ГЕНРИК СЕНКЕВИЧ

THE DELUGE. VOL. 2

Генрик Сенкевич

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Сенкевич Г.

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Содержание

Henryk Sienkiewicz
The Deluge: An Historical Novel of Poland, Sweden, and Russia. Vol. 2 (of 2)

CHAPTER I

The war with cannon was no bar to negotiations, which the fathers determined to use at every opportunity. They wished to delude the enemy and procrastinate till aid came, or at least severe winter. But Miller did not cease to believe that the monks wished merely to extort the best terms.

In the evening, therefore, after that cannonading, he sent Colonel Kuklinovski again with a summons to surrender. The prior showed Kuklinovski the safeguard of the king, which closed his mouth at once. But Miller had a later command of the king to occupy Boleslav, Vyelunie, Kjepits, and Chenstohova.

"Take this order to them," said he to Kuklinovski; "for I think that they will lack means of evasion when it is shown them." But he was deceived.

The prior answered: "If the command includes Chenstohova, let the general occupy the place with good fortune. He may be sure that the cloister will make no opposition; but Chenstohova is not Yasna Gora, of which no mention is made in the order."

When Miller heard this answer he saw that he had to deal with diplomats more adroit than himself; reasons were just what he lacked, – and there remained only cannon.

A truce lasted through the night. The Swedes worked with vigor at making better trenches; and on Yasna Gora they looked for the damages of the previous day, and saw with astonishment that there were none. Here and there roofs and rafters were broken, here and there plaster had dropped from the walls, – that was all. Of the men, none had fallen, no one was even maimed. The prior, going around on the walls, said with a smile to the soldiers, —

"But see, this enemy with his bombarding is not so terrible as reported. After a festival there is often more harm done. God's care is guarding you; God's hand protects you; only let us endure, and we shall see greater wonders."

Sunday came, the festival of the offering of the Holy Lady. There was no hindrance to services, since Miller was waiting for the final answer, which the monks had promised to send after midday.

Mindful meanwhile of the words of Scripture, how Israel bore the ark of God around the camp to terrify the Philistines, they went again in procession with the monstrance.

The letter was sent about one o'clock, not to surrender; but to repeat the answer given Kuklinovski, that the church and the cloister are called Yasna Gora, and that the town Chenstohova does not belong to the cloister at all. "Therefore we implore earnestly his worthiness," wrote the prior Kordetski, "to be pleased to leave in peace our Congregation and the church consecrated to God and His Most Holy Mother, so that God may be honored therein during future times. In this church also we shall implore the Majesty of God for the health and success of the Most Serene King of Sweden. Meanwhile we, unworthy men, while preferring our request, commend ourselves most earnestly to the kindly consideration of your worthiness, confiding in your goodness, from which we promise much to ourselves in the future."

There were present at the reading of the letter, Sadovski; Count Veyhard; Horn, governor of Kjepitsi; De Fossis, a famous engineer; and the Prince of Hesse, a man young and very haughty, who though subordinate to Miller, was willing to show his own importance. He laughed therefore maliciously, and repeated the conclusion of the letter with emphasis, —

"They promise much to themselves from your kindness; General, that is a hint for a contribution. I put one question, gentlemen: Are the monks better beggars or better gunners?"

"True," said Horn, "during these first days we have lost so many men that a good battle would not have taken more."

"As for me," continued the Prince of Hesse, "I do not want money; I am not seeking for glory, and I shall freeze off my feet in these huts. What a pity that we did not go to Prussia, a rich country, pleasant, one town excelling another."

Miller, who acted quickly but thought slowly, now first understood the sense of the letter; he grew purple and said, —

"The monks are jeering at us, gracious gentlemen."

"They had not the intention of doing so, but it comes out all the same," answered Horn.

"To the trenches, then! Yesterday the fire was weak, the balls few."

The orders given flew swiftly from end to end of the Swedish line. The trenches were covered with blue clouds; the cloister answered quickly with all its energy. But this time the Swedish guns were better planted, and began to cause greater damage. Bombs, loaded with powder, were scattered, each drawing behind it a curl of flame. Lighted torches were hurled too, and rolls of hemp steeped in rosin.

As sometimes flocks of passing cranes, tired from long flying, besiege a high cliff, so swarms of these fiery messengers fell on the summit of the church and on the wooden roofs of the buildings. Whoso was not taking part in the struggle, was near a cannon, was sitting on a roof. Some dipped water from wells, others drew up the buckets with ropes, while third parties put out fire with wet cloths. Balls crashing rafters and beams fell into garrets, and soon smoke and the odor of burning filled all the interior of buildings. But in garrets, too, defenders were watching with buckets of water. The heaviest bombs burst even through ceilings. In spite of efforts more than human, in spite of wakefulness, it seemed that, early or late, flames would embrace the whole cloister. Torches and bundles of hemp pushed with hooks from the roofs formed burning piles at the foot of the walls. Windows were bursting from heat, and women and children confined in rooms were stifling from smoke and exhalations. Hardly were some missiles extinguished, hardly was the water flowing in broken places, when there came new flocks of burning balls, flaming cloths, sparks, living fire. The whole cloister was seized with it. You would have said that heaven had opened on the place, and that a shower of thunders was falling; still it burned, but was not consumed; it was flaming, but did not fall into fragments; what was more, the besieged began to sing like those youths in the fiery furnace; for, as the day previous, a song was now heard from the tower, accompanied by trumpets. To the men standing on the walls and working at the guns, who at each moment might think that all was blazing and falling to ruins behind their shoulders, that song was like healing balsam, announcing continually that the church was standing, that the cloister was standing, that so far flames had not vanquished the efforts of men. Hence it became a custom to sweeten with such harmony the suffering of the siege, and to keep removed from the ears of women the terrible shouts of raging soldiery.

But in the Swedish camp that singing and music made no small impression. The soldiers in the trenches heard it at first with wonder, then with superstitious dread.

"How is it," said they to one another, "we have cast so much fire and iron at that hen-house that more than one powerful fortress would have flown away in smoke and ashes, but they are playing joyously? What does this mean?"

"Enchantment!" said others.

"Balls do not harm those walls. Bombs roll down from the roofs as if they were empty kegs! Enchantment, enchantment!" repeated they. "Nothing good will meet us in this place."

The officers in fact were ready to ascribe some mysterious meaning to those sounds. But others interpreted differently, and Sadovski said aloud, so that Miller might hear: "They must feel well there, since they rejoice; or are they glad because we have spent so much powder for nothing?"

"Of which we have not too much," added the Prince of Hesse.

"But we have as leader Poliorcetes," said Sadovski, in such a tone that it could not be understood whether he was ridiculing or flattering Miller. But the latter evidently took it as ridicule, for he bit his mustache.

"We shall see whether they will be playing an hour later," said he, turning to his staff.

Miller gave orders to double the fire, but these orders were carried out over-zealously. In their hurry, the gunners pointed the cannons too high, and the result was they carried too far. Some of the balls, soaring above the church and the cloister, went to the Swedish trenches on the opposite side, smashing timber works, scattering baskets, killing men.

An hour passed; then a second. From the church tower came solemn music unbroken.

Miller stood with his glass turned on Chenstohova. He looked a long time. Those present noticed that the hand with which he held the glass to his eyes trembled more and more; at last he turned and cried, —

"The shots do not injure the church one whit!" And anger, unrestrained, mad, seized the old warrior. He hurled the glass to the earth, and it broke into pieces. "I shall go wild from this music!" roared he.

At that moment De Fossis, the engineer, galloped up. "General," said he, "it is impossible to make a mine. Under a layer of earth lies rock. There miners are needed."

Miller used an oath. But he had not finished the imprecation when another officer came with a rush from the Chenstohova entrenchment, and saluting, said, —

"Our largest gun has burst. Shall we bring others from Lgota?"

Fire had slackened somewhat; the music was heard with more and more solemnity. Miller rode off to his quarters without saying a word. But he gave no orders to slacken the struggle; he determined to worry the besieged. They had in the fortress barely two hundred men as garrison; he had continual relays of fresh soldiers.

Night came, the guns thundered unceasingly; but the cloister guns answered actively, – more actively indeed than during the day, for the Swedish camp-fires showed them ready work. More than once it happened that soldiers had barely sat around the fire and the kettle hanging over it, when a ball from the cloister flew to them out of the darkness, like an angel of death. The fire was scattered to splinters and sparks, the soldiers ran apart with unearthly cries, and either sought refuge with other comrades, or wandered through the night, chilled, hungry, and frightened.

About midnight the fire from the cloister increased to such force that within reach of a cannon not a stick could be kindled. The besieged seemed to speak in the language of cannons the following words: "You wish to wear us out, – try it! We challenge you!"

One o'clock struck, and two. A fine rain began to fall in the form of cold mist, but piercing, and in places thickened as if into pillars, columns and bridges seeming red from the light of the fire. Through these fantastic arcades and pillars were seen at times the threatening outlines of the cloister, which changed before the eye; at one time it seemed higher than usual, then again it fell away as if in an abyss. From the trenches to its walls stretched as it were ill-omened arches and corridors formed of darkness and mist, and through those corridors flew balls bearing death; at times all the air above the cloister seemed clear as if illumined by a lightning flash; the walls, the lofty works, and the towers were all outlined in brightness, then again they were quenched. The soldiers looked before them with superstitious and gloomy dread. Time after time one pushed another and whispered, —

"Hast seen it? This cloister appears and vanishes in turn. That is a power not human."

"I saw something better than that," answered the other. "We were aiming with that gun that burst, when in a moment the whole fortress began to jump and quiver, as if some one were raising and lowering it. Fire at such a fortress; hit it!"

The soldier then threw aside the cannon brush, and after a while added, —

"We can win nothing here! We shall never smell their treasures. Brr, it is cold! Have you the tar-bucket there? Set fire to it; we can even warm our hands."

One of the soldiers started to light the tar by means of a sulphured thread. He ignited the sulphur first, then began to let it down slowly.

"Put out that light!" sounded the voice of an officer. But almost the same instant was heard the noise of a ball; then a short cry, and the light was put out.

The night brought the Swedes heavy losses. A multitude of men perished at the camp-fires; in places regiments fell into such disorder that they could not form line before morning. The besieged, as if wishing to show that they needed no sleep, fired with increasing rapidity.

The dawn lighted tired faces on the walls, pale, sleepless, but enlivened by feverishness. Kordetski had lain in the form of a cross in the church all night; with daylight he appeared on the walls, and his pleasant voice was heard at the cannon, in the curtains, and near the gates.

"God is forming the day, my children," said he. "Blessed be His light. There is no damage in the church, none in the buildings. The fire is put out, no one has lost his life. Pan Mosinski, a fiery ball fell under the cradle of your little child, and was quenched, causing no harm. Give thanks to the Most Holy Lady; repay her."

"May Her name be blessed," said Mosinski; "I serve as I can."

The prior went farther.

It had become bright day when he stood near Charnyetski and Kmita. He did not see Kmita; for he had crawled to the other side to examine the woodwork, which a Swedish ball had harmed somewhat. The prior asked straightway, —

"But where is Babinich? Is he not sleeping?"

"I, sleep in such a night as this!" answered Pan Andrei, climbing up on the wall. "I should have no conscience. Better watch as an orderly of the Most Holy Lady."

"Better, better, faithful servant!" answered Kordetski.

Pan Andrei saw at that moment a faint Swedish light gleaming, and immediately he cried, —

"Fire, there, fire! Aim! higher! at the dog-brothers!"

Kordetski smiled, seeing such zeal, and returned to the cloister to send to the wearied men a drink made of beer with pieces of cheese broken in it.

Half an hour later appeared women, priests, and old men of the church, bringing steaming pots and jugs. The soldiers seized these with alacrity, and soon was heard along all the walls eager drinking. They praised the drink, saying, —

"We are not forgotten in the service of the Most Holy Lady. We have good food."

"It is worse for the Swedes," added others. "It was hard for them to cook food the past night; it will be worse the night coming."

"They have enough, the dog-faiths. They will surely give themselves and us rest during the day. Their poor guns must be hoarse by this time from roaring continually."

But the soldiers were mistaken, for the day was not to bring rest When, in the morning, officers coming with the reports informed Miller that the result of the night's cannonading was nothing, that in fact the night had brought the Swedes a considerable loss in men, the general was stubborn and gave command to continue cannonading. "They will grow tired at last," said he to the Prince of Hesse.

"This is an immense outlay of powder," answered that officer.

"But they burn powder too?"

"They must have endless supplies of saltpetre and sulphur, and we shall give them charcoal ourselves, if we are able to burn even one booth. In the night I went near the walls, and in spite of the thunder, I heard a mill clearly, that must be a powder-mill."

"I will give orders to cannonade as fiercely as yesterday, till sunset. We will rest for the night. We shall see if an embassy does not come out."

"Your worthiness knows that they have sent one to Wittemberg?"

"I know; I will send too for the largest cannons. If it is impossible to frighten the monks or to raise a fire inside the fortress, we must make a breach."

"I hope, your worthiness, that the field-marshal will approve the siege."

"The field-marshal knows of my intention, and he has said nothing," replied Miller, dryly. "If failure pursues me still farther, the field-marshal will give censure instead of approval, and will not fail to lay all the blame at my door. The king will say he is right, – I know that. I have suffered not a little from the field-marshal's sullen humor, just as if 'tis my fault that he, as the Italians state, is consumed by *mal francese*."

"That they will throw the blame on you I doubt not, especially when it appears that Sadovich is right."

"How right? Sadovich speaks for those monks as if he were hired by them. What does he say?"

"He says that these shots will be heard through the whole country, from the Carpathians to the Baltic."

"Let the king command in such case to tear the skin from Count Veyhard and send it as an offering to the cloister; for he it is who instigated to this siege."

Here Miller seized his head.

"But it is necessary to finish at a blow. It seems to me, something tells me, that in the night they will send some one to negotiate; meanwhile fire after fire!"

The day passed then as the day previous, full of thunder, smoke, and flames. Many such were to pass yet over Yasna Gora. But the defenders quenched the conflagrations and cannonaded no less bravely. One half the soldiers went to rest, the other half were on the walls at the guns.

The people began to grow accustomed to the unbroken roar, especially when convinced that no great damage was done. Faith strengthened the less experienced; but among them were old soldiers, acquainted with war, who performed their service as a trade. These gave comfort to the villagers.

Soroka acquired much consideration among them; for, having spent a great part of his life in war, he was as indifferent to its uproar as an old innkeeper to the shouts of carousers. In the evening when the guns had grown silent he told his comrades of the siege of Zbaraj. He had not been there in person, but he knew of it minutely from soldiers who had gone through that siege and had told him.

"There rolled on Cossacks, Tartars, and Turks, so many that there were more under-cooks there than all the Swedes that are here. And still our people did not yield to them. Besides, evil spirits have no power here; but there it was only Friday, Saturday, and Sunday that the devils did not help the ruffians; the rest of the time they terrified our people whole nights. They sent Death to the breastworks to appear to the soldiers and take from them courage for battle. I know this from a man who saw Death himself."

"Did he see her?" asked with curiosity peasants gathering around the sergeant.

"With his own eyes. He was going from digging a well; for water was lacking, and what was in the ponds smelt badly. He was going, going, till he saw walking in front of him some kind of figure in a black mantle."

"In a black, not in a white one?"

"In black; in war Death dresses in black. It was growing dark, the soldier came up. 'Who is here?' inquired he – no answer. Then he pulled the mantle, looked, and saw a skeleton. 'But what art thou here for?' asked the soldier. 'I am Death,' was the answer; 'and I am coming for thee in a week.' The soldier thought that was bad. 'Why,' asked he, 'in a week, and not sooner? Art thou not free to come sooner?' The other said: 'I can do nothing before a week, for such is the order.'"

"The soldier thought to himself: 'That is hard; but if she can do nothing to me now, I'll pay her what I owe.' Winding Death up in the mantle, he began to beat her bones on the pebbles; but she cried and begged: 'I'll come in two weeks!' 'Impossible.' 'In three, four, ten, when the siege is over; a year, two, fifteen – ' 'Impossible.' 'I'll come in fifty years.' The soldier was pleased, for he was then fifty, and thought: 'A hundred years is enough; I'll let her go.' The man is living this minute, and well; he goes to a battle as to a dance, for what does he care?"

"But if he had been frightened, it would have been all over with him?"

"The worst is to fear Death," said Soroka, with importance. "This soldier did good to others too; for after he had beaten Death, he hurt her so that she was fainting for three days, and during that time no one fell in camp, though sorties were made."

"But we never go out at night against the Swedes."

"We haven't the head for it," answered Soroka.

The last question and answer were heard by Kmita, who was standing not far away, and he struck his head. Then he looked at the Swedish trenches. It was already night. At the trenches for an hour past deep silence had reigned. The wearied soldiers were seemingly sleeping at the guns.

At two cannon-shots' distance gleamed a number of fires; but at the trenches themselves was thick darkness.

"That will not enter their heads, nor the suspicion of it, and they cannot suppose it," whispered Kmita to himself.

He went straight to Charnyetski, who, sitting at the gun-carriage, was reading his rosary, and striking one foot against the other, for both feet were cold.

"Cold," said he, seeing Kmita; "and my head is heavy from the thunder of two days and one night. In my ears there is continual ringing."

"In whose head would it not ring from such uproars? But to-day we shall rest. They have gone to sleep for good. It would be possible to surprise them like a bear in a den; I know not whether guns would rouse them."

"Oh," said Charnyetski, raising his head, "of what are you thinking?"

"I am thinking of Zbaraj, how the besieged inflicted with sorties more than one great defeat on the ruffians."

"You are thinking of blood, like a wolf in the night."

"By the living God and his wounds, let us make a sortie! We will cut down men, spike guns! They expect no attack."

Charnyetski sprang to his feet.

"And in the morning they will go wild. They imagine, perhaps, that they have frightened us enough and we are thinking of surrender; they will get their answer. As I love God, 'tis a splendid idea, a real knightly deed! That should have come to my head too. But it is needful to tell all to Kordetski, for he is commander."

They went.

Kordetski was taking counsel in the chamber with Zamoyski. When he heard steps, he raised his voice and pushing a candle to one side, inquired, —

"Who is coming? Is there anything new?"

"It is I, Charnyetski," replied Pan Pyotr, "with me is Babinich; neither of us can sleep. We have a terrible odor of the Swedes. This Babinich, father, has a restless head and cannot stay in one place. He is boring me, boring; for he wants terribly to go to the Swedes beyond the walls to ask them if they will fire to-morrow also, or give us and themselves time to breathe."

"How is that?" inquired the prior, not concealing his astonishment "Babinich wants to make a sortie from the fortress?"

"In company, in company," answered Charnyetski, hurriedly, "with me and some others. They, it seems, are sleeping like dead men at the trenches; there is no fire visible, no sentries to be seen. They trust over much in our weakness."

"We will spike the guns," said Kmita.

"Give that Babinich this way!" exclaimed Zamoyski; "let me embrace him! The sting is itching, O hornet! thou wouldst gladly sting even at night. This is a great undertaking, which may have the finest results. God gave us only one Lithuanian, but that one an enraged and biting beast. I applaud the design; no one here will find fault with it. I am ready to go myself."

Kordetski at first was alarmed, for he feared bloodshed, especially when his own life was not exposed; after he had examined the idea more closely, he recognized it as worthy of the defenders.

"Let me pray," said he. And kneeling before the image of the Mother of God, he prayed a while, with outspread arms, and then rose with serene face.

"Pray you as well," said he; "and then go."

A quarter of an hour later the four went out and repaired to the walls. The trenches in the distance were sleeping. The night was very dark.

"How many men will you take?" asked Kordetski of Kmita.

"I?" answered Pan Andrei, in surprise. "I am not leader, and I do not know the place so well as Pan Charnyetski. I will go with my sabre, but let Charnyetski lead the men, and me with the others; I only wish to have my Soroka go, for he can hew terribly."

This answer pleased both Charnyetski and the prior, for they saw in it clear proof of submission. They set about the affair briskly. Men were selected, the greatest silence was enjoined, and they began to remove the beams, stones, and brick from the passage in the wall.

This labor lasted about an hour. At length the opening was ready, and the men began to dive into the narrow jaws. They had sabres, pistols, guns, and some, namely peasants, had scythes with points downward, – a weapon with which they were best acquainted.

When outside the wall they organized; Charnyetski stood at the head of the party, Kmita at the flank; and they moved along the ditch silently, restraining the breath in their breasts, like wolves stealing up to a sheepfold.

Still, at times a scythe struck a scythe, at times a stone gritted under a foot, and by those noises it was possible to know that they were pushing forward unceasingly. When they had come down to the plain, Charnyetski halted, and, not far from the enemy's trenches, left some of his men, under command of Yanich, a Hungarian, an old, experienced soldier; these men he commanded to lie on the ground. Charnyetski himself advanced somewhat to the right, and having now under foot soft earth which gave out no echo, began to lead forward his party more swiftly. His plan was to pass around the intrenchment, strike on the sleeping Swedes from the rear, and push them toward the cloister against Yanich's men. This idea was suggested by Kmita, who now marching near him with sabre in hand, whispered, —

"The intrenchment is extended in such fashion that between it and the main camp there is open ground. Sentries, if there are any, are before the trenches and not on this side of it, so that we can go behind freely, and attack them on the side from which they least expect attack."

"That is well," said Charnyetski; "not a foot of those men should escape."

"If any one speaks when we enter," continued Pan Andrei, "let me answer; I can speak German as well as Polish; they will think that some one is coming from Miller, from the camp."

"If only there are no sentries behind the intrenchments."

"Even if there are, we shall spring on in a moment; before they can understand who and what, we shall have them down."

"It is time to turn, the end of the trench can be seen," said Charnyetski; and turning he called softly, "To the right, to the right!"

The silent line began to bend. That moment the moon lighted a bank of clouds somewhat, and it grew clearer. The advancing men saw an empty space in the rear of the trench.

As Kmita had foreseen, there were no sentries whatever on that space; for why should the Swedes station sentries between their trenches and their own army, stationed in the rear of the trenches. The most sharp-sighted leader could not suspect danger from that side.

At that moment Charnyetski said in the lowest whisper; "Tents are now visible. And in two of them are lights. People are still awake there, – surely officers. Entrance from the rear must be easy."

"Evidently," answered Kmita. "Over that road they draw cannon, and by it troops enter. The bank is already at hand. Have a care now that arms do not clatter."

They had reached the elevation raised carefully with earth dug from so many trenches. A whole line of wagons was standing there, in which powder and balls had been brought.

But at the wagons, no man was watching; passing them, therefore, they began to climb the embankment without trouble, as they had justly foreseen, for it was gradual and well raised.

In this manner they went right to the tents, and with drawn weapons stood straight in front of them. In two of the tents lights were actually burning; therefore Kmita said to Charnyetski, —

"I will go in advance to those who are not sleeping. Wait for my pistol, and then on the enemy!" When he had said this, he went forward.

The success of the sortie was already assured; therefore he did not try to go in very great silence. He passed a few tents buried in darkness; no one woke, no one inquired, "Who is there?"

The soldiers of Yasna Gora heard the squeak of his daring steps and the beating of their own hearts. He reached the lighted tent, raised the curtain and entered, halted at the entrance with pistol in hand and sabre down on its strap.

He halted because the light dazzled him somewhat, for on the camp table stood a candlestick with six arms, in which bright lights were burning.

At the table were sitting three officers, bent over plans. One of them, sitting in the middle, was poring over these plans so intently that his long hair lay on the white paper. Seeing some one enter, he raised his head, and asked in a calm voice, —

"Who is there?"

"A soldier," answered Kmita.

That moment the two other officers turned their eyes toward the entrance.

"What soldier, where from?" asked the first, who was De Fossis, the officer who chiefly directed the siege.

"From the cloister," answered Kmita. But there was something terrible in his voice.

De Fossis rose quickly and shaded his eyes with his hand. Kmita was standing erect and motionless as an apparition; only the threatening face, like the head of a predatory bird, announced sudden danger.

Still the thought, quick as lightning, rushed through the head of De Fossis, that he might be a deserter from Yasna Gora; therefore he asked again, but excitedly, —

"What do you want?"

"I want this!" cried Kmita; and he fired from a pistol into the very breast of De Fossis.

With that a terrible shout and a salvo of shots was heard on the trench. De Fossis fell as falls a pine-tree struck by lightning; another officer rushed at Kmita with his sword, but the latter slashed him between the eyes with his sabre, which gritted on the bone; the third officer threw himself on the ground, wishing to slip out under the side of the tent, but Kmita sprang at him, put his foot on his shoulder, and nailed him to the earth with a thrust.

By this time the silence of night had turned into the day of judgment. Wild shouts: "Slay, kill!" were mingled with howls and shrill calls of Swedish soldiers for aid. Men bewildered from terror rushed out of the tents, not knowing whither to turn, in what direction to flee. Some, without noting at once whence the attack came, ran straight to the enemy, and perished under sabres, scythes, and axes, before they had time to cry "Quarter!" Some in the darkness stabbed their own comrades; others unarmed, half-dressed, without caps, with hands raised upward, stood motionless on one spot; some at last dropped on the earth among the overturned tents. A small handful wished to defend themselves; but a blinded throng bore them away, threw them down, and trampled them.

Groans of the dying and heart-rending prayers for quarter increased the confusion.

When at last it grew clear from the cries that the attack had come, not from the side of the cloister, but from the rear, just from the direction of the Swedish army, then real desperation seized the attacked. They judged evidently that some squadrons, allies of the cloister, had struck on them suddenly.

Crowds of infantry began to spring out of the intrenchment and run toward the cloister, as if they wished to find refuge within its walls. But soon new shouts showed that they had come upon the party of the Hungarian, Yanich, who finished them under the very fortress.

Meanwhile the cloister-men, slashing, thrusting, trampling, advanced toward the cannons. Men with spikes ready, rushed at them immediately; but others continued the work of death. Peasants, who would not have stood before trained soldiers in the open field, rushed now a handful at a crowd.

Valiant Colonel Horn, governor of Kjepitsi, endeavored to rally the fleeing soldiers; springing into a corner of the trench, he shouted in the darkness and waved his sword. The Swedes recognized him and began at once to assemble; but in their tracks and with them rushed the attackers, whom it was difficult to distinguish in the darkness.

At once was heard a terrible whistle of scythes, and the voice of Horn ceased in a moment. The crowd of soldiers scattered as if driven apart by a bomb. Kmita and Charnyetski rushed after them with a few people, and cut them to pieces.

The trench was taken.

In the main camp of the Swedes trumpets sounded the alarm. Straightway the guns of Yasna Gora gave answer, and fiery balls began to fly from the cloister to light up the way for the home-coming men. They came panting, bloody, like wolves who had made a slaughter in a sheepfold; they were retreating before the approaching sound of musketeers. Charnyetski led the van, Kmita brought up the rear.

In half an hour they reached the party left with Yanich; but he did not answer their call; he alone had paid for the sortie with his life, for when he rushed after some officer, his own soldiers shot him.

The party entered the cloister amid the thunder of cannon and the gleam of flames. At the entrance the prior was waiting, and he counted them in order as the heads were pushed in through the opening. No one was missing save Yanich.

Two men went out for him at once, and half an hour later they brought his body; for Kordetski wished to honor him with a fitting burial.

But the quiet of night, once broken, did not return till white day. From the walls cannon were playing; in the Swedish positions the greatest confusion continued. The enemy not knowing well their own losses, not knowing whence the aggressor might come, fled from the trenches nearest the cloister. Whole regiments wandered in despairing disorder till morning, mistaking frequently their own for the enemy, and firing at one another. Even in the main camp were soldiers and officers who abandoned their tents and remained under the open sky, awaiting the end of that ghastly night. Alarming news flew from mouth to mouth. Some said that succor had come to the fortress, others asserted that all the nearer intrenchments were captured.

Miller, Sadovski, the Prince of Hesse, Count Veyhard, and other superior officers, made superhuman exertions to bring the terrified regiments to order. At the same time the cannonade of the cloister was answered by balls of fire, to scatter the darkness and enable fugitives to assemble. One of the balls struck the roof of the chapel, but striking only the edge of it, returned with rattling and crackling toward the camp, casting a flood of flame through the air.

At last the night of tumult was ended. The cloister and the Swedish camp became still. Morning had begun to whiten the summits of the church, the roofs took on gradually a ruddy light, and day came.

In that hour Miller, at the head of his staff, rode to the captured trench. They could, it is true, see him from the cloister and open fire; but the old general cared not for that. He wished to see with his own eyes all the injury, and count the slain. The staff followed him; all were disturbed, – they had sorrow and seriousness in their faces. When they reached the intrenchment, they dismounted and began to ascend. Traces of the struggle were visible everywhere; lower down than the guns were the overthrown tents; some were still open, empty, silent. There were piles of bodies, especially among the tents; half-naked corpses, mangled, with staring eyes, and with terror stiffened in their dead eyeballs,

presented a dreadful sight. Evidently all these men had been surprised in deep sleep; some of them were barefoot; it was a rare one who grasped his rapier in his dead hand; almost no one wore a helmet or a cap. Some were lying in tents, especially at the side of the entrance; these, it was apparent, had barely succeeded in waking; others, at the sides of tents, were caught by death at the moment when they were seeking safety in flight. Everywhere there were many bodies, and in places such piles that it might be thought some cataclysm of nature had killed those soldiers; but the deep wounds in their faces and breasts, some faces blackened by shots, so near that all the powder had not been burned, testified but too plainly that the hand of man had caused the destruction.

Miller went higher, to the guns; they were standing dumb, spiked, no more terrible now than logs of wood; across one of them lay hanging on both sides the body of a gunner, almost cut in two by the terrible sweep of a scythe. Blood had flowed over the carriage and formed a broad pool beneath it. Miller observed everything minutely, in silence and with frowning brow. No officer dared break that silence. For how could they bring consolation to that aged general, who had been beaten like a novice through his own want of care? That was not only defeat, but shame; for the general himself had called that fortress a hen-house, and promised to crush it between his fingers, for he had nine thousand soldiers, and there were two hundred men in the garrison; finally, that general was a soldier, blood and bone, and against him were monks.

That day had a grievous beginning for Miller.

Now the infantry came up and began to carry out bodies. Four of them, bearing on a stretcher a corpse, stopped before the general without being ordered.

Miller looked at the stretcher and closed his eyes.

"De Fossis," said he, in a hollow voice.

Scarcely had they gone aside when others came, this time Sadovski moved toward them and called from a distance, turning to the staff, —

"They are carrying Horn!"

But Horn was alive yet, and had before him long days of atrocious suffering. A peasant had cut him with the very point of a scythe; but the blow was so fearful that it opened the whole framework of his breast. Still the wounded man retained his presence of mind. Seeing Miller and the staff, he smiled, wished to say something, but instead of a sound there came through his lips merely rose-colored froth; then he began to blink, and fainted.

"Carry him to my tent," said Miller, "and let my doctor attend to him immediately."

Then the officers heard him say to himself, —

"Horn, Horn, – I saw him last night in a dream, – just in the evening. A terrible thing, beyond comprehension!"

And fixing his eyes on the ground, he dropped into deep thought; all at once he was roused from his revery by the voice of Sadovski, who cried: "General! look there, there – the cloister!"

Miller looked and was astonished. It was broad day and clear, only fogs were hanging over the earth; but the sky was clear and blushing from the light of the morning. A white fog hid the summit itself of Yasna Gora, and according to the usual order of things ought to hide the church, but by a peculiar phenomenon the church, with the tower, was raised, not only above the cliff, but above the fog, high, high, – precisely as if it had separated from its foundations and was hanging in the blue under the dome of the sky. The cries of the soldiers announced that they too saw the phenomenon.

"That fog deceives the eye!" said Miller.

"The fog is lying under the church," answered Sadovski.

"It is a wonderful thing; but that church is ten times higher than it was yesterday, and hangs in the air," said the Prince of Hesse.

"It is going yet! higher, higher!" cried the soldiers. "It will vanish from the eye!"

In fact the fog hanging on the cliff began to rise toward the sky in the form of an immense pillar of smoke; the church planted, as it were, on the summit of that pillar, seemed to rise higher

each instant; at the same time when it was far up, as high as the clouds themselves, it was veiled more and more with vapor; you would have said that it was melting, liquefying; it became more indistinct, and at last vanished altogether.

Miller turned to the officers, and in his eyes were depicted astonishment and a superstitious dread.

"I acknowledge, gentlemen," said he, "that I have never seen such a thing in my life, altogether opposed to nature: it must be the enchantment of papists."

"I have heard," said Sadovski, "soldiers crying out, 'How can you fire at such a fortress?' In truth I know not how."

"But what is there now?" cried the Prince of Hesse. "Is that church in the fog, or is it gone?"

"Though this were an ordinary phenomenon of nature, in any event it forebodes us no good. See, gentlemen, from the time that we came here we have not advanced one step."

"If," answered Sadovski, "we had only not advanced; but to tell the truth, we have suffered defeat after defeat, and last night was the worst. The soldiers losing willingness lose courage, and will begin to be negligent. You have no idea of what they say in the regiments. Besides, wonderful things take place; for instance, for a certain time no man can go alone, or even two men, out of the camp; whoever does so is as if he had fallen through the earth, as if wolves were prowling around Chenstohova. I sent myself, not long since, a banneret and three men to Vyelunie for warm clothing, and from that day, no tidings of them."

"It will be worse when winter comes; even now the nights are unendurable," added the Prince of Hesse.

"The mist is growing thinner!" said Miller, on a sudden.

In fact a breeze rose and began to blow away the vapors. In the bundles of fog something began to quiver; finally the sun rose and the air grew transparent. The walls of the cloister were outlined faintly, then out came the church and the cloister. Everything was in its old place. The fortress was quiet and still, as if people were not living in it.

"General," said the Prince of Hesse, with energy, "try negotiations again, it is needful to finish at once."

"But if negotiations lead to nothing, do you, gentlemen, advise to give up the siege?" asked Miller, gloomily.

The officers were silent. After a while Sadovski said, —

"Your worthiness knows best that it will come to that."

"I know," answered Miller, haughtily, "and I say this only to you, that I curse the day and the hour in which I came hither, as well as the counsellor who persuaded me to this siege [here he pierced Count Veyhard with his glance]. You know, however, after what has happened, that I shall not withdraw until I turn this cursed fortress into a heap of ruins, or fall myself."

Displeasure was reflected in the face of the Prince of Hesse. He had never respected Miller over-much; hence he considered this mere military braggadocio ill-timed, in view of the captured trenches, the corpses, and the spiked cannon. He turned to him then and answered with evident sarcasm, —

"General, you are not able to promise that; for you would withdraw in view of the first command of the king, or of Marshal Wittemberg. Sometimes also circumstances are able to command not worse than kings and marshals."

Miller wrinkled his heavy brows, seeing which Count Veyhard said hurriedly, —

"Meanwhile we will try negotiations. They will yield; it cannot be otherwise."

The rest of his words were drowned by the rejoicing sound of bells, summoning to early Mass in the church of Yasna Gora. The general with his staff rode away slowly toward Chenstohova; but had not reached headquarters when an officer rushed up on a foaming horse.

"He is from Marshal Wittemberg!" said Miller.

The officer handed him a letter. The general broke the seal hurriedly, and running over the letter quickly with his eyes, said with confusion in his countenance, —

"No! This is from Poznan. Evil tidings. In Great Poland the nobles are rising, the people are joining them. At the head of the movement is Krishtof Jegotski, who wants to march to the aid of Chenstohova."

"I foretold that these shots would be heard from the Carpathians to the Baltic," muttered Sadovski. "With this people change is sudden. You do not know the Poles yet; you will discover them later."

"Well! we shall know them," answered Miller. "I prefer an open enemy to a false ally. They yielded of their own accord, and now they are taking arms. Well! they will know our weapons."

"And we theirs," blurted out Sadovski. "General, let us finish negotiations with Chenstohova; let us agree to any capitulation. It is not a question of the fortress, but of the rule of his Royal Grace in this country."

"The monks will capitulate," said Count Veyhard. "Today or to-morrow they will yield."

So they conversed with one another; but in the cloister after early Mass the joy was unbounded. Those who had not gone out in the sortie asked those who had how everything had happened. Those who had taken part boasted greatly, glorifying their own bravery and the defeat they had given the enemy.

Among the priests and women curiosity became paramount. White habits and women's robes covered the wall. It was a beautiful and gladsome day. The women gathered around Charnyetski, crying "Our deliverer! our guardian!" He defended himself particularly when they wanted to kiss his hands, and pointing to Kmita, said, —

"Thank him too. He is Babinich,[1] but no old woman. He will not let his hands be Kissed, for there is blood on them yet; but if any of the younger would like to kiss him on the lips, I think that he would not flinch."

The younger women did in fact cast modest and at the same time enticing glances at Pan Andrei, admiring his splendid beauty; but he did not answer with his eyes to those dumb questions, for the sight of these maidens reminded him of Olenka.

"Oh, my poor girl!" thought he, "if you only knew that in the service of the Most Holy Lady I am opposing those enemies whom formerly I served to my sorrow!"

And he promised himself that the moment the siege was over he would write to her in Kyedani, and hurry off Soroka with the letter. "And I shall send her not empty words and promises; for now deeds are behind me, which without empty boasting, but accurately, I shall describe in the letter. Let her know that she has done this, let her be comforted."

And he consoled himself with this thought so much that he did not even notice how the maidens said to one another, in departing, —

"He is a good warrior; but it is clear that he looks only to battle, and is an unsocial grumbler."

[1] This name is derived from *baba* an old woman.

CHAPTER II

According to the wish of his officers, Miller began negotiations again. There came to the cloister from the Swedish camp a well-known Polish noble, respected for his age and his eloquence. They received him graciously on Yasna Gora, judging that only in seeming and through constraint would he argue for surrender, but in reality would add to their courage and confirm the news, which had broken through the besieged wall, of the rising in Great Poland; of the dislike of the quarter troops to Sweden; of the negotiations of Yan Kazimir with the Cossacks, who, as it were, seemed willing to return to obedience; finally, of the tremendous declaration of the Khan of the Tartars, that he was marching with aid to the vanquished king, all of whose enemies he would pursue with fire and sword.

But how the monks were mistaken! The personage brought indeed a large bundle of news, – but news that was appalling, news to cool the most fervent zeal, to crush the most invincible resolution, stagger the most ardent faith.

The priests and the nobles gathered around him in the council chamber, in the midst of silence and attention; from his lips sincerity itself seemed to flow, and pain for the fate of the country. He placed his hand frequently on his white head as if wishing to restrain an outburst of despair; he gazed on the crucifix; he had tears in his eyes, and in slow, broken accents, he uttered the following words: —

"Ah, what times the suffering country has lived to! All help is past: it is incumbent to yield to the King of the Swedes. For whom in reality have you, revered fathers, and you lords brothers, the nobles, seized your swords? For whom are you sparing neither watching nor toil, nor suffering nor blood? For whom, through resistance, – unfortunately vain, – are you exposing yourselves and holy places to the terrible vengeance of the invincible legions of Sweden? Is it for Yan Kazimir? But he has already disregarded our kingdom. Do you not know that he has already made his choice, and preferring wealth, joyous feasts; and peaceful delights to a troublesome throne, has abdicated in favor of Karl Gustav? You are not willing to leave him, but he has left you, you are unwilling to break your oath, he has broken it; you are ready to die for him, but he cares not for you nor for any of us. Our lawful king now is Karl Gustav! Be careful, then, lest you draw on your heads, not merely anger, vengeance, and ruin, but sin before heaven, the cross, and the Most Holy Lady; for you are raising insolent hands, not against invaders, but against your own king."

These words were received in silence, as though death were flying through that chamber. What could be more terrible than news of the abdication of Yan Kazimir? It was in truth news monstrously improbable; but that old noble gave it there in presence of the cross, in presence of the image of Mary, and with tears in his eyes.

But if it were true, further resistance was in fact madness. The nobles covered their eyes with their hands, the monks pulled their cowls over their heads, and silence, as of the grave, continued unbroken; but Kordetski, the prior, began to whisper earnest prayer with his pallid lips, and his eyes, calm, deep, clear, and piercing, were fixed on the speaker immovably.

The noble felt that inquiring glance, was ill at ease and oppressed by it; he wished to preserve the marks of importance, benignity, compassionate virtue, good wishes, but could not; he began to cast restless glances on the other fathers, and after a while he spoke further: —

"It is the worst thing to inflame stubbornness by a long abuse of patience. The result of your resistance will be the destruction of this holy church, and the infliction on you – God avert it! – of a terrible and cruel rule, which you will be forced to obey. Aversion to the world and avoidance of its questions are the weapons of monks. What have you to do with the uproar of war, – you, whom the precepts of your order call to retirement and silence? My brothers, revered and most beloved fathers! do not take on your hearts, do not take on your consciences, such a terrible responsibility. It was not you who built this sacred retreat, not for you alone must it serve! Permit that it flourish, and that it bless this land for long ages, so that our sons and grandsons may rejoice in it."

Here the traitor opened his arms and fell into tears. The nobles were silent, the fathers were silent; doubt had seized all. Their hearts were tortured, and despair was at hand; the memory of baffled and useless endeavors weighed on their minds like lead.

"I am waiting for your answer, fathers," said the venerable traitor, dropping his head on his breast.

Kordetski now rose, and with a voice in which there was not the least hesitation or doubt, spoke as if with the vision of a prophet, —

"Your statement that Yan Kazimir has abandoned us, has abdicated and transferred his rights to Karl Gustav, is a calumny. Hope has entered the heart of our banished king, and never has he toiled more zealously than he is toiling at this moment to secure the salvation of the country, to secure his throne, and bring us aid in oppression."

The mask fell in an instant from the face of the traitor; malignity and deceit were reflected in it as clearly as if dragons had crept out at once from the dens of his soul, in which till that moment they had held themselves hidden.

"Whence this intelligence, whence this certainty?" inquired he.

"Whence?" answered the prior, pointing to a great crucifix hanging on the wall. "Go! place your finger on the pierced feet of Christ, and repeat what you have told us."

The traitor began to bend as if under the crushing of an iron hand, and a new dragon, terror, crawled forth to his face.

Kordetski, the prior, stood lordly, terrible as Moses; rays seemed to shoot from his temples.

"Go, repeat!" said he, without lowering his hand, in a voice so powerful that the shaken arches of the council chamber trembled and echoed as if in fear, – "Go, repeat!"

A moment of silence followed; at last the stifled voice of the visitor was heard, —

"I wash my hands – "

"Like Pilate!" finished Kordetski.

The traitor rose and walked out of the room. He hurried through the yard of the cloister, and when he found himself outside the gate, he began to run, almost as if something were hunting him from the cloister to the Swedes.

Zamoyski went to Charnyetski and Kmita, who had not been in the hall, to tell them what had happened.

"Did that envoy bring any good?" asked Charnyetski; "he had an honest face."

"God guard us from such honest men!" answered Zamoyski; "he brought doubt and temptation."

"What did he say?" asked Kmita, raising a little the lighted match which he was holding in his hand.

"He spoke like a hired traitor."

"That is why he hastens so now, I suppose," said Charnyetski. "See! he is running with almost full speed to the Swedish camp. Oh, I would send a ball after him!"

"A good thing!" said Kmita, and he put the match to the cannon.

The thunder of the gun was heard before Zamoyski and Charnyetski could see what had happened. Zamoyski caught his head.

"In God's name!" cried he, "what have you done? – he was an envoy."

"I have done ill!" answered Kmita; "for I missed. He is on his feet again and hastens farther. Oh! why did it go over him?" Here he turned to Zamoyski. "Though I had hit him in the loins, they could not have proved that we fired at him purposely, and God knows I could not hold the match in my fingers; it came down of itself. Never should I have fired at an envoy who was a Swede, but at sight of Polish traitors my entrails revolt."

"Oh, curb yourself; for there would be trouble, and they would be ready to injure our envoys."

But Charnyetski was content in his soul; for Kmita heard him mutter, "At least that traitor will be sure not to come on an embassy again."

This did not escape the ear of Zamoyski, for he answered: "If not this one, others will be found; and do you, gentlemen, make no opposition to their negotiations, do not interrupt them of your own will; for the more they drag on, the more it results to our profit. Succor, if God sends it, will have time to assemble, and a hard winter is coming, making the siege more and more difficult. Delay is loss for the enemy, but brings profit to us."

Zamoyski then went to the chamber, where, after the envoy's departure, consultation was still going on. The words of the traitor had startled men; minds and souls were excited. They did not believe, it is true, in the abdication of Yan Kazimir; but the envoy had held up to their vision the power of the Swedes, which previous days of success had permitted them to forget. Now it confronted their minds with all that terror before which towns and fortresses not such as theirs had been frightened, – Poznan, Warsaw, Cracow, not counting the multitude of castles which had opened their gates to the conqueror; how could Yasna Gora defend itself in a general deluge of defeats?

"We shall defend ourselves a week longer, two, three," thought to themselves some of the nobles and some of the monks; "but what farther, what end will there be to these efforts?"

The whole country was like a ship already deep in the abyss, and that cloister was peering up like the top of a mast through the waves. Could those wrecked ones, clinging to the mast, think not merely of saving themselves, but of raising that vessel from under the ocean?

According to man's calculations they could not, and still, at the moment when Zamoyski re-entered the hall, Kordetski was saying, —

"My brothers! if you sleep not, neither do I sleep. When you are imploring our Patroness for rescue, I too am praying. Weariness, toil, weakness, cling to my bones as well as to yours; responsibility in like manner weighs upon me – nay, more perhaps, than upon you. Why have I faith while you seem in doubt? Enter into yourselves; or is it that your eyes, blinded by earthly power, see not a power greater than the Swedes? Or think you that no defence will suffice, that no hand can overcome that preponderance? If that is the case your thoughts are sinful, and you blaspheme against the mercy of God, against the all-might of our Lord, against the power of that Patroness whose servants you call yourselves. Who of you will dare to say that that Most Holy Queen cannot shield us and send victory? Therefore let us beseech her, let us implore night and day, till by our endurance, our humility, our tears, our sacrifice of body and health, we soften her heart, and pray away our previous sins."

"Father," said one of the nobles, "it is not a question for us of our lives or of our wives and children; but we tremble at the thought of the insults which may be put on the image, should the enemy capture the fortress by storm."

"And we do not wish to take on ourselves the responsibility," added another.

"For no one has a right to take it, not even the prior," added a third.

And the opposition increased, and gained boldness, all the more since many monks maintained silence. The prior, instead of answering directly, began to pray.

"O Mother of Thy only Son!" said he, raising his hands and his eyes toward heaven, "if Thou hast visited us so that in Thy capital we should give an example to others of endurance, of bravery, of faithfulness to Thee, to the country, to the king, – if Thou hast chosen this place in order to rouse by it the consciences of men and save the whole country, have mercy on those who desire to restrain, to stop the fountain of Thy grace, to hinder Thy miracles, and resist Thy holy will." Here he remained a moment in ecstasy, and then turned to the monks and nobles: "What man will take on his shoulders this responsibility, – the responsibility of stopping the miracles of Mary Her grace. Her salvation for this kingdom and the Catholic faith?"

"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!" answered a number of voices, "God preserve us from that!"

"Such a man will not be found!" cried Zamoyski.

And those of the monks in whose hearts doubt had been plunging began to beat their breasts, for no small fear had now seized them; and none of the councillors thought of surrender that evening.

But though the hearts of the older men were strengthened, the destructive planting of that hireling had given forth fruits of poison.

News of the abdication of Yan Kazimir and the improbability of succor went from the nobles to the women, from the women to the servants; the servants spread it among the soldiers, on whom it made the very worst impression. The peasants were astonished least of all; but experienced soldiers, accustomed to calculate the turns of war in soldier fashion only, began to assemble and explain to one another the impossibility of further defence, complaining of the stubbornness of monks, who did not understand the position; and, finally, to conspire and talk in secret.

A certain gunner, a German of suspected fidelity, proposed that the soldiers themselves take the matter in hand, and come to an understanding with the Swedes touching the surrender of the fortress. Others caught at this idea; but there were those who not only opposed the treason resolutely, but informed Kordetski of it without delay.

Kordetski, who knew how to join with the firmest trust in the powers of heaven the greatest earthly adroitness and caution, destroyed the secretly spreading treason in its inception.

First of all he expelled from the fortress the leaders of the treason, and at the head of them that gunner, having no fear whatever of what they could inform the Swedes regarding the state of the fortress and its weak sides; then, doubling the monthly wages of the garrison, he took from them an oath to defend the cloister to the last drop of their blood.

But he redoubled also his watchfulness, resolving to look with more care to the paid soldiers, as well as the nobles, and even his own monks. The older fathers were detailed to the night choirs; the younger, besides the service of God, were obliged to render service on the walls.

Next day a review of the infantry was held. To each bastion one noble with his servants, ten monks and two reliable gunners were detailed. All these were bound to watch, night and day, the places confided to them.

Pan Mosinski took his place at the northeastern bastion; he was a good soldier, the man whose little child had survived in a miraculous manner, though a bomb fell near its cradle. With him Father Hilary Slavoshevski kept guard. On the western bastion was Father Myeletski, of the nobles Pan Mikolai Kryshtoporski, a man surly and abrupt in speech, but of unterrified valor. The southeastern bastion was occupied by Charnyetski and Kmita, and with them was Father Adam Stypulski, who had formerly been a hussar. He, when the need came, tucked up his habit, aimed cannon, and took no more heed of the balls flying over his head than did the old sergeant Soroka. Finally, to the southwestern bastion were appointed Pan Skorjevski and Father Daniel Ryhtalski, who were distinguished by this, that both could abstain from sleep two and three nights in succession without harm to their health or their strength.

Fathers Dobrosh and Malahovski were appointed over the sentries. Persons unfitted for fighting were appointed to the roofs. The armory and all military implements Father Lyassota took under his care; after Father Dobrosh, he took also the office of master of the fires. In the night he had to illuminate the walls so that infantry of the enemy might not approach them. He arranged sockets and iron-holders on the towers, on which flamed at night torches and lights.

In fact, the whole tower looked every night like one gigantic torch. It is true that this lightened cannonading for the Swedes; but it might serve as a sign that the fortress was holding out yet, if, perchance, some army should march to relieve the besieged.

So then not only had designs of surrender crept apart into nothing, but the besieged turned with still greater zeal to defence. Next morning the prior walked along the walls, like a shepherd through a sheepfold, saw that everything was right, smiled kindly, praised the chiefs and the soldiers, and coming to Charnyetski, said with radiant face, —

"Our beloved leader, Pan Zamoyski, rejoices equally with me, for he says that we are now twice as strong as at first. A new spirit has entered men's hearts, the grace of the Most Holy Lady will do the rest; but meanwhile I will take to negotiations again. We will delay and put off, for by such means the blood of people will be spared."

"Oh, revered father!" said Kmita, "what good are negotiations? Loss of time! Better another sortie to-night, and we will cut up those dogs."

Kordetski (for he was in good humor) smiled as a mother smiles at a wayward child; then he raised a band of straw lying near the gun, and pretended to strike Pan Andrei with it on the shoulders: "And you will interfere here, you Lithuanian plague; you will lap blood as a wolf, and give an example of disobedience; here it is for you, here it is for you!"

Kmita, delighted as a schoolboy, dodged to the right and to the left, and as if teasing purposely, repeated: "Kill the Swedes! kill, kill, kill!"

And so they gave comfort to one another, having ardent souls devoted to the country. But Kordetski did not omit negotiations, seeing that Miller desired them earnestly and caught after every pretext. This desire pleased Kordetski, for he divined, without trouble, that it could not be going well with the enemy if he was so anxious to finish.

Days passed then, one after another, in which guns and muskets were not indeed silent, but pens were working mainly. In this way the siege was prolonged, and winter was coming harsher and harsher. On the Carpathian summits clouds hatched in their precipitous nests storms, frost, and snows, and then came forth on the country, leading their icy descendants. At night the Swedes cowered around fires, choosing to die from the balls of the cloister rather than freeze.

A hard winter had rendered difficult the digging of trenches and the making of mines. There was no progress in the siege. In the mouths not merely of officers, but of the whole army, there was only one word, – "negociations."

The priests feigned at first a desire to surrender. Father Dobrosh and the learned priest Sebastyan Stavitski came to Miller as envoys. They gave him some hope of agreement. He had barely heard this when he opened his arms and was ready to seize them with joy to his embraces. It was no longer a question of Chenstohova, but of the whole country. The surrender of Yasna Gora would have removed the last hope of the patriots, and pushed the Commonwealth finally into the arms of the King of Sweden; while, on the contrary, resistance, and that a victorious resistance, might change hearts and call out a terrible new war. Signs were not wanting. Miller knew this, felt what he had undertaken, what a terrible responsibility was weighing on him; he knew that either the favor of the king, with the baton of a marshal, honors, a title, were waiting for him, or final fall. Since he had begun to convince himself that he could not crack this "nut," he received the priests with unheard-of honor, as if they were embassadors from the Emperor of Germany or the Sultan. He invited them to a feast, he drank to their honor, and also to the health of the prior and Pan Zamoyski; he gave them fish for the cloister; finally, he offered conditions of surrender so gracious that he did not doubt for a moment that they would be accepted in haste.

The fathers thanked him humbly, as beseemed monks; they took the paper and went their way. Miller promised the opening of the gates at eight of the following morning. Joy indescribable reigned in the camp of the Swedes. The soldiers left the trenches, approached the walls, and began to address the besieged.

But it was announced from the cloister that in an affair of such weight the prior must consult the whole Congregation; the monks therefore begged for one day's delay. Miller consented without hesitation. Meanwhile they were counselling in the chamber till late at night.

Though Miller was an old and trained warrior, though there was not, perhaps, in the whole Swedish army a general who had conducted more negotiations with various places than that Poliorcetes, still his heart beat unquietly when next morning he saw two white habits approaching his quarters.

They were not the same fathers. First walked Father Bleshynski, a reader of philosophy, bearing a sealed letter; after him came Father Malahovski, with hands crossed on his breast, with drooping head and a face slightly pale.

The general received them surrounded by his staff and all his noted colonels; and when he had answered politely the submissive bow of Father Bleshynski, he took the letter from his hand hastily and began to read.

But all at once his face changed terribly: a wave of blood flew to his head; his eyes were bursting forth, his neck grew thick, and terrible anger raised the hair under his wig. For a while speech was taken from him; he only indicated with his hand the letter to the Prince of Hesse, who ran over it with his eyes, and turning to the colonels, said calmly, —

"The monks declare only this much, that they cannot renounce Yan Kazimir before the primate proclaims a new king; or speaking in other words, they will not recognize Karl Gustav."

Here the Prince of Hesse laughed. Sadovski fixed a jeering glance on Miller, and Count Veyhard began to pluck his own beard from rage. A terrible murmur of excitement rose among those present.

Then Miller struck his palms on his knees and cried, —

"Guards, guards!"

The mustached faces of four musketeers showed themselves quickly in the door.

"Take those shaven sticks," cried the general, "and confine them! And Pan Sadovski, do you trumpet for me under the cloister, that if they open fire from one cannon on the walls, I will hang these two monks the next moment."

The two priests were led out amid ridicule and the scoffing of soldiers. The musketeers put their own caps on the priests' heads, or rather on their faces to cover their eyes, and led them of purpose to various obstacles. When either of the priests stumbled or fell, an outburst of laughter was heard in the crowds; but the fallen man they raised with the butts of muskets, and pretending to support, they pushed him by the loins and the shoulders. Some threw horse-dung at the priests; others took snow and rubbed it on their shaven crowns, or let it roll down on their habits. The soldiers tore strings from trumpets, and tying one end to the neck of each priest, held the other, and imitating men taking cattle to a fair, called out the prices.

Both fathers walked on in silence, with hands crossed on their breasts and prayers on their lips. Finally, trembling from cold and insulted, they were enclosed in a barn; around the place guards armed with muskets were stationed.

Miller's command, or rather his threat, was trumpeted under the cloister walls.

The fathers were frightened, and the troops were benumbed from the threat. The cannon were silent; a council was assembled, they knew not what to do. To leave the fathers in cruel hands was impossible; and if they sent others, Miller would detain them as well. A few hours later he himself sent a messenger, asking what the monks thought of doing.

They answered that until the fathers were freed no negotiations could take place; for how could the monks believe that the general would observe conditions with them if, despite the chief law of nations, he imprisoned envoys whose sacredness even barbarians respect?

To this declaration there was no ready answer; hence terrible uncertainty weighed on the cloister and froze the zeal of its defenders.

The Swedish army dug new trenches in haste, filled baskets with earth, planted cannon; insolent soldiers pushed forward to within half a musket-shot of the walls. They threatened the church, the defenders; half-drunken soldiers shouted, raising their hands toward the walls, "Surrender the cloister, or you will see your monks hanging!"

Others blasphemed terribly against the Mother of God and the Catholic faith. The besieged, out of respect to the life of the fathers, had to listen with patience. Rage stopped the breath in Kmita's

breast. He tore the hair on his head, the clothing on his breast, and wringing his hands, said to Charnyetski, —

"I asked, 'Of what use is negotiation with criminals?' Now stand and suffer, while they are crawling into our eyes and blaspheming! Mother of God, have mercy on me, and give me patience! By the living God, they will begin soon to climb the walls! Hold me, chain me like a murderer, for I shall not contain myself."

But the Swedes came ever nearer, blaspheming more boldly.

Meanwhile a fresh event brought the besieged to despair. Stefan Charnyetski in surrendering Cracow had obtained the condition of going out with all his troops, and remaining with them in Silesia till the end of the war. Seven hundred infantry of those troops of the royal guard, under command of Colonel Wolf, were near the boundary, and trusting in stipulations, were not on their guard. Count Veyhard persuaded Miller to capture those men.

Miller sent Count Veyhard himself, with two thousand cavalry, who crossing the boundary at night attacked those troops during sleep, and captured them to the last man. When they were brought to the Swedish camp, Miller commanded to lead them around the wall, so as to show the priests that that army from which they had hoped succor would serve specially for the capture of Chenstohova.

The sight of that brilliant guard of the king dragged along the walls was crushing to the besieged, for no one doubted that Miller would force them first to the storm.

Panic spread again among the troops of the cloister; some of the soldiers began to break their weapons and exclaim that there was help no longer, that it was necessary to surrender at the earliest. Even the hearts of the nobles had fallen; some of them appeared before Kordetski again with entreaties to take pity on their children, on the sacred place, on the image, and on the Congregation of monks. The courage of the prior and Pan Zamoyski was barely enough to put down this movement.

But Kordetski had the liberation of the imprisoned fathers on his mind first of all, and he took the best method; for he wrote to Miller that he would sacrifice those brothers willingly for the good of the church. Let the general condemn them to death; all would know in future what to expect from him, and what faith to give his promises.

Miller was joyful, for he thought the affair was approaching its end. But he did not trust the words of Kordetski at once, nor his readiness to sacrifice the monks. He sent therefore one of them, Father Bleshynski, to the cloister, binding him first with an oath to explain the power of the Swedes and the impossibility of resistance. The monk repeated everything faithfully, but his eyes spoke something else, and concluding he said, —

"But prizing life less than the good of the Congregation, I am waiting for the will of the council; and whatsoever you decide I will lay before the enemy most faithfully."

They directed him to say: "The monks are anxious to treat, but cannot believe a general who imprisons envoys." Next day the other envoy of the fathers came to the cloister, and returned with a similar answer.

After this both heard the sentence of death. The sentence was read at Miller's quarters in presence of the staff and distinguished officers. All observed carefully the faces of the monks, curious to learn what impression the sentence would make; and with the greatest amazement they saw in both a joy as great, as unearthly, as if the highest fortune had been announced to them. The pale faces of the monks flushed suddenly, their eyes were filled with light, and Father Malahovski said with a voice trembling from emotion, —

"Ah! why should we not die to-day, since we are predestined to fall a sacrifice for our Lord and the king?"

Miller commanded to lead them forth straightway. The officers looked at one another. At last one remarked; "A struggle with such fanaticism is difficult."

The Prince of Hesse added: "Only the first Christians had such faith. Is that what you wish to say?" Then he turned to Count Veyhard. "Pan Veyhard," said he, "I should be glad to know what you think of these monks?"

"I have no need to trouble my head over them," answered he, insolently; "the general has already taken care of them."

Then Sadovski stepped forward to the middle of the room, stood before Miller, and said with decision: "Your worthiness, do not command to execute these monks."

"But why not?"

"Because there will be no talk of negotiations after that; for the garrison of the fortress will be flaming with vengeance, and those men will rather fall one upon the other than surrender."

"Wittemberg will send me heavy guns."

"Your worthiness, do not do this deed," continued Sadovski, with force; "they are envoys who have come here with confidence."

"I shall not have them hanged on confidence, but on gibbets."

"The echo of this deed will spread through the whole country, will enrage all hearts, and turn them away from us."

"Give me peace with your echoes; I have heard of them already a hundred times."

"Your worthiness will not do this without the knowledge of his Royal Grace?"

"You have no right to remind me of my duties to the king."

"But I have the right to ask for permission to resign from service, and to present my reasons to his Royal Grace. I wish to be a soldier, not an executioner."

The Prince of Hesse issued from the circle in the middle of the room, and said ostentatiously, —

"Give me your hand. Pan Sadovski; you are a gentleman, a noble, and an honest man."

"What does this mean?" roared Miller, springing from his seat.

"General," answered the Prince of Hesse, "I permit myself to remark that Pan Sadovski is an honorable man, and I judge that there is nothing in this against discipline."

Miller did not like the Prince of Hesse; but that cool, polite, and also contemptuous manner of speaking, special to men of high rank, imposed on him, as it does on many persons of low birth. Miller made great efforts to acquire this manner, but had no success. He restrained his outburst, however, and said calmly, —

"The monks will be hanged to-morrow."

"That is not my affair," answered the Prince of Hesse; "but in that event let your worthiness order an attack on those two thousand Poles who are in our camp, for if you do not they will attack us. Even now it is less dangerous for a Swedish soldier to go among a pack of wolves than among their tents. This is all I have to say, and now I permit myself to wish you success." When he had said this he left the quarters.

Miller saw that he had gone too far. But he did not withdraw his orders, and that same day gibbets wore erected in view of the whole cloister. At the same time the soldiers, taking advantage of the truce, pushed still nearer the walls, not ceasing to jeer, insult, blaspheme, and challenge. Whole throngs of them climbed the mountain, stood as closely together as if they intended to make an assault.

That time Kmita, whom they had not chained as he had requested, did not in fact restrain himself, and thundered from a cannon into the thickest group, with such effect that he laid down in a row all those who stood in front of the shot. That was like a watchword; for at once, without orders, and even in spite of orders, all the cannons began to play, muskets and guns thundered.

The Swedes, exposed to fire from every side, fled from the fortress with howling and screaming, many falling dead on the road.

Charnyetski sprang to Kmita: "Do you know that for that the reward is a bullet in the head?"

"I know, all one to me. Let me be – "

"In that case aim surely,"

Kmita aimed surely; soon, however, he missed. A great movement rose meanwhile in the Swedish camp, but it was so evident that the Swedes were the first to violate the truce, that Miller himself recognized in his soul that the besieged were in the right.

What is more, Kmita did not even suspect that with his shots he had perhaps saved the lives of the fathers; but Miller, because of these shots, became convinced that the monks in the last extremity were really ready to sacrifice their two brethren for the good of the church and the cloister.

The shots beat into his head this idea also, that if a hair were to fall from the heads of the envoys, he would not hear from the cloister anything save similar thunders; so next day he invited the two imprisoned monks to dinner, and the day after he sent them to the cloister.

Kordetski wept when he saw them, all took them in their arms and were astonished at hearing from their mouths that it was specially owing to those shots that they were saved. The prior, who had been angry at Kmita, called him at once and said, —

"I was angry because I thought that you had destroyed the two fathers; but the Most Holy Lady evidently inspired you. This is a sign of Her favor, be rejoiced."

"Dearest, beloved father, there will be no more negotiations, will there?" asked Kmita, kissing Kordetski's hands.

But barely had he finished speaking, when a trumpet was heard at the gates, and an envoy from Miller entered the cloister.

This was Pan Kuklinovski, colonel of the volunteer squadron attached to the Swedes. The greatest ruffians without honor or faith served in that squadron, in part dissidents such as Lutherans, Arians, Calvinists, – whereby was explained their friendship for Sweden; but a thirst for robbery and plunder attracted them mainly to Miller's army. That band, made up of nobles, outlaws, fugitives from prison and from the hands of a master, of attendants, and of gallows-birds snatched from the rope, was somewhat like Kmita's old party, save in this, that Kmita's men fought as do lions, and those preferred to plunder, offer violence to noble women, break open stables and treasure chests. But Kuklinovski himself had less resemblance to Kmita. Age had mixed gray with his hair. He had a face dried, insolent, and shameless. His eyes, which were unusually prominent and greedy, indicated violence of character. He was one of those soldiers in whom, because of a turbulent life and continuous wars, conscience had been burned out to the bottom. A multitude of such men strolled about in that time, after the Thirty Years' War, through all Germany and Poland. They were ready to serve any man, and more than once a mere simple incident determined the side on which they were to stand.

Country and faith, in a word all things sacred, were thoroughly indifferent to them. They recognized nothing but war, and sought in it pleasure, dissipation, profit, and oblivion of life. But still when they had chosen some side they served it loyally enough, and that through a certain soldier-robber honor, so as not to close the career to themselves and to others. Such a man was Kuklinovski. Stern daring and immeasurable stubbornness had won for him consideration among the disorderly. It was easy for him to find men. He had served in various arms and services. He had been ataman in the Saitch; he had led regiments in Wallachia; in Germany he had enlisted volunteers in the Thirty Years' War, and had won a certain fame as a leader of cavalry. His crooked legs, bent in bow fashion, showed that he had spent the greater part of his life on horseback. He was as thin as a splinter, and somewhat bent from profligacy. Much blood, shed not in war only, weighed upon him. And still he was not a man wholly wicked by nature; he felt at times nobler influences. But he was spoiled to the marrow of his bones, and insolent to the last degree. Frequently had he said in intimate company, in drink; "More than one deed was done for which the thunderbolt should have fallen, but it fell not."

The effect of this impunity was that he did not believe in the justice of God, and punishment, not only during life, but after death. In other words, he did not believe in God; still, he believed in the devil, in witches, in astrologers, and in alchemy. He wore the Polish dress, for he thought it most fitting for cavalry; but his mustache, still black, he trimmed in Swedish fashion, and spread at the ends turned upward. In speaking he made every word diminutive, like a child; this produced a strange

impression when heard from the mouth of such a devil incarnate and such a cruel ruffian, who was ever gulping human blood. He talked much and boastingly; clearly he thought himself a celebrated personage, and one of the first cavalry colonels on earth.

Miller, who, though on a broader pattern, belonged himself to a similar class, valued him greatly, and loved specially to seat him at his own table. At that juncture Kuklinovski forced himself on the general as an assistant, guaranteeing that he would with his eloquence bring the priests to their senses at once.

Earlier, when, after the arrest of the priests, Pan Zamoyski was preparing to visit Miller's camp and asked for a hostage, Miller sent Kuklinovski; but Zamoyski and the prior would not accept him, as not being of requisite rank.

From that moment, touched in his self-love, Kuklinovski conceived a mortal hatred for the defenders of Yasna Gora, and determined to injure them with all his power. Therefore he chose himself as an embassy, – first for the embassy itself, and second so as to survey everything and cast evil seed here and there. Since he was long known to Charnyetski he approached the gate guarded by him; but Charnyetski was sleeping at the time, – Kmita, taking his place, conducted the guest to the council hall.

Kuklinovski looked at Pan Andrei with the eye of a specialist, and at once he was pleased not only with the form but the bearing of the young hero, which might serve as a model.

"A soldier," said he, raising his hand to his cap, "knows at once a real soldier. I did not think that the priests had such men in their service. What is your rank, I pray?"

Id Kmita, who had the zeal of a new convert, the soul revolted at sight of Poles who served Swedes; still, he remembered the recent anger of Kordetski at his disregard of negotiations; therefore he answered coldly, but calmly, —

"I am Babinich, former colonel in the Lithuanian army, but now a volunteer in the service of the Most Holy Lady."

"And I am Kuklinovski, also colonel, of whom you must have heard; for during more than one little war men mentioned frequently that name and this sabre [here he struck at his side], not only here in the Commonwealth, but in foreign countries."

"With the forehead," said Kmita, "I have heard."

"Well, so you are from Lithuania, and in that land are famous soldiers. We know of each other, for the trumpet of fame is to be heard from one end of the world to the other. Do you know there, worthy sir, a certain Kmita?"

The question fell so suddenly that Pan Andrei was as if fixed to the spot. "But why do you ask of him?"

"Because I love him, though I know him not, for we are alike as two boots of one pair; and I always repeat this, with your permission, 'There are two genuine soldiers in the Commonwealth, – I in the kingdom, and Kmita in Lithuania,' – a pair of dear doves, is not that true? Did you know him personally?"

"Would to God that you were killed!" thought Kmita; but, remembering Kuklinovski's character of envoy, he answered aloud: "I did not know him personally. But now come in, for the council is waiting."

When he had said this, he indicated the door through which a priest came out to receive the guest. Kuklinovski entered the chamber with him at once, but first he turned to Kmita: "It would please me," said he, "if at my return you and none other were to conduct me out."

"I will wait here," answered Kmita. And he was left alone. After a while he began to walk back and forth with quick steps; his whole soul was roused within him, and his heart was filled with blood, black from anger.

"Pitch does not stick to a garment like evil fame to a man," muttered he. "This scoundrel, this wretch, this traitor calls me boldly his brother, and thinks he has me as a comrade. See to what I

have come! All gallows-birds proclaim me their own, and no decent man calls me to mind without horror. I have done little yet, little! If I could only give a lesson to this rascal! It cannot be but that I shall put my score on him."

The council lasted long in the chamber. It had grown dark. Kmita was waiting yet.

At last Kuklinovski appeared. Pan Andrei could not see the colonel's face, but he inferred from his quick panting, that the mission had failed, and had been also displeasing, for the envoy had lost desire for talk. They walked on then for some time in silence. Kmita determined meanwhile to get at the truth, and said with feigned sympathy, —

"Surely, you are coming with nothing. – Our priests are stubborn; and, between you and me, they act ill, for we cannot defend ourselves forever."

Kuklinovski halted and pulled him by the sleeve. "And do you think that they act ill? You have your senses; these priests will be ground into bran, – I guarantee that! They are unwilling to obey Kuklinovski; they will obey his sword."

"You see, it is not a question of the priests with me," said Kmita, "but of this place, which is holy, that is not to be denied, but which the later it is surrendered the more severe must the conditions be. Is what men say true, that through the country tumults are rising, that here and there they are slashing the Swedes, and that the Khan is marching with aid? If that is true, Miller must retreat."

"I tell you in confidence, a wish for Swedish broth is rising in the country, and likely in the army as well; that is true. They are talking of the Khan also. But Miller will not retreat; in a couple of days heavy artillery will come. We'll dig these foxes out of their hole, and then what will be will be! – But you have sense."

"Here is the gate!" said Kmita; "here I must leave you, unless you wish me to attend you down the slope?"

"Attend me, attend me! A couple of days ago you fired after an envoy."

"Indeed! What do you mean?"

"Maybe unwillingly. But better attend me; I have a few words to say to you."

"And I to you."

"That is well."

They went outside the gate and sank in the darkness. Here Kuklinovski stopped, and taking Kmita again by the sleeve, began to speak, —

"You, Sir Cavalier, seem to me adroit and foreseeing, and besides I feel in you a soldier, blood and bone. What the devil do you stick to priests for, and not to soldiers? Why be a serving lad for priests? There is a better and a pleasanter company with us, – with cups, dice, and women. Do you understand?"

Here he pressed Kmita's arm with his fingers. "This house," continued he, pointing with his finger to the fortress, "is on fire, and a fool is he who flees not from a house when 'tis burning. Maybe you fear the name of traitor? Spit on those who would call you that! Come to our company; I, Kuklinovski, propose this. Obey, if you like; if you don't like, obey not – there will be no offence. General Miller will receive you well, I guarantee that; you have touched my heart, and I speak thus from good wishes. Ours is a joyous company, joyous! A soldier's freedom is in this, – to serve whom he likes. Monks are nothing to you! If a bit of virtue hinders you, then cough it out. Remember this also, that honest men serve with us. How many nobles, magnates, hetmans! What can be better? Who takes the part of our little Kazimir? No man save Sapyeha alone, who is bending Radzivill."

Kmita grew curious; "Did you say that Sapyeha is bending Radzivill?"

"I did. He is troubling him terribly there in Podlyasye, and is besieging him now in Tykotsin. But we do not disturb him."

"Why is that?"

"Because the King of Sweden wants them to devour one another. Radzivill was never reliable; he was thinking of himself. Besides, he is barely breathing. Whoever lets himself be besieged is in a fix, he is finished."

"Will not the Swedes go to succor him?"

"Who is to go? The king himself is in Prussia, for there lies the great question. The elector has wriggled out hitherto; he will not wriggle out this time. In Great Poland is war, Wittemberg is needed in Cracow, Douglas has work with the hill-men; so they have left Radzivill to himself. Let Sapyeha devour him. Sapyeha has grown, that is true, but his turn will come also. Our Karl, when he finishes with Prussia, will twist the horns of Sapyeha. Now there is no power against him, for all Lithuania stands at his side."

"But Jmud?"

"Pontus de la Gardie holds that in his paws, and heavy are the paws, I know him."

"How is it that Radzivill has fallen, he whose power was equal to that of kings?"

"It is quenching already, quenching – "

"Wonderful are the ordinances of God!"

"The wheel of war changes. But no more of this. Well, what? Do you make up your mind to my proposition? You'll not be sorry! Come to us. If it is too hurried to-day, think till to-morrow, till the day after, before the heavy artillery comes. These people here trust you evidently, since you pass through the gate as you do now. Or come with letters and go back no more."

"You attract others to the Swedish side, for you are an envoy of Sweden," said Kmita; "it does not beseem you to act otherwise, though in your soul who knows what you think? There are those who serve the Swedes, but wish them ill in their hearts."

"Word of a cavalier!" answered Kuklinovski, "that I speak sincerely, and not because I am filling the function of an envoy. Outside the gate I am no longer an envoy; and if you wish I will remove the office of envoy of my own will, and speak to you as a private man. Throw that vile fortress to the devil!"

"Do you say this as a private man?"

"Yes,"

"And may I give answer to you as to a private man?"

"As true as life I propose it myself."

"Then listen, Pan Kuklinovski," Here Kmita inclined and looked into the very eyes of the ruffian. "You are a rascal, a traitor, a scoundrel, a crab-monger, an arch-cur! Have you enough, or shall I spit in your eyes yet?"

Kuklinovski was astounded to such a degree that for a time there was silence.

"What is this? How is this? Do I hear correctly?"

"Have you enough, you cur? or do you wish me to spit in your eyes?"

Kuklinovski drew his sabre; but Kmita caught him with his iron hand by the wrist, twisted his arm, wrested the sabre from him, then slapped him on the cheek so that the sound went out in the darkness; seized him by the other side, turned him in his hand like a top, and kicking him with all his strength, cried, —

"To a private man, not to an envoy!"

Kuklinovski rolled down like a stone thrown from a ballista. Pan Andrei went quietly to the gate.

The two men parted on the slope of the eminence; hence it was difficult to see them from the walls. But Kmita found waiting for him at the gate Kordetski, who took him aside at once, and asked, —

"What were you doing so long with Kuklinovski."

"I was entering into confidence with him," answered Pan Andrei.

"What did he say?"

"He said that it was true concerning the Khan."

"Praise be to God, who can change the hearts of pagans and make friends out of enemies."

"He told me that Great Poland is moving."

"Praise be to God!"

"That the quarter soldiers are more and more unwilling to remain with the Swedes; that in Podlyasye, the voevoda of Vityebsk, Sapyeha, has beaten the traitor Radzivill, and that he has all honest people with him. As all Lithuania stands by him, except Jmud, which De la Gardie has taken."

"Praise be to God! Have you had no other talk with each other?"

"Yes; Kuklinovski tried afterward to persuade me to go over to the Swedes."

"I expected that," said the prior; "he is a bad man. And what did you answer?"

"You see he told me, revered father, as follows: 'I put aside my office of envoy, which without that is finished beyond the gates, and I persuade you as a private man.' And I to make sure asked, 'May I answer as to a private man?' He said, 'Yes' – then – "

"What then?"

"Then I gave it to him in the snout, and he rolled down hill."

"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!"

"Be not angry, father; I acted very carefully, and that he will not say a word about the matter to any man is certain."

The priest was silent for a time, then said; "That you acted honestly, I know. I am only troubled at this, that you have gained a new enemy. He is a terrible man."

"One more, one less!" said Kmita. Then he bent to the ear of the priest. "But Prince Boguslav, he at least is an enemy! What is such a Kuklinovski? I don't even look back at him."

CHAPTER III

Now the terrible Arwid Wittemberg made himself heard. A famous officer brought his stern letter to the cloister, commanding the fathers to surrender the fortress to Miller. "In the opposite event," wrote Wittemberg, "if you do not abandon resistance, and do not yield to the said general, you may be sure that a punishment awaits you which will serve others as an example. The blame for your suffering lay to yourselves."

The fathers after receiving this letter determined in old fashion to procrastinate, and present new difficulties daily. Again days passed during which the thunder of artillery interrupted negotiations, and the contrary.

Miller declared that he wished to introduce his garrison only to insure the cloister against bands of freebooters. The fathers answered that since their garrison appeared sufficient against such a powerful leader as the general himself, all the more would it suffice against bands of freebooters. They implored Miller, therefore, by all that was sacred, by the respect which the people had for the place, by God and by Mary, to go to Vyelunie, or wherever it might please him. But the patience of the Swedes was exhausted. That humility of the besieged, who implored for mercy while they were firing more and more quickly from cannons, brought the chief and the army to desperation.

At first Miller could not get it into his head why, when the whole country had surrendered, that one place was defending itself; what power was upholding them; in the name of what hopes did these monks refuse to yield, for what were they striving, for what were they hoping?

But flowing time brought more clearly the answer to that question. The resistance which had begun there was spreading like a conflagration. In spite of a rather dull brain, the general saw at last what the question with Kordetski was; and besides, Sadovski had explained incontrovertibly that it was not a question of that rocky nest, nor of Yasna Gora, nor of the treasures gathered in the cloister, nor of the safety of the Congregation, but of the fate of the whole Commonwealth. Miller discovered that that silent priest knew what he was doing, that he had knowledge of his mission, that he had risen as a prophet to enlighten the land by example, – to call with a mighty voice to the east and the west, to the north and the south, *Sursum corda!* (Raise your hearts) in order to rouse, either by his victory or his death and sacrifice, the sleeping from their slumber, to purify the sinful, to bring light into darkness.

When he had discovered this, that old warrior was simply terrified at that defender and at his own task. All at once that "hen-house" of Chenstohova seemed to him a giant mountain defended by a Titan, and the general seemed small to himself; and on his own army he looked, for the first time in his life, as on a handful of wretched worms. Was it for them to raise hands against that mysterious and heaven-touching power? Therefore Miller was terrified, and doubt began to steal into his heart. Seeing that the fault would be placed upon him, he began himself to seek the guilty, and his anger fell first on Count Veyhard. Disputes rose in the camp, and dissensions began to inflame hearts against one another; the works of the siege had to suffer therefrom.

Miller had been too long accustomed to estimate men and events by the common measure of a soldier, not to console himself still at times with the thought that at last the fortress would surrender. And taking things in human fashion, it could not be otherwise. Besides, Wittemberg was sending him six siege guns of the heaviest calibre, which had shown their force at Cracow.

"Devil take it!" thought Miller; "such walls will not stand against guns like these, and if that nest of terrors, of superstitions, of enchantment, winds up in smoke, then things will take another turn, and the whole country will be pacified."

While waiting for the heavier guns, he commanded to fire from the smaller. The days of conflict returned. But in vain did balls of fire fall on the roofs, in vain did the best gunners exert superhuman power. As often as the wind blew away the sea of smoke, the cloister appeared untouched, imposing

as ever, lofty, with towers piercing calmly the blue of the sky. At the same time things happened which spread superstitious terror among the besiegers. Now balls flew over the whole mountain and struck soldiers on the other side; now a gunner, occupied in aiming a gun, fell on a sudden; now smoke disposed itself in terrible and strange forms; now powder in the boxes exploded all at once, as if fired by some invisible hand.

Besides, soldiers were perishing continually who alone, in twos or in threes, went out of the camp. Suspicion fell on the Polish auxiliary squadrons, which, with the exception of Kuklinovski's regiment, refused out and out every cooperation in the siege, and showed daily more menacing looks. Miller threatened Colonel Zbrojek with a court-martial, but he answered in presence of all the officers: "Try it, General."

Officers from the Polish squadrons strolled purposely through the Swedish camp, exhibiting contempt and disregard for the soldiers, and raising quarrels with the officers. Thence it came to duels, in which the Swedes, as less trained in fencing, fell victims more frequently. Miller issued a severe order against duels, and finally forbade the Poles entrance to the camp. From this it came that at last both armies were side by side like enemies, merely awaiting an opportunity for battle.

But the cloister defended itself ever better. It turned out that the guns sent by Pan Myaskovski were in no wise inferior to those which Miller had, and the gunners through constant practice arrived at such accuracy that each shot threw down an enemy. The Swedes attributed this to enchantment. The gunners answered the officers that with that power which defended the cloister it was no business of theirs to do battle.

A certain morning a panic began in the southwestern trench, for the soldiers had seen distinctly a woman in a blue robe shielding the church and the cloister. At sight of this they threw themselves down on their faces. In vain did Miller ride up, in vain did he explain that mist and smoke had disposed themselves in that form, in vain besides was his threat of court-martial and punishment. At the first moment no one would hear him, especially as the general himself was unable to hide his amazement.

Soon after this the opinion was spread through the whole army that no one taking part in the siege would die his own death. Many officers shared this belief, and Miller was not free from fears; for he brought in Lutheran ministers and enjoined on them to undo the enchantment. They walked through the camp whispering, and singing psalms; fear, however, had so spread that more than once they heard from the mouths of the soldiers: "Beyond your power, beyond your strength!"

In the midst of discharges of cannon a new envoy from Miller entered the cloister, and stood before the face of Kordetski and the council.

This was Pan Sladkovski, chamberlain of Rava, whom Swedish parties had seized as he was returning from Prussia. They received him coldly and harshly, though he had an honest face and his look was as mild as the sky; but the monks had grown accustomed to see honest faces on traitors. He was not confused a whit by such a reception; combing briskly his yellow forelock with his fingers, he began: —

"Praised be Jesus Christ!"

"For the ages of ages!" answered the Congregation, in a chorus.

And Kordetski added at once; "Blessed be those who serve him."

"I serve him," answered Sladkovski, "and that I serve him more sincerely than I do Miller will be shown soon. H'm! permit me, worthy and beloved fathers, to cough, for I must first spit out foulness. Miller then – tfu! sent me, my good lords, to you to persuade you – tfu! – to surrender. But I accepted the office so as to say to you: Defend yourselves, think not of surrender, for the Swedes are spinning thin, and the Devil is taking them by the eye."

The monks and the laity were astonished at sight of such an envoy. Pan Zamoyski exclaimed at once: "As God is dear to me, this is an honest man!" and springing to him began to shake his hand; but Sladkovski, gathering his forelock into one bunch, said, —

"That I am no knave will be shown straightway. I have become Miller's envoy so as to tell you news so favorable that I could wish, my good lords, to tell it all in one breath. Give thanks to God and His Most Holy Mother who chose you as instruments for changing men's hearts. The country, taught by your example and by your defence, is beginning to throw off the yoke of the Swedes. What's the use in talking? In Great Poland and Mazovia the people are beating the Swedes, destroying smaller parties, blocking roads and passages. In some places they have given the enemy terrible punishment already. The nobles are mounting their horses, the peasants are gathering in crowds, and when they seize a Swede they tear straps out of him. Chips are flying, tow is flying! This is what it has come to. And whose work is this? – yours."

"An angel, an angel is speaking!" cried monks and nobles, raising their hands toward heaven.

"Not an angel, but Sladkovski, at your service. This is nothing! – Listen on. The Khan, remembering the kindness of the brother of our rightful king, Yan Kazimir, to whom may God give many years! is marching with aid, and has already passed the boundary of the Commonwealth. The Cossacks who were opposed he has cut to pieces, and is moving on with a horde of a hundred thousand toward Lvoff, and Hmelnitski *nolens volens* is coming with him."

"For God's sake, for God's sake!" repeated people, overcome as it were by happiness.

But Pan Sladkovski, sweating and waving his hand, with still more vigor cried, —

"That is nothing yet! Pan Stefan Charnyetski, with whom the Swedes violated faith, for they carried captive his infantry under Wolf, feels free of his word and is mounting. Yan Kazimir is collecting troops, and may return any day to the country and the hetmans. Listen further, the hetmans, Pototski and Lantskoronski, and with them all the troops, are waiting only for the coming of the king to desert the Swedes and raise sabres against them. Meanwhile they are coming to an understanding with Sapyeha and the Khan. The Swedes are in terror; there is fire in the whole country, war in the whole country – whosoever is living is going to the field!"

What took place in the hearts of the monks and the nobles is difficult of description. Some wept, some fell on their knees, other repeated, "It cannot be, it cannot be!" Hearing this, Sladkovski approached the great crucifix hanging on the wall and said, —

"I place my hands on these feet of Christ pierced with a nail, and swear that I declare the pure and clean truth. I repeat only: Defend yourselves, fail not; trust not the Swedes; think not that by submission and surrender you could insure any safety for yourselves. They keep no promises, no treaties. You who are closed in here know not what is passing in the whole country, what oppression has come, what deeds of violent are done, – murdering of priests, profanation of sanctuaries, contempt of all law. They promise you everything, they observe nothing. The whole kingdom is given up as plunder to a dissolute soldiery. Even those who still adhere to the Swedes are unable to escape injustice. Such is the punishment of God on traitors, on those who break faith with the king. Delay! – I, as you see me here, if only I survive, if I succeed in slipping away from Miller, will move straightway to Silesia, to our king. I will fall at his feet and say: Gracious King, save Chenstohova and your most faithful servants! But, most beloved fathers, stand firm, for the salvation of the whole Commonwealth is depending upon you."

Here Sladkovski's voice trembled, tears appeared on his eyelids, but he spoke further. "You will have grievous times yet: siege guns are coming from Cracow, which two hundred infantry are bringing. One is a particularly dreadful cannon. Terrible assaults will follow. But these will be the last efforts. Endure yet these, for salvation is coming already. By these red wounds of God, the king, the hetmans, the army, the whole Commonwealth will come to rescue its Patroness. This is what I tell you: rescue, salvation, glory is right here – not distant."

The worthy noble now burst into tears, and sobbing became universal.

Ah! still better news was due to that wearied handful of defenders, to that handful of faithful servants, and a sure consolation from the country.

The prior rose, approached Sladkovski, and opened wide his arms. Sladkovski rushed into them, and they embraced each other long; others following their example began to fall into one another's arms, embrace, kiss, and congratulate one another as if the Swedes had already retreated. At last the prior said, —

"To the chapel, my brethren, to the chapel!"

He went in advance, and after him the others. All the candles were lighted, for it was growing dark outside; and the curtains were drawn aside from the wonder-working image, from which sweet abundant rays were scattered at once round about. Kordetski knelt on the steps, farther away the monks, the nobles, and common people; women with children were present also. Pale and wearied faces and eyes which had wept were raised toward the image; but from behind the tears was shining on each face a smile of happiness. Silence continued for a time; at last Kordetski began, —

"Under thy protection we take refuge, Holy Mother of God – "

Further words stopped on his lips, weariness, long suffering, hidden alarms, together with the gladsome hope of rescue, rose in him like a mighty wave; therefore sobbing shook his breast, and that man, who bore on his shoulders the fate of the whole country, bent like a weak child, fell on his face, and with weeping immeasurable had strength only to cry: "O Mary, Mary, Mary!"

All wept with him, but the image from above cast brightest rays.

It was late at night when the monks and the nobles went each his own way to the walls; but Kordetski remained all night lying in the chapel in the form of a cross. There were fears in the cloister that weariness might overpower him; but next morning he appeared on the bastions, went among the soldiers and the garrison, glad and refreshed, and here and there he repeated, —

"Children, the Most Holy Lady will show again that she is mightier than siege guns, and then will come the end of your sorrows and torments."

That morning Yatsek Bjuhanski, an inhabitant of Chenstohova, disguised as a Swede, approached the walls to confirm the news that great guns were coming from Cracow, but also that the Khan with the horde was approaching. He delivered a letter from Father Anton Pashkovski, of the monastery at Cracow, who, describing the terrible cruelty and robbery of the Swedes, incited and implored the fathers of Yasna Gora to put no trust in the promises of the enemy, but to defend the sacred place patiently against the insolence of the godless.

"There is no faith in the Swedes," wrote Father Pashkovski, "no religion. Nothing divine or human is sacred and inviolate for them. It is not their custom to respect anything, though guarded by treaties or public declarations."

That was the day of the Immaculate Conception. Some tens of officers and soldiers of the allied Polish squadrons besought with most urgent requests Miller's permission to go to the fortress for divine service. Perhaps Miller thought that they would become friendly with the garrison, carry news of the siege guns and spread alarm; perhaps he did not wish by refusing to cast sparks on inflammable elements, which without that made relations between the Poles and the Swedes more and more dangerous: 'tis enough that he gave the permission.

With these quarter soldiers went a certain Tartar of the Polish Mohammedan Tartars. He, amid universal astonishment, encouraged the monks not to yield their holy place to vile enemies, considering with certainty that the Swedes would soon go away with shame and defeat. The quarter soldiers repeated the same, confirming completely the news brought by Sladkovski. All this taken together raised the courage of the besieged to such a degree that they had no fear of those gigantic cannons, and the soldiers made sport of them among themselves.

After services firing began on both sides. There was a certain Swedish soldier who had come many times to the wall, and with a trumpet-like voice had blasphemed against the Mother of God. Many a time had the besieged fired at him, but always without result. Kmita aimed at him once, but his bow-string broke; the soldier became more and more insolent, and roused others by his daring. It was said that he had seven devils in his service who guarded and shielded him.

He came this day again to blaspheme; but the besieged, trusting that on the day of the Immaculate Conception enchantments would have less effect, determined to punish him without fail. They fired a good while in vain; at last a cannon ball, rebounding from an ice wall, and tripping along the snow like a bird, struck him straight in the breast and tore him in two. The defenders comforted themselves with this and cried out: "Who will blaspheme against Her another time?" Meanwhile the revilers had rushed down to the trenches, in panic.

The Swedes fired at the walls and the roofs; but the balls brought no terror to the besieged.

The old beggarwoman, Konstantsia, who dwelt in a cranny of the cliff, used to go, as if in ridicule of the Swedes, along the whole slope, gathering bullets in her apron, and threatening from time to time the soldiers with her staff. They, thinking her a witch, were afraid she would injure them, especially when they saw that bullets did not touch her.

Two whole days passed in vain firing. They hurled on the roof ship ropes very thickly steeped in pitch; these flew like fiery serpents; but the guards, trained in a masterly manner, met the danger in time. A night came with such darkness that, in spite of the fires, tar barrels, and the fireworks of Father Lyassota, the besieged could see nothing.

Meanwhile some uncommon movement reigned among the Swedes. The squeak of wheels was heard, men's voices, at times the neighing of horses, and various other kinds of uproar. The soldiers on the walls guessed the cause easily.

"The guns have come surely," said some.

The officers were deliberating on a sortie which Charnyetski advised; but Zamoyski opposed, insisting, with reason, that at such important works the enemy must have secured themselves sufficiently, and must surely hold infantry in readiness. They resolved merely to fire toward the north and south, whence the greatest noise came. It was impossible to see the result in the darkness.

Day broke at last, and its first rays exposed the works of the Swedes. North and south of the fortress were intrenchments, on which some thousands of men were employed. These intrenchments stood so high that to the besieged the summits of them seemed on a line with the walls of the fortress. In the openings at the top were seen great jaws of guns, and the soldiers standing behind them looked at a distance like swarms of yellow wasps.

The morning Mass was not over in the church when unusual thunder shook the air; the window-panes rattled; some of them dropped out of the frames from shaking alone, and were broken with a sharp shiver on the stone floor; and the whole church was filled with dust which rose from fallen plaster.

The great siege guns had spoken.

A terrible fire began, such as the besieged had not experienced. At the end of Mass all rushed out on the walls and roofs. The preceding storms seemed innocent play in comparison with this terrible letting loose of fire and iron.

The smaller pieces thundered in support of the siege guns. Great bombs, pieces of cloth steeped in pitch, torches, and fiery ropes were flying. Balls twenty-six pounds in weight tore out battlements, struck the walls of buildings; some settled in them, others made great holes, tearing off plaster and bricks. The walls surrounding the cloister began to shake here and there and lose pieces, and struck incessantly by new balls threatened to fall. The buildings of the cloister were covered with fire.

The trumpeters on the tower felt it totter under them. The church quaked from continuous pounding, and candles fell out of the sockets at some of the altars.

Water was poured in immense quantities on the fires that had begun, on the blazing torches, on the walls, on the fire balls; and formed, together with the smoke and the dust, rolls of steam so thick that light could not be seen through them. Damage was done to the walls and buildings. The cry, "It is burning, it is burning!" was heard oftener amid the thunder of cannon and the whistle of bullets. At the northern bastion the two wheels of a cannon were broken, and one injured cannon was silent.

A ball had fallen into a stable, killed three horses, and set fire to the building. Not only balls, but bits of grenades, were falling as thickly as rain on the roofs, the bastions, and the walls.

In a short time the groans of the wounded were heard. By a strange chance three young men fell, all named Yan. This amazed other defenders bearing the same name; but in general the defence was worthy of the storm. Even women, children, and old men came out on the walls. Soldiers stood there with unterrified heart, in smoke and fire, amid a rain of missiles, and answered with determination to the fire of the enemy. Some seized the wheels and rolled the cannon to the most exposed places; others thrust into breaches in the walls stones, beams, dung, and earth.

Women with dishevelled hair and inflamed faces gave an example of daring, and some were seen running with buckets of water after bombs which were still springing and ready to burst right there, that moment. Ardor rose every instant, as if that smell of powder, smoke, and steam, that thunder, those streams of fire and iron, had the property of rousing it. All acted without command, for words died amid the awful noise. Only the supplications which were sung in the chapel rose above the voices of cannon.

About noon firing ceased. All drew breath; but before the gate a drum was sounded, and the drummer sent by Miller, approaching the gate, inquired if the fathers had had enough, and if they wished to surrender at once. Kordetski answered that they would deliberate over the question till morning. The answer had barely reached Miller when the attack began anew, and the artillery fire was redoubled.

From time to time deep ranks of infantry pushed forward under fire toward the mountain, as if wishing to try an assault; but decimated by cannon and muskets, they returned each time quickly and in disorder under their own batteries. As a wave of the sea covers the shore and when it retreats leaves on the sand weeds, mussels, and various fragments broken in the deep, so each one of those Swedish waves when it sank back left behind bodies thrown here and there on the slope.

Miller did not give orders to fire at the bastions, but at the wall between them, where resistance was least. Indeed, here and there considerable rents were made, but not large enough for the infantry to rush through.

Suddenly a certain event checked the storm.

It was well toward evening when a Swedish gunner about to apply a lighted match to one of the largest guns was struck in the very breast by a ball from the cloister. The ball came not with the first force, but after a third bound from the ice piled up at the intrenchment; it merely hurled the gunner a number of yards. He fell on an open box partly filled with powder. A terrible explosion was heard that instant, and masses of smoke covered the trench. When the smoke fell away it appeared that five gunners had lost their lives; the wheels of the cannon were injured, and terror seized the soldiers. It was necessary to cease fire for the time from that intrenchment, since a heavy fog had filled the darkness; they also stopped firing in other places.

The next day was Sunday. Lutheran ministers held services in the trenches, and the guns were silent. Miller again inquired if the fathers had had enough. They answered that they could endure more.

Meanwhile the damage in the cloister was examined and found to be considerable. People were killed and the wall was shaken here and there. The most formidable gun was a gigantic culverin standing on the north. It had broken the wall to such a degree, torn out so many stones and bricks, that the besieged could foresee that should the fire continue two days longer a considerable part of the wall would give away.

A breach such as the culverin would make could not be filled with beams or earth. The prior foresaw with an eye full of sorrow the ruin which he could not prevent.

Monday the attack was begun anew, and the gigantic gun widened the breach. Various mishaps met the Swedes, however. About dusk that day a Swedish gunner killed on the spot Miller's sister's son, whom the general loved as though he had been his own, and intended to leave him all that he

had, – beginning with his name and military reputation and ending with his fortune. But the heart of the old warrior blazed up with hatred all the more from this loss.

The wall at the northern bastion was so broken that preparations were made in the night for a hand-to-hand assault. That the infantry might approach the fortress with less danger, Miller commanded to throw up in the darkness a whole series of small redoubts, reaching the very slope. But the night was clear, and white light from the snow betrayed the movements of the enemy. The cannons of Yasna Gora scattered the men occupied in making those parapets formed of fascines, fences, baskets, and timbers.

At daybreak Charnyetski saw a siege machine which they had already rolled toward the walls. But the besieged broke it with cannon fire without difficulty; so many men were killed on that occasion that the day might have been called a day of victory for the besieged, had it not been for that great gun which shook the wall incessantly with irrestrainable power.

A thaw came on the following days, and such dense mists settled down that the fathers attributed them to the action of evil spirits. It was impossible to see either the machines of war, the erection of parapets, or the work of the siege. The Swedes came near the very walls of the cloister. In the evening Charnyetski, when the prior was making his usual round of the walls, took him by the side and said in a low voice, —

"Bad, revered father! Our wall will not hold out beyond a day."

"Perhaps these fogs will prevent them from firing," answered Kordetski; "and we meanwhile will repair the rents somehow."

"The fogs will not prevent the Swedes, for that gun once aimed may continue even in darkness the work of destruction; but here the ruins are falling and falling."

"In God and in the Most Holy Lady is our hope."

"True! But if we make a sortie? Even were we to lose men, if they could only spike that dragon of hell."

Just then some form looked dark in the fog, and Babinich appeared near the speakers.

"I saw that some one was speaking; but faces cannot be distinguished three yards away," said he. "Good evening, revered father! But of what is the conversation?"

"We are talking of that gun. Pan Charnyetski advises a sortie. These fogs are spread by Satan; I have commanded an exorcism."

"Dear father," said Pan Andrei, "since that gun has begun to shake the wall, I am thinking of it, and something keeps coming to my head. A sortie is of no use. But let us go to some room; there I will tell you my plans."

"Well," said the prior, "come to my cell."

Soon after they were sitting at a pine table in Kordetski's modest cell. Charnyetski and the priest were looking carefully into the youthful face of Babinich, who said, —

"A sortie is of no use in this case. They will see it and repulse it. Here one man must do the work."

"How is that?" asked Charnyetski.

"One man must go and burst that cannon with powder; and he can do it during such fogs. It is best that he go in disguise. There are jackets here like those worn by the enemy. As it will not be possible to do otherwise, he will slip in among the Swedes; but if at this side of the trench from which the gun is projecting there are no soldiers, that will be better still."

"For God's sake! what will the man do?"

"It is only necessary to put a box of powder into the mouth of the gun, with a hanging fuse and a thread to be ignited. When the powder explodes, the gun – devil I wanted to say – will burst."

"Oh, my son! what do you say? Is it little powder that they thrust into it every day, and it does not burst?"

Kmita laughed, and kissed the priest on the sleeve of his habit. "Beloved father, there is a great heart in you, heroic and holy – "

"Give peace now!" answered the prior.

"And holy," repeated Kmita; "but you do not understand cannon. It is one thing when powder bursts in the butt of the cannon, for then it casts forth the ball and the force flies out forward, but another if you stop the mouth of a gun with powder and ignite it, – no cannon can stand such a trial. Ask Pan Charnyetski. The same thing will take place if you fill the mouth of a cannon with snow and fire it; the piece will burst. Such is the villanous power of powder. What will it be when a whole box of it explodes at the mouth? Ask Pan Charnyetski."

"That is true. These are no secrets for soldiers," answered Charnyetski.

"You see if this gun is burst," continued Kmita, "all the rest are a joke."

"This seems impossible to me," said Kordetski; "for, first, who will undertake to do it?"

"A certain poor fellow," said Kmita; "but he is resolute, his name is Babinich."

"You!" cried the priest and Charnyetski together.

"Ai, father, benefactor! I was with you at confession, and acknowledged all my deeds in sincerity; among them were deeds not worse than the one I am now planning; how can you doubt that I will undertake it? Do you not know me?"

"He is a hero, a knight above knights," cried Charnyetski. And seizing Kmita by the neck, he continued: "Let me kiss you for the wish alone; give me your mouth."

"Show me another remedy, and I will not go," said Kmita; "but it seems to me that I shall manage this matter somehow. Remember that I speak German as if I had been dealing in staves, wainscots, and wall plank in Dantzig. That means much, for if I am disguised they will not easily discover that I am not of their camp. But I think that no one is standing before the mouth of the cannon; for it is not safe there, and I think that I shall do the work before they can see me."

"Pan Charnyetski, what do you think of this?" asked the prior, quickly.

"Out of one hundred men one might return from such an undertaking; but *audaces fortuna juvat* [fortune favors the bold]."

"I have been in hotter places than this," said Kmita: "nothing will happen to me, for such is my fortune. Ai, beloved father, and what a difference! Ere now to exhibit myself, and for vainglory, I crawled into danger; but this undertaking is for the Most Holy Lady. Even should I have to lay down my head, which I do not foresee, say yourself could a more praiseworthy death be wished to any man than down there in this cause?"

The priest was long silent, and then said at last, —

"I should try to restrain you with persuasion, with prayers and imploring, if you wished to go for mere glory; but you are right: this is a question affecting the honor of the Most Holy Lady, this sacred place, the whole country! And you, my son, whether you return safely or win the palm of glory, you will gain the supreme happiness, – salvation. Against my heart then I say, Go; I do not detain you. Our prayers, the protection of God, will go with you."

"In such company I shall go boldly and perish with joy."

"But return, soldier of God, return safely; for you are loved with sincerity here. May Saint Raphael attend you and bring you back, cherished son, my dear child!"

"Then I will begin preparations at once," said Pan Andrei, joyfully pressing the priest. "I will dress in Swedish fashion with a jacket and wide-legged boots. I will fill in the powder, and do you, father, stop the exorcisms for this night; fog is needful to the Swedes, but also to me."

"And do you not wish to confess before starting?"

"Of course, without that I should not go; for the devil would have approach to me."

"Then begin with confession."

Charnyetski went out of the cell, and Kmita knell down near the priest and purged himself of his sins. Then, gladsome as a bird, he began to make preparations.

An hour or two later, in the deep night, he knocked again at the prior's cell, where Pan Charnyetski also was waiting.

The two scarcely knew Pan Andrei, so good a Swede had he made himself. He had twirled his mustaches to his eyes and brushed them out at the ends; he had put his hat on one side of his head, and looked precisely like some cavalry officer of noted family.

"As God lives, one would draw a sabre at sight of him," said Charnyetski.

"Put the light at a distance," said Kmita; "I will show you something."

When Father Kordetski had put the light aside quickly, Pan Andrei placed on a table a roll, a foot and a half long and as thick as the arm of a sturdy man, sewn up in pitched linen and filled firmly with powder. From one end of it was hanging a long string made of tow steeped in sulphur.

"Well," said he, "when I put this flea-bane in the mouth of the cannon and ignite the string, then its belly will burst."

"Lucifer would burst!" cried Pan Charnyetski. But he remembered that it was better not to mention the name of the foul one, and he slapped his own mouth.

"But how will you set fire to the string?" asked Kordetski.

"In that lies the whole danger, for I must strike fire. I have good flint, dry tinder, and steel of the best; but there will be a noise, and they may notice something. The string I hope will not quench, for it will hang at the beard of the gun, and it will be hard to see it, especially as it will hide itself quickly in burning; but they may pursue me, and I cannot flee straight toward the cloister."

"Why not?" asked the priest.

"For the explosion would kill me. The moment I see the spark on the string I must jump aside with all the strength in my legs, and when I have run about fifty yards, must fall to the ground under the intrenchment. After the explosion I shall rush toward the cloister."

"My God, my God, how many dangers!" said the prior, raising his eyes to heaven.

"Beloved father, so sure am I of returning that even emotion does not touch me, which on an occasion like this ought to seize me. This is nothing! Farewell, and pray the Lord God to give me luck. Only conduct me to the gate."

"How is that? Do you want to go now?" asked Charnyetski.

"Am I to wait till daylight, or till the fog rises? Is not my head dear to me?"

But Pan Andrei did not go that night, for just as they came to the gate, darkness, as if out of spite, began to grow light. Some movement too was heard around the great siege gun.

Next morning the besieged were convinced that the gun was transferred to another place.

The Swedes had received apparently some report of a great weakness in the wall a little beyond the bend near the southern bastion, and they determined to direct missiles to that spot. Maybe too the prior was not a stranger to the affair, for the day before they had seen old Kostuha (Konstantsia) going out of the cloister. She was employed chiefly when there was need of giving false reports to the Swedes. Be that as it may, it was a mistake on their part; for the besieged could now repair in the old place the wall so greatly shaken, and to make a new breach a number of days would be needed.

The nights were clear in succession, the days full of uproar. The Swedes fired with terrible energy. The spirit of doubt began again to fly over the fortress. Among the besieged were nobles who wished to surrender; some of the monks too had lost heart. The opposition gained strength and importance. The prior made head against it with unrestrained energy, but his health began to give way. Meanwhile came reinforcements to the Swedes and supplies from Cracow, especially terrible explosive missiles in the form of iron cylinders filled with powder and lead. These caused more terror than damage to the besieged.

Kmita, from the time that he had conceived the plan of bursting the siege gun, secreted himself in the fortress. He looked every day at the roll, with heart-sickness. On reflection he made it still larger, so that it was almost an ell long and as thick as a boot-leg. In the evening he cast greedy looks

toward the gun, then examined the sky like an astrologer. But the bright moon, shining on the snow continually, baffled his plan.

All at once a thaw came; clouds covered the horizon, and the night was dark, – so dark that even strain your eyes you could see nothing. Pan Andrei fell into such humor as if some one had given him the steed of the Sultan; and midnight had barely sounded when he stood before Charnyetski in his cavalry dress, the roll under his arm.

"I am going!" said he.

"Wait, I will speak to the prior."

"That is well. Kiss me. Pan Pyotr, and go for the prior."

Charnyetski kissed him with feeling, and turned away. He had hardly gone thirty steps when Kordetski stood before him in white. He had guessed that Kmita was going, and had come there to bless him.

"Babinich is ready; he is only waiting for your reverence."

"I hurry, I hurry!" answered the priest. "O Mother of God, save him and aid him!"

After a while both were standing at the opening where Charnyetski left Kmita, but there was no trace of him.

"He has gone!" said the prior, in amazement.

"He has gone!" repeated Charnyetski.

"But, the traitor!" said the prior, with emotion, "I intended to put this little scapular on his neck."

Both ceased to speak; there was silence around, and as the darkness was dense there was firing from neither side. On a sudden Charnyetski whispered eagerly, —

"As God is dear to me, he is not even trying to go in silence! Do you hear steps crushing the snow?"

"Most Holy Lady, guard thy servant!" said the prior.

Both listened carefully for a time, till the brisk steps and the noise on the snow had ceased.

"Do you know, your reverence, at moments I think that he will succeed, and I fear nothing for him. The strange man went as if he were going to an inn to drink a glass of liquor. What courage he has in him! Either he will lay down his head untimely, or he will be hetman. H'm! if I did not know him as a servant of Mary, I should think that he has – God give him success, God grant it to him! for such another cavalier there is not in the Commonwealth."

"It is so dark, so dark!" said Kordetski; "but they are on their guard since the night of your sortie. He might come upon a whole rank before he could see it."

"I do not think so. The infantry are watching, that I know, and watch carefully; but they are in the intrenchment, not before the muzzles of their own cannon. If they do not hear the steps, he can easily push under the intrenchment, and then the height of it alone will cover him – Uf!"

Here Charnyetski puffed and ceased speaking; for his heart began to beat like a hammer from expectation and alarm, and breath failed him.

Kordetski made the sign of the cross in the darkness.

A third person stood near the two. This was Zamoyski.

"What is the matter?" asked he.

"Babinich has gone to blow up the siege gun."

"How is that? What is that?"

"He took a roll of powder, cord, and flint, and went."

Zamoyski pressed his head between his hands.

"Jesus, Mary! Jesus, Mary! All alone?"

"All alone."

"Who let him go? That's an impossible deed!"

"I. For the might of God all things are possible, even his safe return," said Kordetski.

Zamoyski was silent. Charnyetski began to pant from emotion.

"Let us pray," said the prior.

The three knelt down and began to pray. But anxiety raised the hair on the heads of both knights. A quarter of an hour passed, half an hour, an hour as long as a lifetime.

"There will be nothing now!" said Charnyetski, sighing deeply.

All at once in the distance a gigantic column of flame burst forth, and a roar as if all the thunders of heaven had been hurled to the earth; it shook the walls, the church, and the cloister.

"He has burst it, he has burst it!" shouted Charnyetski.

New explosions interrupted further speech of his.

Kordetski threw himself on his knees, and raising his hands, cried to heaven, "Most Holy Mother, Guardian, Patroness, bring him back safely!"

A noise was made on the walls. The garrison, not knowing what had happened, seized their arms. The monks rushed from their cells. No one was sleeping. Even women sprang forth. Questions and answers crossed one another like lightnings.

"What has happened?"

"An assault!"

"The Swedish gun has burst!" cried one of the cannoneers.

"A miracle, a miracle!"

"The largest gun is burst!"

"That great one!"

"Where is the prior?"

"On the wall. He is praying; he did this."

"Babinich burst the gun!" cried Charnyetski.

"Babinich, Babinich! Praise to the Most Holy Lady! They will harm us no longer."

At the same time sounds of confusion rose from the Swedish camp. In all the trenches fires began to shine. An increasing uproar was heard. By the light of the fires masses of soldiers were seen moving in various directions without order, trumpets sounded, drums rolled continually; to the walls came shouts in which alarm and amazement were heard.

Kordetski continued kneeling on the wall.

At last the night began to grow pale, but Babinich came not to the fortress.

CHAPTER IV

What had happened to Pan Andrei, and in what way had he been able to carry out his plan?

After leaving the fortress he advanced some time with a sure and wary step. At the very end of the slope he halted and listened. It was silent around, – so silent in fact that his steps were heard clearly on the snow. In proportion as he receded from the walls, he stepped more carefully. He halted again, and again listened. He was somewhat afraid of slipping and falling, and thus dampening his precious roll; he drew out his rapier therefore and leaned on it. That helped him greatly. Thus feeling his way, after the course of half an hour he heard a slight sound directly in front.

"Ah! they are watching. The sortie has taught them wariness," thought he.

And he went farther now very slowly. He was glad that he had not gone astray, for the darkness was such that he could not see the end of the rapier.

"Those trenches are considerably farther: I am advancing well then!" whispered he to himself.

He hoped also not to find men before the intrenchment; for, properly speaking, they had nothing to do there, especially at night. It might be that at something like a hundred or fewer yards apart single sentries were stationed; but he hoped to pass them in such darkness. It was joyous in his soul.

Kmita was not only daring but audacious. The thought of bursting the gigantic gun delighted him to the bottom of his soul, – not only as heroism, not only as an immortal service to the besieged, but as a terrible damage to the Swedes. He imagined how Miller would be astounded, how he would gnash his teeth, how he would gaze in helplessness on those walls; and at moments pure laughter seized him.

And as he had himself said, he felt no emotion, no fear, no unquiet. It did not even enter his head to what an awful danger he was exposing himself. He went on as a school-boy goes to an orchard to make havoc among apples. He recalled other times when he harried Hovanski, stole up at night to a camp of thirty thousand with two hundred such fighters as himself.

His comrades stood before his mind: Kokosinski, the gigantic Kulvyets-Hippocentaurus, the spotted Ranitski, of senatorial stock, and others; then for a moment he sighed after them. "If they were here now," thought he, "we might blow up six guns." Then the feeling of loneliness oppressed him somewhat, but only for a short while; soon memory brought before his eyes Olenka. Love spoke in him with immeasurable power. He was moved to tenderness. If she could see him, the heart would rejoice in her this time. Perhaps she thinks yet that he is serving the Swedes. He is serving them nicely! And soon he will oblige them! What will happen when she learns of all these perils? What will she think? She will think surely, "He is a whirlwind, but when it comes to a deed which no other can do, he will do it; where another dares not go, he will go. Such a man is that Kmita!"

"Another such deed I shall never accomplish," said Pan Andrei; and boastfulness seized him completely. Still, in spite of these thoughts he did not forget where he was, whither he was going, what he intended to do; and he began to advance like a wolf on a night pasture. He looked behind once and a second time. No church, no cloister! All was covered with thick, impenetrable gloom. He noted, however, by the time, that he must have advanced far already, and that the trench might be right there.

"I am curious to know if there are sentries," thought he.

But he had not advanced two steps after giving himself this question, when, in front of him, was heard the tramp of measured steps and a number of voices inquired at various distances, —

"Who goes?"

Pan Andrei stood as if fixed to the earth. He felt hot.

"Ours," answered a number of voices.

"The watchword!"

"Upsala."

"The counter-sign!"

"The crown."

Kmita saw at this moment that there was a change of sentries. "I'll give you Upsala and a crown!" And he rejoiced. This was really for him a very favorable circumstance, for he might pass the line of guards at the moment of changing sentries, when the tramp of the soldiers drowned his own steps.

In fact, he did so without the least difficulty, and went after the returning soldiers rather boldly up to the trench itself. There they made a turn to go around it; but he pushed quickly into the ditch and hid in it.

Meanwhile objects had become somewhat more visible; Pan Andrei thanked Heaven, for in the previous darkness he could not by feeling have found the gun sought for. Now, by throwing back his head and straining his vision, he saw above him a black line, indicating the edge of the trench, and also the black outlines of the baskets between which stood the guns.

He could indeed see their jaws thrust out a little above the trench. Advancing slowly in the ditch, he discovered the great gun at last. He halted and began to listen. From the intrenchment a noise came, – a murmur; evidently the infantry were near the guns, in readiness. But the height of the intrenchment concealed Kmita; they might hear him, they could not see him. Now he had only to rise from below to the mouth of the gun, which was high above his head.

Fortunately the sides of the ditch were not too steep; and besides the embankment freshly made, or moist with water, had not frozen, since for some time there had been a thaw.

Taking note of all this, Kmita began to sink holes quietly in the slope of the intrenchment and to climb slowly to the gun. After fifteen minutes' work he was able to seize the opening of the culverin. Soon he was hanging in the air, but his uncommon strength permitted him to hold himself thus till he pushed the roll into the jaws of the cannon.

"Here's dog sausage for thee!" muttered he, "only don't choke with it!"

Then he slipped down and began to look for the string, which, fastened to the inner side of the roll, was hanging to the ditch. After a while he felt it with his hand. But then came the greatest difficulty, for he had to strike fire and ignite the string.

Kmita waited for a moment, thinking that the noise would increase somewhat among the soldiers in the breastworks. At last he began to strike the flint lightly with the steel. But that moment above his head was heard in German the question, —

"Who is there in the ditch?"

"It is I, Hans!" answered Kmita, without hesitation; "the devils have taken my ramrod into the ditch, and I am striking fire to find it."

"All right, all right," said the gunner. "It is your luck there is no firing, for the wind would have taken your head off."

"Ah!" thought Kmita, "the gun besides my charge has still its own, – so much the better."

At that moment the sulphur-string caught, and delicate little sparks began to run upward along its dry exterior.

It was time to disappear. Kmita hurried along the ditch with all the strength in his legs, not losing an instant, not thinking overmuch of the noise he was making. But when he had run twenty yards, curiosity overcame in him the feeling of his terrible danger.

"The string has gone out, there is moisture in the air!" thought he; and he stopped. Casting a look behind, he saw a little spark yet, but much higher than he had left it.

"Eh, am I not too near?" thought he; and fear hurried him forward.

He pushed on at full speed; all at once he struck a stone and fell. At that moment a terrible roar rent the air; the earth trembled, pieces of wood, iron, stones, lumps of ice and earth, whistled about his ears, and here his sensations ended.

After that were heard new explosions in turn. These were powder-boxes standing near the cannon which exploded from the shock.

But Kmita did not hear these; he lay as if dead in the ditch. He did not hear also how, after a time of deep silence, the groans of men were heard, cries and shouts for help; how nearly half the army, Swedish and allied, assembled.

The confusion and uproar lasted long, till from the chaos of testimony the Swedish general reached the fact that the siege-gun had been blown up of purpose by some one. Search was ordered immediately. In the morning the searching soldiers found Kmita lying in the ditch.

It appeared that he was merely stunned from the explosion. He had lost, to begin with, control of his hands and feet. His powerlessness lasted the whole ensuing day. They nursed him with the utmost care. In the evening he had recovered his power almost completely.

He was brought then by command before Miller, who occupied the middle place at the table in his quarters; around him sat the Prince of Hesse, Count Veyhard, Sadovski, all the noted officers of the Swedes, of the Poles, Zbrojek, Kalinski, and Kuklinovski. The last at sight of Kmita became blue, his eyes burned like two coals, and his mustaches began to quiver. Without awaiting the question of the general, he said, —

"I know this bird. He is from the Chenstohova garrison. His name is Babinich."

Kmita was silent; pallor and weariness were evident on his face, but his glance was bold and his countenance calm.

"Did you blow up the siege-gun?" asked Miller.

"I did."

"How did you do it?"

Kmita stated all briefly, concealed nothing. The officers looked at one another in amazement.

"A hero!" whispered the Prince of Hesse to Sadovski.

But Sadovski inclined to Count Veyhard. "Count Veyhard," asked he, "how are we to take a fortress with such defenders? What do you think, will they surrender?"

"There are more of us in the fortress ready for such deeds," said Kmita. "You know not the day nor the hour."

"I too have more than one halter in the camp," said Miller.

"We know that. But you will not take Yasna Gora while there is one man alive there."

A moment of silence followed. Then Miller inquired, —

"Is your name Babinich?"

Pan Andrei thought that after what he had done, and in presence of death, the time had come in which he had no need to conceal his name. Let people forget the faults and transgressions bound up with it; let glory and devotion shine over them.

"My name is not Babinich," said he, with a certain pride, "my name is Andrei Kmita; I was colonel of my own personal squadron in the Lithuanian contingent."

Hardly had Kuklinovski heard this when he sprang up as if possessed, stuck out his eyes, opened his mouth, and began to strike his sides with his hands. At last he cried, —

"General, I beg for a word without delay, without delay."

A murmur rose at the same time among the Polish officers, which the Swedes heard with wonder, since for them the name Kmita meant nothing. They noted at once that this must be no common soldier, for Zbrojek rose, and approaching the prisoner said, —

"Worthy colonel, in the straits in which you are I cannot help you; but give me your hand, I pray."

Kmita raised his head and began to snort.

"I will not give a hand to traitors who serve against their country!"

Zbrojek's face flushed. Kalinski, who stood right behind him, withdrew. The Swedish officers surrounded them at once, asking what man this Kmita was whose name had made such an impression. During this time Kuklinovski had squeezed Miller up to the window, and said, —

"For your worthiness the name Kmita is nothing; but he is the first soldier, the first colonel, in the whole Commonwealth. All know of him, all know that name; once he served Radzivill and the Swedes; now it is clear that he has gone over to Yan Kazimir. There is not his equal among soldiers, save me. He was the only man who could go alone and blow up that gun. From this one deed you may know him. He fought Hovanski, so that a reward was put on his head. He with two or three hundred men kept up the whole war after the defeat at Shklov, until others were found who, imitating him, began to tear at the enemy. He is the most dangerous man in all the country – "

"Why do you sing his praises to me?" inquired Miller. "That he is dangerous I know to my own irreparable loss."

"What does your worthiness think of doing with him?"

"I should give orders to hang him; but being a soldier myself, I know how to value daring and bravery. Besides, he is a noble of high birth, – I will order him shot, and that to-day."

"Your worthiness, it is not for me to instruct the most celebrated soldier and statesman of modern times; but I permit myself to say that that man is too famous. If you shoot him, Zbrojek's squadron and Kalinski's will withdraw at the latest this very day, and go over to Yan Kazimir."

"If that is true, I'll have them cut to pieces before they go!" cried Miller.

"Your worthiness, a terrible responsibility! for if that becomes known, – and the cutting down of two squadrons is hard to hide, – the whole Polish army will leave Karl Gustav; at present their loyalty is tottering, as you know. The hetmans are not reliable. Pan Konyetspolski with six thousand of the best cavalry is at the side of our king. That force is no trifle. God defend us if these too should turn against us, against the person of his Royal Grace! Besides, this fortress defends itself; and to cut down the squadrons of Zbrojek and Kalinski is no easy matter, for Wolf is here too with his infantry. They might come to an agreement with the garrison of the fortress."

"A hundred horned devils!" cried Miller; "what do you want, Kuklinovski? do you want me to give Kmita his life? That cannot be."

"I want," answered Kuklinovski, "you to give him to me."

"What will you do with him?"

"Ah, I – will tear him alive from his skin."

"You did not know even his real name, you do not know him. What have you against him?"

"I made his acquaintance first in the fortress, where I have been twice as an envoy to the monks."

"Have you reasons for vengeance?"

"Your worthiness, I wished privately to bring him to our camp. He, taking advantage of the fact that I laid aside my office of envoy, insulted me, Kuklinovski, as no man in life has insulted me."

"What did he do to you?"

Kuklinovski trembled and gnashed his teeth. "Better not speak of it. Only give him to me. He is doomed to death anyhow, and I would like before his end to have a little amusement with him, – all the more because he is the Kmita whom formerly I venerated, and who repaid me in such fashion. Give him to me; it will be better for you. If I rub him out, Zbrojek and Kalinski and with them all the Polish knighthood will fall not upon you, but upon me, and I'll help myself. There will not be anger, wry faces, and mutiny. It will be my private matter about Kmita's skin, of which I shall have a drum made."

Miller fell to thinking; a sudden suspicion flashed over his face.

"Kuklinovski," said he, "maybe you wish to save him?"

Kuklinovski smiled quietly, but that smile was so terrible and sincere that Miller ceased to doubt.

"Perhaps you give sound advice," said he.

"For all my services I beg this reward only."

"Take him, then."

Now both returned to the room where the rest of the officers were assembled. Miller turned to them and said, —

"In view of the services of Pan Kuklinovski I place at his absolute disposal this prisoner."

A moment of silence followed; then Pan Zbrojek put his hands on his sides, and asked with a certain accent of contempt, —

"And what does Pan Kuklinovski think to do with the prisoner?"

Kuklinovski bent, straightened himself quickly, his lips opened with an ill-omened smile, and his eyes began to quiver.

"Whoso is not pleased with what I do to the prisoner, knows where to find me." And he shook his sabre.

"Your promise, Pan Kuklinovski," said Zbrojek.

"Promise, promise!"

When he had said this he approached Kmita. "Follow me, little worm; come after me, famous soldier. Thou'rt a trifle weak; thou needst swathing, – I'll swathe thee."

"Ruffian!" said Kmita.

"Very good, very good, daring soul! Meanwhile step along."

The officers remained in the room; Kuklinovski mounted his horse before the quarters. Having with him three soldiers, he commanded one of them to lead Kmita by a lariat; and all went together toward Lgota, where Kuklinovski's regiment was quartered.

On the way Kmita prayed ardently. He saw that death was approaching, and he committed himself with his whole soul to God. He was so sunk in prayer and in his own doom that he did not hear what Kuklinovski said to him; he did not know even how long the road was.

They stopped at last before an empty, half-ruined barn, standing in the open field, at some distance from the quarters of Kuklinovski's regiment. The colonel ordered them to lead Kmita in, and turning himself to one of the soldiers, said, —

"Hurry for me to the camp, bring ropes and a tar bucket!"

The soldier galloped with all the breath in his horse, and in quarter of an hour returned at the same pace, with a comrade. They had brought the requisite articles.

"Strip this spark naked!" ordered Kuklinovski; "tie his hands and feet behind him with a rope, and then fasten him to a beam."

"Ruffian!" said Kmita.

"Good, good! we can talk yet, we have time!"

Meanwhile one of the soldiers climbed up on the beam, and the others fell to dragging the clothes from Kmita. When he was naked the three executioners placed Pan Andrei with his face to the ground, bound his hands and feet with a long rope, then passing it still around his waist they threw the other end to the soldier sitting on the beam.

"Now raise him, and let the man on the beam pull the rope and tie it!" said Kuklinovski.

In a moment the order was obeyed.

"Let him go!"

The rope squeaked. Pan Andrei was hanging parallel with the earth, a few ells above the threshing-floor. Then Kuklinovski dipped tow in the burning tar-bucket, walked up to him, and said, —

"Well, Pan Kmita, did not I say that there are two colonels in the Commonwealth? – only two, I and thou! And thou didst not wish to join company with Kuklinovski, and kicked him! Well, little worm, thou art right! Not for thee is the company of Kuklinovski, for Kuklinovski is better. Hei! a famous colonel is Pan Kmita, and Kuklinovski has him in his hand, and Kuklinovski is roasting his sides!"

"Ruffian!" repeated Kmita, for the third time.

"This is how he will roast his sides!" finished Kuklinovski, and he touched Kmita's side with the burning tow; then he said, —

"Not too much at first; we have time."

Just then the tramp of horses was heard near the barn-door.

"Whom are the devils bringing?" asked Kuklinovski.

The door squeaked and a soldier entered. "General Miller wishes to see your grace at once!"

"Ah! that is thou, old man?" asked Kuklinovski. "What business? What devil?"

"The general asks your grace to come to him straightway."

"Who came from the general?"

"There was a Swedish officer; he has ridden off already. He had almost driven the breath out of his horse."

"I'll go," said Kuklinovski. Then he turned to Kmita: "It was hot for thee; cool off now, little worm. I'll come again soon, we'll have another talk."

"What shall be done with the prisoner?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Leave him as he is. I shall return directly. Let one go with me."

The colonel went out, and with him that soldier who had sat on the beam at first. There remained only three, but soon three new ones entered the barn.

"You may go to sleep," said he who had reported Miller's order to Kuklinovski, "the colonel has left the guard to us."

"We prefer to remain," replied one of the first three soldiers, "to see the wonder; for such a – "

Suddenly he stopped. A certain unearthly sound was wrested from his throat like the call of a strangled cock. He threw out his arms and fell as if struck by lightning.

At the same moment the cry of "Pound" was heard through the barn, and two of the newly arrived rushed like leopards on the two remaining soldiers. A terrible, short struggle surged up, lighted by the gleams of the burning tar-bucket. After a moment two bodies fell in the straw, for a moment longer were heard the gasps of the dying, then that voice rose which at first seemed familiar to Kmita.

"Your grace, it is I, Kyemlich, and my sons. We have been waiting since morning for a chance, we have been watching since morning." Then he turned to his sons: "Now out, rogues, free the colonel in a breath, – quickly!"

And before Kmita was able to understand what was taking place there appeared near him the two bushy forelocks of Kosma and Damian, like two gigantic distaffs. The ropes were soon cut, and Kmita stood on his feet. He tottered at first; his stiffened lips were barely able to say, —

"That is you? – I am thankful."

"It is I!" answered the terrible old man. "Mother of God! Oh – let his grace dress quickly. You rogues – " And he began to give Kmita his clothes.

"The horses are standing at the door," said he. "From here the way is open. There are guards; maybe they would let no one in, but as to letting out, they will let out. We know the password. How does your grace feel?"

"He burned my side, but only a little. My feet are weak – "

"Drink some gorailka."

Kmita seized with eagerness the flask the old man gave him, and emptying half of it said, —

"I was stiff from the cold. I shall be better at once."

"Your grace will grow warm on the saddle. The horses are waiting."

"In a moment I shall be better," repeated Kmita. "My side is smarting a little – that's nothing! – I am quite well." And he sat on the edge of a grain-bin.

After a while he recovered his strength really, and looked with perfect presence of mind on the ill-omened faces of the three Kyemliches, lighted by the yellowish flame of the burning pitch. The old man stood before him.

"Your grace, there is need of haste. The horses are waiting."

But in Pan Andrei the Kmita of old times was roused altogether.

"Oh, impossible!" cried he, suddenly; "now I am waiting for that traitor."

The Kyemliches looked amazed, but uttered not a word, – so accustomed were they from former times to listen blindly to this leader.

The veins came out on his forehead; his eyes were burning in the dark, like two stars, such was the hate and the desire of vengeance that gleamed in them. That which he did then was madness, he might pay for it with his life; but his life was made up of a series of such madnesses. His side pained him fiercely, so that every moment he seized it unwittingly with his hand; but he was thinking only of Kuklinovski, and he was ready to wait for him even till morning.

"Listen!" said he; "did Miller really call him?"

"No," answered the old man. "I invented that to manage the others here more easily. It would have been hard for us three against five, for some one might have raised a cry."

"That was well. He will return alone or in company. If there are any people with him, then strike at once on them. Leave him to me. Then to horse! Has any one pistols?"

"I have," said Kosma.

"Give them here! Are they loaded, is there powder in the pan?"

"Yes."

"Very well. If he comes back alone, when he enters spring on him and shut his mouth. You can stuff his own cap into it."

"According to command," said the old man. "Your grace permits us now to search these? We are poor men."

He pointed to the corpses lying on the straw.

"No! Be on the watch. What you find on Kuklinovski will be yours."

"If he returns alone," said the old man, "I fear nothing. I shall stand behind the door; and even if some one from the quarters should come, I shall say that the colonel gave orders not to admit."

"That will do. Watch!"

The tramp of a horse was heard behind the barn. Kmita sprang up and stood in the shadow at the wall. Kosma and Damian took their places near the door, like two cats waiting for a mouse.

"He is alone," said the old man.

"Alone," repeated Kosma and Damian.

The tramp approached, was right there and halted suddenly.

"Come out here, some one, – hold the horse!"

The old man jumped out quickly. A moment of silence followed, then to those waiting in the barn came the following conversation, —

"Is that you, Kyemlich? What the thunder! art mad, or an idiot? It is night, Miller is asleep. The guard will not give admission; they say that no officer went away. How is that?"

"The officer is waiting here in the barn for your grace. He came right away after you rode off; he says that he missed your grace."

"What does all this mean? But the prisoner?"

"Is hanging."

The door squeaked, and Kuklinovski pushed into the barn; but before he had gone a step two iron hands caught him by the throat, and smothered his cry of terror. Kosma and Damian, with the adroitness of genuine murderers, hurled him to the ground, put their knees on his breast, pressed him so that his ribs began to crack, and gagged him in the twinkle of an eye.

Kmita came forward, and holding the pitch light to his eyes, said, —

"Ah! this is Pan Kuklinovski! Now I have something to say to you!"

Kuklinovski's face was blue, the veins were so swollen that it seemed they might burst any moment; but in his eyes, which were coming out of his head and bloodshot, there was quite as much wonder as terror.

"Strip him and put him on the beam!" cried Kmita.

Kosma and Damian fell to stripping him as zealously as if they wished to take the skin from him together with his clothing.

In a quarter of an hour Kuklinovski was hanging by his hands and feet, like a half goose, on the beam. Then Kmita put his hands on his hips and began to brag terribly.

"Well, Pan Kuklinovski," said he, "who is better, Kmita or Kuklinovski?" Then he seized the burning tow and took a step nearer. "Thy camp is distant one shot from a bow, thy thousand ruffians are within call, there is thy Swedish general a little beyond, and thou art hanging here from this same beam from which 'twas thy thought to roast me. – Learn to know Kmita! Thou hadst the thought to be equal to Kmita, to belong to his company, to be compared with him? Thou cut-purse, thou low ruffian, terror of old women, thou offscouring of man. Lord Scoundrel of Scoundrelton! Wry-mouth, trash, slave! I might have thee cut up like a kid, like a capon; but I choose to roast thee alive as thou didst think to roast me."

Saying this, he raised the tow and applied it to the side of the hanging, hapless man; but he held it longer, until the odor of the burned flesh began to spread through the barn.

Kuklinovski writhed till the rope was swinging with him. His eyes, fastened on Kmita, expressed terrible pain and a dumb imploring for pity; from his gagged lips came woful groans; but war had hardened the heart of Pan Andrei, and there was no pity in him, above all, none for traitors.

Removing at last the tow from Kuklinovski's side, he put it for a while under his nose, rubbed with it his mustaches, his eyelashes, and his brows; then he said, —

"I give thee thy life to meditate on Kmita. Thou wilt hang here till morning, and now pray to God that people find thee before thou art frozen."

Then he turned to Kosma and Damian. "To horse!" cried he, and went out of the barn.

Half an hour later around the four riders were quiet hills, silent and empty fields. The fresh breeze, not filled with smoke of powder, entered their lungs. Kmita rode ahead, the Kyemliches after him. They spoke in low voices. Pan Andrei was silent, or rather he was repeating in silence the morning "Our Father," for it was not long before dawn.

From time to time a hiss or even a low groan was rent from his lips, when his burned side pained him greatly. But at the same time he felt on horseback and free; and the thought that he had blown up the greatest siege gun, and besides that had torn himself from the hands of Kuklinovski and had wrought vengeance on him, filled Pan Andrei with such consolation that in view of it the pain was nothing.

Meanwhile a quiet dialogue between the father and the sons turned into a loud dispute.

"The money belt is good," said the greedy old man; "but where are the rings? He had rings on his fingers; in one was a stone worth twenty ducats."

"I forgot to take it," answered Kosma.

"I wish you were killed! Let the old man think of everything, and these rascals haven't wit for a copper! You forgot the rings, you thieves? You lie like dogs!"

"Then turn back, father, and look," muttered Damian.

"You lie, you thieves! You hide things. You wrong your old father, – such sons! I wish that I had not begotten you. You will die without a blessing."

Kmita reined in his horse somewhat. "Come this way!" called he.

The dispute ceased, the Kyemliches hurried up, and they rode farther four abreast.

"And do you know the road to the Silesian boundary?" asked Pan Andrei.

"O Mother of God! we know, we know," answered the old man.

"There are no Swedish parties on the road?"

"No, for all are at Chenstohova, unless we might meet a single man; but God give us one!"

A moment of silence followed.

"Then you served with Kuklinovski?" asked Kmita.

"We did, for we thought that being near we might serve the holy monks and your grace, and so it has happened. We did not serve against the fortress, – God save us from that! we took no pay unless we found something on Swedes."

"How on Swedes?"

"For we wanted to serve the Most Holy Lady even outside the walls; therefore we rode around the camp at night or in the daytime, as the Lord God gave us; and when any of the Swedes happened alone, then we – that is – O Refuge of sinners! – we – "

"Pounded him!" finished Kosma and Damian.

Kmita laughed. "Kuklinovski had good servants in you. But did he know about this?"

"He received a share, an income. He knew, and the scoundrel commanded us to give a thaler a head. Otherwise he threatened to betray us. Such a robber, – he wronged poor men! And we have kept faith with your grace, for not such is service with you. Your grace adds besides of your own; but he, a thaler a head, for our toil, for our labor. On him may God – "

"I will reward you abundantly for what you have done," said Kmita. "I did not expect this of you."

The distant sound of guns interrupted further words. Evidently the Swedes had begun to fire with the first dawn. After a while the roar increased. Kmita stopped his horse; it seemed to him that he distinguished the sound of the fortress cannon from the cannon of the Swedes, therefore he clinched his fist, and threatening with it in the direction of the enemies' camp said, —

"Fire away, fire away! Where is your greatest gun now?"

CHAPTER V

The bursting of the gigantic culverin had really a crushing effect upon Miller, for all his hopes had rested hitherto on that gun. Infantry were ready for the assault, ladders and piles of fascines were collected; but now it was necessary to abandon all thought of a storm.

The plan of blowing up the cloister by means of mines came also to nothing. Miners brought in previously from Olkush split, it is true, the rock, and approached on a diagonal to the cloister; but work progressed slowly. The workmen, in spite of every precaution, fell frequently from the guns of the church, and labored unwillingly. Many of them preferred to die rather than aid in the destruction of a sacred place.

Miller felt a daily increasing opposition. The frost took away the remnant of courage from his unwilling troops, among whom terror was spreading from day to day with a belief that the capture of the cloister did not lie within human power.

Finally Miller himself began to lose hope, and after the bursting of the gun he was simply in despair; a feeling of helplessness and impotence took possession of him. Next morning he called a council, but he called it with the secret wish to hear from officers encouragement to abandon the fortress.

They began to assemble, all wearied and gloomy. In silence they took their places around a table in an enormous and cold room, in which the steam from their breaths stood before their faces, and they looked from behind it as from behind a cloud. Each one felt in his soul exhaustion and weariness; each one said to himself: "There is no counsel to give save one, which it is better for no man to be the first to give." All waited for what Miller would say. He ordered first of all to bring plenty of heated wine, hoping that under the influence of warm drink it would be easier to obtain a real thought from those silent figures, and encouragement to retreat from the fortress.

At last, when he supposed that the wine had produced its effect, he spoke in the following words —

"Have you noticed, gentlemen, that none of the Polish colonels have come to this council, though I summoned them all?"

"It is known of course to your worthiness that servants of the Polish squadron have, while fishing, found silver belonging to the cloister, and that they fought for it with our soldiers. More than ten men have been cut down."

"I know; I succeeded in snatching a part of that silver from their hands, indeed the greater part. It is here now, and I am thinking what to do with it."

"This is surely the cause of the anger of the Polish colonels. They say that if the Poles found the silver, it belongs to the Poles."

"That's a reason!" cried Count Veyhard.

"For my mind, it is a strong reason," said Sadovski; "and I think that if you had found the silver you would not feel bound to divide it, not only with the Poles, but even with me, a Cheh."

"First of all, my dear sir, I do not share your good will for the enemies of our king," answered the count, with a frown.

"But we, thanks to you, must share with you shame and disgrace, not being able to succeed against a fortress to which you have brought us."

"Then have you lost all hope?"

"But have you any yourself to give away?"

"Just as if you knew; and I think that these gentlemen share more willingly with me in my hope, than with you in your fear."

"Do you make me a coward, Count Veyhard?"

"I do not ascribe to you more courage than you show."

"And I ascribe to you less."

"But I," said Miller, who for some time had looked on the count with dislike as the instigator of the ill-starred undertaking, "shall have the silver sent to the cloister. Perhaps kindness and graciousness will do more with these surly monks than balls and cannon. Let them understand that we wish to possess the fortress, not their treasures."

The officers looked on Miller with wonder, so little accustomed were they to magnanimity from him. At last Sadovski said, —

"Nothing better could be done, for it will close at once the mouths of the Polish colonels who lay claim to the silver. In the fortress it will surely make a good impression."

"The death of that Kmita will make the best impression," answered Count Veyhard. "I hope that Kuklinovski has already torn him out of his skin."

"I think that he is no longer alive," said Miller. "But that name reminds me of our loss, which nothing can make good. That was the greatest gun in the whole artillery of his grace. I do not hide from you, gentlemen, that all my hopes were placed on it. The breach was already made, terror was spreading in the fortress. A couple of days longer and we should have moved to a storm. Now all our labor is useless, all our exertions vain. They will repair the wall in one day. And the guns which we have now are no better than those of the fortress, and can be easily dismounted. No larger ones can be had anywhere, for even Marshal Wittemberg hasn't them. The more I ponder over it, the more the disaster seems dreadful. And to think that one man did this, – one dog! one Satan! I shall go mad! To all the horned devils!"

Here Miller struck the table with his fist, for unrestrained anger had seized him, the more desperately because he was powerless. After a while he cried, —

"But what will the king say when he hears of this loss?" After a while he added: "And what shall we do? We cannot gnaw away that cliff with our teeth. Would that the plague might strike those who persuaded me to come to this fortress!"

Having said this, he took a crystal goblet, and in his excitement hurled it to the floor so that the crystal was broken into small bits.

This unbecoming frenzy, more befitting a peasant than a warrior holding such a high office, turned all hearts from him, and soured good-humor completely.

"Give counsel, gentlemen!" cried Miller.

"It is possible to counsel, but only in calmness," answered the Prince of Hesse.

Miller began to puff and blow out his anger through his nostrils. After a time he grew calm, and passing his eyes over those present as if encouraging them with a glance, he said, —

"I ask your pardon, gentlemen, but my anger is not strange. I will not mention those places which, when I had taken command after Torstenson, I captured, for I do not wish, in view of the present disaster, to boast of past fortune. All that is done at this fortress simply passes reason. But still it is necessary to take counsel. For that purpose I have summoned you. Deliberate, then, and what the majority of us determine at this council will be done."

"Let your worthiness give us the subject for deliberation," said the Prince of Hesse. "Have we to deliberate only concerning the capture of the fortress, or also concerning this, whether it is better to withdraw?"

Miller did not wish to put the question so clearly, or at least he did not wish the "either – or," to come first from his mouth; therefore he said, —

"Let each speak clearly what he thinks. It should be a question for us of the profit and praise of the king."

But none of the officers wished more than Miller to appear first with the proposition to retreat, therefore there was silence again.

"Pan Sadovski," said Miller after a while, in a voice which he tried to make agreeable and kind, "you say what you think more sincerely than others, for your reputation insures you against all suspicion."

"I think, General," answered the colonel, "that Kmita was one of the greatest soldiers of this age, and that our position is desperate."

"But you were in favor of withdrawing from the fortress?"

"With permission of your worthiness, I was only in favor of not beginning the siege. That is a thing quite different."

"Then what do you advise now?"

"Now I give the floor to Count Veyhard."

Miller swore like a pagan.

"Count Veyhard will answer for this unfortunate affair," said he.

"My counsels have not all been carried out," answered the count, insolently. "I can boldly cast responsibility from myself. There were men who with a wonderful, in truth an inexplicable, good-will for the priests, dissuaded his worthiness from all severe measures. My advice was to hang those envoy priests, and I am convinced that if this had been done terror would have opened to us before this time the gates of that hen-house."

Here the count looked at Sadovski; but before the latter had answered, the Prince of Hesse interfered: "Count, do not call that fortress a hen-house, for the more you decrease its importance the more you increase our shame."

"Nevertheless I advised to hang the envoys. Terror and always terror, that is what I repeated from morning till night; but Pan Sadovski threatened resignation, and the priests went unharmed."

"Go, Count, to-day to the fortress," answered Sadovski, "blow up with powder their greatest gun as Kmita did ours, and I guarantee that, that will spread more terror than a murderous execution of envoys."

The count turned directly to Miller: "Your worthiness I thought we had come here for counsel and not for amusement."

"Have you an answer to baseless reproaches?" asked Miller.

"I have, in spite of the joyousness of these gentlemen, who might save their humor for better times."

"Oh, son of Laertes, famous for stratagems!" exclaimed the Prince of Hesse.

"Gentlemen," answered the count, "it is universally known that not Minerva but Mars is your guardian deity; but since Mars has not favored you, and you have renounced your right of speech, let me speak."

"The mountain is beginning to groan, and soon we shall see the small tail of a mouse," said Sadovski.

"I ask for silence!" said Miller, severely. "Speak, Count, but keep in mind that up to this moment your counsels have given bitter fruit."

"Which, though it is winter, we must eat like mouldy biscuits," put in the Prince of Hesse.

"This explains why your princely highness drinks so much wine," said Count Veyhard; "and though it does not take the place of native wit, it helps you to a happy digestion of even disgrace. But no matter! I know well that there is a party in the fortress which is long desirous of surrender, and that only our weakness on one side and the superhuman stubbornness of the prior on the other keep it in check. New terror will give this party new power; for this purpose we should show that we make no account of the loss of the gun, and storm the more vigorously."

"Is that all?"

"Even if it were all, I think that such counsel is more in accordance with the honor of Swedish soldiers than barren jests at cups, or than sleeping after drinking-bouts. But that is not all. We should

spread the report among our soldiers, and especially among the Poles, that the men at work now making a mine have discovered the old underground passage leading to the cloister and the church."

"That is good counsel," said Miller.

"When this report is spread among the soldiers and the Poles, the Poles themselves will persuade the monks to surrender, for it is a question with them as with the monks, that that nest of superstitions should remain intact."

"For a Catholic that is not bad!" muttered Sadovski.

"If he served the Turks he would call Rome a nest of superstitions," said the Prince of Hesse.

"Then, beyond doubt, the Poles will send envoys to the priests," continued Count Veyhard, – "that party in the cloister, which is long anxious for surrender will renew its efforts under the influence of fear; and who knows but its members will force the prior and the stubborn to open the gates?"

"The city of Priam will perish through the cunning of the divine son of Laertes," declaimed the Prince of Hesse.

"As God lives, a real Trojan history, and he thinks he has invented something new!" said Sadovski.

But the advice pleased Miller, for in very truth it was not bad. The party which the count spoke of existed really in the cloister. Even some priests of weaker soul belonged to it. Besides, fear might extend among the garrison, including even those who so far were ready to defend it to the last drop of blood.

"Let us try, let us try!" said Miller, who like a drowning man seized every plank, and from despair passed easily to hope. "But will Kuklinovski or Zbrojek agree to go again as envoys to the cloister, or will they believe in that passage, and will they inform the priests of it?"

"In every case Kuklinovski will agree," answered the count; "but it is better that he should believe really in the existence of the passage."

At that moment they heard the tramp of a horse in front of the quarters.

"There, Pan Zbrojek has come!" said the Prince of Hesse, looking through the window.

A moment later spurs rattled, and Zbrojek entered, or rather rushed into the room. His face was pale, excited, and before the officers could ask the cause of his excitement the colonel cried, —

"Kuklinovski is no longer living!"

"How? What do you say? What has happened?" exclaimed Miller.

"Let me catch breath," said Zbrojek, "for what I have seen passes imagination."

"Talk more quickly. Has he been murdered?" cried all.

"By Kmita," answered Zbrojek.

The officers all sprang from their seats, and began to look at Zbrojek as at a madman; and he, while blowing in quick succession bunches of steam from his nostrils, said, —

"If I had not seen I should not have believed, for that is not a human power. Kuklinovski is not living, three soldiers are killed, and of Kmita not a trace. I know that he was a terrible man. His reputation is known in the whole country. But for him, a prisoner and bound, not only to free himself, but to kill the soldiers and torture Kuklinovski to death, – that a man could not do, only a devil!"

"Nothing like that has ever happened; that's impossible of belief!" whispered Sadovski.

"That Kmita has shown what he can do," said the Prince of Hesse. "We did not believe the Poles yesterday when they told us what kind of bird he was; we thought they were telling big stories, as is usual with them."

"Enough to drive a man mad," said the count.

Miller seized his head with his hands, and said nothing. When at last he raised his eyes, flashes of wrath were crossing in them with flashes of suspicion.

"Pan Zbrojek," said he, "though he were Satan and not a man, he could not do this without some treason, without assistance. Kmita had his admirers here; Kuklinovski his enemies, and you belong to the number."

Zbrojek was in the full sense of the word an insolent soldier; therefore when he heard an accusation directed against himself, he grew still paler, sprang from his place, approached Miller, and halting in front of him looked him straight in the eyes.

"Does your worthiness suspect me?" inquired he.

A very oppressive moment followed. The officers present had not the slightest doubt were Miller to give an affirmative answer something would follow terrible and unparalled in the history of camps. All hands rested on their rapier hilts. Sadovski even drew his weapon altogether.

But at that moment the officers saw before the window a yard filled with Polish horsemen. Probably they also had come with news of Kuklinovski, but in case of collision they would stand beyond doubt on Zbrojek's side. Miller too saw them, and though the paleness of rage had come on his face, still he restrained himself, and feigning to see no challenge in Zbrojek's action, he answered in a voice which he strove to make natural, —

"Tell in detail how it happened."

Zbrojek stood for a time yet with nostrils distended, but he too remembered himself; and then his thoughts turned in another direction, for his comrades, who had just ridden up, entered the room.

"Kuklinovski is murdered!" repeated they, one after another. "Kuklinovski is killed! His regiment will scatter! His soldiers are going wild!"

"Gentlemen, permit Pan Zbrojek to speak; he brought the news first," cried Miller.

After a while there was silence, and Zbrojek spoke as follows, —

"It is known to you, gentlemen, that at the last council I challenged Kuklinovski on the word of a cavalier. I was an admirer of Kmita, it is true; but even you, though his enemies, must acknowledge that no common man could have done such a deed as bursting that cannon. It behooves us to esteem daring even in an enemy; therefore I offered him my hand, but he refused his, and called me a traitor. Then I thought to myself, 'Let Kuklinovski do what he likes with him.' My only other thought was this: 'If Kuklinovski acts against knightly honor in dealing with Kmita, the disgrace of his deed must not fall on all Poles, and among others on me.' For that very reason I wished surely to fight with Kuklinovski, and this morning taking two comrades, I set out for his camp. We come to his quarters; they say there, 'He is not at home.' I send to this place, – he is not here. At his quarters they tell us, 'He has not returned the whole night.' But they are not alarmed, for they think that he has remained with your worthiness. At last one soldier says, 'Last evening he went to that little barn in the field with Kmita, whom he was going to burn there.' I ride to the barn; the doors are wide open. I enter; I see inside a naked body hanging from a beam. 'That is Kmita,' thought I; but when my eyes have grown used to the darkness, I see that the body is some thin and bony one, and Kmita looked like a Hercules. It is a wonder to me that he could shrink so much in one night. I draw near – Kuklinovski!"

"Hanging from the beam?" asked Miller.

"Exactly! I make the sign of the cross, – I think, 'Is it witchcraft, an omen, deception, or what?' But when I saw three corpses of soldiers, the truth stood as if living before me. That terrible man had killed these, hung Kuklinovski, burned him like an executioner, and then escaped."

"It is not far to the Silesian boundary," said Sadovski.

A moment of silence followed. Every suspicion of Zbrojek's participation in the affair was extinguished in Miller's soul. But the event itself astonished and filled him with a certain undefined fear. He saw dangers rising around, or rather their terrible shadows, against which he knew not how to struggle; he felt that some kind of chain of failures surrounded him. The first links were before his eyes, but farther the gloom of the future was lying. Just such a feeling mastered him as if he were in a cracked house which might fall on his head any moment. Uncertainty crushed him with an insupportable weight, and he asked himself what he had to lay hands on.

Meanwhile Count Veyhard struck himself on the forehead. "As God lives," said he, "when I saw this Kmita yesterday it seemed as if I had known him somewhere. Now again I see before me that

face. I remember the sound of his voice. I must have met him for a short time and in the dark, in the evening; but he is going through my head, – going – " Here he began to rub his forehead with his hand.

"What is that to us?" asked Miller; "you will not mend the gun, even should you remember; you will not bring Kuklinovski to life."

Here he turned to the officers. "Gentlemen, come with me, whoso wishes, to the scene of this deed."

All wished to go, for curiosity was exciting them. Horses were brought, and they moved on at a trot, the general at the head. When they came to the little barn they saw a number of tens of Polish horsemen scattered around that building, on the road, and along the field.

"What men are they?" asked Miller of Zbrojek.

"They must be Kuklinovski's; I tell your worthiness that those ragamuffins have simply gone wild."

Zbrojek then beckoned to one of the horsemen, —

"Come this way, come this way. Quickly!"

The soldier rode up.

"Are you Kuklinovski's men?"

"Yes."

"Where is the rest of the regiment?"

"They have run away. They refused to serve longer against Yasna Gora."

"What does he say?" asked Miller.

Zbrojek interpreted the words.

"Ask him where they went to."

Zbrojek repeated the question.

"It is unknown," said the soldier. "Some have gone to Silesia. Others said that they would serve with Kmita, for there is not another such colonel either among the Poles or the Swedes."

When Zbrojek interpreted these words to Miller, he grew serious. In truth, such men as Kuklinovski had were ready to pass over to the command of Kmita without hesitation. But then they might become terrible, if not for Miller's army, at least for his supplies and communication. A river of perils was rising higher and higher around the enchanted fortress.

Zbrojek, into whose head this idea must have come, said, as if in answer to these thoughts of Miller: "It is certain that everything is in a storm now in our Commonwealth. Let only such a Kmita shout, hundreds and thousands will surround him, especially after what he has done."

"But what can he effect?" asked Miller.

"Remember, your worthiness, that that man brought Hovanski to desperation, and Hovanski had, counting the Cossacks, six times as many men as we. Not a transport will come to us without his permission, the country houses are destroyed, and we are beginning to feel hunger. Besides, this Kmita may join with Jegotski and Kulesha; then he will have several thousand sabres at his call. He is a grievous man, and may become most harmful."

"Are you sure of your soldiers?"

"Surer than of myself," answered Zbrojek, with brutal frankness.

"How surer?"

"For, to tell the truth, we have all of us enough of this siege."

"I trust that it will soon come to an end."

"Only the question is: How? But for that matter to capture this fortress is at present as great a calamity as to retire from it."

Meanwhile they had reached the little barn. Miller dismounted, after him the officers, and all entered. The soldiers had removed Kuklinovski from the beam, and covering him with a rug laid him on his back on remnants of straw. The bodies of three soldiers lay at one side, placed evenly one by the other.

"These were killed with knives."

"But Kuklinovski?"

"There are no wounds on Kuklinovski, but his side is roasted and his mustaches daubed with pitch. He must have perished of cold or suffocation, for he holds his own cap in his teeth to this moment."

"Uncover him."

The soldier raised a corner of the rug, and a terrible face was uncovered, swollen, with eyes bursting out. On the remnants of his pitched mustaches were icicles formed from his frozen breath and mixed with soot, making as it were tusks sticking out of his mouth. That face was so revolting that Miller, though accustomed to all kinds of ghastliness, shuddered and said, —

"Cover it quickly. Terrible, terrible!"

Silence reigned in the barn.

"Why have we come here?" asked the Prince of Hesse, spitting. "I shall not touch food for a whole day."

All at once some kind of uncommon exasperation closely bordering on frenzy took possession of Miller. His face became blue, his eyes expanded, he began to gnash his teeth, a wild thirst for the blood of some one had seized him; then turning to Zbrojek, he screamed, —

"Where is that soldier who saw that Kuklinovski was in the barn? He must be a confederate!"

"I know not whether that soldier is here yet," answered Zbrojek. "All Kuklinovski's men have scattered like oxen let out from the yoke."

"Then catch him!" bellowed Miller, in fury.

"Catch him yourself!" cried Zbrojek, in similar fury.

And again a terrible outburst hung as it were on a spider-web over the heads of the Swedes and the Poles. The latter began to gather around Zbrojek, moving their mustaches threateningly and rattling their sabres.

During this noise the echoes of shots and the tramp of horses were heard, and into the barn rushed a Swedish officer of cavalry.

"General!" cried he. "A sortie from the cloister! The men working at the mine have been cut to pieces! A party of infantry is scattered!"

"I shall go wild!" roared Miller, seizing the hair of his wig. "To horse!"

In a moment they were all rushing like a whirlwind toward the cloister, so that lumps of snow fell like hail from the hoofs of their horses. A hundred of Sadovski's cavalry, under command of his brother, joined Miller and ran to assist. On the way they saw parties of terrified infantry fleeing in disorder and panic, so fallen were the hearts of the Swedish infantry, elsewhere unrivalled. They had left even trenches which were not threatened by any danger. The oncoming officers and cavalry trampled a few, and rode finally to within a furlong of the fortress, but only to see on the height as clearly as on the palm of the hand, the attacking party returning safely to the cloister; songs, shouts of joy, and laughter came from them to Miller's ears.

Single persons stood forth and threatened with bloody sabres in the direction of the staff. The Poles present at the side of the Swedish general recognized Zamoyski himself, who had led the sortie in person, and who, when he saw the staff, stopped and saluted it solemnly with his cap. No wonder he felt safe under cover of the fortress cannon.

And, in fact, it began to smoke on the walls, and iron flocks of cannon balls were flying with terrible whistling among the officers. Troopers tottered in their saddles, and groans answered whistles.

"We are under fire. Retreat!" commanded Sadovski.

Zbrojek seized the reins of Miller's horse. "General, withdraw! It is death here!"

Miller, as if he had become torpid, said not a word, and let himself be led out of range of the missiles. Returning to his quarters, he locked himself in, and for a whole day would see no man. He was meditating surely over his fame of Poliorcetes.

Count Veyhard now took all power in hand, and began with immense energy to make preparations for a storm. New breastworks were thrown up; the soldiers succeeding the miners broke the cliff unweariedly to prepare a mine. A feverish movement continued in the whole Swedish camp. It seemed that a new spirit had entered the besiegers, or that reinforcements had come. A few days later the news thundered through the Swedish and allied Polish camps that the miners had found a passage going under the church and the cloister, and that it depended now only on the good-will of the general to blow up the whole fortress.

Delight seized the soldiers worn out with cold, hunger, and fruitless toil. Shouts of: "We have Chenstohova! We'll blow up that hen-house!" ran from mouth to mouth. Feasting and drinking began.

The count was present everywhere; he encouraged the soldiers, kept them in that belief, repeated a hundred times daily the news of finding the passage, incited to feasting and frolics.

The echo of this gladness reached the cloister at last. News of the mines dug and ready to explode ran with the speed of lightning from rampart to rampart. Even the most daring were frightened. Weeping women began to besiege the prior's dwelling, to hold out to him their children when he appeared for a while, and cry, —

"Destroy not the innocent! Their blood will fall on thy head!"

The greater coward a man had been, the greater his daring now in urging Kordetski not to expose to destruction the sacred place, the capital of the Most Holy Lady.

Such grievous, painful times followed, for the unbending soul of our hero in a habit, as had not been till that hour. It was fortunate that the Swedes ceased their assaults, so as to prove more convincingly that they needed no longer either balls or cannon, that it was enough for them to ignite one little powder fuse. But for this very reason terror increased in the cloister. In the hour of deep night it seemed to some, the most timid, that they heard under the earth certain sounds, certain movements; that the Swedes were already under the cloister. Finally, a considerable number of the monks fell in spirit. Those, with Father Stradomski at the head of them, went to the prior and urged him to begin negotiations at once for surrender. The greater part of the soldiers went with them, and some of the nobles.

Kordetski appeared in the courtyard, and when the throng gathered around him in a close circle, he said, —

"Have we not sworn to one another to defend this holy place to the last drop of our blood? In truth, I tell you that if powder hurls us forth, only our wretched bodies, only the temporary covering, will fall away and return to the earth, but the souls will not return, – heaven will open above them, and they will enter into rejoicing and happiness, as into a sea without bounds. There Jesus Christ will receive them, and that Most Holy Mother will meet them, and they like golden bees will sit on her robe, and will sink in light and gaze on the face of the Lord."

Here the reflection of that brightness was gleaming on his face. He raised his inspired eyes upward, and spoke on with a dignity and a calm not of earth: —

"O Lord, the Ruler of worlds, Thou art looking into my heart, and Thou knowest that I am not deceiving this people when I say that if I desired only my own happiness I would stretch out my hands to Thee and cry from the depth of my soul: O Lord! let powder be there, let it explode, for in such a death is redemption of sins and faults, for it is eternal rest, and Thy servant is weary and toil worn over-much. And who would not wish a reward of such kind, for a death without pain and as short as the twinkle of an eye, as a flash in the heavens, after which is eternity unbroken, happiness inexhaustible, joy without end. But Thou hast commanded me to guard Thy retreat, therefore it is not permitted me to go. Thou hast placed me on guard, therefore Thou hast poured into me Thy strength, and I know, O Lord, I see and feel that although the malice of the enemy were to force itself under this church, though all the powder and destructive saltpetre were placed there, it would be enough for me to make the sign of the cross above them and they would never explode."

Here he turned to the assembly and continued: "God has given me this power, but do you take fear out of your hearts. My spirit pierces the earth and tells you; Your enemies lie, there are no powder dragons under the church. You, people of timid hearts, you in whom fear has stifled faith, deserve not to enter the kingdom of grace and repose to-day. There is no powder under your feet then! God wishes to preserve this retreat, so that, like Noah's ark, it may be borne above the deluge of disasters and mishap; therefore, in the name of God, for the third time I tell you, there is no powder under the church. And when I speak in His name, who will make bold to oppose me, who will dare still to doubt?"

When he had said this he was silent and looked at the throng of monks, nobles, and soldiers. But such was the unshaken faith, the conviction and power in his voice that they were silent also, and no man came forward. On the contrary, solace began to enter their hearts, till at last one of the soldiers, a simple peasant, said, —

"Praise to the name of the Lord! For three days they say they are able to blow up the fortress; why do they not blow it up?"

"Praise to the Most Holy Lady! Why do they not blow it up?" repeated a number of voices.

Then a wonderful sign was made manifest. Behold all about them on a sudden was heard the sound of wings, and whole flocks of small winter birds appeared in the court of the fortress, and every moment new ones flew in from the starved country-places around. Birds such as gray larks, ortolans, buntings with yellow breasts, poor sparrows, green titmice, red bulfinches, sat on the slopes of the roofs, on the corners over the doors, on the church; others flew around in a many-colored crown above the head of the prior, flapping their wings, chirping sadly as if begging for alms, and having no fear whatever of man. People present were amazed at the sight; and Kordetski, after he had prayed for a while, said at last, —

"See these little birds of the forest. They come to the protection of the Mother of God, but you doubt Her power."

Consolation and hope had entered their hearts; the monks, beating their breasts, went to the church, and the soldiers mounted the walls.

Women scattered grain to the birds, which began to pick it up eagerly.

All interpreted the visit of these tiny forest-dwellers as a sign of success to themselves, and of evil to the enemy.

"Fierce snows must be lying, when these little birds, caring neither for shots nor the thunder of cannon, flock to our buildings," said the soldiers.

"But why do they fly from the Swedes to us?"

"Because the meanest creature has the wit to distinguish an enemy from a friend."

"That cannot be," said another soldier, "for in the Swedish camp are Poles too; but it means that there must be hunger there, and a lack of oats for the horses."

"It means still better," said a third, "that what they say of the powder is downright falsehood."

"How is that?" asked all, in one voice.

"Old people say," replied the soldier, "that if a house is to fall, the sparrows and swallows having nests in spring under the roof, go away two or three days in advance; every creature has sense to feel danger beforehand. Now if powder were under the cloister, these little birds would not fly to us."

"Is that true?"

"As true as Amen to 'Our Father!'"

"Praise to the Most Holy Lady! it will be bad for the Swedes."

At this moment the sound of a trumpet was heard at the northwestern gate; all ran to see who was coming.

It was a Swedish trumpeter with a letter from the camp. The monks assembled at once in the council hall. The letter was from Count Veyhard, and announced that if the fortress were not

surrendered before the following day it would be hurled into the air. But those who before had fallen under the weight of fear had no faith now in this threat.

"Those are vain threats!" said the priests and the nobles together.

"Let us write to them not to spare us; let them blow us up!"

And in fact they answered in that sense.

Meanwhile the soldiers who had gathered around the trumpeter answered his warnings with ridicule.

"Good!" said they to him. "Why do you spare us? We will go the sooner to heaven."

But the man who delivered the answering letter to the messenger said, —

"Do not lose words and time for nothing. Want is gnawing you, but we lack nothing, praise be to God! Even the birds fly away from you."

And in this way Count Veyhard's last trick came to nothing. And when another day had passed it was shown with perfect proof how vain were the fears of the besieged, and peace returned to the cloister.

The following day a worthy man from Chenstohova, Yatsek Bjuhanski, left a letter again giving warning of a storm; also news of the return of Yan Kazimir from Silesia, and the uprising of the whole Commonwealth against the Swedes. But according to reports circulating outside the walls, this was to be the last storm.

Bjuhanski brought the letter with a bag of fish to the priests for Christmas Eve, and approached the walls disguised as a Swedish soldier. Poor man! – the Swedes saw him and seized him. Miller gave command to stretch him on the rack; but the old man had heavenly visions in the time of his torture, and smiled as sweetly as a child, and instead of pain unspeakable joy was depicted on his face. The general was present at the torture, but he gained no confession from the martyr; he merely acquired the despairing conviction that nothing could bend those people, nothing could break them.

Now came the old beggarwoman Kostuha, with a letter from Kordetski begging most humbly that the storm be delayed during service on the day of Christ's birth. The guards and the officers received the beggarwoman with insults and jeers at such an envoy, but she answered them straight in the face, —

"No other would come, for to envoys you are as murderers, and I took the office for bread, – a crust. I shall not be long in this world; I have no fear of you: if you do not believe, you have me in your hands."

But no harm was done her. What is more, Miller, eager to try conciliation again, agreed to the prior's request, even accepted a ransom for Bjuhanski, not yet tortured quite out of his life; he sent also that part of the silver found with the Swedish soldiers. He did this last out of malice to Count Veyhard, who after the failure of the mine had fallen into disfavor again.

At last Christmas Eve came. With the first star, lights great and small began to shine all around in the fortress. The night was still, frosty, but clear. The Swedish soldiers, stiffened with cold in the intrenchments, gazed from below on the dark walls of the unapproachable fortress, and to their minds came the warm Scandinavian cottages stuffed with moss, their wives and children, the fir-tree gleaming with lights; and more than one iron breast swelled with a sigh, with regret, with homesickness, with despair. But in the fortress, at tables covered with hay, the besieged were breaking wafers. A quiet joy was shining in all faces, for each one had the foreboding, almost the certainty, that the hours of suffering would be soon at an end.

"Another storm to-morrow, but that will be the last," repeated the priests and the soldiers. "Let him to whom God will send death give thanks that the Lord lets him be present at Mass, and thus opens more surely heaven's gates, for whoso dies for the faith on the day of Christ's birth must be received into glory."

They wished one another success, long years, or a heavenly crown; and so relief dropped into every heart, as if suffering were over already.

But there stood one empty chair near the prior; before it a plate on which was a package of white wafers bound with a blue ribbon. When all had sat down, no one occupied that place. Zamoyski said, —

"I see, revered father, that according to ancient custom there are places for men outside the cloister."

"Not for men outside," said Father Agustine, "but as a remembrance of that young man whom we loved as a son, and whose soul is looking with pleasure upon us because we keep him in eternal memory."

"As God lives," replied Zamoyski, "he is happier now than we. We owe him due thanks."

Kordetski had tears in his eyes, and Charnyetski said, —

"They write of smaller men in the chronicles. If God gives me life, and any one asks me hereafter, who was there among us the equal of ancient heroes, I shall say Babinich."

"Babinich was not his name," said Kordetski.

"How not Babinich?"

"I long knew his real name under the seal of confession; but when going out against that cannon, he said to me: 'If I perish, let men know who I am, so that honorable repute may rest with my name, and destroy my former misdeeds.' He went, he perished; now I can tell you that he was Kmita!"

"That renowned Lithuanian Kmita?" cried Charnyetski, seizing his forelock.

"The same. How the grace of God changes hearts!"

"For God's sake. Now I understand why he undertook that work; now I understand where he got that daring, that boldness, in which he surpassed all men. Kmita, Kmita, that terrible Kmita whom Lithuania celebrates."

"Henceforth not only Lithuania, but the whole Commonwealth will glorify him in a different manner."

"He was the first to warn us against Count Veyhard."

"Through his advice we closed the gates in good season, and made preparations."

"He killed the first Swede with a shot from a bow."

"And how many of their cannon did he spoil! Who brought down De Fossis?"

"And that siege gun! If we are not terrified at the storm of to-morrow, who is the cause?"

"Let each remember him with honor, and celebrate his name wherever possible, so that justice be done," said Kordetski; "and now may God give him eternal rest."

"And may everlasting light shine on him," answered one chorus of voices.

But Pan Charnyetski was unable for a long time to calm himself, and his thoughts were continually turning to Kmita.

"I tell you, gentlemen, that there was something of such kind in that man that though he served as a simple soldier, the command of itself crawled at once to his hand, so that it was a wonder to me how people obeyed such a young man unwittingly. In fact, he was commander on the bastion, and I obeyed him myself. Oh, had I known him then to be Kmita!"

"Still it is a wonder to me," said Zamoyski, "that the Swedes have not boasted of his death."

Kordetski sighed. "The powder must have killed him on the spot."

"I would let a hand be cut from me could he be alive again," cried Charnyetski. "But that such a Kmita let himself be blown up by powder!"

"He gave his life for ours," said Kordetski.

"It is true," added Zamoyski, "that if that cannon were lying in the intrenchment, I should not think so pleasantly of to-morrow."

"To-morrow God will give us a new victory," said the prior, "for the ark of Noah cannot be lost in the deluge."

Thus they conversed with one another on Christmas Eve, and then separated; the monks going to the church, the soldiers, some to quiet rest, and others to keep watch on the walls and at the gates.

But great care was superfluous, for in the Swedish camp there reigned unbroken calm. They had given themselves to rest and meditation, for to them too was approaching a most serious day.

The night was solemn. Legions of stars twinkled in the sky, changing into blue and rosy colors. The light of the moon changed to green the shrouds of snow stretching between the fortress and the hostile camp. The wind did not howl, and it was calm, as from the beginning of the siege it had not been near the cloister.

At midnight the Swedish soldiers heard the flow of the mild and grand tones of the organ; then the voices of men were joined with them; then the sounds of bells, large and small. Joy, consolation, and great calm were in those sounds; and the greater was the doubt, the greater the feeling of helplessness which weighed down the hearts of the Swedes.

The Polish soldiers from the commands of Zbrojek and Kalinski, without seeking permission, went up to the very walls. They were not permitted to enter through fear of some snare; but they were permitted to stand near the walls. They also collected together. Some knelt on the snow, others shook their heads pitifully, sighing over their own lot, or beat their breasts, promising repentance; and all heard with delight and with tears in their eyes the music and the hymns sung according to ancient usage.

At the same time the sentries on the walls who could not be in the church, wishing to make up for their loss, began also to sing, and soon was heard throughout the whole circuit of the walls the Christmas hymn: —

"He is lying in the manger;
Who will run
To greet the little stranger?"

In the afternoon of the following day the thunder of guns drowned again every other sound. All the intrenchments began to smoke simultaneously, the earth trembled in its foundations; as of old there flew on the roof of the church heavy balls, bombs, grenades, and torches fixed in cylinders, pouring a rain of melted lead, and naked torches, knots and ropes. Never had the thunder been so unceasing, never till then had such a river of fire and iron fallen on the cloister; but among the Swedish guns was not that great gun, which alone could crush the wall and make a breach necessary for assault.

But the besieged were so accustomed to fire that each man knew what he had to do, and the defence went in its ordinary course without command. Fire was answered with fire, missile with missile, but better aimed, for with more calmness.

Toward evening Miller went out to see by the last rays of the setting sun the results; and his glance fell on the tower outlined calmly on the background of the sky.

"That cloister will stand for the ages of ages!" cried he, beside himself.

"Amen!" answered Zbrojek, quietly.

In the evening a council was assembled again at headquarters, still more gloomy than usual. Miller opened it himself.

"The storm of to-day," said he, "has brought no result. Our powder is nearly consumed; half of our men are lost, the rest discouraged: they look for disasters, not victory. We have no supplies; we cannot expect reinforcements."

"But the cloister stands unmoved as on the first day of the siege," added Sadovski.

"What remains for us?"

"Disgrace."

"I have received orders," said the general, "to finish quickly or retreat to Prussia."

"What remains to us?" repeated the Prince of Hesse.

All eyes were turned to Count Veyhard, who said: "To save our honor!"

A short broken laugh, more like the gnashing of teeth, came from Miller, who was called Poliorcetes. "The Count wishes to teach us how to raise the dead," said he.

Count Veyhard acted as though he had not heard this.

"Only the slain have saved their honor," said Sadovski.

Miller began to lose his cool blood. "And that cloister stands there yet, that Yasna Gora, that hen-house! I have not taken it! And we withdraw. Is this a dream, or am I speaking in my senses?"

"That cloister stands there yet, that Yasna Gora!" repeated word for word the Prince of Hesse, "and we shall withdraw, – defeated!"

A moment of silence followed; it seemed as though the leader and his subordinates found a certain wild pleasure in bringing to mind their shame and defeat.

Now Count Veyhard said slowly and emphatically: "It has happened more than once in every war that a besieged fortress has ransomed itself from the besiegers, who then went away as victors; for whoso pays a ransom, by this same recognizes himself as defeated."

The officers, who at first listened to the words of the speaker with scorn and contempt, now began to listen more attentively.

"Let that cloister pay us any kind of ransom," continued the count; "then no one will say that we could not take it, but that we did not wish to take it."

"Will they agree?" asked the Prince of Hesse.

"I will lay down my head," answered Count Veyhard, "and more than that, my honor as a soldier."

"Can that be!" asked Sadovski. "We have enough of this siege, but have they enough? What does your worthiness think of this?"

Miller turned to Veyhard "Many grievous moments, the most grievous of my life, have I passed because of your counsels, Sir Count; but for this last advice I thank you, and will be grateful."

All breasts breathed more freely. There could be no real question but that of retreating with honor.

On the morrow, the day of Saint Stephen, the officers assembled to the last man to hear Kordetski's answer to Miller's letter, which proposed a ransom, and was sent in the morning.

They had to wait long. Miller feigned joyousness, but constraint was evident on his face. No one of the officers could keep his place. All hearts beat unquietly. The Prince of Hesse and Sadovski stood under the window conversing in a low voice.

"What do you think?" asked the first; "will they agree?"

"Everything indicates that they will agree. Who would not wish to be rid of such terrible danger come what may, at the price of a few tens of thousands of thalers, especially since monks have not worldly ambition and military honor, or at least should not have? I only fear that the general has asked too much."

"How much has he asked?"

"Forty thousand from the monks, and twenty thousand from the nobles, but in the worst event they will try to reduce the sum."

"Let us yield, in God's name, let us yield. If they have not the money, I would prefer to lend them my own, if they will let us go away with even the semblance of honor. But I tell your princely highness that though I recognize the count's advice this time as good, and I believe that they will ransom themselves, such a fever is gnawing me that I would prefer ten storms to this waiting."

"Uf! you are right But still this Count Veyhard may go high."

"Even as high as the gibbet," said the other.

But the speakers did not foresee that a worse fate than even the gibbet was awaiting Count Veyhard.

That moment the thunder of cannon interrupted further conversation.

"What is that? firing from the fortress!" cried Miller. And springing up like a man possessed, he ran out of the room.

All ran after him and listened. The sound of regular salvos came indeed from the fortress.

"Are they fighting inside, or what?" cried Miller; "I don't understand."

"I will explain to your worthiness," said Zbrojek, "this is Saint Stephen's Day, and the name's day of the Zamoyskis, father and son; the firing is in their honor."

With that shouts of applause were heard from the fortress, and after them new salvos.

"They have powder enough," said Miller, gloomily. "That is for us a new indication."

But fate did not spare him another very painful lesson.

The Swedish soldiers were so discouraged and fallen in spirit that at the sound of firing from the fortress the detachments guarding the nearest intrenchments deserted them in panic.

Miller saw one whole regiment, the musketeers of Smaland, taking refuge in disorder at his own quarters; he heard too how the officers repeated among themselves at this sight, —

"It is time, it is time, it is time to retreat!"

But by degrees everything grew calm; one crushing impression remained. The leader, and after him the subordinates, entered the room and waited, waited impatiently; even the face of Count Veyhard, till then motionless, betrayed disquiet.

At last the clatter of spurs was heard in the antechamber, and the trumpeter entered, all red from cold, his mustaches covered with his frozen breath.

"An answer from the cloister!" said he, giving a large packet wound up in a colored handkerchief bound with a string.

Miller's hands trembled somewhat, and he chose to cut the string with a dagger rather than to open it slowly. A number of pairs of eyes were fixed on the packet; the officers were breathless. The general unwound one roll of the cloth, a second, and a third, unwound with increasing haste till at last a package of wafers fell out on the table. Then he grew pale, and though no one asked what was in the package, he said, "Wafers!"

"Nothing more?" asked some one in the crowd.

"Nothing more!" answered the general, like an echo.

A moment of silence followed, broken only by panting; at times too was heard the gritting of teeth, at times the rattling of rapiers.

"Count Veyhard!" said Miller, at last, with a terrible and ill-omened voice.

"He is no longer here!" answered one of the officers.

Again silence followed.

That night movement reigned in the whole camp. Scarcely was the light of day quenched when voices of command were heard, the hurrying of considerable divisions of cavalry, the sound of measured steps of infantry, the neighing of horses, the squeaking of wagons, the dull thump of cannon, with the biting of iron, the rattle of chains, noise, bustle, and turmoil.

"Will there be a new storm in the morning?" asked the guards at the gates.

But they were unable to see, for since twilight the sky was covered with clouds, and abundant snow had begun to fall. Its frequent flakes excluded the light. About five o'clock in the morning all sounds had ceased, but the snow was falling still more densely. On the walls and battlements it had created new walls and battlements. It covered the whole cloister and church, as if wishing to hide them from the glance of the enemy, to shelter and cover them from iron missiles.

At last the air began to grow gray, and the bell commenced tolling for morning service, when the soldiers standing guard at the southern gate heard the snorting of a horse.

Before the gate stood a peasant, all covered with snow; behind him was a low, small wooden sleigh, drawn by a thin, shaggy horse. The peasant fell to striking his body with his arms, to jumping from one foot to the other, and to crying, —

"People, but open here!"

"Who is alive?" they asked from the walls.

"Your own, from Dzbov. I have brought game for the benefactors."

"And how did the Swedes let you come?"

"What Swedes?"

"Those who are besieging the church."

"Oho, there are no Swedes now!"

"Praise God, every soul! Have they gone?"

"The tracks behind them are covered."

With that, crowds of villagers and peasants blackened the road, some riding, others on foot, there were women too, and all began to cry from afar, —

"There are no Swedes! there are none! They have gone to Vyelunie. Open the gates! There is not a man in the camp!"

"The Swedes have gone, the Swedes have gone!" cried men on the walls; and the news ran around like lightning.

Soldiers rushed to the bells, and rang them all as if for an alarm. Every living soul rushed out of the cells, the dwellings, and the church.

The news thundered all the time. The court was swarming with monks, nobles, soldiers, women, and children. Joyful shouts were heard around. Some ran out on the walls to examine the empty camp; others burst into laughter or into sobs. Some would not believe yet, but new crowds came continually, peasants and villagers.

They came from Chenstohova, from the surrounding villages, and from the forests near by, noisily, joyously, and with singing. New tidings crossed one another each moment. All had seen the retreating Swedes, and told in what direction they were going.

A few hours later the slope and the plain below the mountain were filled with people. The gates of the cloister were open wide, as they had been before the siege; and all the bells were ringing, ringing, ringing, – and those voices of triumph flew to the distance, and then the whole Commonwealth heard them.

The snow was covering and covering the tracks of the Swedes.

About noon of that day the church was so filled with people that head was as near head as on a paved street in a city one stone is near another. Father Kordetski himself celebrated a thanksgiving Mass, and to the throng of people it seemed that a white angel was celebrating it. And it seemed to them also that he was singing out his soul in that Mass, or that it was borne heavenward in the smoke of the incense, and was expanding in praise to the Lord.

The thunder of cannon shook not the walls, nor the glass in the windows, nor covered the people with dust, nor interrupted prayer, nor that thanksgiving hymn which amid universal ecstasy and weeping, the holy prior was intoning —

"Te Deum laudamus."

CHAPTER VI

The horses bore Kmita and the Kyemliches swiftly to ward the Silesian boundary. They advanced with caution to avoid meeting Swedish scouts, for though the cunning Kyemliches had "passes," given by Kuklinovski and signed by Miller, still soldiers, though furnished with such documents, were usually subjected to examination, and examination might have an evil issue for Pan Andrei and his comrades. They rode, therefore, swiftly, so as to pass the boundary in all haste and push into the depth of the Emperor's territory. The boundaries themselves were not free from Swedish ravagers, and frequently whole parties of horsemen rode into Silesia to seize those who were going to Yan Kazimir. But the Kyemliches, during their stay at Chenstohova, occupied continually with hunting individual Swedes, had learned through and through the whole region, all the boundary roads, passages, and paths where the chase was most abundant, and were as if in their own land.

Along the road old Kyemlich told Pan Andrei what was to be heard in the Commonwealth; and Pan Andrei, having been confined so long in the fortress, forgetting his own pain, listened to the news eagerly, for it was very unfavorable to the Swedes, and heralded a near end to their domination in Poland.

"The army is sick of Swedish fortune and Swedish company," said old Kyemlich; "and as some time ago the soldiers threatened the hetmans with their lives if they would not join the Swedes, so now the same men entreat Pototski and send deputations asking him to save the Commonwealth from oppression, swearing to stand by him to the death. Some colonels also have begun to attack the Swedes on their own responsibility."

"Who began first?"

"Jegotski, the starosta of Babimost, and Pan Kulesha. These began in Great Poland, and annoy the Swedes notably. There are many small divisions in the whole country, but it is difficult to learn the names of the leaders, for they conceal them to save their own families and property from Swedish vengeance. Of the army that regiment rose first which is commanded by Pan Voynillovich."

"Gabryel? He is my relative, though I do not know him."

"A genuine soldier. He is the man who rubbed out Pratski's party, which was serving the Swedes, and shot Pratski himself; but now he has gone to the rough mountains beyond Cracow; there he cut up a Swedish division, and secured the mountaineers from oppression."

"Are the mountaineers fighting with the Swedes already?"

"They were the first to rise; but as they are stupid peasants, they wanted to rescue Cracow straightway with axes. General Douglas scattered them, for they knew nothing of the level country; but of the parties sent to pursue them in the mountains, not a man has returned. Pan Voynillovich has helped those peasants, and now has gone himself to the marshal at Lyubovlya, and joined his forces."

"Is Pan Lyubomirski, the marshal, opposed to the Swedes?"

"Reports disagreed. They said that he favored this side and that; but when men began to mount their horses throughout the whole country he went against the Swedes. He is a powerful man, and can do them a great deal of harm. He alone might war with the King of Sweden. People say too that before spring there will not be one Swede in the Commonwealth."

"God grant that!"

"How can it be otherwise, your grace, since for the siege of Chenstohova all are enraged against them? The army is rising, the nobles are fighting already wherever they can, the peasants are collecting in crowds, and besides, the Tartars are marching; the Khan, who defeated Hmelnitski and the Cossacks, and promised to destroy them completely unless they would march against the Swedes, is coming in person."

"But the Swedes have still much support among magnates and nobles?"

"Only those take their part who must, and even they are merely waiting for a chance. The prince voevoda of Vilna is the only man who has joined them sincerely, and that act has turned out ill for him."

Kmita stopped his horse, and at the same time caught his side, for terrible pain had shot through him.

"In God's name!" cried he, suppressing a groan, "tell me what is taking place with Radzivill. Is he all the time in Kyedani?"

"O Ivory Gate!" said the old man; "I know as much as people say, and God knows what they do not say. Some report that the prince voevoda is living no longer; others that he is still defending himself against Pan Sapyeha, but is barely breathing. It is likely that they are struggling with each other in Podlyasye, and that Pan Sapyeha has the upper hand, for the Swedes could not save the prince voevoda. Now they say that, besieged in Tykotsin by Sapyeha, it is all over with him."

"Praise be to God! The honest are conquering traitors! Praise be to God! Praise be to God!"

Kyemlich looked from under his brows at Kmita, and knew not himself what to think, for it was known in the whole Commonwealth that if Radzivill had triumphed in the beginning over his own troops and the nobles who did not wish Swedish rule, it happened, mainly, thanks to Kmita and his men. But old Kyemlich did not let that thought be known to his colonel, and rode farther in silence.

"But what has happened to Prince Boguslav?" asked Pan Andrei, at last.

"I have heard nothing of him, your grace," answered Kyemlich. "Maybe he is in Tykotsin, and maybe with the elector. War is there at present, and the King of Sweden has gone to Prussia; but we meanwhile are waiting for our own king. God give him! for let him only show himself, all to a man will rise, and the troops will leave the Swedes straightway."

"Is that certain?"

"Your grace, I know only what those soldiers said who had to be with the Swedes at Chenstohova. They are very fine cavalry, some thousands strong, under Zbrojek, Kalinski, and other colonels. I may tell your grace that no man serves there of his own will, except Kuklinovski's ravagers; they wanted to get the treasures of Yasna Gora. But all honorable soldiers did nothing but lament, and one quicker than another complained: 'We have enough of this Jew's service! Only let our king put a foot over the boundary, we will turn our sabres at once on the Swedes; but while he is not here, how can we begin, whither can we go?' So they complain; and in the other regiments which are under the hetmans it is still worse. This I know certainly, for deputations came from them to Pan Zbrojek with arguments, and they had secret talks there at night; this Miller did not know, though he felt that there was evil about him."

"But is the prince voevoda of Vilna besieged in Tykotsin?" asked Pan Andrei.

Kyemlich looked again unquietly on Kmita, for he thought that surely a fever was seizing him if he asked to have the same information repeated; still he answered, —

"Besieged by Pan Sapyeha."

"Just are Thy judgments, God!" said Kmita. "He who might compare in power with kings! Has no one remained with him?"

"In Tykotsin there is a Swedish garrison. But with the prince only some of his trustiest attendants have remained."

Kmita's breast was filled with delight. He had feared the vengeance of the terrible magnate on Olenka, and though it seemed to him that he had prevented that vengeance with his threats, still he was tormented by the thought that it would be better and safer for Olenka and all the Billeviches to live in a lion's den than in Kyedani, under the hand of the prince, who never forgave any man. But now when he had fallen his opponents must triumph by the event; now when he was deprived of power and significance, when he was lord of only one poor castle, in which he defended his own life and freedom, he could not think of vengeance; his hand had ceased to weigh on his enemies.

"Praise be to God! praise be to God!" repeated Kmita.

He had his head so filled with the change in Radzivill's fortunes, so occupied with that which had happened during his stay in Chenstohova, and with the question where was she whom his heart loved, and what had become of her, that a third time he asked Kyemlich: "You say that the prince is broken?"

"Broken completely," answered the old man. "But are you not sick?"

"My side is burned. That is nothing!" answered Kmita.

Again they rode on in silence. The tired horses lessened their speed by degrees, till at last they were going at a walk. That monotonous movement lulled to sleep Pan Andrei, who was mortally wearied, and he slept long, nodding in the saddle. He was roused only by the white light of day. He looked around with amazement, for in the first moment it seemed to him that everything through which he had passed in that night was merely a dream; at last he inquired, —

"Is that you, Kyemlich? Are we riding from Chenstohova?"

"Of course, your grace."

"But where are we?"

"Oho, in Silesia already. Here the Swedes will not get us."

"That is well!" said Kmita, coming to his senses completely. "But where is our gracious king living?"

"At Glogov."

"We will go there then to bow down to our lord, and offer him service. But listen, old man, to me."

"I am listening, your grace."

Kmita fell to thinking, however, and did not speak at once. He was evidently combining something in his head; he hesitated, considered, and at last said: "It cannot be otherwise!"

"I am listening, your grace," repeated Kyemlich.

"Neither to the king nor to any man at the court must you mutter who I am. I call myself Babinich, I am faring from Chenstohova. Of the great gun and of Kuklinovski you may talk, so that my intentions be not misconstrued, and I be considered a traitor, for in my blindness I aided and served Prince Radzivill; of this they may have heard at the court."

"I may speak of what your grace did at Chenstohova – "

"But who will show that 'tis true till the siege is over?"

"I will act at your command."

"The day will come for truth to appear at the top," added Kmita, as it were to himself, "but first our gracious lord must convince himself. Later he also will give me his witness."

Here the conversation was broken. By this time it had become perfect day. Old Kyemlich began to sing matins, and Kosma and Damian accompanied him with bass voices. The road was difficult, for the frost was cutting, and besides, the travellers were stopped continually and asked for news, especially if Chenstohova was resisting yet. Kmita answered that it was resisting, and would take care of itself; but there was no end to questions. The roads were swarming with travellers, the inns everywhere filled. Some people were seeking refuge in the depth of the country from the neighboring parts of the Commonwealth before Swedish oppression; others were pushing toward the boundary for news. From time to time appeared nobles, who, having had enough of the Swedes, were going, like Kmita, to offer their services to the fugitive king. There were seen, also, attendants of private persons; at times smaller or larger parties of soldiers, from armies, which either voluntarily or in virtue of treaties with the Swedes had passed the boundaries, – such, for instance, as the troops of Stefan Charnyetski. News from the Commonwealth had roused the hope of those "exiles," and many of them were making ready to come home in arms. In all Silesia, and particularly in the provinces of Ratibor and Opol, it was boiling as in a pot; messengers were flying with letters to the king and from the king; they were flying with letters to Charnyetski, to the primate, to Pan Korytsinski, the

chancellor; to Pan Varshytski, the castellan of Cracow, the first senator of the Commonwealth, who had not deserted the cause of Yan Kazimir for an instant.

These lords, in agreement with the great queen, who was unshaken in misfortune, were coming to an understanding with one another, with the country, and with the foremost men in it, of whom it was known that they would gladly resume allegiance to their legal lord. Messengers were sent independently by the marshal of the kingdom, the hetmans, the army, and the nobles, who were making ready to take up arms.

It was the eve of a general war, which in some places had broken out already. The Swedes put down these local outbursts either with arms or with the executioner's axe, but the fire quenched in one place flamed up at once in another. An awful storm was hanging over the heads of the Scandinavian invaders; the ground itself, though covered with snow, began to burn their feet; threats and vengeance surrounded them on all sides; their own shadows alarmed them.

They went around like men astray. The recent songs of triumph died on their lips, and they asked one another in the greatest amazement, "Are these the same people who yesterday left their own king, and gave up without fighting a battle?" Yes, lords, nobles, army, – an example unheard of in history, – passed over to the conqueror; towns and castles threw open their gates; the country was occupied. Never had a conquest cost fewer exertions, less blood. The Swedes themselves, wondering at the ease with which they had occupied a mighty Commonwealth, could not conceal their contempt for the conquered, who at the first gleam of a Swedish sword rejected their own king, their country, provided that they could enjoy life and goods in peace, or acquire new goods in the confusion. What in his time Count Veyhard had told the emperor's envoy, Lisola, the king himself, and all the Swedish generals repeated: "There is no manhood in this nation, there is no stability, there is no order, no faith, no patriotism! It must perish."

They forgot that that nation had still one feeling, specially that one whose earthly expression was Yasna Gora. And in that feeling was rebirth.

Therefore the thunder of cannon which was heard under the sacred retreat found an echo at once in the hearts of all magnates, nobles, town-dwellers, and peasants. An outcry of awe was heard from the Carpathians to the Baltic, and the giant was roused from his torpor.

"That is another people!" said the amazed Swedish generals.

And all, from Arwid Wittemberg to the commandants of single castles, sent to Karl Gustav in Prussia tidings filled with terror.

The earth was pushing from under their feet; instead of recent friends, they met enemies on all sides; instead of submission, hostility; instead of fear, a wild daring ready for everything; instead of mildness, ferocity; instead of long-suffering, vengeance.

Meanwhile from hand to hand were flying in thousands throughout the whole Commonwealth the manifestoes of Yan Kazimir, which, issued at first in Silesia, had found no immediate echo. Now, on the contrary, they were seen in castles still free of the enemy. Wherever the Swedish hand was not weighing, the nobles assembled in crowds large and small, and beat their breasts, listening to the lofty words of the fugitive king, who, recounting faults and sins, urged them not to lose hope, but hasten to the rescue of the fallen Commonwealth.

"Though the enemy have already advanced far, it is not too late," wrote Yan Kazimir, "for us to recover the lost provinces and towns, give due praise to God, satisfy the profaned churches with the blood of the enemy, and restore the former liberties, laws, and ancient enactments of Poland to their usual circuit; if only there is a return of that ancient Polish virtue, and that devotion and love of God peculiar to your ancestors, virtues for which our great-grandfather, Sigismund I., honored them before many nations. A return to virtue has already diminished these recent transgressions. Let those of you to whom God and His holy faith are dearer than aught else rise against the Swedish enemy. Do not wait for leaders or voevodas, or for such an order of things as is described in public law. At present the enemy have brought all these things to confusion among you; but do you join, the first

man to a second, a third to these two, a fourth to the three, a fifth to the four, and thus farther, so that each one with his own subjects may come, and when it is possible try resistance. Afterward you will select a leader. Join yourselves one party to another, and you will form an army. When the army is formed and you have chosen a known chief over it, wait for our person, not neglecting an occasion wherever it comes to defeat the enemy. If we hear of the occasion, and your readiness and inclination, we will come at once and lay down our life wherever the defence of the country requires it."

This manifesto was read even in the camp of Karl Gustav, in castles having Swedish garrisons, in all places wherever Polish squadrons were found. The nobles shed tears at every word of the king their kind lord, and took an oath on crosses, on pictures of the Most Holy Lady, and on scapulars to please him. To give a proof of their readiness, while ardor was in their hearts and their tears were not dry, they mounted here and there without hesitation, and moved on while hot against the Swedes.

In this way the smaller Swedish parties began to melt and to vanish. This was done in Lithuania, Mazovia, Great and Little Poland. More than once nobles who had assembled at a neighbor's house for a christening, a name's day, a wedding or a dance, without any thought of war, finished the entertainment with this, that after they had taken a good share of drink they struck like a thunderbolt and cut to pieces the nearest Swedish command. Then, amid songs and shouts, they assembled for the road. Those who wished to "hunt" rode farther, changed into a crowd greedy for blood, from a crowd into a "party" which began steady war. Subject peasants and house-servants joined the amusement in throngs; others gave information about single Swedes or small squads disposed incautiously through the villages. And the number of "balls" and "masquerades" increased with each day. Joyousness and daring personal to the people were bound up with these bloody amusements.

They disguised themselves gladly as Tartars, the very name of which filled the Swedes with alarm; for among them were current marvellous accounts and fables touching the ferocity, the terrible and savage bravery of those sons of the Crimean steppes, with whom the Scandinavians had never met hitherto. Besides, it was known universally that the Khan with about a hundred thousand of the horde was marching to succor Yan Kazimir; and the nobles made a great uproar while attacking Swedish commands, from which wonderful disorder resulted.

The Swedish colonels and commandants in many places were really convinced that Tartars were present, and retreated in haste to larger fortresses and camps, spreading everywhere erroneous reports and alarm. Meanwhile the neighborhoods which were freed in this manner from the enemy were able to defend themselves, and change an unruly rabble into the most disciplined of armies.

But more terrible for the Swedes than "masquerades" of nobles, or than the Tartars themselves, were the movements of the peasants. Excitement among the people began with the first day of the siege of Chenstohova; and ploughmen hitherto silent and patient began here and there to offer resistance, here and there to take scythes and flails and help nobles. The most brilliant Swedish generals looked with the greatest alarm at these crowds, which might at any moment turn into a genuine deluge and overwhelm beyond rescue the invaders.

Terror seemed to them the most appropriate means by which to crush in the beginning this dreadful danger. Karl Gustav cajoled still, and retained with words of kindness those Polish squadrons which had followed him to Prussia. He had not spared flattery on Konyetspolski, the celebrated commander from Zbaraj. This commander stood at his side with six thousand cavalry, which at the first hostile meeting with the elector spread such terror and destruction among the Prussians that the elector abandoning the fight agreed as quickly as possible to the conditions.

The King of Sweden sent letters also to the hetmans, the magnates, and the nobles, full of graciousness, promises, and encouragement to preserve loyalty to him. But at the same time he issued commands to his generals and commandants to destroy with fire and sword every opposition within the country, and especially to cut to pieces peasant parties. Then began a period of iron military rule. The Swedes cast aside the semblance of friendship. The sword, fire, pillage, oppression, took the place of the former pretended good will. From the castles they sent strong detachments of cavalry

and infantry in pursuit of the "masqueraders." Whole villages, with churches and priests' dwellings, were levelled to the earth. Nobles taken prisoners, were delivered to the executioner; the right hands were cut from captured peasants, then they were sent home.

These Swedish detachments were specially savage in Great Poland, which, as it was the first to surrender, was also the first to rise against foreign dominion. Commandant Stein gave orders on a certain occasion to cut the hands from more than three hundred peasants. In towns they built permanent gibbets, which every day were adorned with new victims. Pontus de la Gardie did the same in Lithuania and Jmud, where the noble villages took up arms first, and after them the peasants. Because in general it was difficult for the Swedes in the disturbance to distinguish their friends from their enemies, no one was spared.

But the fire put down in blood, instead of dying, grew without ceasing, and a war began which was not on either side a question merely of victory, castles, towns, or provinces, but of life or death. Cruelty increased hatred, and they began not to struggle, but to exterminate each the other without mercy.

CHAPTER VII

This war of extermination was just beginning when Kmita, with the three Kyemliches, reached Glogov, after a journey which was difficult in view of Pan Andrei's shaken health. They arrived in the night. The town was crowded with troops, lords, nobles, servants of the king and of magnates. The inns were so occupied that old Kyemlich with the greatest trouble found lodgings for his colonel outside the town at the house of a rope-maker.

Pan Andrei spent the whole first day in bed in pain and fever from the burn. At times he thought that he should be seriously and grievously ill; but his iron constitution gained the victory. The following night brought him ease, and at daybreak he dressed and went to the parish church to thank God for his miraculous escape.

The gray and snowy winter morning had barely dissipated the darkness. The town was still sleeping, but through the church door lights could be seen on the altar, and the sounds of the organ came forth.

Kmita went to the centre of the church. The priest was celebrating Mass before the altar; there were few worshippers so far. At benches some persons were kneeling with their faces hidden in their hands; but besides those Pan Andrei saw, when his eyes had grown used to the darkness, a certain figure lying in the form of a cross in front of the pews on a carpet. Behind him were kneeling two youths with ruddy and almost angelic childish faces.

This man was motionless, and only from his breast moving continually with deep sighs could it be known that he was not sleeping, but praying earnestly and with his whole soul. Kmita himself became absorbed in a thanksgiving prayer; but when he had finished his eyes turned involuntarily to the man lying as a cross, and could not leave him; something fastened them to him. Sighs deep as groans, audible in the silence of the church, shook that figure continually. The yellow rays of the candles burning before the altar, together with the light of day, whitening in the windows, brought it out of the gloom, and made it more and more visible.

Pan Andrei conjectured at once from the dress that he must be some noted person, besides all present, not excepting the priest celebrating Mass, looked on him with honor and respect. The unknown was dressed entirely in black velvet bound with sable, but on his shoulders he had, turned down, a white lace collar, from under which peeped the golden links of a chain; a black hat with feathers of like color lay at his side; one of the pages kneeling beyond the carpet held gloves and a sword enamelled in blue. Kmita could not see the face of the unknown, for it was hidden by the folds of the carpet, and besides, the locks of an unusually thick wig scattered around his head concealed it completely.

Pan Andrei pressed up to the front pew to see the face of the unknown when he rose. Mass was then drawing to an end. The priest was singing *Pater noster*. The people who wished to be at the following Mass were coming in through the main entrance. The church was filled gradually with figures with heads shaven at the sides, dressed in cloaks with long sleeves, in military burkas, in fur cloaks, and in brocade coats. It became somewhat crowded. Kmita then pushed with his elbow a noble standing at his side, and whispered, —

"Pardon, your grace, that I trouble you during service, but my curiosity is most powerful. Who is that?" He indicated with his eyes the man lying in the form of a cross.

"Have you come from a distance, that you know not?" asked the noble.

"Certainly I come from a distance, and therefore I ask in hope that if I find some polite man he will not begrudge an answer."

"That is the king."

"As God lives!" cried Kmita.

But at that moment the king rose, for the priest had begun to read the Gospel.

Pan Andrei saw an emaciated face, yellow and transparent, like church wax. The eyes of the king were moist, and his lids red. You would have said that all the fate of the country was reflected in that noble face, so much was there in it of pain, suffering, care. Sleepless nights divided between prayer and grief, terrible deceptions, wandering, desertion, the humiliated majesty of that son, grandson, and great-grandson of powerful kings, the gall which his own subjects had given him to drink so bountifully, the ingratitude of that country for which he was ready to devote his blood and life, – all this could be read in that face as in a book, and still it expressed not only resignation, obtained through faith and prayer, not only the majesty of a king and an anointed of God, but such great, inexhaustible kindness that evidently it would be enough for the greatest renegade, the most guilty man, only to stretch out his hands to that father, and that father would receive him, forgive him, and forget his offences.

It seemed to Kmita at sight of him that some one had squeezed his heart with an iron hand. Compassion rose in the ardent soul of the young hero. Compunction, sorrow, and homage straitened the breath in his throat, a feeling of immeasurable guilt cut his knees under him so that he began to tremble through his whole body, and at once a new feeling rose in his breast. In one moment he had conceived such a love for that suffering king that to him there was nothing dearer on earth than that father and lord, for whom he was ready to sacrifice blood and life, bear torture and everything else in the world. He wished to throw himself at those feet, to embrace those knees, and implore forgiveness for his crimes. The noble, the insolent disturber, had died in him in one moment, and the royalist was born, devoted with his whole soul to his king.

"That is our lord, our unhappy king," repeated he to himself, as if he wished with his lips to give witness to what his eyes saw and what his heart felt.

After the Gospel, Yan Kazimir knelt again, stretched out his arms, raised his eyes to heaven, and was sunk in prayer. The priest went out at last, there was a movement in the church, the king remained kneeling.

Then that noble whom Kmita had addressed pushed Pan Andrei in the side.

"But who are you?" asked he.

Kmita did not understand the question at once, and did not answer it directly, so greatly were his heart and mind occupied by the person of the king.

"And who are you?" repeated that personage.

"A noble like yourself," answered Pan Andrei, waking as if from a dream.

"What is your name?"

"What is my name? Babinich; I am from Lithuania, from near Vityebsk."

"And I am Pan Lugovski, of the king's household. Have you just come from Lithuania, from Vityebsk?"

"No; I come from Chenstohova."

Pan Lugovski was dumb for a moment from wonder.

"But if that is true, then come and tell us the news. The king is almost dead from anxiety because he has had no certain tidings these three days. How is it? You are perhaps from the squadron of Zbrojek, Kalinski, or Kuklinovski, from near Chenstohova."

"Not from near Chenstohova, but directly from the cloister itself."

"Are you not jesting? What is going on there, what is to be heard? Does Yasna Gora defend itself yet?"

"It does, and will defend itself. The Swedes are about to retreat."

"For God's sake! The king will cover you with gold. From the very cloister do you say that you have come? How did the Swedes let you pass?"

"I did not ask their permission; but pardon me, I cannot give a more extended account in the church."

"Right, right!" said Pan Lugovski. "God is merciful! You have fallen from heaven to us! It is not proper in the church, – right! Wait a moment. The king will rise directly; he will go to breakfast before high Mass. To-day is Sunday. Come stand with me at the door, and when the king is going out I will present you. Come, come, there is no time to spare."

He pushed ahead, and Kmita followed. They had barely taken their places at the door when the two pages appeared, and after them came Yan Kazimir slowly.

"Gracious King!" cried Pan Lugovski, "there are tidings from Chenstohova."

The wax-like face of Yan Kazimir became animated in an instant.

"What tidings? Where is the man?" inquired he.

"This noble; he says that he has come from the very cloister."

"Is the cloister captured?" cried the king.

That moment Pan Andrei fell his whole length at the feet of the king. Yan Kazimir inclined and began to raise him by the arms.

"Oh, ceremony another time, another time!" cried he. "Rise, in God's name, rise! Speak quickly! Is the cloister taken?"

Kmita sprang up with tears in his eyes, and cried with animation, —

"It is not, and will not be taken, Gracious Lord. The Swedes are beaten. The great gun is blown up. There is fear among them, hunger, misery. They are thinking of retreat."

"Praise, praise to Thee, Queen of the Angels and of us!" said the king. Then he turned to the church door, removed his hat, and without entering knelt on the snow at the door. He supported his head on a stone pillar, and sank into silence. After a while sobbing began to shake him. Emotion seized all, and Pan Andrei wept loudly. The king, after he had prayed and shed tears, rose quieted, with a face much clearer. He inquired his name of Kmita, and when the latter had told his assumed one, said, —

"Let Pan Lugovski conduct you at once to our quarters. We shall not take our morning food without hearing of the defence."

A quarter of an hour later Kmita was standing in the king's chamber before a distinguished assembly. The king was only waiting for the queen, to sit down to breakfast. Marya Ludvika appeared soon. Yan Kazimir barely saw her when he exclaimed, —

"Chenstohova has held out! The Swedes will retreat! Here is Pan Babinich, who has just come, and he brings the news."

The black eyes of the queen rested inquiringly on the youthful face of the hero, and seeing its sincerity, they grew bright with joy; and he, when he had made a profound obeisance, looked also at her boldly, as truth and honesty know how to look.

"The power of God!" said the queen. "You have taken a terrible weight from our hearts, and God grant this is the beginning of a change of fortune. Do you come straight from near Chenstohova?"

"Not from near Chenstohova, he says, but from the cloister itself, – one of the defenders!" exclaimed the king. "A golden guest! God grant such to come daily; but let him begin. Tell, brother, tell how you defended yourselves, and how the hand of God guarded you."

"It is sure, Gracious King and Queen, that nothing saved us but the guardianship of God and the miracles of the Most Holy Lady, which I saw every day with my eyes."

Here Kmita was preparing for his narrative, when new dignitaries appeared. First came the nuncio of the Pope; then the primate, Leshchynski; after him Vydjga, a golden-mouthed preacher, who was the queen's chancellor, later bishop of Varmia, and finally primate. With him came the chancellor of the kingdom, Pan Korytsinski, and the Frenchman De Noyers, a relative of the queen, and other dignitaries who had not deserted the king in misfortune, but chose to share with him the bitter bread of exile rather than break plighted faith.

The king was eager to hear; therefore he ceased eating, every moment, and repeated, "Listen, gentlemen, listen; a guest from Chenstohova! Good news; hear it! From Yasna Gora itself!"

Then the dignitaries looked with curiosity on Kmita, who was standing as it were before a court; but he, bold by nature and accustomed to intercourse with great people, was not a whit alarmed at sight of so many celebrated persons; and when all had taken their places, he began to describe the whole siege.

Truth was evident in his words; for he spoke with clearness and strength, like a soldier who had seen everything, touched everything, passed through everything. He praised to the skies Pan Zamoyski and Pan Charnyetski; spoke of Kordetski, the prior, as of a holy prophet; exalted other fathers; missed no one save himself; but he ascribed the whole success of the defence, without deviation, to the Most Holy Lady, to Her favor and miracles.

The king and the dignitaries listened to him in amazement. The archbishop raised his tearful eyes to heaven. Father Vydjga interpreted everything hurriedly to the nuncio; other great personages caught their heads; some prayed, or beat their breasts.

At last, when Kmita came to the recent storms, – when he began to relate how Miller had brought heavy guns from Cracow, and among them one against which not only the walls of Chenstohova, but no walls in the world could stand, – such silence began as though some one were sowing poppy seeds, and all eyes rested on Pan Andrei's lips.

But he stopped suddenly, and began to breathe quickly; a clear flush came out on his face; he frowned, raised his head, and spoke boldly: "Now I must speak of myself, though I should prefer to be silent. And if I say aught which seems praise, God is my witness that I do so not for rewards, for I do not need them, since the greatest reward for me is to shed my blood for majesty."

"Speak boldly, I believe you," said the king. "But that great gun?"

"That great gun – I, stealing out in the night from the fortress, blew into fragments with powder."

"O loving God!" cried the king.

But after this cry was silence, such astonishment had seized each person. All looked as at a rainbow at the young hero, who stood with flashing eyes, with a flush on his face, and with head proudly erect. And so much was there in him at that moment of a certain terribleness and wild courage that the thought came to each one unwittingly, such a man might dare such a deed. After silence of a moment the primate said, —

"This man looks like that!"

"How did you do it?" asked the king.

Kmita explained how he did it.

"I cannot believe my ears," said Pan Korytsinski, the chancellor.

"Worthy gentlemen," answered the king, with dignity, "you do not know whom we have before us. There is yet hope that the Commonwealth has not perished while it gives such cavaliers and citizens."

"This man might say of himself, '*Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinæ* (If the broken firmament should fall the ruins would strike him unterrified)!'" said Father Vydjga, who loved to quote authors at every opportunity.

"These are almost impossible things," said the chancellor again. "Tell, Cavalier, how you brought away your life, and how you passed through the Swedes."

"The explosion stunned me," said Kmita, "and next day the Swedes found me in the ditch lying as if lifeless. They judged me at once, and Miller condemned me to death."

"Then did you escape?"

"A certain Kuklinovski begged me of Miller, so that he might put me to death, for he had a fierce animosity against me."

"He is a well-known disturber and murderer; we have heard of him," said the castellan of Kjyvinsk. "His regiment is with Miller at Chenstohova. That is true!"

"Previously Kuklinovski was an envoy from Miller to the cloister, and once tried to persuade me in secret to treason when I was conducting him to the gate. I struck him in the face and kicked him. For that insult he was enraged against me."

"Ah, this I see is a noble of fire and sulphur!" cried the king, amused. "Do not go into such a man's road. Did Miller then give you to Kuklinovski?"

"He did, Gracious Gentlemen. Kuklinovski shut me with himself and some men in an empty little barn. There he had me tied to a beam with ropes, then he began to torture me and to burn my sides with fire."

"By the living God!"

"While doing this he was called away to Miller; when he was gone three nobles came, certain Kyemliches, his soldiers, who had served with me previously. They killed the guards, and unbound me from the beam – "

"And you fled! Now I understand," said the king.

"No, your Royal Grace. We waited for the return of Kuklinovski. Then I gave command to tie him to that same beam, and I burned him better with fire."

When he had said this, Kmita, roused by remembrance, became red again, and his eyes gleamed like those of a wolf. But the king, who passed easily from grief to joy, from seriousness to sport, began to strike the table with his hand, and exclaim with laughter, —

"That was good for him! that was good for him! Such a traitor deserved nothing better!"

"I left him alive," continued Kmita, "but he must have perished from cold before morning."

"That's a deed; he does not give away his own. We need more of such!" cried the king, now completely delighted. "Did you come hither with those soldiers? What are their names?"

"They are Kyemlich, a father and two sons."

"My mother is from the house of Kyemlich," said Father Vydjga.

"It is evident that there are great and small Kyemliches," answered Kmita, smiling; "these are not only small persons, but robbers; they are fierce soldiers, however, and faithful to me."

Meanwhile the chancellor, who had been whispering for a time in the ear of the Archbishop of Gnyezno, said at last, —

"Many come here who for their own praise or for an expected reward are glad to raise dust. They bring false and disturbing news, and are frequently sent by the enemy."

This remark chilled all present. Kmita's face became purple.

"I do not know the office of your grace," said he, "which, I think, must be considerable, therefore I do not wish to offend you; but there is no office, as I think, which would empower any one to give the lie to a noble, without reason."

"Man! you are speaking to the grand chancellor of the kingdom," said Lugovski.

"Whoso gives me the lie, even if he is chancellor, I answer him, it is easier to give the lie than to give your life, it is easier to seal with wax than with blood!"

Pan Korytsinski was not angry; he only said: "I do not give you the lie, Cavalier; but if what you say is true, you must have a burned side."

"Come to another place, your great mightiness, to another room, and I will show it to you!" roared Kmita.

"It is not needful," said the king; "I believe you without that."

"It cannot be, your Royal Grace," exclaimed Pan Andrei; "I wish it myself, I beg it as a favor, so that here no one, even though I know not how worthy, should make me an exaggerator. My torment would be an ill reward; I wish belief."

"I believe you," answered the king.

"Truth itself was in his words," added Marya Ludvika. "I am not deceived in men."

"Gracious King and Queen, permit. Let some man go aside with me, for it would be grievous for me to live here in suspicion."

"I will go," said Pan Tyzenhauz, a young attendant of the king. So saying, he conducted Kmita to another room, and on the way said to him, "I do not go because I do not believe you, for I believe; but to speak with you. Have we met somewhere in Lithuania? I cannot remember your name, for it may be that I saw you when a youth, and I myself was a youth then?"

Kmita turned away his face somewhat to hide his sudden confusion.

"Perhaps at some provincial diet. My late father took me with him frequently to see public business."

"Perhaps. Your face is surely not strange to me, though at that time it had not those scars. Still see how *memoria fragilis est* (weak memory is); also it seems to me you had a different name."

"Years dull the memory," answered Pan Andrei.

They went to another room. After a while Tyzenhauz returned to the royal pair.

"He is roasted, Gracious King, as on a spit," said he; "his whole side is burned."

When Kmita in his turn came back, the king rose, pressed his head, and said, —

"We have never doubted that you speak the truth, and neither your pain nor your services will pass unrewarded."

"We are your debtors," added the queen, extending her hand to him.

Pan Andrei dropped on one knee and kissed with reverence the hand of the queen, who stroked him on the head like a mother.

"Be not angry with the chancellor," said the king. "In this place there are really not a few traitors, or, if not traitors, men who are unwise, that wind three after three, and it belongs to the chancellor's office to discover truth touching public affairs."

"What does my poor anger mean for such a great man?" answered Pan Andrei. "And I should not dare to murmur against a worthy senator, who gives an example of loyalty and love of country to all."

The chancellor smiled kindly and extended his hand. "Well, let there be peace! You spoke ill to me of wax; but know this, that the Korytsinskis have sealed often with blood, not with wax only."

The king was rejoiced. "This Babinich has pleased us," said he to the senators, "has touched our heart as few have. We will not let you go from our side, and God grant that we shall return together soon to our beloved country."

"Oh, Most Serene King," cried Kmita, with ecstasy; "though confined in the fortress of Yasna Gora, I know from the nobles, from the army, and even from those who, serving under Zbrojek and Kalinski, besieged Chenstohova, that all are waiting for the day and the hour of your return. Only show yourself. Gracious Lord, and that day all Lithuania, Poland, and Russia will stand by you as one man! The nobles will join; even insignificant peasants will go with their lord to resist. The army under the hetmans is barely breathing from eagerness to move against the Swedes. I know this, too, that at Chenstohova deputies came from the hetmans' troops to arouse Zbrojek, Kalinski, and Kuklinovski, against the Swedes. Appear on the boundary to-day, and in a week there will not be a Swede; only appear, only show yourself, for we are there like sheep without a shepherd."

Sparks came from Kmita's eyes while he was speaking, and such great ardor seized him that he knelt in the middle of the hall. His enthusiasm was communicated even to the queen herself, who, being of fearless courage, had long been persuading the king to return.

Therefore, turning to Yan Kazimir, she said with energy and determination: "I hear the voice of the whole people through the mouth of this noble."

"That is true, that is true, Gracious Lady, our Mother!" exclaimed Kmita.

But certain words in what Kmita had said struck the chancellor and the king.

"We have always been ready," said the king, "to sacrifice our health and life, and hitherto we have been waiting for nothing else but a change in our subjects."

"That change has taken place already," said Marya Ludvika.

"*Majestas infracta malis* (Majesty unbroken by misfortune)!" said Father Vydjga, looking at her with homage.

"It is important," said the archbishop, "if, really, deputations from the hetmans went to Chenstohova."

"I know this from my men, those Kyemliches," answered Pan Andrei. "In the squadrons of Zbrojek and Kalinski all spoke openly of this, paying no attention to Miller and the Swedes. These Kyemliches were not enclosed in the fortress; they had relations with the world, with soldiers and nobles, – I can bring them before your Royal Grace and your worthinesses; let them tell how it is seething in the whole country as in a pot. The hetmans joined the Swedes from constraint only; the troops wish to return to duty. The Swedes beat nobles and priests, plunder, violate ancient liberties; it is no wonder then that each man balls his fist and looks anxiously at his sabre."

"We, too, have had news from the troops," said the king; "there were here, also, secret envoys who told us of the general wish to return to former loyalty and honor."

"And that agrees with what this cavalier tells," said the chancellor. "But if deputations are passing among the regiments it is important, for it means that the fruit is already ripe, that our efforts were not vain, that our work is accomplished, that the time is at hand."

"But Konyetspolski," said the king, "and so many others who are still at the side of the invader, who look into his eyes and give assurances of their devotion?"

Then all grew silent, the king became gloomy on a sudden, and as when the sun goes behind a cloud a shadow covers at once the whole world, so did his face grow dark. After a time he said, —

"God sees in our heart that even to-day we are ready to move, and that not the power of Sweden detains us, but the unhappy fickleness of our people, who, like Proteus, take on a new form every moment. Can we believe that this change is sincere, this desire not imagined, this readiness not deceitful? Can we believe that people who so recently deserted us, and with such light hearts joined the invader against their own king, against their own country, against their own liberties? Pain straitens our heart, and we are ashamed of our own subjects! Where does history show such examples? What king has met so many treasons, so much ill-will? Who has been so deserted? Call to mind, your kindnesses, that we in the midst of our army, in the midst of those who were bound to shed their blood for us, – it is a danger and a terror to tell it, – we were not sure of our life. And if we left the country and had to seek an asylum, it is not from fear of the Swedish enemy, but of our own subjects, to save our own children from the terrible crime of king murder and parricide."

"Gracious Lord!" exclaimed Kmita; "our people have sinned grievously; they are guilty, and the hand of God is punishing them justly; but still, by the wounds of Christ, there has not been found among that people, and God grant that there will never be found, a man who would raise his hand on the sacred person of the anointed of God."

"You do not believe, because you are honest," said the king, "but we have letters and proofs. The Radzivills have paid us badly for the kindness with which we have covered them; but still Boguslav, though a traitor, was moved by conscience, and not only did he not wish to lend a hand to such a deed, but he was the first to warn us of it."

"What deed?" asked the astonished Kmita.

"He informed us," said the king, "that there was a man who offered for one hundred gold ducats to seize us and deliver us, living or dead, to the Swedes."

A shiver passed through the whole assembly at these words of the king, and Kmita was barely able to groan out the question, "Who was that man? – who was he?"

"A certain Kmita," answered the king.

A wave of blood suddenly struck Pan Andrei in the head, it grew dark in his eyes, he seized his forelock, and with a terribly wandering voice said: "That is a lie! Prince Boguslav lies like a dog! Gracious King, believe not that traitor; he did that of purpose to bring infamy on an enemy, and to frighten you, my king. He is a traitor! Kmita would not have done such a deed."

Here Pan Andrei turned suddenly where he was standing. His strength, exhausted by the siege, undermined by the explosion of powder in the great gun, and through the torture given by Kuklinovski, left him altogether, and he fell without consciousness at the feet of the king.

They bore him into the adjoining room, where the king's physician examined him. But in the assembly of dignitaries they knew not how to explain why the words of the king had produced such a terrible impression on the young man.

"Either he is so honest that horror alone has thrown him off his feet, or he is some relative of that Kmita," said the castellan of Cracow.

"We must ask him," replied the chancellor. "In Lithuania nobles are all related one to another, as in fact they are with us."

"Gracious Lord," said Tyzenhauz, "God preserve me from wishing to speak evil of this young man; but we should not trust him at present too much. That he served in Chenstohova is certain, – his side is burned; this the monks would not have done in any event, for they as servants of God must have every clemency, even for prisoners and traitors; but one thing is coming continually to my head and destroying trust in him, that is, I met him somewhere in Lithuania, – still a youth, at a diet or a carnival, – I don't remember – "

"And what of that?" asked the king.

"And it seems to me always that his name was not Babinich."

"Do not tell every little thing," said the king; "you are young and inattentive, and a thing might easily enter your head. Whether he is Babinich or not, why should I not trust him? Sincerity and truth are written on his lips, and evidently he has a golden heart. I should not trust myself, if I could not trust a soldier who has shed his blood for us and the country."

"He deserves more confidence than the letter of Prince Boguslav," said the queen, suddenly, "and I recommend this to the consideration of your worthinesses, there may not be a word of truth in that letter. It might have been very important for the Radzivills of Birji that we should lose courage completely, and it is easy to admit that Prince Boguslav wished also to ruin some enemy of his, and leave a door open to himself in case of changed fortune."

"If I were not accustomed," said the primate, "to hear wisdom itself coming from the mouth of the gracious queen, I should be astonished at the quickness of these words, worthy of the ablest statesman – "

"*Comasque gerens, animosque viriles* (Though wearing tresses, she has the courage of a man)," interrupted Father Vydjga, in a low voice.

Encouraged by these words, the queen rose from her chair and began to speak: "I care not for the Radzivills of Birji, for they, as heretics, listen easily to the whispers of the enemy of the human race; nor of the letter of Prince Boguslav, which may touch private affairs. But I am most pained by the despairing words of my lord and husband, the king, spoken against this people. For who will spare them if their own king condemns them? And still, when I look through the world, I ask in vain, where is there another such people in which the praise of God endures with the manner of ancient sincerity and increases continually? In vain do I look for another people in which such open candor exists. Where is there another State in which no one has heard of those hellish blasphemies, subtle crimes, and never ending feuds with which foreign chronicles are filled. Let people skilled in the history of the world show me another kingdom where all the kings died their own quiet deaths. You have no knives or poisons here; you have no protectors, as among the English. It is true that this nation has grown grievously guilty, has sinned through frivolity and license. But where is the nation that never errs, and where is the one which, as soon as it has recognized its offence, begins penance and reformation? Behold they have already taken thought, they are now coming, beating their breasts to your majesty, ready to spill their blood, to yield their lives, to sacrifice their fortune for you. And will you reject them; will you not forgive the penitent; will you not trust those who have reformed, those who are doing penance; will you not return the affection of a father to children who have erred?

Trust them, since they are yearning for their Yagyellon blood, and for your government, which is of their fathers. Go among them; I, a woman, fear no treason, for I see love, I see sorrow for sins and restoration of this kingdom to which they called you after your father and your brother. It does not seem to me likely that God will destroy such a great commonwealth, in which the light of the true faith is burning. For a short period God's justice has stretched forth the rod to chastise, not to ruin its children, and soon will the fatherly love of that heavenly Lord receive them and cherish them. But do not contemn them, O king, and fear not to confide in their sonly discretion, for in this way alone can you turn evil into good, suffering into comfort, defeat into triumph."

When she had said this, the queen sat down, with fire still in her eyes, and heaving breast; all looked at her with veneration, and her chancellor, Vydjga, began to speak with a resonant voice, —

"Nulla sors longa est, dolor et voluptas,
Invicens cedunt.
Ima permutat brevis hora summis."

(No fortune is long, pain and pleasure
Yield in turn.
A short hour changes the lowest with the highest.)

But no one heard what he said, for the ardor of the heroic lady was communicated to every heart. The king himself sprang up, with a flush on his sallow face, and said, —

"I have not lost the kingdom yet, since I have such a queen. Let her will be done, for she spoke with prophetic inspiration. The sooner I move and appear in my realms the better."

To this the primate answered with seriousness: "I do not wish to oppose the will of my gracious king and queen, nor to turn them from an undertaking in which there is hazard, but in which there may be also salvation. Still I should consider it a wise thing to assemble in Opol, where a majority of the senators are tarrying, and there listen to the ideas of all; these may develop and explain the affair more clearly and broadly."

"Then to Opol!" exclaimed the king, "and afterward to the road, and what God will give!"

"God will give a happy return and victory!" said the queen.

"Amen!" said the primate.

CHAPTER VIII

Pan Andrei fretted in his lodgings like a wounded wildcat. The hellish revenge of Boguslav Radzivill brought him almost to madness. Not enough that that prince had sprung out of his hands, killed his men, almost deprived him of life; he had put upon him besides shame such as no one, not merely of his name, but no Pole from the beginning of the world, had ever groaned under.

There were moments when Kmita wished to leave everything – the glory which was opening before him, the service of the king – and fly away to avenge himself on that magnate whom he wanted to eat up alive.

But on the other hand, in spite of all his rage and the whirlwind in his head, he remembered that while the prince lived revenge would not vanish; and the best means, the only way to hurl back his calumny and lay bare all the infamy of his accusation, was precisely the service of the king; for in it he could show the world that not only had he not thought of raising his hand against the sacred person of Yan Kazimir, but that among all the nobles of Lithuania and Poland no person more loyal than Kmita could be found.

But he gnashed his teeth and was boiling like a stew; he tore his clothing, and long, long was it before he could calm himself. He gloated over the thought of revenge. He saw this Radzivill again in his hands; he swore by the memory of his father, that he must reach Boguslav even if death and torments were awaiting him therefor. And though the prince was a mighty lord whom not only the revenge of a common noble, but even the revenge of a king, could not easily touch; still, whoso knew that unrestrained soul better, would not have slept calmly, and more than once would have trembled before his vows.

And still Pan Andrei did not know yet that the prince had not merely covered him with shame and robbed him of repute.

Meanwhile the king, who from the first had conceived a great love for the young hero, sent Pan Lugovski to him that same day, and on the morrow commanded Kmita to accompany his majesty to Opol, where at a general assembly of the senators it was intended to deliberate on the return of the king to the country. Indeed there was something over which to deliberate. Lyubomirski, the marshal of the kingdom, had sent a new letter, announcing that everything in the country was ready for a general war, and urging earnestly the return. Besides this, news was spread of a certain league of nobles and soldiers formed for the defence of the king and the country, concerning which men had really been thinking for some time, but which, as appeared afterward, was concluded a little later, under the name of the Confederation of Tishovtsi.

All minds were greatly occupied by the news, and immediately after a thanksgiving Mass they assembled in a secret council, to which, at the instance of the king, Kmita too was admitted, since he had brought news from Chenstohova.

They began then to discuss whether the return was to take place at once, or whether it were better to defer it till the army, not only by wish, but by deed, should abandon the Swedes.

Yan Kazimir put an end to these discussions by saying: "Do not discuss, your worthinesses, the return, or whether it is better to defer it awhile, for I have taken counsel already concerning that with God and the Most Holy Lady. Therefore I communicate to you that whatever may happen we shall move in person these days. Express your ideas therefore, your worthinesses, and be not sparing of counsel as to how our return may be best and most safely accomplished."

Opinions were various. Some advised not to trust too greatly to the marshal of the kingdom, who had once shown hesitation and disobedience, when, instead of giving the crown to the emperor for safe keeping, according to the order of the king, he had carried it to Lyubovlya. "Great," said they, "is the pride and ambition of that lord, and if he should have the person of the king in his castle, who knows what he might do, or what he would ask for his services; who knows that he would not

try, or wish to seize the whole government in his own hands, and become the protector, not only of the entire country, but of the king?"

These advised the king therefore to wait for the retreat of the Swedes and repair to Chenstohova, as to the place from which grace and rebirth had spread over the Commonwealth. But others gave different opinions, —

"The Swedes are yet at Chenstohova, and though by the grace of God they will not capture the place, still there are no unoccupied roads. All the districts about there are in Swedish hands. The enemy are at Kjepitsi, Vyelunie, Cracow; along the boundary also considerable forces are disposed. In the mountains near the Hungarian border, where Lyubovlya is situated, there are no troops save those of the marshal; the Swedes have never gone to that distance, not having men enough nor daring sufficient. From Lyubovlya it is nearer to Russia, which is free of hostile occupation, and to Lvoff, which has not ceased to be loyal, and to the Tartars, who, according to information, are coming with succor; all these are waiting specially for the decision of the king."

"As to Pan Lyubomirski," said the Bishop of Cracow, "his ambition will be satisfied with this, that he will receive the king first in his starostaship of Spij, and will surround him with protection. The government will remain with the king, but the hope itself of great services will satisfy the marshal. If he wishes to tower above all others through his loyalty, then, whether his loyalty flows from ambition or from love to the king and the country, his majesty will always receive notable profit."

This opinion of a worthy and experienced bishop seemed the most proper; therefore it was decided that the king should go through the mountains to Lyubovlya, and thence to Lvoff, or whithersoever circumstances might indicate.

They discussed also the day of returning; but the voevoda of Lenchytsk, who had just come from his mission to the emperor for aid, said that it was better not to fix the date, but to leave the decision to the king, so that the news might not be spread and the enemy forewarned. They decided only this, that the king would move on with three hundred dragoons, under command of Tyzenhauz, who, though young, enjoyed already the reputation of a great soldier.

But still more important was the second part of the deliberations, in which it was voted unanimously that on his arrival in the country, government and the direction of the war should pass into the hands of the king, whom nobles, troops, and hetmans were to obey in all things. They spoke besides of the future, and touched upon the causes of those sudden misfortunes which, as a deluge, had covered the whole land in such a brief period. And the primate himself gave no other cause for this than the disorder, want of obedience, and excessive contempt for the office and majesty of the king.

He was heard in silence, for each man understood that it was a question here of the fate of the Commonwealth, and of great, hitherto unexampled changes in it, which might bring back the ancient power of the State, and which was long desired by the wise queen who loved her adopted country.

From the mouth of the worthy prince of the church there came words like thunderbolts, and the souls of the hearers opened to the truth, almost as flowers open to the sun.

"Not against ancient liberties do I rise," said the primate, "but against that license which with its own hands is murdering the country. In very truth men have forgotten in this Commonwealth the distinction between freedom and license; and as excessive pleasure ends in pain, so freedom unchecked has ended in slavery. You have descended to such error, citizens of this illustrious Commonwealth, that only he among you passes for a defender of liberty who raises an uproar, who breaks diets and opposes the king, not when it is needful, but when for the king it is a question of saving the country. In our treasury the bottom of the chest can be seen; the soldier unpaid seeks pay of the enemy; the diets, the only foundation of this Commonwealth, are dissolved after having done nothing, for one disorderly man, one evil citizen, for his own private purpose may prevent deliberation. What manner of liberty is that which permits one man to stand against all? If that is freedom for one man, then it is bondage for all others. And where have we gone with the use of this freedom which seemed such sweet fruit? Behold one weak enemy, against whom our ancestors gained

so many splendid victories, now *sicut fulgur exit ab occidente et poret usque ad orientem* (flashes like lightning from the west, and goes as far as the east). No one opposes him, traitorous heretics aided him, and he seized possession of all things; he persecutes the faith, he desecrates churches, and when you speak of your liberties he shows you the sword. Behold what your provincial diets have come to, what your veto has come to, what your license has come to, your degradation of the king at every step. Your king, the natural defender of the country, you have rendered, first of all, powerless, and then you complain that he does not defend you. You did not want your own government, and now the enemy is governing. And who, I ask, can save us in this fall, who can bring back ancient glory to this Commonwealth, if not he who has spent so much of his life and time for it; when the unhappy domestic war with the Cossacks tore it, who exposed his consecrated person to dangers such as no monarch in our time has passed through; who at Zborovo, at Berestechko, and at Jvanyets fought like a common soldier, bearing toils and hardships beyond his station of king? To him now we will confide ourselves; to him, with the example of the ancient Romans, we will give the dictatorship, and take counsel ourselves how to save in time coming this fatherland from domestic enemies, from vice, license, disorder, disobedience, and restore due dignity to the government and the king."

So spoke the primate; and misfortune with the experience of recent times had changed his hearers in such a degree that no man protested, for all saw clearly that either the power of the king must be strengthened, or the Commonwealth must perish without fail. They began therefore to consider in various ways how to bring the counsels of the primate into practice. The king and queen listened to them eagerly and with joy, especially the queen, who had labored long and earnestly at the introduction of order into the Commonwealth.

The king returned then to Glogov glad and satisfied, and summoning a number of confidential officers, among whom was Kmita, he said, —

"I am impatient, my stay in this country is burning me, I could wish to start even to-morrow; therefore I have called you, as men of arms and experience, to provide ready methods. It is a pity that we should lose time, when our presence may hasten considerably a general war."

"In truth," said Lugovski, "if such is the will of your Royal Grace, why delay? The sooner the better."

"While the affair is not noised about and the enemy do not double their watchfulness," added Colonel Wolf.

"The enemy are already on their guard, and have taken possession of the roads so far as they are able," said Kmita.

"How is that?" asked the king.

"Gracious Lord, your intended return is no news for the Swedes. Almost every day a report travels over the whole Commonwealth, that your Royal Grace is already on the road, or even now in your realms, *inter regna*. Therefore it is necessary to observe the greatest care, and to hurry by through narrow places stealthily, for Douglas's scouts are waiting on the roads."

"The best carefulness," said Tyzenhauz, looking at Kmita, "is three hundred faithful sabres; and if my gracious lord gives me command over them, I will conduct him in safety, even over the breasts of Douglas's scouts."

"You will conduct if there are just three hundred, but suppose that you meet six hundred or a thousand, or come upon a superior force waiting in ambush, what then?"

"I said three hundred," answered Tyzenhauz, "for three hundred were mentioned. If however that is too small a party, we can provide five hundred and even more."

"God save us from that. The larger the party, the more noise will it make," said Kmita.

"I think that the marshal of the kingdom will come out to meet us with his squadrons," put in the king.

"The marshal will not come out," answered Kmita, "for he will not know the day and the hour, and even if he did know some delay might happen on the road, as is usual; it is difficult to foresee everything."

"A soldier says that, a genuine soldier!" said the king. "It is clear that you are not a stranger to war."

Kmita laughed, for he remembered his attacks on Hovanski. Who was more skilled than he in such actions? To whom could the escort of the king be entrusted with more judgment?

But Tyzenhauz was evidently of a different opinion from the king, for he frowned and said with sarcasm against Kmita, "We wait then for your enlightened counsel."

Kmita felt ill will in the words; therefore he fixed his glance on Tyzenhauz and answered, —

"My opinion is that the smaller the party the easier it will pass."

"How is that?"

"The will of your Royal Grace is unfettered," said Kmita, "and can do what it likes, but my reason teaches me this: Let Pan Tyzenhauz go ahead with the dragoons, giving out purposely that he is conducting the king; this he will do to attract the enemy to himself. His affair is to wind out, to escape from the trap safely. And we with a small band in a day or two will move after him with your Royal Grace; and when the enemy's attention is turned in another direction it will be easy for us to reach Lyubovlya."

The king clapped his hands with delight. "God sent us this soldier!" cried he. "Solomon could not judge better. I give my vote for this plan, and there must not be another. They will hunt for the king among the dragoons, and the king will pass by under their noses. It could not be better!"

"Gracious King," cried Tyzenhauz, "that is pastime."

"Soldier's pastime!" said the king. "But no matter, I will not recede from that plan."

Kmita's eyes shone from delight because his opinion had prevailed, but Tyzenhauz sprang from his seat.

"Gracious Lord!" said he, "I resign my command from the dragoons. Let some one else lead them."

"And why is that?"

"For if your Royal Grace will go without defence, exposed to the play of fortune, to every destructive chance which may happen, I wish to be near your person to expose my breast for you and to die should the need be."

"I thank you for your sincere intention," answered Yan Kazimir; "but calm yourself, for in just such a way as Babinich advises shall I be least exposed."

"Let Pan Babinich, or whatever his name may be, take what he advises on his own responsibility! It may concern him that your Royal Grace be lost in the mountains. I take as witness God and my companions here present that I advised against it from my soul."

Scarcely had he finished speaking when Kmita sprang up, and standing face to face with Tyzenhauz asked, "What do you mean by these words?"

Tyzenhauz measured him haughtily with his eyes from head to foot, and said, "Do not strain your head, little man, toward mine, the place is too high for you."

To which Kmita with lightning in his eyes replied, "It is not known for whom it would be too high if – "

"If what?" asked Tyzenhauz, looking at him quickly.

"If I should reach higher people, than you."

Tyzenhauz laughed. "But where would you seek them?"

"Silence!" said the king suddenly, with a frown. "Do not begin a quarrel in my presence."

Yan Kazimir made an impression of such dignity on all surrounding him, that both young men were silent and confused, remembering that in the presence of the king unseemly words had escaped them. But the king added, —

"No one has the right to exalt himself above that cavalier who burst the siege gun and escaped from Swedish hands, even though his father lived in a village, which, as I see, was not the case, for a bird from his feathers, and blood from deeds are easily known. Drop your offences." Here the king turned to Tyzenhauz. "You wish it; then remain with our person. We may not refuse that. Wolf or Denhoff will lead the dragoons. But Babinich too will remain, and we will go according to his counsel, for he has pleased our heart."

"I wash my hands!" said Tyzenhauz.

"Only preserve the secret, gentlemen. Let the dragoons go to Ratibor to-day, and spread as widely as possible the report that I am with them. And then be on the watch, for you know not the day nor the hour – Go, Tyzenhauz, give the order to the captain of the dragoons."

Tyzenhauz went out wringing his hands from anger and sorrow; after him went other officers.

That same day the news thundered through all Glogov that the king had already gone to the boundaries of the Commonwealth. Even many distinguished senators thought that the departure had really taken place. Couriers, sent purposely, took the report to Opol and to the roads on the boundary.

Tyzenhauz, though he had declared that he washed his hands, did not give up the affair as lost; as attendant of the king, he had access to the person of the monarch every moment made easy. That very day therefore, after the dragoons had gone, he stood before the face of Yan Kazimir, or rather before both royal persons, for Marya Ludvika was present.

"I have come for the order," said he; "when do we start?"

"The day after to-morrow, before dawn."

"Are many people to go?"

"You will go; Lugovski with the soldiers. The castellan of Sandomir goes also with me. I begged him to take as few men as possible; but we cannot dispense with a few trusty and tried sabres. Besides, his holiness the nuncio wishes to accompany me; his presence will add importance, and will touch all who are faithful to the true church. He does not hesitate therefore to expose his sacred person to hazard. Do you have a care that there are not more than forty horses, for that is Babinich's counsel."

"Gracious Lord!" said Tyzenhauz.

"And what do you wish yet?"

"On my knees I implore one favor. The question is settled, the dragoons have gone, – we shall travel without defence, and the first scouting party of a few tens of horses may capture us. Listen, your Royal Grace, to the prayer of your servant, on whose faithfulness God is looking, and do not trust in everything to that noble. He is an adroit man, since he has been able in so short a time to steal into your heart and favor; but – "

"Do you envy him?" interrupted the king.

"I do not envy him, Gracious Lord; I do not wish even to suspect him of treason positively; but I would swear that his name is not Babinich. Why does he hide his real name? Why is it somehow inconvenient to tell what he did before the siege of Chenstohova? Why specially has he insisted upon dragoons going out first, and that your Royal Grace should go without an escort?"

The king thought awhile, and began, according to his custom, to pout his lips repeatedly.

"If it were a question of collusion with the Swedes," said he at last, "what could three hundred dragoons do? What power would they be, and what protection? Babinich would need merely to notify the Swedes to dispose a few hundred infantry along the roads, and they could take us as in a net. But only think if there can be a question of treason here. He would have had to know beforehand the date of our journey, and to inform the Swedes in Cracow; and how could he do so, since we move the day after to-morrow? He could not even guess that we would choose his plan; we might have gone according to your suggestion or that of others. It was at first decided to go with the dragoons; then if he wished to talk with the Swedes this special party would have confused his arrangements, for he would have to send out new messengers and give fresh notice. All these are irrefragable reasons. And besides he did not insist at all on his opinion, as you say; he only offered, as did others, what seemed

to him best. No, no! Sincerity is looking forth from the eyes of that noble, and his burned side bears witness that he is ready to disregard even torture."

"His Royal Grace is right," said the queen, on a sudden; "these points are irrefragable, and the advice was and is good."

Tyzenhauz knew from experience that when the queen gave her opinion it would be vain for him to appeal to the king, Yan Kazimir had such confidence in her wit and penetration. And it was a question now with the young man only that the king should observe needful caution.

"It is not my duty," answered he, "to oppose my king and queen. But if we are to go the day after to-morrow, let this Babinich not know of it till the hour of departure."

"That may be," said the king.

"And on the road I will have an eye on him, and should anything happen he will not go alive from my hands."

"You will not have to act," said the queen. "Listen; not you will preserve the king from evil happenings on the road, from treason, and snares of the enemy; not you, not Babinich, not the dragoons, not the powers of earth, but the Providence of God, whose eye is turned continually on the shepherds of nations and the anointed of the Lord. It will guard him. It will protect him and bring him safely; and in case of need, send him assistance, of which you do not even think, you who believe in earthly power only."

"Most Serene Lady!" answered Tyzenhauz, "I believe, too, that without the will of God not a hair will fall from the head of any man; but to guard the king's person through fear of traitors is no sin for me."

Marya Ludvika smiled graciously. "But you suspect too hastily, and thus cast shame on a whole nation, in which, as this same Babinich has said, there has not yet been found one to raise his hand against his own king. Let it not astonish you that after such desertion, after such a breaking of oaths and faith as the king and I have experienced, I say still that no one has dared such a terrible crime, not even those who to-day serve the Swedes."

"Prince Boguslav's letter, Gracious Lady?"

"That letter utters untruth," said the queen, with decision. "If there is a man in the Commonwealth ready to betray even the king, that man is Prince Boguslav, for he in name only belongs to this people."

"Speaking briefly, do not put suspicion on Babinich," said the king. "As to his name, it must be doubled in your head. Besides, we may ask him; but how can we say to him here, how inquire, 'If you are not Babinich, then what is your name?' Such a question might pain an honest man terribly, and I'll risk my head that he is an honest man."

"At such a price, Gracious Lord, I would not convince myself of his honesty."

"Well, well, we are thankful for your care. To-morrow for prayer and penance, and the day after to the road, to the road!"

Tyzenhauz withdrew with a sigh, and in the greatest secrecy began preparations that very day for the journey. Even dignitaries who were to accompany the king were not all informed of the time. But the servants were ordered to have horses in readiness, for they might start any day for Ratibor.

The king did not show himself the entire following day, even in the church; but he lay in the form of a cross in his own room till night, fasting and imploring the King of kings for aid, not for himself, but for the Commonwealth.

Marya Ludvika, together with her ladies-in-waiting, was also in prayer.

Then the following night freshened the strength of the wearied ones; and when in darkness the Glogov church-bell sounded to matins, the hour had struck for the journey.

CHAPTER IX

They rode through Ratibor, merely stopping to feed the horses. No one recognized the king, no one paid much attention to the party, for all were occupied with the recent passage of the dragoons, among whom, as all thought, was the King of Poland. The retinue was about fifty in number, for several dignitaries accompanied the king; five bishops alone, and among others the nuncio, ventured to share with him the toils of a journey not without peril. The road within the boundary of the empire, however, presented no danger. At Oderberg, not far from the junction of the Olsha with the Odra, they entered Moravia.

The day was cloudy, and snow fell so thickly that it was not possible to see the road a few steps ahead. But the king was joyous and full of courage, for a sign had been manifested which all considered most favorable, and which contemporary historians did not neglect to insert in their chronicles. Behold, just as the king was departing from Glogov, a little bird, entirely white, appeared before his horse and began to circle round, rising at times in the air, at times coming down to the head of the king, chirping and twittering joyously meanwhile. They remembered that a similar bird, but black, had circled over the king when he was retreating from Warsaw before the Swedes.

But this was white, exactly of the size and form of a swallow; which fact roused the greater wonder, because it was deep winter, and swallows were not thinking yet of return. But all were rejoiced, and the king for the first few days spoke of nothing else, and promised himself the most successful future. It appeared from the beginning, too, how sound was Kmita's advice to travel apart.

Everywhere in Moravia people were telling of the recent passage of the King of Poland. Some stated that they had seen him with their own eyes, all in armor, with a sword in his hand and a crown on his head. Various stories, also, were current of the forces which he had with him, and in general the number of his dragoons was exaggerated to the fabulous. There were some who had seen ten thousand, and who could not wait till the last horses, men, gunners, and flags had passed.

"Surely," said they, "the Swedes will spring before them, but what they will do with such a force is unknown."

"Well," asked the king of Tyzenhauz, "was not Babinich right?"

"We are not in Lyubovlya yet, Gracious Lord," replied the young magnate.

Babinich was satisfied with himself and with the journey. Generally he went ahead of the king's party with the three Kyemliches, examining the road; sometimes he rode with the rest, entertaining the king with narratives of single incidents in the siege of Chenstohova, of which the king never had enough. And almost every hour that young hero, cheerful, mettlesome, eagle-like, drew nearer the heart of the king. Time passed for the monarch now in prayer, now in pious meditation on eternal life, now in discussing the coming war and the aid hoped from the emperor, and finally in looking at knightly amusements with which the attendant soldiers endeavored to shorten the time of the journey. For Yan Kazimir had this in his nature, that his mind passed easily from seriousness almost to frivolity, from hard labor to amusements, to which, when there was leisure, he gave himself with his whole soul, as if no care, no grief had pressed him at any time.

The soldiers then exhibited themselves, each with what he could do; the Kyemliches, Kosma, and Damian, immense and awkward figures, amused the king by breaking horseshoes, which they broke like canes; he paid them a thaler apiece, though his wallet was empty enough, for all his money, and even the diamonds and "parafanaly" (paraphernalia) of the queen, had been spent on the army.

Pan Andrei exhibited himself by throwing a heavy hatchet, which he hurled upward with such force that it was barely visible, and then he sprang under the instrument with his horse and caught it by the handle as it fell. At sight of this the king clapped his hands.

"I saw that done," said he, "by Pan Slushka, brother of the vice-chancellor's wife, but he threw not so high by half."

"This is customary with us in Lithuania," said Pan Andrei; "and when a man practises it from childhood he becomes skilful."

"Whence have you those scars across the lip?" asked the king of him once, pointing to Kmita's scars. "Some one went through you well with a sabre."

"That is not from a sabre, Gracious Lord, but from a bullet. I was fired at by a man who put the pistol to my mouth."

"An enemy or one of ours?"

"One of ours; but an enemy whom I shall yet call to account, and till that happens it is not proper for me to speak of it."

"Have you such animosity as that?"

"I have no animosity. Gracious Lord, for on my head I bear a still deeper scar from a sabre, through which cut my soul almost left me; but since an honorable man did it I harbor no offence against him." Kmita removed his cap and showed the king a deep furrow, the white edges of which were perfectly visible. "I am not ashamed of this wound," said he, "for it was given me by such a master that there is not another like him in the Commonwealth."

"Who is such a master?"

"Pan Volodyovski."

"For God's sake! I know him. He did wonders at Zbaraj. And I was at the wedding of his comrade, Skshetuski, who was the first to bring me news of the besieged. Those are great cavaliers! And with them was a third, him the whole army glorified as the greatest of all. A fat noble, and so amusing that we almost burst our sides from laughter."

"That is Pan Zagloba, I think!" said Kmita; "he is a man not only brave, but full of wonderful stratagems."

"Do you know what they are doing now?"

"Volodyovski used to lead dragoons with the voevoda of Vilna."

The king frowned. "And is he serving the Swedes now with the prince voevoda?"

"He! The Swedes? He is with Pan Sapyeha. I saw myself how, after the treason of the prince, he threw his baton at his feet."

"Oh, he is a worthy soldier!" answered the king. "From Pan Sapyeha we have had news from Tykotsin, where he is besieging the voevoda. God give him luck! If all were like him, the Swedish enemy would regret their undertaking."

Here Tyzenhauz, who had been listening to the conversation, asked suddenly, "Then were you with Radzivill at Kyedani?"

Kmita was somewhat confused, and began to throw up his hatchet. "I was," answered he.

"Give peace to your hatchet," said Tyzenhauz. "And what were you doing at the prince's house?"

"I was a guest," answered Kmita, impatiently, "and I ate his bread, until I was disgusted with his treason."

"And why did you not go with other honorable soldiers to Pan Sapyeha?"

"Because I had made a vow to go to Chenstohova, which you will more easily understand when I tell you that our Ostra Brama was occupied by the Northerners."

Tyzenhauz began to shake his head and smack his lips; this attracted the attention of the king, so that he looked inquiringly at Kmita. The latter, made impatient, turned to Tyzenhauz and said, —

"My worthy sir! Why do I not inquire of you where you have been, and what you have been doing?"

"Ask me," replied Tyzenhauz; "I have nothing to conceal."

"Neither am I before a court; and if I shall ever be, you will not be my judge. Leave me, then, that I lose not my patience."

When he had said this, he hurled the hatchet so sharply that it grew small in the height; the king raised his eyes after it, and at that moment he was thinking of nothing save this, would Babinich catch it in its fall, or would he not catch it?

Babinich put spurs to his horse, sprang forward, and caught it. That same evening Tyzenhauz said to the king, —

"Gracious Lord, this noble pleases me less and less."

"But me more and more," answered the king, pursing his lips.

"I heard to-day one of his people call him colonel; he only looked threateningly, and straightway confused the man. There is something in that."

"And it seems to me sometimes that he does not wish to tell everything," added the king; "but that is his affair."

"No, Gracious Lord," exclaimed Tyzenhauz, forcibly, "it is not his affair, it is our affair, and that of the whole Commonwealth. For if he is some traitor who is planning the death or captivity of your Royal Grace, then with your person will perish all those who at this moment have taken arms; the whole Commonwealth will perish, which you alone are competent to save."

"I will ask him myself to-morrow."

"God grant that I be a false prophet, but nothing good looks out of his eyes. He is too smart, too bold, too daring; and such people are ready for anything."

The king looked troubled. Next morning, when they moved on their journey, he beckoned Kmita to approach him.

"Where were you, Colonel?" asked the king, suddenly.

A moment of silence followed.

Kmita struggled with himself; the wish was burning him to spring from his horse, fall at the feet of the king, and throw off the burden he was bearing, – tell the whole truth at once. But he thought of the fearful impression which the name Kmita would make, especially after the letter of Prince Boguslav Radzivill. How could he, who had been the right hand of Radzivill, who had maintained the preponderance of Prince Yanush, who had aided him in scattering his disobedient squadrons, who supported him in treason; how could he, accused and suspected of the most terrible crime, – an attack on the person of the king, – succeed in convincing the king, the bishops, and senators, that he had corrected himself, that he was transformed? With what could he show the sincerity of his intentions? What proofs could he bring save naked words? His former offences pursue him unceasingly, unsparingly, as furious dogs a wild beast in the forest. He determined on silence. But he felt also unspeakable disgust and hatred of subterfuge. Must he throw dust in the eyes of the king, whom he loved with all the power of his soul, and deceive him with fictitious tales?

He felt that strength failed him for this; therefore he said, after a while: "Gracious King, the time will come, perhaps soon, in which I shall open my whole soul to your Royal Grace as in confession to a priest. But I wish deeds to vouch for me, for my sincere intention, for my loyalty and my love of majesty, not words simply. I have offended against you, my Gracious Lord, and the country, and I have repented too little yet; therefore I am seeking service in which I can find reparation more easily. Besides, who has not offended? Who in the whole Commonwealth does not need to beat his breast? It may be that I have offended more grievously than others, but I was the first also to bethink myself. Do not inquire, Gracious Lord, about anything until the present service will convince you concerning me; do not ask, for I cannot answer without closing the road of salvation to myself, for God is the witness, and the Most Holy Lady, our Queen, that I had no evil intent, that I am ready to give the last drop of my blood for you."

Here Pan Andrei's eyes grew moist, and such sincerity and sorrow appeared on his face that his countenance defended him with greater power than his words.

"God is looking at my intentions," said he, "and will account them to me at judgment, but, Gracious Lord, if you do not trust me, dismiss me, remove me from your person. I will follow at a

distance, so as to come in time of difficulty, even without being called, and lay down my life for you. And then, Gracious Lord, you will believe that I am not a traitor, but one of that kind of servants of whom you have not many, even among those who cast suspicion on others."

"I believe you to-day," said the king. "Remain near our person as before, for treason does not speak in such fashion."

"I thank your Royal Grace," answered Kmita; and reining in his horse somewhat, he pushed back among the last ranks of the party.

But Tyzenhauz did not limit himself to conveying suspicions to the king. The result was that all began to look askance at Kmita. Audible conversation ceased at his approach, and whispers began. Every movement of his was followed, every word considered. Kmita noticed this, and was ill at ease among these men.

Even the king, though he did not remove confidence from him, had not for Pan Andrei such a joyful countenance as before. Therefore the young hero lost his daring, grew gloomy, sadness and bitterness took possession of his heart. Formerly in front, among the first, he used to make his horse prance; now he dragged on many yards behind the cavalcade, with hanging head and gloomy thoughts.

At last the Carpathians stood white before the travellers. Snow lay on their slopes, clouds spread their unwieldy bodies on the summits; and when an evening came clear at sunset, those mountains put on flaming garments from which marvellously bright gleams went forth till quenched in the darkness embracing the whole world. Kmita gazed on those wonders of nature which to that time he had never seen; and though greatly grieved, he forgot his cares from admiration and wonder.

Each day those giants grew greater, more mighty, till at last the retinue of the king came to them and entered a pass which opened on a sudden, like a gate.

"The boundary must be near," said the king, with emotion.

Then they saw a small wagon, drawn by one horse, and in the wagon a peasant. The king's men stopped him at once.

"Man," said Tyzenhauz, "are we in Poland?"

"Beyond that cliff and that little river is the emperor's boundary, but you are standing on the king's land."

"Which way is it then to Jivyets?"

"Go straight ahead; you will come to the road." And the mountaineer whipped his horse.

Tyzenhauz galloped to the retinue standing at a distance.

"Gracious Lord," cried he, with emotion, "you are now *inter regna*, for at that little river your kingdom begins."

The king said nothing, only made a sign to hold his horse, dismounted, and throwing himself on his knees, raised his eyes and his hands upward.

At sight of this, all dismounted and followed his example. That king, then a wanderer, fell after a moment in the form of a cross on the snow, and began to kiss that land, so beloved and so thankless, which in time of disaster had refused refuge to his head.

Silence followed, and only sighs interrupted it.

The evening was frosty, clear; the mountains and the summits of the neighboring fir-trees were in purple, farther off in the shadow they had begun to put on violet; but the road on which the king was lying turned as it were into a ruddy and golden ribbon, and rays fell on the king, bishops, and dignitaries.

Then a breeze began from the summits, and bearing on its wings sparks of snow, flew to the valley. Therefore the nearer fir-trees began to bend their snow-covered heads, bow to their lord, and to make a joyous and rustling sound, as if they were singing that old song, "Be welcome to us, thou dear master!"

Darkness had already filled the air when the king's retinue moved forward. Beyond the defile was spread out a rather roomy plain, the other end of which was lost in the distance. Light was dying

all around; only in one place the sky was still bright with red. The king began to repeat *Ave Maria*; after him the others with concentration of spirit repeated the pious words.

Their native land, unvisited by them for a long time; the mountains which night was now covering; the dying twilight, the prayer, – all these caused a solemnity of heart and mind; hence after the prayer the king, the dignitaries, and the knights rode on in silence. Night fell, but in the east the sky was shining still more redly.

"Let us go toward that twilight," said the king, at last; "it is a wonder that it is shining yet."

Then Kmita galloped up. "Gracious Lord, that is a fire!" cried he.

All halted.

"How is that?" asked the king; "it seems to me that 'tis the twilight."

"A fire, a fire! I am not mistaken!" cried Kmita.

And indeed, of all of the attendants of the king he knew most in that matter. At last it was no longer possible to doubt, since above that supposed twilight were rising as it were red clouds, rolling now brighter, now darker in turn.

"It is as if Jivyets were burning!" cried the king; "maybe the enemy is ravaging it."

He had not finished speaking when to their ears flew the noise of men, the snorting of horses, and a number of dark figures appeared before the retinue.

"Halt, halt!" cried Tyzenhauz.

These figures halted, as if uncertain what to do farther.

"Who are you?" was asked from the retinue.

"Ours!" said a number of voices. "Ours! We are escaping with our lives from Jivyets. The Swedes are burning Jivyets, and murdering people."

"Stop, in God's name! What do you say? Whence have they come?"

"They were waiting for our king. There is a power of them, a power! May the Mother of God have the king in Her keeping!"

Tyzenhauz lost his head for a moment. "See what it is to go with a small party!" cried he to Kmita; "Would that you were killed for such counsel!"

Yan Kazimir began to inquire himself of the fugitives. "But where is the king?"

"The king has gone to the mountains with a great army. Two days ago he passed through Jivyets; they pursued him, and were fighting somewhere near Suha. We have not heard whether they took him or not; but to-day they returned to Jivyets, and are burning and murdering."

"Go with God!" said Yan Kazimir.

The fugitives shot past quickly.

"See what would have met us had we gone with the dragoons!" exclaimed Kmita.

"Gracious King!" said Father Gembitski, "the enemy is before us. What are we to do?"

All surrounded the monarch, as if wishing to protect him with their persons from sudden danger. The king gazed on that fire which was reflected in his eyes, and he was silent; no one advanced an opinion, so difficult was it to give good advice.

"When I was going out of the country a fire lighted me," said Yan Kazimir, at last; "and when I enter, another gives light."

Again silence, only still longer than before.

"Who has any advice?" inquired Father Gembitski, at last.

Then the voice of Tyzenhauz was heard, full of bitterness, and insult: "He who did not hesitate to expose the king's person to danger, who said that the king should go without a guard, let him now give advice."

At this moment a horseman pushed out of the circle. It was Kmita.

"Very well!" said he. And rising in the stirrups he shouted, turning to his attendants standing at some distance, "Kyemliches, after me!"

Then he urged his horse to a gallop, and after him shot the three horsemen with all the breath that was in the breasts of their horses.

A cry of despair came from Tyzenhauz: "That is a conspiracy!" said he. "These traitors will give us up surely. Gracious King, save yourself while there is time, for the enemy will soon close the pass! Gracious King, save yourself! Back! back!"

"Let us return, let us return!" cried the bishops and dignitaries, in one voice.

Yan Kazimir became impatient, lightnings flashed from his eyes; suddenly he drew his sword from its sheath and cried, —

"May God not grant me to leave my country a second time. Come what may, I have had enough of that!" And he put spurs to his horse to move forward; but the nuncio himself seized the reins.

"Your Royal Grace," said he, seriously, "you bear on your shoulders the fate of the Catholic Church and the country, therefore you are not free to expose your person."

"Not free," repeated the bishops.

"I will not return to Silesia, so help me the Holy Cross!" answered Yan Kazimir.

"Gracious Lord! listen to the prayers of your subjects," said the castellan of Sandomir. "If you do not wish to return to the emperor's territory, let us go at least from this place and turn toward the Hungarian boundary, or let us go back through this pass, so that our return be not intercepted. There we will wait. In case of an attack by the enemy, escape on horses will remain to us; but at least let them not enclose us as in a trap."

"Let it be even so," said the king. "I do not reject prudent counsel, but I will not go wandering a second time. If we cannot appear by this road, we will by another. But I think that you are alarmed in vain. Since the Swedes looked for us among the dragoons, as the people from Jivyets said, it is clear proof that they know nothing of us, and that there is no treason or conspiracy. Just consider; you are men of experience. The Swedes would not have attacked the dragoons, they would not have fired a gun at them if they know that we were following them. Be calm, gentlemen! Babinich has gone with his men for news, and he will return soon of a certainty."

When he had said this the king turned his horse toward the pass; after him his attendants. They halted on the spot where the first mountaineer had shown them the boundary.

A quarter of an hour passed, then a half-hour and an hour.

"Have you noticed, gentlemen," asked the voevoda of Lenchytsk on a sudden, "that the fire is decreasing?"

"It is going out, going out; you can almost see it die," said a number of voices.

"That is a good sign," said the king.

"I will go ahead with a few men," said Tyzenhauz. "We will halt about a furlong from here, and if the Swedes come we will detain them till we die. In every case there will be time to think of the safety of the king's person."

"Remain with the party; I forbid you to go!" said the king.

To which Tyzenhauz answered, —

"Gracious Lord, give command later to shoot me for disobedience, but now I will go, for now it is a question of you." And calling upon a number of soldiers in whom it was possible to trust in every emergency, he moved forward.

They halted at the other end of the defile which opened into the valley, and stood in silence, with muskets ready, holding their ears toward every sound. The silence lasted long; finally the sound of snow trampled by horses' feet came to them.

"They are coming!" whispered one of the soldiers.

"That is no party; only a few horses are to be heard," answered the other. "Pan Babinich is returning."

Meanwhile those approaching came in the darkness within a few tens of yards.

"Who is there?" cried Tyzenhauz.

"Ours! Do not fire there!" sounded the voice of Kmita.

At that moment he appeared before Tyzenhauz, and not knowing him in the darkness, inquired, —

"But where is the king?"

"At the end of the pass."

"Who is speaking, for I cannot see?"

"Tyzenhauz. But what is that great bundle which you have before you?" And he pointed to some dark form hanging before Kmita, on the front of the saddle.

Pan Andrei made no answer, but rode on. When he had reached the king's escort, he recognized the person of the king, for it was much clearer beyond the pass, and cried, —

"Gracious Lord, the road is open!"

"Are there no Swedes in Jivyets?"

"They have gone to Vadovitsi. That was a party of German mercenaries. But here is one of them, Gracious Lord; ask him yourself." And Pan Andrei pushed to the ground that form which he held before him, so that a groan was heard in the still night.

"Who is that?" asked the astonished king.

"A horseman!"

"As God is dear to me! And you have brought an informant! How is that? Tell me."

"Gracious Lord; when a wolf prowls in the night around a flock of sheep it is easy for him to seize one; and besides, to tell the truth, this is not the first time with me."

The king raised his hands. "But this Babinich is a soldier, may the bullets strike him! I see that with such servants I can go even in the midst of Swedes."

Meanwhile all gathered around the horseman, who did not rise from the ground however.

"Ask him, Gracious Lord," said Kmita, not without a certain boastfulness in his voice; "though I do not know whether he will answer, for he is throttled a little and there is nothing here to burn him with."

"Pour some gorailka into his throat," said the king.

And indeed that medicine helped more than burning, for the horseman soon recovered strength and voice. Then Kmita, putting a sword-point to his throat, commanded him to tell the whole truth.

The prisoner confessed that he belonged to the regiment of Colonel Irlehorn, that they had intelligence of the passage of the king with dragoons, therefore they fell upon them near Suha, but meeting firm resistance they had to withdraw to Jivyets, whence they marched on to Vadovitsi and Cracow, for such were their orders.

"Are there other divisions of the Swedes in the mountains?" asked Kmita in German, while squeezing the throat of the horseman somewhat more vigorously.

"Maybe there are some," answered he in a broken voice. "General Douglas sent scouting-parties around, but they are all withdrawing, for the peasants are attacking them in passes."

"Were you the only ones in the neighborhood of Jivyets?"

"The only ones."

"Do you know that the King of Poland has passed?"

"He passed with those dragoons who fought with us at Suha. Many saw him."

"Why did you not pursue him?"

"We were afraid of the mountaineers."

Here Kmita began again in Polish: "Gracious Lord, the road is open and you will find a night's lodging in Jivyets, for only a part of the place is burned."

But unconfiding Tyzenhauz was speaking at this time with the castellan of Voinik, and said: "Either that is a great warrior and true as gold, or a finished traitor. Consider, your worthiness, that all this may be simulated, from the taking of this horseman to his confederates. And if this is a trick, – if the Swedes are in ambush in Jivyets, – if the king goes and falls as into a net?"

"It is safer to convince one's self," answered the castellan of Voinik.

Then Tyzenhauz turned to the king and said aloud: "Gracious Lord, permit me to go ahead to Jivyets and convince myself that what this cavalier says and what this trooper declares is true."

"Let it be so! Permit them to go, Gracious Lord," said Kmita.

"Go," said the king; "but we will move forward a little, for it is cold."

Tyzenhauz rushed on at all speed, and the escort of the king began to move after him slowly. The king regained his good humor and cheerfulness, and after a while said to Kmita, —

"But with you it is possible to hunt Swedes as birds with a falcon, for you strike from above."

"That is my fashion," said Kmita. "Whenever your Royal Grace wishes to hunt, the falcon will always be ready."

"Tell how you caught him."

"That is not difficult. When a regiment marches there are always a few men who lag in the rear, and I got this one about half a furlong behind. I rode up to him; he thought that I was one of his own people, he was not on his guard, and before he could think I had seized and gagged him so that he could not shout."

"You said that this was not your first time. Have you then practised somewhere before?"

Kmita laughed. "Oh, Gracious Lord, I have, and that of the best. Let your Royal Grace but give the order and I will go again, overtake them, for their horses are road-weary, take another man, and order my Kyemliches to take also."

They advanced some time in silence; then the tramp of a horse was heard, and Tyzenhauz flew up. "Gracious King," said he, "the road is free, and lodgings are ready."

"But did not I say so?" cried Yan Kazimir. "You, gentlemen, had no need to be anxious. Let us ride on now, let us ride, for we have earned our rest."

All advanced at a trot, briskly, joyously; and an hour later the wearied king was sleeping a sleep without care on his own territory.

That evening Tyzenhauz approached Kmita. "Forgive me," said he; "out of love for the king I brought you under suspicion."

Kmita refused his hand and said: "Oh, that cannot be! You made me a traitor and a betrayer."

"I would have done more, for I would have shot you in the head; but since I have convinced myself that you are an honest man and love the king, I stretch out my hand to you. If you wish, take it; if not, take it not. I would prefer to have no rivalry with you save that of attachment to the king; but I am not afraid of other rivalry."

"Is that your thought? H'm! perhaps you are right, but I am angry with you."

"Well, stop being angry. You are a strong soldier. But give us your lips, so that we may not lie down to sleep in hatred."

"Let it be so!" said Kmita.

And they fell into each other's arms.

CHAPTER X

The king's party arrived at Jivyets late in the evening, and paid almost no attention to the place, which was terrified by the recent attack of the Swedish detachment. The king did not go to the castle, which had been ravaged by the enemy and burned in part, but stopped at the priest's house. Kmita spread the news that the party was escorting the ambassador of the emperor, who was going from Silesia to Cracow.

Next morning they held on toward Vadovitsi, and then turned considerably to one side toward Suha. From this place they were to pass through Kjechoni to Yordanovo, thence to Novy Targ, and if it appeared that there were no Swedish parties near Chorshtyn to go to Chorshtyn; if there were, they were to turn toward Hungary and advance on Hungarian soil to Lyubovlya. The king hoped, too, that the marshal of the kingdom, who disposed of forces so considerable that no reigning prince had so many, would make the road safe and hasten forth to meet his sovereign. Only this could prevent, that the marshal knew not which road the king would take; but among the mountaineers there was no lack of trusty men ready to bear word to the marshal. There was no need even of confiding the secret to them, for they went willingly when told that it was a question of serving the king. These people, though poor and half wild, tilling little or not at all an ungrateful soil, living by their herds, pious, and hating heretics, were, in truth, given heart and soul to the sovereign. They were the first to seize their axes and move from the mountains when news of the taking of Cracow spread through the country, and especially when news came of the siege of Chenstohova, to which pious women were accustomed to go on pilgrimages. General Douglas, a well-known warrior, furnished with cannon and muskets, scattered them, it is true, on the plains, to which they were not accustomed; but the Swedes only with the greatest caution entered their special districts, in which it was not easy to reach them, and easy to suffer disaster, – so that some smaller divisions, having needlessly entered this labyrinth of mountains, were lost.

And now news of the king's passage with an army had already done its own, for all had sprung up as one man to defend him and accompany him with their axes, even to the end of the world. Yan Kazimir might, if he had only disclosed who he was, have surrounded himself in a short time with thousands of half-wild "householders;" but he thought justly that in such an event the news would be carried about everywhere by all the whirlwinds through the whole region, and that the Swedes might send out numerous troops to meet him, therefore he chose to travel unknown even to the mountaineers.

But in all places trusty guides were found, to whom it was enough to say that they were conducting bishops and lords who desired to preserve themselves from Swedish hands. They were led, therefore, among snows, cliffs, and whirlwinds, and over places so inaccessible that you would have said: "A bird cannot fly through them."

More than once the king and the dignitaries had clouds below them, and when there were not clouds their glances passed over a shoreless expanse, covered with white snows, an expanse seemingly as wide as the whole country was wide; more than once they entered mountain throats, almost dark, covered with snow, in which perhaps only a wild beast might have its lair. But they avoided places accessible to the enemy, shortening the road; and it happened that a settlement, at which they expected to arrive in half a day, appeared suddenly under their feet, and in it they awaited rest and hospitality, though in a smoky hut and a sooty room.

The king was in continual good humor; he gave courage to others to endure the excessive toil, and he guaranteed that by such roads they would surely reach Lyubovlya as safely as unexpectedly.

"The marshal does not expect that we shall fall on his shoulders!" repeated the king, frequently.

"What was the return of Xenophon to our journey among the clouds?" asked the nuncio.

"The higher we rise, the lower will Swedish fortune fall," answered the king.

They arrived at Novy Targ. It seemed that all danger was passed; still the mountaineers declared that Swedish troops were moving about near Chorshtyn and in the neighborhood. The king supposed that they might be the marshal's German cavalry, of which he had two regiments, or they might be his own dragoons sent in advance and mistaken for the enemy's scouts. Since in Chorshtyn the bishop of Cracow had a garrison, opinions were divided in the royal party. Some wished to go by the road to Chorshtyn, and then pass along the boundary to Spij; others advised to turn straight to Hungary, which came up in wedge-form to Novy Targ, and go over heights and through passes, taking guides everywhere who knew the most dangerous places.

This last opinion prevailed, for in that way meeting with the Swedes became almost impossible; and besides this "eagle" road over the precipices and through the clouds gave pleasure to the king.

They passed then from Novy Targ somewhat to the south and west, on the right hand of the Byaly Dunayets. The road at first lay through a region rather open and spacious, but as they advanced the mountains began to run together and the valleys to contract. They went along roads over which horses could barely advance. At times the riders had to dismount and lead; and more than once the beasts resisted, pointing their ears and stretching their distended and steaming nostrils forward toward precipices, from the depths of which death seemed to gaze upward.

The mountaineers, accustomed to precipices, frequently considered roads good on which the heads of unaccustomed men turned and their ears rang. At last they entered a kind of rocky chasm long, straight, and so narrow that three men could barely ride abreast in it. Two cliffs bounded it on the right side and the left. At places however the edges inclined, forming slopes less steep, covered with piles of snow bordered on the edges with dark pine-trees. Winds blew away the snow immediately from the bottom of the pass, and the hoofs of horses gritted everywhere on a stony road. But at that moment the wind was not blowing, and such silence reigned that there was a ringing in the ears. Above where between the woody edges a blue belt of sky was visible, black flocks of birds flew past from time to time, shaking their wings and screaming.

The king's party halted for rest. Clouds of steam rose from the horses, and the men too were tired.

"Is this Poland or Hungary?" inquired, after a time, the king of a guide.

"This is Poland."

"But why do we not turn directly to Hungary?"

"Because it is impossible. At some distance this pass turns, beyond the turn is a cliff, beyond that we come out on the high-road, turn, then go through one more pass, and there the Hungarian country begins."

"Then I see it would have been better to go by the highway at first," said the king.

"Quiet!" cried the mountaineer, quickly. And springing to the cliff he put his ear to it.

All fixed their eyes on him; his face changed in a moment, and he said: "Beyond the turn troops are coming from the water-fall! For God's sake! Are they not Swedes?"

"Where? How? What?" men began to ask on every side. "We hear nothing."

"No, for snow is lying on the sides. By God's wounds, they are near! they will be here straightway!"

"Maybe they are the marshal's troops," said the king.

In one moment Kmita urged his horse forward. "I will go and see!" said he.

The Kyemliches moved that instant after him, like hunting-dogs in a chase; but barely had they stirred from their places when the turn of the pass, about a hundred yards distant, was made black by men and horses. Kmita looked at them, and the soul quivered within him from terror.

Swedes were advancing.

They were so near that it was impossible to retreat, especially since the king's party had wearied horses. It only remained to break through, to perish, or to go into captivity. The unterrified king understood this in a flash; therefore he seized the hilt of his sword.

"Cover the king and retreat!" cried Kmita.

Tyzenhauz with twenty men pushed forward in the twinkle of an eye; but Kmita instead of joining them moved on at a sharp trot against the Swedes.

He wore the Swedish dress, the same in which he disguised himself when going out from the cloister. Seeing a horseman coming toward them in such a dress, the Swedes thought perhaps this was some party of their own belonging to the King of Sweden; they did not hasten their pace, but the captain commanding pushed out beyond the first three.

"What people are you?" asked he in Swedish, looking at the threatening and pale face of the young man approaching.

Kmita rode up to him so closely that their knees almost touched, and without speaking a word fired from a pistol directly into his ear.

A shout of terror was rent from the breasts of the Swedish cavalry; but still louder thundered the voice of Pan Andrei, "Strike!"

And like a rock torn from a cliff rolling down, crushing everything in its course, so did he fall on the first rank, bearing death and destruction. The two young Kyemliches, like two bears, sprang after him into the whirl. The clatter of sabres on mail and helmets was heard, like the sound of hammers, and was followed straightway by outcries and groans.

It seemed at the first moment to the astonished Swedes that three giants had fallen upon them in that wild mountain pass. The first three pushed back confused in the presence of the terrible man, and when the succeeding ones had extricated themselves from behind the bend of the pass, those in the rear were thrown back and confused. The horses fell to biting and kicking. The soldiers in the remoter ranks were not able to shoot, nor come to the assistance of those in front, who perished without aid under the blows of the three giants. In vain did they fall, in vain did they present their weapon points; here sabres were breaking, there men and horses fell. Kmita urged his horse till his hoofs were hanging above the heads of the steeds of his opponents, he was raging himself, cutting and thrusting. The blood rushed to his face, and from his eyes fire flashed. All thoughts were quenched in him save one, – he might perish, but he must detain the Swedes. That thought turned in him to a species of wild ecstasy; therefore his powers were trebled, his movements became like those of a leopard, mad, and swift as lightning. With blows of his sabre, which were blows beyond human, he crushed men as a thunderbolt crushes young trees; the twin Kyemliches followed, and the old man, standing a trifle in the rear, thrust his rapier out every moment between his sons, as a serpent thrusts out its bloody tongue.

Meanwhile around the king there rose confusion. The nuncio, as at Jivyets, seized the reins of his horse, and on the other side the bishop of Cracow pulled back the steed with all his force; but the king spurred him till he stood on his hind legs.

"Let me go!" cried the king. "As God lives! We shall pass through the enemy!"

"My Lord, think of the country!" cried the bishop of Cracow.

The king was unable to tear himself from their hands, especially since young Tyzenhauz with all his men closed the road. Tyzenhauz did not go to help Kmita; he sacrificed him, he wanted only to save the king.

"By the passion of our Lord!" cried he, in despair, "those men will perish immediately! Gracious Lord, save yourself while there is time! I will hold them here yet awhile!"

But the stubbornness of the king when once roused reckoned with nothing and no man. Yan Kazimir spurred his horse still more violently, and instead of retreating pushed forward.

But time passed, and each moment might bring with it final destruction.

"I will die on my own soil! Let me go!" cried the king.

Fortunately, against Kmita and the Kyemliches, by reason of the narrowness of the pass, only a small number of men could act at once, consequently they were able to hold out long. But gradually even their powers began to be exhausted. A number of times the rapiers of the Swedes had struck

Kmita's body, and his blood began to flow. His eyes were veiled as it were by a mist. The breath halted in his breast. He felt the approach of death; therefore he wanted only to sell his life dearly. "Even one more!" repeated he to himself, and he sent down his steel blade on the head or the shoulder of the nearest horseman, and again he turned to another; but evidently the Swedes felt ashamed, after the first moment of confusion and fear, that four men were able to detain them so long, and they crowded forward with fury; soon the very weight of men and horses drove back the four men, and each moment more swiftly and strongly.

With that Kmita's horse fell, and the torrent covered the rider.

The Kyemliches struggled still for a time, like swimmers who seeing that they are drowning make efforts to keep their heads above the whirl of the sea, but soon they also fell. Then the Swedes moved on like a whirlwind toward the party of the king.

Tyzenhauz with his men sprang against them, and struck them in such fashion that the sound was heard through the mountains.

But what could that handful of men, led by Tyzenhauz, do against a detachment of nearly three hundred strong?

There was no doubt that for the king and his party the fatal hour of death or captivity must come.

Yan Kazimir, preferring evidently the first to the second, freed finally the reins from the hands of the bishops, and pushed forward quickly toward Tyzenhauz. In an instant he halted as if fixed to the earth.

Something uncommon had happened. To spectators it seemed as though the mountains themselves were coming to the aid of the rightful king.

Behold on a sudden the edges of the pass quivered as if the earth were moving from its foundations, as if the pines on the mountain desired to take part in the battle; and logs of wood, blocks of snow and ice, stones, fragments of cliff's, began to roll down with a terrible crash and roar on the ranks of the Swedes crowded in the pass. At the same time an unearthly howl was heard on each side of the narrow place.

Below in the ranks began seething which passed human belief. It seemed to the Swedes that the mountains were falling and covering them. Shouts rose, the lamentations of crushed men, despairing cries for assistance, the whining of horses, the bite and terrible sound of fragments of cliffs on armor.

At last men and horses formed one mass quivering convulsively, crushed, groaning, despairing, and dreadful. But the stones and pieces of cliff's ground them continually, rolling without mercy on the now formless masses, the bodies of horses and men.

"The mountaineers! the mountaineers!" shouted men in the retinue of the king.

"With axes at the dog-brothers!" called voices from the mountain.

And that very moment from both rocky edges appeared long-haired heads, covered with round fur caps, and after them came out bodies, and several hundred strange forms began to let themselves down on the slopes of the snow.

Dark and white rags floating above their shoulders gave them the appearance of some kind of awful birds of prey. They pushed down in the twinkle of an eye; the sound of their axes emphasized their wild ominous shouting and the groans of the Swedes.

The king himself tried to restrain the slaughter; some horsemen, still living, threw themselves on their knees, and raising their defenceless hands, begged for their lives. Nothing availed, nothing could stay the vengeful axes. A quarter of an hour later there was not one man living among the Swedes in the pass.

After that the bloody mountaineers began to hurry toward the escort of the king.

The nuncio looked with astonishment on those people, strange to him, large, sturdy, covered partly with sheepskin, sprinkled with blood, and shaking their still steaming axes.

But at sight of the bishops they uncovered their heads. Many of them fell on their knees in the snow.

The bishop of Cracow raising his tearful face toward heaven said, "Behold the assistance of God, behold Providence, which watches over the majesty of the king." Then turning to the mountaineers, he asked, "Men, who are you?"

"We are of this place," answered voices from the crowd.

"Do you know whom you have come to assist? This is your king and your lord, whom you have saved."

At these words a shout rose in the crowd. "The king! the king! Jesus, Mary! the king!" And the joyful mountaineers began to throng and crowd around Yan Kazimir. With weeping they fell to him from every side; with weeping, they kissed his feet, his stirrups, even the hoofs of his horse. Such excitement reigned, such shouting, such weeping that the bishops from fear for the king's person were forced to restrain the excessive enthusiasm.

And the king was in the midst of a faithful people, like a shepherd among sheep, and great tears were flowing down his face. Then his countenance became bright, as if some sudden change had taken place in his soul, as if a new, great thought from heaven by birth had flashed into his mind, and he indicated with his hand that he wished to speak; and when there was silence he said with a voice so loud that the whole multitude heard him, —

"O God, Thou who hast saved me by the hands of simple people, I swear by the suffering and death of Thy Son to be a father to them from this moment forward."

"Amen!" responded the bishops.

For a certain time a solemn silence reigned, then a new burst of joy. They inquired of the mountaineers whence they had come into the passes, and in what way they had appeared to rescue the king. It turned out that considerable parties of Swedes had been wandering about Chorshtyn, and, not capturing the castle itself, they seemed to seek some one and to wait. The mountaineers too had heard of a battle which those parties had delivered against troops among whom it was said that the king himself was advancing. Then they determined to push the Swedes into an ambush, and sending to them deceitful guides, they lured them into the pass.

"We saw," said the mountaineers, "how those four horsemen attacked those dogs; we wanted to assist the four horsemen, but were afraid to fall upon the dog-brothers too soon!"

Here the king seized his head. "Mother of Thy only Son!" cried he, "find Babinich for me! Let us give him at least a funeral! And he is the man who was considered a traitor, the one who first shed his own blood for us."

"It was I who accused him. Gracious Lord!" said Tyzenhauz.

"Find him, find him!" cried the king. "I will not leave here till I look upon his face and put my blessing on him."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.