

and ending with Solzhenitsyn. He takes on left-wing journalists and periodicals in the United States, starting with *The Nation* and Christopher Hitchens, and ending with another Russian expatriate (and American intellectual) Yuri Slezkine. The book incorporates letters written by the author in response to other intellectuals' books and articles. Altogether, Reznik provides a fascinating and very personal view of select twentieth-century cultural happenings in the USSR and the United States.

Raj doczesny komunistów. Dzieje Rosji w XX wieku (The communist paradise in this world: A history of Russia in the twentieth century), **by Adam Krzyżanowski. Introduction by Stanisław Górka, edited by Stanisław Górka and Mateusz Matyszkowicz.** Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2006. xxviii + 441 pages. Index. ISBN 978-83-7188-592-1. In Polish.

Secretly written in the 1950s, this insightful tome shows that it was possible to correctly assess Soviet Russia even when all the archives were closed and critical writing was strictly forbidden. Adam Krzyżanowski, one of the few survivors of prewar Polish intelligentsia and a former Sachsenhausen prisoner, died in 1963. This is the first edition of his unorthodox work that, we predict, will soon become a bibliographical rarity.



Adam Mickiewicz's birthplace in Zaosie (presently Belarus), as presented in a drawing by Napoleon Orda (1807–1883). This modest house was owned by Mickiewicz's uncle, then bought by the Stypułkowski family who were expropriated from it by the Russian government for the family's participation in the November 1831 rising.

Pan Tadeusz by Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)

Book Six The Genry Village

Argument:

First intimations of the armed foray.

Protazy's errand.

Robak and the Judge hold counsel on the commonweal.

Protazy's vain errand continued.

A digression on hemp.

The gentry village of Dobrzyn.

A portrait of Matthias Dobrzynski and his household.

Translated by Christopher A. Zakrzewski

Forlorn of her rosy hue, Dawn crept imperceptibly out of the raw murk; on her skirts hung the morning—dim of eye. Day had long since broken, yet the light was ever so feeble. Fog overhung the earth like the straw roof of a humble Lithuanian cottage. From the whiter glow on the eastern horizon, you could tell where the risen sun was beginning his journey across the earth; but his march was joyless, and he slumbered on his way.

Following the sky's example, life on earth was slow in stirring. Driven tardily to pasture, the herd caught the wild hare at their belated breakfast. At the peep of day the hare usually make for the trees. Today, in the gloom of the mist, they still nibbled at the chickweed or scraped holes in the sand in pairs, intent on enjoying the open air. But with the arrival of the cattle, they scampered back to the woods.

Silence reigned in the forest. A bird stirred; yet it piped no song. Shaking the dew from its plumage, it huddled closer to the tree, then, tucking its head into its shoulders, shut its eyes again and waited for the sun. Somewhere by the edge of a pool there clacked a stork. Crows, drenched in mist, roosted on the hayricks. Throats agape, they plied their raucous chatter—a sound as irksome to the farmer as the prospect of wet weather.

The field folk had long been astir. The reaper women struck up their wonted song, dull, plaintive, and dreary as a rainy day, the more dismal, as the thick fog muted its strains. The reaping hooks clinked; the meadow clinked back. A line of mowers, whistling their tune, swished through the after-grass. At the end of each verse, they halted to sharpen their blades, beating their mallets in time. Hidden in the mist they reaped. Only their songs, scythes, and sickles told of their presence—like an invisible music.

The overseer sat bored on a sheaf among the harvesters. Paying no attention to the reaping, he kept turning his head and looked down at the crossroads where extraordinary goings-on had drawn his attention.

Since daybreak the highway and roads had been the scene of unusual traffic. A peasant's creaking trap flew past like a post-chase. A britzka rattled by at a full gallop. Another passed it coming the other way, then another. From the left, an errand-bound rider sped by. A dozen more riders thundered up from the right. Everyone was in a hurry and heading in different directions. What could this mean? The overseer rose to his feet. He would take a closer look and find out. Long he stood by the roadside. But he called out in vain. No one stopped. He could recognize no one in the fog. Like phantoms the riders flitted by. Time after time, the thud of iron hoofs and—stranger still—the rattle of sabers fell upon his ears. All this both gladdened and terrified the overseer. Though Lithuania was still at peace, dull rumors of war had long been circulating—rumors about the French, Dbrowski, and Napoleon. Could these armed riders be harbingers of war? Full of expectant hope and eager for news, the overseer hurried off to report these happenings to the Judge.

After last night's quarrel, the manor inmates and guests had risen in low despondent spirits. In vain the Chief Steward's daughter offered to read the women's fortunes. Vain her attempts to engage the men in a round of *marriage*. No one was in the mood for cards or amusement. All brooded quietly in their corners. The men sucked at their pipes. The women plied their knitting needles. Even the houseflies drowsed.

The Steward, oppressed by this silence, threw down his flapper and sought out the servants in the kitchen. There the shouts of housekeeper, the threats and smacks of the cook, and the din of the kitchen boys better satisfied his craving for noise. Gradually the steady roll of the roasting spits lulled him into a pleasant state of drowsiness.

Since early morning the Judge had been busy writing in his study. All the while, Protazy sat waiting for him on the grass embankment under the window. At length, having drafted his writ of summons, the Judge called him in and read out his complaint against the Count. He detailed the outrage the latter had perpetrated upon his honor and the scurrilous words he had used. Against Gerwazy he laid charges of wanton destruction and bodily harm. Both men he cited before the magistrates' court for their insults and the cost of the legal action. The summons had to be served this very day, in person, by word of mouth, before the sun went down.

On seeing the document the Sergeant at Arms pricked up his ears and stretched out his hand. His demeanor was solemn; and though he rose to his feet slowly, his elation was such that he could have leapt for joy. The very thought of forensic action set his blood astir. He recalled the old days when, on the promise of a generous retainer, he would brave bruises to serve a summons. So, after a lifetime of fighting wars, a legless veteran lies in his hospital bed. But let him hear the sound of a distant bugle or drum and, starting up, he cries out with a sleepy yell, "Thrash the Muscovites!" then peg-legs it out of the ward so fast that a youth is hard put to keep up with him.

Protazy hastened to put on his dress. Neither robe nor tunic would do today; that garb was strictly for solemn sessions of the court. Errands such as this called for a different get-up altogether: loose riding breeches, a coat with skirts that could be buttoned up or lowered to the knees, and a cap with folding ear-flaps tied over the head by a string—worn up in good, and down in dirty weather. Thus appareled, he seized a cane and set out on foot. A Sergeant at Arms before a lawsuit is like a scout before a battle; circumstances force him to go about in a variety of costumes and guises.

It was just as well that he had hurried off, for he would have taken brief comfort in the summons. Already a new strategy was being plotted at the Manor. A preoccupied Father Robak suddenly dropped in on the Judge.

"Judge," he said, "this mistress aunt of ours, this giddy-brained flirt, Telemena, spells trouble. When Jacek confided our poor little Sophie to her care, it was with the understanding that she was a worthy woman who knew the ways of the world. But all she seems to do is muddy the waters and engage in intrigues. She is making eyes at Tadeusz. (I keep a close watch on her.) Perhaps she has designs on the Count as well, or even both at

once. We must think how to remove her, for her actions may lead to all manner of gossip, bad blood, and strife among our youngsters, which in turn may hinder your legal deliberations."

"Deliberations?" exclaimed the Judge with unwonted passion. "Enough of deliberations! I have finished with them; broken off all parley."

"What? Have you taken leave of your senses? Where is your head? What are you babbling about? Not another quarrel?"

"No fault of mine," rejoined the Judge, "as will come to light in due course. That pompous fool of a Count and his scoundrel Gerwazy were the cause of it. But that is for the court to decide. Too bad you did not dine with us at the castle or I should be calling on you as a witness to the gross affront he dealt me."

"Why in God's name did you go there!" exclaimed Robak. "You know I cannot abide that place. Never will I set foot in those ruins again! Another quarrel! God forgive us! Tell me what happened. The matter will have to be put right. As if I had not enough of this silliness. Weightier affairs rest on my shoulders than appeasing squabbling parties. But once again I shall bring you to terms."

"Terms!" broke in the Judge, stamping his foot. "What do you mean? You and your terms can go to the devil! The nerve of the monk! Treat him nicely and he thinks he can lead you by the nose. A Soplica, sir, does not take kindly to terms. We sue to win. Many a time we sat out a lawsuit only to win it after six generations. I was foolish enough to follow your advice and file a third appeal with the boundary court. No more arbitration. No more, I say! No, sir! No, sir! No, sir! (And pacing the floor, he punctuated each shout with a stamp of his foot.) "Besides, after last night's outrages, the Count must either beg my pardon or grant me satisfaction!"

"But my dear Judge! Think of poor Jacek when he hears of this. Why, he will be driven to despair! Have the Soplicas not caused enough grief in the castle? My dear brother! The very thought of that awful incident wrings my heart. You know yourself how, after Targowica, they seized a portion of the castle grounds and awarded it to your brother; and how he, repenting of his sin, had to pledge upon condition of absolution to make full reparation. To this end, he took it upon himself to raise and educate poor little Sophie, the Horeszko heiress. Dear has it cost him! To wed Sophie with Tadeusz has been his abiding dream—to unite the disaffected houses and so to restore with honor what the Soplicas plundered."

"I had nothing to do with it!" retorted the Judge hotly. "I never knew Jacek, or so much as laid eyes on him. I know almost nothing of his freebooting days, for I was still learning rhetoric at the Jesuit school at the time. Later, while serving as the Governor's page, I was awarded the estate. I accepted it without question. Jacek bade me take Sophie in. I took her, reared her, fretted over her future. . . But enough of this woman's talk. And then, to crown all, this Count shows up from God knows where. And with what claim to the castle? Why, you know yourself, my friend, that he has barely a drop of Horeszko blood in his veins. And he is to insult me? And I am to talk terms with him?"

"Come now, brother," rejoined the priest, "there are compelling reasons! Remember how Jacek was all set to have the lad go for a soldier and then kept him back in Lithuania? Why? Because he reckoned Tadeusz would be of greater service to our country at home! You must have heard the rumors of which I have frequently been the principal initiator. Well, now is the time to make it all plain. The hour has come! Momentous things, dear brother! War is upon us. The war for Poland, my brother! We shall be Poles again! War is certain! When I set out on my secret mission here, the army advance posts already stood on the banks of the Niemen. At this very moment Bonaparte is mustering the largest array the world has ever seen or history recorded. The entire Polish army is marching with the French. Our Poniatowski, our Dabrowski, and our white eagle standards! Even now they are on the move. Napoleon has merely to give the word and they will cross the Niemen, and our country, dear brother, rises out of the ashes!"

Without a word the Judge removed his glasses, folded them, then stared at the monk. Tears welled up in his eyes. And heaving a heavy sigh, he flung himself on the Bernadine's neck.

"My good Robak!" he cried. "Can it really be true? My good Robak," he said again. "Can it really be true? All those dashed hopes! Do you remember? 'Bonaparte's on the move!' they tell us. And we wait for him. 'He has reached the Kingdom!' they say. 'He has beaten the Prussian. He is coming!' And what does he do? Sign the Treaty of Tilsit! So, can it really be true? Are you not imagining it?"

"As God is in Heaven it is true."

"Then blest the lips that bear these tidings!" cried the Judge, raising his hands. "You shall not regret your errand, Robak; neither shall your abbey. Two hundred of my choice muttons are now at its disposal. Yesterday you took

a shine to my chestnut mare and praised my bay. This very day they shall stand in your quester's wagon. Ask whatever you please this day. I will refuse nothing! Only please, touching this whole affair with the Count, say no more. He slighted my honor. I have served him a summons. It wouldn't do to back out now."

The astonished monk wrung his hands and stared fixedly at the Judge.

"So," he replied, shrugging his shoulders, "while Napoleon brings freedom to Lithuania and the world trembles in its boots, you still have lawsuits on your mind? After all I have told you, you are going to sit idly by, arms folded, when action is called for?"

"Action?" queried the Judge. "What kind of action?"

"Have you not read it in my eyes? Still no promptings in your heart? Oh, my brother! If you have a drop of Soplica blood in your veins, consider but this. The French strike from the front? Well, suppose we stir up a popular insurrection in the rear. What say you to that? Let Lithuania's heraldic charger snort again. Let the Bear of Zhmudz roar once more! Oh! Were but a thousand men—nay, five hundred!—to attack the Muscovite from behind, an uprising would spread through Lithuania like wildfire. What if we seized Moscow's guns and standards and went as victors to meet our country's deliverers? We'd march up, and Bonaparte, seeing our lances, would ask, 'Whose troops are these?'—'Insurrectionists, Your Imperial Highness! Lithuania's militia!' we'd yell back—'Who leads you?' he'd ask. 'Judge Soplica!' we'd say. Oh, who then would breathe a word of Targowica! As long as the Ponary Heights stand and the Niemen flows, so long shall the people of Lithuania exalt the bearer of the Soplica name! Every son and grandson of Jagiello's city will point and say, 'There goes Soplica of that noble family that fathered the Uprising!'"

"Never mind what people will say!" rejoined the Judge. "The world's praise means nothing to me. God knows I am innocent of my brother's sins. I was never one to meddle in politics. I work in my study and till my acres. Still, I am a nobleman and should be glad to clear my family's name. And, being a Pole, I should be equally glad to serve my country—cost it my very life. Swordsmanship has never been my forte, though I have thrashed a few in my time. Everyone knows how, during Poland's last gathering of the diets, I challenged and wounded the two Buzwik brothers, who. . . but let that pass! So what think you? Do we take the field? Mustering riflemen will be no trouble. We have no shortage of powder. Our parish priest keeps a field-piece or two in

the rectory. I recall Jankiel saying that he keeps lance-heads in store at the tavern and that we were welcome to use them in time of need. Whole crates of them he smuggled in from Königsberg! All ready for mounting! I shall go now and fetch them. We'll whittle up shafts in a jiffy. Of swords we have plenty. Our noblemen will mount up; and with my nephew and myself at the head—well, we will do our best!"

"O noble Polish blood!" cried the Bernardine, deeply moved, throwing his arms around the Judge's shoulders. "O worthy son of the Soplicas! God charges you with the task of wiping clean your errant brother's sins. I have always esteemed you highly, but from this moment I love you like a brother. We shall make every preparation, aye, but now is not the time to take the field. I myself shall inform you of the hour and place. This I know: the Czar has dispatched emissaries to Napoleon to sue for peace. War has not yet been declared, but Prince Joseph has heard from Monsieur Bignon (a member of Napoleon's Imperial Council) that nothing will come of these talks, and that war is certain. So the Prince sent me here to scout out the land with orders that, upon Napoleon's arrival, Lithuania should stand ready to declare her wish to be reunited with her sister, the Crown—that the Commonwealth may be restored.

"In the meantime, my brother, we must come to terms with the Count. I know! He is a strange soul, a bit of a dreamer, but he is young and honest and an honorable Pole. We need such men as he. Dreamers can be very useful in revolutionary times. I know this from experience. Even fools are useful so long as they are honest souls and led by men of prudence. The Count enjoys respect among the nobility. If he were to rise, he would stir up the entire district. Knowing how rich he is, every gentleman will say, 'It is a sure thing, since even the lords are up in arms. Where do I sign up?'"

"Let him come to me first!" rejoined the Judge. "Let him come here. Let him beg for my pardon. I am his senior in years and hold an office! As to the lawsuit, the court of arbitration—"

The Bernardine slammed the door behind him.

"Pleasant journey!" called out the Judge after him.

The priest leapt into his wagon, cracked his whip, stung the horses' haunches with the traces; the wagon started forward and vanished into the fog. Now and then a grey cowl could be seen above the mist like a vulture soaring over the clouds.

Meanwhile the Sergeant at Arms had already reached the Count's estate. As a wily fox, lured by the smell of bacon fat, pads swiftly toward his goal, but, mindful of the huntsman's ruses, halts every few steps, sits up, and, lofting his brush in the air, waves it like a fan over his nostrils as though inquiring of the breeze if the meat is poisoned; so Protazy swung off the road, circled the meadow around the mansion and, twirling his cane in his hand, halted periodically, as if spying a cow in distress. Thus maneuvering, he came to a halt at the garden. Then, stooping down, he made a sudden dash forward as if pursuing a corncrake and, having cleared the fence, dived into the hemp.

Both man and beast find a measure of security in this dense, odorous patch of vegetation encircling the house. Wild hare, sprung from the cabbage patch, take refuge in the hemp, for hemp provides safer cover than a copse. Once ensconced in this thick and pungent herbage, the hare fears no greyhound; nor can the bloodhound sniff him out. In the hemp the house servant can escape the lash or fist and lie low until his master simmers down. Even the peasantry, fleeing the draft, find refuge in the hemp, while the government officials go combing the forest after them. That is why, during a battle, or a raid, or a requisition drive, both sides take such great pains to occupy the hemp ground, for it stretches right up to the front of the house; while, in the rear, it often extends to where the hop begins. Thus the hemp ground provides the warring parties with suitable cover for an attack or retreat.

Protazy, brave soul though he was, was not altogether without fear. The scent of the hemp brought back memories of his many previous excursions. In every case, the hemp patch had borne witness to his pains. Like the time the nobleman from Telsz (Dzindolet by name) put a pistol to his, Protazy's, breast and bade him crawl under the table and bark out the served summons like a dog. That was one time Protazy had had to leg it into the hemp. Then there was the time the proud and insolent Wolodkowicz—scourge of the regional diets and disrupter of court sessions—seized the writ from his hand, tore it to shreds, then, stationing two cudgel-bearing haiduks at the door, poised his naked rapier over Protazy's head and roared, "Either I run you through or you eat these scraps!" Being the prudent soul that he was, Protazy went through the motions of chewing, inched his way toward the window, then took a header into the hemp.

True, greeting a summons with a sword or whip was no longer customary in Lithuania (indeed, only rarely

had the Sergeant of Arms been so abused); but Protazy could not have known of this change of custom, for he had not served a writ in a good many years. Although he was always keen to go and constantly pressed the Judge to send him, he was always refused out of regard for his advanced years. Today, the matter being urgent, the Judge had accepted his offer to deliver the summons.

Protazy looked around and listened intently. Not a sound to be heard. Cautiously he thrust his arms into the hemp, parted the thicket of stalks and, like a fisherman diving into the water, plunged unseen through the vegetation. He raised his head. Not a sound. He crept up to the windows. Still no sound. He took a peep inside the mansion. Not a soul about. Heart a-flutter, he stepped onto the veranda and pushed the door open. Like an enchanted castle the house stood empty. Seizing the moment, Protazy whipped out the summons and with a loud voice proceeded to read out its burden. A footfall fell on his ear. His heart leapt to his mouth. He was all set to make a dash for it, when, to his great relief, the familiar figure of Robak appeared in the doorway. Both men stood there greatly surprised.

Clearly the Count and his entire retinue had left the house—and in a hurry too, for the door was ajar. You could see the Count had been busy collecting arms. Double-barreled shotguns and sporting pieces lay scattered over the floor. All around lay ramrods and guncocks, locksmith's tools for mending firearms and powder and paper for making cartridges. Could he have taken his entire household on a hunting expedition? But then why the side arms? For here lay a rusty hiltless saber, there, a sword minus its knot. Evidently they had been choosing weapons from this pile of junk and even dipped into their store of obsolete arms. Robak took a moment to examine the harquebuses and broadswords then went off to reconnoiter the grounds, to seek out the servants and discover the Count's whereabouts. Eventually he found two old women in the deserted farmyard. They informed him that the Count and his men had ridden out, heavily armed, to the village of Dobrzyn.

Now Dobrzyn was famed throughout Lithuania for the courage of its men and comeliness of its womenfolk. At one time it had been a thriving, populous village. When King Jan Sobieski mustered the general militia "under the twigs," the Ensign-Keeper supplied His Majesty with six hundred fully armed knights from Dobrzyn alone. Now the clan had shrunk and grown poor. In former days they had prospered well, biding in

the manors of lords, serving in the army, mounting raids, and taking part in the regional diets. Now they were forced to shift for themselves, toiling like indentured serfs; only they never wore the peasant's caftan, wearing instead a black-striped capote and, on Sundays, the broad-sleeved nobleman's robe. Even the poorest of their women wore distinctive garb. Eschewing the peasant woman's beaded vest, they went about in drill or percale. When grazing their cattle, they wore leather, not birch-bast, shoes, and when reaping, and even spinning, they always wore gloves.

The people of Dobrzyn differed from their Lithuanian brethren in their language, stature, and physiognomy. Pure Polish blood ran in their veins. All had raven-black hair, high foreheads, dark eyes, and aquiline noses. This ancient clan hailed from the region of Dobrzyn in Mazovia; and though they had put down roots in Lithuania four centuries ago, they still preserved their Mazovian speech and manners. When christening their young, they invariably chose the name of one of the Crown's patron saints, Bartholomew or Matthias. The son of Matthias was baptized Bartholomew, the son of Bartholomew, Matthias. The women were christened either Catherine or Maryna. To distinguish one from the other, men and women resorted to nicknames deriving from some attribute or defect. Sometimes, as a token of his fellows' scorn or esteem, a man received more than one nickname. The same gentleman might go by one name in Dobrzyn and another in the neighboring village. Other minor noblemen of the district would take after the Dobrzynskis and resort to nicknames as well; only they called them *bynames*. Almost every clan makes use of nicknames now, and few are aware that the custom began in Dobrzyn. But there the usage served a purpose, while in the rest of the country the custom arose out of silly imitation.

Thus, Matthias Dobrzynski, the chieftain of the clan, had originally been styled *Cock o' the Steeple*. Later, during the rising of seventeen-ninety-four, they christened him *Hipsmiter*. Among his own folk he went by the appellation of *Little King*, while the Lithuanian gentry called him *Matthias of Matthiases*.

As Matthias presided over the people of Dobrzyn, so his cottage, standing between the tavern and the church, presided over the village. You could tell that it was rarely visited and that impoverished gentry folk dwelt there. There was no gate. The garden stood unfenced. Unsowed by hand, it was overgrown with birch saplings. Yet the cottage had every appearance of being the village capital, for it was better constructed than the other cottages, and more sprawling. The right wing, housing the parlor, was

built of brick. Hard by stood the lumber house, the granary, barn, cowshed, and stables—all clustered together as was common among our minor gentry. Everything looked extraordinarily old and dilapidated. The cottage roof shone green, as if sheeted with tin; in fact, it was overgrown with moss and grasses as rank as prairie herbage. The straw roofs of the granaries looked like hanging gardens. All kinds of plant life flourished there: stinging nettle, crimson crocus, yellow mullein, and the gaudy-brushed amaranth. Birds of every kind nested there: pigeons in the loft, swallows in the windows; and in the untrodden grass by the front door, tame rabbits scratched and frisked about. In a word, the cottage had every appearance of a rambling birdcage or rabbit hutch.

And yet the place had once been the scene of battles! Everywhere you could see signs of the frequent fierce attacks that had been mounted there. An old cannonball the size of a child's head lay rusting in the grass by the gate—a relic of the Swedish Wars. Once it had taken the place of a rock to keep the gate-leaf open. In the yard, on unhallowed ground, among the weeds and wormwood, there moldered a dozen wooden crosses: grim reminders that there lay buried men who had been visited by a sudden and violent death. Anyone caring to look closely at the cottage, lumber house or granary would see that the walls were riddled from top to bottom with what looked like insect boreholes. Ensconced in each of these little cavities was a bullet—like a black bee slumbering in its earthy cell.

The knobs, studs, and hooks of every door had been severed off or gouged by a sword-stroke. Evidently the temper of Sigismund steel had been tested here: steel so hard you could smite the head off a nail with ease or cut through a hook without nicking the blade. Mounted over the lintel, partially obscured by shelves of cheeses and plastered up with swallows' nests, stood the Dobrzyn coat of arms.

Like ancient arsenals, the house, stable, and coach-house were filled with pieces of armor of every description. From the cottage roof hung four prodigious helmets—formerly adornments of martial brows, now home to Aphrodite's birds, the doves. Here the purring pigeon fed his unfledged squabs. In the stable, over the manger, there hung an enormous open hauberk and a ring-mail corselet. These articles served as a fodder-rack from which the stable boy forked clover to the young colts. In the kitchen lay several rapiers, tempered in the hearth by the impious maid who used them as roasting spits. A horsetail ensign—booty plundered from the Turk at Vienna—served as a besom for sweeping the grain. In a word, Mars had ceded the field to frugal Ceres. Together with

Pomona, Flora, and Vortumnus, she presided over Matthias's house, stable, and granary. Alas! Today these deities must yield sway again. Mars had returned.

At the crack of dawn a dispatch bearer galloped into Dobrzyn. He rode from house to house, as if rousing the villagers for their turn of statute labor. The gentry brethren rose from their beds and poured out into the streets. The tavern rang with shouts, the rectory window blazed with candlelight. Everywhere people ran about. What could this mean? they wondered. The elders held council; the youth saddled their horses. The women held tightly to their boys. The youngsters struggled to break free. All were raring to up and fight without the slightest notion of whom they were to fight or for what. Like it or not, stay home they must. A long, crowded, and terribly unruly meeting took place in the rectory. At last, unable to come to any agreement, they decided to refer the entire matter to their old patriarch, Matthias.

Matthias had seen three-score summers and twelve; He was a sprightly old man of small stature—a former Bar Confederate. Friend and foe knew him for his curved saber of damascene steel with which he could chop up a pike or bayonet like chaff. This prodigious weapon he had jokingly christened *The Switch*. He quit the Confederates and, siding with the Crown, stood with Tyzenhaus, Lithuania's Under-Treasurer; but when the King took Targowica's part, he deserted the royal cause. Thus, his changing allegiances gave rise to the nickname *Cock o' the Steeple*. Like a weathervane he turned his standard to the wind. There was no fathoming his turncoat ways. Perhaps he was over-fond of war. Defeated on one side, he sought his fortunes on the other. Or perhaps he was merely a shrewd observer of the spirit of the times, crossing to whichever side he saw as tending to the advantage of his country. Who knew? One thing was certain. He was never swayed by a desire for personal glory or paltry gain; nor did he ever side with the Czarist cause. The very sight of a Muscovite made him foam and froth at the mouth. After the last partition of his country, he kept out of sight, biding at home like a bear sucking on his paw in his den.

The last action he had seen was with Oginski in Wilno, where both had served under Jasinski. There he and Switch performed wondrous feats of valor. Everyone knew how he alone had leapt off Praga's ramparts to go to the aid of Pocij, who, having received twenty-three wounds, had been left on the battlefield. All of Lithuania gave them up for lost. But the pair returned, their bodies pierced through like sieves. Pocij, an upright man, sought

to reward Dobrzynski handsomely after the war. He offered him a farmstead with five houses for life along with an annuity of a thousand *zBotys* in gold. But Matthias wrote back to him, saying, "Let Pocij be Matthias's debtor, not Matthias Pocij's!" He refused the farmstead, declined the gold, and went home to toil by the sweat of his brow. There he built beehives, concocted potions for the cattle, snared partridge for the county fair, and hunted for game.

Dobrzyn was home to many wise elders versed in Latin and jurisprudence. Many of these sages were far better off than Matthias. Yet of the entire clan, Matthias—a poor, simple old man—was the most highly respected, not only as the celebrated wielder of *The Switch*, but also as a man of good sense and solid views. He was conversant with his nation's history and his clan's traditions, held his own in law, was skilled in husbandry, and knew the hunter's and apothecary's craft. Folk even ascribed to him knowledge of extraordinary and supernatural events (which the parish priest sternly disclaimed). At the very least, he was keenly attuned to atmospheric changes and could predict the weather better than any farmer's almanac. Small wonder that when it came to matters such as when to sow the crops, or dispatch the barges, or harvest the corn, whether to launch an court action or seek terms—none of this was undertaken in Dobrzyn without first seeking Matthias's advice. Not that the old timer actively sought out such influence; indeed, he would dearly be rid of it. He would huff at his clients. Most times he would say nothing and push them out the door. He seldom imparted advice, and then not just to anyone. Only when it came to settling the most pressing disputes and disagreements did he express his opinion when asked—and then only in the most laconic terms.

All counted on Matthias to take the matter in hand today. They felt sure he would place himself at the head of an armed foray, for since his youth he had loved a good brawl; and he was a sworn foe of the Muscovite race.

At this moment Matthias was shuffling about his deserted yard, humming snatches of *When Early Breaks the Dawn*. He was glad the day was clearing. The fog, not lifting in the usual manner and forming clouds, was actually sinking to the earth. A faint breeze reached out its hand and, stroking the mist, smoothed and spread it out over the fields. Meanwhile, the sun broke through from above with a thousand rays, enduing the mist with tints of gold, silver, and crimson. So a pair of masters fashion the gold-fibered sashes of Sluck: a maid sits under

the web, threading silk on the looms and smoothing the surface with her hand, while the weaver lowers down strands of purple, silver, and gold, creating brilliant flower motifs; even so the breeze wove its web of vapors over the earth, while the sun embroidered it.

Matthias stood warming himself in the sun. He had said his prayers and was setting about his domestic chores. Gathering an armful of grass and leaves, he sat down in front of his house and whistled. At once a host of rabbits leapt from their holes. Their long ears, like white daffodils springing up from the grass, shone white; their eyes glistened like blood-red rubies beading the velvet green cushion of the sward. Cocking their ears they sat up and looked about. At last, lured by the cabbage leaves, the entire little flock of furballs scampered toward Matthias. To his very feet they hopped, then up on his lap and shoulders. The old man—himself as white as a rabbit—loved to have them flock around him. And so, stroking their warm furry bodies with one hand and scooping up millet seed from his hat with the other, he scattered the grain over the grass for the sparrows. At once a noisy throng dropped from the cottage eaves.

The old man was thus taking pleasure in their banquet, when the rabbits suddenly bolted for their holes; with a flutter of wings the startled birds returned to the eaves. A party of new guests walked smartly into the yard. A delegation had arrived from the rectory to seek Matthias's advice.

"*Praised be the Lord Jesus Christ!*" they greeted him from a distance with low bows.

"*Now and forever, amen*" came Matthias's reply.

On learning of the party's pressing business, he ushered them into his cottage. They filed in and seated themselves on the bench. The leading delegate stood up among them and began to present the matter. Meanwhile, more and more of the nobility arrived. Most of them were Dobrzyń-folk, but there were also a good many neighbors from the surrounding villages. Some were armed, some not. Some arrived in traps, some in britzkas. Others came mounted, still others on foot. They drew up their carts, hitched their rigs to the young birch trees and, burning with curiosity over the progress of the talks, began to mill about the house. The parlor being now filled, they crowded into the entranceway. Others, thrusting their heads through the open window, listened intently.

(to be continued in the next issue)

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