

**Ivan Franko**

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**SHORT  
STORIES**

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Today, more than a hundred years after the outstanding Ukrainian author and revolutionary democrat Ivan Franko published his first works, the lasting esthetic and educational value of his numerous and diverse writings continues to be as widely recognized as ever. This is largely due to the fact that the interests and aspirations of the common people were the cause to which Ivan Franko devoted all of his many and varied talents — in fact, his whole life. Throughout his literary career his creative effort was invariably centered on working people and their struggle for a better future.

Ivan Franko was a great poet, prose-writer, playwright, literary critic and translator, journalist and public figure. He left behind a rich legacy made up of nearly five thousand fiction and non-fiction works, theoretical essays and articles written in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, German and other languages. His very name has come to symbolize a whole epoch in the history of Ukrainian letters, culture and social science. I. Franko's works quickly won widespread recognition not only within his homeland but also far beyond its boundaries. Already during his lifetime they were published in Russia, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Slovakia, Hungary, the United States, Canada and other countries.

The writings of Ivan Franko are permeated with the spirit of internationalism. He stressed that the ability to combine national traits with what is common to all people regardless of their nationality, to develop the distinctive national form, filling it with the universal human content, was essential to any major author's stature, as exemplified by the literary work of his great precursor and teacher Taras Shevchenko.

Ivan Franko was born on the 27th of August, 1856, in the village of Nahuyevichi (now the village of Ivan Franko, Drohobich District, Lviv Region) into the family of a blacksmith. His childhood experiences left him with first-hand knowledge of the grinding poverty and shameless exploitation of peasants and oil

workers in his native Galicia — Ukraine's ethnic region which was then under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

After finishing gymnasium in the town of Drohobich Ivan Franko continued his education in Lviv and later in Chernivtsi. In 1891 he graduated from the Department of Philology of Chernivtsi University.

As a writer and public figure, Ivan Franko was active in the struggle of Galicia's working people against social and national oppression. He took part in editing and promoting progressive magazines *Hromadskiy druh* (Community Spokesman), *Dzvin* (Bell) and *Molot* (Hammer). In the 1890s he edited a magazine of his own. Named *Zhitye i slovo* (Life and Word), it became the mouthpiece of a whole number of talented Ukrainian writers. In its feature column *Visti z Rosiyi* (News from Russia) the magazine ran stories on workers' strikes and organizations and the development of the labour movement in Russia.

The clear-cut revolutionary-democratic orientation of I. Franko's publications and his active campaigning against the very foundations of the monarchical regime soon invited the close attention of the police. I. Franko was detained three times — in 1877, 1880 and 1889.

In 1893 I. Franko obtained a doctorate and applied for a chair at Lviv University. But the authorities, who viewed his political record as questionable at best, saw to it that his application was turned down.

Three times in the 1890s the then progressive Radical Party nominated Ivan Franko its candidate in the elections to the Austrian Parliament and the Galician Provincial Legislature. Each time, though, the ruling circles spared no effort to make sure the "peasants' nominee" failed to obtain a seat in either.

And yet the unceasing harassment and persecutions failed to break Ivan Franko's indomitable spirit. Till the very end of his life he remained an unyielding and outspoken champion of a better life for his underprivileged countrymen.

Ivan Franko died on the 28th of May, 1916, in Lviv.

Most of the distinguishing characteristics of Ivan Franko's poetry and prose can be traced back to his social and political views.

I. Franko was the most outstanding poet in the post-Shevchenko period of the Ukrainian letters. In his best collection of verse *From the Heights and the Depths* (*Z vershin i nizin*, 1887), which opens with the poem *Hymn*, also known as *Spirit of Revolt* (*Vichniy revolyutsioner*), he emerges as a poet of the impending

revolution, as an innovator who boldly discards the existing canons of poetry, democratizing its traditional forms. Second only to T. Shevchenko's *Kobzar*, the collection *From the Heights and the Depths* was the highest achievement of Ukrainian revolutionary poetry.

The esthetic and political principles, first expressed in *From the Heights and the Depths* found further development in I. Franko's later collections *The Withered Leaves* (Ziviyale listya, 1896), *My Emerald* (Miy izmaragd, 1897) and *From the Days of Grief* (Iz dniv shurbi, 1900).

In the years of the first revolution in Russia (1905—1907) Ivan Franko published a book of verse entitled *Semper Tiro* (1906), in which he denounced the bourgeois slogan "Art for the Art's Sake" and reaffirmed the principles of realism and service to the people.

Ivan Franko's prose enriched the Ukrainian literature with a whole new gallery of characters which embraced all the strata of the bourgeois society — workers and capitalists, peasants and landlords, progressive intellectuals and Civil Service bureaucracy.

Equipped with a profound knowledge of life and influenced by the progressive Ukrainian, Russian and West European authors, Ivan Franko developed a highly realistic style of writing. He knew and popularized the literary reviews and critical essays of Russian revolutionary democrats M. Chernishevsky, A. Gerzen, M. Dobrolyubov and others. As the working people's emancipatory movement against social and national oppression was gathering momentum, I. Franko took an increasingly great interest in progressive political, economic and philosophical doctrines. Under the influence of what he then read and studied, particularly *Das Kapital* by K. Marx, *Anti-Düring* by F. Engels, and *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* by K. Marx and F. Engels, Ivan Franko injected a fresh stream of burning social issues into Ukrainian literature's subject matter.

In the short stories of the cycle *Borislav* (1877) — *Oil Worker* (Ripnik), *At the Job* (Na roboti), *Converted Sinner* (Naverneniy hrishnik) — the writer showed the rise of the working class in Galicia and the unavoidable confrontation between this new class and that of its exploiters. The author followed up this theme in his story *Boa Constrictor* (1878).

A special place in Ivan Franko's prose should be reserved for his story *Borislav is Laughing* (Borislav smiyetsya, 1882). In fact, this story made I. Franko the world's first fiction writer to portray the workers as a social class capable of assuming

the overall leadership in the struggle of all working people against capitalist exploitation. It is also quite significant that here we find episodes where poor peasants display solidarity with workers on strike. I. Franko himself wrote that he had sought to present "the new people" — workers' leaders.

In *His Own Fault* (Sam sobi vinen, 1880), *Forests and Pastures* (Lisi i pasoviska, 1883) and a whole number of other stories I. Franko draws the reader's attention to the social drama of the Galician village. He realistically describes the disintegration of the patriarchal setup of life in the countryside, the wholesale impoverishment of Galicia's peasantry, and accurately records the process of its proletarianization. The writer traces the awakening of the Galician peasants' political consciousness and shows the first stirrings caused by socialist propaganda in the countryside. The poor peasant Olexa Storozh from the story *My Meeting with Olexa* (Moya stricha z Olexoyu, 1878) has sensed with his heart that socialism is "such a science that stands for the rights of the poor people."

In the story *The Crossing Tracks* (Perekhresni stezhki, 1900) I. Franko proceeds to describe an episode of the mass peasant movement which was arising in the 1880s and the 1890s under the influence of the working class. The writer now leads his hero beyond the narrow limits of the everyday routine onto the much broader scene of social and political life. Instead of lone and largely isolated protesters, here we find a whole peasant community which hold a rally where poor villagers stand up to speak of their grievances and the wrongs done to them by the landlords and the village administration.

While in *The Crossing Tracks* peasants still act within the legal framework of what was allowed by the Austrian constitution, the collective protest of a village community against the local landlord in the story *The Great Din* (Velikiy shum, 1907) is of a much more resolute character and grows into a full-scale rebellion that eventually is put down only by the resort to armed force. The story was written under the influence of the Russian Revolution of 1905—1907, while for the necessary material the author turned to the accounts of the wave of peasant strikes which had swept through Galicia just on the eve of the revolutionary events in Russia.

Another classic of Ukrainian literature Mikhailo Kotsyubinsky, the author of *Fata Morgana* (1910, English-language edition — 1976), a story very close to I. Franko's in terms of the plot and subject matter, wrote, "Unlike earlier writers, he

[Franko] is interested in the village not merely from the ethnographic viewpoint; he does not idealize the countryside life. What he is really interested in are the social and economic aspects of this life."

Ivan Franko's profound knowledge of human nature in its varied manifestations makes his characters strikingly alive. The writer realized that literary characters could be real only if, as F. Engels wrote, their motivation stemmed not from petty personal whims, but from that mainstream of history which carried them all. In one of his articles I. Franko pointed out that the literature of critical realism of those years "saw one of its most important tasks in providing a psychological analysis of social phenomena, in showing, one should say, how facts of social life are reflected in the soul and consciousness of an individual and, on the other hand, how new developments of social category arise and grow in the soul of that individual." Characteristically, the writer often called his works "studies in psychology."

The collection of short stories by Ivan Franko we present to the reader opens with *The Pencil* (Olovets, 1879), one of his earlier autobiographical works which vividly describes the crude methods of education widely practised in the Galician school at that time. The story *In the Blacksmith Shop* (U kuzni, 1892) also derives from the author's personal experiences. Here the reader will find I. Franko's moving reminiscences of his father's smithy, which became his first school of life and where he learned to love working people and hate their oppressors. *The Hower* (Rubach, 1886) is remarkable for its symbolic image of a fighter determined to free his people from "savagery, ignorance and ill will". Burning social themes may well serve as the common denominator of all the works included into this collection.

The stories we have selected for this book are, of course, only a tiny part of Ivan Franko's literary legacy. However, we believe that they will give the reader a fairly good idea of this writer's creativity and versatility, and of the lofty ideals, of which he was so outstanding a champion.

I V A N B A S S,  
D R . P H I L O L .



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## THE PENCIL

I beg you not to think that I invented the story or that the title is a metaphor of some sort. No, the business is really about a pencil, and not a whole one, but a stub of, let us say, three inches long. But then, if anyone would say that it was three and a half inches long, I wouldn't sue him, either. What I know well, however, is that it didn't reach four inches. On that, as the jurists say, I could "take my oath," or as our Yasenitsya folk say, "cross my heart and hope to die." The hero of this story was three and a half inches long, no longer. Many years have passed since we last saw each other, that is, since I saw it, for how could it see me with its sharpened point? Anyway, it lay a whole day and a half in my shoolbag, underneath the books, in pitch darkness! If I'm not lying, this was not less than sixteen years ago — enough time to forget even one's closest friend. But I never forgot it, that stub of a pencil, three and a half inches long, of dark red wood, hexahedral and painted yellow, with the name "Mittel" stamped on the blunt end in silver; the other end was sharpened, not too dull either — just as much as a village schoolboy needed.

That's how it lay on the snow one winter morning in the Yasenitsya schoolyard right beside the path made by the early pupils. It was a clear, lovely morning. The frost was biting like mad; wee shreds of snow floated in the air, completely transparent, visible only in diamond-like flashes when the sun's rays broke on them. The pencil did not sink into the icy, sparkling snow, but lay right on top of it. Its yellow paint glistened in the sun and the silver letters of "Mittel" could be seen from afar. Some

schoolboy, running to school, must have lost it. And so it lay there, stretching its black, sharpened point toward the school wall, as though it was trying to tell every passer-by that was where it belonged; as though it was begging with its silver eyes to be picked up from its bed, which was fine but very cold, and carried there, into the school, from which the din made by the boys as they were waiting for the teacher to come, could be heard all over the village.

Now, tell me, on your honor, what would you have done if you had happened to come upon such a "Mittel" in such a position, not entirely suited to its "rank." I think that 90 percent of you, not suspecting that this was the hero, let alone of a story, but even of a news item or a tiny advertisement, would have picked it up and simply put it in your pocket. The other 10 percent would doubtlessly not even have bent down for it.

I frankly admit that I belonged to the 90 percent, that is, suspecting no evil in the pencil, I bent down for it and, since I had no pockets on me, I placed it in my leather schoolbag, where I kept my books. But the extraordinary thing about it all was the fact that I was overjoyed at my find. I was a poor village lad and in all my life till that time I had never had a pencil, but was compelled to write with that confounded goose quill which blotted so terribly, spluttering and sputtering under the pressure of my hand. And there I found a pencil by chance, and a very fine one at that! It's true that I had seen in only for a fleeting moment when it was lying on the snow, for then I had picked it up in my hand and quickly shoved it into the bag, as though fearing that the sun, which was shining so brightly, would steal it from my fingers. Another curious thing about all this was that the thought never even entered my head that some other schoolboy might have lost it—hear me, not even a thought. No, no, no! Which schoolboy among us loses pencils! It must have been that some goodness knows what unknown gentleman had visited the teacher and doubtlessly he had lost this pencil. Or, maybe, it was the roving dealer to whom the teacher

sold a cow last year; it could be that the pencil had lain there from last year and no one noticed the poor thing. Or maybe it fell together with the snow from the sky in the night? Didn't Granny say that quite often it rains cats and dogs, so why not pencils? That's how I figured it as I crossed the yard to the school. So what, isn't a six-year-old boy permitted to think that way? Well, then! I took a great liking to that pencil. I kept my hand inside the bag and the pencil was in my hand, I turned it this way and that, trying to guess its thickness, and to recall its shape. In brief, my imagination constantly fluttered and circled around that pencil like a butterfly does around a flower. I adamantly chased away any thought that the pencil might belong to another schoolboy and that I, therefore, would have to give it back to its owner.

The classroom was already full of pupils. Some were seated at their desks, muttering whatever they had to learn by heart at home and darting frightened glances at the door to see if the teacher was coming. Others, who were bolder, walked about the classroom, wrestled, pushed each other between the desks, drew all kinds of monstrosities on the blackboard and then quickly rubbed them off with the wet rag that served for a sponge. Nobody asked about the pencil. This pleased me very much, and I quickly and sort of stealthily made my way to the second row and sat down at my usual place. Pulling out the book needed for the next class, I heard the scratch of the pencil against the leather in my bag and began to tremble all over — I don't know whether from joy or from some strange fear.

Now the teacher came and school started. All's well! Here the period was over, the teacher had gone, the noise and clamor of recess had begun as always, and still no one spoke about the pencil. I sat, looked about me and trembled like a thief over his loot, fearing that at any moment someone would come and demand the pencil from me.

But no one asked for the pencil. The schoolboys walked about, studied, made mischief or picked fights as always.

Stepan Leskiv, my good friend, came up.

"Oho, it's clear that you don't know your arithmetic lesson today; you sure will catch a hiding! And if teacher tells me to give you the beating, boy, you had better watch out!"

What a tease that Stepan was! He knew that I was weak in arithmetic, so he kept teasing me. But I knew for sure that he was only joking; besides, today I was not afraid of the teacher because I had learned my arithmetic lesson (to write out the numbers up to 100). I learned it extra good! Who do you think all day yesterday was writing numerals with his finger on the window panes covered thick with mist? "Just don't you worry too much about my arithmetic," I replied to Stepan. "You had better watch that you don't get a hiding yourself!"

It's the strangest thing, honest, so strange! I had intended to answer Stepan also jokingly, with a smile, gently—but I replied somehow so angrily, so sharply, in such a rough voice, that it made me feel bad! I could even feel how the blood suffused my entire face. Stepan stood over me for a moment, saying nothing and staring at me with puzzled eyes, and then he walked away, evidently sorry he had hurt me with his joke. He liked me so much, that gentle, quiet, helpful, good-natured lad! Why had I answered him so sharply? Why had I saddened him? After all, he had spoken to me jokingly and I had no reason to get angry with him!

Such were the thoughts that raced through my head as Stepan went and silently sat at his desk. He was a small tow-headed lad of eight. His father, a poor peasant, was a neighbor of my uncle's, at whose place I lived, so that we two boys were constant companions. They say that Stepan's father had once been a wealthy man, but a big fire and other misfortunes had ruined his farm. He was a tall, strong man with a dour expression, who bent more and more to the ground and spoke in a deep, gruff voice. Somehow, I couldn't help feeling afraid of him, and thought him a cruel man. Little Stepan, on the other hand, took after his mother, a quiet, gentle woman with a good-natured face that was still pretty, and bright gray eyes. That's why many a time I would

stand behind the hedge fence by the pasture, waiting for old Leskiv to leave the house so that I could run in if only for a moment to play with Stepan. Of course, we often quarreled, too, as children do, but never for long. I, who was quicker to quarrel and even to fight, was also the first to make up, while Stepan, always even-tempered, would smile so warmly, as though he wanted to say:

“See, I knew all along you couldn’t do without me!”

But now, why did I get angry at Stepan? Oh no, I knew full well that I wasn’t angry with him at all! To the contrary, his hurt, sad look brought on a pain that twisted my childish breast. Somehow I was ashamed, not knowing myself why it was so, and I forgot about the pencil. It wasn’t until these impressions cooled off and passed away, and I saw before me the bag, in which my senses seemed to feel the touch of the pencil from afar, that my imagination returned to that object, and in a minute I had completely forgotten about Stepan and his sad look. The teacher came in again, the study hour began and slowly came to an end — and still no one had uttered a word about the pencil.

In the third period we were to have arithmetic. This lofty and terrible science was taught in this way: the teacher called one pupil up to the blackboard, told him to write numbers on it, and all the other boys had to write those same numbers down in their scribblers. The teacher continually walked about the desks, peering here and there into the scribblers to see if everybody was writing properly.

Before the arithmetic period I heard some kind of racket, some nervous, curt questions and answers in the last row, where Stepan sat, but I could not figure out what this was about because of the general din. Just the same, something nudged me, some sort of disquiet took hold of me. I thought to myself: “I won’t take the pencil out now, I’ll write with the pen as usual, though I’m fed up with it.”

The teacher came in. Resting a moment at the table, he rose and called me to the blackboard. I went up, scared and shivering, because writing in general, be it letters or numbers, was a ~~hard~~ hard nut for me to

crack; all symbols came out crooked, hooked and sprawling from under my hand, so that they usually looked like an old fence, in which each post sticks out in a different direction and the cross pickets stick out each its own way, unable to achieve a juncture with the fenceposts. But what could I do? Once the teacher called me up, I had to go. I stood at the board and took the rag in my right hand and the chalk in my left.

“35!” cried the teacher and glanced at me. “Why, you, blockhead, how are you holding the chalk? You’re going to write southpaw, eh?”

I transposed the unfortunate instruments of learning in both hands, then I lifted my right hand as high up as I could on the blackboard and barely managed to reach its middle. The task of writing the number 35 on the blackboard was difficult, because one had to write “twisting” numerals. Yesterday, practicing writing numerals with my finger on window panes, I had long considered how to write that confounded three so it would come out roundish and with a little projection in the middle. I had nobody I could ask, so I figured it out, that I would write it starting from the middle of the projection, first drawing an arc upward, then another downward. That’s how I learned to write it at home and that’s how I tried now with trembling hand to do it on the board. But now, worse luck, my hand was shaking, what little strength there was in it seemed to freeze up, so that no matter how I tried to press the chalk to the blackboard, the confounded lines came out so thin and frail that they were hardly visible. With great effort I managed to write the three.

“Well, are you finished?” shouted the teacher and turned to me.

“Not... not yet,” I answered and, covered with cold sweat, began to write 5, again according to my own method, of course, that is, beginning with the bottom. “What, what, what?” the teacher cried and ran up closer to me. “How are you writing, how?”

I was silent. My trembling hand finished the figure on the board. The five looked more like an S than a round-bellied coxcombed 5.

“Oh, you sow’s belly!” (that was the usual attribute applied by the teacher to the schoolchildren). “Don’t you know how 5 is written?”

And without waiting for an answer to this question, the teacher grabbed up a flat ruler from the table with one hand, with the other took hold of my hand, from which the chalk flew out, and a loud smack resounded over the classroom. My palm turned red and seemed to swell, while under the skin it felt as though ants were crawling. I had been able to withstand pain from my earliest years, so I didn’t cry, only made a face.

“So you don’t know how to write a 5? Didn’t you see how I did it? Look how 5 is written — like this!” and the teacher snatched up the chalk and with a sweeping movement first wrote a huge 5 on the blackboard and then one like it (though, maybe, not so correct and clear) on my face.

“Keep on writing,” he shouted at me. “48!”

I began to write. The teacher looked on for another minute. The four satisfied him and he began walking up and down between the desks.

“Why aren’t you writing?” he shouted threateningly at the boys, who were watching what was taking place at the board, half laughing and half afraid. At the teacher’s roar all the heads bent down as grain bows, its ripening, heavy ears before the wind.

“You, you marriage broker, how did you write 3?” the teacher asked one boy.

Instead of an answer, instead of an explanation, smack went the ruler on the palm of the hand.

“What’s that over the 5?” he asked another.

“A blot from the quill.”

Again a smack of the ruler on the palm.

“And you godfather, why aren’t you writing?” he asked a third.

“Because I... pl... please, teacher,” Stepan Leskiv’s voice came through his tears.

“What?” roared the teacher menacingly.

“I lost my pencil somewhere.”

At that moment the chalk for some unknown reason fell from my hand. I repeat: for some unknown reason, because I was sure that the pencil which

was peacefully reposing in my bag didn't belong to Stepan. By no means! But still, when I heard his words, I become so scared and my hand began to shake so, that the chalk slipped out of it like a fish. I was fortunate that the figure I had been ordered to write was already written, because I couldn't have written it now.

"So," shouted the teacher, "you lost it? Just wait and I'll teach you!"

The Lord knows what it was that the teacher wanted to teach Stepan. We, the pupils, only knew that two days back the teacher had a terrible quarrel with Stepan's father and, it appeared, was only waiting for an excuse to take revenge on the boy for the father; aside from that, we saw that today the teacher was a little drunk and we knew there would be beatings.

"March to the middle!" he shouted to Stepan.

The poor boy evidently knew what was coming and he took his time: the teacher grabbed him by his long yellow hair and dragged him to the middle of the room.

"Stand here! And you," he turned to me, "have you written it?"

"Yes, I have."

"Go to your seat. And you go up to the board."

With these words the teacher poked Stepan. I began to breathe a little more easily, firstly, because I myself was now seated in a safe place, and secondly, because I thought that nothing would happen to Stepan because of the pencil, since the teacher had sent him to the blackboard—for I knew that Stepan could write. Only when I heard the angry voice in which the teacher dictated new numerals to Stepan, and saw how vicious he got when he saw that Stepan was writing them correctly, did I begin to be afraid for some reason. My heart was heavy as though something kept whispering inside me that if something were to happen to Stepan because of the pencil, I would also be to blame. I don't know why such strange thoughts should come into my head, but one thing was certain, I was shivering like an aspen leaf.

Stepan kept writing figures until the blackboard was all covered, and the teacher kept a close eye on him, trying to catch him making a mistake, but he couldn't.

"Enough," he cried. "Now lie down!"

"But what for, please, teacher?" asked Stepan.

"What? What for? You dare ask me? Lie down at once!"

When I heard those words I felt as though something was choking me. The teacher went to the back of the room to pick out a cane, while poor Stepan, pale and trembling, stood by the blackboard, wringing the rag in his hands.

"Why does teacher want to beat me?" Stepan asked again through tears as he saw the teacher approaching with the cane in his hand.

"Lie down!" he shouted and without further ado grasped Stepan by the hair, turned him over on the chair and began to beat him with the rod with all his might. Stepan cried out from pain, but the cry only seemed to infuriate the drunken teacher.

"You'll know next time how to lose pencils!" he shouted in a hoarse, panting voice and the cane whistled as it fell on poor Stepan's body.

What was taking place inside of me during that long, terribly hard moment? The first idea that flashed through my head was to stand up and say that it was all my fault, that I had Stepan's pencil, that I had found it, but hadn't returned it. But fear of the whistling cane rivetted me to my seat, and squeezed my throat as though with steel pincers. ...Stepan's screams tore at my breast. I was all bathed in cold sweat: I distinctly felt pain, the sharp pain from the blows. I felt it in all my body and so vividly that all my muscles involuntarily contracted and trembled, while in my throat rose sobs which could have been heard throughout the room. But terror had stunned everybody to such a degree that notwithstanding the graveyard silence none of my classmates heard my sobs.

And the teacher continued to administer the beating! Poor Stepan had already become hoarse, his face turned blue from strain, his fingers convulsively

dug into the teacher's knees, his feet kicked in the air, but the cane didn't stop whistling through the air and each swish, every whack on Stepan's coarse home-spun shirt shook and squeezed thirty children's hearts in the classroom and brought new screams of pain and despair from Stepan's breast. I no longer remember and I don't want to recall what was taking place within me during that terrible time, what sensations flashed through my body, what pain penetrated my joints, what thoughts tumbled about in my head. But no, there were no thoughts at all! I sat cold and petrified, like a stone! Even now, after sixteen years, whenever I recall that moment, it seems to me that it stunned me for a long time as though from a blow with a rock on the forehead, and if I had had many such moments in my childhood, I would have become the same sort of dolt as those which we see by the hundreds in every primary school in our country, those unhappy, physically and spiritually stunted children, whose senses from the most tender years were dulled by terrible, disgusting scenes, and their heads from six years of age were stupefied by such school discipline.

At last the whistling of the cane ceased. The teacher let go of Stepan and he fell to the floor, drained of strength, exhausted and breathless. The teacher, red as a beet, threw away the cane and sat down in the chair from which Stepan had just rolled off. For a minute he panted, not saying a word. The whole classroom was silent, still as the grave and sad. Only the groans of the poor lad, who was convulsively sobbing, could be heard.

"Aren't you getting up?" hissed the teacher, kicking him in the side with his foot.

After a moment Stepan with great difficulty lifted himself to his feet and stood, holding on to a desk.

"Get to your seat! Next time you'll know what it means to lose pencils!"

Stepan went to his seat. Silence again descended on the classroom. The teacher had evidently sobered up a bit and perceived that he had done wrong to beat the boy so hard. He knew that it wasn't good to tangle with Leskiv. This thought irritated him more

than ever and he sprang up and began to run about the room panting heavily.

"Oh, you beggars, you bandits!" he yelled as he ran, and it wasn't clear whether he meant us, the children, or the absent Yasenitsya residents.

The teacher ran about the room some more, breathed heavily again and muttered under his nose, and then he turned to us and shouted:

"Go home!"

But even that usually magic phrase, which promised us reprieve from the burden of school learning if only for the day, now made no more impression on us than if it had been spoken to the deaf. Alarm and uncertainty had stunned all the schoolboys, and robbed them of their reflexes. A second, louder shout from the teacher was needed before all rose to prayer. When the pupils moved from their desks and began to leave the room after the prayers, this was not accompanied by the usual noise and gadding about; all went slowly, glancing with apprehension at the teacher who stood by the table until all the boys had gone out. Everyone felt somewhat depressed. Stepan went out sobbing, and when already at the door he glanced back at the teacher, the latter shook his fist at him. I went out practically at the end, barely dragging my feet. I was so terribly frightened and ashamed for some reason, that at that moment I would have been glad to sink through the floor. Maybe a murderer feels such a weight on his heart after he has committed a crime, I don't know. Especially, I wouldn't have looked Stepan in the face at that moment for all the money in the world. I imagined his pain so vividly — no, I suffered it no less than he — and in addition that confounded inner voice constantly whispered to me that he was suffering on my account, that the pencil was his! Yes, now something told me clearly that it was his pencil I had found! Well, and it would seem quite natural that I go straight off to him and return him what he had lost. Wasn't it time already? But no! It seemed natural, but for me, weighted down with fear, grief and shame as I was at the time, it was impossible. It wasn't that I still wanted to keep the pencil for

myself — nothing of the kind! It now lay heavy as a stone in my bag and burned my fingers from afar — I wouldn't have touched it then, or even looked at it, for anything in the world! How glad I would have been if someone had forcibly snatched the bag from me and spilled out all its contents, so the pencil would fall where Stepan could later pick it up! But nothing like that happened: the schoolboys had other things on their minds.

As soon as they were out of the school and the schoolyard, the boys surrounded the still sobbing Stepan and began to question him where and how he had lost his pencil, and what sort of pencil it was; some loudly denounced the teacher, others comforted Stepan and told him to be sure to complain to his father.

"H-how do-do I know w-w-where I lost it," Stepan sobbed. "But what will D-dad tell m-me now! H-he b-bought it for me in the city only d-day before y-yesterday, and I've l-lost it. Oh-oh-oh!" the poor boy wailed, for he was no less terrified of his father than of the teacher.

"Don't cry, silly, don't be scared," the boys comforted him, though I'm sure that not one of them would have agreed to be in Stepan's shoes.

"Aha, d-don't c-cry!" answered Stepan sorrowfully. "He'll k-kill me fo that p-pencil! He said he paid six kreutzers for it in the city. 'If you lose it,' he told me, 'I'll skin you alive, hear me!'... Oh-oh-oh!" I couldn't listen any more. Stepan's every word hurt me like a thorn. I ran home quickly, all a-tremble, pale and breathless.

"Oh, you've probably been fighting with the boys again," cried my aunt when I entered. "Look how you come panting like a bloodhound! Oh, you beggar, you good-for-nothing, you useless thing, you outlandish oat!" My aunt was twenty-odd years old and not yet married. She was "very good" — at least, you could say that about her tongue, which never liked to be idle and never lacked for words.

I hung up my bag with the books on a peg and sat down to eat without saying a word. Having eaten, I sat at the table and took a book, but not to do my

homework — I was in no mood to study; I sat over the book like a stump and reread the same words a hundred times without understanding what I read and what it meant. I tried not to think about Stepan, the teacher or old Leskiv, but their faces continually rose in my thoughts, chilling me to the marrow, gnawing and worrying at me like reminders of old crimes do to a sinner. I wished so hard that night would come soon, but the night held off as though it was under a spell. I was afraid to look into the bag with the pencil as though it wasn't a bag but a horrible pit, and not a pencil, but a serpent.

I won't describe the tortures I suffered before night fell. And what awful nightmares I had in the night, how I hollered, how I ran, how I hid, and how lizards ran and flew after me, each with a sharp mouth and "Mittel" written in large letters on its back, and how I was pricked by thorns with shiny yellow skin and hexahedral stems, sharpened at the ends — but let all this sink in the well of forgetfulness. Suffice it to say that when I rose in the morning I felt as though I had been beaten black and blue or boiled in a cauldron, and in addition my aunt scolded me for tossing and screaming all night and giving her no sleep.

Eearly, before I had left for school, my uncle came from the village and, taking off his heavy cloth gloves, began to relate the various village news.

"Why did the teacher beat up Leskiv's Stepan so badly yesterday?" my uncle suddenly asked me. That question frightened me terribly, as though someone had dashed scalding water on me.

"Well... well... well... he said that... that..."

"What's the matter, can't you talk, or what?" shouted my aunt, from the side. "So what happened to Stepan?" she asked my uncle.

"The teacher gave him such a beating for some kind of pencil, that the boy barely crawled home alive."

"What pencil!"

"Well, on Monday his father bought him a pencil, and yesterday he lost it. The teacher was drunk and he began to beat the boy as though he was to blame. The poor kid barely managed to get home, they say.

So when he got home and told his story, the old bear went mad and began to beat the child. He took him by the hair and threw him to the floor and put the boots to him!... Lord! The old woman began to howl, the boy fainted, they were barely able to bring him to with water, and they say that now he's in bed, can't move an inch! Why should they torture a child so!..."

Uncle hadn't finished his story when I burst into tears and interrupted him.

"What's the matter with you?" uncle asked in amazement.

"Have you gone crazy, boy, or what?" cried my aunt.

"I... I... I..." I stuttered, crying, but my sobs would not let me finish what I wanted to say.

"Well, what is it? Speak up!" said my uncle kindly.

"I... I found... Stepan's pencil!"

"You found it? Where? When?"

"Yesterday, by the school, in the snow," I said more bravely.

"Well, and why didn't you return it to Stepan?"

"I didn't know it was his and he didn't ask."

"And later, after school?"

"I... I was scared."

"Scared? What the bow-legged devil were you scared of?" asked my aunt, but I didn't answer her.

"So where is that pencil?"

"In my bag."

My uncle looked into the bag and took out that ill-fated pencil I didn't dare look at.

"Well, look at it, good people, and for such a trifle they beat a boy so badly! May they both perish!"

Uncle spat and walked out, taking the pencil with him. My aunt pushed me out to go school. I was still sobbing as I went, and the tears coursed willy-nilly down my cheeks, although my heart had become much lighter.

Stepan didn't come to school that day and all the following week, he was sick in bed. More than that, the next week our teacher also fell ill suddenly — my uncle guessed that old Leskiv must have given him "a good drubbing." I never actually found out

if that's what happened — suffice it to say that I didn't see Stepan for two full weeks after that. Oh, how arfaid I was to meet him now! How often, in my restless dreams, I saw his good gentle face, still black and blue, drawn with pain and thin — and with what reproach his good-natured gray eyes looked at me! And when I did see him, when I heard his voice, all the tortures and perturbations of the past days seemed to revive at once in my soul — but only for a minute. Stepan was now well and happy as of old, he spoke to me kindly, as though there had been nothing between us; and he didn't even mention the pencil. Perhaps, he didn't know that I had kept his pencil and so was responsible for his sufferings? I don't know. Anyway, at no time afterwards did we ever talk about the pencil.

*1879*

Translated by  
John Weir

## THE HEWER

During my long and arduous journey I went into an enormous dense forest — and I lost my way. The coolness of the forest, which usually is so refreshing, now lay heavy on my breast, as doubt lies heavy on the soul. Huge black boughs hung menacingly over me, rustling their leaves ominously. Writhing roots that had crawled out of the ground, here and there, blocked my passage with snares about my feet like hands of mysterious demons of darkness, straining to seize me in their claws. The dry sticks snapped under my feet, but to my alarmed imagination this seemed like the crackling, the breaking, and the painful whispering of the parched and withered dreams of my youthful days. And above this, the hushed silence all around, interrupted occasionally only by the chirr of a squirrel on a bough, or the growling of a bear in the thicket.

I walked on, filled with anxiety, insensate and mute. Some invisible power seemed to drive me on, but whither to — I did not know. The density of the forest completely screened the sunlight from my eyes, but even without it, the sun — that bright and unerring heavenly wanderer — had long since ceased to be the helmsman of my earthly journey. My heart was pounding violently within my breast; my sense of hearing, sharpened to acuteness by the vast silence of the eternal primeval forest, picked up vague sounds, which rose from the deepest depths of my being: the hollow, long-forgotten lamenting toll of the village bells, the painful, gasping breath of a dying mother, childish, naively-candid whispers of prayers, the repercussions of a terrible life-storm, the grating of prison keys, abruptly broken-off curses

and insults, the soft weeping of a betrayed woman, the hoarse cry of despair and the cold smile of resignation. Swayed by these inner voices, as of under the spell of a mother's mournful song, my consciousness began slowly to sink into slumber, drowning itself in the cool darkness and losing itself in the thick depths of the forest. I walked slowly and then more and more slowly, but I never ceased to go onward, ever onward.

My state could have been likened to sleep — a heavy, painful sleep, the more painful since it was a dreamless one. A kind of inexpressible feeling of being lost, of seeing no way out before me, of knowing that sooner or later my strength would fail me in this awful solitude, that perhaps I might become a live prey to the wild beasts, who get wind of every scent of life in this primeval forest — this feeling never left me for a single moment, but tortured and pained me unceasingly like a thorn stuck in my foot. Except for this one painful sensation, I felt nothing else — neither sorrow nor hope. A kind of torpor enveloped me and froze everything that was human within me, save this one animal sensation of pain and apprehension.

With a desperate effort I leaped across the fallen uprooted trees, forced my way through boggy ground, clawed my way up steep inclines to catch a glimpse of a wider view, even if only slightly wider. To no avail. The primeval forest hemmed me in from all sides and seemed to be whispering to me with its millions of leaves, with the creaking of its branches, the chirring of squirrels and the growling of bears:

“You shall not escape! You shall not escape! All who have entered here must say goodbye to hope!”

Darkness had fallen. The clear-cut outlines of the surrounding objects had become diffused with the darkness, forming a compact, solid, impenetrable wall all around. I was unable to take a single step farther for fear of striking my chest, my head or feet against a barrier. Deathly anxiety made me vainly bulge my eyes, but my pupils could not capture a single quiver of the tiniest ray of light. Exhausted,

I fell to the ground. At that moment the wind which had been drowsing up under the treetops during the daytime, awoke from its sleep and sent forth a long drawn-out, mournful wail, like a messenger carrying some dreadful news to a far-off land.

For a moment I lay in a state of complete numbness, and I imagined that dark demons of the wilderness were clustered round me, bending over me with low whispers of satisfaction, stretching out long arms to press against my breast and stop my heart's loud beating. I sprang to my feet as if stung by the touch of a serpent and with inexpressible alarm I strained my eyesight once again for some small ray of salvation in this darkness.

And I saw it.

I seemed to see a pale half-moon gliding serenely through the woods, piercing the darkness. At times it would twinkle and in the same moment a hollow rumble like underground thunder went echoing through the primeval forest, followed by the splitting and cracking of a forest giant as it crashed to the ground. Then again the mysterious half-moon calmly and evenly floated through the primeval forest. My eyes, thirsting for light, could not tear themselves away from its serenely-languid luster.

Now it was approaching closer and closer, and suddenly I realized that there wasn't anything supernatural about the mystery. Through the woods along an untrodden path a man was walking, clad in a peasant's coarse homespun coat and carrying in his hand an ax, which flashed and appeared to me from a distance like the light of a half-moon. In the murk I could not discern the face of this man: there loomed only the vague outlines of his powerful figure, and in the darkness his eyes shone with a strange fire. In this state of alarm I fell to my knees before him and from my choking throat I could utter only these words:

"Save a wandering soul who has lost his way!"

"Follow me!" replied the unknown traveler in a voice so calm and gentle, yet at the same time so resolute, that I immediately felt new strength flowing in my muscles and new hope arising in my soul.

And I followed him. The darkness somehow became less dense before him — whether it was from the brightness of his ax or the light in his eyes — I did not know. He walked straight on, veering neither to the right nor left, as if he saw far off in the distance ahead of him a certain goal which he had to reach at a definite hour. Unhurriedly, yet without tarrying, he proceeded at an even, firm, but confident pace. The dust of rotten wood was luminous under his footsteps. Moving behind him, I saw before me only the dark contours of his back and shoulders, but the more closely and attentively I observed these contours, the larger they seemed to grow, looming before my eyes to colossal, but nonetheless, not fantastic dimensions.

However, a dark tree-trunk, a forest giant was obstructing our path. Without a moment's hesitation my guide raised his ax high and struck it against the mighty obstacle. The primeval forest emitted a wail that reverberated in a powerful echo, and with a terrible crash, as if struck by a thunderbolt, the tree toppled to the ground, tearing away and crushing its own and adjacent branches as it fell. Owls and ravens, nesting in its forked crown, began to screech; bats, dwelling in its hollows, fluttered above our heads; and for a long time the primeval forest could not quiet down after the loss of one of its sons. But my guide, quite unperturbed, started onwards, silently and sedately, and I behind him.

But now an enormous black mass, a steep mountain cliff stood in our way. Its craggy chimney-like steeples were reaching upwards, carved on the dark sky in wildly fantastic outlines, here, in the shape of long, tapering columns, there, like Gothic towers, and still farther on, misty figures — a Sphinx with an upraised paw, a monk in a cowl, kneeling at prayer, a dromedary with outstretched neck. And again my leader, calmly and without hesitation, raised his ax and delivered a mighty blow. Millions of sparks flew out from under his blade, a thundering crash shook the earth and the primordial cliff split in two as it began to crack, break apart and crumble into small clods that went tumbling down with a dull thud some-

where into the chasm below, then again they began to split with a wild crunching into smaller chunks, leveling out our road. And so onwards, without deviating for a moment from his straight path, my leader calmly advanced, and I behind him.

Then all at once I felt a cold blast of wind on my face, and there before us somewhere from beneath the ground, came the sound of hollow rumbling, a violent agitation, a roaring and raging of a tempest. A few more steps and a black abyss suddenly yawned at the very feet of my guide, a cleft in a steep craggy ravine, at the bottom of which a stream was churning and frothing in its mad rush. But even this hindrance did not stop my guide. A flash of his upraised ax, a crash of a giant tree falling, and its trunk dropped across the abyss, making a convenient footway bridge. In a mad, impotent fury the demons of darkness and destruction howled below, the spuming waves gurgled, spraying us with icy foam, but we were not deterred and calmly crossed the bridge. At last the darkness began to fade away and the primeval forest grew less and less dense. Before long we came out onto an open plain and my eyes joyfully greeted the first rays of the rising sun suspended over the gold-edged purple clouds. Then I began to view with curiosity what lay before us.

This was a dismal-looking landscape. A vast and boundless plain whose borders vanished somewhere into the far distant mist of dawn. Not a hillock, not a shrub, not a trace of a living soul, only the enormous primeval forest, stretching out of the north like a black wall from one end of the horizon to the other. And before us the steppe, and more steppe; sparse dry grass and creeping weeds trailing over the gentle slopes — this was all of its vegetation. Without a single impediment my eyes raced across this area far and wide into infinity, forcibly carrying my very soul with them and leaving an inexpressible sorrow in my heart, a feeling of emptiness, unfulfilled desires and unattainable endeavors. Engrossed in these oppressive sensations, I followed my leader silently without looking behind me, but all the more vigilantly striving to catch a glimpse of every tiny

dot on the far horizon, searching for something to break this killing monotony.

And suddenly I seemed to see far out against the distant background of the rose-colored skyline what appeared to be the dim outlines of some huge bird, sitting on the steppe with its neck stretched high in the air and its long beak hanging down. Was this a crane standing on guard? Or was this an eagle of the steppe, awakened, and about to take flight? But this bird did not attempt to rise and soar, for the closer we approached him the longer his neck became, growing longer and straighter. Not far from it there appeared a second, farther on a third, a fourth... They stood side by side in a row that kept getting longer as we came nearer and extended endlessly and boundlessly, disappearing somewhere far off into the transparent mist. My eyes — grown weary of the monotony of the steppe — I could not tear them away for an instant from this enigmatic creature. And the closer I came up to it, the more alarmingly did my heart begin to beat, and the more clearly did I recognize the completely horrifying monstrosity of this creature. The crane's long neck — this was a towering black pillar; what resembled a bird's head — this was a cross-beam, and the beak hanging down — this was a hanged victim that swayed at the end of a rope with every puff of wind.

I was stunned with shock and fright. This was a ghastly sight: a corpse, still fresh, with only the upper half stripped of its flesh by birds of prey; black blood stains under the gallows; bones bearing the traces of horrible deathly tortures: eyes that had been burnt out, hands that were charred, leg-bones broken. I cast a glance at the more distant gallowses: it was the same sight, except that the corpses were less recent, bare skeletons or parts of skeletons, and under the gallowses, appalling instruments of torture, rusting in clotted blood — woodscrews, pincers, spiked shirts, frightful iron masks, rack-wheels, chains and winches. And farther on there were only half-charred remains of skulls, nailed to the gallowses, tarred shirts and crowns of thorns, broad swords and iron claws. And farther on — no, my eyes could not reach

the end of this monstrous row, disappearing into endless space and losing itself somewhere in the infinitude.

"My God!" I cried out, covering my eyes with my hands. "Are all these bandits?"

"No," replied my guide, "these are all martyrs."

And laying his ax aside, he knelt under the horrible pillar at the feet of the hanging corpse. Sustained by some mysterious power, I followed suit.

"This is our sacrifice," my guide was saying as he bowed his head. "Let us pray that this most recent victim, tortured in the cause of truth and freedom, shall be the last and that from now on there will be no need for such sacrifices."

And throwing ourselves face-down on the ground, we prayed with our souls, with fervency, with tears, kissing the earth watered with the blood of the tortured martyr. And when we stood up my leader took his ax in hand and again approached the gallows.

"Our temple lies in our spirit and in truth," he said. "Those who have written their attestation to it with their blood we should regard as pointers of our way and not as idols. It is their victory and not their relics which we shall consecrate."

And having said this, he raised his ax and struck. The gallows fell over and crumbled into dust — and all of them fell and crumbled away to the farthest edge of the horizon. Only a wide belt of fertile earth, covered with luxuriant verdure, marked the remaining traces left by the sufferings that had been endured and buried here long ago, and the battles and victories of countless human generations. And the heavy feeling of anxiety in my heart was dispelled; with increased courage and renewed strength I continued onward after my leader, and it seemed to me that every atom of that earth and that air was bringing new strength, new thoughts, new and freer sensations into my being. I had the feeling that I was like a member of that same family, one of the creations and products of those thousand-year-old battles and sufferings, one of the fortunate heirs of those victories.

But at this point, a huge dark cloud, with gleaming sharp spires, appeared from the east and spread out menacingly, shutting out the sunlight in front of us. For an instant it looked as if it would engulf us in total darkness, but its efforts proved in vain. On the contrary, the closer we approached it, the smaller it grew as its outlines shrank together, and at last we saw that this was not a cloud at all, but a giant statue standing on the plain. On a pedestal of black marble, reaching into the clouds, sat a marble figure of a man with a long curly beard and glittering eyes, holding aloft a sheaf of golden arrows in his right hand raised high. His head was encircled with a crown of golden rays and his left hand held a convex shield. The pedestal was like a mountain blocking our passage, and the colossus on that pedestal looked as if he had thrust his head into the clouds. In front of the statue we saw a multitude of people in different attires and postures. Some, wearing long white robes and garlands on their heads, were dancing to the jingling tones of monotonous music; others were burning sacrifices in blazing bonfires; while still others, with anxious faces, crawled on their knees over sharp stones to touch their lips to that black marble; and off to one side, shackled slaves with bowed heads were waiting to see if they would not soon be led to slaughter in honor of that colossus.

“Who is that?” I asked of my leader.

“A symbol. A petrified figment of their own imagination, which has become their ruler, their tyrant. It is for his sake that their dances are performed, incense and fires are burned, their tears and blood are shed. In the name of the future about which they know nothing they kill the present which they see and hear. In order to save themselves from imaginary and dubious sufferings, they inflict real and immeasurable torments upon themselves and their brothers. But the hour of freedom has already struck. Behold, how the dancers have given up their dancing and in self-abandoned mockery are ridiculing one another. Behold, how the offerers of sacrifices are stamping out the fires. Behold, how those who went

to implore for mercy of the black marble are putting up resistance to free themselves and are pelting him with stones. Behold, how the shackles are falling off the slaves who had been fated for bloody sacrifices. We have arrived at the right time."

And having pronounced these words, my leader seized the ax with both hands and struck the black pedestal. The huge structure started to sway, the stone colossus trembled to its very summit and with a clatter began to shed the gilded rays from its head and the arrows from its hand. Then, with a tremendous crash, the colossus toppled over to the ground, breaking into pieces and strewing the ground far and wide with the broken fragments of its stone body. Bewildered and frightened throngs of people stood silently by, only the ones attired in gala-dress with garlands on their heads broke out into tearful lamentation and wailing, crying out:

"The world-order has been overturned! The foundation of all existence has fallen into ruin! Woe! Woe!"

But my leader, ignoring their vociferations, addressed the people:

"Be not distressed! Learn how to be free — and you shall be free! Desire to be brothers — and you shall be brothers! Know how to live — and you shall stay alive!"

And he went away, bridging a way for himself amongst the ruins. In speechless wonder, I followed him.

"Who are you?" I finally asked.

Then for the first time, he turned his face toward me and uttered gently:

"Do you not recognize me?"

I gave no reply. The sun seemed to have risen from that side, and I was compelled to lower my eyes before that resplendence of power, triumph and hope emanating from his countenance.

"I do recognize you with all my heart and with all my being, but I dare not give utterance to your name," I replied.

"I am the Hower who hews down the obstacles on mankind's road, obstacles placed there by savagery,

ignorance and ill will. You have seen a part of my work?"

"I have."

"Do you know wherein lies my strength?"

"I can feel... I have guessed..."

"Do you recognize its significance? And do you understand its goal?"

"I understand and I desire to catch sight of its reflection at least from afar."

"You must be able to renounce your desire, then the goal shall be foremost in your mind. You were not destined to see, but rather, to follow the path of truth and freedom. Are you willing to take this task upon yourself?"

"I am willing."

"Will you tread the thorny paths unwaveringly?"

"I will."

"Go then."

And he gave me the ax.

1886

Translated by  
Cecilia Dalway

## THE PLAGUE

### I

Returning from the refectory, the prior of the Jesuit monastery in Ternopil, yawning lightly, was preparing to lie down for a nap after a good dinner. Since it was a hot summer day, he took off his cassock and boots. At that moment someone rapped on the door of his cell. The prior frowned, pulled a sour face, and waited a moment. It was only after a second knock that he said:

“Enter, please!”

Pater Gaudenti, a convent member, entered with a low, exaggeratedly humble bow.

“What is it you want, frater?” the prior asked him sternly.

“I wanted to ask you, clarissime,” the pater began, stopping at the threshold, “to hear me out. I wanted to talk with you about some things...”

“Why? Has something important occurred?” the prior asked sharply.

“N-no,” the pater drawled, “nothing exceptional... no, God forbid! But I wanted to ask you to hear some of my thoughts and ideas...”

“Ah, your thoughts!” the prior spoke with a sarcastic tinge in his voice. “But couldn’t those thoughts and ideas of yours be postponed until a more appropriate time?”

“Of course, of course they could be!” the pater quickly agreed. “Only, if you’ll pardon me, clarissime, I thought that the present time would be the most appropriate. There are no classes now, and apart from that, you will also soon be sending your regular monthly report to our most reverend father, the provincial superior.”

"Report!" the prior almost cried out, and he completely woke from the drowsiness into which he was beginning to be lulled by the pater's low and monotonous speech, accompanied by the buzzing of large flies on the panes of the barred cell windows and the chirping of the sparrows in the branches of the dense cherry trees hanging down to the very window. "Report!" he repeated and glanced at the pater from under drawn brows. "What have you to do with my report?" "God forbid!" pater Gaudentiy excused himself hurriedly. "I know very well, clarissime, that the report is your business, and precisely because of that I venture to trouble you with my petition, that you take my thoughts and ideas and present them in your report to the father, the provincial superior, if you find them worthy and at all useful, of course."

But the prior, even though he didn't take his watchful eyes off pater Gaudentiy, was no longer listening to his insinuating, somewhat liquid and monotonous talk. A new thought struck him suddenly and it captured his entire attention. He knew that every pater had the right to secretly present "papers" to the provincial superior, that is, to carry tales about the other brothers, including him, the prior. The affairs had been such, however, that until recently the Ternopil convent had been like a family and there had been no unpleasantness on account of informers. But this year, suddenly, there had come a change for the worse. All of a sudden two paters were transferred from Ternopil to a mountain cloister in Tyrol, which was considered a place of penal exile, and they were replaced by two others. From that time on it was as if a sack had been untied, pouring all sorts of censures, penances and other unpleasantness from Cracow on the unfortunate Ternopil convent. The prior and all the paters could not figure out who was doing that service to them. They suspected first one, then another in their midst, especially since all felt guilty of more than one indulgence and neglect of monastery discipline.

Pater Gaudentiy was somehow suspected least of all of being the author of that "nastiness." Firstly, because more than four years had passed since he

came to Ternopil and the first years of his stay with the Ternopil Jesuits had been so peaceful and happy. Secondly, pater Gaudentiy had the reputation among the rest of the brothers of being a prattler and even a simpleton. That reputation, naturally, could not have been much to the pater's liking, and yet he always sustained it in various guileless ways. It started and stuck to him mainly as the result of his vaunted "single-handed missionary crusade" to Lublin gubernia to conduct Catholic propaganda among the Uniates there. The crusade had ended with the not very heroic flight of the pater from the frontiers of Russia where, like the ancient prophet Jonah, he spent only three days, and from which he returned frightened and numb from a blow he received from a rifle butt in the powerful hands of a frontier guard. The pater described this feat of his with truly comic tragicalness, and his story caused the whole fraternity to roar with laughter every time he told it. Pater Gaudentiy himself, as if he did not even notice the impression he was producing, made faces and contorted his body as if he were reliving his tortures and, carried away with his tale, he would grow pale, shiver and sob in turn, which naturally sent his listeners into new paroxysms of laughter. At the same time the pater seemed so simple, frank and devoid of malice that it was difficult even to imagine that he could inform on his confreres.

But still, some vague prompting sent exactly this thought into the prior's head at the moment when the pater mentioned the monthly report. He recalled everything that he knew of pater Gaudentiy's past. He was the son of a poor Mazurian\* peasant. In 1847 the Tarnow bishop, Wojtarowicz, adopted him as his ward. After the bishop's death he studied in Gracow, then completed his studies in Rome, where he became a monk and entered the society "named after Jesus." The prior did not know what sort of a reputation Gaudentiy had in Rome, he only knew that some years later the general of the Jesuit Society, Becks, himself sent him on that mission to

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\* *Mazury* — ethnographical region in N Poland

Lublin gubernia, in which the pater achieved such brilliant "discomfiture." Only now, on thinking over all those circumstances, did the prior come to the conclusion, in a flash, that, recognizing the exceptional importance of the "position" of Catholicism in Lublin gubernia and in Russia generally, the leaders in Rome must assuredly have given deep consideration to who was to be entrusted with such a mission, and therefore they must have had some guarantee that the young monk could acquit himself well. But this meant that pater Gaudentiy could not be such a dolt and so naive as he pretended. If that was so, everything suddenly became clear to the prior and pater Gaudentiy grew in stature in his eyes, though he himself probably never noticed it. The entire conduct of the silly pater immediately took on a completely different meaning, achieving the dimension of a cleverly conceived and ably executed truly Jesuitic intrigue. The prior, moreover, had long sensed that they were dissatisfied in Rome with the activities of the Ternopil convent, and that they expected something more of it, since it was their easternmost outpost. Unconsciously he felt that some sort of change was coming. And now, looking intently out of the corners of his eyes at pater Gaudentiy, he guessed, not without cause, that here was the prophet or even the defender of that new orientation in the Order's activity, who could sweep him aside as he had swept away the fraters exiled to Tyrol.

Under the influence of these thoughts and conjectures, which flashed swiftly through his mind, the prior's countenance took on a somewhat perplexed expression and after a moment's silence he said, rapidly and jerkily:

"So, that's how it is! Thoughts and ideas... Well, that's not a bad thing! Of course, of course, we'll consider them and jot them down... Be seated, reverendissime, be seated, if you please, right here! I am at your service."

A slightly ironical smile flashed across pater Gaudentiy's face when, bowing low, he sat down on a plain wooden chair at the table across from the prior.

"Well, clarissime," said the prior when they were

both seated face to face, "what are the ideas you wanted to tell me about?"

"I have only one thought, clarissime, that which we all share: the welfare and expansion of our holy Catholic Church," replied pater Gaudentiy. "You, clarissime, are aware better than I of the situation of our Church in this province. and particularly of our Order here, in the most eastern outpost of Catholicism, face to face, I would say, with the terrible enemy — Orthodoxy."

"Aha, it's clear I'm not mistaken," the prior thought. "This is he, the prophet of reform, who was sent here to spy on us. This is the informer! Well, that's fine. Now, at least, I know who I'm dealing with."

And turning to the pater, he said as though in perplexity:

"Pardon me, reverendissime, but I must confess that I don't quite understand what you are leading up to."

"I'll have the honor of explaining that right away," the pater replied hurriedly. "I humbly beg of you to hear me out. I only wanted to assure you that I never permitted a doubt to enter my mind about your profound sagacity, accurate knowledge and correct estimation of the situation in which we find ourselves. And if I presumed on my own initiative to gather certain information that has to do with the present situation, and to draw some conclusions from it, this in no sense was because of any distrust of your leadership, but rather because of a passionate devotion to our common sacred cause."

The prior's perplexity grew into impatience. He felt a certain loathing and hatred of this scraping hypocrite and informer who sat before him, but at the same time he could not deny that in this matter he was acting completely in the spirit of the rules of the Jesuit Order. But since in this instance the matter involved the prior personally, the man in him took precedence over the Jesuit. Guessing that before him sat his secret enemy and informer, he decided to talk to him straight, without the usual hypocrisy. "I'm still the superior here," he thought, "and I must let him know this, come what may!"

"You know, reverendissime," he spoke in a sharp

and contemptuous tone, "you should speak to me simply and frankly. I was never in Rome, I have never studied diplomacy, and I was always of the opinion that diplomacy concealed a great deal of insincerity. And moreover, I figure we're our own kind of people, so let us talk without unnecessary beating about the bush."

Pater Gaudentiy again smiled ironically, as if pleased that he had so quickly broken down the old prior's patience and made him show his dislike of him so openly.

"As you wish, clarissime," he said in that same exaggeratedly humble voice. "My soul is innocent of any taint of insincerity, especially toward my superior, who to me should be second only to God."

"Get to the business, reverendissime, to the business!" the prior interrupted him.

"My business is the following," the pater continued with imperturbable calm. "You are aware, clarissime, to what aim and task our holy Order is dedicated in this province. The sacred word spoken by the most holy Pope Urban—'*Oriente[m] esse convertendum*'\* — contains our entire program. The way to achieve its realization should always and everywhere be the object of our constant and most earnest concern."

"And do you consider, then, that we are not paying enough attention to this task of ours?" asked the prior with unconcealed dissatisfaction.

"God forbid, clarissime, God forbid! I never thought that! And then, who are those 'we'? That means I'm part of them, too... No, no, that's not what I was leading up to. Just listen! It probably is no secret to you (with these words an ironic tone again tinged his voice) that in the eastern part of this province there live people who consider themselves to be of the same race as the people on the other side of the Zbruch River. But the kernel of the matter is this: those people supposedly belong to the Catholic Church, yet at the same time they consider themselves members of the Grek, that is the Orthodox

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\* The East must be converted (L.)

Church. This... this duality of religious consciousness between two enemy camps — what do you think, clarissime, would that not evoke certain doubts and fears?”

“So that’s what!” the prior practically cried out. “You consider the position of the Uniate Church to be dual and therefore ambiguous?”

“That’s it, clarissime,” pater Gaudenti replied sternly. “Not only that, but I consider the very existence of this dual, neutral ground here on the border to be one of the foremost barriers to the spreading of our influence on the other side of the boundary line.” “Hmmm... in any case, the idea is interesting,” the prior said coldly and semi-contemptuously through set teeth, “and I would like very much to know your proofs, the facts that led you to such a conclusion.”

“Oh, as to that, clarissime, I’m quite prepared,” the pater cried gaily. “Take their priests, for example! Of what benefit is it to us that they consider themselves Catholic priests when they live with wives? Where a person should be working for Catholicism, giving himself completely and without equivocation to the promotion of its interests, they listen to their wives and act as their family relations dictate!”

“All that is true, but these are all old matters that must have been discussed many times even before you thought of them,” the prior noted querulously. “What’s the use of talking about it if it isn’t within our power to change things? This matter has been decided and endorsed by the Synods and the Apostolic Throne.”

“We’ll come back to that later,” the pater replied with unruffled confidence. “But here is another circumstance. Does not the kind of upbringing given the younger generation of priests by those Greek Catholics seem foolish and unreligious to you? What sort of priest will he make, the young man who is to be consecrated to the cloth tomorrow, to partake of the greatest mystery of the Church, if today, instead of preparing for that sacred act with contrite spirit, he’s making the rounds of the feasts, dancing the ‘kozachok’ and ‘kolomeika,’ turning the heads of priests’ daughters and thinking only about finding

a bride with a rich dowry, so he can get rid of the debts he piled up in the seminary?"

The pater, evidently, was becoming inflamed and carried away by the current of his own thoughts. His speech, at first languid and sugary, became lively and passionate, and the prior began to listen with greater attention.

"It's not fitting, that's true," he said, "but only it seems to me that we haven't the power to change it." "It is only the words of Christ and the dogmas of the holy Catholic Church that cannot be changed by anyone," the pater spoke heatedly. "All other things are human decisions made at definite times to meet temporary needs. As conditions change, the needs also change, and new ones arise in their place — and that is why the decisions must be changed to suit new conditions and needs. You, clarissime, referred to former Bulls and Synods in which the position of the Uniate Church was defined. Do not forget that all this was two or three hundred years ago, when Poland, a powerful Catholic state, existed here, when Orthodoxy was on the downgrade, and the Catholic Church could make concessions to local traditions without injury to its own might and esteem. Now the situation has changed! Now both friends and foes are ready to consider any concessions made by Catholicism to be proof of its actual weakness. Now, clarissime, when we have actually become weaker, we must at least pretend that we are strong by applying the kind of measures that are applied by the strong."

The prior listened to this fiery harangue with wide-open eyes. He had not expected such passion and such a broad view of the question from a common pater. There could be no doubt that a rather big-time agent was sitting before him.

"Well, suppose we agree that it's so," he said, "and that everything can be changed. Still it would be interesting to hear what you intend to do, and how?"

"Oh, it's only necessary to have a good knowledge of how the matter stands at present for the line of conduct to become clear of itself. We must clearly

realize that the position of this so-called Union is very shaky, that at the present time it's a tree without roots: it has departed from Orthodoxy, yet it hasn't come over to Catholicism. Now, tell me, can anything be more foolish than this demand for some kind of autonomy, for a people's church, which the Uniates are making? Why, the whole strength of the Catholic Church lies in the fact that it is monolithic and centralized, and that it always holds to the principle: he who isn't with us, is against us. Autonomy, neutrality in time of war—that's the same as treason. That's why we should first of all root all those yearnings for autonomy and confirm Catholicism *sans phrase*,\* and only then will we have a powerful lever in our hands for further struggle with the East."

Pater Gaudenti paused to catch his breath. His forehead was spangled with beads of sweat and flecks of white foam appeared at the corners of his mouth. The prior sat silent, with an expression of deep thought on his full, glistening countenance. Finally he said:

"Well, reverendissime, your ideas are very interesting and I'll see to it, of course, that they are brought to the attention of those who should know about them. It even seems to me that the people themselves will not be opposed to such a project. I know the Uniate populace of this city fairly well and I see that they very readily attend Latin Mass in the Roman Catholic churches. I have often been to the Catholic pilgrimages in Milyatin, Kokhavin and Kalvaria, and I've seen for myself how the masses of Uniate people gather at those affairs. That's what leads me to think that the local people themselves prefer the Latin ritual, perhaps, to the Greek, and will not oppose the reforms you have probably planned."

"The facts you have mentioned, clarissime, are valuable and interesting in themselves," the pater replied, "but unfortunately, they're only one side of the medal. You point to the Latin pilgrimages in Kalva-

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\* without phrases (of courtesy), without more ado (Fr.)

ria and Milyatin, so I'll point to the Uniate pilgrimage at Hoshiv and Zarvanitsya, where every year nearly the same number of people gather as they do at the ones you mention. This means, therefore, that here we have to do mainly not with rituals, but with the fact, evidently, that the people like to go on pilgrimages without caring very much where or what kind of pilgrimages. But I'll bring yet another fact to your attention. Every year thousands of these Uniates tramp to Orthodox Pochaïv, even though that's on the other side of the border, while the Catholic pilgrimages of the Dominican Fathers in neighboring Pidkamin, on this side of the border, right across from Pochaïv, cannot reach such fame no matter what they do. There's a fact worth thinking about."

"But, if you'll pardon me, reverendissime, how do you explain that?" asked the puzzled prior.

"That's exactly where the difficulty lies, for you can't explain this fact at all, actually, without admitting the idea that not only is the Union hypocritical and should not be tolerated from political considerations at the present time, but also that it has proved completely incapable of bringing up the popular masses in a religious manner, having inculcated in them an indifference to the most basic religious verities, dual faith, or even the complete absence of all religious conviction."

"Come, that's an exaggeration!" the prior attempted to argue.

"No, clarissime," pater Gaudentiï interrupted him, forgetting all respect for his superior's rank. "First hear me out, and don't pass judgment until later! Not long ago, returning from Pidkamin I caught up with a group of those pilgrims not far from the village of Tovstokhlopi. I entered into conversation with them.

"'From where does God bring you?' I asked them.

"'Why, from the pilgrimage,' a man who was walking at the head of the pilgrims told me.

"'Where did you go for the pilgrimage?' I asked further.

"'Why, to Pochaïv.'

“‘To Pochaïv? Well, and how did you like it there?’

“‘Why, and how should we like it? Fine,’ answered the man artlessly.

“‘Fine? Have fear of God!’ I couldn’t help exclaiming. ‘What is there so fine? Don’t you know that the divine service there is schismatic?’

“‘God knows,’ answered the man, scratching the back of his head, ‘if it’s schismatic or not schismatic. It’s not for us to judge. For us it’s enough to know that they praise God there as well. And we know another thing,’ he added and looked me over sarcastically, ‘that they charge less for confession there than in Pidkamin, and besides they heat the church there in winter.’”

Finishing his tale, pater Gaudentiï fell silent and sat for several moments for greater effect with his arms outstretched, his mouth half-open, and his eyes staring, as if transfixed with shock and anger.

“In your opinion, slarissime,” he asked, breaking the pause, “is not that eloquent proof of the complete collapse of religious sentiment among the masses of the Uniate people? Why, you would think that the light of Christ’s faith had not yet touched those people!”

“Yes, that’s true,” the prior sadly confirmed. “It cannot be left that way. By the way, do you know where those people were from?”

“From Tovstokhlopi. I got that information right off.”

“Who is their priest there?”

“Chimchikevich.”

“Who’s that? Chimchikevich? Somehow I don’t recall hearing that name before.”

“And no wonder, for there is a real antediluvian priest. He’s terribly old and hasn’t gone out of the village anywhere for some thirty years now. He’s a freak, not a priest. I dropped in to see him one time a year ago when I was passing through, and I became acquainted with him.”

“All right, we’ll talk about that later,” the prior interrupted him. “Now tell me what conclusions you have arrived at and what means you advise for the realization of your intentions?”

"I presume to suggest the following proposals for the approval of the superior bodies. First of all, to bring our influence to bear on the common people in the villages and townships, ridding them of the contamination of dual faith and systematically implanting the Catholic spirit in them."

"Fine, but by what means?" asked the prior.

"The usual means. We must systematically organize processions and missions in the villages and towns, especially along the border, with the greatest of ceremony and with appropriate sermons. And we must influence the literate in the cities and villages through the publications that would be appropriate to this purpose, as is already being done by us with such success in the western part of Galicia."

"I am in complete agreement with you, reverendissime," said the prior, and he pressed the hated pater's hand. "All that is wisely conceived, and I believe your advice will receive the full approval of the authorities."

"*Non mihi, clarissime,*" the pater replied humbly, "*sed ad majorem gloriam nominis Jesu.*" \* As to the Uniate priesthood, we should divide it into two categories. There are foxy ones among them, who verbally acknowledge union with Rome, but in their hearts they lean to Orthodoxy and under the guise of 'purifying the ritual' they are striving to push the Union into Orthodox forms, taking it farther and farther away from the holy Roman Church. We must consider them our vicious enemies and deal with them as we do with an enemy in war. They must be watched continually and as soon as they provide the slightest excuse for it, they must be exposed to the authorities and before their own flock. The second category is composed of the antediluvians, men who are poor in spirit and naively good-natured. There are more of those, of course, and they must be won with kindness, we must mellow them down in all sorts of ways and slowly transform them into our tools... At the same time we must pay the utmost

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\* It's not for me, clarissime, but for the greater glory of Jesus' name (L.)

attention to see that the hierarchy is selected from among the supporters of our tendency and to rear the youth in our spirit, and especially we must make certain that the younger generation of priests is ordained only in celibacy. Along with that, it is self-evident that the Uniates must be strictly forbidden to go on Orthodox pilgrimages to Pochaïv or even to Kiev.”

The prior actually beamed with pleasure, pater Gaudentiy's plan seemed so simple, logical and grand to him. All that Josafat Kuncevicz, William Rutsky, Sheptitsky, Rillo\* and other mergers of rites could not achieve — and they failed exactly because they merged the tops without going down to the roots, satisfying themselves with changing forms without changing the spirit of the masses — all this now seemed easy and near of attainment. Such a simple and seemingly natural line of development was shown in regard to it all that one only wondered why no one heretofore had stumbled on such true and clear clues. The Jesuit and the Pole rose simultaneously in the old prior's heart, for though he had served the Order many years now, yet he had preserved a spark of patriotism from the days of his youth in the shape of vague day-dreams of a great, powerful and strictly Catholic Poland, stretching from sea to sea. All that would be torn away from Orthodoxy and the Union, in his opinion, would fall of itself into the lap of Catholicism and Poland. Unable to control his joy, the prior rushed to embrace pater Gaudentiy.

“Oh, reverendissime! Having heard your plan, even

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\* *Kuncevicz, Josafat* (1580—1623) — Uniate bishop of Vitebsk (now in Byelorussian SSR). Assassinated by the local burghers in 1623 for his notoriously cruel suppression of Orthodoxy

*Rutsky, Velyamin* (1574—1637) — Kiev Uniate metropolitan (1613—1637)

*Sheptitsky, Andriy* (1865—1944) — count, rich landlord. From 1900 headed the Uniate Church, was one of the chief inspirers of Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism. During the Second World War collaborated with the Nazis

*Rillo, Maximillian* — Uniate bishop of Przemyśl (now in Poland)

I, who am old, have grown younger!" he exclaimed. "Truly, your ideas are worthy of close consideration, and you may be sure that I'll apply all my efforts and influence that they be carried out. And, besides, it seems you yourself maintain some sort of correspondence with the authorities, don't you?"

This question was trown in so innocently, so mildly, and flowed so naturally from the relations that had arisen between them just a moment ago, that pater Gaudenti, intoxicated with his triumph and with the great impression his oratory had made on the prior, was not able to turn to falsehood on the spur of the moment.

"Well, yes," he said, "sometimes, in the line of duty, I have..."

The prior's small eyes glistened with malicious glee. Then, smiling good-naturedly and pressing the pater's hand, he hurriedly chimed in:

"Of course, of course! That's what I thought, that it was you who sometimes, in the line of duty, naturally, writes information against our brethren! Well, reverendissime, that's commendable, even our articles command us to do so. No, no, don't look at me in such confusion! I'm not saying anything! To the contrary, I'm even glad. You are such an able and experienced man and you'll inevitably go very far, and, after all, that's the only way we have open! I will pass your ideas and plans on to the proper place, and please be sure to do me a favor and not forget me in your prayers and your... he-he-he... reports!"

With these words, bowing politely and chattering without pause, the prior led the stunned and baffled pater Gaudenti out into the hallway and then locked the door of the cell in his very face.

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A month had passed since that conversation. Again pater Gaudenti was in the prior's cell, sitting across from the prior with humble and self-effacing mien, ready to hear why he had been summoned.

The pater's life had not been happy during that month. Nobody had so much as uttered a word of rebuke or shown the slightest sign of unfriendliness or anger, and yet his former comic role had abruptly ended, everybody turned away from him, and those who had previously revelled in listening to his tales and jokes now either passed him without a word or else only exchanged some brief, curt phrases with him. Whenever they encountered him the faces of the brethren immediately became long, their lips pursed, and their whole appearance became somehow sour and pious. This whole month had been one unending *silentium*\* for pater Gaudentiy, the more irksome because the prior had not allowed him to go a step outside the monastery walls, and had not sent him, as he used to, to preach either in the city or in suburban churches.

The pater endured this general unfriendliness toward him without flinching, but still you could see that it hurt him to the quick and that he regarded it as a great injustice. After all, he had done nothing unlawful! Who knows, maybe every one of the brethren was doing the same thing on the quiet! But there they were, chummily chatting while they walked the monastery grounds, laughing, joking, slapping each other on the shoulder, picking ripe cherries, while he was avoided as if he were contaminated.

"It's all that sybarite's intrigue, that lousy prior's," the pater ground his teeth with rage as he walked up and down his solitary cell. "But just you wait," he shouted and shook his fist at the wall, "my time will come! We'll settle accounts yet!"

Therefore it was no wonder that all the clouds of pater Gaudentiy's wrath and hate gathered over the head of the prior and that every meeting with his "pastor, next to God" was very hard to bear, all the harder because a deep sense of shame and a wounded human dignity was added to the anger and the hatred.

The prior understood all this very well, but he also understood that once he had been uncovered as a spy,

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\* silence (L.)

pater Gaudentiy had become impotent against him, so he tried in every way to prolong the tortures of the hapless pater and make them more painful. Therefore he ordered him to sit across from himself in the refectory — this was the place of honor, where usually sat the member of the fraternity who of all men in the monastery was considered next to the prior. But the prior did not deign to say a single word to Gaudentiy, while conversing with those who sat on either side of him, and never ceased to needle him with his piercing good-naturedly sarcastic glances. Under the prior's looks pater Gaudentiy felt as if he were on fire in his place of honor — he immediately sensed that the prior wanted to shame him publicly, and therefore he sat without a word, hunched over, his face bent down, striving not to see anyone or hear anything. He would not have ventured to speak to a neighbor for anything in the world, for he knew for certain that the latter would pretend not to have heard him and would turn away, while a quiet, biting, serpentine whisper would spread about the table. Thanks to this innocent slyness on the part of the devout prior, the joint meals became an incessant torture to pater Gaudentiy; a spoonful of food refused to go down his gullet, he bit each piece of bread as if he were eating his own flesh, and he returned from dinner sweating, panting and broken down. During that month he had lost much weight, his eyes had sunk and his lips had paled and stretched more than before.

But once an extraordinary event took place: the prior had the pater called to his cell. There is no use denying that the pater went in a not very pious frame of mind. The prior greeted him with his usual mocking-sarcastic look and lit into his talk without letting him say a single word:

“Ah, yes, ah yes, reverendissime, what did I tell you! Be seated, please be seated, right there... It happened exactly as I told you it would. Here's a letter from the provincial father, and it is very, actually very gracious to you! Of course, that's not to be wondered at; you have fully earned such confidence on the part of our superiors!”

Saying this, the prior unfolded the provincial head's letter and placed it on the table before him. Pater Gaudentiy stretched out his hand to take the letter. "No, reverendissime, pardon me," said the prior, laughing, and he covered the letter with his broad beefy palm, "but the letter is not addressed to you. I'm only supposed to tell you its contents, namely, that your propositions have been favorably received and that you yourself are instructed to carry out the first one, that is the establishment of missions and preaching sermons wherever and whenever it appears to you to be necessary. Of course, we are all obliged to assist you in this matter, but according to the plans from higher-up, the business must at first be conducted secretly, without attracting attention, just the way you know how," he prior could not refrain from pricking Gaudentiy.

"The will of our superiors is the will of God," the pater said modestly and humbly, "and I am prepared to get to business right away."

"Now, that's splendid!" said the prior. "But tell me, in that case, what your plan is and what assistance we should offer you."

"I would like to conduct a mission in that same village of Tovstokhlopi, which I had occasion to mention in my conversation with you."

"Umhuh, I remember!" the prior confirmed. "You even named the local priest — some queer name..."

"Chimchikevich," the prior replied.

"Umhuh, umhuh, Chimchikevich. What sort of a phenomenon is he?"

"A very interesting phenomenon," the pater answered, "and it is because of that very phenomenon that I must go to Tovstokhlopi to launch my missionary activity. Just think: a gaffer of eighty, a queer character, practically no education, no understanding at all of the dogmas of the faith — in a word, an antediluvian phenomenon. And at the same time he's an awfully good-hearted oldster, naive and trusting as a child.

So, on the one hand, missionary work is needed very much in Tovstokhlopi, and on the other, that's exactly where it will be easiest to start, because

Chimchikevich is less able than anyone else to offer any kind of resistance."

"Well, that's fine! God give you help! But why do you think that missionary word is needed more in Tovstokhlopi than anywhere else?"

"Just consider, clarissime, that this antediluvian person has been living there for fifty years, and what education does he provide for his flock? Just consider that he preaches only twice or three times a year: and what sermons! It's a comedy, no less! The neighboring priests repeated them to me verbatim, because those sermons have become proverbial among them. 'Children, today Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a Jewish town, in a poor and squalid stable. Exactly! And I would advise you not to get into a wrangle with the tax commissioner, because what will you gain from it? Huh? His is the hand and his is the power. That's what. God's blessing on you a-a-a-all!...' Here's another sample: 'My dear children, today Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and tomorrow will be patron saint's day. Now remember, don't any one of you dare to get drunk or to raise any rumpus. Heaven forbid! Strangers will be gathered here, and what sort of reputation would our community have, eh?... And the commons, don't you think it's high time you got together and figured out what to do about it?... I hear that a renter is making up to you, wants to lease it or something... Eh, elder? Remember, if you dare let the renter into the village, I won't even want to see you any more! I won't even want to hear of you any more, let alone what! This we utter unto you, with all our soul and all our thought!...' "

The prior guffawed unrestrainedly.

"Oh, you're killing me, reverendissime! Hahaha! Stop, for the Lord's sake! Can it really be possible?"

"That's the absolute truth, clarissime. But what more do you want, it's enough to look at the way he lives to be convinced that you may expect even worse things from him. He lives in a squalid peasant shanty, which is old and leans to one side; he lives completely alone, except for an old servant woman Feska, who is deaf in one ear, and an ancient servant Pro-

kip who is blind in one eye. On its own initiative the community once had built Chimchikevich a fine residence in the main street, just across from the church; at first he wouldn't move into the new house for anything; when at last they made him do it, he lived in it less than a fortnight, walking about the spacious rooms as if in a daze, continually complaining that it was too large for him and made him feel as if he was living in a steppe. So finally he went and moved back into his 'hibernacle' one night and stocked grain in that new spacious parsonage as if it were a barn. You can imagine what a scandal there was in the village and in the whole district when unruly sheaves began to stick out of all the windows of the new residence. Nothing in the world could bring the old codger to move back in there to live. The community, in order to avoid becoming a general laughing-stock, was compelled to thresh the priest's grain which was stored in that new residence as fast as they could, and then to turn it into a community meeting hall, library and granary, and to leave the priest in his old nest."

"Well, you've chosen a fine opponent, reverendissime!" said the prior, wiping away the tears that were rolling down his face from laughter with a silk handkerchief, but yet injecting a tone of sarcasm in his voice. "With such an opponent the battle will necessarily be brief and victory is assured."

"That's how it is, clarissime!" the pater replied humbly. "When the rye is ripe, the stalks themselves bend to the sickle."

"Fine, fine, go with God's blessing to the harvest! When do you expect to leave?"

"I think there's no reason to waste time. I can deliver my first sermon in Tovstokhlopi next Sunday."

"Excelent. Today is Monday. I'll write your Chimchikevich today, so he get everything ready, and you can set out directly after divine service on Saturday."

"As you will, clarissime!" replied the pater.

They both rose. The prior walked with the pater to the door and answered his bowing and scraping only with his usual good-naturedly jeering smile.

After early mass on Saturday the pious pater Gaudentiy climbed into the monastery carriage that had been prepared for him and gayly drove out of town. The day was wonderfully fine. Wherever the eye lit on the fields, sickles flashed, scythes strummed, songs, laughter and shouts of working folk rang out. Summer field work was in full swing under the burning rays of the sun.

After the suffocating monastery air pater Gaudentiy took pleasure and revelled doubly in the broad, free expanse, the fresh, scented breeze that was wafted down from the far-away pine forests of Brodi district, and the grand, although monotonous Podolian landscape.

While the road to Tovstokhlopi was good, still it was some distance away. It was already past lunch time when the light-spring carriage, rumbling easily along the hard dirt road, entered the small courtyard of the Tovstokhlopi parsonage.

"Ah, reverendissime!" exclaimed Father Chimchikevich from a shed, seeing pater Gaudentiy from a distance as he climbed down from the carriage. "Ashes should be strewn at the feet of such rare guests! What storms, what rainclouds have driven you to our parts, huh?"

Pater Gaudentiy did not reply, only smiled sweetly, came up to the old man with wide open arms and warmly embraced him.

"I beg you to come in! Don't spurn our home!" Chimchikevich invited him, hopping around the Jesuit. "Prokip, hey Prokip," he turned to his servant and comrade, "get some oats and hay for the horses and help to unharness them!"

"If you please, Father, maybe he'll drive away soon?" Prokip growled lazily glancing with hostility at the uninvited guest out of his one good eye.

"Now, now, he will drive away, that's true," Chimchikevich replied, laughing good-naturedly, "he didn't come to take over the parish, that's certain. But he won't be leaving soon, Prokip, not soon. We won't

let him get away very soon. Hey, Feska, where are you, old one?"

"Here I am, dear Father. What is it you want?"

"Fix us a bit to eat, granny. Understand?"

"Should I get the gander?" the deaf old lady asked, and Chimchikevich, not wishing to shout more loudly, began to explain to her with his fingers what it was he wanted.

"Now there's a true picture of this whole church," pater Gaudentiy thought, as he watched and listened to everything that was going on about him, "the shepherd is senile, and his flock is half deaf and half blind!"

But now Father Chimchikevich, taking hold of him and pattering with his feet, began to lead the pater to his living room, which simultaneously served him as bedroom, dining room and office.

"Be seated, reverendissime! Be seated!" he begged, drawing up a plain wooden chair, while the Jesuit was examining his home. To tell the truth, there was not much to examine. The living room was small, clean and simply furnished with wooden furniture; in the corner stood a wooden bed, covered with an old-fashioned bedspread of village make, but very beautifully made; at one side stood a desk, heaped high with parish registers in strong leather binding, on which, contrary to the general village custom, not a bit of dust was to be seen; in the other corner stood a small bookcase with glass panes, and on the wall under an old-fashioned picture of Saint Nicholas there hung around an oat wreath with red guelder rose berries plaited in it. In the middle of the living room stood a large, square oaken table, covered with a lace tablecloth, and in a wooden bowl on it lay freshly cut golden-amber honeycombs, which filled the entire living room with a strong honey aroma.

"It's as if I knew visitors were coming, my soul felt it!" Chimchikevich spoke gayly. "After lunch something seemed to urge inside me: go and bring some honey! And I have wonderful honey, reverendissime! Just be so kind and try a little of it!"

The pater still sat dumb as a fish. He was somehow

confused by the complete naivete and good nature of this old gaffer. But he couldn't resist the temptation of the aromatic honeycombs. Pulling his chair close to the table, he took a finely carved wooden spoon and slowly sucking out the honeycombs, he began a conversation with Chimchikevich. And of course, all the while Chimchikevich spoke only in his own tongue, Ruthenian, while the Jesuit employed the most select Polish, careful not to sully his tongue with a Ruthenian word.

"Ah yes, dear Father," the Jesuit began with the appearance of sincere satisfaction, "there's no doubt about it, that's fine honey you have, fine! No wonder your apiary is famous throughout the county. You can see right off that the beekeeper knows his vocation." "Fifty years, reverendissime, fifty years now I'm keeping bees, so why shouldn't I know their nature and their habits?"

"Fifty years!" the pater exclaimed, as if Chimchikevich had told him some extraordinary news. "So that's how it is! So you're priest for fifty years already?"

"Oh, no, I'm a priest for fifty-five years already," Father Chimchikevich replied simply. "Wait a bit! I was ordained at the time Napoleon was given a beating — at Waterloo or someplace! How long ago would that be? I think it was in 1815, wasn't it? That was a fine time, reverendissime. God forbid that I should live to see another like it!"

"You think so?"

"Of course, and why not? Well, and then for five years they moved me around the administrations. Oh, how I suffered then — the Lord preserve us! As they say, I was in fire and in shipwreck, I froze and was soaked... My late wife died in misery, too; and for us, reverendissime, our wife is the first and the last. And here I am, holding on in this place for fifty years now. Like that tree of God, wherever God plants it, there it grows so long as it's His divine will. Or what do you think, reverendissime, huh?"

"You've got a fine village, too, there's no denying it," the Jesuit continued as if developing further the thread of his earlier thought. "It's a pleasure to the

eyes to look on it when passing through. The fields are cultivated, the orchards, the gardens, the houses are new, the cattle is fat and sleek, everywhere one sees plenty and God's blessing..."

"Well, reverendissime, we work the best we can, 'In the sweat of thy brow, thou must get thy bread,' or however it is written in the book, what? And we do not forget others."

"I have heard so, Father, I have," the Jesuit picked it up. "The county administrator can't praise your community highly enough. 'Whether it's paying taxes or whatever, 'he says,' they're always the first, in keeping order in the community, or taking care of the roads and bridges, with them it's always as God said it should be. And if there's need of a collection to help fire victims or people ruined by the floods or the poor folks — Tovstokhlopi give like gentlemen.'"

"Like people, reverendissime, like people, not like gentlemen! The gentlemen are not very generous when it comes to such things. And we do as Christ has taught: give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and unto God what belongs to God. That's how, what?"

"Yes, it's like that," the pater said through set teeth, slightly bending his head to the side. "I won't argue with you about what belongs to the people and what to God. In this respect Tovstokhlopi can serve as the model for all other communities, and of course, the example was set by you, and no-one else. Everyone must acknowledge that. But what concerns the divine, the spiritual side..."

The pater did not finish his sentence, although, trying to evade such a seemingly painful subject. But Chimchikevich evidently did not suspect that there was anything painful in it, for he asked straight out:

"Well, and have you something to rebuke me with from that point of view? Speak out, speak, I'll gladly hear you out."

"No, no rebuke!" the pater replied at once, as if touched to the quick. "What right would I have to rebuke you for anything? God forbid! I only... well..."

for example, take this! The district school inspector just can't get over it. 'How strange it is,' he says, 'that the village is rich, decent, solicitous, and here five years now I keep troubling them, begging them and trying to convince them, and yet no matter what I do, I can't persuade them for anything in the world to establish a school in the village' "

"So that's it!" Father Chimchikevich exclaimed in a lively voice. "So the inspector has been complaining to you! Perhaps he has sent you here to convince us to open a school here?..."

"No, no, Father, nothing of the kind! I'm completely unfit for such service!"

"That's what I thought," said Father Chimchikevich, calming down. "And as to the inspector, although I wouldn't want to speak an evil word of him, but he is a fool and that's all. He was told once that so long as he'd be the inspector here, we wouldn't have a school, so why does he keep making trouble? I myself told him this quite clearly."

"You told him that? Now, that's interesting!"

"No, reverendissime, there's nothing interesting about it. Our people took a dislike to the inspector and they don't want him as the chief over our school. Why they do not, that's their own business. 'We got information from the neighboring villages,' they say, 'how he treats the teachers and how he orders them to treat the children, and we can see that we would not tolerate that in our village. So it's better that we shouldn't have a school at all, than that we should be continually fighting with the inspector and being punished God knows for what!'"

Pater Gaudentiŷ spread his arms wide with amazement.

"Well, I am compelled to tell you that that's completely wrong. Those are just plain peasant tricks. Well, if every official would have to win his subject's approval that would be a bit too thick. Really, that would be too much! And what did you have to say about it, Father? Did you actually remain silent? I think that it was your duty to explain to them that their stand was, if you'll pardon me, foolish and groundless. Why, by their action, on account of their

whim, they are depriving the entire younger generation of education!"

"Well, reverendissime, I couldn't have told them that with my hand on my heart."

"You couldn't? Why is that?"

"First of all, because they're right, and the inspector is there for the people and not the people for the inspector. Secondly, this did not deprive anyone of an education, because all the people in our village are educated, all the children can read and write much better than in those neighboring villages where there are schools."

"All the children can read and write!" the pater exclaimed amazed. "But there's no school in the village! How did this happen?"

"It's simple. All the fathers and mothers teach their children themselves."

"And how did they learn?"

"I taught them. For thirty years now I've had the rule that I won't marry an illiterate man and an illiterate maid from this village."

Pater Gaudentiý stared at Father Chimchikevich as at an outlandish monster. And the outlandish monster also goggled foolishly at the pater as if he couldn't understand what was so strange about the things he said.

After a few minutes of silence, Father Chimchikevich dragged a low stool from under the table, brought a basket from the hallway filled to overflowing with cabbage leaves and sat down on the stool. In that instant, as though at a signal, dozens of rabbits tore into the living-room through the partially opened door of a neighboring pantry, and hopping happily, converged on their master. Together with them a current of an unpleasant animal odor came into the living room, but Father Chimchikevich didn't notice it. The rabbits covered the old man like a mass of light varicolored moss. Some of them leaped onto his knees, others on his shoulders, his head and his hands, while the others rushed to the basket and began to chew the fresh leaves, moving their long ears and staring at the strange guest out of dozens of round eyes.

“Away with you!” Father Chimchikevich cried gently, shaking himself free of his soft-furred pets and scattering the cabbage leaves on the floor for them. The rabbits jumped off his knees and shoulders all together and ran to feed, while several stopped in front of their master, stood up on their hind paws and looked straight in his eyes, as if begging him not to chase them away from him.

“You see, reverendissime,” Father Chimchikevich broke the silence with a smile, “they’re dumb creatures, so to say, and yet they can be taught something and acquire habits. It’s only necessary for a man to do one’s best, to put his soul into the business, and then his work will have a soul, it will live. That’s how! But he who does not put his soul into the work, he’ll never find it; don’t you think so?”

It is not clear whether it was the smell of the rabbits, or that continually repeated question, or maybe the suspicion aroused in the pater’s soul that Chimchikevich was not as foolish as he seemed, or finally, all this taken together that brought the pater to a dither of nervous irritation. He was somewhat perturbed and decided to finish this conversation right there and then and to come straight to the point of the matter.

“I am in complete agreement with you, Father,” he said in an entirely different voice, stern and full of reproach. “Wherever the pastor does not impart true piety to his flock, there is no use looking for it.”

At these words Father Chimchikevich sprang from the chair as if he had been stung by a snake.

“What... what... what do you mean, reverendissime?” he asked in a trembling voice, as if something was boiling and lumping up inside of him. “Are you saying that against me?”

“Neither for nor against, just in general,” the Jesuit answered evasively.

“Meaning, that is, that I’m an old dolt, fooling around with bees and rabbits and not teaching my parishioners piety, eh?”

“Please, Father! Who says that?” the Jesuit cried.

“I know who says it, reverendissime, I know! You yourself just said it too! Well, maybe it’s really so!

Maybe I'm really a fool and not fit for anything! Why, for twenty years now all sorts of good friends keep writing reports on me to the consistory, saying I'm an ignoramus, that I'm useless, that I don't preach any sermons in the church, and that I do God knows what else. And all this they do 'with good intentions,' so to say. But, probably, none of them has thought how it would be for me, an old man, to listen to such censure. Please, have some pity on me, too. You can see that I have one foot in the grave already, and that if not today, then tomorrow I'll be squaring my accounts with God! Let me die in peace! Don't poison the few final moments that are left to me! Am I to blame that the Lord seems to have forgotten about me and doesn't take me to Him?"

The old man's voice broke down from excitement and two huge teardrops rolled down his withered, wrinkled cheeks. The Jesuit sat silent, his eyes downcast, and he tried not to look at Father Chimchikevich.

"I know very well," Chimchikevich resumed a little more calmly, "that pastors are now expected to know more and be able to do more, but I'm already too old to learn. Take the sacred dogmas, for example! Even in the seminary I didn't know much about them; and the way they taught us there at that time! Later I forgot everything I had learned. So how can I preach my peasants a sermon? If I started talking about the dogmas, I'm afraid that I'd be liable to spout some heresies yet. If I did, then for sure there would be so many complaints and reports sent in about me that I'd never wash myself clean of them. I will confess to you that to read from the pulpit what others have written and published is distasteful to me and my eyes don't serve me: and then there's always the rub that I don't understand them so very well either. And just to speak what comes to the tongue, well it's shameful and my conscience won't permit me. I know that I'm not a clever speaker. My parishioners would fall asleep, honest to God, they would fall asleep should I start talking about things that aren't directly connected with their lives. I haven't the gift to talk flowingly and logically about things that aren't closely connected with them. Now

tell me, reverendissime what am I to do? Give me your counsel! Shall I bring down the wrath of God upon me by using His sacred name in vain? I'd rather keep quiet and bring down the wrath of the consistory upon me."

"Of course," the pater agreed, "it's a greater sin to anger God than to anger the consistory. But how can you anger God if every Sunday you teach your parishioners the sacred faith and the Christian life?"

"Here's how I will anger Him: during my sermon everybody will fall asleep and I'll weave a lot of heresies to boot, that's what! I know myself well and I don't strive for what God has not given me. And to pretend, to act slyly, to teach people what I don't know myself — I'm too old for that, reverendissime, and my conscience won't let me."

"My God!" pater Gaudentiy spoke up. "Does that mean that your parishioners live like that, without learning the holy faith?"

"That's how they live," Father Chimchikevich replied, hanging his head on his chest. "Of course, they all read and know the catechism by heart, but they don't know any more than that, because I myself don't know any more, and I don't even understand everything in the catechism, so I can't explain it all to them. Well, what's to be done, reverendissime, if I don't understand? I tried to read theological books. But no go... Whether it's because of my weak eyes or my dulled memory, anyway I don't understand a thing. And here people come up sometimes and they ask: what is this and how are we to understand that? What can I tell them? Should I start lying, since I do not know for certain myself? So I tell them most often: 'My dear children! Understand it any way you want to, or don't understand it at all, it will be all the same to God. He Himself has said, it's not for you to fathom the seasons and the years. So leave it at that! See that you live in godly fashion and the rest will come out somehow.'"

Pater Gaudentiy even slapped his knees.

"Have fear of God, Father! Do you really say that to them?"

"Of course! I say what my conscience dictates."

“But what of the respect of the Church, which has been given the authority to teach and to point out the ways of the Lord?”

“Well, reverendissime,” Chimchikevich spoke practically with tears in his eyes, “it looks as if the Lord God did not want to grant me that respect, and since He hasn’t given me it, where am I to get it, eh?”

“In that case you should leave this place, for which you feel inadequate. Your conscience should trouble you night and day for that sin, that you are occupying such an important position, but aren’t performing the duties that go with it. Why, in this way you are leading your spiritual flock to the terrible abyss of impiety, barbarism and savagery! For what is man without faith, if not a beast? Your own conscience should tell you that!”

“What am I to do, reverendissime, if my conscience doesn’t tell me anything of the kind?”

“Why doesn’t it? Why not?”

“Because my parishioners are very far from atheism, ungodliness, or what was that strange name you gave it, reverendissime, eh?... much farther from it than the parishioners of other churches who sleep for two hours every Sunday through the sermon. I don’t preach but I teach them, simply, in conversations about home matters that are of interest to everyone. I understand this and so do they. ‘Don’t steal, don’t drink, don’t curse, don’t fight, help a person when he’s in trouble’... Will you believe me, reverendissime, that during the past ten years not one person from our village has been in jail? For thirty years now we don’t have a single crooked dealer here. We don’t have a school, but what a reading-room we have! It’s true that this appears funny, but what of it? Whoever thinks it funny let him laugh!” “All that’s very fine,” the pater agreed, “but it’s not enough.”

“Of course, it’s not enough,” Father Chimchikevich said in a lively manner, eyeing the Jesuit with a sly smile. “Have you driven through our village, reverendissime? Have you seen what it looks like? Just like one big orchard with houses scattered in it here and there. And in addition it is fenced from both sides with a whole forest of fruit trees! What? Maybe

I'm lying?.. And do you know, reverendissime, how that forest is called? Penance Wood, that's how. Why? It was a barren grazing land when I came here, believe me! 'The Waste'—that's how it was called. And then at confession, instead of the usual penance: the Lord's Prayer five times, 'Virgin Mary' five times and 'I Believe' once, I began to give each one of them such penances as to plant a fruit tree at first by his house, and later on that barren land, and if the sins were heavy, then several fruit trees. Well, in fifty years a forest has grown up and the whole village is covered with trees wherever there was space to plant them. The villagers have set up a treasury from the proceeds of the Penance fruit, and just out of the interest on the money they pay all the taxes, provincial, county, community and school taxes, and I won't even mention what goes to help the poor and the needy. What do you think, reverendissime, does such penance meet with God's favor, or not?"

"Do not blaspheme, Father!" the pater snapped sharply. "Who can know what meets God's favor and what doesn't! The ways of God are inscrutable! But insofar as my weak brain can judge, I tell you boldly: it is not favorable in His eyes and it cannot be!"

"Not favorable? Why is that?" Father Chimchikovich asked with undisguised wonderment.

"Because God demands a contrite and humble heart in doing penance, and what do you give Him? Furthermore, God demands that man should tear himself away as much as possible from all earthly things, from worldly vanities, but do not you with all your labors tie them down to earthly things instead? No, Father, your way is the way of error! God cannot bless such workings. To the contrary, God has even raised His hand over you and sends you the harbingers of His wrath, and woe unto you if you do not repent in time and return to the path of truth!" With these words the pater rose involuntarily and stretched out his right arm. His face shone, his eyes glittered, the sternness of an angered judge lined his forehead and his lips.

"Harbingers? What harbingers?" Father Chimchikevich asked, trembling and turning pale.

"That's where the misfortune lies, that you don't recognize them! He has sent you the most terrible spiritual contagion: spiritual blindness, double-faith and indifference!"

"Double-faith and indifference? What do you mean by that?"

"Very simply. Your flock cannot distinguish good from evil, Christ from Belial, the holy Catholic faith from the schism. Your spiritual sheep travel amiably across the border to Orthodox services. Isn't that something?"

"Oh, that's what you are getting at!" said Chimchikevich, breathing more easily and with a lighter heart. "Well, that's not such a terrible sin, it seems."

"Not a terrible sin!" the pater almost shouted.

"I don't think so. After all, they praise the same God, and they even do it the same way we do."

"The same God!" the pater waxed angry. "Then the Turks also praise the same God. So I suppose you would let your parishioners go to Turkish services?"

"Well now, reverendissime, that's going too far. I let them go to Latin services, only they themselves aren't very eager to go there, because they don't understand anything. But the Orthodox services are the same as ours. As to the dogmatic niceties that divide us, I don't understand them and neither do my peasants."

"Oh, Faather, Father!" pater Gaudenti said sorrowfully, wagging his head. "And you can say that! You, a Catholic priest, can speak like that and even act like it!"

"What of it, reverendissime? One sings the music he knows! Am I to blame that I speak and act only the way I know how?"

"That means that you must increase your knowledge, or else..."

"Or else what?"

"Or else find someone who will help you."

"And... who would help me?" Chimchikevich inquired naively.

"Is that such a big thing? I'm prepared to do it myself."

"You, reverendissime? In what way?"

"I can undertake to preach a sermon in your church not only tomorrow, but even every Sunday."

"How's that, tomorrow? Not only tomorrow?" Chimchikevich asked in a puzzled voice.

"But of course! Why, that's why I came here," replied the pater, in his turn puzzled by Chimchikevich's puzzlement.

"Why did you come?"

"To preach in your church tomorrow. You were informed of that, weren't you?"

"I? God save me! I was informed?"

"Of course! Our prior, in Ternopil, that is, was to write you about it!"

"Your prior! In the name of the Father and the Son!... But I do not know your prior!"

"How's that? Didn't he write you? Didn't you receive a letter?"

"I got some kind of letter this week," Chimchikevich replied in confusion, "but I didn't know who it was from or what it was about."

"Why didn't you know?"

"I didn't know, that's all. See, here it is! I took all kinds of pains to try to decipher it: it seemed that I could make out some letters, but not a single word! There's no use denying it, I gave up and put it away. Here it is, take a look, is it from your prior?"

And Father Chimchikevich handed the pater the prior's crumpled and soiled letter. The pater glanced at it, not knowing what to make of all this, and then he groaned: the letter was written in Latin, which Chimchikevich had managed to forget completely fifty years and more ago.

"So that's what was the matter!" the pater said after a moment's silence, during which he managed in his heart to damn the sly prior for playing such a trick on him. "What will we do now?"

"I don't know, reverendissime."

"At all costs I must preach in your church tomorrow. My authorities have ordered me to."

"Well,' Chimchikevich answered quietly, "go to it with God's help, reverendissime. Only what will my authorities say about this?"

"Your authorities? How's that?"

"Well, the metropolitan and consistory. Or maybe you have their permission?"

"No, but isn't that your responsibility?"

"Of course not. Without permission from my betters I cannot permit a priest of a different ritual to preach in my church."

Pater Gaudenti stood as if rooted to the spot. Here was a do! On account of such a foolish formality his whole mission faced failure! Oh, must bagatelles, the petty things of life to which he paid no attention and which sometimes can spoil the whole business, must they always dog his steps. But no, they can't, not in this case, at least! He began to walk the floor in nervous excitement. Suddenly he confronted Chimchikevich.

"So you say that you have no power to permit me to preach in the church?"

"I haven't, reverendissime."

"But can I preach beside the church, in the churchyard?"

"Yes, there you may."

"Well, that's fine. I'll preach in the churchyard."

"Good. Only you know, reverendissime. I'm an old, weak man. I'm afraid I may get into trouble over that."

"Who would make trouble for you?"

"The county chief, for instance. You know, the churchyard, after all, is a public place and a sermon is, after all, a speech. Our official is a strict man, he takes his duties seriously. He'll come dashing up here and ask: 'What's this, Father, some kind of meetings are being held in your village in a public place and speeches are being made without the permission of the authorities?' And what will I say to that?"

"Just laugh it off, Father!"

"Well, you may laugh, reverendissime, and may it give you health! But I am getting goose-pimples. Why should I look for trouble when I have none? Do you know what it would be better to do? You have

good horses and a light carriage, the road is good now: why don't you, pardon the suggestion, drive to the city and get official permission? I will gladly do everything that depends on me. Take that trouble, reverendissime, it will be for the glory of God, and I, old man that I am, will rest easier."

At first pater Gaudentiý had intended to argue and convince Chimchikevich that his fears were groundless, but the barely perceptible ironic note in the priest's final words struck like a bolt of lightning. He immediately perceived that he had underrated this oldster and that behind that childish simplicity and naiveté of his there was hidden something that was deeper, and out-of-the-ordinary "something on the mind." Without uttering another word, red-faced and angry, the pater grabbed his hat and rushed out on the porch.

"Harness up!" he shouted with all his might, noticing that the sun had already begun to sink and recalling that the city was a good two miles away.

"That damned priest!" he muttered, while waiting for his carriage to be brought. "He has worn me out completely! He appears to be as dumb as a log and yet he's as taut as bast. But I'm a smart one, too, to waste so much time for nothing! The devil take him with that permit! He managed to think something up, all right! How will I manage to get it today?"

"Aha, Father, if you please, how about it? Didn't I say that he would leave soon?" Prokip said to Chimchikevich with a smile as he closed the gate after the quest's departure.

"That's so, Prokip," Father Chimchikevich said sadly, "he's left, but he'll be back, if not today, then tomorrow."

"God preserve us!" Prokip cried. "What does he want of us, Father, please?"

"What does he want?" Father Chimchikevich repeated. "What does he want, you ask? Well, listen Prokip! You have known me a long time. What do you think: have I cared for the people of this community? Have I taught them good? Have I set them a good example? Was I a good priest to you?"

"Only a scoundrel would say otherwise!" Prokip cried. "You have been not a priest, but a true father to us! That's what you've been!"

"Don't talk like that, Prokip! I know my faults. But I never knew and never imagined to this day the things that Jesuit said to me."

"So that's a Jesuit? What did he say to you?"

"He said that my parishioners don't know God, but worship two gods, because they go to church both here and at Pochaïv, and they say that the God in Pochaïv is different from ours. D'ye hear, old fellow. And on that account he threatened us with divine punishment."

"So that's what he croaked about! May the crows croak over his carcass!"

"Do not curse, Prokip! He said we must therefore all be enlightened and converted to the true Jesuitic faith, and that he would do it."

"He? He should live that long! How is he going to go about converting us?"

"He will preach to us every Sunday."

"Is that all? Well, we've heard them preach before! That is nothing to get alarmed over! Let them talk. I thought maybe an order would come from the county, and the county would send the gendarmes in. Then we would really be in trouble, for they wouldn't convert us so much as they would skin us. But sermons — we-e-e-ll!"

And making a gesture with his hand, Prokip wandered off to the yard to his work. But Father Chimchikevich still sat for a long time on the porch of his old house, in the shade of thickly winding, blossoming bean vines, thinking about the Jesuit's sudden visit, the conversation he had with him, and the strange plan.

"Oh, this is not a simple, accidental thing," he thought. "These Jesuits are sharpening their teeth not alone, but it seems that they want to swallow me first. So what? It's God's will! I begged the Lord to let me die in peace, but it seems that on account of my sins the Lord did not hear me, and it will probably come to this, that with my own eyes I will yet see, perhaps, the beginning of a new struggle, and maybe I'll yet

lay down my old bones in that struggle. His will be done! But the struggle will be savage and terrible! And who will be the victor? A black cloud is rolling down on us from the west, a terrible invasion, armed with education, treachery, intrigue, protection and all sorts of clever tricks. And what will we put out in the field against it? A great epidemic is approaching, a terrible plague, which can wipe us from the face of the earth like water carries away topsoil. How will we defend ourselves, what cure will we find for it?..."

And Father Shimchikevich picked up an old prayerbook in a wooden, cloth-wrapped binding, the prayers written in a large, fine hand on old, thick paper. This was the only valuable thing he possessed and it was worth more to him than anything on earth. The old man opened the book and began to read from it, slowly, loudly and clearly. The prayer calmed him down; the heavy sensation evoked by the Jesuit disappeared. Somehow, involuntarily, Chimchikevich's eyes wandered to the last pages of the prayerbook where he himself, on the basis of ancient notes, documents and old folk's stories, had written the more than 300-year-old chronicle of the village of Tovstokhlopi. One page of that chronicle especially caught his attention. Having read it, he chuckled quietly. A new idea had flashed through his mind. He read that page over again and once more he smiled.

4

It was Sunday. A rare summer's day. Not a cloudlet could be seen in the sky. The ages-old lindens with their thick green foliage surrounded the old but well-kept church with its red dome, covered with tin, with a gilded cross on the very top. Beside the church the new copper roof of the small, squat belfry shone as though it was on fire. From the church came the sound of the loud, drown-out chant of the liturgy, which was heard throughout the village; inside the church all who could were singing: the men, women, boys and girls in a harmonious chorus. It seemed that this tremendous vocal tide was pushing out the walls of the old church and lifting it up. Pater

Gaudentiy, tall and dark, was standing to one side, beside the rood loft, with a countenance that was neither pious nor morose, waiting for the service to end. He had suffered much yesterday: he had arrived in town late in the evening and lodged in a foul inn. In the morning he had run around more than enough before he finally woke the county chief and got a permit from him to speak in a public place. But he had got his way, nevertheless, and had returned in time. At first he had been very worried that Father Chimchikevich would play him dirty and get done with the divine service early, so when he arrived he would find the doors shut and nobody in the church. But no. Father Chimchikevich had behaved himself loyally, and after mass had waited an hour for his arrival. This pacified the pater somewhat toward Chimchikevich, although even yet he was not able to forgive him the uneasiness he had caused him yesterday.

Now Father Chimchikevich began to read the Gospel in a quavering voice. The pater was afraid that he would now launch himself into a sermon, but no, the Father continued to conduct the services. Now the divine service was finished. After communion the pater walked out of the church. Near the belfry a huge square slab, about two cubits high, some old gravestone, stood between two lindens. The pater stood on it, this would be his pulpit. He took his liturgical robe from a bundle and slipped it on over his soutane. Standing high on the stone with the shaven crown of his head shining in the sun — he had forgotten to bring his beret — he seemed to be as tall as a roadside pile and as menacing as an apparition. The sun was nearing midday and it burned unmercifully. Sparrows chirped in the shade of the lindens. A mass of large red bugs crawled about the graves and filled all the openings and shaded cracks in the wooden fence. There was not a breath of wind to freshen the air. The leaves did not move at all, as though they were petrified. The pater stood exactly on the spot where there was no shade during the middle of the day. The perspiration began to form in small, shiny beads on his forehead, cheeks and

hands; he listened impatiently to the singing which continued to flow from the church. The benediction had already been read, when suddenly the pater almost cursed aloud in rage — from the church came the sounds of “Rejoice, Nicholas, great Thaumaturge!”

“Has the priest gone mad, or what? Today he gets the notion to read the akathistos!”

But his anger did not avail him anything, he was compelled to wait to the end of the akathistos. Meanwhile, Father Chimchikevich, as though on purpose, pronounced each word slowly, in drawn-out fashion, as if he guessed what torments pater Gaudentiy was suffering! The akathistos dragged along a good half hour; and the pater’s sufferings during that time on his stone pulpit in the sunlit square could not be pictured and could not be told. He would gladly have climbed down from the stone and gone to sit in the shade by the belfry, if it had not been for a group of children and older girls, who had come out of the vestibule and stood beside the church, crossing themselves and looking at him.

It would not do to climb down in front of them. The pater sent them to the devil a score of times, but that did not help any. The small beads of perspiration had long since turned into streams that coursed quietly down his cheeks, back and chest. His shirt was completely wet and it stuck to his body. The blood poured into his face, his head was aflame, there was a humming in his ears and his throat was dry; the pater began to seriously be afraid that he would suffer a sunstroke or some other sudden illness.

Well, thank God! The akathistos at long last came to an end! He breathed more freely. But what was that? The singing had stopped in the church, but now something was being said. Can it be? Had Father Chimchikevich begun to preach a sermon? The pater smiled ironically, recalling the stories about his sermons. “It probably won’t last long,” he thought, “and yet it’s a pity that I’m not inside the church. It would be interesting to hear him!”

And really, it was worthwhile hearing that sermon.

“My children,” spoke Father Chimchikevich, “I have just read in the ancient papers that exactly one hundred years ago today... yet, one hundred years to the day! — a terrible plague broke out in our village of Tovstokhlopi. Half the village died in one week. Three hundred and eighty souls died without confession and the holy sacrament. God preserve us all from anything like that, folks! So what do you think, my children, wouldn't it be proper for us to mark the centennial of such a great misfortune in some way?”

The people stood, crossed themselves piously and sighed from the bottom of their hearts.

“So listen to what I have in mind in this regard, children!” Father Chimchikevich continued. “Let us say mass, kneeling down, for all those dead souls, and then you select a dozen of the strongest lads, do you understand? And let them take turns right until nightfall ringing the bells without a pause. Let those sounds go to God on highest and let those departed of ours know that we haven't forgotten about them even after a hundred years. Let this be for the glory of God, that he should take pity on us and turn away from us all evil, all plagues, whether physical or spiritual. Amen.”

After these words the wee church bells tinkled, then the thin bells in the church cupola chimed in, followed by the loud peals from the belfry. The people fell to their knees and the requiem began. The pater looked on in amazement, not knowing whether he should remain erect or also fall to his knees. Finally, he too knelt on his slab.

The requiem ended, the divine service was over, and yet the bells kept on pealing. Crossing themselves, the people began to leave the church; the girls in white blouses and varicolored ribbons looking like a field of poppies; behind them the women in white head scarfs, and the peasants, gray in drab overcoats; the children ran in groups all over the cemetery. The pater stood up on the stone, sprayed with sunshine, and crossed himself. The people gathered about him out of curiosity, while the bells kept ringing without a stop. The young men pushed into the

belfry with malicious smiles, rattling with their heavy boots as they climbed the winding staircase, while those who were already up stuck their heads out of the windows and openings and looked down at the Jesuit with no less curiosity. Their laughter could be heard through the loud noise of the bells.

A still greater crowd of people gathered, and the pater, crossing himself once more, looked up at the belfry in surprise, as if asking with his eyes when the bells would stop ringing. But the bells kept on pealing with all their might, and without stopping. And those bells in the Tovstokhlopi belfry are really good and loud! They say that they were smelted from former Cossack cannons that had been sunk in the marshes around here after some battle or other, and were later found by the peasants. Good, loud bells! When all seven toll at one time, if you are around the belfry you cannot hear your own voice, and the echo is heard in seven neighboring villages.

The pater crossed himself for the third time.

"In the name of the Father and the Son," he began in a loud voice, but—what was the use! The bells completely drowned out his voice.

"What's this, aren't they going to stop ringing?" he shouted with all his might to the crowd gathered about him.

"What? What did you say?" the people shouted back.

"Won't they stop ringing?" the pater roared.

"Yes, they'll stop."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"Why tonight? Why is that?"

"We are driving the plague away."

"What plague?"

"One hundred years ago! There was a plague! Three hundred souls without confession! For the souls of the dead! We're driving away the plague!" The pater made out such fragmentary phrases from the confused shouts of the people. He immediately surmised that this was a new invention of Chimchikevich's. His eyes blazed with anger and he leaped down from the stone to the earth.

"I am to preach a sermon to you," he said benevolently to the people.

"Then preach!" voices were heard from the mass.

"How can I preach when the bells are ringing! Tell them to stop!"

"No, we cant!"

"But the county chief himself gave me permission to preach!"

"Then preach!"

More and more laughter could be heard in the crowd. The belfry was packed with youth, in whom every gesture and word uttered by the pater evoked irrepressible laughter and joy. Meanwhile the bells continued to ring without a moment's pause. The pater realized that his efforts were useless, and that the angrier he got, the more ridiculous his position would become. So he came to the conclusion that it would be better to retreat at this time, in the hope of better achieving victory the next time. Sweetly smiling, he said:

"Well, toll away, toll away, and I'll come next Sunday instead. God be with you!"

But as he was climbing into the carriage which was waiting for him close by, behind the church hedge, he shook his closed fist in the direction of the parsonage and muttered viciously:

"Just you wait, you old schismaticist, I'll teach you a lesson!"

1887

Translated by  
John Weir

## THE STORY OF A SHEEPSKIN COAT

*Dedicated to Ivan Sandulyak,\*  
son of Luka, from Karlovo*

### 1

Once there was a sheepskin coat. It was a plain sheepskin coat, and not any too new either. True, it was not patched, although it did show signs of wear and tear; it smelt of human sweat, and its decorative trimmings typical of a Pokuttia \*\* sheepskin coat had long since faded. In a word, it now was just an ordinary, uncomely coat, evoking no particular interest in the amateur ethnographer, and without the slightest right to be proud of its unsightly appearance.

Nevertheless, it was very proud of itself, and in its soliloquies, which it naturally carried on in the darkness of night as it hung on a clothes-peg over the master's bed, it boasted and behaved in a most immodest manner.

"Well now," it would discourse, "just show me a sheepskin coat, a fur, or priestly vestments that have a greater claim to pride and respect than do I! True, people are more inclined to scrape and bow and tip their hats for a fox-fur adorning a blue serge, they are more apt to nuzzle up to some priestly vestments, but that doesn't mean anything! It all depends how you look at things. For, to tell the truth, just what are their merits? Perhaps only that one may cost more than another. Can they possibly measure up to me, a poor, simple sheepskin coat that keeps the whole family warm with my own natural warmth? Yes, indeed! I can rightly say that if it

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\* *Sandulyak, Ivan* (1848—1926) — peasant, public figure, author of several songs

\*\* *Pokuttia* — district between the Carpathian Mountains and upper reaches of the Dniester River

weren't for me nobody, but nobody in my master's family could venture outdoors, in the wintertime. For I am the only sheepskin coat, the only warm garment they have.

"And just let the lordly foxes and wolf-skin coats show me a garment that serves as loyally, as untiringly and as unselfishly as I!

"No sooner do the first cocks begin to crow, the master gets up, pulls me down from the peg and goes to the stable to add some chopped straw to the oats for the cattle. Returning from the stable, he sets to work cutting straw for the horses — and there is the mistress already throwing me over her own shoulders to go out to the stable and milk the cow. When she comes back, again the master puts me on and goes out into the yard to chop some wood. After chopping the wood and watering the horses and the cow at the spring, he carries in some water and goes back to the house, but for me there is no letup. Already the daughter is putting me on. The girl goes to a rich neighbor to spin the whole day long for a mere spoonful of food and a nice thank you. No sooner does she arrive than the rich man's servant carries me home again, for I must fulfill yet another duty. The master's little son, a seven-year-old lad, having eaten a morsel of bread with garlic and a bowl of *zatirka*\* must set out for school. So he too puts me over his wee little shoulders, even though I reach almost down to his ankles and drag my tail over the snow, and away he goes to school. And even here I mustn't tarry for long. While still in the hallway I am being removed from the lad's shoulders by a young man — a servant of another rich neighbor, who needs my master to do some thrashing or to clean out the stable. And at noon when the children are coming out of school, that same young man brings me to school so that I can protect the lad from the frost as he returns home. From home he takes me to the master again and in the evening I go traveling after the daughter. And so I keep going

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\* *zatirka* — soft dough broken into bits and boiled in milk or water

back and forth the whole day through like a weaver's shuttle, from corner to corner, from shoulders to shoulders, from job to job, always ready for service, always in great demand, eagerly awaited and thankfully received. Truly, to live like this makes one understand one lives not in vain. One stands up to one's designation, serves conscientiously, and is useful. Living like this, one feels a satisfaction in fulfilling one's obligations, and one can be proud of it."

Thus did the hapless sheepskin coat carry on a discourse with itself. Only one thing saddened it, the fact that it was wearing out too quickly.

"I have a feeling that I haven't long for this world. Soon I'll be coming apart at the seams, my hair will fall out, and even now my skin is beginning to crack here and there. What then shall my poor master do? I know that for a long time now his most ardent desire has been to scrape enough together for a new sheepskin coat, but what a long time it'll take him to make his dream come true. Ever since the lord of the manor had the forests cut down, there is no livelihood to be had from the horses during the winter season. My master doesn't keep sheep, and the little he earns with his hands in winter is hardly enough to buy shoes and pay the taxes. How can he possibly manage to get a new coat? And without a sheepskin coat in winter — why, that's like being more dead than alive. Ah, a peasant's fate, how hard it is indeed!"

## 2

One day a slight change came about in the sheepskin coat's daily round of duties.

The morning went by as usual.

The sheepskin coat had seen the lad off to school, and there was the master, the boy's father, running up the street in his shirt-sleeves. He rushed into the schoolhouse — the teacher was not there yet — and blowing on his frozen fingers, he quickly said to the boy:

"Yurko, let me have the coat! The manor lord has

sent for me and wants me to ride into the forest with his wagon."

"Oh my, and how shall I get home from school without the sheepskin coat?" asked the boy, scratching his head.

"Run as fast as you can, son, running will keep you warm and no harm shall come to you," replied the father, putting on the coat. "God willing, I may find a better job at the manor, then we'll be able to afford another sheepskin coat," he added by way of cheering up the perturbed boy.

During that whole day the sheepskin coat never left his master's shoulders. By the time they both returned home in the evening, the coat split in three places on the sleeves, and the master was grumbling and dissatisfied because the overseer had paid so little for the work and did not even tell him to come back the next day.

But the worst news awaited them at home. Yurko was lying ill in bed. The little lad was burning up with fever, with parched lips he was moaning and repeating deliriously: "I have a stitch in my side, oh, how it's stabbing!"

From that day on the sheepskin coat's life changed. The boy did not go to school. How the parents looked after him, how they sighed, and exorcised, and how relatives wept — that I wouldn't know how to tell you. All I know is that Yurko was in bed for about two weeks, and then recovered. It just goes to show how hardy the peasants are. The fever subsided, the cough stopped, the stabbing in the side went away, and only weakness remained. The boy was anxious to go back to school, but his mother, seeing how weak he was, would not allow him.

One day, as the whole family was sitting at the table around a tureenful of zatirka and the sheepskin coat was hanging on the peg, the door opened and in walked the esteemed excellencies of the community council: the taskmaster and the barrister.

"Praise be to Jesus!" said they as they entered the house.

"Praised be the Lord forever!" said the host in reply, rising from the table.

"It's dinner-time!" said the hostess.

"God be with you, may God bless, you," the community council responded.

Silence reigned in the house for a moment.

"We beg you to be seated," invited the host. The council members sat down on the bench.

"What brings you to us, Sirs?" asked the host.

"Well, you see, friend Ivan, it wasn't our own idea to come here," said the barrister, scratching his head. "It was our esteemed superior who sent us here."

"Oh, has something new come up?" the host exclaimed in dismay. "But I've worked off my civil obligation."

"It's not about your civil obligation," declared the taskmaster. "You're not sending your boy to school, that's what. The honorable teacher has placed a fine upon him. You will have to pay a rinsky."

"A whole rinsky? Good Lord!" cried out Ivan. "But the boy was ill."

"Who knew about it? Why didn't you send word to the teacher?"

"Dear Lord! Do you suppose a man can remember everything?" asked Ivan.

"Ha, but we're not to blame for that either. We were given orders to exact a penalty from you, a rinsky."

"Even if you put me to torture, even if you burn the soles of my feet with hot irons, you still won't find a single rinsky in cash anywhere in my whole household."

"We don't get anything out of it, dear friend," said the barrister and the taskmaster. "We, my friend, are just public servants: we have to do whatever we're ordered to do. If there is no money we are ordered to take whatever we can. There, that sheepskin coat, for instance!"

"Friend, that sheepskin coat is our one and only precious possession!" shrieked the host as if he had been scalded with hot water. "Without it not one of us can emerge from the house into the frost."

But his pleas were in vain. The sheepskin coat was already in the taskmaster's hands and having looked it over, he began to appraise it, nodding his head.

“Well, two or three rinskys, it’s still worth that much any time.”

“Don’t worry, friend,” said the barrister. “Your coat won’t be lost. We’ll take it to Judka. If you bring the rinsky today, we’ll bring your coat back today.”

“But friend, for the love of God!” entreated Ivan. “Where am I going to get a rinsky for you? How can I go out to earn any money in the wintertime without a sheepskin coat!”

“What’s it to us? Get it any way you please! We have strict orders.”

“And besides, the sheepskin coat is wet,” complained the wife, wringing her hands. “I only hope Judka lets it dry before he throws it some place in the store-room.”

But the council members were no longer listening. The taskmaster tucked the coat under his arm and without a goodbye to anyone left the house. The barrister followed him. Those who remained in the house after the sheepskin coat had been carried away had such a feeling as if the body of a dearly beloved member of the family had been carried out. For a moment they sat there as if stunned, and then both women, as if in response to a command, broke into loud lamentations and the boy wiped away his tears with his sleeve. The master of the house remained sitting at the window, downcast, his eyes following the departing council, which had swooped down like a whirlwind out of the blue and carried off the very thing that left the family the more poorer and completely helpless.

### 3

A week went by. In some miraculous way Ivan was able to dig up a rinsky from some place or other, took it to the elder and received permission to retrieve the sheepskin coat of which he had been robbed. Together with the taskmaster he went to Judka, happy in the thought that he would once again have his sheepskin coat home at last. But his joy was sadly shortlived. A foul stench of decay assailed his nostrils when Judka brought out the coat from the store-

room. After lying around in the dampness a week the sheepskin coat had become altogether unfit for use, it had rotted through and was falling apart in Ivan's fingers. He gasped and clutched his head in his hands.

"May the Lord strike you down!" he cried, turning first to the taskmaster, then to Judka.

"Why? Why me?" Judka was indignant. "Why should I have to dry your sheepskin coat for you?"

"I'm not to blame either," the taskmaster said defensively. "They told me to take it and I took it, the rest is not up to me."

"But have you no fear of God," lamented Ivan. "I paid the rinsky and lost the sheepskin coat too. Who is going to undo the wrong that has been done to me?"

Jurka and the taskmaster merely shrugged their shoulders.

*1892*

Translated by  
Cecilia Dalway

## THE SERF'S BREAD

It happened in the winter, early in 1896. After a popular assembly in Peremyshl my readers from Tor-ki, particularly deputy Novakovsky, asked me to visit their village. I had long wished to visit Tor-ki and so I gladly accepted the invitation, and the two-mile sleigh ride through the moonlit snowfields was more of a pleasant than dreadful experience. I happened to sit in the sleigh side by side with Andriy Kritsky, an old peasant who proved to be a good speaker at the assembly. During the ride he proved to be an even better narrator. We had time to converse, and Kritsky talked without a pause. He knew everyone in the village, he knew the history of every household, every corner, and his memory reached back to about two years before 1848. His stories about the last years of serfdom were actually the most interesting and most impressive I could remember. Maybe sometime I will have a chance to write down all of them in full (Kritsky is still alive and God bless him for an ever longer life!). And now I will convey from memory but a part of that narration — not word for word, but just as I have remembered it.

“I was very young when serfdom was abolished,” said Kritsky. “I only did corvee labor for three years. But I’ll remember those three years as long as I live. Those were terrible times, Sir! Young people today, thank God, have no idea what it was like in those days. And don’t let them ever. There’s no need to. But there are some things they ought to know. What you have written in your *Landlords’ Mockeries*\* is true, but that’s not the whole truth.

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\* *Landlords’ Mockeries* (Panski zharti) — title of a poem from Ivan Franko’s collection of verse *From the Heights and the Depths* (Z vershin i nizin, 1887)

You couldn't, Sir, know everything in detail, for you hadn't lived yet in the world. For those who haven't seen it with their own eyes it is not easy to understand. Take a look at our fields, Sir. Thank God, the land is blessed, even the poorest can make some sort of living if he has a pair of able hands and a will to work. As yet we haven't any of that emigration fever here. We eat our own rye or wheat bread, feed our horses with oats, and don't suffer from hunger. We have our own draught animals, our own wagons, there's a school in the village, a reading hall and a community store, and there're no cheating dealers around. In a word, we're standing on our own feet as much as a peasant in Galicia can stand on his own feet.

"Don't ask me to tell you how things were here before 1848! Suffice it to tell you that there wasn't a single wagon in the whole village. The landlord alone had wagons, while the peasants had only sleighs. In summer they used to carry the grain to the threshing floor and the hay to the haystacks in sleighs, in sleighs they carried the dung to the fields; summer or winter they carried the dead to the graveyard in sleighs.

"Of course, to the dead it was all the same. But how did the living fare? My father was from Medika originally. He had two brothers, and the three of them were handsome, capable lads. The master took one into the manor as his lackey, took him along with him to Brodi and there lost him to another landlord in a card game. There is now a family of Kritskys in the Brodi district, they are our relatives. The master returned home and took the second brother into service in the manor, took him along with him to Warsaw, and that one, too, disappeared somewhere. My father saw that the same was in store for him, so he escaped here, to Torki. This village was under the same landlord, so to say, but a little farther away from the master's presence, and somehow he got away with it. My father had a hard life, he married a poor girl, they couldn't make a living as it was, and yet they were driven to do corvee labor. I had barely reached twelve when I too had to go to work with-

out pay on the landlord's estate. Oh, but I experienced every kind of suffering during those three years!... But it isn't about myself that I want to tell you.

"There was a poor, unfortunate man in our village, Onopriy by name. He was truly poor and unfortunate. Today there are people who appear even poorer, and yet they manage to live on the earth, people with only a hut and not a foot of land. Even tenants look like human beings among the people. In those days it was different. Onopriy had a shanty, he had a wee garden and a bit of field. Today he'd be a farmer of sorts, but then he was called a 'pawn.' I still remember him clearly as though it were yesterday. He was hunched over, his eyes fallen deep in their sockets, his face the hue of the earth, he walked bare-foot summer and winter without a hat or a cap — at least, I never saw his head covered with anything. His shirt was coarse, made of sackcloth, and black as the ceiling in a smokehouse. Over his shirt he wore an old, tattered coat of worsted fabric which had rotted at the bottom, and which he belted with bast or a straw-band. That was all the clothing he had, winter or summer. He always bent over, always slowly, barely crawling, and he always was chewing something in his mouth, and he always was hungry. We, the boys, as we were tending the master's sheep or doing some other chore, often teased him and made fun of him. He never got angry, never raised his voice, but always replied to us humbly and in a servile and repressed voice:

"'All right, children, all right! Have your fun. But give me a piece of bread, if you have any, for I swear that I haven't had a piece in my mouth this day as yet...'

"'What are you always chewing, Onopriy?' we would ask.

"'Oh nothing!' he would answer unwillingly, and dropping his head, he would sigh heavily.

"'Onopriy chews his cud! Chews his cud!' one of the shepherds usually yelled. Others would pick it up, and laughter would resound over the pasture-land, but Onopriy wouldn't do anything, he'd just turn

away and hobble off to his work. Only once I saw him stealthily wiping his eyes with the grimy sleeve of his sackcloth.

“He had a bad wife, so they said in the village. You couldn’t tell that from her appearance, for she was a handsome woman, healthy, red-cheeked and jolly. It was only later that I came to understand what evil fate had paired them off. Onopriy had stayed single a long time, he worked at the manor and had nothing of his own, when suddenly the master ordered him to marry Marta. That was a great misfortune for him, for Marta henpecked him, ground him into dust, starved him, and even — so it was told — beat him in the evenings, and herself ran after the men at the manor. With such a wife Onopriy soon aged, became stoped, got yellow and withered, turned to ‘goose air,’ as they said in the village.

“I don’t know under what clause it was, but suffice it to say that although he was a farmer, so to speak, not a hired man, Onopriy did corvee labor practically every day. It seems that his wife herself drove him to work beyond the prescribed days. But what sort of work was it? The poor soul didn’t have the strength of a beetle, and unless others helped in the field or in the barn, he caught it from the overseer who didn’t spare the whip, and beat him and kicked him until the old man’s bones rattled. And he would take it without a peep from his lips. Sometimes it looked as if he would never rise after such an inhuman beating, that all his bones were broken,— but no! He would lie there a bit, moaning quietly, and then he’d get up and begin to potter slowly about again doing something, no faster and no better than before the beating.

“One time — I remember it as if it were yesterday, and I won’t forget it to the day I die — it was around noon. Wheat was harvested. A lot of people were herded to the master’s wheat fields. They had already finished gathering in the crop on one field and they had to go to another field, far away at the other end of the village, on the other side of the road. Don’t think, Sir, that it was so simple to go from one field to another. Today people go from field to

field, their sickles shining in the sun, while they breathe deep, straighten out their spines, call out to one another, greet each other, joke or ask about one another's health. But not in those days. The masters always needled their overseers: 'You don't know how to keep order, you waste a lot of time crawling from one field to another.' And the overseers? Well, they were mounted on horses, and they had whips in their hands... As soon as one field was done, they immediately hollered:

"'Come on, full speed to the other field! Get going!'

"And they would trot their horses and drive before them all the reapers, old and young, hot and thirsty, in the dust, or in the rain. Already tired out by their heavy labor, without a chance to rest up, the people ran as fast as they could. Naturally, the young and the strong ran ahead, shouting, hooting, and laughing, so that from afar you would have thought a wedding party had set off racing across the fields. But the pregnant women, the old grannies and the children couldn't keep up the pace and were left behind. Oh, but their lot was bitter! From behind the overseer on his horse rained blows of the whip right and left, not caring whether he struck a back or a head. The poor souls ran, fell into ditches and tripped over furrows, often getting under the horses' hooves. Oh, Sir, how many times I saw pregnant women fall like that, and when they got up their blouses were criss-crossed with red stripes! That was the whip, cutting into the flesh right through the cloth.

"So, one time they were driving the people like that from one field to another. The folk ran along through the fields, panting, flushed, covered with dust, their eyes red from the blazing sun. I was standing beside the road, grazing the master's horses on the fallowland. The young men raced past me first, then came the girls, then the older men, and at the very back the oldsters were heavily pounding with their feet. Onopriy was among them, and he got left behind until he was the very last. You could see his knees wobbling under him and his open mouth striving to snatch as much air as possible. But it was no use, the poor fellow couldn't catch up with the rest. The over-

seer on his horse was practically on top of him. In another second the shout came:

“*Predzej, chamie, predzej!*” \*

“Simultaneously came the whistle of the whip, which flashed in the air like a black snake and then wound itself around Onopriy’s legs, which were bare up to his knees. There was a slight snap, the whip flashed in the air again, and again it wound itself around the old man’s bare legs. He groaned and fell to the ground, and blood began to seep from the wide red marks on his legs.

“The overseer reined in his horse.

“*Wstawaj, drabie!*” \*\* he shouted to Onopriy.

“Slowly, with great effort, he began to raise himself from the earth. At that moment the whip once more descended on his back. He sagged like a drooping vine, and in that instant something black and hard fell out of his shirt-front and rolled into the ditch. Onopriy stretched out his hand to recover his loss, but he wasn’t quick enough.

“*Co to jest!*” \*\*\* shouted the overseer, noticing his movement.

“‘It’s... it’s... it’s...’ Onopriy babbled.

“*Podejm i podaj tu!*” \*\*\*\* the overseer yelled.

“Still bent over and shivering violently, Onopriy crawled into the ditch, picked up the thing that had fallen out of his shirt-front and handed it to the overseer. He examined this object while Onopriy stood before him, his head bare and his hands crossed on his chest as though in prayer. I couldn’t tear my eyes from his feet. His knees were continually shaking, as they do when a man is very cold, and the blood flowed in tiny streams from the red rings on the thin, dirt-caked calves, rapidly seeping into the gray dust of the road.

“*Co to jest?*” \*\*\*\*\* at last the overseer asked Onopriy.

“‘It’s... it’s... bread.’”

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\* Faster, you scum, faster! (Pol.)

\*\* Get up, you tramp! (Pol.)

\*\*\* What’s that? (Pol.)

\*\*\*\* Pick it up and give it to me! (Pol.)

\*\*\*\*\* What is that? (Pol.)

“‘Co? Chleb?’ \*

“‘Well, yes, my bread. I eat that kind. For other people it’s cattle oil cake, but for me, kind Sir, it’s bread.’

“The overseer held Onopriy’s bread in his hand for another minute, he looked it over, he smelled it, and then his hand began to shake and he hurled that bread far off into the field, then quickly took a handkerchief from his pocket and began to wipe his eyes. Even he wept.

“You know, Sir, they say that the Lord once made a miracle and set stones to weeping. Of course, that was a miracle, divine power. But I, sinner that I am, think that it was a greater miracle when that overseer of ours wept over Onopriy’s bread.

“I was only fourteen then, but when I saw tears in the eyes of that man, who was like a scourge to us, a heartless beast, I felt as though a knife had been thrust into my heart. Until then I hadn’t understood a thing, hadn’t given anything a thought; if I was ordered to work, I worked; if I was beaten, I suffered it, because I saw others doing the same. I never even thought whether it could be otherwise, didn’t even understand whether it was good or bad. To the contrary, I had often been told that it must be so, that God had willed it, that the peasants were lazy and had to be driven to work. But those overseer’s tears immediately turned everything upside down in my soul. I saw that there must be a horrible evil, a terrible wrong in the world, if even such a beast had been compelled to weep over it.

“The overseer stayed silent a moment, wiped his eyes with the handkerchief, and then he took a coin out of his purse, threw it to Onopriy, and said:

“‘*Na, masz! Idź do karczmy! Kup sobie chleba! A zaraz tam wychodź do roboty!*’ \*\*

“And without further ado he turned his horse around and galloped after the reapers, while Onopriy, hanging his head and not even looking to his bleeding legs,

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\* What? Bread? (Pol.)

\*\* Here, take that! Go to the inn! Buy yourself some bread! And come to work right away! (Pol.)

tramped down the road to the village. When he had gone a long way, I picked that 'bread' and hid it in my shirt-front. At first I intended to show it to the other boys, so they could see what sort of cud old Onopriy had been chewing every day, but when I held that cattle-cake in my hand, I felt so miserable that I, too, bawled like a baby out there in the middle of the field, among the master's horses. When I came home that evening, I hid that cake in a hiding place in the verge of the thatched roof, and I've kept it to this day, and will leave it for my grandchildren, so they may be reminded of what once was.

"That was the last harvest under serfdom. On Easter Sunday serfdom was abolished, and the people did the spring chores already on their own plots. Old Onopriy did not rejoice, remaining the same as before.

"'What's that freedom to me!' he sighed. 'Have it for yourselves, for mine has been already taken away.'

"He had but one wish: to taste his own rye bread...

"'If I had but a bite of rye bread from my own field,' he would say all the time. 'Maybe then I would know what freedom tastes like.'

"Harvest time was approaching. The rye crop was marvelous, the stalks taller than a man, and the ears thick and juicy. Day after day, early in the morning, Onopriy would run out to his plot, look at his rye, fearfully watch every cloud, take a stalk and pick out a kernel to see whether it was ready to be reaped. That time came at last; the grain grew hard, the stalks had thickened and bent downward. The people weren't even yet preparing to harvest when Onopriy took his sickle one day and went to his field.

"'I'll reap two, three sheaves, thresh some grain, grind it with the millstone, and taste at last that heavenly bread.'

"The day was drawing to a close. I was returning from haying with another boy. We were walking along a little path in the rye field, and there — something rustling was crawling in front of us. We ran up closer and saw Onopriy. He had reaped three sheaves, perched one up on his head, another on one shoulder, and the third on the other, and thus bent

under that weight was crawling homeward. The sheaves were large and the rye mellow, and the stalks touched the ground and trailed behind him. We walked behind him, chatting and joking. As if by accident one of us would from time to time step on the sheaves. The poor soul didn't have enough strength to tear the ear from the stalk; every time he stopped and not turning around said in a plaintively calm voice:

“Boys, leave me in peace! That bread is holy!”

“We took pity on him and stopped doing him any damage.

“Let me take those sheaves home for you!” I said.

“No sonny, I'll manage myself.”

“We accompanied him to his shanty. His wife wasn't at home, the door was shut from the inside. And while we were looking for the key under the thatched roof and unlocking the door, Onopriy was standing all the while with the sheaves on his back. When the door sprung open he rushed inside in a headlong lunge, tripped on the threshold and silently, together with the sheaves, sagged to the ground. No sound escaped his lips. The sheaves covered him.

“What happened, grandpa?” we asked from the yard.

“No answer. We ran into the shanty, threw the sheaves aside, and there he was lying on the ground, face down and dead...”

“He didn't live to taste the free bread...”

1896

Translated by  
John Weir

## THE CONSTITUTION FOR PIGS

*To Antin Hritsuniyak*

This story is not my spiritual property. I heard it in Zbarazh, in Eastern Galicia, from an old peasant, Antin Hritsuniyak by name, who told it at a public meeting. Hritsuniyak is a very interesting phenomenon, one of the few living survivals of that tribe of story-tellers and bandurists who composed *dumas*\* about the exploits and adventures of the Cossacks Hritsko Zborovsky, Kishka, Bezrodny and Andiber, about the battles waged by Khmelnitsky\*\* against the Poles, and about the tragic escape of the three brothers from Azov\*\*\* and told and chanted them to the Cossack army. There is nothing out of the ordinary in his appearance: a plain gray-haired old man, dressed not finely and even poorly, not very tall, thin, his face furrowed from life's worries but full of expression, and his black eyes bright. He stands out in no way in a crowd of peasants, he breaks into conversation rarely, and at first glance does not show any higher order of intelligence than the ordinary level of a Galician peasant. Naturally, he can neither read nor write.

A few minutes before the meeting opened I was talking with several peasants I knew, Hritsuniyak came up and we were introduced, exchanged a few

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\* *duma* — epic folk ballad — a narrative poem saturated with lyrical motifs and digressions and sung to the accompaniment of Ukrainian stringed folk instruments — kobza, bandore (bandura), or hurdy-gurdy

\*\* *Khmelnitsky, Bohdan* (c1595—1657) — prominent statesman and military leader. In 1648—1654 headed the Ukrainian people's War of Liberation against feudal Poland, which led to the reunion of Ukraine with Russia

\*\*\* *Azov* — port on the Don River in S European part of the USSR. A Turkish fortress in 15th—17th centuries

words and parted. My acquaintances, mainly young farmers who had finished grammar school and whose keen reading had increased their education, could not praise Hritsunyak highly enough to me for his remarkable oratorical powers and also as one of the few people of the older generation who had joined the radical peasant movement heart and soul.

Therefore, it is not strange that I was impatient to hear his speech. But the meeting opened, the points on the agenda were discussed and decided one by one, and yet Hritsunyak did not ask for the floor. Only when we came to the final point on the agenda, "Motions and interpellations," did he climb up on the table that served us for a platform, and he did it rather reluctantly, quite evidently giving way to the urging of acquaintances. When his figure appeared before the gathering, a kind of rustle and whispering swept the hall, and then all present, of whom there were more than 600, tightly packed in a fairly small space, became so quiet you could hear a poppy seed drop in the silence.

"Well, if I must speak," Hritsunyak said with complete gravity to those who stood closest to him, "then I must have a paper before me. It is true that I'm illiterate, but I know my figures and I can't speak without a paper. Any paper will do, even a tax form."

Loud laughter greeted this opening statement of Hritsunyak's. One of the men who stood closest to him gave him a sheet of clean paper. Hritsunyak took it in both his hands and, holding it in front of him as though he were reading from it, he began his speech in such a monotonous, lilting chant he may have been imitating a village pupil who was just learning to read "by rote." Later his voice became much livelier, never departing, however, from that rhythmic tone, as of Biblical prose. Every minute or so the entire meeting interrupted his story with thunderous guffaws, but the speaker never even twitched a whisker; rather the contrary, as the bursts of general merriment followed fast one another, his countenance took on an ever more sober, even somber expression, until at last it achieved complete wooden apathy, the humor and irony being betrayed

only by the extraordinary flashing eyes under the hanging eyebrows.

"Listen, brothers, I'll tell you about a conversation I had recently. You see, there came to visit me my childhood friend whom I had not seen for years. We greeted each other as is proper and I asked him:

"Well, old frined, how are you? How are things with you?"

"Thank God, I'm not bad and things are good with me,' he says to me.

"Well, that's good news,' I say. 'I would like very much to know what those good things are that you are enjoying?"

"What good things? Well, that's not hard to answer, and you know it yourself.'

"No, no, you won't wriggle out of it that way,' I told him. 'You must tell me in detail what good things you have met with.'

"Ah, friend,' he replied, 'are these not good things that we, thank God, have lived to see? Just think: we don't do corvee labor for years now, we are all equal before the law, whether you are of the gentry or a peasant, and well, we have a Constitution, thanks be.'

"He had tumbled out so much at once that toward the end he was out of breath.

"Hoho, dear friend,' I said, 'those are truly fine things that you spoke of here, but do you know that you mustn't look at them too closely?"

"And why not?"

"For this reason, that they are like those store-bought kerchiefs, they don't hold color, and the dye afterwards stains a person's fingers.'

"My frined couldn't grasp that, so I went on:

"You see, my friend, it's absolutely true that we aren't forced to do corvee labor now. But would you like to recall a little more clearly what it used to be like then, and how it is now with us?"

"Since my friend couldn't recall those things very clearly, I had to help him out with my memory:

"Isn't it true, in those days the master's otaman used to come very early every day and go from house to house in the village, knocking with his cane on the

doors and hollering: "Hey, you, Ivan, Hrits, Semen, hurry to do corvee or there'll be work for the birch rods!"

"That's right, that's right, that's how it was then," said my friend and involuntarily he scratched himself in the place where at that moment it didn't itch.

"And how is it with us now? No longer does the otaman go from house to house through the village with his cane, that's true. But what does the peasant do? I'll tell you what he does, dear friend. The peasant gets up of his own will early as early can be, he takes a hen or a basket of eggs and he goes to that same otaman—now he's called "the manager"—and he places his gift before him and begs, "bowing before your worship," to let him go to do corvee labor on the master's fields. And if he should come without a gift, then the manager gives him a cuff on the nape and kindly leaves him free ... to die of starvation.'

"My poor friend could find nothing to answer me with, and only sighed deeply and nodded his head.

"And we're also equal under the law, as you say, dear friend,' I continued to talk to him. 'That must also be true, though up to now I somehow hadn't noticed it. Whenever I come to the county chief or the judge, or even to the county autonomous department, I still keep hearing the same as prior to 1848; "Wait, peasant! Get out of here, peasant!" And when I once tried to be smart and cited my equality before the law, I received a blow that was just as strong and set my ears ringing just as much as in the times of the otamans. But just look you when the landowner, or the overseer or even the common lessee walk into the office, they are never left to wait outside, but are invited to sit down at once and are treated so politely, so delicately!... Well, we had that same sort of equality before 1848 too!'

"But there were beatings then!' my friend interjected and again involuntarily he scratched himself in the spot where it didn't itch.

"You are right,' I answered him, 'there were beatings then, but now they have invented something that takes the place of birch rods entirely! And even more,

perhaps. Listen to what a neighbor of mine told the county chief. You see, something led my neighbor, a most peaceful person, to go to Vienna — you know, with that large delegation that journeyed to the emperor to complain of all the ills which the people suffered from Governor Badeni. Well, you know what happened?... The delegation heard whatever there was to hear in Vienna, but when it returned home, all the poor delegates were dragged off to hearings and punished. This good fortune didn't miss my neighbor, either: the county chief sentenced him to pay a fine of fifty rinskys cash. Hearing this verdict, my neighbor gathered up courage and says: 'Sir county chief, I'm a poor man. If I have committed such a terrible crime in that I journeyed to the emperor to complain of the most excellent seym elections, there is nothing to be done, I'm prepared to take my just punishment. But my wife and my children are completely innocent of this crime of mine, so why are you punishing them? Punish me alone, and not them. But placing such a fine on me, you make me sell my last cow and the last pig too to pay it and thus the punishment will be harder on my household than on me myself. Therefore I beg you, your excellency county chief, couldn't you change that punishment from a fine to a beating? I'm a strong and healthy man, thank God, and somehow I'll survive fifty blows with a rod, but God is my witness that my farm won't survive a fine of fifty rinskys! That's what my poor neighbor said to the county chief, but the county chief would not grant his plea, because, said he, we are equal before the law, there are no more beatings, and whatever you're fined you must pay even if you tear it from your own body. And so my poor neighbor is now waiting for the state sale and robbery of all his property, which is due any day, because he still hasn't paid that fine. Well, and what do you say, my dear friend, of those modern birch rods that, instead of hitting one part of the body, hit the entire man and his whole family to boot?'

"My friend had no ready reply, and only sighed heavily.

"'And we've got a Constitution, too,' after a moment's silence I resumed my conversation with my

friend, 'certainly we have! They say it's very fine and magnificent. Did you ever see it, dear friend?'

"'See it?' my friend was puzzled. 'I saw it on paper, printed in a book, why shouldn't I?'

"'Oh no, I'm not talking about the paper one,' I answered, 'but about the real one, the way it looks in reality. Have you ever seen this real, living Constitution?'

"'But how can it be seen? After all, we all live under it, we feel it...'

"'Oh certainly, we feel it, you never said a truer word. But I have seen it with my own eyes and want to tell you about it. I was driving one time with my two sons to Ternopil to market. In front of me a farmer I didn't know was driving with his wife. This man was seated up front, driving the horses, while his wife sat on the seat in the back, and between them, with straw heaped about it and its legs well tied, lay a large, fat pig which they were taking to the town to sell, and it calmly stuck its head with its floppy ears out of the cart. We come to Ternopil and as we cross the toll-gate we see an elderly gent sitting by the toll-shed with a shining knife in his hand, and he is smoking a pipe with a long stem... so long. As soon as he saw the cart with the pig in it he jumped up from the bench and yelled:

"'Stop, peasant!'"

"'The farmer halted the cart and the gent with the knife walked up:

"'What have you got there?' he asked severely.

"'A pig, begging your worship's favor,' the farmer replied humbly.

"'I can see for myself that it's a pig, but how are you transporting it, eh? Can't you see how the poor animal's feet have swollen from the rope? Why, you scamp, you good-for-nothing, don't you know that it is forbidden to torture a poor creature so?'

"'Saying this, the gent approached the pig and cut the ropes on it so quickly with his knife, that in his haste he wounded the pig's legs.

"'Off with you to the police station! You must be punished as you deserve!' hollered the implacable gent, the emancipator of hogs.

“The farmer sat petrified on the cart; he had begun to excuse himself to the angry gent, but no go, he wouldn’t even listen to him. But the farmer’s wife was evidently more shrewd. She figured out how to avoid trouble. While her husband was trying to convince the unyielding gent, she pulled out a red kerchief from her bosom, dug in it for a minute or so, brought out 20 kreutzers that had been tied in one corner (she had worked at least two days to be sure, and gone faint from hunger to earn them), tucked them into the obstinate gent’s palm and then began to add her pleas to those of her husband. Only then did the obstinate gent soften up a little, and he said:

“‘Well, this time I’m letting you go free, but remember this as long as you live!’

“During this to-do I had driven a bit ahead with my cart, but I told the boys to stop the horses because I wanted to see how the matter would end. We waited a while until the farmer with the pig had passed us again. But the set-up in the cart was altogether different now than before. The wife was sitting in the front and driving the horses, while the man was sitting in the back and holding the pig round the neck with both arms. And the pig, freed from the ropes, now stood up straight in the cart and gazed about on all sides, and every second it was being frightened by some new object it saw and every moment it was ready to jump. And it wasn’t long before a gentleman’s shiny four-in-hand overtook them, the horses jogging along, the bells tinkling and the coachman snapping his whip. The pig took terrible fright, jerked to the side and jumped out of the cart. Evidently the farmer who was holding the animal round the neck was weaker than it was, and he also flew out of the cart and fell so unfortunately that he hit his face against a rock and set it bleeding, while the pig took to its heels! There my boys leaped off our cart and caught it and helped the farmer lead it to the marketplace. And that, my friend, is how that Constitution for pigs looks like! “But that’s not the whole story yet. On the afternoon of the same day I was returning from Ternopil leaving

early so as to get home before dark. We neared the toll-gate and there was that strict gent with the bright knife still sitting there, calmly puffing on the pipe with the long stem. I let my eyes wander over the suburban fields and suddenly I noticed, far out on the highway, two men in peasant garb marching in step toward the town.

“‘Well, those fellows had served in the army for sure,’ I thought to myself, ‘and learned their hay-foot, straw-foot so thoroughly there that even now, when they’re getting on in years, they keep in step and march straight in a row.’”

“‘But when they came closer, I saw something dark behind them and something bright, like a long tongue of flame, sticking up above their heads. It didn’t take great wisdom then to guess that this was a gendarme. And when they came closer yet I heard at every step they took the soft music: cling-clang! cling-clang!’”

“‘Aha,’ thought I to myself, ‘that explains it! That’s why they keep time so strictly and march so straight in a row! But just you wait, sir gendarme! Wait till you come to the toll-gate! When the angry gent with the bright knife catches sight of you with those poor men manacled together so cruelly, then you’ll learn whether it’s permissible to torture baptized creatures so!’”

“‘I was already quaking in my heart for fear that the angry gent, in his great haste to knock off the shackles with which the unfortunate men were bound, would cut their hands the way he did the pig’s feet. I was no less curious to see how the angry gent would go after the inhuman gendarme and take him off to the police station. But to my great surprise nothing of that kind happened. The two manacled men and the gendarme crossed the toll-line unmolested and walked past the angry gent. And the angry gent instead of pouncing on the gendarme rose and bowed to him very politely, and I went along home with my nose hanging down like this. So there you are, my dear friend,’ I finished my story, ‘that’s what the Constitution for peasants looks like. A peasant must envy a common pig.’”

The applause that broke out went on for quite a while. When it died down old Hritsunyak added: "Pardon me, my dear folks, actually I should have told you this when we were discussing the 'reasons of emigration' item on the agenda, but I think that it's never too late for such a story."

And with those words he got down from the table.

*1896*

Translated by  
John Weir

## PURE RACE

In the summer of 1895 I was travelling by train from Budapest to Galicia. It was scorching hot. Coaldust from the engine was pouring in through the open windows of the coach making it hard to breathe. We drew the blinds in the compartment and were riding in silence, now and then wetting our parched throats with a few drops of an abominable factory-made wine which we had bought at the station in Budapest as "genuine Hungarian."

Not so far from Budapest two new passengers stepped into our compartment (ours was a second-class compartment). One was an elderly gentleman, tall, portly, with a sweeping greyish moustache and closely cropped hair, now completely white; however, his face still shone with a healthy ruddy colour, and the lips, red and full, spoke of unimpaired physical strength and an alert mind. The same traits could also be heard in his voice, a resounding and strong voice, which he evidently was not in the habit of keeping low. His whole external appearance, his dress, simple-looking, yet of good quality and well-tailored, showed that this was a rich countryside landowner from some peripheral province. His companion was young, a boy probably sixteen years of age, brown-haired, with a very handsome face, that type with broad straight features which in boyhood promise considerable height, stout build and, in general, an imposing appearance. And although his moustache had barely begun to sprout, the young man was already almost as tall as the older gentleman, whose similarity of features immediately suggested to be his father. The young man was apparently a gymnasium student who must have stayed a couple of days with his friends some-

where near Budapest after the end of the term and was now going with his father to his native village to enjoy his vacations in full freedom. This was really so, as before long we found out from conversation with the two travellers.

The older gentleman proved to be quite a vivacious type who liked to talk, tell stories and jokes. While the train stood at the station he continually rushed outside or spoke half shouting to someone through the window of the coach, or else conversed with the train guard in a language in which one sentence out of ten sounded to me very much like our "Already ready, speedy Teddy?"\*

And when the train started, the gentleman made himself comfortable in the compartment, occupying with his son a whole sofa — to be sure, there were only five of us in the compartment: myself, my Ruthenian companion plus a German travelling salesman — and began to talk. At first he started in Hungarian but, having satisfied himself that apart from him and his son no one knew the language, switched over to German. He spoke tirelessly, not hurriedly, quite fluently, in a self-assured, kindly if somewhat condescending tone, but, unable to make out what we were and what nationality we belonged to, adopted a gentlemanly style, just in case. From him we learned that he was a descendant of an old-line family of Hungarian gentry and owned a large estate somewhere near Nyiregyhaza\*\*, that several years ago he had become a widower and now had only that one son, that his son had just finished his sixth year in the gymnasium, distinguished himself with phenomenal abilities, and the father desired to assure him a brilliant future and so on. When the father started to heap praise upon his son's abilities, the boy blushed like a rose and protested in German, "But, Father, you are spoiling me! How can you say all these things if I know better myself that I am not so wise at all?"

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\* Unrenderable in English. In the Ukrainian original — imitation of palatalized [d]-endings characteristic of the Hungarian language

\*\* *Nyiregyhaza* — town in NE Hungary

“Hush, hush! Nobody asked you!” retorted the father with pretended severity. His eyes were glittering and it was evident that he loved very much this boy, whose face, he said, was a vivid reminder of his late wife.

Having heard that this gentleman — I will call him Mr. Z.— lived near Nyiregyhaza, we somehow naturally recalled the much-talked-of Tisza-Eszlar murder trial \* held in those parts.

“Ah, don’t speak of this odious affair to me,” cried out Mr. Z. in a tone full of patriotic indignation. “A ritual murder! My goodness! One just refuses to believe that in the civilized Hungary in the 19th century something similar could have occurred! This is a real stain on our history. Nowadays nothing of the kind could have happened. I dare say there isn’t a single person in Hungary today who would believe such a nonsense as a ritual murder.”

“Hungary strides forward,” uttered the salesman sententiously.

“Oh, we do stride forward! Just remember in how many things we have recently surpassed all Europe! The zone tariff on railroads — isn’t this a gain of civilization? And what? While the Germans were still debating whether this could be possible, we just went and introduced it and immediately solved the matter. And our confessional laws! Our civil marriages...! Gentlemen, this is a very important matter! A matter of principle!”

“For me an even more important matter of principle,” I intervened, “is to know whether this progress is the exclusive property of the upper crust of the nation or involves all its strata down to the very bottom.”

“All, all of them!” shouted the patriot enthusiastically and without a moment of hesitation. “Any other way would be meaningless. Just think that the steam engine is ploughing our fields. All this adds up to a social revolution... peaceful, of course, peaceful!”

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\* *Tisza-Eszlar murder trial* — Tisza-Eszlar, neighbourhood in the Hungarian village of Szabolcs on the Tisza River, known for the anti-Semitic trial (1883) of a number of the local Jewish community members charged with murdering a Christian girl. All defendants were acquitted

“Peaceful, or, maybe, not peaceful!” I broke in. “The steam plough was followed by the riots of Alföld\* farmhands. And these riots have now prompted me to raise the question, for I’m afraid, Sir, there seemed to be very little culture in those riots but a great deal of primitive savagery instead.”

“No, no, no! You have been misinformed!” the patriot was shouting almost trying to close his ears. “Hungarian workers lacking culture! Maybe those vagabonds, Slovaks and Ruthenians, these are really wild, I’ll agree. But Hungarian workers! My Lord! I’m not a socialist and don’t advocate any social doctrines but, looking at our workers’ organizations, listening to disputes in workmen’s societies, I’m as glad as a child. And what I’m glad about is progress, development, the growing feeling of strength of the Hungarian nation. And not myself alone! You know, among the Hungarian nobility there are no conservatives upon this point. He who is a Hungarian patriot must also be a progressive. I know of no land where the wave of progress would sweep the whole nation as suddenly and strongly as in Hungary.”

Undoubtedly Mr. Z. would have continued singing laudatory songs to Hungarian progress for a long time, but the train stopped. We were at the station in Miskolc,\*\* where the train was to stand fifteen minutes. It was time to alight and get something to eat, so the conversation had to be interrupted for a while. But, as Mr. Z. and I were descending together from the coach, we saw, on a pathway behind the station building, a group of people, hunched with sacks upon their shoulders, clad in nondescript coats of white homespun wool and felt hats. They were resting on the grass, munching at bread which was black like soil, their faces turned towards the train. Among them there were women and young girls, yet there was no merry hum, no laughter, no songs. The whole group made an impression of some half-savage nomads who had found themselves in a civilized land where everything was strange, fearsome and awesome,

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\* *Alföld* — lowlands in SE Hungary

\*\* *Miskolc* — town in N Hungary

where everything spelled danger. I knew well what those people were but played a simpleton and asked Mr. Z.: "Now, what's that?"

"This?" drawled Mr. Z., adjusting his pince-nez and pretending to scrutinize the crowd. "Ah, these are our Hottentots. They are those Ruthenians whom I mentioned to you."

"Serfs?" I asked in all seriousness.

"Serfs!" the patriot cried out. "Now then, do you really think that serfdom still exists in Hungary?"

"Well, but their appearance, their scared and cowed figures —" I was apologizing.

"Lack of culture, lack of culture and nothing else!"

"Which means they are free citizens —"

"But of course!"

"— of the free Hungraian state," I went on with emphasis on every word.

Hr. Z. sensed the irony.

"Well, yes. Only, you see, there is one thing here, one catch... All right, we will speak of it yet."

We were at the buffet. Nourishment business got underway, and Hungarian progress could meanwhile continue undisturbed. Refreshed, we emerged back onto the platform. There remained several minutes before the train was due to start, so I decided to have a closer look at the group of my compatriots whom Mr. Z. had kindly deigned to call Hottentots. But, to my surprise, they were no longer on their previous camping site. Where had they gone and why were they not taking the train for which they must have waited? It had not taken me long looking round before I saw them. Along the railroad track across the field stretched a narrow but well-trodden path, which did not lead to a town or a village but somewhere far away and, together with the track, was lost in the distance. It was along this path that my compatriots were now plodding one after another, bent-shouldered and covered with dust, like a long grey caterpillar slowly creeping on a green striped kerchief, crawling in the scorching heat carrying their humble sacks. Straining my eyes a little, I discerned another such group still farther ahead, while yet another was coming in also along a path which led across the

track from the opposite side. Having found a railroad guard who did not answer my questions in all human languages with the inevitable Hungarian *Nem tudom* \* but, having taken me aside and glancing round in fear, spoke Slovak to me, I learned from him that tens of such groups of Ruthenian highlanders were passing there every day, that all of them were walking beside the railroad from their mountains and then on all the way to Banat,\*\* walking a whole week with just dry bread to eat, trying to get there in time for harvest, find a job and earn something. Apparently they did not have money to afford travelling by train, so they walked, and to find the way to Banat kept to the railroad.

My first reaction was to look out for Mr. Z. and share with him this information on the Hungarian Hottentots and the spread of civilization throughout all the strata of Hungary's populace, but here the bell rang for the second time and simultaneously some hubbub, noise and shouting, like in a village pub, broke out on the platform. I sped there and saw the porter holding by the collar an old, grey-bearded Jew with side-curls, and struggling to drag him inside the station building, while the Jew was resisting with his hands and feet, trying to break away, whining and crying like a small child. The porter was severely jabbering something in Hungarian, the Jew replied in his jargon, people were crowding in on all sides, some talking, some shouting, others laughing. Not knowing the Hungarian language, I was standing like at a Turkish prayer and did not know what was the matter, when suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the imposing figure of Mr. Z. emerged beside the porter and the old Jew. He sternly told something to the porter and the latter immediately released the Jew; then Mr. Z. turned towards the Jew and asked him something in Hungarian, but the Jew only shook his head and with an air of despair passed his hand under the chin as if he wanted to say, "Cut my throat if you wish, but I understand nothing".

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\* I do not understand (Hung.)

\*\* *Banat*—historical name of a region in SE Europe, part of Austria-Hungary in 18th—19th centuries

"Where are you going, old man?" asked Mr. Z. in German.

"To Kis Szolyva, my dear Sir, to Kis Szolyva!" muttered the Jew. "I just must go there, my son is ill, he writes me to come at once."

"You must go and yet don't have money to travel?" Mr. Z. went on.

"What do you mean I don't have the money?" cried out the Jew. "I have enough to pay half of the third-class fare."

"This isn't enough."

"How come this isn't enough? I'm a poor Jew, how can I pay more? Just look, my dear Sir, here I have a poverty certificate from the Jewish community here in Miskolc. I was told that with such a certificate they would let me travel at half the price."

"Before they would, but now they won't," said Mr. Z.

"Why won't they? *Gott gerechter!* \* Why not? After all, I'm now even poorer than I was before. And I just must get to Kis Szolyva! Oh, dear, dear!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, we will now take up a collection for this poor man!" announced Mr. Z. and took off his hat. Time was pressing, we had to get back onto the train. About a dozen passengers of the second class threw in ten or twenty cents each, Mr. Z. added something from his own pocket and poured the coins into the palm of the porter, ordering him something in Hungarian. He himself took the Jew by the arm and led him to the coach.

"Now, what's going to happen to me?" the Jew was asking, still resisting, as if he could not believe what had taken place before his own eyes.

"Come, come with me!" reassured him Mr. Z. pulling the Jew behind him.

"But I don't have a ticket!" argued the Jew.

"Now you are going to have one! Come, don't be afraid!"

"But this is the second class!" the Jew was shouting with fear. "Why should I go to the second class?"

"Come, come on!" Mr. Z. gently urged him and not without some effort pulled him inside our coach and

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\* Lord merciful! (Ger.)

then into the very compartment where we sat. The Jew came in somewhat bewildered, carrying under his arm a dirty and ill-smelling sack, which he first wanted to put under the sofa, but, seeing it did not fit in, tried to place it in the corner on the sofa; then, instantly realizing this would not be proper, finally stowed it on a shelf above his head not without difficulty and with the help of the younger Mr. Z. I do not know whether it was the Jew or his sack, but our compartment at once filled with that characteristic "racial" smell, so well known to anyone who, at least once in his life, travelled third class on a Galician railroad on a non-Sabbath day.

Mr. Z. did not seem to notice all that. He was very glad, treated the old Jew as his special guest, so he was fussing round him, did his best to seat him comfortably and then sat down next to him, though trying not to touch the Jew's soiled frock coat, and proceeded to ask him questions about his son, wife, other children, his business and income, all that with such curiosity as if he expected to obtain from the old man information of God knows what importance. The old man's answers revealed that the Jew was just an ordinary Jew, who had run a pub at Veretsky's estate, where he had sired a whole bunch of children but, having married his youngest son away to Skotar-ske, left the pub and in partnership with his latest in-law started to trade in flax, yarn and peasant linen. Somehow this business had brought him to Miskolc, where he had spent a few weeks, but now he was returning home for he heard his son was ill. Mr. Z. questioned the old man about that son with great interest, asked to describe his appearance and to compare him with his own son, who was formally introduced to the Jew. And when all resources of the conversation had thus been exhausted, the more so that the old Jew, unaccustomed to being treated in this way, was answering somewhat unwillingly, bungled and paused and scowled at Mr. Z., as if he was not entirely sure whether he was really so kind or was just making fun of him, Mr. Z. told, turning towards us, "Oh, you just can't imagine how I like such people!"

"Now, what is it that makes them so likeable?" I asked.

"Their racial nature! Look at this old man! Isn't he a true specimen, so to say? Don't you think that this is what those Jews who two thousand years ago prayed in Solomon's temple must have looked like?"

"Definitely not. I'd rather say that this is what the Jews in medieval ghettos must have looked like."

"Even so! Even so! Isn't this, too, a part of history?"

"It surely is. But this specimen, as you call him, isn't a museum exhibit after all. He must also be a Hungarian citizen!"

"Oh, I understand what you mean!" Mr. Z. took up animatedly. "True, it is also our fault that with all the enormous progress of Hungary in every sphere we still have to deal with such citizens like this one and such as those over there!" And he pointed to a new group of Ruthenians who were trailing slowly and wearily southwards on their pathway along the railroad.

"Especially these," he pointed to the Jew, "have more than once been harmed by us, but now it is time to stop doing that. Now we have recognized them our brothers, our equals, and you are going to see what they will soon become — Ah!"

This involuntary shriek, which broke out from his lungs, cut short his edifying harangue. He turned towards the Jew. Seeing that Mr. Z. had diverted his attention from him, the old man felt a little more at ease and decided that the best way out of this situation would be to have a smoke. From his sack he had taken out a big wooden brass-plated, so-called "tavern-style," pipe, pulled out a large soiled pouch, stuffed the pipe with some kind of black tobacco and lit it. It was the smell of this tobacco which Mr. Z. had found so disgusting that it had forced such a cry out of his throat and made him interrupt the conversation.

"Ah, you smoke?" he turned towards the Jew smiling in a most genial manner. "Will you please try this one!"

From his side pocket he took out a silver case and gave the Jew a cigar.

"*A fejner Cuba!*"\* said the Jew, eyeing the cigar with an air of connoisseur. "*Danke, Herr Graf!*"\*\*

And calmly putting a rich man's cigar into his pocket, he added, "I'll take it to my son."

"But pray you smoke one too!" Mr. Z. insisted. "Here, take another. I really want you to smoke one of my cigars."

"*Danke, Herr Graf,*" repeated the Jew, putting the second cigar into the same pocket. "Why should an old man like me smoke such things? I'd rather smoke my pipe...."

And he calmly began puffing at the pipe, discharging whole clouds of bluish acrid smoke right into the face of Mr. Z. For some time the latter stood somewhat perplexed, choking with the smoke and biting at his moustache, and then just as calmly snatched the pipe out of the Jew's teeth and hurled it through the window of the coach. The Jew cried out in fear, his usual "Oh, my dear!" broke out from his throat in a most natural way. But seeing that his benefactor had found it possible to play such a practical joke on him, he simpered through tears and muttered, apparently not understanding well what had happened, "Herr Graf! I'm an old man — a poor man — I may not argue with you, my dear Sir. The pipe has cost me two rinskys — three rinskys, I swear, three rinskys!"

Mr. Z., now beaming with satisfaction, took out three rinskys and gave them to the Jew, who, delighted with such unexpected luck, rushed to kiss his hand and, when Mr. Z. had not let him do it, suddenly grabbed the hand of his son and kissed it.

"*Herr Graf!* Please let me kiss your hand!" he muttered. "*Sie sind ä fejner Mann, ä edler Mann!*"\*\*\* You don't want to wrong an old Jew."

"Next time you are given a cigar and told to smoke it, you'd better do it," spoke Mr. Z. in a seemingly good-natured and yet distinctly angry tone. "As a matter of fact, you yourself should have been thrown out like your pipe, understand?"

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\* A good Cuban cigar (broken Ger.)

\*\* Graf — count (Ger.)

\*\*\* You are a good man, a noble man (broken Ger.)

Only now did the Jew understand that what Mr. Z. had just done to him was not a mere childish joke, that the gentleman was cruel and was only restraining himself in the presence of strangers. Having grasped that, the Jew shivered, turned pale as a sheet and seemed to want to say something but was unable to produce a sound: only his blue lips were moving and his white beard, yellowed by tobacco closer to the mouth, was slowly shaking. He huddled in the very corner of the compartment, doubled up and grew totally silent. For a time he still moved his frightened look across the compartment, but then the forced immobility, heat and foul air, the monotonous motion of the coach and the rattle of the wheels soon lulled him to sleep. Several times his head jerked forward and then he fell asleep, letting his head drop back onto the side cushion of the sofa Mr. Z. no longer paid the slightest attention to him, only his son, seeing the old man in such an unusual position, promptly produced a pencil and a small drawing book and proceeded to sketch the Jew's head with its beard pointing upwards and the neck outstretched in such a way as if his throat was about to be cut. Meanwhile Mr. Z. resumed the conversation.

"A racial man, no doubt about that," he spoke nodding in the direction of the Jew. "The whole nature of his race is beautifully revealed in his every action, every word. But of what use is it? This race is now obsolete. This is an old, used up, rusty race.... It is not without some embryos of civilization but has none of that momentum, that potential for growth, which are now so typical of our Hungarian nation. And this is the most important thing of all. Wide scope, energy! Just have a look at those savages down there (a company of Ruthenians again flashed in the coach window like a flock of grey cranes on a flight to the south). Here you don't have to look twice to understand that this is again an entirely different race, unable to adapt itself to civilization, vanishing like the American Indians at the approach of Europeans. No progress produces the slightest effect upon those Ruthenians, they are immune to any development, any

cultural work is wasted on them. They must die out and that's the end of it."

He said it with such determination and finality that I knew better than argue with him. He must have known it, but I did not.

"I don't know," Mr. Z. went on with a derisive and complacent smile. "There, beyond the Carpathians, some say and think that we are hungarianizing Ruthenians. This not a lie, this is nonsense! To hungarianize would mean assimilating them, mixing up with them. Goodness, this would be the most awful crime perpetrated against the Hungarian nation, against the purity of its race. To mix up with this spineless, indolent, uncultured folk would be nothing less than undermining the foundations of our own future. Only the most irreconcilable enemy of the Hungarian nation could do something similar. No, gentlemen, we do not intend to hungarianize them. We have put them on the verge of extinction. Our civilization has surrounded them with a frontier which is steadily shrinking until their very existence becomes a thing of the past. Ruthenian provinces are our Indian reservations and each year they shrink just like in America."

"Then these must be the pioneers of civilization, those who push the frontier!" said I, nodding in my turn towards the sleeping Jew, who had begun to snore loudly.

"It doesn't really matter who pushes the frontier," Mr. Z. shrugged his shoulders. "They cannot resist anybody. The sooner they die out the faster Hungary's progress will become."

"A strange thing," the salesman broke in. "It seems their race is pure too, and yet —"

"Where do you see a pure race there?" exclaimed Mr. Z. "That's just the point that their race is anything but pure. This is a concoction of the most miserable races, of Slavs, Rumanians, Gypsies and devil knows what else. A pure race, Sir, boils in your blood like in the veins of a pure-bred horse. Oh, I wish you could see my Janos. This is a racial Hungarian if there ever was one! Simply a wonderful

man. Just spending a day in his company, just watching him gives me strong inspiration and sheer pleasure and strengthens my faith in the great future of a nation which is capable of producing such individuals."

Mr. Z. spent much time and eloquence extolling the virtues of his Janos, now addressing my taciturn companion, now turning to the German salesman, who reacted to nearly every word with exclamations of admiration and repeatedly expressed his desire to make a closer acquaintance of such a remarkable man. In the meantime I sat next to the young man, who, with a smile which was shy like a young girl's, showed me his drawing and, when I had praised it, started speaking with me at a low voice about his father, whom he loved very much, his late mother, whom he was still unable to remember without tears, his village and vacation pleasures. He spoke with simplicity and candor; his words, just like his face, showed a pure and yet unspoiled soul, radiated something so good and attractive that I simply could not resist the impulse to shake him heartily by the hand, when, looking out of the window and seeing yet another group of migrating Ruthenians, he sighed and said softly, "Poor people! They struggle so hard for their existence. It is fairly easy for Father who is now travelling second class to doom them to extinction. But how must they feel walking for tens of miles on end in such a heat, seeing train after train rattling on past them!"

I stared at the young man in sheer amazement but he, squeezing my hand in a handshake which was no less sincere than mine, said, "Don't be surprised at my speaking in this way. At our gymnasium we have a circle of some of the more free-thinking boys. We gather, read, debate. But, you know, we have to hide it all, not so much from the professors as from our fellow students. Most of our youth, especially those from the popertied classes, are so rotten, so rotten...!"

As he was saying these words, the boy's eyes were gleaming and his cheeks flushed with emotion. I felt an urge to embrace him. However, I steered the conversation away to another topic.

“Now tell me who is this Janos whom your father has been praising so much?”

“Oh, that is Father’s lackey,” explained the young gentleman. “Father likes him very much, believes him in everything, but somehow I cannot bring myself to like him. I confess that I am even afraid of him. To me he often looks like a fierce dog that may fawn and crawl on its belly, but all the time you have a feeling that it may growl and attack you at any moment.”

I will not recount all the conversations which were going on in our compartment while we rode on. The dusk was falling already. The speed of the train was completely out of keeping with those bombastic words about Hungary’s extraordinary progress into which Mr. Z. was bursting all the time. Although ours was a passenger train, it was trailing so slowly across flat rolling plains, and stood so long at small stations that its performance could have done credit even to our barbarian Galician local lines. We were to travel with Mr. Z. till Satoralja-Ujhely, \* where he was to change to Alföld Railroad that led to Nyiregyhaza, but before reaching that city he had to leave the train at a small station and now he was worrying about what was going to happen to them if at the station there was no place to stay overnight. The town was far from the station, there were no cabs, and his own carriage was unlikely to go out to meet them, for when he left his home he had not said when he was due to return. To be sure, today he had sent a telegram, but he did not expect it dispatched from a small station to reach his village in time; the telegram was unlikely to be delivered until his arrival or even later.

In general, as night was closing on, Mr. Z. was becoming increasingly restless, as if he expected something or was afraid of something. At every station he rushed onto the platform and, if there was time, sped to the station building. Here and there he would come across some acquaintances, greeted them, exchanged a few words, but then would cut the conversation, as if some thought was haunting him and driving away. But in the compartment, while the train was going, he kept silent and even tried to doze,

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\* *Satoralja-Ujhely* — town in N Hungary

although he must have simply forced himself to keep his eyes closed and sit motionless, for after a while he would stir again. His son spoke to him, telling him something in Hungarian; Mr. Z. listened to him and smiled, but here, too, it was obvious that he made an effort to show interest in his son's words, while some irresistible anxiety was tormenting his soul.

It was already almost ten o'clock. We were approaching Satoralja-Ujhely, when at a small station, just before that city, Mr. Z., who had rushed out onto the platform, suddenly began greeting somebody, embracing him and speaking of something in a loud and highly animated voice. His son, who had stayed in the compartment and was looking out the window, immediately recognized the man.

"My goodness, but this is our Janos!" he exclaimed. "What is he doing here?"

I was interested in seeing this celebrated pure-race Hungarian, but on the platform where Mr. Z. and Janos were standing it was already quite dark. I did not have to wait long, though: a few minutes later Mr. Z., slightly out of breath and overjoyed, appeared in the compartment, pushing Janos in front of him.

"Just imagine, Lajos," shouted Mr. Z. in German to his son (only now did I learn that the name of the younger Mr. Z. was Lajos). "Here I go out onto the platform and see whom I find there? Our Janos! Gentlemen, here is that Janos of whom we have been speaking," said Mr. Z. turning towards us.

While the son was greeting Janos, without much cordiality but yet quite politely, we had a chance to have a closer look at him. He was a lad of enormous height, with shoulders so broad that he could hardly fit into any doorframe, and with hands as large as spades, a true colossus. His jet-black hair, black eyes and teeth white like garlic, almost all of which his grin exposed, gave his face an expression of wildness and cruelty which could not be softened even by his smile similar to the smile of a Negro. His figure did look typical, but far more of a Gypsy than of a Hungarian. Only sharp-pointed moustaches, twisted upwards, and a Hungarian folk costume made him look Hungarian.

"Now you see, gentlemen, what a pure race means!" Mr. Z. shouted to us when the train had started. "You don't think, do you, that any other servant, one who is not a racial Hungarian, could have done something similar? But here I meet Janos on the platform at a station where I couldn't possibly expect to find him. 'Janos,' I ask, 'what are you doing here, of all places?' 'Waiting for you.' 'For me? Here?' 'I took the carriage, drove out to the station, left the carriage and the driver there and went to look out for you in Satoralja-Ujhely, but, not finding you there, walked all the way here at night.' You see? Walked all the way! 'But how did you know I was coming?' 'How did I know? Just felt it in my heart. I felt such an anguish as though someone was whispering all the time, 'Go, Janos, go! Today the master is coming!' These are his own words! And this is a servant, a lackey! Where else in the world is there such a servant? Who except a purebred racial Hungarian can make such a servant?"

During all this outpour of his master's words Janos stood dead still near the door of the compartment, his eyes glued to the lips of Mr. Z. It was obvious that he did not understand his words in German and only in some mechanical way was reproducing every expression he saw on his master's face whether it was laughter, surprise or seriousness. And he was doing it all in such a natural way that it was utterly impossible to suspect him of putting up a show.

"It seems that Mr. Janos does not understand German?" asked the salesman, turning half to Janos and half to Mr. Z. Janos did not even glance in his direction and kept his eyes riveted to his master.

"Not a single word!" said Mr. Z. "How could he! He grew up on pastures herding horses! Only two years ago he was, so to say, a savage, a child of nature, and now you couldn't name me a salon where he would not know how to behave. Now he composes songs and plays a guitar. Sir, this is a phenomenal person! And you can see yourself how he is devoted to me, he felt with his heart that I was coming. No, only the Hungarian nation produces such people, and having such people it can expect a great future."

We arrived at Satoralja-Ujhely. The train stopped. Mr. Z. said good-buy to us and went to buy tickets for another train, Lajos shook hands with me again and followed his father; Janos stayed for a while, gathering their packs into his huge arms. When his masters had stepped down from the coach, he broke into his cannibal-like grin and, slowly grinding out word for word, said with a Hungarian accent, "*Guter Herr! Majnt, Janos versteht nix dajtsch, und Janos versteht olles. Gute Nocht, Herren!*" \*

These words produced a most terrifying effect on me. I no longer remember clearly how and why I rushed to my feet to run after Mr. Z. and warn him. I was already on the steps of the coach when I changed my mind. What would I warn him against? What would I tell him? That his Janos understood German? Did it mean anything? Was this a vice or something to be ashamed of? I did not go to the station, and our train soon started. Early next morning I was already in Lviv.

I am not a regular reader of Pester Lloyd, the one Hungarian newspaper which is sometimes obtainable in Lviv, but from time to time I glance through it. That was what I did several days after my arrival. In one of the headlines I noticed a name which was identical with the name of my travelling companion whom I have been calling Mr. Z. I had another look and got petrified, and in this state of petrification, without so much as sitting down, I read the whole article. It was a detailed account of a horrible event. Mr. Z. and his son had been murdered. Their bodies had been found terribly mutilated. The fact that the day before the victim's confidential lackey Janos together with the driver and the stableman had driven out to meet their master, who was due to return from Budapest with his student son, and that those three servants together with the carriage had since disappeared without a trace, immediately put the police on the track of the murderers. A search in the land-

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\* Dear gentlemen! You think Janos understands no German, and Janos understands everything. Good night, gentlemen! (broken Ger.)

owner's house revealed that all the money, valuables, gold and silverware were taken, that all was gone. Both the robbery and the murder were committed in a most efficient way. There was no doubt that Janos was really the chief of a gang of ruffians who had purposely gone into the employ of Mr. Z. in order to come into possession of his property some time. The driver and the stableman, both recently engaged, were, just as Janos, of unknown origin. Despite diligent investigation the authorities failed to trace down the criminals. Only the carriage and the horses of Mr. Z. were found in Nyiregyhaza.

There certainly is nothing like the pure Hungarian race!

*1896*

Translated by  
Oles Kovalenko

## THE SHEPHERD

One hundred meters underground, in the depths of a ten-meter long mine drift, in the sultry heat and petroleum fumes, a worker toiled. Over and over he struck the clay rock with his pick, breaking lumps of clay away from it. But the rock was hard and stingy, and allowed only small chunks to be torn piecemeal away from its body. It sent forth a hollow thud and groaned under the blows of the pick, as if weeping, as if threatening; it perspired with a stinking sweat, but it refused to yield and stubbornly held on to its hidden secret treasures. The worker, a healthy lad who had just recently arrived from the mountains to work in Borislav, was beginning to feel annoyed.

"Ha-ah!" he repeated all the while as he pounded away with all his might at the little hole, into which he had already struck three times without breaking off a single clod. "Curses on your mother! How long are you going to hold on? Let go!"

And with all his force he rammed his pick into the hole to break off the clod. At last the clod gave way and he picked it up with both hands and threw it into the bucket.

"Get in there, devil take you! Go out into the world! Get a taste of the sunshine!" he scolded. "Ha-ha, my fine one! I'm not joking. Don't try to get funny with me, for I've had worse ones than you to deal with! You don't know what seven hundred sheep can be like. It's not like two clods that look alike, yet I knew how to manage those sheep."

And he grabbed the handle of the bucket filled with clay, carried it to the mine, fastened it to the rope and rang to have it pulled up, while he himself

returned with the empty bucket to the drift and resumed his work of picking at the earth. His thoughts were flying over the mountain-valley after the sheep, and in order to break the loneliness and darkness he relished these thoughts, chatting about them with the clay, with the pick, the empty bucket and the ax — for these were his only companions here in this bottomless pit.

“You might think, laddie, that tending seven hundred sheep is a small task! But they are living things, and each one has a mind of its own. Not a very big mind, for, after all, it’s only a dumb animal, but just the same it’s the kind God gave it. Once they get into the woods or into the mountain-valley, they stay together in a bunch. They don’t scatter about, one here, another there, like cattle do. They’re always clustered in a little bunch. Ha-ah!

“But the bear, that thief, it’s just what he’s waiting for. Oh, he too has a mind of his own! And what a mind! It’s not without reason that Uncle Bear is called Mr. Great Paw! He sits behind a log and waits until the entire flock of sheep gets in among the roots of an upturned tree and then one jump and he’s got them all as good as stabled. Then he strangles every last one of them. And they, poor little things, won’t even bleat any longer, but huddle into a little heap and quietly await their death. Ha-ah!

“With my staff in hand, my rifle over my shoulder and my reed-pipe under my belt — that’s how I set out each morning after the sheep, laddie. Three dogs along — Hey, hey! One, ahead of the flock, two at the sides, while I behind. I walk along, stopping now and then to tarry a while. The sheep have scattered over the grass like a swarm of bees. A black heap, a white heap, a black heap, a white heap. They nip off a blade of grass here, a nip there, and on and on they go, farther and farther. They don’t graze like cattle do, but nibble away like children, now as if they were playing, now as if they were hurrying off to get some place. And up in the front are the rams, the leaders. You don’t have to turn the whole flock, only the rams. Ah Byrr-byrr! Ah Drya-oo!”

The shepherd's calls resounded through the dark drift, blending with the dull pounding of the pick.

"It's so lovely there in our mountains, in the mountain-valley! Oh, how lovely! Really beautiful! Not at all like your parts around here, may you..."

He was about to curse, but bit back the words and slapped his palm over his mouth. His soul at the moment was in the realm of poetry, amidst living nature, sensitive and perceptive, and being in her power, he was afraid to offend her.

"Ah, but it's lovely there in our parts! Oh, Lord! A person might have done enough of hired labor, lived through bitter poverty, worked for others, yet in spite of it all, he can recollect these things without regret. You enter the valley and it's green all around, only the thistles nestle their little heads against the ground, peeking out like inquisitive eyes from amid the grasses and moss. It's cool. The breeze is blowing. You breathe deeply and fully with your lungs. Everything around you is fragrant and everything in turn breathes upon you with health and vigor. Down below, the mountain-valey is surrounded by a black wall of forest, and the round spire of the mountain peak rises above you. There is stillness all around, only the sheep are rustling in the ferns, somewhere a dog barks once in a while, a green woodpecker strikes in the forest, or a squirrel cries out. As for me, I walk along leisurely, stop, take out my reed-pipe from under my belt and oh, how I begin to play with trills and flourishes, pouring out a sentimental ballad that sets my heart to leaping in my breast or brings the tears to my eyes! Ha-ah! Devil take you! Let go! Ha-ah!"

The bell rang above. The empty bucket was back. The worker took his full bucket, hauled it to the shaft and sent it up, returning with the empty one. He returned in a hostile mood, for he was beginning to feel hungry. Furiously he struck with the pick, breaking off the clay in large lumps, while in his imagination he struggled with the bear.

"Ha, ha! Uncle — my fine fellow. That won't do at all! One sheep, you might say, is nothing much, but today you kill one, tomorrow you'll kill two, and the

day after you'll savage half my flock. No, my fine fellow! There's no such agreement between us! Do you suppose that I carry this rifle around merely to scare you with? Ho-ho! Just you wait, I'll forfeit a night's sleep and I'll lie in ambush for you in those upturned roots! It's all the same to me, life or death, but finish this business with you I must!"

He struck a couple of blows and stopped to rest, leaning on the handle of his pick.

"That thief of an Uncle! Three nights he tormented me! He must have sniffed out the message with his nose, he didn't show up. But I'm not one to be fooled — not me! Once I set out to do something, there is no stopping me. On the fourth night he shows up, after all. The night is dark as pitch. The wind is moaning in the fir-tree tops. Down below, the stream is murmuring and I, crouching among the roots of a giant upturned tree, keep my eyes on the sight of my gun and sit waiting, straining my ears hard. Now I can hear him coming. I know that he must pass in front of me, so I sit there holding my breath. Crunch-crunch, he is close already I keep my eyes and ears open and there he is, my good Uncle, pushing along like a haystack in the dark. His muzzle is pointing upwards, scenting the breeze as he moves slowly and cautiously. My eyes are almost popping out of my head as I strain to aim my shot straight under his left shoulder-blade. All of a sudden he rears, turns his head and sniffs. He got wind of the powder and whirls around in his tracks to make a run for it, and in that moment, bang-bang! A touch of the trigger and I hit my mark, getting him with both barrels. Without so much as a stagger, down went Uncle, crashing to the ground as if hit by lightning. But he lay there only for a moment. In a flash he sprang up from the ground, let out a roar, reared up on his hind legs and came straight at me. It was quite evident that he was not hit right in the heart. I sit there motionless. There is nowhere to run and no time to reload. 'Well,' I thought to myself, 'if I'm such a rotten shot and merely scratched him then this will be the end of me. But then, it's God's will. A mother brings you into this world but once.' I still

have my ax under my belt, though. I spit in the palm of my hand, seize my ax, cross myself, shift my feet which were pressed against two roots to a better position, brace my back against the twisted roots of the upturned tree, rising up like a wall behind me, clench my teeth, lower my head to see better and then I await Uncle. And here he is almost upon me. Clawing at the roots with his paws, he sniffs and roars like a wrathful drunk who is unable to utter a single sensible word, but feels only that he is furious and is roaring and pushing forward. There, now he's gotten the scent of my foot and is reaching for it with his paw. Like the sting of nettles, that's how it felt, no worse. And in that moment I swung my ax and plunged the blade to the very butt in Uncle's head, splitting his skull apart. He let out one last moan, so heavy, so doleful, like that of a sinful soul in agony and went crashing down below to disappear through the impenetrable darkness of the hole under the upturned tree. I didn't even have time to draw out my ax, and so it went rolling down with him. In one jump I'm out of the upturned tree and then away I go tearing through brush and over mountain paths, through the woods and onto the clearing, along the ravine, through the fir groves and in the same breath I find myself in the mountain-valley beside the sheep cot. I knock. 'Is that you, Panko?' asks the chief shepherd from within. 'It's me, open up.'

"He got up, lit the lantern and opened the door. 'Well, what happened?' 'Oh, nothing much,' said I. 'Was Uncle there?' 'Well, yes, he was there.' 'And did he get away?' 'No, he didn't get away.' 'Well, where is he then?' 'He's lying out there.' 'Do you mean to say that you...' the shepherd did not finish his sentence. 'Oh laddie, what happened to your foot?' he cried out. 'My foot?' I didn't know myself what was wrong with my foot and only now as I looked down did I see that the whole shoe and the whole footcloth and the whole binding-strap were bloody, and blood was behind me. Once, just one single time, did Uncle tap me on the foot with his claw and at a stroke he tore right through my shoe, the rag and my leg to

the very bone. When they unwrapped my foot I fainted from having lost so much blood. But the shepherd, thanks be to him, knew the magic words, he stemmed the flow of the blood, applied some kind of salve and in a week's time I was as good as new. And on the following day they found Uncle Bear dead with my ax deep in his skull."

Again the bell sounded and again the worker hauled the heavy bucket of clay to the shaft, brought in a new one and again, as he dug, he carried on a conversation with himself, filling the hollow underground not only with the thuds of his pick but also with the sounds of his words, the poetry of his forests and mountain-valleys. In proportion to his growing hunger, his weakness from exhaustion and the oppressive fumes, his thoughts became more melancholic. He recalled the hard life of shepherds in winter, about the flat oat bread, potatoes and the lenten soup which was often all he had to eat in wintertime, about the tedious threshing and the still more tedious idleness during the Lents, the hardships of breadless periods before harvests, the illnesses, and the squabbles over a crust of bread or a half-baked potato. He recalled that sheep-breeding was going out because merchants had bought up the mountain-valleys and found it more profitable to pasture oxen than sheep. But herding oxen is much different from herding sheep. Oh, but that's a hard and nasty job. And you won't taste any more buttermilk nor fresh cheese made from sheep's milk nor gruel cooked with sheep butter. Live like a dog, and watch like a dog! And very soon after he quit his job, took the advice of a friend who persuaded him to go to Borislav, where he could make some money, settle down (You'll be welcome everywhere nowadays if you have money!) and be his own boss on his own farm. He even remembered a little ditty which that friend taught him:

*Oh, I'll go off to Borislav  
To earn myself some money,—  
And I'll return from Borislav  
My own sweet boss, by golly!*

He made an attempt to sing the ditty with his lusty shepherd's voice, but no, somehow it just didn't seem to come out right. Hard as he tried, a song one hundred meters underground didn't sound as it should.

And in a kind of embittered anger he continued picking at the ground. He began to loathe it, this dark, heavy, unmercifully hard ground which was so stubbornly resisting his pick.

"Ah, but you are hard, holy one!" he uttered reproachfully. "And God alone knows if you're really holy or not?"

He stopped, straightened out and began to contemplate this question as if it were goodness knows of what importance.

"And honestly, can it really be holy down here? Up there on top, why, it's a sure fact. Water is made holy and they sprinkle it with the word of God read over it. But here? It's an absolute certainty that not a single droplet of holy water nor the sound of God's word has ever reached this place since the world began. No wonder the fumes here are so foul. They surely don't come from anything holy — more likely from something accursed. The very fact that it is forbidden to make candles for the church out of this wax is evidence enough that it must be evil and nasty! Lord forgive us for this sin! A person intrudes into even such places as this and carries off the devil's own property. And he thinks he'll get away with it? Oh no, laddie, not on your life. No good can come of this! And that friend of mine who set me on this course, did he not perish in just such a drift? He was buried under a cave-in and suffocated dead; they could not even get his body out. Some ghoul has glutted him up! Oh, Lord!"

And he crossed himself and fell to his picking with even greater persistence. The rumbling in his stomach told him that it must be close to noon, and he listened for the triple ring of the bell — the moment when he would be allowed to climb up to the top. In the meantime, his fanciful imagination was working indefatigably, ever unfolding before him new images, the most delightful of which were the enchanting,

tranquil, bright images of the mountain-valley, the forests, the flock of sheep and the simple artless events in the life of a shepherd. Thrown into a deep underground drift by destiny, he knew by his own example that those days of old were gone forever and would never return again, that his life had taken a different course, that he had left the ancient patriarchal life and entered a new one, a life unknown to his grandfathers and great-grandfathers, a life which was both awe-inspiring and full of wonders, yet not in the least better, freer or grander than the old one. But that old one lived in his recollections: there still remained enough of it to fill out and inspirit the darkness and loneliness of the new life with the magical charm of poetry. Thus, many a time would the sun hide behind a cloud, and of all the splendor of a summer's day, of all the luxurious resplendence of light and colors, there would remain only enough to spill a golden radiance around the edges of the heavy clouds that hung over the western sky.

*1899*

Translated by  
Cecilia Dalway

## IN THE BLACKSMITH SHOP

*(From my recollections)*

Deep down in my recollections there burns a fire. A rather small hearth whose fire, not bright but vigorous, lights up the first outlines, emerging out of the darkness of a child's soul. It is the fire in my father's blacksmith shop.

To this day I can see that iron shovel with which father scooped up the coal from the wooden bin (he himself burned the coal behind the huts in a pit, which is still known as the coal-burner though there is no trace of it now) and threw it into the fireplace over a handful of glowing coals that had been brought from the house in an earthenware bowl, and then in his usual hurried manner he addressed the servant-boy:

"Come on, come on, Andrus, puff up some smoke there, easy now, easy until it kindles."

Andrus, who usually carried me from the house on his shoulders and set me down on the coal-bin by the hearth, grabbed hold of the handles of the bellows and began to blow. At first, the bellows were rather short-winded, they had not taken in enough air yet, nor gotten warmed up to the job; all they did was blow air on the coals instead of strengthening the fire.

"Slowly, Andrus, come on, come on, boy, take it easy!"

"That Wild Old Woman is still wheezing!" said Andrus jokingly as he strained at the handles with all his might, trying to fill up the bellows with as much air as possible.

His reference to the Wild Old Woman sent shivers running through me.

"Where is that Wild Old Woman?" I asked.

Andrus laughed.

"In the bellows. Can't you hear how she's wheezing?"

I pricked up my ears—and really she was wheezing. “You just wait until I squeeze her good and hard,” said Andrus, “and I’ll have her groaning.”

“I don’t want you to! Don’t squeeze her!” I cried out. I was ready to burst into tears. I did not understand Andrus’s jesting. My imagination was peopled with ghosts, vampires and suicides about whom I had learned from the scary stories our two servants told during their spinning every evening.

Many a time they would mention the Wild Old Woman, too, who sits smoking in the Thing and sends out her smoke from there. Andrus was the first to say that she lived in the blacksmith bellows, and from that time on those bellows filled me with terror.

“There! There now! You, boy! Don’t talk nonsense to the child. Don’t listen to him, Ivas, don’t listen to him. There is no Wild Woman in the bellows.”

“Then what’s all that huffing and puffing in there?”

“That’s the wind, my son. You see, the bellows fill up with air, and when you squeeze them, they blow. Watch, I can make them blow, too!”

And father blew into the fire a couple of times.

I calmed down. A tongue of flame appeared. Then several bluish little tongues slipped somewhat timidly out of the coals. But as the Wild Woman began to blow harder, the bluish little tongues reddened at the roots and leapt rashly out of the depths of the coal pile. Gradually the black coal, too, took on a scarlet color, the flames hissed and straightened up like a bunch of glistening knives or arrows. But the Wild Woman had already blown up her leather belly almost up to the ceiling. Andrus was bearing down on it with both hands, his chest and his stomach, in order to press the handle down. The flaming knives below were becoming white; the coal was turning from red to gold and appeared translucent as if it were melting. I could not tear my eyes away from that small hearth, which could not boast of being too bright and scarcely drove away the shadows from the little wooden blacksmith shop; but, for all that, it spit out lusty sparks high up into the trough-like clay-covered log roofing, which was black with

hanging soot, and concealed within itself a mighty warmth and a powerful working energy.

Father stood at the anvil and, taking his handy little hammer in hand, he swiftly struck the anvil several times in quick succession like the rat-tat-tat of a rolling drum. The sound was carried throughout the village outskirts — a sign that the work in the blacksmith shop was about to begin.

Now from under the bellows he pulled out various boxes filled with all sorts of ironware. Here there were worn-out tooth-edged axes, which had to be steel-plated. And there was one looking quite unconcerned with its skull cracked open — its head was smashed and it had to be completely “rehashed,” as father put it in his figurative language. And over yonder by the door the plow-cutter had to be fastened into place. Next to the blacksmith shop in a small lean-to, standing side by side with the grindstone, were a couple of wagon wheels, which were brought in to be forged. There also lay new pieces of iron strips for the rims.

Father’s fame as a blacksmith was known far and wide throughout all the neighboring villages, and particularly was he famous for his axes. Thirty years after his death an old man from another village, recalling my father in a conversation I had with him, told me:

“No, you won’t find another blacksmith like him anymore. I still use an ax he made to this very day. An ax with a soul — that’s what it is.”

When father’s drum call, which he played on the anvil with his hammer, reechoed over the village, the neighbors, as a rule, began to congregate. The work in the blacksmith shop was in progress mostly during the winter — in summer there were only two short seasons: plowing-time and harvest-time. Outside of that, father opened up his shop in summer only when someone happened to come with some very important and urgent jobs.

In winter there was little work to be done in the households. Here and there in some thrashing barn the flails would be beating, the saws crunching in the hallways, or the windlass whirring as it turned

the rope. The work was not urgent. At such times the blacksmith shop was full of cheer. Anyone coming in with a bigger job — whether to forge a wagon or to make an ax — never forgot to bring along a bottle of moonshine tucked away in his bosom. Going to the blacksmith's was like paying a visit, like going to a neighbor rather than to a craftsman to have him do whatever had to be done and then goodbye — I don't know you and you don't know me.

Father never put a price on his work — “What's for the people is also for me” — and if they weren't ready to pay on the spot he was willing to wait. But he liked to have the blacksmith shop filled with noisy talk and fun. He could work best with lots of company, pleasant talk and a glass of moonshine to boot. And besides, there were times when he needed more helpers, too. Even if it were just to fit the rims over the wheels: three or four men grabbed hold of some stout poles with iron hooks on them, two others, with father making three, carried a red-hot rim with long tongs, placing it on the felly of the wheel, while the men with the poles grabbed the iron with the hooks, leaned the end of the pole against the rim to the wheel and pressed down with all their strength. Father then seized a large hammer and beat the iron down where necessary. The wooden rim, on touching the hot iron began to burn here and there, but the fire quickly went out.

“Come on, come on!” Father's comments went together with the striking hammer, now against the iron, now against the wooden felly, and with the clinking of the hooks as they pulled the rim in all directions. Then, three or four men also seized large hammers and began to drive the rim down onto the felly, striking in time with a thrashing-like rhythm. Clank-clank-clank! Clank-clank-clank! The sound reechoed over the village until the rim was firmly fixed in place.

The older farmers expertly looked the wheel over, examining it closely to see if the rim was on tight, if every spoke was in its proper place and the hub firm and strong. First one, then another lifted the wheel high with a brawny arm, let it drop lightly on

the ground and listened to the sound as it dropped. "The wheel rings like a bell." repeated one after another. It was the highest praise for the blacksmith. Meanwhile, in the blacksmith shop the Wild Woman was moaning and groaning, the fire in the hearth turned white, and in its depths something glew and shone like gold, sending forth oblong branched sparks, the cinders. It was the future ax "cooking." Father threw into the hearth two good handfuls of nails, the old-fashioned kind made by hand from forged iron, covered them over with more coal and put on another man, in addition to Andrus, to blow the bellows. In father's shop the rule was such: whoever came in was welcome to sit and talk, and when the time came for treating, he would not be left out either; but when help was needed, father would turn to him without ceremony: "Come on, fellow!" (if he happened to be one of the younger ones), or "Friend-neighbor! How about a swing with that hammer!" Or, "To the bellows!" Or anything else at which he needed a helping hand. At such times he would take special care of my little personality. When a larger piece of red-hot iron, from which powerful sparks were flying or which was sizzling with greenish-white cinders, had to be carried to the anvil, father always called to someone present:

"Well, shield that child there, will you!"

I was dreadfully afraid of those sparks, but, nonetheless, I terribly loved to watch them fly from under father's hammer like a swarm of fiery bumblebees and spatter in all directions. Especially I loved to watch how two separate pieces of iron had to be welded into one, and also when father took the nails that were melted down in the hearth and beat them into a single lump. After several firings he would take this lump and forge it into an oblong flat little bar, one and a half spans in length and three fingers wide. After folding it over on the rounded corner of the anvil he then riveted the ends together. And now the most important stage in the making of an ax was about to begin: to make a good strong head and to melt, forge and steel-face the blade. The thick bar that had been folded over went in-

to the fire all over again, and when it was white-hot an iron device had to be beaten into the shapeless hole. Upon this device would then be formed the opening in the butt end of the ax. Father took great care in forging the head onto this device; his ax heads never cracked nor fell apart, and that, for a farm ax, which often served as a sledge too, was indeed a virtue of the highest kind. The iron device and the ax which had quite a different appearance now went into the fire again. The place where both ends of the bar met together and which was to become the blade, was plastered over completely with a thin paste of clay—this was to facilitate the melting of the iron. Having placed the ax into the fire, father covered it carefully, as if it were a child, with burning coal and then with additional fresh coal. This coal he sprinkled with water which also contained a thin solution of clay—its purpose being to give it a little more “pep.” And now the Wild Woman began to groan with all her might. Not until brilliantly-white cinders, together with the ordinary coal cinders, began to escape from the fireplace—not even then—but only when those cinders were sizzling and flying out of the fire in thick swarms—only then was it a sign that the iron was fired sufficiently.

Father slowly picked up the red-hot iron with a pair of tongs, scraped off the coal and vitrified clay with his hammer, placed it on the anvil and tapped it lightly a few times with his hammer. To me those taps always possessed a mysterious charm: no matter how light they might be, still, at each blow great swarms of cinders would sizzle and scatter over the whole blacksmith shop; and even though I would ordinarily at such times be sitting on something high, shielded from the anvil behind the back of some towering man, nevertheless, from my safe hiding place my eyes would follow every move in the blacksmith shop, watching every cinder, while at the same time never losing sight of the piece of iron, which was taking on a more distinct form with every blow of father’s hammer. And having given the soft iron its proper form, father would wink at those

present, especially the younger ones, urging them on with:

“Come on, boy! Get a hold of the hammers! Make it snappy, there!”

Two men would seize the mighty hammers and strike the iron in rhythm. Clank-clank-clank! Clank-clank-clank! The blows of three hammers rang out in unison. Father's small one was high in tone and the other two low and gruff as if angry.

The blade was welded, but now father's work on the details began: again he worked on the head of the ax until the point was reached when the iron device could be removed, and then he worked on the blade and cutting edge. Father forged and reforged every part several times, concerning himself not only with the shape, but especially being careful that the iron should be smooth and sturdily made, that there should be no flaw or rough spot any place and that the ax should look as if “cast in a mold.”

In the meanwhile the men in the blacksmith were involved in small talk. Neighbors would tell about recent news of the village: what had been said at the village council, what had been seen at the market in Drohobich, and what the roving old beggarman had broadcast. Most of the conversation was about Borislav, about its oil fields and wells: at that time extraction of oil and wax was carried out on a large scale there. Thousands of dealers swarmed Borislav, swindling land out of the peasants for a mere song and digging “holes” around the place. In the neighboring villages there appeared a type of “oil-worker,” usually a young lad, and not only of poor but also of well-to-do estate, who, as the peasants said, “bent the bow for a black shirt and a white piece of bread.” This was the first manifestation of an industrial capitalistic order that was being established in our quiet, and still patriarchal corner.

Mostly it were pieces of gossip about this new occurrence, that reached our smith shop. This week, for instance, five men perished in the oil wells, three others suffocated in another pit, while this one or another fell from the bucket and got ripped to tatters against the snaggy logs making up the primitively

built shafts of the pits. This was the one recurrent theme of the stories. Another theme went thus: this inhabitant of Borislav became a beggar, that one became a drunkard and another one, they said, after a drinking-bout with the land dealers was pushed into a pit, and there followed endless snatches of tales about all sorts of swindling, about oil workers going on drunken sprees, about the good wages they were making and how they were squandering their earnings, and the explosions in shafts that had been sunk to depths of 35, 70 and 84 feet. I listened to those stories as I might listen to fantastic tales about distant, enchanted lands. Borislav, with all its horrors, its wild life and wild leaps to fortune, with its peculiar industry, its peculiar methods of work and its strange people had taken hold of my imagination. Our village lay far from the highway, no one from our place either walked or rode to Borislav, but after I heard all those stories in the blacksmith shop throughout the whole of winter, I made up my mind that next spring I'd run out onto the highway and wait to see the oil-workers as they come down that highway to Borislav from some of the more distant poorer villages, or as they return home from there on Saturday. However, my curiosity was satisfied even sooner: it was still winter when father took me to Drohobich one Monday, and there I saw throngs of oil-workers and crowds of merchants, who stopped every peasant who looked like an inhabitant of Borislav from the way he was dressed, with the query:

"Mister, mister! Are you from Borislav! Do you have any oil-bearing ground for sale?"

Father listened to those stories about Borislav with reluctance. He had grown so accustomed to the old ways of village life that in this new Borislav disorder he sensed something hostile to the previously established order of things. He did not display his feelings about this, he did not censure nor become indignant as some of the other die-hard adherents of the old order did, but when the supply of news ran out, he gladly turned the conversation to other, chiefly moral topics. Father, who was a skilled and indus-

trious worker, loved to poke fun at idlers and bunglers, at gawks and bums. To sustain his points he liked to relate short, pointed narratives and parables, naturally with the blacksmith trade as a background. Here in the blacksmith shop I heard for the first time such narratives as the one about the boy whose father brought him to the smithy to be trained. But fearing that "the child might burn himself or that a spark might burn out his eye" he requested the smith to place his son in a basket neiled to the wall. "It will just watch everything that goes on and will learn just as well." The boy "studied" in this fashion for seven years, but when he returned to his father, instead of making a plowshare, he produced a fizzle.

As soon as the conversation had been channeled into general topics and story-telling, it progressed in a lively manner. There were many willing listeners, and among our neighbors there were some expert narrators. There followed an outpour of anecdotes, recollections of years gone by, about the Kossuth war, about the lean years, about the wanderings of our peasants to Podolia in search of work, or to Bukovina to harvest corn. Personal experience was interwoven with short but apt folk characteristics of the Podolians, Hutsuls, Boikos, as well as places like Kolomia, Horodenki, Sadohori, Chernivtsi.

But now the ax was ready. Once more father put it through the fire, but only until it was red-hot and then he plunged the cutting edge to a depth of two fingers into cold water to temper it. And then to the vise it went and to the file to make it smooth, and finally to the whetstone to sharpen it — and it was ready, the inseparable companion of the farmer, whether it be in the forest, at the plow, or for drayage jobs, wherever there was a need for "hand-power." The blacksmith joyfully looked at his work, admired it for a few moments and then handed it over to his neighbors. And the new ax traveled from hand to hand. Each one examined the head, tested the edge with his finger to see if it was sharp, examined the blade to see if it was well riveted and looked it over thoroughly as if it were his very own ax.

“Well, this one will last for a long time,” declared one.

“And I’d like to have those oak trees this ax would chop down,” sighed another.

The lucky owner of the new ax viewed it proudly and lovingly. He watched it being made from the very first moment, from the time it was still just a handful of old nails. He helped to blow the bellows, to strike the hammer during its making — in a sense, it was a part of his own labor. Joyfully he thanked the blacksmith, reached into a bag and pulled out a flat half-quart bottle of moonshine. Father asked to have a glass brought from the house, a loaf of bread, a flat round of cheese on a wooden plate — and the treat began, “the baptism” of the new ax.

Father drank up a glass of moonshine, ate a snack and started on a new job; the rest of the company shared in the treat, chatting and jesting. This one was daydreaming: If only he had two or three hundred in spot cash, then he would do this and that and have something to show. Another started to figure out how much money had passed through his hands in the last year.

“Twelve ten-spots, so help me, my friend, twelve tenspots to the penny! What a nice pair of oxen that might have brought. But now, what! Gone with a snap of the fingers. I wouldn’t mind if I had spent it on grub and drinks and fancy clothes, but it all went to satisfy the Devil’s mother.”

“And how about you, friend Marko,” someone turned to our simple-hearted neighbor, “if you had twelve ten-spots right now, what would you do?”

“I-I-I,” stuttered Marko, “I w-w-would kn-kn-know where to hide them.”

“You’d wrap them up in a rag, that’s for sure, and cram them some place under the eaves of the roof!” someone bantered. Marko made no effort to throw back a rejoinder, only shook his head as if saying:

“Go ahead and have your fun and good luck to you, but I know what I know!”

Others consulted about their domestic problems, this one’s cow had calved; that one’s child had a cough, another boasted that yesterday he had thrashed five

bushels of wheat from half a shock. Father did not tolerate slander or defamation of those who were not present, and whenever anyone's tongue had a tendency of slipping in that direction, he knew how to take him down a peg or two with an appropriately stinging retort, and if it happened to be one of the younger ones, he would give him a downright scolding with:

"Don't stick your nose into other people's business!"

Nor did father like any kind of obscenity in conversation. He himself, as well as all those present kept within the bounds of such propriety which, of course, was fit for honest and decent folk. Now and then they joked about women, but as for father, he liked to relate a certain parable of the temptress-wench to demonstrate the point that "women's nature can lead even an innocent man to sin."

Now a certain father once lived in a forest with his son for twenty years. The boy grew up in the woods never seeing a living soul except his own father. But when he was twenty the father said:

"Now my son, let's go out into the world for a while and see how people live there."

"That's fine, father!" said the son.

So they went. They came to a village and at the end of the village there was a blacksmith shop. They entered the blacksmith shop and sat down. The son watched the blacksmith at work and then asked:

"Father, maybe I could work a while too?"

"That's fine, son, go ahead and work a while."

The youth went up to the fire right to the place where the iron was being heated, but instead of taking the tongs he seized the red-hot iron with his bare hands, placing it on the anvil and began to forge it, and the iron did not burn him at all.

The blacksmith's eyes popped out at the sight, but the father, quite unperturbed, asked his son:

"Well, how about it, my son, is the work going well?"

"Just fine, father!"

"If you want to you can remain here. But first of all, let's go a little farther, for we've seen very little of the world as yet."

And so they went farther on through the village and in the street they came across a wench. The son stopped and looked, he'd never seen anything like that before, and so he asked:

"Father, what in the world is this?"

"This, my dear boy, is a temptress," said the old man.

The son's eyes were fairly blazing with desire.

"Ah father, if only we had a temptress like that in the forest."

The old man could see that the boy's blood was up so he said to him:

"Well, that's enough, my son! We'll have to go back home again."

So they turned back. Again they came to the blacksmith shop, and the old man asked his son:

"Well, son, would you like to do a little more forging?"

"All right, father," replied the son.

And just as before he went up to the fire where the iron was lying red-hot. He seized it with his hand and Oh, what a yell he let out. how he jerked his hand back. His palm was all a blister. He had burned it badly. The old man then said:

"You see, my son, that's all on account of that desire you had for the temptress."

So they both stole away and returned to the forest. Father related this parable in jest. The asceticism which was its underlying principle was altogether alien to his nature. On the contrary, he was everywhere and at all times a friendly and social-minded man. "With the people and for the people" — this was the motto of his life. To this day I remember how deeply impressed I was by his tale of the holy man who asked God to free him from human love.

This was way back in the olden times, and there lived a certain famous doctor. He helped people very much and by the kind will of God all people loved him too. So everybody swarmed around him like flies to honey. Wherever he turned, wherever he went he had friends, and should he speak but once to someone, that person would be ready to leap into the fire for him. And then one time as he was walking

through the forest, he came across an old man who was stark naked and covered with hair from head to toe, praying in some kind of cave.

"What are you doing here, old man?" asked the doctor.

"I am serving God," replied the old man.

"In what way are you serving him?"

"As you can see: I have set all worldly things aside, renounced everything and am praying and weeping over my sins."

"But wouldn't you be serving God better if you had remained in the world and worked for people?"

"One can't serve God and Mammon at the same time," replied the old man. "People with all their torments, tribulations and endeavors belong to Mammon. Let them await their reward from whomever they serve. I serve God and God shall reward me, but if you serve the people, what will they repay you with on Judgement Day?"

With this they parted: the old man remained in the forest, while the doctor went about his business. But from that time on he began to ponder over the old man's words and to brood until he reached the point when he began to hate people and he too was filled with a desire to isolate himself from them. He fled to the forest but the people found him, and when he refused to return to the city, they said they'd live with him in the forest. Again he fled from them, and again they found him. He hid himself in the inaccessible wilderness — and there they found him too: he went to sea and asked to be left on a barren rock surrounded by water — and even there people found him and began to attach themselves to him as of old. Then he began to pray to God: "Lord, send me an illness that will make everyone afraid of me, so they will stop clinging to me!"

And so fervently did he pray to God, and so earnestly did he entreat and implore that at last the Lord God sent upon him an illness so great that he began to thrash his body on the ground, to rave deliriously, to foam at the mouth, and to snarl like a beast, so that all the people became frightened of him and took to their heels. And during each attack he always

saw demons, jabbing him with red-hot tongs, dragging him towards them with iron hooks, beating him with iron rods, and screaming:

“Come here to us! Come here to us!”

He suffered for twelve long years. He no longer hid himself in the forest and brushwood. His soul now yearned for people, but the people only shied away from him. He walked through cities and villages, begging for shelter, but his illness had given him such a ghastly appearance that no one would have him under his roof. If he joined a crowd of people they all dispersed at once; he could not even come into a church, for as soon as he made his appearance everybody rushed out. After that, they would not even allow him to enter. Finally, after twelve years he heard a voice:

“Valenty! Valenty!”

“Who is calling me?” he cried out in response.

And the voice said: “Now do you think life is so sweet without the people’s love?”

And he answered: “Lord, I have sinned. Let me die, that I may no longer be chastised.”

And the Lord replied: “So you see! He who serves the people, serves me. I created man for the people and only with people and because of people can he attain happiness. If I had wanted him to have happiness only for himself and because of himself, I would have made him a stone. If I had wanted him to serve only me alone, I would have made him an angel. But I gave man the greatest gift of all — love for the people, and only along this road can be hope to find me. But you wanted to be wiser, to take a short cut through backroads and byroads, and so you found yourself in the wilderness, where the ones with tongs and iron rods lie in wait. But now, enough of this penance of yours. And because of your past service and help to the people, I shall take you with me, while your illness I shall leave to the people as a memento, that they may overcome their fear and aversion of it, and learn to love and aid one another even in a terrible condition such as this.”

“So Doctor Valenty became a Saint,” concluded father, “while his illness still goes visiting among the

people to this day. But he who helps and watches over the sick, over men who are afflicted with this illness, shall be blessed with the grace of Cod.”

Forty years have gone by from that day when, in a little wooden blacksmith shop in our village, my father's hand struck the hammer over the anvil and sent the drum call echoing away for the last time. How much has changed since that time. Not only the blacksmith shop itself, but almost everything which was fundamental to a quiet patriarchal life in our secluded world that vanished almost without a trace. Of the former company that chatted around the blacksmith's workbench, puffed up smoke with the bellows, fitted the rims on the wheels, thundered away eagerly with their hammers over the red-hot iron, and told their endless stories over a glass of moonshine, all, most likely, have departed from this life. And the gaiety and liveliness of that time have been extinguished by fate in many of them long before their death. Surely, at that time, none of them could have imagined that the blacksmith shop and its jolly crowd of friends would remain alive and unfaded in the soul of a little red-haired boy who, bare-footed and wearing only a shirt, sat in a corner near the hearth, while a devoted father asked someone from time to time to shield him from the flying sparks. Deep down in my recollections there burns even to this day that small but mighty fire. Blue, red and golden-white rays of light are darting from within it, the glowing coals seem to be melting, and within its depths something even more white and radiant is smoldering and spitting out sizzling branched cinders. It is the fire in my father's blacksmith shop. And it seems to me that as a child I had taken a supply of it into my soul on life's long journey. And it has not been extinguished to this day.

1892

Translated by  
Cecilia Dalway

## THE THISTLES

The pupil appeared before the teacher, his face flushed, his whole body trembling with indignation.

"Teacher," he spoke barely catching his breath. "You sent me to the people and told me to live ten years in their midst and take part in their life and watch their deeds —"

He stopped for breath.

"And here you come back after a year and, as I see, you are not quite satisfied," said the teacher, smiling kindly.

"Oh, don't speak to me of satisfaction!" exploded the young man. "I am all burning and trembling. Not even in a nightmare could I have seen anything like what I have had to go through during this year. So many lies, so much hypocrisy, so much petty malice, and insensibility, and insincerity!"

"Well, well!" remarked the teacher. "Your indignation speaks well of your unspoiled heart. But couldn't you tell me in detail of what you have seen and what has so outraged you?"

"In detail! I only wish I could tell you in detail about all I have experienced during this year! I have been living like a man locked up in a place swarming with fleas. Every touch there caused pain, and itching, and aversion. I have seen politicians who at rallies adamantly claimed they were ready to suffer for the people's cause, and would then gamble away thousands at cards and beg for loans from the enemies of the same people. I have seen newsmen who in their papers were denouncing spies and informers, and there and then were themselves informing the enemies of all that was going on in their camp. I have seen teachers who smeared and reviled knowledge before

youth, and then cursed that very youth because it was crowding schools and giving them trouble. I have seen clergymen who in public were outraged whenever anyone dared to reproach them with even a single timid word with their errors, while they themselves were spending whole nights playing cards, drinking and ridiculing their own colleagues. I have seen —”

“My son,” the teacher interrupted him. “Do you really think that what you have seen is something new, something that has never happened before?”

“It may well have happened before, but not here, and it all couldn’t have been so widespread or done in such a shameless manner. I am telling you, teacher, that I become totally disheartened, that my heart nearly fails when I watch it all. Just imagine, they call upon the ignorant masses to put fire to the enemy’s homes and warehouses! They do it just for fun’s sake and take some fiendish pleasure in doing it, because they know only too well that no good will come of their appeal and that only those who might follow it will suffer. And when nobody follows them, they say, “There are just two ways to deal with our enemy — either burn his property, or kiss his hand. We have called on you to burn and no one has, so now we shall go the other way.”

“Well,” spoke the teacher, “*umgekehrt ist auch gefahren.* \* There is nothing so strange about that.”

“Just think, they are all eager to cut each other’s throats, to tear one another to pieces, and at the same time they publicly urge all to unite and extol the blessings of unity! And everyone of them does it with the sole purpose of seeing his own word prevail. It is all an amazingly blind gamble in which they bank on something they do not have, it is all a race in pursuit of some devilish if-I-don’t-get-it-you-won’t-either delight.”

“Look, son,” said the teacher, giving the pupil a glass of pure cold water, “take it and drink it!”

“What does this mean?” asked the pupil.

“Drink it and listen to what I will tell you. I am not going to bore you with too long a story. You

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\* Going back means also going (Ger.)

see, when I was a child, I lived in my father's house in a village. There was a big pasture land not far from our house. I remember very well what it was like back in those days of my childhood; large, all covered with dense low grass. I was often running about that pasture in the company of other children, rolling on the grass and it seems that today I can still feel its soft silky touch on my body.

"Several years passed. I went to a school in town and seldom visited our family house. But once, when I came there for summer holidays, I experienced quite a surprise; nearly all of our pasture land was now grown with giant thistles. They had settled on it in huge islands of greenish thorns, dotted on top with pale orange flowers of thistle heads, interspersed in places with the silvery down of ripe thistle seeds. From those islands, like from big regiment, columns of thistles, some smaller and some larger, were marching in all directions like detachments, sent out to conquer more and more territory. Some scouts of that army, and even whole parties of those bold armed ruffians of the vegetable kingdom, had already reached as far as the road which led through the middle of the pasture and the banks of the river which curved on two sides of it in a huge hook, and even here in some places they were already standing in closed ranks like soldiers. Wherever you saw one such parasite you could immediately spot a whole bunch of smaller ones around it, which were evidently offshoots of its roots. And before the stem shot upwards, soft grass faded away and the white eyes of daisies disappeared under its curly leaves, which spread all over the ground in large wreaths; even hard stems of the fragrant caraway had to retreat before those arrogant invaders, impregnable in their thorny armour.

'Father, what is this?' I asked my father, seeing what misfortune had overtaken the pasture I loved so much.

'The thistles, son, don't you see yourself?' said Father.

'But where did they come from?'

'God knows. They've just grown here.'

'But they will spoil all the pasture.'

'They have already. But what can we do?'

'Cut them.'

'We've already cut them, son, but it doesn't help. They grow even faster.'

'Plough the field.'

'This is something we can't do. The pasture belongs to the community and the community wishes to have at least the shadow of its benefit....'

"I would often go out to look at that field of thistles. It seemed to me they were rustling even when there was no wind. The giant thistles, as tall as a man, stood like a dense forest, shaking their heads, as though they were mocking me for my impotent nostalgia over the soft grassy pasture. And when autumn began to approach, clusters of woolly seeds had ripened on all heads, and then every breath of wind wafted millions of those downy seeds to all sides. Some rose high into the air and flew for miles; others raced in clouds over the ground, clinging to fences and trees, filling up ditches, covering ponds and pools with the whitish threads of their down, carpeting people's yards, sowing all fields, gardens and orchards with the accursed thistle seed; some even flew inside houses, beating against windows as though they wanted to get the war message direct to the farmers, to tell them that the army of thistles threatened to take away from them all fertile land, to ruin all their fields, cultivated with such effort, to block the whole world from their eyes. I was terrified at the sight of that endless snowstorm of thistle seeds, and I nearly cried as I showed it all to my father.

'Father, what is going to happen to us? Every such bit of down will grow into a huge thistle that will spoil a square foot of land. Just look how many millions of them are in the air.'

'Well, son, let them fly. We can't stop them.'

'But they will take our land away from under our feet.'

'Don't fear, son, the Lord is merciful. Not all of these seeds are to come up and grow. Millions of them are flying and millions of them will perish. And we aren't entirely helpless either. We'll do what we can

to make sure they won't be master of our land for long.'

"When the autumn came, I again left my father's home and went back to school and a larger world. I was not to return home until ten years later. As I was approaching our village I remembered the pasture and started wondering what new conquests the army of thistles had made there since I had last seen it. Surely, by now it would have become one whole sea of thistles, at most cut in half by a single pathway. Somehow I did not muster enough courage to ask my coachman, so I was waiting until we reached the place. And there was the familiar hill over which the road was winding like a snake, then the old community wattle gate, opened for us by the old Panko with a sheepskin hat perched on his bald head despite the summer heat. And here we drove onto the pasture. But what a wonder! Not a single one, mind you, not a single thistle was left of those proud giants that used to stand here in closed ranks and dense islands. Here and there you could see lonely small thistles, but of an entirely different breed, nothing like those I had seen here before. And the pasture was again the pasture of the good old times; low, dense, soft grass all over the place, millions of white eyes of daisies, and closer to the road some yellow flowers of salsify, and nothing else.

"Having reached our home, I was unable to hide my curiosity and right after the first greetings asked my father:

'Father, what has happened to our thistles on the pasture?'

'You see, son, they are gone, thanks to God.'

'I see. But how? Did you plough the pasture?'

'No.'

'Did you cut them?'

'No.'

'Then, maybe, burned out?'

'Oh, no, we didn't. They have just gone. Their luck ran out. Those were wet years, and near the pasture down the river the landlord decided to build a mill, so he dammed the river. The ground on the pasture must have become soaked with moisture, and those

parasites must have found it to their liking and rushed to grow all over the place. But a few years later the water burst the dam, the stream became shallow, the ground dried out, and that was the end of lucky years for the thistles. They disappeared. Just as they came God knows how and from where, so they went away. Each year there were less and less of them until they were all gone. You see, even such nastiness has its seasons.'

"That's where my father finished his story, and that's where I am ending mine," said the teacher to the pupil. "Do you understand it, son?"

The pupil was staring at the teacher with puzzled eyes.

"So what? Do we have to wait till the evil goes away of its own accord?"

"But don't forget the dam, that dam which checks the free run of the river, brings about rot and stagnation and helps the thistles to grow! It is the dam, son, the dam that must be burst! You see signs of rot and stagnation, but you have failed to discover the causes which must be eliminated!"

"I understand you!" said the pupil springing to his feet. "I am going and will do what I can."

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Translated by  
Oles Kovalenko



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**РАССКАЗЫ**

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