German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Karl Emil Franzos (1848-1904)

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The Beard of Abraham Weinkafer

In the South Russian province of Podolia, on the railway line that connects Kiev with the Black Sea, there lies the little town of Vinnytsia. A Jewish man lived there, Abraham Weinkafer by name, a master glazier by trade. He passed his days quietly and peaceably; a good husband and father, a diligent craftsman. He did nothing to draw public attention to himself. Now, he did have an advantage over his fellow citizens, but in Vinnytsia, where the sense of beauty is little cultivated, this gained no recognition: he had the most magnificent beard in the little town, a giant beard, which looked particularly beautiful and awe-inspiring after it had turned grey.

It was in the year 1871, and Abraham was in his mid-fifties at the time, when the Governor-General of Podolia came to Vinnytsia one day. A new school, in the foundation of which he had taken a lively interest, was to be opened, and he did not want to be missing from the ceremony. The man belonged to the old nobility, he had not only received an aristocratic education but also really learned something; he had a passion for all that was beautiful and he dabbled in the arts; he composed elegant verses and painted devilishly nice watercolours. Yet he was not only a perfect gentleman, but also a truly amiable, benevolent soul, and, as an official, always strove only to do good. The only thing was, he was somewhat absent-minded and exceedingly forgetful, and the most amusing anecdotes were told about this, inter alia, how once, at the Court Table at Petersburg – he belonged to the privileged favourites of Alexander II and the entire Imperial House – he had pushed his plate back, pulled out a pencil and begun, to the horror of those sitting next to him, to draw on the white damask cloth. He was himself conscious of this failing, and to compensate for it he chose an adjutant with an excellent memory.

All the inhabitants of the small town had assembled in festive garb before the new school in honour of the distinguished visitor, and our hero was among them. He looked quite splendid in his kaftan of black silk, decorated with the giant beard, and could not fail to instantly catch a painter's eye. That was why the Governor, when he was walking through the lines after the ceremony had come to an end, followed by his adjutant and the town's Chief of Police, stopped in front of him, surveyed him with a highly satisfied smile, and affably asked his name and profession. The simple man was so disconcerted by this unexpected honour that he could only stammer out his answer.

"That is excellent," said the Governor, clapping him condescendingly on the shoulder. "Master glazier – I like to hear that; a trade in hand finds gold in every land… But tell me, my man" – he spoke down to the old man because he was just a Jew, but there was certainly no nasty intent,[1] – "how did you come by this beard?"

This question made good Abraham even more disconcerted. "How is it that I have come by my beard?" he humbly asked at last. "It just grew on me!..."

"A glorious beard!" His Excellency cried enthusiastically. "And what is the most important thing, it goes with your face, your whole appearance. to have no idea, good Abraham, of what a curiosity you are… Would you care to sit for me? I would like to draw you. Only a pencil sketch, one hour will suffice."

"Draw?" cried Abraham, raising an averting hand, "what is there to draw in an old Jew?"

"So, just as modest as handsome!" laughed the Governor. But the Chief of Police understood the meaning of Abraham's whining tone better. "There is a particular reason for that!" he explained to his superior. "The man is not, indeed, one of the strictly Orthodox Jews himself, but he fears their anger. The fact is that these consider it to be sinful if a Jew has his portrait taken… You will do what His Excellency commands," he concluded brusquely, having turned to Abraham.

"Not that tone!" the Governor forbade. "The man is not obliged to sit for me, you know… But if I ask you again," he said to the Jew, "you'll do it, perhaps? As I said, only one hour, say tomorrow morning, as I shall depart at the midday-hour…"

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[1] In the original, he uses the informal "du" for "you" instead of the polite "Sie."

The Jew naturally did not refuse any longer, and on the next morning the "sitting" took place. The Governor conversed with the Jew in the most affable manner and presented him with a valuable amber cigarette-holder on parting. This cigarette-holder and Abraham's account of his conversation with the Governor occupied the people of Vinnytsia for weeks to come. The master glazier could not praise the condescension of his distinguished patron enough; only, he was quite disparaging in his remarks about the sketch; he himself, although he knew his own face well enough, was not able to make himself out in this criss-cross of pencil strokes. Yet he did a grievous injustice to the Governor's talent with this judgement, for it was a truly pretty and characteristic sketch.

This opinion was shared several months later by a very grand lady at the Petersburg Court when the Governor showed her the drawing. She was the Duchess of L., related to the Imperial House and distinguished by a fine feeling for art, who had tried her hand, and not without success, as a painter in the historical genre. "Splendid!" she cried, her eyes lighting up. "What a handsome patriarchal head! This would be the ideal model for the Patriarch Abraham in the Biblical scene I have long intended to paint! Again and again, I have delayed the execution, simply because an entirely suitable model could not be found… Pray, leave the sketch with me!"

"With pleasure, Your Highness," the General assured her. "But I could procure the man himself for you, you know."

"Oh," cried the Duchess, "do you believe that to be possible… Why, that would be delightful!"

"Nothing is impossible when Your Highness gives the command!" the cavalier gallantly replied. "Besides, this should not be so very difficult, the man will do it very willingly for money and blandishments. He lives in Vinnytsia; his name has, admittedly, slipped my mind, but my adjutant is sure to still know it. I shall give him the order this very day; he will certainly arrange the matter quickly and adeptly. You shall have your model here in a week's time at the latest."

The adjutant really did still know the name, indeed, he remembered all the other particulars, even that Abraham had hesitated for a moment for fear of the fanaticism of his co-religionists. But even if he had not remembered this, requisition through government channels would have seemed to him the only way certain to succeed. At any rate, the Duchess of L. must not be kept waiting. And so he telegraphed to the Provincial Chancellery in Kamenetz-Podolsk that the Jew, Abraham Weinkafer in Vinnytsia was to be taken and transported to St. Petersburg at once, and on arrival there he was to report without delay to the Governor, who would meet the costs of the journey. A reliable man was to be assigned the Jew as a companion.

The telegram reached the hands of the Vice-Governor, and this official might perhaps have been surprised at its contents if he had just had more time. As it was, all he did was to quickly order one of his Court Councillors to bring the Jew to Petersburg by the shortest route and under guard. And the Court Councillor simply did not have any time either and therefore passed the order on to his secretary; only, he introduced the word "arrest." "What can this master glazier from Vinnytsia have done," the young official asked from curiosity, “to have to be sent directly to Petersburg?” “Clearly a political crime!” said the Court Councillor. That made sense to the secretary, and he thought it must have been a serious crime, otherwise such haste would not have been ordered. And so he telegraphed to the Chief of Police in Vinnytsia that the master glazier, Abraham Weinkafer, being accused of a serious political crime, was to be brought to Petersburg forthwith under escort and with all possible expedition.

The Chief of Police read the order with boundless amazement; had he ever sought anything behind the handsome beard, it would assuredly not have been political machinations. The thought also occurred to him that there was a misunderstanding here, but that was of course no use; the order was set down clearly enough and had to be carried out. He had the Jew summonsed, who appeared in a rather agitated state; all his life, the police had taken no notice of him. Paralysed with horror, he listened to the order, and it was long before he could utter a sound. “Mercy!” he pleaded at last, throwing himself at the Chief of Police’s feet. “It cannot be true, what have I to do with ‘Politics’? If you had not explained the word to me just now, I wouldn’t understand it!”

The official was a sufficient judge of character to know that this tone was genuine. Moved to pity for the unfortunate man, he decided to do for him the only thing that lay in his power: He inquired of the government by telegraph if there were not a confusion of names. In the meantime, he absolutely had to detain him as a prisoner. His wife and children were of course allowed to visit him. After the first, terrible shock was overcome, they began, like him, to hope: The truth of the matter must surely come to light. Furthermore, all the inhabitants of Vinnytsia had the firm conviction that their honest, peaceful fellow citizen, who had never yet worried his head about the dull quarrels in the world, but only about his clear window-panes, could not possibly be a dangerous conspirator.

Only three days had passed when the answer from the Government arrived, signed by that secretary: it contained a reprimand for the Chief of Police because he was delaying the course of justice with superfluous questions; there was no misunderstanding. A western official would perhaps have made precise enquiries beforehand, but it is unlikely that every one would have done so, as the wording of the order was so definite. In any case, that secretary did not act maliciously – and that is precisely the deciding factor in this story.

On the next morning, Abraham was taken, heavily chained, to the railway station on a small cart. Opposite him sat two soldiers with loaded muskets; his wife and children wailed as they ran along beside the wagon, and many members of the community followed at the back, from curiosity or from compassion. The unfortunate man did not lose his composure; tears may have streamed incessantly over his pale countenance, but he kept comforting his wife and children. “Trust in the Almighty, as I trust in Him,” he cried to them. “He will not let me, an innocent man, perish. My heart tells me this: I’ll see you again soon and we’ll be happy.”

It took three weeks before Abraham was committed to the fortress-prison in Petersburg, to the division for political prisoners. A brief interrogation was held with him in the Reception Office; he naturally protested his innocence, and, just as naturally, he was not believed. There may have been only one single document about him – the accompanying report of the Vinnytsia Chief of Police, in which he gave notice that he hereby handed over, in accordance with the order of high government, Abraham Weinkafer, accused of a political crime – but this was sufficient to keep the man in custody. The other documents, thought the gentlemen, were sure to follow soon. The prisoner was clothed in the criminal uniform, and his long beard being against prison regulations, it was shaved off. The glorious, the patriarchal beard! This did not actually cause the unfortunate man woe; he had heavier sorrow. But how those two art-loving souls, the Governor-General and the Duchess, would have lamented, had they learned about this irreplaceable loss for art. The most splendid model for a patriarch to be found in the Empire had been heinously mutilated.

But they did not learn about it. The Duchess did, it is true, when fourteen days had passed by since her conversation with the Governor-General, incidentally ask him what the position was regarding her model, and he at once asked his adjutant, who in his turn inquired of the Provincial Government by telegraph. But the answer: The matter had been delayed by the dilatoriness of the Vinnytsia Chief of Police but all was now in perfect order and the Jew would be in Petersburg in the next few days at any rate – reassured all parties.

Shortly afterwards, the Governor left the capital to go on a holiday trip abroad. He now took leave of his adjutant for good; he had personally recommended this excellent man for a higher post in a northern province. When the Governor returned to his official residence several months later, no further mention was made of the Jew. He had completely forgotten him, as had his clerks. All the more ardently did the poor, forsaken wife remember her unfortunate husband. When a year of fruitless waiting had passed by, she resolved to travel to Kamenetz-Podolsk. She wished to implore the Governor for mercy; she took with her the proof of his former favour, the amber cigarette-holder, which she had not alienated, even though Want had gradually moved into the house which had been deprived of its bread-winner. By an unhappy chance, the Governor had just gone to Petersburg at that time. But his deputy received her, and he too was not a man without a conscience; he listened patiently to her complaints and then gave her the answer he was obliged to give: Only the court had authority for political crimes; neither he nor his master could order anything in this matter. But if her husband were truly innocent, he would without doubt return home soon. With this scant consolation, she went home and waited patiently once again. But when a second year had elapsed, she planned to repeat her journey to the Governor, even though she could not produce the amber cigarette-holder any longer. But then people told her that her patron had been transferred several months before; he had been given a high government post in Moscow.

Meanwhile, Abraham was sitting in prison in Petersburg. He had been told that he would soon be brought to trial, but day after day, month after month, a year went by without anybody concerning themselves with him. His pleas for a trial continued to be in vain; they did not even reach the examining magistrate. “You’ll be brought forward as soon as it’s your turn,” the prison warder told him. Finally, at an inspection of the prisoners, attention was drawn to him. A year’s detention without trial – that did strike the Inspector as quite remarkable, and he made inquiries of the examining magistrate. But the latter was able to plead that the blame did not lie with him – the papers had simply not arrived yet, and the Inspector had to accept this reason.

A second year elapsed. The old man declined more and more; he could now have sat as a model for Job at the most. His trust in God had long sustained him; at last, the rage of despair overtook him. He began to rave in his cell, and so brought severe disciplinary action down upon himself. But this event had at least the good effect of reminding the authorities of his existence. The Examining Court requisitioned the documents from the Provincial Government. The answer did not arrive until several months later; it was, of course, that nothing was known about this matter there; the arrest had been effected on the orders of the former Governor-General who now lived in Moscow. The Court now directed an enquiry to him. From his deputy came the answer: His Excellency was at a spa, the matter would be laid before him following his return.

And another year passed by, and a new Inspector came. He was shaken by the sight of the old man, but even more by his story. He decided to get to the bottom of the matter and began to do so quite by rule. First of all, he interpellated the Vinnytsia Chief of Police. “Government order,” was the answer, but the worthy man was not satisfied with that; he repeated his supposition that there was a misunderstanding here. If that were so, then it had already had terrible consequences: The prisoner’s wife had died of grief, and his children were left in the greatest misery. The Inspector now turned to the Provincial Government. It referred him to its answer of the previous year. Now the inquiry was finally directed to the former Governor again, and this time, the answer came at once: He had never had a political prisoner taken directly to Petersburg. Indeed, the distinguished gentleman could give this answer with the utmost certainty, notwithstanding that his memory was usually so unreliable; for he had always left political investigations to the courts.

The Inspector now found the matter altogether unsettling. He applied for the prisoner to be released, for a criminal might be there, but there was no crime. However, the court demanded complete clarification first, and made fresh enquiries. Yet light was shed on the case even before these came to a conclusion. The Governor came to Petersburg, whither his former adjutant had been transferred in the meantime. The latter looked him up and asked for his intercession to obtain a high post. The Governor promised this readily; with the help of the very influential Duchess of L., it would surely be easily managed. He betook himself to the grand lady and recommended his protégé to her. She promised her good offices in the most amiable manner, but because her memory was as excellent as the Governor's was weak, she asked with a slightly malicious smile, "Is this not the same gentleman who procured my model for me so punctually?"

"The same!" eagerly cried the Governor. "I had quite forgotten about that. Did you paint the Jew? A splendid head, is it not?"

"Doubtless – but I have never seen it!"

Filled with dismay, the Governor communicated this to his protégé. The latter initiated vigorous enquiries; he wished to convince the grand patroness that he had done his bit. On the very next day, he was able to give the Governor a horrified account of where the poor model was. Both gentlemen betook themselves to the prison at once. No doubt – there was his name on the list. The gaoler was fetched. “Have Abraham Weinkafer brought here immediately!” he was ordered. The official stood there, looking embarrassed. “Beg pardon, Excellency… the man died two months ago. It’s a real miracle that he held out for so long. But he kept hoping…”

The two gentlemen have provided for the orphaned children. Even they could not bring the dead man back to life.

That is the story of the beard of Abraham Weinkafer, and I cannot find any words to add to it.

Jancu the Judge

The following is related strictly after the facts. This assurance will seem almost superfluous to whoever reads it. For this story bears the stamp of its author – of Fate. Only this most merciless and most careless of poets dares such hideous and yet such simple effects. To imitate these through art would perhaps be a rewarding task for a writer of novellas, but it would surely be a sad one. The portrayer of foreign customs, however, takes a different point of view. For him, Truth must be the highest goddess.

Farmer Jancu is sitting on the Accused’s Stool in front of a *Romanian* jury. His brown serdak[2] is torn, and through it, as through the splits in his shirt, his glistening bronze-coloured skin can be seen. His hair falls in long, tangled, discoloured strands over his wan countenance, his head is sunk on his breast, his dull eyes are vacantly directed at the floor. No look meets the public, the jury, the judge.

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[2] A short overcoat.

The clerk of the court calls out the case and the bill of indictment is read out. Farmer Jancu, owner of a large farm, Greek Orthodox, 29 years of age, previously of irreproachable character and judge in his village, has confessed to the murder of his wife, Xenia, 21 years of age, his farmhand Alexa, 43 years of age, and the gypsy woman Mariula, of unknown age, at any rate far older than 50, in one and the same night, from Shrove Sunday through to Monday. The charge describes the three crimes according to the statement of the accused; there are no eye-witnesses. Yet Jancu's confession, which of itself occasioned his arrest immediately after the deed, is very comprehensive and confirmed by the results of the post-mortem. Jancu killed his wife with a bullet to the heart, the farmhand with a load of three buckshot to the head, and he strangled the gypsy woman with his hands. He refuses to divulge any information, notes the charge, concerning his reasons; the deed is also inexplicable to the witnesses.

The examination begins. "Jancu," asks the President, "do you confess your guilt today also?"

The accused rises to his feet, but his countenance remains unmoved, and his eyes are fixed on the floor. "Yes," he replies in a flat voice, "it's all true." And he instantly falls back onto his seat.

"You must remain standing, Jancu," the President informs him. "You must now tell us everything that you did and thought on that Sunday and the night thereof."

Jancu shakes his head and lets it fall even lower on his breast. Then he rises to his feet nevertheless, reluctant, hesitant. But his voice sounds flat and emotionless, as before: "No, good Sir, I won't do that. For what I did, you know already, and it's unnecessary for me to say it once more. And why I did it, I won't tell you or any man."

"But the law will have it so," states the President. "The jury must hear your confession from your own lips. And when you confess to the deed so remorsefully, why not to the reasons as well? For it can only be to your advantage, Jancu! All the people in your village say that you were the best and most upright of men. That is why you became judge in your village at so young an age. Also, Prince St., whom you formerly served for three years, personally came to the Examining Magistrate and said he considered himself bound by his conscience to testify on your behalf that you, Jancu, were the most honest, most sensible, most loyal man he ever had around his person. So when a man like you suddenly commits such an atrocious crime, then he is either mad, and you are not, or he has been thrown into the most terrible agitation by some occurrence. Now what was this occurrence? Confess it, I pray you! It will lighten your conscience and perhaps soften your sentence!"

But again Jancu shakes his head, and again the words fall slowly, calmly, tonelessly from his lips. "Good Sir, I thank you and the good Prince and my neighbours, but I don't want any of that! My confession was not remorseful; I just said everything that the judge needed to know so I can be punished, and I told nothing but the truth, for I've never lied before and I didn’t want to lie in this last matter either. But I didn’t do it out of remorse, for I don’t regret my deed. And if I were still now what I used to be, a happy, peaceful man, and if I now learned what I learned at that time, I would kill those three people in the next hour, as I did on that night. And so I don’t need to lighten my conscience, for it’s light. And as concerns the more lenient sentence, what use is leniency to me? What I’d like most is for these gentlemen” – he points to the jury – “to say: He should hang! But sadly that can’t happen, for we’ve stopped hanging, and I’ll just be placed in the salt-mines at Okna for the rest of my life. Should I wish to come out from there – what for? No, that’s not for me! I’ll stay there, and the work, the dog’s fare, and the blows will kill me after a few years. And that’s for the best. For I’ll be happy to die, Sir, I’ll be very happy to die!”

These words do not perhaps make any particularly deep impression on the reader. For the listener, however, they will be unforgettable. One could sense that there was in fact a burden weighing on this man’s soul which made death appear to him as a relief; not remorse, not the awareness of guilt, but an overpowering something under whose influence he had acted, which pressed him to the ground to this day.

The examination of the witnesses began. The first witness was the hoary-headed farmer Thodika, who had been the village judge before Jancu and now occupied the office again, “until another, younger house-father comes along who’ll be as honest as Jancu there.” The small, garrulous old man, with the wan face, in which his nose shines out red as a ruby, swore the oath and then related the following:

“Well, so it was Shrove Sunday. That’s an especially holy day, I went to church early, then ate in the tavern, and in the evening I walked home. But because I've sworn an oath, I'll tell the truth: namely, I didn't walk, but my wife and my sons carried me, because I was very drunk. Alright, they put me to bed, and I have a sound sleep. Around the third hour of the morning a terrible gale gets up, I don't hear any of it, but my wife says to my daughter Anitza, who was in the house with us because her husband was going to beat her to death – but they're reconciled now – she says this: 'Anitza,' she said, 'someone has hanged themselves, or a serious crime has happened, the wind's blowing really too strong.' And then there's a violent knocking at the door. The women are scared. 'It's me, Jancu the Judge, open up!' But when they light the pine torches and he steps in, they're even more frightened: it's Jancu and yet it isn't, the man has suddenly aged twenty years. 'What do you want?' my wife stammers. But he walks up to me and shakes me awake. 'Thodika, you must get up!' In the beginning, I don't hear anything, for I really had drunk a bit too much, but then I give a start. 'Hey, Jancu, what is it?' But as I look at him, I'm very soon half-sober from terror, and I become completely sober when he says to me: 'You were the judge before me and are the eldest in the Committee. I lay my office in your hands. And so arrest me, as it is your duty to now, and take me to the town at once. For I'm a murderer, I've killed my wife, my farmhand and the old witch. Then I leap up: 'Jancu, you're crazy!' And then I recall that he had lost his only child the day before, a dear little girl, Aniula, quite suddenly from cramps. So I think to myself: he loved the child so uncommonly much, her dying will have fried his brain, and I say sympathetically: 'Jancu, you've had a terrible dream. Perhaps because of your poor girl. Take comfort, it was God's will.' 'No,' he cries wildly, 'it was *not* God's will, but no matter, it's avenged! I've dealt justice in God's name, now people may do with me as they please; take me to the town!' And then I realised that it was true, and my heart stood still. It was enough to drive you to madness, but it really was the case: our judge, Jancu, was a murderer. Well, I took him into town in the morning."

"And did he not tell you," asks the President, "why he committed the crime?"

Thodika looks down at the ground and then, in embarrassment, over at Jancu. A peculiar change comes over the latter; he lifts up his head, his features come to life, and his blazing eyes are fixed, half-threateningly, half-imploringly, on the witness's countenance.

"Gentlemen," he stammered, disconcerted, "a word about that slipped his lips, against his will, when we were driving to the town. But I swore a sacred oath to him not to tell it to anyone. And now I've sworn the oath here to speak the whole truth. I'm at a complete loss what to do! Jancu, if you'll allow me…"

"You'll be silent," the other starts up, livid.

"Jancu," the President says sternly, "another word, and I'll have you taken out."

"My oath," says Thodika in a whiny voice, "my dear Jancu, I can't help you. So…"

"Be silent!" the accused cries furiously, peremptorily. The President makes a sign to the policeman. But Jancu continues: "If all my shame is to become known among men, then at least nobody shall speak it but I myself. Have that garrulous old woman step back. I'll say how everything came about myself…"

All is now as silent as the grave in the broad hall. And Jancu tells his story, not in a flat and dull voice as earlier, but wildly, passionately, almost through sobs. No heart remains unmoved, no eye dry, when the poor, unhappy man relates:

"I'll tell it myself, however hard it is for me to do. But I couldn't bear to hear someone else telling it. I didn't think that I'd end this way, and nobody thought it. For I was once a happy man and a good man; I may say that now, for you see, I'm not talking about myself, but about a dead man. Initially, I didn't fare well in life, I was the second son, my elder brother was to inherit everything; I had to serve as a farm-labourer. In my father's house, admittedly, but it's often harder to be a servant with your own folks than with strangers, take my word for it. After my father's death, I went to the town as a servant; I was diligent and devoted, everyone will testify to this. I also learned to read and write, and because I saw how brandy makes men into beasts, I've never touched a drop of it. Then I came to be with the Prince and was with him in Germany and in France. That's another country; even the peasant is a human being there. Well, the Prince was satisfied with me, as you know, he personally remembered me in my great need. I thought to myself at that time: now you'll stay in the town a while longer and save up your wages, and then you'll go to your village and buy yourself some fields. But things turned out differently. When I come home from our travels, my elder brother is dead, and all the big farmstead falls to me. So I buckle down to it and begin to manage the farm. But people say that I’m still missing something, and I feel this myself. So I began to look out for a wife, and I took Xenia. Not only because she was very beautiful and pleased me greatly, but also, around half out of pity. She was very poor and had to serve as a maid at her elder sister’s, and that reminded me of my younger days. I won’t say, by the way, that I married her out of magnanimity; I was also very much in love with her. Xenia was a quiet girl, whom nobody in the village could say anything against, and beautiful – admittedly, in a different way from how our girls usually are. She was delicate, blonde, and had still blue eyes. Perhaps it was precisely that which I liked. In short, we were man and wife within four weeks.

It was – with what is about to come, the words don’t want to pass my tongue, but I have to say them, for they are the truth – it was a truly happy marriage. My wife rarely laughed and was never particularly affectionate, but I thought to myself: ‘That’s just her way.’ She was a good housewife and faithfully stood by my side in my arduous work. For I had put all my efforts into running a model farm and imitating all the good I had seen elsewhere. That was difficult with our labourers, who are three-quarters pig and only one-quarter man, but I did all that was humanly possible, and I succeeded in many things, I may say. My property grew, and, because I was helpful wherever I could be, my popularity grew as well. I lacked only one thing to make my happiness complete: I had no children. Then, two years ago, my wife gave birth to a child, a lovely girl, blonde and blue-eyed, such a beautiful, dear child! O my Aniula! …”

The man’s voice fails him. He stares into space and shakes his head. Then he continues:

“Everything had worked out well for me; I had become judge so young in years! If someone had asked me at midday Saturday, before that terrible day: ‘Judge Jancu, who is the happiest man in the world?’, it’s highly possible that I would have said: ‘It almost seems to me that I am.’ And a little more than a day later, I was the unhappiest; never before has anyone been so wretched, never! I’ll briefly relate how this came about. For when I think of it, my head reels and my strength forsakes me. So it was midday Saturday. I come home from the pond, where I’ve been having ice dug out for the alehouse-keepers in Bucharest, and sit down to eat. My wife serves me meat and then a sweet rice pudding. But I don’t want to eat any of that, whereas Aniula, who’s sitting on my lap, hungrily reaches for it. I leave the child at the dish and quickly ride back out to the workers. I’ve been there about two hours when a maid comes running up as white as a sheet – the child is dying. I ride like the wind, but when I come home my little daughter is dead. Mariula, the old gypsy woman, is standing beside her and says, “It was cramps, like children often have!” My heart is almost breaking, but I pull myself together, as a man should. I arrange everything pertaining to the laying out and go to the priest. Then I come home, I send my wife to bed, but I myself sit down beside the dead body and stay there throughout the night. There is no sound save the crackling of the candles, and every now and then I hear my wife give a sigh; so passes the night. In the morning, I put everything in order at the farm, then I hold the juridical day in the village hall, as is my duty, and after that I come home. My wife is squatting on the floor and staring at the dead body with dry eyes; there’s something like madness in this. I want to raise and console her, but she wildly screams, ‘Don’t touch me!’ and dashes out. I look after her in amazement, but then I think to myself: ‘She’s always been so peculiar and quiet, grief shows itself in her in a peculiar way.’ Then I sit down again, and my grief finds release, and I weep a long time… Tears are a great relief; since then, I haven’t been able to weep any more…”

Again the man stares into space. Then he heaves a deep sigh and continues: “In twilight, I set out and go to the priest, to discuss the final arrangements for the burial the next day. But I take the side-path over the fields. And I hear a whimpering behind the hedge. ‘Who’s there?’ I cry. ‘It’s me, Mariula,’ the witch replies. ‘You’ve been brought here by God, Jancu, or the Devil. But no matter, even I have to go to the gallows, he and she shall go with me. Here I lie, he beat me half to death, that Alexa, because I demanded my honestly earned money from him, the money for the poison I gave Xenia. Is it my fault that the child died and not you? My poison was good!’ ‘Witch,’ I yell out, ‘What’s this you’re saying?’ ‘O wise one!’ she scoffs, ‘Don’t you suspect anything? Don’t you know that your wife hates you, that she only took you because of your farm? She prefers everyone else to you, she’s now having an affair with ugly old Alexa; they wanted to poison you, I supplied them with the poison.’ My hair stands on end. ‘You’re lying!’ I shout at last. She laughs scornfully. ‘Pray convince yourself! Go home and tell your wife that you have to go to the town on official duty and won’t come back until tomorrow. But then come back in three hours, and I’ll bet that you’ll find the two together.’ No words can express how I felt. I go home, load my pistols, have the second farmhand hitch up the horse, and tell my wife, ‘I won’t be back before the burial.’ But I call a halt at the nearest country inn and then go home through the stormy night. The bedroom window is dimly lit, I walk up, it’s only the gleam of light which falls through the open door from the catafalque. And,” the narrator breaks off, before yelling out in a horribly hoarse voice, “the two of them had been together five paces from the dead body!... Seeing this, I press the cock, aim and shoot, first her then him, fast as lightning. They both rattled their lives out in their blood. Then I go in and drag his corpse away, so nobody will discover the monstrous sin these two committed. And then I stand for a long, long time, staring at the bodies. There is a giggling beside me. ‘Splendid, Jancu, splendid!” Mariula had crept in. And I strangled her, for she was guilty too. Then I went to see Thodika… And now I ask, could it not be possible for me to be given the death penalty out of mercy?”

It was not possible. Jancu was sentenced to hard labour for life. After deliberating for nine hours, the jury had pronounced him guilty by eight votes to four. He was therefore only one vote short of being acquitted.

The Latinist Artilleryman

Many, many years have passed since that time, but if I were an artist, I could draw every detail, so exceedingly clear does it appear before my eyes. I can even remember the small grey coat worn by my neighbour on the left, Moses Salzmann, and Theodor Bohusiewicz’s breeches. But unfortunately, I became a draughtsman only in words and must therefore make the attempt with them. So picture to yourselves a dismal, rainy February day and, in its light, a dismal, rainy little town, and in one of the mire-filled streets a sinister grey house, and in this house a sinister grey room. Admittedly, while I write this down, the bright golden sunshine of remembrance flickers on the days of my youth. For I see myself among the many fifteen- and sixteen-year-old boys who are there, sitting together on low school-benches. Anxiously and with pounding hearts, we sit there, blinking timidly at the teacher's desk from time to time, as if a tiger or a ghost or even the headmaster were standing there. But nothing of the like stands there, rather, on the contrary, a handsome young man who is smiling as he unties the knot of a string which holds a pile of exercise books together. It is the Latin Professor, Herr Wilhelm Lang, and these exercise books are our homework. He smiles, woe to us, we know that smile. All those who have done the task negligently turn pale, and those who have actually copied it from others fold up like a pocket-knife. But a quiet trembling passes through even the ranks of the "Star Pupils." For who is able to boast: "I can stand in the sight of Professor Lang," and who can say of themselves, "I am righteous in his eyes"?

He smiles, oh, his smile grows wider and wider. And now he holds one of the exercise-books up high. "Can you guess," he asks, "who did the best work on this task?" Deepest silence. Only a few sighs become audible. "So, nobody. Well, the best work is that of our wise Aristides, Aristides Lewczuk."

That is a joke. And so there is dutiful laughter in the front benches, where the good pupils sit, and a less obligatory giggling in the middle benches, where the less good pupils sit. But in the back benches, where the defiant ones and the lazy ones squat, the unappreciated geniuses and that species who are always “on the receiving end,” there is no laughter when the Professor cracks a joke. There, all stays as quiet as the grave…

But why is that remark about wise Aristides a joke? And who is Aristides Lewczuk?

A second-year in the grammar school at Czernowitz.[3] But much more than that. Just take a look at him, the large, ungainly, twenty-six-year-old man – there, close to the wall, on the backmost bench. He has the nickname “the sloth” and anyone who sees him sprawling on his bench, where he reigns supreme, his yellow, puffy countenance with its goggling black little eyes resting on both arms, will not find the designation so very inappropriate. He has just been roused from a gentle daze by a bump on the nose from the boy in front of him, and he now looks around in a not particularly intelligent way. Being intelligent is not his thing at all. Poor boy! Up until his fourteenth year, he lived contentedly in Mamornitza, the dirty little Romanian village on the border where his father is the local judge, and no thirst for higher things tormented him. But that was, unfortunately, the case with his father: Aristides had to study and become a priest. And so the poor, stupid boy came to the town, into school, oh, only God has kept count of the tears and blows! After that, Aristides explained to his father that, it seemed to him, he had “no head for Latin.” But the local judge was of a different opinion, and so Aristides bowed to his fate, to become a shining light in Greek non-uniate Christianity. Admittedly, he seemed at the same time to form the conviction that said Christianity was not in such a hurry. For he avoided haste and used exactly eight years for Lower Grammar School. And now he sits in the Second Year, on the back bench, the poor, foolish, much-teased “ultimus ultimorum” …

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[3] Now Chernivtsi in Ukraine.

“Lewczuk!” says the Professor; Aristides hesitantly gets up and scratches behind his ear. “Someone else has written this task, that is clear. For it is not only flawless but written in elegant Latin. And for that reason, I shall not content myself with entering a ‘Third’ for you followed by the note, ‘Attempted to cheat,’” Aristides scratches more strongly, “but I shall also ask you: Who is the author? It is not a grammar-school pupil!” Aristides is silent. “Well – quickly now!”

“I cannot say who is,” Aristides tearfully stammered at last in his ponderous German.

“Why not?”

“Because he’ll get twenty-five for it pretty quick!”

We burst out into gales of laughter; even the Professor smiles.

Only Aristides remains deadly serious. “The Captain is sure to let him have,” he adds.

“Come here, Lewczuk,” Lang cries impatiently. Aristides advances slowly until he finally stands before the teacher’s desk. “Has your little bit of mind grown rebellious? Who did the task?”

“The Latinist Artilleryman has done. I don’t know what’s called. Other soldiers always say, ‘Latinist.’ The Captain also cries, ‘Latinist.’ So I say ‘Latinist’ too.”

“And where did you make this curious acquaintance?”

“At our home, in the yard, at Frau Terlecka’s. The Captain lives there too with horses. ‘Latinist’ is orderly of Captain, serves horses.”

The class writhes in convulsive laughter. “And this groom did the task?” cries the Professor. “Who is this man?” “Very good man!” affirms Aristides. “Honest soul. But is always sad, always sad, sick, at the chest. He comes to me the other day, says: ‘You are a student?’ I say, ‘Yes.’ He says, ‘Please lend me books.’ I say, ‘I have only schoolbooks.’ He says, ‘Lend me schoolbooks.’ I give Mathematics. He asks, “Perhaps Classics?’ I ask, ‘Do you know Latin, Greek?’ He says, ‘Yes!’ I give him Ovid, he reads Ovid. I give him Xenophon, he reads Xenophon. I give him Homer, he reads Homer. Without dictionary, knows very well. I ask: ‘Why are you common soldier?’ He says, ‘For fifteen years now,’ tells me, because of packet, because of informers, because of bad people…”

“What?” the Professor interrupts him in astonishment.

“Because of packet,” Aristides repeats imperturbably, “because of informers, because of bad people. You know, Prague Revolution.[4] I listen. My heart is sore, I say: ‘Is sad!” I ask, “But can you perhaps do this task?’ He says, ‘Yes!’ I say, ‘Then do it!’ He does. I copy.”

The Professor had grown grave. “Does any one of you live near Lewczuk?” he then asked. I put my hand up. “Please let Lewczuk take you there. Speak with the man and then report to me. Perhaps there is something that can be done for him.” –

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[4] The Prague Uprising of June 12-17, 1848.

The three forenoon school-lessons were over. I went with Lewczuk through the filthy streets, which lay in thick fog, to his remote dwelling in Russian Street. My fellow pupil was as flustered as someone with so happy a natural disposition could be. “Damn, if comes out,” he said. “Captain gets wind, gets angry, has twenty-five given, man is sick, will die, who is to blame? I!” But then: “What, I? Not I! He himself! I say to him straight: ‘I am *not* top of class, I am no star pupil, I am bad schoolboy. So make some *mistakes;* four mistakes: SATISFACTORY, or five: ADEQUATE, or six: PASSABLE AT A PINCH. But he promises, then does without mistakes, of course! Lang smells a rat!” I took the liberty of asking why my colleague did not endeavour to make only six mistakes in a task through his own efforts. “No point,” he said with fatalistic resignation, “am in Quinta first year, must repeat anyway. No head, too stupid. But does no harm! Do I want to become a doctor? No! Or lawyer? No! Or professor? No! So, only priest, village, peasants, head good enough!” He made this confession to me at the gate to his dwelling. We waded through the mire of the courtyard. “Stables there,” said Aristides, pointing to a small, dilapidated building, “will find there. I go have sleep, until noon. Cheerio!”

I walked through the stable doors. Two glossily currycombed horses neighed at me, weapons and regimentals hung on the walls. I was just about to withdraw when a violent coughing sounded towards me from the background, where a bed might have been, followed by the question: “Can I help you?”

I looked over but was not able to distinguish anything in the gloomy light of this day. So I touched my hat and spoke into the twilight: “I wish to speak with the Latinist Artilleryman.” The man got up and walked towards me. He was built quite tall, but his posture was limp, his figure emaciated. He had to be very ill. One could see this in his face also: it was bare and sombre, dreadfully sombre. And something more could be read from this face: that riding-breeches and stable-jacket were not the right attire for this man. I do not know how it happened, but I took off my hat. “I am the artilleryman you are seeking.” A soft smile played around the corners of his mouth as he spoke. This made me aware that I, a complete stranger, had actually called him by his nickname, which threw me into so embarrassed a state that I told the tale of our Aristides’s homework and Lang’s instruction only very confusedly. He looked at me gratefully with his sad blue eyes. “I thank the Professor for his kindness and you for this trouble, I thank you with all my heart. I am sorry that poor Lewczuk got into hot water, but I really forgot the ‘six mistakes.’ I did not like doing it at all, but I did owe him a return for the books he had lent me. And the composition was correct?” “And how! The Professor said straight away: ‘No grammar-school pupil wrote that!’”

“Yes,” he said, “when you have once devoted your life to something, you don’t forget it so easily.” He coughed convulsively, and I was horrified to see bloody froth appearing on his lips for a moment. Then the fit eased up and he continued: “It is fifteen years since I had a Latin book in my hand. I had only Homer.” He went to his bed and brought me the small, voluminous, well-worn little book. “I put this in my pocket on that night of the ninth to the tenth of May when they tore me out of bed in Prague, and since then, as by a miracle, I have smuggled it through everywhere. I should actually be angry with this book," he continued with an appalling smile, "it has kept me alive."

"Oh, I know," I cried, "You were in the Prague Revolution!"

He shook his head. "No! I was a diligent student who lived only for his studies. My crime was: I once knew somebody who cared about politics."

"What?" I cried, horrified. "And for that –"

"Yes, for that!" But then he said, changing the subject, "So tell the Professor that I thank him with all my heart. But I can scarcely think what else could be done for me."

"But you are so ill! You cannot stay here any longer, in this damp stable!"

"Soon it will be spring!" he replied with a smile that cut me to the quick. "I always feel better when the days are fair. And if all the signs do not deceive me, my young friend, I shall become perfectly healthy again in this very spring!"

Tears filled my eyes. "Don't speak like that!" I asked. "Everything will be all right. We have Schmerling[5] now!" I remembered how, three years before, at the end of February 1861, the entire town, and the grammar school in particular, had been illuminated to honour the February Constitution, and how we schoolboys, at the order of our class teacher, had made a banner at that time: 'Liberias et justitia Austriae fundamenta.' And so I continued: "We have a constitution now. Nobody may suffer injustice any longer. Now Austria is built on freedom and justice…" He smiled, smiled so strangely, that I broke off. I have often been obliged to remember that smile – on July 30th, 1865 – on February 6th, 1871 … and often since then, very often…

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[5] Anton von Schmerling (1805-93), a reforming statesman.

"We can perhaps," I concluded, "make your life more bearable in the meantime. You would like books?"

"Oh," he cried with delight, "that would certainly be splendid! If you would be so kind! You have no idea how great a favour you would be doing me!" He was electrified, his eyes shone. "If the Professor could lend me a solid commentary on Homer! Then perhaps a Horace. You see how insatiable I am already! And then – I would also like to read Schiller's poems one more time, before I – before it becomes spring!"

"I shall see to everything," I promised. "I'll fetch the classics from the Professor this afternoon. But the Schiller I have myself, I'll bring it right away."

I ran home and brought him the book. The way in which he reached for it, trembling, and began to read in a low voice, is something I never shall forget.

After that, I went to Lang and told him everything. He was deeply affected and showed the liveliest interest. He would willingly have given me his whole library; laden like a mule, I trotted to Russian Street. At the same time, I brought an invitation from the Professor to pay him a visit soon. The poor artilleryman was moved to tears. He opened every book, read the title and cried out time after time: "Oh, to see this again!" Then we took everything to Lewczuk's room; here, in the Treasury Stables, the books were not safe from confiscation. Honest Aristides did not, indeed, truly understand the poor Latinist's joy, but he shared it. "Is glad about books!" he said, astonished, to me. "I'm never glad about books. But if poor, sick man is glad, I'm glad too!" The artilleryman also accepted the invitation with gratitude. "Next Sunday," he said, "when my Captain is hunting in Zuczka."

I took him to the Professor's house on that day and was allowed to stay. It was moving to see how the mortally ill man came to life, as it were, through contact with an educated man who took the liveliest interest in him and, moreover, pursued the same learned studies as he himself had formerly done. And on that day he told us the story of his life, a simple, sober story and yet full of crushing tragedy.

"My name is Franz Bauer and I was born in southern Bohemia, near Budweis. My parents were poor people, and I had to struggle my way up through my own efforts. Even during my schooldays, I supported myself by giving private lessons, and I continued to help myself in the same way at university. I entered Prague University in 1847 and studied Philology. I took no part in the movement of 1848; I had no connection with the Prague June Days. It is not that I was insensitive to the ideals which were championed at that time, they were the ideals of nationality and freedom, and my old folks had preached them to me, albeit in their own way. But I was not the type that is suited to noisy activity, being a quiet, timid person who was actually well versed only in his books. At that time, I began the preliminary work for a treatise: 'On the Genesis of the Homeric Epics.' Winter passed in tireless work, the spring of eighteen-hundred and fortynine came. Then disaster broke over me.

“At that time I associated now and then with a compatriot and fellow student, who was a member of the student fraternity ‘Marcomannia.’ He was a good, hard-working person, but also fanatical and devoted to the revolutionary ideas. He came to me one day in March and told me that a large secret society had formed against the ‘black and yellow tyranny,’[6] and he belonged to it: the society consisted of young people of all stations, Germans and Czechs, it had contact with the country folk and also, through some officers in Bohemian regiments, with the military. The purpose of the society was to seize Hradčany[7] and all fortifications in Prague; on this signal, the whole land would rise up. He invited me to join the society, which I flatly refused to do; I also warned him not to get mixed up in such dangerous affairs. But he said, firstly, it was his duty to liberate the Fatherland, and secondly, the matter could not possibly miscarry, for the Prague Society did not stand alone, it was in contact with a large revolutionary league in Dresden through the Russian agitator Bakunin,[8] and it maintained relations with Görgey,[9] who would continue to defeat the Imperial and Royal[10] troops and very soon be in Budapest, and soon be in Vienna also. Moreover, the society was under the leadership of proven and experienced patriots. Of course, I stuck to my refusal nonetheless, and he broke off, disgruntled. We did not speak about the matter subsequently, and I forgot about it. For it had not particularly interested me: it seemed to me to just be a case of foolish, boyish fanaticism. But I was to be reminded of it in a terrible way… My friend had visited me several times during April. He usually called for me in the late afternoon, whereupon we would go for a longish walk that lasted into the night. So he came to me at dusk on May the ninth, a large, sealed packet under his arm. “Here I am,” he said, “But now you must accompany me to my room, I want to get the packet to safety there. After that, I am at your disposal.” But because he lived in a small alley in the Old Town and we had planned a walk in the opposite direction, I said, laughing: “Leave your treasure here until tomorrow! What is inside it?” “All kinds of papers,” he replied, and I put it in my table drawer. We went out and spent some really pleasant hours. Around ten o’clock I returned home, read some Greek verses, and then fell asleep. It may have been around three o’clock in the morning when I was woken by a banging at my door. I started up in fright; I heard, outside, the wails of my old landlady, the curt question, ‘Where does he sleep?’ and the clashing of weapons. ‘Soldiers!’ I cried, horrified, and leapt to my feet. My first thought was of the fateful packet; I had to get rid of it. But it was too late, the patrol was already in my room. I was arrested, my books hastily rummaged through, my papers, including the packet, which I still held in my hand, bundled together and hauled away. Then they dragged me down the stairs and took me on a little cart through the twilight streets to Hradčany. On the street-corners in the city, which still lay in deep sleep, proclamations had been put up which announced a state of siege. I also saw an escort just stepping out of a house, with a young person, a student, in their midst. He was deathly pale, but he held his head up high and his eyes shone. ‘Long live the holy cause!’ he enthusiastically cried to me. I made no answer, I was stunned. High up, the cannons were directed at the town, the Hradčany resembled a military camp… I was thrown into a prison. Here, I gradually became aware of my situation. There could be no doubt – that conspiracy of which my friend had spoken had been discovered, and I was arrested as an accomplice. They had found the papers on me, I did not know how they had got wind of that, but I was a lost man! But then I picked myself back up: I was innocent, and if there was a God in Heaven, He could not suffer me to pay for a crime I had not committed.”

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[6] Referring to the colours of the flag of the Habsburg Monarchy.

[7] The district around Prague Castle.

[8] Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), Russian anarchist.

[9] Artúr Görgey (1818-1916), Hungarian General (and chemist).

[10] k.k. = kaiserlich-königlich: Pertaining to the Dual Monarchy of Austria (Emperor) and Hungary (King).

The narrator paused. “And yet I did pay for it,” he cried despairingly, “paid with my whole life.” Then he calmed down again and continued: “Further details hold little interest for you, I am sure. I had been brought to disaster by my friend, but not intentionally. He had been arrested shortly before midnight. He was still awake; he had bolted the door and written a note to me in great haste: ‘Destroy the papers!’ He had entrusted this to his landlord, who had been disturbed from sleep. And this honest man had nothing better to do than hand it over, with my address, to the head of the patrol. It happened very quickly.

“The proceedings against me did not happen so quickly. The trial moved slowly forward, and I discovered from the judge, during the countless examinations, what a dangerous person I was. My innocence did not come to light; the gentlemen of the Court Martial pronounced me guilty. I was sentenced to death and the punishment was then, by way of grace, mitigated to twenty years’ service in the Artillery Train Corps. People call that mitigation and grace! Five years later, my Captain made my acquaintance. He was the chairman of a military court which, incited by my comrades – I had told them my story – sentenced me to be transferred to a punishment battalion. My fate moved him, he took me on as his orderly and treats me quite humanely, that is to say, when he is sober…” And softly, very softly, he added: “Oh, if only it were spring!”

I shall not describe what we two listeners felt during this narration. The Professor sought to alleviate the man’s lot whenever he could, and I at least carried books to him, as there was really nothing else I could do for him.

His presentiment, his hope, that he would get well in the spring, did not deceive him.

On a fine Sunday in May, I walked down Russian Street with several fellow pupils. We were going to the small wood of Horecza. Then Aristides approached us; he was strolling towards the town. “Hey,” we cried, “come with us, Lewczuk”; he was always welcome as our scapegoat. But Aristides gravely shook his head. “I’m going to funeral,” he said, and turning to me, he continued: “Come with me, ‘Latinist’ is dead, poor, sick man, no hurt any more. Thursday gets haemorrhage, Captain has him dragged to hospital, died Friday morning. Funeral is today four o’clock, I bought schnaps for medical orderly, he told me.” We went to the military hospital. At four o’clock on the dot the sad procession strode out, the funeral procession of a common soldier. Only I and Aristides may have felt any sorrow. The ceremony at the graveyard was very short. The pastor spoke a short prayer, then the coffin was lowered into the grave, and two

Czech medical orderlies cheerfully filled it up.

I cannot express what I felt during this. Aristides was very moved also. “Because of packet,” he murmured. “Why did God allow?” Why?! I have no answer to that. Nor, I suppose, does the dear Lord or, just as little, the – Austrian government.

The Revolt at Wolowce

Over the sunlit heath there passed a humming, soft and incessant, as though it were asleep and this was the sound of its breathing. I listened to it as I slowly strolled along in the scorching heat, and listened, but could not discover where the quiet sounds came from. It was similar to the sound when, all of a sudden – who knows why? – a breath of wind awakens on the heath and stirs the juniper bushes. But on this occasion, the air lay still over the heated earth, and up in the sky the small white clouds seemed nailed to the spot; and yet, that strange humming swam in the mild waves of the ether. Nor could it be the chirping of crickets, which sounded shrill and from close by; but this sound quivered softly, half-blown-away, in my ears. At last it died away completely, and there was unutterable solitude around me; no sound and no movement for as far as the vast bell of the Heavens lay over the plain. Then it awoke again; first heading towards me from one direction until, gradually, the sounds stretched a web over the whole heath. Was that music – a fiddle or a flute – but far away, very far away? Was it perhaps Jacek the minstrel? The crazy old man has found a place for himself where the bushes lie close together, and spread his patched jacket over them, and now he is softly playing his fiddle in the shade, wildly, sweetly, confusedly, as the bird pipes its song. Indeed, today wouldn’t be the first time; how often have I met him thus, when I left the monastery school and ran onto the heath, deeper and deeper into it, after butterflies or the shadows of clouds. Yes, it will be the old one – perhaps over by the Black Cross again – I last met him there that Sunday… And I began to walk more quickly and ever more quickly and – came to a sudden halt. Loud laughter took hold of me, and yet there was a soft burning in my eyelids. Fool that I was, dreaming fool that I was! It was fifteen years since that Sunday, and old Jacek was dead long since. I was a wild boy no longer, but a man, who had wandered himself weary all over the world and come back again to greet his home. Fifteen years! It is a long period of time and much can die around us and in our own hearts. And much changes, even in the most remote corner of the earth, even in a village on a heath in Podolia. Perhaps the people of Barnow had stayed the same and only I had changed – I don’t know! Only one thing I do know: While I walked through the dirty alleys past the damp huts and the unkempt people, I envied all those who can think of their hometown as a bright, friendly place, I deeply envied them. And at that time, I could not conceive why I actually felt so attached to this hometown of mine.

But once I came upon the heath, I understood it. The magical charms of the plain came over me again and made my lonely heart sad, devoted, and large. The old dreams came over me, and I walked, with a smile on my lips and yet strangely moved, towards the “Black Cross” as if I could not fail to meet the old minstrel there. The closer I came, the clearer it became, the shriller. It was two shepherd's pipes which had sent such enchanting sounds out into the distance. The cross is massive and crudely put together, formed of fir-beams painted black. There is no Christ attached to it, only the outline of a hoe is carved, large and crude, at its foot. This symbol was erected on a great day: when serfdom fell from the bodies of these poor people. That is why they carved in the hoe, the mark of the free man. Some birch trees have also been planted around, the only shade as far as the eye can see. For that reason, travelling folk who pass over the heath under a burning sun like to rest under these trees: the horde of gypsies, who wander around tirelessly stealing while also prophesying, fiddling, and healing horses; the Wire-Slovak;[11] the Ukrainian day-labourer; the Jewish "Village-goer"[12] who moves from farmstead to farmstead from Sunday to Friday exchanging wares and honeyed words for money and blows; the foreign juggler; the Russian "singer," very venerable and very dangerous to people's property, who tells our tame peasant about the great feats of his ancestors and kinsmen, the Cossacks, while humbly begging his way; finally, beggars without any poetical gloss, beggars pure and simple, of any nation, of any faith, down to the "cadger" who is also a Talmudist and a living newspaper for his co-religionists. They all rest here under the birch-trees and drink from the spring which bubbles forth; the place is rarely deserted, and even when none of the travelling folk is at the spot, there will be several shepherds enjoying the coolness.

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[11] Poor peasants from Slovakia who travelled from place to place with mousetraps made of wire and mended broken tableware and kitchenware with wire-netting.

[12] "Dorfgeher" = Peddler.

For the hill on which the cross rises up also forms the boundary between the pastures of the little town of Barnow and those of the village of Wolowce. Today also, two shepherds sat there, blowing their shawms in synchronous chaos, which gave a shrill and jarring sound. But when I came up very close to them, they stopped playing and rose to their feet. They were boys, thirteen-, fourteen-year-old flaxenheads with dull faces and those strangely sad eyes which are found in everyone who grows up in solitude on the large plain. They were very simply clad, one of them only in a shirt and trousers of the coarsest grey linen, the other wearing a brown serdak but with no shirt under it. The latter was actually the more elegant of the two, for he wore a straw-hat, whereas the other made do with a faded blue soldier’s cap. They uncovered their heads to me, but held their headgear close to their ear so they could scratch behind it with that hand. Courtesy does not protect one from embarrassment.

I did not deepen this embarrassment: I nodded to the herd-boys, but I did not speak to them – what questions did I have to ask that they could answer? If this one or that one were still alive, who had once carved a pipe for me, or told me a tale, here? Dead! – How often I had heard that answer in the little town on this day; I had my fill of it, more than my fill… I threw myself down under the last birch-tree, far from the herd-boys, and thought of the old time and that Sunday fifteen years ago.

That had been a fine September day, almost as bright as spring, and I had gone out onto the heath to take my leave of it, for the next day I was to go back to the Latin School. And so as I sat here under the birch-trees, really tired from walking, and deep silence was all around – but for a gust of wind which passed over the heath like a sudden sigh every now and then – my eyelids became heavy and I fell asleep. But a shrilling sound cut through my dream, and when I suddenly started up, I thought that I was still dreaming. Before me stood the old minstrel, even more ragged than usual, but with a large bouquet at his breast, and his eyes, usually so sad and dull, glowed with a wild joy. Now he kissed his fiddle and pressed it to his breast, now he bowed the strings like a madman; it sounded roughly like the "Radetzky March." "Good day, Young Master! I woke you up, there's something I must tell you. I come from the District Court and I have my fiddle again, because Aunt Kasia kept it for me, and now I'm practising this march – I'll play it when they finally take Herr Wincenty to the gallows." And the bars sound merrily again. "But where are the others?" I asked. "Still in prison – because of rebellion! The scriveners released me: 'You can go, you're mad.' Well, Young Master, I'm mad, that's true, the Starost[13] made me mad when I was yet young. But this I do know: The Emperor is alive still, and he will hear about what has happened, and what then? Hey! Then he'll put his mouth to the wire and tell the scriveners of the District Court: 'Let the people of Wolowce go home, they are good people, even if they have done foolish things in desperation, and as regards the dead Hussar, there are enough gypsies running around whom we can catch and dress in blue and set on a horse.' And to the spiteful little scrivener in Barnow, he'll say: 'Have Herr Wincenty hanged, the peasants were right when they were about to do it; he really earned it for Fedko and for the others too.’ And then the fat man will have to go, whether he wants to or not, and he’ll take the hussars with him again, and they’ll draw their sabres and blow their bugles and ride to Wolowce; but this time it’s not for us, but for the lord and his servants! And the fat man will sadly say to Wincenty: ‘Brother, I’m sorry, but you have to hang!’ And they’ll take him to the gallows. While I walk beside the cart and play this march – listen, Young Master! This march…”

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[13] Nobleman; landowner; headman.

It still sounded in my ears, what he played back then on that fine September afternoon… But the old minstrel has fiddled no more on Earth long since; the next spring, he was dead. And the Emperor did not hear about it, the people of Wolowce lay in prison for a long time afterwards, and Herr Wincenty was absolutely *not* hanged, “although he really deserved it for Fedko” … Memory lured me ever more deeply into those forgotten events, and I thought of the dismal, ill-fated battle that was fought here, a battle for justice, and of the strange “Revolt at Wolowce” …

I brooded over this for a long time. It is not good, I had to say to myself in the end, for such events to happen. It is not good for the Poles, not for the Ruthenes, not for the Austrian government. And last, very last of all, it is also not good for – the Good Lord! The higher a lord stands, the more he must look to his reputation. And the Good Lord stands highest of all. He is all-bountiful, all-righteous – and then He allows such an event in Podolia … God knows! It is also not good for God that it happened. But – it happened.

Its beginning was very ordinary, its end was very strange. And a glaringly comic touch mixed with its shattering tragedy. The village of

Wolowce near Barnow is a large and handsome estate. It allows its owner to live a splendid life. He can even go to Paris from time to time and give the tailors, cocottes and gamblers there happy days. Of course, the income does not suffice for happy years. And when the man does not care about the management of his estate for ten whole years but continually makes only the people of Paris happy, then he must perforce return home in the eleventh year, and affliction comes upon his head. And upon the heads of the Jews into the bargain. This is a sufficient account of the fate of the noble lord Wincenty Barwulski. There he sat in the gloomy, dilapidated manor-house, fighting against affliction and fighting against the Jews. With varying success! For as concerned the Jews, he did throw them out without further ado in the beginning, it was true, but even in the next few years he had to first ask them for prolongation before they flew out, and in the end he restricted himself, for good reasons, to the asking and completely gave up the throwing out. In this way, the Jews vanquished Herr Wincenty, while he on the other hand vanquished affliction. “For,” Pestalozzi[14] neatly and correctly observes, “a good person is happy as well; an inexhaustible spring of innocent joys flows from the pure heart.” This fits, word by word, the possessor of Wolowce, who was a good person, an ordinary person, a model person. He had a fervent hatred of idleness; an afternoon passed in yawns, an evening passed in snores, rightly seemed to him to be something abominable. For that reason, he gambled in the afternoon and in the evening into the night. If a man plays

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[14] Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Swiss educational reformer.

Macau, he is not idle, for he sits and does something: He loses his money. Incidentally, the ordinary person won at times, even conspicuously, and thereby soon gained the reputation throughout the district of being an industrious, nimble-fingered person … But even more bitter than his hatred of idleness was his hatred of all spirituous drinks, and his *ceterum censeo*[15] was: “Schnaps is the curse of mankind!” And so he exterminated it wherever he met it, in unbelievable quantities, and wine or mead in no lesser ones. Every night he fought a battle against the Demon Alcohol, every night he was vanquished and sank under the table with the dawn; but towards the midday-hour he rose again and sombrely, resolutely, began the battle anew. He gave his arch-enemy no pardon, he asked for none – there was greatness in this good person, moral greatness … But this heroic soul was also soft-hearted and capable of the most delicate sensitivity; Herr Wincenty could not bear to see a woman cry, his own wife least of all. For soon after his return from Paris, he had married, partly because of his affliction, partly because of the Jews. He had not, admittedly, found a rich and noble heiress-daughter, but only a schoolteacher’s daughter. No ordinary one, however. For you see, in some little Podolian town there was a schoolteacher who had a beautiful wife and a Dominican monastery which had a handsome prior. The schoolteacher’s wife bore the schoolteacher a girl, and as little Aniela grew and blossomed, it so turned out that she resembled the prior. For this reason, the Very Reverend Father loved her and settled a large dowry on her. But no suitor appeared, in spite of the dowry and in spite of the moving beauty of the poor girl, who looked out into the world so timidly and sadly with her brown eyes as though she had to beg forgiveness of people for the mark of infamy which burnt, through no fault of her own, on her fair countenance. The resemblance was too strong – no suitor appeared. But a model person does not care for such prejudices: Herr Wincenty married Anelia, and as long as the dowry lasted and the prior was alive, the poor girl had no whims. But when the Very Reverend Father died, Frau Aniela began to have strange ideas: she would sleep only in an ice-cold room, eat no other food than mouldy bread, and furthermore, she would whip herself so violently, every day, that her poor young body was completely covered with bloody weals. Yes! She did all this to herself; at least, Herr Wincenty assured his cronies that she did, when even these rough hearts felt somewhat sympathetic and told him: "Brother, feel fear before God, take an axe and settle this all at once, but don't keep tormenting your weeping willow inch by inch to death!" The "weeping willow" – for the woman wept constantly. And good Wincenty could not bear to see his wife crying. So he chased her out of doors one icy winter's night. On the next morning, she was found, frozen to death, on the threshold…

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[15] “Furthermore, I propose that…” Used to introduce a core belief of the speaker.

Such a model person was Herr Wincenty Barwulski. It would be superfluous to give further examples; also, it is difficult to write when one's hand spontaneously clenches into a fist. But one fine trait must needs be emphasised, because this story is founded on it. Herr Wincenty was not beautiful, no. On the puffy, bloated body, which shaky little legs laboriously dragged forward, there sat a head, completely bald, even without eyebrows, exceedingly similar to a round, yellowish-green pumpkin. Only, at a late hour every night, when the battle once again inclined towards its end and Herr Wincenty inclined towards the floor, the pumpkin blazed a violet colour. So he was not beautiful, but his heart beat warmly for beauty. For that reason, no woman and no maiden in Wolowce was safe from him; if she did not willingly obey, he used violence – what does a nobleman have servants and ropes in his house for? In the beginning, the poor peasants ran to Barnow and poured out their sorrows to the 'Scrivener,' the all-mighty district overseer, noble Herr Teofil von Strusket, which name means 'menial servant.' Sometimes, the man took down the complaint in evidence, and sometimes he did not; the effect remained the same. Indeed, it was ridiculous to expect a noble Pole to send another noble Pole into prison on account of a wretched Ruthenian maiden, it was most ridiculous! Even the stupid peasants gradually came to realise this and saved themselves the journey into town. They also knew that Herr Wincenty returned their wives and daughters to them in the end – in three, four, at most eight days – for the good man could not bear to see a woman cry! … But a terrible anger gradually accumulated in these usually so impassive and patient people, an unutterable hatred …

It was to break out all of a sudden. This is a kind of village story, not, admittedly, in the popular and charming Idyllic genre. There lived at Wolowce a strapping young peasant, Fedko Hawliuk. A splendid man, this Fedko, an immensely strong, handsome, serious fellow – all who looked at him could not but think of the ancient epic lays of this enslaved people: there was still to be seen one of those "hawk-faces" before which Poles and Tatars had crept away trembling in former days. He also had no low opinion of himself and looked out into the world very proudly, first of all, as the heir to the richest farmstead in the village, which would as a matter of course fall to him upon his mother’s death, and secondly, as a discharged Imperial and Royal Corporal of the Nassau Infantry. He had been a soldier, had learned to read and write, and had come upon the discovery, in the western provinces, that even the peasant is a human being. So this man could not have felt happy as a subject of Herr Wincenty, even without a particular reason for discontent. But there was a particular reason in this case.

A love-affair, of course. The girl was called Xenia; she was a pretty, blonde thing and very poor with it. Nevertheless, Fedko made her his bride, and not, as he easily could have, his concubine. He just loved her with all his heart – this happens at times among Podolian peasants also. Indeed, he loved her so deeply that, to the great astonishment of the whole community, he kept his wild blood in check when he was home on leave. “My Xenia must walk up to the altar wearing the garland in her hair,” he would proudly say.

But when at length he came home with his discharge, it was no go: not the garland, not the wedding. Herr Wincenty was to blame for this with his servants and ropes …

When Fedko heard this, he turned deathly pale, but he said nothing. He just went to the castle at once and looked for the lord. But Wincenty was in Iwonicz Spa just at that time. Then the peasant went to his bride. She looked dreadful, aged by twenty years. But she did not faint when he came; she was able to calmly look him in the eye and tell him in detail how the atrocity had happened. “You must kill him!” she concluded. “Of course I must,” replied Fedko. “Unfortunately, he is not here, we’ll have to wait. When he comes, I’ll shoot him and marry you at once. And then I’ll go to Barnow and give myself up to the Emperor’s scriveners…”

He was resolved to do this, firmly resolved.

But things turned out differently. For apart from Xenia, there was also his mother, who implored him in mortal dread not to destroy himself; there was the priest, who came to him with everlasting fire and the torments of Hell; there was his comrade, ex-lance corporal Hritzko Barila, who said to him: “Corporal! What will the regiment say when it hears that you died as a murderer on the gallows…?” This all worked on Fedko. Perhaps the last most of all. For fourteen days he walked around alone and brooding, then he came home: “I’ll try to live.” And to Xenia he said, “Despise me, but I can’t do it.” “Then I can’t become your wife,” she replied. And she walked out of the village and vanished without a trace.

She never came back. There are deep, still ponds on our heaths…

Then three, four years went by. And during these years, not a week passed in which Fedko did not show a marriage broker the door. For all the people in Podolia enter into marriages through middlemen: the Jews in the towns, the nobles in their manors, the peasants in the villages. A point is made of ensuring that the money and the families are of equal birth; the hearts, after all, have time to find each other after the wedding … This may surprise many a man, and he may think: In the uncivilized East, where elemental passions appear among people more often, love or at least sensual desire should be a weightier factor in marriage than is – dreadful enough! – the case in the West. But he forgets that the urge for possession is also an elemental urge, at its strongest precisely in rude natures – an utterly cursed elemental urge …

And so it is a thriving business, this trade in people, among us and in Podolia. And one finally came to Fedko who was not thrown out. For various reasons. First of all, the young peasant had often had to reflect on the saying which sounds in all the tongues of the East: “A farm without a wife is like a tavern without schnaps.” Secondly, the girl in question was very pretty, very good and very rich. And thirdly, Fedko knew that this black-haired Hanusia from Okulince was madly in love with him. Perhaps it was this last which was decisive. For this peasant had a heart, an enthusiastical heart even; he later gave many proofs of this until that hour when the bullet from crooked Michalko’s gun came flying and bore through this proud, unfortunate heart … So: the successful middleman came and went between Wolowce and Okulince, and soon Fedko also came and went, and a few weeks later, there was the wedding.

It was celebrated in Wolowce, on a Sunday around Whitsundtide, when spring begins in Podolia. For he is a late guest in this land, but once he has come, he is fair and wonder-working, as everywhere. The barren heath blossomed, the sky laughed and the larks sang, and in the world the people laughed and sang, making the spring day tremble. The marriage ceremony had been in the morning, and, because the young couple were very rich, the priest had given a prodigiously long sermon. And whereas he was wont to conclude with these words for the less well-to-do, “So may you be truly happy with God's help!", on this occasion he concluded with: "I know for certain, it is God's will that you shall become very happy." This was somewhat incautious of the man, for either he did *not* know for certain, or God's will changed within a few hours. Unspeakable misfortune came over the heads of both …

After the ceremony, everyone moved to the tavern, including the priest, and drank and danced, including the priest, and a great many got plastered, including the priest. It was a wedding, the like of which the village had never seen before; three bands struck up, Jews, Czechs, and Gypsies, and old Jacek besides. And when twilight fell, little Moschko could swindle even more audaciously than before and mix the schnaps half and half with water – hardly anyone noticed what he was drinking anymore.

It was at this hour, when thick shadows were already lying outside, and in the people's heads no less, that an unexpected guest came to the party. A good man readily takes part in other people's joy … Outside, people heard the gypsies launching into a flourish only to suddenly stop, then the peasants all shouting out at once. And through the lines which hesitantly opened for him, there strode, timidly greeted by the sober, furiously glared at by the drunk, Herr Wincenty, into the tap-room and up to the table of the bridal couple. He gave a friendly grin, and when he noticed that everyone had abruptly fallen silent and Fedko had turned dreadfully pale, his grin became even friendlier. "Good evening, people! I come to bring you my congratulations, you lucky bridegroom, from the bottom of my heart!" The father of the bride rose to his feet, embarrassed, but Fedko remained seated and darkly stared at his mortal enemy. "So this is the bride!" the good man cordially continued, pinching Hanusia's cheek. "Heavens! What a splendid wench! This is a different build from Xenia. There wasn't much on her, my dear Fedko, believe me." The young peasant sprang up, his blood shot to his head, his hand suddenly felt for the place where he usually wore his belt and the broad knife inside it. Herr Wincenty noticed this, and the yellow pumpkin became even yellower, insofar as this was actually possible. "Well enjoy yourselves, you lot, good night." And he quickly took himself off.

It is uncertain what he had intended with this visit. Perhaps he wished to publicly mock his victim one more time before he secretly annihilated him utterly. Perhaps he also wanted to have a look at Hanusia in advance, to see if she was worth the new, monstrous outrage. What is a fact is that this outrage was committed.

The happy noise soon burst out again after Herr Barwulski had gone. Only Fedko sat there silent and grim; the others kept dancing and drinking. And when the tenth hour struck, everyone who could still stay on their feet formed a merry procession. Led by the musicians, the guests escorted the newlyweds to Fedko's house with torches and lanterns. There the couple stayed alone, everyone else moving back to the tavern. And the dancing, drinking, and whooping went on, but more and more weakly. Ever fewer feet danced, ever more throats snored. Inside, in the musty room, and outside, on the meadow, the sleepers lay close together. The musicians had also dozed off, and little Moschko swayed from weariness and even forgot to mix the drinks. When morning approached, grey and hesitant, only a bunch of inexhaustible carousers, among them Hritzko

Barila, remained sitting around the table before the tavern, and old Jacek untiringly played for them whatever came to his fingers.

Then he shrilly stopped and stared at the village street as if he saw a ghost there. In the pale glow of dawn, a figure came slowly, very slowly, staggering up towards the inn. “Jadwiga!” the old man wildly yelled – who knows what memory awoke in the poor madman’s heart! – “Jadwiga! My Starost’s daughter!”

But Hritzko knew better. With a cry of fear, he leapt up and ran towards the woman who was arduously dragging herself forward.

“Hanusia! What has happened? Where is Fedko …?”

She stared at him as if she did not understand him. Her features were hideously contorted; horror and pain lay in her countenance as if chiselled in. She was half undressed; on the nape of her neck and her arms were traces of lashes of the whip; her few clothes hung ripped to shreds and soaked in blood on her maltreated body. “Your lord!” she groaned. “Fedko lies bound … they dragged me to the castle … and have now turned me out …”

She collapsed in a swoon. “Carry her into the tavern!” ordered Hritzko, and he rushed to Fedko’s house with several companions. A faint groaning reached their ears. In the bedroom, the unhappy man lay on the floor, a gag in his mouth, his hands and feet coupled together with a tangle of chains and ropes. His clothes were torn, all the furniture in the bedroom was smashed, there were trails of blood and clumps of hair all around; the man must have put up a furious defence. The men untied him. When they looked in his face, they were deeply shocked, they thought he had gone mad. But he asked first and foremost: “Is everyone still in the tavern?” “Yes, Hanusia as well.” “Then come!” But they had to support him to walk. They avoided looking at his countenance – it made them feel too uneasy. For this countenance was ashen-grey and completely rigid, only his eyes showed strangely changing expressions: Now they flared up savagely, now they became fixed, almost glassy, like those of a dead man.

Everyone was awake around the tavern. Inside, the women lamented while occupying themselves with Hanusia. In front of the tavern stood the men, nobody spoke out loud, only every now and then a muffled whisper passed through the lines. Their inebriation had evaporated; there are things so terribly egregious that they penetrate even the foggiest brain and drive the vapours out of it. When Fedko approached, only a few shouts were to be heard – this does not lie in the nature of these folk, who are slow and deliberate and unspeakably tough. They made way for him in silence; Hritzko led him to a bench, where he sat down. The peasants crowded up close to him, and there was a dull silence among the two hundred people. Only, one old man cried out sobbing: “You poor, good man!” But the others ordered him to be quiet: “Now only Fedko has to order how it’s to be done!” What had to be done was clear to all of them …

Fedko rose to his feet. “Everyone” – he began. But he could not continue. When he looked at the people all decked out, decked out for his wedding feast, and considered what had happened and what he now had to say to them, he felt as if an iron fist were squeezing his throat. A sudden, heavy tear burst forth from his eye and rolled down his cheek. Then he began again: “You all know, that with Xenia and now this. The man is a wild beast, and we are given into his hands without protection and without justice; the Emperor’s Scrivener is a Pole and his friend. So we must avenge and defend ourselves; it is not our choice, we must. As we get together to shoot the wolf to death, so let us all go there now and hang this person – it is the same case. Who will come with me?” A tumultuous cry of “We all will!” met his ears.

“Then come!” The procession started moving almost without a sound and slowly rolled through the village street. Here and there a small crowd stopped, and axes, scythes, old guns were brought up. The men armed themselves. They looked serious; they really felt as if they were setting off on a wolf-hunt. Everyone knows: “It could be my death.” But everyone also knows: “It is my duty.”

Thus they mutely moved towards the castle in the red early morning.

Thus began the Revolt of Wolowce.

The manor-house is built differently from most of the manor-houses in Podolia. They are as a rule large and stately stone houses from the eighteenth century, when these nobles still had much money, or small and shabby stone houses from the nineteenth century, when they had little money left. Stylish kingly piles are extremely rare, and ancient castles are almost even rarer. This is simply because far too much violence, war, and distress roared through the poor land in days of yore. There came Mongols and Cumans, Turks and Romanians, Swedes, Tatars and Muscovites and all other kinds of nice guests. All that was not nailed down fast, they stole, and all that they could not stuff into their backpacks, such as castles and family watch-towers, they set alight. So there is but little from past days still standing in this landscape. And that little is allowed to – more quickly than is necessary – fall to pieces.

That is why the sinister old fortress of Wolowce with its immense blackened walls, its narrow little windows and embrasures, its menacing corner towers, is a great rarity in the land. There were many good, large ashlars in the building, a scarce commodity on the plain, and Herr Wincenty would have liked to flog them. But the stones were too firmly set. The man has often cursed his forefathers' solid cement, only not in those bloody days which followed Fedko's wedding, when it saved his miserable life. Of course, the singular situation of the fortress also played its part. It is placed close by, very close by, the river, the Sereth. This is a dull, slow companion; it hesitantly winds out from still ponds and slowly creeps its joyless way through the barren heath, even stopping at times and forming large swamps, until its yellow waters mix with the blue of the waves of the Dniester and are swiftly swept away towards the Pontus. At one of the spots where the sluggish one stands still, the fortress was erected, and so it is sufficiently protected by the swamp on the river side. While on the land side, there stretches a wide and deep moat, and in the moat is dark, eternally still water which exhales an alarming fragrance up to the heavens in summer. But in those spring days, this swamp and this moat both rendered tremendous service to Herr Wincenty's neck. The main merit is of course due to the Catholic priest of Okulince, or rather only to two things about him, firstly, his having a niece, and secondly, his being a fat man who could not possibly walk quickly. In the end, that was the reason why Wincenty Barwulski managed to stay alive. Forebodings often creep over the human heart, especially the heart of the pure, of the sensitive person. And so, Herr Barwulski ordered his servants on that night, when dawn was approaching: “Now give the wench a sound whipping for me down in the courtyard, and then drive her out and be quick about it, or these stupid peasants will come in the end to fetch her.” And yet his heart did not become calm, not even after this had been done, and he cried to his faithful manservant, crooked Michalko: “Mikita is to hitch the bays to the britzka, we’re driving to Barnow.” And he added in thought: “I don’t know, but I have a bad feeling that this Fedko could in the end cause trouble here this very day; he looked so strange yesterday, the filthy cur.” But before Mikita woke up and prepared the carriage, it was daylight. And when Michalko, with two other servants, opened the enormous doors of the heavy, ancient, iron-covered gate, for the britzka to drive out, they stopped in horror and then hurriedly slammed both doors shut. At the same time, up in the window of the first floor, the yellowish-green pumpkin-head of Herr Wincenty turned violet for a moment and then dreadfully yellow. For the procession of peasants was winding its way in between the village orchards out onto the heath and towards the fortress. They walked slowly and soundlessly, as doom walks, and the young red gold of the sun glittered around their scythes …

“That is Death coming!” … This flashed through Wincenty’s mind up there; it was what crooked Michalko thought down at the entrance. But while the noble fellow covered his face with his trembling hands and began to babble a half-forgotten prayer, the servant acted with a cool head and prudence for himself and for his master. For he was a scoundrel, this deformed servant, a scoundrel who would have done credit to any gallows; but he was a man as well, and he proved that in this hour. He gave orders, and the other servants obeyed. Within a few minutes, the gate was barricaded, the body of servants armed and apportioned to the embrasures. There were fourteen men in the castle with Michalko; further, several women, among them Herr Wincenty, who hid themselves, wailing, down on the ground floor … “When I whistle once, every second man fire in the air; when I whistle twice, you all shoot into the crowd!” Thus did the crooked one command, and opening the middle-door of the storey, he stepped onto the small balcony over the entrance.

The foremost of the crowd had already come up to around fifty paces from the bridge. “Stop!” cried Michalko. “What do you want?” They pressed forward without a word. “Stop! Or it will be the death of you!” he repeated, and whistled: a bang from seven rifles, the bullets hissed over the heads of the crowd. They stopped, and retreated several steps. Michalko seized the moment. “Brothers! What is it that you want, anyway? Nobody will set foot on the bridge alive, I’m telling you! But perhaps we can come to a peaceful settlement? Speak – what do you seek in the castle?” At first, only a merry fiddling was the reply – crazy Jacek. Then a soldier on leave in the last ranks shouldered his gun, aimed, and fired at the servant. The bullet bored its way into the masonry above his head. But the brave scoundrel laughed: “So you pay the castle this honour for my sake? Or was it a mistake? Do you take me for someone else, or even for a roebuck? Speak …!”

That sort of reaction always works; there was no second marksman to aim at the little man who placed himself as a target up there on the open balcony.

Fedko held a whispered consultation with his adjutant, Hritzko. They had not thought about whether they would encounter resistance or not; it was, moreover, a matter of indifference to them; they had to catch and hang Wincenty, they were certain of that. And some of his servants as well, they thought as an aside. Now they saw that the affair was somewhat difficult. The gate was barricaded, the embrasures manned. They had several guns too, but what use was that against the walls! The iron gate had to be battered down, that was clear. But the rifles of the besieged raked the entrance, the little wooden bridge. “It must be!” said Fedko to his people. “But some of us must die.” “What does that matter?” they answered him. “If it simply must be … ” There is a streak of fatalism in all Slavs; in this tribe, it assumes immense proportions. “Well, I’ll fall only if I’m destined to,” thought every one of them. “A man just has to do his duty … “

But Fedko felt sympathy for them. He himself was destroyed and shattered like a tree from lightning, but the others should not be for his sake. The wolf had of course to be killed, but that might be done without people shedding their blood. The attempt had to be made. An uncanny, icy calm had come over the man; only, in a corner of his consciousness, he felt his appalling woe lurking like a cloud.

He bid the others step back; he alone stepped forward as far as the little bridge. “Listen, Michalko!” he began. “I’m listening!” “We’re looking for the lord.” “What do you want from him?” “That is our business.” “But mine as well; I guard his house.” “If you will know, we won’t hide it: we want to hang him!” “Fine! But you must look for him in Barnow, he has driven to the town.” “You’re lying!” “I’m not lying!” “You can swear to that?” “Yes!” “As true as your soul shall belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and not the Devil?” Michalko hesitated for a moment; it was a terrible oath. But my soul belongs to the Devil anyway, whatever the condition, he thought. “Yes!” he replied out loud.

“You’re lying!” Fedko said coldly. “You’re a perjured dog, worse than a Jew, why, even worse than a Pole. But I’ll speak further with you because I wish to save people’s lives. You’re a gallows bird, but a Ruthenian nonetheless! Michalko, I ask for the last time: Is the lord inside? Swear it to me, as true as your dead mother has rest in the grave! If you say ‘Yes’ to this also, then I’ll withdraw with my men and strike the wolf dead in the town!”

The little man blanched; he was capable of all things in this world, but robbing his dead mother of rest in the grave is something no son of this people can bring himself to do. Two factors contribute to this: a very gloomy characteristic, and a very light one, of this strangely-natured national mind – superstition, which is greatly occupied with the “Restless Ones,” so that it was in this tribe of all tribes that the legend of vampires was born, before passing from there to the Poles, Muscovites, and Romanians; and on the other hand, a touching child’s love.

The small villain fought a hard fight, and his face turned as ashen-gray as the stone walls. “This will cost me my neck,” he whispered in a dead voice, but then he shrilly cried: “You fool, you cuckold, you happy bridegroom of Xenia, you happy husband of Hanusia! – Listen! The lord *is* in the castle! Fetch him out, if you have the courage … !”

The peasants gave wild howls of rage but Fedko stood immovable and signalled to them to be quiet. Mikita, the coachman, a slender youth, had stepped onto the balcony beside Michalko. He was very pale; mortal dread stared out from his wide-open eyes, and in a quivering, penetrating voice he cried: “Listen, all of you, listen with mercy to what all the servants have to say to you. Insofar as your revenge will be satisfied with the lord alone, we’ll open the gate immediately and not fire a shot. But swear to us, Fedko, that we’ll keep life and limb. If you intend to thrash us, in God’s name …” “You dog!” Michalko yelled in fury. “You treacherous milksop!” He leapt up at the slender youth and, quick as lightning, wrestled him down by the throat and spat in his face. “You licked your lips at the afters from the lord’s table, and you licked your lips at the afters from the lord’s bed, yet you’ll betray him in his great need? Go to the peasants, go!” And with superhuman strength, he swung the gurgling man’s body high up in the air and pitched him over the balcony parapet down into the depths. Mikita’s head hit the stone edge of the castle moat and was dashed to pieces; his body plummeted into the water, making it leap up high, then the dark waters closed together, and only a gentle rippling remained on their surface …

He was the first person to lose his life in the revolt at Wolowce.

For an instant, everyone stood paralysed and breathless. Then the crooked one leapt back into the chamber from the balcony, and at the same moment there came a flash, a bang, a light blue cloud from one of the embrasures, and Fedko staggered. The flintlock fell from his hand, his brown Serdak turned dark. That was the first and the last shot Herr Wincenty fired. While all had been still, he had ventured forth from his hiding-place to the embrasure. There he saw his mortal enemy standing so alone and close to the castle, so convenient for a shot. He had dared to discharge because nobody had noticed him.

Their leader’s wound enraged the peasants. “Urraha! Urraha!” they thunderously raised the age-old battle-cry of the Cossacks, and they stormed forwards over the bridge and against the gate. Terrible was the sound of the furious axe-blows on the iron, terrible were the cries; in between, the gunfire of the besieged rattled out, the groans, the shrill cries of distress of the wounded, the cries of woe from the women and children in the background. And in between this, ever and always, the fiddling of the madman … But above all the slaughter, the screams and the fighting, above all the unutterable distress, there stretched the bright spring sky, shining with a deep, mild light like a calmly musing eye …

“Urraha!” the battle-cry of the men rang out incessantly. “Holy Virgin, we call to you!” the sobbing, penetrating cry from the hundred women’s throats sounded incessantly behind them. But the battle-cry availed not a whit, valour not a whit, prayers not a whit. The battle was too unequal. In this world, it is not the one with the better right who wins but the one with the better weapons. It has been so at all times and in all places and in all cases, and it was so on that spring day in this remote corner of the world where a small group of tormented souls rose up against their oppressor.

The battle was too unequal. Iron can do nothing against iron, and so the gate withstood the axes. But the peasants were mowed down by the dozen by the salvos. Even the foremost rank, who were attacking right up against the door, were not entirely protected, for they could be shot at from the embrasures of the projecting corner-towers. And so, in the end, the peasants had to take up their dead and wounded and withdraw out of the range of fire.

The fighting had lasted barely half an hour, the sixth hour of the morning was just past; the dew on the grass vied in sparkling with the drops of blood, the breezes wafted cool and scented air – a delightful springtide morning, and so much misery on earth! The fighting had lasted barely half an hour, and eight men lay shot dead with a good five times as many wounded. Of the servants in the castle, one was dead, one wounded. Hritzko Barila had felled both of them. He was the only good shot among the peasants to also have a good gun. Now, he had kneeled down before the bridge, with his gun levelled, and had kept a sharp lookout for which embrasure the flash and the little blue cloud would emerge from. And when they came out, his bullets flew into the embrasure. In this way, he had hit one servant in the eye, Crooked Michalko in the shoulder-blade. The rest of the dead and wounded were peasants. The wailing of their sisters, wives, and mothers was heart-rending …

Herr Wincenty had proved a bad shot; Fedko had received only a heavily bleeding but light wound in his upper arm. No sooner had he suffered it to be bound than he was all action again. “Light the church as on a High Feast Day, lay the dead on biers there, all in a row – they died for a holy cause. Take the wounded to their homes. Gregori Barila, brother of Hritzko, will drive to Okulince for the field-doctor.” Then he summoned the elders to a council of war. “We cannot achieve anything during the day. We must wait for night, when the dogs cannot aim at attackers. Then up and at the gate, and burning pitch-wreaths in all the windows at the same time. For people would rather surrender than burn.” Everyone agreed. Then he suggested how they could use the time until twilight. “Some will wind the pitch-wreaths with the women, others will keep the castle surrounded in a large semi-circle so those inside cannot make contact with the people at Barnow. The rest will ride to the nearest villages, tell the people what has happened here, and ask them to help us. They help us hunt the wolf in winter, today we are hunting the wolf in spring. We are in need of reinforcements, I have a feeling that the Emperor’s Scrivener in Barnow will hear of this and come with the ‘Crested Helmets.’[16] Two boys up the bell-tower – they shall ring the Emergency Bell for people in lonely places to hear.” This was done. The incendiary devices were manufactured inside the village, and at the same time every house resounded with wails for the dead, the dying, the wounded. But out on the heath, which had reverberated with such hideous noise in the earliest dawn, all was now deathly quiet. The scythes of the peasant-watchmen glittered in a wide semi-circle; on the river-side, the swamp kept guard for them. Only, every now and then, new arrivals came in singing. Or Jacek suddenly fiddled a dance. Or the Emergency Bell raised its voice again, and the short strokes shrilled uncannily through the mild air …

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[16] “Spitzhauben” = policemen.

Towards noon, the ‘Word of God’ came running, puffing and panting, onto the heath from Wolowce. In vain had the priest’s wife striven to get him out of bed earlier; the ‘Word of God’ had got really sloshed at the wedding the day before. Now, of course, it came as quickly as possible and clapped its hands over its head while yet a distance away. “Fedko!” it cried from afar. “This is rebellion, you know!” “Self-defence!” Fedko coldly replied. “But it is God’s will that we seek justice from the authorities!” “If we can get it there! Besides, it seems to me, Reverend Father, that you don’t always quite exactly know what God’s will is. Remember the concluding words of the marriage address you gave yesterday!” “But you *can* still be happy!” “Happy!” the poor man gave a bitter laugh. Then he added in a quiet, dull voice, which sounded like a suppressed cry of woe: “I would I were dead!” “Go home, Reverend Father!” he then ordered. “Or help to take care of the sick. In any case, do not travel to Barnow today, it could turn out unpleasantly for you!” Nonplussed, very nonplussed, the ‘Word of God’ left the scene.

Nevertheless, people in Barnow learned about the revolt as soon as the midday hour. The first uncertain news had been brought by a beggar. Then a messenger came from the besieged, a ten-year-old boy. He looked dreadful, exactly like the Bog-Devil in the Ruthenian legend – covered all over with a crust of black mud. He had flung himself into the river from a window in the castle and had swum and waded through; it was a miracle that he did not suffocate. In his belt he brought a missive from Wincenty to Teofil von Strusek, the Imperial and Royal District Governor and petty tyrant of Barnow. The strokes were almost illegible, so strongly had the wretch's hand trembled while writing. "All the ammunition used up … the gate off its hinges … three thousand raging peasants … if help does not come immediately, we are lost." "Lost!" Herr Strusek repeated, and he ran around in his office. "Lost!" and he lost his head. Then he finally gathered his senses and his armed force. It consisted of full four gendarmes. But District Governor Strusek loved and respected Strusek the man far too much to plunge him into any danger. He gave instructions to his subordinate, the Imperial and Royal District Commissioner Ladislaus Krapulinski. "Restore order in the village!" he ordered shortly and sharply. And so the state-authority, five of them, got on a hand-cart and rolled towards the "three thousand" peasants.

But the teeth of a fifth of the state-authority chattered considerably on the way. He was not exactly a hero, this Ladislaus Krapulinski. He was, all in all, a strange piece of humanity, this Imperial and Royal District Commissioner, worthy of a look here in passing. A hopeful youth in his forties, an elongated, ungainly figure with enormous hands and feet, which he comically turned outwards; his back bent from the billions and further billions of bows he had made in his life; his face, in which a reddish nose sparkled, unspeakably sugary. The man had never studied, had been a laboratory technician in a pharmacy in his youthful days; how had he become the Imperial and Royal Commissioner? Through bows! That way, he had become a scrivener, then a clerk, then the betrothed of his boss's elder sister and legally trained civil servant, and through further bows – he had, of course, as a man of honour, been able to shake off the irksome betrothal after its purpose had been effected – become Imperial and Royal District Governor. Let us rejoice that such a career is no longer possible in the Austria of today. Or are there still such officials in the East nowadays? … Whomever he wound his way towards, this Imperial and Royal District Commissioner, Ladislaus Krapinski, his back bent, his countenance simpering softly and sweetly, that person had the uncanny feeling that a poisonous reptile was creeping up to him. Of course, not everybody had this correct feeling right away. But Fedko had it.

The scene was short and drastic. When Fedko was informed that the five were approaching, he gathered a bunch of his men around him and let the state-authority approach. It was delightful – or was it rather sad? – to see *how* they approached. The four gendarmes strode along, two by two, slowly and calmly. But before them, then beside them, and finally behind them, his knees buckling, his deathly-pale countenance distortedly saccharine, tripped Imperial and Royal Ladislaus. When they were standing close before the leader of the peasants, he had of course to creep forward. He humbly took off his hat and gave a most respectful greeting. Then he began, trembling: “Dear Sir Fedko …” But the peasant sharply cut him short. “Commissioner, you know that I’m no Sir, and I know I’m not dear to you. Save your kind words, they do no good. The wolf must be slain. You won’t find your way to angry words, for you seem to me to be a little afraid, but they wouldn’t do any good either. Go home, I’m giving you good advice, go home quickly!”

Krapulinski heeded this advice; for the time being, he obediently slipped behind the gendarmes. The captain, an old soldier, flushed with shame. “In the name of the Emperor –“ he began. But Fedko did not let him continue speaking either. “Comrade, you are an honest fellow, but you must see that you are no use here. Talking is no use, and as far as action is concerned, you are four against three hundred. But regarding the words you spoke, the words that you are here in the Emperor’s name, I would like to talk with the timorous one about that. Come here, Pole, don’t tremble so, I won’t bite you. Listen to what I say to you, and tell it to the Chief Scrivener in the city. The blood that has flowed here and will flow here today, *you* have it on your conscience, and it will bear witness against you before God. If you had governed as the Emperor wishes, if you had protected us against the beasts, then we wouldn’t have had to defend ourselves. Pole! You come by our church, dismount and look at the silent men who lie there, they were very loud this morning. And then while you are on your way, think, Pole, about why they are silent now, think hard about it. And now – go!” They went and arrived in Barnow as the sun was sinking. Herr Strusek was waiting for them on the office steps. “It was no use!” Ladislaus reported. “No urging, no threats were any use. They bowed before me and kissed the hem of my coat, but they will not disperse before they have slain Herr Barwulski. It’s five thousand men approximately. To me, as I said, they were very humble, and even pressed me to give their greeting to the District Governor, but otherwise they are very furious. Only the military can help –” But where to get military help from? There were none in Barnow; in the district town, which was six leagues away, there was a squadron of hussars. So Herr Strusek telegraphed the District Captain: “Immense peasant revolt broken out in Wolowce and environs.

Mob of eight thousand peasants formed, plundering and murdering in every manor-house. Deepest danger for state. Send regiment at once."

The sun stuck to the western edge of the heath like a blood-red ball, and the rebels looked at it in silence. Perhaps the thought flashed through every heart and mind: "Who knows if I shall see it rise tomorrow?" … Night fell, and it was a dreadful night, a night of horror and terror, and many a mother's son really did greet the sun for the last time, that evening; when it rose again, he lay dead, shot or stabbed, hanged or burnt. Inhuman deeds were done on that night, and in the end the beast throttled the beast; unspeakable deeds were done – should they nonetheless be described here casually and at length?

Only in brief, what is absolutely necessary. Under the shield of night, the peasants assaulted the gate once more. Again in vain. Again, entire ranks were laid low by the servants' guns. They simply shot into the dark, densely-packed mass and were sure of hitting a mark without taking aim. Again, the peasants retreated.

But they soon approached again, with pitch-wreaths, torches, and other incendiary devices. The darkness yielded to glaring red light. Now the servants could have shot their enemy down with ever greater certainty. But their fire stayed silent; they had used up their ammunition. The peasants noticed this and came up closer, and on a signal the firebrands, weighted with stones, flew at a hundred places into the castle at the same time. Many a torch went out, in many a room the servants extinguished it, but this was work done in vain. Half an hour later, raging flames were shooting out of every window, up to the roof and into the dark night sky.

The castle and its occupants were done for, and the victors' jubilant "Urraha!" rang spine-chillingly through the night. Only the two corner-towers and the massive storey directly over the entrance remained untouched by the fire. This last was favourable for the peasants: the iron gate reached only a moderate heat and the wooden bridge was preserved. So they could run at the gate once more, and this time it came off its hinges. And they rushed through smoke and flame into the fortress.

They came upon many a corpse, but upon no living soul. "Go and look in the corner-towers!" ordered Fedko. He had assumed correctly. But in one of the towers, those who had fled had also suffocated in the smoke. It was the women who had been in the castle, then three servants, among them Michalko. They took the bodies outside, and behold! Michalko began to breathe again in the pure air. So they bound him and jubilantly dragged him onto the heath. This was their first living prisoner. In the other tower, they found four more: three servants and Herr Wincenty. He had passed out from fear. The peasants threw themselves upon him as he was dragged past. But Fedko covered him with his own body. "The wolf shall not perish at the hand of an honest man, but at the end of the rope." They thereupon left the burning castle and gathered on the heath around their five prisoners. "And then, sad to say, much time was frittered away," Hritzko Barila said later, before the judges. At first they built five proper gallows. They needed several hours for this, and the day grew light while they were about it. And then they hanged the servants, one after the other, to give Herr Wincenty a good foretaste. When Wincenty saw that he had but a few more minutes to live, he fell down before Fedko and asked to be allowed a Father Confessor. And this peasant had, as mentioned before, an enthusiastical heart; he granted the request and sent for the Catholic priest in nearby Okulince. In the meantime, they strung up Michalko to pass the time, and cut him down again so they could repeat the sport …

The Priest of Okulince kept them waiting a long time. For he had a niece, and this niece was affectionate and did not want to let him go to the furious peasants. And when she finally let him out of her arms, he moved slowly, for he was fat. And when at last he arrived, other people had come before him.

It was towards the ninth hour of the morning. The peasants had cut Michalko down from the gallows a second time and were making shift to hang him a third time. Then the ground rumbled – far away at first, then closer and closer – dully echoing like a severe storm – clear fanfares rang out – the hussars were here.

The fight was short and could, actually, hardly be called a fight. A panic-stricken terror took hold of the peasants, they threw away their scythes and fled. Only one of them used his gun, Fedko, who shot a hussar dead. That was the last death in the Revolt at Wolowce. The peasants were taken prisoner in packs, the examination began, a hard, a very hard fate overtook the hapless ones, but no death sentence was pronounced.

The only one destined for the rope had escaped. Fedko had fled into the high mountains. He became a “Haidamak” as the robbers in the Carpathians are called. But an unusual robber: what he took from the rich, he gave to the poor.

The mountain-dwellers idolised him as a result, and all attempts to catch him were unavailing. All the advertisements of a reward did no good – nobody betrayed Fedko. Why, he was “our avenger”!

But he did not carry this on for long. Michalko had sworn an oath to kill him, and he kept his oath. Of course! – He had made this vow at a solemn place – at the gallows. And so this daring man crept into the mountains, lay in wait for the robber, and shot him dead.

Michalko and our Herr Wincenty lived on with a thousand joys. The former is alive still today. So many good people had to die and decay – only not these two. For virtue is rewarded in this world and vice is punished condignly …

That was the Revolt at Wolowce, and this sad story touched me to the quick when I lay, on that summer day fifteen years later, in the shade of the birch-trees, beside the “Black Cross,” whither the shawms had drawn me as they sounded so enchantingly in the distance. The boys were still sitting there. I rose to my feet and walked over to them.

“How is Herr Wincenty doing now?” I asked.

“He’s doing badly, at last,” the older one replied with a laugh.

“Where is he now?”

“In Hell.”

“So he is dead?”

“For five years now.”

“What disease did he die of?”

“It was the schnaps …”

“And who is your lord now?”

“The Armenian –”

“Which Armenian?”

“The Bogdan.”

“How else is he called?”

“He’s also called the Bug.”

“So you’re not content?”

“Oh yes!” the boy replied. “Father always says: ‘The bug bites, the wolf tears to pieces.’ And he says, ‘After all, an angel will never become Lord of the Manor in Podolia …’”

They do not need to be angels, I thought, if they were only humans!

Then I walked slowly back to the town. The wide heath swam in the warm red of the evening sun; only, the “Black Cross” rose up dark against the shining background.

It was erected when serfdom fell from the bodies of these poor people. When will the day come on which it falls from their souls? Poor, poor folk, when will your day come?!

Kossowicz’s Revenge

It was on July the 7th, 1864 – Fate has ensured that I never forget the date – at half-past eight in the morning in the classroom of the Septima[17] at Czernowitz in Bukovina; in Germany, the class would be called ‘Unterprima.’ At the teacher’s desk stood Professor Wilhelm Lang, the ambitious man who read Horace with us as early as in the Septima, his slim, elegant figure leaning slightly forward, his examination book in his white, soft, ringed hand. He had just cried, “Kossowicz!” and smiled, as he invariably smiled when he called out the name of the tall, ungainly, fat pupil. And the simple Romanian priest’s son had risen to his feet and scanned the asclepiadian strophe badly, and was now stuttering over the translation – as he always did. But we schoolboys grinned happily, Professor Lang never cracked better jokes than when he examined Kossowicz Eusebius, our poor, much-teased ‘ultimus ultimorum.’

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[17] The Lower Sixth.

Now on this occasion, the merriment was to reach an unprecedented pitch. The Romanian had read, “Nil pictis timidus navita puppibus fidit”[18] and now had to translate it. “The timorous sailor does not trust…” he began, “does not trust…”

“His natural genius,” the Professor broke in, “but prepares.”

The class brayed with laughter.

“Kossowicz! What does *pingere* mean?”

“Paint,” a compassionate neighbour whispered to the examinee.

“Paint,” Kossowicz repeated.

“And *puppis*?”

“Backside of a ship,” the same neighbour whispered again. But Kossowicz caught only the first word. His dull face seemed to light up.

“I know!” he said joyfully in his strange German, and then, in a voice of thunder, heavily stressing every syllable: “The timorous sailor does not trust his painted backside!”

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[18] “The terrified sailor puts no trust in painted sterns” – Horace, *Odes* I:14, ll.14-15.

We burst into howls of laughter that made the walls echo. Lang also laughed and laughed, so hard that tears ran down his cheeks. Then he cried:

“Kossowicz Eusebius, sit down on your *puppis.* It is a shame that you are too old for me to paint it red and blue: It wouldn’t do any good!”

Strangely, all was quiet after this. We were high-spirited lads between fifteen and seventeen, Kossowicz was our whipping-boy, Lang our idol, every joke of his was met with laughter – this time, we were silent. For we felt: That’s going too far! One should not treat a twenty-three-year-old man in that way. The poor, foolish person, who had come to the grammar school late and gone through every class twice, was perhaps only two years younger than our elegant teacher.

Kossowicz also felt this to be the case. At first he stood motionless, his dull, impassive countenance learning forward; he clearly had not yet understood the ‘joke.’ Then his massive frame began to twitch, he turned deathly pale. “Professor,” he stammered, almost menacingly, “I –”

He did not get any further. At that very moment the door opened and the Headmaster walked in. We shot up from our seats, not only because the regulations commanded it, but also from surprise and expectation. The Headmaster had come during a lesson – that was unheard-of and must have the weightiest reasons.

No pleasant ones – that much we could see in the worthy man’s countenance. Stefan Wolf was his name, but we called him Gorgias because he cited that dialogue of Plato in every speech he made. His countenance was pale, and the mighty moustache trembled.

He walked to the teacher's desk, beside the Professor, who looked at him with no less astonishment than we did.

"So," he began – never did mortal ear hear a speech from the honest man which began with another word – "So, you may go. So, lessons for the school-year are over. You may collect your reports from me in a week's time…"

A sound of surprise from fifty throats, then a humming and buzzing. "Why?" some voices cried.

"Nonsense!" thundered Gorgias. "Be silent! So, the Provincial Governor has just decreed this. So – the war, the terrible war. So" – the moustache trembled convulsively, "the Battle of Königgratz…[19] but that is not enough. So" – and at this word the moustache hopped up and down, just as if it had a life of its own – "Cholera…"

Cries and whispers again.

"Nonsense! Be silent! One does not vex one's headmaster in such times. Also, you must not eat fruit. So, anyone who eats cucumbers – nonsense, he must be severely punished! So, three people died in Water Street last night! Go home!"

We began to pack up our books.

"Quiet! Nonsense!" he thundered again. "Plato says in his Gorgias…" He paused. "No, I'll tell you tomorrow – I should say next time. So – cholera, bile – discharge of bile. Any other derivation is false." And he repeated with terrible firmness: “Utterly false, you hear!” But then the man’s voice broke – I have rarely met anyone with a warmer heart in my life. “Adieu boys! Hard times! Stay sensible and do not fear. We are in God’s hands. Until we meet again – in autumn. All of us, hopefully, all of us.”

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[19] This major battle, on 3rd July 1866, was a decisive victory for the Prussians over Austria which effectively ended the Austro-Prussian War.

And he ran out so we would not see the tears in his eyes, and all of us ran after him, he to dismiss the next class, we down the corridor into the street.

It lay in the glow of the July sun. The children were playing on the pavements, people were going about their business. Nowhere was there an agitated expression, an anxious word. We laughed, cried out, thumped each other. If the last words of the good old man, whom we all loved and honoured like a father in spite of his idiosyncratic oratorical performances, had not lingered in our ears, our joy at the unexpectedly early holidays would have been complete.

Not until we reached the Market Square did that name, whose correct derivation he had impressed upon us with such energy, meet our ears again, but not exactly in a terrifying manner. Two policemen went from one pedlar woman to the other and confiscated the unripe cherries and gooseberries. The women wailed, the bystanders laughed, and the policemen did not take their task seriously.

“Stupid business! But the mayor has ordered it! Cholera! Make way, you people!”

In Siebenburg Street, I caught up with my coeval, Kossowicz. He was walking along with bowed head and did not move aside for anybody, so that people shoved him out of the way angrily or laughingly. I caught him up and spoke to him. “Don’t take it to heart,” I said, trying to calm him down. “He didn’t mean it in such a bad way.”

He shook his large, unshapely head. “I am bitter,” he said sombrely. “I am very bitter! Lang is dog!” he then shrieked out. “He’s not!” I said. “He shouldn’t, admittedly, have made that joke!”

“Is dog!” he repeated. “Am I bad? No! Am I lazy? No! Am I boy? No! One threatens bad, lazy boy with blows, but me? I am an old man with beard, unhappy man! Why? No head for studying! But I must study all the same! Want to be farmer, am to be priest. Good man would have pity on me – so Kossowicz can’t do anything, gets a third, but one leaves him in peace! Bad man does that to me! But I’ll show him – call me dog if I don’t!”

On his impassive countenance lay the expression of an iron resolve.

“Kossowicz,” I said, frightened, placing my hand on his shoulder, “you won’t avenge yourself on Lang! You won’t make yourself unhappy!”

“It’s all one to me,” he replied. “I’m unhappy anyway! But he shall learn to be better and be in awe of God!”

“What are you going to do?” I asked, holding him fast.

“You’ll hear,” he replied, and tearing himself free, he walked into the ground-level house owned by a priest’s widow where he lived as a lodger with many other schoolboys.

I took this much more seriously than the cholera and continued on my way, more sober than hitherto. Only when I was at home did I get a sense of the horrors that the name held. When I entered the room with my news, my mother’s face turned as pale as the linen at which she was sewing. “That is dreadful…” she murmured with lips that had lost their colour. “If it comes like it did thirty-five years ago…” And she told me about the cholera epidemic of 1831, which she had experienced as a young girl in Brody, how every tenth person had died and there were too many dead for the hands to bury them.

I listened, and because she was agitated, it made an impression on me, but not a deep one. Then I took my cap from its nail and made to go out.

“Where to?”

“To Kossowicz. The poor fellow mustn’t do anything stupid!” I told her what this was about.

She nodded. “But be back by twelve o’clock. We’re going to your guardian, whose birthday is today, to congratulate him. We shall dine there also.”

The Romanian was not at home. What had happened to him? was his landlady’s greeting to me. He had sat there brooding a long time and then suddenly run away. And if it was true that the people in Water Street were dying off like flies?

I decided to go there, although there was barely enough time to if I wanted to be back home by midday. Czernowitz lies on a hill, and Water Street, following the course of the River Prut, encircles the foot of the hill. In those days only poor people lived there, particularly Jews and Ruthenians. Except for the height of the summer, when people frequented the Prut Baths, the townspeople never visited the miserable and remote suburb.

I came back over the market square which was now somewhat busier than before. In particular, people were standing in dense groups around large yellow placards which were just being put up. The mayor let it be known that three cases of diarrhoea and sickness had occurred, with fatal issue, in the suburb of Prut since the day before. It had not yet been ascertained whether it was a matter of Asiatic Cholera; however, he had immediately seen to it that all necessary steps were taken. A cholera barracks was under construction, and the suburb of Prut was blocked off. The notice concluded with some pieces of advice about hygiene.

The bystanders passed very different judgements on this document. Some praised the mayor for his energy, others found his zeal extremely superfluous. “Because three workers died in Prut suburb, after stuffing their stomachs with unripe fruit, he brings the entire town into a turmoil!” It was Herr Gregor Lupul who gave the most scathing condemnation of these “idiocies.” This man was the owner of the finest house, the mightiest stomach, the reddest nose and the loudest voice in all Czernowitz. “Who died up here in 1831? Nobody who had enough to eat. Aren’t I right, Mayer? You must know that, I’d say!”

I certainly do know it, Herr von Lupul,” small, slight Salomon Mayer replied, flattered. “Cholera is a kind of epidemic typhus for poor people.” “And I’m not to eat lettuce because of that?” Lupul cried indignantly. “Just for that, I’ll eat an Italian one this very day! Come along, Mayer, to the wine tavern in Anatowicz!”

Mayer went along, while I went to Water Street. The deeper I came down the hill, the more people were standing there, the louder they were talking, the more vehemently they gesticulated. Everywhere the same topic and the same opinions. Some praised, others mocked the mayor. Some urged caution, others boasted about all the things they had dared to eat; some told, while trembling, how several people died down below every hour and all the doctors were busy there, others swore that the people in Water Street were as happy as ever. Nobody knew anything for certain.

Then two wagons came clattering down the road, large, cumbersome carts, covered with black cloth. Two town-servants sat on the box-seat.

“Where to? Why?” people cried to them.

“To fetch the dead!” one of the servants replied.

“How many?”

“A dozen or so. It could easily be more now!”

Wild yells and clamour, interspersed with shrill laughter – and the next moment the street was as if swept clean. Howling, wailing, cursing, people rushed up the hill towards their homes and passed on the terrible news, making it ten times worse.

When I reached the entrance to Prut Street, a large crowd of people were standing there, laughing and shouting: apprentices, vagabonds, and maids. They amused themselves mocking the town police who were guarding the entrance to the street so that nobody would leave the infected district. Otherwise, there was nothing to see. The few little houses one could see offered the same sight as usual. In front of the doors, dirty children played in the gutter, tattered washing flapped at the windows to dry, a cobbler squatted on his three-legged stool in front of his workshop mending a pair of boots, a drunk sat on a bench and struck out around him with a stick, and a lost woman leaned far out of her dormer window, half-dressed, and shamelessly laughed at us. All as usual in this place of misery and depravity…

I had turned to walk away when a sound reached my ear that made me stop – I think I can hear it still while I write this. “Boze!”[20] a voice cried shrilly, desperately. Even the rough riff-raff around me fell suddenly silent. Once again, “Boze!” and “Ratujcie!”[21] And out of the house before which the cobbler was sitting, a man came hurtling out, a young, deathly pale, almost naked man, who must have just leapt out of bed, and turned around in the air like a spinning-top and crashed down in convulsions. That was the first cholera sufferer I saw at that time.

When I came home, it was long past twelve. My mother bitterly scolded me when she discovered where I had been, and after sprinkling me with a distillation she had procured in the meantime, she made me change my clothes. Then we went to the house of my stern guardian. The other congratulators were already there, they had been waiting to eat for us, and the old gentleman was very ungracious.

“This idiotic talk of cholera spoils your mood!” he cried. “And now people don’t come to table on time.”

“But Doctor Atlas and Lupul are not here yet either,” his wife observed, attempting to pacify him.

“The doctor is in the service of the town,” he exclaimed, “and must do what the mayor wants. He probably just has to make the drunks in Water Street sober again! But Lupul – that's right, Lupul is not here yet either! Where is the old fellow? Send over to him!"

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[20] “God!”

[21] “Save me!”

It took a long time before the messenger returned. In the meantime, we sat down to table. My guardian was still clearly surly, and his mood did not improve when the messenger finally reported that the housekeeper did not know where Herr von Lupul was, he had been out since the morning. "The fellow will surely not have forgotten!" cried the old gentleman, incensed with anger. That was forgivable, for Lupul was his best friend, and this Demosthenes of Czernowitz had been accustomed to speak the toast to the birthday-boy at the July 7th dinner for twenty-five years. But because the food was good, and the wine even better, the host's mood gradually brightened, particularly as another friend of the house gave three cheers almost just as well as Lupul usually did. And so we sat there and ate and drank, and because the two empty chairs at the table made us feel uncomfortable, we pushed them away. At my guardian's house, everything was done thoroughly and substantially, we had gone to table after one, and the coffee was served shortly before six. Only then did he remember his missing friend and send over again. This time the servant returned very quickly.

"Well?" the old gentlemen called to him. "Is he at home?"

"Yes, since two o'clock."

"Why does he not come?"

"He cannot!"

"Is he ill?"

"He is dead!" the servant rapped out. "Died of cholera, Doctor Atlas was with him."

A few minutes later, the room was empty, the company scattered, as if the dead man himself had appeared in their midst. My mother and I also went home.

When we passed by the priest's widow's little house, the old woman was standing before the door and anxiously peering up and down the street. "Is Kossowicz at home?" I asked.

"No!" she cried. "I'm dying with worry! Not come home to eat! In the nine years he's lived with me, I've never known the like. He stay away from food! Something has happened to him. Cholera! If I only knew where to look for him."

I was at a loss too. I sought to reassure her and asked her to let me know when he was back.

An hour later the widow's child came: Kossowicz had just returned home and asked me to visit him, he was not feeling too well.

My mother impressed caution on me but allowed me to go.

I found him sitting on a bench in the little garden in front of the house. He was pale and had wrapped his 'Bunda'[22] around him, in spite of the sultriness, as if he felt shivery. "Stop!" he cried to me, when I entered the garden. "Stop!" he cried again, when I took a few steps forward. "Don't come too close to me, I just been with a cholera sufferer!"

"With whom?"

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[22] A Romanian peasant's cloak.

“With Lang!”

I did not believe my ears, but he told me:

“I go to him around eleven o’clock. Why? To box his ears. Then they could hang me for all I care, but the bad man shall be taught his lesson. I get there. His maid says, ‘The Professor not at home.’ I ask, ‘When comes?” She says, ‘At two, after eating.’ I run around in the People’s Garden until half past one, quite furious, and I keep repeating what I want to say to him. Then I place myself before his house. In vain. Doesn’t come. Comes at last, but in a coach. Very pale, very wretched. I think, ‘Bad! You can’t thump sick people!’ Want to go. Then I see he can’t get out the coach himself. I walk over, I help him. He says, ‘Careful! It seems to me – cholera.’

“I angrily say, “Oh, no! Nettles are never frostbitten!’ And because he can’t walk, I help him into his room. The maid is afraid, doesn’t dare go in. So what to do? I must lay him in bed. He says, ‘Kossowicz, I don’t deserve this from you!’ I say, ‘No, something completely different, and that will come once you’re better!’ He says, ‘What?’ I say, ‘You’ll learn soon enough.’ But he grows sicker and sicker, and I see: really cholera. What to do? He is dog, but now he is sick, I cannot leave him alone. So I send the maid to hospital for ambulance, and meanwhile I nurse him! One hour and two and three, and he becomes worse and worse. And ambulance does not come. God in Heaven, I pray, what shall I do, the man’s dying in my hands but he must get well again so I can thump him. God in Heaven, I pray, if you don’t want me to thump him, I won’t do it, but let him get well. Then I’m satisfied with the revenge that he sees: This Kossowicz, I’ve always kept on at him and have tormented and tortured him, and now he stays by me and nurses me! – Isn't that so?" he interrupted himself. "Say, that's good revenge, isn't it? Very good?!"

I could only give a silent yes. "But where is Lang now?" I then asked. "In the hospital. At six, ambulance finally came. But was already half-dead. I fear, will die! And I'm like that too. Stay away, you, ten paces from me! What's that face you're making, stupid boy! So you think, I have my revenge, even if Lang dies?"

Several minutes later I had to go to the hospital to fetch the ambulance for my colleague. On the morning of July the 8th, he died there; he survived the teacher who had offended him, and nursing whom he had caught the disease, only by two hours.

Governesses and Playmates

Anyone who reads the title of these lines will perhaps expect a description of the beneficent activity displayed by the female "culture-bearers" from the West in Russia and Romania, in Galicia[23] and Hungary, expect a charming genre-picture of the foreign girl in the wild Carpathian valley becoming the benefactress of the entire region and receiving the warmest adoration in return. That would be a mistake; for I do not intend to start singing a hymn here, but to give a cry of warning, which I wish will sound its shattering way through the ears and into the hearts of everyone concerned.

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[23] A historical region which covered what is now southeastern Poland and western Ukraine.

Every year, thousands of nursemaids, governesses and companions go from the West to Half-Asia.[24] There are no reliable statistics for this; a cursory estimate would put the number at three to six thousand souls. Several experts give much higher numbers; so much is certain, that the export is a constant one, yet of varying intensity. The figures given above are therefore to be understood as at least three thousand single girls and women in years of lesser demand, at least six thousand in those of greater demand, going as educators to the East. It is nursemaids who are the most requested, governesses next, and “companions” the least. Even smaller is the number of the “playmates”: boys, who are exported to the East as living grammars of the French language, as it were. There shall be no further mention of them here for the moment; let us talk only of the ladies for the present. If we contemplate their homelands and group these according to the numbers they supply for this emigration, the following order ensues: Switzerland, France, Belgium, England, Germany, Austria, and Italy. Spanish, Dutch, and Danish women are almost nowhere to be found, and even then are sure to be in the houses of their compatriots.

The scale of countries is significant because it throws light on the direction of the cultural endeavours in the East. The educated and half-educated members of these interesting nationalities look to Paris as the Mecca of civilisation, consider a knowledge of the French language to be the main requirement, often enough to be the only requirement for a good education, and they therefore principally choose governesses with a view to their teaching French to their children above all else. For that reason, the three countries with French as a lingua franca are at the top. For Switzerland is also to be reckoned among them, its western cantons alone being involved in this export. Her occupying the very first place can be explained partly by the social conditions of this country, partly by the Frenchwoman, and the Parisienne in particular, being unwilling to leave her home, and finally by the school education in Switzerland being better and more thorough than the one in France. So it comes about that this large nation stands only in second place, and even this it maintains only with difficulty against little Belgium. The two Germanic nations which follow are involved in considerably smaller numbers. Since around 1870, these have incidentally experienced constant growth; in particular, Germany delivers a sizeable contingent by now which should soon surpass that of England. Austria and Italy, on the other hand, have only a very small share in this export.

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[24] Eastern Europe.

If we now answer the most obvious question, what form the fate of these women takes at the places of their activity, then the answer can only be a sad one. All the sorrows that only sentimental hearts can feel, we of course leave out of consideration. If anyone accepts a post three hundred leagues from home and then laments that it is much too far away, we cannot join our voice to their plaint. They should simply have considered that earlier. But is sorrow at the futility of one’s activity, which is as serious in the intention as in the execution, only sentimentality? Must not, rather, every warm-hearted soul feel this, and feel it all the more strongly, the more honest it is? Now it is likely that there will be only a few female educators who were spared this painful feeling during their activity in the East. The reason lies in the mental atmosphere into which they come, this consistently practised cultural hypocrisy, which takes appearance for essence, which wants the form and does not care about the content. The governess who has been called into a Russian, Romanian, Polish, or Hungarian house will in most cases realise in a short space of time that she is absolutely not required to teach her pupils thorough knowledge. The young misses are to be able to speak French capitally; one should not bore them with the perusal of the French classics or, indeed, with dry geographical or historical data. They should be able to drum out a few hits on the piano, but trying to open their minds to the nobility and the beauty of the art of music would be to inflict superfluous torment. Now either the governess bends to these educational maxims, and then she must needs feel discontent at the way in which she carries out her profession; or she does not bend, and then she can just return to her home country, where such pedantic female educators are not only tolerated but even held in high regard. If only the return were not so very difficult! Let nobody raise the objection that I have in mind only such women as have an ideal conception of their profession and that their number is small. I do think that almost every educator has enough idealism to feel the smart when she is made to do her job not thoroughly, but superficially, not conscientiously, but without scruples!

Of course, this social ill is the lesser one; of far heavier weight is the undignified social position of the governess in those families, the, by European standards, ignominious treatment she endures there. There are also heartwarming exceptions, I admit this and may do so without hesitation, because I have observed them with my own eyes; but on the other hand, I could relate stories, likewise founded on autopsies, about the mistreatment of these unfortunate ladies which could not fail to arouse the indignation of the most indifferent reader. I refrain from doing so because these are, after all, only exceptions on the opposite side, and here I have to describe only the rule. The rule is that the governess in the house of the Romanian boyar, the Hungarian magnate, the Muscovite or Polish nobleman, is thought of and treated in the same way that the German housewife behaves towards her maid-of-all-work. She is protected from physical maltreatment, but she is given every order curtly and brusquely; she is regarded as a being to whom no consideration of courtesy is owed, as a servant whom one pays and feeds so that she will perform her duty, but who is so little equal to her master and mistress in social or purely human relations as, say, a milkmaid. Yet one should not assume, by way of explanation, that malice is some general feature in the character of those peoples; the treatment of governesses in Half-Asia is just “the custom of the land,” or, more correctly, “the shame of the land.” What is going to induce the noble gentlemen of those lands to give the governess in their house humane treatment? This worthy girl earning her bread through work, while they live the high life on their inherited fortune? But work, you know, is nothing commendable in their eyes; any activity pursued to earn a living seems demeaning to them. The foreigner being more educated than they are? But it is only the educated person and those with ingenuous minds who have respect for education, and these nobles truly do not belong to either of these categories. Her being the educator of their children and no milkmaid? But she is paid for that, is she not. And she is free to go when she no longer likes it. If only the return were not so very difficult! And here nobody, at least no European, should interrupt me with the objection that I am raising this complaint only in the name of particularly prissy women.

But even this is not the worst. It is a terrible fact that countless of these creatures, young, unimpeachable girls, have become and are becoming victims of the brutal sensuality of those half-barbarians. Let this not be glossed over with the objection that aristocratic families in the West assuredly prey on defenceless creatures likewise. The case is different. For in Europe, these poor girls, however defenceless they may be in other respects, do have at least one protection which keeps the worst away from them or avenges it on the perpetrator: in Europe, Themis is not, as in those lands, a shameless hussy who gives the rich native a friendly wink and scornfully bids the abandoned foreigner begone. Furthermore, that kind of thing occurs only occasionally in our lands; not so in Half-Asia. There, one can point to – I repeat this expression intentionally and can justify it – countless cases of this kind; there, the infamy does not happen just by chance, but it is in part planned in advance. Yes, in advance! Of those three to six thousand girls who go to the East every year, there are perhaps a hundred every year who are brought only for the purpose of ruining them. And this hundred are no less upright and pure than the others, and they go there no less unsuspectingly than the others; they too are called to find an honest living and useful activity, and they are given dishonour and death! Every year, a number of victims is sold to Hungary, Russia, and Romania, where they inhabit first the houses of rich lechers and then – the more fortunate among them, the graveyards, the more unfortunate, the houses of pleasure. But who cares about this? Don't they go there as "governesses"? And the stream of education pours from the West to the East, and one must helpfully oblige the noble striving for education of the Russian and Romanian, the Polish and Hungarian gentlemen. "That is terrible!" I hear cried out, but in the same breath comes the question: "Is it true, though?" Yes, and I have already proved this, many years ago. When I made the decision in 1874 to describe the cultural conditions of Half-Asia, I told myself at once that one of my first obligations must be to point out this "governess trade." I know, indeed, that no words of a single human being would be strong enough to eliminate so deeply-rooted an infamy, and especially not the words of a young author who had no major newspaper at his disposal. But this consideration could not absolve me from fulfilling my duty. I wrote an article for an Austrian paper in which I gave a general description of the terrible practice. It appeared, and the practical result, as far as I was able to ascertain, was – three letters from the public. Two of these replies made fun of me for smuggling in a racy read under the cloak of moral indignation, for this matter could not be true, otherwise one would surely have heard of it elsewhere. The third letter came from a concerned "Mother in Graz," in which she enquired whether one of the most honourable gentlemen in Galicia was "also such a man," for her daughter Nanni served in his house, not as a governess, it was true, but as a “kitchen-help.” That was all. I thought that Austria was too little involved in that export; an article in a North German paper must have a better effect. A Berlin newspaper published it, and this time only one letter came: “Lie to other people, we Berliners are too wise for this!” I wrote a third article for a German newspaper in Switzerland under the assumption that it surely must have the greatest effect there. But this third attempt also had a very modest result: the editorial staff did print my work, but they wrote to me that people there in general were, of course, already informed about the terrible practice, and my essay did not offer anything more than generalities.

This won’t do, I thought, the ones do not believe what I say, and the others know it already. I must bring it about that the ones believe me and the others do not simply content themselves with knowing about the matter but are also pressed to do something about it. I shall complain at large no longer but publish individual cases. The sketches which I had published first in 1875 in a much-read Viennese newspaper, then in the first edition of this book, served this purpose. I reported on those unfortunate “governesses” of whose fate I had, by chance, received more detailed information during the sojourns of my youth, then during my later travels in the East. I added nothing, but I glossed over nothing also. As this representation has not become redundant even today, I present it here.

It was in the year 1858, and I a 10-year-old boy at the time. But I can still remember everything exactly. It was a spring day; I had travelled with my father, who was the district doctor at Czortkow,[25] a small town in East Galicia, to the village of K. My father had work to do in the village, so he set me down at the manor house. Mr. Ludwig v. T. had his home there, and he was assuredly, beside his brother Henrik, who lived in the neighbouring village of Sz., the richest nobleman in the district. Both of them had married young, and a son had issued from both their marriages, and both had named him after themselves. Little Ludwig in K. had been my playmate before this, and on that spring day we boys romped around loudly and wildly enough. A third boy was there with us, a pale, shy lad: Ludwig's cousin, little Henrik v. T. from Sz. His mother had died young, his father was often away from home, yet the poor boy came to his relatives but seldom; the two brothers did not get on particularly well together.

But this time, Henrik had already been on his uncle's estate for two weeks. "It's fun here," he cried with delight when, having finally run ourselves tired, we were building a castle of fieldstones on the heath beside the high-road. "I didn't at all think it would be so great and didn't want to leave home. But I had to, because a new French girl has just arrived who's to teach me."

"Stupid Henrik," his cousin laughed, "in that case, you'd have to stay at home, wouldn't you!"

But the pale boy shook his head. "No," he replied, "I know what I'm saying: For that very reason I had to go away. It was no different last year, nor two years ago either; whenever I get a new tutor, I have to go away and am not allowed to return for a month. Papa wants it so. When I was eight, he came back from Paris, sent the Padre away and said: ‘Your tutor will come tomorrow.’ And she came on the next day, she was slim and blonde and pale. And she was very serious, although our old Fruzia said: ‘Why, she’s barely more than a child herself, how shall she educate other children?’ and she always wore black clothes. That made me afraid of her at first. But she was as good as an angel, and I was very fond of her, and Papa too, he was always very friendly when he spoke to her. But after fourteen days he suddenly became terribly angry with her. It was in the evening, Amelie had put me to bed and I had fallen asleep, then I suddenly woke up because Papa was berating Amelie and shouting at her terribly in the next room. She just quietly sobbed. But suddenly she flung open the door and came rushing up to my bed and pulled me out. And my Papa came after her, and his servant, Janko, was standing in the doorway. Then she cowered into a corner and pressed me close to her and shouted something at my Papa. He turned quite pale and told Janko: ‘Tear the child away from her.’ But then he had second thoughts and said in a hoarse voice, ‘Good night’ and laughed and went away. She held me firmly on her lap and cried a lot, and then I fell asleep. And I’ve never seen Amelie since that time, because I woke up late in my bed the next morning, and old Fruzia dressed me, and Janko put me in the carriage and took me to the monastery, to Uncle Prior. I stayed there a month. And when I came back, Amelie was not there anymore. ‘Wherever is she?’ I asked. And Fruzia said, ‘Your father has sent her back to Vienna, to the woman he fetched her from. He could not stand her crying. But I fear she will lay hands upon herself on the way, I fear your father won't be able to answer before God for the wrong he has done Amelie. Your father is a bad man.' I told this to Papa, and he had Fruzia beaten for it."

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[25] Chortkiv, in Ukraine.

"But it's true all the same," said Little Ludwig, "my mother says it too." Henrik continued his story, and whatever parts of his boyish chatter may have slipped my mind were refreshed much later by accounts from other mouths: "Then a second French girl came in winter, she was called Josephine. But on the day she was due to arrive, my father had Janko take me to Uncle Prior once more. 'I don't want any of those aggravations again,' he said. So I spent another month in the monastery, and when I came back, lessons began. But I learned little with Josephine. She was completely different from Amelie: really moody and small and black and always springing around and always laughing. But Fruzia told me that she too cried a lot in the beginning. And she cried later, when she was alone: 'I often heard her sobbing out for hours, 'O ma mère!'[26] But that was only when Papa was not at home; in his presence, she always sprang around as merrily as could be. But she was afraid of him for all that, even more than I was. He was generally good to her, but in spring he became angry and hit her, and she cried a lot. And then Janko took her to Lemberg. And then Papa went on travels for a year, and Father Ignatius was with me as tutor, a very bad fellow. Well, Papa came home three weeks ago and sent the Padre away, and he told me, 'You're going to get a French girl again. And she looks exactly like Amelie.' I was really happy, for Amelie was as good as an angel, you know. But on the day she was to come, I had to leave for here. Well, it’s great fun being here …”

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[26] "Oh my mother!"

And we continued building our castle on the blooming heath until we became hungry. And the sun was setting by then. But just as we were about to run home, a carriage came thundering down the road. “Those are our black horses,” cried Henrik, and he ran up to the carriage, “that’s Janko. He must have come for me. Isn’t that so, Janko?” But the servant shook his head. “We’re driving to Czortkow for the doctor.” “Why, my papa is here, in the village,” I cried, and we boys climbed into the carriage, shouting with joy. My father stood in conversation with Herr Ludwig v. T. at the gate of the manor-house. “Doctor,” cried Janko, “You should come to Sz. at once. Something terrible has happened!” “My brother?” cried Herr v. T., turning pale. “No,” replied Janko, “the French girl has taken poison; I fear we won’t find her among the living.”

My father quickly sprang into the carriage, and Herr Ludwig followed him. “Allow me to accompany you,” he said. “Your boy can stay here.” But my father lifted me in. “The boy can sleep in the carriage.” And then we drove away and the two men did not speak another word. Only Herr v. T., who was very pale, said once in a dull voice, “I knew it would come to this.”

Then night set in, I fell asleep and did not wake up until we stopped in the courtyard of the castle at Sz. The building lay in darkness, only several windows on the first floor being illuminated. The two men hurried into the castle. I squinted at the bright windows, then I wrapped myself in my father’s bunda and fell asleep once more. I don’t know how long I lay like that, nor what awoke me. When I opened my eyes, all around me was as before. But the horses had been unharnessed, I was alone in the dark castle courtyard. Then I began to feel afraid, so I climbed down from the carriage and went into the castle looking for my father. There was not a living soul on the stairs or in the first-floor corridor. Ever more hesitantly, I crept through the dimly lit passageway. At last, I saw a half-opened door, and I stole in.

It was a large room, likewise dimly lit. An old female servant sat in the window-niche crying bitterly. She took no notice of me. I crept on tiptoe to a second open door, from which a bright light shone through, then hid myself behind the door curtain and looked in. It was a bedchamber; on a bed, a female figure lay motionless. I saw little of her face, I could barely distinguish it from the pillow, it was so pale. But all the more clearly could I see the flood of blonde hair; it lay like a light cloud around her countenance. My father stood by the bed; I saw his countenance clearly and almost gave a start, never had I seen it so sombre. The two brothers were also in the room. Ludwig leaned in a window-niche; Henrik, a handsome, well-built man in his thirties, sat in a leather armchair looking fixedly at the bed. Everything remained motionless, only for a few seconds. I believe that if I had become a painter, I could reproduce this picture even today. Feature by feature, so deeply do unusual impressions become fixed in a child's mind. And I know what followed just as well. My father bent over the bed once again. "She is dead," he said then, "she must have taken a large quantity of arsenic." "So it was arsenic!" gnashed Henrik, and he leapt up. "Now I know where she got the poison. Fruzia always keeps a supply of it for the rats. Oh, I'll have the old hag whipped until … " But

Ludwig heavily laid his hand on his brother's shoulder, so heavily that Henrik buckled. “You will not do that,” he said in a dull voice, “for the reason that the old woman did not murder the girl, but – you did.” Henrik was silent. Then my father's eyes fell on the door-curtain and he discovered me there. “Be off with you!” he cried vehemently and walked up to me. “I was looking for you,” I stammered. Then he grasped my hand. “I can go,” he said to Herr Henrik. “You can see that there is nothing left to save.” “I thank you,” he replied and came up to my father, embarrassed, his right hand stretched out. “Sad accident … hmm! I ask for discretion!” But my father's right hand did not let go of my hand. “I must do my duty,” he said. We left.

Here ends my personal remembrance of this case, which is indelibly fixed in my memory. I shall only add: my father did his duty and informed the court of the suicide. He and an official were thereupon sent to Sz. And the post-mortem was carried out. The official established that Charlotte G. had purloined the poison from the housekeeper's supply. Henrik and his body of servants claimed to have no idea what the reason for the suicide might be. Only old Fruzia tersely declared: The young lady poisoned herself because the night before the master had stunned her with a sleeping drug and deflowered her in that state. But the investigation had to be discontinued as early as the second examination of the old woman. Fruzia retracted her first statement: she had lied to avenge herself on the master for his often having her beaten.

How many governesses from Geneva Herr von T. subsequently obtained for his son, I cannot say. I only know that he lived in a thousand joys for a long time afterwards and was greatly respected in his circles.

In the year 1872, I came, richly provided with letters of recommendation, to a medium-sized town in Moldova. One of these letters was addressed to a young German merchant who had set up business there only a few years before. Mr. Friedrich K. received me warmly and cordially and then took me into his private apartment. There he introduced me to his spouse, and if the husband had soon captivated me, his wife did so even more: a Gretchen in appearance, slim, blue-eyed, and with the magic of chaste girlishness in every feature, every movement. One could hardly believe that this fair being was already a wife and mother, even less that she was a Frenchwoman. And that was the lady's upbringing and origin on her father's side; her "maither" was, of course, as she told me in broken Swiss-German, from Berne. "Laddie" was what she called her splendid two-year-old curly-head, who laughed loudly as he smacked my hand. I can scarcely say what a favourable impression the flourishing small household made on me, and I would happily have stayed for lunch, as the dear people wished me to. But I had a dozen more visits to make. So I promised to come again the next day and continued my tour with sighs: to civil servants and bankers. And they were all, unfortunately, at home.

So when I appeared in the town park late in the afternoon – what passes for a town park in Moldova – to listen to the strains of the military band – what passes for a military band in Romania – I found a great many new acquaintances. But I searched and searched until I found Friedrich and his wife. I sat down with them and chatted while their little boy sat on my lap and played a fearful game with my moustache. All the while, the music played at ear-splitting volume, and the stately dignitaries whom I had waited upon in all humility paraded slowly past. Of course I made a respectful salutation. But my salutation – was not returned. Now and then a gentleman awkwardly raised his hat, but the ladies looked all around as if I were thin air. Initially I laughed at this, but then I grew angry, and in the end I remarked to Friedrich, “But your fellow citizens are exceedingly – polite, are they not.” He turned pale, and his wife blushed. “The impoliteness is not aimed at you,” he said at last, dejectedly, “but at us. I am persona non grata, not in business relations, but in social ones.” I kept silent after this disclosure; he had to add an explanatory word. He did not do this, however, and his wife, now become deathly pale, looked fixedly at the ground. I quickly began to speak of other things. But the married couple remained dejected and monosyllabic. Finally, the situation made me feel uneasy, and I took my leave. “We shall expect you tomorrow,” said Friedrich with a forced smile. “And I can hardly tell you how delighted we shall be if you come after all.”

After all? I returned to my hotel in a strange mood. Why did an interdiction hang heavily over the dear young couple, one so terrible that they themselves did not even dare to speak of it? But whom to ask? Then I found on my table an invitation for that evening, from Mr. V. Now, Mrs. V., and the two lovely Misses V. had not, it was true, done me the honour of noticing me that afternoon, but I did not know if I should hold that against them. I went over. The married couple received me very cordially. After the very first words, Madame began to speak about that encounter in the town park. How terribly sorry she had felt and so on, that one should, as a stranger, be exposed to such disagreeableness and so on, until I finally asked: “Indeed, what is the problem with the people?” Madame bashfully cast her eyes down to the ground. Mr. V. whispered to me, “Mr. Friedrich K. is an honest, worthy young merchant. But his wife was previously a prostitute. And he took her to the hymeneal altar straight from the house of pleasure!” “Impossible,” I cried with vehemence, “that woman –” then both the Misses V. swept into the drawing-room. I believe I decidedly did not make the impression of being a brilliant companion on the V. family. On the next morning I was still very distracted. My thoughts returned time and time again to the young couple. How could the man who seemed respectability personified, have decided to take such a step? But did this maidenly woman have, in fact, such a past? At midday, however, I walked the path to the young merchant’s house. For, I told myself, first of all, you’re no teenage girl, secondly a foreigner who doesn’t need to care a hang about the opinion of the good town, thirdly you should not requite intended kindness with incivility. And with this in my head, I entered Friedrich K.’s office. He pressed my hand as if I had done him the greatest service by coming. “My wife will be delighted,” he said. “The laddie has already stammered something about ‘German Uncle.’” We went up. Today, Mrs. Marie looked, if possible, even lovelier than yesterday. But she was embarrassed, and she remained so, even during the meal. When it came to an end, she quickly rose. We gentlemen went into the Smoking Room.

“I owe you an explanation,” Mr. K. began almost as soon as we had sat down. “I would have liked to give it to you yesterday, but my wife was with us, you know. So I had to take the chance that an explanation would come to you from a stranger's mouth. And this has probably happened, it is immaterial from whom or in what form. I myself tell you that I did indeed have to buy the worthy girl who, today, as my wife, makes me happier than I deserve, out of the house of a procuress before I could marry her. But how Marie came into this land and into this house – nobody will have told you that. Listen!

"Here," – he took a sheet of paper out of his breast pocket and handed it to me unfolded – "you have a contract of service from March eighteen hundred and seventy-one, concluded through the mediation of a Viennese and a Genevan Institute of Employment, between Miss Marie Ch. on the one side and the landowner's widow Mrs. Sophie K. on the other side. Marie Ch. binds herself herein to enter into Mrs. K.'s service as companion for free board and lodging and a yearly salary of one thousand eight hundred francs. In particular, she is bound to read to the lady and to nurse her in cases of illness. As you see, a legally binding instrument, in strictly juristical style, and yet – the most infamous farce ever drawn up in legal form. Sophia K. is a widow, but not of a landowner, rather of a lackey; she is very healthy, needs no nursing, and even less does she need a reader of French books, as she does not understand a syllable of it. She is the former lover and current housekeeper of the landowner Doxaki P. in S. near Roman. That man is perhaps the most infamous lecher to be found in Romania, and that is saying something. The noble man regularly lived through the winter in Paris and spent the summer on his estate. To suitably amuse himself during this time, and also not to get out of practice with his French, he obtains, or rather, obtained until three years ago – for since then I have put a stop to his game – a companion for his housekeeper every spring. In the name of Sophia K., he always turned to sound employment agencies, stressed as his first requirement the absolute respectability of the applicant, and was in this way certain of really receiving a hitherto unspoilt victim of his lust. Then in autumn he regularly got back a part of his expenses before his departure for Paris. That is, he sold the unfortunate ‘companion’ to the procuress Sara P. in this town …

“You feel,” the young merchant continued, “terribly moved from the mere narration. Now consider how poor Marie’s position must have appeared to her. When she, an orphan, but in the care of attentive relatives hitherto, now suddenly saw herself in a completely strange land, alone and helpless, at the mercy of the beast and his power. For brave Doxaki saw to it that even she, the unsuspecting one, became aware of her situation within a very short time. In her desperation, her mortal fear, she barricaded herself in her room, finding no other means to elude the wretched man’s attacks, and decided to starve herself to death. Having got to know her character later, I am convinced that she would have carried out this resolve. Herr Doxaki was able to dissuade her from this through a ruse. He wrote her a long and sentimental letter in which he assured her that he was so moved by her heroic spirit as to give up every censurable thought, and he was also most willing to help her return home. To this end, he enclosed a banknote of five hundred francs; his carriage was at the young lady’s disposal to take her to the nearest train station at any time. The unsuspecting woman fell into the trap and even had emotional expressions of gratitude conveyed to Doxaki. In the next hour, the carriage stood before the door, her suitcases were loaded, the girl walked down the stairs. Then Doxaki walked up to her and verbally asked her forgiveness. He thanked her for restoring in him a belief which he had lost long before in the storms of life, the belief in women's honour. And in conclusion, he requested, as a sign of reconciliation, that Marie would not leave his house so – half-starved. Who could have resisted such contrite imploration, especially as the table was already prepared and the poor girl really was dreadfully hungry. Marie ate and drank, and – the wretched man had achieved his aim. Large quantities of a drug were mixed into the dishes which stunned the girl's senses, and let her become the lecher's victim … When the girl regained consciousness, the force of her misery was too great for her shattered nerves to withstand. Marie fell into a high fever and hovered between life and death. This was a confounded nuisance to Herr Doxaki; if the girl died, he might perhaps have to fear some unpleasantness. So he made the suggestion to his worthy friend, Sara P., that he deliver the girl, in her current state, into her house gratis. Mrs. Sara entered into the risky transaction; the sick woman was brought hither; Dr. R., a German, treated her. Through him, I learned about the case. It interested me deeply, from reasons which can be of little interest to you …" A shadow flew over the narrator's countenance, but then he continued: "I had a female cousin, who likewise went to ruin in foreign parts many years ago. And this cousin was very … close to me … Well, I got to know and to respect the convalescent. I pitied and loved her. And that is why I made her my wife, and she has made me very, very happy. And so I am conscious of being a man of honour."

… It happened many years ago and in Lipcani, a dirty dump in Bessarabia. In the village's best inn, a contemptible dive, I rested for several hours in the evening. I had left Mohyliv in the morning and was very tired from the long day's journey in the miserable hired carriage. Nevertheless, I wanted to continue on that night to reach the Austrian border near Novoselytsia[27] in good time the next day. After I had settled my reckoning, the old Jewish hostess came to my table once more. She had a request, she began in some embarrassment, but not for herself. That was to say: actually for herself as well, for the poor girl was lying there, and she could not throw her out, and there could be no thought of payment either. The girl wanted to go home, but it was very far away. If I would not at least take her over the border with me?

"What kind of a girl is this?" I asked.

A sort of teacher, was the answer. She did not speak German, but she spoke some Russian, and French "like water." A terrible injustice had been done the poor girl, but she should tell me about that herself. With that, the good-natured woman shuffled off out the door and soon came back with her protegee.

In all my travels throughout the world, I have met much misery. But never have I seen a human being whose appearance touched my heart more shatteringly than the poor creature who now came creeping towards me, hesitant, staggering. She was a very scantily clad girl of perhaps seventeen years of age. This face had certainly never been beautiful, but now it was disfigured by the traces of unutterable grief. Something like mortal fear lay spellbound on it, her eyes were inflamed from days of weeping, and tears streamed unstoppably down her cheeks. To make the cup of misery full, the poor girl was evidently close to the time when she would become a mother.

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[27] Lipcani is in Moldova; Mohyliv-Podilskyi and Novoselytsia are in Ukraine.

My eyes became moist when I looked into this countenance. I spoke to her and averred that I would help her. The poor girl was not quite in her right mind; she only stammered, “to Geneva” and kept her hands clasped. I had a bed prepared for her in the carriage and sat down beside the coachman. We drove through the night. Through the rattling of the carriage I could hear the incessant whimpering of the sick girl.

Towards noon we came to the Russian border village of Novoselytsia. I brought her, after much persuasion, to eat some soup. Then I asked her if she had a passport. She needed one to cross the Russian border cordon. “At the General’s wife’s,” she stammered, “with my other things.” Then she began to weep bitterly again and told me in between times, stammering, sobbing, confused, the monstrous outrage that had been perpetrated against her.

The girl was the daughter of a Genevan cobbler. She had never had the benefit of an education and so had no hope of ever becoming a governess. Then a Russian General’s wife came to Vevey for an autumn sojourn, and she was looking for a nursemaid for her five-year-old daughter. The cobbler’s daughter got the post and was very happy about it; she was treated well, became fond of the child, and so was happy to go with the General’s wife to Sicily and then to the estate near Lipkany. After that, the General’s wife travelled to Baden-Baden; the nursemaid stayed behind on the estate, alone with the child. Then in late autumn she unexpectedly received brilliant company. The son of the General’s wife, a young officer in the Guards, found it advisable to avoid Petersburg for the winter; he probably had good reasons. As he felt bored in the dreary manor-house, he seduced the poor nursemaid to kill time. In spring, he was able to return to Petersburg; a month later, the General’s wife came home. The French girl had no proper awareness of her condition until the servants began to make gibes. The General’s wife received news of this and summoned the girl. She confessed everything in tears. The Russian woman flew into a frenzy, called the poor thing a strumpet and exercised justice on her. She had her unclothed in the courtyard and flogged. The poor victim lost consciousness for shame and pain. When she regained consciousness, she found herself lying on the high road. Compassionate Tschumaken[28] took pity on the unhappy girl and brought her to Lipkany.

I was shaken to the very depths of my heart, but young man that I was, there was little help I could give the girl. With the help of some Polish florins, which replaced the missing passport for the Russian nacelnik,[29] I smuggled her through the cordon into Austria. Then an Englishman in Czernowitz [Chernivtsi] took charge and care of the unhappy girl and procured complimentary tickets and travel expenses to Vienna for her. From there she was going to return to Geneva with the help of her compatriots. Whether she reached her home, I do not know.

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[28] Ruthenian salt carters.

[29] (Police) chief.

In the winter of 1872-73 I lived in Pest, where I often associated with a young doctor who, in spite of his youth, already enjoyed a considerable practice. On a March day at four o'clock, when his consultation hours came to an end, I was climbing up the stairs of his apartment to call on him to go for a walk, when I passed a lady dressed in black, standing motionlessly on the half-landing, her hand resting on the banister. I looked at her while I went past, and I had a violent shock. That countenance was young and of noble contours, but dreadfully pale; even her lips were colourless and contorted by an expression of deepest despair, which lay on them as if spellbound. The corners of her mouth were drawn down, her lips half-open, as if a scream of horror had just escaped them; her eyebrows were drawn up high, and her eyes were glassy, lacklustre, and bulging far out of their sockets, as if they had just witnessed the most terrible occurrence. The woman was evidently suffering some immense physical or mental pain. Sympathy and horror took hold of me. "You are unwell?" I did not want to ask the question; my lips asked it themselves. The lady stared at the sound of my voice, put her hand to her brow, and softly shook her head. Then she staggered down the stairs.

"Was that a patient?" I asked the young doctor upstairs, and I described the lady to him. "Yes!" he said. "An extremely unfortunate creature. She is a governess and comes from Belgium, from a very respectable family, as she claims. Last autumn, she entered the house of an elderly widowed magnate in this city as governess to his two little girls. The man seduced her, and he did so, as she swears, under the pretence of marrying her. Of course he now threatens her with dismissal at the mere mention of this promise. But that was not enough, he has also infected her with a loathsome disease. The girl had no idea of the nature of this disease and did not seek advice from a doctor until today, many months later. I had of course to tell her the whole truth and also reveal to her that there is very little hope of a complete recovery. Poor thing!"

With that, he closed the door of his apartment, and we descended the stairs and walked up and down the Danube Quay, which was filled with people, until the evening mist rose from the river. Then we parted. The young doctor was unaware that his unfortunate patient had plunged herself into the river on the opposite bank that same hour. She drowned, because the mist prevented rescue.

And let that be the last story – not, certainly, the last that has come to my knowledge, but the last I shall tell.

There only remains for me to talk of the "playmates," of those boys who are brought to the East ostensibly to serve as living grammar books in the houses of the rich there, but, in truth – at least, in no small part – to be used in particular houses as the object of unnatural desires. Such houses exist in Kiev and Odessa, Bucharest and Galaţi, Constantinople and Athens. To say more on this issue is impossible at this point and probably superfluous as well.

May these lines serve their purpose of drawing attention and of warning. –

And that ends my account of 1876. To draw attention, to warn, was actually my sole aim. That little would be achieved by rousing moral indignation was clear to me – it is indeed a beautiful delusion to believe that this has ever made a rogue lay down his arms. And if these facts were spoken of, I told myself, loudly enough to fill every civilized European with the deepest repugnance, the Boyars in Half-Asia will nevertheless continue to do as they please. But I wanted to open the eyes of those girls who venture the journey to the East, and of their parents and guardians, so they would be on their guard. Normally people say, "Exempli trahunt,"[30] perhaps I thought I would achieve my intention here in the opposite sense: "Vestigia terrent."[31] I did indeed achieve this aim, and I did so – all too much! I could infer this from the hail of newspaper articles and letters which fell on my writing-desk. Getting to read in all the tongues of the East that I was a libeller of my homeland and all the other compliments, did not surprise nor offend me; the accusation that I was an "enemy to culture" who wished to deprive the East of the elements of a foreign education also left me indifferent. But I was given pause by the accusation that I wished to oppress the girls' hearts with such things, for there really was something in that; and the letters which came to me confirmed it. There was much foolishness in these, but from many letters there rang out the shattering complaint: "Good, now we are warned, but how will this avail us? We must go to the East to earn our bread, because we cannot find it in our homeland. We want to have a guarantee that we shall enter a respectable house, but who can give us this guarantee?"

The question was justified, but where could the answer be found? Apparently it was easily given: "The guarantee has to be given to you by that agency who arranged your employment. So avoid the bad agencies and use the conscientious ones.” But this is no real help either. There was and there is no agency of whom it could in any way be proved that they were professionally involved in arranging such infamous deeds. When a governess they have placed in a position ends up in bad hands thereby, then the agents in Geneva, Brussels, Berlin, or Vienna are accused of negligence at most, and not always of this. If such agencies existed in Europe and this infamy needed them for its existence, it would soon be destroyed. But it does not need them – indeed, more than this, it does not even need the assistance of the agencies in its own land. If such agencies existed in Romania, Russia and so on, they would likewise soon be exposed, and they could be made harmless. But the case is, in the main, as follows: the landowner, Herr L.v.P. in Volhynia, widower and father of two young girls, has obtained a governess for them. He has no wicked intention from the outset; he in fact wants only a teacher for his children. But chance brings an attractive young girl into his house, and his brutal nature is unable to resist this temptation. Then he sends the poor girl away: He knows that nobody in his government will lend an ear to her complaint or accusation. This experience encourages him to further attempts: he orders a governess from the agency at Warsaw once again; as a precaution, he makes youth and “pleasant appearance” conditions this time. But this condition is made so often, and by such respectable people, that it really cannot arouse the agent’s suspicion. What could? It does not occur to him to make detailed enquiries. So he writes to his business friend in Brussels or Berlin, and this man is in his turn completely incapable of conducting an investigation, even if he wished to. He concludes a preliminary contract with a lady who meets the conditions that are set, she receives a travel advance and goes to Volhynia. The rest – see above! And what is to prevent Herr L.v.P. from repeating the scandalous deed as often as he likes? But as horrible as this example is, the reader already knows that there are even worse cases: I point to the story of Marie Ch. The Viennese and the Genevan employment agencies, who were involved in concluding this contract, were both respectable firms. The agent cannot always inquire, and if we assume that he could, through what means could the obligation to do this be imposed on him with such binding force that he *must* fulfil it?

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[30] Examples lead (to action).

[31] Footprints (of the past) frighten [i.e. lead to inaction].

Where the power of the individual does not suffice to eradicate an evil that is harmful to the community, one may with justice appeal to the might of the state, even if one is, for the rest, decidedly of the opinion that the “Villain State” is called upon all too much nowadays. No remedy could of course be expected from the states of Half-Asia, but it could from those of Europe. And so I finally gave a practical point to my suggestions: It is the duty of the state to protect its members from injustice, even in distant climes. Of course, Switzerland or the German Empire could not assign a guardian of her honour to every nursemaid from Geneva or Berlin, nor instruct their ambassadors to keep an eye on every single one and care about her welfare. But what they are easily able to do is to offer them the certainty that they will not fall into disreputable hands. In other words: It shall be made the duty of the consulates to officially issue information immediately and in all conscientiousness. Then at least the most lurid cases, such as those of Marie Ch., will be avoided.

It is a great pleasure to me to be able to report that this suggestion did not fail to bear fruit. On the contrary, the practical effect was greater than I had ever dared to hope. I may stress this because the result is not owing to me but to the force of the facts, for I have done nothing but my duty.

Switzerland stands at the top in that scale, and she was the first to give the problem a practical solution. The Federal Government in Bern, as the Swiss Ambassador, Herr Dr. v. Tschudi in Vienna, informed me at that time, presented my essays to a commission of inquiry. This suggested a highly useful measure which was implemented at once. Under the patronage of the government, there arose a society which made the protection of young female Swiss citizens in the East its business. This is achieved by the society not only making use of the Swiss consulates in the East, but also appointing private foreign members to those lands and recommending the emigrants to them. Even greater stress is laid on preventing the defenceless girls from coming into bad hands from the outset. If, for example, a young girl in Lausanne wants to enter a Romanian house as a governess, she will not have her Swiss passport handed over to her until she has stated the name of her future master at a branch of the society and the enquiry which is then immediately conducted by telegraph has produced a satisfying result concerning the good reputation of that family. I consider this to be the only correct way. The Swiss girl in Half-Asia is thus protected from the worst.

But who protects the German girl?

It is not the purpose of these lines to complacently report the one result, but to pose this question to everyone whom it concerns. The export of German governesses, nursemaids, and companions to those lands grows year by year. Does the German Bundesrat[32] not consider it its duty to set up the same protection for German girls that Swiss girls already enjoy?

My Uncle Bernhard

My Uncle Bernhard was not actually my uncle, nor was he called Bernhard. His sister had married a distant cousin. That was the entire relationship. But if he was not the uncle of all of us in his blood, he was so in our hearts. The whole family, in so far as they wore short dresses or boy's jackets, turned to him when they wanted something. For he was always deeply convinced of the necessity of colourful picture-books and pretty dolls, or he easily became convinced of this need: through a single imploring look from a child's eyes. And whenever somebody did not want to have something, a beating or a scolding, he likewise fled to this small, quiet man. Uncle Bernhard shook his head, made a short but weighty speech and then went to our parents as mediator. And he was as a rule successful in averting the storm, for, apart from the kind mothers, no father's heart in the family could resist him when he said, in his mild, earnest way: "Don't hit the children! Be glad that they are alive and blooming! Not everybody has it so good!"

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[32] "Federal Council," the upper house of the German Parliament.

This was not perhaps very logical, nor did any particular pedagogical wisdom lie therein. But, as beforementioned, no heart could resist these words, and they certainly did not harm any of his protégés. The unruliest urchin was ashamed to have Uncle Bernhard pleading for him too often, and when this man grew angry with them at last, they felt it more painfully than the most cutting rod. Why he exerted so great an influence on us, we ourselves did not understand. For he was not impressive, neither in his appearance nor in his career. A scrawny, depressed little man with a long, gaunt, much-furrowed countenance, which a grey goatee only made appear even longer and gaunter. This goatee gradually turned white, but as for the rest, his countenance did not change, and his clothes were also eternally the same: a long, dark-yellow coat, of nankeen in summer, of wool in winter. Other than Uncle Bernhard, not a soul in the entire town of Czernowitz wore such a coat, and not a soul led such a way of life.

Early in the morning and late in the evening he went on long, solitary walks, and during the day he sat in his little room and wrote curly Hebrew characters on long strips of paper. They were contributions for the Hebrew newspapers, people said, political articles, and it was actually an everlasting shame that the little man had not learnt German so well as to be able to work for the Vienna papers, for he was not only a great Talmudist but also a "sharp writer." And another uncle, a real one, Salomon Brunnstein, was always wont to say: "The Tsar in Petersburg should give thanks to God every day that our Bernhard doesn't know German!" The man lived on the proceeds of his work and the interest on a small capital, and he saved just enough more to frequently delight all the children he knew with presents. But that was also the only joy in his dark, lonely life, and when we, half-a-dozen scamps, advanced into his room, he could play with us and be merry and laugh so heartily that tears welled up in his eyes. We did not at all understand why the grown-ups always said that Uncle Bernhard was actually the unhappiest man to walk this earth. Children are rarely keen observers. And perhaps those tears which ran down his cheeks so suddenly were no tears of joy. Perhaps his poor, crushed heart never flinched more painfully than when he was laughing and playing with others' children.

Everything about this man had a story behind it: the furrows in his countenance, the long, yellow coat, and the long strips of paper. And everything shall be told, with careful attention paid to order. I shall write about the long yellow coat first. This strange article of clothing came from a compromise which Uncle made with his sister Henriette. He had been victorious in the cut, she in the colour. When he had come to Czernowitz from his hometown in Russian Podolia many years before, because he had nobody left in this world except for this very sister, he wore that long, black talar which the Jews of the East customarily wear, and went by the name he had borne since his birth, Berisch Reinmann. But his sister had not lived in the German town for fifteen years for nothing: she had turned from a simple Hendl Reinmann into an emancipated Henriette Schwarzental and strove to now make her brother happy too with the blessings of an advanced culture. "You must be called Bernhard," she told him, and the little man remonstrated a little and then obeyed and was called Bernhard. “You must wear a German coat,” she commanded; but he put up stubborn resistance to this, not from aversion to the culture, but because he had worn the long, wide comfortable coat throughout his life. But she continued to bombard him, and so Bernhard had his new talar made from dark-yellow material. That was no longer “Jewish” costume, and Henriette was contented.

She refrained from further attempts to make her brother “German.” But he himself, admittedly, strove quietly and bashfully for the same goal, without anybody knowing this for certain. He took lessons in the language, which he had hitherto spoken only as a corrupt jargon. The aging man spent many years learning High German. Many may have ardently thirsted for the spring of Western culture, many may have achingly struggled for it, but perhaps nobody ever did so as fervently, as eagerly, as this little “Jewish writer.” Why? He was not driven by thirst for knowledge, nor the hope to be able to turn what he had arduously gained into money one day, he was not driven by vanity – but by his *heart,* his crushed heart, which wanted to take revenge and warn others. Bernhard Reinmann wanted to become a “German writer,” he wanted to write against Russia in German newspapers. “What good does it do me,” he sighed, “if I write for the ‘Hamagid’ and the ‘Ivri’?[33] Palmerston does not read the ‘Hamagid’, and Thiers[34] does not read the ‘Ivri’. Yes, if I could write for the ‘East German

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[33] The leading Hebrew-language newspapers of the time.

[34] Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865), British Prime Minister 1855-1858 and 1859-1865; Marie Joseph Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), President of France 1871-1873.

Post,' or even for the 'Augsburg Gazette!'" But this heart's desire of his never came true. He learned so much High German as to be able to read and understand any book, but he never learned to write, whether it be that he lacked confidence or that he had really begun too late to overcome the difficulties. The older he became, the more deeply this vain yearning gnawed at his heart. "What" – he often asked his visitors, while looking up mournfully from the curly characters, "What am I doing now? I am whispering! But I would like to shout so that the mighty rulers of this world will hear me and take pity on their brothers!"

Now this thirst has long ceased to torment him, and his soul has been freed from every woe, including the most bitter one, which had oppressed it: the gnawing remembrance of murdered happiness. For my Uncle Bernhard is dead, he has been for many, many years now. The children wept sorely when he was buried, for children are egotistical in their love. But the older people and his friends said: "Death was compassionate to him! Now he will see his wife and children again, whom he longed for so achingly!" My Uncle Brunnstein also spoke so, only he added: "The Tsar in Petersburg can be glad that Berisch Reinman died before he could tell his story in the 'East German Post.'"

My Uncle Brunnstein was a good and clever man, but I do think that he overrated this story there. I, who am telling it now, am far from doing that. And as concerns the Tsar in Petersburg, it has absolutely no connection to him. But I think that it is worth the effort, nonetheless, to tell *how* Berisch Reinmann became the unhappiest person to walk this earth.

How? Basically, only through a misunderstanding. But woe to the state in which such a misunderstanding can occur. “It is the worst curse of bad people,” runs a wise saying from the Orient, “that they cannot become good, even when they want to.” It is the curse of tyrannical states that they cannot become just even when they want to, that they must crush even when they wish to elevate and make happy…

Countless people know, like me, about this man’s story. Were Truth not, in any case, invariably the only goddess I serve, this external reason alone would force me not to add anything and not to withhold anything.

Berisch Reinmann was a happy man into his fortieth year. The son of poor parents, he had created a considerable estate and a merry household for himself by his own efforts. He was a corn merchant in a small town in Russian Podolia, close to the border with Austria. It is a trade which requires much wisdom and luck. The harvest, with the deteriorated circumstances of the aristocrats in that place, who cannot afford to wait, is usually sold to the dealer as early as the spring, so that it is he, not the landowner, who has all the difficulty of a bad year, but also, of course, all the blessings of a good year. There, one can, in spite of all one’s caution, become poor, and also, of course, attain to wealth in a short time. Reinmann became rich. Moreover, he had a beloved wife and two children in full bloom. His wife was sickly, their marriage had remained childless for many years, and all the more anxiously did the man nourish and cherish the blessing which had come his way so late, when hope was all but gone. He had every reason to be satisfied with his fate in other ways also. He enjoyed an excellent reputation among his fellow citizens and was aware of having fully earned it through charitableness and honesty. He got on well with the authorities because he took the world as it is. He knew that the two rulers of his little hometown, the judge and the lieutenant of the police, were not entitled to demand presents from him, but when they did this, he gave them the wished-for tribute, which was not exactly calculated low. He had no reason to fear them, but he knew that they could easily sour the happiness of his life if they so wished. “Everyone does it,” he thought, “I will not change Russia.”

Then the old lieutenant of the police died and a new one took his place. I would like to give his name, but it has slipped my mind in the course of the years. The man was an avaricious beast; if anyone were to use a milder expression, they would be lying. He had served in the army and had been dismissed because of his alcoholism and a sordid affair. But one of the most powerful officials in the government of Podolia was his cousin. He who has such a cousin need have no care in Russia; the man who was dismissed in disgrace received that office which could have given him an ample and honourable living. For the dissipated life that he led, his regular income certainly did not suffice, nor did that unlawful tribute which people paid him without demur as they had his predecessor. He raised the tribute, he demanded payment for every official duty that he was obliged to perform – people grumbled, but they complied. Reinmann was the richest Jew in the village, so he had to suffer more than the others, he had to not only sacrifice the largest sums but also larger ones in comparison with his means than his co-religionists; but he was nevertheless the only one who did not grumble. “I will not change Russia,” he repeated his maxim with resignation, and he paid.

But it was this very resignation which led to his ruin. “If this Jew,” thought the Lieutenant of the Police, “pays a thousand rubles without turning a hair, then he’ll moan when I demand two thousand from him, but he’ll pay them.” And this noble man acted accordingly at the next opportunity he was able to instigate. He was wrong. The Jew did not moan. But he did say, after counting out the money on the table: “Sir, you are ruining me. That is no exaggeration, I can prove it to you. I do not want to appeal to your magnanimity, but be wise! A wise host does not slaughter the cow which gives him milk!”

The Lieutenant of the Police was embarrassed. Then he relieved himself through a refined joke: “But you’re no cow, are you, Berisch, but a Jew, and so a swine! He! He!”

Berisch did not bat an eyelid. Whoever grows up as a Jew in Russia and Poland gets used to such jokes. “Take my words to heart,” was all he said on parting.

The Lieutenant of the Police really did take them to heart through full four weeks. Then he sent to Reinmann to ask for a small loan.

“How much?” the Jew asked the messenger.

“A thousand rubles.”

“I won’t give that. Go!”

The messenger, a young subordinate official, stood lost in amazement. Never before had a Jew dared to speak to him like this when he came on behalf of the mighty one. “Are you mad?” he asked.

“Go!”

There was something in this voice and in the expression of the eyes which made the young man feel quite uneasy. He left more quickly than he had come.

The Lieutenant of the Police was foaming with rage. An hour later, Reinmann received an official summons to appear at the office immediately.

And he came straightaway.

“Why won’t you lend me the thousand rubles?” the Lieutenant of the Police began.

“If I am officially summonsed for that,” was the answer, “then I will have my reason taken down.”

“I’ll ruin you!”

“You have half-done that anyway. I shall put up a fight for the other half.”

“Fight – against *me!* Do you know who my cousin is?”

“He is not the Tsar!”

The Jew was dismissed, and the Lieutenant of the Police, reflect as hard as he might, could not think why he had actually wanted to bring the man in for questioning.

Some days later – it was towards the end of June – he knew why. A forgotten decree, last implemented a long time before, prohibited Jews from having Christian servants and day-labourers. Reinmann employed about fifty Christian stewards and carters all the year round and often half a thousand reapers at harvest-time.

When the Lieutenant of the Police publicised the prohibition, the Jew turned pale, but quickly regained his composure.

“I shall appeal to the Provincial Government,” he declared. “For my sake, as for the sake of my people. I shall be entirely ruined, but they will also be put out of work. And they are Orthodox Christians!”

The decision came after only a week: the Lieutenant of the Police had acted in accordance with the law. A penalty for frivolous action was imposed upon the unauthorised litigant.

The Jew was in the depths of despair, but the sympathy of his co-religionists came to him in his need. They were on good terms with the Lieutenant of the Police, they were allowed to keep Christian workers. So they took on all the rights and responsibilities of Reinmann. He did not come off without heavy losses, but the worst was avoided.

Up until autumn, all remained peaceful. The Lieutenant of the Police seemed not to be giving any more thought to the man he hated to death. Then, one night in October, the Jew’s house was surrounded and searched by policemen, and he himself was pulled out of bed and dragged to prison. He lay in fetters for eight days on rotting straw with bread and water. Finally, he learned what he was accused of doing: he had stolen a little sack of corn from his neighbour, the sexton. It was found during the search of the cellar, and the sexton had affirmed on oath that the little sack of wheat was his property and had disappeared only a short time before.

And that was certainly no perjurious statement. But just as little did anybody doubt how the little sack had come into the Jew’s house: through the policemen themselves, during the search of the house.

The unhappy man’s family offered everything to free him from prison, or at least from the hands of his mortal enemy. If his guilt were in fact not so evident, then the police had no further right to him, but that rather belonged to the judicial authority, the Town Magistrate. A tragic coincidence gave greater impetus to the relatives' zeal. Reinmann's wife, always sickly and frail in any case, had passed away several days after his arrest as a result of the shock and from grief. They therefore strove twice as hard to at least return the father to the two orphaned children as soon as possible.

The Town Magistrate was helpful to them in this, not perhaps without external motivation – no matter! He energetically insisted on his right to have the prisoner delivered into his keeping. Nevertheless, the Lieutenant of the Police did not do this until he had received five hundred rubles from the relatives for it.

The trial lasted only a short time. The accused was, in spite of the corpus delicti, acquitted. The court, it said in the verdict, had notwithstanding arrived at the conviction that a man of the character and means of Reinmann could not possibly have so far forgotten himself as to steal a small sack of wheat from his neighbour.

This verdict may also, in spite of Reinmann's innocence, have cost some cash; but there was no other way.

When the Jew came back to his house and learned about the death of his wife, his sorrow vented itself in bitter weeping for days on end. But then he became remarkably calm, so calm that his children and relatives almost felt uneasy. "*Now* I shall seek my true right," he said, and when they pointed his own wise saying out to him, "You won't change Russia," he shook his head and said; "I must attempt to in this one matter, if not for my, then at least for God’s sake. He, the Eternally-Just, shall not be covered with dishonour here!”

What he planned, he told nobody. Only later did people learn that he had intended to go to Petersburg and tell his story to the Tsar.

A chance occurrence, seemingly favourable, saved him the journey. In the next few days, a member of the Imperial House was to pass through a neighbouring village, on his way to Kiev from abroad, and have a night’s rest there. A good reputation preceded the Grand Prince. People said of him that he was just as noble as he was energetic; they were glad that an important administrative post in Kiev had been assigned to him.

His reputation did not deceive, as Berisch Reinmann was also to learn. It cost him much money and effort to obtain an audience with the great lord late that evening; but when he stood before him, it seemed that all was won. The young Prince listened to him affably in spite of his fatigue and became deeply agitated. “Dreadful,” he cried, wringing his hands; his eyes filled with tears. His purely human sympathy and his patriotism had equal shares in this agitation. “I thank you!” he said. “You are right, the sun should not shine on the like!” He noted everything down in detail. “I shall have the case looked into, stringently, immediately, when I arrive in Kiev. I shall give directions to the Provincial government.”

“The government?” the Jew interrupted him. And he told him all about the cousin.

Again the Prince became deeply agitated. “Why, that is terrible!” he cried. “Then those calumnies which miserable knaves in foreign countries…”

He stopped. It overwhelmed him, those men in exile not being “miserable knaves” and their accusations not being calumnies. He turned away. Then he walked right up to the stooped man. “You are not lying?” he asked, boring into his countenance with flashing eyes. The Jew calmly withstood the look. “It is all true,” he said solemnly. “As true as my children are dear to me; as true as I hope to be reunited with my wife one day!”

“Good!” said the Grand Prince after a pause. “I shall conduct the investigation directly from Kiev!”

Three weeks had passed since this discussion when the Lieutenant of the Police received, one morning, a telegram from Kiev, from the office of the Grand Prince. It read: “The merchant Berisch Reinmann is to be sent hither under the strictest guard for the purpose of official investigation.”

The fiend rejoiced. Now he had his victim in his claws again. He interpreted the telegram to mean that the High Court had found fault with the Town Magistrate’s verdict of acquittal and was re-opening the investigation for theft.

He had Reinmann arrested and bound, and issued a compulsory passport for him: “Criminal, requisitioned by Kiev.” Then he instructed two Cossacks to convey the unhappy man from station to station, that is to say: from prison to prison. “Particularly dangerous,” he wrote down, additionally, in the passport, and to render any attempt at flight impossible, he gave orders, at the same time, how the Cossacks were to escort the man: between the two horses, both his arms tied to the stirrups.

That was everything he could do for his mortal enemy for the time being. But he could do more for his children. These were a six-year-old boy and a fourteen-year-old girl. They were now completely abandoned; their mother was dead, their father in custody. The law stipulates that in such cases the authorities must take care of the abandoned ones. The Lieutenant of the Police took care of and provided for them. The boy, he put in the nearest Greek-Orthodox monastery. However, the house to which he entrusted the girl, the delicate, pure, hitherto closely guarded child, was – a place my pen refuses to put down on paper.

It takes a long time to reach Kiev from the border, particularly when one must make the journey in such a manner as Berisch Reinmann did. If a wild, desperate energy had not kept him going, he would surely have succumbed to the unspeakable tribulations of this journey.

Finally, finally, Kiev was reached. He was in prison there for two days, then at break of dawn on the third morning a young officer, an adjutant of the Grand Prince, walked into his cell.

“Come!” he cried breathlessly to him. “The Grand Prince is inconsolable over the misunderstanding to which you have fallen victim. He awaits you in his castle!”

“A misunderstanding!” murmured the broken man, and he let flow the tears which impetuously burst from his eyes. He had borne every torment without shedding a tear, but this sudden deliverance floored him and left him aghast. The adjutant was severely shaken also. He carefully escorted the staggering man to the carriage and lifted him in. “The Grand Prince will explain everything to you,” he said. “I am certain that you will be given the most splendid satisfaction.”

The Jew nodded in silence. “But my poor wife will not come back to life,” he thought, “and nobody can compensate and recompense me for what I have suffered.”

Out loud, however, he asked: “Good sir, how did it come about?”

The adjutant was able to tell him precisely.

“A misunderstanding,” he emphasised. It was actually only such. When the Grand Prince arrived in Kiev, he remembered his promise and summoned the President of the Tribunal to discuss the case with him. The President recommended that the Jew be brought to Kiev, to first and foremost obtain a sure substratum of the charge, and further because this main witness could remain uninfluenced here. For he remembered many a case in his experience where investigations of this kind had not led to any result – the reason being that people had worked away at the injured party so energetically in the meantime, through threats or money, that all of a sudden they no longer deemed themselves injured. The Grand Prince said he probably did not believe in such a danger, from the impression the man had made on him, but he agreed, as for the rest, that he be brought hither.

Such was his zeal that he personally undertook to arrange this, and he told his Expert Councillor: “See to it that the merchant Berisch Reinmann from B. appears here as soon as possible.” But an Expert Councillor does not of course carry out such a task himself. And so he told one of the Department-Chiefs of the Chancery: “The Grand Prince wishes that the merchant X. be brought hither as soon as possible. You are answerable to me for executing this precisely, it is an official matter.” Whereupon the Department-Chief instructed his secretary: “Have merchant X. brought hither at once under strict guard, with all precautionary measures taken, for the purpose of official investigation." But the secretary naturally turned at once to that authority which was responsible for the execution of such tasks for their district, to the police station of B.

The Jew was silent while the adjutant told him this story on the way to the castle, and he just kept nodding as if what had happened were the most natural thing in the world, and as if he had to approve of it. Then, after he had sat there a while with his eyes closed, he suddenly opened them wide and recited, in a loud, hard voice, a Hebrew saying to himself.

"What is that?" asked the officer.

"A saying of our fathers," was the answer. "It is difficult to translate."

But this saying, one of the sombre, dark sentences of the Kabbalah, ran: "Curse will beget curse, and sin will beget sin unto the last generation. But when the sinners feel that their measure is full, and they dread the judgement of God and they want to atone and do penance, then He will disorder their minds, and atonement will beget sin, so that what they deserve shall come true for them."

The Grand Prince received him cordially, and doubly cordially when he saw how terribly the unhappy man had changed in those few weeks. "You shall have justice," he promised, and he kept his word as far as he was able.

Eight days later, the dismissed Lieutenant of the Police stood before the Grand Prince in Kiev. The Jew was also present. Initially, the man vehemently denied ever having used extortion and "considered it beneath his dignity to defend himself against so notorious a thief.” But in the middle of the interrogation a telegram was brought to the Grand Prince which had just arrived from B. The police had confessed to the Investigating Commissioner who had been sent there that they had received that little sack of grain from the Lieutenant of the Police and taken it with them before searching the house, to then adroitly “find” it in the cellar.

Then the wretched man denied no longer but sank to his knees and whimpered for mercy.

Only two days later he stood before the judges. Reinmann attended the trial in the witness box.

The procedure was short. The sentence was one of twenty years’ hard labour in the Siberian mines and restitution of the extorted sums to Reinmann.

After publication, the dastard requested permission to speak. He said: “I know that there can be no appeal against the sentence, and accept it. But to show your lordships that I am a good man after all in my heart of hearts, I’ll free the Jew here from the worry which must beset him for his children’s sake. I have made sure they are well provided for, my bosom friend!”

The Jew leaned forward, trembling, and fixed his eyes on his enemy’s countenance in mortal fear.

“Very well!” he slowly continued. “With regard to your daughter first, I have given her to a woman who has already taken care of many a solitary young girl, to old Ivanovna – you know her, Berisch?”

He knew her. A scream escaped his breast, so wild, so shrill, that the judges started from their seats in horror.

“And as for your son,” the fiend continued, “you must likewise be grateful to me! He will not roast in Hell like you, infidel Jew! The venerable monks have baptized him, he will enter the Kingdom of Christ!”

Then the unhappy man put his hand to his heart and fell in a faint to the floor. At first, it was feared that he would go mad or die of grief. But the human heart can endure more than is commonly believed. Berisch Reinmann stayed alive.

The Grand Prince saw to it that his daughter was returned to him at once. But even he could not give the father his son; here, his power found its limit. Whoever is taken into the bosom of the ruling, orthodox Church in Russia may not be taken away from it. The mere attempt is a capital crime which is punished with death – to this day!

Berisch Reinmann stayed in B. because they brought his daughter, who was mortally ill, into his house, and he awaited her death. He knew that she could not recover – what she had endured was too terrible… After her death he moved to Czernowitz. That is the story of my Uncle Bernhard.

The Forced Ones

It was in the year 1871, in the fullness of spring. The acacia-trees on the boulevard in Odessa were blossoming, as were the strange flowers of the South over in the whitely-flashing villa district. Even over the poor heath there passed a breath of scent, and marram grass shyly raised its tenderly-feathered head on the yellowish dune. And with this, the happy sunshine of springtide lay over the young and beautiful city and the harbour and the deep-blue sea, day after day, it seemed as if there were clouds no more in that May. Everything was beautiful, everything. But that was no use to me; I had to go away and go home. At least I departed in the evening, when all the splendour was veiled. The next morning, I was in Balta, a handsome town, which, translated from Southern Russian, means that very many wood and mud huts stand close together there. Here I left the train, or rather it left me. A terminus; in those days, anyone who wanted to travel to Bukovina from Odessa had to make use of the imperial mail coach, run by the Podolian or Bessarabian governments, from Balta onwards, unless he prudently preferred a hired carriage. For only the uninformed man travels with the mail coach in New Russia, and that man becomes informed who has once sampled it. This mail coach is not so dreadful as its reputation; it is much more dreadful. In Old Russia, it is much better, and in some regions it is quite good. But in the south, one cannot recommend the Imperial torture-cart even to prospective suicides. For anyone who denies the will to live, however emphatically, will find a more agreeable opportunity for this than being buffeted to death.

I therefore hired the “britzka” of Nussan Goldkafer from Husiatyn. Now, one should hardly think of the vehicle of the same name which is common in western Austria, particularly in Moravia. That is such an ideal and civilised coach that it has in fact barely anything in common with the britzka of my homeland other than the name. It is difficult to describe this graceful conveyance, the main purpose of which appears to be to keep the traveller’s stomach in a constant state of gentle shaking – often ungentle, it simply depends on the road. The reader will most easily form a picture of it if he imagines an open coffin fixed to a crude framework with four wheels of the same size, to the front end of which a small board is nailed – the coach-box – and over the rear end of which there is stretched a covering in the form of an upside-down trough, which the traveller rests under.

So much in explanation of the “Britzka.” Now, in explanation of Nussan Goldkafer, the observation: Whoever has his home in the East will always prefer the Jewish coachman to the Christian one. The Christian is cheaper and more willing, that is true. But the Jew, setting aside a few exceptions, has two good characteristics: He does not leave an item of the traveller’s luggage behind on the road with a cousin as a souvenir, and he does not drink himself into unconsciousness. Oh, only those in Half-Asia really know what intoxication means! In this tame Europe, one is inclined to give this name to a slight merriness, which is slept off in a single night! But anyone who has had to stay, as I have, in a wretched forest-tavern for full thirty hours, because the coachman, a Romanian rascal from Bessarabia, was not to be shaken out of his stupor, he knows what magnitude an intoxication can reach, and in future he steers clear of this willing, cheap fellow. The Jews in the East have also absorbed a little of this general moistness, but they are still the most moderate nation in that jumble of peoples. Drunkards are found only in the dark, wild sect of the “Chassidim”; superstition, fanaticism, idleness have led to this vice there, as, unfortunately, to many others also. But my Nussan was no “Chassid”; he belonged to the “Misnagdim,” the opposition, the Scripture-believers. Whereas the Chassidim place the Kabbala over the Talmud, the

Misnagdim respect only the Bible and commentaries on the Bible and reject the Kabbala. They despise the Miracle-Rabbis, like to become handicraftsmen, carters, innkeepers, shopkeepers, and are orthodox but not fanatical. Thus, for example, they will avoid eating a meat dish and a milk dish together as a deadly sin, but they hate nobody for the sake of their faith, and the acquisition of foreign education seems laudable to them. They are (mutatis mutandis![35]) the old Catholics of Judaism; in spite of all their dogmatic orthodoxy, they see themselves surpassed by a majority which keeps piling up new dogmas as steps – to Heaven, as they believe, to the peak of imbecility, as others believe … “Thank God, I am no Chassid!” my Mr. Goldkafer fiercely said to me, even before we had driven past the last huts in Balta. One of these huts was a Chassidic “Beth Hamidrash”[36] which one could translate, extremely freely of course, as “Public library.” A large, dilapidated room, in which dirty folios lie on the tables and boys, men, and old people, who would likewise be none the worse off for greater cleanliness, sit on the benches. The venerable assembly either sways back and forth with the regularity of a pendulum, reading from the folios in low voices, or it debates the things of the other world in a shrill discussion, or it devotes itself – the opportunity for this presenting itself often enough – to a thing of this world, brandy. Breeding grounds for idleness, in which a truly learned man will be found as often as a white raven; in general, Jewish scholars are not found among the

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[35] i.e. making the necessary changes for a different situation, the main point still standing.

[36] Hebrew for “House of Study.”

Chassidim.

“Not one of those!” Nussan cried fiercely, and he brandished his whip at the pious house in the most unequivocal way. “But a genuine Jew, a Misnagid, a man, an honest man, a carter!” And then he began to explain his point of view to me in greater detail.

I do not know why he did it; the coachmen do not as a rule hold religious-philosophical conversations in the East either. Perhaps because he wanted to make up to me, through lively talk, for having taken a hitchhiker, a fat peasant from Ukraine, who now sat beside him, taking up a great deal of room on the box-seat. Or because he wanted to prove to me that one can be a carter and yet be well-versed in age-old knowledge. Every man, except for the time of his juvenile years, simply likes to try to show himself to his neighbour in the most favourable light. And this orthodox Jew naturally considered his knowledge of the Talmud to be his finest adornment.

While he spoke with utmost eagerness, with citations fairly raining down, I could not refrain from looking at him and then at his neighbour, and singular thoughts came over me. Both people were roughly the same in their means and their way of life, and in their relation to European culture, about which they both probably knew equally little. Their clothing was also the same – drill coats with sheepskin cloaks worn over them, turned inside-out because of the heat. Except that one of them wore an amulet, a little bag with garlic bulbs, which his priest had consecrated for him at Easter for fifty kopeks, while the other wore a kind of waistcoat with tzitzit hanging from its corners. And yet – what an immense gulf separated the spheres of thought of these two compatriots only for the reason that the one wore the garlic amulet and the other the waistcoat! The Ukrainian cleaved to the soil with Slavic doggedness, and regarding the past of his people, he probably only knew that very many Ukrainians had died. But the Jew – he did, it was true, drive back and forth on the Podolian highroad, but this land was not his homeland. His homeland was a land far, far away, which he had never seen, which, as he saw it, existed on earth no more: Today, milk and honey flow no longer in the valley of the Jordan … And everything he knew, everything he thought, everything that elevated him to be a human, had its roots in that land and its stories. The dust of millennia had settled over it; to him, it was the eternally young, the only world. Every Jew brought up with the Talmud is really – sit venia verbo![37] – an erudite man, but this erudition is dead and rigid, it proves nothing other than the great educational capacity of this race; it is of no use either to him or to the peoples among whom he lives…

The hail of citations came in spells; now it eased off, now it became heavier again. And then there came, at the end, an argument without citations. "But what does that lead to? Apostasy! Godlessness! At first too pious, and then utterly godless! When a Chassid stops being a Chassid, what does he become? A 'Meschumed'![38] He eats pork! Or a roast and rice pudding from the same bowl. But God will know what he has to do with the dogs who apostasise from the faith into which they are born. With all of them! … that is" – he broke off and then hesitantly continued, "hmm, with all of them? … I do not know, those people come to my mind…”

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[37] Excuse the word.

[38] Apostate.

He fell silent and stared thoughtfully into space.

“Which people, Nussan?”

“Hmm … it just came to my mind because we have to drive past one of those houses today … I mean the *‘Forced Ones’* …”

“The Forced Ones?” … I thought of a new sect. There are normally no great intellectual movements in the East, but in matters of faith there is very often a singular newborn to be registered. “Are they Christians or Jews?”

“Neither Christians nor Jews, but just ‘Forced Ones.’ Oh Sir, that is a great misery! And a great outrage! Our children at least will not know about this, for no new victims are added, and a curse rests upon the marriages of these people: they remain barren. But what am I saying! – It is no curse, but a blessing, a mercy from God! – Should the abominable misery be passed on? … The ‘Forced Ones’ have no children; God knows what he wants! … But one should not talk about it; fool that I am, sinner that I am, what am I prattling about! …”

And he fiercely laid into the horses, making the coach fly jerkily on. I asked no more questions; I know these people. If they consider something to be a sin, they do not do it; not for anything.

But I was to hear all the same, that very day, about the people to whom God shows his mercy when he lets them perish alone …

We drove further west, always towards the sun, through the densely wooded, gently rolling grassland which lies between the grey, fantastically formed limestone rocks of the Dniester valley and the black, rich arable land of Ukraine. The countryside is sparsely inhabited and poorly cultivated; one can travel for hours without perceiving a house, a ploughed field, or any other trace of human hands, apart from the road, and it does not look as if human hands had occupied themselves with it very much. When we came to a particularly bad stretch, we got out and walked along beside the horses, and Nussan uttered Jewish curses, the rustic, Ukrainian ones, and I, German ones. Then we took our seats in the coach and drove on in silence.

When the sun stood over our heads, we stopped in a tavern situated at the edge of a forest which stretched for miles. These woods belong to a Potocki, I believe Count Adam,[39] the former Austrian Minister. That is a good landlord. The forest showed signs of cultivation, and the tavern was in good condition.

Admittedly, inside it looked just as filthy as is the case in all of these "Karczmas."[40] This was, however, not the fault of Count Adam, but of the landlord and landlady who lived there. And perhaps not of these people either, but of the strange concepts of cleanliness in the East. *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner;*[41] it saddened me greatly that the landlady, a beautiful, voluptuous young woman, evidently did not wash her face every day, but I could not hold that against her.

Apart from this woman, there were four living beings in the large taproom with grey-green walls: a couple who possessed immortal souls and a couple without these. Two cattle-dealers, a Muscovite and a Ukrainian, and their curs. The curs were going at one another’s throat and the masters were doing likewise. “You Russian!” cried the one, “You Ruthene!” cried the other, and in a tone as if these were the worst of all invectives.

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[39] Adam Józef Potocki (1822-72), Polish aristocrat and politician.

[40] Inns or taverns (Polish word).

[41] To understand all is to forgive all.

The young woman sat sleepily behind the bar and watched the argument. At any rate, the argument was not so interesting for her as it would certainly have been for a Slavic brother from Austria. I believe that cats and dogs like each other more than the individual Slavic tribes in Russia.

With our entrance, the fight took a new turn. The Ukrainian peasant who had come with us did not stop to ask who was in the right but fell upon the Russian and began to give his rear parts a vigorous tanning. The Muscovite, caught between the Devil and the deep blue sea, withdrew into a corner double-quick and bombarded his opponents with the most defamatory opinions of their nationality and of their – mothers. “You son of a bitch!” And that was the gentlest remark, relatively speaking, which he cried over at them. The Ukrainians also expressed, with great certainty, their opinions of their opponent’s birther, though they certainly did not have any personal knowledge of her. But in the end, both parties did no more than growl quietly, and their curs did likewise.

I came to an understanding with the woman about my lunch, or rather: I tried to, for she did not understand me, and I understood her only with great difficulty. The Jews in South Russia do indeed speak German too, but it is different not only from the language of Luther and Lessing, but also from the jargon which the Jews of Galicia and Romania speak. A lot of Slavic words are woven in, and an outlandish pronunciation makes the whole thing well-nigh incomprehensible. I shall place the landlady's answer here as faithfully as possible as a sample of this language. "*Rajd pomale; Kardunisch her jech swair. Jech ob nor jajzis w dome in maith. Efscher zan impes jajisnice in potem brutne zjwilis."* In German this is: "Speak slowly (Slavic word); I find it difficult to understand German ('Kardunisch,' i.e. the language which is spoken behind the cordon [border]: in Austria, therefore, the German language). I have only eggs in the house (Slavic) and mead. Perhaps an egg dish for a light meal and later roast onions." A sentence which approaches High German more closely than the preceding may hardly be put together from this boundlessly corrupted jargon.

I thought I should do without the "*brutne zjwilis*" and contented myself with "*jajisnice in maith*." The beautiful woman sat down with me and tried to entertain her guest. As she also spoke "*pomale*," I could guess what she was telling me. Her husband was sixteen years old and still in the Talmud School at the time, under Rabbi von Belz. Their wedding had taken place four years before, she had been seventeen years of age at the time. Here, with her parents-in-law, she had it very good, and she just pitied her poor husband, who still had to exert himself so much in the school, far away from her. Perhaps this sounds unbelievable to the reader. But there are many such marriages among the Jews of the East …

It was in this house that I was to meet my first "Forced One."

While chatting, we had not heard the rolling of a small cart which came driving slowly up to the tavern. Only when it stopped did we look up.

It was a wretched peasant's cart, containing a small barrel and a basket on it. A lean nag struggled to draw the light vehicle. A peasant drove it; he jumped down before the door.

The young landlady hastily arose. "What does he want?" she whispered. A slight pallor rushed over her cheeks. Even more striking was the behaviour of my coachman. "Sir, sir!" he cried to me in a loud, almost fearful voice. And at the same time he stretched out his hand towards the door, as if wanting to keep an approaching danger at bay.

"What is wrong with you?" I asked, astonished. But he merely shook his head violently and stared at the newcomer.

This was an elderly peasant, dressed like all Ukrainian countrymen. I could not see much of his face, it being shaded by his straw hat. "Hostess," he turned to the young woman, "would you like to buy something from me? I have old sour cherry schnaps and wooden spoons, wooden bowls, pepper casters, pin-boxes, salt cellars, wooden cups – a large selection, turned or carved, good hard wood, everything very cheap…"

He said this almost imploringly, but slowly and without raising his eyes. It was easy to tell from his pronunciation that he was no Ukrainian but a Pole. For he always said "g" instead of "h" and swallowed the final vowel.

The woman looked at him timidly. "You know my father-in-law has forbidden it," she said hesitantly. "Because of your wife … But he is not at home –" She broke off and turned to the coachman: "Reb Nussan, you will not betray me? You often come this road…"

The “Misnagid” shrugged his shoulders and turned away. “Do as you like,” he growled angrily.

“Then,” the woman hastily said to the peasant, “then bring me only a bowl and twelve spoons, I’ll think of something to tell father-in-law…” And when the man had gone to fetch his basket, she continued: “You shouldn’t take it amiss, Reb Nussan. They are such very poor people.”

“Certainly! Very poor people!” he replied in a milder tone. “In life, hunger and misery! And after death, Hell! And all undeserved!”

But the man was already back in the room with his basket. The woman chose, haggled, and finally paid a few kopeks.

I walked up and inspected the wares; there were very neatly carved little articles among them.

“I also have cigar-boxes,” the man said, and he humbly took off his hat.

But for the time being his countenance was of more interest to me than his wares. One seldom sees such features; however much sorrow may rage on this earth, one sees them seldom. Gloomy defiance lay upon this pale, careworn face as if chiselled there, and his eyes had a look which went straight to the heart; tired, almost fixed, and yet full of the most passionate grief…

“You are a Pole?” I asked.

“Yes – from Lithuania.”

“But you live in this region?”

“In the Dettimer tavern; eight versts from here.[42] I am the landlord there.”

“And a turner also?”

“One must help oneself any way one can. We rarely have customers in our house.”

“Your tavern lies out of the way?”

“Hard by the main road, Sir! It was at one time the best inn-business between the Bug and the Dniester. But coachmen do not like to make a stop at our house…”

“Why not?”

“Because – because they consider it a sin. Especially the Jews.” And he hastily added: “If you wish to buy anything – this box here…” The pretty little box which he offered me lies before me as I write this. The view of a stately country house is carved on the lid. This beautiful piece of work delights me still today, but at the time, the excellence of the execution surprised me so that I cried out incredulously: “And you made this yourself?”

“Yes – everything, with a wood lathe and a knife.”

“Why, then you are an artist!” I cried. “Where did you learn woodcarving?”

“In Kamieniec Podolski.”

“In the fortress?”

“Yes. From a fellow prisoner during the revolt of eighteen hundred and sixty-three."[43]

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[42] Just over five miles.

"You were one of the insurgents?"

"No. But there was a fear that I might join them. That was why they dragged me and the other 'Forced Ones' to the fortress when the revolt broke out and did not release us until everything was over."

"Without cause?"

"Without the slightest. I am not a broken man only today, I was so already at that time. When I was still a young man, working in the Siberian mines poisoned the marrow of my bones. Nor had I in the five years of my settlement – I have been the landlord of that tavern since eighteen hundred and fifty-eight – given the slightest grounds for suspicion. But I was a 'Forced One,' and that is enough…"

"A 'Forced One' – what does that mean?"

"Well, a person who is simply forced in all matters where others may freely choose: place of residence, trade, wife, and faith!"

"Appalling!" I cried. "And you acquiesced?"

A bitter smile twitched around his mouth. "Does it touch you so nearly?" he asked. "We usually bear very easily the most grievous sorrows which others suffer."

"La Rochefoucauld[44] said that," I remarked in astonishment. "Have you read him?"

"Yes, I was once very fond of French literature. But forgive me my bitterness. I am so little used to sympathy – and what good could it do me now, anyway? He stared straight ahead with a pained expression, and I was silent likewise; I felt, no doubt, that any easy expression of sympathy to this man would be an act of brutality. There was an awkward pause.

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[43] The January Uprising was a Polish-Lithuanian rebellion against Russian rule.

[44] Francois, Duc de la Rochefoucauld (1613-80), famous for his maxims: "Nous avons tous assez de force pour supporter les maux d'autrui" (We all have strength enough to endure the misfortunes of others).

“Did you work from a model?” I asked at last, pointing to the carving on the lid.

“No – from memory.”

“A singular architectural style!”

“All of the old manor houses in Lithuania are. It is the old watch-tower that is striking. It was a very old house after all.”

“Was? Does it not exist any more today?”

“It was burned down, seven years ago now. The Russians ransacked it and set it on fire. They had no idea that they were raging against their own property. The house had been confiscated many years before and a Crown estate since eighteen hundred and forty-eight.”

“And you still have the outline so firmly fixed in your memory?”

“Of course! For it is the house where I was born, I grew up there and rarely left it up to my eighteenth year. One does not forget such things. It was more than twenty years ago, but in all those years no day has passed on which I did not think of the house. I was well aware that my mother was dead and my female cousin worse than dead. I knew: the old house is deserted, only the Russian steward lives in it, and whenever he is in need of burlap, he takes one of the family portraits off the walls. But I longed for the old house nonetheless – God knows how badly! And when it burned down – I should actually have been happy that the enemy now had it no longer either – and yet tears came to my eyes when I heard. The first tears in a long time and probably my last ones. Nothing can affect me any more…”

I write what he said. But how he said it, I cannot write. I believe it would have pulled at the heartstrings of the most callous man. My Nussan was no soft man. Yet he had quietly crept over and now nodded his bearded head gravely and mournfully.

“If I may, Pani[45] Valerian,” he said, “upon my honour, it is a sad story. Certainly very sad. Yet there is something I would like to say to you. Now look at me. I – that is to say: *not* I, God forbid, but let us say: I – am travelling alone through a large forest. A man comes along. Abuses me. Wants to beat me. Says: ‘You dog of a Jew!’ Sets about pulling my beard out. Will I put up with it? No! But instead? I will defend myself! Good! But if a hundred such people come? Will I confront them? I would have to be mad! But I will rather silently curse them back to their great-great-grandfather’s bones, while out loud I’ll say: ‘Mr. Benefactors!’” ‘Mr. Benefactor’ is an empty courtesy of the East, more or less like the way in which one ennobles everyone in Vienna. “‘A shabby Jewish beard is really not worthy of being pulled out by you!’ And will look to getting along with the dogs in peace. So that is the whole story of Poland. The whole story, the whole tragedy. That is to say: the Pole is not so clever as I am. That is to say: if he were as strong as the Russian – fight in God’s name! But the Russian is a hundred times stronger – so, Pani Walerian, why do you provoke him, why do you confront him?"

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[45] Polish for “Mrs.” The Polish for “Mr.” is “Pan.”

I had to smile, but the poor "Forced One" did not smile and did not deign to give any answer at all to this discourse on practical politics. He only said, after a pause, having turned to me: "But I did not even 'confront the Russian'! I have only the punishment of the criminal, without the pleasant awareness of really having been a 'criminal' and having risked everything for my people. I was so young when they dragged me to Siberia, a little over nineteen! My father had died young, I was in charge of our small estate. Then there was a cousin in the house, a beautiful, sixteen-year-old girl – truly, I had no thoughts of politics! At the most, I wore Polish costume, read our poets, particularly Mickiewicz and Slowacki,[46] and had a picture of Kosciuszko[47] in my room. And even the Russian would not have crushed me for the sake of such acts of high treason in normal times. But it was in the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight, and Nikolai Pavlovich[48] had not sworn in vain: 'And if all of Europe burns, I'll keep my land damp so no spark arises!' And he kept it damp – through rivers of blood and tears! Wherever a young Polish nobleman lived, who could at most have become a revolutionary in certain circumstances, the house was searched, and if, for example, only a single forbidden book was found, then it was: 'Poshli![49] To Siberia!' It happened thus with me also, as fast as lightning, bewildering – I was already in Siberia but still did not believe my misery! Oh, I felt all through the journey as if a spinning-top were rotating in my brain! Then I hoped they would have to set me free, because I was innocent, and in those days –" he smiled; it was a horrible smile – in those days, I still believed in God! When I had stopped hoping, I began to rave, and in the end I became numb. It was a dreadful condition, often all the memory inside me was erased for weeks on end, at most I still knew my name! That is literally true, Sir – this Siberia is a quite exceptional region! …"

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[46] Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) is regarded as the greatest Polish poet and is most famous for his national epic *Pan Tadeusz* (1834). Juliusz Slowacki (1809-1849) was a lyric poet and dramatist.

[47] Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746-1817), Polish national hero who led an unsuccessful revolution to liberate his land from Russia and Prussia.

[48] The reactionary Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855).

[49] Russian for "Let's go!"

The man had sunk down upon a bench, and his hands lay limply in his lap – never in all my days have I seen a human face so terribly tired. At last he continued: "Ten years had gone by in this way, at least people told me so; I had long ceased to count the days of my misery. What was the point? I had already fallen so low that I did not even feel any sympathy for myself any longer. Then one day I was summoned with several companions to the Inspector: We were pardoned and were allowed to become colonists in South Russia. The Tsar's mercy would assign to each of us a residence, a trade, and a wife, who had been pardoned likewise. Only we had to, of course, convert to the Greek Orthodox Church. That was a small matter for us, Sir, awfully small! We consented, drunk with happiness – people are glad to leave Siberia, no matter where they go, they are even glad to go to their death. And we had experienced a pardon! Alexander Nikolaevich[50] is a gracious master: In Siberia the mines are overcrowded, and in South Russia the steppes are empty! Oh, a philanthropist, a benefactor – *decus et deliciae generis humani!*[51] However, I am perhaps being unjust to him…

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[50] Tsar Alexander II (1818-1881).

“We started the immense journey and travelled slowly towards the southwest – eight months later we were in Mogilev. There they kept us only in mild confinement and, above all else, they had the priest work on us. That was very quickly over and done with. One morning, they drove us all together, into a large room, about a hundred men and women. Then the priest came, a burly, dirty man, who had evidently been strongly fortifying himself for his holy work, for he smelt of schnaps at twenty paces and struggled to stay on his feet. ‘You scurvy dogs!’ he flared up. ‘You lice of humanity, you’re now to become Orthodox Christians, but I’m truly not going to take much trouble with you. For what do you think I get per head? Ten kopeks! A dog should be a missionary – today is really the last time I’m doing it! Although our Little Father, Alexander Nikolaevich, has set a rate of one ruble per head, the Director, the cad, steals ninety kopeks and leaves ten to me! But I have undertaken this today because I was told that there are many of you! So listen! Up to now, you have been Catholics, Protestants, Jews! That’s very wrong! For every Jew is a bug, every Protestant a dog, and every Catholic a pig! That’s what you are in life. But what are you after death? Carrion, dear people, carrion! And will Christ have mercy on you on Judgement Day? He really won’t! Wouldn’t dream of it! – And until then? Hell! – So, dear people, why would you want that? Be converted! So whoever agrees to become an Orthodox Christian, let him now hold his tongue! Whoever makes a sound will get the knout and have to go back to Siberia! So, dear brothers and sisters, will you become Orthodox Christians?' We were silent. 'Good!' the priest continued. 'Now pay attention! Those of you who are already a Christian need only raise the oath-taking fingers[52] and repeat the profession of faith after me. It'll be quick. But the damned Jews always cause some particular annoyance, and it's no different here; the Jews I must baptise beforehand. Jews, step forward – the other rabble can stay right where they are!' And in this edifying way was the ceremony performed!"

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[51] “The glory and delight of the human race” – a variation of the Roman historian Suetonius’s praise of Emperor Titus (r.79-81), “amor ac deliciae generis humani” (“love and delight…”, in his *De vita Caesarum* “Lives of the Twelve Caesars” (A.D. 121).

The narrator had stated all of this without batting an eyelid, and no smile came to my lips either, for all the drasticness of the account.

"On the next day," Valerian continued, "there followed the Second Act: the choice of occupation. It was just as spontaneous as that of faith, but one had perforce to individualise rather more here. Three young government officials had the task of taking down our wishes and giving consideration to them insofar as it was 'advisable and possible in the public interest' to do so. The man before whom I was called was particularly young, moreover of that kind who stay boyish even with grey hair. A so-and-so who was very refined on the outside, dreadfully brutish on the inside, bigoted and cruel, without a trace of human feeling. He had his sport with us, exquisite spot, which greatly amused his comrades and his mistress no doubt when he told them about it in the evening. The knave ascertained our wishes most meticulously and then ordered the exact opposite for us! There was an aristocratic lady among us, a Pole of an ancient bloodline, a noble, pale, unfortunate woman, who cold not have failed, in her helpless, broken condition, to inspire respect and pity in the most brutal nature. The woman was too old to be married to a ‘Forced One,’ she had to choose a profession herself, and asked to be employed as a teacher in an institute for officer’s daughters; and there was an urgent need for such personnel. But the young gentleman ordered her to go to the garrison barracks at Mogilev as a washerwoman. There was an old Jew who had been sent to Siberia for smuggling forbidden books over the border near Chernyshevskoe. He had once owned a printing works and was also a master of the craft. Perhaps he could be employed in an Imperial printing press, the old man begged, and he had, besides this, only the earnest wish to be allowed to live in a village where there were few Jews or none at all. For he had, only under coercion, renounced his faith, to which he hung with every thread of his soul, and he trembled at the thought that his former co-religionists would now regard him as a sinner and abhor him. The young official conscientiously took this down and made the man an agent of the police in Miaskowka, a small town in the province of Podolia which is inhabited exclusively by Jews. There was a schoolmaster from Lithuania, a consumptive, mortally ill man, who begged on his knees for one last favour: to be able to die in some village; the country air was good for his sore chest. “Of course, that is a modest wish!” said the worthless knave, and he sent him to a prison hospital as an attendant. Do I still need to tell you how I fared? I also let myself be deceived by the cad’s hypocritical look and revealed to him my request to go to some very remote crown estate as steward, where I would need to associate with as few people as possible. And that is why I became a tavern-keeper on a much-frequented military road…”

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[52] The thumb and the first and second fingers of the right hand.

The unfortunate man leapt to his feet and paced up and down the room in agitation. “But now comes the best of all!” he cried despairingly. “The Third Act: the choice of a wife!”

But when he now opened his mouth to speak, he could not: excruciating indignation choked him. He kept silent, but a sudden, heavy tear raced down his cheek and bore witness to how bitterly he suffered in the mere remembrance of that ignominious moment.

“It was dreadful!” he groaned.

Finally, he pulled himself together.

“Sir! Sir!” he cried, “Since the sun has risen, it has shone on many a dreadful game which the powerful have played with the powerless, but it has surely never seen a more chaotic farce than the way in which we were coupled together. In my youth, I once read in a history of the French Revolution how Carrier[53] murdered the Royalists. He had any mother’s son tied to some woman or other and taken down the Loire in a barge. In the middle of the river, a trapdoor in the bottom of the boat was opened, and the gagged couple disappeared under the waves. But this barbarian was an angel in comparison with the Tsar’s officials, and the ‘Republican weddings' a benefaction in comparison with the ones which we were compelled to enter into! For in Nantes, the victims were fettered together only for death, whereas we were fettered together for life!

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[53] Jean-Baptiste Carrier (1756-94), French revolutionary who was responsible for, and guillotined for, the execution of thousands of civilians in Nantes.

"So one morning, they took us back into that hall where we had become Orthodox Christians. There were around thirty of us; then just as many women were driven in. With them came that despicable wretch who had appointed our professions in so human a fashion. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began, speaking with a nasal twang, 'His Majesty has forgiven every one of you with all his heart and wishes your happiness. The lone person is seldom happy, and so you are to get married. Every gentleman has the right to choose a lady, provided that she is in agreement. In view of the fact that none of you, gentlemen, is in a position to select a lady who would be unworthy of him – for all of the ladies also come partly from the penal colonies, partly from the houses of correction –, and as His Majesty has furthermore, with paternal solicitude, allocated you a branch of industry, then you can and may simply follow the promptings of your heart. So that ideal is here realised which our most renowned compatriot Alexander Herzen[54] had in mind. Ladies and gentlemen! You are in a position to embody the dream of the socialist standard marriage! So to work, begin embodying! And furthermore, as every love kindles quickly, "sudden as lightning and soft as the breezes of spring," as our Lermontov sings, so I consider an hour sufficient time to give you to choose. Bear also in mind that marriages are made in Heaven, and place implicit trust in your inner voice. My congratulations in advance, ladies and gentlemen!”

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[54] Alexander Herzen (1812-70), socialist writer and agrarian populist.

Then the young cad laid his watch down before him, sat down on the estrade, and grinned at us with malicious glee in his green fish-eyes. Incidentally, very few had understood the full scornfulness of his words, for we were a very motley company. Incredibly motley! The wildest imagination could not have contrived more glaring contrasts. Side by side with the brutish Bessarabian herdsman, who had once massacred his wife and children while intoxicated, stood the highly cultured scholar from Vilnius, whom the most ideal impulse in the human breast, love for one’s people, had brought to Siberia. There stood the wily habitual shoplifter from Moscow beside the Polish nobleman, who, at the height of his misfortune, still valued his honour as the greatest treasure, and the young ex-professor from Kharkiv, whom his communist dreams had brought hither, beside the highwayman from the Don region, the banknote-counterfeiter from Odessa, the fraudulent faked bankrupt from Kherson! There I stood, to my right a deserter from Lipcani, to my left a Bashkir who had been pardoned at the very foot of the gallows, although he had once assisted in roasting a Jewish family alive in a village inn. A company so crazily and chaotically tossed together that the memory of it still makes my head swim! Beside the finest nobility of the human breast, the basest degeneracy; beside the highest education, the lowest, the absolute most bestial depravity!

“And the women! The shameless hussies, whom the authorities had readily released from the correctional institutions because they had made their depraved female companions even more depraved, beside the unfortunate Polish woman whose pure soul had never been poisoned by a breath of vulgarity, whose quiet or proud happiness no suspicion of sorrow had spoiled, until a letter, a cockade, alms to an exiled compatriot plunged her into misery – here! There leaned the French governess who had dreamed of a Moscow Revolution and the United States of Europe with her young friend, a seminarist, beside the child-murderess from the village on the heath in Ukraine, beside the thief from Mogilev, beside the sweetheart of the highwayman from Crimea. There, beside the delicate, innocent maiden, who had committed no other crime than being born to a sinful mother in a penal colony, thronged the husband-murderer, the poison-mixer, the infamous procuress. Perhaps here the contrasts were even more glaring, for nothing is as good as a noble woman and nothing as bad as a depraved one! …

“And these people were now to marry each other – and one hour had been allowed them to become acquainted and come together! Oh Sir! Perhaps now you can understand why I felt choked before I began to relate this! Oh Sir, that was the most execrable and at the same time the most singular outrage ever to have happened on earth!”

He fell silent and paced up and down, deathly pale, trembling slightly, in the room. The young landlady stared straight ahead as if lost in thought, and Reb Nussan kept his head bowed like a sympathiser.

Then the unfortunate man regained his composure and continued, more calmly: “It must have been an interesting spectacle, how the sixty of us behaved in that hour. Even the blasé fiend was overcome with a feverish excitement: now he jumped up, now he fell back into his chair and drummed his trembling fingers on a little table. But how everything happened, I cannot describe to you precisely – I was not quite myself in that terrible hour. Only this do I know, that we stood together initially crowded into two groups, the men here, the women there, and that not a glance flew from one group to the other in the first minute; not a glance, let alone a word. We all stared straight ahead, as if lightning had struck us, even the dullest and the most shameless. There was a silence in the hall, a deathly silence, with only a heavy sigh or convulsively hurried breathing every now and then…

“The minutes slipped by, certainly only a few minutes, they seemed an eternity to me. Then a loud, hoarse voice suddenly exclaimed: ‘Up, my lads – there are some right pretty wenches here!’ We looked up; it was that Muscovite thief, a gaunt, withered man with the ugliest face I have ever seen. He crossed over to the women and examined, in his own way, which one was the most desirable. Here he was received with a rough shove, there with a saucy, inviting look, while others, the better ones, drew back trembling from him. The Bashkir followed him; he lumbered towards the women like an ungainly beast of prey and bellowed: ‘I want a fat one – it’s the fattest one I want!’ But even the ugliest and most shameless women shrank back from him; that suitor was really too hideous. The third was the Cossack from the Don region, a slim and handsome youth – as he came striding towards the women, a forward hussy skipped towards him and threw her arms round his neck, but he pushed her back and went up to that voluptuous, pretty Ukrainian girl who had murdered her child. The hussy he had spurned threw a curse after him, and the next moment she was hanging on my neck. I shook her off, then she repeated the procedure with my neighbour, the former Professor, without meeting with any more success there. Her example took effect: the shameless and depraved ones among the women turned the tables and descended on us.

"Ten minutes later, the hall presented a very different scene from at first. In the centre stood a crowd of men and women in the most animated negotiation, screeching and flirting; one or the other couple, which had already come together, withdrew into the window niches, and here and there a man tugged at an unhappy woman who desperately tried to break from his arms. Those women who still retained a touch of femininity had ducked into a corner, and in another corner the three of us leaned, the ex-professor, Count S., and I, having instinctively come together, and stared at the lunatic goings-on. We did not think of making a choice as well – I, at least, did not entertain this thought for a moment…

"'Half an hour left, ladies and gentlemen!' the nasal voice of our tormentor rang out. 'Twenty minutes left!' 'Fifteen minutes left!'

"But I stood still, as if rooted to the spot, and stared into space. My knees almost gave way; my heart beat slowly with dull, heavy beats; but I did not move. Now, I did have a wild, heavy rush of blood to my head and brain whenever that voice became audible; but I took no step, I did not want to. I was raging terribly inside – the deepest disgust, the bitterest despair, the wildest indignation which perhaps ever pierced a poor, dark heart! No, a voice cried inside me, I am still a human being, I must still preserve my human dignity – I must not go courting, in this hall, in the sight of these people! That was my firm resolve; but I could barely restrain another wild wish and desire, for it was almost stronger than me. I wanted to rush at the tormentor and throttle him…

“Why did I not do this in the end? Because I loved my own life and did not want to die on the gallows. It was the most harrowing hour of my life, and yet I did not have the strength to choose this honourable way out, suicide through revenge. Oh Sir, the source of the greatest misery on earth is this dark, ardent instinct of self-preservation! Without it, I would have been free from pain today, for many a long year!...

“So I stood in my corner and pressed my hands to my breast and kept the beast inside me captive, the beast or – the nobler part! That thought was not carried out in the end. But my eyes may have betrayed what was raging inside me. They once met those of the fiend, and I saw the lordling start and turn green. Then, a while later, they squinted over to me timidly and maliciously. I turned away and pretended not to see.

“‘Five more minutes, ladies and gentlemen! Anyone who has not yet done so is herewith requested to discover his heart within this time. Otherwise, I shall be compelled by virtue of my office to join the ladies and gentlemen together. I shall of course do this to the best of my knowledge and my conscience, but this does nevertheless involve your constantly running the risk of entering into a common-sense marriage instead of one from inclination. So – forwards – fall in love!’

“Again all the blood rushed to my head, but I did not move. It seemed to me that I would make myself an accessory to this dreadful outrage if I now in fact ‘discovered my heart’ inside of five minutes. But then another thought began to shake me – suddenly and overwhelmingly: ‘It lies in your hands to at least save yourself from the worst. Who knows whom the cad will couple you with otherwise! Choose for yourself, choose!’

“I took a step forward … I opened my eyes wide … But I could see nothing. A red cloud seemed to lie before my eyes – my blood was boiling with indignation! I staggered forwards – I tried to distinguish the figures around me…

“Oh Sir!” the narrator suddenly shrieked, “what scenes I saw there! … I am no coward, but I … I do not dare to speak of it…

“So I wandered around in despair – for barely two minutes, but I could spend days telling what went through my heart and my head during this time, and still not tell it to the end … Then I saw a senseless woman leaning in a corner, a young, frail creature with blonde hair – I later learnt that she was that fatherless girl to whom a depraved mother had given birth in a penal colony. A boorish fellow with sly, artful features, the banknote-counterfeiter, bent over the fainted figure, tried to raise her up in his arms, and covered her pale mouth with greedy kisses. I saw this, and I felt as if a thunderbolt was passing through my brain and illuminating it. I rushed at the man, pulled him up, gave him a punch in the stomach that sent him flying ten paces back, and took the senseless woman up in my arms like a child. I was resolved to defend her with the last drop of my blood.

“But there was no further attack. The counterfeiter did indeed pick himself up and shake his fists at me, but he did not have the courage to come closer. As he stood there, a replacement clung to him, a disgusting globule of fat, a woman trafficker. He looked at her, somewhat baffled, but then submitted to her amorous attentions…

"'Ladies and gentlemen! Time does not strike for the happy man[55] – but I must nevertheless ask you to accept the declaration that the hour is up. I request the individual pairs to step forward and confess their mutual inclination to me. I know that deep, chaste love does not do this willingly – I beg your pardon, but my office imposes this duty upon me. Before all else, I ask those gentlemen there to step forward with their ladies.'

"He pointed to me and the counterfeiter. Again my heart tightened in my breast. But I stepped forward, my burden in my arms. 'Keep your knouts at the ready,' the cad told the Cossacks who stood around him.

"Then he turned to me. 'Mr. Benefactor, is it your firm intention to carry this lady here not only in this hall, but also through all of your life?' I nodded. 'And you, Honoured Miss?' But the unfortunate woman lay in a deep swoon. 'She is unconscious,' I stammered. 'Then I am sorry, Sir Benefactor,' the official continued, 'but I unfortunately have to refuse you my consent. In the interest of humanity and human dignity, I must insist that mutual willingness is declared through a loud, audible "Yes!" Moreover, as I have followed the events in this hall with close attention, not from curiosity, but partly from duty, partly from pure human sympathy, I can assure you with the utmost certainty that it is not you who is the object of this young lady's inclination. I do not mean to prejudice your personal merits hereby, but another man simply succeeded in winning this heart before you – that gentleman there!’

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[55] "Die Uhr schlägt keinem Glücklichen" – a quote from Friedrich Schiller's drama *Wallenstein's Lager* [Wallenstein's Camp] (1799).

“He pointed to the counterfeiter. ‘Only an excess of happiness at being chosen by him caused the young lady to collapse earlier. Therefore I ask you, Mr. Benefactor, not to separate two hearts which have come together, steadfastly and dotingly, for life! A more beautiful substitute beckons to you: that mature, desirable belle who clings to the arm of your rival only with reluctance. So – changez, messieurs!’

“Dog!” I cried, flying at him.

But then a fearful lash whistled down on my head. Bleeding, unconscious, I crashed down…

“When I woke up, they were just forming the wedding procession to the chapel. The hag whom the cad had allocated to me was kneeling at my side, washing the blood from my head and holding vinegar under my nose.

“‘I like you,’ she croaked, ‘You’ll have it good with me!’ She raised me up, placed my arm in hers and dragged me forward. I was still half stunned and followed submissively. She dragged me into the line which had just started to move slowly towards the church. I suffered no more while I was dragged along in this manner – I had gone through too much – I barely held on to a dim sensation of my being. But while I trudged so mechanically onwards, I felt a heavy hand seize me by the collar. ‘Brother,’ a coarse voice grunted in my ear, ‘I like your fat one. Wouldn’t you like to swap with me? Mine isn’t so fat, but she’s younger instead.’ It was the man behind me, the Bashkir. The woman he dragged forward was thin, ugly, and black-haired, in a swoon or near one. An expression of boundless despair lay on her features and perhaps made her even uglier. But it was precisely that which attracted me. The woman who could suffer so dreadfully had at least a heart, was at least not altogether depraved, and for that reason – no matter, what had brought her hither – was more deserving of me than the grinning hag at my side.

“I shook myself together. ‘Done!’ I whispered to the Bashkir…

We were crossing the threshold of the chapel just then, when the procession came to a standstill for a little while. We used the moment. The hag did start squawking, but the Bashkir was able to calm her down, and when she looked at him more closely, he seemed to even please her. But the woman whom I now led by the arm had probably, in her dull despair, hardly noticed the exchange. So it succeeded. We were married. Only when we walked out of the chapel did our tormentor become aware of the change. Then he made me pay for it, certainly –” The unhappy man gritted his teeth and became even paler – “he made me pay terribly for it, but he could not change it now. The priest had pronounced, while invoking God, that only death could separate us!”

The narrator fell silent.

“And who was the woman to whom you were married?” I asked at last.

“A deportee who had been pardoned likewise. A Jewess, by the name of Gittle Reismann – they had given her the name Xenia when they baptised her.”

“And why” – a new question hovered on my lips, but I did not dare to utter it.

“What was my wife’s crime? I can tell you that also, and it is, in its way, barely a less amusing story than mine!”

Up to this point, Reb Nussan had listened silently and compassionately. But now that the conversation had turned to his co-religionist, he rose and moved restlessly back and forth. Gittel was called Xenia now, but she was a Jewish girl nonetheless. It evidently mortified him that a Christian was going to talk about her, no matter that it was the speaker’s own wife.

“Pani Valerian!” he said, scratching behind his ear. “The history of Poland and what has happened to you, those are things you can tell. But what do you know about Jewishness? Jewishness is something quite special. Excuse me, Pani Valerian – do you understand how Gittel came to grief? It seems to me that you can’t understand it!”

“Leave it be!” I said dismissively. “I’ll figure it out.”

But Reb Nussan was not to be rebuffed so easily.

“You?” he asked. “Excuse me – but what kind of a coat are you wearing there? A German coat! And do you have tzitzit on your waistcoat? Excuse me – but you don’t have any. So – how much are you going to know about Jewishness?”

“Leave it be!” I repeated. “You can have your say later.”

“Have my say later? Good! In the coach! But come into the coach! Pani Valerian, may you live a hundred and twenty years and be healthy and happy, but we must go now, the gentleman and I. For today is Friday, and I do not travel into the Sabbath, and we still have eight versts to go to Tsapivka.”

And only when this third assault had been repulsed was Valerian able to tell his tale.

“Perhaps the Jew is right,” he began, “perhaps there really is something in this adventure that a person of another faith has difficulty figuring out. For it surely cannot have been sisterly love alone which steeled this timed young creature to put herself in harm’s way… Faith will have played a role there too. And this faith is so dark, so mysterious! …

“Gittel was the child of a rich man in a town of Podolia which is inhabited almost only by Jews, in Belz. You will no doubt have heard the name often enough, it is a kind of Mecca for the Jews in Podolia and Volhynia, and they make their way thither in droves in autumn to spend the high holidays in its ancient synagogue. In particular, prayers on the Day of Propitiation,[56] if they are said in that House of God, are supposed to purify from each and every sin.”

“What are you saying?” the coachman interrupted him. “Excuse me, but you don’t understand it! The prayer house in Belz is certainly a holy house, but it is only stone and mortar as well. People do not go there in the high holidays for that reason, but because a holy rabbi resides in this town. He may be one of those Chassids, but he is really a very holy man.”

“The Jews in Belz also,” continued Valerian, “have a reputation for being particularly devout and nowhere are the thousand regulations of the Talmud so scrupulously followed and observed. And old Naftali, Gittel’s father, was very devout; he was even one of the most devout. And as he was also, as I said before, very affluent, he enjoyed a high reputation.

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[56] Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in Judaism. Celebrated on the tenth day of Tishri (the seventh month).

Gittel, his eldest child, was barely ten years old when suitors for her began to present themselves, if not for marriage, yet for betrothal. But Naftali did not hurry. He was a widower and had another child apart from Gittel, a son, who was six years younger. So he was able to settle a large dowry on his daughter, and consequently no suitor was good enough for him. When Gittel was thirteen years old, a grave misfortune struck him: he went blind. But this shook neither his pride nor his trust in God. 'I *can* be content,' he used to say. 'Naftali Reismann would not swap places with anyone, not even as a blind man!'"

"Excuse me, but I have to laugh!" cried Nussan. "Did he call himself by the name which the Christians had given him?! 'Naftali Reismann' – that surely never occurred to him! One actually remembers this name only when one needs a passport or – God forbid! – has to go to court or – God forbid! – go to assentation. But otherwise? Never! He will rather have said: 'Naftali Feigeles,' because his mother was called Feige – or 'Naftali the Oscher of Belz' [the Croesus of Belz], for people called him that –"

"Nussan!" I firmly commanded, "everything else in the coach!"

"I beg your pardon, Naftali Reismann, he he!"

But his laughter sounded very forced, and he moved resentfully to the side.

"The family felt themselves to be Children of Fortune," continued the Pole, "and would have remained so; if Belz had simply not been situated in Russia. Their misfortune was occasioned by a genuinely Russian reason. This happened in the year eighteen hundred and fifty: Gittel was seventeen at that time, her brother Ruben eleven years old. Eleven years

– that does not count as a conscriptable age in the rest of the world. And in the Empire of the Knout this was not usually the case, but only just in those particular years. Nikolai Pavlovitch needed soldiers; many rivers of blood had been shed extinguishing the Hungarian conflagration; now it was the Turk's turn.[57] They recruited with feverish zeal throughout the immense Empire. In those days, conscription and period of service were not yet regulated. They went to work very simply: They surrounded the village or the town, drove the young men together, selected the ones fit for service, and put them in the soldier's coat for life. That is to say: this coat was taken back off those who were growing old and invalid, and they then had the free choice of hanging themselves or dying of starvation behind any hedge they liked. In short: becoming a soldier in Russia meant, and still means today, to be a dead man walking. For that reason, nobody willingly became or becomes a soldier, whatever social station or tribe he belongs to, not even the brutish Muscovite peasant, although he is taught a certain dog-like devotion to the Tsar by the same means by which the hound is made devoted: by the stick. But that measure hit the Poles and the Jews most bitterly, albeit for very different reasons. To the Jews, this empire was not detestable from national motives, service for the Tsar was not more bitter than death because of that; but Jews do not at all like to take deadly weapons in their hands –"

But then Nussan was in again.

"Listen!" he said. "I will not say this only later in the coach, but right now, to your face. What are you? Pani Valerian, a Pole is what you are, and that is why you hate Jews. You were in Siberia, and you are a ‘Forced One,’ but a Pole remains a Pole. You say the Jews are cowards. Come here, I will show you if I’m a coward! But I will do it amicably! – I will explain to you why we do not like to become soldiers, especially among the Muscovites. First of all, what do we care about the Tsar? He behaves towards us as if we were dogs – shall we behave towards him as if he were our father? Secondly, a soldier is a Jew no longer, he must eat as a Christian and even do drills on the Day of Propitiation, so he loses the hereafter. And what does he have in this life? He has it worse than a dog; he is dead for his relatives and his relatives for him. But the main thing, I tell you, is this: he must live as if he were no Jewish child!”

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[57] The Crimean War.

Again, Valerian did not deem the speech worthy of a word, the speaker worthy of a glance.

“The Jews do not willingly become soldiers,” he went on, “this fact was no secret from the Tsar. And he well knew that here, those methods which he had successfully employed against other people would be no use. The little Jewish towns were surrounded with a cordon, but it was found that the most part of the birds had flown the nest. Money had opened a way to the government chancelleries for the wily ones, and they knew several weeks in advance which measures were being planned. Many of the prisoners liberated themselves through money, and what remained was poor, ill-fed, half-crippled riff-raff.

“No ordinary method was any good against this, as I said, and the Tsar chose one that was out of the ordinary. It was terribly brutal, it flew in the face of humanity, but it guaranteed the desired result. They continued to hunt for the conscriptable Jews, but with even greater zeal they seized seven- to twelve-year-old boys and sent them, after their assentation, to the newly-established soldier-colonies. This achieved two objectives. The boys were easier to lay hands on, because a child can hardly flee the parental home; and these stunted shoots of an effeminate race could be brought up purposefully, and willing, robust war-machines could be made of them. Draconian measures against bribery promoted the execution of this method. In short – the Tsar could be satisfied, although the mortality among the small, pitiable recruits was dreadfully high and only every second one, often only every third one, reached the colony and grew up. But this was precluded by levying double the number of conscripts from the very outset. A quite simple expedient, and if this meant double the number of existences being crushed as was absolutely necessary, what did it matter?

"No words can describe the despair which came over Polish-Russian Jewry at that time. But it was no dull despair which leaves one's hands resting in one's lap. Every sinew of the energetic soul of this people tensed; for did this not concern what was holiest to them – God and their children?

"As long as the children remained in Russia, there was no escape. For that was probably the only time in the history of that empire when even the ruble lost much of its omnipotence, the ruble, which is usually an even more absolute ruler than the Tsar in that efficient and moral body politic. But where to take the children? To Austria, to Prussia? In those days, both states lay in the shackles of ‘Nicholas the Great,’ the ‘Pillar of Order,’ and so they had their soldiers and officials carry out not only their own police business on their borders but that of the Russians as well.

“So Romania remained as the only refuge, and soon a secret, daring activity developed along the River Prut border. Stations were set up at intervals of four to five miles in the provinces of Podolia and Bessarabia: in lonely village inns or in a winery before the town or in the forecourt of an out-of-the-way prayer house. If the youthful fugitive managed to reach one of these stations unchecked, then he was as good as saved. For there existed a well-organised traffic between these places of refuge. The boys stayed hidden throughout the day and were taken one station further every night, usually swathed in cloth as bales of goods. The last station was near Lipcani, and from there they were taken over the river on barges, to Moldavia, where their co-religionists received them and took care of them.”

“Although they were other people’s children,” Nussan interpolated, “and although there are certainly richer people in the world than Moldovian Jews. We really must not be the evil dogs the Poles say we are!”

“In the long term,” Valerian continued, “the Russians could not of course fail to notice that a secret power was foiling their intentions and taking precisely the very best bites away from them. A high price was placed on the revelation of the secret, but although perhaps a hundred thousand people knew about it, yet one must speak the truth and observe that no traitor appeared among them. The discovery was brought about by chance.”

“Yes, very close to here,” Nussan interrupted him. “The coachman was called Roth-Moschele. He is driving very leisurely at night on the road by the Dniester, and inside lie ten boys wrapped in coarse woollen blankets. All of a sudden he comes upon thirty Cossacks. ‘What are you carrying there?’ ‘Horse-covers,’ Moschele says with perfect calm. ‘Unload them.’ Moschele is not afraid, he throws the ten bales onto the ground, and not a single one of the children makes a sound, they are in any case half-dead from terror. But then a Cossack stabs his pike into a bale, and the poor pricked boy screams. That is how it all came out. Once the Russian knew one station, he discovered all the others, and the saving stopped. Twenty thousand people came to grief because of that, the young ones among the soldiers, the old ones to Siberia. Twenty thousand!”

“That figure is too high,” Valerian remarked, “but the number of victims of that nocturnal revelation may be in the thousands at any rate. And by a quirk of fate, now, after every escape route had been cut off, after the deepest hopelessness had taken hold of even the most courageous and the most cunning, danger approached the House of Naftali. Up to then, he had only taken a lively interest in the plight of his co-religionists and supported them with gifts of money, while he himself had nothing to fear for his Ruben, both the Lieutenant of the Police and the Commandant of Belz being totally in his hands because of pecuniary obligations. Then the officer had to march off, and the official came under an investigation which cost him his office and his freedom. And in their successors, fear was greater than avarice. The rich old man fell into the deepest despair; he had to look on helplessly while the danger of losing his only son approached ever nearer. He himself was blind, and nobody was willing to make the attempt to smuggle the boy to Moldavia; nobody would do this any more for all the wealth in the world. Then Gittel took her heart in both her hands and told her father that she would try it.

“This was a tremendous decision for a tender, timid, sixteen-year-old girl, the daughter of a rich house, who had grown up in a life of soft luxury, tenderly guarded, up to that time. And, as I said, all her love for her father and brother does not sufficiently explain such heroism; here, the conviction also clearly played a part that this work was going to happen, must happen, for the sake of God. The old man was against it for a long time, but his helpless despair made him finally give his consent. The boy was disguised in girl’s clothes, which was admittedly a sin accordingly to Jewish law. But on this occasion the end seemed to sufficiently justify the means.

“The children began the journey. The unhappy woman has told me the details of this daring venture often enough while bitterly accusing herself of not having been as cautious as she should. Yet I believe that she does herself a grave injustice there. I believe, after everything she has told me, that at that time she showed an intelligence and a heroic spirit which, in such a delicate, unworldly creature, must be called truly admirable.

“Certainly – it was all in vain! They came safely to Lipcani, so almost right up to the border. Only the river now separated them from their destination, and it seemed to be easy to cross. For at that place the banks of the Prut are swampy and densely covered with willow trees.

“But they were caught in Lipcani itself. Through a singular coincidence. They arrived in the evening and intended to start the boat-trip at night. They put up at an inn and fervently prayed in their little room that the last stage might be successful also. The room lay at ground level; a Russian walked past and regarded the praying girls with curiosity. It occurred to him that the smaller one moved while praying exactly like Chassidim boys do; she bent to the right and the left and forwards, the three movements following each other regularly like the strokes of a machine. The elder girl, however, stood motionless, as it is stipulated for the Jewess when praying. The recent ukase came to the Russian's mind and the large rewards which were offered for the discovery of a refugee. He went to the Lieutenant of the Police. An hour later they were both arrested. On the next morning, Ruben was deported to the soldier's colony, Gittel to Siberia…"

The narrator fell silent.

But I had one more question on my mind. "This is not idle curiosity," I asked, "but has your marriage managed to console you?"

"Console?" he smiled sadly. "For sorrows like mine and those of my wife, there is no consolation. But we are two people who were locked in the same dungeon, and even if we do not understand each other in our love, we do so in our hate. We go quietly and dully along beside one another, know little about what lives in the other's breast, and anxiously strive to cause each other as little pain as possible. Incidentally, I am ailing badly, it will not last much longer."

We parted.

Nussan drove the horses on hard, but nevertheless gave a detailed commentary on the Pole's tale at the same time. However, I paid it no heed; my heart was aching with impotent compassion.

In the twilight we came past an isolated house, from which a meagre light glimmered. “That is the Dettiimer tavern,” said Nussan.

“Stop!” I ordered.

“But the Sabbath!” moaned Nussan.

He had to obey nonetheless. “Only a few minutes,” I reassured him, and I walked towards the house.

In the taproom a light was burning; I looked in. It was a large, gloomy room, with a lamp burning before an icon in a corner. Right beside it was a table, on which stood two candles which were being lit. A woman was bending over them.

I could see her countenance, and its features were hard and furrowed by grief. They were not transfigured even in prayer. For the woman was praying; I saw it from the movement of her lips and her hands. And from the latter I was also able to guess which prayer it was: the benediction which the Jewish woman speaks over the sabbath candles on Friday evening.

I stared for long into this countenance and at the three lights, until Nussan’s moaning pleas finally called me away…

That was in the year 1871. But I have not been able to forget what I heard and saw on that spring day on the Podolian highroad. And then it seemed to me to be my duty to tell it.