the first onset Ismail Pasha

himself fell from his horse. A hussar rushed upon him, and severing from his body his big bared head, stuck it on the point of a lance, and raised it in the air as a very emblem of terror to the panic-stricken Turks. The Janissaries were no longer able to rally, in every direction they broke through the hostile ranks in a desperate attempt at flight, and, which was worse still, the flying infantry barred the way against the cavalry which was hastening to their assistance.

All this was taking place within two hundred yards of Hassan Pasha, and he saw nothing of it.

"Glory be to Allah," he cried, raising his hands to heaven; "victory is ours! The Christian is flying and is casting down his banners in every direction. The best of his warriors are wallowing in the dust. The rest are flying without weapons and with pale——"

Those about him listened, horror-stricken, to his words. The Christian host was at that moment cutting down the Janissaries, the flower of the Turkish camp!

"Thou ravest, my master!" cried Yffim Beg, seizing the bridle of Hassan Pasha's horse. "Fly and save thyself! The best of thy army has perished, the Janissaries have fallen, the Moldavian army hath fled. Ismail Pasha's head has been hoisted on to a pike!"

"Impossible!" roared Hassan, beside himself, "come with me; let us charge, the victory is ours."

But his generals seized him, and tearing his sword from his hand, seized the bridle of his horse on both sides and hurried him along with them towards the bridge, which was now full of fugitives.

The hazard of the die had changed. The pursuers had become the fugitives. An hour before the Christian camp ran the risk of annihilation; it was now the turn of the Turks.

Kiuprile seeing the catastrophe, destroyed his bridges and remained on the opposite bank.

Meanwhile on the wings, Kucsuk Pasha and Feriz Beg, with his brigade of Amazons, were valiantly holding their own against the cuirassiers of Toggendorf and the hussars of Petneházy, till at last the melancholy notes of the bugle-horns gave the signal for retreat, and the combatants gradually separated. Only a few scattered bands, and presently, only a few scattered individuals, still fought together, and then they also wearily abandoned the contest and returned silently to their respective camps. Both sides felt that their strength was exhausted. The Christian host had four thousand, the Turkish sixteen thousand slain, and among them its best generals; they also lost all their heavy cannons, their banners, and their military renown; but none lost so much as Feriz Beg. The Amazon Brigade had perished. By its deliberate self-sacrifice it had saved the Turkish army from utter destruction.

Chapter XIII

THE PERSECUTED WOMAN.

Perhaps by this time you have clean forgotten our dear acquaintance, pretty Mariska, the wife of the Prince of Wallachia?

Ah, she is happy! Although her husband is far away, her sorrow is forgotten in the near approach of a new joy—the joy of motherhood.

There she sits at eventide in the garden of her castle, weaving together dreams of a happy future, and her court ladies by her side are making tiny little garments adorned with bright ribbons.

When the peasant women pass by her on the road with their children in their arms, she takes the children from them, presses them to her bosom, kisses, and talks to them. She is the godmother of every new-born infant, and what a tender godmother! Day after day she visits the churches, and before the altar of the Virgin-Mother prays that she also may have her portion of that happiness which is the greatest joy God gives to women.

After the battle of St. Gothard it was Prince Ghyka's first thought to send a courier to his wife, bidding her not to be anxious about her husband, for he was alive and would soon be home.

This was Mariska's first tidings of the lost battle, and she thanked God for it. What did she care that the battle was lost, that the glory of the Turkish Sultan was cracked beyond repair, so long as her husband remained to her? With him the husbands of all the other poor Wallachian wives were also safe. She at once hastened to tell the more remote of these poor women that they were not to be alarmed if they heard that the Turkish army had been cut down, for their husbands were free and quite near to them.

What joy at the thought of seeing him again! How she watched for her husband from morn till eve, and awoke at night at the slightest noise. If a horse neighed in the street, if she heard a trumpet far away, she fancied that her husband was coming.

One night she was aroused by the sound of a light tapping at her bedroom door, and her husband's voice replied to her question of "Who is there?"

Her surprise and her joy were so great that in the first moment of awaking she knew not what to do, whereupon her husband impatiently repeated:

"Mariska, open the door!"

The wife hastened to embrace her husband, admitted him, fell upon his neck, and covered him with kisses; but, perceiving suddenly that the kisses her husband gave her back were quite cold, and that his arm trembled when he embraced her, she looked anxiously at his face—it was grave and full of anxiety.

"My husband!" cried the unusually sensitive woman with a shaky voice. "Why do you embrace me—us, so coldly," her downcast eyes seemed to say.

The Prince did not fail to notice the expression, and very sadly, and sighing slightly, he said:

"So much the worse for me!"

His hands, his whole frame shook so in the arms of his wife; and yet the Prince was a muscular as well as a brave man.

"What has happened? What is the matter?" asked his wife anxiously.

"Nothing," said the Prince, kissing her forehead. "Be quiet. Lie down. I have some business to do which must be done to-night. Then I'll come to you, and we'll talk about things."

Mariska took him at his word, and lay down again. But she still trembled—why, she knew not.

There must be something wrong, something very wrong with her husband, or else he would not have welcomed his wife so coldly at the very moment of his arrival.

After a few moments, during which she heard her husband talking in an undertone with someone outside, he came in with his sword in his hand, and after seeming to look for something, he turned to Mariska:

"Have you the keys of your treasure-box?"

"Yes, they are in my secretaire."

The Prince took the keys and withdrew.

Mariska breathed again. "Then it is only some money trouble after all," she thought. "Thank God it is no worse. They have lost something in the camp, I suppose, or they are screwing some more tribute out of him."

In a short time the Prince again returned, and stood there for a time as if he couldn't make up his mind to speak. At last he said:

"Mariska, have you any money?"

"Yes, dear!" Mariska hastened to answer, "just ten thousand thalers. Do you want them?"

"No, no. But have them all ready to hand, and if you collected your jewels together at the same time you would do well."

"What for, my husband?"

"Because," stammered Ghyka, "because—we may—and very speedily, too—have to set out on our travels."

"Have to travel—in my condition?" asked Mariska, raising a pathetic face up to her husband.

That look transfixed the very soul of Ghyka. His wife was in a condition nearer to death than to life.

"No, I won't stir a stump," he suddenly cried, beside himself with agitation, striking his sword so violently on the table that it flew from its sheath, "if heaven itself fall on me, I won't go."

"For God's sake, my husband, what is the matter?" cried Mariska in her astonishment; whereupon the Prince proudly raised his eyebrows, approached her with a smile, and pressing his wife to his bosom, said reassuringly:

"Fear nothing. I had an idea in my head; but I have dismissed it, and will think of it no more. Take it that I have asked you nothing."

"But your anxiety?"

"It has gone already. Ask not the reason, for you would laugh at me for it. Sleep in peace. I also will sleep upon it."

The husband caressed and kissed his wife, and his hand trembled no longer, his face was no longer pale, and his lips were no longer so cold as before.

But the wife's were now. When her husband tenderly kissed her eyes and bade her sleep, she pretended that she was satisfied; but as soon as he had withdrawn from her room, she arose, put on a dressing-gown, and calling one of her maids, descended with her into the hall, and sent for a faithful old servant of her husband's, who was wont to accompany him everywhere, an old Moldavian courier.

“Jova!” she said, “speak the truth! What’s the matter with your master? What have you seen and heard?”

“It is a great trouble, my lady. God deliver us from it! We only escaped destruction at the battle of St. Gothard by not standing up against the Magyars. But what were we to do? Christian cannot fight against Christian, for then should we be fighting against God. The Turkish army was badly beaten there. And now the Vizier of Buda, that he may wash himself clean, for the Sultan is very wroth, wants to cast the whole blame of the affair on the head of the Prince.”

“Great Heaven! And what will be the result?”

“Well, it would not be a bad thing if your Highnesses were to withdraw somewhere or other for a time to give the Sultan’s wrath time to cool.”

“To my father’s, eh? in Wallachia?”

“Well, a little farther than that, I should say.”

“True, we might go to Transylvania; we have lots of good friends there.”

“Even there it might not be as well to stay. You would do well to make a journey to Poland.”

“Do you suppose the danger to be so great then?”

“God grant it be not so bad as I think it.”

“Thank you for your advice, Jova. I will tell my husband quite early in the morning.”

“My lady, you would do well not to wait till morning.”

The woman grew pale.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that if you would take care of yourselves, you should take carriage this very night, this very hour. I will go before the horses with a lantern, and a courier shall be sent on ahead to have fresh relays of horses awaiting us at every station, so that by the time it begins to grow grey, we shall have left the last hill of this region out of sight.”

The terrified Princess returned to her bedchamber, and quickly packed up her most valuable things, making all the necessary preparations for a long journey. But the door leading to her husband’s room was locked, and she durst not call him, but with an indescribable sinking of heart awaited the endlessly distant dawn. She was unable to close her eyes the whole night. Wearied out in body and soul she rose as soon as she saw the light of dawn, sitting with her swimming head against the window, whence she could look down into the courtyard.

Gradually the courtyard awoke to life and noise again, and the hall was peopled with domestics hurrying to and fro. The grooms began walking the horses up and down, the peasant girls with pitchers on their heads were returning from the distant wells, a merry voice began singing a popular ditty in one of the outhouses. All this seemed as strange to the watchful lady as the life and the movement of the outside world seems to one condemned to death who gazes upon it from the window of his cell.

Then the door opened and her husband came out of his bedchamber and greeted his wife with a voice full of boisterous courage. He was dressed in a short stagskin jacket, which he generally wore when he went a-hunting, and wore big Polish boots with star-like spurs.

“Going a-hunting, eh?” asked Mariska, from whose soul all her terrifying phantoms vanished instantly when her husband embraced her in his vigorous arms.

“Yes, I’m going a-hunting. I feel so full of energy that if I don’t tumble about somewhere or other I shall burst. Any boar or bear that I come across to-day will have good cause to remember me.”

“Oh! take care no ill befalls you!”

“Befalls me!” cried the Prince, proudly smiting his herculean breast.

The lady flung herself on her husband’s neck with the confidence of a child, and lifting from his head his saucy bonnet with its eagle plume, which gave him such a brave appearance, and smoothing down his curls, kissed his bonny face, and forgot all her thoughts and visions of the bygone night.

The Prince withdrew, and Mariska opened her window and looked out of it to see him mount his horse.

While the Prince was going downstairs, a dirty Turkish cavasse in sordid rags entered the courtyard, from which at other times he was wont to fetch letters, and mingled with the ostlers and stablemen without seeming to attract attention.

A few moments later the Prince ordered his horse to be brought in a loud resonant voice, whereupon the cavasse immediately came forward, and producing from beneath his dirty dolman a sealed and corded letter, pressed it to his forehead and then handed it to the Prince.

The Prince broke open the letter and his face suddenly turned pale; taking off his cap, he bowed low before the cavasse and saluted him.

O Prince of Moldavia! to doff thy eagle-plumed cap to a dirty cavasse, and bow thy haughty manly brow before him! Whatever can be the meaning of it all? Mariska’s heart began to throb violently as she gazed down from her window.

The Prince, with all imaginable deference, then indicated the door of his castle to the cavasse and invited him to enter first; but the Turk with true boorish insolence, signified that the Prince was to lead the way.

Suddenly, in an illuminated flash, Mariska guessed the mystery. In the moment of peril, with rare presence of mind, she rushed to her secretaire, where her jewels were. Her first thought was that the cavasse had come for her husband; he must be bribed therefore to connive at his escape.

Then she saw hastening through the door the old groom Jova. The face of the ancient servitor was full of fear, and there were tears in his eyes.

“Has the cavasse come for my husband, then?” she inquired tremulously.

“Yes, my lady,” stammered the servant; “why don’t you make haste?”

“Let us give him money.”

“He won’t take it. What is money to him? If he returns without the Prince his own head will be forfeit.”

“Merciful God! Then what shall we do?”

“My master whispered a few words in my ear, and I fancy I caught their meaning. First of all I must take you off to Transylvania, my lady. Meanwhile my master will remain here with the cavasses and their attendants, who are now in the courtyard. My master will remain with them and spin out the time till he feels pretty sure that we have got well beyond the river Sereth in our carriage. Near there is a bridge over a steep rocky chasm, beneath which the river flows. That

bridge we will break down behind us. The Prince will then bring forth his charger Gryllus, on whose back he is wont to take such daring leaps, and will set out in the same direction with the Turkish cavasses. When he approaches the broken-down bridge, he will put spurs to his steed and leap across the gap, while the Turks remain behind. And after that God grant him good counsel!"

Mariska perceiving there was no time to be lost, hastily collected her treasures and, assisted by Jova, descended by way of the secret staircase to the chapel and stood there, for a moment, before the image of the Blessed Virgin to pray that her husband might succeed in escaping. Before the chapel door stood a carriage drawn by four muscular stallions. She got into it quickly, and succeeded in escaping by a side-gate.

Meanwhile the Prince, with great self-denial, endeavoured to detain his unwelcome guests by all manner of pretexts. First of all he almost compelled them to eat and drink to bursting point, swearing by heaven and earth that he would never allow such precious guests as they were to leave his castle with empty stomachs. Then followed a distribution of gifts. Every individual cavasse got a sword or a beaker and every sword and every beaker had its own peculiar history. So-and-so had worn it, So-and-so had drunk out of it. It had been found here and sent there, and its last owner was such a one, etc., etc. And he artfully interlarded his speech with such sacred and sublime words as "Allah!" "Mahomet!" "the Sultan!" at the mention of each one of which the cavasses felt bound to interrupt him repeatedly with such expressions as "Blessed be his name!" so that despite the insistence of the Turks, it was fully an hour before his horse could be brought forward.

At last, however, Gryllus was brought round to the courtyard. The Prince now also would have improved the occasion by telling them a nice interesting tale about this steed of his, but the chief cavasse would give him no peace.

"Come! mount your Honour!" said he, "you can tell us the story on the way."

The Prince mounted accordingly, and immediately began to complain how very much all the galloping of the last few days had taken it out of him, and begged his escort not to hurry on so as he could scarce sit in his saddle.

The chief cavasse, taking him at his word, had the Prince's feet tied fast to his stirrups, so that he might not fall off his horse, sarcastically adding:

"If your honour should totter in your saddle, I shall be close beside you, so that you may lean upon me."

And indeed the chief cavasse trotted by his side with a drawn sword in his hand; the rest were a horse's head behind them.

When they came to the path leading to the bridge the way grew so narrow because of the rocks on both sides that it was as much as two horsemen could do to ride abreast. The Prince already caught sight of the bridge, and though its wooden frame was quite hidden by a projecting tree, a white handkerchief tied to the tree informed him that his carriage with his consort inside it had got across and away, and that the supports had been also cut.

At this point he made as if he felt faint and turning to the chief cavasse, said to him, "Come nearer, I want to lean on you!" and upon the cavasse leaning fatuously towards him he dealt him such a fearful blow with his clenched fist that the Turk fell right across his horse. And now: "Onward, my Gryllus!"

The gallant steed with a bound forward left the escort some distance behind, and while they dashed after him with a savage howl, he darted with the fleetness of the wind towards the bridge.

The Prince sat tied to his horse without either arms or spurs, but the noble charger, as if he felt that his master's life was now entrusted to his safe-keeping, galloped forward with ten-fold energy.

Suddenly it became clear to the pursuers that the beams of the bridge had been severed and only the balustrade remained. "Stop!" they shouted in terror to the Prince, at the same time reining in their own horses. Then Ghyka turned towards them a haughty face, and leaning over his horse's head, pressed its flanks with his knees, and at the very moment when he had reached the dizzy chasm he laughed aloud as he raised his eagle-plumed cap in the air, and shouted to his pursuers: "Follow me, if you dare!"

The charger the same instant lowered its head upon its breast, and, with a well-calculated bound, leaped the empty space between the two sides of the bridge as lightly as a bird. The Prince as he flew through the air held his eagle-plumed cap in his hand, while his black locks fluttered round his bold face.

The terrified cavasses drew the reins of their horses tightly lest they should plunge after Gryllus; but one of them, carried away by his maddened steed, would also have made the bold leap but the fore feet of the horse barely grazed the opposite bank, and with a mortal yell it crashed down with its rider among the rocks of the stream below.

The Prince meanwhile, beneath the very eyes of the cavasses, loosened the cords from his legs on the opposite shore and also allowed himself time enough to break down the remaining balustrades of the bridge, one by one, and pitch them into the river. Then, remounting his steed, he ambled leisurely off whilst the cavasses gazed after him in helpless fury. A rapid two hours' gallop enabled him to overtake the carriage of his wife, who, according to his directions, had hastened without stopping towards Transylvania with the sole escort of the old horseman.

On overtaking the carriage he mounted the old man on his own nag, and sent him on before to Transylvania requesting the Prince to allow him and his wife to pass through Transylvania to the domains of the Kaiser. He himself took a seat in the carriage by the side of Mariska, who was quite rejoiced at her husband's deliverance, and forgot the anxieties still awaiting her.

According to the most rigorous calculations their pursuers would either have to go another way, or they might throw another bridge over the Sereth; but, in any case they had a day's clear start of them, which would be quite sufficient to enable them, travelling leisurely, to reach the borders of Transylvania, where the Seraskier of Moldavia had no jurisdiction.

In this hope they presently perceived the mountains of Szeklerland rising up before them, and the nearer they came to them the more lightly they felt their hearts beat, regarding the mountain range as a vast city of refuge stretching out before them.

They had already struck into that deep-lying road which leads to the Pass of Porgo, which, after winding along the bare hillside, plunges like a serpent into the shady flowering valleys beneath, and every now and then a mountain stream darted along the road beside them; above them the dangerous road looked like a

tiny notch in which a heavy wagon crawled slowly along, with lofty rocks apparently tottering to their fall above it in every direction.

And here galloping straight towards them, was a horseman in whom the Prince instantly recognised his *avant courier*.

Old Jova reached them in a state of exhaustion, and Gryllus also seemed ready to drop.

"Go no further, sir!" cried the terrified servant, "I have come all the way without stopping from Szamosújvár where the Prince is staying. I laid your request before him. 'For God's sake!' cried the Prince, clasping his hands together, 'don't let your master come here, or he'll ruin the whole lot of us. Olaj Beg has just come hither with the Sultan's command that if the Prince of Moldavia comes here he is to be handed over.'"

The Prince gazed gloomily in front of him, his lips trembled. Then he turned his face round and shading his eyes with his hand, gazed away into the distance. On the same road by which he had come a cloud of dust could be seen rapidly approaching.

"Those are our pursuers," he moaned despairingly; "there is nothing for it but to die."

"Nay, my master. Over yonder is a mountain path which can only be traversed on foot. With worthy Szeklers or Wallachs as our guides we may get all the way to Poland through the mountains. Why not take refuge there?"

"And my wife?" asked the Prince, looking round savagely and biting his lips in his distress; "she cannot accompany me."

All this time Mariska had remained, benumbed and speechless, gazing at her husband—her heart, her mind, stood still at these terrible tidings; but when she heard that her husband could be saved without her, she plunged out of the carriage and falling at his feet implored him, sobbing loudly, to fly.

"Save yourself," she cried; "do not linger here on my account another instant."

"And sacrifice you, my consort, to their fury?"

"They will not hurt me, for they do not pursue an innocent woman. God will defend me. You go into Transylvania; there live good friends of mine, whose husbands and fathers are the leading men in the State; there is the heroic Princess, there is the gentle Béldi with her angel daughter, there is Teleki's daughter Flora—we swore eternal friendship together once—they will mediate for us; and then, too, my rich father will gladly spend his money to spare our blood. And if I must suffer and even die, it will be for you, my husband. Save yourself! In Heaven's name I implore you to depart from me."

Ghyka reflected for a moment.

"Very well, I will take refuge in order to be able to save you."

And he pressed the pale face of his wife to his bosom.

"Make haste," said Mariska, "I also want to hasten. If die I must—I would prefer to die among Christians, in the sight of my friends and acquaintances. But you go on in front, for if they were to slay you before my eyes, it would need no sword to slay me; my heart would break from sheer despair."

"Come, sir, come!" said the old courier, seizing the hand of the Prince and dragging him away by force.

Mariska got into the carriage again, and told the coachman to drive on quickly. The Prince allowed himself to be guided by the old courier along the narrow pass, looking back continually so long as the carriage was visible, and mournfully pausing whenever he caught sight of it again from the top of some mountain-ridge.

"Come on, sir! come on!" the old servant kept insisting; "when we have reached that mountain summit yonder we shall be able to rest."

Ghyka stumbled on as heavily as if the mountain was pressing on his bosom with all its weight. He allowed himself to be led unconsciously among the steep precipices, clinging on to projecting bushes as he went along. God guarded him from falling a hundred times.

After half an hour's hard labour they reached the indicated summit, and as the courier helped his master up and they looked around them, Nature's magnificent tableau stood before them; and looking down upon a vast panorama, they saw the tiny winding road by which his wife had gone; and, looking still farther on, he perceived that the carriage had just climbed to the summit of a declivity about half a league off.

Ah! that sight gave him back his soul. He followed with his eyes the travelling coach, and as often as the coach ascended a higher hill, it again appeared in sight, and it seemed to him as if all along he saw inside it his wife, and his face brightened as he fancied himself kissing away her tears.

At that instant a loud uproar smote upon his ears. At the foot of the steep mountain, on the summit of which his wife had just come into sight again, he saw a troop of horsemen trotting rapidly along. These were the pursuers. They seemed scarcely larger than ants.

Ah! how he would have liked to have trampled those ants to death.

"You would pursue her, eh? Then I will stop you."

And with these words seizing a large grey rock from among those which were heaped upon the summit, he rolled it down the side of the mountain just as the Turks had reached a narrow defile.

With a noise like thunder the huge mass of rock plunged its way down the mountain-side, taking great leaps into the air whenever it encountered any obstacle. Ah! how the galloping rock plunged among the terrified horsemen—only a streak of blood remained in its track, horses and horsemen were equally crushed beneath it.

With a second, with a third rock also he greeted them. The cavasses, at their wits' end, fled back, and never stopped till they had clambered up the opposite ridge; they did not feel safe among the plunging rocks below and there they could be seen deliberating how it was possible to reach the road behind their backs.

Guessing their intention, the Prince sent his servant to fling a rock down upon them from the hillside beyond, which, as it came clattering down, made the cavasses believe that their enemies were in force, and they climbed higher up still.

"There they will remain till evening," thought the Prince to himself; "so they will not overtake Mariska after all."

And so it conveniently turned out. The cavasses, after consulting together for a long time fruitlessly as to what road they should take to get out of the dangerous pass, began to yell from their lofty perch at their invisible foes, threatening them with the highest displeasure of the Sultan if they did not allow them to pass

through in peace; and when a fresh shower of rocks came down by way of reply, they unsaddled their horses and allowing them to graze about at will, lit a fire and squatted down beside it.

Meanwhile, the hunted lady, exchanging her tired horses for four fresh ones in the first Transylvanian village she came to, pressed onwards without stopping. Travelling all night she reached Szamosújvár in the early morning. The Prince was no longer there. He had migrated in hot haste, they said, before the rising of the sun, to Klausenberg.

Mariska did not descend from her carriage, but only changed her horses. Three days and three nights she had already been travelling, without rest, in sickness and despair. And again she must hasten on farther. It was evening when they reached Klausenberg. The coachman, when he saw the towers in the distance, turned round to her with the comforting assurance that they would now be at Klausenberg very shortly. At these words the lady begged the coachman not to go so quickly, and when he lashed up his horses still more vigorously notwithstanding, and cast a look behind him, she also looked through the window at the back of the carriage and saw a band of horsemen galloping after them along the road.

So their pursuers were as near to them behind as Klausenberg was in front.

There was not a moment's delay. The coachman whipped up the horses, their nostrils steamed, foam fell from their lips, they plunged wildly forward, the pebbles flashed sparks beneath their hoofs, the carriage swayed to and fro on the uneven road, the persecuted lady huddled herself into a corner of the carriage, and prayed to God for deliverance.

Chapter XIV

OLAJ BEG.

The Prince was just then standing in the portico of his palace conversing with the Princess, whose face bore strong marks of the sufferings of the last few days. Shortly after the panic of Nagyenyed she had given birth to a little daughter, and the terror experienced at the time had had a bad effect on both mother and child.

Apafi's brow was also clouded. The Prince's heart was sore, and not merely on his own account. Whenever there was any distress in the principality he also was distressed, but his own sorrow he had to share alone.

For some days he had found no comfort in whatever direction he might turn. The Turks had made him feel their tyranny everywhere, and the foreign courts had listened to his tale of distress with selfish indifference; while the great men of the realm dubbed him a tyrant, the common folks sung lampoons upon his cowardice beneath his very windows; and when he took refuge in the bosom of his family he was met by a sick wife, who had ceased to find any joy in life ever since he had been made Prince.

A sick wife is omnipotent as regards her husband. If Anna had insisted upon *her* husband's quitting his princely palace, and returning with her to their quiet

country house at Ebesfalu—where there was no kingdom but the kingdom of Heaven—perhaps he would even have done that for her.

As the princely pair stood on the castle battlements, the din of the town grew deeper, and suddenly the rumble of a carriage, driven at full tilt, broke upon the dreamy stillness of the castle courtyard, and dashing into it stopped before the staircase; the door of the coach was quickly thrown open and out of it rushed a pale woman, who, rallying her last remaining strength, ran up the staircase and collapsed at the feet of the Prince as he hastened to meet her, exclaiming as she did so:

"I am Mariska Sturdza."

"For the love of God," cried the agitated Prince, "why did you come here? You have destroyed the state and me; you have brought ruin on yourself and on us."

The unfortunate lady was unable to utter another word. Her energy was exhausted. She lay there on the marble floor, half unconscious.

The Princess Apafi summoned her ladies-in-waiting, who, at her command, hastened to raise the lady in their arms and began to sprinkle her face with eau-de-Cologne.

"I cannot allow her to be brought into my house," cried the terrified Apafi; "it would bring utter destruction on me and my family."

The Princess cast a look full of dignity upon her husband.

"What do you mean? Would you hand this unfortunate woman over to her pursuers? In her present condition, too? Suppose *I* was obliged to fly in a similar plight, would you fling *me* out upon the high road instead of offering me a place of refuge?"

"But the wrath of the Sultan?"

"Yes; and the contempt of posterity?"

"Then would you have me bring ruin upon my throne and my family for the sake of a woman?"

"Better perish for the sake of a woman than do that woman to death. If you shut your rooms against her, I will open mine wide to receive her, and then you can tell the Sultan if you like that I have taken her."

Apafi felt that his wife's obstinacy was getting him into a hideous muddle. This audacious woman would listen to no reasons of state in any matter which interested her humanity.

What was he to do? He pitied the persecuted lady from the bottom of his heart, but the emissary of the Sublime Porte, Olaj Beg, had come to demand her with plenipotentiary power. If he did *not* shelter the persecuted lady he would pronounce himself a coward in the face of the whole world; if he *did* shelter her, the Porte would annihilate him!

In the midst of this dilemma, one of the gate-keepers came in hot haste to announce that a band of Turkish soldiers was at that moment galloping along the road, inquiring in a loud voice for the Princess of Wallachia.

Apafi leant in dumb despair against a marble pillar whilst Anna quickly ordered her women to carry the unconscious lady to her innermost apartments and summon the doctor. She then went out on the balcony, and perceiving that the cavasses had just halted in front of the palace, she cried to the gate-keepers:

"Close the gates!"

Apafi would have very much liked to have countermanded the order; but while he was still thinking about it, the gates were snapped to under the very noses of the cavasses.

They began angrily beating with the shafts of their lances against the closed gate, whereupon the Princess called down to them from the balcony with a sonorous, authoritative voice:

"Ye good-for-nothing rascals, wherefore all that racket? This is not a barrack, but the residence of the Prince. Perchance ye know it not, because fresh human heads are wont to be nailed over the gates of your Princes every day as a mark of recognition? If that is what you are accustomed to, your error is pardonable."

The cavasses were considerably startled at these words, and, looking up at the imperious lady, began to see that she really meant what she said. For a while they laid their heads together, and then turned round and departed.

Apafi sighed deeply.

"There is some hidden trick in this," said he, "but what it is God only knows."

A few moments later a müderris appeared from Olaj Beg at the gate of the Prince, and, being all alone, was admitted.

"Olaj Beg greets thee, and thou must come to him quickly," said he.

Anna had drawn near to greet her guest, but hearing that Olaj Beg summoned the Prince to appear before him, she approached the messenger, boiling over with wrath.

"Whoever heard," she said, "of a servant ordering his master about, or an ambassador summoning the Prince to whose Court he is accredited?"

But Apafi could only take refuge in a desperate falsehood.

"Poor Olaj Beg," he explained, "is very sick and cannot stir from his bed, and, indeed, he humbly begs me to pay him a visit. There is no humiliation in this—none at all, if I am graciously pleased to do it. He is an old man of eighty. I might be his grandson, he is wont to scold me as if I were his darling; I will certainly go to him, and put this matter right with him. You go to your sick guest and comfort her. I give you my word I will do everything to get her set free. For her sake I will humble myself."

The Princess Apafi's foresight already suggested to her that this humiliation would be permanent, but, perceiving that her own strength of mind was not contagious, she allowed her husband to depart.

Apafi prepared himself for his visit upon Olaj Beg. With a peculiar feeling of melancholy he did not put on his princely dolman of green velvet, but only the *köntös* of a simple nobleman, imagining that thus it would not be the Prince of Transylvania but the squire of Ebesfalu who was paying a visit on Olaj Beg. He went on foot to the house of Olaj Beg, accompanied by a single soldier, who had to put on his everyday clothes.

The dogs had been let loose in the courtyard, for the Beg was a great protector of animals, and used to keep open table in front of his dwelling for the wandering dogs of every town he came to.

Making his way through them, Apafi had to cross a hall and an ante-chamber, brimful with praying dervishes, who, squatting down with legs crossed, were reading aloud from books with large clasps, only so far paying attention to each other as to see which could yell the loudest.

The Prince did not address them, as it was clear that he would get no answer, but went straight towards the third door.

The chamber beyond was also full of spiders'-webs and dervishes, but a red cushion had been placed in the midst of it, and on this cushion sat a big, pale, grey man in a roomy yellow caftan. He also was holding a large book in front of him and reading painfully.

Apafi approached, and even ventured to address him.

"Merciful Olaj Beg, my gracious master, find a full stop somewhere in that book of yours, turn down the leaf at the proper spot, put it down, and listen to me."

Olaj Beg, on hearing the words of the Prince, put the book aside, and turning with a sweet and tender smile towards him, remarked with emotion:

"The angels of the Prophet bear thee up in all thy ways, my dear child. Heaven preserve every hair of thy beard, and the Archangel Izrafil go before thee and sweep every stone from thy path, that thy feet may not strike against them!"

With these words the Beg graciously extended his right hand to be kissed, blinking privily at the Prince; nor would Apafi have minded kissing it if they had been all alone, but in the presence of so many dervishes it would have been derogatory to his dignity; so, instead of doing so, he took the Beg's hand and provisionally placed it in his left hand and gave it a resounding thump with his right, and then shook it amicably as became a friend.

"Don't trouble thyself, my dear son, I will not suffer thee to kiss my hand," cried Olaj Beg, drawing back his hand and making a show of opposition so that everyone might fancy that Apafi was angry with him for not being allowed to kiss it.

"You have deigned to send for me," said Apafi, taking a step backwards; "tell me, I pray, what you desire, for my time is short. I am overwhelmed with affairs of state."

These last words Apafi pronounced with as majestic an intonation as possible.

Olaj Beg thereupon folded his hands together.

"Oh, my dear son!" said he, "the princely dignity is indeed a heavy burden. I see that quite well, nor am I in the least surprised that thou wishest to be relieved of it; but be of good cheer, the blessing of Heaven will come upon us when we are not praying for it; when thou dost least expect it the Sublime Sultan will have compassion upon thee, and will deliver thee of the heavy load which presses upon thy shoulders."

Apafi wrinkled his brows. The exordium was bad enough; he hastened towards the end of the business.

"Perchance, you have heard, gracious Olaj Beg! that the unfortunate Mariska Sturdza has taken refuge with us."

"It matters not," signified the Beg, with a reassuring wave of the hand.

"She took refuge in my palace without my knowledge," observed Apafi apologetically, "and what could I do when she was all alone? I couldn't turn her out of my house."

"There was no necessity. Thou didst as it became a merciful man to do."

"If you had seen her you would yourself have felt sorry for her—sick, half-dead, desperate, she flung herself at my feet, imploring compassion, and before I could reply to her she had fainted away. Perhaps even now she is dead."

“Oh, poor child!” cried Olaj Beg, folding both his hands and raising his eyes to Heaven.

“Her husband had left her in great misery, and alone she plunged into jeopardy,” continued Apafi, trying to justify the persecuted woman in every possible manner.

“Oh, poor, unhappy child!” cried Olaj Beg, shaking his head.

“And more than that,” sighed Apafi, “the poor woman is big with child.”

“What dost thou say?”

“Yes, sir, and flying day and night in all sorts of weathers from her pursuers in such a condition, you can imagine her wretched condition; she was scarce alive, she was on the very threshold of death.”

“Allah be gracious to her and extend over her the wings of his mercy!”

Apafi began to think that he had found Olaj Beg in a charitable humour.

“I knew that you would not be angry about her.”

“I am not angry, my son, I am not angry. My eyes overflow at her sad fate.”

“She, you know, had no share in her husband’s faults.”

“Far from it.”

“And it would not be right that an innocent woman should atone for what her husband has committed.”

“Certainly not.”

“Then do you think, my lord, that the Sublime Sultan will be merciful to this woman?”

“What a question! Have no fear for her!”

Apafi was not so simple as not to be struck by this exaggerated indulgence, the more satisfactory were the Beg’s replies the keener grew his feeling of anxiety. At last, much perturbed, he ventured to put this question:

“Gracious Beg! will you allow this unfortunate woman to rest in peace at my house, and can you assure me that the Sublime Sultan will espouse her cause?”

“The Holy Book says: ‘Be merciful to them that suffer and compassionate them that weep.’ Therefore, behold I grant thee thy desire: let this poor innocent woman repose in thy house in peace, let her rest thoroughly from her sufferings and let her enjoy the blessedness of peace till such time as I must take her from thee by the command of the Grand Seignior.”

Apafi felt his brain reel, so marvellous, so terrible was this graciousness of the Turk towards him.

“And when think you you will require this woman to be handed over?”

Olaj Beg, with a reassuring look, tapped Apafi on the shoulder, and said with a voice full of unction:

“Fret not thyself, my dear son! In no case will it be earlier than to-morrow morning.”

Apafi almost collapsed in his fright.

“To-morrow morning, do you say, my lord?”

“I promise thee she shall not be disturbed before.”

Apafi perceived that the man had been making sport with him all along. Rage began to seethe in his heart.

“But, my lord, I said nothing about one day. One day is the period allowed to condemned criminals.”

“Days and seasons come from Allah, and none may divide them.”

“Damn you soft sawder!” murmured Apafi between his teeth. “My lord,” he resumed, “would you carry away with you a sick woman whom only the most tender care can bring back from the shores of Death, and who, if she were now to set out for Buda, would never reach it, for she would die on the way?”

Olaj Beg piously raised his hands to Heaven.

“Life and death are inscribed above in the Book of Thora, and if it there be written in letters embellished with roses and tulips that Mariska Sturdza must die to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, die she will most certainly, though she lay upon musk and were anointed with the balm of life, and neither the prayers of the saints nor the lore of the Sages could save her—but if it be written that she is to live, then let the Angels of Death come against her with every manner of weapon and they shall not harm her.”

Apafi saw that he would have to speak very plainly to this crafty old man.

“Worthy Olaj Beg! you know that this realm has a constitution which enjoins that the Prince himself must not issue ordinances in the more weighty matters without consulting his counsellors. Now, the present case seems to me to be so important that I cannot inform you of my resolution till I have communicated it to my council.”

“It is well, my dear son, I have no objection. Speak with those servants of thine whom thou hast made thy masters; sit in thy council chamber and let the matter be well considered as it deserves to be; and if thereafter ye decide that the Princess shall accompany me, I will take her away and take leave of thee with great honour; but if it should so fall out that ye do not give her up to me, my dear son, or should allow her to escape from me—then will I take thee instead of her, together with thy brave counsellors, my sweet son.”

The Beg said these words in the sweetest, tenderest voice, as old grandfathers are wont to address their grandchildren, and descending from his pillows he stroked the Prince’s face with both his hands, and kissed him on the temples with great good will, quite covering his head with his long white beard.

Apafi felt as if the whole room were dancing around him. He did not speak a word, but turned on his axis and went right out. He himself did not know how he got through the first door, but by the time he had shut the second door behind him he bethought him that he was still the Prince of Transylvania, and by descent one of the first noblemen of the land, whereas Olaj Beg was only a nasty, dirty Turkish captain, who had been a camel-driver in the days of his youth, and yet had dared to speak to him, the Prince, like that! By the time he had reached the third door he had reflected that in the days when he was nothing but the joint-tenant of Ebesfalu, if Olaj Beg had dared to treat him so shamefully, he would have broken his bald head for him with a stout truncheon. But had he not just such a stout truncheon actually hanging by his side? Yes, he had! and he would go back and strike Olaj Beg with it, not exactly on the head perhaps, but, at any rate, on the back that he might remember for the rest of his life the *stylus curialis* of Transylvania.

And with that he turned back from the third door with very grave resolves.

But when he had re-opened the second door he bethought him once more that such violence might be of great prejudice to the realm, and besides, there was not

very much glory after all in striking an old man of eighty. But at any rate he would tell him like a man what it had not occurred to him to say in the first moment of his surprise.

So when he had opened the first door and was in the presence of Olaj Beg, he stood there on the threshold with the door ajar, and said to him in a voice of thunder:

"Hearken, Olaj Beg! I have come back simply to tell you—"

Olaj Beg looked at him.

"What dost thou say, my good son?"

"This," continued Apafi in a very much lower key, "that it will take time to summon the council, for Béldi lives at Bodola, Teleki at Gernyeszeg, Csaky at Déva, and until they come together you can do what you think best: you may remain here or go"—and with that he turned back, and only when he had slammed to the door he added—"to hell!"

Chapter XV

THE WOMEN'S DEFENCE.

This incident was the occasion of great affliction to the Estates of Transylvania. The counsellors assembled at the appointed time at the residence of the Prince, who at that moment would have felt happier as a Tartar captive than as the ruler of Transylvania.

On the day of the session everyone appeared in the council chamber with as gloomy a countenance as if he were about to pronounce his own death-warrant.

They took their places in silence, and everyone took great care that his sword should not rattle. There were present: old John and young Michael Bethlen, Paul Béldi, Caspar Kornis, Ladislaus Csaky, Joshua Kapi, and the protonotarius, Francis Sárpataky. For the Prince, there had just been prepared a new canopied throne, with three steps; it was the first time he had sat on it. Beside it was an empty arm-chair, reserved for Michael Teleki.

As soon as the guard of the chamber announced that the counsellors had assembled, the Prince at once appeared, accompanied by Michael Teleki and Stephen Naláczi.

It could be seen from the Prince's face that for at least two hours Teleki had been filling his head with talk. Nalaczi greeted everyone present with a courtly smile, but nobody smiled back at him. Teleki, with cold gravity, led the Prince to the throne. The latter on first looking up at the throne, stood before it as if thunderstruck, and seemed to be deliberating for a moment whether it ought not to be taken away and a simple chair put in its place. But after thinking it well out he mounted the steps, and, sighing deeply, took his seat upon it.

Michael Teleki stood silent in his place for some time, as if he was collecting his thoughts. His eyes did not travel along the faces of those present as they generally did to watch the effect of his words, but were fixed on the clasp of his kalpag, and

his voice was much duller than at other times, often sinking to tremulous depths, except when he pulled himself together and tried to give it a firmer tone.

"Your Highness, your Excellencies,—God has reserved peculiar trials for our unfortunate nation. One danger has scarce passed over us when we plump into another; when we try to avoid the lesser perils, we find the greater ones directly in our path, and we end in sorrow what we began in joy. Scarcely have we got over the tidings of the battle of St. Gothard (we had our own melancholy reasons for not participating therein), and the consequent annihilation of the far-reaching designs of the Turkish Empire, by the peace contracted between the two great Powers, amidst whose quarrels our unhappy country is buffeted about as if between hammer and anvil, when we have a fresh and still greater occasion for apprehension. For the generals of the Turkish Sultan impute the loss of the battle to the premature flight of Prince Ghyka, and at the same time hold us partly responsible for it—and certainly, had our soldiers stood in the place of the Wallachian warriors, although they would not have liked fighting their fellow-Magyars, nevertheless, if once they had been in for it, they would not have ran away and so the battle would not have been lost—wherefore the wrath of the Sublime Sultan was so greatly kindled against both the neighbouring nations, that he sent his cavasses to seize the Prince of Moldavia and carry him in chains to Stambul with his whole family. As for Transylvania, but for the mercy of God and the goodwill of certain Turkish statesmen, we might have seen it suddenly converted into a sandjak or province, and a fez-wearing Pasha on the throne of his Highness. Now it has so happened that the Prince of Moldavia, wresting himself and his wife out of the hands of their pursuers, took the shortest road to Transylvania. We sent a message to them that on no account were they to try to come here, as their flight would cost us more than a Tartar invasion. The Prince, therefore, took refuge in the mountains, but let his wife continue her journey, and, in an evil hour for us and herself, she arrived here a few days ago with the knowledge and under the very eyes of the Sultan's plenipotentiary. The husband having escaped, the whole wrath of the Sultan is turned upon the wife and upon us also if we try to defend her. What, then, are we to do? If we had to choose between shame and death, I should know what to say; but here our choice is only between two kinds of shame: either to hand over an innocent, tender woman, who has appealed to us for protection, or see a Turkish Pasha sitting on the throne of the Prince!"

"But there's a third course, surely," said Béldi, "by way of petition?"

"I might indeed make the request," interrupted Apafi, "but I know very well what answer I should get."

"I do not mean petitioning the envoy," returned Béldi. "Who would humiliate himself by petitioning the servant when he could appeal to the master?"

At this Apafi grew dumb; he could not bring forward the fact that he had already petitioned the servant.

"I believe that Béldi is right," said young Michael Bethlen, "and that is the only course we can take. I am well acquainted with the mood of an eastern Despot when he gets angry, and I know that at such times it is nothing unusual for him to level towns to the ground and decapitate viceroys; but fortunately for Transylvania it is situated in Europe, where one state has some regard for

another, and it is the interest of all the European kingdoms to maintain a free state between themselves and the Ottoman Empire, even if it be only a small one like Transylvania. And it seems to me that if our petition be supported at Stambul by the French, Austrian, and Polish ambassadors, there will be no reason for the Sultan, especially after such a defeat as the last one, to send a Pasha to Transylvania. And, finally, if we show him that our swords have not rusted in their scabbards, and that we know how to draw them on occasion, he will not be disposed to do so."

The youth's enthusiastic speech began to pour fresh confidence into the souls of those who heard him, and their very faces appeared to brighten because of it.

Teleki shook his head slowly.

"I tell your Excellencies it will be a serious business," said he. "I am obliged to arouse you from an agreeable dream by confronting you with a rigorous fact. Europe has not the smallest care for our existence; we only find allies when they have need of our sacrifices; let us begin to petition, and they know us no more. It is true that at one time I said something very different, but time is such a good master that it teaches a man more in one day than if he had gone through nine schools. In consequence of the battle of St. Gothard, peace has been concluded between the two Emperors. I have read every article of it, every point, and we are left out of it altogether, as if we were a nation quite unworthy of consideration. Yet the French, the English, and the Polish ministers were there, and I can say that not one of them received so much pay from his own court as he received from us. If they want war, oh! then we are a great and glorious nation; but when peace is concluded they do not even know that we are there. In war we may lead the van, but in the distribution of rewards we are left far behind. And now the Pasha of Buda, who is bent upon our destruction and would like to set a pasha over Transylvania, after the last defeat, has sent down Yffim Beg to us to go from village to village demanding why the arrears of taxes have not been paid, and then he is coming to the Prince to ask the cause of the remissness and threaten him with the vengeance of the Pasha of Buda."

There was a general murmur of indignation.

"Ah, gentlemen, let us confess to each other that we play at being masters in our own home, but in fact we are masters there no longer. We may trust to our efforts and rely upon our rights, but we have none to help us; we have no allies either on the right hand or on the left; we have only our masters. We may change our masters, but we shall never win confederates. The Power which stands above us is only awaiting an opportunity to carry out its designs upon us, and no one could render it a better service in Transylvania than by raising his head against it. We have all of us a great obligation laid upon us: to recognise the little we possess, take care to preserve it, and, if the occasion arise, insist upon it. It is true that while the sword is in our hands we may defend all Europe with it; but let our sword once be broken and our whole realm falls to pieces and the heathen will trample upon us in the sight of all the nations. We shall bleed for a half-century or so, and nobody will come to our assistance; the gates of our realm will be guarded by our enemies; and, like the scorpion in a fiery circle, we shall only turn the bitterness of our hearts against ourselves. Do you want reasons, then, why we should not defend those hunted creatures who seek a refuge with us? The World

and Fate have settled their accounts with us; this realm is left entirely to its own devices. Matters standing thus, if we refuse to deliver up to Olaj Beg the above-mentioned Princess of Moldavia, the armies of the Pashas of Buda and Grosswardein will instantly receive orders to reduce Transylvania to the rank of a vassal state of the Porte. There is no room here for regret or humanity, self-preservation is our one remaining duty and the duty of self-preservation demands that where we have no choice, we should do voluntarily what we may be forced to do."

Teleki had scarce finished these words than an attendant announced that the Princess of Moldavia requested admittance into the council chamber.

Apafi would have replied in the negative, but Teleki signified that she might as well come in.

A few moments later the attendant again appeared and requested permission for the ladies of the Princess's suite to accompany their mistress, as she was too weak to walk alone.

Teleki consented to that also.

The counsellors cast down their eyes when the door opened. But there is a sort of spell which forces a man to look in the very direction in which he would not, in which he fears to look, and lo and behold! when the door opened and the hunted woman entered with her suite, a cry of astonishment resounded from every lip. For of what did the woman's suite consist? It consisted of the most eminent ladies of Transylvania. The wives and daughters of all the counsellors present accompanied the unfortunate lady, foremost among them being the Princess and Dame Michael Teleki, on whose shoulders she leaned; and last of all came old Dame Bethlen, with dove-white hair. All the most respectable matrons, the loveliest wives, and fairest maidens of the realm were there.

The unfortunate Princess, whose pale face was full of suffering, advanced on the arms of her supporters towards the throne of the Prince. Her knees tottered beneath her, her whole body trembled like a leaf, she opened her lips, but no sound proceeded from them.

"Courage, my child," whispered Anna Bornemissza, pressing her hand; whereupon the tears suddenly burst from the eyes of the unfortunate woman, and, breaking from her escort, she flung herself at the feet of the Prince, embracing his knees with her convulsive arms, and raising towards him her tear-stained face, exclaimed with a heart-rending voice: "Mercy! … Mercy!"

A cold dumbness sat on every lip; it was impossible for a time to hear anything but the woman's deep sobbing. The Prince sat like a statue on his throne, the steps of which Mariska Sturdza moistened with her tears. The silence was painful to everyone, yet nobody dared to break it.

Teleki smoothed away his forelock from his broad forehead, but he could not smooth away the wrinkles which had settled there. He regretted that he had given occasion to this scene.

"Mercy!" sobbed the poor woman once more, and half unconsciously her hand slipped from Apafi's knees. Aranka Béldi rushed towards her and rested her declining head on her own pretty childlike bosom.

Then Anna Bornemissza stepped forward, and after throwing a stony glance upon all the counsellors present, who cast down their eyes before her, looked Apafi

straight in the face with her own bright, penetrating, soul-searching eyes, till her astonished husband was constrained to return her glance almost without knowing it.

"My petition is a brief one," said Dame Apafi in a low, deep, though perfectly audible voice. "An unfortunate woman, whom the Lord of Destiny did not deem to be sufficiently chastened by a single blow, has lost in one day her husband, her home, and her property; she implores us now for bare life. You see her lying in the dust asking of you nothing more than leave to rest—a petition which Dzengis Khan's executioners would have granted her. That is all she asks, but we demand more. The destiny of Transylvania is in your hands, but its honour is ours also; ye are summoned to decide whether our children are to be happy or miserable. But speak freely to us and say if you wish them to be honourable men or cowards. And I ask you which of us women would care to bear the name of a Kornis, a Csaky, or an Apafi, if posterity shall say of the bearers of these names that they surrendered an innocent woman to her heathen pursuers and constrained their own sons thereby to renounce the names of their fathers? Look not so darkly upon me, Master Michael Teleki, for my soul is dark enough without that. An unhappy woman is on her knees before you, hoping that she will find you to be men. The women of Transylvania stand before you, hoping to find you patriots. We beg you to have compassion for the sake of the honour of our children."

Teleki, upon whom the eyes of the Princess had flashed fiercely during the speech, as if accepting the challenge, answered in a cold, stony voice:

"Here, madam, we dispense justice only, not mercy or honour."

"Justice!" exclaimed Anna. "What! If a husband has offended, is his innocent wife, whose only fault is that she loves the fugitive, is she, I say, to suffer punishment in his stead? Where is the justice of that?"

"Justice is often another name for necessity."

"Then who are all ye whom I see here? Are ye the chief men of Transylvania or Turkish slaves? This is what I ask, and what we should all of us very much like to know: is this the council chamber of the free and constitutional state of Transylvania, or is it the ante-chamber of Olaj Beg?"

The gentlemen present preserved a deep silence. This was a question to which they could not give a direct answer.

"I demand an answer to my question," cried Dame Apafi in a loud voice.

"And what good will the answer do you, my lady?" inquired Teleki, pressing his index-finger to his lips.

"I shall at any rate know whether the place in which we now stand is worthy of us."

"It is not worthy, my lady. The present is no time for the Magyars to be proud that they dwell in Transylvania; we are ashamed to be the responsible ministers of a down-trodden, deserted, and captive nation. This your Highness ought to know as well as any of us, for it was a Turkish Pasha who placed your husband on the Prince's seat. And, assuredly, it would be a far less grief to us to lose our heads than to bend them humbly beneath the derisive honour of being the leaders of a people lying among ruins. But, at the most, history will only be able to say of us that we humbly bowed before necessity, that we bore the yoke of the stranger without dignity, that running counter to the feelings of our hearts and the

persuasions of our minds, we covered our faces with shame, and yet that that very shame and dishonour saved the life of Transylvania, and that poor spot of earth which remained in our hands saved the whole country from a bloody persecution. We are the victims of the times, madam; help us to conceal the blush of shame and share it with us. There, you have the answer to your question."

Dame Apafi grew as pale as death, her head drooped, and she clasped her hands together.

"So we have come to this at last? Formerly valour was the national virtue, now it is cowardice. What is our own fate likely to be if we reject this poor woman? What has happened to-day to a Princess Ghyka might easily happen to the wives of Kornis and Csaky and Béldi to-morrow. For their husbands' faults they may be carried away captive, brought to the block, if only God does not have mercy upon them, for you yourselves say that this would be right. Why do you look at us? You, Béldi, Kornis, Teleki, Csaky, Bethlen, here stand your wives and daughters. Draw forth your coward swords, and if you dare not slay men, at least slay women; kill them before it occurs to the Turkish Padishah to drag them by the hair into his harem."

As Dame Apafi mentioned the names of the men one after another, their wives and daughters, loudly weeping, rushed towards them, and hiding their heads in their bosoms, with passionate sobs, begged for the unfortunate Princess, and behold the eyes of the men also filled with tears, and nothing could be heard in the room but the sobbing of the husbands mingled with the sobbing of their wives.

On Teleki's breast also hung the gentle Judith Veér and his own daughter Flora, and the great stony-hearted counsellor stood trembling between them; and although his cast-iron features assumed with an effort a rigorous expression, nevertheless a couple of unrestrainable tears suddenly trickled down the furrows of his face.

The Prince turned aside on his throne, and covering his face, murmured: "No more, Anna! No more!"

"Oh, Apafi!" cried the Princess bitterly; "if perish I must it shall not be by your hand. Anna Bornemissza has strength enough to meet death if there be no choice between that and shame. Be content, if Olaj Beg demands my death, I shall at least be spared the unpleasantness of falling at your feet in supplication. And now, pronounce your decision, but remember that every word you say will resound throughout the Christian world."

Teleki dried the tears from his face, made his wife and daughter withdraw, and said in a voice tremulous with emotion:

"In vain should I deny it, my tears reveal that I have a feeling heart. I am a man, I am a father, and a husband. If I were nothing but Michael Teleki, I should know how to sacrifice myself on behalf of persecuted innocence; and if my colleagues around me were only companions-in-arms, I should say to them, gird on your swords, lie in wait, rush upon the Turkish escort of the Princess, and deliver her out of their hands—if we perish, a blessing will be upon us. But in this place, in these chairs, it is not ourselves who feel and speak. The life, the death of all Transylvania depends upon us. And my last word is that we incontinently deliver up Mariska Sturdza to the ambassador of the Porte. If my colleagues decide

otherwise, I will agree to it, I will take my share of the responsibility, but I shall have saved my soul anyhow. Speak, gentlemen, and if you like, vote against me."

The silence of death ensued, nobody spoke a word.

"What, nobody speaks?" cried Dame Apafi in amazement. "Nobody! Ah! let us leave this place! There is not a man in the whole principality."

And with these words the lady withdrew from the council chamber. Her attendants followed her sorrowfully, one by one, tearfully bidding adieu to the unfortunate Princess. Aranka Béldi was the last to part from her. During the whole of this mournful scene her eyes had remained tearless, but she had knelt down the whole time by Mariska's side, holding her closely embraced, and assuring her that God would deliver her, she must fear nothing.

When all the ladies had withdrawn, and Dame Béldi beckoned her daughter to follow her, she tenderly kissed the face of her friend and whispered in her ear: "I have still hope, fear not, we will save you!" and smiling at her with her bright blue eyes like an angel of consolation, got up and withdrew.

The Princess, tearless, speechless, then allowed herself to be conducted away by the officers of the council chamber.

The men remained sitting upon their chairs, downcast and sorrowful. Every bosom was oppressed, and every heart was empty, and the thought of their delivered fatherland was a cold consolation for the grief they felt that the Government of Transylvania should fling an innocent woman back into the throat of the monster which was pursuing her.

The silence still continued when, suddenly, the door was violently burst open, and shoving aside the guards right and left, Yffim Beg entered the room. He had been sent by Hassan Pasha to levy contributions on the Prince and the people.

The rough Turkish captain looked round with boorish pride upon the silent gentlemen, who were still depressed by the preceding incident, and perceiving that here he had to do with the humble, without so much as bowing, he strode straight up to the Prince, and placing one foot on the footstool before the throne, and throwing his head haughtily back, flung these words at him:

"In the name of my master, the mighty Hassan Pasha, I put this question to thee, thou Prince of the Giaurs, why hast thou kept back for so long the tribute which is due to the Porte? Who hath caused the delay—thou, or the farmers of the taxes, or the tax-paying people? Answer me directly, and take care that thou liest not!"

The Prince looked around with wrinkled brows as if looking for something to fling at the head of the fellow. He regretted that the inkstand was so far off.

But Teleki handed a sheet of parchment to Sárpataky, the clerk of the council.

"Read our answer to the Pasha's letter," said he; "as for you—sir I will not call you—listen to what is written therein. 'Beneficent Hassan Pasha, we greatly regret that you bother yourself about things which are already settled. We do not ask you why you came so late to the battle of St. Gothard. Why do you ask us, then, why we are so late with the taxes? We will answer for ourselves at the proper time and place. Till then, Heaven bless you, and grant that misfortune overwhelm you not just when you would ruin others.' When you have written all that down, hand it to his Highness the Prince for signature."

The gentlemen present had fallen from one surprise into another. Michael Teleki, who a moment before, against the inclinations of his own heart and mind, had tried to compel the land to submit to the demand of Olaj Beg, could in the next moment send such a message to the powerful Vizier of Buda.

But Teleki knew very well that the storm which was passing over the country on account of the Princess of Moldavia was sure to rebound on the head of the Vizier of Buda. The Sultan was seeking for an object on which to wreak his wrath because of the lost battle, and if the Pasha of Buda did not succeed in making the Government of Transylvania the victim, he would fall a victim himself.

As for Yffim Beg, he did not quite know whether a thunder-bolt had plunged down close beside him, or whether he was dreaming. There he stood like a statue, unable to utter a word, and only looked on stupidly while the letter was being written before his very eyes, while Apafi's pen scraped the parchment as he subscribed his signature, while they poured the sand over it, folded it up, impressed it with an enormous seal, and thrust it into his palm.

Only then did he emerge somewhat from his stupor.

"Do ye think I am mad enough to carry this letter back with me to Buda?"

And with these words he seized the letter at both ends, tore it in two, and flung it beneath the table.

"Write another!" said he, "write it nicely, for my master, the mighty Hassan Pasha, will strangle the whole lot of you."

Teleki turned coldly towards him.

"If you don't like the letter, worthy müderris, you may go back without any letter at all."

"I am no müderris, but Yffim Beg. I would have thee know that, thou dog; and I won't go without a letter, and I won't let you all go till ye have written another."

And with these words he sat down on the steps of the Prince's throne and crossed his legs, so that two were sitting on the throne at the same time, the Beg and Apafi.

"Guards!" cried Apafi in a commanding voice, "seize this shameless fellow, tie him on to a horse's back and drive him out of the town."

They needed not another word. One of the guards immediately rushed forward to where Yffim Beg was still sitting on a footstool with legs crossed, and took him under the arm, while another of them grasped him firmly by the collar, and raising him thus in the air, kicking and struggling, carried him out of the room in a moment. The Beg struck, bit, and scratched, but it was all of no avail. The merciless drabants set him on the back of a horse in the courtyard, without a saddle, tied his feet together beneath the horse's belly, placed the bridle of the steed in the hands of a stable-boy, while another stable-boy stood behind with a good stout whip; and so liberally did they interpret the commands of the chief counsellor, that they escorted the worthy gentleman, not only out of the town, but beyond the borders of the realm.

Chapter XVI

A FIGHT FOR HIS OWN HEAD.

At Buda, while Hassan Pasha was fighting with the army of the German Emperor, Yffim Beg was preparing the triumphal arches through which the victors were to pass on their return, adorning them with green branches and precious carpets, and leaving room for the standards to be captured from the Germans and Hungarians. The bridge was also repaired and strengthened to support the weight of the heavy gun-carriages and cannon which Montecuculi was to have abandoned, and at the same time a large space on the Rákás was railed in where all the slaves of all the nations, including women and children, were to be impounded.

And after all these amiable preparations the terrible message reached the worthy Yffim Beg from Hassan Pasha that he was to place all his movable chattels, gold and silver, on a fugitive footing, barricade the fortress, cut away the bridge so that the enemy might not be able to cross it, and follow him with the whole harem, beyond the Raab, for who could tell whether they would ever see the fortress of Buda again.

Yffim Beg was not particularly pleased with this message, but without taking long to think about it, he put the damsels of the harem into carriages, sent them off along the covered way adjoining the water-gate, in order to make as little disturbance as possible, and, as soon as they were on the other side of the bridge, ordered it to be destroyed and the garrison of the fortress to defend themselves as best they could.

He reached the Turkish army to find the opposing hosts drawn up against each other on different sides of the river, across which they bombarded each other from time to time, without doing much damage.

The Pasha's pavilion was well in the rear, out of cannon-shot; he was delighted when he saw Yffim Beg, and could not take his fill of kissing Azrael, who was lovelier and more gracious than ever.

"Remain here," he said to his favourites, embracing the pair of them. "I must retire now to the interior of my pavilion to pray for an hour or so with the dervishes, for a great and grievous duty will devolve upon me in an hour's time—two great Turkish nobles, Kucsuk Pasha and his son, are to be condemned to death."

Azrael started as violently as if a serpent had crept into her bosom.

"How have they offended?" she asked, scarce able to conceal her agitation.

"Against the precepts of the Prophet they engaged in battle on a day of ill-omen; they have cast dirt on the victorious half-moon, and must wash off the stain with their blood."

Hassan withdrew; Azrael remained alone in the tent with the Beg.

"I saw thee shudder," said Yffim, fixing his sharp eyes on the face of Azrael.

"Death chooses the thirteenth; he leaped past me at this very moment."

"And on whom has the fatal thirteen fallen?"

"On someone who stands beside me or behind me."

"Behind thee in the tent outside is Feriz Beg."

"But thou art beside me."

"I am too young to die yet."

“And is not he also?”

“He of whom Hassan saith: *He hath sinned!* becomes old and withered on the spot.”

“And hast thou done nothing for which thou shouldst die?”

“My beard will grow white because of my loyalty; life is long in the shadow of Hassan.”

“But how long will Hassan have a shadow?”

“Till his night cometh—but that is still far off.”

“Hast thou not heard of the case of Ajas Pasha, Yffim?—of Ajas, who was the mightiest of all the Pashas?”

“He was the Sultan’s son-in-law.”

“The Grand Seignior gave him his own daughter to wife, and loaded him with every favour. One day Ajas lost a battle against the Zrinyis. It was not a great defeat, but the Sultan was wrath and beheaded Ajas Pasha.”

“H’m! I recollect, it was a sad story.”

“And dost thou remember the story of the faithful Hiassar? Ajas charged him to bring to him before his death his favourite wife, not his whole harem which thou hast brought to Hassan Pasha, but only his favourite wife, that he might take leave of her; and dost thou know that for doing this thing the Sultan had Hiassar roasted to death in a copper ox? For a disgraced favourite possesses nothing—all he had is the Sultan’s, his treasures, his wives and his children; and whoever lays his hand upon them is robbing the Sultan. Who knows, Yffim Beg, but what at this moment I may not be the Sultan’s slave-girl? and from slave-girl to favourite is but a step, and thou knowest it would be but a short step for me.”

“What accursed things thou art saying.”

“The wife of Ajas Beg was the Sultan’s favourite at the time when Hiassar was burnt, and a word from her would have saved him. But she said it not, because she was wrath with him; methinks the woman loved him once, and the slave despised her love. Give me my mandoline, Yffim, I would sing a song.”

The odalisk lay back upon the bed, while Yffim anxiously paced to and fro like a hyena fallen into a snare. The story just related had a striking resemblance to his own, and it would not take very much to give it a similar termination.

Suddenly he stood before the damsel, who nonchalantly strummed the strings of her instrument.

“What dost thou want?”

“Ask not what thou knowest.”

“Thou wouldst save Feriz?”

“I will save him.”

“I swear by Allah it is not to be done. Die he must, if only to tame thee; for if he remain alive thou wilt destroy the lot of us sooner or later.”

Azrael collapsed at the feet of the Beg. Sobbing, she embraced his knees.

“Oh, be merciful! Say but a word for him to the general. I love the youth as thou canst see and dost very well know. Do not let him perish!”

Like all little souls, Yffim Beg became all the bolder at these supplicating words, and seizing Azrael by the arms, roughly pulled her to her feet, and whispered in her ear with malicious joy:

“I’ll make thee a present of his head.”

At these words the woman raised her head, her eyes like those of a furious she-wolf seemed to glow with green fire, her tresses curled like serpents round her bosom. She said not a word, but her tightly clenched teeth kept back a whole hell of dumb fury.

At that moment the Vizier returned.

Azrael at once put on a smile. Hassan could not see what was seething in her heart.

Yffim approached the Pasha confidentially.

"Does the Sultan know of thy disaster?"

"He has heard it since."

"It would be as well to send me with gifts to the Porte."

"Ask not that honour for thyself, Yffim; learn, rather, that whomsoever I send to Stambul now is as good as sent to Paradise. The Sultan's wrath is kindled, and he can only quench it with blood."

All the blood quitted Yffim's own face.

"Then thou hast thy fears, my master?"

"His rage demands blood, and the blood of a great man, too. Which of us? That is all one, but a great man must die. If I cannot sacrifice someone in my place I shall perish myself, but there are men of equal value to myself from whom I can choose. There are two especially—Kucsuk and his son. They began the battle; if they had not begun it, there would have been no battle; and if there had been no battle, there would have been no disaster. They are Death's sons already. The third is the Prince of Moldavia. He was the first to fly from the fight; he had a secret understanding with the Christians. He is a son of Death also. I can throw in the Prince of Transylvania also, because he kept away from the battle altogether and was late with his tribute. Had he sent it sooner, we should have had money; and if we had had money, we should have been able to have bought hay; and if we had had hay the soldiers would not have hastened on the battle and so lost it. He also is a son of Death, therefore. Go thou into Transylvania and bring him hither to me."

Azrael listened to all this with great attention. Yffim Beg regarded her with a radiant countenance, as much as to say: "You see our heads won't ache yet!"

The odalisk, however, trembled no longer; she pressed her lips tightly together, and as if she was quite certain of what she was about to do, she pressed her sweetly smiling face close to that of the Vizier, and hanging on his arms, whispered to him:

"O Hassan, how my soul would rejoice if I could see flow the blood of thine enemies."

Hassan sat the damsel on his knees, and his lips sported with her twining tresses.

Yffim Beg was in such a mighty good humour at being commissioned by Hassan to go as ambassador to the Prince of Transylvania, and so blindly exalted by such a mark of confidence, that he fancied he could well afford to torment Azrael a little.

"Whilst thou wert away, my master," said he, "thy damsel implored me to grant her a favour, which I dare not do without first asking thy permission."

Azrael regarded the smiling Beg with sparkling eyes, anxiously awaiting what he would be bold enough to betray.

“What was it?—speak, Yffim Beg,” remarked Hassan wildly.

“Thou and the other Pashas are about to condemn a youth to death—young Feriz Beg, I mean.”

“Well?” said Hassan frowning, while the odalisk whom he held embraced trembled all over.

“Azrael would like to see the young man die.”

The girl grew pale at these words; her heart for a moment ceased to beat, and then began fiercely to throb again.

“A foolish wish,” said Hassan; “but if thou desire it, be it so! Be present at the meeting of the Pashas, stand behind the curtains by my side, and thou shalt hear and see everything.”

Azrael imprinted a long and burning kiss on Hassan’s forehead with a face full of death, and stood behind the curtain holding the folds together with her hands.

“If thou shouldst faint,” whispered Yffim Beg sarcastically, “thou shalt have a vessel of musk from me.”

Azrael laughed so loudly that Yffim fancied she must have gone mad.

“And now call the Pashas and draw the curtain of the tent,” commanded Hassan.

At the invitation of Yffim all the officers of the camp came to the pavilion and took their seats in a circle on cushions. Last of all came the Grand Vizier, Kiuprile, a big, stout, angry man, who, without looking at anyone, sat down on the cushion beside Hassan and turned his back upon him.

Then the roll of drums was heard, and Kucsuk Pasha and Feriz Beg, well guarded, were brought in from different sides—Kucsuk on the left hand, and Feriz on the right.

“Look!” whispered Azrael to Hassan from behind the curtain; “look how proud they are, the son on the right, the father on the left. They seem to be encouraging each other with their glances.”

Hassan nodded his head as if thanking his favourite for assisting his weak eyes, and as both figures came within the obscurity of the tent, where the light was not very good at the best of times, acting on the hint given, he turned towards the aged Kucsuk Pasha and cried:

“Thou immature youth, step back till I speak to thee.”

Then, turning to young Feriz Beg, he said:

“Step forward, thou hardened old traitor! Wherefore didst thou leave the armies of the Sublime Sultan in the lurch?”

Feriz Beg, as if a weapon against his persecutors had suddenly been put into his hand, stepped boldly right up to Hassan Pasha, and exclaimed in a bold voice, which rang though the tent:

“Thou art the traitor, not I; for thou darest to hold the office of general when thou art blind and canst not distinguish two paces off father from son, or an enemy from a friend.”

Hassan sprang in terror from his carpet when he heard Kucsuk’s son speak instead of Kucsuk.

“That is not true,” he stammered, changing colour.

“Not true!” replied Feriz stiffly; “then, if thine eyes be good, wilt thou tell me what regiment is now passing thy tent with martial music?”

The tent be it understood was open towards the plain overlooking the whole camp and the river beyond.

A military band was just then crossing the ground not far from the tent, quite alone; no regiment was coming after it.

“Methinks, thou mutinous dog, ‘tis no answer to my question to inquire what regiment is now passing by, for it maybe that I know better than thou why it has arrived; nor is it part of my duty to mention therabble by name; suffice it that I hear the trumpets and see the banners.”

The Pashas looked at each other; there was neither regiment nor banners.

“So that’s it, eh?” said Kiuprile, spitting in front of him; and with that he rose from his place, and, without looking at Hassan, took Kucsuk and Feriz by the arm. “Come!” said he to the other generals—“you can go now!” he cried to the guards, and the whole assembly withdrew from the tent.

Hassan fell back on his carpet. He himself had betrayed his great defect.

Azrael rushed from her hiding-place.

“Oh, my master!” she cried; “thou didst wrongly interpret my words, and so made everything go wrong.”

“I am lost,” he stammered, and quite beside himself he plunged into the interior of the tent to pray with the dervishes.

Yffim Beg stood there as if his soul had been filched from him; while Azrael approached him with a smile of devilish scorn and stroked his face down with her hand.

“Dost thou fancy thou wilt require another good word for thee?”

“I can betray thee.”

“Thou couldst if thou didst but know which of the two is to live longest—Hassan or I.”

Two hours after this scene there was a private conversation between Hassan Pasha and Yffim Beg, from which even Azrael was excluded. The interview over, Yffim Beg departed quickly from the camp. The general had sent him to Transylvania to go in his name from village to village to make a general inspection, and ask the magistrates why the common folks did not pay the taxes at the proper time. He was thence to go to the Prince and ask the cause of this delay in the transmission of taxes; thus either the people or the Prince would be held responsible. Hassan for a long time had had a scheme in his head of seizing Transylvania by force of arms, whereby, on the one hand, he would win the favour of the Porte, by adding a new subject state to Turkish territory, and, on the other hand, would secure for himself a good easy princely chair instead of a dangerously-jolting general’s saddle.

At the same time Olaj Beg was worrying Apafi to seize the escaped Princess of Moldavia and send her to Hassan Pasha, who was well aware that the silken cord would be constantly dangling before his eyes till he had found someone else whose neck he could jeopardise instead of his own.

Kucsuk and his son had escaped from his talons, but he had just heard from Olaj Beg that the Moldavian Princess was with Apafi, and in an interesting condition, so that there was every prospect of a young Prince being born. Here, then, in case of necessity, was a person who could be handed over, and in case she escaped, the silken cord would remain round Apafi’s neck.

A few days after the departure of Yffim Beg, peace was hastily concluded between the Porte and the King of the Romans. In consequence thereof Hassan avoided a collision with the other generals, and, quitting them, hastened back to Buda with his army. Kiuprile marched right off to Belgrade, Kucsuk was dispatched to the fortress of Szekelyhid; only Feriz remained at Buda, for the simple reason that he was confined to his bed by a feverish cold in a kiosk, which was erected for him by the express command of Kiuprile.

Just about this time Azrael had an excess of devotion, and was constantly plagued by terrifying dreams in which she saw Hassan Pasha walking up and down without his head, and every morning she got leave from him to pay a visit to an old dervish to pray against the apparition of evil spirits. Hassan was much affected by this devotion towards him and true Mussulman fervour, and made no opposition to his favourite damsel going every morning to the mosque to pray, and only returning from thence late every evening; but he impressed it upon her suite to keep a watchful eye upon the girl lest she should deceive them. They therefore permitted pious Azrael to visit the worthy dervish so wrapped up that only her eyes were visible, and soon afterwards saw her return with the gracious old man. The dervish had a white beard and white eyebrows, as if he were well frosted; his eyes were cast down, and he wore such a frightfully big turban that not even the tips of his ears were visible. He was also not very lavish of speech, dumbly he pointed out to the veiled damsel the great clasped book and she knelt down before it and began to read with edifying devotion, touching it from time to time with her forehead; while the dervish, raising his hand, blessed one by one the slaves standing outside the door, and, after indicating by dumb show that he must now go to the kiosk where the sick Feriz Beg was lying and cure him by the efficacy of his prayers, he hobbled away.

All four slaves glued their faces to the iron lattice work of the door, thrust their cheeks between its ornaments, and saw how the kneeling damsel kept praying all the time before the large open book. She must have had an unconscionable fondness for prayer, for even when the evening grew late she had not moved from the spot till the dervish, leaning on his crutch, came hobbling back from Feriz Beg. Then she accompanied him into the interior of the mosque, and after a short hymn, returned to make her way back to the fortress.

And thus it went on for ten days. The slaves of her escort now began to think that Azrael wanted to learn the Koran by heart and grew tired of watching her praying and bowing and genuflecting with unwearied devotion.

Let us leave them gazing and marvelling, and seek out Feriz Beg, whom now, as at other times, the old dervish was tending.

There sat the good old man by the bedside of the pale and handsome youth. Nobody else was in the room. With his hand he dried the dripping sweat from the youth's forehead, every hour he put red healing drops into his mouth with a golden spoon, he guessed what was wanted immediately from every sigh, from every groan of the invalid. When he slept he fanned fresh air upon him, when he woke and stretched forth his burning hands, he felt the throbbing pulse and comforted and soothed him with gentle and consolatory words; and if he flung about impatiently in the fever of delirium, he covered him up carefully, like a tender mother, moistened his lips with fresh citron-water; and if he perceived from

his flushed face how he was suffering he would raise his head, and press his burning temples to his bosom.

On the tenth day the youth's illness took a turn for the better. Early in the morning, when he awoke, he had a clear consciousness of his condition.

There by the side of his bed still sat the old man with his eyes fixed on the youth's face.

"So thou hast been my nurse, eh?" sighed the youth gratefully, and he extended his hand to take that of the dervish, and he respectfully impressed upon it a long burning kiss, closing his eyes piously as he did so.

And when he again opened his eyes, holding continually the kissed hand between his own hands, behold! by his bedside no longer sat the old dervish, but a young and tremulous damsel, with black tresses rolling down her shoulders, with a blushing face and timidly smiling lips—it was Azrael.

Feriz fancied that he was the sport of some delirious dream or enchantment, and only when he looked about him in his bewilderment and perceived the cast-off false beard and turban and the other lying symbols of age, did he regain his presence of mind; and immediately the expression of gratitude and devotion disappeared from the face of Feriz Beg, his features took in a rigorous expression and he withdrew his hand from the pressure of those other hands. Speak he could not, both mind and body were too much broken for that; but he pointed to the door and signified to the damsel in dumb show that she was to withdraw.

"Thou knowest me, for thou hatest me," stammered Azrael; "if thou didst not know me thou wouldst not hate me, and if thou didst know me better thou wouldst love me."

The youth shook his head.

"Then—thou—lovest—another?" said the trembling girl.

Feriz Beg nodded: yes.

Azrael rose from her place as if some venomous spider had bitten her, her face was convulsed by a burning grief, she pressed her hands to her bosom; then slowly her form lost all its proud rigidity, and her eyes their savage brightness, her features softened, and collapsing before the bed of the youth she hid her face in his pillows and murmured in a scarce audible voice: "And therefore I love thee all the more."

Then, resuming her disguise, she calmly piled upon herself all the tokens of old age till once more before the sick man stood the gentle honest dervish who hobbled away on his crutches, blessing everyone he encountered till he returned again to the mosque.

After Azrael had withdrawn, Feriz at once dismissed the dervish, who, at the youth's command, confessed everything to him. The general's favourite damsel, he said, had come to the mosque to pray ten days ago and had changed garments with him in his hiding-place in order to tend the dear invalid all day long while the dervish, enwrapped in her veil, had prayed in the sight of the slaves.

Feriz Beg threatened the dervish with death if he did not confess everything, and, as it became a true cavalier, richly rewarded him when he had revealed the secret intrigue, forbidding him at the same time to assist it any further.

Several days had passed by.

Hassan Pasha spent his days in the mosque, and his nights behind the trellised gates of his harem; he scented an evil report in every new arrival, and avoided all intercourse with his fellows. The whole day he was praying, the whole night he was drunk; from morning to evening he was occupied with the priests and the Koran, and from the evening to the morning he amused himself among his damsels, listened to their songs, bathed in ambergris-water, drank wine mingled with poppies, and had his body rubbed with cotton-wool that he might sleep and be in paradise.

Frequently he had bad dreams, an evil foreboding, like the pressure of a night-hag, lay upon his heart, and when he awoke he seemed to see it all vividly before his eyes and durst not sleep any more, but dressed himself, sought out the room of Azrael and made the damsel sit down beside him and amuse him with merry stories.

The odalisk held unlimited sway over the mind of Hassan, and could, at will, tune his mind to a good or evil humour by anticipating his thoughts. The Pasha trusted her implicitly.

It is a bad old custom with oriental potentates to go to bed fuddled and dream all manner of nonsense, and then incontinently to demand a clear interpretation of the nebulous stuff from their wise men—or wise women.

This happened to be the case one morning with Hassan Pasha and Azrael who just then was watering with a silver watering-can a gorgeous gobæa, whose luxurious offshoots clambered like a living ladder to the roof of the greenhouse, thence casting down to the ground again tendrils as thick as ropes.

“Last night I was dreaming of this very plant that thou dost nourish in yon large tub,” said Hassan in a voice that sounded as if he thought it an extraordinary thing to be listening to his own words. “I dreamt that it put forth a long and flowery shoot which grew into a tall tree, and from the end of one of the branches of this tree hung a large yellow fruit. Then I thought I had some important and peculiar reason for breaking off the fruit, and I sent a big white-bearded ape up into the tree to fetch it. The ape reached the fruit, and for a long time plucked at it and shook it, but was unable to break it off. At last, however, he fell down with it at my feet, the golden fruit burst in two, and a red apple rolled out of it, and I picked them both up and was delighted. What does that signify?”

Azrael kept plucking the yellow leaves off her dear plant and throwing them through the window, beckoned to the Pasha to sit down beside her, and tapping him on the shoulder, began to tick off the events on her pretty fingers.

“The golden fruit is the Moldavian Princess, and the white ape thou didst send for her is none other than Olaj Beg. Thy dream signifies that the Beg is about to arrive with the Princess, who in the meantime has borne a son, and thou wilt rejoice greatly.”

Hassan was well content with this interpretation, when a eunuch entered and brought him a sealed letter on a golden salver. It was from the Pasha of Grosswardein.

The letter was anything but pleasant. Ali Pasha begged to inform the Vizier that the Government of Transylvania, having delivered Mariska Sturdza into the hands of Olaj Beg, the Beg at once set off with her, and had got as far as Királyhágó, when some persons hidden in the forest had suddenly rushed out upon him,

massacred his suite to the last man, and left the Princess' carriage empty on the high road. The Princess had in all probability been helped to rejoin her husband in Poland.

The letter fell from the hand of Hassan Pasha.

"Thou hast interpreted my dream backwards," he roared, turning upon Azrael; "everything has turned topsy-turvy. The ape descended from the tree with the fruit, but knocked his brains out."

At that moment the door-keeper announced: "Olaj Beg has arrived with the Moldavian Princess."

At these words Hassan Pasha, in the joy of his heart, leaped from his cushions, and after kissing Azrael over and over again, rushed forward to meet Olaj Beg, and meeting him in the doorway, caught him round the neck and exclaimed, beside himself with joy:

"Then my ape has not knocked his brains out, after all!"

Olaj Beg smilingly endured the title and the embrace, but on looking around and perceiving Azrael standing in the window he began doing obeisance to her with the greatest respect.

"Hast thou brought her? Where is she? Thou hast not lost her, eh? Thou hast well looked after her?" asked Hassan in one breath.

By this time Olaj Beg had bowed his head down to his very knees before the damsel, and was saying to her in a mollified voice:

"May I hope that the beautiful Princess will not find it tiresome if we talk of grave affairs in her presence?"

Azrael at once perceived the object of all this bowing and scraping. Olaj Beg wished her to withdraw.

"Thou mayest speak before me, worthy Olaj Beg, though what thou art about to say is no secret to me, for I can read the future, and my secrets I tell to none."

And now Hassan intervened.

"Thou mayest speak freely before her, worthy Olaj Beg. Azrael is the root of my life."

Olaj Beg made another deep and long obeisance.

He had heard enough of that name to need no further recommendation. He made up his mind on the spot to tell Hassan, who was in the power of this infernal woman, no more than he deserved to know.

"Then thou hast brought the Princess with thee?" insisted Hassan, whose joy beamed upon his face in spite of himself. "Did the Transylvanian gentlemen make much difficulty in handing her over?"

"They handed her over, but it would have been very much better if they had not. I should have preferred it if they had risen in her behalf, stirred up all Klausenberg against me and beaten me to death. At any rate, I should then have died gloriously. But alas! the Magyar race is degenerating, it has begun to be sensible. Those good old times have gone when they used to fire a whole village for the sake of a runaway female slave; and it was possible to seize a whole county in exchange for one burnt village; if the Hungarian gentry continue to be as wise as they are now the younger generation of them may strike root in our very Empire."

“I was alarmed on thy account, for I have just received a letter from the Pasha of Grosswardein, in which he informed me that certain persons had attacked the Princess’s escort at Királyhágó and cut them down to a man.”

“I anticipated that,” replied Olaj Beg slily. “When with much shedding of tears they handed the Princess over to me, I heard them whisper in her ear: ‘Fear nothing!’ and I well understood from that that those same gentlemen who in the council chamber, with wise precautions, resolved to deliver up the fugitive Princess, had agreed among themselves over their cups at dinner-time that as I left Transylvania they would lie in wait for, fall upon me, and liberate and take away with them the Princess whom, by the way, they did not deliver over immediately, giving out that she was sick and suffering torments. While I was awaiting her recovery, nobody but her ladies was allowed admittance to her, and as soon as she was on her legs again, I made all my preparations for the journey next day, marshalling all the carriages and baggage-wagons in the courtyard. I myself, however, got into a sorry matted conveyance with the Princess and her child, and set off the same night in the direction of Déva. My suite, with the empty carriages, was to follow next morning in the direction of Grosswardein. The masked men cut them down as arranged, but the Princess and her son were in safe hands all the time. Olaj Beg is an old fox, and a fox knows his way about.”

Hassan Pasha rubbed his hands delightedly.

“Nevertheless,” continued Olaj Beg, “imagine not, my good general, that because this woman is now in thy hands thou wilt be able to keep her. Sleeplessness will enter thy house as soon as thou hast admitted her within thy doors. If it be hard to guard any woman, it will be particularly hard to guard this one. The men and women of a whole kingdom have sworn to set her free by force or fraud, and will use every effort to do so. They will open thy bedroom doors with skeleton keys, they will dig beneath thy cellars, they will strew sleeping powder in thy evening potions, they will corrupt thy most faithful servants, and if no other poison make any impression upon thee they will pour into thy heart the most potent of all poisons, the tears of a supplicating woman. I have brought the treasure, and I deliver it into thy hands. Allah requites me for my pains by taking her from me. Thou art now her guard, conceal her as best thou canst. Thy greatest worry will be that thou canst not slay her, for indeed she were best hidden beneath the ground. But thou art to see to it that she is delivered alive into the hands of the Sultan’s envoys, for shouldst thou kill her thyself be sure thou wilt soon feel the silken cord around thine own neck. Meanwhile, peace be with thee and to all who abide in the shadow of the Prophet!”

With these words Olaj Beg stepped into the adjoining room, and leading in the Princess, placed her hand in the hand of Hassan; then he raised his eyes to Heaven.

“Allah is my witness,” said he, “that I have delivered her and her child into thy hands!”

In the first moment Hassan Pasha was amazed at the woman’s loveliness, and thought with regret that it was necessary for his own safety that she must die.

Olaj Beg, however, had yet another piece of good advice to impart, and, with that object, drew nigh to him to whisper in his ear; but, as if his courage failed him at the last moment, he delivered his sentiments in the Arabic tongue.

“Thou wouldst guard this woman best if thou tookest her child from her and locked it up separately. The mother certainly would not escape without the child.”

The Princess Ghyka did not understand these words, but she saw how the old fox indicated her little one with a glance and with what a greedy look Hassan regarded it; and she pressed the child all the closer to her bosom as she saw him come a step closer. The unhappy woman trembled when she saw Hassan smile upon the child like a hungry wolf would smile if he encountered it on his path. She guessed from their play of feature the terrible idea which the two men were discussing in a foreign tongue, and in her despair cast her eyes upon Azrael, as if hoping that she would find a response to her agony in a woman’s heart.

The odalisk pretended she had not observed the look, as if those present were not worthy of the slightest attention from her; when, however, Hassan gratefully embraced the Beg for this fresh piece of advice, Azrael intervened with a peculiar smile.

“Thou dost act like one who, bending beneath the weight of a burden too heavy for him, would pass it on to his neighbour.”

Hassan looked at his favourite damsel inquiringly, while Olaj Beg, who was unaccustomed to hear women talk at all when men were holding counsel together, looked back with offended surprise over his shoulder.

Azrael reclined lazily back upon her cushions, and swung one leg over her knee as she conversed with the two men.

“Worthy Hassan,” said she, “thou wouldst make two troubles out of one, if thou didst separate thy captives; while thou keepest thine eye on one of them, they will steal away the other behind thy back.”

Hassan cast a troubled look upon Olaj Beg, who stroked his long white beard and smiled.

“If thou dost permit thy damsels to ask questions, thou must needs answer them,” said he.

At these words Azrael leaped from her place and boldly approached the two men, her flaming black eyes measured the Beg from head to foot, and when she spoke it was with a determined, startling voice.

“Listen to me, Hassan—yes, I say, thou shouldst listen to me before all thy friends just because I am a woman. A man can only give advice, but a woman loves, and before a man thinks of danger a woman already sees it coming from afar, and while a man may grow into a crafty old fox, a woman is born crafty. Hassan knows very well that of all those who wear a mask of friendship for him, there is but one on whom he can absolutely rely, whose love all the treasures in India can as little destroy as they can lull her hatred asleep, who watches over him while he sleeps, and if she sleeps is dreaming of his destiny—that person am I.”

Hassan confirmed the words of the damsel by throwing his arm round her shoulders and drawing her towards him.

“If this woman requires a sleepless, uncorruptible guardian,” continued Azrael, “I will be that guardian. Make for us a long chain, and let one end of it be fastened to my arm and the other to her girdle. Thus the slave will be chained to the jailer, and, sleeping or waking, will be unable to escape from me. I shall be a good janitor. I will not let her, or her child, out of my hands.”

The damsel accompanied these words with such an infernal smile that Olaj Beg involuntarily edged away from her; while Hassan was enchanted by this noble specimen of loyalty. But Mariska's face was bright and resigned again, for she understood from the words of the odalisk, threatening as they were, that she and her child were not to be separated, and to all else she was indifferent.

Olaj Beg drew the folds of his caftan over his lean, dry bosom, and after peering at the two women, remarked to Hassan:

"'Tis well thou canst trust a woman to look after a woman."

With that he backed out of the room, blessing all four corners of it as he went, and in the gateway distributed with great condescension to every one of the servants who had done anything for him some money ingeniously twisted up in pieces of paper (which, by the way, were found to contain a half-penny each when at last unfolded), and sitting in his mat-covered carriage, gave strict orders to the coachman not to look back till he saw the citadel of Buda.

But Hassan the same hour sent for his goldsmith, and bade him prepare immediately a silver chain, four yards long, with golden shackles at each end, for Azrael and Mariska. The goldsmith took the measure of the hands of the two damsels, and brought in the evening a chain made of beaten silver, whose shackles were fastened by masterly-constructed padlocks, which Hassan himself fastened on the hands of the damsels, thrusting the key which opened the padlocks into his girdle, which he tapped a hundred times a day to discover whether it was still there or not. Then he dismissed the pair of them into Azrael's dormitory. Mariska endured everything—the chain, the shame, and rough words—for the privilege of being able to embrace her child. She lay down content on the carpets as far from Azrael as the chain would permit it, and folding her hands above the baby's innocent head, prayed with burning devotion to the God of mercy, and calmly went to sleep holding the child in her arms.

A little beyond midnight the child began softly wailing. At the first sound of its crying Mariska awoke, and as she moved her hand the chain rattled. Azrael was instantly alert.

"Hast thou had evil dreams?" inquired the odalisk of Mariska; "the rattling of the chain aroused me."

"The weeping of my child awoke me," said Mariska softly; and drawing the little one to her bosom, as it embraced its mother's beautiful velvet breast with its chubby little finger, and drank from the sweetest of all sources the draught of life, the young mother gazed upon it with unspeakable joy, smiled, laughed, caught the child's rosy little fingers in her mouth, and implanted resounding kisses on its rosy, chubby cheeks. She had no thought at that moment for chain and dungeon.

Azrael felt in her heart the torments of the demons—it was that jealousy which those who are rocked in the lap of happiness feel at the sight of a luckless wretch who is happier than they are in spite of all his wretchedness.

"Wherefore dost thou rejoice?" she asked, gazing upon the lady with the eyes of a serpent.

"Because my child is with me."

"But the whole world has abandoned thee."

"It is more to me than the whole world."

"More than thy husband?"

Mariska reflected for a moment, and then, instead of replying, hugged the child still closer to her bosom and imprinted a kiss upon its forehead.

"Wert thou ever a mother?" she asked Azrael in her turn.

"Never," stammered the odalisk, and involuntarily her bosom heaved beneath a sigh.

It was plain from the face of Mariska how much she pitied this poor woman. Azrael perceived the look, and it wounded her that she should be pitied.

"Dost thou not know that both of you must die?" she asked with a darkened countenance.

"I am ready."

"And art thou not terrified at the thought? They will strangle thy child with a silken cord, and hang it dead upon thy breast, and then they will strangle thee likewise, and put you both in the grave, in the cold earth."

"We shall see each other in a better world," said Mariska with fervent devotion.

"Where?" inquired the astounded Azrael.

Mariska, with holy confidence, raised her little one in her arms, and, lifting her eyes, said: "God will take us unto Himself."

"And what need hath God of you?"

"He is the Father of those who suffer, and in the other world He rewards those who suffer grief here below."

"And who told thee this?"

Mariska, as one inspired, placed her hand upon her heart and said: "It is written here!"

Azrael regarded the woman abashed. Truly, many mysterious words are written in the heart, why cannot everyone read them? She also had listened to such mystic voices, but they were words shouted in a desert, in her savage breast there was no manner of love which could interpret their meaning.

Mariska again put down her child on the edge of the cushion.

"Place not thy child there," cried Azrael impatiently; "it might easily fall, place it between us!"

Mariska accepted the offer, and placed the little one between herself and Azrael.

When the first ray of dawn penetrated the large window Mariska awoke, and, folding her hands together above the head of the little child, again began to pray.

Azrael looked on darkly.

"Dost thou never pray?" said Mariska, turning towards her.

"Why should women pray? Their destiny is not in their own hands. Their fate depends upon their masters; if their masters are happy, they are happy also; if their masters perish, they perish with them. This is their earthly lot—and that is all. Allah never gave them a soul—what have they to do with the life beyond this? In Paradise the Houris take their places and the Houris remain young for ever. The breath of a woman vanishes with the autumn mist like the fumes of a dead animal, and Allah has no thought for them."

Mariska, with only half intelligible sorrow, looked at this woman who wished to seem worse than she really was.

Azrael crept closer up to her.

"And dost thou really believe that there is someone who listens to what the worms say, to what the birds twitter, and to what women pray?"

“Certainly,” replied the young Christian woman; “turn to Him, and thou wilt feel for thyself His goodness.”

“How can it be so? Why should He pay any attention to me?”

“It is not enough I know to clasp thy hands and close thy eyes. Thy petition must come straight from thy heart, and thy soul must believe that it will gain its desire.”

Azrael’s face flushed red. Hastily she cast herself down on her knees on the carpet, and pressing her folded hands to her bosom, stammered in a scarce audible voice:

“God! grant me one moment in my life in which I can say: I am happy.”

Her eyes were still closed when the door of the dormitory opened, and Hayat, the oldest duenna of the harem, entered with an air of great secrecy. She was now a shrivelled up bundle of old bones, but formerly she had been the first favourite of Hassan Pasha, and now she was the slave and secret confidante of all the favourites in turn.

Azrael leaned towards her, perceiving from the face of the duenna that she brought some message for her; whereupon the latter advanced and, looking around in case anyone should be lurking there, whispered some words in Azrael’s ear.

On hearing these words the odalisk leaped from her seat with a face flushed with joy, while unspeakably tender tears trembled in her eyes. Her hands were involuntarily pressed against her heaving bosom, and her lips seemed to murmur some voiceless prayer.

Some great unusual joy had come upon her, some joy which she had always longed but never dared to hope for. Scarce able to restrain herself she turned towards her comrade, who, after listening to her, gazed wonderingly at her and pressed her hand, exclaiming in a voice of strong conviction: “Then it is true, our prayer has indeed been heard!”

Azrael began merrily putting on her garments, and helped Mariska also to dress; then she sent the duenna with a message to Hassan. She must go again to the mosque of the old dervish to pray, for she had been dreaming of Hassan.

Soon afterwards Hassan himself came to her, took from her arm the golden shackle which fastened the chain that bound her to Mariska, and, ordering her palanquin to be brought up to the door, sent her away to the old dervish; while, seizing the end of the Princess’s chain, he led her, together with her child, into his own apartments and there sat down on his cushions, drawing his rosary from his girdle and mumbling the first prayers of the naáma, constantly holding in his hand the end of the Princess’s chain.

The Vizier had of late been much given to prayer, for since the lost battle not a soul had come to visit him. The envoys of the Sultan, the country petitioners, the foreign ministers, the begging brotherhoods, all of them had avoided his threshold as if he were dead.

The first day he was painfully affected by this manifestation, but on the second day he commanded the door-keepers to admit none to his presence. Thus, at any rate, he could make himself believe that if nobody came to visit him it was by his express command.

He knew right well that a sentence of death had been written down and that this sentence was meant for one of two persons, either the Princess or himself, where their two shadows mingled a double darkness was cast, and Israfil, the Angel of Death, stood over them with a drawn sword.

Hassan knew this right well, and he pressed in his hand convulsively the silver chain to which his prisoner was attached, that prisoner whom he regarded as the ransom for his own life.

Chapter XVII

THE EXTRAVAGANCES OF LOVE.

After that melancholy scene, when the ladies of Transylvania vainly drew tears and blushes from the faces of their husbands, a ray of hope still remained in one heart alone. It was pretty Aranka Béldi, who, when everyone else's eyes were full of tears, could whisper words of encouragement to her unhappy friend, and who, when everyone else abandoned her, embraced her last of all, and said to her with firm conviction: "Fear not, we will save you!"

The youths of Transylvania also said: "Fear not, we will save you!" but Fate flung the dice blindly, the marked men in ambush captured only the escort, not the captive, and had all their fine trouble for nothing.

Aranka Béldi, however, begged her father to let her go to Gernyeszeg to visit her friend Flora Teleki, and there the two noble young damsels agreed together to write two letters to acquaintances in Hungary. One of them wrote to Tököly, the other to Feriz Beg, and when the letters were ready, they read to each other what they had written. Flora's letter to Tököly was as follows:

"Sir,

"The fact that *I* write these lines to you shows the desperate position I am in, when I have to hide my blushes and apply to him whom of all men I ought to avoid. But it is a question of life and death. Do you recollect the moment when, in the castle of Rumnik, you saw three maids embrace each other, of whom I was one? We then swore friendship and good fellowship to each other. One of the three at the present moment stands at the brink of death; I mean Mariska Sturdza, whose misfortunes cannot be unknown to you, and this is not the first mode of deliverance which we have attempted—but the last. Your Excellency is a powerful and magnanimous man, who has great influence with the Sultan, and where one expedient fails, you can employ another. I have always pictured your Excellency to myself as a valiant and chivalrous cavalier, and from what I know of the respect which all honourable persons of my acquaintance have for your Excellency, I have the utmost confidence that the unfortunate Princess of Moldavia will not wait in vain for deliverance. Do what you can, and may I add to the esteem in which you are held the fervent blessings of a heart which sincerely prays for your Excellency's welfare.

"Flora Teleki."

Flora's calculations were most just. Tököly, in those days, stood high in the favour of the Sultan, was on terms of intimacy with all the pashas and viziers, and very frequently a casual word from him had more effect than other people's supplications. And Flora showed a fine knowledge of character when she appealed to the magnanimity of the very man who had so grievously offended her, feeling certain that just for that very reason, although Tököly might not recognise the force of his former obligations, he would be magnanimous enough instantly to grant a favour to the lady who asked him for it, especially as the woman to be liberated had been the original cause of their separation.

Aranka kissed her friend over and over again when she had read this letter, and then she suddenly grew sad.

"Oh, *my* letter is not nearly so pretty, I am ashamed to show it to you."

Flora looked at her friend with gentle bashfulness as Aranka handed over her letter, and blushed like a red rose all the time she was perusing it.

> "Noble-hearted Feriz!
>
> "When we were both children you maintained that you loved me (here she inserted within brackets: *like a sister*, and a good thing for her that she did put these three words in brackets). If you still recollect what you said, now is the time to prove it. My dearest friend, Mariska Sturdza, is at Buda, a prisoner in the hands of Hassan Pasha. My only hope of her deliverance depends on you. I have heard such splendid things of you. If you see her, for whom I now implore you, with a sad face and tearful eyes, think how I should look if I were there, and if you give her back to me, and I can embrace her again, and look into her smiling eyes, then I will think of you, too.
>
> "Aranka Béldi."

The girls entrusted these letters to faithful servants, sending the first letter to Temesvár, where Tököly was then residing, and the second to Feriz Beg, who, as we know, lay ill at Buda.

The news first reached Tököly at supper-time. On receiving the letter and reading it through, he at once put down his glass, girded on his sword, and telling his comrades that he was about to take a little stroll, he mounted his horse and vanished from the town.

Feriz was lying half-delirious on his carpet. His health mended but slowly, as is often the case with men of strong constitutions, and the tidings of the smallest disaster which befell the Turks threw him into such a state of excitement that a relapse was incessantly to be feared, so that at last they would not allow any messages at all to be brought to him, for even when they brought good news to him he always managed to look at them from the worst side, so that news of any kind was absolute poison to him. At last his Greek physician made it a rule to read every letter addressed to his patient beforehand; and if it contained the least disturbing element, he let Feriz know nothing at all about it. What especially annoyed Feriz were any letters from women, and these were simply sent back.

Thus Aranka's letter might very easily have had the fate of being suppressed altogether had it not been entrusted to Master Gregory Biró, a shrewd and famous Szekler courier, whose honourable peculiarity it was to go wherever he was sent, and do whatsoever he was told, be the obstacles in the way what they might. If he had been told to give something to the Sultan of Turkey, he would have wormed

his way to him somehow—all inquiries, all threats would have been in vain; he would have insisted on seeing and speaking to him if his head had to be cut off the next moment.

One day, then, worthy Gregory Biró appeared before the kiosk of Feriz Beg and asked to be admitted.

At these words a Moor popped out, and, seizing him by the collar, conducted him to a room where a half-dressed man was standing before a fire cooking black potions in all sorts of queer-shaped crooked glasses. The Moor presented Gregory to the doctor as another messenger.

"What is your name?" he asked, venomously regarding him from over his shoulder, and treating him to the most terrifying grimace he could think of.

"Gregory Biró," replied the Szekler, nodding his head twice as was his custom.

"Gregory, Gregory, what do you want here?"

"I want to see Feriz Beg."

"I am he; what have you brought?"

Gregory twisted his mug derisively at these words, and immediately reflected that the business was beginning badly, for the person before him did not in the least resemble Feriz Beg as described to him.

"I have brought a letter—from a pretty girl."

"Give it to me quickly, and be off."

Gregory twisted round his short jacket that he might get at his knapsack; but while he was fumbling inside it he was cute enough to extract the contents of the letter from its cover, and only handed the empty envelope to the doctor.

"'Tis well, Gregory, now you may go," said he gently, and without so much as opening the envelope he thrust it into the fire and held the blazing paper under a retort which he wanted to warm.

"Is that the way they read letters here?" asked Gregory, scratching his head, and he crept to the door; but there he stopped, and while half his body remained outside he thrust his arm up to the elbow into the long pocket of his *szüre*,[17-17] drew from thence a diamond-clasp, and holding it between two fingers cried: "Look! I found this ring on the road not far from here, perchance Feriz Beg has lost it."

The doctor took the splendid jewel, and feeling convinced that only a nobleman could have lost such a thing, he said he would show it to Feriz Beg immediately.

"Ho! then you are not Feriz Beg after all!" cried the humorist.

The doctor burst out laughing.

"Gregory! Gregory! don't jest with me. I am the cook, and if I like you I will let you stay to dinner."

Gregory pulled a wry face at the sight of the doctor's stews.

The doctor thereupon took in the diamond-clasp to Feriz Beg, after bidding the Moor, whom he left behind him, not to drink anything out of the glasses standing there, or it would make him ill.

Shortly afterwards the doctor returned in great astonishment, planted himself in front of Gregory with frowning eyebrows and roared at him in a voice which alarmed even the Szekler:

"Where did you get that jewel from?"

“Where did I get it from?” said Gregory, shrugging his shoulders; he was very pleased they wanted to frighten him.

“Come, speak!—quick!”

“Not now.”

“Why not?” snapped the doctor firmly.

“Not to you, if you were to break me on the wheel.”

“I’ll bastinado you.”

“Not if you impaled me, I say.”

“Gregory! If you anger me, I’ll make you drink three pints of physic.”

“They are here, eh!” exclaimed Gregory, approaching the hearth, skipping among the flasks of the doctor, and seizing one of them, but he had the sense to choose alcohol, and dragging it from its case, sipped away at it till there was not a drop of it left.

“Leave a little in it, you dog!” yelled the doctor, snatching the flask away from him, “don’t drink it all!”

“I’ll drink up the whole shop, but speak I won’t unless I like.”

The doctor perceived that he had met his match.

“Then will you speak before Feriz Beg?” he asked.

“I’ll speak the whole truth then.”

So there was nothing for it but to open Feriz Beg’s door before Gregory and shove him inside.

Feriz Beg was sitting there on a couch, a feverish flush was burning upon his pale face; he still held the jewel in his hand, and his eyes were fastened upon it; just such a similar clasp he had given to Aranka Béldi when they were both children together.

“How did you come by this jewel?” inquired Feriz in a soft, mournful voice.

“She to whom you gave it gave it to me that you might believe she sent me to you.”

At these words Feriz Beg arose with flashing eyes.

“She sent you to me! She! So she remembers me! She thinks of me sometimes, then.”

“She sent you a letter through me.”

Feriz Beg stretched out a tremulous hand.

“Where is the letter?”

“I flung it into the fire,” interjected the doctor.

“How dared you do that?” exclaimed Feriz angrily.

But the doctor was not afraid.

“I am your doctor, and every letter injures your health.”

“Panajot! you are an impertinent fellow!” thundered Feriz, with a face of inflamed purple; and he smote the table such a blow with his fist that all the medicine bottles tumbled off it.

“Don’t be angry, sir!” said Gregory, twisting his moustache at both ends, while Panajot coolly swept together the fragments of the broken bottles and boxes on the floor; “the worthy man did not burn the letter but only the envelope. I had gumption enough not to entrust the inside of it to him.”

And with these words he drew from his pouch a letter written on all four sides of the sheet and handed it to Feriz, who before reading it covered with kisses the

lines traced by that dear hand, while Master Panajot looked at Gregory in amazement.

"Go along, you old fox, Gregory," said he; "next time you come, I'll throw *you* into the fire to boot."

But Gregory, highly delighted, feasted his eyes on the youth's face all the time he was reading the letter.

As if his soul had changed within him, as if he had passed from the troubles of this world to the joys of Paradise, every feature of the youth's face became smiling and joyful. The farther he read the brighter grew his eyes; and when he came to the last word he pressed the leaf to his heart with an expression of the keenest rapture, and held it there a long time, closing his eyes as if in a happy dream, as if he had shut them to see no other object when he conjured up her image before his mind.

Master Panajot was alarmed, fancying some mischief had happened to the invalid, and turned upon Gregory with gnashing teeth:

"What infernal document have you brought along with you, Gregory?"

Feriz meanwhile smilingly nodded his head as if he would thank some invisible shape, and whispered softly:

"So it shall be, so it shall be."

"I'm afraid you feel bad, my master," said the doctor.

Feriz looked up, and his face had grown quite round.

"I?—I feel very well. Take your drugs from my table, and bring me wine and costly meats dear to the eyes and mouth. I would rejoice my soul and my palate. Call hither musicians, and open wide my gate. Pile flowers upon my windows, I would be drunk with the fragrance of the flowers that the breeze brings to me."

Panajot fancied that the invalid had gone out of his mind, and yet full of the joy of life he rose from his couch, laid aside his warm woollen garment, put on instead a light silk robe, wound round his head a turban of the finest linen instead of the warm shaggy shawl, and he who had hitherto been brooding and fretting apathetically, had suddenly become as light as a bird, paced the room with rapid steps, with proudly erected face, from which the livid yellow of sickness had suddenly disappeared, and his eyes sparkled like fire.

Panajot could not account for the change, and really believed that the patient had fallen into some dangerous paroxysm and in this persuasion bawled for all the members of the negro family. The old Egyptian door-keeper, a young Nubian huntsman, a Chinese cook, trampling upon each other in their haste, all rushed into the room at his cry.

Feriz Beg, with boyish mirth, stopped them all before the doctor could say a word.

"Thou, Ali," he said to the old door-keeper, "go to the mosque and cast this silver among the poor that they may give thanks to Allah for my recovery. And thou, O cook! prepare a dinner for twelve persons, looking to it that there is wine and flowers and music; and thou, my huntsman, bring forth the fieriest steed and put upon him the most costly wrappings; and ye others, take this worthy doctor and lock him up among his drugs that he may not get away, and call hither all my friends and acquaintances, and tell them we will celebrate the festival of my recovery."

The servants with shouts of joy fulfilled the commands of Feriz. First of all they shoved good Panajot into his drug-brewing kitchen, and then they dispersed to do their master's bidding.

Feriz then took the hand of the Szekler who had brought the message and shook it violently, saying to him in a loud firm voice:

"Thou must remain with me till I have accomplished thy mistress's commands. For she has laid a command upon me which I must needs obey."

Meanwhile, the ostlers had brought forward the good charger. It was a fiery white Arab, ten times as restless as usual because of its long rest; not an instant were its feet still. Two men caught it by the head and were scarce able to hold it, its pink, wide open nostrils blew forth jets of steam, and through its smooth white mane could be seen the ruddy hue of the full blood.

The unfortunate Panajot poked his head through the round window of his laboratory, and from thence regarded with stupefaction his whilom invalid bestride the back of the wild charger, that same invalid who, if anyone knocked at his door an hour or two before, complained that his head was bursting.

The charger pranced and caracolled and the doctor with tears in his eyes besought the bystanders if they had any sense of feeling at all not to let the Beg ride on such a winged griffin. They only laughed at him. Feriz flung himself into the saddle as lightly as a grasshopper. The two stablemen let go the reins, the steed rose up erect on his hind legs and bucked along as a biped for several yards. Then the Beg struck the sharp stirrups into its flank, and the steed, snorting loudly, bowed its head over its fore-quarters and galloped off like lightning.

The doctor followed him with a lachrymose eye, every moment expecting that Feriz would fall dead from his horse; but he sat in the saddle as if grown to it, as he had always been wont to do. When the road meandered off towards the fortress he turned into it and disappeared from the astonished gaze of those who were looking after him.

A few moments later the horseman was in the courtyard of the fortress. He demanded an interview with the general, and was told that he was receiving nobody. He applied therefore to his favourite eunuch instead. He arrived at the fortress with a full purse, he quitted it with an empty one; but he now knew everything he wanted to know, viz., that Hassan had entrusted the captive Princess to Azrael; that the two girls were tied by the hands to one chain; that he greatly feared someone would come and filch the Princess from him; that he got up ten times every night to see whether anyone had stolen into the palace; and that since Mariska had been placed in his hands he had drunk no wine and smoked no opium, and would eat of no dish save from the hands of his favourite damsel.

Feriz Beg knew quite enough. Again he mounted his horse and galloped back to his kiosk, taking the neighbouring mosque on his way, on reaching which he called from his horse to the old dervish, who immediately appeared in answer to his summons.

"Tell her who was wont to visit me in thy stead that I want to see and speak to her early to-morrow morning."

And with that he threw some gold ducats to the dervish and galloped off.

The dervish looked after him in astonishment, and picking up the ducats, instantly toddled off to the fortress, prowled about the gate all night, met Hajat at early dawn, and gave her the message for Azrael.

This was the joyful tidings which the odalisk had received in response to her first prayer, and which had made her so happy.

Next morning she ordered her servants to admit none but the old dervish, and to close every door as soon as he had entered.

Shortly afterwards, Azrael with her retinue of servants arrived at the mosque, and a few moments after she had disappeared behind the trellised railings the form of the old dervish appeared in the street, hobbling along with his crutch till he reached the kiosk. Feriz Beg perceived him through the window, and sent everyone from the room that he might remain alone with him.

The dervish entered, closed the door behind him, let down the tapestries, took off his false beard and false raiment, and there before Feriz—tremulous, blushing, and shamefaced—stood the odalisk.

"Thou hast sent for me," she stammered softly, "and behold—here I am!"

"I would beg something of thee," said Feriz, half leaning on his elbow.

"Demand my life!" cried the odalisk impetuously, "and I will lay it at thy feet!" and at these words she flung herself at the foot of the divan on which the youth was sitting.

"I ask thee for nothing less than thy life. Once thou saidst that thou didst love me. Is that true now also?"

"Is it not possible to love thee, and yet live?"

"Say then that I might love thee if I knew thee better. Good! I wish to know thee."

The damsel regarded the youth tremblingly, waiting to hear what he would say to her.

The youth rose and said in a solemn, lofty voice:

"In my eyes not the roses of the cheeks, or the fire of the eyes, or bodily charms make a woman beautiful, but the beauty of the soul, for I recognise a soul in woman, and she is no mere plaything for the pastime of men. What enchants me is noble feeling, self-sacrifice, loyalty, resignation. Canst thou die for him whom thou lovest?"

"It would be rapture to me."

"Canst thou die for her whom thou hatest in order to prove how thou dost love?"

"I do not understand," said Azrael hesitating.

"Thou wilt understand immediately. There is a captive woman in Hassan's castle who is entrusted to thy charge. This captive woman must be liberated. Wilt thou liberate her?"

At these words Azrael's heart began to throb feverishly. All the blood vanished from her face. She looked at the youth in despair, and said with a gasp:

"Dost *thou* love this woman?"

"Suppose that I love her and thou dost free her all the same."

The woman collapsed at the feet of Feriz Beg, and embracing his knees, said, sobbing loudly:

"Oh, say that thou dost not love her, say that thou dost not know her, and I will release her—I will release her for thee at the risk of my own life."

The reply of Feriz was unmercifully cold.

“Believe that I love her, and in that belief sacrifice thyself for her. This night I will wait for her wherever thou desirest, and will take her away if thou wilt fetch her. It was thy desire to know me, and I would know thee also. Thou art free to come or go as thou choosest.”

The odalisk hid her tearful face in the carpets on the floor, and writhed convulsively to the feet of Feriz, moaning piteously.

“Oh, Feriz, thou art merciless to me.”

“Thou wouldst not be the first who had sacrificed her life for love.”

“But none so painfully as I.”

“And art thou not proud to do so, then?”

At these words the woman raised a pale face, her large eyes had a moonlight gleam like the eyes of a sleep-walker. She seized the hand of Feriz in order to help herself to rise.

“Yes, I am proud to die for thee. I will show that here—within me—there is a heart which can feel nobly—which can break for that which it loves, for that which kills it—that pride shall be mine. I will do it.”

And then, as if she wished to clear away the gathering clouds from her thoughts, she passed her hand across her forehead and continued in a lower, softer voice:

“This night, when the muezzin calls the hour of midnight, be in front of the fortress-garden on thy fleetest horse. Thou wilt not have to wait long; there is a tiny door there which conceals a hidden staircase which leads from the fortress to the trenches. I will come thither and bring her with me.”

Feriz involuntarily pressed the hand of the girl kneeling before him, and felt a burning pressure in his hand, and when he looked at the young face before him he saw the smile of a sublime rapture break forth upon her radiantly joyful features.

Azrael parted from Feriz an altogether transformed being, another heart was throbbing in her breast, another blood was flowing to her heart, earth and heaven had a different colour to her eyes. She believed that the youth would love her if she died for him, and that thought made her happy.

But Feriz summoned Gregory Biró, and having recompensed him, sent him back to his mistress with the message:

“Thy wish hath been accomplished.”

So sure was he that Azrael would keep her word—if only she were alive to do so.

Hassan Pasha waited and waited for Azrael. If the odalisk was not with him he felt as helpless as a child who has strayed away from its nurse. In the days immediately following the lost battle, the shame attaching to him and his agonized fear for his life had quite confused his mind; and the drugs employed at that time, combined with restless nights, the prayers of the dervishes, the joys of the harem and opium, had completed the ruin of his nervous system. If he were left alone for an hour he immediately fainted, and when he awoke it was in panic terror—he gazed around him like one in the grip of a hideous nightmare. For some days he would leave off his opium, but as is generally the case when one too suddenly abandons one’s favourite drug, the whole organism threatened to collapse, and the renunciation of the opium did even more mischief than its enjoyment.

When Azrael rejoined him he was asleep, the chain by which he held the Princess had fallen from his hand and when he awoke there was a good opportunity of persuading him that Mariska had escaped from him while he slept.

Hassan looked long and blankly at her, it seemed as if he would need some time wherein to rally his scattered senses sufficiently to recognise anyone. But Azrael was able to exercise a strange magnetic influence over him, and he would awake from the deepest sleep whenever she approached him.

Azrael sat down beside the couch and embraced the Vizier, while Mariska, with tender bashfulness, turned her head away from them; and Hassan, observing it, drew Azrael's head to his lips and whispered in her ear:

"I have had evil dreams again. Hamaliel, the angel of dreams, appeared before me, and gave me to understand that if I did not kill this woman, he would kill me. My life is poisoned because she is here. My mind is not in proper order. I often forget who I am. I fancy I am living at Stambul, and looking out of the window am amazed that I do not see the Bosphorus. This woman must die. This will cure me. I will kill her this very day."

Mariska did not hear these words, all her attention was fixed upon the babbling of her child; and Azrael, with an enchanting smile, flung herself on the breast of the Vizier, embracing his waggling head and covering his face with kisses, and the smile of her large dark eyes illuminated his gloomy soul.

Poor Hassan! He fancies that that enchanting smile, that embrace, those kisses are meant for him, but the shape of a handsome youth hovers before the mind of the odalisk, and that is why she kisses Hassan so tenderly, embraces him so ardently, and smiles so enchantingly. She fancies 'tis her ideal whom she sees and embraces.

Ah, the extravagances of love!

Chapter XVIII

SPORT WITH A BLIND MAN.

Azrael had felt afraid when Hassan said: "I must kill this woman to-day." A fearful spectre was haunting the mind of the Vizier; he must be freed from this spectre, and made to forget it.

So Azrael devised an odd sport for the man on the verge of imbecility.

The seven days had passed during which Hassan had forbidden that anyone should be admitted to his presence, and it occurred to Azrael that in the ante-chamber crowds of brilliant envoys, and couriers, and supplicants were waiting, all eagerly desirous of an audience, many of them with rich gifts; others came to render homage, others with joyful tidings from the seat of war; whilst one of them had come all the way from the Grand Vizier with a very important message from the Sultan himself.

Hassan's stupid mind brightened somewhat at these words, a fatuously good-natured smile lit up his face.

“Let them come in, let them appear before me,” he said joyfully to the girl; “and remain thou beside me and introduce them to me one by one; thine shall be the glory of it.”

But in reality none was awaiting an audience in the ante-room, there were no splendid envoys there, no humble petitioners, no agas, no messengers, none but the Vizier’s own slaves.

But these Azrael dressed up one by one to look like splendid magnates, village magistrates, and soldiers; put sealed letters, purses, and banners in their hands, and placing Hassan in the reception-room on a lofty divan, sat down with the Princess on stools at his feet, and ordered the door-keepers to admit the disguised slaves one by one.

The mockery was flagrant, but was there among them all any who dared to enlighten Hassan? Who would undertake to undeceive him when a mere nod from Azrael might annihilate before the Vizier could realise that they were making sport of him? It was a fleet-winged demon fooling a sluggish mammoth with strength enough to crush her but with no wings to enable it to get at her, and the rabble always takes the part of the mocker, not of the mocked, especially if the former be lucky and the latter unlucky.

The loutish slaves came one by one into the room, and Hassan turned his face towards them, remaining in that position while Azrael told him who they were and what they wanted.

“This is Ferhad Aga,” said the odalisk, pointing at a stable-man, “who, hearing of thy martial prowess in all four corners of the world has come hither begging thee with veiled countenance to include him among thy armour-bearers.”

Hassan most graciously extended his hand to the stable-man and granted him his petition.

Azrael next presented to Hassan a cook from a foreign court, who, dressed in a large round mantle of cloth of silver, might very well have passed for a burgomaster of Debreczen, and whose shoulders bent beneath the weight of two sacks of gold and silver from Hassan’s own treasury.

“This is the magistrate of the city of Debreczen,” said the odalisk, “who hath brought thee a little gift in the name of the municipality, with the petition that when thou dost become the Pasha of Transylvania thou wilt not forget them.”

Hassan smiled at the word money, had the sacks placed before him, thrust his arms into them up to his very wrists with great satisfaction, had their contents emptied at his feet, and dismissed the envoy with a hearty pressure of the hand.

And now followed a negro, who brought some recaptured Turkish banners from the bed of a river which did not exist, in which the Turks had drowned the whole army of Montecuculi.

Hassan was now in such a weak state of mind that he no longer recognised his own people in their unwonted garments, and the more extraordinary the things reported to him the more readily he believed them.

And so Azrael kept on exhibiting to him envoys, couriers, and captains till, at last, it came to the turn of the envoy of the Grand Vizier, whose part the odalisk had entrusted to a clever eunuch who had been instructed to present to Hassan a sealed firman, which Azrael was to read because Hassan could not see the letters.

It was to the effect that Hassan was to endeavour to preserve the life of the captive Princess, as the Grand Vizier himself intended in a few days to take her over alive.

When thus it seemed good to Azrael that the most striking scene of the whole game should begin she exclaimed in a loud voice to the door-keepers:

"Admit the ambassador of the Grand Vizier with the message from the Sublime Padishah!"

The guards drew back the curtains and in came—Olaj Beg!

"Truly I must needs admit," said he turning towards the odalisk, who stood there petrified with fear and amazement, "truly I must admit that thou art blessed with the faculty of seeing through walls and reading fast-closed letters, for thou hast announced me before I appeared officially and thou hast seen the firman hidden in my bosom before I have had time to produce it."

Azrael arose. She felt her blood throbbing in her brain for terror. At that moment she had that keen sensation of danger when every atom of the body—heart, brain, hands, and the smallest nerve—sees, hears, and thinks.

"Thou hast brought the firman of the Sultan?" she inquired of Olaj Beg with wrapt attention.

"Thou knowest also what is written in it, O enchantress!" said Olaj, in a tone of homage, "therefore ask not."

There was something in the yellow face of Olaj Beg which made him most formidable, most menacing at the very time when he seemed to be utterly abject in his humility.

"What doth the Sublime Sultan command?" inquired Hassan, gazing abstractedly in front of him.

"That thou prepare a scaffold in the courtyard of thy palace by to-morrow morning."

"For whom?" inquired Hassan in alarm. It was curious that it was he who trembled at this word, and not the Princess.

"That is the secret of to-morrow. Thou shalt break open and read this firman to-morrow, in it thou wilt find who is to die to-morrow."

At these words Olaj Beg looked at the faces of all who were present, as if he would read their innermost thoughts, but in vain. He recognised none of those on whom his eyes fell. Although many of them seemed to be great men he could not remember meeting any of them in the Empire of the Grand Turk; and the face of Azrael was as cold and motionless as marble, he could read nought from that.

But Azrael had already read the sealed firman through the eyes of Olaj Beg.

She had read it, and it said that if by to-morrow morning the Princess was not set free then the scaffold would be erected for her, but if she had escaped, then it would be raised for Hassan and for whomsoever had set her free.

"I must hasten to set her free," she thought.

Chapter XIX

THE NIGHT BEFORE DEATH.

The Angel of Death had already spread his wings over the palace of Hassan. It was already known that on the morning of the morrow someone of those who now dwelt beneath that roof would quit the world—only the name of the condemned mortal was not pronounced.

Till late at evening the carpenters were at work in front of the palace gates, and every nail knocked into the fabric of the scaffold was audible in the rooms. When the structure was ready they covered it with red cloth, and placed upon it a three-legged chair and by the side of the chair leaned a bright round headsman's sword. A gigantic Kurd then mounted the scaffolding, and stamped about the floor with his big feet to see whether it would break down beneath him. The chair was badly placed, he observed it, put it right and shook his head while he did so. To think that people did not understand how to set a chair! Then he stripped his muscular arms to the shoulder, took up the sword in his broad palm and tested the edge of it, running his fingers along the blade as if it were some musical instrument and could not conceal his satisfaction. Then he made some sweeping blows with it, and as if everything was now in perfect order, he leaned it against the chair again and descended the ladder like a man well content with himself.

The hands of Hassan Pasha trembled unusually when that evening he locked the golden padlocks on the hands of Azrael and Mariska. A hundred timeshe tapped the key hidden in his girdle to convince himself that it had not fallen out.

Scarcely had he left the two women alone than he came back to them again to ascertain whether he had really locked their hands together, for he had forgotten all about it by the time he had reached the door.

Then he came back a second time, looked all round the room, tapped the walls repeatedly, for he was afraid or had dreamt that there was another door somewhere which led out of the room. However, he convinced himself at last that there was not. Then he went to the window and looked out. There was a fall of fifteen feet to the bastions, and the ditch below was planted with sharp stakes; all round the room there was nothing whatever which could serve as a rope. The curtains were all of down and feathers; the dresses were of the lightest transparent material; the shawls which formed Azrael's turban and were twisted round her body were the finest conceivable; and the garments the odalisk actually wore were of silk, and so light that they stuck to the skin everywhere.

Azrael saw through the mind of the Vizier.

"Why dost though look at me?" she exclaimed aloud so that he trembled all over; "thou dost suspect me. If thou fearest this woman whom thou hast confided to me, take and guard her thyself."

"Azrael," said Hassan meekly, "be not angry with me, at least not now."

"Thou hast never suspected me, then?"

"Have I not always loved thee? If even thou didst want my life would I not trust it with thee?"

"Then wander not about the room so. Go and rest!"

"Rest to-night? The Messenger of Death stands before the door."

"What care I about the Messenger of Death? I know when I am going to die! And till then I will not lower my eyes before Death."

"And when will Hassan die?" asked the Vizier, seizing the hand of his favourite and watching eagerly for her answer with parted lips.

“Thou wilt survive me a day and no longer,” said Azrael. There was a tremulousness in the intonation of her voice. She felt that what she said was true.

The tears trickled from Hassan’s face, and he covered it with his hands.

Then the imbecile old man kissed the robe of the odalisk again and again, and folding her in his ardent embrace, actually sobbed over her. And he kept on babbling:

“Thou wilt die before me?”

“So it is written in the book of the Future,” said Azrael proudly; “so long as thou seest me alive, have no fear of Death! But the sound of the horn of the Angel of Death which summons me away will also be a signal for thee to make ready.”

Hassan, having dried his tears, quitted Azrael’s room, and on reaching his own, sank down upon a divan, and was immediately overcome by sleep.

When he had gone, Mariska knelt down before the bed on which her little child was softly sleeping, and drawing a little ivory cross from her breast, began to pray.

Azrael touched her hand.

“Pray not now, thou wilt have time to pray later.”

Mariska looked at her in wonder.

“I? Are not the hours of my life numbered?”

“No. Listen to my words and act accordingly. I will free thee.”

The Princess was astonished, she fancied she was dreaming.

The odalisk now drew a small fine steel file from her girdle, and, seizing the Princess’s hand, began to file the chain from off it.

After the first few rubs the sharp file bit deeply into the silver circlet, but suddenly it stopped, and, press it as hard as she would, it would bite the chain no more.

“What is this? it won’t go on. What is the chain made of? Even if it were of steel, another steel would file it.”

Azrael hastily filed right round the whole of the link which Hassan’s smith had thought good to form of silver only on the outside, thinking that the fraud would never be discovered, and behold, the hard impervious substance which resisted the file was nothing but—glass.

“Ah!” said Azrael, “all the better for us, the work will be quicker;” and seizing an iron candlestick, she broke in pieces with a single blow the whole of the glass chain which was only covered by a light varnish of silver, only the two locked golden manacles remained in their hands.

“We shall be ready all the sooner,” she whispered to Mariska, “now we must make haste and get you off.”

But Mariska still stood before her like one who knows not what is befalling her.

“Hast thou thought how we are to escape?” she inquired of Azrael. “The guards of Hassan Pasha stand at every door, and all the doors have been locked by his own hand. In front of the gates of the fortress the sentinels have been doubled. I heard what commands he gave.”

“I have nought to do with doors or guards; we are going to escape through the window.”

Mariska looked at Azrael incredulously; she fancied she had gone mad. She could see nothing in the room by which they could descend from the window, and below stood the thickly planted sharp stakes.

“Help me to let down this gobæa ladder!” said Azrael, and quick as a squirrel herself, she leaped on the edge of the great porcelain tub, and thrust aside the vigorous shoots of the plant from its natural ladder within, which grew right up to the roof and thence descended again to its own roots.

Mariska began to see that her companion knew what she was about. She hastened to give her assistance, lowered the pliable trunk, and, looking round to see if anyone was watching, bent the branches towards the window.

But still it was too short. The longest creepers only reached to the edges of the palisade, and one could not count upon the green sprouts at the end of the creepers. Even if the ladder which formed the flower were attached to it, it would still not reach to the bottom of the trench.

Azrael looked around the room to see if she could find anything. Suddenly she had hit upon it.

“Give me those scissors,” she said to Mariska, and when the latter had returned to her, the odalisk had already let down her flowing tresses. Four long locks as black as night, reaching below her knee, the crown of a woman’s beauty which make men rejoice in her, were twining there on the floor.

“Give me the scissors!” she said to Mariska.

“Wouldst thou cut off thy hair?” asked the Princess, holding back.

“Yes, yes, what does it matter? It is wanted for the rope, and it will be quite strong enough.”

“Rather cut off mine!” said Mariska. With noble emulation she took from her head her small pearl haube, and loosened her own tresses, which, if not so long and so full of colour, at least rivalled those of her comrade in quantity.

“Good; the two together will make the rope stronger,” said Azrael; and with that the two ladies began clipping off their luxurious locks one by one with the little scissors. One marvellously beautiful tress after another flowed from the head of the odalisk. When the last had fallen, a tear-drop also followed it.

Then she picked up the splendid tresses and began plaiting them together into strong knots.

“Wouldst thou ever have thought,” said Azrael, “that the locks of thy hair would be so intermingled?”

Mariska gratefully pressed the hand of the odalisk.

“How can I ever thank you for your goodness?”

“Think not of it. Fate orders it so—and someone else,” she muttered softly.

And now the attached ladder was long enough to reach the bottom of the palisades. Then they pitched down all the pillows and cushions of the divans till they covered the sharp stakes, so that their points might not hurt the fugitives. Moreover, Azrael tied the tough shoots of the gobæa to the cross piece of the window with the wraps of her turban and girdle.

“And now let me go first,” said the odalisk, when all was ready; “if the branches of the creeper do not break beneath me, then thou canst come boldly after me, for thou and the child together are not heavier than I am.”

The sky was dark and obscured by clouds; no one saw a white shape descending from one of the black windows of the fortress down the wall, lower and lower, till at last it got to the bottom and vanished in the depths of the ditch.

Mariska was waiting above there with a beating heart till the odalisk had descended; a tug at the gobæa-rope informed her that Azrael was already below, and Mariska could come after her.

A supplicating sigh to God ascended from the anxious bosom of the Princess at that supreme moment of trial; then she fastened to her breast with the folds of her garment the little one, who, fortunately, was still sound asleep, and stepping from the window entrusted herself to the yawning abyss below.

And, indeed, she had need of the most confident trust in God during this hazardous experiment, for if the child had awoke, the Komparajis pacing the bastions would have heard his tearful little wail at once, and it would have been all over with the fugitives.

Nothing happened. Mariska reached the ditch in safety, together with her child. Azrael assisted her to descend, and then they began to creep along among the trenches on the river's bank. It was not advisable to clamber upon the trenches, as there they might have encountered a sentinel at any moment.

At last they came to the end of the ditch where two bastions joined together, forming a little oblique opening, through which one could look down on the town of Pesth.

Before the little opening stood a Komparaji leaning on his long lance. As his back was turned towards them, he did not notice the women, while they started back in terror when they saw him. The man stood right in front of the opening completely barring their way, and was gaping at Pesth, facing the steep declivity.

Azrael quickly caught Mariska's hand and whispered in her ear:

"Remain here! Sit down with the child, and see that he does not make a noise."

And with that, quitting her companion and pressing against the wall of the bastion, she slowly and noiselessly began creeping along behind the back of the Komparaji.

The sentinel remained standing there, as motionless as a statue, gazing at the Danube flying in front of him, when suddenly, like the panther leaping upon its prey, the odalisk leaped upon the Komparaji, and before he had time to call out, pushed him so violently that he plunged over into the abyss.

Then quickly seizing Mariska's hand, the odalisk exclaimed:

"And now forward quickly!"

Like two spirits the forms of the women flitted across the bastions. In Azrael's hand was the key of the castle garden; in a few moments they reached the subterranean staircase, and when Azrael had locked the door behind her she turned to Mariska and said:

"Now thou canst pray, for thou art saved."

The report had already spread through the two towns that early at dawn someone would be executed, and here and there people whispered that it would be the Princess of Moldavia.

The population living outside the town were able to give full reins to their imagination, for the gates of the fortress, by Hassan Pasha's command, were already locked fast at six o'clock in the evening, and after that time nobody was allowed to enter out or in except the sentinels outside, and these only by the Szombat gate.

The later grew the hour the more numerous became the crowd assembled in front of the gates thus unwontedly bolted and barred, consisting for the most part of people who lived inside the town of every rank, who thus waited patiently for the chance of reaching their houses again. Knocking at the gates was useless, the guards had been ordered to take no notice of such demonstrations.

The darker grew the night, the more numerous became the throng before the gate, and the more closely they pressed together the plainer it became to them all that they would have to sleep outside.

The largest concourse was in front of the Fejérvár gate, for that was the chief entrance.

It was already close upon midnight, when some dozen horsemen, in the uniforms of Spahis, arrived at the gate, forcing their way through the throng, led, apparently, by a handsome youth (it was too dark to distinguish very clearly), who thundered at the gate with the butt-end of his lance.

"You may bang away at it till morning," said a cobbler of Buda, who was lying prone, chawing bacon at his ease, "they won't let you in."

"Then why are you all here?" cried the youth in the purest Hungarian.

"Because they locked us out at six o'clock in the evening, and would not let us in."

"Why was that?"

"They say that at dawn of day someone in the fortress is to be executed."

"Who is it?" said the youth, visibly affected.

"Why, the Princess of Moldavia, of course."

"Oh, that cannot be in any case," exclaimed the leader of the Spahis. "I have just come from the Sultan, and I have brought with me his firman, in which he summons her to Stambul; not a hair of her head is to be crumpled."

"Then it will be just as well, sir, if you try to get into the fortress, for it may be you have come with the sermon after the festival is over, and that letter may remain in your pocket if once they cut off her head."

The youth seemed for a moment to be reflecting, then, turning to those who stood around, he said:

"Through which gate do they admit the soldiers on guard?"

"Through the Szombat gate."

The youth immediately turned his horse's head, and beckoned to his comrades to follow him.

But at the first words he had uttered, a figure enwrapped in a mantle had emerged from a corner of the gate, and when he began to talk about the Princess and the firman, this figure, with great adroitness, had crept quite close to him, and when he turned round had swiftly followed him till, having made its way through the throng, it overtook him, and, placing its hand on the horseman's knee, said in a low voice: "Tököly!"

"Hush!" hissed the horseman, with an involuntary start, and bending his head so that he might look into the face of his interlocutor, whereupon his wonder was mingled with terror, and throwing himself back in his saddle, he exclaimed: "Prince! can it be you?"

For Prince Ghyka stood before him.

"Could I be anywhere else when they want to kill my wife?" he said mournfully.

“Do not be cast down, there will be plenty of time till to-morrow morning. I have plenty of confidence in my good star. When I really wish for a thing I generally get it even if the Devil stand in the opposite camp against me, and never have I wished for anything so much as to save Mariska.”

The Prince, with tears in his eyes, pressed the hand of the youth, and did not take it at all amiss of him that he called his wife Mariska.

“Well, of course, you have brought the firman with you, and if you come with the suite of the Sultan—”

“Firman, my friend? I have not brought a bit of a firman with me, and those who are with me are my good kinsfolk in Turkish costumes, worthy Magyar chums everyone of them, who have agreed to help me through with whatsoever I take it into my head to set about; but I have got something about me which can make firmans and athnamés, and whatever else I may require, whether it be the key of a dungeon, or a marshal’s bâton, or a prince’s sceptre—a golden knapsack, I mean.”

“And what are you going to get with that?”

“Everything. I will corrupt the sentinels so that they will let me into the fortress; and once let me get in, and I’ll either make Hassan Pasha sell Olaj Beg, or Olaj Beg sell Hassan Pasha. If a good word be of no avail I will use threats, and if my whole scheme falls through, Heaven only knows what I won’t do. I’ll chop Hassan Pasha and his guards into a dozen pieces, or I’ll set the castle on fire, or I’ll blow up the powder magazine—in a word, I won’t desist till I have brought out your consort.”

“How can I thank you for your noble enthusiasm?”

“You mustn’t thank me, my friend; you must thank Flora Teleki, who is your wife’s friend, and expects this of me.”

“Then you are re-engaged?”

“No, my friend. Helen is my bride. Ah, that is the only real woman in the whole round world. I should be with her now if I were not engaged in this business, and as soon as I have finished with it, the pair of us will give you a wedding the like of which has never yet been seen in Hungary.”

The Prince sadly bowed his head. He means well, he thought, but there is a very poor chance of his succeeding. The mercurial youth seems to have no idea that within an hour he will be jeopardizing his head by engaging in a foolhardy enterprise which runs counter to the whole policy of the Turkish Empire. But Tököly’s mind never impeded his heart. His motto always was: “*Virtus nescia freni.*”

“Then what do you intend to do?” Tököly casually asked Ghyka, just as if he considered it the most extraordinary thing in the world to find him there.

“I also want to save Mariska, and I have hopes of doing so,” said the Prince.

“How? Tell me! Perchance we may be able to unite our efforts.”

“Scarcely, I think. My plan is simply to give myself up instead of my wife. They would execute her for my fault; it is only right that I should appear on the scaffold and take her place.”

“A bad idea!” exclaimed Tököly, “a stupid notion. If you deliver yourself up, they will seize you as well as your wife and do for the pair of you. I know a dodge worth two of that. Take horse along with us, and let us make our way into the fortress sword in hand; we shall do much more that way than if we went hobbling in on crutches. Luck belongs to the audacious.”

“You know, Tököly, that I do not much rely on Turkish humanity; and I am quite prepared, if I deliver myself up, for them to kill both me and her; but at least we shall die together, and that will be some consolation.”

“It is no good talking like that,” cried the young Magyar impatiently. “Stop! A good idea occurs to me. Yes, and it will be better if you come with us and we all act in common. We will say openly at the gate that we bring with us the fugitive Prince of Moldavia as a captive. At the mere rumour of such a thing they will instantly admit us, not only into the fortress, but into the presence of Hassan likewise. The Pasha knows me pretty well, and if I tell him that I bring you a captive, he will believe me, or I’ll break his head for him. He will be delighted to see you. But I will not give you up. I am responsible for you, and must mount guard over you. This will make it necessary to postpone the execution, for we shall have to write to Stambul that the husband has fallen into our hands, and inquire whether the wife is to be sacrificed, and we shall have time to elope ten times over before we get a reply.”

The Prince hesitated. If this desperate expedient had been a mere joke, Tököly could not have spoken of it with greater nonchalance. The Prince gave him his hand upon it.

“The only question now is: which is the easiest way into the fortress. Let us draw near the first sentinel whom we find on the bridge or in the garden and wait until they change guard.”

The horsemen thereupon surrounded the Prince as if he was their captive, and escorted him along the river’s bank.

It was late. On the black surface of the Danube rocked the shapeless Turkish vessels, their sails creaking in the blast of the strong south wind.

It was scarce possible to see ahead at all, nevertheless the little band of adventurers, constantly pushing forward, kept looking around to see where the sentinels were, keeping very quiet themselves that they might catch the watchword.

Suddenly a cry was heard, but a cry which ended abruptly, as if the mouth from which it proceeded had been clapped to in mid-utterance.

On reaching the walls of the palace garden, however, one of them perceived that an armed figure was standing in the little wicket gate.

“There’s the sentinel!” said Tököly.

“The rascal must certainly be asleep to let us come right up to him without challenging us,” said Tököly; and he approached the armed man, who still stood motionless in the gate, and addressed him in the Turkish tongue:

“Hie, Timariot, or whoever you are! Are you guarding this gate?”

“You see that I am.”

“Then why don’t you challenge those who approach you?”

“That’s none of my business.”

“Then what is your business?”

“To stand here till I am relieved.”

“And when will they relieve you?”

“Any time.”

“Does the relief watch come by this gate?”

“Not by this gate.”

“And by which gate can one get into the fortress?”

“By no gate.”

“You give very short answers, my friend, but we must get at Hassan Pasha this very night without fail.”

“You must learn to fly then.”

“Don’t joke with me, sir! I have very important tidings for the Vizier; you may possibly find it easier to get into the fortress than we could. You shall receive from me a hundred ducats on the spot if you inform the Pasha that I, Emeric Tököly, bring with me as a captive the fugitive Prince of Moldavia, and the Vizier himself will certainly reward you for it richly.”

The Count had no sooner mentioned his name, and pointed at the captive prince, than the Turkish sentinel quickly came forth from beneath the archway, and Tököly and Ghyka, in astonishment, exclaimed with one voice:

“Feriz Beg!”

“Yes, ‘tis I. Keep still. You want to save Mariska, so do I.”

“So it is,” said Tököly. “I promised the woman I do not love that I would do it, and I will keep my promise. You need have no secrets from us, for we shall require your assistance.”

“Your secrets are nought to me.”

The Prince listened with downcast head to the conversation of the two young men; then he intervened, took their hands, and said with deep emotion:

“Feriz! Tököly! Once upon a time we faced each other as antagonists, and now as self-sacrificing friends we hold each other’s hands. I don’t want to be smaller than you. A scaffold has been put up in the courtyard of the fortress of Buda, that scaffold awaits a victim, whoever it may be, for the sword which the Sultan draws in his wrath will not remain unsatisfied. That scaffold was prepared for my wife, you must let me take her place. I am well aware that whoever liberates her must be prepared to perish instead of her. Let me perish. You, Feriz, can easily get into the fortress. Tell Hassan that the scaffold shall have the husband instead of the wife—let him surrender the wife for the husband.”

“Leave the scaffold alone, Prince. He who deserves it most shall get to the scaffold.”

“Don’t listen to the Prince!” said Tököly to Feriz; “he has lost his head evidently, as he wants to make a present of it to Hassan. All I ask of you is to let me into the fortress; once let me get inside, and no harm shall be done. I was born with a caul, so good-luck goes with me.”

“Good. Wait here till the muezzin proclaims midnight, which will not be long, I fancy, as the night is already well advanced; meanwhile, keep your eye on those horsemen below there.”

The men fancied Feriz wanted to join the sentinels when the watch was relieved, and taking him at his word, hid themselves and their horses behind the lofty bank.

The night was now darker than ever, only here and there a lofty star looked down upon them from among the wind-swept clouds.

Hassan had a restless night. Horrible dreams awoke him every instant, and yet he never wholly awoke, one phantom constantly supplanted the other in his agitated brain.

The raging blast broke open one of the windows and beat furiously against the wall, so that the coloured glasses crashed down upon the floor.

Aroused by the uproar, and gazing but half awake at the window, he saw the long curtain slowly approaching him as if some Dzhin were inside and had come thither to terrify him.

"Who is that?" cried Hassan in terror, laying his hand on his sword.

It was no one. It was only the wind which had stiffened out the curtains, expanding them like a banner and blowing gustily into the room.

Hassan seized the curtain, pulled it away from the window, fastened it up by its golden tassels, and laid him down again. The wind returned to torment him and again worried the curtain till it had succeeded in unravelling the tassels, and again blew the curtain into the room.

And then the tapestries of the door and the divans began fluttering and flapping as if someone was tugging away at their ends, and the flame of the night-lamp on the tripod flickered right and left, casting galloping shadows on the wall.

"What is that? Have the devils been let loose in this palace?" Hassan asked himself in amazement.

The closed doors jarred in the blast as if someone was banging at them from the outside, and every now and then the bang of a window-shutter would respond to the howling of the blast.

Men have curious supernatural faculties through which their minds are suddenly illuminated. At that moment the idea flashed through Hassan's brain that, in the apartments of the wing beyond, a window must needs be open, which was the cause of the unwonted current of air which fluttered the curtains of his palace and made the doors rattle, and this window could be none other than Azrael's, and if it were open, then the two women must have escaped.

At this horrible idea he quickly leaped out on to the floor, seized his sword, which was lying at his bedside, and, bursting open the door, rushed like a madman through all the apartments to Azrael's dormitory.

At the instant of their escape Azrael had turned over the long divan and placed it right across the room in such a way that one end of it was jammed against the door, whilst the other end pressed against the wall, so that when Hassan tried to open the door, he found it impossible to do so.

Everything was now quite clear to him.

He called to nobody to open the door; he knew that they had escaped. In the fury of despair he snatched a battle-axe from the wall and began to break open the hard oaken door, so that the whole palace resounded with the noise of the blows, and the guards and the domestics all came running up together.

Having beaten in the door at last, Hassan rushed into the room, cast a glance around, and even *his* eyes could see that his slave had flown.

Howling with rage he rushed to the window, and when he saw the dependent branches of the gobæa, he beat his forehead with his fists and laughed aloud as if something had broken loose inside him.

"They have run off!" he yelled; "they have escaped, they have stolen their lives, and they have stolen my life, too. Run after them into every corner of the globe, pursue them, bring them back tied together, tied together so that the blood may flow through their fingers. Oh, Azrael, Azrael! How have I deserved this of thee?"

And with that the old man burst into tears, and perceiving the odalisk's girdle on the window-frame, to which the plant was attached, he took it down, kissed it hundreds of times, hid his tearful face in it, and collapsed senseless on the floor.

"Hasten, Princess, hasten!"

The odalisk pressed her companion's hand, and dragged her down along the bushy hillside. And now they had reached the hollow forming the entrance to the underground passage which terminated at the gates of the garden on the banks of the Danube.

The odalisk had succeeded in filching the keys of the door of this secret passage from Hassan. While she was trying which of the two it was that belonged to the lock of the inner door, a cry resounded through the stillness of the night. "Hassan!" exclaimed the two girls together. They had recognised the voice.

"They have discovered our escape," said Azrael.

"Oh, God! do not leave me!" cried Mariska, pressing her hands together. "My child!"

Azrael quickly opened the grating door. It took a few moments, and during that time a commotion was audible in the town, no doubt caused by the cry of Hassan. Cries of alarm and consternation spread from bastion to bastion, the whole garrison was aroused, and there was a confused murmur within the fortress.

"Let us hasten!" cried Azrael, quickly opening the door and dragging after her the Princess into the blind-black corridor.

At that moment a cannon-shot thundered from the fortress as an alarm-signal.

Mariska, at the sound of the shot, collapsed in terror at Azrael's feet, and lay motionless in the corridor, still holding her child fast clasped in her arms.

"Hah! the woman has fainted," cried the odalisk in alarm; "we shall both perish here," she cried in her despair.

The din in the fortress grew louder every instant, from every bastion the signal-guns thundered.

"No, no, we must not perish!" exclaimed the heroine, and with a strength multiplied by the extremity of the danger, she caught up the moaning woman and child in her arms, and raising them to her bosom began making her way with them along the covered corridor.

Pitch darkness engulfed everything around them; the odalisk groped her way along by the feel of the wet, sinuous walls, stumbling from time to time beneath the burden of the dead weight in her arms, but at every fresh shot she started forward again and went on without resting.

Onwards, ever onwards!—till the last gasp! till the last heart-throb! The awakened child also began to cry.

Azrael's knees tottered, her bosom heaved beneath the double load, her staring eyes saw nothing; and the world was as dark before her soul as it was before her eyes.

Heavy was the load upon her shoulder; but heavier still was the thought in her heart that this woman whom she was saving at the risk of her own life was the darling of him whom she loved herself, yet save her she must, for she had promised to do so.

At every step she felt her strength diminishing; with swimming head she staggered against the wall, the steps seemed to have no end; if only she could hold

out till she reached the door with her, and then for a moment might see Feriz Beg and hear from his lips the words: “Well done!”—then Israfil, the Angel of Death might come with his flaming sword.

For some time she had gathered from the hollower resonance of the steps in the darkness that she was approaching the door; rallying her remaining strength, she tottered forward a few paces with her load, and when the latch of the door was already in her hand, her knees gave way beneath her, and along with the Princess and the child, she fell in a heap on the threshold, being just able to shove the key into the lock and turn it twice.

Feriz Beg, with the Magyar nobles, plunged again beneath the shade of the deep arch of the gate of the fortress garden and with wrapt attention listened for the muezzin to proclaim midnight. It was then that Azrael had said she would come.

It never occurred to him that the woman could not come, so deeply had he looked into her heart that he felt sure she would fulfil her promise.

If only the muezzin would proclaim midnight from the mosque.

At last a cry sounded through the stillness of the night, but it was not the voice of the muezzin from the mosque, but Hassan’s yell of terror from the fortress window and the din which immediately followed it, proclaiming that there was danger.

Feriz’s heart was troubled, but he never moved from the spot. He knew right well what that noise meant. They had tried to help the Princess to escape and her escape was discovered.

“What is that noise?” asked the Prince apprehensively, sticking up his head.

Feriz did not want to alarm him.

“It is nothing,” he answered. “Some one has stolen away on the bastions, perhaps, and they are pursuing him.”

Then the first cannon-shot resounded.

Feriz, for the first time in his life, was agitated at the sound of a cannon.

“That is an alarm-signal,” cried Tököly, drawing his sword.

“Keep quiet!” whispered Feriz, “perhaps they are shooting at the people who are thronging the gates.”

Nevertheless the shots were repeated from every bastion; the tumult, the uproar increased; a tattoo was beaten, the trumpets rang out and a whole concourse of people could be seen running along the bastions with torches and flashing swords in their hands.

“They are pursuing someone!” cried the Prince, and unable to endure it any longer, he leaped upon the bank.

“I know not what it is,” stammered Feriz, and a cold shudder ran through his body.

Ghyka grasped his sword, and would have rushed up the hill as if obeying some blind instinct.

“What would you do?” whispered Feriz, grasping the hand of the Prince, and pulling him back by force under the gate.

For a few moments they stood there in a dead silence, the tumult, the uproar seemed to be coming nearer and nearer—if it were to overtake them?

“Hush!” whispered Feriz, holding his ear close to the door. He seemed to hear footsteps approaching from within and the plaintive wail of a child.

A few moments afterwards there was a fumbling at the latch and a key was thrust into the lock and twice turned. Feriz hastened to open the door and the senseless forms of the two women fell at his feet.

The youth quickly dragged the Prince after him, and recognising Mariska, who still lay in the embrace of Azrael, he placed her in her husband's arms together with the weeping child.

"Here are your wife and child," said he, "and now hasten!"

"Mariska!" exclaimed the Prince, beside himself; and embracing the child whom he now saw for the first time, he kissed the rosy face of the one and the pallid face of the other again and again.

That voice, that kiss, that embrace awoke the fainting woman, and as soon as she opened her eyes, she quickly, passionately, flung her arms round her husband's neck while he held the child on his arm. No sound came from her lips, all her life was in her heart.

"Quick! quick!" Feriz whispered to them. "Get into this skiff. When you get to the other side it will be time to rejoice in each other; till then we have cause to fear, for the whole of the Buda side of the river is on the alert. But I'll look after them here. On the other bank my servant is awaiting you with the swift horses; mention my name, and he will hand them over to you. On the banks of the Raab you will find another of my servants with fresh relays. Choose your horses, and then to Nógrád as fast as you can. Thence it will be easy to escape into Poland. Do not linger. Every moment is precious. Forward!"

With that he conducted the fugitives to the skiff which was ready waiting for them, and at the bottom of which two muscular servants of his were lying out of sight. These helped them in, Feriz undid the rope, and at a few strokes of the oars they were already some distance from the shore.

Then only did Feriz breathe freely, as if a huge load had fallen from his heart.

"May they not pursue them?" inquired Tököly anxiously.

"They may," returned Feriz; "but they cannot transport the horses in boats, as the fugitives now sit in the only boat here; the bridge, too, has been removed and they will hardly be able to build another in time on such a night as this."

The fugitives had now reached the middle of the Danube, when Mariska, who had scarce been herself for joy and terror in her half-unconscious state, suddenly bethought her of her companion who had saved her with such incomprehensible self-sacrifice and energy, and standing up in the skiff waved her handkerchief as if she would thereby make up for the leave-taking which she had neglected in her joy and haste.

"What are they doing?" cried Feriz angrily, seeing that they were attracting attention in consequence.

Fortunately the night was dark and the people rushing down from the bastions could not see the skiff making its way across the Danube; presently its shape even began to vanish out of sight of the young eyes that were watching it.

Feriz looked up to the sky with a transfigured face. Two stars, close together, looked down very brightly from amidst the fleeting clouds. Did he not see Aranka's eyes in that twin stellar radiance?

Tököly took the hands of the young hero and pressed them hard.

“Once before we stood face to face,” he said with a feeling voice, which came from the bottom of his heart, “then I prevailed, now you prevail. God be with you!”

Then the young Count mounted his horse, and beckoning to his comrades, galloped off in the direction of Gellérthegy.

Feriz stood there alone on the shore with folded arms and tried to distinguish once more the shape of the skiff already vanishing in the darkness.

Nobody thought of the poor odalisk who had saved them.

All at once the youth felt the contact of a burning hand upon his arm. Broken in mind and body, the odalisk dragged herself to his knees, and seizing his hand drew it to her breast and to her lips. She could not speak, she could only sob and weep.

Feriz looked at her compassionately.

“Thou hast done well,” he said gently.

The girl embraced the youth’s knees, and it was well with her that he suffered her to do so.

“I thank thee for keeping thy word,” said Feriz; “look now! that woman was not my beloved. She has a husband who loves her.”

Indescribably sweet were these words to the damsel. In them she found the sweetest reward for her sufferings and self-sacrifice. Then it was not love after all which made Feriz save this woman through her!

The uproar meanwhile was extending along the shore, the pursuers could see that they were on the track of the fugitives.

“We must be off,” said Feriz; “wouldst thou like to come with me?”

“Come with him!” What a thought was that for Azrael! To be able to live under the same roof with him!

Yet she answered: “I will not come.”

It occurred to her that if she were found with the dear youth he would perish because of her. And besides, she knew that the invitation was due not to love but to magnanimous gratitude.

“I want to go over to the island,” she said in a faint voice.

“Then I’ll help thee to find thy skiff,” said the youth, extending his hand to the odalisk to raise her up.

She was still kneeling on the ground before him.

She fixed upon him her large eyes swimming with tears, and whispered in a tremulous voice:

“Feriz! Thou wert wont to reward those damsels who sacrificed themselves for thee, who died nobly and valiantly because they loved thee. Have not I also won that reward?”

Feriz Beg sadly lowered his head as if it afflicted him to think of the significance of these words; then softly, gently, he bent over the damsel, and drawing her lovely head towards him, pressed a warm, feeling kiss on her marble forehead.

The odalisk trembled with rapture beneath the load of that more than earthly sensation of pleasure, and leaping up and stretching her arms to Heaven, she whispered:

“I am happy!—For the first time in my life. Now I may go—and die.”

Feriz, tenderly embracing her, led the damsel to her skiff. Then she stopped suddenly, and leaning her head against the shoulder of the youth, murmured in his ear:

"When thou reachest thy kiosk, lie not down to sleep! Sit at thy window and look towards the island in the direction of sunrise. The night will be over ere long, and the dawn will come sooner than at other times. When thou seest this portent think of me and say for me the prayer which is used before the cold dawn, and say from thy heart: 'That woman does penance for her sins!'"

The odalisk felt two tear-drops falling upon her cheek. They fell from the eyes of the youth.

She could never feel happier in this world than she felt now.

A few minutes later the skiff was flying over the rocking waves.

Chapter XX

THE VICTIM.

The Princess was saved, but she who had saved her was doomed.

Along the banks of the rivers, and on the summits of the bastions, alarm-beacons had been kindled announcing the flight of the fugitives. It was late. On the shore the swift Arab horses of the pursuers were racing with the wind. But the wind was not idle, but blew and raged and fought with the foaming waves of the Danube, and tossed and pitched about every little boat that lay upon it.

There was only one skiff, however, that ventured to cross the Danube and rise and fall with its billows, which were like the waves of the sea. A white form stood stonily motionless in the boat, and the blast kept twisting its soft garments round its body. The trembling boatman called upon the name of Allah.

"Fear not, when you carry me," Azrael said to him, and her eyes hung upon a star which shone above her head, shining through the tatters of the scurrying clouds.

The skiff reached the shore of the Margaret island. The damsel got out, and her last bracelet dropped from her hand into the hand of the boatman.

"Remember me, and begone."

"Dost thou remain here?"

"No."

"Whither wilt thou go?"

Azrael answered nothing, but pointed mutely to the sky.

The boatman did not understand much about it; but, anyhow, he understood that he could not give the damsel a lift up there, so he drew back his canoe and departed.

Azrael remained alone on the island, quite alone; for that day everyone had been withdrawn by command of the Vizier; the damsels, the guards, and the eunuchs had all migrated to the fortress, the paradise was empty and uninhabited.

Azrael strolled the whole length of the shore of the island. The mortars were still thundering down from the fortress, the horsemen were still shouting on the river's

bank, the signal fires were blazing on the bastions, the night was dark, the wind blew tempestuously and scattered the leaves of the trees—but she saw neither the beacon fires, nor the darkness; she heard neither the tumult of men nor the howling of the blast; in her soul there was the light of heaven and an angelic harmony with which no rumour, no shape of the outer world would intermingle.

She came to the kiosk in the centre of the island. Wandering aimlessly she had hit upon the labyrinthine way to it unawares. The sudden view of the summer-house startled her, and it awoke a two-fold sensation in her heart, it appealed equally to her memory and her imagination. She bethought her of the resolve she had made on coming to the island. She remembered that when she parted from the youth of her heart she had said: “When thou comest to thy kiosk, do not lie down to sleep; sit down at thy window, and look towards the island in the direction of the dawn. This night will be soon over, and the dawn will dawn more quickly than at other times. When thou seest it think of me and say for me the prayer of direction for the departing.”

She reflected that the youth must now be sitting at the window, looking towards the island, with his fine eyes weary of staring into the darkness. She would not weary those fine eyes for long.

She hastily opened the door with her silver key and entered the hall. A hanging lamp was burning in the room just as the servants had left it in the morning. She drew forth a wax taper, and having lit it, proceeded to the other rooms, which opened one out of another, and whose floors were covered by precious oriental carpets, whose walls were inlaid with all manner of woods brought from foreign countries, and covered with tapestries, all splendid masterpieces of eastern art; the atmosphere of the rooms was heavy with intoxicating perfumes.

All this was frightful, abominable to her now. As she walked over the carpets, it was as if she were stepping on burning coals; when she inhaled the scented atmosphere, it was as though she were breathing the corruption of the pestilence; everything in these rooms awoke memories of sin and disgust in her heart—costly costumes, porcelain vases, silver bowls, all of them the playthings of loathsome moments, whose keenest punishment was that she was obliged to remember them.

But they shall all perish. And if they all perish, if these symbols of sin and the hundred-fold more sinful body itself become dust, then surely the soul will remember them no more? Surely it will depart far, far away—perchance to that distant star—and will be happy like the others who are near to God and know nothing of sin, but are full of the comfort of the infinite mercy of God, who has permitted them to escape from hence?

With the burning torch in her hand she went all through the rooms, tearing down the curtains and tapestries, and piling them all on the divan; and when she entered the last of the rooms she saw a pale white figure coming towards her from its dark background. The shape was as familiar to her as if she had seen it hundreds of times, although she knew not where; and its face was so gentle, so unearthly—a grief not of this world suffused its handsome features and the joy of heaven flashed from its calm, quiet eyes—its hair clung round its head in tiny curls, as guardian-angels are painted.

The damsel gazed appalled at this apparition. She fancied Heaven had sent her the messenger of the forgiveness of her sins; but it was her own figure reflected from a mirror concealed in the dark background—that gentle, downcast, sorrowful face, those pure, shining eyes she had never seen in a mirror before; the cut-off hair increased the delusion.

Tremblingly she sank on her knees before this apparition, and touching the ground with her face, lay sobbing there for some time; and when she again rose up, it appeared to her as if that apparition extended towards her its snow-white arms full of pity, full of compassion; and when she raised her hands to Heaven it also pointed thither, raising a face transformed by a sublime desire. No, she could not recognise that face as her own, never before had she seen it so beautiful.

Azrael placed her hands devoutly across her breast and beckoned to the apparition to follow her, and raising the curtain she returned into that room where she had already raised a funeral pyre for herself.

There, piled up together, lay cushions of cloth of gold, Indian feather-stuffs, divans filled with swansdown, light, luxurious little tables, harps of camphor-wood adorned with pearls, lutes with the silvery voices of houris, a little basin filled with fine fragrant oils composed from the aroma of a thousand oriental flowers; this she everywhere sprinkled over the heaped-up stuff, and also saturated the thick carpets with it, the volatile essence filled the whole atmosphere.

Then she pressed her hand upon her throbbing heart, and said: “God be with me!”

And then she fired the heaped-up materials at all four corners, and, as if she were ascending her bridal bed, mounted her cushions with a smiling, triumphant face, and lay down among them, closing her eyes with a happy smile.

In a few moments the flames burst forth at all four corners, fed freely by the light dry stuff, and combining above her like a wave of fire, formed a flaming canopy over her head. And she smiled happily, sweetly, all the time. The air, filled with volatile oil, also burst into flame, turning into a sea of burning blue; white clouds of smoke began to gather above the pyre; the strings of the harp caught by the flames burst asunder one by one from their burning frame, emitting tremulous, woeful sounds as if weeping for her who was about to die. When the last harp-string had burnt—the odalisk was dead.

The night was now drawing to a close. Feriz Beg, quietly intent, was sitting at the window of his kiosk, as he had promised the odalisk. He had not understood her mysterious words, but he did as she asked, for he knew instinctively that it was the last wish of one about to die.

Suddenly, as he gazed at the black waves of the Danube and the still blacker clouds in the sky, he saw a bright column of fire ascend with the rapidity of the wind from the midst of the opposite island, driving before it round white clouds of smoke. A few moments later the flames of the burning kiosk lit up the whole region. The startled inhabitants gazed at the splendid conflagration, whose flames mounted as high as a tower in the roaring blast. Nobody thought of saving it.

“No human life is lost, at any rate,” they said quietly; “the harem and its guards were transferred yesterday.”

The wind, too, greatly helped the fire. The kiosk, built entirely of the lightest of wood, was a heap of ashes by the morning, when Feriz, accompanied by the

müderris in his official capacity, got into a skiff and were rowed across to the island. Not even a remnant of embers was to be found, everything had been burnt to powder. Nothing was to be seen but a large, black, open patch powdered with ashes. The fire had utterly consumed the abode of sin and vice. Nothing remained but a black spot. In the coming spring it will be a green meadow.

In the afternoon of the following day we see a familiar horseman trotting up to the gates of the fortress—if we mistake not, it is Yffim Beg.

All the way from Klausenburg he had been cudgelling his brains to find words sufficiently dignified to soften the expression of the insulting message which the Estates of Transylvania had sent through him to his gracious master. On arriving in front of Hassan's palace he dismounted as usual, without asking any questions, and gave the reins to the familiar eunuchs that they might lead the horse to the stables.

There was no trace of the scaffold that had been erected in front of the gate the day before. Yffim Beg entered and passed through all the rooms he knew so well, all the doors of which were still guarded by the drabants of Hassan as of yore; at last he reached Hassan's usual audience chamber, and there he found Olaj Beg sitting on a divan reading the Alkoran.

Yffim Beg gazed around him, and after a brief inspection, not discovering what he sought, he addressed Olaj Beg:

"I want to speak to Hassan Pasha," said he.

Olaj Beg looked at him, rose with the utmost aplomb, and approached a table on which was a silver dish covered by a cloth. This cloth he removed, and a severed bloody head stared at Yffim Beg with stony eyes.

"There he is—speak to him!" said Olaj Beg gently.

Chapter XXI

OTHER TIMES—OTHER MEN.

Great men are the greatest of all dangers to little States. There are men born to be great generals who die as robber-chiefs. If Michael Teleki had sat at the head of a great kingdom, his name perchance would have ranked with that of Richelieu, and that kingdom would have been proud of the years during which he governed it. It was his curse that Transylvania was too small for his genius, but it was also the curse of Transylvania that he was greater than he ought to have been.

The Battle of St. Gothard was a painful wound to Turkish glory, and it left behind it a constant longing for revenge, though a ten-years' peace had actually been concluded; and presently a more favourable opportunity than the prognostications of the Ulemas or the wisdom of the Lords of Transylvania anticipated presented itself, an opportunity far too favourable to be neglected.

Treaty obligations had compelled the Kaiser to take part in the War of the Spanish Succession against Louis XIV., and the Kaiser's enemies at once saw that the time for raising their standards against him had arrived. The war was to begin from Transylvania, and the reward dangled before the Prince of Transylvania for

his participation in this war was what his ancestors had often but vainly attempted to gain in the same way—the Kingdom of Hungary.

It was, of course, a dangerous game to risk one kingdom in order to gain another, for both might be sacrificed. There was even a party in Transylvania itself which was indisposed to risk the little Principality for the sake of the larger kingdom, and though the most powerful arm of this party, Dionysius Banfy, had been cut off, it still had two powerful heads in Paul Béldi and Nicholas Bethlen.

So one fine day at the Diet assembled at Fogaras, the Prince's guard suddenly surrounded the quarters of Paul Béldi and Nicholas Bethlen, and informed those gentlemen that they were State prisoners.

What had they done? What crime had they committed that they should be arrested so unceremoniously?

Good Michael Apafi believed that they were aiming at the princely coronet. This was a crime he was ready to believe in at a single word, and he urged the counsellors who had ordered the arrest at once to put the law into execution against the arrestants. But that is what these gentlemen took very good care not to do. It was much easier to kill the arrestants outright than to find a law which would meet their case.

In those days worthy Master Cserei was the commandant of the fortress of Fogaras, and the castle in which the arrestants were lodged was the property of the Princess. As soon as Anna heard of the arrest she summoned Cserei, and showing him the signet-ring on her finger, said to him: "Look at that ring, and whatever death-warrant reaches you, if it bears not the impression of that seal, you will take care not to execute the prisoners; the castle is mine, so you have to obey my orders rather than the orders of the Prince."

The Prince and his wife then returned together to Fejérvár. On the day after their arrival the chief men of the realm met together in council at the Prince's palace, and it was Teleki's idea that only those should remain to dinner who were of the same views as himself. So they all remained at the Prince's till late in the evening, and thoroughly enjoyed the merry jests of the court buffoon, Gregory Biró, who knew no end of delightful tricks, and swallowed spoons and forks so dextrously that nobody could make out what had become of them.

Apafi had not noticed how much he had drunk, for every time he had filled his beaker from the flagon standing beside him, the flagon itself had been replenished, so that he fancied he had drunk nothing from sheer forgetfulness. But his face had got more inflamed and bloodshot than usual, and suddenly perceiving that the chair next to his was empty, he exclaimed furiously: "Who else has bolted? It is Denis Banfy who has bolted now, I know it is. What has become of Denis Banfy, I say?"

The gentlemen were all silent; only Teleki was able to reply:

"Denis Banfy is dead."

"Dead?" inquired Apafi, "how did he die?"

"Paul Béldi formed a league against him and he was beheaded."

"Béldi?" cried Apafi, rising from his seat in blind rage, "and where is that man?"

"He is in a dungeon at present, but it will not be long before he sits on the throne of the Prince."

“On the scaffold, you mean!” thundered Apafi, beside himself, in a bloodthirsty voice, “on the scaffold, not the throne. I’ll show that crafty Szekler who I am if he raises his head against me. Call hither the protonotarius, the law must be enforced.”

“The sentences are now ready, sir,” said Nalaczi, drawing from his pocket three documents of equal size; “only your signature is required.”

He was also speedily provided with ink and a pen, which they thrust into the trembling hand of the Prince, indicating to him at the same time the place on the document where he was to sign his name. The thing was done.

“Is there any stranger among us?” asked Teleki, looking suspiciously around.

“Only the fool, but he doesn’t count.”

The fool at that moment was making a sword dance on the tip of his nose, and on the sword he had put a plate, and he kept calling on the gentlemen to look at him—he certainly had paid no attention to what was going on at the table.

The three letters were three several commands. The first was directed to Cserei, telling him to put the prisoners to death at once; the second was to the provost-marshal, Zsigmond Boer, to the effect that if Cserei showed any signs of hesitation he was to be killed together with the gentlemen; the third was to the garrison of the fortress, impressing upon them in case of any hesitation on the part of the provost to make an end of him forthwith along with the others. All three letters, sealed with yellow wax, were handed over to Stephen Nalaczi, who, placing them in his kalpag, pressed his kalpag down upon his head and hastened quickly from the room. He had to pass close to the jester on his way out, and the fool, rushing upon him, exclaimed. “O ho! you have got on my kalpag; off with it, this is yours!” and before Nalaczi had recovered from his surprise he found a cap and bells on his head instead of a kalpag.

The magnate considered this jest highly indecent, and seized the jester by the throat.

“You scoundrel, you, where have you put my kalpag? Speak, or I’ll throttle you.”

“Don’t throttle me, sir,” said the jester apologetically, “for then you would be the biggest fool at the court of the Prince.”

“My kalpag!” cried Nalaczi furiously, “where have you put it?”

“I have swallowed it, sir.”

“You worthless rascal,” roared Nalaczi, throttling the jester, “would you play your pranks with me!”

“Truly, sir, I shall not be able to bring it up again if you press my throat like that.”

“Stop, I mean to search you,” said Nalaczi; and he began to tear up the coat of the jester, whereupon the kalpag came tumbling out from between its folds. “You clumsy charlatan,” laughed Nalaczi, “well, you hid it very well, I must say.” Then he put on his kalpag again, in which were all three letters well sealed with yellow wax, but he now hastened outside as rapidly as possible in case the fool should spirit them away again.

The same night he galloped to Fogaras, though it cost him his horse to get there, summoned Cserei, and giving him the letter addressed to him said:

“You, sir, are to execute this strict command to the very letter.”

The commandant took the letter, broke the seal, and then looked at the magnate in amazement:

"I know not, sir, whether you or I have been made a fool of—but there's not a scrap of writing in this letter."

Nalaczi incredulously examined the letter. It was a perfect blank. Hastily he broke open the other two letters. In these also there was nothing but the bare paper.

The fool, while the nobleman was throttling him, had substituted blanks for the letters sent, and sent the sentences the same evening to the Princess, who thereby had discovered all that the Prince and his councillors were doing.

In the morning the Princess went to Apafi with the three sentences in her hand, and reproached him for wanting to murder his ministers.

The worthy Prince was amazed at seeing these orders signed by himself. He knew nothing about it, and embracing his wife, thanked her for watching over him and not allowing him to send forth such orders. As for Nalaczi, the shame of the thing made it impossible for him to show himself at Court, and he could only nourish a grudge against the fool.

This accident greatly upset the worthy Prince, and he immediately rushed to release the captives. First of all, however, they had to sign deeds in which they solemnly engaged not to seek to revenge themselves on their accusers.

Paul Béldi was wounded to the heart, but he regarded this calamity as a just retribution for having been the first to sign the league[21-18] against Denis Banfy; it was a weapon which now recoiled upon himself.

But this private grief was the least of his misfortunes, for while Paul Béldi and Nicholas Bethlen had been sitting in their dungeon the war party had had a free hand, so that when the two gentlemen were released they were astounded to learn from their partisans that only the sanction of the Diván was now necessary for a rupture of the peace.

Béldi perceived that to remain silent any longer would be equivalent to looking on while the State rushed to its destruction. He immediately assembled all those who were of the same opinion as himself—Ladislaus Csaky, John Haller, George Kapy—and consulted with them as to the future of the realm.

Béldi opined throughout that the Prince should be spared, but he was to be compelled to dismiss such councillors as Teleki, Székely, Mikes, and Nalaczi, and form a new council of state. Kapy would have done more than this. "If we want as much as that," said he, "it would be better to declare ourselves openly; and if we draw the sword, we shall have no need to petition, but can fight, and whoever wins let him profit by it and become Prince."

"No!" said Béldi, "I have sworn allegiance to the Prince, and though I love my country, and am prepared to fight for it, yet I will never break my oath. My proposition is that we assemble in arms at the Diet which is convened to meet at Nagy-Sink, together with the Szekler train-bands, and if we show our strength the Prince assuredly will not hesitate tochange his counsellors, for I know him to be a good man who rather fears than loves them."

The gentlemen present accepted Béldi's proposition.

"Then here I will leave your Excellencies," said Kapy, stiffly buttoning his *mente*.[21-19] "I am not afraid of war, for there I see my enemy before me, and can

fight him; but I do not like these armed appeals, for they are apt to twist a man's sword from his hand and turn it against his own neck."

And he withdrew. The other gentlemen resolved, however, that they would all arm their retainers. At a word from Béldi the armed Szeklers of Háromszék, Csik, and Udvarhelyszék rose at once; they were ready at an hour's notice to rise in obedience to the command of their generalissimo.

The news of this audacious insurrection reached Michael Teleki at Gernyeszeg, who was beside himself with joy, well aware that Béldi was not the sort of man who was likely to prevail in a civil war whilst the contrary case would bring about his ruin, as he had now gone too far to draw back again. He immediately hastened to the Prince and, arousing him from his bed, told him that Béldi had risen against him, and so terrified Apafi that he immediately got into his coach, and fled by torchlight to Fogaras. Gregory Bethlen, Farkas, and the other counsellors also took to their heels in a panic—only Teleki remained cool. He knew the character of Béldi too well to be afraid of him.

So the spark of ambition and rage was kindled in Paul Béldi's heart, and for some days it looked as if he would be the master of Transylvania, for nothing could resist him with the Szekler bands at his side, and all the regular troops were scattered among the frontier fortresses.

But Béldi thought it enough to show his weapons without letting them be felt. Instead of a declaration of war he sent a manifesto full of loyalty to the Prince, in which he assured his Highness that he had taken up arms not against his Highness but in the name of the state; all he demanded was that the counsellors of the Prince should be tried by the laws of the realm.

Whilst this wild missive was on its way, Teleki had had time to call together the troops from the frontier fortresses, and send orders to those of the Szeklers who had not risen to assemble under Clement Mikes in defence of the Prince; and while Béldi awaited an attack, he proceeded to take the offensive against him at once.

One day Béldi was sitting in the castle of Bodola along with Ladislaus Csáky, when news was brought them that Gregory Bethlen, with the army of the Prince, was already before Kronstadt.

"War can no longer be avoided," sighed Csáky.

"We can avoid it if we lay down our arms," returned Béldi.

"Surely you do not think of that?" inquired Csáky in alarm.

"Why should I not? I will take no part in a civil war."

"Then we are lost."

"Rather we shall save thousands."

The same day he ordered his forces to disperse and return home.

The next day Gregory Bethlen sent Michael Vay to Bodola, who brought with him the Prince's pardon.

Csáky ground his teeth together. It occurred to him that he had got Denis Banfy beheaded, yet he too had received a pardon, and he inquired of Vay in some alarm: "Can we really rely on this letter of pardon?"

Michael Vay was candid enough to reply: "Well, my dear brethren, though you had a hundred pardons it would be as well if you courageously resolved to quit Transylvania notwithstanding."

Csáky gave not another moment's thought to the matter, but packed up his trunks, and while it was still daylight escaped through the Bozza Pass.

Béldi decided to remain; shame prevented him from flying.

Nevertheless, Michael Vay told his wife and children of his danger and they insisted, supplicating him on their knees, that he should hasten away and save himself.

"And what about you?" asked Béldi, looking at his tearful family.

He had two handsome sons, and his daughter Aranka had grown up a lovely damsel; she was the apple of her father's eye, his pride and his glory.

"What about you?" he asked with a troubled voice.

"You can more easily defend us at Stambul than here," said Dame Béldi; and Béldi saw that that was a word spoken in season.

That word changed his resolve, for, indeed, by seeking a refuge at the Porte, he would be able to help himself and his family much more, and perhaps even give a better turn to the fortunes of his country. There, too, many of the highest viziers were his friends who had very great influence in affairs.

He immediately had his horse saddled, and after taking leave of his family with the utmost confidence, he escaped through the Bozza Pass the same night with an escort of a few chosen servants into Wallachia, where he found many other fugitive colleagues, and with them he took refuge at the Porte—then the highest court of appeal for Transylvania.

Chapter XXII

THE DIVÁN.

The gates of the seraglio were thrown wide open, the discordant, clanging, and ear-piercing music was put to silence by a thundering roll of drums, and twelve mounted cavasses with great trouble and difficulty began clearing a way for the corps of viziers among the thronging crowd, belabouring all they met in their path with stout cudgels and rhinoceros whips. The indolent, gaping crowd saw that it was going to be flogged, yet didn't stir a step to get out of the reach of the whips and bludgeons.

The members of the Diván dismounted from their horses in the courtyard and ascended the steps, which were guarded by a double row of Janissaries with drawn scimitars, the blue and yellow curtains of the assembly hall of the Diván were drawn aside before them, and the mysterious inner chamber—the hearth and home of so much power and splendour, once upon a time—lay open before them.

It was a large octagonal chamber without any of those adornments forbidden by the Koran; its marble pavement covered by oriental carpets, its walls to the height of a man's stature inlaid with mother-o'-pearl. Along the walls were placed a simple row of low sofas covered with red velvet and without back-rests, behind them was a pillared niche concealing a secret door where Amurath was wont to listen unperceived to the consultations of his councillors.

Through the parted curtains passed the members of the Council of the Diván. First of all came the Grand Vizier, a tall, dry man with rounded projecting shoulders; his head was constantly on the move and his eyes peered now to the right and now to the left as if he were perpetually watching and examining something. His brown, mud-coloured face wore an expression of perpetual discontent; every glance was full of scorn, rage, and morbid choler; when he spoke he gnashed his black teeth together through which he seemed to filter his voice; and his face was never for an instant placid, at one moment he drew down his eyebrows till his eyes were scarce visible, at the next instant he raised them so that his whole forehead became a network of wrinkles and the whites of his eyes were visible; the corners of his mouth twitched, his chin waggled, his beard was thin and rarely combed, and the only time he ever smiled was when he saw fear on the face of the person whom he was addressing; finally, his robes hung about him so slovenly that despite the splendid ornaments with which they were plastered he always looked shabby and sordid.

After the Grand Vizier came Kiuprile, a full-bodied, red-faced Pasha, with a beard sprawling down to his knees; the broad sword which hung by his side raised the suspicion that the hand that was wont to wield it was the hand of no weakling; his voice resembled the roar of a buffalo, so deep, so rumbling was it that when he spoke quietly it was difficult to understand him, while on the battle-field you could hear him above the din of the guns.

Among the other members of the Diván there were three other men worthy of attention.

The first was Kucsuk Pasha, a muscular, martial man; his sunburnt face was seamed with scars, his eyes were as bright and as black as an eagle's; his whole bearing, despite his advanced age, was valiant and defiant; he carried his sword in his left hand; his walk, his pose, his look were firm; he was slow to speak, and rapid in action.

Beside him stood his son, Feriz Beg, the sharer of his father's dangers and glory, a tall, handsome youth in a red caftan and a white turban with a heron's plume.

Last of all came the Sultan's Christian doctor, the court interpreter, Alexander Maurocordato, a tall, athletic man, in a long, ample mantle of many folds; his long, bright, black beard reaches almost to his girdle, his features have the intellectual calm of the ancient Greek type, his thick black hair flows down on both shoulders in thick locks.

The viziers took their places; the Sultan's divan remains vacant; nearest to it sits the Grand Vizier; farther back sit the pashas, agas, and begs.

"Most gracious sir," said Maurocordato, turning towards the Grand Vizier, "the poor Magyar gentlemen have been waiting at thy threshold since dawn."

The Grand Vizier gazed venomously at the interpreter, protruding his head more than ever.

"Let them wait! It is more becoming that they should wait for us than we for them."

And with that he beckoned to the chief of the cavasses to admit the petitioners.

The refugees were twelve in number, and the chief cavasse, drawing aside the curtains from the door of an adjoining room, at once admitted them. Foremost

among them was Paul Béldi, the others entered with anxious faces and unsteady, hesitating footsteps; he alone was brave, noble, and dignified. His gentle, large blue eyes ran over the faces of those present, and his appearance excited general sympathy.

Only the Grand Vizier regarded him with a look of truculent indifference—it was his usual expression, and he knew no other.

"Fear not!—open your hearts freely!" signified the Grand Vizier.

Béldi stepped forward, and bowed before the Grand Vizier. One of the Hungarians approached still nearer to the Vizier and kissed his hand; the others were prevented from doing the same by the intervention of Maurocordato, who at the same time beckoned to Béldi to speak without delay.

"Your Excellencies!" began Béldi, "our sad fate is already well-known to you, as fugitives from our native land we come to you, as beggars we stand before you; but not as fugitives, not as beggars do we petition you at this moment, but as patriots. We have quitted our country not as traitors, not as rebels, but because we would save it. The Prince is rushing headlong into destruction, carrying the country along with him. His chief counsellor lures him on with the promise of the crown of Hungary in the hope that he himself will become the Palatine. Your excellencies are aware what would be the fate of Hungary after such a war. A number of the great men of the realm joined me in a protest against this policy. We knew what we were risking. For some years past I have been one of those who disapproved of an offensive war—we are the last of them, the rest sit in a shameful dungeon, or have died a shameful death. Once upon a time, as happy fathers of families, we dwelt by our own firesides; now our wives and children are cast into prison, our castles are rooted up, our escutcheons are broken; but we do not ask of you what we have lost personally, we ask not for the possession of our properties, we ask not for the embraces of our wives and children, we do not even ask to see our country; we are content to die as beggars and outcasts; we only petition for the preservation of the life of the fatherland which has cast us forth, and which is rushing swiftly to destruction—hasten ye to save it."

Kucsuk Pasha, who well understood Hungarian, angrily clapped his hand upon his sword, half drew it and returned it to its sheath again. Feriz Beg involuntarily wiped away a tear from his eyes.

"Gracious sirs," continued Béldi, "we do not wish you to be wrath with the Prince for the tears and the blood that have been shed; we only ask you to provide the Prince with better counsellors than those by whom he is now surrounded, binding them by oath to satisfy the nation and the Grand Seignior, for none will break such an oath lightly and with impunity; and these new counsellors will constrain him to be a better father to those who remain in the country than he was to us."

When Béldi had finished, Maurocordato came forward, took his place between the speaker and the Grand Vizier, and began to interpret the words of Béldi.

At the concluding words the face of the interpreter flushed brightly, his resonant, sonorous voice filled the room, his soul, catching the expression of his face, changed with his changing feelings. Where Béldi calmly and resignedly had described his sufferings, the voice of the interpreter was broken and tremulous. Where Béldi had sketched the future in a voice of solemn conviction,

Maurocordato assumed a tone of prophetic inspiration; and finally, when in words of self-renunciation he appealed for the salvation of his country, his oratory became as penetrating, as bitterly ravishing, as if his speech were the original instead of the copy. Passion in its ancient Greek style, the style of Demosthenes, seemed to have arisen from the dead.

The listening Pashas seemed to have caught the inspiration of his enthusiasm, and bent their heads approvingly. The Grand Vizier contracted his eyelids, puckered up his lips, and hugging his caftan to his breast, began to speak, at the same time gazing around abstractedly with prickling eyes, every moment beating down the look of whomsoever he addressed or glaring scornfully at them. His screeching voice, which he seemed to strain through his lips, produced an unpleasant impression on those who heard it for the first time; while his features, which seemed to express every instant anger, rage, and scorn in an ascending scale, accentuated by the restless pantomime of his withered, tremulous hand, could not but make those of the Magyars who were ignorant of Turkish imagine that the Grand Vizier was atrociously scolding them, and that what he said was nothing but the vilest abuse from beginning to end.

Mr. Ladislaus Csaky, who was standing beside Paul Béldi, plucked his fur mantle and whispered in his ear with a tremulous voice:

"You have ruined us. Why did you not speak more humbly? He is going to impale the whole lot of us."

The Vizier, as usual, concluded his speech with a weary smile, drew back his mocking lips, and exposed his black, stumpy teeth. The heart's blood of the Magyars began to grow cold at that smile.

Then Maurocordato came forward. A gentle smile of encouragement illumined his noble features, and he began to interpret the words of the Grand Vizier: "Worshipful Magyars, be of good cheer. I have compassion on your petition, your righteousness stands before us brighter than the noonday sun, your griefs shall have the fullest remedy. Ye did well to supplicate the garment of the Sublime Sultan; cling fast to the folds of it, and no harm shall befall you. Now depart in peace; if we should require you again, we will send for you."

Everyone breathed more easily. Béldi thanked the Vizier in a few simple sentences, and they prepared to withdraw.

But Ladislaus Csaky, who was much more interested in his Sóva property than in the future of Transylvania, and to whom Béldi's petition, which only sought the salvation of the fatherland, and said nothing about the restitution of confiscated estates, appeared inadequate, scarce waited for his turn to speak, and, what is more, threw himself at the feet of the Vizier, seized one of them, which he embraced, and began to weep tremendously. Indeed, his words were almost unintelligible for his weeping, and Mr. Csaky's oratory was always difficult to understand at the best of times, so that it was no wonder that the Grand Vizier lost his usual phlegm and now began to curse and swear in real earnest; till the other Magyar gentlemen rushed up, tore Csaky away by force, while Maurocordato angrily pushed them all out, and thus put an end to the scandalous scene.

"If you kneel before a man," said Béldi, walking beside him, "at least do not weep like a child."

Before Béldi could reach the door he felt his hand warmly pressed by another hand. He looked in that direction, and there stood Feriz.

"Did you say that your wife was a captive?" asked the youth with an uncertain voice.

"And my child also."

The face of Feriz flushed.

"I will release them," he said impetuously. Béldi seized his hand. "Wait for me at the entrance."

The Hungarian refugees withdrew, everyone of them weaving for himself fresh hopes from the assurances of the Vizier. Only Ladislaus was not content with the result, and going to his quarters he immediately sat down and wrote two letters, one to the general of the Kaiser, and the other to the minister of the King of France, to both of whom he promised everything they could desire if they would help forward his private affairs, thinking to himself if the Sultan does not help me the Kaiser will, and if both fail me I can fall back upon the French King; at any rate a man ought to make himself safe all round.

Scarce had the refugees quitted the Diván when an Aga entered the audience-chamber and announced:

"The Magyar lords."

"What Magyar lords?" cried the Grand Vizier.

"Those whom the Prince has sent."

"They're in good time!" said the Vizier, "show them in;" and he at once fell into a proper pose, reserving for them his most venomous expression.

The curtains were parted, and the Prince's embassy appeared, bedizened courtly folks in velvet with amiable, simpering faces. Their spokesman, Farkas Bethlen, stood in the very place where Paul Béldi had stood an hour before, in a velvet mantle trimmed with swan's-down, a bejewelled girdle worthy of a hero, and a sword studded with turquoises, the magnificence of his appointments oddly contrasting with his look of abject humility.

"Well! what do ye want? Out with it quickly!" snapped the Grand Vizier, with an ominous air of impatience.

Farkas Bethlen bent his head to his very knees, and then he began to orate in the roundabout rhetoric of those days, touching upon everything imaginable except the case in point.

"Most gracious and mighty, glorious and victorious Lords, dignified Grand Vizier, unconquerable Pashas, mighty Begs and Agas, most potent pillars of the State, lords of the three worlds, famous and widely-known heroes by land and sea, my peculiarly benevolent Lords!"

All this was merely prefatory!

Kiuprile began to perspire; Kucsuk Pasha twirled his sword upon his knee; Feriz Beg turned round and contemplated the fountains of the Seraglio through the window.

"Make haste, do!" interrupted Maurocordato impatiently; whereupon Farkas Bethlen, imagining that he had offended the interpreter by omitting him from the exordium, turned towards him with a supplementary compliment:

"Great and wise interpreter, most learned and extraordinarily to be respected court physician of the most mighty Sultan!"

Kiuprile yawned so tremendously that the girdle round his big body burst in two.

Farkas Bethlen, however, did not let himself be put out in the least, but continued his oration.

“Our worthy Prince, his Highness Michael Apafi, has been much distressed to learn that those seditious rebels who have dared to raise their evil heads, not only against the Prince but against the Sublime Porte also, as represented in his person, in consequence of the frustration of their plans, have fled hither to damage the Prince by their falsehoods and insinuations. Nevertheless, although our worthy Prince is persuaded that the wisdom of your Excellencies must needs confute their lying words, your goodwill confound their devices, and your omnipotence chastise their audacity, nevertheless it hath also seemed good to his Highness to send us to your Excellencies in order that we may refute all these complaints and accusations whereby they would falsely, treacherously and abominably disturb the realm…”

Maurocordato here took advantage of a pause made by the orator to take breath after this exordium, and before he was able to proceed to the subject-matter of his address, began straightway to interpret what he had said so far for the benefit of the Grand Vizier, being well aware that the Vizier would not allow anyone to speak a second time before he had spoken himself.

The speech of the interpreter was this time dry and monotonous. All Farkas Bethlen’s homiletical energy was thrown away in Maurocordato’s drawling, indifferent reproduction.

The Grand Vizier replied with flashing eyes, his face was twice as venomous as it had been before, and his gestures plainly indicated an intention to show the envoys the door.

Maurocordato interpreted his reply.

“The Grand Vizier says that not those whom ye persecute but you yourselves are the rebels who have broken the oath ye made to the Sublime Porte, inasmuch as your ambitious projects aim at the separation of Transylvania from its dependence on the Porte and at the conquest of Hungary—both sure ways of destruction for yourselves. Wherefore the Grand Vizier gives you to understand that if you cannot sit still and live in peace with your own fellow-countrymen, he will send to you an intermediary, who will leave naught but tears behind him.”

The Hungarian gentlemen regarded each other in astonishment. Not a trace of simpering amiability remained on the face of Farkas Bethlen, who was furious at the failure of the speech he had so carefully learnt by heart. He bowed still deeper than before, and sacrificing with extraordinary self-denial the remainder of his oration, especially as he perceived that any further parleying would not be permitted, he had resort to more drastic expedients.

“Oh, sir! how can such accusations affect us who have always been willing faithfully to fulfil your wishes? We pay tribute, we give gifts, and now also our worthy Prince hath not sent us to you empty-handed, having commanded Master Michael Teleki not to neglect to provide us with suitable gifts, who has, moreover, sent to your Excellencies through me two hundred purses of money,[22-20] as a token of his respect and homage, beseeching your Excellencies to accept this little gift from us your humble servants.”

With these words the orator beckoned to one of the deputation, at whose summons, four porters appeared carrying between them, suspended on two poles, a large iron chest, which Farkas Bethlen opened, discharging its contents at the feet of the Grand Vizier.

The jingling thalers fell in heaps around the Diván, and the sound of the rolling coins filled the room. The features of the Grand Vizier suddenly changed. Maurocordato stepped back. Bethlen's last words had needed no interpreter; the Vizier could not keep back from his face a hideous smile, the grin of the devil of covetousness. His eyes grew large and round, he no longer clenched his teeth together, he was rather like a wild beast eager to pounce upon his prey.

Farkas Bethlen humbly withdrew among his colleagues; the Vizier could not resist the temptation, he descended from the Diván, rubbing his hands, tapping the shoulders of the last speaker, smiling at all the deputies, and even going so far as to extend his hand to one or two of them, which those fortunate beings hastened to kiss, and spoke something to them in Turkish, to which they felt bound to reply with profound obeisances.

During this scene Maurocordato had quitted the Diván, and as in default of an interpreter the envoys were unable to understand the words of the Vizier, and could only bow repeatedly, Kiuprile, who had learnt Hungarian while he was Pasha of Eger, arose and roared at them in a voice which made the very ceiling shake:

"The Vizier bids you go to hell, ye dogs of Giaours, and if we want you again we will send for you!" Whereupon he gave a vicious kick at a thaler which had rolled to his feet, while the deputies, after innumerable salutations, left the Diván.

On the departure of the Prince's envoys, the Grand Vizier immediately sent for Béldi and his comrades. When the refugees entered the Diván, not one of them yet knew that the envoys of the Prince had been there and brought the money which they saw piled up before them, though they could not for the life of them understand what the Grand Vizier and themselves had to do with all that money; and inasmuch as Maurocordato had also departed, and the cavasses sent after him could not find him anywhere, the Hungarians, in the absence of an interpreter, stood there for some time in the utmost doubt, striving to explain as best they could the signification of the peculiar signs which the Grand Vizier kept making to them from time to time, pointing now at the heaps of money and now at them, and expounding his sayings with all ten fingers. Every time he glanced at the money he could not restrain his disgusting, hyæna-like smile.

"Don't you see," whispered Csaky to Béldi, "the Grand Vizier intends all that money for us?"

Béldi could not help smiling at this artless opinion.

At last, as the interpreter did not come, Kiuprile was constrained, very much against the grain, to arise and interpret the wishes of the Grand Vizier as best he could.

"Worthy sirs, this is what the Grand Vizier says to you. The Prince's deputies have been here. They ought to have their necks broken—that's what I say. They brought with them this sum of money, and they said all sorts of things which are not true, but the money which they brought is true enough. Having regard to which the Grand Vizier says to you that he recognises the justice of your cause

and approves of it, but the mere recognition of its justice will make no difference to it, for it will remain just what it was before. But if you would make your righteous cause progress and succeed, promise him seventy more purses than those of the Prince's envoys, and then we will close with you. We will then fling *them* into the Bosphorus sewn up in sacks, but you we will bring back into your own land and make you the lords of it."

A bitter smile crossed the lips of Paul Béldi, he sighed sorrowfully, and looked back upon his comrades.

"You know right well, sir," said he to Kiuprile, "that we have no money, nor do I know from whence to get as much as you require, and my colleagues are as poor as I am. We never used the property of the State as a means of collecting treasures for ourselves, and what little remained to us from our ancestors has already been divided among the servants of the Prince. We have no money wherewith to buy us justice, and if there be no other mode of saving our country, then in God's name dismiss us and we will throw ourselves at the feet of some foreign Prince, and supplicate till we find one who must listen to us. God be with you; money we have none."

"Then I have!" cried a voice close beside Béldi; and, looking in that direction, they saw Kucsuk Pasha approach Paul Béldi and warmly press the right hand of the downcast Hungarian gentleman. "If you want two hundred and seventy purses I will give it; if you want as much again I will give it; as much as you want you shall have; bargain with them, fix your price; I am here. I will pay instead of you."

Feriz Beg rushed towards his father, and, full of emotion, hid his face in his bosom. Béldi majestically clasped the hand of the old hero, and was scarce able to find words to express his gratitude at this offer.

"I thank you, a thousand times I thank you, but I cannot accept it; that would be a debt I should never be able to repay, nor my descendants after me. Blessed are you for your good will, but you cannot help me that way."

Kiuprile intervened impatiently.

"Be sensible, Paul Béldi, and draw not upon thee my anger; weigh well thy words, and hearken to good counsel. To demand so much money from thee as a private man in exile would be a great folly, but assume that thou art a Prince, and that this amount, which it would be impossible to drag out of one pocket, could easily be distributed over a whole kingdom and not be felt. Do no more then than promise us the amount; it is not necessary that thou shouldst pay us before we have made thee Prince."

Béldi shuddered, and said to Kiuprile with a quavering voice:

"I do not understand you, sir, or else I have not heard properly what you said."

"Then understand me once for all. If it be true what thou sayest—to wit, that the present Prince of Transylvania rules amiss, why then, depose him from his Principality; and if it also be true what thou sayest—to wit, that thou dost love thy country so much and seest what ought to be done—why then, defend it thyself. I will send a message to the frontier Pashas, and they will immediately declare war upon this state, seize Master Michael Apafi and all his counsellors, clap them into the fortress of Jedikula, and put thee and thy comrades in their places. Thou art only to promise the Grand Vizier two hundred and seventy purses, and he will engage to make thee Prince as soon as possible, and then thou wilt be able to pay

it; which, if thou dost refuse, of a truth I tell thee, that I will clap thee into Jedikula in the place of Michael Apafi."

The heart of Paul Béldi beat violently throughout this speech. His emotion was visible in his face, and more than once he would have interrupted Kiuprile if the Hungarian gentlemen had not restrained him. When, however, Kiuprile had finished his speech. Paul Béldi took a step forward, and proudly raising his head so that he seemed to be taller than usual, he replied in a firm, strong voice:

"I thank you, gracious sir, for your offer, but I cannot accept it. A sacred oath binds me to the present Prince of Transylvania, and if he has forgotten the oath which he swore to the nation it is no answer to say that we should also violate ours, nay, rather should we remind him of his. I have raised my head to ask for justice, not to pile one injustice upon another. Transylvania needs not a new Prince, but its old liberties; and if I had only wanted to make war upon the Prince, the country would rise at a sign from me, the whole of the Szeklers would draw their swords for me, but it was I who made them sheath their swords again. I do not come to the Porte for vengeance, but for judgment; not my own fate, but the fate of my country I submit to your Excellencies. I do not want the office of Prince. I do not want to drive out one usurper only to bring in a hundred more. I will not set all Transylvania in a blaze for the sake of roasting Master Michael Teleki, nor for the sake of freeing a dozen people from a shameful dungeon will I have ten thousand dragged into captivity. May I suffer injustice rather than all Transylvania. Accursed should I be, and all my posterity with me, if I were to sell my oppressed nation for a few pence and bring armies against my native land. As to your threats—I am prepared for anything, for prison, for death. I came to you for justice, slay me if you will."

Kiuprile, disgusted, flung himself back on his divan; he did not count upon such opposition, he was not prepared for such strength of mind. The other gentlemen who, from time to time, had fled to the Porte from Transylvania had been wont to beg and pray for the very favour which this man so nobly rejected.

The Grand Vizier, perceiving from the faces of those present the impression made on them by Béldi's speech, turned now to the right and now to the left for an explanation, and dismay gradually spread over his pallid face as he began to understand. Béldi's colleagues, pale and utterly crushed, awaited the result of his alarming reply; while Ladislaus Csaky, unable to restrain his dismay, rushed up to Béldi, flung himself on his neck in his despair, and implored him by heaven and earth to accept the offer of the Grand Vizier.

If the offer had been made to him he would most certainly have accepted it.

"Never, never," replied Béldi, as cold as marble.

The other gentlemen knelt down before him, and with clasped hands besought him not to make himself, his children, and themselves for ever miserable.

"Arise, I am not God!" said Béldi, turning from his tearful colleagues.

The Grand Vizier, on understanding what it was all about, leaped furiously from his place, and tearing off his turban, hurled it in uncontrollable rage to the ground, exclaiming with foaming mouth: "Hither, cavasses!"

"Put that accursed dog in chains!" he screeched, pointing with bloodshot eyes at Béldi, who quietly permitted them to load him with fetters weighing half-a-hundredweight each, which the army of slaves always had in readiness.

“Wouldst thou speak, puppy of a giaour?” cried the Vizier, when he was already chained.

“What I have said I stand to,” solemnly replied the patriot, raising his chained hand to Heaven. “God is my refuge.”

“To the dungeon with him!” yelled Kara Mustafa, beckoning to the drabants to drag Béldi away.

Just as a hard stone emits sparks when it is struck, so Béldi turned suddenly upon the Vizier and said, shaking his chains, “Thine hour will also strike!”

Then he suffered them to lead him away to prison.

Immediately afterwards, the Grand Vizier sent for the envoys of the Prince, and commending them and those who sent them, gave each of them a new caftan, and with the most gracious assurances sent them back to their native land, where nevertheless Master Farkas Bethlen had never been accounted a very great orator.

In the gates of the Seraglio the dismissed envoys encountered Master Ladislaus Csaky. The worthy gentleman at once perceived from their self-satisfied smiles and the new caftans they were wearing that they had been sent away with a favourable reply; whereupon, notwithstanding that he had already agreed with Paul Béldi to render homage to the French and German Ministers, he did not consider it superfluous to pay his court to Master Farkas Bethlen also, and offer to surrender himself body and soul if the Prince would agree to pardon him and restore his estates.

Farkas Bethlen accepted the proposal and not only promised Csaky an amnesty, but high office to boot if he would separate from Béldi; nay, he rewarded on the spot that gentleman who had thus very wisely fastened the threads of his fate to four several places at the same time, so that if one of them broke he could still hold on to the other three.

“Béldi has ruined his affairs utterly,” said Kucsuk Pasha to his son, as they retired from the Diván; “I give up every idea of saving him.”

“I don’t,” sighed Feriz. “I’ll either save or perish with him.”

“Let us go to Maurocordato, he may perhaps advise us.”

After an hour’s interview with Maurocordato, Feriz Beg, with fifty armed Albanian horsemen, took the road towards Grosswardein.

Chapter XXIII

THE TURKISH DEATH.

In the gate of the Pasha of Grosswardein, amidst the gaping throng of armed retainers there, could be seen a pale wizened Moslem idly sprawling on the threshold, apparently regardless of everything, but sometimes looking up, cat-like, with half-shut, dreamy eyes, and at such times he would smile craftily to himself.

Suddenly a handsome, chivalrous youth galloped out of the gate before whom the soldiers bowed down to the earth; this was the Pasha’s favourite horseman, Feriz Beg, who had just arrived from Stambul.

The Beg, as if he had only by accident caught sight of the sprawling Moslem, turned towards him, tapped him on the shoulder with his lance, and while the latter, feigning ignorance and astonishment, gazed up at him, he drew nearer to him and said:

"What Zülfikar! dost thou not recognise me?"

The person so addressed bowed himself to the earth.

"Allah is gracious! By the soul of the Prophet, is it thou, gracious sir?" and with that he got up and began walking by the side of the horse of the Beg, who beckoned him to follow.

"I have lost a good deal of money and a good many horses over the dice-box at Stambul, Zülfikar," said Feriz Beg, "so I have come into these parts to rehabilitate my purse a little. Where dost thou go a-robbing now, Zülfikar?"

"La illah, il Allah! God is gracious and Mohammed is His holy Prophet," said Zülfikar, rolling his eyes heavenwards.

"A truce to this piety, Zülfikar; ye renegades, with unendurable shamelessness, are always glorifying the Prophet, born Turks don't mention him half as much. What I ask thee is, where dost thou go a-plundering now of nights?"

"I thank thee, gracious sir," answered Zülfikar, making a wooden picture of his face, "my wife is quite well, and there is nothing amiss with me either."

"Zülfikar, I value in thee that peculiarity of thine which enables thee to become deaf whenever thou desirest it, but I possess a very good remedy for that evil, and if thou wilt I will cure thee of it."

Zülfikar dodged the lance which was turned in his direction, and said with a Pharisaical air:

"What does your honour deign to inquire of me?"

"Didst thou hear what I said to thee just now?"

"Dost thou mean: where I went robbing? I swear by the beard of the Prophet that I go nowhither for such a purpose."

"I know very well, thou cat, that thou goest nowhither where there is trouble, but thou dost ferret out where a fat booty lies hidden, and thou leadest our Spahis on the track of it, wherefore they give thee also a portion of it; so answer me at once whom thou art wont to visit at night, as otherwise I shall open a hole in thy head."

"But, sir, betray me not; for the Spahis would tie me to a horse's tail and the Pasha would impale me. Thou knowest that he does not allow robbery, but if it happens he looks through his fingers."

"So far from betraying thee I would go with thee, I only know one mode of getting hold of booty. While the others storm a village, I stand a little distance off at the farther end of the village; whoever has anything to save always makes for the farther end of the village, and so falls into my hands."

The renegade began to feel in his element.

"My good sir, at night the Spahis will go to Élesd. There dwell rich Wallachians away from the high road. They have never had blackmail levied on them and there's lots of gold and silver there; if we get a good haul, do not betray me."

"But may we not fall in with the soldiers of Ladislaus Székely?"

"Nay, sir," said Zülfikar, winking his eyes, "they are far from here. Do not betray thy faithful servant."

Feriz Beg put spurs to his horse and galloped off. Zülfikar sat down in the gate again, very sleepily blinking his eyes, and smiling mysteriously.

Towards evening four-and-twenty Spahis crept out of the fortress and made off in the direction of Élesd. Feriz Beg kept an eye upon them, and when they had disappeared in the woods he aroused his Albanian horsemen and quietly went after them.

It was past midnight when Feriz Beg and his company reached the hillside covering Élesd. The Spahis had already plundered the place as was evident from the distant uproar, the loud shrieks, the pealing of bells, and a couple of flaming haystacks which the mauraders had set on fire to assist their operations.

Feriz Beg posted his Albanian horsemen at the mouth of a narrow pass, divided them into four bands and ordered them all to remain as quiet as possible and wait patiently till the Spahis returned.

After some hours of plundering the distant tumult died away, and instead of it could be heard approaching a sound of loud wrangling. Presently, in the deep valley below, the Spahis became visible, staggering under the stolen goods, dispersed into twos and threes and quarrelling together over their booty.

Feriz Beg let them come into the narrow pass and when they were quite unsuspiciously at the height of their dispute, he suddenly blew his horn and then suddenly fell upon them from all sides with his Albanian horsemen, surrounded and attacked the marauders, and before they had had time to use their weapons began to cut them down. The tussle was ashort one. Not one of the Albanians fell, not one of the Spahis escaped.

Feriz dried his sword and leaving the dead Spahis on the road, galloped back with his band to Grosswardein.

In the Pasha's gate he again encountered Zülfikar and, shaking his fist at him, dismounted from his horse.

"Thou dog! thou hast betrayed us to Ladislaus Székely; the Spahis have all been cut down."

Zülfikar turned yellow with fear. It is true that he usually did something like this: when the Spahis would only promise him a small portion of the booty, he would for a few ducats extra let the Hungarian generals know of their coming, when one or two of them would bite the dust and the rest return without the booty. Last night also he had told the captain of Klausenberg of this particular adventure, but the commandant had been unable to make any use of it, for it had been the Prince's birthday, and he had been obliged to treat the soldiers.

Zülfikar felt a lump in his throat when he heard that all twenty-four of the Spahis had perished, and he immediately quitted the fortress and made his way to Klausenberg through the woods as hard as he could pelt.

Feriz Beg, however, in great wrath, paid a visit upon the Pasha.

"Your Excellency," said he, assuming a very severe countenance, "this is the sort of allies we have. Last night I went on an excursion, taking four-and-twenty Spahis with me, in order to purchase horses for myself in the neighbourhood. We dealt honourably with the dealers. I entrusted the horses to the Spahis and myself galloped on in front. In a narrow pass the soldiers of Ladislaus Székely laid an ambush for the Spahis, surrounded them and cut them off to a man. When I came to their assistance there they were all lying slain and the slayers had trotted off on

my own good steeds. Most gracious sir, that is treachery, our own allies do us a mischief. I will not put up with it, but if thou dost not give me complete satisfaction, I will go myself to Klausenberg and put every one of them to the sword, from Master Michael Apafi down to Master Ladislaus Székely."

Ajas Pasha, whose special favourite Feriz Beg was, laughed loudly at this demonstration, patted the youth's cheek, and said in a consolatory voice:

"Nay, my dear son, do not so, nor waste the fire of thy enthusiasm upon these infidels. I have a short method of doing these things—leave it to me."

And thereupon he sent for an aga, and gave him a command in the following terms:

"Sit on thy horse and go quickly to Klausenberg. There go to the commandant, Ladislaus Székely, and speak to him thus: Ajas Pasha wishes thee good-day, thou unbelieving giaour, and sends thee this message: Inasmuch as thy dog-headed servants during the night last past have treacherously fallen upon the men of Feriz Beg and cut down four-and-twenty of them, now therefore I require of thee to search for and send me instantly these murderers, otherwise the whole weight of my wrath shall descend upon thine own head. Moreover, in the place of the horses stolen from him, see that thou send to me without delay just as many good chargers of Wallachia, and beware lest I come for them myself, for then thou wilt have no cause to thank me."

When the aga had learnt the message by heart he withdrew, and Ajas Pasha turned to Feriz Beg complacently:

"Trouble not thyself further," said he, "in a couple of days the murderers will be here."

"I want the Prince to intercede for them himself," said Feriz Beg.

"And dost thou not believe then that the little finger of the Sublime Porte is able to give thee the lives of a few giaour hirelings, when it sends forth thousands to perish on the battle-field?"

"And I will venture to bet a hundred ducats that Master Ladislaus Székely will reply that his soldiers were not out of the fortress at all last night."

"I am sorry for thy hundred ducats, my dear son, but I will take thy bet all the same; and, if I lose, I will cut just as many pieces out of the skin of Master Ladislaus Székely."

The terrified Zülfikar was almost at his last gasp by the time he reached the courtyard of Master Ladislaus Székely, where, greatly exhausted, he obtained an audience of the commandant, who was resplendent in a great mantle trimmed with galloon and adorned with rubies and emeralds. This love of display was the good old gentleman's weak point. He had the most beautiful collection of precious stones in all Transylvania; the nearest way to his heart was to present him with a rare and beautiful jewel.

He was engaged in furbishing up a necklace of chrysoprases and jacinths with a hare's foot when the renegade breathlessly rushed through the door unable to utter a word for sheer weariness. Ladislaus Székely fancied that Zülfikar had come for the reward of his treachery, and very bluntly hastened to anticipate him.

"I was unable to make any use of your information, Zülfikar; it was the Prince's name-day, and the soldiers were not at liberty to leave the town."

“How can your honour say so,” stuttered Zülfikar; “you had four-and-twenty Spahis cut down at Élesd. What fool told your honour to kill them? You should merely have deprived them of their booty.”

Ladislaus Székely let fall his necklace in his fright and gazed at the renegade with big round eyes.

“Don’t be a fool, Zülfikar, my son! Not a soul was outside this fortress to-day or yesterday.”

“Your honour has been well taught what to say,” said the renegade, with the insolence of fury; “you put on as innocent a face over the business as a new-born lamb.”

“I swear to you I don’t understand a word of your nonsense.”

“Of course, of course! Capital! Excellent! But your honour would do well to keep these falsehoods for the messengers of Ajas Pasha, who will be with your honour immediately; try and fool them if you like, but don’t fool me.”

Ladislaus Székely, well aware that every word he said was the sacred truth, fancied that Zülfikar’s assertion was only a rough joke which he wanted to play upon him, so he cast an angry look on the renegade.

“Be off, my son Zülfikar, and cease joking; or I’ll beat you about the head with this hare’s foot till I knock all the moonshine out of you.”

“Your honour had best keep your hare’s foot to yourself, for if I draw my Turkish dagger I’ll make you carry your own head.”

“Be off, be off, my son!” cried Székely, looking around for a stick, and perceiving a cane in the corner with a large silver knob he seized it. “And now are you going, or I shall come to you?” he added.

Zülfikar had just caught sight, meanwhile, through the window of the aga sent by Ajas Pasha, and fearing to encounter him, hastily skipped through the door, which sudden flight was attributed by Master Ladislaus Székely to his own threats of violence. He followed close upon the heels of the fugitive, and ran almost into the very arms of the aga; whereupon, the aga, also flying into a rage, belaboured the commandant with his fists, reviled his father, his mother, and his remotest ancestry, and only after that began to deliver the message of Ajas Pasha, which he enlarged and embellished with the choicest flowers of an angry man’s rhetoric.

At these words Ladislaus Székely changed colour as often as a genuine opal, or as a fractured polyporus fungus. It was clear to him that someone or other had just slain a number of marauding Spahis, but he knew very well that neither he nor his men had performed this heroic deed, for that particular evening they had all been safe and sound at ten o’clock, and yet he was expected to pay the piper!

“Gracious sir, unconquerable aga,” he said at last, “my men the whole of that evening were on duty beneath the windows of the Prince, and the same evening I myself closed the city gates, so that no living thing except a bird could get out. Therefore, I pray you ask not of me the slayers of the Spahis, for never in my life have I killed one of them.”

The aga gnashed his teeth, and stared wildly about, as if seeking for big words worthy of the occasion.

“Darest thou say such things to me, thou wine-drinking infidel?” he cried at last. “I know very well that thou, single-handed, hast not cut down four-and-

twenty Spahis; rather do I believe there were two thousand of you that fell upon them, but these thou must give up to me, every man-jack of them."

Large drops of perspiration began to ooze out upon the forehead of the commandant, and in his embarrassment it occurred to him that deeds were better than words, so he seized the chain covered with chrysoprases and jacinths, which he had just been polishing, and handed them in a deprecating manner to the Turk, knowing that such a line of defence was most likely to obtain a hearing.

But the envoy gave the chain handed to him such a kick that the precious stones were scattered all over the deal boards, and, trampling them beneath his feet, he roared with a blood-red face:

"I want the murderers, not your precious stones."

The commandant thereupon seeing that the aga's embassy was really a serious matter, took him down to the soldiers, who were drawn up in the courtyard, in order to ask each one of them in the hearing of the envoy: "Where were you during the night in question?" Naturally everyone of them was able to prove an alibi, not one of them could be suspected.

The aga very nearly had an overflow of gall. He said nothing, he only rolled his eyes; and when the last soldier had denied any share in the death of the Turks, he leaped upon his horse, and threatening them with his fist, growled through his gnashing teeth:

"Wait, ye also shall have your St. Demetrius' day!"**(23-21)** and with that he galloped back to Grosswardein.

On his arrival he found Feriz Beg with the Pasha, and at once told his story, exaggerating the details to the uttermost.

"What did I tell thee?" said Feriz to the Pasha; "didn't I say they would send back the message that they had never quitted the town. I am sorry for your honour's hundred ducats."

At these words Ajas Pasha kicked over his chibouk and his saucer of sherbet, and in a hoarse, scarce intelligible voice, said to the aga:

"Be off this instant to Stambul as fast as thou canst. Tell the Grand Vizier what has happened, and say to him that if he does not give me the amplest satisfaction, I myself will go against these unbelieving devourers of unruminating beasts who have dared to send me such a message, and will destroy them, together with their strongholds; or else I will cast my sword to the ground, and tie a girdle round my loins, and go away and join the brotherhood of Iskender! Say that, and forget it not!"

Very soon one firman after another reached the Prince from Stambul, each one of which, with steadily rising wrath, demanded the extradition of the assassins of the Spahis. The Prince made inquiries and searched for them everywhere, but nobody could be found to take upon his shoulders this uncommitted deed of heroism.

The messages from the Porte assumed a more and more furious tone every day. In itself the death of four-and-twenty Spahis was no very serious stumbling-block, but what more than anything lashed the Turkish generals into a fury was the persistent refusal of the Prince to acknowledge the offence. Yet with the best will in the world he was unable to do anything else, for not a single person on whom suspicion might fall could he find throughout the Principality.

In those days the dungeons of Klausenburg were well filled with condemned robbers; in the past year alone no fewer than thirty incendiaries had been discovered who had resolved to fire all Transylvania.

One day the noble Martin Pók, the provost-marshal of the place, appeared before the robbers, and attracted the attention of the most evil-disposed of these cut-throats and incendiaries by shouting at them:

"You worthless gallows-dogs, which of you would like to be set free at any price?"

"I would! I would!" cried a whole lot of them.

"Bread is going to be dear, so we cannot waste it on the like of you, so Master Ladislaus Székely has determined that whoever of you would like to become Turks are to be handed over to our gracious master, Ajas Pasha, who will make some of you Janissaries, and send the rest to the isle of Samos; so whoever will be a Turk, let him speak."

Everyone of them wanted to be a Turk.

"Very well, you rascals, just attend to me! I must tell you what to say when you stand before the Pasha, for if you answer foolishly you will be bastinadoed. First of all he will ask you: 'Are you Master Ladislaus Székely's men?' You will answer: 'Yes, we are!' Then he will ask you: 'Were you at Élesd on a certain day?' And you must admit that you were. Finally, he will ask you if you met Feriz Beg there? You will admit everything, and then he will instantly release you from servitude. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes!" roared the incendiaries; and dancing in their fetters they followed the provost-marshal upstairs, who turned his extraordinary small head back from time to time to smile at them, at the same time twisting the ends of his poor thin moustache with an air of crafty self-satisfaction.

One day two letters reached Grosswardein from Stambul. One of these letters was from Kucsuk Pasha to his son, the other was from the Sultan to Ajas Pasha.

The letter to Feriz Beg was as follows:

> "My Son—Let thy heart rejoice: Kiuprile and Maurocordato have not been wasting their time. The Grand Vizier is very wrath with the Prince and his Court. The death of the four-and-twenty Spahis is an affair of even greater importance in Stambul just now than the capture of Candia. I fancy we shall very soon get what we want."

Feriz Beg understood the allusion, and went at once to the Pasha in the best of humours.

"Listen to what the omnipotent Sultan writes," said the Pasha, producing a parchment sealed with green wax, adorned below with the official signature of the Sultan, the so-called Tugra, which was not unlike a bird's-nest made of spiders'-webs.

Feriz Beg pressed the parchment to his forehead and his lips, and the further he read into it the more his face filled with surprise and joy.

> "Valiant Ajas Pasha my Faithful Servant!—I wish thee always all joy and honour. Inasmuch as I learn from thee that the faithless servants of the Prince, in time of peace and amity, have slain four-and-twenty Spahis, and that their masters not only have not punished this misdeed but even presumed to deceive me with lying reports

thereof, thereby revealing their ill-will towards me, now therefore I charge and authorise thee in case the counsellors of the Prince do not surrender the murderers in response to my ultimatum, which even now is on its way to them, or in case they make any objection whatsoever, or even if they simply pass over the matter in silence; in any such case I charge and authorise thee instantly to invade Transylvania with all the armies at thy disposal, and by the nearest route. Kucsuk Pasha also will immediately be ready at hand with his bands at Vöröstorony, and the Tartar King hath also our command to lend thee assistance. This done, I will either drive the Prince into exile or take him prisoner, when I will at once strike off the chains of Master Paul Béldi—who, because of his stubbornness, now sits in irons at Jedekula—and whether he will or not, I will place him incontinently on the throne of the Prince, etc., etc."

"Dost thou believe now that we shall get the murderers?" asked Ajas Pasha triumphantly.

"Never!" said Feriz Beg, laughing aloud and beside himself with joy.

"What dost thou say?" growled the astonished Ajas; "but suppose we go for them ourselves?"

"Well!" said Feriz, perceiving that he had nearly betrayed himself, "in that case—yes." But he said to himself "Not then or ever; and Paul Béldi will be released, and Paul Béldi will become Prince, and his wife will be Princess Consort, and Aranka will be a Princess too, and we shall see each other again."

At that moment an aga entered the room and announced with a look of satisfaction:

"Master Ladislaus Székely has now sent the murderers."

Feriz Beg reeled backwards. The word "impossible" hung upon his lips, and he nearly let it escape. It *was* impossible.

"Let them come in!" said Ajas Pasha viciously. He would have preferred to carry out the Sultan's conditional command, seize the Principality, and conduct the campaign personally.

Feriz Beg fancied he was dreaming when he saw the forty or fifty selected rascals who, led by Martin Pók, drew up before Ajas Pasha; the rogues were dressed up as soldiers but thief, criminal, was written on the face of each one of them.

Master Martin Pók exhibited them to the Pasha and Feriz Beg, and very wisely stood aside from them. Feriz Beg clapped his hands together in astonishment. He knew better than anyone that these fellows had never seen the Spahis, and he waited to hear what they would say.

Ajas Pasha sat on his sofa with a countenance as cold as marble, and at a sign from him a file of Janissaries formed behind the backs of the rascals, who tried to look as pleasant and smiling as possible before the Pasha to gain his favour.

"Ye are Master Ladislaus Székely's men, eh?" inquired the Pasha of the false heroes.

"We are—at thy service, unconquerable Pasha," they replied with one voice, folding their hands across their breasts and bowing down to the very ground.

The Pasha beckoned to the Janissaries to come softly up behind each one of them.

“Ye were at Élesd at midnight on the day of St. Michael the Archangel, eh?” he asked again.

“We were indeed—at thy service invincible Pasha!” they repeated striking their knees with their foreheads.

Feriz Beg rent his clothes in his rage. He would have liked to have roared at them: “Ye lie, you rascals! You were not there at all!” but he was obliged to keep silence.

Ajas beckoned again to the Janissaries, and very nicely and quietly they drew their swords from their sheaths, and, grasping them firmly, concealed them behind their backs.

The Pasha put the third question to the robbers.

“Ye met Feriz Beg, eh?”

“Lie not!” cried Feriz furiously. “Look well at me! Have you ever seen me anywhere before? Did you ever meet me at Élesd?”

The interrogated, bowing to the earth, replied with the utmost devotion: “Yes—at your service, invincible Pasha and most valiant Beg!”

At that same instant the swords flashed in the hands of the Janissaries, and the heads of the robbers suddenly rolled at their feet.

“Oh, ye false knaves!” cried Feriz Beg, striking his forehead with his clenched fist.

Ajas Pasha turned coolly towards Martin Pók: “Greet thy master, and tell him from me that another time he must be quicker, and not make me angry.—As for thee, Feriz, my son, pay me back those hundred ducats!”

Chapter XXIV

THE HOSTAGE.

One evening two horsemen dressed as Turks rode into the courtyard of the fortress of Szamosújvár, and demanded an audience of the noble Danó Sólymosi, the commandant. A soldier conducted to him the two Moslems, one of whom seemed to be a man advanced in years, whose sunburnt face was covered with scars; the other was a youth, whose face was half hidden in the folds of a large mantle, only his dark eyes were visible.

“Good evening, captain,” said the elder Turk, greeting the commandant, who at the first moment recognised the intruder and joyfully hastened towards him and grasped his hand.

“So God has brought Kucsuk Pasha to my humble dwelling.”

“Then thou dost recognise me, worthy old man?” said Kucsuk, just touching the hand of the worthy old Magyar.

“How could I help it, my good sir? Thou didst free my only daughter from the hands of the filthy Tartars, thou didst deliver her from grievous captivity, thou didst give her a place of refuge, food, and pleasant words in a foreign land. I should not be a man if I were to forget thee.”

“Well, for all these things I have come hither to beg something of thee.”

“Command me! My life and goods are at thy service.”

“Dost thou not detain here the family of Paul Béldi?”

“Yes, sir; they brought the unfortunate creatures hither.”

“I must have Paul Béldi’s consort out of this prison for a fortnight, at the accomplishment of which time I will bring her back again.”

The captain was thunderstruck.

“Sir,” said he, “you are playing with my head.”

“None will know, and in two weeks’ time she will be here again.”

“But if they discover it?”

“Have no fear of that. During that time I will leave in thy hands as a hostage my own son.”

The young cavalier approached, threw back his mantle, and the captain recognised Feriz Beg. He fancied he was dreaming.

“Dost thou not suppose that I will bring back the woman for the sake of my son?”

“Do what you think well,” said the commandant. “I owe you a life, I will now pay it back to you; follow me!”

The commandant led his visitors up a narrow corkscrew fortress into the corner tower, which was used as a dungeon for state prisoners. The circular windows were guarded by heavy iron bars, the heavy iron-plated oaken doors groaned upon their hinges, indicating thereby that they were very seldom opened.

“Why did you put them in this lonely place?” asked Kucsuk Pasha; “is there not some other prison in the town?”

“Don’t blame me, sir; my orders were to lock the lady up securely, apart from her child, and in this tower are two adjacent chambers with a common window, and in one of them I have put the mother and in the other the child. I knew that they would not mind if they could speak to each other through the window, and press each other’s hands, and even kiss each other through the bars.”

“Thou art a true man, my good old fellow,” said Kucsuk Pasha, patting the commandant’s shoulder; while Feriz Beg warmly pressed his hand.

“Thou wouldst put me into just such another dungeon, eh?” he asked.

“There would be no need of that, good Feriz Beg; you should dwell in my apartments.”

“But I would not have it so,” said the youth, thinking with glowing cheeks of the fair Aranka who would thus be his next-door neighbour and fellow-prisoner.

At last the iron door of the prison was opened, the jailor remained outside, and the two Osmanlis entered. By the side of a rude oak table was sitting a lady in deep mourning in front of the narrow window, reading aloud from a large Bible with silver clasps; her children at the window of the other dungeon were listening devoutly to the Word of God.

When the men entered the woman started and looked up; the dim ray of light coming through the narrow window made her face appear still paler than it used to be; she looked up seriously, sadly—sorrow had lent a gentle gravity to the face that used to be so bright and gay.

Kucsuk Pasha approached, and taking the lady’s soft transparent hand in his own, briefly introduced himself.

“I am Kucsuk Pasha, thy husband’s most faithful friend in this world after thyself.”

“I thank you for your visit; my husband has often mentioned your name. Do you perchance bring me any message from him?”

“He would have thee with him.”

“Then I am free?” cried the lady, tremulous between joy and doubt.

“Rejoice not, lady; it is not in my power to give thee freedom, I only promise thee a brief interview with Paul Béldi, just time enough for thee to tell him how much thou hast suffered. He cannot come to thee, so thou must come to him. With me thou canst come most quickly, for the greatest part of the time we shall be travelling together.”

“Will my children come with me?”

“They will remain here. But thou wilt see them again soon. Either thou wilt conquer Paul Béldi with thy tears, and melt his iron will, and then he will come back to Transylvania as Prince and every gate will be open before him; or else he will stand fast to his determination, and then thou wilt return to thy dungeon and he to his, and so you will both die in the dungeons of different realms. Now take leave of thy children and hasten. It depends upon thee whether they become princes and princesses or slaves for ever.”

“And who will defend them, who will watch over them, who will pray with them while I am away?”

“Be not distressed. I will leave my own son here as a hostage while thou art away. Feriz will occupy thy dungeon, he will watch over thy children, and not let them be afraid. Hasten now and take leave of them.”

Dame Béldi rushed to the round window. Loudly sobbing, she called her children one by one, and then embraced them all as best she could. The cold iron bars stood between her breast and theirs. The tears of their weeping faces could not dissolve them.

“Give this kiss to father!—And this kiss from me!—And this from me!” lisped the children, putting their little arms round their mother’s neck through the bars.

“My child, my good Aranka!” said Dame Béldi to the girl, who being about fifteen or sixteen was the eldest of them all; “look after thy little brothers and sisters! And you, my good little lads, comfort Aranka. God bless you! God defend you! One more kiss, Aranka! And one more for you, little David?”

“Madame, time is passing, and Paul Béldi is waiting for thee to open his prison!” intervened Kucsuk Pasha, withdrawing Dame Béldi from thewindow of her children’s prison, who thereupon turned her tear-stained face towards Feriz Beg, and in a passion of grief flung herself on the youth’s neck, and said to him in a voice almost indistinguishable for her sobbing:

“Thou noble heart! promise me that thou wilt love my children when I am far away!”

“By Allah, I swear it!” exclaimed the youth, pressing to his bosom the poor woman who was half-fainting for sorrow, “I swear that I will love them for ever!”

Ah! there was one among them whom he had already loved for a long, long time.

“Hasten, lady!” urged the Pasha; “cast this mantle over thee, and place this turban on thy head that the guards may not recognise thee in the distance. The way is long, the time is short.”

“God be with you, God be with you!” sobbed Dame Béldi, casting with tremulous hands hundreds of kisses towards her children, who waved their goodbyes to her from their window and then, violently repressing her emotion, she rushed from the dungeon.

Kucsuk Pasha pressed the hand of his son in silence, and left him in Dame Béldi’s room.

The children kept on weeping behind their window.

The youth drew nearer to them.

“Weep not,” he said cheerfully, “your mother will soon come again and bring your father with her, and then you will all rejoice together.”

“Ah, but then they’ll kill father!” sobbed one of the children timidly.

“So long as Feriz Beg can use his sword none shall touch Paul Béldi,” cried the youth, with flashing eyes. “My sword and my father’s will flash around him, his enemies will be my enemies. Fear not! when I get back my sword, I will win back his liberty with it.”

“I thank you, I thank you,” whispered a gentle voice overcome by emotion.

Feriz Beg recognised the silvery voice of Aranka, and the weeping blue eyes of the seraph face which regarded him, like Heaven after rain, flashed upon him a burning ray of gratitude which was to haunt him in his dreams and in his memory for ever.

Feriz felt his heart leap with a great joy. Pressing close up to the prison bars that he might get as close to the girl as possible he said to her with a tender voice:

“How happy I am now that we dwell together as neighbours in the same dungeon, but oh, how much happier shall we be when no doors are closed upon us? Let me then have a place beside thy hearth and within thy heart!”

The fair, sad girl, with a face full of foreboding, stretched through the bars of the dungeon a hand whiter than a lily, whiter than snow. Feriz Beg solemnly raised it to his lips and falling on his knees, in an outburst of sublime devotion touched his lips and his forehead with that beloved hand.

Chapter XXV

THE HUSBAND.

At the very hour when Kucsuk Pasha arrived at Stambul, Master Ladislaus Székely, whom Master Michael Teleki had sent with rich presents to the Porte, likewise dismounted from his carriage. It was his mission to win the favour of the infuriated Grand Vizier and the Pashas, who had again begun violently to urge Paul Béldi to accept the princely throne.

Master Ladislaus Székely had also brought with him Zülfikar to be his guide and interpreter through the tortuous streets of Stambul.

As we already know, this worthy gentleman’s particular hobby was the collection of jewels, and the Prince had sent through him such a heap of precious stones that the heart of the good gentleman when he saw them all spread out

before him died away within him at the thought that the whole collection was ruthlessly to be broken up and distributed among a lot of foreigners and Pashas.

"What a shame to lose them all," he thought. "And even then who knows whether we shall be safe after all. It is like casting pearls before swine. A much quicker way would be to get Master Paul Béldi assassinated. That would be cutting the knot once for all, and we should have no further danger from that quarter. Michael Teleki wouldn't kill me for a trifle like that, I know. You, Zülfikar, my son, could you undertake to poison someone?" he inquired, turning towards the renegade.

"The whole town if you like."

"No, only Master Paul Béldi. It is all one to him whether he dies or remains a prisoner for life."

"I'll do it for two hundred ducats, if you pay me half in advance."

"I'll pay you, Zülfikar, but how will you get at him?"

"That's my affair, all you have to do is to get the money ready."

Accordingly Ladislaus Székely gave the earnest-money to the renegade, and the renegade went home and wrote a letter in the name of the Beglerleg of the following tenour: "Be assured that our affairs are in the best order, and we shall shortly gain our object."

He strewed over these lines a fine blue dust which was the strongest of poisons, calculating that whoever wanted to read the letter would first brush the dust off it, whereupon the fine dust would rise in the air, and the person reading the letter would inhale the dust and die.

After attaching the letter to his turban, he began prowling round the dungeon of Paul Béldi, awaiting an opportunity of worming his way into it.

Paul Béldi was sitting alone in the darkest corner of the dungeon of Jedikula. At his feet lay his faithful bloodhound, Körtövely, with his eyes fixed sadly on his master. Whenever his master slept the dog would sit up, never take his eyes off him, and begin growling at the lightest noise.

Béldi, with folded arms, was sitting on the stone bench to which he was chained. His face had grown terribly pale and as if turned to stone. The pale gleam of light which filtered through the narrow window and lit up his face, found there no trace of that weary longing which the dweller in prisons generally has for the sun's rays. The whole man, body and soul, was hardened into steel.

Suddenly the dog lying at his feet impatiently raised its sagacious head, and then with a whimper of joy ran towards the door; there it stood for a time merrily barking, and then ran back to its master and stood before him wagging its tail with one foot on his shoulder, whining and whimpering with such lively joy that one might almost have understood what it wanted to say.

"What's the matter? Good dog!" said Béldi, stroking the dog's head. "What is it? Nobody's coming to see me that can make you happy."

At that moment the key turned in the door of the dungeon and a group of men by the light of torches descended the steps and entered Béldi's prison; whereupon Körtövely quickly left his master and burrowing his way through the throng, began to yelp merrily over someone, and then rushing back to his master, planted his fore-paws on his breast and barked as if he would burst because he could not express more plainly the joy which his wonderful canine instinct had anticipated.

Béldi, perceiving among those who visited him the Grand Vizier, Kiuprile, and Maurocordato, ordered his dog to be quiet, and standing up before them, saluted them with a deep bow.

"Well, thou obstinate man!" said the Grand Vizier, "how long wilt thou torment thyself and offend the Sultan and thine own good friends? Wilt thou ever perceive that to sit on a stone bench in a damp dungeon is a very different thing to sitting on a princely throne?"

"The more I suffer," said Béldi, in a strangely calm voice, "the more reason I have to rejoice that my country does not suffer instead of me."

The Grand Vizier thereupon said something in Turkish which Maurocordato sadly interpreted: "The Grand Seignior informs thee that because of money thou hast been cast into prison, and only money can release thee; promise, therefore, two hundred and seventy purses, and thou shalt get the Principality to enable thee to pay it."

"I have told you my determination," said Béldi, "and I will not depart from it. I will not promise money to the detriment of my country. I will not lead an army against it, and I will not break my oath. These were and will be my words from which I can never depart."

"Never!" cried Kucsuk Pasha, pressing through the crowd. "Wilt thou not even now?"—and with that he led a pale female figure towards Béldi.

"My wife!" exclaimed the captive, and he gripped fast his chains lest he should collapse for joy, terror, and surprise.

The pale woman in mourning fell upon his bosom, her tears became his fetters.

Paul Béldi burst into tears, he fell back upon his stone bench, his very soul was shattered. He remained clinging upon his wife's neck, speechless, unable to utter a word, and the whining dog licked now the hand of his master and now the lady's hand.

"Let us turn aside," said Kucsuk Pasha; "let us leave them together"—and the Turks withdrew from the dungeon, leaving Paul Béldi alone with his wife.

"I fancied," said Dame Béldi when she was able to utter a word amidst her choking sobs. "I fancied I was suffering instead of you, and oh! you were suffering more than I."

"How did you come here?" asked Béldi, in a low stifled voice.

"Kucsuk Pasha left his son as a hostage in my stead."

"Worthy man! What useless sacrifices he is making for my sake. And my children?"

"They remain in the dungeon whither also I must return, if you will not accept the Sultan's offer."

"Have they taken away my girl Aranka also?" asked Béldi, with a heavy heart.

"Yes, they have taken her too, and if we are released we shall have no whither to go. They have taken everything of ours. The Bethlen property has become the prey of Farkas Bethlen; the Haromszeki estate is now in the hands of Clement Mikes, although it is not lawful to deprive a Székler of his lands, even for high-treason. Our castle at Bodola has been totally destroyed, our escutcheon has been torn to pieces, and your name has been recorded in the journals of the Diet as a traitor."

"Oh, ye men!" roared Béldi, shaking his chains in the bitterness of his anger; "if I were not Paul Béldi the wrath of God would descend upon your heads. But ah!—I

love my country even if worms are gnawing it. Dry your eyes, my good wife! you see I am not weeping. What we suffer is the visitation of God upon us. I remain a Christian and a patriot. I leave my cause to God!"

"You will not accept the offer of the Sultan?" inquired Dame Béldi, approaching her husband with fear and despair in her eyes.

"Never!" replied Béldi, in a low voice.

The wife, with a loud scream, flung herself at the feet of her husband, and, seizing his knees in a convulsive embrace, begged and besought him: "You would send me back to my dungeon? You would separate me from you for ever? Never, never, not even in the hour of death, shall I see you again."

"Comfort yourself with the thought that you loved me, and were worthy of me, if you can suffer as I do and for the same reason."

"You would plunge your children into eternal captivity?"

"Tell them that their father lived honourably and died honourably, and teach them to live and die like him."

"Think of your girl, Aranka; your favourite, your dearest child."

"Rather may she fade away than Transylvania be plunged in the flames of war."

"Béldi! drive me not to despair!" cried the wife trembling violently. "I am afraid, horribly afraid, of my dungeon. Twice have I had fever from the close, damp air. There was none to care for me in my sickness; I was calling your name continually, and you were far from me; I saw your image, and was unable to embrace you. Oh, Béldi! I shall die without you! The most terrible form of death—despair—will kill me!"

Béldi knelt down by the side of his wife and embraced and kissed her. The woman fainted in his arms as the Turks entered his prison. Béldi beckoned Kucsuk Pasha to him. A sort of leaden, death-like hue had begun to spread over his face; he could scarce see with whom he was conversing. He laid his swooning wife in the arms of the Pasha, and stammered with barely intelligible words: "I thank you for your good will. Here is my wife—take her—back to her dungeon!"

The Turks, in speechless astonishment, lifted up the fainting woman, and left the dungeon without plaguing Béldi with any more questions.

Béldi stood stonily there as they went out, with open lips and a dull light in his eyes. When the last Turk had gone, and he saw his wife no longer, his head began to nod and droop down, and suddenly he fell prone upon the floor.

Körtövely, the old hound, began sorrowfully, bitterly, to whine.

At that moment Zülfikar entered the dungeon with the poisoned letter.

He was too late. Paul Béldi had already departed from this world.

When Ladislaus Székely heard of Béldi's death he gave a magnificent banquet, and when the company was at its merriest Zülfikar came rushing in.

"Come! out with those hundred ducats!" he whispered in the ear of Master Ladislaus Székely.

"What do you mean?" cried Székely in a voice flushed with wine. "Paul Béldi had a stroke; be content with what you have had already."

"Thou faithless dog of a giaour!" cried the renegade at the top of his voice so that everyone could hear him, "is this the way thou dost deceive me? Thou didst bargain with me for the death of Paul Béldi for two hundred ducats, and now thou wouldst beat me down by one half. Thou art a rogue meet for the hangman's

hands. Is it thus thou dost treat an honest man? I'll not kill a man for thee another time until thou pay me in advance, thou faithless robber!"

The company laughed aloud at this scene, but Master Ladislaus Székely seemed very much put out by the joke. "What are you talking about, you crazy fellow?" said he. "Who asked you to do anything? I never saw you in my life before!"

"What!" cried Zülfikar. "I suppose thou wilt deny next that thou didst write this letter to Paul Béldi!" and with that he gave Ladislaus Székely the poisoned letter. He seized it, broke the seal, brushed away the dust, and ran his eye over it, whereupon he flung it at the feet of Zülfikar, exclaiming: "I never wrote that."

Then he beckoned to the servants to seize Zülfikar by the collar and pitch him into the street. But the renegade stood outside in front of the windows and began to curse Székely before the assembled crowd for not paying him the price of the poison.

Inside the house the guests laughed more heartily than ever, and at last Székely himself began to look upon the matter in the light of a joke, and laughed like the rest; but when he returned home to Transylvania he felt a pain in his stomach, and did not know what was the matter. He became deaf, could neither eat nor drink, and his bowels began to rot.

Nobody could cure him of his terrible malady, till at last he fell in with a German leech, who persuaded him that he could cure him with the dust of genuine diamonds and sapphires. Ladislaus Székely handed to the charlatan his collection of precious stones. He abstracted the stones from their settings, but ground up common stones instead of them in his medical mortar, and stampeded himself with the real stones, leaving Ladislaus Székely to die the terrible death by poison which he had intended for Paul Béldi.

Paul Béldi they buried in foreign soil; none visited his grave. Only his faithful dog sat beside it. For eight days it neither ate nor drank. On the ninth day it died on the deserted grave of its master.

Chapter XXVI

THE FADING OF FLOWERS.

And now let us see what became of Aranka and Feriz.

At last they were beneath one roof together—this roof was a little better than the roof of a tomb, but not much, for it was the roof of a dungeon. They could only see each other through a narrow little window, but even this did them good. They were able to press each other's hands through the iron bars, console each other, and talk of their coming joys and boundless happiness. The walls of the prison were so narrow, so damp, the narrow opening scarce admitted the light of day; but when the youth began to talk of his native land, Damascus, rich in roses, of palm-trees waving in the breeze, of warm sunny skies, where the housetops were planted with flowers, and the evergreens give a shade against the ever-burning sun, at such times the girl forgot her dungeon and fancied she was among the rose-groves of

Damascus, and when the youth spoke of the future she forgot the rose-groves of Damascus and fancied she was in heaven.

Days and days passed since the departure of Dame Béldi, and there were no news of her. Every day the spirits of the girl declined, every evening she parted more and more sadly with Feriz, and every morning he found it more and more difficult to comfort her. And now with great consternation the youth began to perceive that the girl was very pale, the colour of life began to fade from her round, rosy cheeks, and there was something new in the brightness of her eyes—it was no earthly light there which made him tremble as he gazed upon her. The youth durst not ask her: "What is the matter?" But the girl said to him:

"Oh, Feriz! I am dying here; I shall never see your smiling skies."

"I would rather see the sky black than thee dead."

"The sky will smile again, but I never shall. I feel something within me which makes my heart's blood flow languidly, and at night I see my dead kinsfolk, and walk with them in unknown regions which I never saw before, and which appear before me so vividly that I could describe every house and every bush by itself."

"That signifies that thou wilt visit unknown regions with me."

"Oh, Feriz, I no longer feel any pleasure in those lands of yours, nor am I glad when I think of your palms, and as often as I see you darkness descends upon my soul, for I feel that I am going to leave you."

"Speak not so, joy of my existence. Grieve not God with thy words, for God is afflicted when the innocent complain."

"I am not complaining. I go from a bad into a good world, and there I shall see you in my dreams."

"But if this bad world should become better, and you lived happily in it?"

Aranka sadly shook her pretty, angelic head.

"That it is not necessary for this world to grow better you can see from the fact that the good must die while the wicked live a long time. God seeks out those that love Him, and takes them unto Himself, for He will not let them suffer long."

Feriz shuddered. What could have put these solemn, melancholy thoughts into the heart of this girl, this child? It was the approach of Death, the worm-bitten fruit ripens more quickly than the rest. Slow, creeping Death had seized upon the childish mind and made it speak like the aged—and sad it was to listen to its words.

"Cheer up," said Feriz, with an effort, skimming with his lips the girl's white hand which she thrust out to him through the bars. "Thy mother will soon be here; thy father will sit on the throne of the Prince as he deserves; thou wilt be a Princess, and I will strive and struggle till I am high enough to sue for thee, and then I will lay my glory and renown at thy feet, and thou shalt be my bride, my queen, my guardian angel."

The girl shook her head sorrowfully.

"And we will walk along by the banks of the quiet streams in those ancient lands where not craft but valour rules, where the wise are only learned in the courses of the stars and the healing virtues of the plants, not in the science of the rise and fall of kingdoms. There from the window of my breeze-blown kiosk, which is built on the slopes of Lebanon, thou wilt view the whole region round about. Above, the shepherds kindle their fires in the blackness of the cedar forests;

below, the mountain stream runs murmuring along, and all round about us the nightingale is singing, and what he singeth is the happiness of love. In the far distance thou seest the mirror of the great sea, and the white-sailed pleasure boat rocks to and fro on the transparent becalmed billows, and the moon looks down upon the limitless mirror, and a fair maiden sits in the pleasure-boat, and at her feet lies a youth, and both of them are silent, only a throbbing heart is speaking, and it speaks of the happiness of love."

A couple of tears dropped from the eyes of the girl—the future was so seductive—and that picture, that fair country, she did not seem to be regarding them from the earth, it seemed to her as if she was looking down upon them from the sky and regretting that she was forced to leave—the beautiful world.

Aranka adored her father. The man who was respected for his virtues by a whole kingdom was the highest ideal of his child. When Feriz began to speak of him, the girl's face brightened, and at the recital of his heroic deeds the tears dried up in her flashing eyes; and when the youth told her how the great patriot would return, glorious and powerful, supported by the mightiest of monarchs, and how he would throw open the prison doors of his children and be parted from them no more, then a smile would gradually transfigure the girl's face, and she would feel happy. And then she would steal apart into her own dungeon, and kneel down before her bed, and pray ardently that she might see her father soon, very soon.

And she was to see him before very long.

Paul Béldi's body was now six feet deep in the ground, and his soul a star farther off in the sky—to see him one must go to him.

Paler and paler she became every day, her waking moments were scarcely different from her dreams, and her dreams from her waking moments. The provost-marshal now had compassion on the withered flower, and allowed it on the sunny afternoons to walk about on the bastions and breathe the fresh air. But neither moonlight nor fresh air could cure her now.

Frequently she would take the hand of Feriz Beg and press it to her forehead. "See how it burns, just like fire! Oh, if only I might live till my father comes. How he would grieve for me!"

Feriz Beg saw her wither from day to day, and still there was no sign of liberty. The youth used frequently to walk about the courtyard half a day at a time, like a lion in a cage, beating the walls with his forehead at the thought that that for which he had been striving his whole life long, and the possession whereof was the final goal of his existence, was drawing nearer and nearer to Death every hour, and no human power could hold it back!

The wife of the provost-marshal, a good, true woman, nursed the rapidly declining girl. Medical science was then of very small account in Transylvania; the sick had resort to well-known herbs and domestic remedies based on the experience of the aged; they trusted for the most part to our blessed mother Nature and the mercy of God.

The worthy woman did all she could, but her honest heart told her that the arrival of Aranka's father, and the sooner the better, would do more good than all her remedies. That would transform the invalid, and joy would give her back her failing vital energy.

Feriz Beg had not been able to speak to Aranka for two days; the girl had suffered greatly during the night, and Feriz was condemned to listen to the moaning of his beloved, and to hear her in the delirium of fever through the prison windows without being able to go to her, without being able to wipe the sweat from her forehead, or put a glass of cold water to her lips, or whisper to her words of comfort, and had to be content with knowing that she was with those who carefully nursed her.

Oh, it is not to the dying that death is most bitter.

By the morning the fever left her. The rising sun was just beginning to shine through the narrow round window and the sick girl begged to be carried out into the open air and the warm morning sunshine. She was no longer able to walk by herself, and they carried her out on to the bastions in an arm-chair.

It was a beautiful autumn morning, a sort of transparent light rested upon the whole region, giving a pale lilac blue to the sunlit scene. Where the road wound down from the Szekler hills a light cloud of dust was visible in the morning vapour; it seemed to be coming from the direction of Szamosújvár.

"Ah! there is my mother coming!" whispered Aranka, with a smiling face.

The young Turk held his hand before his face and fixed his eagle eyes in that direction; and when for a moment the breeze swept the dust off the road, and a carriage on springs drawn by five horses appeared, he exclaimed with a beating heart:

"Yes, that is indeed the carriage in which they took away thy mother."

Aranka was dumb with joy and surprise; she could not speak a word, she only squeezed Feriz Beg's hands and fixed her tearful eyes upon him with a grateful look.

The carriage seemed to be rapidly approaching. "That is how people hasten who have something joyful to say," thought Feriz, and then he began to fear less boundless joy might injure the life of his darling.

Soon the carriage arrived in front of the fortress and rumbled noisily over the drawbridge. Aranka, supported by the arm of Feriz, descended into the courtyard. They pressed onward to meet the carriage, and the smile upon her pallid face was so melancholy.

The glass door of the carriage was opened, and who should come out but Kucsuk Pasha.

There was nothing encouraging in his look; he said not a word either to his son or to the girl who clung to him, but the castellan was standing hard by, and he beckoned to him.

"In the carriage," said Kucsuk, "is the prisoner for whom I left my son as an hostage; take her back, and look well after her, for she is very ill."

Dame Béldi lay in the carriage unconscious, motionless.

Aranka, paler than ever and trembling all over, asked:

"Where is my father?"

Kucsuk Pasha would have spoken, but tears came instead of words and ran down his manly face; silently he raised his hand, pointed upwards, and said, in a scarce audible voice: "In Heaven!"

The gentle girl, like a plucked flower, collapsed at these words. Feriz Beg caught her moaning in his arms, she raised her eyes, a long sigh escaped her lips, then her beautiful lips drooped, her beautiful eyes closed, and all was over.

The beloved maiden had gone to her father in Heaven.

Chapter XXVII

THE SWORD OF GOD.

For some time past God's marvels had been multiplied over Transylvania. No longer were they disquieting rumours which popular agitators invented for the disturbance of the public peace, but extraordinary natural phenomena whose rapid sequence stirred the heart of even the coldest sceptic.

One summer morning at dawn, after a clear night, an unusually thick heavy mist descended upon the earth, which only dispersed in the afternoon, spread over the whole sky in the shape of an endless black cloud, and there remained like a heavy motionless curtain. Not a drop of water fell from it, and at noonday in the houses it was impossible to see anything without a candle.

Towards evening every bird became silent, the flowers closed their calices, the leaves of the trees hung limply down. The people walking about outside began to complain of a stifling cough, and from that time forth the germs of every disease antagonistic to nature were seen in every herb, in every fruit; even the water of the streams was corrupted. The hot blood of man, the earth itself was infected by a kind of epidemic, so that weeds never seen before sprang up and ruined the richest crops, and the strongest oaks of the forest withered beneath the assault of grey blight and funguses, and the good black soil of the fruitful arable land was covered with a hideous green mould.

For three whole days the sky did not clear. On the evening of the fourth day the stifling stillness was followed by a frightful hurricane, which tore off the roofs of the houses, wrenched the stars and crosses from the steeples of the churches, swept up the dust from the high-roads, caused such a darkness that it was impossible to see, and bursting open the willow trees, which had just begun to bloom, drove the red pollen before it in clouds, so that when the first big rain-drops began to fall they left behind them blood-red traces on the white walls of the houses. "It is raining blood from Heaven!" was the terrified cry. Not long afterwards came the cracking thunderbolts flashing and flaming as if they would flog the earth with a thousand fiery whips, while one perpendicular flash of lightning plumped right down into the middle of the town, shaking the earth with its cracking concussion, so that everyone believed the hour of judgment was at hand.

Nevertheless the storm had scattered the clouds, and by eventide the sky had cleared, and lo! before the eyes of the gaping multitude a gigantic comet stood in the firmament, all the more startling as nobody had been aware of its proximity because for three days the sky had been blotted out by clouds.

The nucleus of the comet stood just over the place where the sun had gone down, and the blood-red light of evening was not sufficient to dim the brightness

of the lurid star; it appeared as if it had just slain the sun and was now bathing in its blood.

The comet was so long that it seemed to stretch across two-thirds of the firmament, and the end of it bulged out broadly like a Turkish scimitar.

“The sword of God!” whispered the people with instinctive fear.

For two weeks this phenomenon stood in the sky, rising late one day and early the next. Sometimes it appeared with the bright sun, and in the solar brightness it looked like a huge streak of blue enamel in the sky and spread around it a sort of febrile pallor as if the atmosphere itself were sick: on bright afternoons the sun could be regarded with the naked eye.

The people were in fear and terror at this extraordinary phenomenon, and when the blind masses are in an unconscious panic then a storm is close at hand, then they are capable of anything to escape from their fear.

In those days the priests of every faith could give strange testimony of the general consternation which prevailed in Transylvania. The churches were kept open all day long, and the indefatigable curers of souls spoke words of consolation to the assembled hosts of the faithful. Magyari, the Prince’s chaplain, preached four sermons every day in the cathedral, which was so crowded at such times that half the people could not get in at all but remained standing outside the doors.

One evening the church was so filled with faithful worshippers that the very steps were covered with them, and all sorts of Klausenberg burgesses intermingled with travelling Szeklers in a group before the principal door, and after the hymn was finished they clapped to their clasped psalm-books and began to talk to each other while the sermon was going on inside.

“We live in evil times,” said an old master-tanner, shaking his big cap.

“We can say a word about that too,” interrupted a Szekler, who was up in town about a law-suit, and who seized the opportunity of saying what he knew because he had come from far.

“Then you also have seen the sword of God?” inquired a young man.

“Not only have we seen it, my little brother, but we have felt it also. Not a single evening do we lay down to rest without reciting the prayers for the dead and dying, and scarce a night passes but what we see the sky a fiery red colour, either on the right hand or to the left.”

“What would that be?”

“Some village or town burning to ashes. They say the whole kingdom is full of destroying angels; one never knows whose roof will be fired over his head next.”

“God and all good spirits guard us from it.”

“We hear all sorts of evil reports,” said a gingerbread baker. “Yesterday I was talking to a Wallachian woman whose husband was faring on the Járas-water on a raft taking cheese to Yorda. He was not a day’s journey from his home when the Járas turned, began to flow upwards, and took the Wallachian back to his house from which he had started.”

A listening clergyman here explained the matter by saying that the Aranyos, into which the Járas flows, was greatly flooded just then, and it was its overflow which filled up the Járas; in fact it was Divine Providence which brought the Wallachian back, for if he had been able to go on farther, the Tartars would certainly have fallen upon him and cut him to pieces.

“I have experienced everything in my time,” said the oldest of the burgesses, “war, plague, flood and pestilence, but there’s only one thing I am afraid of, and that is earthquake, for a man cannot even go to church to pray against that.”

At that moment the preacher in the church began to speak so loudly that those standing outside could hear his words, and, growing suddenly silent, they pressed nearer to the door of the church to hear what he was saying.

The right rev. Magyari was trouncing the gentlemen present unmercifully: “God prepares to war against you, for ye also are preparing to war against Him. You have broken the peace ye swore to observe right and left, and ye shall have what you want, war without and war within, so that ye may be constrained to say: ‘Enough, enough, O Lord!’ and ye shall not see the end of what you have so foolishly begun.”

Magyari already knew that Teleki, at the Diet of Szamosújvár, had announced the impending war.

Just at this very time two men of the patrician order in sable kalpags were seen approaching, in whom the Klausenbergers at once recognised Michael Teleki and Ladislaus Vajda, and so far as they were able they made room for them to get into the church through the crowd; but the Szekler did not recognise either of them, and when Ladislaus Vajda very haughtily shoved him aside with his elbows, he turned upon him and said:

“Softly, softly, sir! This is the house of God, not the house of a great lord. Here I am just as good a man as you are.”

Those standing beside him tried to pull him aside, but it is the peculiarity of the Szeklers that they grow more furious than ever when people try to pacify them; and on perceiving that Ladislaus Vajda, unable to make his way through the throng, began to look about him to see how he best could get to his seat, the Szekler cried in front of him:

“Cannot you let these two gentlemen get into the church? don’t you see that the lesson is meant for them?”

Teleki meanwhile had forced his way just over the threshold, and taking off his kalpag, exposed his bald, defenceless head in the sight of all the people, with his face turned in the direction indicated by the boisterous Szekler.

Magyari continued his fulminating discourse from the pulpit.

“Nobody dare speak against you now, for your words are very thunderbolts and strike down those with whom you are angry—nay, rather, men bow the knee before you and say, ‘Your Excellency! Your Excellency!’ but the judgment of the Lord shall descend upon you, the Lord will slay you, and then men will point the finger of scorn at you and say: ‘That is the consort of the accursed one who betrayed his country!—these are the children of that godless man!’ And your descendants will blush to bear the shameful name you have left them, for then the tongue of every man will wag in his mouth against you, and they will cry after your posterity: ‘It was the father of those fellows who betrayed Transylvania and plunged us into slime from which we cannot now withdraw our feet’ …”

“Come away, your Excellency!” said Ladislaus Vajda to Teleki, whom the parson seemed to have seen, for he turned straight towards him as he spoke.

“What are you thinking of?” Teleki whispered back; “the parson is speaking the truth, but it doesn’t matter.”

“Whither would ye go, ye senseless vacillators!” continued Magyari, “who empowered you to make the men of Transylvania fugitives, their wives widows, and their children orphans? Verily I say to you, ye shall fare like the camel who went to Jupiter for horns and got shorn of his ears instead.”

“It may be so,” said Teleki to Vajda, “but we shall pursue our course all the same.”

The parson saw that the Minister of State was paying attention to his discourse, so he wrinkled his forehead, and thus proceeded:

“When King Louis perished on the field of Mohács, the Turkish Emperor had the dead body brought before him, and recognising at the same time the corpse of an evil Hungarian politician lying there, he struck off its head with his sword, and said: ‘If thou hadst not been there, thou dog! this honest child-king would not be lying dead here.’ God grant that a foreign nation may not so deal with you.”

Teleki scratched his head, and whispered:

“It may happen to me likewise, but that makes no difference.”

Shortly afterwards another hymn was sung, the two magnates put on their kalpags and withdrew, and the emerging crowd of people flowed along all around them, among whom the Szekler, as recently mentioned, followed hard upon the heels of the two gentlemen with singular persistency, lauding to the skies before everyone, in a loud voice, the sermon he had just heard, so as to insult the two gentlemen walking in front of him as much as possible.

“That was something like a sermon,” he cried, “that is just how our masters ought to have their heads washed—without too much soap. And quite right too! Why saddle the realm with war at all? Why should Transylvania put on a mustard plaster because Hungary has a pain in its stomach? What has all this coming and going of foreigners to do with us? Why should we poor Transylvanians suffer for the sake of the lean foreigners among us?”

Ladislaus Vajda could put up with this no longer, and turning round, shouted at the Szekler:

“Keep your distance, you rascal, speak like a man at any rate; don’t bark here like some mad beast when it sees a better man than itself.”

At these words the Szekler thrust his neck forward, stuck his face beneath the very nose of the gentleman who had spoken to him, looked him straight in the face with bright eyes that pricked like pins, and said, twisting his moustaches fiercely:

“Don’t you try to fix any of your bastard names on me, sir, for if I go home for my sword I will pretty soon make you a present of a head, and that head shall be your own.”

Ladislaus Vajda would have made some reply, but Teleki pulled him by the arm and dragged him away.

“Nothing aggravates your Excellency,” said the offended gentleman.

“Let him growl, he’ll be all the better soldier if we do have war; never quarrel with a Szekler, my friend, for he always has a greater respect for his own head than for anyone else’s.”

And so the two gentlemen disappeared through the gates of the Prince’s palace.

The Prince himself was present at this sermon, and it produced this much impression that he enjoined a fast upon his whole household and then went to bed. In the night, however, he awoke repeatedly, and had so many tormenting

visions that he woke up all his pages, and it was even necessary at last to send for the Princess herself, and only then did he become a little calmer when she appeared at his bedside; in fact, he kept her with him till dawn of day, continually telling her all sorts of sad and painful things so that the Princess's cries of horror could be heard through the door.

In the morning, after the Princess had retired to her own apartments, she immediately summoned to her presence Michael Teleki, who, living at that time at the Prince's court as if it were his own home, was not very long in making his appearance, and obeyed the command to be seated with as much cheerful alacrity as if he had been asked to sit down at a banquet, though well aware that a bitter cup had been prepared for him which he must drain to the dregs.

"Sir," said the Princess, "Apafi was very ill last night."

"That was owing to the fast, he isn't used to such practices. Generally, he has a good supper, and if he departs from his usual course of life he is bound to sleep badly. Bad dreams plague an empty stomach just as much as an overburdened one."

"And how about an overburdened conscience, sir? I have spent the whole night at his bedside, only this instant have I quitted him; he would not let me leave him, he pressed my hand continually, and he talked, soberly and wide-awake, of things which I should have thought could only have been talked about in the delirium of typhus. He said that that night he had stood before the judgment-seat of God, before a great table—which was so long that he could not see the end of it—and at this table sat the accusing witnesses, first of all Denis Banfy, and then Béldi, Dame Béldi and their daughter, and eldest son, who died in prison; Kepi, too, was there, and young Kornis, and old John Bethlen, and the rest of them; all these familiar faces were before him, and as tremblingly he approached the throne of God they all fixed their eyes upon him and pointed their fingers at him. Sir, it was a terrible picture."

"Does your Highness fancy that I am an interpreter of dreams?" asked Teleki maliciously.

"Sir, this is more than a dream—it is a vision, a revelation."

"It may be so; the souls of the gentlemen enumerated are, no doubt, in Heaven, and it is possible that countless other souls will follow them thither."

"And will the soul that shed their blood ascend thither too?"

"Will your Highness deign to speak quite plainly—I suppose you mean me? Of course, I am the cause of all the evils of Transylvania. Till I came upon the scene, none but lamb-like men inhabited this state, in whose veins flowed milk and honey instead of blood! King Sigismund, Bethlen, Bocskai, George Rákóczy, for instance! Under them only some fifty or sixty thousand men lost their lives in their party feuds and ambitious struggles! Fine fellows, every one of them of course, everyone calls them great patriots. But I, whose sword has never aimed at a self-sought crown, I, who am animated by a great and mighty thought, a sublime idea, I am a murderer, and responsible not only for those who have fallen in battle, but also for those who have died quietly in their beds, if they were not my good friends."

"There was a time, sir, when you used every effort to prevent Transylvania from going to war."

“That was the very time when your Highness pleaded before the Prince for war in the name of your exiled Hungarian kinsfolk. Other times, other men.”

“I knew not then that such a desire would lead to the ruin of so many great and honourable men.”

“You feared war, and yet you fanned it. He who resists a snow-storm is swept away. Not the fate of men alone, but the fate of kingdoms also is here in question. Apafi may console himself with the reflection that God regards us both as far too petty instruments to lay upon our souls what He Himself has decreed in the fullness of time, and what will and must happen in spite of us, for the weeping and mourning which we listen to here is also heard in Heaven. The mottoes of our escutcheons go very well together. Apafi’s is ‘*Fata viam inveniunt*,’ mine is ‘*Gutta cavat lapidem*.’ Let us trust ourselves to our mottoes.”

The Princess, with folded arms, gazed out of the window and remained in a brown study for some time. And now, as though her thoughts were wandering far away, she suddenly sighed: “Ah! this Béldi family so unhappily ruined, and how many more must be ruined likewise!”

“Your Highness!” rejoined the Minister, without moving a muscle of his face, “when, in time of drought, we pray for rain the whole day, does anybody inquire what will become of the poor travellers who may be caught in the downpour? Yet it may well happen that some of them may take a chill and die in consequence.”

“I don’t grasp the metaphor.”

“Well, the whole Principality is now praying for rain—a rain of blood, I admit—and there is every sign that God will grant it. I do not mean those signs and wonders in which the common folks believe, but those signs of the times which rivet the attention of thinking men. Formerly there was a large party in Transylvania which had engaged to uphold an indolent peace, and which had so many ties, amongst the leading men both of the Kaiser and the Sultan, that Denis Banfy could at one time boldly tell me to my face that that Party was a hand with a hundred fingers, which could squeeze everything it laid hold of like a sponge. And lo! the fingers have all dropped off one by one. Denis Banfy has perished—they say I killed him. Paul Béldi has died in prison—they say I have poisoned him. God hath called John Bethlen also to Himself. Kapi has died. The boldest of my enemies, Gabriel Kornis, has also died in the flower of his youth—naturally they attribute his death to me likewise. All those, too, who opposed war in the Diván have disappeared one by one. Kucsuk Pasha has been shot down by a bullet at Lippa. Kiuprile Pasha has been stifled by his own fat; and the youngest of the Viziers, Feriz Beg, has gone mad.

“Gone mad!” cried the Princess, covering her face with her hands; “that noble, worthy youth who loved Transylvania so well?”

“Do you not see the hand of God in all this?” asked the Minister.

“No, sir,” said the Princess, rising with a face full of sadness and approaching the Minister so as to look him straight in the face while she spoke to him, “it is your hand that I see everywhere. Denis Banfy perished, but it was you who had him beheaded. Béldi is dead, but it was you who drove him to despair. It was you, too, who threw his family into prison, and only let them out when the foul air had poured a deadly sickness into their blood. And Feriz Beg has gone mad because he loved Béldi’s daughter, and she is dead.”

“Very well, your Highness, let it be so,” replied the imperturbable Minister. “To attribute to me the direction of destiny is praise indeed. Believe, then, that everything which happens in the council chamber of this realm and in the heart of its members derives from me. I’ll be responsible. And if your Highness believes that that flaming comet, which they call the Sword of God, is also in my hand—why—be it so! I will hurl it forth, and strike the earth with it so that all its hinges shall be out of joint.”

At that very moment the palace trembled to its very foundations.

The Princess leaped to her feet, shrieking.

“Ah! what was that?” she asked, as pale as death.

“It was an earthquake, madame,” replied Teleki with amazing calmness. “There is nothing to be afraid of, the palace has very strong vaults; but if you are afraid, stand just beneath the doorway, that cannot fall.”

On recovering from her first alarm the Princess quickly regained her presence of mind.

“God preserve us! I must hasten to the Prince. Will not you come too?”

“I’ll remain here,” replied Teleki coolly. “We are in the hands of God wherever we may be, and when He calls me to Him I will account to Him for all that I have done.”

The Princess ran along the winding corridor, and, finding her husband, took him down with her into the garden.

It was terrible to see from the outside how the vast building moved and twisted beneath the sinuous motion of the earth; every moment one might fear it would fall to pieces.

The Prince asked where Teleki was; the Princess said she had left him in her apartments.

“We must go for him this instant!” cried the Prince, but amongst all the trembling faces around him he could find none to listen to his words, for a man who fears nothing else is a coward in the presence of an earthquake.

Meanwhile the Minister was sitting quietly at a writing-table and writing a letter to Kara Mustafa, who had taken the place of the dead Kiuprile. He was a great warrior and the Sultan’s right hand, who not long before had been invited by the Cossacks to help them against the Poles, which he did very thoroughly, first of all ravaging numerous Polish towns, and then, turning against his confederate Cossacks, he cut down a few hundred thousands of them and led thirty thousand more into captivity.

To him Teleki wrote for assistance for the Hungarians.

Every bit of furniture was shaking and tottering around him, the windows rattled noisily as if shaken by an ague, the very chair on which he sat rocked to and fro beneath him, and the writing-table bobbed up and down beneath his hand so that the pen ran away from the paper; but for all that he finished his letter, and when he came to the end of it he wrote at the bottom in firm characters:

“Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinæ!”

Mustafa puzzled his brains considerably when he came to that part of the letter containing the verse which had nothing to do with the text, which the Minister, under the influence of an iron will struggling against terror, had written there almost involuntarily.

When the menacing peril had passed, and the pages had returned to the palace, he turned to them reproachfully with the sealed letter in his hand.

"Where have you been? Not one of you can be found when you are wanted. Take this letter at once, with an escort of two mounted drabants, to Varna, for the Grand Vizier."

And then he began to walk up and down the room as if nothing had happened.

Chapter XXVIII

THE MAD MAN.

In the most secret chamber of the Diván were assembled the Viziers for an important consultation. The impending war was the subject of their grave deliberations. For as Mohammed had said, there ought to be one God in Heaven and one Lord on earth, so many of the Faithful believed that the time for the accomplishment of this axiom had now arrived.

Those wise men of the empire, those honourable counsellors, Kucsuk and Kiuprile, were dead. Kara Mustafa, an arrogant, self-confidant man, directed the mind of the Diván, and everyone followed his lead.

The Sultan himself was present, a handsome man with regular features, but with an expression of lassitude and exhaustion. During the whole consultation he never uttered a word nor moved a muscle of his face; he sat there like a corpse.

One by one the ambassadors of the Foreign Powers were admitted. The orator of Louis XIV. declared that the French King was about to attack the Kaiser with all his forces; if the Sultan would also rise up against him, he would be able to seize not only all Hungary but Vienna likewise.

The Sultan was silent. The Grand Vizier, answering for him, replied that Hungary had long since belonged to the Sultan, and no doubt Vienna and Poland would shortly share the same fate. The Sultan could only suffer tributary kings on the earth.

The ambassador drew a somewhat wry face at these words, reflecting that France also was on the earth; then he withdrew.

After him came the envoys of Emeric Tököly, offering the blood and the swords of the Hungarian malcontents to the Sultan if he would help them to win back Hungary.

This time the Sultan replied instead of Mustafa.

"The Grand Seignior greets his servants, and will be gracious to them if they will help him to win back Hungary."

The envoys noticed that their words had ingeniously been twisted, but as they also had their own *arrière-pensées* in regard to the Turks, they only looked at each other with a smile and withdrew.

Then came the Transylvanian embassy—gentle, mild-looking men, whose orator delivered an extraordinarily florid discourse. His Highness, Michael Apafi, they said, and all the estates of Transylvania, were ready to draw their swords for the glory of the Grand Seignior and invade Hungary.

Mustafa replied:

"The Grand Seignior permits you to help your comrades in Hungary."

The orator would like to have heard something different—for example, that the crown of Hungary was reserved for Michael Apafi, the dignity of Palatine for Teleki, etc., etc., and there he stood scratching his ear till the Grand Vizier told him he might go.

Ha, ha! the Turkish policy was written in Turkish.

After the foreign envoys came the messengers from the various pashas and commandants in Hungary, who brought terrible tidings of raids, incursions, and outrages on the part of the Magyar population against the Turks. The Grand Vizier exclaimed angrily at every fresh report, only the Sultan was silent. Last of all came the ulemas.

On their decisions everything depended.

Very solemnly they appeared before the Diván. First of all advanced the Chief Mufti in a long mantle reaching to his heels, and with a large beehive-shaped hat upon his head; his white beard reached to his girdle. After him came two imams, one of whom carried a large document in a velvet case, whose pendant seal swung to and fro beneath its long golden cord; the other bent beneath the weight of an enormous book—it was the Alkoran.

The Alkoran is a very nice large book, larger than our *corpus juris* of former days, and in it may be found everything which everyone requires: accusatory, condemnatory, and absolvatory texts for one and the same thing.

The Mufti presented the Alkoran to the Sultan and all the Viziers in turn, and each one of them kissed it with deep reverence; then he beckoned to one of the imams to kneel down on a stool before the Diván and remain there resting on his hands and knees, and placing the Koran on his back, began to select expressly marked texts.

For seventy years he had thoroughly studied the sacred volume, and could say that he had read it through seven hundred and ninety-three times. He, therefore, knew all its secrets, and could turn at once to the leaf on which the text he wanted to read aloud could be found.

"The Alkoran saith," he read with unctuous devotion, "'the knot which hath been tied in the name of Allah the hand of Allah can unloose!' The Alkoran saith moreover: 'Wherever we may be, and whatever we may be, everywhere we are all of us in the hand of Allah.' Therefore this treaty of peace is also in the hand of Allah, and the hand of Allah can unloose everything. Furthermore, the Alkoran saith: 'If any among thy suffering father's children implore help from thee, answer him not: come to me to-morrow, for my vow forbids me to rise up to-day; or, if any ask an alms of thee answer him not: to-day it cannot be, for my vow forbids me to touch money; or, if anyone beg thee to slay someone, answer him not: to-morrow I will help thee, for my vow forbids me to draw the sword to-day; verily the observance of thy vow will be a greater sin to thee than its violation.' Moreover, thus saith the Alkoran: 'The happiness of the nations is the first duty of the rulers of the earth, yet the glory of Allah comes before it.' And finally it is written: 'Whoso formeth a league with the infidel bindeth himself to wage war upon Allah, yet vainly do the nations of the earth bind themselves together that they may live long, for let Allah

send his breath upon them and more of them are destroyed in one day than in ten years of warfare: kings and beggars—it is all one.'"

At each fresh sentence the viziers and the ulemas bowed their heads to the ground. Mustafa could not restrain a blood-thirsty smile, which distorted his face more and more at each fresh sentence, and at the last word, with a fanatical outburst, he threw off the mask altogether, and with a howl of joy kissed repeatedly the hem of the Chief Mufti's mantle.

The Mufti then unclasped the velvet case which contained the treaty of peace, and drawing forth the parchment, which was folded fourfold, he unfolded it with great ceremony, and placing it in the hands of the second imam that he might hold it spread open at both ends, he exhibited the document to the viziers.

It was a long and beautiful script. The initial letter was as big as a painted castle and wreathed around with a pattern of birds and flowers. The whole of the first line of it was in ultramarine letters, the other lines much smaller on a gradually diminishing scale, and whenever the name of Allah occurred, it was written in letters of gold. The Sultan's name was always in red, the Kaiser's in bright green letters. At the foot of it was the fantastic flourish which passed for the Sultan's signature, which he would never have been able to write, but which was always engraved on the signet ring which he wore on his finger.

"Lo! here is the treaty," said the Mufti, pointing to the document, "from which, by the command of Allah, I will now wash off the writing."

Thereupon he drew across the document a large brush which he had previously dipped into a large basin of water in which sundry chemicals had been dissolved, and suddenly the writing began to fade away, the Sultan's name written in red letters disappeared instantly from the parchment, then the lines written in black ink visibly grew dimmer. The Kaiser's name written in bright green letters resisted more obstinately, but at last these also vanished utterly, and nothing more remained on the white parchment but the name of God written in letters of gold—the corrosive acid was powerless against that.

Deep silence prevailed in the Diván, every eye was fixed with pious attention on the bleaching script.

Then, seizing a drawn sword, the Mufti raised it aloft and said:

"Having wiped away the writing which cast dishonour on the name of Allah, I now cut this document in four pieces with the point of my sword."

And speaking thus, and while the imam stretched the parchment out with both hands, the Mufti cut it into four pieces with the sword he held in his hand, and placing the fragments in a pan, filled it up with naptha from a little crystal flask.

"Lo! now I burn thee before the face of Allah!"

Then he passed an ignited wax taper over the pan, whereupon the naptha instantly burst into flame, and the fragments of the torn document were hidden by the blue fire and the white smoke. Presently the flame turned to red, the smoke subsided, and the parchment was burnt to ashes.

"And now I scatter thy ashes that thou mayst be dispersed to nothing," said the Mufti; and, taking the ashes, he flung them out of the palace window. The burnt paper rags, like black butterflies, descended gently through the air and were cast by the wind into the Bosphorus below.

No sooner was this accomplished than the pashas and viziers all leaped from their seats and drew their swords, swearing with great enthusiasm by the beard of the Prophet that they would not return their weapons to their sheaths till the crescent should shine on the top of the tower of the Church of St. Stephen at Vienna.

At that moment the door-curtains were thrust aside, and into the Diván rushed—Feriz Beg.

The face of the youth was scarce recognisable, his turban was awry upon his forehead, his eyes, full of dull melancholy, stared stonily in front of him, his dress was untidy and dishevelled, his sword was girded to his side, but its handle was broken. Nobody had prevented him from rushing through the numerous halls into the Diván, and when he entered the ulemas parted before him in holy horror. When the youth reached the middle of the room, he stood there glancing round upon the viziers with folded arms, just as if he were counting how many of them there were, one by one they all stood up before him—nay, even the Sultan did so, and awaited his words tremblingly.

Everyone in the East regards the insane with awe and reverence, and if a crazy fakir were to stop the greatest of the Caliphs in the way and say to him: “Dismount from thy horse, and change garments with me,” he would not dare to offer any opposition, but would fulfil his desire, for a strange spirit is in the man and God has sent it.

How will it be then when the terrible spirit of madness descends upon such a valiant warrior, such a distinguished soldier as Feriz Beg, who, when only six-and-twenty, had fought a hundred triumphant battles, and frequently put to shame the grey beards with his wisdom. And lo! suddenly he goes mad, and stops people in the street, and speaks such words of terror to them that they cannot sleep after it.

The youth, with quiet, gentle eyes and a sorrowful countenance passes in review the faces of all who are present, and heartrending was the expression of deep unutterable anguish in his voice when he spoke.

“Pardon me, high and mighty lords, for appearing among you without an invitation—I who have now no business at all in the world anywhere. The world in which I lived is dead, it has withdrawn to Heaven far from me; all those who possessed my heart are now high above my head, and now, I have no heart and no feeling: neither love, nor valour, nor the desire of fame and glory; in my veins the blood flows backwards and forwards so that oftentimes I rush roaring against the walls round about me and tear carpets and pillows which have never offended me; and now again the blood stands still within me, my arteries do not beat at all, so that I lie stiff and staring like a dead man. I beg you all, ye high and mighty lords, who in a brief time will go to Paradise, to take a message from me thither.”

The high lords listened horror-stricken to the calm way in which the youth uttered these words, and they saw each other’s faces growing pale.

Feriz paid no attention to their horrified expressions.

“Tell to them whom I love, and with whom my heart is, to give me back my heart, for without it I am very poor. I perceive not the fragrance of the rose, wine is not sweet to my lips, neither fire nor the rays of the sun have any warmth, and the note of the bugle-horn and the neighing of my charger find no response in me.

High and mighty lords, tell this to those who are above if I myself go not thither shortly."

There were present, besides Mustafa, Rezlán Pasha, Ajas Beg, Rifát Aga, Kara Ogli the Kapudan Pasha, and many more who promised themselves a long life.

The Grand Seignior had always made a particular favourite of Feriz, and he now addressed him in a gentle, fatherly voice.

"My dear son, go back home; my viziers are preparing to subdue the world with unconquerable armies. Go with them, in the din of battle thou wilt find again thy heroic heart and be cured of thy sickness."

An extraordinary smile passed across the face of Feriz, he waved aside the idea with his hand and bent his head forwards, which is a way the Turks have of expressing decided negation.

"This war cannot be a triumphant war, for men are the cause thereof. Allah will bring it to nought. Ye draw the sword at the invitation of murderers, deceivers, and traitors. I have broken the hilt of my own sword in order that I may not draw it forth. They have killed those whom I love, how can I fight in that army which was formed for them who were the occasion of the ruin of my beloved?"

At this thought the blood flew to the youth's face, the spirit of madness flamed up in his eyes, he rose to his full height before the Sultan, and he cried with a loud, audacious voice:

"Thou wilt lose the war for which thou dost now prepare, for thy viziers are incapable, thy soldiers are cowards, thy allies are traitors, thy wise men are fools, thy priests are hypocrites, and thou thyself art an oath-breaker."

Then, as if he were suddenly sorry of what he had said to the Sultan, he bent humbly over him and taking hold of the edge of his garment raised it up and kissed it—and then, regarding him with genuine sympathy, murmured softly:

"Poor Sultan!—so young, so young—and yet thou must die."

And thereupon, with hanging head, he turned away and prepared to go out. None stayed him.

On reaching the door, he fumbled for his sword, and perceiving when he touched it that the hilt was missing, he suddenly turned back again, and exclaimed in a low whisper:

"Think not that it will rust in its sheath. The time will come when I shall again draw it, and it will drink its fill of blood. When those who now urge us on to war shall turn against us, when those who now stand in line with us shall face us with hostile banners, then also will I return, though then ye will no longer be present. But ye shall look on from Paradise above. So it will be: ye shall look on … Poor young Sultan!"

Having whispered these prophetic words, the mad youth withdrew, and the gentlemen in the Diván were so much disturbed by his words that, with faces bent to the earth, they prayed Allah that He would turn aside from them the evil prophesy and not suffer to be broken asunder the weapons they had drawn for the increase of His glory.

Chapter XXIX

PLEASANT SURPRISES.

All the chief generals, all the border pashas, had received the Sultan's orders to gather their hosts together and lead them against the armies of the King of the Romans, and besiege the places which were the pretext of the rupture—to wit, the fortresses of Fülek, Böszörmény, and Nagy Kallá.

At the same time the Government of Transylvania also received permission to attack Hungary with its armies, as had already been decided at the Diet of Szamosújvár.

Vast preparations were everywhere made. The Magyar race is very hard to move to war, but once in a quarrel it does not waste very much time in splitting straws.

Teleki, too, had attained at last to the dream of his life and the object of all his endeavours, for which he had knowingly sacrificed his own peace of mind, and the lives of so many good patriots—he was the generalissimo of the armies of Transylvania.

The Hungarian exiles in Transylvania hailed him as their deliverer, and he saw himself a good big step nearer to the place of Esterházy—the place of Palatine of Hungary. And why not? Why should he not stand among the foremost statesmen of his age?

All the way to the camp at Fülek he was the object of flattery and congratulation; the Hungarians gathered in troops beneath his banner, colonels and captains belauded him. As for the worthy Prince, he did not show himself at all, but sat in his tent and read his books, and when he felt tired he took his watch to pieces and put it together again.

At Fülek the Transylvanian army joined the camp of Kara Mustafa.

Teleki dressed up the Prince in his best robes, and trotted with him and his suite to the tent of the Grand Vizier with growing pride when he heard the guards blow their trumpets at their approach, and the Grand Vizier as a special favour admitted them straightway to his presence, allowed them to kiss his hand, made the magnates sit down, and praised them for their zeal and fidelity, giving each of them a new caftan; and when they were thus nicely tricked out, he dismissed them with an escort of an aga, a dragoman, and twelve cavasses to see the whole Turkish camp to their hearts' content.

Teleki regarded this permission as a very good omen. Turkish generals are wont to be very sensitive on this point, and it is a great favour on their part when they allow foreigners to view their camps.

The dragoman took the Hungarian gentlemen everywhere. He told them which aga was encamped on this hill and which on that, how many soldiers made up a squadron of horse, and how many guns, and how many lances were in every company. He pointed out to them the long pavilion made of deal boards in which the gunpowder lay in big heaps, and gigantic cannon balls were piled up into pyramids, and round mortars covered with pitchy cloths, and gigantic culverines, and siege-guns, and iron howitzers lay on wooden rollers. The accumulated war material would have sufficed for the conquest of the world.

The gentlemen sightseers returned to their tents with the utmost satisfaction, and, overjoyed at what he had seen, the Prince gave a great banquet, to which all

the Hungarian gentlemen in his army were also invited. The tables were placed beneath a quickly-improvised baldachin; and at the end of an excellent dinner the noble feasters began to make merry, everyone at length saw his long-deferred hopes on the point of fulfilment, and none more so than Michael Teleki.

One toast followed another, and the healths of the Prince and of Teleki were interwoven with the healths of everyone else present, so that worthy Apafi began to think that it would really be a very good thing if he were King of Hungary, while Teleki held his head as high as if he were already sitting in the seat of the Palatine.

Just when the revellers were at their merriest, a loud burst of martial music resounded from the plain outside, and a great din was audible as if the Turkish armies were saluting a Prince who had just arrived.

The merry gentry at once leaped from their seats and hurried to the entrance of the tent to see the ally who was received with such rejoicing, and a cry of amazement and consternation burst from their lips at the spectacle which met their eyes.

Emeric Tököly had arrived at the head of a host of ten thousand Magyars from Upper Hungary. His army consisted of splendid picked warriors on horseback, hussars in gold-braided dolmans, wolf-skin pelisses, and shakos with falcon feathers. Tököly himself rode at the head of his host with princely pomp; his escort consisted of the first magnates of Hungary, jewel-bedizened cavaliers in fur mantles trimmed with swansdown, among whom Tököly himself was only conspicuous by his manly beauty and princely distinction.

The face of Teleki darkened at the sight, while the faces of all who surrounded him were suddenly illuminated by an indescribable joy, and their enthusiasm burst forth in *eljens* of such penetrating enthusiasm at the sight of the young hero that Teleki felt himself near to fainting.

Ah! it was in a very different voice that they had recently cried "*Viva!*" to him, it was a very different sort of smile with which they had been wont to greet *him*.

Meanwhile Tököly had reached the front of the marshalled Turkish army, which was drawn up in two rows right up to the pavilion of the Grand Vizier, allowing the youth and his suite to pass through between them amidst a ceremonious abasement of their horse-tail banners. The young general had only passed half through their ranks when the Grand Vizier came to meet him in a state carriage drawn by six white horses.

From the hill on which Teleki stood he could see everything quite plainly.

On reaching the carriage of the Grand Vizier, Tököly leaped quickly from his horse, whereupon Kara Mustafa also descended from his carriage, and, hastening to the young general, embraced him and kissed him repeatedly on the forehead, made him take a seat in the carriage beside him, and thus conveyed him to his tent amidst joyful acclamations.

Teleki had to look on at all this! That was very different from the reception accorded to him and the Prince of Transylvania.

He looked around him—gladness, a radiant smile shone on every face. Oh! those smiles were so many dagger-thrusts in his heart!

In half an hour's time Tököly emerged from the tent of the Grand Vizier. His head was encircled by a diamond diadem which the Sultan had sent for all the way to Belgrade, and in his hand was a princely sceptre. When he remounted and

galloped away close beside the tents of the Transylvanians, the Hungarians in Teleki's company could restrain themselves no longer, but rushed towards Tököly and covered his hands, his feet, his garments, with kisses, took him from his horse on to their shoulders, and carried him in their arms back to camp.

Teleki could endure the sight no more; he fled into his tent, and, throwing himself on his camp-bedstead, wept like a child.

The whole edifice which he had reared so industriously, so doggedly, amidst innumerable perils, during the arduous course of a long life—for which he had sacrificed relations, friends, and all the great and wise men of a kingdom, and pledged away the repose of his very soul—had suddenly collapsed at the appearance of a mere youth, whose only merit was the exaggerated fame of a few successful engagements! It was the heaviest blow he had ever staggered under. Oh! Fortune is indeed ingenious in her disappointments.

Evening came, and still Teleki had not quitted his tent. Then the Prince went to see him. Teleki wanted to hear nothing, but the Prince told him everything.

"Hearken, Mr. Michael Teleki! The Hungarian gentlemen have not come back to us, but remain with Tököly. And Tököly also, it appears, doesn't want to have much to do with us, for instead of encamping with us he has withdrawn to the furthest end of the Turkish army, and has pitched his tents there."

Teleki groaned beneath the pain which the distilled venom of these words poured into his heart.

"Apparently, Mr. Michael Teleki, we have been building castles in the air," continued Apafi with jovial frankness. "We are evidently not of the stuff of which Kings and Palatines of Hungary are made. I cannot but think of the cat in the fable, who pulled the chestnuts out of the fire with the claws of others."

Teleki shivered as if with an ague.

Apafi continued in his own peculiar vein of cynicism: "Really, my dear Mr. Michael Teleki, I should like it much better if we were sitting at home, and Denis Banfy and Paul Béldi and the other wise gentlemen were sitting beside me, and I were listening to what they might advise."

Teleki clenched his fists and stamped his feet, as much as to say: "I would not allow that."

Then with a bitter smile he watched the Prince as he paced up and down the tent, and said with a cold, metallic voice:

"One swallow does not make a summer. If ten or twelve worthless fellows desert to Tököly, much good may it do him! The army of the real Hungarian heroes will not follow their example, and when it can fight beneath the banner of a Prince it will not fling itself into the arms of a homeless adventurer."

"Then it would be as well if your Excellency spoke to them at once, for methinks that this night the whole lot of them may turn tail."

Teleki seemed impressed by these words. He immediately ordered his drabants to go to the captains of the army collected from Hungary who had joined Apafi at Fülek, and invite them to a conference in his tent at once.

The officers so summoned, with a good deal of humming and hahing, met together in Teleki's tent, and there the Minister harangued them for two good hours, proving to demonstration what a lot of good they might expect from cleaving to Apafi, and what a lot of evil if they allowed themselves to be deluded by

Tököly, till the poor fellows were quite tired out and cried: “Hurrah!” in order that he might let them go the sooner.

But that same night they all fled to the camp of Tököly. None remained with Apafi but his faithful Transylvanians.

But even now Teleki could not familiarise himself with the idea of playing a subordinate part here, but staked everything on a last, desperate cast—he went to the Grand Vizier. He announced himself, and was admitted.

The Grand Vizier was alone in his tent with his dragoman, and when he saw Teleki he tried to make his unpleasant face more repulsive than it was by nature, and inquired very viciously: “Who art thou? Who sent thee hither? What dost thou want?”

“I, sir, am the general of the Transylvanian armies, Michael Teleki; you know me very well, only yesterday I was here with the Prince.”

Just as if the two speakers did not understand each other’s language, the dragoman had to interpret their questions and answers.

“I hope,” replied the Grand Vizier, “thou dost not expect me to recognise at sight the names of all the petty princes and generals whom I have ever cast eyes on? My master, the mighty Sultan, has so many tributary princes in Europe, Asia, and Africa, that their numbers are incalculable, and all of them are superior men to thee, how canst thou expect me to recognise thee among so many?”

Teleki swallowed the insult, and seeing that the Grand Vizier was anxious to pick a quarrel with him, he came straight to the point.

“Gracious sir, I have something very important to say to you if you will grant me a private interview.”

The Grand Vizier pretended to fly into a rage at these words.

“Art thou mad or drunk that thou wouldst have a private interview with me, although I don’t understand Hungarian and thou dost not understand Turkish, or perchance thou wouldst like me to learn Hungarian to please thee? Ye learn Latin, I suppose, though no living being speaks it? And ye learn German and French and Greek, yet ye stop short at the language of the Turks, though the Turks are your masters and protectors! For a hundred and fifty years our armies have passed through your territories, yet how many of you have learned Turkish? ‘Tis true our soldiers have learnt Hungarian, for thy language is as sticky as resin on a growing tree. Therefore, if thou art fool enough to ask me for a private interview—go home and learn Turkish first!”

Teleki bowed low, went home and learnt Turkish—that is to say, he packed up a couple of thousand thalers in a sack—and, accompanied by two porters to carry them, returned once more to the tent of the Grand Vizier.

And now the Grand Vizier understood everything which the magnate wished to say. The dragoman interpreted everything beautifully. He said the Sultan was building a fortress on the ice when he entrusted the fate of the Hungarians to such a flighty youth as Emeric Tököly. How could a young man, who was such a bad manager of his own property, manage the affairs of a whole kingdom? And so fond was he of being his own master, that he suffered himself to be exiled from Transylvania with the loss of all his property rather than submit to the will of his lawful Prince. The man who had already rebelled against two rulers would certainly not be very loyal to a third; while Apafi, on the other hand, had all his life

long been a most faithful vassal of the Sublime Porte, and, modest, humble man as he was, would be far more useful than Tököly, whom the Porte would always be obliged to help with men and money, whereas the latter would always be able to help with men and money the Porte and its meritorious viziers—*uti figura docet*.

Mustafa listened to the long oration, took the money, and replied that he would see what could be done.

Teleki was not quite clear about the impression his words had made, but he did not remain in uncertainty for long; for scarcely had he reached the tent of the Prince than a defterdar with twelve cavasses came after him, and signified that he was commanded by the Grand Vizier immediately to seize Michael Teleki, fling him into irons, and bring him before a council of pashas.

Michael Teleki turned pale at these words. The faithless dragoman had told everything to Tököly, who had demanded satisfaction from the Grand Vizier, who, without the least scruple of conscience, was now ready to present to another the head of the very man from whom he had accepted presents only an hour before.

The magnate now gave himself up for lost, but the Prince approached him, and tapping him on the shoulder, said:

"If I were the man your Excellency is pleased to believe me and make other people believe too—that is to say, a coward yielding to every sort of compulsion—in an hour's time your Excellency would not have a head remaining on your shoulders. But everyone shall see that they have been deceived in me."

Then, turning towards the defterdar, he said to him in a firm, determined voice:

"Go back to your master, and say to him that Michael Teleki is the generalissimo of my armies and under my protection, and at the present moment I have him in my tent. Let anyone therefore who has any complaint against him, notify the same to me, and I will sit in judgment over him. But let none dare to lay a hand upon him within the walls of my tent, for I swear by the most Holy Trinity that I will break open the head of any such person with my cudgel. I would be ready to go over to the enemy with my whole army at once rather than permit so much as a mouse belonging to my household to be caught within my tent by a foreign cat, let alone the disgrace of handing over my generalissimo!"

The defterdar duly delivered the message of the enraged Prince to the Grand Vizier. Emeric Tököly was with him at the time, and the two gentlemen on hearing the vigorous assertion of the Prince agreed that after all Michael Apafi was really a very worthy man, and sending back the defterdar, instructed him to say with the utmost politeness and all due regard for the Prince that so long as Michael Teleki remained in the Prince's tent not a hair of his head should be crumpled; but he was to look to it that he did not step out of the tent, for in that case the cavasses who were looking out for him would pounce upon him at once and treat him as never a Transylvanian generalissimo was treated before; and now, too, he had only the Prince to thank for his life.

Teleki was annihilated. Nothing could have wounded his ambitious soul so deeply as the consciousness that the Prince was protecting him. Tothink that this man, whom the whole kingdom regarded as cowardly and incapable, could be great when he himself had suddenly become so very small! His nimbus of wisdom, power, and valour had vanished, and he saw that the man whom he had only

consulted for the sake of obtaining his signature to prearranged plans was wiser and more powerful and more valiant than he.

Peering through the folds of the tent he could see that, faithful to the threatening message, the cavasses were prowling around the tent and telling the loutish soldiers that if Teleki stepped out they would seize him forthwith. The Szeklers laughed and shouted with joy thereat.

Then the magnate began to reflect whether it would not be best if he drew his sword, and rushing out, slash away at them till he himself were cut to pieces.

What a ridiculous ending that would be!

Towards evening Emeric Tököly paid a visit to the Prince. He approached the old man with the respect of a child, did obeisance, and would have kissed his hand, but Apafi would not permit it, but embraced him, kissed him on the forehead repeatedly, and made him sit down beside him on the bear-skin of his camp-bed.

The young leader feelingly begged the old man's pardon for all the trouble that he had caused him and Transylvania.

"It is I who ought to beg pardon of your Excellency," said Apafi in a submissive voice.

"Not at all, your Highness and dear Father. I know that you have always loved me, but evil counsellors have whispered such scandalous things to you about me that you were bound to hate me—but God requite them for it if I cannot."

"Be magnanimous towards them, my dear son; forgive them, for my sake."

Tököly was silent. He knew that Teleki was in the tent, he saw him, but he would not take any notice of him. At last, without even looking towards him, he said, in the most passionate, threatening voice:

"Look, ye, Teleki, you have practised all sorts of devices against me, but if you put your nose outside the tent of the Prince you will eat his bread no more. You would be in my power now, and here your head would lie, but for his Highness whom I look upon as a father."

Michael Teleki was silent, but future events were to prove that he had heard very well what was now spoken.

After surrendering the fortress of Fülek to the Turks, the Transylvanian gentlemen returned home with their army; and Michael Teleki, when he got home, paid a visit to the church where lay the ashes of Denis Banfy, and hiding his face on the tomb, he wept bitterly over the noble patriot whom he had sacrificed to his ambitious plans.

Chapter XXX

A MAN ABANDONED BY HIS GUARDIAN-ANGEL.

One blow followed hard upon another.

In the following year the Sultan assembled a formidable host against Vienna, and the Transylvanian bands also had to go. Teleki would have avoided the war, but his representations and pretexts fell not upon listening ears. They asked him why he, who had hitherto urged on the campaign, wanted to withdraw from it now

that it was in full swing? If he had liked the beginning, the end also should please him.

But the end was exceedingly bitter.

The formidable host surrounding Vienna was scattered in a single night by the heroic sword of Sobieski, the gigantic military enterprise was ruined.

The Transylvanian forces took no part in these operations. During the siege of Vienna they had been left at Raab, and Teleki did not let the opportunity pass. While the stupid Turks were fighting in the trenches, he entered into communication with the German commander at Raab and attached himself to the winning side.

Everything which the insane Feriz had prophesied in the Diván was literally fulfilled.

The Turkish armies were everywhere routed. They lost the fortresses of Grand Visegrad and Érsekújvár one after the other. The fortress of Nograd was struck by lightning, which fired the powder-magazine and blew up the garrison. Finally Buda was besieged and captured in the sight of the Grand Vizier, and after a domination of one hundred and fifty years, the half-moons were hauled down from the bastions and crosses re-occupied their places.

And all those who were present at the Diván fulfilled, one by one, the prophecy that they should see Paradise before long.

Rislán Pasha fell beneath the walls of Buda at the head of the Janissaries, the Vizier of Buda was throttled by order of Kara Mustafa after the battle was lost, Rifa Aga was drowned in the Danube among the fugitives, Kara Ogli fell defending the ramparts of Buda, Tököly killed Ajas Pasha at the Sultan's command; and, after the fall of Buda, Olaj Beg brought to Kara Mustafa for his own use the silken cord and the purple purse. It was the last purse which Kara Mustafa ever saw, for after his decapitation his head was put inside it.

And, finally, the people of Stambul, maddened by so many losses and reinforced by the rebellious Janissaries, rushed upon the Seraglio, cut down the counsellors of the Sultan, and threw the Sultan himself into the same dungeon in which he had let his own brother languish for thirty-nine years. The brother was now set on the throne, and the dethroned Sultan died in the dungeon.

And this also was fulfilled that those who had stirred up the Turks to begin the war turned against them at the end of it. Transylvania deposited its oath of homage in the hands of Caraffa, and Michael Teleki, who became a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, opened the gates of the towns and fortresses to German garrisons. The Prince paid the victors thirteen thousand florins, which it took heavy wagons two weeks to convey from Fogaras to Nagyszeben. But Michael Teleki, in addition to his countly escutcheon, got a present of a silver table service which cost ten thousand florins. So Transylvania became imperial territory, and its alliance with the Porte was dissolved.

And then it was that God called to Himself the last lovable figure in our history, the virtuous and magnanimous Anna Bornemissza.

Only after her death did Apafi feel what his wife had been to him, his guardian-angel, his consoler in all his sorrows, the brightest part of his life, and when that light set, everything around him was doubly dark. Every misfortune, every trouble, now weighed doubly heavy on his mind and heart; he had no longer any refuge

against persecuting sorrow. He fled from one town to another like a hunted wild beast which can find no refuge from the dart which transfixes it. At last he barricaded himself in his room, which he did not quit for six weeks; and if visitors came to see him he complained to them like a child:

"I am starving to death. I have lost everything. It is a year since I got a farthing from my estates or my mines or my salt-works. If the farrier comes I cannot pay him his bill for my mantle, for I haven't got a stiver. What will become of my son when I am gone, poor little Prince? There's not enough to send him to school."

He began to get quite crazy, and could neither eat, drink, nor sleep. The whole day he would stride up and down his room, and utter strange things in a loud voice. What troubled him most was that he must die of hunger.

At last those about him hit upon a remedy. Every day they laid purses of money before him and said: "This sum Stephen Apor has sent from your property, and that amount Paul Inezedi has collected from your salt-works. Why should your Highness be anxious when there is such lots of money?"

And the next day they presented the same purses to him over again, and invented some fresh story. And this simple deceit somewhat pacified the poor old man, but the old worries had so affected his mind, never very strong at any time, that he could never recover his former spirits. He grew duller and more stupid every day, and often when he lay down he would sleep a couple of days at a stretch.

And at last the Almighty had mercy upon him and called him away from this vale of tears; and he went to that land where the Turks plunder not, and there is no warfare.

Chapter XXXI

THE NEWLY-DRAWN SWORD.

The German armies were now in complete possession of Transylvania, the Turks were everywhere driven back and trampled down, the hereditary Prince of Bavaria took Belgrade by storm and put twelve thousand Janissaries to the edge of the sword. Thus the gate of the Turkish Empire was broken open, and the victoriously advancing host, under the Prince of Baden, crushed the remains of the Turkish army at Nish. Then Bulgaria and Albania were subjugated, the sea shore was reached, and only the Hæmus Mountains stood between the invaders and Stambul.

The deluge left nothing untouched, even little Wallachia, whose fortunate situation, wild mountains, and villainous roads had hitherto saved it from invasion, saw the approach of the conquering banners.

Old S___ was still the Prince, and he now gave a brilliant example of the dexterity of Wallachian diplomacy, which at the same time illustrates the simplicity of his character.

The armies invading Wallachia were entrusted to the care of General Heissler, who consequently wrote to Prince S___ informing him that he was advancing on

Bucharest through the Transylvanian Alps with ten thousand men, therefore he was to provide winter quarters and provisions for his army, as he intended to winter there.

At exactly the same time the Tartar Khan gave the Prince to understand that he intended to invade Moldavia in order that he might follow the movements of the Transylvanian army close at hand.

The Prince liked the one proposition as little as the other, so he sent the Tartar Khan's letter to General Heissler bidding him beware, as a great force was coming against him, and he sent Heissler's letter to the Tartar Khan advising him in a friendly sort of way not to move too far as Heissler was now advancing in his rear.

Consequently both armies turned aside from the Principality, and Wallachia had to support neither the Germans nor the Tartars.

This is the diplomacy of little states.

Amidst the wildly romantic hills of Lebanon is a pleasant valley for which Nature herself has a peculiar preference. Amidst the gigantic mountains which encircle a vast hollow on every side of it, rises a roundish mound. On level ground it would be accounted a hill, but in the midst of such a range of snowy giants it emerges only like a tiny heap of earth, and to this day nothing grows on it but the cedar—the finest, darkest, most widely spreading specimens of that noble and fragrant tree are here to be found. A foaming mountain stream gurgles down it on both sides, a little wooden bridge connects the opposing banks, and in the midst of the bridge a rock projecting from the water clings to the mountain side. Far away among the blue forests shine forth the white roofless little houses of the city of Edena, which, built against the mountain side, peer forth like some card-built castle, and still farther away through gaps in the hills the Syrian sea is visible.

Here in former days on the heights stood the romantic and poetical kiosk of Feriz Beg.

The youth, with dogged persistence, continued to live for years in this sublime solitude with the din of battle all around him. The prophecy which he had once pronounced in the Diván was whispered abroad among the people, ran through the army, and as every one of his sayings was severally fulfilled, the more widely there spread in the hearts of the soldiers the superstitious belief that till he seized his sword they would everywhere be defeated, but when he should again appear on the battlefield the fortune of war would turn and become favourable once more to the Ottoman arms.

Long ago the Diván had wished to profit by this blind belief, and countless embassies had been sent to the youthful hermit in his solitude announcing the fall of generals, the loss of battles, the pressure of peril.

Nothing could move Feriz. To all these tidings he replied:

"Thus it must come to pass! Doves do not spring from serpents' eggs. Your rulers are those who took it upon them to wipe out a sacred oath from the patient pages, who tore up and burnt and scattered to the winds the vow that was made before God, and now ye likewise shall be wiped from the page of history and your memory shall be laden with reproaches. Learn ye, therefore, that it is dangerous to play with the name of Allah, and though many of you grow so high that his head touches the Heavens—yet he is but a man, and the earth moves beneath his feet, and presently he shall fall and perish."

The men perceived that these words were not so bad as they seemed to be at first sight, and after every fresh defeat, more and more of his old acquaintances came to see him and begged and prayed him to seize his sword once more and let himself be chosen leader of the host.

He sternly rejected every offer. No allurement was capable of making him change his resolution.

"When the time comes for me to draw my sword," he said, "I will come without asking. That time will come none the quicker for anyone's beseeching, but come it will one day and not tarry."

And, indeed, the advent of that time had become a matter of necessity for the Ottoman Empire. The banners of the German Empire were waving in the very heart of Turkey; the Poles had recovered Podolia, the Venetians were on the Turkish islands, and at last Transylvania also broke with the Porte and opened her fortresses to the enemies of the Padishah.

The new Sultan collected fresh armies, military enthusiasm was stimulated by great rewards, fresh alliances were formed, and among the new allies the one who enjoyed the greatest confidence was Emeric Tököly, who was proclaimed Prince of Transylvania, and orders were given to the Tartar Khan and the Prince of Moldavia to support him with their forces.

Tököly, always avid of fame and glory, threw himself heart and soul into this new enterprise, but it was only when he saw the army with which he was to conquer Transylvania that he had misgivings. His soldiers were good for robbing and burning, they had been used to that for a long time, but when it came to fighting there was no power on earth capable of keeping them together. What could he make of soldiers whose sole knowledge of the art of warfare consisted in running backwards and forwards, whose most sensible weapon was the dart, and who, whenever they heard a gun go off, stuffed up their ears and bolted like so many mice? And with these ragamuffins he was expected to fight regular, highly-disciplined troops.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him. He sat down and wrote a letter and delivered it to a swift courier, enjoining him not to rest or tarry till he had placed it in the proper hands.

This letter was addressed to Feriz Beg. In it Tököly informed him of the course of events in Transylvania, and it concluded thus:

"Behold, what you prophesied has come to pass, those who began the war along with us now continue the war against us. Remember that you held out the promise of joining us when such a time came; fulfil your promise."

Feriz Beg got this letter early in the morning, and the moment after he had read it he ordered his stableman instantly to saddle his war-charger, he chose from among his swords those which smote the heaviest, exchanged his grey mantle for a splendid and costly costume, gave a great banquet to all his retainers, and bade them make merry, for in an hour's time, he would be off to the wars.

The imperial army was making itself quite at home in Albania. Beautiful scenery and beautiful women smiled upon the victors; there was money also and to spare. And soon came the rumour that a gigantic Tartar host was approaching the Albanian mountains, in number exceeding sixty thousand. The imperial army was no more than nine thousand; but they only laughed at the rumour, they had seen

far larger armies fly before them. The pick of the Turkish host, the Spahis, the Janissaries, had cast down their arms before them in thousands; while it was the talk of the bazaars that all that the Tartars were good for was to devastate conquered territory. Besides, reinforcements were expected from Hungary, where the Prince of Baden was encamped beneath Nándor-Fehérvár with a numerous army.

The leader of the Albanian forces was the Prince of Hanover.

He was a pupil of the lately deceased Piccolomini, and though he inherited his valour he was scarcely his equal in wisdom.

On hearing of the approach of the Tartar army he assembled his captains and held a council of war. The enemy was assumed to be the old mob which used to turn tail at the first cannon-shot, and could not be overtaken because of the superior swiftness of its horses. And indeed it was the old mob, but a new spirit now inspired it; it followed a new leader whom the enemy had never put to flight or beaten, and that leader was Feriz Beg.

Tököly's letter had speedily brought the young hero all the way from Syria to Stambul to offer his sword and his genius to the new Sultan, and the Sultan had charged him to lead the Tartar hordes against the imperial army.

When Feriz, from the top of a hill, saw the forces of the Prince of Hanover all wedged together in a compact mass on the plain before him like a huge living machine only awaiting a propelling hand to set it in motion, he quickly sent the Tartars who were with him back into the fir-woods that they might well cover their darts with the tar and turpentine exuding from the trees, and this done, he sent them to gallop round the Prince's camp and take up their position well within range.

The Prince observed the movement but left them alone; oftentimes had the Turks attempted a simple assault upon the German camp; oftentimes had their threefold superior forces surrounded the small, well-ordered camp and assaulted it from every side, and the Germans used always politely to allow them to come within range of their guns and then discharge all their artillery at once—and generally that was the end of the whole affair.

Feriz, however, made no assault upon them, but got his Tartars to surround them, commanding them to set their darts on fire and discharge them into the air so that they might fall down into the German camp. According to this plan they could fire at the enemy at a much greater distance off than the enemy could fire upon them, for the dart, flying in a curve could reach further than the straight-going musket balls of those days, and wherever it fell its sharp point inflicted a wound, whereas the bullet was often spent before it reached its mark.

Suddenly a flaming flood of darts darkened the air and the burning resinous bolts fell from all sides into the crowded ranks of the imperial army; the points of the darts fastened in the backs of the horses, the burning drops fell upon the faces and garments of the warriors, burning through the texture and inflicting grievous wounds; the horses began to rear violently at this unexpected attack; the gunners, cursing and swearing, began to discharge their guns anyhow at the enemy; nobody paid any attention to the orders of the general, discipline was quite at an end; the burning darts were destructive of all military tactics, for there was no refuge from them, and every dart struck its man.

Then Feriz Beg blew with the trumpets, and suddenly the imperial troops were attacked from all sides. They were unable to repel the attack in the regular way, but intermingled with their assailants, fought man to man. The picked German troopers quitted themselves like men, not one of them departed without taking another with him to the next world, but the Turks outnumbered them, and just when the Prince's army was exhausted by the attacks of the Tartars, Feriz brought forward his well-rested reserves, who burned with the desire to wash out the shame of former defeats. The Prince of Hanover fell on the battle-field with the rest of his army. Not one escaped to tell the tale.

This was the first victory which turned the fortunes of war once more in favour of the Turks after so many defeats.

Chapter XXXII

THE LAST DAY.

It was well known in Transylvania that the Porte had proclaimed Tököly Prince and given into his hands armies wherewith he might invade the Principality and conquer it, so General Heissler gave orders to the counties and the Szeklers to rise up in defence of the realm, which they accordingly did.

The Hungarian forces were commanded by Balthasar Mackási and Michael Teleki himself; the leader of the Germans was Heissler, with Generals Noscher and Magni, and Colonel Doria under him, all of them heroic soldiers of fortune, who, all the way from Vienna to Wallachia, had never seen the Turks otherwise than as corpses or fugitives.

When Tököly was approaching through Wallachia with his forces, Heissler quickly closed all the passes, and placed three regiments at the Iron Gates, while he himself took up a position in the Pass of Bozza, and there pitched his camp amidst the mountains.

The encamped forces were merry and sprightly enough, there was lots to eat and drink of all sorts, and the Szeklers were quite close to their wives and houses, so that they did not feel a bit homesick—only Teleki was perpetually dissatisfied. He would have liked the forces to be marching continually from one pass to another and sentinels to be standing on guard night and day on every footpath which led into the kingdom.

The third week after the camp had been pitched at Bozza he suddenly said to the general with a very anxious face:

"Sir, what if Tököly were to appear at some other gate of the kingdom while we are lying here?"

"Every avenue is closed against him," answered Heissler.

"But suppose he got in before we came here?"

"The trouble then would not be how he got in but how he could get out again."

But Teleki wanted to show that he also knew something of the science of warfare, so he said with the grave face of an habitual counsellor:

“I do not think it expedient that we worthy soldiers should be crammed up into a corner of the kingdom. In my opinion it would be much safer if, after guarding every pass, we took up a position equi-distant between Törcsvár and Bozza.”

Now for once Teleki was right, but for that very reason Heissler was all the more put out. It was intolerable that a lay-general should suggest something to him which he could not gainsay.

And the worst of it was Teleki would not leave the general alone. “I am participating in nothing here,” said he, “make use of me, give me something to do, and I will do it—occupation is what I want.”

“I’ll give it you at once,” said Heissler, and putting his arm through Teleki’s he led him to his tent, there made him sit down beside him at a round table, sent one of the yawning guards to summon Noscher, Magni, Doria and the other generals, made them sit down by the side of Teleki, sat down at the table himself, and drawing a pack of cards from his pocket, gave it to Teleki with the words:

“Here’s some occupation for you—you deal!”

“What, sir!” burst forth Teleki, quite upset by the jest, “play at cards when the enemy stands before us?”

“How can we be better employed when the enemy is *not* before us? Do you know how to play at landsknecht?”

“I do not.”

“Then we’ll teach you.”

And they did teach him, for in a couple of hours they had won from him a couple of hundred ducats, whereupon Teleki, on the pretext that he had no more money, retired from the game.

It was not the loss of a little money which vexed him so much as the scant respect paid to his counsels.

The other gentlemen continued the game. Heissler suddenly by a grand coup won all the ready-money of the other generals, so that at last there was a great heap of thalers and ducats in front of him, and his three-cornered hat was filled to the brim with money.

The losing party tried to console itself with jests.

“Well, well! lucky at cards, luckless in love!”

“Eh!” said Heissler, sweeping together his winnings, “I have only had one love in my life, and that is on a battlefield, but there I have always been lucky.”

At that moment a rapid galloping was heard, and after a brief parley with the guard outside, a dusty dragoon courier entered the tent and whispered breathlessly in Heissler’s ear:

“Tököly’s advance guard is before Törcsvár, it attacked and cut down the troops posted in the pass, only the Szeklers still hold out; if we don’t come quickly the pass will be taken.”

Heissler suddenly swept the cards from the table, and snatching up his hat so that the money in it rolled away in every direction, he clapped it on his head, and drawing his sword exclaimed: “To horse, gentlemen! Quick! Towards Törcsvár! We shall arrive in good time, I know!”

“Well! wasn’t I right?” growled Teleki.

“Oh, there’s no harm done! Blow the trumpets, we must strike our tents; let the camp fires burn, and at the third sound of the trumpet let everyone advance

towards Törcsvár. A company and a couple of mortars will be enough to guard the pass. All right now, Mr. Michael Teleki!"

Then he also took horse. Teleki too hastened back to his levies, and soon the whole host was trotting on in the dark towards Törcsvár.

It was the 19th August, such a silent summer night that not a leaf was stirring. Against the beautiful starry sky rose the majestic snowy Alps which encircle Transylvania within their mighty chain; everything was still, only now and then through the melancholy night resounded the din and bustle of the warriors hurrying towards Törcsvár.

Here in the mountain-chasm a wide opening is visible which presently contracts so much that two carriages can scarce advance along it abreast. The road goes deep down between two rocks, and if a few hundred resolute and determined men planted themselves in that place, they could hold it against the largest armies.

On the other side of Moldavia, looking downwards, could be seen the camp-fires of the hosts of Tököly, who was encamped on the farther side of the Alps, occupying a vast extent of ground.

In front all was dark. After the first surprise caused by some hundreds of dragoons who had penetrated into Moldavia, the Szeklers had quickly blocked the pass by felling trees across it, retired to the mountain summits, and received the advancing Tartars with such showers of stones that they were compelled to desist from any further advance and turn back again.

Great commotion was observable in the Turkish camp. The Tartars were roasting a whole ox on a huge spit, and cut pieces off it while it was roasting; some jovial Wallachians, a little elated by wine, began dancing their national dances; on a hill the Hungarian hussars were blaring their *farogatos*, whose penetrating voices frequently pierced the most distant recess of the snowy Alps.

But just because the camp had begun making merry the outposts had been carefully disposed. The leaders of the host were youths in age but veterans in military experience; they were keeping watch for everyone.

They met as they were going their rounds and, without observing it, strayed somewhat from the camp and advanced without a word along a mountain path.

At last Feriz broke the silence by remarking gravely to Tököly:

"Is it not desperating to see a mountain before you and not be able to fly?"

"Especially when your desires are on the other side of that mountain."

"What are your desires?" said Feriz bitterly, "in comparison with mine; you have only a thirst for glory, I have a thirst for blood."

"But mine is a still stronger impulse," said Tököly; "I have a wife."

"Ah! I understand, and you want to see your wife? I also should like to see her if I am not slain. And is the lady worthy of you?"

"One must have lived very far from this kingdom not to have heard of her," said Tököly proudly. "My name has not given such glory to Helen as her name has to me. When everyone in Hungary laid down their arms, and I myself fled from the kingdom, she herself remained in the fortress of Munkács and defended it as valiantly as any man could do. Helen stood like a man upon the bastions amidst the whirring of the bullets and the thunder of the guns, extinguished the bombs cast into the fortress with huge moistened buffalo-skins, fired off the cannons

against the besiegers with her own hands, and cut down the soldiers who attempted to storm the walls, spiked their guns, and burnt their tents."

At this Feriz grew enthusiastic.

"We will save this brave woman; is she still defending herself?"

"No. My chief confidant—a man whom I trusted would carry out my ideas, a man whom I found a beggar and made a gentleman—betrayed her, and they now hold her captive. Believe me, Feriz, if they gave her back to me I would perchance for ever forget my dream of glory and renounce the crown I seek, but to win her back I'll go through hell itself, and you will see that I shall go through this mountain chain also, for though I have not the strength to fly over it, I have the patience to crawl over it."

Feriz Beg sighed gloomily.

"Alas! I have no one for whose sake I might hasten into battle."

Early next morning Tököly came over to Feriz's quarters and told him that he had just received tidings that Heissler had arrived during the night, having galloped without stopping through Szent Peter to Törcsvár. Teleki, too, was with him.

That name seemed to electrify the young Turk.

He leapt quickly from his couch, and, seizing his sword, raised it towards Heaven and cried with a savage expression which had never been on his face before: "I thank thee, Allah, that thou hast delivered him into my hands!"

The two young generals then consulted together in private for about an hour, after sending everyone out of their tent. Then they came forth and reviewed their forces. Feriz selected his best Janissaries and Spahis, Tököly the Hungarian hussars and the swiftest of the Tartars, and with this little army, numbering about six thousand, they marched off without saying whither. The vast camp meanwhile was intrusted to the care of the Prince of Moldavia, who was charged to stand face to face night and day over against the Transylvanian army, and not move from the spot.

Meanwhile the two young leaders, with their picked band, made their way among the hills by the dark, sylvan mountain paths, whose wilderness no human foot had ever yet trod. Anyone looking down upon them from the rocks above would have called their enterprise foolhardy. Now they had to crawl down precipitous slopes on their hands and knees; now gigantic rocks barred their way, which enclosed them within a narrow, mountainous gorge whence there was no exit; here and there they had to cling on to the roots of the stout shrubs growing out of the crevices of the rocks, or pull themselves up, man by man, and horse by horse, by means of ropes fastened to the trunks of trees. In these regions nought dwelt but savage birds of prey, and the startled golden eagle looked down in wonder from his stony lair at the panting, toiling host—what did such a multitude of men seek in that desolate wilderness?

The Transylvanian gentlemen from the vantage-point of a lofty mountain ridge watched the two opposing hosts facing each other in front of the defiles. Now the Szeklers would burst forth from the woods on the straying Tartars and drive them back to their tents, and now like a disturbing swarm of wasps the Tartars and Wallachians would force the Szeklers back to the very borders of the forest. It was

great fun to watch all this from the lofty ridge where stood Heissler, Doria, and Teleki observing the manly sport through long telescopes.

Suddenly the sentinels brought to Heissler a Wallachian who had given the pickets to understand that he had brought a message from the Prince of Wallachia to the commander-in-chief.

"No doubt it is to tell you once more not to go into Wallachia again, for the enemy has eaten it up," said Teleki, turning to Heissler, who had got to the bottom of the Prince's former craftiness. "What is your master's message?" he said, turning towards the Wallachian.

"He sends his respects, and bids you be on your guard against Tököly, for he has a large army and is very crafty; but instead of opposing him in the direction of Wallachia you would do better if you saw to it that he did not break into Transylvania, and you ought to beware of this all the more as only three days ago he departed from the main host along with his chief Sirdar, with a picked army of six thousand men, which has since vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed it up."

"What did I say?" remarked Heissler, with a smile to Teleki. "You may go back, my son, from whence you came," he said to the Szekler.

But Teleki shook his head at this.

"It is quite possible," said he, "that while we are halting here, Tököly may issue forth somewhere behind our very backs."

Heissler pointed at the snow-capped mountains.

"Can anything but a bird get through those?"

"If Tököly lead the way—yes."

"Your Excellency has a great respect for that gentleman."

"Truly, Mr. General, I should advise you to summon hither the regiments left at the iron gate, and bring up some more cannons."

Heissler did not even reply, but beckoned to him to be silent.

At that instant a wild yell suddenly struck upon the ear of the general, and looking back towards Zernyest he saw a large column of smoke rising heavenwards, while the outposts came galloping up towards the camp.

"What is that?"

"Tököly has got through the mountains!" was the terrifying report, "the Tartars have burnt Tohair and plundered the camp."

"To horse, to arms, every man!" roared Heissler, and drawing his sword leaped upon his horse. Doria, Noscher, and Magni quickly marshalled their squadrons, Macskári quickly got together his squadrons, and descended into the plain.

They had scarce got into battle array when they were joined by the boyar Balacsán, the refugee Moldavian nobleman, who kept on foot two regiments of the Hungarians and Wallachians at his own expense.

The cry of the ravaging Tartars was now audible close at hand in the village of Tohair, which was blazing away under the very eyes of the Transylvanian hosts. Balacsán's soldiers, eager for the fray, begged leave of Heissler to drive them from the village, and rushing upon them with a wild yell, quickly drove the Tartars back through the burning streets; while Heissler, with the main body of the army, galloped towards Zernyest with the greatest haste. He also succeeded in occupying it before Tököly had reached it.

Here the soldiers rested after their tiring gallop. Heissler distributed wine and brandy among them, then marshalled them, and sent to the front the military chaplains. Two Jesuits, crucifix in hand, confessed all the German soldiers, and the Rev. Mr. Gernyeszeg preached a pious discourse to the Calvinists.

Meanwhile Tököly's army had advanced upon Zernyest. On one side of him were the snowy Alps, on the other a reed-grown morass, which in the hot days of August was quite dried up and could easily be crossed.

As soon as the Szeklers saw the Turks, with their characteristic pigheadedness they seized their pikes and would have rushed upon them with their usual war-cry: "Jesus! Help, Jesus! Help!"

Their leaders drove them back by beating them with their sword-blades, and exhausted the whole vocabulary of abuse and condemnation before they could prevent them prematurely from beginning the battle.

Teleki meanwhile summoned to his side his trusty servant, and as he was dressed in a black habit—for they were still in mourning for the Prince—with few jewels on it, he detached his diamond aigrette and gold chain, and adding his signet-ring to them, gave them to the servant that he might take them before the battle to Gernyeszeg, and give them to his daughter, Dame Michael Vay.

The old servant would have asked why he did this, but Teleki turned away from him and beckoned him to go away.

Then he had his favourite charger, Kálmán, brought forth, and after stroking its neck tenderly, trotted off to the front of his forces and addressed them in these words:

"My brave Transylvanians, now is the time to fight together valiantly for glory and liberty in the service of his Imperial Majesty in order to deliver our country, our wives and children, from Turkish bondage and the tyranny of that evil ally of theirs, Tököly, for otherwise you and your descendants have nought but eternal slavery to expect. Grieve not for me if I, your general, fall on the field of battle. Behold, I bring my white beard among you, and am ready to die."

While he was saying these words his adjutant, Macskári, came to him and began to explain that the Transylvanians had been placed in the rear and were grumbling loudly at having been so set aside.

On hearing this Teleki at once galloped up to Heissler.

"Sir," said he, "you are a bad judge of the Hungarian temperament in warfare if you place them in the rear; the Szekler, in particular, has a great aptitude for the assault, but don't expect help from him if you keep him waiting in the rear till the front ranks are broken."

Generals, on the eve of a battle are, very naturally, somewhat impatient of advice, especially if it be delivered by a civilian. Heissler therefore snubbed the minister somewhat unmercifully, whereupon Teleki galloped back to his men without saying another word.

Meanwhile the Turkish army had slowly begun to move; on the left wing a regiment of Tartars stealthily entered the reeds of the morass and began to surround the right wing of the Transylvanians; but their experienced general, perceiving their approach from the undulatory movement of the reed-stalks, speedily ordered Doria to advance against them with six squadrons of dragoons, whereupon Teleki also sent thirteen regiments of Szeklers against them under

Michael Henter, and soon the two stealthily crouching hosts could be seen in collision. The Szeklers, with a wild yell, rushed upon the Tartars, who turned tail after the first onset, and fled still deeper among the reeds. Doria pursued them everywhere, the discharge of the artillery fired the reeds in several places, and they began to burn over the heads of the combatants.

At that moment Tököly suddenly blew the trumpets and advanced into the plain with thirty-two squadrons, who rushed upon the foe with a sky-rending howl. There was a roll of musketry as the assailants drew near, and nine of the thirty-two squadrons bit the dust, hundreds of riders fell from their horses.

But the rest did not turn back as they used to do. Feriz Beg was leading them, they saw his sword flashing in front of them, and felt sure of victory.

At the moment of the firing a bullet had struck the youth in the breast; but he regarded it not, he only saw Teleki before him, dressed in black. He recognised him from afar, and galloped straight towards him.

Beneath the savage assault of the Turkish horsemen the German dragoons gave way in a moment, their ranks were scattered; against the slim darts of the Spahis and the light csakanyis of the hussars the straight sword and the heavy cuirass were but a poor defence. The first line was cast back upon the second, and when General Noscher was struck down by a dart in the forehead, the centre also was broken.

The Szeklers simply looked on at the battle from the rear.

"What think you, comrades," they said to one another, "if they only brought us here to look on, wouldn't it be better to look on from yonder hill?"

And with that they shouldered their pikes, and without doing the slightest harm to the Turks, went off in a body.

The cavalry, who still had some stomach in them, on perceiving the flight of the infantry, also suddenly lost heart, and giving their horses the reins, scampered off in every direction.

Heissler thus was left alone on the battle-field, and up to the last moment strenuously endeavoured to retrieve the fortunes of the day. All in vain. Balacsán fell before his very eyes on the left wing, and shortly afterwards, General Magni staggered towards him scarce recognisable, for he had a fearful slash right across his head, which covered his face with blood, and his left arm was pierced by a dart. It was not about himself that he was anxious, however, for he grasped Heissler's bridle and dragged him away.

Heissler, full of desperation, fought against his own men, who carried him from the field by force. At last he reached the top of a hillock and, looking back, perceived one division still fighting on the battlefield. It was the picked division of Doria who, in its pursuit of the Tartars, had been cut off from the rest of the army, and seeing that it was isolated had hastily formed into a square and stood against the whole of the victorious host, fighting obstinately and refusing to surrender. This was too much for Heissler. He tore himself loose from his escort, and returned alone to the battlefield. A few stray horsemen followed him, and he tried to cut his way to Doria through the intervening hussars.

A tall and handsome cavalier intercepted him.

"Surrender, general, it is no shame to you. I am Emeric Tököly."

Heissler returned no answer but galloped straight at him, and, whirling his sword above his head, aimed a blow at the Hungarian leader.

Tököly called to those around him to stand back. Alone he fought against so worthy an enemy till a violent blow broke in twain the sword of the German general, and he was obliged to surrender.

Meanwhile Doria's division was overborne by superior forces; he himself fell beneath his horse, which was shot under him, and was taken prisoner.

The rest fled.

Michael Teleki fled likewise, trusting in his good steed Kálmán. He heard behind him the cries of his pursuers; there was one form in particular that he did not wish to have behind him, and it seemed to Teleki as if he were about to see this form.

This was the chief sirdar, Feriz Beg. Mortally wounded though he was, he did not forget his mortal anger, and though his blood flowed in streams, he still felt strength enough in his arm to shed the blood of his enemy.

Suddenly Michael directed his flight towards a field of wheat, when his horse stumbled and fell with him.

Here Feriz Beg overtook the minister, and whirling around his sword, exclaimed:

"That blow is from Denis Banfy!"

Teleki raised his sword to defend himself, but at that name his hand shook and he received a slash across the face, whereupon his sword fell from his hand; but he still held his hand before his streaming eyes and only heard these words:

"This blow is for Paul Béldi! This blow is for the children of Paul Béldi! This blow is for Transylvania!"

That last blow was the heaviest of all!

Teleki sank down on the ground a corpse.

Feriz Beg gazed upwards with a look of transport, sighed deeply, and then drooped suddenly over his horse's neck. He was dead.

Next day when they found Teleki among the slain, and brought him to Tököly, the young Prince cried:

"Heh! bald head! bald head! if you had never lived in Transylvania so much blood would not have flowed here."

Thus the prophecy of Magyari was fulfilled.

Then Tököly ordered the naked, plundered corpse to be clothed in garments of his own and sent to his widow at Görgéncy.

In exchange for the captured generals, Heissler and Doria, Tököly got back his wife Helen. This was his greatest gain from the war.

Both of them now sleep far away from their native land in the valley of Nicomedia.

(1-1) A sort of maize pottage.
(2-2) A Servian Prince.
(2-3) A Roumanian Prince.
(3-4) An inn.

(4-5) *i.e.* the Emperor Leopold.
(5-6) Common.
(5-7) Police officers.
(5-8) Sheepskin mantle.
(5-9) Common.
(5-10) Horse-dealers.
(5-11) Long-handled hammers.
(5-12) Mounted troops.
(5-13) See *Midst the Wild Carpathians*, Book II., Chapter IV.
(6-14) Sledge-hammer.
(9-15) Evil spirit.
(12-16) Province.
(17-17) Sheepskin mantle.
(21-18) See *Midst the Wild Carpathians*, Book II., Chapter VII.
(21-19) Fur pelisse.
(22-20) Equivalent to 100,000 thalers.
(23-21) *i.e.* you shall be stoned to death.